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## BRIEFING

# MILITARY (MIS)ADVENTURES IN MALI

ROLAND MARCHAL\*

THE FRENCH MILITARY INTERVENTION that officially started on 11 January 2013 has reshaped the Malian crisis. It raises questions regarding the French government's understanding of the situation in northern Mali, the attitude of the African and international communities, and the ability of military interventions to address problems that go beyond security concerns about Jihadist, Islamist, or criminal movements in the Sahel.<sup>1</sup>

The French intervention came in response to an offensive by armed Islamist groups against Konna, Sevare airport, and Mopti. This attack broke an implicit agreement with the government in Bamako that no armed entities would cross a political boundary that had been set up in the spring of 2012. The reasons for this breach are not yet known, but the attacks were in part triggered by the political dialogue in Ouagadougou and Algiers regarding how to resolve the crisis, and the impact this had on the constituency of the main Islamist armed groups in northern Mali.<sup>2</sup> Although France was sceptical of the value of engaging armed groups in talks, ECOWAS mediator Blaise Compaoré argued that this was the best way to offer a settlement. The talks failed to deliver, but it nevertheless seems likely that the prospect of a negotiated settlement increased tensions within some of the armed groups. The subsequent establishment of the Movement for the Islamic Azawad (MIA) led by Alghabass ag Inthallah<sup>3</sup> on

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1. For background information see Roland Marchal, 'Is a military intervention unavoidable?', 22 October 2012, <<http://www.peacebuilding.no/Regions/Africa/Publications/Is-a-military-intervention-in-Mali-unavoidable>> (10 February 2013).

2. Some US pundits have mentioned a possible deal between Ansar ed-Din leader, Iyad ag Ghali, and politicians in Bamako to take over the whole country. In this regard it is worth noting that the intervention stopped an attempted coup against Dioncounda Traoré, launched a few hours before French soldiers landed in Bamako.

3. Alghabass ag Inthallah is the son of the Ifoghas Amenokal (traditional leader) and was a lead negotiator for Ansar ed-Din. Before the crisis started he was an MP who supported the previous President, and his political trajectory expresses the complexities and ambiguities of Tuareg politics in the current setting.

23 January 2013 can be read as the external manifestation of these tensions, as well as a product of a complex entanglement of ethnic ties, ideological inclinations, and political opportunism.

This briefing provides an analysis on some aspects of the French intervention, its implications for Mali and the region, and likely future developments. The evidence does not support the accusation that this is a neo-colonial action designed to enhance French influence in Africa. However, there should be no doubt that the conflict is going to last much longer than the French government anticipated, that the discrepancy between the military containment in the north and the political crisis in Bamako is going to increase, and that the international community will have problems in thinking regionally and acting locally as this situation requires.

### *The French intervention*

The French decision to launch a military intervention in Mali came as a great surprise on 10 January. President François Hollande has no known interest in Africa and, as his mentor, the former Prime Minister and socialist leader, Lionel Jospin, has cultivated a distance from African politicians and the idea of 'FranceAfrique'.<sup>4</sup> For months, Hollande also adamantly expressed the view that no French boots would be on the ground.<sup>5</sup> French intervention would be limited to providing logistical support and intelligence to an African force mainly made up of ECOWAS contingents. France also mobilized diplomatically to support United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions to provide the legal and financial framework for such a force and campaigned in Brussels to set up a European Union Training Mission (EUTM) to rebuild a Malian army able to reconquer the north.

Yet on 11 January French troops were fighting in Konna, and by early February France had more troops and military hardware in Mali than at any time in Afghanistan, equal only in recent times to its deployment in Côte d'Ivoire with Opération Licorne. To explain this shift, several aspects must be taken into consideration. The new French government decided to produce its own assessment of Mali in May 2012 and demonstrated a growing interest in the country from that time onwards. According to some

4. FranceAfrique is an expression coined by the Ivorian President Felix Houphouët-Boigny in 1956. It has come to mean a set of networks made up of French and African officials, businessmen, and operatives who cultivate the confusion between private and public interests to make money, defend their interests, and pursue influence in France as well as in Africa.

