# Understanding Conflict Drivers and Resilience Factors in the Sahel: Desk Study

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# NAVANTI

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## II. ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

- o 3N – Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens Initiative
- o AD – Ansar Dine, or Ansar al-Din (Defenders of the Faith) is an Islamist group that wants the imposition of strict Shari'a law across Mali.
- o ADC -- Alliance Démocratique du 23 Mai pour le Changement (Main Kel Tamasheq rebel group leading 2006 uprising from Kidal.  Leaders Iyad Ag Ghali, Ibrahim Bahanga, Hassan ag Fagaga).
- o AFISMA – African-led Support Mission to Mali
- o AFRICOM – US Africa Command
- o AQIM/AQMI – al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (based in Algeria; threatens the Sahel and parts of Europe) AQAP – al-Qaeda in the Islamic Peninsula (based in Yemen; threatens the entire Gulf region)
- o ATT – Amadou Toumani Touré, ousted Malian President
- o AU – African Union
- o BH – Boko Haram, (full name is Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, meaning Western Education is sinful in Islam) is a jihadist militant organization based in northeast Nigeria
- o CAF – Conflict Assessment Framework
- o DOD – Department of Defense
- o DOS – Department of State
- o ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States
- o EU – European Union
- o FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- o FEWS NET – Famine Early Warning Systems Network
- o FIS - Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front, an outlawed Islamist political party in Algeria)
- o FOCAC – Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
- o GIA – Armed Islamic Group (Algerian terror organization that brutalized civilians during the Algerian civil war)
- o GSPC – Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (indigenous Algerian terror organization fighting the Algerian government until it merged with al-Qaeda and changed its name to AQIM)
- o IDP – Internally Displaced Persons
- o MAA – Arab Movement of Azawad
- o MIA – Islamic Movement of Azawad
- o MIST – Military Information Support Team
- o MNJ -- Nigerien Movement for Justice (main Kel Tamasheq rebel group in Niger during the 2007-8 rebellion)
- o MNLA – Movement for National Liberation of Azawad (a political and military organization based in northern Mali made up of Tuareg seeking secular national independence)

- o MUJAO/MUJWA – Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (active jihadi organization that broke away from AQIM, and has the stated goal of spreading jihad across West Africa)
- o OIC – Organization of Islamic Cooperation
- o TSCTP – Trans Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership
- o UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- o USAID – US Agency for International Development
- o USSOCOM – US Special Operations Command
- o VEO – Violent Extremist Organization
- o VOA – Voice of America

## III.  EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This report is a USAID/USSOCOM collaborative assessment on the instability and resilience factors in the Sahel aimed to inform those working toward preventing future conflict.**  The region addressed in this report includes the territories of Mauritania, Mali, Niger and southern Algeria.  Given recent events in Mali, that country is the focal point of the report, with its immediate neighbors Mauritania, Algeria and Niger also of central importance and other countries, including Senegal, Burkina Faso, Libya and Nigeria, figuring into the analysis only as necessary.  The report examines key identity groups in the region with an emphasis on people referred to as "Tuareg" in English and "Touareg" in French, who call themselves Kel Tamasheq, or speakers of the Tamasheq language.

**International jihadi activities in the Sahel-Sahara region of Africa have forced their way into international attention** with the ten-month control of northern Mali, major attacks on In Amenas, Algeria and Agadez and Arlit, Niger, and kidnappings in Mauritania, Mali, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon.  Despite the proliferation of armed groups, there are currently **two main logics organizing armed violence in the Sahara-Sahel region**.  One is the **justification of jihadi[1] violence by some converts to reformist Islam**.  The other is **Kel Tamasheq[2] rejection of the legitimacy of the Malian and Nigerien states** to rule over them.  Jihadi ideologies and activities and Kel Tamasheq ethnonationalism are two separate and often antagonistic dynamics, though the members of both groups inhabit the same difficult territory and sometimes make common cause.  They are further linked to and placed in competition with one another by the importance of illegal and illicit economic activities to both.  Lastly, some key figures, including Kel Tamasheq strong men Iyad ag Ghali and Alghabasse ag Intalla, have kept a foot on both sides of this line.  While the distinction between jihadi and ethnonationalist dynamics is blurred in actual practice, it remains a useful distinction for analysis and policy interventions.

**Older forms of Kel Tamasheq and Saharan Arab politics have been turned on their heads by a combination of the "fast money" introduced by drugs, and social transformations that include religious trends both toward secularist modernity and reformist conservatism.**[3]  Older clerical and/or noble groups have suddenly lost influence and prestige, and this has opened multiple localized fault lines promoting conflict.

**Large-scale intercommunal violence is a real threat** and will continue to be one for some time into the future.  The **racial dimension of conflict in the Sahel**, which has rested below the surface for many decades, **appears to be rising into open rhetoric and action**. Still existing interethnic oppositions (e.g. Songhai vs. Tuareg) have been complicated and in some cases

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[1] In this report I use the terms "Salafi" and "reformist" interchangeably to describe those who espouse the theological currents that promote a return to original and putatively purer forms of Muslim religious practice.  I use
[2] The people most often called "Tuareg" by others call themselves Kel Tamasheq, or "Those who speak Tamasheq language."  As it is the term they use to refer to themselves and is commonly used in northern Mali and Niger, it is the term used here.
[3] The reversal described below between the Kounta and Tilemsi Arabs in the region between Gao and Kidal is a prime example of this, but there are also elements of the same dynamic among Idnane, Ifoghas and Imghad clans of the Kel Tamasheq.

amplified by racial discourse ("Black" vs., "White"). [4] This not only shifts the lines of demarcation subtly (for instance the large number of "Black" Kel Tamasheq in an in-between position), but also begins a process of simplification and polarization that often accompanies genocidal or quasi-genocidal dynamics. Moreover, cynical political actors on all sides who have little to offer in terms of policies have already started capitalizing on the fear and distrust that surround such a situation, and might see it as being to their advantage if such large-scale violence did occur. Thus they should be expected to be reluctant or even obstreperous partners in any post-conflict peacebuilding process. A "racial" conflagration in Mauritania, Mali or Niger could spark violence along similar lines in the neighboring countries.

**There will be no solution to problems in the northern hinterlands of Mali and Niger[5] without a solution of the problems in their capitals**. Grand theft within the government and military and the self-cannibalization of the state's institutions that have accompanied it are direct causes of the conflict in Mali. This means that policy interventions that try to address service provision or military capacity at the middle level (decentralization and local development programs, platoon and company-level tactical training) without addressing the major structural problems at the center are likely to compound, rather than help, solve Mali's problems. The relatively low-performing, very poor, yet not hollowed-out structures of the government of Niger provide a partial counterexample to the Malian case.[6]

**Because of the roles they have played both in funding jihadi organizations and in hollowing out the Malian state, some of the illicit economic streams** (most notably the drugs trade and kidnapping for ransom) **need active international engagement** to help shut them down. **However, this intervention in itself could create more conflict locally** as those with much to lose will lash out and some of the social transformations will once again be thrown up for grabs. The current struggle around the drug trade in Mexico is a useful parallel. Development aid can help to soften the conflict-producing effects of such socio-economic shocks, but it will have to be sensitive to local social conflict dynamics in order to work without creating more conflict through unintended consequences.

**International actors have an important role to play in fostering and creating spaces for discussion** around governance, religion, race, and the rights and responsibilities that accompany citizenship. The events of 2012-2013 have been so dramatic and so shocking to Malians and their neighbors that simply providing (and protecting) the space for discussion should be enough. The only way to ruin the possibility that Sahelian citizens will engage in this discussion would be to try to engineer the conversation in order to predetermine its outcomes. In this regard, the **U.S. government would probably be best served by operating with a very light touch** in the realm of "messaging." Support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide studios and administrative support, but trust local actors to shape and produce content are likely

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[4] It is worth bearing in mind that in recent months in Mali, the terms "*nomade*" and "*sédentaire*" have become a kind of code for "White" and "Black" respectively. This is especially true around Gao, as evidenced by Navanti respondents' language, language in the Malian press, and results of the author's interviews.
[5] The same is likely true of the relations between capitals and peripheries in Mauritania, Chad and Algeria, as well.
[6] Though many have pointed to the importance of the flow of post-Qaddafi era weapons into Mali as a cause of the 2012 rebellion, this disregards the fact that Mali has no border with Libya, while Niger does. The bigger difference is that Niger dealt proactively with the threat of a well-armed and reinvigorated Kel Tamasheq rebellion while Mali's laissez faire attitude toward Kel Tamasheq rebels and jihadis came back to haunt it.

to work best in a situation where mistrust of jihadis does not automatically translate into trust of secular liberal values or the U.S. government. The single most effective message the U.S. government could convey may be an explicit public statement renouncing the use of predator drones in the Sahara-Sahel.[7]

## IV.    A NOTE ON "MAPPING"

States typically aspire to control their territory, and to do that they try to know who the people living in that territory are, what they do, and where they go. Some citizens acquiesce to the demands of their states to identify and enroll themselves and to submit to controls as they cross borders and engage in trade, or politics. Others resist the state's attempt to know them. Many of the people who fill the following pages, whether as nomads, smugglers, jihadis, or bandits, invest a great deal of energy in evading these attempts. Survival in any of these livelihoods requires cultivating inscrutability.

The tension between the modern state's desire to know all of its citizens and some of those citizens' refusal to be known lies at the heart of dynamics in the Sahel-Sahara region today. It has been a longstanding tension between West and North African States and their pastoralist populations, who follow the rains and the grazing land, regardless of international borders. It has also been a built-in tension between long-distances traders, mostly Arab and Kel Tamasheq, who become smugglers by virtue of the fact that they often try to minimize customs payments and sometimes deal in prohibited trade goods that can range from pasta to cocaine.

With the arrival of a regional Al Qaeda franchise in the Sahara-Sahel and the control of the northern two-thirds of Mali by a group of mostly jihadi insurgents in 2012, international actors' desire to know this region and its people increased dramatically, and that is the context of this paper.

This analysis is described as part of a mapping exercise, and given that context it must be noted that the analyses of the most experienced, knowledgeable, and respected specialists on this region consistently emphasize how limited their knowledge is, and how prevalent is the practice of disseminating false information for strategic gain.[8] This is not a practice born of international jihadi strategy, but a much older practice in Kel Tamasheq politics and the techniques of desert smugglers and bandits. Given new international interest in the region, such distortions may be on the rise.

This does not mean that it is impossible to craft an analysis. However, the information that has been incorporated into maps tends to give it a sense of fixity and certainty that it often does not merit in the Sahelian setting. The fluidity surrounding the reshuffling and horse trading currently taking place amongst the defeated and regrouping jihadis and Kel Tamasheq separatist rebels is

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[7] As detailed below, opinion polls and ethnographic research both indicate that while citizens in Sahelian countries generally have positive views of the United States, many Muslims in the region feel that the U.S. is fighting Islam rather than just terrorism. In some countries in the region, the majority feel that working with Western militaries will make their countries less safe, rather than more. Armed drones appear to play a particularly polarizing role in this discussion.

[8] A good example is LeCoq and Schrijver, "The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust: Potholes and Pitfalls on the Saharan Front," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, January 2007.

amplified by the secrecy surrounding jihadi tactics (like suicide missions) and the above-mentioned historical preference for mobility, dissimulation, and evasion of state surveillance and control. Consequently, all attempts to "map" the realities of this region should be taken with a grain of salt. The bolder and more self-assured claims to knowledge about this region are, the more skeptically they should be treated.
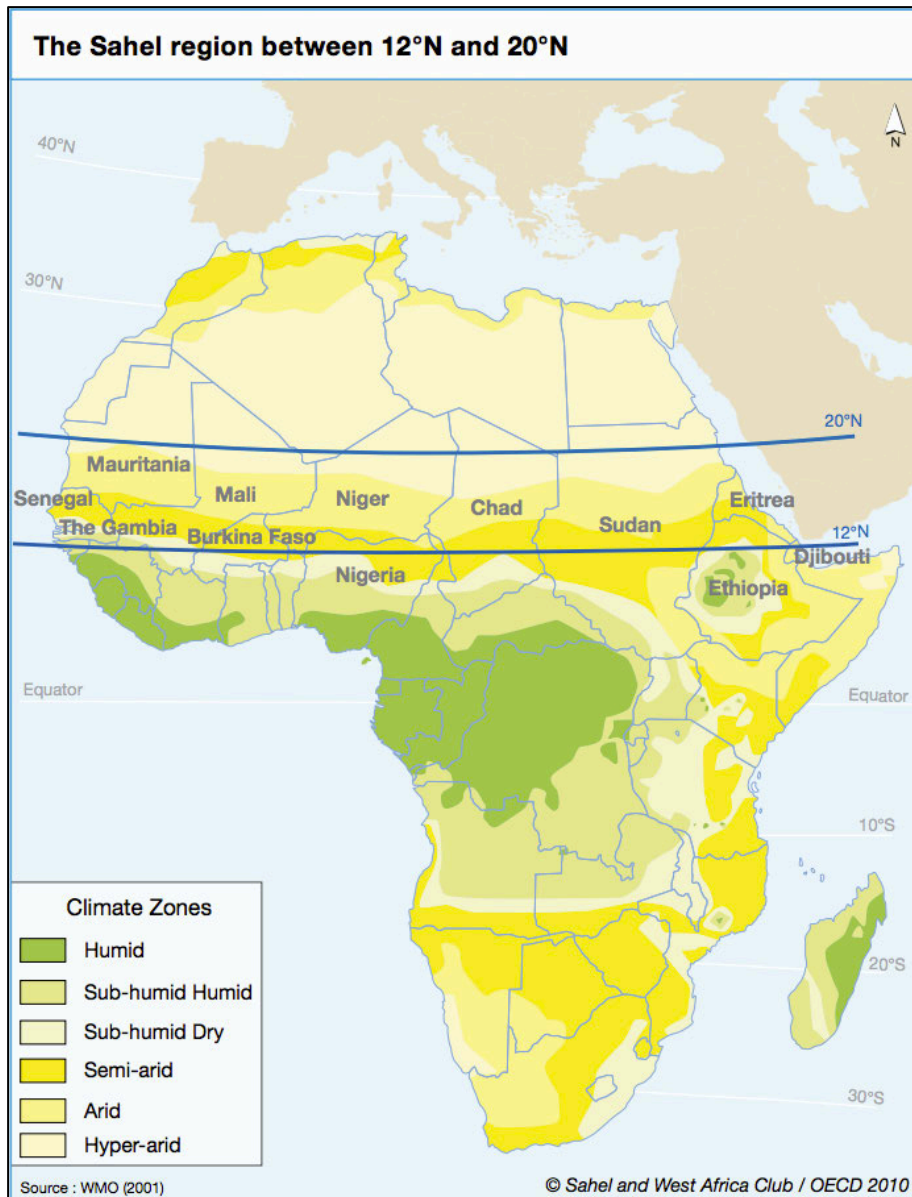
## V.    REGIONAL BACKGROUND

This study is the result of collaboration between USAID and USSOCOM, and is intended to identify several key factors shaping conflict dynamics in the Sahara-Sahel region. The report's focal point is northern Mali, but because people, ideas and some political dynamics travel across borders, it includes analysis of neighboring countries. The central ethno-linguistic groups at the center of the report are the Kel Tamasheq (commonly called "Tuareg"), Arabs (including Mauritanian "Moors"), Songhai, and Fulbe. Here again, there is occasional mention of Soninke, Bamana, Dogon, and Hausa when necessary, given the fact that in this part of West Africa people are extremely mobile, neighborhoods are often intermixed, and many individuals deploy different (even opposed) identities according to the situation. This applies to ostensibly "sedentary" groups almost as much as ostensible "nomads."

This is a desk study. The methodology has thus been to build the analysis primarily from academic, journalistic and "grey" literatures, supplemented by the author's telephone or face-to-face interviews with experts on the region. Two further sources are responses from Navanti's network of respondents on the ground in the relevant countries, and the author's own six research trips undertaken in 2004-2006 to Mauritania, Mali (including several trips to Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal), Niger, Chad and Algeria, which provide background to understanding the current dynamics. The paper recommends several axes of further field-based research that would help to answer questions not addressed here.

### A. Sahara-Sahel Environment and Livelihoods

The Sahara-Sahel is a vast region stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, and from several hundred kilometers south of the Mediterranean coast some 2500 kilometers southward to the coastal forest belt of West Africa and the Central African rainforest. Though the region was once lush savannah plain filled with game and pastoralists following their herds across the fertile band, it has long since become a harsh environment where access to water is scarce and where populations must diversify their livelihood strategies in order to survive. The sparsely populated Sahara, though forbidding to those who are not accustomed to it, has for several millennia served as a zone of trade, travel, and exchange. The word "Sahel" is derived from the Arabic for "shore," and the metaphor is apt. Just as the ocean is a dangerous and forbidding zone for those who lack the navigational skills and the proper outfitting, so is the desert. For those such as the Kel Tamasheq, who have mastered the techniques required for travelling, trading, and staying alive in the desert, this knowledge has served as the comparative advantage that made for a viable niche economy that developed over centuries.

**The Sahel region between 12°N and 20°N**

Climate Zones
- Humid
- Sub-humid Humid
- Sub-humid Dry
- Semi-arid
- Arid
- Hyper-arid

Source : WMO (2001)

© Sahel and West Africa Club / OECD 2010

As in many maritime regions, the precariousness of these livelihoods required that Sahel/desert populations diversify their activities. In addition to pastoral herding of camels and goats, hunting, and farming hardy crops such as sorghum and millet, many Sahara-Sahel inhabitants have also engaged in forms of raiding and smuggling that have existed alongside other forms of trade. A principal finding of much of the historical and ethnographic work on the region is that the lines between illegal and illicit trade in this region are porous and shifting, a fact that is relevant to the current political situation in the region.

If the harshness of the environment contributed to a diversification of livelihood strategies, environmental shocks have pushed even the most resourceful pastoralists and farmers in the region to the brink of famine. The region has known periodic failures of rains, in the mid 1700s, 1820s and 1830s, and in the 1910s, but the Sahelian droughts that culminated in 1972-4 and 1984-5 were especially devastating. Many pastoralists in the region covered in this paper lost

most or all of their herds, and the famine-related deaths, displacements and forced livelihood changes (including sedentarization of many former pastoralists) are still marked on the memories of many Sahara-Sahel residents.[9]



Coefficient of variation for annual precipitation (1901 – 2006)

Source: UK Met Office Hadley Centre; CRU data 1901-2000, University of East Anglia Climate Research Unit (CRU) © Sahel and West Africa Club / OECD 2010
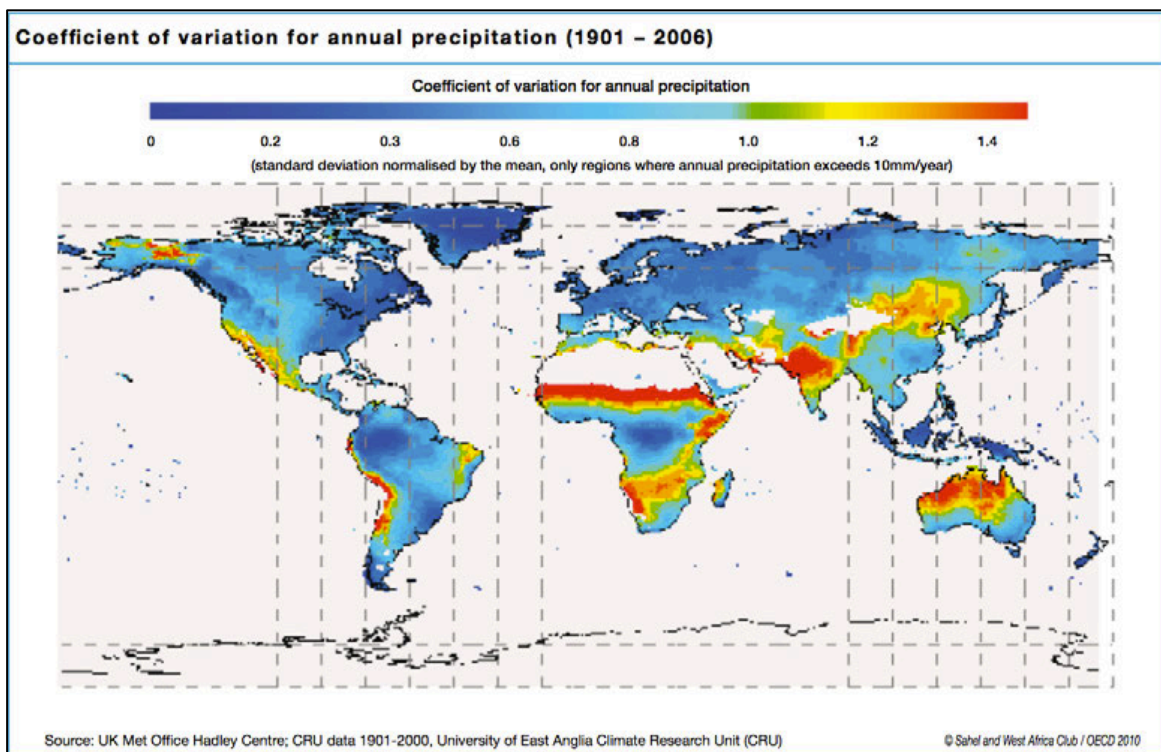
Rains since the mid-1980s have been unpredictable, including years of overabundance that have sometimes created problematic floods. However, the scientific consensus is that the Sahara is moving southward into the Sahel zone. In conjunction with rising population densities, this has placed enormous strains on both the societies and states trying to manage these transformations. These shifts should be understood as a fundamentally important variable in the unfolding of the political dynamics studied in this paper. While environmental issues will factor throughout this paper, they will not be central to its explanatory framework. This is partly due to the fact that the literature on the links between environmental stresses and conflict has reached a wide range of findings,[10] and while most agree that environmental stresses contribute to conflict in this region, the magnitude of the effect is far from agreed. For the sake of this analysis, climate change and climate shocks are considered necessary but not sufficient causal factors. As Straus writes,

> In assessing the risk of such disputes [over natural resources] materializing into violent conflict, it is essential to avoid any crude deterministic relationship between poverty and resource scarcity, on the one hand, and conflict, on the other. Where tensions exist and

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[9] In Mali, the losses sustained in the 1970s and 1980s droughts compounded those imposed in 1964, when the Malian army killed thousands of head of livestock as part of a policy of collective punishment of the Kel Tamasheq population for the 1963-64 rebellion.
[10] See Berenter and Busby, 2010; Busby et al. 2010; Hissler, 2010; Trémolières, 2010.

lead to violent conflict, there are usually specific problems of management, leadership (or its absence), local politics, and local history that come into play.[11]

At several points the analysis compares Niger to Mali. The two countries have many of the same environmental challenges, similar populations, histories of separatist rebellion and currents of reformist Muslim preaching that sometimes trend toward jihadi rhetoric. Some 6.4 million Nigeriens faced hunger during the 2011-2012 Sahel food crisis. But this didn't cause radicalization, coups, violent conflict, or chaos. In 2012 the Issoufou government in Niger launched the 3N Initiative (see box). Humanitarian groups active in Niger point out that the proactive approach taken by the new administration aims to combat both food insecurity and malnutrition, heralding it as an example to other crisis-prone Sahel countries. This is one of several instances where the report will point out that coherent, proactive governance and a will to address structural issues makes the difference between predisposing factors developing into full-blown conflict or not.

