

**Committee: Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA4)**

**Issue: The conflict in northern Mali**

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**Position: Deputy Chair**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

“I am young, I am twenty years old; yet I know nothing of life but despair, death, fear, and fatuous superficiality cast over an abyss of sorrow. I see how peoples are set against one another, and in silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently slay one another.”

- Erich Maria Remarque

As said by a character crafted by Erich Maria Remarque war can only bring devastation. As war has darkened and ripped apart the soul of this young man returning from World War I fronts, so can it rip apart whole nations and ethnicities. The war/conflict in northern Mali unfortunately is no exception.

Up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Malian economy has been a dominant one mostly in the upper Niger basin. This is mainly attributed to the country's riches in gold. However, after the first French colonization and the conflicts between Islamic religious groups (fighting for the creation of a theocratic state and the imposition of Sharia Law), the political and social landscape in Mali has fallen apart and resulted in becoming one of the poorest economies worldwide. These two major events and their long-term impacts on the country have, thus, created the modern war of northern Mali. Unstable and autocratic governments, clashes between Muslim groups, government overthrows, political assassination and rebellions are events constantly occurring in the region of Mali.

It is, therefore, the obligation of the global society to put an end to the political unrest in Mali and restore peace and prosperity in the region.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

## Conflict

A conflict refers to a “strong disagreement between people, groups, etc. that results in angry argument”. In the topic at hand such a disagreement has resulted already in a harsh dispute mostly armed. (Merriam Webster Online Dictionary)

## Coup d'état

A coup d'état is “a violent overthrow or alternation of an existing government by a small group.” (Merriam Webster Online)

## Colony

“An area that is controlled by or belongs to a country and is usually far away from it.” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary)

## Sharia Law

The term “Sharia” can be translated into “way” or “path”. It is a branch of the Islamic Law that sets various frameworks on the way that an individual embracing the Law behaves on his daily life on both private and public level.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### History of the conflict in the North\Key-Events

#### Early History until declaration of an independent Azawad

When the Empire of Mali was first created it was the world’s first gold exporter and thus a dominant force in the upper Niger basin. It is said that 50% of the global gold reserves stemmed from Mali. These gold reserves followed a specific trading route called the Trans-Saharan trading routes from the south of Mali on the Niger River to the cities of Gao and Timbuktu. From there Tuareg nomads transported and sold the goods to the whole region of Africa.



Figure 1: Display of the northern and south region of Mali.

After the establishment of new cheaper sea trading routes by European forces the Trans-Saharan trading network was abandoned and the northern part of Mali lost its income which led to an economic decline from which they never recovered. After the French colonization that targeted the south only, the north became a land of constant conflict between local war clans and movements and the region of Azawad (the North) changed multiple times its borders becoming part of Mali, Senegal and Niger from time to time until returning back to Mali due to its historical occupation of the country. This false draw of the Malian borders is one major factor to the violent events that were about to follow in Mali. In 1894 the Tuareg presence as a rebel force was firstly seen but quickly and violently suppressed by French forces. After Mali's independence in 1960 the Tuareg tried to revolt against the Malian government of Modibo Keita. This rebellion was called the "First Tuareg Rebellion" and aimed at establishing an independent state called Azawad in the north and to stop the neglect of the Tuareg tribes in the distribution of state benefits. The rebellion failed and Tuareg areas were forced under military administration.

Then, in 1990 after years of depression in the north and after the suffering of major droughts driving lives of people into famine and despair and after many Tuaregs moving to Libya in order to fight for the Libyan army, the remaining people of the tribe tried to rebel once again against the Malian government.

This rebellion, called the Second Tuareg Rebellion, resulted in the Tuareg being granted