5. See for instance his interview with Radio France International on 11 October 2012, <<http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20121011-francois-hollande-afrique-francophonie-sommet-interview-nouvelle-page>> (4 April 2013).

close observers, funding for the MNLA was cut off<sup>6</sup> and the new analysis abandoned the previous romantic vision of the Tuaregs developed by many French actors including the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE), the French Secret Services, that has maintained intimate relations with Tuareg figures as a result of previous conflicts and the growth of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). At first, the state apparatus was divided and various positions could be discerned. The diplomats – led by a political rival of Hollande, Laurent Fabius – were supportive of an African-led force and privileged a resolution of the Bamako crisis. The Secret Services thought that it was critical to address the MNLA and Tuareg grievances to resolve the crisis. By contrast, the military – especially the Commandement des Opérations Spéciales (COS), the French Special Forces – argued that the insurgents were not numerous and embedded enough to be a military threat and, therefore, could be defeated by a ‘smart’ intervention.<sup>7</sup>

Partly as a result of these contradictory interpretations, Paris decided to play by the book and raise its concerns in international fora and organizations. But, the French government became increasingly frustrated; the European Union was uninterested in Mali and France was unable to convince member states that the situation in northern Mali represented a threat to Europe. The UN Security Council demonstrated the same reluctance. After months of intensive diplomatic work, the UNSC resolution 2085 passed just before Christmas, but it was far from what the French had expected, providing only a basic roadmap with no timetable and no commitment for generating troops. At the ECOWAS level, the situation was as grim: meetings were inconclusive and the feeling in Paris was that many African players wanted to benefit from the Malian crisis, but were not interested in solving it.

The French military pushed for the ‘smart’ military intervention. Though this was not the most important factor, they were concerned that the economic crisis in France would have negative effects on the defence budget at a time when a new White Paper on Defence was discussed. The military had two key factors in their favour. The first one was that the Defence Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, was a close political associate and friend of Hollande, and was very sympathetic to the views of his Army. The second was the skills of the President’s Military Chief of Staff, General Benoit Puga, who had been in the past Head of the Special Forces, and had

6. This argument has been quoted by several Malian sources. A few French close observers have repeated it, but no independent confirmation is available.

7. Such as good intelligence and Special Forces on the ground. More than 200 troops with Tigre combat helicopters were moved from Burkina Faso to Mali in early January. Their actual number is not known. It seems likely that Canadian, US, and UK Special Forces are currently involved in intelligence gathering or more.

in different positions supervised the operations in Chad (2006–9) and in Libya (2011). Appointed by Nicolas Sarkozy, he was kept on by Hollande, and many observers considered him more influential than the people in charge of Africa in the diplomatic service/cell, who were less experienced.<sup>8</sup>

There were other considerations too. When the President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, met François Hollande he pushed hard for a quick intervention in northern Mali that would save his country from this ‘contagion’. Other African presidents, such as Macky Sall and Alpha Condé, though not as emphatically supportive, were also in favour of such a move. There is no doubt that their dialogue with Hollande played a major role in convincing him to launch the intervention. Sometimes, Africa may have as much influence on France, as France is usually claimed to have on Africa. Very lazy critics talk about a neo-colonial intervention and the reassertion of ‘FranceAfrique’ interests, which is inaccurate and misleading. Most obviously, the three African presidents just mentioned have been democratically elected, which is hardly a feature of ‘FranceAfrique’. Mali, itself, does not belong to the ‘FranceAfrique’ sphere of influence, though being a Francophone country.<sup>9</sup> There are a few thousand French residents in Mali, but most of them are dual nationals and do not have the same economic importance as the French community in Côte d’Ivoire or Gabon.

Moreover, Mali’s main resources, gold and cotton, are not in the hands of French companies. François Hollande may expect to improve his popularity rating in France for a few weeks, but French political analysts concur that military interventions overseas rarely sustain such popularity.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, from 2008 onwards France campaigned to get the European Union and the international community at large involved in the Sahel in order to develop programmes that would strengthen security and civilian dimensions of the region’s states. Most of its partners were reluctant to move despite the growing disruptions orchestrated by AQIM and its associated groups. Given this, some pundits have more accurately compared the French intervention in Mali to the UK military operation in Sierra Leone in May 2000.

Whatever was claimed publicly and subsequently became the main justification for the French intervention, it seems unlikely that the Islamist

8. Jean Guisnel, ‘Le militaire qui murmure à l’oreille de Hollande’, *Le Point*, 7 February 2013, p. 26.

9. See Stephen Smith, ‘What are they doing in Mali?’, *The London Review of Books*, 7 February 2013, <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n03/stephen-w-smith/in-search-of-monsters>> (23 February 2013).