> **3N – Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens** [*Les Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens*] is a broad government-led strategy aimed at improving food production, nutrition, and livelihood security through transformation in the energy, environment, and industrial sectors. The project is estimated to cost $2 billion in the initial 2012-2015 phase and is possible because Nigeriens had the political will to make it happen.

### B. History of the Region

The region addressed in this report includes the territories that became Mauritania, Mali, Niger and southern Algeria. Other countries, including Senegal, Burkina Faso, Libya, and Nigeria will figure in the analysis. Given the recent dramatic events in Mali, that country is the focal point of the report, with its immediate neighbors Mauritania, Algeria and Niger also of central importance. Other countries are included in the analysis only as necessary.

The four countries under study are linked by a variety of factors, including the physical Sahara-Sahel geography described above, populations of Mande, Arab, Berber, and Songhai communities that live in several or all of the countries, and a series of cultural and historic links. These include the fact that this region was home to some of the greatest medieval empires in West African history, including the Empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai, all of which emanated from present-day Mali into neighboring countries. All four countries are more than 90 percent Muslim, and have histories of heterogeneous Muslim conversion and practice. Each of the four was colonized by France, and the French influence in the region remains strong, as evidenced by the dramatic French military intervention that began on 11 January, 2013 to push back jihadis who had just taken the Malian town of Konna and threatened to move toward Bamako.

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[11] Straus, Scott "Mali and its Sahelian Neighbors." World Bank 2011 World Development Report Background Paper. July 2011.

Map Sources: US National Park Service, GAUL, UNOCHA, Logistics Cluster
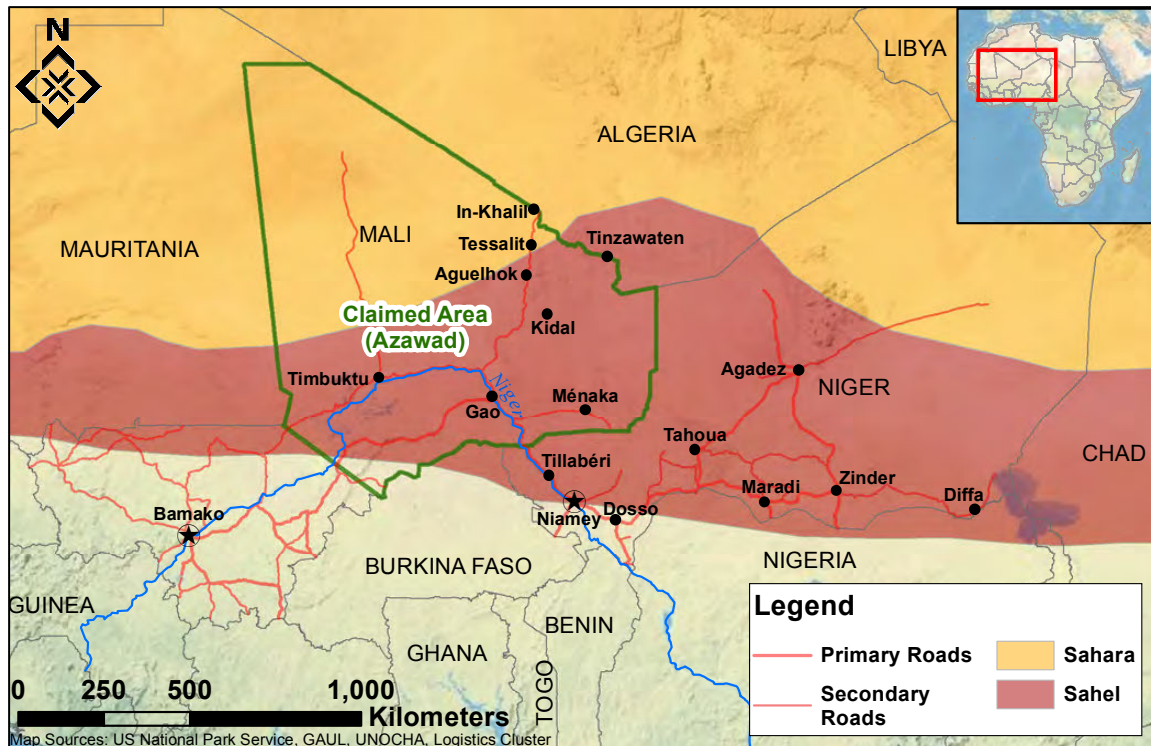
A final shared element that will figure in this analysis is that each country constitutes part of the fault line between "White" and "Black" Africa. These terms are both contested, fluid, and politically delicate, but it is impossible to understand some of the dynamics at play in this region today without addressing the stereotypes, self-stereotypes, and painful history of social and political relations shaped by ideas of race that have been linked to the seizure, sale, and holding of slaves on the basis of an ideology of Arab/Berber racial superiority.

## C. The Colonial Legacy

If the history of local intercommunal relations has often been painful, so have the relations between the Saharan-Sahelian countries and Europe. As with North Africans, Europeans sought and purchased black African slaves, and later used the ideology of racial superiority to justify colonization. In the context of the present analysis, what is most germane is the rather noxious form of romanticization that resulted from the meeting of these two worldviews. French writing on the Kel Tamasheq to this day[12] indulges in a great deal of T. E. Lawrence-style romanticism and admiration of the martial qualities and pride of the Kel Tamasheq. LeCoq has noted that throughout the colonial period, northern Mali was administered by French military officers rather than civilian *Commandants du Cercle*, and that the majority of these officers were from the French nobility. The romanticization of Kel Tamasheq *noblesse d'epée* ("nobles of the sword") and the Tamasheq self-ascription of superiority over its southern neighbors has contributed to lasting incomprehension between these Saharan "Blue Men" and their soon-to-be post-

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[12] Raffray 2012. Writing of the 2007 Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ) Kel Tamasheq rebellion in Niger, Guichaoua (2009 page 247) writes, "The MNJ mobilized the image of the noble and nomadic 'Blue Man of the Desert' standing up against subjugation imposed by central governments, a cliché firmly rooted in French colonial historiography."

independence rulers in Mali and Niger, who had only recently been the prey of their slave raids.

The French respect for the Saharan nomads is not a straightforward subject. In the 1950s and 1960s, they were the perfect foil to the Mediterranean Arab political actors they were fighting in Algeria and Marxist firebrands such as Mali's Modibo Keita and Guinea's Sékou Touré to the south of the Sahara. Moreover, at the moment of independence, discoveries of oil and gas under the Saharan sands meant that the French made a last-minute effort to hive off a Saharan zone called the *Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes* (OCRS) that would preserve French access to the underground wealth of this region. What has proved to be a problematic legacy is that both the OCRS initiative and prior acceptance of Kel Tamasheq demands for political autonomy in the Sahara have fed into the present situation, in which neither people in the south nor those in the north treat Kel Tamasheq as full citizens of the countries in which they live. In this scenario, most Kel Tamasheq in Mali and Niger evade, rather than engage with, the state, refusing to acknowledge almost any responsibilities and only rarely claiming any rights as citizens. Since these claims of rights often are accompanied by violence, the Malian state most often responds with considerable violence.[13] Kel Tamasheq are thus able to take a position as being both victims of and superior to southern Malians. Southern Malians, in their turn, can patronize Kel Tamasheq, few of whom have engaged the educational system to the secondary or tertiary levels, while still privately discussing the lingering resentments linked to histories of violence and enslavement. In short, if the French left their former colonies with a common language and a set of administrative and cultural legacies that have become fully owned by francophone Africans, they undercut these potential sources of unity by tolerating and even encouraging a sense of "white" racial superiority among some of their colonial subjects.

### D. Postcolonial Governance

As might well be expected, the mostly black African governments of the independence era were repulsed by what they perceived as French practices of turning a blind eye to slavery in the north of Mali and Niger, and the double standard of colonization for black Africans and semi-autonomy for "white" Africans that had prevailed at least through the end of World War II. Northern Malians and Nigeriens were thus quickly brought under the yoke of the independent state. Mauritania was quite a different situation. To this day, the "white" minority (about 30 percent) still rules the black majority, split about evenly between black Hassaniya Arabic speakers and ethnic Soninke, Fulbe and Wolof. In Algeria the equation is different again, with Kel Tamasheq and other Berber groups frequently complaining that they are treated as second-class citizens by the coastal Arab political and economic elites.

In Mali and Niger, these tensions have reached the boiling point on several occasions, leading to separatist Kel Tamasheq rebellions three times in Mali and once in Niger, along with a series of smaller uprisings and hit-and-run attacks. In Algeria the democratic elections of 1991 - which were curtailed by the army (with French and American acquiescence) when it became clear that the citizens were about to elect Islamist candidates - sparked the bloody civil war of the 1990s. This war saw jihadis, many of whom had fought as mujahidin in Afghanistan in the 1980s, fighting the state, and both sides using the civilian population as their battleground. Killing up to

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[13] Niger has often, though not always, dealt with these negotiations with greater tact.

150,000 people,[14] the war saw the main Algerian jihadi groups – primarily the FIS (*Front Islamique du Salut)*, and the GIA (*Groupe Islamique Armé*) – mutate and split. In 1998, the GIA became the GSPC (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*), and at about that time, the group's southern katiba (cell or unit) became more active. Over the next five years, interactions between southern Algerian Arab jihadis, such as Mokhtar Belmokhtar and Abu Zeid, and Algerian and Malian Kel Tamasheq became more frequent. During 2003, the hostage-taking of 32 European tourists brought GSPC operatives into Mali (where half the hostages were released). This encounter enriched the GSPC emirs with five million Euros, which they were able to use to purchase weapons and to spread largesse to the local population. More importantly, it convinced them that the newly elected Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) was someone with whom they could do business. His Nigerian style of governance emphasized containment and self-enrichment, treating the Malian territory as a mosaic of fiefdoms. As long as powerful actors made sure that their superiors received their cut of any significant economic activity in which they were involved, and didn't impinge on the territory of other actors, they were given a free hand in their zones of influence.

### E.  Situation from January 2012

The laissez faire style of governance that characterized ATT's administration became increasingly mafiesque over time.[15] Given that only a tiny fraction of the population was seeing the benefits of this style of governance, resentments and dissatisfaction ran high. At the same time, the state was in the process of cannibalizing itself, most notably in the area of its security forces, who were focused on making money, rather than defending the national territory and protecting its citizens. As a result, when yet another rebellion began in northern Mali, rebels quickly took Ménaka and then Aguelhok. Given the prevailing modus operandi of the ATT government, this was not treated as a major problem. Rebels would fight for a period of time, negotiations would take place, money would circulate, and everything would settle in to a new status quo for a year or two, or maybe five, until the dance began again.[16]

> **Amadou Toumani Touré – "ATT"**
> ATT, former Army General and President of Mali from 2002 until he was ousted in March 2012, originally seized power in a 1991 coup that toppled long-time military ruler Moussa Traore. Originally regarded as the "soldier for democracy" for restoring democracy to Mali, and as a champion of public health working alongside the Carter Center, ATT became known later in his career for his lax governance style, ineffective handling of the north, and his administration's collusion with smugglers and armed groups.

Lower-ranks soldiers, however, had other ideas. Particularly enraged by the way this logic effectively shrugged off the massacre of 97 Malian soldiers at Aguelhok, and riding the massive wave of dissatisfaction with ATT's non-governance, a group of lower ranks officers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo took power on 22 March 2012. Despite his fiery rhetoric, there has been little to suggest that Sanogo and his colleagues were interested in much more than placing

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[14] This is the Algerian government's official figure. Some researchers (e.g. Hagelstein, 2008, who estimates 44,000) suggest lower numbers.

[15] See the section on "The Perception of State Involvement in Illicit Economies" below for details.

[16] Until 2012, the dynamic between northern Mali and Bamako had come to closely resemble that between the Niger Delta and Abuja. A major goal of both diplomatic and development interventions moving forward should be to move all actors out of this cynical and elite-oriented pattern.

themselves at the head of the lucrative economic pyramid scheme that the Malian state had become.[17] Accusations that the putschistes quickly became embroiled in the illicit economic networks once controlled by the ATT clan went so far as to suggest that the January 2013 move to take Konna was linked to a secret deal between the putschistes and the jihadis who had shared interests in the drug trade.[18] In any case, while Sanogo decried the lack of support the ATT administration had given the soldiers on the front, a coalition of Kel Tamasheq separatists and jihadis decided to claim two-thirds of the national territory, and the Malian army simply abandoned their posts. It is indicative of how far separated the realities of the north are from Bamako that this military failure hardly seemed to affect Sanogo's popularity in the capital.
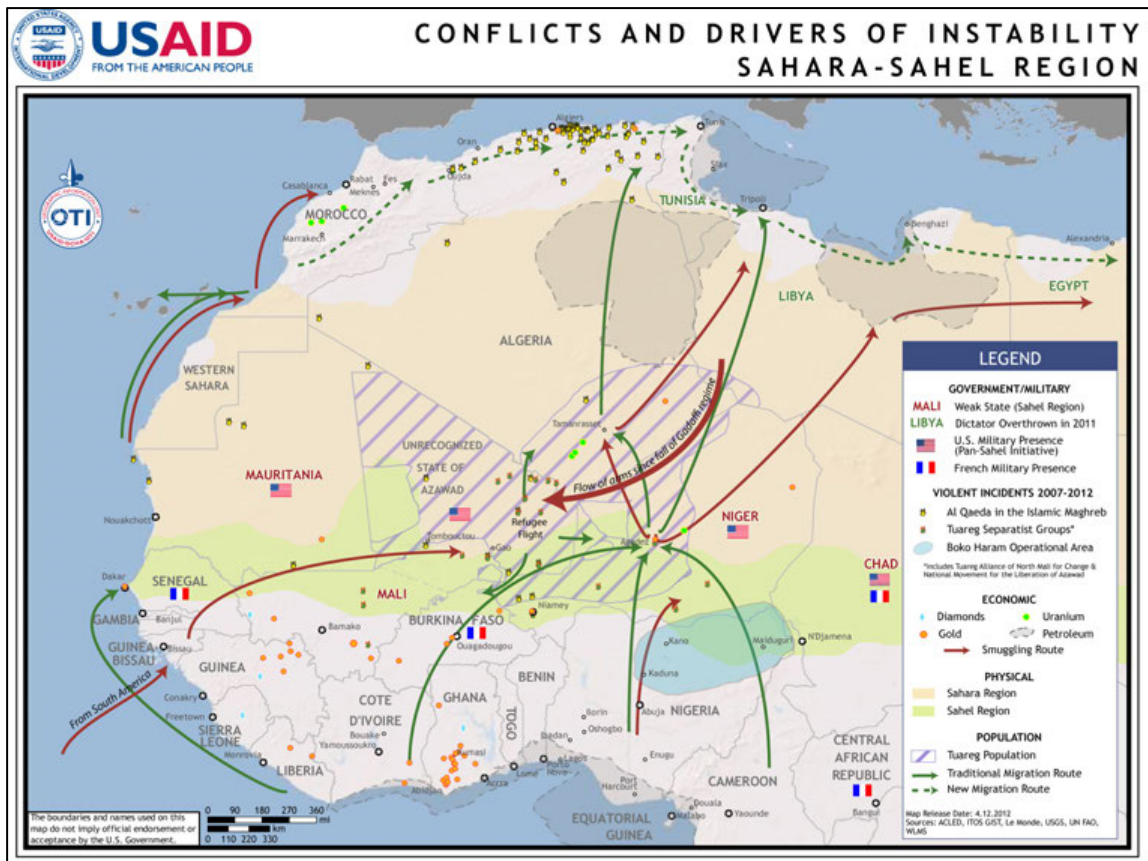


The nine-month period from April 2012 to January 2013 saw an effective partition of Mali, during which jihadi groups ousted the secular ethnonationalist MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) from most of the north, and West African states planned an

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[17] Sanogo resembles Moussa Dadis Camara, the one-time Guinean putschiste, both as a lower-ranks officer who represents a new generation and as one who cultivated popular support via a populist anti-establishment, anti-corruption rhetoric. This may help to explain the significant amount of popular support both enjoyed in the early stages of their careers.

[18] See «Mali : histoire secrete d'une guerre surprise », *Le Nouvel Observateur,* 7 fevrier 2013, also author's interview with West African diplomat, 21 April, 2012. The article claims that Captain Sanogo may have wanted to use further advances by the jihadis to disqualify the civilian government, thus making clear the need for a new imposition of military rule, after which the junta and the jihadis could share profits from the drug trade. The International Crisis Group (2013:6) writes that although it could not find compelling evidence that such claims were true, it could not rule them out. Perhaps most important is the fact that such claims would even garner credibility in Bamako.

internationally backed military intervention to re-conquer the lost territory. A push by the jihadis to conquer the town of Konna in January 2013 was another easy success, but claims that they would soon overrun Bamako were squelched by a massive French attack. It began with air strikes and followed with a ground force that grew to 4,000 French and about 2,000 Chadian soldiers, who quickly took Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, and Tessalit, and then proceeded to engage in fierce fighting in the Ifoghas mountains to the northeast of Kidal, where the jihadis had retreated. At present, France is about to start drawing down its forces, while a new United Nations (UN) resolution is about to create a UN peacekeeping force that will "blue hat" the African AFSIMA (African-led Support Mission to Mali) force.[19]

## VI.    IDENTITIES I:  ETHNIC GROUPS AND SUBGROUPS

One of the most significant works of anthropology written about the Sahel region in the last twenty to thirty years is Jean-Loup Amselle's *Mestizo Logics* (1990). Using the Wassolon region of Mali as his ethnographic example, he shows how the same person can be an ethnic Fulbe in one situation, an ethnic Bamana in another, and in yet others, claim his mixed heritage. As Amselle rightly insists, this situation is not specific to the southern Malian region he studies but is typical of West Africa. This caveat is a useful "grain of salt" to go with the schematic treatment of identities sketched below. Many people can and do claim multiple ethnic identities, and what each of these mean varies according to the social and political setting.

### A.  Traders, Smugglers, and Bandits

It is also worth noting that a number of occupational groups, including smugglers and bandits, have long been present in the region, and typically operate both within extended family networks and across broad multiethnic networks of trust. Judith Scheele (2012) writes about the ways that smuggling, trade, family networks and religious piety all interconnect for Arabs living and travelling between southern Algeria and northern Mali.

In this context it is useful to distinguish between illicit and illegal trades. For instance, because pasta and flour are subsidized by the Algerian state, it is technically illegal to transport them over the border for sale in Mali. At the same time, already expensive goods from (landlocked) Bamako can cost far more than smuggled Algerian goods by the time that both reach northern Mali. The modest savings these Algerian staples represent can make a huge difference in the lives of poor Kel Tamasheq in northern Mali, and few if any of those involved consider such trade to be illicit, even though they understand perfectly well that it is illegal. In fact, this trade is referred to as "Al frud" by Arab traders, a term derived from the French "fraude."[20] In essence, illegal but licit trade takes place where most of the community agrees that it is the laws that are wrong, not the people who break them.

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[19] The African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) was unanimously approved by the UN Security Council in Resolution 2085 on 20 December, 2012. The subsequent attack of Konna and French intervention effectively trumped all prior plans, accelerating the deployment of first Chadian and later Guinean, Senegalese and Burkinabe troops.
[20] Scheele, page 110.

At the other end of the spectrum lie *haram*, polluting substances, including drugs. However lucrative the proceeds from this trade, there is general consensus that the laws are right and those who break them are wrong. Scheele carefully teases apart the internal contradictions surrounding illicit trade. There is a popular belief that those involved in *haram* businesses such as the cigarette or drugs trades will renounce or damage the bonds of reciprocity that link them to their extended families. In reality, most of those involved in illicit trade still invest the money into making a pious life possible for their families, sending relatives on the Haj, allowing wives and sisters to live comfortably at home rather than circulating in public, and making gifts to religious figures. Many other smuggled goods, from gasoline to weapons to people, fall somewhere between foodstuffs and cocaine on the licit/illicit spectrum, but the modest profits Arab and Kel Tamasheq traders make as they cross borders is one of the main sources of income in the desert economy. Jihadis are generally understood to derive some profits from smuggling, either taxing the goods as they transit areas they control (AQIM – Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) or being directly involved (MUJWA – Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa).[21]

The figure of the social bandit is discussed below in its relevance to Kel Tamasheq society. More entrepreneurial forms of banditry have also existed in the Sahara-Sahel zone, and kidnapping for ransom fits smoothly within that model. Bandits' primary advantage in this zone is their mobility and knowledge of the terrain. The most admired strongmen amongst Kel Tamasheq rebels are often famous for their ability to drive the ubiquitous Toyota Land Cruiser pickups in the desert at night at high speeds with no headlights. The same skills essential to a successful bandit are essential to the rebel and vice versa.

