

Mali: The Need for Determined and Coordinated International Action

I. OVERVIEW

In the absence of rapid, firm and coherent decisions at the regional (Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS), continental (African Union, AU) and international (UN) levels by the end of September, the political, security, economic and social situation in Mali will deteriorate. All scenarios are still possible, including another military coup and further social unrest in the capital, which threaten to undermine the transitional institutions and create a power vacuum that could allow religious extremism and terrorist violence to spread in Mali and beyond. None of the three actors sharing power – namely interim President Dioncounda Traoré, Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra, and the ex-junta leader, Captain Amadou Sanogo – has sufficient popular legitimacy or the ability to prevent the aggravation of the crisis. The country urgently needs to mobilise the best Malian expertise irrespective of political allegiance rather than engaging in power plays that will lead the country to the verge of collapse.

Almost six months after President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) was overthrown by a coup and the Malian army relinquished control of the three northern administrative regions to armed groups – including the Tuareg separatists of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the Islamist fighters of Ansar Dine (Ançar Eddine), the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – none of the pillars of the Malian state has been able to give a clear direction to the political transition and formulate a precise and coherent demand for assistance to the international community to regain control of the north, which makes up more than two thirds of the territory. The next six months are crucial for the stability of Mali, the Sahel and the entire West African region, with risks running high and decision-making at all levels lacking leadership.

The messages from Crisis Group's July 2012 report on Mali are still relevant. The principle of a military action in the north is not to be ruled out. Indeed, the use of force will most likely be necessary to restore Mali's territorial integrity and neutralise transnational armed groups that

indulge in terrorism, jihadism and drug and arms trafficking. But the use of force must be preceded by a political and diplomatic effort aiming at separating two different sets of issues: those related to communal antagonisms within Malian society, political and economic governance of the north and religious diversity management; and those related to collective security in the Sahel-Sahara region. Forces of the Malian army and ECOWAS are not capable of tackling the influx of arms and combatants between Libya and northern Mali through southern Algeria and/or northern Niger. Minimal and sustainable security in northern Mali cannot be reestablished without the clear involvement of Algerian political and military authorities.

Following the 26 September high-level meeting on the Sahel, expected to take place on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York, Malian actors, their African and non-African partners and the UN will have to specify their course of action and clarify minimal objectives to be attained by March 2013.

The president and the prime minister should:

- ❑ form immediately a small informal group aimed at helping the government define a global strategy to resolve the crisis and including Malian personalities who are preferably retired from the political scene and have specific skills and significant experience in the areas of internal security, governance and public administration, organisation of elections, decentralisation, inter-communal mediation and international relations, and more specifically in the area of regional diplomacy.

ECOWAS leaders should:

- ❑ recognise the limitations of the organisation in mediating the crisis and planning a military mission in Mali, and thus work closely with the AU and the UN, which are better equipped to respond to challenges posed by a crisis threatening international peace and security.

The UN Security Council and member states represented at the high-level meeting on the Sahel should provide support to the Secretary-General to:

- ❑ appoint a special representative of the Secretary-General for the Sahel and provide him with the necessary means

to achieve his mission, which must focus on reconciling the positions of ECOWAS member states, regional players (Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and Mali) and Western countries;

- boost the UN presence in Mali to help the transitional government withstand the economic and social crisis, produce a credible roadmap for the restoration of territorial integrity and the organisation of transparent elections as soon as possible, and uphold the rule of law by gathering detailed information on human rights violations committed in the south (in particular in Bamako and Kati) as well as in the north;
- implement, together with the AU and ECOWAS, a mission to facilitate reconciliation within the Malian army to prevent another military coup with unpredictable consequences.

Mali's foreign partners, in particular the European Union and the U.S., should:

- support efforts to reestablish Malian defence and security forces by enhancing their unity, discipline and efficiency so that they can ensure security in the south, represent a credible threat to armed groups in the north and participate in operations against terrorist groups;
- help stabilise the Malian economy and employment through a rapid resumption of foreign aid so as to prevent social unrest, which would only deepen the political and humanitarian crisis;
- respond favourably to the request for urgent humanitarian assistance to civilian populations affected by the crisis in Mali and the entire Sahel region, in accordance with what the UN has been advocating for several months without generating the adequate response the situation requires.