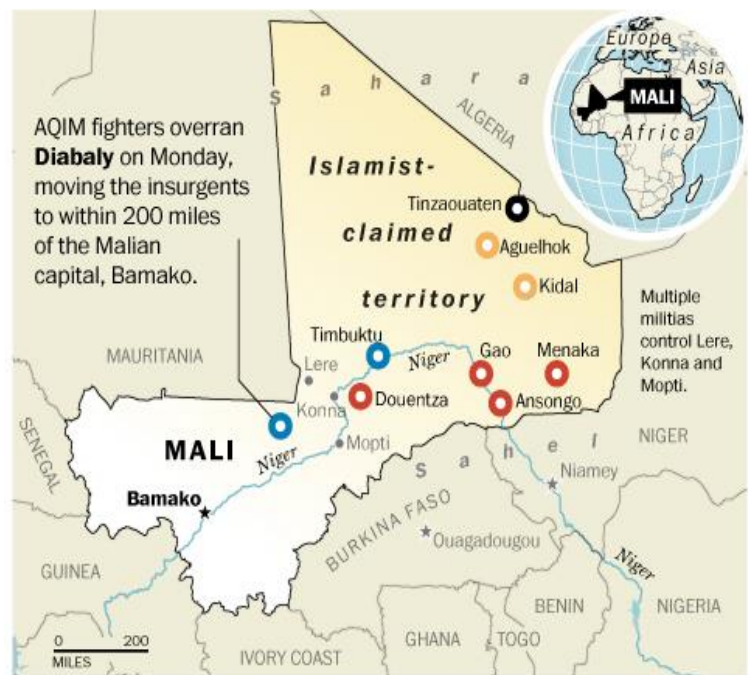
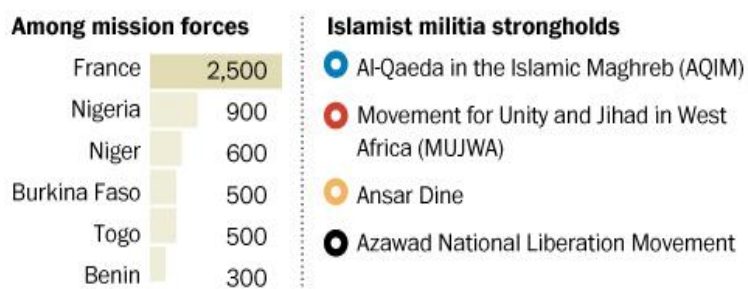


Figure 2: Infographic of the active forces in Mali (January, 2013)

greater autonomy which caused the revolution to die out apart from several minor hostilities

that never stopped. In 2006, after Mali has witnessed major political changes (first democratic elections) the government and Tuareg forces signed a peace agreement in order to give more autonomy to the northern desert region of Mali. A year later this peace agreement was infringed as Tuareg forces killed several military officials on the Mauritanian border. Then in 2009 several hundreds of Tuareg rebels handed their weapons and pledged themselves to peace. Despite that fact, as the Libyan war came to an end, the Tuareg that left the country to fight in the war, returned heavily armed and reignited the rebellion in the northern of Mali. The incapability of the government of Amadou Toure to deal with the rebels lead to a coup d'état in March 2012 conducted by the newly formed National Committee for the Return of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDR). Such an action was condemned, Mali's membership in the African Union was suspended and sanctions were imposed by the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS). During this month rebels and Islamic groups dedicated to impose Sharia Law on the region took advantage of the political turmoil and seized the whole northern part of Mali including the cities of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. In April the ECOWAS closed the Malian borders as an act for the military junta to step down from power and to pave the way for democratic elections, while simultaneously rebels declared Azawad as an independent state.

#### **French Intervention and UN involvement**

Dioucounde Traore was designated as an interim president in order to establish peace talks with rebels and to prepare the country for elections. In January 2013 rebels in cooperation with several extremist groups such as Ansar Al-Dine advanced to the capital after capturing the town of Konna and the Malian president Traore asked France for help. France sent a total of 2,500 heavily armed and highly trained troops to deal with the conflict in the north. They managed to recapture the regions of Gao and Timbuktu and to repel all groups linked to Al-Qaeda from the capital and the south. After peace talks with Tuareg rebels, (they captured the town after French troops repelled the terrorist groups that have captured it) the town of Kidal was also handed in to the Malian government and as European countries committed themselves to aid Mali gathering \$4 billion for its restoration, France began the gradual removal of troops from the region. In this manner France handed in the responsibility for the protection of Mali to the MINUSMA peacekeeping operation of the UN.

#### **Events from the peace deal with the Tuareg until today**

In June 2013 a peace deal was signed between the government and Tuareg rebels, but it was broken 1 year later. Subsequently the Tuareg seized control of Kidal city and the

town of Menaka, Agelhok, Anefis and Tessalit. One event that was fully condemned and caused frustration in the UN was the killing of 9 UN peacekeeping officers in clashes against the rebels. Clashes continued until France had once again been involved in the fight against terrorism in Mali by assassinating two high-ranked officials of Al-Qaeda in Azawad.