### B. Kel Tamasheq (Tuareg)

The people often referred to as "Tuareg" in English and "Touareg" in French call themselves Kel Tamasheq, or speakers of the Tamasheq language.[22] Kel Tamasheq have often been split by multiple oppositions among different groups within the society, even while they have often managed to present a united front against outside actors. This generalization still does not explain all cases, with the relations of ethnic Kel Tamasheq and the Malian, Nigerien and Algerian states all being quite different. As explained further below, both the government of Niger and Kel Tamasheq leaders based in Niger have exerted far greater will to cooperate with one another, despite the fact that Niger's Kel Tamasheq, too, rebelled against the state twice in the last twenty years. Today, Niger's Prime Minister is a Kel Tamasheq man who has spent his career as a civil servant. In contrast, leaders of Mali's Ifoghas clan of Kel Tamasheq have repeatedly initiated rebellions, made peace deals and broken them, entered the Malian military and deserted, and acted in bad faith in ways that are exasperating even to other Kel Tamasheq.[23]

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[21] Lacher, 2012, Lebovich 2013.

[22] This paper uses "Kel Tamasheq" both on the principle that people's own terms for themselves are preferable to those used by others, and because it emphasizes native language as the most stable basis for assigning identity in a region where ethnicity, race and status are all fluid and determined partly by context.

[23] Still, the united Kel Tamasheq front does sometimes prevail across national boundaries. LeCoq, et al. (forthcoming) recount that when President Issoufou of Niger expressed support for a West African military intervention into Mali, Kel Tamasheq from Niger informed him that they were prepared to take up arms against the Nigerien government in support of their Kel Tamasheq cousins in Mali.
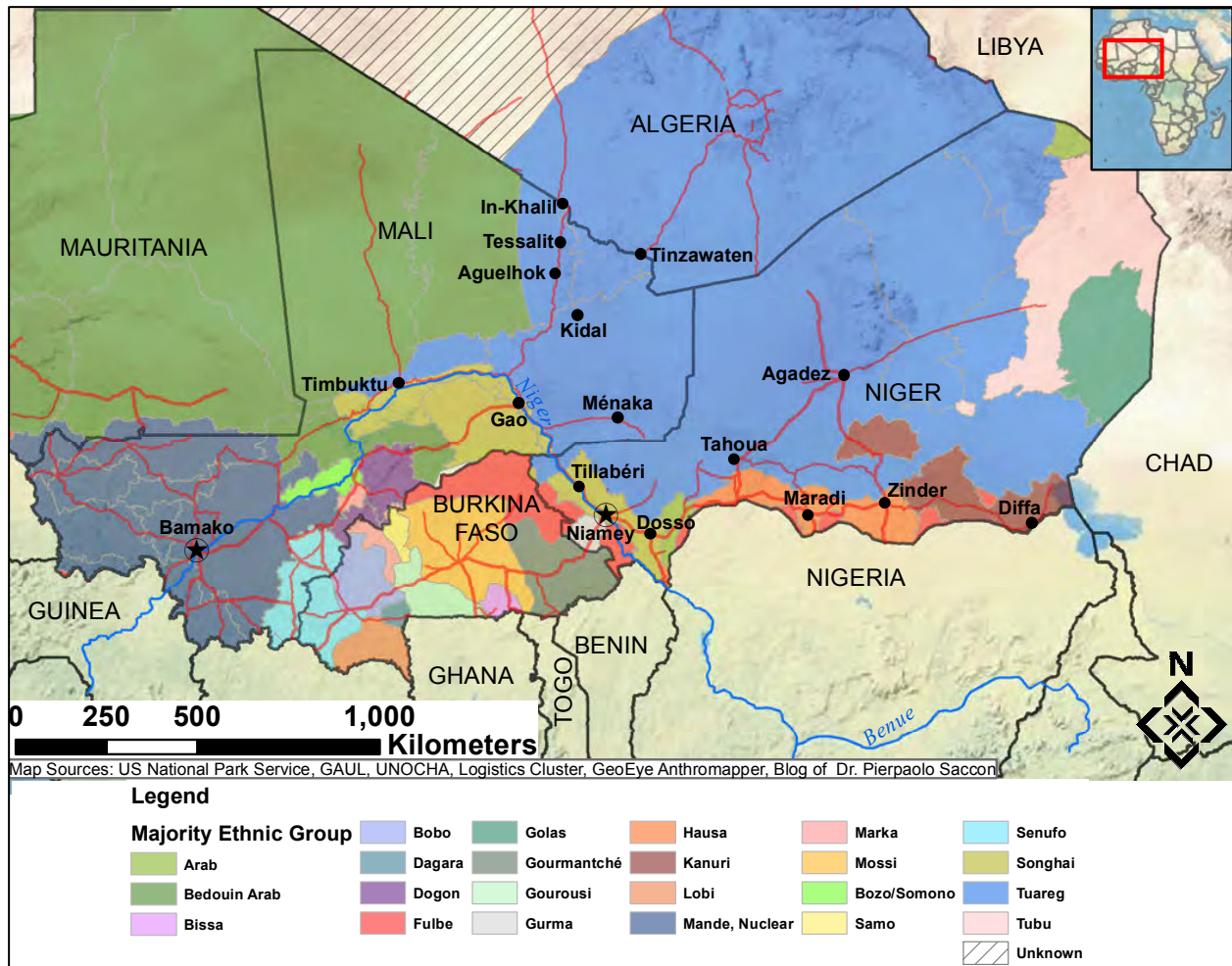
In his book *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms, and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*, Baz LeCoq underlines the complexity of Tamasheq social formations. Some define descent along the mother's line (matrilineality) while others define it along the father's line (patrilineality). In principle, Tamasheq men in Niger say that their ideal wife would be their Father's Brother's daughter, but according to Murphy, few actually take these parallel cousins as their wives.[24] Tamasheq society is divided into five groups: *Imushagh* Warrior Nobles, Clerics, *Imghad* (free-born non-nobles), *Inadan* "casted" blacksmiths, and finally the *Iklan* slaves, who since the 1940s are free, but who continue to carry some degree of servile status from their slave background.[25] While acknowledging that contemporary Tamasheq are familiar with these distinctions and sometimes use them, LeCoq insists that, "it is not at all clear what it exactly means to be a member of any of these groups nowadays."[26] Since the 1990s second rebellion, many of these statuses are undergoing significant transformations.

Kel Tamasheq in Mali, Niger and Algeria live by a complex set of livelihood strategies that include herding camels and goats, trading both legal and illegal goods, tourism and artisanal

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[24] Murphy, Robert 1967 "Tuareg kinship." American Anthropologist Vol 69, pp. 163-170.
[25] In northern Mali, Iklan are also commonly referred to by the equivalent Songhai term, "Bellah."
[26] LeCoq, p. 6.

production, and by a cluster of criminal activities best termed banditry.  As Hobsbawm has argued,[27] bandits often live in a kind of symbiosis with states, especially in the mountainous, forested or desert regions that are difficult for weaker states to control.  Acts of theft, piracy, and pillage that target the state are often tolerated by local populations, especially to the extent that the bandits recirculate some of their wealth among the population.  The ideal type of the Kel Tamasheq social bandit was Alla ag Albachir, of the Irayaken Ifoghas clan.  Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, he defied and raided the French, who ultimately hunted him down and decapitated him in 1954 as a warning to other rebellious Kel Tamasheq.[28]  His legend lives on in music and stories, and his son Elledi was a major figure in the 1963 Alfellaga rebellion.

Given the difficult relations between Kel Tamasheq and the states that claimed to rule them, such banditry has often been treated locally as a just redress of structural inequities, similar to the situation between militants and the local population in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The delicate balance amongst bandits, local populations and the state often goes awry, especially when the bandits break their implicit contracts by either preying on the locals or frontally attacking the state.  It might be said that Kel Tamasheq banditry has gone wrong in all of the ways it possibly could, with strongmen like Ibrahim Bahanga typifying men who operate on a basis of self-enrichment and empowerment, rather than rebellion and honor.[29]  Equally willful and rebellious as Alla ag Albachir, Bahanga nevertheless failed to garner the kinds of support his predecessor did.  This is perhaps partly because his activities were fundamentally based on repeatedly reneging on the engagements into which he had entered (he repeatedly deserted the Malian army in which he had been given a position as a non-commissioned officer).  This abrogated a fundamental tenet of Kel Tamasheq conduct; honor, or *eshik*.  Moreover, unlike Hobsbawm's social bandit, Bahanga often did little to redistribute the proceeds of his own illegal activities amongst anyone but his immediate circle.  In this regard he resembled a Liberian warlord more than an honor-bound social bandit.  This is a problem that has come to plague the leaders of the most recent Tuareg rebellion.

Given that Kel Tamasheq inhabit the same space as the jihadis operating under the Al Qaeda franchise, it is important to say something about Kel Tamasheq and religion.  In his 1964 essay on Kel Tamasheq in Niger, anthropologist Robert Murphy put the matter bluntly:

> The Tuareg, like their neighbors on all sides, are Moslem.  They are noted, however, as infamous and unregenerate back-sliders who observe neither proper law nor custom, who misperform the ritual postures in prayer, fail to make ablutions, eat and drink during the fasting days of Ramadan, and who have few of the wise and holy in their ranks.  Despite the best Tuareg efforts to simulate orthodoxy in the presence of their censorious neighbors, these charges are substantially true.

> One of their most obvious points of heterodoxy is in the treatment of their women.  The Tuareg woman enjoys privileges unknown to her sex in most Moslem societies.  She is not kept in seclusion nor is she diffident about expressing her opinions publicly…  The

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[27] Hobsbawm, Eric  2000 *Bandits, Revised Edition.*  New York:  New Press.
[28] LeCoq p. 184.
[29] Bahanga died in a car accident in August, 2011.

shock of early Arab travelers at this state of affairs is understandable and was aggravated by the fact that the men were veiled and the women were not.[30]

Though the passage was based on Murphy's fieldwork of 50 years ago, the charge of religious laxity has continued to the present. It is a commonplace of the study of fundamentalist conversion that is often those who perceive themselves to have been lax who are most attracted to the prestige and the moral clarity of self-consciously "strict" forms of religion such as Salafist Islam. The forms of reformist Islam in the region are numerous, and different strains have gone under the names of "the Dawa" or Tablighi Islam on one hand (originating in South Asia, but by now an international proselytizing network), and "*Intégriste*," "Wahhabi," or "les bras croisés," all names for the type of reformist Islam introduced from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait by Arab missionaries and by Africans returning from travel to other parts of the world, including the Hajj in Saudi Arabia. Neither of these forms of religious practice is inherently violent or even politicized. Tablighis explicitly admonish converts to avoid worldly political engagements. At the same time, almost all jihadis in West Africa do espouse Salafi Islam.[31] Thus while most Salafis are not involved in politics, almost all jihadis are Salafis, which has brought these converts under scrutiny.

### C. Imghad as Intermediate Category

As mentioned already, Kel Tamasheq society is divided along multiple lines, some of them clans and "fractions" whose membership is defined by genealogy, and some more like social classes. One of the latter groups is the Imghad. In the somewhat stilted classifications of French colonial ethnology, Imghad were called "*vassaux*," or vassals. This was partly the result of the metaphor of "feudal" Europe the French used for understanding hierarchical African societies. Socialist governments such as Mali's Modibo Keita's maintained this metaphor after independence, as they tried to eliminate inequalities in "traditional" societies. The Imghad/noble relation had already been in the process of transforming for some time, and in the context of this paper, the most relevant oppositions emerged in the Kidal and Ménaka regions at the end of the 1990s rebellion and to the present. This set of oppositions has increasingly aligned Imghad from this region with the state as against the Imushagh (noble) fighters from the Ifoghas clans. The major Imghad figure on the scene today is El Hajj Gamou, discussed below in the context of combatant groups.

### D. Ifoghas

The postcolonial history of Kel Tamasheq in Mali can be divided into five main periods: the Alfellaga first rebellion (1963-4); the Teshumara (1968-1990); the Al Jebha second rebellion

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[30] Robert F. Murphy, 'Social Distance and the Veil', *American Anthropologist*, 66, 6 (December 1964).

[31] Prior currents of jihad in West Africa, on the contrary, were organized around Sufi theology. This was the case in Uthman dan Fodio's jihad in northern Nigeria and also in Umar Tal's jihad from present-day Guinea into the Malian region of Macina. Tal justified waging war against other Muslims through the argument that his Tijani form of Sufi Islam was the only right way, and should be forcefully imposed on those still practicing the wrong (Qadiriya) form of Sufi Islam. This bit of 1860s history is instructive mainly because in some superficial readings of "good" and "bad" forms of Islam today, Tijani and other Sufi practices are sometimes portrayed as the peaceful and "moderate" forms of Islam that should be promoted as a bulwark against reformist Islam. What matters is not the theological of these different schools of religious thought but rather the ways they are mobilized and politicized. Such mobilizations are constantly changing, as scholars of Islam in the region have insisted.

(1990-1996); the Third Rebellion (2006-2009); and the events of 2012-2013. The Alfellaga is the Tamasheq term for the first rebellion, begun in 1963 and brutally crushed by the Malian government in 1964. After this military defeat, many Malian Kel Tamasheq went into exile, some in Algeria, some in Niger, and many of the surviving rebels in Libya. This period of youth unemployment is the one Kel Tamasheq call the Teshumara,[32] and it lasted from 1968 to 1990. Al Jebha is the name given to the second rebellion, which took place between 1990 and 1996. The third rebellion took place between 2006 and 2009, and shared many of the same key actors with those involved in the second rebellion and the most recent events. In all of these uprisings, the Ifoghas clan, centered around Kidal, played a central role.

It is important in the context of discussions of Kel Tamasheq identity not to treat all Tamasheq speakers as a unified bloc. This is probably obvious in the wake of the multiple schisms on display since January 2012, but the point has often been lost in political analyses, and the current treatment of groups by ethnicity could foster the same misunderstanding. In reality, many other Malian and Nigerien Kel Tamasheq and Arabs find the Ifoghas incredibly troublesome and difficult. Although the Kel Tamasheq community in Mali attempts to present a united front under the current trying circumstances, many Malians from the north condemn the inconstancy, rent-seeking and in-fighting of such men as Iyad ag Ghali, Ibrahim Ag Bahanga (deceased), and Hassan Fagaga. Various members of Idnan, Kel Essuq, Imghad and other fractions of the Malian Tuareg community complain amongst themselves of "the Kidal rogues."[33] As one local contributor put it, "It is evident that in the Adagh (area around Kidal), the Ifoghas are the only tribal group still capable of creating tensions between tribes and also capable of playing the stabilization card because of their capacity to create alliances which always place their enemy in a minority position any time there is a crisis."[34] Given their centrality to all of the Malian Kel Tamasheq rebellions, their links (especially through Iyad Ag Ghali) to Salafi and jihadi networks, and their involvement in trafficking, the Ifoghas cannot be ignored in future negotiations with the Bamako government. They have been and are likely to remain the main potential spoilers to any potential peace plan. By the same token, they should not be the only, nor even the main actors representing Mali's Kel Tamasheq.

### E. Iklan (Bellah)

Iklan is the Tamasheq term, and Bellah the Songhai term, for "slave." The origin of most Iklan within Kel Tamasheq society is also loosely linked to contemporary tensions, as many of them were probably seized during raids on their Songhai neighbors to the south. As with the Haratine black Moors of servile background (in Mauritania), most Iklan no longer know the origins of their families before their ancestors were enslaved, and thus share their masters' language and

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[32] The term is the Tamasheq nominalization of the French loan word "*chômeur*" or unemployed person, and literally means "unemployedness. " *Ishumar* is Tamasheq for "unemployed men." The broader connotation, however, is one of creativity and resistance, often away from home, under circumstances where frontal attack would be suicidal. In this regard it is an almost perfect instance of what Gramsci called the "War of Position" (1971: 229-239). This cultural and political resistance characterized those who fled Malian military reprisals for the 1963-64 rebellion and gave rise to the poetry and music that became known internationally through groups like Tinariwen. It also spawned the 1990s rebellion, prosecuted in large part by those who had been in the Teshumara in Libya and Algeria in the 1970s and 1980s.
[33] LeCoq, p. 397.
[34] Navanti respondent, 15 April, 2013.

culture. Issues of race, ethnicity and the legacy of local slavery are further discussed in a separate section below, but it is worth underlining the intermediate position of this group, who are fully Kel Tamasheq while also being treated in specific circumstances as second class citizens.[35]

### F. Songhai/Djerma/Zerma

While Kel Tamasheq, Fulbe and Arab populations in the Sahara-Sahel zone often move across borders as part of their merchant or pastoralist livelihoods, Songhai/Djerma people are primarily sedentary farmers. Main crops include rice, millet and manioc. Songhai constitute the majority of the population in two of the three northern regions in Mali (Timbuktu and Gao). There are about one million Songhai in Mali (six percent of the national population) and 3.5 million Djerma in Niger (20 percent of the population). They were the rulers of the famed Songhai empire, which ruled the Sahelian region in the 15th and 16th centuries. Songhai today are settled mainly along the Niger River in both Mali and Niger, and they represent the majority population group in both Timbuktu and Gao regions. Gao was the seat of the Songhai empire, which covered most of present-day Niger and Mali, and stretched westward across parts of present-day Guinea, Senegal and Gambia to the Atlantic Ocean. Various Songhai states have existed for at least 1,000 years, and Songhai are proud of this legacy, even under circumstances where the former glory of the empire is no longer evident.

Tensions between Songhai and Kel Tamasheq have a long history in this region, despite the fact that the two populations are significantly intermingled and have lived peacefully together for many centuries. Recent decades have not always been so peaceful, however. Songhai men made up the majority of the Ganda Koy militia that brutally and indiscriminately attacked Kel Tamasheq, mostly civilians, in the wake of the 1990s rebellion. This helped to plant the seeds for future rebellions. When the Kel Tamasheq-dominated MNLA came to power in northern Mali in early 2012, it claimed Gao as the seat of its Azawad homeland, an initial insult to the Songhai inheritors of the history of the Songhai Empire of Sonni Ali and Askia Mohammed. More pointedly, MNLA fighters reportedly targeted Songhai and Bellah residents for rape, abductions, and theft.[36] Given both these recent abuses and the history of ethnic targeting verging on cleansing, most of the Kel Tamasheq and Arab civilians who had not already left Timbuktu and Gao regions during 2012 left as soon as French, Chadian and Malian forces began to re-conquer the country's north.

### G. Fulbe/Peuhl/Fulani

Ethnic Fulbe, who speak Pular or Fulfulde dialects of the same language and are also called Peuhl, Fula, and Fulani, number over 30 million people across every country in West Africa and the Sahel. In deep history, Fulbe lived as nomadic pastoralists, though for several centuries, the populations of sedentary Fulbe have far outnumbered pastoralists in such regions as Senegal's

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[35] For those who speak French, this interview from Malian television with Mossa ag Intazoume, the Bamako-based leader of the Bellah community is quite interesting: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMsIwQD0DyI.

[36] I take up the issues of Bellah/Iklan people of servile status and of race below, but it is worth noting here that the MNLA's pattern of sexual abuse in particular appears to have targeted Bellah women and girls. Human Rights Watch "Mali: War Crimes by Northern Rebels." April 30, 2012.

Futa Tooro, Guinea's Futa Jallon, and the Macina region of Mali. Fulbe live throughout the region inhabited by Kel Tamasheq, Songhai/Zerma, and in all the cities and towns of Mauritania, Mali and Niger, where many are engaged in trade (from petty "*tablier*" traders who sell telephone recharge cards, candies and cigarettes by the piece, to major import-export barons who conduct large-scale trade between West Africa and Dubai or Guangzhou.

Fulbe have a long history of Muslim conversion, piety, and scholarship. Most Fulbe belong to the Tijaniyya tariqa, or Sufi "way," often referred to as a brotherhood. In the last twenty years, an increasing number of Fulbe have converted to various forms of reformist Islam, and as in Songhai, Dogon, Bamana and Kel Tamasheq communities, this has sometimes led to tensions between Tijanis and the converts, who are often young men, frequently are upwardly mobile in social and economic terms,[37] and can be seen as disrespectful to their elders. Fulbe clerics also led the series of 18th and 19th century jihads that brought Islam into northern Nigeria and Cameroon, and also brought the Tijani brotherhood into modern-day Guinea and Mali.

The point about intergenerational competition and upward mobility is worth bearing in mind with regard to all the ethnic groups mentioned here. The egalitarian rhetoric of reformist Islam challenges both the inherited and age-based advantages from which most young men are excluded. A parallel means of "jumping the queue" for young men of any religion living within societies dominated by an age-based hierarchy is small-scale warfare. This was a notable feature of the civil conflicts that have wracked Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire in the last two decades. Given this general context, the attraction for young men of Salafi religion and that of militia membership bear some similarities to one another, and occasionally overlap, as in the case of AQIM, MUJWA, or Ansar Dine.

In the context of the present conflict, the Fulbe have played roles on multiple sides. Fulbe were involved with the Ganda Koy in the 1990s and 2000s, and have thus fought against Kel Tamasheq. On the other hand, a sizeable number of Fulbe reportedly joined the jihadis in 2012. One source suggests that Imams in Mopti, Sevaré and Konna all recruited young men, especially among their *Talibe* religious students, to join the MUJWA. A number of suicide bombers have reportedly been Fulbe, as have some of the MUJWA detainees held since the beginning of Operation Serval.

### H. Arabs

The Arabs present in northern Mali include those born and raised in Mali and those who have come from neighboring countries.

