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Towards Lasting Peace in Mali: Reflections on Post-Election Challenges

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The central government, with the support of France, ECOWAS, AU, UN, EU and other bilateral partners should undertake an inclusive political dialogue with the representatives of all local stakeholders, especially the Tuareg, on the future state of Mali.
- There is the need to craft an integrated development strategy that focuses on addressing the underlying causes of the crisis, and improving governance in the north.
- The central government, with the support of the international community, should carry out comprehensive security and defence sector reforms and ensure effective democratic control of the armed forces.
- There is the need for an integrated Sahel strategy and a coordinated regional response involving all states in the Sahel with the support of the international community to deal with terrorism and the threat of transnational organised crimes.

Introduction

Mali was plunged into a state of insecurity and chaos after the Tuareg-led rebellion in 2011 and the subsequent occupation of the country's northern territories by extremist groups.¹ Although a legitimate government is currently in place and a semblance of stability exists in the country, the post-election challenges are immense and multifaceted.² They include issues of poor

governance, underdevelopment, fractured army, reunification of Mali, the Tuareg rebellion, transnational organised crime, terrorism and humanitarian crises.³ This Policy Brief examines three of the post-election challenges critical to the stability of Mali, namely, the reunification of the state, development and governance deficits, and the reform of the armed forces. It then offers recommendations on how Mali, with the support of

¹ Aning, K. and Aubyn, F., (2013). Challenges in Mali: Historic duty to ensure peace. *New Routes*, No. 2

² Interview with a former Malian Ambassador in Bamako, Mali, November 2013; Interview with African Union

ECOWAS and UN officials in Bamako, Mali, November 2013.

³ Interview with a former Malian Ambassador in Bamako, Mali, November 2013; Interview with African Union ECOWAS and UN officials in Bamako, Mali, November 2013.

the international community, can overcome these challenges to ensure sustainable peace. The paper argues that while there are many problems confronting Mali, prioritizing and surmounting these three challenges will pay greater dividends in the long term and consolidate the country's peace and stability.

Background to the Elections

Mali has historically alternated between periods of rebellion, *coups d'état* and military dictatorship after obtaining independence from France in 1960. Since the transition to multi-party democracy in 1992, Mali's democracy has been considered as one of the few success stories in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the recent instability has shown that this view was flawed and incongruous with domestic realities. For example, how does one explain the sudden military overthrow of a democratically elected President in March 2012 just a month to the expiration of his tenure? Moreover, why did the population welcome the unconstitutional removal of the President with only moderate resistance? Certainly, this showed the ambivalence of the military and the people towards the democratic prospects of their country. The fact is that since independence, Mali has been saddled with long-term structural problems which include the disparity in socio-economic development between the north and the south, poor governance, poverty, unemployment, corruption, recurring Tuareg rebellion, transnational organised crime, arms proliferation, and a weak defence and security sector.⁴ Efforts by succeeding governments since 1992 to tackle these problems have yielded limited results. Unsurprisingly, it was a combination of these challenges, compounded by the poor political management of the 2011 Tuareg rebellion that led to the 18-month hiatus in constitutional rule in Mali. In spite of the peaceful conduct of a presidential and legislative election, the peace that presently prevails in the country is

not sustainable. This is because some of the underlying causes of the country's present predicament remain unresolved. In the section below, we briefly examine some of these obstacles to lasting peace in Mali.

Reunification of the State and the Kidal Enigma

The restoration and re-organisation of the state is one of the main post-election challenges. As of November 2013, the home base of the Tuaregs, Kidal, was still under the control of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). It was the only northern city not recaptured during the French and the African-led International Support Mission (AFISMA) military intervention in Mali. The reason principally was that unlike Timbuktu and Gao that were occupied by foreign extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Kidal was controlled by the MNLA, which is a local rebel group. For this reason, it is alleged that France took the decision not to attack Kidal first, in order to prevent any bloodbath and secondly, to compensate the Tuareg for betraying Muammar Gaddafi during the Libyan crises in 2011, based on a supposed French arrangement with the Tuareg mercenaries.⁵ Whatever reason that necessitated this decision by France regarding Kidal, the sad reality is that as long as the Malian army is denied access to the town, the government cannot claim to have authority over the entire national territory. More ominous is the fact that Kidal is increasingly becoming insecure due to the presence of extremist groups. The kidnapping and murder of two French journalists, Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon, outside Kidal on 3 November 2013 by AQIM operatives is symptomatic of this worrying situation. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which is mandated to support the Malian authorities to regain the occupied regions in

⁴ Interview with a military officer in Bamako, Mali, November 2013.

⁵ Interview with an African Union Human Rights Officer in Bamako, November 2013.

the north, dismantle the terrorist networks and restore the authority of the state, is also not enforcing its robust mandate effectively.