II. A TENUOUS ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN POLITICIANS AND SOLDIERS

The interim president Dioncounda Traoré is highly unpopular. He merely owes his tenuous position to ECOWAS and his title of constitutional replacement for the deposed president.¹ The hopes generated by his return to the country after prolonged medical treatment in France and his in-

spiring speech on 29 July 2012 have completely disappeared. He has lost ground to the prime minister, Cheick Modibo Diarra, whose position however seemed very weak at the end of July.² Appointed under the 6 April framework agreement, the prime minister held tight to his post and to some extent escaped from the control of those who pushed through his appointment, particularly Burkina Faso, the mediating country chosen by ECOWAS. Despite the regional organisation's wish to see him leave office at the end of July, Modibo Diarra retained his post and exerted considerable influence in the formation of the second transitional government, a 31-member national unity government which is not very different from the previous one. Announced on 20 August, it included eighteen ministers in addition to representatives of the main political blocs.³

The prime minister firmly indicated that he did not intend to resign and that he owed his position to the ECOWAS-negotiated agreement rather than to the interim president. He also made clear his intention to impose himself as a key new actor on the political scene.⁴ The fierce rejection of politicians of the past twenty years by Malian citizens disillusioned by the scale of state corruption enables him to appear as a "new" man in politics after a brilliant international career as a scientist. He also draws support from family networks, particularly from his father-in-law, former President General Moussa Traoré.⁵ Finally, he has an alliance of convenience with Islamic associations part of the High Islamic Council (Haut Conseil islamique, HCI) and prominent religious figures.⁶ This has generated some unease in Bamako, where many people believe that religious figures are increasingly interfering in politics, as reflected by the creation of a new religious affairs ministry.⁷

Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo no longer has an official title. However, he still represents the army factions that are in control of the security apparatus, thus having the capacity for repression. Located approximately 15km from

² Crisis Group interviews, political actors, diplomats, researchers, Bamako, 9-15 September 2012.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Crisis Group interviews, political actors, diplomats, Bamako, 10, 12, 13, 14 September 2012.

⁵ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and senior Malian officer, Bamako, 10, 11, 12 September 2012.

⁶ In addition to the HCI, presided over by Mahmoud Dicko, who organised a mass rally in a large stadium in Bamako on 12 August, where speakers praised the prime minister, the latter has good relations with Cheick Sharif Mohamed Ould Cheicknè Hamala Hamaoula, better known as the "Cherif de Niore" and a scholar with spiritual authority. Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, 10 and 12 September 2012, Bamako. Also see "Mali: grand meeting du Haut conseil islamique pour discuter de la crise politique", RFI, 12 August 2012.

⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Malian political actors, diplomats, researchers, Bamako, 10-13 September 2012.

¹ This briefing provides an update to the International Crisis Group's last report on Mali. For a description of political, military and security developments in Mali since the beginning of the rebellion in the north in January 2012 and a detailed analysis of the multi-faceted crisis in the country, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°189, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, 18 July 2012.

Bamako, the garrison town of Kati – which holds what remains of the Malian army’s weapons, ammunition and equipment after the military debacle in the north – is an undeniable centre of power that continues to escape the civilian transitional authorities’ control. Captain Sanogo has understood the international community’s message about the need for him to withdraw from the political scene and keep a low profile.⁸ Because they have committed serious human rights violations, Sanogo and other leaders of the ex-junta know they face the possibility of complex judicial proceedings in the future. But junior and non-commissioned officers of the former junta also have to face the anger of rank-and-file soldiers, who have no consideration for political issues, international injunctions and warnings about respect for human rights.⁹

Sanogo’s physical survival depends on his capacity to keep the promises he made to soldiers, especially regarding bonuses and other advantages, while his survival as a long-term actor in the transition depends on his ability to show respect for the civilian authorities and carve himself a key role in restructuring and re-equipping the armed forces. Sanogo only represents those of the army who overthrew the former president and dismissed generals and other officers who were in command. Senior officers representing the army’s interests in the government report to their colleagues in Kati, but the balance of power within the group of coup leaders and their supporters – who came along when the mutiny became a political takeover – is very shaky.¹⁰ Outside the junta, there are many malcontents in the army, sidelined and humiliated by the men from Kati. The bloody repression of the attempted counter-coup allegedly carried out by “red berets” faithful to the former president on 30 April has also left its mark.¹¹

The interim president and even the prime minister lack popularity after months of inaction and shallow promises. But Captain Sanogo and his group in Kati do not inspire people’s trust either, even in segments of the population that

once believed that the coup was a solution to the lax attitude and corruption of ATT regime’s last years.¹² Public perception of the military in Bamako is determined by the people’s appreciation of the army’s attitude towards regaining control of the north. It is an objective that unifies public opinion, shocked by the ease with which the Tuareg and Islamist rebels took control of the regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. The feeling of humiliation caused by the loss of national territory is intense and those who believed that Sanogo’s men had the ability and will to avenge the insult are increasingly doubtful about the army’s courage to fight, even though it has been purged of the old generals.¹³

Arguments concerning the lack of arms and logistical support for a northern offensive convince few people. However, a blockade of arms shipments in the port of Conakry, Guinea, due to an unofficial political decision by ECO-WAS,¹⁴ has allowed the Malian army to divert some public anger towards neighbouring countries and the regional organisation. Even senior Malian civilian officials and military officers believe that poor management of army recruitment over the years, characterised by lax administration and clientelism, has led many soldiers to believe that they would never end up on the battlefield.¹⁵ Some soldiers would be willing to fight in the north once they have been re-equipped, but nothing indicates that they form the majority.