### I. Moors

In the context of this analysis, I use the term "Moor" to refer to the "white" Arabs of Mauritania. They make up approximately 30 percent of the population, and control most positions of power in politics, business and the military. They claim descent from Yemeni Arabs who traveled to the Maghreb and then southward in the 17th century, following a route already taken by

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[37] As pointed out by Furth (2005), many of these young men are Fulbe of servile background who use the Salafi ideology that everyone is equal before God--"We are all God's slaves"--to justify marrying women of noble birth.

Almoravid Arabs several centuries before. They have a long history of enslavement of black Africans, and the other 70 percent of the Mauritanian population is about half black Africans speaking Wolof, Soninke, and other African languages, and half black speakers of Hassaniya Arabic who are presumed to be the descendants of slaves held by Arab masters. This is relevant because it is a similar situation to that in northern Mali, where the large population of Bellah ex-slaves is in a comparable situation.

## J. Berabiche

Berabiche Arabs predominate in the region surrounding Timbuktu, where they lay claim to the long and illustrious history of that city's history as a center of Islamic learning, though most Berabiche are traders. They are also speakers of Hassaniya Arabic, and most espouse the Qadiriya "path" of Sufi Islam. Because of the long history of Islam in Timbuktu, the residents until quite recently were rather averse to Salafi currents. As with other groups in the north, they have organized ethnic militias to protect their interests in lieu of the Malian state.

## K. Kounta

Kounta Arabs are traditionally known as nobles and clerics, and held great prestige. They are most numerous in the area around Tarkint, between Gao and Kidal. In recent years, their modest lifestyle has caused them to lose prestige by comparison with their Lamhar/Tilemsi neighbors, who have become more adept and more embedded in the cross-border smuggling economies. This has caused growing friction between Kounta and Lamhar. On March 8, 2013 (shortly after Operation Serval came into the Gao area), traditional Kounta leader Alwatta Ould Bady was tortured and killed, allegedly by drug traffickers whom he had denounced.

## L. El Amhar (Lamhar)

The El Amhar Arabs live in the Tilemsi valley north of Gao, and are also called Tilemsi Arabs. Over the last two to three decades, Lamhar Arabs have become the nouveaux riches of northern Mali, and most Malians and outside observers identify this group as being at the center of the cocaine transshipment network in Mali. Recently Lamhar Arab Baba Ould Cheikh was arrested, accused of involvement in trafficking drugs (to include the infamous "Air Cocaine" incident, which saw a 737 land in the Malian desert, where hundreds of kilos of cocaine were reportedly offloaded for transport across the desert toward Europe, and the plane was torched).[38] In Gao, a new neighborhood of massive, gaudy villas has sprouted in the last few years, and is known locally as "Cocainebougou" or "the cocaine neighborhood" in Bamankan. Almost all of the mansions are owned by Tilemsi Arabs.[39]

## M. Algerian Arabs

There are Algerian Arabs in northern Mali for trade, as there have been for many years. In many cases, these traders, who ply various routes between Tamanrasset, in southern Algeria, and Kidal,

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[38] Lebovich, Andrew Mali's Bad Trip: 'Air Cocaine,' Al-Qaeda, And West African Drug Trade – *Foreign Policy* , March 15 2013.
[39] Interview with specialist on northern Mali, 15 April 2013.

Gao and Timbuktu, have families both in Algeria and in Mali. As Scheele has described,[40] the trans-Saharan trade has for many years been based upon extended kinship networks and broader relations of trust. This trade has always walked a line between legal and illegal, but until recently stayed away from such *haram* (illicit) goods as cigarettes, alcohol and drugs. In recent years, those boundaries have become increasingly porous.

While some of the Algerians involved in the drugs and other illicit trades are civilians, a significant role has also been played by such jihadis as Mokhtar Belmokhtar (see box), and the recently killed Abu Zeid. Both used cigarette smuggling and kidnapping for ransom to fund jihad, while in other cases, they may well have been using jihad to provide cover for their business activities.

> **Mokhtar Belmokhtar**
> A former Al Qaeda commander, Algerian national, and veteran of the war in Afghanistan, Belmokhtar is often referred to as "Mr. Marlboro" for his involvement in cigarette smuggling. In early 2013, he is believed to have split with AQIM to form his Signed in Blood Battalion, which claimed credit for the January siege on the In Amenas gas facility in southern Algeria, and the May suicide attacks in northern Niger.

### N. Foreign Actors (Pakistanis, Tunisians, Qataris, Nigerians)

Most foreign actors have entered this region either in the context of Tablighi and other forms of reformist proselytizing, or as jihadi fighters. In the period since the January 2012 attacks, and especially since the July 2012 consolidation of control of most cities in northern Mali by jihadi combatants, the region has added a new influx of foreign fighters, including from Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, and France. Regional fighters from Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Tunisia, Libya and Nigeria had already been noted within AQIM's ranks over the prior years.[41] The Ansar Dine/AQIM/MUJWA control of northern Mali drew new allies, most notably Boko Haram fighters from northern Nigeria, a MUJWA commander reportedly from Egypt, and Hicham Bilal, a Nigerien and MUJWA's only black African katiba head.[42]

## VII.    IDENTITIES II: COMBATANT GROUPS

The combatant groups in Mauritania, Mali, and Niger generally fall into one of two groups: ethnonationalist/separatist groups and jihadis. Since 1990, both the ethnonationalists (whose center of gravity in the region is Kidal, Mali) and the jihadis (whose center of gravity has been on the Algerian coast, but has gradually moved southward into the desert) have split, realigned themselves, and split again, creating an alphabet soup of organizations. Tracing these schisms and realignments is an interesting pursuit in itself. Still, it is worth underlining the fact that almost all of the men holding leadership positions in the different jihadi groups had passed through AQIM, and many individuals migrated from one group to another (and sometimes to yet another) over the course of 2012. The following section will try to identify the operative dynamics that characterize the different groups, while paying due attention to the fact that some

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[40] Scheele, Judith 2012 *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the 20th Century*. New York: Cambridge U. Press 2012.
[41] See, for instance, Robert Fowler's 2011 account of his AQIM captivity, where he cites Algerians, Malians, Mauritanians, a Senegalese, a Nigerian and one man he guessed to be Ivorian or Guinean within the section of the Belmokhtar katiba that held him. See also Daniel, Serge "Islamist fighters ready for battle in north Mali" Agence France Presse. Sep 26, 2012.
[42] Bilal defected from MUJWA in November 2012.

of the important shifts have a great deal to do with specific individuals such as Iyad ag Ghali, El Hajj Gamou, or Mokhtar Belmokhtar, each of whom has pushed his followers in new directions.
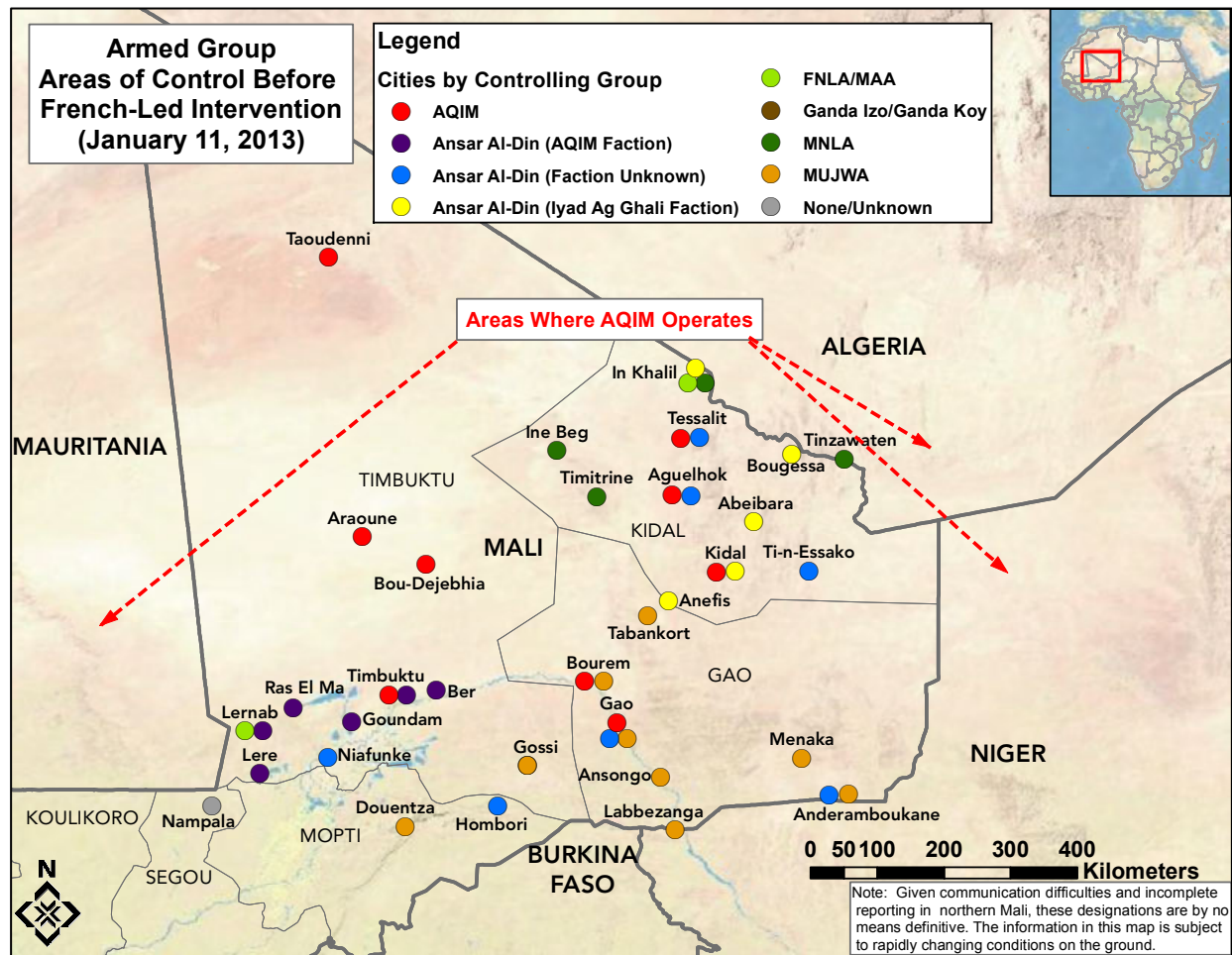


Among the ethnonationalists, the most prominent now is the Kel Tamasheq National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). It is the inheritor of a series of Kel Tamasheq groups in Mali and Niger that have several times called for total or partial autonomy from the state. As with Casamançais separatists in Senegal, the former *Forces Nouvelles* rebels in northern Côte d'Ivoire, and the various militant movements in the Niger Delta, the MNLA claims both abuse/neglect by the state and cultural/geographical difference from the rest of the nation. The cultural difference and the abuse and/or inattention of the state are linked in the explanatory frameworks offered by these insurgents, and also promoted as justification for separatist militancy.

Among the jihadis, the best known group is Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, a group formerly focused on fighting the Algerian government that has increasingly expanded the scope of its membership and its operational territory to include Mali and Mauritania, and occasionally Niger. Boko Haram may be in the process of a similar evolution toward regional and even international jihadi aspirations, and this may be at least partly a result of contact between the two groups.

Between the MNLA and AQIM stand several hybrids, of which the most important are Ansar Dine and the Movement for Tawhid (unity) and Jihad in West Africa, known as MUJAO in French and MUJWA in English. Ansar Dine is almost exclusively Kel Tamasheq in its membership and is led by the charismatic veteran of the 1990s and mid-2000s Kel Tamasheq rebellions, Iyad ag Ghali. While its membership looks like that of the MNLA, its ideology is like that of AQIM. It appears that at the leadership level, there is considerable back-and-forth between AQIM and Ansar Dine, while at the rank-and-file level, the organization looks more like the MNLA. The other innovative organization is MUJWA. It is ideologically similar to AQIM and its leadership is still mainly Arab, but its rank-and-file is more ethnically mixed, and is self-consciously oriented toward sub-Saharan Africans. This has come as a shock to some, but those who have spent time with AQIM have noted its mixed composition well before the events of 2012. At the same time they noted the internal tensions between an ideology of radical equality before God and the realities of racist attitudes among many Arab jihadis that have sometimes become public since 2012.

### A. AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb)

AQIM is the name adopted by the former *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* (GSPC), which itself was an offshoot of the GIA, one of the main anti-government combatant groups during Algeria's civil war in the 1990s. Over time operating in the desert, the organization developed links through recruitment and marriage with Kel Tamasheq, Mauritanian Moors, and some black Africans from Senegal, Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa. Until quite recently (c. 2010), the activities of the southern katibas (operational units or cells) still seemed to be centered on raising funds for operations in coastal Algeria. This was done mainly through kidnapping, but there are also multiple sources suggesting that the organization taxed the flow of illicit goods, including drugs, as they crossed the desert.[43]

Two factors influenced AQIM's 2012 ability to control and govern territory. First, katiba heads including Abu Zeid and Mokhtar bel Mokhtar increasingly showed both their ambition and their skill in an increasingly wide range of activities that sometimes brought them into disputes with overall AQIM emir Abdelmalek Droukdel. It seems likely that while Droukdel wished they would continue pumping money northward, those overseeing Saharan operations developed greater ambitions. Secondly, as a result of marrying and living with local people in the Sahara, and of incorporating Saharan and sub-Saharan members, the southern AQIM katibas began to change in complexion (literally and figuratively). This took place while other actors, including Ifoghas like Iyad ag Ghali, were following their own routes toward Salafi Islam and various justifications of jihadi violence.

It is in this context that the opportunities presented by the arrival of weapons and trained fighters from Libya, the MNLA push to control northern Malian territory, and the Malian government's lack of ability or interest in governing this same territory figuratively fell into the laps of the jihadis. Ambitious commanders seized the opportunity for self-promotion. Perhaps more importantly, Ansar Dine and MUJWA presented partial solutions to one of AQIM's fundamental problems. As an outgrowth of the Algerian civil war, AQIM had achieved relative success in expanding its ideological and operational remit to encompass international jihadi objectives. As

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[43] See Daniel, 2012 on both points.

a northern Algerian Arab organization, it had been less successful in incorporating Berber and sub-Saharan personnel. As those who have witnessed the internal workings of AQIM before 2012 have noted,[44] black katiba members were systematically treated as second-class citizens by their Arab colleagues. Kel Tamasheq seem to have occupied a position halfway in between. There was clearly an element of meritocracy in the organization, as evidenced by the promotion of such Kel Tamasheq as Abdelkrim Taleb (Amamda ag Hama) within AQIM.[45] However, the existence of ethnically distinct jihadi groups (Ansar Dine and MUJWA) may have presented an attractive option for some within the AQIM structure to separate jihadis into separate organizations by ethnicity or race, while maintaining the preeminence of AQIM and its Arab leaders within the jihadi command structure.
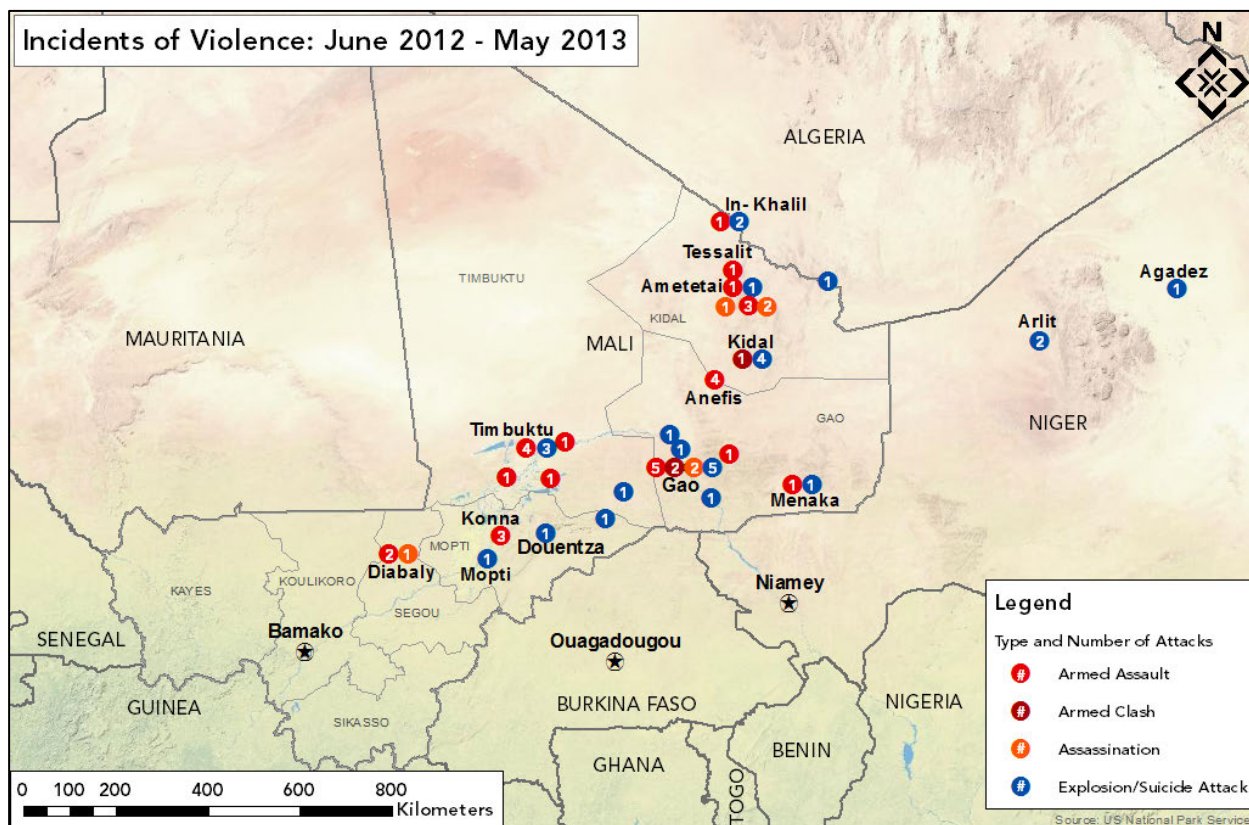


Since the group came to international attention with the kidnapping of 32 tourists in the Sahara in 2003, there has been a running debate about whether the groups were "really" ideologically driven jihadis or "really" bandit-smuggler-kidnappers, whose motivations were economic. This debate has continued throughout 2012 around MUJWA, which has credibly been linked to the trans-Saharan cocaine trade. Ironically, as attention has shifted to MUJWA's illicit economic activities, the implicit consensus has shifted on AQIM, which tends to be classified now as a "real" jihadi organization.

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[44] Daniel, 2012, Fowler, 2012.
[45] Ag Hama later joined his cousin Iyad ag Ghali in Ansar Dine.

This is a false dichotomy. Most insurgent groups have to become involved in illegal economic activities in order to support their movements, and many communities in the Sahara have to engage in at least technically illegal economic activities just to survive.[46] To say Mokhtar bel Mokhtar is a cigarette smuggler and thus not a "real" jihadi is to impose an outsider's perspective on Saharan life. This said, AQIM's activities in the Sahara were for some time focused on seeking the means to prosecute jihad not so much in sub-Saharan Africa as along the Algerian coast. In this regard, the events of 2012 are a watershed because they have opened a new chapter in jihadi mobilization south of the Sahara. The rapidity with which MUJWA and AQIM recruited black African jihadis has surprised many. With estimates of the number of hardcore jihadis in Mali in 2012 running from 800 to 1200, and estimates of the number killed since the French intervention began in January 2013 between 300 to 700 (plus those killed in the various battles between the MNLA and the jihadis),[47] the viability of future AQIM and related jihadi activity in the Sahara-Sahel zone may rely to a significant extent on their ability to continue recruiting Malians, Nigeriens, Senegalese, and other sub-Saharan Africans.[48]

Against this, AQIM's evident discomfort with non-Arab members remains a potential sticking point. Letters sent by emir Abdelmalek Droukdel admonishing Malian jihadis for overzealous application of Shari'a and other tactical mistakes shows traces of his discomfort both with ambitious Algerian Arab commanders and with the new, more heterogeneous groups such as MUJWA. It remains to be seen how damaging such internal tensions will be to the group. As with the GSPC and the GIA that preceded it, AQIM has shown itself to be both prone to schisms and pragmatic in adapting to changing circumstances. It has successively replaced a series of leaders killed or captured, including overall emir Nabil Sahraoui, and katiba (unit) leaders Amari "El Para" Saifi (captured in Chad), Abdelhamid Abu Zeid (killed by the French/Chadians in 2013), and Nabil Makhloufi (died in September 2012 in his vehicle).

### B. Al Muwaqun Bi Dima

Over the course of 2012, Mokhtar bel Mokhtar reportedly grew increasingly disaffected with some aspects of AQIM. Some reports indicated that he had poor relations both with AQIM emir Abdelmalek Droukdel and with the other most powerful katiba commander, Abu Zeid (now dead). He is said to have spent much time with members of Ansar Dine in the latter part of 2012.[49] Just days after the French began air strikes on Konna and other points held by the jihadis, bel Mokhtar's Al Muwuqun bi dima ("Those who sign in blood") splinter group attacked the In Amenas gas facility in the Algerian desert. Though the attack had been carefully planned over months, its timing was clearly meant as a response to the French intervention. Over 800 people were initially taken hostage, and 114 died by the time Algerian security forces finished a commando strike.

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[46] In the section below on illicit and illegal economies, I address the local perceptions surrounding the morality of different kinds of illegal or informal economic activities.

[47] International Crisis Group (2013:10) cites the Malian military's figure of 600 jihadis killed as of 27 March 2013.

[48] It is worth noting that the Sahara-Sahel (like the Maghreb) has long been one of the explicit strategic areas identified by Al Qaeda as a target for growth. See Naji, Abu Bakr 2006 *The Management of Savagery*.