10. Sarkozy’s popularity collapsed at the time of the EUFOR intervention in Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR), and did not increase when he launched his war against Qaddafi. The same argument can be applied to François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac.

offensive launched on 10 January intended to take Bamako.<sup>11</sup> Sevaré, the operational headquarters of the Malian Army, and Mopti were ambitious enough goals. The French President could have pursued a more modest intervention to reverse that offensive, stopping short of launching the reconquest of the North. However, this was not seen as a realistic option by the military because the consequence would have been that French troops would have been stuck on the Azawad 'frontiers', confirming a *de facto* partition of the country that would have made the constitution of an African force less urgent. The Ivorian stalemate would have been repeated.

The French army kept a tight control on the media for weeks: most of the news and reports were fed by them. In particular, there is no doubt that the Malian army was kept out of the fighting but brought to the forefront in time for press conferences. There was also a kind of stagecraft in the way the French soldiers intervened. No dead bodies were shown to journalists. While most of the fighting was limited to air strikes, in Diabali the journalists were reporting hand-to-hand fighting (with no French casualties!) ... And so on and so forth. Propaganda is part of the war and the French army has operationalized the lessons learned from recent US military interventions.

The main aims of the war have been expressed in different ways by different actors and the lack of agreement between the cautious Laurent Fabius and the more 'va-t-en guerre' Hollande has been noticeable from early January onwards. The very loose use of certain words – 'Jihadist', 'Islamist', and 'terrorist' often being used interchangeably – and the shifting aims of the war ('Malian sovereignty', 'repelling armed Islamists and Jihadists', 'eradicating terrorism') reflects more than mere bad communication skills on the part of the current government in Paris. Rather, they reveal that while some of the propaganda lessons from the US military adventures have been taken on board, more substantial lessons regarding the importance of a clear and commonly held set of achievable targets and an exit strategy may have been missed. As a consequence, Hollande used his trip to Mali in early February to admit for the first time that despite the fact that all cities are now under rule, the French army had not completed its mission and the eradication of terrorism would take more time.

### *The European Union and the US*

Until the military intervention started, the European Union showed little inclination to support the French position. After 11 January, things

11. The insurgents were said to number between 2,000 and 3,000. Bamako's population is close to 2 million inhabitants.

changed and important moves were made. This can be explained with reference to the different motivations of member states.

There is a long-standing perception among EU member states that France wants to make the EU pay for its national policies towards Africa. This feeling is not without foundation, but is also a way for European countries to justify their lack of interest in the 'black continent' and the promotion of their own areas of interest, especially Eastern Europe. In particular, Germany's unwillingness (or lack of interest) in developing its own diplomatic expertise on Africa has complex roots, but also acts as a deterrent to a stronger European policy towards the continent.

During the Sarkozy presidency, this feeling proved correct on two important occasions: the European Mission in Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR), and the war in Libya. Many countries were hesitant to get involved in Chad but wanted to support Sarkozy, and do something to ease the predicament of the people of Darfur. At the end of the European Union Force (EUFOR) Chad/CAR Operation in March 2009, none of the member states doubted the fact that the European mission had successfully protected Idriss Déby Itno and pre-empted a political solution for Chad, without achieving anything significant on the CAR and Darfur. Member states were even harsher concerning Libya, since Sarkozy did not take the time to call them before intervening. These two episodes generated bitter feelings, and Sarkozy's behaviour was seen as typically French rather than the aberration of a 'buzzing' President. Although France acted alone in Mali, François Hollande made calls to all EU and major African and international partners to inform them of his course of action: he wanted to prove that he was not behaving like his predecessor.

However, throughout 2012, French officials also made a number of mistakes as they attempted to convince Europeans that Mali was a suitable case for intervention: they were confident to a degree of arrogance and never produced the evidence they claimed to have about the threat that Mali represented. This did not go unnoticed by other European governments.<sup>12</sup> The appointment of Romano Prodi as the UN SRSG on Mali, a decision inspired by Paris, was seen as another French trick to divert European funds from Somalia to Mali. The French government miscalculated in three respects. First, Prodi did not show nearly the intellectual and political commitment that was required, as demonstrated by his decision to establish his office in Rome. Second, the UK had made Somalia a priority of its Africa policy and therefore had little appetite to see European funds diverted while London was spending significantly on a bilateral basis. Third, all member states know that there is no ESDP without France and the UK being both involved at the same time, since Germany is typically

12. Interviews, European diplomats, Brussels and Paris, January 2013.

reluctant to act. Until the In Amenas hostage taking, David Cameron's attitude was unsupportive.