III. DANGER ON ALL SIDES

Fragile political and institutional arrangements, deep divisions cutting through the political establishment, organised into various unstable coalitions,¹⁶ and the precarious

⁸ He only reappeared on Malian state television on 10 September to affirm that he fully agreed with President Traoré after a letter from the interim president to ECOWAS requesting military assistance became public and provoked controversy and outcry. A “spokesperson” for the captain, reportedly without the latter’s permission, said that the army was against the request for military assistance from ECOWAS as formulated in President Traoré’s letter. Crisis Group interviews, Malian diplomats and members of the government, Bamako, 10 and 11 September 2012.

⁹ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Bamako, 10 and 13 September 2012.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, senior officers, Bamako, 11 and 15 September 2012.

¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, senior government official and researchers, Bamako, 13 and 15 September 2012. Also see “Mali: security forces ‘disappear’ 20, torture others”, Human Rights Watch, 25 July 2012.

¹² Crisis Group interviews, residents of Bamako, 9-15 September 2012.

¹³ Crisis Group interviews, residents of Bamako, 9-15 September 2012.

¹⁴ The blockade of arms and equipment ordered by Mali, a landlocked country, in the port of Conakry in Guinea, on the orders of ECOWAS, led to heated protests in Bamako from both the civilian and military authorities as well as the general public. Crisis Group interviewed a taxi driver who spontaneously described ECOWAS as a “rebel” organisation that was preventing Mali from fighting the rebel groups controlling the north. This affair further poisoned relations between the Malian authorities and the West African organisation and increased its unpopularity among the population. Crisis Group interviews, Bamako, 10-15 September 2012. Also see “Guinea blocks arms shipment to Mali as distrust grows”, Reuters, 6 September 2012.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, senior government officials and military officers, Bamako, 13 and 15 September 2012.

¹⁶ For a reminder of the political blocs that formed after the March 2012 coup, see Crisis Group Report, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, op. cit.

balance of power within the army are not the only factors that raise doubts about the state's capacity to get back on its feet and formulate a political and military strategy to regain control of its lost territory with the support of the international community. The political deadlock, the uncertain security situation and the suspension of most foreign aid have triggered an economic crisis that could provoke social unrest. Although civil servants' salaries will continue to be paid over the next three months, there has been a drastic reduction in public and private investment and many small and medium-sized businesses have closed or experienced a significant decline in activity. There is no doubt that this has already thrown thousands of people into unemployment in Bamako and other towns.¹⁷ The large flows of people from the north, especially Gao and Timbuktu, to Bamako where they have family, is increasing the daily financial problems experienced by the population.¹⁸

According to revised estimates from the government and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mali's economy contracted by 3.1 to 4.1 per cent in 2012. The country is therefore undergoing a severe recession, with a decline in activity in all sectors except for gold and cotton production.¹⁹ Meanwhile, public finances have been seriously affected by a drop in revenue estimated at CFA 278 billion (about \$539 million), including CFA 190 billion (\$368 million) in donations suspended by foreign partners.²⁰ Public expenditure is expected to decrease by CFA 461 billion (\$894 million) this year, with public investment dropping from an estimated CFA 539 billion to CFA 156 billion (\$1,045 to \$302 million). According to the government, the sectors most affected by much-needed budget cuts will be water and sanitation (-94 per cent), debt refund (-92 per cent), transport (-84 per cent) and agriculture (-70 per cent).²¹

The expected suspension of subsidies that have so far kept basic commodities' prices stable threatens to provoke social unrest in an already volatile political and military context.²² The consequences of a social explosion for the country's stability remain uncertain. But in a worst-case scenario, chaos would break loose in Bamako, triggering the redeployment of the army, possibly led by even more radical commanders; the buffer zone between north and south

would become the theatre of clashes between communal militias and armed Islamist groups; and atrocities would be committed against civilians. Another collapse of the state in Bamako would spread unrest throughout the country, as the regular army would be just as uncontrollable as the rebel militias and groups in the north. In this context, Islamist elements linked to AQIM could conduct terrorist attacks in Bamako.