[49] Beaumont, Peter "Mr. Marlboro: the jihadist back from the 'dead' to launch Algerian gas field raid," *The Guardian*, Thursday 17 January 2013

Bel Mokhtar travelled to Afghanistan in the late 1980s to join the jihad, and upon his return to Algeria moved into the anti-government insurgency. He was one of the founders of the GSPC (initially started to minimize civilian deaths within their jihad), but despite his tactical brilliance, he has not risen to the top of the organization's hierarchy. Descriptions by those who have met him suggest he is intense, ascetic and ideologically driven despite his deep implication in the region's smuggling economy, which some have suggested as proof that he was not really a jihadi.[50] There have been many reports of bel Mokhtar's death, including in June of 2012 and again in March 2013, when the Chadian government announced the Chadian/French forces had killed both bel Mokhtar and Abu Zeid in fighting in the Adrar des Ifoghas mountains. He appears to have escaped once again and was said by some to have planned the suicide bomb attacks claimed by MUJWA on an army barracks and a French uranium mine in Niger on 23 May 2013.

## C. Ansar Dine

"Ansar Dine no longer exists," according to one specialist on northern Mali who has spent time in the north since Operation Serval took control of Gao. Many in Kidal probably wish it never existed, as the formation of the jihadi group made public a major rift within the Ifoghas political elite. Although the group was more than just Iyad ag Ghali's private militia, his rank-and-file did not stay around for long when it became clear that Ansar Dine was on the losing team, at least for the moment. Still, adhesion to Salafi strains of Islam has grown rapidly in Kidal over the past decade, and while some certainly joined for reasons of convenience or political expedience, others, including Iyad,

> **Ansar Dine (or Ansar al-Din)**
> Launched in March 2012, "Defenders of the Faith" was a jihadi group in northern Mali led by prominent Tuareg rebellion figure Iyad ag Ghali. Ansar Dine sought the imposition of Shari'a across Mali and has been affiliated with AQIM, MNLA, and MUJWA at different stages. Ansar Dine was strongest among Ifoghas (Iryaken and Kel Afellah) Tuaregs and Berabiche Arabs.

appear to be more serious in their ideological commitments. For Kel Tamasheq, and especially the Ifoghas, the bigger story is that this is the first time since the 1960s that Ifoghas simply have not been able to put their internal feuds aside and present a united front as they fight for independence, development, self protection, or simply gain.

An important question surrounds the future of Iyad ag Ghali. Comments from Mali specialists included, "He has played all of his cards," and "He's done. He has nowhere left to go."[51] Ag Ghali has reportedly alienated most of the Ifoghas, most other Kel Tamasheq, southern Malians and Algeria. Still, he is an astute political player who retains some of the prestige he earned as a leader of the 1990s rebellion and found ways to capitalize on the 2006 rebellion, on his role as a hostage negotiator, and as an interlocutor who bridged the Kel Tamasheq and the jihadi fighting groups in 2012. As the MNLA recuperates influence as the "least bad option" for most Kel Tamasheq, his betrayal of that group, his support of shari'a, which is generally unpopular amongst Kel Tamasheq, and his reputation for betrayal and ambition will present serious handicaps in the future.

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[50] Keenan, Jeremy "West's made-up terror links to blame for killing" *The Independent*, 4 June 2009.
[51] Interviews with journalists who have covered northern Mali during 2012 and since operation Serval.

### D. MIA (Islamic Movement of Azawad)

Formed in January 2013, the MIA is an Ansar Dine breakaway group that claims a more moderate approach to Islam, seeks a political solution to the current conflict, and rejects all forms of extremism and terrorism. MIA is led by Alghabass ag Intallah (of the Ifoghas clan) and is present around Menaka, Kidal, and Tinzawaten.

The MIA has taken much of the personnel from Ansar Dine and tried to repackage them as secularists who want to assist the French troops in stabilizing Mali's North. The MIA appears to be moving increasingly close to the MNLA, and may turn out to simply be a transitional face-saving mechanism for former Ansar Dine fighters and commanders as they join one of the other combatant groups or return to civilian life.

### E. MUJWA (Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa)

MUJWA is the most perplexing and contradictory combatant group in the Malian imbroglio, but one thing is clear: much of its local support and recruiting success has come through MUJWA's mostly successful self-promotion as a non-Tuareg, sub-Saharan African organization. Still, it is a group that touts sub-Saharan representation but has almost exclusively Arab commanders (though many are Mauritanian, Sahraoui, and Malian Arabs). It preaches piety, yet is almost universally accused of involvement in drug trafficking. It talks about bringing jihad and Shari'a to sub-Saharan Africa, but most of its initial operations took place in Algeria.

Despite this, MUJWA is growing increasingly successful at recruiting would-be black African jihadis from villages that had long cultivated Salafi practice (such as Kadji and the other villages around Gao that have been much discussed in the press).[52] They have also successfully recruited other jihadis from all over West Africa. A Reuters report noted that, "A Malian intelligence officer said Islamists' identity cards seized in Gao came from countries including Togo, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Algeria and Niger."[53]

The group has also reportedly maintained links with cocaine traffickers, many from the group of Tilemsi Arabs resident in Gao and the area north of the town. As with AQIM's involvement in kidnapping for ransom and the cigarette trade, many have suggested that the organization is "simply" a front for criminal enterprise. As one interviewee succinctly put it: "They are getting people to perform amputations and to perform suicide missions: clearly this is not a question of either/or."[54]

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[52] Tinti, Peter, The Jihadi from the Block: In the war for the heart of northern Mali, the real fear isn't al Qaeda, it's the criminals and fundamentalists lurking just around the corner. *Foreign Policy* MARCH 19, 2013 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/19/jihad_mali_al_qaeda_gao

[53] Lewis, David 13 Mar 2013 -"INSIGHT-Islamist inroads in Mali may undo French war on al Qaeda." http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/13/us-mali-rebels-recruits-idUSBRE92C05V20130313

[54] Interview with journalist, April 13, 2013.

Of particular concern are MUJWA's tendency towards suicide bombing and its ties with Boko Haram and Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the latter with whom it recently carried out suicide attacks in northern Niger.[55]

### F. MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)

The separatist-secular MNLA has pushed forward its political program while alienating almost all Malians who were not Kel Tamasheq through its cynical partnering with the jihadis, its participation in the Aguelhok massacre, and its abuse of civilians everywhere it has governed, especially Gao. Its pretension of carving out an independent Azawad state that included the Songhai-majority Timbuktu and Gao regions, and its claim that the historic Songhai capital of Gao would be the capital of Azawad, especially infuriated ethnic Songhai. By the time the French arrived, it appeared that the MNLA had been militarily defeated, was reviled by southern Malians, Songhai, Fulbe and many Bellah, and was even broadly rejected by many Kel Tamasheq. Since the arrival of the French and Chadians on the scene, the MNLA has leapt back into action, claiming that it is prepared to fight the jihadis, but refusing to allow the Malian government into its Kidal stronghold. Although it is not systematically raping and abusing civilians as it did when it controlled Gao, its refusal of Mali's sovereignty over Kidal (however dilapidated and abusive the Malian army has been in its own right) continues to raise the ire of Malians across the country.

While Kel Tamasheq and northern Nigeriens don't all support the MNLA, many support its cause and see it as the best option given the political vacuum in the north. For example, a 33-year-old Kel Tamasheq male in Agadez said (when asked about the legitimacy of armed groups in northern Mali: "There has been a change in opinion about the MNLA among Tuaregs in Niger, because we see the failure of the movement to deal with the Islamists. However, the MNLA remains popular among people in northern Niger." At the same time, a 50-year-old Kel Tamasheq male in Tahoua, Niger believed differently, saying: "Public opinion in Tahoua doesn't support any group. However, it is the Arabs and Tuaregs that are most dangerous if the situation continues over the next 12 months and they remain unemployed; that can become a problem in the future if things aren't resolved."[56] This small sample shows that many Nigerien Kel Tamasheq are moving away from the MNLA, telling us the outcome in Mali may have less impact on Nigerien Kel Tamasheq calls for independence/autonomy than some analysts state.

Backed as it is into trying to make something out of its many strategic mistakes and abuses, the MNLA has begun successfully cultivating the Kel Tamasheq diaspora and the communities of those who have fled to refugee camps. Given the poor record of the Malian state in killing, raping and dispossessing Kel Tamasheq after prior rebellions, this has been easy to do. The current rhetoric of the MNLA seems to be, "without us, genocide." This will be a major hurdle for future peacebuilding, and limiting Malian army, Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso abuses of Kel Tamasheq and of Arabs is of utmost importance.

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[55] "Niger suicide bombers target Areva mine and barracks" BBC News, 23 May 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22637084
[56] Survey conducted by Navanti Native Researcher in Tahoua, Niger in April 2013 of 50 year-old Tuareg male.

### G. Col Hajj Gamou's Forces

If the chasm between Iyad ag Ghali's Ansar Dine and Bilal ag Acherif's MNLA exposed some of the contentious politics among the Kel Tamasheq, the bitter hatred between Ag Ghali and Col. El Hajj Gamou makes the point even more clearly that not all Kel Tamasheq are united. As mentioned above, Gamou is an Imghad Kel Tamasheq from the Gao region. A group of about 700 mostly Imghad fighters follows Gamou, and is waiting in Gao, having reentered the country in the wake of the French re-conquest after its escape to Niger in April, 2012. Gamou has political aspirations and reportedly harbors a deep dislike of the Ifoghas leadership, but it is not clear what his objectives, nor those of his fighters, are. ATT long used him to counterbalance Ifoghas "troublemakers" such as Iyad ag Ghali and Ibrahim Bahanga, which only heightened the enmity between Gamou and the Kidal powerbrokers.

### H. Ganda Koy/Ganda Iso

Ganda Koy (or Koy) means "Owners of the Land" in Songhai. The group began in 1994 as an ethnic self-protection militia led by Imam Muhammed Maïga and commanded by a group of former Malian army officers. It became notorious as it began perpetrating massacres, rapes and thefts of Kel Tamasheq and Arabs in northern Mali, including one infamous massacre of clerics in 1994. The group was reconstituted in late 2011 as it became clear that Kel Tamasheq were preparing a new rebellion. Since then it has been a Fulbe/Songhai ethnic militia mobilized in opposition to "white" northerners. The legacy of the 1990s abuses delegitimizes the Ganda Koy to some extent, which has probably led to the formation of a number of other ethnic militia/civil defense groups.

The best known of these is the Ganda Iso. These "sons of the land" have a younger membership but a similar modus operandi to the Ganda Koy. The first military commander of the organization (Ahmadou Diallo, an ethnic Fulbe) made several serious errors early on, including turning El Hajj Gamou into a sworn enemy by killing three of his cousins in 2008. In the period since the jihadis were chased out of Gao, the number of Songhai youth organizations with names like "Young Patriots of Gao" has multiplied. The Songhai/Fulbe ethnic militias are among those who appear to have little self-consciousness about talking about their quasi-genocidal intentions toward the Kel Tamasheq and Arabs. As a Ganda Iso leader told one researcher, "The Tuareg are just like little birds. They flit about from here to there without realizing that any day their throats will be slit and they will die."[57] This makes it easy for the MNLA to convince Kel Tamasheq in refugee camps that without the MNLA they will be killed.

### I. Boko Haram

Observers agree that there has been a rapprochement between Boko Haram and the Sahelian Al Qaeda affiliate. Exactly what the content and meaning of this rapprochement might be is more difficult to specify. For most of its existence, Boko Haram's activities have been aimed at the Nigerian federal government, and the state governments in the country's North, but that appears to be changing as the group rejects calls for amnesty and ramps up its violent insurgency. After

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[57] Human rights researcher, April 8, 2013.

the death of the founding leader, Muhammad Yusuf, in 2009, the group turned a corner and began attacking civilians and anyone they felt stood in the way of realizing an Islam-driven state. The group's current leader, Abubakar Shekau, took command of the organization in 2010, and threatened attacks on foreign actors as well as pledged allegiance to global jihad. This allegiance remained somewhat theoretical until Boko Haram's August 2011 attack on UN headquarters in Abuja, which killed 26. More recently their targets have included international groups, including five French tourists it kidnapped along the Cameroon/Nigeria border. Similarly, given reports of multiple simultaneous improvised explosive device attacks, it appears that Boko Haram members are learning from and possibly incorporating members from international jihadi networks. Both kidnapping and IED attacks are new tactics for them. Some of the organization's new techniques may have come from the several months during which approximately 200 Hausa-speaking jihadis believed to be Boko Haram members were resident in AQIM/Ansar Dine-controlled Timbuktu.[58] In January, the Nigerian press announced that Shekau had also fled from northern Nigeria to Gao, Mali, after a gun battle with Nigerian security forces that reportedly wounded him. Given the group's movement as well as its usage of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), heavy weaponry, and bomb-making materials, it is evident that Boko Haram has increased access to regional criminal and illicit trafficking networks, and is growing increasingly aligned with global jihad.

## VIII.   INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE: RELATIONS BETWEEN SAHELIAN CAPITALS AND THE NORTH

### A.  State Attitudes toward Pastoralists in the Region

The Malian state in the 1960s was a modernist socialist state that aspired to bring all its citizens into the realm of modern life through its policies. Kel Tamasheq were preferred targets of this developmentalist policy. LeCoq writes:

> This ambitious project could provocatively be described as a *mission civilisatrice*, to avoid calling it internal colonialism. It is not an exaggerated observation that the Keita government saw the Kel Tamasheq and Bidan [Arabs] as a kind of 'barbarian others' who needed to be integrated in the fabric of national society, while being closely scrutinized as possible traitors of the Malian nation.[59]

In this new system of scientific developmentalist policy, almost everything mobile populations did was wrong: their pastoralist techniques were deemed irrational, their mobility a barrier to both education and public health outreach, and their trade practices illegal. The relations between Niger and its nomadic populations were somewhat less strained, but similar.

When the Malian Kel Tamasheq rebelled, the Malian army crushed the 1963-64 Alfellaga rebellion with extreme brutality. They targeted civilian populations for collective punishments, including forced removals to "regrouping zones," poisoned wells, and the slaughter of almost all Kel Tamasheq livestock they found. In late 1963, the Malian government struck an agreement

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[58] Hinshaw, Drew "Timbuktu Training Site Shows Terrorists' Reach: Nigerians Flooded to al Qaeda-Linked Camp in Mali, Locals Say, Drilling With Shoulder-Fired Arms," *The Wall Street Journal*, 1 February 2013.
[59] LeCoq 2010, page 136.

with Algeria, allowing it to pursue Kel Tamasheq rebels into southern Algeria. The government humiliated the leaders of the rebellion and executed three of the most revered (and apolitical) clerics in the region, as well as numerous chiefs and civilians. This ensured the second (1990s) Kel Tamasheq rebellion in the same way that the Treaty of Versailles ensured the return of a humiliated and vengeance-seeking Germany in the 1930s. In both Mali and Niger, the histories of colonial romanticization of nomadic populations, the enslavement and conquest of black African populations, and the interplay of developmentalist critique of nomadic "backwardness" and the rebellious responses to it have created a particular type of mistrust between Sahelian states and their nomadic northern populations. This mistrust compounds the other legitimacy deficits described in the following sections. One advantage of this long history of mistrust is that Saharan populations have remained exceptionally self-reliant. However, if more Kel Tamasheq are to become integrated as full-fledged citizens of their countries, they will need the skills that come with formal education and which they have continuously requested.

## B. The Growth of Democracy Cynicism

For the past two decades, donors have placed a great deal of faith in decentralization as a means of bringing democracy closer to citizens and potentially bypassing greedy elites in capital cities. However, as anyone familiar with ward-level politics in Chicago knows, local politics may simply be a different level at which the problems of patronage and graft operate, rather than the more virtuous form of direct democracy we would like to imagine. Some scholars of Mali and Niger have argued that local actors can manipulate decentralization and democratization programs in order to make them into even more efficient (though localized) patronage and rent-producing networks.[60] Such devolution builds upon some of the systems of colonial domination, which Mamdani has described as "decentralized despotism."[61] This is not an inevitable outcome, and de Sardan et al. describe situations in which "local reformers" ensure high levels of service provision. The important point is that the determinative role of such actors and the centrality of political considerations is the same within centralized and decentralized development schemes, and the structural shift does not in itself solve any of the inherent problems commonly identified among elites in the capitals.

Do Malians feel their representatives have served them well? Data from Afrobarometer surveys suggests they do not.[62] Mali's multiparty democracy began in 1992, and Afrobarometer surveys began there in 2000.[63] They show a broad trend of commitment to democracy as an ideal, but

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[60] Glenzer, Kent "Politics is a Thing That Passes': A Historical Ethnography of Power, Development, And Democracy In Mali's Pondori Flood Plain, C. 1818-2002." Unpublished PhD dissertation, Emory University. Olivier De Sardan et al. "Local Governance and Public Goods in Niger. 2010.

[61] Mamdani, Mahmood *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton U. Press 1996.

[62] Afrobarometer "Malians Ambivalent about the Way Out of the Country's Present Crisis," http://www.afrobarometer.org/files/documents/press_release/mli_r5_pr1en.pdf; Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 113 "Crisis In Mali: Ambivalent Popular Attitudes On The Way Forward" February 2013. "http://www.afrobarometer.org/files/documents/briefing_papers/afrobriefno113en.pdf

[63] Afrobarometer's first surveys in Guinea, Niger, and Algeria are forthcoming. The organization just finished its second round of surveys in Burkina Faso, where commitment to democratic ideals was slightly lower than in Mali, while levels of satisfaction with existing democratic practices were slightly higher. The greatest similarities to Mali among Sahelian countries with multiple polls may be Senegal, where patience with democracy indicators

deep disillusionment with the actual results of democracy. The percentage which preferred democracy over other political systems dropped from 72 to 62 percent between 2008 and 2012, while the percent which said they were "satisfied with Malian democracy" has fallen steadily from a high of 63 percent in 2002 to 57, 49, and finally 31 percent in the 2012 survey. Meanwhile the percentage of people which claimed to be "attached to elections" remained steady, between 81 and 86 percent over the past twelve years.

The explanation for the gap between theoretical commitment to democracy and actual disengagement can be found in respondents' answers to other questions. While trust of the army hovered between 79 and 87 percent from 2000 to 2008, in 2012, it had fallen to 67 percent. Trust in politicians fell even further, with trust of the National Assembly going from 70 percent in 2005 to 42 percent in 2012, and trust in the President plummeting from 81 percent in 2005 to 65 percent in 2008 and then to 43 percent in 2012.

Despite this disillusionment, Malians remain committed to republican values: 88 percent said that, "it is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for." In defining the reasons for the political crisis, 31 percent blamed a "lack of patriotism among leaders" and 16 percent the weakness of the Malian state, while only six percent blamed the political class's incompetence. This response is meaningful in the context of programs intended to build "capacity" among Malian civil servants and ministry officials. The results of the Afrobarometer surveys, as with the Malian press and interviews conducted by the author since the early 2000s, locate the problem less in an absence of capacity than in low salaries and "lack of patriotism," or practices of self-enrichment at the expense of the collectivity.

Part of the sourness surrounding the experience of democracy in Mali has had to do with the fact that the vast majority of the population has seen very few economic benefits from having participated in good faith in multiparty elections. Some Malian intellectuals have responded with increasingly strident criticisms, not only of their own political elite, but also of the structures some say were foisted upon them by international actors. Former UNDP coordinator and Culture Minister Aminata Traoré is the best-known and one of the most strident of these anti-globalization critics, but many ordinary Malians make a parallel critique of western influences in Mali that came to the fore during the heated 2009 debate surrounding the Family Code.[64] The subtle connection between democracy fatigue or cynicism and the attraction of alternate political systems, including those built upon Islamic jurisprudence, is one of the questions that deserves further research on the ground. The fact that the head of the High Islamic Council is himself a Salafi cleric gives the lie to the stereotype that reformist currents exist primarily in the north. Also significant is the fact that the High Council's vice president enunciates a critique of the Malian political elite similar to that of secular intellectuals such as

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plummeted in recent years. It's important to note that polling numbers may be somewhat skewed as they didn't include survey results from respondents in the Kidal region.

[64] That code, which gave women more equal inheritance rights, raised the age of legal marriage to 18, and otherwise increased protections of women's rights, was denounced by the High Islamic Council and a vocal minority of Bamako residents, including some women. Accusing the National Assembly and the President of being anti-Muslim and threatening violence against them, this group caused the ATT to renege on his promise to sign the law, which had already been passed by the legislature.

Aminata Traoré.[65]

### C. The Politics of "*Chantage*"

One development that characterized the period from the 2006 rebellion onward was a new style of Kel Tamasheq politics. Kel Tamasheq warlords increasingly deployed a depoliticized "politics" of autonomy as they effectively held the Malian state to ransom. The style of this politics resembles that which prevails in the Niger Delta. In both places, strong men hijack the legitimate claims of a disenfranchised population in the service of increasing their own wealth and power. The result is that the large majority of the people in the regions they claim to represent become even further disenfranchised. In this "dialectic of contempt," in which neither the representatives of the state nor the representatives of Kel Tamasheq aspirations believed their interlocutors were dealing in good faith, entrepreneurs of violence such as Ibrahim Bahanga and Iyad ag Ghali emerged as central actors. This ultimately contributed to the disaster that occurred in 2012. ATT's method of dealing with these actors was both to buy them off and to deploy a strategy of divide and conquer in order to try to neutralize them. He consequently threw his lot in with both Tilemsi Arabs and Imghad Kel Tamasheq (both groups cultivated in order to neutralize the Ifoghas). When the Tilemsi Arabs and the Imghad became increasingly involved in the drugs trade, ATT's hands were tied,[66] just as they were to an extent with actors such as ag Ghali, who also played the role of privileged intermediary in hostage negotiations. In this scenario, Kel Tamasheq warlords make empty promises, break them when it is convenient, and take up arms again when they choose to hold the government up for ransom. This may be how the 2012 rebellion began, though events soon surpassed what any of the actors could have predicted.