As so often with the EU, changes of policy were first very slow and then very quick. In early January, the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) was still stuck in its preparatory phase. Very few countries (all from Southern Europe) were interested in being a part of it, and to a significant extent this selective support illustrated the prevailing sense of malaise. By early February, about 20 countries (including non-EU members such as Norway) were to send military to train and reorganize the Malian army. The budget had been doubled and the mandate made more robust. Yet, the level of unpreparedness resulting from the slow response is reflected in the difficulties participants had in identifying a 50-soldier team that would protect the trainers. Similarly, in early February the EUTM was stuck because Belgium had not provided clearance to use its helicopters (already in Mali) for evacuation because the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs disagreed on who should provide the clearance and one minister decided to leave for holidays before a consensual decision had been reached.

The EUTM was also forced to reshape its mandate. Before the French intervention, its ambition was to train about 2,500 Malian soldiers to retake northern Mali with the support of a mainly ECOWAS contingent. Today, its task is to re-establish a national Malian army that will comply with its obligations in terms of human rights and laws of war. This is a daunting duty as the political crisis in Bamako is not yet settled and the coup makers of March 2012 retain a capacity to destabilize the process. The right political context is missing and, at the same time, the period required to build a new army out of the current corrupt, disorganized, and collapsed apparatus is unknown: some pundits estimate a year, others a year and a half. Political uncertainties cloud those evaluations.

Of course, to be effective EU action must not be limited to the EUTM. Political work to cultivate national reconciliation and the emergence of a new social contract in Mali is absolutely needed. But the EU has not yet developed high-level representation in Mali and, shackled by its internal regulations, may eventually appoint someone whose political skills do not meet the requirements. Furthermore, his/her nationality will also be a point of possible contention for Malians and there is a danger that such an appointment may just add to the confusion, since there are already a number of special envoys acting on the ground. The European Union also needs to plan, with Malian involvement ('ownership' is more politically correct), an economic recovery programme for northern Mali and, let us hope, for the region. It should be clear that a mere focus on northern Mali would be detrimental to any reconciliation and appeasement policy. Such a recovery



programme faces real challenges because it aims at improving livelihoods in one of the poorest regions of the continent while simultaneously undoing the trafficking networks (at least some of them) that have provided a way of life for some people, promoted the corruption of military and civilian officials, and allowed the Jihadist armed groups to build opportunistic alliances with sectors of the population.<sup>13</sup> It may not be possible to achieve these two goals at the same time.

More remarkable than the EU reluctance to address the Malian crisis is the US attitude. In other crises (Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Philippines), the US government has been unwilling to envision an engagement with the armed Islamists who were working in connection with al-Qaeda.<sup>14</sup> In the Sahel, it articulated a discourse with multiple references to 'ungoverned spaces' and 'safe havens for Jihadists', yet in Mali's case it has shown a surprisingly flexible attitude.<sup>15</sup> The US Ambassador to the United Nations, with her usual diplomatic tact and sense of nuance, described the plan to set up an African force for Mali as 'crap'.<sup>16</sup> This should come as a surprise to US tax payers, who have disbursed dozens of millions of dollars over the past eight years for a Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative/Partnership that appears to have been unproductive on the ground (witness the collapse of the Malian army) and also became politically irrelevant once dialogue, rather than confrontation, was required.

The lack of consistency in the US position is partly a result of the fact that its agenda for Mali is guided by different parameters than those expressed publicly. The Obama administration considers Algeria the pivotal state in the region and therefore was not persuaded by the French view regarding the Malian threat to the region. Huge interests in the energy industry also provide a strong motivation to act. At the same time, US pundits recurrently stressed that the insurgency in northern Mali was not a threat to any regime in the region and could be dealt with in a mild manner. That argument was shaken by the offensive in Konna in early January 2013. Last but not least, the White House did not want to start a new war on terror (nowadays the term is prohibited in Washington) while it was painfully closing its Afghanistan file.

13. Trafficking actually means the informal trade of legal and illegal commodities and the protection of some other activities. There is a need to develop a realistic understanding of what will have to be accepted – for the time being at least – and what should be resisted.