The worst-case scenario is not the most likely one. But seeing the country sink into an indefinite period of transition led by illegitimate civilian authorities supervised by an army faction that is more interested in protecting its own interests than regaining control of the north is also worrying. Such a combination of political deadlock and economic impoverishment of Malian society would present an unprecedented risk of religious radicalisation and intercommunal violence, both of which would be compounded by a desire of revenge within armed forces humiliated by the human losses sustained in the north, notably during the rebel takeover of Aguelhoc.²³ The reported execution by soldiers of sixteen harmless Malian and Mauritanian Muslim Dawa preachers²⁴ who were travelling to an annual rally in Bamako at a checkpoint in Diabaly (about 400km to the north east of Bamako) shows that previously unthinkable criminal acts are now possible.²⁵

Moreover, the soldiers stationed in the Sévaré area, at the border of the government-controlled zone, have been accused of harassment and atrocities against northern civilians travelling to Bamako.²⁶ People with fair skin (notably Tuaregs and Arabs) no longer use buses to travel between the north and south. Some prefer to avoid the military checkpoints at Sévaré, near Mopti, by travelling to Burkina Faso before making their way to Bamako.²⁷ Even though the atmosphere in the capital still seems relaxed, with no perceptible un-

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, humanitarian agency staff, economic actors and others, Bamako, 9-15 September 2012.

¹⁸ Crisis Group observations and interviews with displaced people from Gao now in Bamako, 14 September 2012.

¹⁹ "Mali's economic pillars resist turmoil, for now", Reuters, 17 September 2012.

²⁰ "Situation des comptes économiques (estimations gouvernement et FMI)", document obtained by Crisis Group, September 2012.

²¹ "La crise au Mali: analyse de l'impact budgétaire", document prepared by Oxfam, 27 August 2012.

²² Prices are estimated to rise by 6 per cent in 2012. "Situation des comptes économiques", op. cit.

²³ See "Mali: pourquoi les soldats ont disjoncté à Diabaly", *Jeune Afrique*, 20 September 2012. For more on the massacre at Aguelhoc in January 2012, see Crisis Group Report *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, op. cit.

²⁴ The Jamaat ut-Tabligh, usually called Dawa or Tabligh, is a missionary movement of Indian origin introduced to Mali in the mid-1990s. The Tabligh preaches a hardline Islam based on personal redemption, does not have a political vocation and even condemns jihad. For more on the Tabligh in Mali, see Bouhleb-Hardy, Grémont and Guichaoua, *Contestation armée et recompositions religieuses au Nord-Mali et au nord-Niger: perspectives locales*, French foreign ministry, Research Unit, 2009, unpublished and Crisis Group Africa Report N°92, *Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?*, 31 March 2005.

²⁵ On the killings in Diabaly, see "Mali: civilians bear the brunt of the conflict", Amnesty International, September 2012 and "Mali: pourquoi les soldats ont disjoncté à Diabaly", op. cit.

²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, displaced women from Gao interviewed in Bamako, 13 September 2012.

²⁷ Ibid.

ease between different segments of the population, the crisis in the north has seriously reduced the trust between black people in general and northerners with fairer skin. Many people, especially soldiers, have not forgotten that pro-independent Tuaregs of the MNLA, not the Islamists of Ansar Dine and MUJAO, started the rebellion.

The fear of a countrywide religious radicalisation is now present in people's minds. In the regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal, Islamists, including those who work with traffickers of all sorts, have all the latitude to recruit youths condemned to a life of despair and boredom. The lashes inflicted by armed Islamists in market places as punishment for smoking or other behaviour judged deviant, the many prohibitions imposed by sharia law, the amputations of thieves' arms and feet are serious attacks on freedom and constitute a terrible burden on northerners. However, the latter could certainly adapt to their new life, abandoned by the distant Malian state.²⁸

In the south, including Bamako, the increasing power of mosques controlled by hardline Islamist-Wahhabi currents is not a new development, but many people are now worried about the combination of events in the north and the growing influence of militant and political Islam in public life in the south. In a context of political and economic crisis and social despair, prejudices can easily resurface. Fears of an increase in religious extremism, the domination of political space by Islamic coalitions and the infiltration of AQIM terrorists into the capital could brutally end the legendary tranquillity of Bamako. In September 2012, the flare-up of political and religious violence in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and even Niger – where a church was wrecked in Zinder²⁹ in a very worrying precedent – creates a context that is particularly favourable to the contamination of Mali. More than ever, maximum caution is necessary in the search for a solution to the crisis.