Malians may no longer be willing to accept this state of affairs. As one local interviewee wrote, "Thus far there is no direct violence against Tuaregs or Arabs in the Bamako area but everything will depend on how the government manages negotiations through the Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission. Through discussions with many people, southern Malians are no longer willing to accept the government giving certain privileges to Tuaregs and Arabs on the basis of race, as was the case with previous conflicts. Many believe that the state should not give in to blackmail by armed groups."[67] This was seconded by a human rights researcher, who said, "Many Malians now look at prior negotiations with the Tuareg and see them as characterized by naïveté, an attitude that they now insist must be abandoned."[68]

### D. The Perception of State Involvement in Illicit Economies

There are many forms of illegal economic enrichment that can undercut an administration's legitimacy. Skimming large portions of development assistance or directing post-conflict

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[65] Vice President Haidara said in an interview, *"Il n'y a pas de Mali. Qui représente le Mali? À qui on peut s'adresser aujourd'hui? Quand tu dis Dioncounda, il est un président n'importe qui dont personne n'a besoin. Le premier-ministre, Cheick Modibo Diarra, lui, il dort la peur dans le ventre. Quant aux militaires…rien. Qui donc? C'est vrai qu'il n'y a pas de Mali !"* Diawara, Lacine "Chérif Ousmane Madani Haidara à Option: Une voix captivante su la voie de Dieu. *Option*, 24 November, 2012.
[66] Interview with journalist working in Mali, 15 April 2013.
[67] Navanti Bamana male respondent from Gao, 12 April 2013.
[68] Interview with Human Rights Watch researcher, 8 April 2013.

development schemes to favored elites who, allegedly, persistently pocket most of the funds are two such situations dealt with elsewhere in this paper. The two illicit economies most important across the Sahel-Sahara in the last 15 years have been kidnapping and smuggling of goods, including weapons and drugs. Smuggling is best conceived as consisting of two broad strains, including on the one hand foodstuffs, fuel, and consumer electronics. As in every other region of the world, smugglers attempt to buy cheap in one country and sell dear in a neighboring country, meanwhile evading taxes, tariffs, or extending the benefits of government subsidies to citizens of other countries. A cat and mouse game ensues between smugglers and customs or police officers, but populations on either side typically do not consider the transaction a major ethical transgression, even after macroeconomists from the International Monetary Fund admonish everyone about the millions of dollars thus lost to state coffers. In the terms used in several sections of this analysis, the important distinction is that between trade that is considered illegal by states, and that which is considered illicit by local populations. As several commentators have noted, smuggling at the local level can actually be an important source of resiliency,[69] and interdiction policies need to take this seriously. It is vitally important to squelch the drugs and kidnapping economies, but there is little reason for international actors to become involved in the elimination of the cross-border trade in subsidized Algerian pasta.

The major *illicit* goods smuggled in the Sahel-Sahara are cigarettes and drugs, including hashish, cocaine and heroin. Weapons tend to flow toward the areas where kidnapping and drug smuggling take place (as well as insurgencies), and are not necessarily treated locally as illicit, so in this section I treat them as a dependent variable.[70]

Across the Sahel, there is a broad perception that government officials are centrally involved in illicit activities, namely drug smuggling and kidnapping. Wolfram Lacher lists the various ways in which government officials in Mauritania, Niger, Libya, and Algeria are alleged to have been involved in the drugs trade. They include: a major hashish smuggling network in Mauritania that was operating with special permits allegedly issued by the former head of police; the release of Abta Hamidine in Niger, despite the fact that he had been interdicted transporting explosives and weapons from Libya to fighters (alleged to be AQIM) in northern Mali; and various smuggling networks implicating state officials in southern Algeria and Libya.[71] Lacher, however, singles out Mali:

> [N]owhere in the region were state institutions more implicated in organized crime than in northern Mali. The former Malian leadership tried to use organized crime as a resource for the exercise of influence in the north by allowing its local allies to engage in criminal activity. It eventually lost control over the conflicts this generated, while the rule of law

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[69] Reitano and Shaw (2013:1) write, "Long marginalized by the states in the region, these cross-border communities have created webs of dependency with their kin in neighboring countries, and use arbitrage and migration as a resilience strategy in periods of instability."

[70] Allowing weapons to circulate without government control also undoubtedly weakens the state's ability to impose itself in regions like the Sahel-Sahara. Again, because this analysis argues that governance in the desert has for the most part been willingly devolved to local actors, the proliferation of weapons is treated as more a result than a cause of instability. The much-touted influx of Qaddafi-era weapons was especially important inasmuch as it introduced heavier weapons. Between their use in 2012-2013 and the destruction of materiel by the French Operation Serval, it is not clear that there is any remaining ammunition for these weapons.

[71] Lacher, 2012, pages 10-11.

and the legitimacy of state institutions were eroded through complicity with organized crime.[72]

The economy that developed around drugs resembles that which developed around kidnapping. One of the key players from the first major (2003) GSPC kidnapping negotiation onward was Iyad ag Ghali. Ag Ghali had been the leading negotiator during the end of the 1990s Kel Tamasheq rebellion, and he played a parallel role in many of the negotiations to release hostages taken by the GSPC/AQIM in the period from 2003 to 2011. Here again, there are many lingering allegations of self-enrichment through this network that tainted the reputation of the ATT administration.

At the regional level, the end of the Qaddafi years in Libya has introduced a new kind of uncertainty amongst smugglers. As trade routes and networks that were once controlled by Qaddafi's clan are now up for grabs, the Libya-Niger border has become unsettled. One regional specialist suggested that the competition surrounding this new opening could be a driver of conflict along the Sahara-Sahel border for some time to come.[73] Beyond this dynamic and the Qaddafi government weapons that moved south after his death, between 200,000 and 400,000 people returned, mostly to Niger and Mali, in the second half of 2011.

### E. The Delegitimization of the ATT Government throughout Mali

One telling fact emerges from a survey conducted by Malian economist and statistician Sidiki Guindo in late April 2012, shortly after the coup d'état.[74] When asked "According to you, who was primarily responsible for the partition of the country?" Fifty-one percent of respondents blamed ATT, only 26 percent the rebels, and 12 percent the junta.[75] This is quite stunning, given that it was the rebels who were clearly the proximate cause of the partition and that all three major cities in the north fell within days of the coup, which might have suggested that Malians blamed the junta more than ATT. Yet the deep structural damage that ATT's (non-) rule did was singled out by a majority of Bamakois, even at a time when anti-northern and nationalist sentiments were running high.

In 2010, Malian Minister of Health Oumar Ibrahim Touré was sacked after it became clear that $4 million had been stolen from the International Fund for the Fight against AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria.[76] A Malian diplomat put it this way: "Corruption has rotted Malian society to such a point that it's no longer just a question of restructuring the Army. It is now necessary to restructure the whole nation."[77] Malians were not the only ones to remark upon the disastrous nature of ATT's administration. As a 2012 International Crisis Group report stated:

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[72] Ibid, page 11.
[73] Specialist on illicit trade in the Sahel, personal communication, 29 April, 2013.
[74] Guindo's survey was conducted in all regions of Mali's capital, Bamako, and surveyed 1,100 people over 18, 49% of them women.
[75] Interestingly, 6% blamed "all of us" and 1.3% blamed France, which at that point was perceived by many Malians to be backing the MNLA.
[76] Michel, Nicolas Dégâts collatéraux 26/12/2010 *Jeune Afrique.*
[77] Malian diplomat, 20 April, 2013.

For years, Mali's major donors had no longer believed the country was well governed despite its good image, but they always showed a lot of patience in their public statements. In private, they made repeated and detailed criticisms of corruption, including the dubious award of public works contracts to businessmen directly connected to political decision-makers; the mixing of private interests and good works in the activities of the Foundation for Children run by President ATT's wife, Touré Lobbo Traoré; and the misappropriation of funds and materials in the education, health and other sectors.[78]

Even when factoring in the difficulty of travelling to polls and low levels of civic education, Mali's voters have been particularly lukewarm as regards their elections. Since the return of multiparty elections in 1992, presidential turnout has ranged between 24 and 39 percent, and turnouts for legislative elections between 21 and 32 percent.[79] This tempers the enthusiasm many have expressed for the country's four consecutive elections. While acceptance of democratic principles seems to have been genuine and broad, it may equally have been quite shallow.

### F. Institutional Performance as an Explanation for Different Outcomes in Niger

Some of the problems above, which point to the intersection of identity-based and historic fault lines, questions of (often illegal) economic gain, and "big man" power politics are comparable across countries. Indeed, a recent *Foreign Affairs* article states that despite progress and attempts at reform, "by President Mahamadou Issoufou, Niger's secular political elite lacks legitimacy in the eyes of its largely illiterate, rural, and deeply religious population. Numerous failed attempts at democratization and rampant corruption by previous governments have plagued the country for over two decades. Among the

**Mahamadou Issoufou**
Elected as President of Niger in March 2011 following a year-long military junta, Mahamadou Issoufou is a veteran opposition leader in Nigerien politics, running as a candidate in each presidential election since 1993. An ethnic Hausa and member of the Party for Democracy and Socialism, Issoufou is credited with restoring democracy and increasing foreign assistance.

population, this troubled legacy has fostered a general sense of alienation from the capital."[80] Given Niger's extreme poverty, history of weak governance and security, and vast territory and multi-ethnic society, Niger is just as vulnerable to banditry and violent extremism as Mali. Case in point, recent attacks by MUJWA, in consort with Belmokhtar, in northern Niger indicate that jihadi groups are looking to export their attacks to neighboring countries, specifically those meddling in Mali's affairs.

Despite these challenges, the different ways that Niger and Mali have dealt with their Kel Tamasheq rebellions and flows of Libyan weapons give some pointers as to the difference that good policy can make. This said, the Malian situation simultaneously points to the ways that a few key mobilizers can make a tremendous difference. In Mali's case, that difference was mostly negative. In hindsight one can see how bad a combination ATT's laissez faire approach was in

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[78] ICG 2012:20.
[79] "Voter turnout data for Mali. International IDEA, http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=ML. Cf. ICG 2012:20.
[80] Elischer, Sebastian "After Mali Comes Niger: West Africa's Problems Migrate East" Foreign Affairs, February 12, 2013 http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138931/sebastian-elischer/after-mali-comes-niger

the context of rapid criminalization of the state and active spoilers, including AQIM and several of the Kel Tamasheq warlords.

Niger experienced Kel Tamasheq rebellions in the 1990s and in 2007 that paralleled those taking place across the border in Mali at the same time.  However, there are a number of differences between the two countries.  First, Malian Kel Tamasheq are only a majority in sparsely populated Kidal Province, and then a sizeable minority in the two other northern provinces (Timbuktu and Gao).  In Niger, they are spread across the majority of the territory, making calls for secession less likely.

More important still is that the most recent (late 2000s) post-rebellion policies adopted in the two countries are quite different.  While Mali launched the security-oriented PSPSDN (Special Program for Peace, Security, and Development in North Mali), Niger continued with a policy focused on development and inclusion of Kel Tamasheq representatives within government.[81] Still, the importance of personalities should not be underestimated.  Ibrahim Bahanga, Iyad ag Ghali, and Hassane ag Fagaga may have had disagreements amongst themselves, but they certainly have relished reneging on their engagements, and leading men into battle once again. By contrast, the Kel Tamasheq head of the Niger High Authority for Peace expressed a diametrically opposed attitude of compromise and realism: "If we were to always get into the details regarding the government's attitude… if we were to always get involved in recriminations, there would be no peace. You must at one point stop to give peace a chance and reconstruct bit by bit because it is a long-term endeavour,"[82]

There is no question that Libyan weapons were used by the MNLA in Mali, but a quick look at a map shows how far Mali is from the nearest part of Libya.  Those weapons had to cross a wide swathe of Algerian or Nigerien territory to reach Mali, and Niger made it clear that it was invested in actively managing the threat they posed. The government of Niger fought skirmishes on its borders to prevent stockpiles of weapons from entering from Libya. It re-activated the High Authority for Peacebuilding (HACP) to supervise negotiations with Tuareg rebels and integrating returnees. "In 2011, what with the political turmoil in Ivory Coast and the war in Libya, we had to cope with more than 200,000 [home-coming] 'refugees'," says Ibrahim Boukary Abdou, the HACP secretary general. The organization has funded various development schemes to collect any stray weaponry, with incentives for whole communities rather than individuals."[83] This kind of coordinated and proactive approach contrasts sharply with the ATT administration's approach.

## IX.    SOCIAL PATTERNS IN THE SAHEL/SAHARA REGION

### A. Illegal/Illicit Economic Networks

The arrival of South American cocaine transiting through African nations on its way to Europe,

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[81] The International Crisis Group referred to the PSPSDN as "The final failure of ATT's security policy" (ICG, 2012:6).  See also IRIN  "Can Niger Offer Mali Lessons on the Tuareg?"  11 April 2013.
[82] IRIN, op. cit.
[83] Bozonnet, Charlotte  "Niger Remains Wary of Mali Crisis on its Doorstep."  The Guardian 5 March 2013. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/05/niger-conflict-mali-army

and the somewhat less well known transit of Moroccan hashish on its way to the eastern Mediterranean, have created some qualitatively new dynamics in the Sahel since 2000.[84] Colombian and Venezuelan drug cartel representatives have prodded every country along the West African coast, from Mauritania down to at least Nigeria, in order to try to find governmental and military allies with whom they can do business. In many cases, Nigerian traffickers are said to be involved, whether as intermediaries for the Latin Americans or as their competitors.[85]

In countries including Guinea and Guinea Bissau, the national security forces have been accused of involvement in the drugs trade. In Mali, putschist Captain Sanogo raised eyebrows when he ordered the release of Miguel Angel Devesa-Mera, a Spaniard who had been imprisoned in Bamako for drug trafficking.[86] In the wake of Operation Serval, Devesa-Mera was reportedly in Gao, claiming to be making peace among Malians but rumored to be trying to find outlets for cocaine still stashed in Gao and the surrounding countryside. Even if cartel heads in South America decide that the opportunity costs of doing business in Mali have risen to unacceptably high levels, their first attempt will most likely be to try neighboring countries such as Mauritania and Niger to transship drugs.
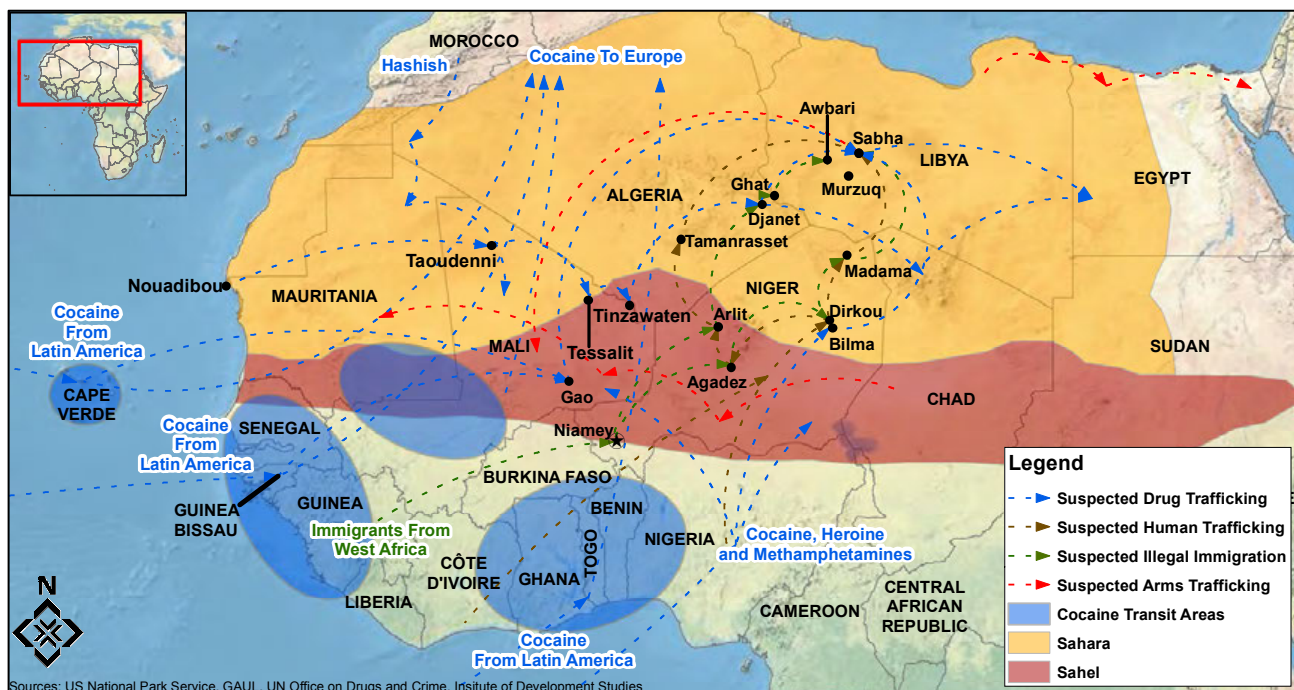


The risks for both Mali and its neighbors are well described by Cedric Jourde in an essay on Mauritania:

> The argument that the state cannot control these illegal economic transactions, therefore, misidentifies the problem. In fact, some high-ranking military officers, as well as

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[84] Lacher, 2012, page 7 claims that one third of all Moroccan hashish is estimated to pass through the Sahel on its way toward the Eastern Mediterranean.
[85] UNODC, 2013.
[86] Interview with journalist, April 14, 2013.

members of their families and tribes, play key roles in this illicit economy and are involved in numerous local power struggles. The result is a seemingly irreconcilable tension: the state as an abstract entity is threatened by this illicit business, yet simultaneously many state agents are deeply involved in these activities. The suggestion, then, that the Mauritanian state needs more technology, surveillance materials, vehicles, and capacity-building is true, but it misses the point. That state officials may follow private, social, and political incentives not congruent with the interests of the state indicates that the problem is less technical than political. Allegiances to one's ethnic group, tribe, clan, or personal network can be stronger than those to the state.[87]

### B. The Politics of the Envelope

While jihadi and Kel Tamasheq separatist ideologies pitted vocal minorities within both the Arab and Kel Tamasheq communities of Mali and Niger against the state, the situation with illegal economic activity was more complex. The Malian state, especially under ATT, was deeply involved in such illegal activities, and also tried to use them as means of managing its relations with potentially dangerous rivals in Mali's far north. The Malian approach to the north is comparable in many ways to the approach of the Nigerian state to the Niger Delta region. With the advent of democratic politics, a purely military response to unrest became less palatable, and attempts to "buy off" the most troublesome actors began to make sense for several reasons.

First, it facilitated a "*Fuite en avant*" or a kind of forward retreat, whose overarching logic was to push the day of reckoning forward so that (hopefully) someone else would have to deal with the problems when the situation finally imploded. ATT came within just two months of succeeding at this game. Second came, the "politics of the envelope," by which troublesome actors were incorporated or at least temporarily neutralized by being paid illicit monies or granted posts that would facilitate their self-enrichment. Such deals allowed actors in the capitals and intermediaries along the way to take their own cuts of the action. Among the political elites in power in both the north and the south of the country, this could be seen as a "win-win" situation. Needless to say, their "winning" came at the expense of the other 99 percent of the population, a fact about which Malians have complained bitterly for years, and which fed into both the lower-ranks coup d'état of 2012 and to its generally positive reception. It is crucially important to recognize that the Malian government's and Malian military's incapacity to deal with the insurgent threats they face are as much a self-fulfilling prophecy as a naturally occurring fact.

Paying off spoilers is a potential source of resilience in the short term, inasmuch as it can sometimes stave off an immediate threat of violence. For it to translate to long-term resilience, key actors would then have to seize the lull in order to negotiate, and address some of the structural factors (e.g. youth unemployment, lack of representation of one group in government or the military, or paucity of development funds flowing to one region) that have fed into the incipient conflict. This is not what has happened in Mali, and the policy of rewarding obstreperous actors in order to push the moment of reckoning forward a little has only succeeded in compounding anger and frustration among the majority who receive nothing.

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[87] Jourde 2011, page 3.

These are failed strategies of containment. The failure has much to do with the fact that the attempt to placate and localize insurgents is not accompanied by a meaningful threat of state force. This was painfully evident in Mali in 2012, but might well apply to Niger or Mauritania in the future.[88] Again, it is important to distinguish here between lack of capacity and a choice to make governance informal. The (Weberian) assumption that Sahelian states would aspire to a monopoly of violence within their territories if only they could is not borne out by the facts.[89] Dismantling, undercutting, and hollowing out state institutions has been a lucrative business for the Malian political class, regardless of ethnicity. Similarly, underpaid soldiers resentful of the massive wealth their superiors amassed while they often went unpaid have opened Malian military armories to rebels, several times selling off their own weapons to those who would later kill them in massacres such as that at Aguelhok, where about 80 Malian soldiers were executed by Kel Tamasheq insurgents.

### C. Identities: Ethnicity, Race, or Status?

For many years, the story of race and politics as regards Sahelian countries, including Mauritania, Mali, and Niger, has focused on the ways in which Europeans used racist ideology to justify both the Atlantic Slave Trade and then colonization. Recent scholars of the Sahel region have insisted that a more open discussion of racial hierarchies and exploitation among Africans in the Sahel region need not be a diversion from acknowledgment of the sordid history of European exploitation of Africa.[90] The topic has been both delicate and distasteful to educated elites in Mali and Niger, and far from capital cities, people often say that they choose not to discuss the slave or servile origins of neighbors or family "members"[91] in order not to offend them. In the context of this analysis, the lingering resentments and potential violence that accompany these relations make them important. Indeed, this report argues that the extreme delicacy barring discussion of the subject of race and enslavement has been both self-serving (to the descendants of former masters who might be called to account for past abuses and contemporary inequalities) and a contributor to the conflict dynamics. As with the question of different forms of Muslim practice and speech and the cultivation of criminal economic networks, what is often touted locally as the Sahelian culture of acceptance and dialogue can at other moments look like simple unwillingness to address difficult issues.