While Kidal appears to be gradually slipping away from state control, the ultimate challenge that remains unsettled is the “Tuareg question”, or in other words, how to define and negotiate the kind of lasting relationship that should exist between the north and the south. The north of Mali is a desert inhabited by the Tuareg (who account for 5 percent of Mali’s population), Maure, Songhai and Peulh minorities while the south is dominated by the majority Mande (Bambara, Soninke, Malinke) who have ruled Mali since independence. Unlike the south, the people in the north have historically suffered from underdevelopment, chronic drought, food insecurity, and inadequate political representation. These are some of the main issues that underpin the continuous Tuareg rebellion and demands for an independent state. Recent events makes it clear that without swift resolution of the Tuareg quagmire and the issue in Kidal, it will be impossible for Mali to maintain its territorial integrity and ensure sustainable peace as it risks becoming the new “DRC” of Africa. Given the unsuccessful resolution of the Tuareg rebellion by previous administrations, the only alternatives left for the new Malian government might be whether to go for a federal system of governance or give full autonomy to the northern territories or maintain the status quo? Whatever political system is chosen, the fact remains that controlling the entire territory is practically impossible for the state, given the extent and remoteness of the Sahara, which covers almost two-thirds of Mali.

Rebuilding the Malian Armed Forces

The Malian armed forces remain one of the potential threats to the country’s stability. During the conflict, the army was completely demoralized and it disintegrated. Soon after the coup in 2012, the military hierarchy was dissolved and many personnel, especially those from the north, deserted

the barracks to join the MNLA. Captain Sanogo and his cronies practically controlled the armed forces throughout the transition period. Since then, the army has been fractured with several cases of indiscipline and acts of violence reportedly committed by Sanogo and his cronies. As a result, the military is weak, lacks professionalism, is poorly equipped, and highly divided, with deep mistrust towards personnel from the north, especially those of Tuareg origin. Interestingly, this is the army which is expected to deal with the insecurity in the north. What is certain is that the Malian army is entirely incapable of pursuing the fight against the Islamist guerrilla insurgency in the north. The challenge, therefore, is how to train and build the professionalism of the armed forces. It needs adequate logistics to operate, clarity in role and mission, and restoration of discipline and efficiency. This in turn requires re-establishing hierarchy and accountability and lastly, ensuring effective democratic control and preventing the military from interfering in politics.⁶ The jailing of Sanogo, the coup leader, by Mali’s justice ministry on charges of murder and assassination is a bold step in this direction but more holistic reform needs to be undertaken to make the armed forces stronger, more professional and unified.

Addressing Development and Governance Deficits

Governance in Mali since independence has not made sufficient progress in addressing longstanding structural problems such as human security, transparency and accountability, corruption, poverty, unemployment and economic mismanagement. Past governments have only delivered rudimentary service in the areas of health, education, electricity and infrastructure outside the capital Bamako. Several years of political marginalisation, poor governance and unequal

⁶ See France 24, Mali coup leader Sanogo charged with murder. Available at <http://www.france24.com/en/20131127-mali-coup-general-sanogo-detained-deaths-questioning>. (Accessed 25 November 2013).

distribution of power and resources has widened the development gap between the south and north.⁷ Most public institutions such as the judiciary, security services, ministries and the legislature are corrupt, ineffective and inefficient. What is crucial now is how to undertake urgent institutional and structural reforms as well as human rights and anti-corruption reforms to improve governance in the country.

In terms of development, little progress has so far been made since the transition to multiparty democracy in 1992. The country remains at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index, with about 68 percent of its population of 16 million living below the poverty line.⁸ The situation was worsened by the recent food, political and security crises and the suspension of international aid. It is, indeed, one of the countries in West Africa that may not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, according to the World Bank.⁹ With the growing urbanisation, burgeoning population and high youth unemployment rate, there is the need for an integrated development strategy that can repair and rebuild the country's socio-economic fabric by creating more employment opportunities, improving access to good quality social services, and strengthening institutions and governance.¹⁰

⁷See BTI, (2012). Mali Country Report. Available at <http://www.bti-project.org/countryreports/wca/mli/>. (Accessed 15 November 2013).

⁸ UNDP, (2013). Mali Country Profile: Human Development Indicators. Available at <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MLI.html>. (Accessed 20 November 2013).

⁹ World Bank, (2011). *Mali – Social safety nets*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

¹⁰ African Economic Outlook, (2013). West Africa-Mali. Available at <http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/mali>. (Accessed 25 November 2013).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Three of the major challenges facing Mali are the reunification of the state, development and governance deficits, and reform of the armed forces. While these are immense challenges, prioritizing them will pay dividends in the long term to consolidate peace and stability in the country. In that regard, the Malian government, with the support of the international community can focus on the following to ensure lasting peace:

- The central government, with the support of France, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and other bilateral partners should undertake an inclusive political dialogue with representatives of all local stakeholders, especially the Tuareg, on the future state of Mali.
- There is the need to craft an integrated development strategy that focuses on addressing the underlying causes of the crisis, and improving governance in the north.
- The central government needs to carry out comprehensive security and defence sector reforms and ensure effective democratic control of the armed forces.
- There should be an integrated Sahel strategy and a coordinated regional response involving all states in the Sahel, with the support of the international community, to deal with the regional dimension of the crisis and the threat of transnational organised crime.

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