IV. THE LIMITATIONS OF ECOWAS AND THE ALGERIAN FACTOR

The lack of a credible national political leader is not counterbalanced by strong regional authorities. ECOWAS has displayed many good intentions over the last six months, by multiplying heads of state summits, meetings organised by Burkina Faso mediators and meetings of chiefs-of-staff to prepare a mission to Mali (MICEMA). But none of these initiatives has produced convincing results, except for the

junta's formal withdrawal from political power. The credibility of ECOWAS has been seriously damaged by hasty decision-making following the negotiation of the 6 April framework agreement; the debatable choice of President Compaoré as mediator;³⁰ the disregard for the nationalist sensibility of Malian elites and public opinion;³¹ the series of blunders and mistakes committed by mediators; the unrealistic plans for military intervention considering the military capabilities of member countries; and neglect of the imperative need for a diplomatic approach directed towards Algeria, an essential actor in responding to the crisis in northern Mali.³²

At the political level, the West African organisation, represented by an enterprising yet opaque Burkina Faso mediation, initially thought it would be able to exercise a dominant influence over the transitional institutions that it helped put into place.³³ However, Malian actors, beginning with Prime Minister Diarra, actively sought to consolidate their position rather than appear as puppets manipulated by Burkina Faso and subjected to ECOWAS's orders.

ECOWAS also seems to have thought that the disintegration of the Malian army following the coup meant that it would easily accept an external military presence. However, the break-up of the army into several factions represented in the junta meant that in the short term, ECOWAS was not going to have any interlocutor who could speak on behalf of the army and with which it could define the terms of deployment of a military mission. The meetings of ECOWAS chiefs-of-staff in Abidjan and Bamako in August only served to show the lack of understanding between the regional organisation and the Malian military.³⁴ The 17 September meeting of ECOWAS foreign and defence ministers at its Mediation and Security Council in Abidjan confirmed that the discussions had reached deadlock.³⁵

²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, political actors and displaced people from Gao, interviewed in Bamako, 12 and 13 September 2012.

²⁹ "Film anti-islam: église saccagée au Niger", *Le Figaro*, 16 September 2012.

³⁰ For a critique of Burkina Faso's mediation efforts on behalf of ECOWAS, see Crisis Group Report, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, op. cit.

³¹ Burkina Faso was perhaps the worst-placed country in the whole of West Africa to mediate in the Mali crisis. After all, the two countries were at war for a brief period (five days of fighting) in 1985, which the population has not forgotten. The two countries were in dispute over the border strip of Agacher, reportedly rich in minerals. Land and air combats took place on 25-30 December 1985. See <http://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMEve?codeEve=583>.

³² Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, political actors, military personnel, researchers, Bamako, 10-15 September 2012.

³³ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, political actors, researchers, Bamako, 10, 12, 13 September 2012.

³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and senior officials, Bamako, 10 and 13 September 2012.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Dakar, 20 September 2012.

At the military level, ECOWAS quickly threatened to intervene in order to help Mali recover Islamist-controlled regions, even though it was not in a position to conduct such an operation without massive, immediate and multi-faceted support from external partners like France, the EU and the U.S. The national armies of ECOWAS's forested countries were unprepared to fight against armed movements perfectly accustomed to the desert immensity of northern Mali. These armed groups also had easy and continuous access to arms, fuel and other equipment through their tentacular networks in the Sahara region – Algeria, Libya, Egypt – which has become a safe haven for traffickers and jihadis.³⁶

It was also foreseeable that Algeria would not want to see ECOWAS troops deployed in northern Mali, on the other side of its southern border, especially since these troops would be supported by Western powers, notably France, whose relations with Algiers are complicated. Algeria expressed several times its preference for a “political solution” in northern Mali. Everybody knows that it is, by far, the country capable of putting the most pressure on armed groups based there. For example, the longstanding relations between Ansar Dine's current leader, Iyad Ag Ghali, and the Algerian intelligence services are well-known.³⁷ As a member state, Mali certainly ought to be able to count on ECOWAS' support in the event of a serious threat to its territorial integrity, but the security of the vast northern regions of the country, which are rich in oil, uranium and other natural resources,³⁸ also depends on the maintenance of trusty relations between Bamako and Algiers.

The rupture of the strategic alliance between Mali and its powerful North-African neighbour during the years of ATT's presidency is an important factor in explaining the ease with which the Islamists of Ansar Dine and AQIM took control of northern Mali.³⁹ Algeria did not intervene when the rebels took the strategic border town of Tessalit,⁴⁰ and did not help Malian forces to hold Kidal, despite the Operational Joint General Staff (CEMOC) of the region's countries (Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Algeria) being based in Tamanrasset, southern Algeria. It is both essential and urgent for leaders of the transition in Bamako as well as

ECOWAS, which displays a rhetorical determination that goes beyond its capacity to deliver, to make a diplomatic effort specifically aimed at Algeria, involving prominent West African personalities who really understand the complex internal dynamics of the country.