14. Caitriona Dowd and Clionadh Raleigh, 'Briefing: The myth of global Islamic terrorism and local conflict in Mali and the Sahel', *African Affairs*, 112, 3, p. 498.

15. Alexis Arief, 'Crisis in Mali' (Washington, Congressional Research Service, 14 January 2013).

16. Colum Lynch, 'Rice: French plan for Mali intervention is "crap"', *Turtle Bay Blog*, 11 December 2012, <[http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/11/rice\\_french\\_mali\\_intervention\\_plan\\_is\\_crap](http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/11/rice_french_mali_intervention_plan_is_crap)> (23 February 2013).

*The reshaping of the Malian crisis*

There is no doubt that the French intervention is reshaping both national and international agendas on Mali, but not always in the way assumed by international actors. Despite the victories claimed by the French contingent, it seems that little ground fighting took place in northern Mali. One can therefore assume that the Islamist or Jihadist fighters had to choose between three different possibilities. The first one was to go underground in cities taken over by the French, so that they can subsequently re-start terrorist attacks, as has already happened in Gao. The second option was to move northward, take refuge in the mountains, and try to reorganize before launching offensives in urban areas or attempt to disrupt the logistical networks of the international presence. The third was to seek refuge in IDP or refugee camps in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mauritania, and rebuild connections with other scattered fighters. It therefore seems likely that in a few weeks or months terrorist attacks will reoccur. Mali is not Afghanistan, and the social support the armed Islamist groups had enjoyed was limited (but real). The challenge for the international presence is to avoid building a larger constituency for the insurgency, which could happen if the wider population is treated as part of the problem (for example, in the wake of a terror attack) and international forces adopt a hostile stance towards the Malian army. It is not an impossible task, but it requires well-trained troops, a simultaneous political process of reconciliation, and a discussion on impunity.

In most conversations, Malians are adamantly sceptical with regard to the MNLA and MIA, frequently expressing the view that both movements are made up of criminals. It is clear that the MNLA on the ground committed crimes and was basically dismantled by Ansar ed-Din. Today, as the MIA, its new strength is artificial and is derived from the need of fighters to join a more respectable movement at a time when they may lose everything. Such political nomadism is not new and happened in the previous 'Tuareg wars'. Recruitment in those conflicts followed three main patterns. Ethnicity/clanship came first, and may explain the attractiveness of the MIA as an exit option for many Ansar ed-Din fighters, as they recruit members from the same Tuareg clan. Integration into economic networks was also a key factor, since armed individuals had a share in the protection business, which is what guaranteed the success of trafficking in northern Mali. The proceeds of such activities made it possible to buy supporters and to encourage people to defect from other rival groups, especially from the MNLA. Contrary to Western perceptions, ideology did not play a great role in mobilization, but one cannot escape the fact that for many in the north (as well in the south), these groups were made up of "good" Muslims up to the time they enforced *huddud* (cutting hands and stoning illegal couples)

and harsh punishment for those seen as not being sufficiently devoted Wahhabis. Fluidity is therefore the dominant pattern.

The French expected their intervention to solve once and for all the question of what to do with coup makers. The best-case scenario for France was that Captain Sanogo would leave Mali for a prestigious embassy with a fair amount of money in his bank account. While this was not impossible, the unfolding scenario has proved to be very different. Captain Sanogo is still strong enough to keep Red Berets loyal to the former President and accused of participating in a counter-coup in late April 2012 in jail, despite a Court order to release them. Captain Sanogo was also behind the fighting that took place on 8 February near the Djikoroni camp between Green and Red Berets, as Sanogo supporters wanted relatives of the Red Berets to leave the camp. Whatever the official explanation, Sanogo is really motivated by the need to assert control of elite troops at the time of a possible political breakthrough. This situation just proves how optimistic EUTM is being when it talks about rebuilding a republican Malian army in one year. Without discussing here the many practical difficulties of the EUTM itself, there are many important problems that the Malian army will have to solve. The first one is the lack of a clear chain of command as Captain Sanogo, the would-be Thomas Sankara of Mali, is still appointing majors and colonels and interfering with military (and civilian) authorities. The second is that the Malian soldiers may not be treated as well as their African counterparts, who will be part of a UN peacekeeping operation under Chapter VII. Salaries will differ and Malian soldiers may face greater constraints than their foreign colleagues. Moreover, the question of who will benefit from the protection rackets in the north is still unanswered.