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

### France

Taking into consideration that Mali has been formerly colonized by France, it is logical to conclude that France has a main presence in the conflict in the North. It has drafted the SC resolution initiating UN intervention and it has been sending French troops in the region, which have been great assistance against the active extremist organizations and the Tuareg rebels. The French intervention resulted in recapturing Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao and in the killing of high-ranked Al-Qaeda officials.

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

This national movement dedicated to the Liberation of Mali based in Azawad is one of the main military organizations involved in the northern Mali conflict. It has been active since 2011 and under the lead of Bilal Ag Acherif it has captured most of northern Mali including the cities of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. It consists of trained Tuareg soldiers that (most of them) fought in the Libyan War and has cooperated with a few other active nationalist organizations in the region, such as the Ansar al-Dine. However after the Ansar al-Dine and the Movement of Oneness and Jihad in West Africa started cooperating and fought against the MNLA, the Movement lost their captured regions to them.

### AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb)

This Salafi-jihadists terrorist group (as designated by the United States) is the most infamous organization in the northern Mali conflict. Now affiliated with Al-Qaeda it has been active since the civil war in Algeria in 1990. The organization has as a primary goal the overthrow of Tunisian, Libyan,



Figure 3: Display AQIM militants and flag

Malian and Algerian governments and the imposition of new regimes loyal to the Sharia law.

Moreover, the organization considers France as its arch-nemesis since France is the country that has been supporting both financially and militarily all governments opposed to

the group. It is said that AQIM has cooperated with the most notorious terrorist groups worldwide, such as Al-Shabab, Boko Haram and the AQAP. As far as its involvement in northern Mali is concerned, it has firstly aided the 2012 military coup by nomadic Tuareg tribes, helping them to gain control of northern Mali until they would marginalize the tribes and impose their brutal Sharia-Law with the help of Ansar al-Dine. It is the dominant force in the region of Azawad.

**Movement for the Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)**

This splinter group of AQIM has also contributed in a large scale in the political unrest in Mali. It has declared itself active since 2011 after the abduction of three humanitarian workers in a Saharan refugee camp. It has took place in almost all military campaigns of the AQIM, but it does not restrict itself only in armed war. It has been conducting drug trafficking, narcoterrorism, kidnapping and transnational organized crime.

**African Union**

Until the French intervention in Mali, the African Union hadn't been active towards ending the political and humanitarian unrest in Mali. The African Standby Force which collected more than £50m has not yet got off ground due to various differences between African states and due to the lack of training. Nevertheless the AU contributed to helping the newly elected president of Mali and aiding the government militarily after the French intervention.

**United Nations**

As far as the conflict in the North is concerned the United Nations has passed several resolutions and deployed the MINUSMA peacekeeping mission aiming to recruit 11,200 military and 1,440 police personnel. The mission has been active since 1 July 2013 and has played a significant role in the ease of the political unrest in Mali after the coup d'état. Said Djinnit, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for West Africa aiming to provide the necessary aid to the Malian government has contributed to the deployment of the UNOM (United Nations Missions in Mali) in January 2013. UNOM's actions among others is consultancy of the government and the planning, deployment and operations of the MINUSMA.

**TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

Date	Description of Event
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19 <sup>th</sup> century	France conducts its first colonial advance.
1898	French colonization in Mali is completed.
1959	Formation of the Mali Federation by Mali and Senegal.
1960	The Mali Federation fails and splits. With the help of Modibo Keita Mali gains independence.
1962	The First Tuareg Rebellion
1968	Military official (Lieutenant) Moussa Traore overthrows the government by force. (coup d'état)
1977	Modibo Keita dies in prison. His death triggers unrest throughout the country.
1979	First elections after the government of Modibo Keita. Moussa Traore is reelected as president.
1985	Malian and Burkinabe troops clash on borders.
1991	Traore is overthrown and a transitional committee replaces him.
1992	After the first democratic multiparty elections Alpha Konare becomes the first president to be elected in democratic manner.
1995	Thousands of displaced people and refugees return to Mali after peace agreement between the government and the Tuareg tribe.
April 2002	Amadou Toure is the newly elected president. However, the poll is accused of fraud.
October 2002	Without any public comment and explanation, the government of Amadou Toure resigns to be replaced by a government of national unity.
April 2008	Ceasefire between government and the Tuareg is signed
May 2008	17 soldiers killed by Tuareg rebels in a north-eastern army facility.
February 2009	700 rebels surrender to the government after it has taken control of all the bases of the most active Tuareg group.
May 2009	Fight towards the elimination of Al-Qaeda rebel groups with Algeria sending weapons and military equipment.