Nigeria, the only major military and economic power in ECOWAS, should accept the responsibility of establishing a direct dialogue with Algeria on the security of the Sahel-Sahara region, all the more so because it is facing the Islamist terrorism of the Boko Haram sect, which has tenuous but well-established links with AQIM.⁴¹ The lack of leadership within ECOWAS, given Abuja's political problems and the security situation in northern Nigeria, weakens the regional organisation. Its current chair, Côte d'Ivoire's Alassane Ouattara, leads a country that still suffers from a fragile security situation – including thousands of former combatants scattered across the country – despite some economic progress.⁴² Burkina Faso's president, Blaise Compaoré, who has established himself as an indispensable although controversial mediator in recent years in West African crises, has lost a lot of his credibility in Mali and is no longer in a position to restore trust between ECOWAS and Bamako.⁴³

V. THE POSITION OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Given the persistent confusion on the political and military levels in Bamako, international actors have been reduced to a wait-and-see attitude since the beginning of the Malian crisis. France is the most active Western power and instigated the voting of the UN Security Council Resolution 2056 on the situation in Mali (5 July 2012). It has openly expressed its stance, with its foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, stating several times that military intervention in northern Mali is inevitable and that France would support ECOWAS although it would not deploy French soldiers on the ground.⁴⁴ Aware of the crucial role of Algiers in the search for a solution to the crisis in northern Mali, French diplomats have paid several visits to Algeria, but the Algerian position does not seem to have significantly changed.⁴⁵ The fact that an AQIM group in northern Mali still holds French hostages remains an important constraint.

³⁶ For more on the links between armed groups in northern Mali and terrorist groups in Libya as well as the movement of AQIM leaders between Mali and Libya, see “AQLIM buys weapons from Libyan rebels – Algerian paper reveals”, www.ennahar.com, 11 September 2012; and also Crisis Group interview, diplomat, 13 September 2012.

³⁷ See Crisis Group Report, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, op. cit.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Malian researcher and economic actor, Bamako, 10, 11, 13 September 2012.

³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, researcher and former Malian diplomat, Bamako, 10 and 13 September 2012.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, researchers, former diplomat, Bamako, 10, 11, 13 September 2012.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, senior Malian official, Bamako, 13 September. See also *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, op. cit.

⁴² See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°83: *Côte d'Ivoire: Continuing the Recovery*, 16 December 2011.

⁴³ See “Trafic d'armes: toujours la même histoire sur le Burkina”, *Bendré*, 13 September 2012.

⁴⁴ See Crisis Group Report, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, diplomat and researcher, Bamako, 10 and 13 September 2012.

The EU, within the framework of its strategy for the Sahel, has indicated it would support reforms of the Malian security sector and would include Mali and Mauritania in the EUCAP program implemented in Niger.⁴⁶ However, institutional instability in Bamako and the lack of a transition roadmap continue to hold back any resumption of cooperation. The U.S. has adopted a cautious attitude, guided by the principle of non-cooperation with post-coup governments until elections are organised.⁴⁷ Like other external partners and certain Malian actors, Washington believes that only a presidential election organised as soon as possible will allow the political authorities to regain legitimacy and enable the formation of a government capable of providing a long-lasting solution to the crisis in the north.

Although the Malian government is aware of the need to resume the electoral preparations that were interrupted by the coup and to consider all options, including the holding of a presidential election before the reunification of the country,⁴⁸ the chances of seeing national elections being held within the next six months are extremely slim. However, the government, external partners, notably the UN, as well as political parties and civil society organisations must imperatively work towards a consensus on key questions, such as voter registration lists and the roles given to each institution involved in organising and monitoring the elections.