A full discussion of race and hierarchy in the Sahel is beyond the scope of this paper, but several points are worth making. First, "race" does not mean simply skin color. By American or

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[88] In this regard, Algeria looks quite different, and it has largely succeeded inasmuch as its strategy has been to push AQIM into Mali and tolerate occasional forays into southern Algeria. Still Belmokhtar's men's attack on In Amenas shows that even with a strong army and ruthless security services, this approach can fail.

[89] This line of analysis has been the subject of considerable anthropological and qualitative political science, including by Lombard (2012) for Central African Republic, Reno (1999) for Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria, and Roitman (2004) for Cameroon.

[90] LeCoq, "The Bellah Question: Slave Emancipation, Race, and Social Categories in Late Twentieth-Century Northern Mali" 2005; Hall, Bruce "Bellah Histories of Decolonization, Iklan Paths to Freedom: The Meanings of Race and Slavery in the Late Colonial Niger Bend (Mali), 1944-1960."*The International Journal of African Historical Studies;* 2011; 44, 1; page. 61.

[91] In richer or noble Kel Tamasheq, Arab, or sometimes Fulbe families, this metaphor of family membership is partly genuine, partly dissimulation. As LeCoq (2005:43) writes of two "family members" who had been assigned to wash his clothes, "Despite being called family members, their black and slave origins meant that they were to perform certain tasks deemed unfit for guests."

European standards of phenotype and skin color, all Songhai are "black," Kel Tamasheq are a mix of "white" and "black," and most (but not all) Arabs are "white." As Hall emphasizes, these categorizations have little to do with local conceptions of race, which equate "whiteness" with high social status. Thus Songhai-speaking elites have called themselves "white" and slaves or former slaves as "black." While social "blackness" most often coincides with phenotypically dark skin, dark skin does not necessarily correlate with low status, nor does white skin automatically confer high status, or social "whiteness."

As discussed briefly in the section above on social identities, Kel Tamasheq and Arabs raided and bought slaves from their southern, black neighbors, with the presumption that at least some portion of Kel Tamasheq slaves were probably ethnic Songhai. Race also played a clear role in the constitution of the various combatant groups. While the MNLA and Ansar Dine were overwhelmingly Kel Tamasheq in their constitution and headed by noble, "white" Ifoghas and Idnane clans, the MUJWA made explicit its intention of welcoming and recruiting jihadis across the racial and ethnic spectrum. As Andrew Lebovich wrote,

> In a widely-circulated video taken just after the fall of Timbuktu in April, Omar Ould Hamaha – who has alternately been identified as a leader within AQIM, Ansar Dine… and MUJAO[92] – told an audience gathered around a truck that, "our combat, it is in the name of Islam, it is not Arab or Tuareg, or black or white". In Gao and Timbuktu, MUJAO and AQIM have made a determined effort to recruit locally from different ethnic groups and tribes.

There is little consensus on the extent to which either MUJWA or AQIM has localized itself. It is clear that the leadership of both groups remains Arab. However, as accounts by journalists and by authors who have spent time with AQIM attest,[93] the rank-and-file is more mixed in racial, ethnic and national terms. Fowler notes that in Mokhtar bel Mokhtar's katiba, "they preached equality, but did not practice it. Sub-Saharan Africans were clearly second-class in the eyes of AQIM. Hassan was explicit, saying of AQIM, "it is true that racism is a problem." "[94] There are likely tensions between the desire to be seen as locally rooted, the strains of living together under trying conditions, and the residues of what may be racially driven biases among some members of both groups. One Mali specialist noted that almost all the Shari'a punishments such as amputations meted out in 2012 by MUJWA or Ansar Dine targeted poor Bellah, or those descended from the Kel Tamasheq's black African slaves. As he put it, "there was little risk involved, since no one was going to stand up for the people they targeted. They got to make a dramatic point and no one complained. By contrast, when they beat up a popular Songhai radio presenter, people were out in the streets of Gao, protesting."[95]

Tensions amongst the three jihadi groups (AQIM, MUJWA, Ansar Dine) appeared to have racial dimensions, with black African fighters funneled primarily toward MUJWA. Deserting MUJWA katiba head Hisham Bilal complained that the Arab commanders of MUJWA viewed

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[92] MUJAO is the French acronym of the group called MUJWA in this paper.
[93] Daniel, Serge  *AQMI : L'industrie de l'enlevement.*  Paris, Fayard 2012; Fowler, Robert, *A Season in Hell: My 130 Days in the Sahara with Al Qaeda.*  Toronto:  Harper Collins Canada 2011.
[94] Fowler, 2011:148.
[95] Interview with Mali specialist, April 15, 2013.

black African jihadists as "cannon fodder" and believed "a black man is inferior to an Arab or a white."[96] Despite this, when Bilal, the only black katiba head among Mali's jihadis, departed, he was reportedly replaced by a jihadi from Benin.  It also appears that black Africans are among those conducting suicide missions against the forces that have retaken Timbuktu, Gao, Ménaka and Kidal, and this ultimate sacrifice could indicate serious commitment.  Jourde (2011:4) has noted that the two suicide missions to take place in Mauritania were carried out by Haratine, and hypothesizes that Haratine may have been particularly attracted to the egalitarian aspects of Salafi rhetoric, given the injustices they have historically endured.  This is a line of analysis that would require much more research to confirm, but is provocative nonetheless.

### D.  Malian Self-Perceptions

A 2005 International Crisis Group report warned that "Mali, a star pupil of 1990s neoliberal democratization, runs the greatest risk of any West African country other than Nigeria of violent Islamist activity."  At that time, however, Malians were insistent that there was no such problem.  In retrospect, part of the explanation for Mali's spectacular implosion is the degree of denial that was operating at many different levels of society.  This is not to say that there were no criticisms of Malian politics and politicians.  Malians frequently expressed disgust at the high levels of corruption in government.  However, the laissez-faire approach to illicit economic activity, the outsourcing of security responsibilities to non-state actors, and the strident religious rhetoric that paralleled the acceptance of an Al Qaeda franchise making northern Mali its home base was far more than just a set of compromises struck by the president.  Positive Malian self-perceptions are thus both a source of risk and of resilience.

Malians as well as those foreigners who appreciate Mali often extol the virtues of Mali's inclusive and welcoming culture.  Many extol such practices as *Sanankuya/cousinage* or joking relations between clans and sometimes ethnic groups that involve ribald verbal abuse.  In principle, these forms of stereotyped exchange are meant to provide an "icebreaking" script of social interaction even for strangers, and also to release potential frustrations and anger that might exist between groups.  Although it is an article of faith in Mali that *sanankuya* is part of the national culture of peace, Mali is by no means the only country to cultivate the practice of joking relations. Like other cultural norms, it can be a source of both resilience and conflict.  It predisposes people to be more sympathetic to joking "cousins" while also leaving them free to characterize non-"cousins" in much more negative, stereotypical terms.[97]

Similarly, the national discourse around religion has been that Malian Islam is flexible, tolerant, and inclusive. The events of 2012 and 2013 may undercut a bit of the smugness these assertions sometimes carry, but they do not need to be treated as purely fictional, either.  As a source for rebuilding the sense of social trust, the positive self-stereotypes Malians cherish can be a very useful springboard for the types of discussions that should take place.  It will be important,

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[96] AFP, November 9, 2012.
[97] This is the slightly more pessimistic reading that can be given to a recent paper based on field experiments in Mali where respondents were asked to evaluate generic political speeches by speakers who were assigned different ethnically-identifiable names according to their relations to the respondent.  See Dunning and Harrison  "Cross-cutting Cleavages and Ethnic Voting:  An Experimental Study of Cousinage in Mali" *American Political Science Review* vol 104, No. 1:1-19, 2010

however, not to let them become a means for silencing the difficult conversations that also need to be had.  Are there limits to the speech or behavior people are willing to tolerate?  Are Malians ready to forego "easy" drug money and the problems it creates, even in the knowledge that there will be no economic activity equally lucrative to replace it?  Are people ready to tackle the difficult legacy and contemporary reality of enslavement and other forms of servitude?  What recompense do individuals owe their neighbors and fellow citizens for the various forms of criminal activity that have directly or indirectly foreshortened others' life chances?  Pride and self-regard will help to provide the resiliency people will require in addressing these explosive issues, even while some will use them to try to short-circuit difficult but necessary discussions.

### E.  Conflict (and Resilience) between Farmers and Pastoralists

In the Sahel region, competition for sufficient land, water and pasturage risks pitting farmers such as the Songhai, Bamana, or Hausa against pastoralists such as Kel Tamasheq or Fulbe even under the best circumstances.  Desertification, drought, and insecurity only make these dynamics more acute.  Given the circulation of huge numbers of small arms and light weapons, local officials in northern Mali suggest that almost every pastoralist has an automatic rifle.  These weapons can be used to rustle livestock as well as to protect one's own herds against rustling.

It is not clear that this dynamic has fed directly into the recent fighting, but such clashes, as well as fights over access to wells, have caused deadly clashes that have sometimes fed into later conflicts and alignments.  Ibrahim Bahanga, for instance, came to prominence in 1997 when he forced the redrawing of the In-Tedjedit Commune boundaries in order to assure his clan access to watering rights in this area where Kidal and Ménaka meet.  Although in local terms this was seen as an insurgent strongman's fulfillment of his duty to look out for his clan and other clients, it also contributed to shaping Bahanga's fractious relationship with the Malian state.

On the other hand, farmer-pastoralist relations need not be conflicting, especially since in the Sahel, many farmers also own livestock, and will give several head of cattle (which represent their savings account) to a pastoralist from the region to graze and take care of, while taking payment in calves.  Pastoralists also eat grains, even if these crops were traditionally grown for noble Kel Tamasheq and Fulbe by slaves.  The increasing emancipation of Bellah means that pastoralists are forced into yet more symbiotic relationships with sedentary farmers.

What is crucial is that governments become involved in order to manage these relations.  While the French colonial government in Mali and Niger reserved all land above 14 degrees north for pastoralists, the combination of growing population density and successive droughts have meant that farmers have moved north of that line at the same time that pastoralists have moved farther south than ever before in order to find pasturage.  The transhumance corridors once allowed pastoralists to cross in a southerly and then northerly direction as they follow pasture.  Given the flexibility and vagueness of customary land tenure boundaries, farmers regularly encroach on these corridors just as pastoralists stray from them.  It is thus imperative that the state manage these relations in order to avoid conflict.

Water harvesting schemes are among several other approaches that have worked well in Sahelian countries.  By grading and contouring cultivated land in particular ways, Sahelian farmers have

learned how to catch the 25-50 percent of rainfall that normally runs off and is lost to cultivation. Such rain harvesting can also raise the water table, allowing wells to remain wet during the dry season and allowing watering of dry season gardens. On-farm forestry, in which trees are planted in the middle of fields to be cultivated with cereals, has also paid dividends in the Sahelian countries. Using tree branches to fertilize soil allows the trees to improve soil fertility by fixing nitrogen, among other benefits.

## X.   TRAJECTORIES: CONFLICT AS A POTENTIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE OPENING

There are structural tendencies within Malian society that favor the avoidance of overt conflict. Many vaunt this culture of "tolerance," but it is worth noting that the events of 2012 and 2013 have been singularly intolerant. There are two broad possibilities as peace and some sense of normalcy return to Mali.[98]  On one hand, there could be a tacit decision to turn away from the recent events as if from a bad dream, and effectively to pretend they did not happen. The other would be to address them frontally, dissecting the aspects of Mali's political, religious, and social dynamics that contributed to this unprecedented disaster. The reality will probably fall between these two poles, but it is worth bearing in mind that in many post-conflict societies, the accumulated shock of mass violence – combined with the need to reconstruct battered livelihoods and compounded by outsiders' own lack of imagination – tend to favor a gradual return to the status quo ante. This is true even when there is general agreement about the ways that those systems contributed to the conflict.

A different approach is to see periods of conflict as openings to transformative social processes. These processes are unlikely to be successfully engineered from above by technocrats, be they local or expatriate. They need to emerge from local dialogue. This dialogue, however, is fragile and easily squelched, not least by local elites who may decide that they have little to gain and a great deal to lose in the context of any transformation. One of the most important roles that outside actors can play is to preserve this space for dialogue and try to protect it from capture by political interests. Initiatives such as locally produced, local language radio broadcasting, the Commission of Dialogue and Reconciliation, the constitution of a robust anti-corruption commission that is firewalled from political interference, and the establishment of an internationally supported customs and policing regime to eliminate drug trafficking in the region while providing alternative livelihood strategies, would count among the most useful initiatives. On the military side, a thoroughgoing reform of the security sector is desperately needed.

### A.  Trends and Triggers

The most immediate triggers for violent conflict will come from ethnically targeted murder, rape and theft that may accompany score settling, and from types of asymmetric guerilla fighting that targets civilians. Now that the French and Chadian troops have killed a significant number of jihadis and destroyed weapons caches, the ability of these groups to conquer and control wide swathes of territory is probably very low. However, the existence of suicide bombings in four

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[98] The events in Mali are close enough to the problems and preoccupations of people living in Niger and Mauritania and possibly other neighboring states that the Malian experience provides a parallel if less dramatic opening there, too.

northern cities of Mali as well as the major attack on In Amenas, Algeria and on Agadez and Arlit, Niger underline the fact that jihadis have survived the French intervention, and they remain armed, organized, and motivated.

Alongside this worry is that there will be massacres, ethnic cleansing, or targeted violence visited upon civilians as members of an ethnic or racial group. Given the history of vicious reprisals of prior Kel Tamasheq uprisings by the Malian state in conjunction with ethnic militias, and given existing reports of quasi-genocidal rhetoric, torture, and executions, the threat is real.[99] International actors and the Malian government, including the military chain of command, must nip this dynamic in the bud. This would perpetuate the resentments and narratives that have underwritten intercommunal violence up to now. MNLA representatives likely stand prepared to both cultivate and manipulate fear within Kel Tamasheq communities in refugee camps in order to present themselves as the only (ethnonationalist, separatist) solution for Kel Tamasheq people caught between a hostile Malian state and jihadis intent on imposing Shari'a. As one researcher put it, "The MNLA desperately want a genocide," in order to promote its own political position.[100]
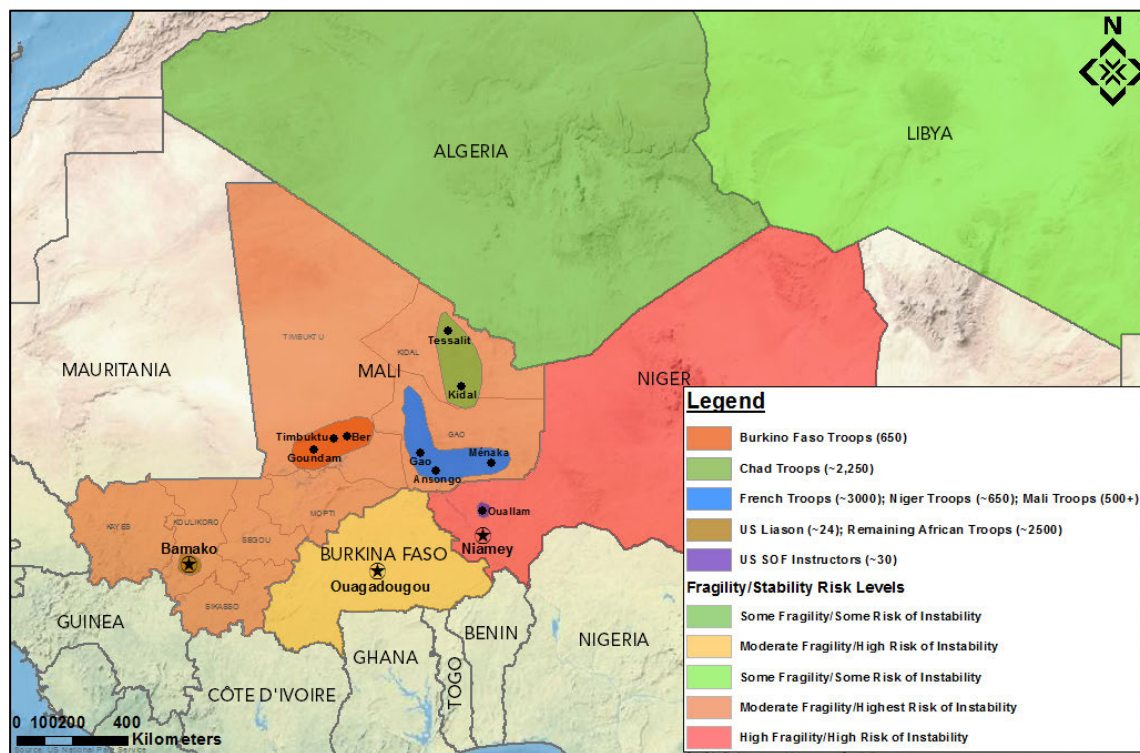


As for the jihadis, it is likely that the coming months will see the leadership retreating, regrouping, and rearming while encouraging some high-profile suicide missions targeting the symbols of the Malian state, secular authorities, and international presence, including the AFISMA/UN peacekeeping contingents. Attacks in the capitals of troop-contributing countries

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[99] Human Rights Watch, Mali: Two Torture Victims Die in Detention. April 11, 2013;
 Mali: Soldiers Torture Detainees in Léré. March 26, 2013; Mali: Malian Army, Islamist Groups Executed Prisoners; February 1 2013; Mali: Security Forces 'Disappear' 20, Torture Others. July 25, 2012.
[100] Interview with researcher on northern Mali, 8 April.

against both Euro-American targets and against civilians of those countries (in order to turn public opinion against the peacekeeping operation) are also likely. Here again, if there are no reprisals against Kel Tamasheq and Arab communities, it will be much easier to move forward with negotiations to include these communities as full citizens in a state where they and the state first acknowledge and then live up to both their rights and their responsibilities as citizens.

### B. Criminal Collusion

In the medium term, a return to the practices of the ATT state would be the second-most destabilizing trend in Mali after the threat of festering intercommunal resentments. International Crisis Group has recently suggested that this process is already underway, writing that:

> The arrival of Diango Cissoko on the scene [after Prime Minister Cheikh Modibo Diarra was ousted in December 2012] has reinforced the sentiment in Bamako of a neutralization of the [positive] political consequences of the coup d'état and the reinstatement of the "old regime" who were responsible for the country's collapse.[101]

As in other places around the world, a criminalized regime could also find it useful to keep such intercommunal tensions simmering, as a ready distraction from its own lack of interest or ability to play its proper role. Drugs are a scourge to the individuals who become addicted to them, but they have also proven to be a scourge to the states whose political and military elites also become "addicted" to the proceeds of the drugs trade. The example of Guinea Bissau is especially stark in this regard.

It is important to underline the ways that the events of 2012 were not a crisis caused by the "ungoverned" nature of Saharan-Sahelian space. Aside from the forms of alternate governance that organize access to water and pasturage in these zones, Algeria, Niger and Mauritania share the same climactic zone and populations as northern Mali. The collapse of state authority in northern Mali was the culmination of Bamako's own policies, and should provide clear guidance for post-conflict policies by development, security and humanitarian partners. As Niger and Mali specialist Yvan Guichaoua puts it:

> Following the 'ungoverned spaces' approach is thus likely to yield unwelcomed solutions to the crisis. It contains a built-in response to the conundrum it names: to repel terrorists, it suggests, let's replace the political void they have taken advantage of by the deployment of the legitimate administration! As, to international donors, legitimacy is overwhelmingly considered to be located in central authorities, this would entail rebuilding Mali by relying on the very powerbrokers and representatives in Bamako who bear a huge responsibility in the country's present crisis. Giving back to Mali the chunk of territory forcibly detached from it by Tuareg separatists, then occupied by allied Islamist groups, without drastically reconsidering the country's north-south relations would be foolish.[102]

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[101] ICG 2013:20.
[102] Guichaoua, Yvan "Mali: The Fallacy of Ungoverned Spaces." February 14, 2013, http://matsutas.wordpress.com.

The disastrous cocktail that included drugs, weapons, cigarettes, would-be immigrants, and kidnapping for ransom linked politicians, businessmen, military officers and jihadis in a perverse and unsustainable embrace. The jihadis made clear that they had always been biding their time, and that these criminal enterprises were always just means to an end, not least of which was to weaken and manipulate Malian politicians and officers so as to more easily do away with them when the time came. Various Kel Tamasheq and Arab actors tried to have it both ways, making money, seeking political autonomy and sometimes even waging jihad at the same time. The cynicism of the MNLA backfired badly in this context as it was soon outflanked by the jihadis who understood themselves to be answering to a higher calling.

Interdiction and prosecution are only part of the problem, however. As far as conflict dynamics are concerned, diminishing or eliminating drugs and weapons flows as well as kidnapping for ransom through the region solves one problem, but it creates another one. That is the further impoverishment of Kel Tamasheq and Arab communities who have historically gained part of their living from smuggling activities. It is essential to distinguish between illicit economic enterprises that pose a serious threat to regional stability, namely drugs and kidnapping, and those that do not. Stopping both at once could be radically destabilizing to Saharan societies, as there will be little to replace these sources of income. In this context, development initiatives that focus on pastoral livelihoods are of central importance – regreening, livelihood diversification, livestock management and marketing, and agricultural projects as already programmed within USAID's Sahel resilience programming. The inclusion of a strong governance component is absolutely essential, as so many of the problems in the north are linked to others in the capital.

## XI.    GAPS AND QUESTIONS

Despite our best efforts, no study can be 100% complete. We highlighted the following gaps in knowledge and understanding that are important to address before there can be comprehensive strategies to increase stability in the Sahel.