April 2010	Mali, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger join forces against terrorism.
March 2012	President Traore accused of failing to deal with the Tuareg rebellion effectively which results into his deposal by the CNRDR and to the suspension of Mali from the African Union.
May 2012	The MNLA movement merges with the Islamist group Ansar Al-Dine and together they declare the northern region of Mali as an Islamic State. Al-Qaeda supports their efforts.
June-July 2012	Ansar Al-Dine and its allies turn on the MNLA and capture major cities such as Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao.
January 2013	After the capture of the town of Kona and the march of Islamist fighters towards the capital; French aid is requested, resulting into a rapid French intervention through which Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao are recaptured.
June 2013	Tuareg nationalist agree to sign a peace deal in order to pave the way for elections, where Ibrahim Boubacar Keita wins.
May 2014	The peace agreement with the MNLA Tuareg nationalist movement is infringed and the cities of Menaka, Aghelok, Anefis and Tessalit are captured by the movement.
October 2014	Nine UN-Peacekeepers killed in northern Mali.
May 2015	Main Al-Qaeda commanders, Amada Ag Hama and Ibrahim Ag Inawalen, killed by French troops

## UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- UN SC Resolution 2071 S/RES/2071 (2012)

This resolution that was unanimously adopted by the UNSC urges the ECOWAS and the AU to present an Action Plan for a military intervention in Mali, calls upon all rebel groups to cut off ties with terrorist organizations and mainly urges member states, the AU, the Secretary General and the EU to provide humanitarian, technical and military assistance to the newly elected government of national unity.

- UN SC Resolution 2085 S/RES/2085 (2012)



This resolution is mainly attributed to the establishment of the AFISMA peacekeeping mission. However, it also calls for elections on April 2013 in order to restore constitutional order and national unity, urges the global community to contribute troops to AFISMA mission and urges the Secretary General to submit proposals on the planning, deployment and operation of AFISMA.

- [UN SC Resolution 2100 S/RES/2100 \(2013\)](#)

Through the unanimous adoption of the resolution the AFISMA mission is transformed into the MINUSMA mission. Moreover, the French military intervention in Mali is welcomed and supported by the UN.

- [UN SC Resolution 2164 S/RES/2164 \(2014\)](#)

Mandate of MINUSMA is extended until 30 June 2015.

- [UN SC Resolution 2227 S/RES/2227 \(2015\)](#)

Mandate of MINUSMA is extended until 30 June 2016. 40 military observers are added to the 11,200 military personnel in order to supervise the ceasefire.

## **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

As far as the conflict in the northern region is concerned most actions have been organized and supported by the UN. All the resolutions mentioned in the Study Guide are great examples of such actions, but they are not the only steps taken towards solving and ending the crisis. The French intervention has played a significant role in recapturing major cities of great importance and in repelling terrorist groups and rebels. Moreover, several NGOs have contributed to the humanitarian and refugee crisis by providing food and healthcare.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Although today the secessionists have been defeated, the terrorists have been repelled and the fight is slowly coming to an end, nothing is over. As seen in Malian history, rebels could at any time start new clashes against the government and the MINUSMA and reignite the conflict of northern Mali. They have broken every single peace agreement and ceasefire signed until now and there is no guarantee that they won't repeat such actions again in the future.

What has to be done in order to avoid further conflict is to create such a comprehensive agreement from which both the government and rebels will benefit and that will pave the way for the restoration of a working economical and humanitarian environment in Mali. As stated by Malian officials the government is strongly willing to maintain peace, security, rule of law and good governance in the region. Therefore, the UN and the global community has to provide the country with the appropriate funds, expertise and supervising so that it can achieve everything that it is willing to do.

Similarly should the issue of terrorism be dealt with but with a more strategic approach. If full separation between the Tuareg rebels and the terrorists can be achieved then the influence of them in the region will fade away and as there would be no benefit in the region they would slowly abandon it.

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