At the military level, the U.S. is much less present than France, but its experts have participated in ECOWAS planning meetings. Washington has expressed its profound concern about the threat represented by AQIM in Mali, but also throughout the region, including Nigeria. U.S. agencies closely follow events in Mali. However, due to the fact that, among other things, its attention is focused on explosive situations such as Syria, the U.S. is unlikely to play a direct military role in Mali. Nevertheless, it is ready to assist in intelligence, communications and planning military operations if asked to do so by ECOWAS, assuming the latter can formulate a feasible military strategy. But even if this proves to be the case and if political conditions in Bamako are also encouraging, the U.S. believes, like most analysts, that the implementation of a feasible military strategy will require a closer UN-ECOWAS partnership.⁴⁹

In a context of confusion and lack of authority within both the Malian government and ECOWAS, and considering the serious multidimensional crisis that Mali is going through and that is also weakening the entire Sahel region, the UN has a crucial role to play. In recent months, the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) has been working on an integrated strategy for the Sahel, which will be discussed at the UN meeting scheduled for 26 September in New York. The UN wants to develop a strategic framework to help the Sahel countries deal with the specific security, food, economic and social challenges faced by the region.⁵⁰ Although this initiative is positive and supported by Security Council Resolution 2056, it is important to warn right from the start of the pitfalls of these global strategies, which mobilise international experts for years without making any measurable contribution to the consolidation of the political and administrative apparatus of the states concerned.

One of the main objectives that such a strategy for the Sahel should aim at is the reinstatement or creation of states' capacity to formulate public policies in all areas, especially in the fields of security, territorial administration and economic and social development. One of the many lessons to be learned from the Malian crisis is that a state administration without political direction or strategic vision coupled with a powerful transnational criminal economy leads to corruption, extremist religious currents penetrating into traditionally open societies and terrorism. The discussion on an integrated security and development strategy for the Sahel is welcome but the UN must urgently take up its responsibilities in the resolution of the Malian crisis and acknowledge that ECOWAS is incapable of the leadership it intends to have.

VI. SAVING MALI: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The main messages from Crisis Group's July 2012 report on Mali are still relevant. It is necessary to restore the political, institutional, security and military foundations of the state in order to gradually regain the three northern regions. Crisis Group maintains that the idea of hastily putting back together military forces in order to quickly regain control of the lost territory must be discarded in the short term. In the past two months, nothing significant has been accomplished with regard to the reconstitution of a coherent chain of command within the army. In the current context, a Malian military offensive supported by ECOWAS or/and other forces is likely to cause more civilian casualties in

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Bamako, 12 September 2012 and Brussels, 19 September 2012.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Bamako, 12 September 2012. Also see "Crisis in Mali", Congressional Research Service, 16 August 2012.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, member of the government and diplomats, Bamako, 10 and 11 September 2012.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, senior American officials, Washington DC, 11 September 2012.

⁵⁰ The following countries are generally considered to be part of the Sahel, from east to west: Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad.

the north, worsen insecurity as well as economic and social conditions throughout the country, radicalise ethnic communities, encourage violence by extremist groups and drag the whole region into a multidimensional conflict with no front line in the Sahara.

The debate on military intervention is not only about the necessity and feasibility of operations aiming to recover the towns of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. The hardest part is not to regain control of towns that are currently held by combatants essentially living in their machine-gun mounted vans, ready to drive off along desert roads, but to establish sustainable control over the vast northern territories and regional capitals. Will ECOWAS soldiers or French special forces help Malian troops maintain control of these areas? Before embarking on a military adventure, Mali needs to clarify intercommunal issues, begin a direct dialogue with Algeria on the security of its southern border, shed light on the relations of different countries with the armed groups, reestablish a normal and republican hierarchy in the Malian army and provide it with appropriate equipment. If Mali hopes to emerge from this crisis in one piece, it needs defence and security forces to be under the control of the civilian political authorities.

The Malian transitional authorities must finally accept their historic responsibility at an unprecedented moment of crisis. Interim President Dioncounda Traoré still has a chance to improve his image by guaranteeing the state's basic principles and the society's values: democracy, freedom, secularism, religious tolerance and the sacred character of peaceful relations between ethnic communities. Cheick Modibo Diarra should act as head of the transitional government and not as a leader responsible for the "liquidation" of the old ATT-era political class and the restructuring of Mali. Even if he is sincere in his wish to clean up state administration, this is not the time for settling political scores but rather one for seeking national unity to avoid the situation deteriorating further over the next six months. The recommendations of the last Crisis Group report regarding the need for a political dialogue involving all the communities of the north and south as well as armed groups that want to participate are still relevant.

A trigger is needed to give hope to Malians who no longer believe that the government has a vision to help the country respond to the two major challenges it faces, namely the crisis in the north and the organisation of elections by April 2013, when the twelve-month transitional period comes to an end. The president and the prime minister must urgently identify Malian personalities who are preferably retired from the political scene and have specific skills and significant experience in the areas of internal security, governance and public administration, organisation of elections, decentralisation, intercommunal mediation and international relations, and more specifically in the area

of regional diplomacy. It should form a small informal group aimed at helping the government define a global strategy to resolve the crisis and prepare a realistic roadmap for the next few months. The country urgently needs to mobilise the best Malian expertise irrespective of political allegiance rather than engaging in power plays that will lead the country to the verge of collapse.