The third main problem is that most of the rank and file, as well as the general population, share the view that some communities, not individuals, are responsible for Mali's predicament. However, Malian soldiers will be asked to avoid targeting Tuareg and Arab communities by the international community. President Dioncounda Traoré, despite his disappointing handling of the transition since returning to Bamako in July 2012, is proving to be an open-minded politician who is ready to compromise for the sake of saving his country. However, most politicians in Bamako are inclined to believe that a mere restoration of the old system will be enough. Buoyed by a sense of victory against the armed movements in the north, many politicians feel that the situation is getting back to 'business as usual', and therefore that the only discussion should be about elections and who among the donors should pay for what. Many who applauded the French intervention may grow more critical when it becomes clear that the former colonial power is avoiding punishing the Tuaregs for the crimes that it is widely felt they committed.

Beyond these most pressing issues, attempts to rebuild the Malian state face a further set of challenges going forward. Elections are likely to be a very divisive issue, as argued by Susanna Wing.<sup>17</sup> Most seriously, if there is no political *aggiornamento*, elections would mobilize no more than a quarter of the voters and be seen as a way for a predatory class to recapture wealth and power. The coup in Bamako illustrated a crisis of the political system that goes far beyond Tuareg or northern Mali issues. For elections to make for a more inclusive and legitimate government, it must first be clear that the main parties are committed to building a new form of social contract that does not rest on the Mali or Ségou empires, which *de facto* exclude parts of the population in the north. Islam will have to be part of this conversation. While the post-colonial state always defined itself as secular, in reality Islam is mobilized as a solution for all private matters and has had an increasing presence within the public sphere since the deepening of the state crisis in the 1990s and 2000s. The situation is complex and does not fit the very secular understanding that Western politicians often have of the day-to-day functioning of Malian society. Although there is competition between Maleki Islam and Salafiyya, bringing an end to the Mali crisis may require religion to play a greater, not lesser, role in national politics.<sup>18</sup>

*Conclusion: the future of an intervention*

François Hollande has decided that the war on terror is not over, and although the French intervention ended in March about 1000 troops will remain in Mali to assist the UN peacekeeping mission starting in July. Terrorism is a kind of warfare; it is not the enemy itself. It would be a serious mistake if the French were to have a neoconservative moment at a time when this strategy has failed so dramatically for the US, at such a high human cost. But options today are limited. The apparent success of the military operations will be tested by terrorist attacks and the residual guerrillas in Mali. Armed Islamist groups have stockpiled fuel, heavy weapons, and other supplies outside urban areas, not only in the Adrar mountains, near the Algerian border, but also near the cities they controlled farther south such as Timbuktu and Gao. They recognized that they might lose the cities should an international intervention take place, and planned for this ahead of time. The capacity of these groups to counter-attack may be significant. Many key locations escaped air strikes and there is no public

17. Susanna Wing, 'Briefing: Mali: politics of a crisis', *African Affairs*, 112, 3, p. 476.

18. Maleki Islam is the most popular religion in Mali. The opposition to the Salafi school of thought is led by Sheikh Ousmane Madani Haidara, the chairman of Ançar ed-Din (no relation to Iyad ag Ghali's movement) who is campaigning for the maintenance of the current secularism. The Wahhabi community developed from the mid-1940s and has become prominent in the business realm.

account of the casualties on the Islamist side. Except those militants killed by the strikes, and those who have defected, many are likely to have escaped further north or to have entered displaced/refugee camps in Mali or neighbouring countries. They will take time to reorganize themselves, assess the ground situation carefully, and decide their next move; a lack of resistance today should not be taken as concrete evidence that the crisis is over.<sup>19</sup>

This is significant, because the international intervention faces a number of major challenges. The conflict may diffuse elsewhere – in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and even Tunisia, since many Tunisians were parts of AQIM and MUJWA. The international community thus faces a regional problem that will require a regional solution. The radical reform of Malian politics is critical to a successful process of state reconstruction. The French government has focused mainly on the military dimension of the current crisis, but a more comprehensive approach is needed – one that recognizes the need for a more inclusive political settlement that could provide a model of how to build a more inclusive political system for the whole region.

19. It is important to note that the French military would stress their ability to intervene quickly, which allows them to be used as a bridging operation. The fighting is taking place night and day, which explains why armed Islamists were unable to reorganize on the frontline and preferred to run away. Superior firepower is also a clear advantage in this kind of war.