- What are the livelihood alternatives to smuggling and kidnapping?
- What are the internal group oppositions (e.g. between Ifoghas and Imghad Kel Tamasheq) that are likely to endure, and which are more likely to heal themselves?
- What is the importance of race as distinct from ethnicity, status or occupation?
    - How is race conceived locally (e.g. NOT simply a matter of skin color)?
- Were the events of 2012/2013 the result of a purely circumstantial conjuncture
    - (AQIM activities, deepening cynicism of Malian state actors, arrival of weapons from Libya, coup), or the result of durable dynamics? Which ones remain, and which (e.g. AQIM's logistical supply chain) have been disrupted?
- Have the drug and kidnapping economies in northern Mali been disrupted? If so, are they moving to neighboring Niger, Mauritania, or Libya?
- What is the extent of Sahraoui/POLISARIO involvement in jihadi and in drug networks?
- Will ethnicity become more or less important in organizing the patterns of conflict?
- What is the level of elite willingness to cooperate and find common ground?
- How do questions of gender, family and sexuality link elite Salafist discourses with the

concerns of non-elite Malians?

- What are the sources of anti-Western and anti-American sentiment in the Sahel?
  - How do they vary by country? What are the relative importance of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, support for Sahelian or North African Countries that are seen as illegitimate, torture and detention without trial, use of drones, support for Israel over Palestine?
- What is Algeria's willingness to see the problem solved?
- Does provision of development aid have any effect on conversion to reformist Islam? To rates of recruitment to jihadi or ethnonationalist groups?
- What debates has the 2012 experience of Shari'a and Islamist rule in Mali prompted, both in Mali and across the region?
- Are most reformists converted in their home villages and towns or while working as migrant laborers in cities and neighboring countries?
- What are attractions of reformism?
  - Re-moralization of politics?
  - Re-traditionalization of family structures?
  - Anti-Western sentiment?
  - Prestige of Arab culture and theologies?

## XII.  FINDINGS

### A.  Address Security Sector Reform

No policies, programs or interventions in the north of Mali will have a chance of succeeding until the way that both civilians and military officers do business is changed radically. Further investment in training or equipment of the Malian military is thus likely to be part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, if it is not preceded by serious security sector reform. This requirement will make policy more difficult, more expensive (if the USG supports security sector reform), and slower, but ignoring it is likely to lead to a situation similar to the one that took place in 2012-2013, except that civilian deaths are likely to be at least an order of magnitude higher as a result of ethnic polarization that has taken place during the recent fighting. The Malian military is split by a major divide between Red and Green Beret units, with Captain. Sanogo's Green Berets having gained the upper hand over the course of 2012. This rift will have to be addressed alongside mistrust of Kel Tamasheq soldiers within units.

One of the paradoxes of the situation in Mali is that the military took power in a coup d'état from ATT, himself a former military officer (who had taken power in a coup) on the basis of accusations that he had not supported the army. The coup then ushered in the total capitulation of the Malian army and its retreat from the northern two thirds of the country. Despite the ostensible departure of Captain Sanogo and his colleagues from politics, most Malians feel that they are still controlling politics from behind the scenes. Meanwhile, it is French and Malian troops who are reconquering the North, and the Malians, left to guard checkpoints in their wake, appear as soft targets for jihadi attack. Clearly, the Malian military is in sore need of major reforms. Moreover, it would seem that these reforms have as much to do with administration, management, and other politically sensitive issues as anything else. Certainly, platoon and

company-level tactics may still be useful, but disgruntled and unpaid soldiers who see their commanding officers getting rich and thus sell their own weapons and abandon post call out for different kinds of interventions than mere infantry training exercises.

The military hierarchy will likely resist these changes, and it will thus be essential to get full support from the new political leadership in Bamako.  It goes without saying that before any meaningful reforms can begin, the 2012 putschistes will have to desist from further involvement in politics.  If these basic preconditions cannot be met, reforms are unlikely to be meaningful.  European Union training has begun, but at present there is little consensus on the best way to reform a military.  At one end of the spectrum, there is the Liberian post-war model of dismantling the entire institution and recruiting, vetting and training a new army from scratch.  This offers the advantage of a fresh start if done properly, but it has the drawbacks of being very expensive and presents unique challenges as it creates an army of Privates and Second Lieutenants (Liberia had to patch together a command and control hierarchy of officers from other Anglophone African nations and some Liberian former officers brought back from retirement).  On the other end of the spectrum was the experiment in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in which fighters from multiple rebel forces were incorporated into the national army with little further training, yielding an undisciplined and incoherent structure with major problems of rank inflation. The Malian approach is likely to be between these two poles, but there is little consensus on what would constitute the recommended practices in such a case.

### B.  Address Illicit Economies

The term "corruption" is often used in describing a wide range of practices in poor countries.  Because it is frequently deployed by "experts" from rich countries who are giving lessons to citizens of poor countries, it can be a rhetorical style that people in the Sahel quickly tune out.  Citizens of Sahelian countries do, however, have robust critiques of the thefts perpetrated by their political and military elites, as described already.  As with security sector reforms, development initiatives must take these structural problems very seriously.  As some researchers have noted, "Before still more millions are poured into the country in development aid, capacity building support, and military assistance, a clear and explicit agreement needs to be reached around combating criminal activity."[103]

A different area where foreign actors could make a major difference in the Sahara-Sahel region is by ceasing to pay ransoms in the case of kidnapping.  Lacher estimates that some $40-65 million was paid by European countries to AQIM from 2008 to 2012.  Interestingly, the bounty of $100,000 AQIM offered for any European delivered to it by any criminal actor did not apply to Americans, for whom they knew they could not gain a ransom.  Alongside this straightforward means of addressing the kidnapping economy (whose meager benefits to local economies could at least be compensated when tourism resumed), should go policies to help stop the transshipment of drugs through the Sahel.  As one scholar of Mali suggested, "it would be much better to stop the drugs at or near the coast, before they arrive in Mali or Niger."  Once they are there, they represent such huge sums in local terms that it will be very difficult to stop them continuing on toward North Africa."[104]  Such an approach would also be likely to lead to a more

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[103] Reitano and Shaw 2013:3.
[104] Mali historian, April 28, 2013.

gradual asphyxiation of the drugs economy in Mali, which might cause less social and political disruption than an abrupt stop would.

### C.  Address Race

Mali has just created a "Commission of Dialogue and Reconciliation."[105] For those familiar with transitional justice mechanisms constituted in other countries, it is already striking that the commission's title does not include the term "truth."  This could be an important advantage for the commissioners inasmuch as it could give them added flexibility in working obliquely toward some of the knotty issues that underlie the present conflict.  These would have to include a deep history of racism and enslavement of black Africans by some northern Malian populations.  Such an approach should pay due respect to the complexities of the local meanings of race, the subtleties of servility and "unfreedom" in local contexts, and the fact that black Malians in both the north and the south also held slaves and serfs.  It is important that a nuanced approach not become an excuse to avoid this painful and delicate issue.  It can and should be treated as inextricably interlinked with a frank discussion of the Malian state's vindictive abuses of Kel Tamasheq populations in the wake of the 1963 and the 1990s rebellions.  Many on each side will insist that one of these two issues be discussed, but not the other.  If there is to be meaningful "dialogue and reconciliation," all parties will have to address subjects they would rather not.

The role of international actors here will be largely to fund and accompany such a process, as only Malians can decide how far they are willing to push into this conversation.  It is worth bearing in mind that such commissions are constituted in Mali and elsewhere as often to evade as to address such difficult topics, and international actors can at least weigh in on the ongoing dynamics by providing funds and technical support or by retracting them, according to the quality of the work being undertaken.  Promotion of locally controlled and produced radio broadcasting can and should accompany such a dialogue and reconciliation process.  There would need to be clear ground rules for such engagements, and an active promotion of heterogeneous production teams, but there are organizations with expertise in such work on similarly sensitive topics. There are undoubtedly many talented Malians who view Malian politics with a clear but un-cynical eye who would be eager to participate.

### D.  Discussing Conversion and Muslim Practice

The events of 2012 and 2013 in Mali do not speak for themselves (events never do), but they have undoubtedly left strong impressions on all people living in the Sahara-Sahel belt.  Whether they construe it as a worst-case scenario or as the predictable endpoint of coercive Salafi Islam, Sahelian citizens have had a short, dramatic experience of living under Islamist governance.  As they emerge from the shock of the violence and chaos wreaked on their country, Malians will undoubtedly discuss the role of religion in what happened.  This will be a slow and sometimes halting process, most likely, given the likelihood that for some time jihadis may target some of those willing to speak loudest against them.  More importantly, it is probable that there will be a lively debate about whether the AQIM/Ansar Dine/MUJWA form of governance was an example of Islamists showing their "true colors," the botched application of a sound principle

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[105] Le Mali crée une "Commission dialogue et reconciliation." Le Monde.fr avec AFP,  6 March 2013.

(application of Islamic law), or the perverse imposition of a "foreign" ideology on Malians who prize tolerance and moderation.[106] Islam's proper role in politics already is and will have to be a major point of consideration as Mali attempts to rebuild a post-war polity. The fact that this subject, as with race, ethnicity, the legacy of slavery, and misgovernance, has been largely relegated to private conversation has allowed a variety of dynamics to develop without speaking their own names.

Operation Serval, which will become a peacekeeping mission likely to be welcomed by most at first, will eventually come to be experienced by some Malians as a foreign occupation, however short its duration, and in some cases, this may take on religious overtones. Given these and other sensitive aspects, it would be counterproductive for outside actors actively to promote this discussion. It will begin within households and among close friends, and will undoubtedly work its way to different scales at its own pace. If institutions such as the Commission of Dialogue and Reconciliation and locally produced radio programs are thriving, these discussions will emerge on their own, as part of a dialogue that is powerful precisely because it is locally authored. The experience of national partition, Shari'a rule, and the noxious mix of criminality, violence, and strident religious rhetoric were probably experienced as overwhelmingly negative by most Malians who lived under jihadi rule.

The only way to undercut the power of that experience would be to try to capture, instrumentalize and stage-manage it in a didactic fashion. Promoting and protecting free expression is a more productive approach, and at the moment, it is primarily the putschistes who appear to be using violence and manipulation of the judicial system to silence anyone who criticizes them. Emphasizing the importance of rights of expression and assembly, and providing technical support for public conversations, for instance on radio, would thus be more productive than trying to promote a specific "narrative." One clear statement that would likely garner broad support among Sahelian citizens would be an explicit U.S. renunciation of predator drone strikes. Ethnographic evidence as well as surveys suggest that even though there is limited anti-American sentiment in the Sahel and Sahara, many citizens of the region are mistrustful of U.S. military presence, and in countries like Niger, the majority of respondents believe the U.S. is fighting against Islam rather than just terrorism.

   E. **Address the Violent Instrumentalization of Ethnic Identities by States and by other Key Mobilizers**

The situation in Mali has already become polarized along ethnic, political, and generational lines. In such a situation there are incentives for all parties to bait one another to the point of inciting them to violence. It is a perverse irony of the way that democracy, human rights discourse, and electronic media work that having one's own constituents massacred by one's political opponents or their constituents is an outcome for which to hope. There has already been considerable demagoguery both in Bamako and in the north, all of it amplified by diaspora actors and Internet sites. As in Côte d'Ivoire and many other places, the rhetoric of genocide is often used as a

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[106] This last position was the one ultimately claimed by Islamic High Council President Mahmoud Dicko. The contradictions in his own position are evident to Malians, given his earlier hesitance to condemn the jihadis, his role as mediator between them and the transitional government in Bamako, and his own religious orientation (described as Wahhabi by his Vice President), shaped by his years of training in the Gulf.

justification of the need for preemptive action, sometimes violent, sometimes political. International actors can play a judicious but useful role here by quietly discouraging and occasionally contradicting such rhetoric.

## XIII.   CONCLUSION

The entire Sahel region looks qualitatively different than it did before 2012.  The Malian political system, praised regularly for holding regular and transparent elections, collapsed almost at the first nudge, and one can only wonder how fragile other regional governments might also be.  The regional Al Qaeda franchise, long portrayed by some as mere smugglers using religious ideology as a smokescreen for their criminal activities, showed itself to be both willing to and capable of taking territory, and more importantly, it showed that it had many willing recruits among Mauritanians, Malians, Senegalese, Nigeriens and Nigerians, some of whom will find their way back to their home countries.  The Malian army, split into multiple competing factions and weakened by the rank-and-file's perception of high-level corruption amongst the officer elite, showed itself utterly incapable of protecting the national territory, even while it defied civilian control and preyed upon Malian civilians.

This image is radically at odds with the Mali portrayed internationally through 2011 as a beacon of democracy.  Mali's development and security partners, including the United States, bear some responsibility for the dysfunctional and "codependent" relations they fostered.  Still, it would be disingenuous to pretend that foreigners should have known things that took Malians themselves by surprise.  As one journalist put it:

> [P]oliticians did not expect to be marginalized. The Green Berets did not expect to take power (the coup was a mutiny that turned out to be a coup when two pick-ups drove towards the presidency). The Red Berets and the elite battalions did not expect to lose their prestige. The Tuaregs did not expect to control the territory. And nobody expected Islamists and Al-Qaeda to seize control of the North. From the inside, the whole crisis has been a question of seizing opportunities while a failed state fell apart.[107]

Having said this, it would be inexcusable to return to failed policies based upon prior ignorance or misunderstanding.  Sadly, this is too often what happens in the context of post-conflict reconstruction or development, if only because donors and diplomats can do little until they have someone sitting across the table from them, and because spoilers need to be managed.

For Malians, this points to the critical need to discuss some of the fault lines in Malian society and politics in a more open way than has been possible in the past.  International actors can play a useful accompanying role here, funding institutions including the Dialogue and Reconciliation Council and radio broadcasting that address sensitive issues, and insisting that crude attempts to squelch such discussion, such as the arrest of journalist Boukary Daou, are unacceptable.  The international footprint in these areas should be as small and unobtrusive as possible.

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[107] Boisvert, Marc-André     "Mali,   the   Unexpected   Crisis,   A   Year   Later…"   December   31   2012, http://matsutas.wordpress.com/page/2/.

In other areas, including security cooperation and development aid, there is a responsibility to "first do no harm."  In retrospect, a focus on capacity building may have been deleterious to the extent that it presumed the political will to apply such interventions in ways that would promote sustainable and inclusive development and security.  While these problems are especially stark in the Malian case, they should also be taken seriously in cooperation with neighboring countries. Demonstrated political will to reform dysfunctional institutions should be a prerequisite for disbursing further assistance.

## 2011 | 2012 | 2013

**06 September**
Niger launches the 3N (Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens) Initiative.

**07 April**
Issoufou Mahamadou becomes President of Niger.

**16 October**
MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) is founded (largely by Tuareg fighters who fought in the Libyan civil war) from a merger of MNA (National Movement of Azawad) and the more hardline ATNM (Niger-Mali Tuareg Alliance).

**22 October**
MUJWA (Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa) breaks away from AQIM and becomes internationally known after kidnapping three western aid workers in Tindouf, Algeria.

**July – September**
Sahelian countries experience severe drought, causing food insecurity for 18 million people across the region. An ensuing famine is caused largely by failed crops and low crop yields, insect plague, loss of herds, high food prices, conflict, forced migration, and low levels of community resilience.

**20-23 October**
Muammar Gaddafi is captured and killed on October 20, 2011. The National Transitional Council declares the liberation of Libya and the official end of the Libyan Civil war on October 23, 2011.

# Map: APPENDIX 2: DIVERGENT LOCAL PERSPECTIVES MAP
*To view this graphic properly, the file must be opened with Adobe Reader 9 or newer (not Preview).*

## Ethnically and Racially Oriented Violence

## Anti-Western Sentiment

## Legitimacy of Rebel Groups

**PROFILE:**
Tuareg male, 56, Niono, Mali
There was a time when these acts of racially oriented violence were very serious. I myself have been accused and targeted by my own neighbors in the area for having housed a cousin who had deserted the army at the beginning of the crisis.

**PROFILE:**
Bambara male, 37, Gao, Mali (Displaced to Bamako)
Thus far there is no direct violence against Tuaregs or Arabs in the Bamako area but everything will depend on how the government manages negotiations through the Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission. Through discussions with many people, southern Malians are no longer willing to support the government giving certain privileges to Tuaregs and Arabs on the basis of race as was the case with previous conflicts. Many believe that the state should not give in to blackmail by armed groups.

**PROFILE:**
Tuareg (Kel Away) male, 33, Agadez, Niger
Right now in Niger we are very far from the Malian situation, even if our wounds are still open. Knowing that tensions can return to any crisis, we think that things may get worse because there are many young people who are unemployed, and that can become a problem in the future if things aren't resolved.

**PROFILE:**
Malian Arab male, 35, Timbuktu, Mali
When the MNLA independence movement arrived in Timbuktu on April 1, 2012, they hunted the Bambara and other ethnic groups who were not from northern Mali. This is because they [southerners] were believed to be in control of the administrative apparatus of the country, enjoy all the benefits of it, and so are better off than other northerners.

**PROFILE:**
Ilgdallan male, 24, Kidal, Mali
If the Ifoghas are not involved in the peace process, they will try to play any card possible, including the ethnic/tribal card, to regain prominence, by either infiltrating or dividing the MNLA, by opposing certain tribes within the MNLA, or by playing on the Arab crisis with Idnane, Imghad or Kounta-Arab.

**PROFILE:**
Talkast-Idnane male, 45, Kidal, Mali
There are three forms of recently observed violence:
1 - Those performed by the MNLA on Arabs suspected to be close to MAA in the In Khalid region, and on the pretext that they are working with MUJWA.
2 - The MAA-MNLA conflict which could resurface in the In Khalid and Timtaghene areas and up to Kidal and Timbuktu. Some believe that the MAA is allied with Ansar Sharia and the Berbers and could target the Idnanes in this area.
3 - Violence has also been reported on the side of Aguel-hock to individuals belonging to the Imghad tribe suspected of working with the Malian Army or Operation Serval. People think that these acts of violence are people from Ansar al-Din evolving into small groups that can hide among the population in Aguelhoc, Tessalit, In Abeg and Tamasna."
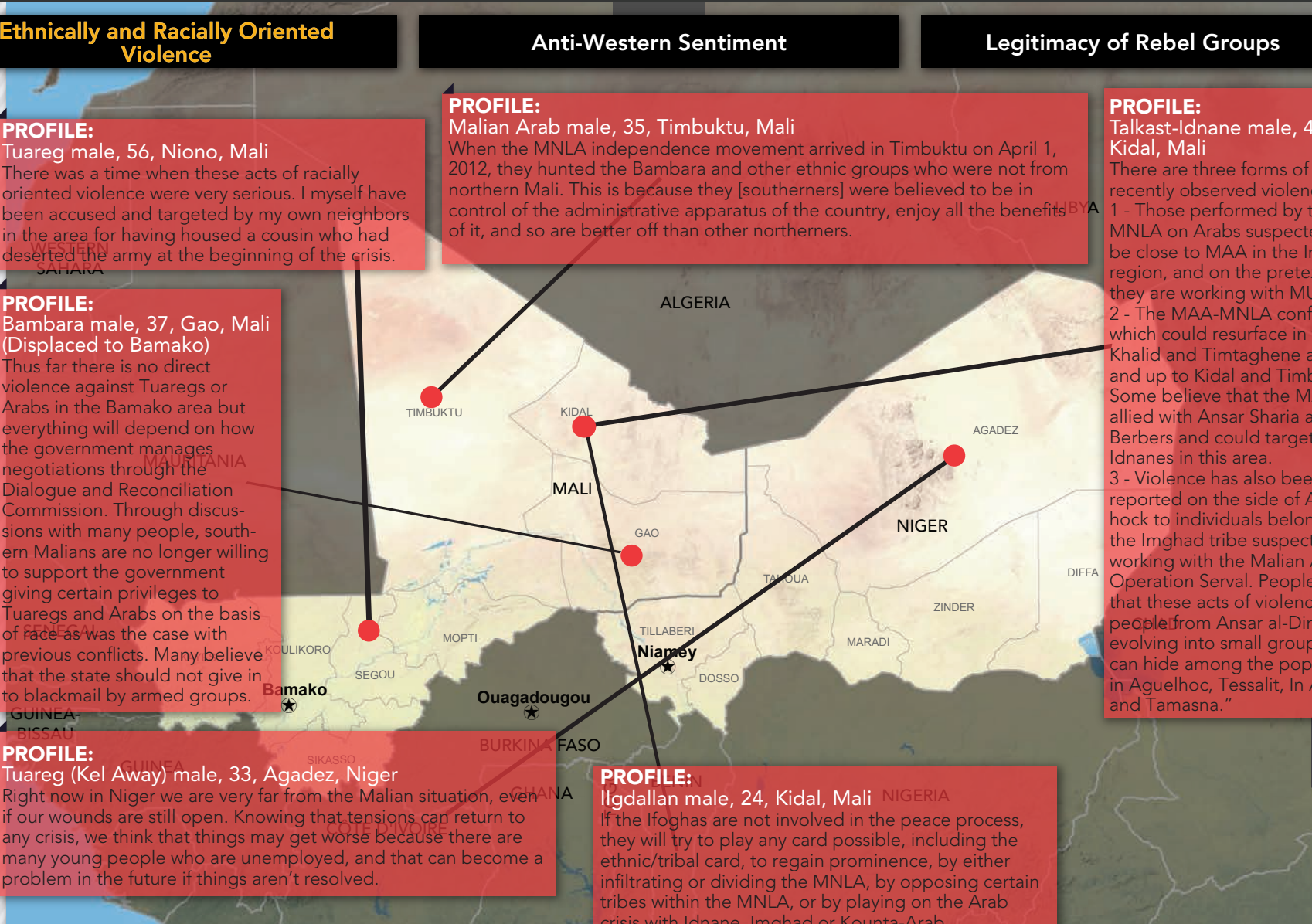
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