The Malian crisis is a serious threat to peace and international security and it is the responsibility of the UN Security Council, along with the AU Peace and Security Council to draw up a framework for an international response and guarantee the allocation of the necessary human and material resources. The UN Secretary-General should immediately appoint a special representative for the Sahel. Considering the numerous security, economic and financial interests of neighbouring countries, great powers and armed groups from northern Mali and the Sahara, this special representative should focus on reconciling the positions of regional and international actors.

The UN should boost its presence in Mali to help the transitional government withstand the economic and social crisis, produce a credible roadmap for the restoration of territorial integrity in the north, with specific and targeted use of force as a last resort, and the organisation of transparent elections within a reasonable timeframe. The UN operation in Mali should also help uphold the rule of law by gathering detailed information on human rights violations in the country. In the absence of a UN peacekeeping mission, the Security Council should ask the Secretary-General to strengthen the UN system in Bamako, to adapt it to the specific needs generated by the crisis and to ensure that the roles of the special representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the special representative for the Sahel are clearly defined. The former, based in Dakar, could support the internal political process in Mali, while the latter, whose appointment is awaited, could be in charge of regional and international diplomacy.

Meetings of heads of state and government in New York to discuss the Sahel and the Malian crisis must ask the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council to define a roadmap for the international support of Mali, in addition to a clear distribution of roles and appropriate financial resources. In particular, it is urgent to:

- ❑ appoint a special representative of the UN Secretary-General for the Sahel and provide him with the necessary means to work towards the reconciliation of the positions of ECOWAS member states, neighbouring countries (Algeria and Mauritania) and Western countries, and the coordination of ECOWAS, AU and UN initiatives;
- ❑ undertake, within the framework of the UN/AU/ECOWAS initiative, a mission to ease tensions within the Malian

- army. This could be led by a retired general from a West African country with recognised moral authority;
- ❑ support efforts to reestablish Malian defence and security and forces by strengthening their unity, discipline and efficiency;
 - ❑ contribute to the resilience of the Malian economy, which is already mired in a serious crisis, by rapidly resuming foreign aid and providing urgent humanitarian assistance to civilian populations;
 - ❑ threaten with targeted sanctions anyone who hinders the normal functioning of transitional institutions in Bamako and the crisis resolution process in the north, or who are responsible for grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law;
 - ❑ announce the creation of a UN independent commission of inquiry into violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed across the whole country since the beginning of the armed rebellion. This commission should report back to the Security Council as soon as possible.

VII. CONCLUSION

The situation in Mali remains confused six months after President ATT was overthrown. Already destabilised by Tuareg and Islamist armed rebellions that took control of the north, the coup completed the disintegration of the Malian state. Partly due to deep divisions within the political, military and spiritual elites, the turmoil is paralysing the search for consensus on how to manage the government, define priorities and set an action plan for the transitional period. But ECOWAS also has a share of responsibility in the confusion: it threatened a military intervention and started preparing it without having the means to execute it and without realising that the Malian state and the armed forces had collapsed.

The UN high-level meeting on the Sahel on 26 September must not only discuss an ambitious integrated strategy for the Sahel which will be gradually implemented over the next few years. Indeed, for Mali, the time for prevention or debate has passed. The next six months will be decisive. Malian leaders must take their responsibilities and work together rather than tear one another to pieces, although they are not the only ones to have contributed to the grave insecurity in northern Mali and instability in the Sahel and North Africa. The UN and member states of the Security Council must give this crisis the political attention and material resources it deserves.

Dakar/Brussels, 24 September 2012

APPENDIX A
 MAP OF MALI



Map No. 4231 Rev. 2 UNITED NATIONS
 June 2012

Department of Field Support
 Cartographic Section

APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 130 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former U.S. Undersecretary of State and Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices or representation in 34 locations: Abuja, Bangkok, Beijing, Beirut, Bishkek, Bogotá, Bujumbura, Cairo, Dakar, Damascus, Dubai, Gaza, Guatemala City, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Kabul, Kathmandu, London, Moscow, Nairobi, New York, Port-au-Prince, Pristina, Rabat, Sanaa, Sarajevo, Seoul, Tbilisi, Tripoli, Tunis and Washington DC. Crisis Group currently covers some 70 areas of actual or potential conflict across four continents. In Africa, this includes, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan Strait, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in

Europe, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, North Caucasus, Serbia and Turkey; in the Middle East and North Africa, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Western Sahara and Yemen; and in Latin America and the Caribbean, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti and Venezuela.

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