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ARMED REBELLION, VIOLENT EXTREMISM, AND THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IN MALI

Mathieu Bere

ABSTRACT: *The French-led military intervention and the UN peacekeeping mission in northern Mali have helped preserve Mali's territorial integrity. However, international interventions have had mixed outcomes in the areas of security, human rights, and humanitarian assistance. Similarly, there has not been much success in eradicating jihadist terrorism or in reconciling the country's North and South. This article argues that the limited achievements of the international interventions in Mali's complex conflict are largely due to the incompatible agendas and assumptions of the stakeholders, which have led to greater focus of international actors on state-centric security and governance matters at the expense of identity issues.*

KEYWORDS: *Mali, intrastate conflict, international military intervention, UN peacekeeping, jihadist terrorism*

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, internal conflicts in fragile states and violent jihadism have become major threats to international peace

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and security. In weak, failing, and conflict-affected states, external third parties, especially the United Nations (UN) and major Western powers, have regularly intervened to protect civilians, help stabilize their politics, and restore peace. These international interventions have most often taken the form of peacekeeping missions, military operations, mediations, and sanctions, which are all favorite policies of liberal internationalism. Some claim that growing UN peace activism, along with the end of the Cold War and increasing global economic interdependence, has contributed to the reduction of wars and of battle-related deaths (Human Security Center 2005: 153–55). However, some scholars interrogate “the moral and practical challenges of military humanitarianism and international state-building ventures geared toward enhancing security through global liberal governance” (Bah 2017: 4). More specifically, they critically look at the issues of mixed-motives, inconsistency, and abuses that negatively affect the effectiveness and credibility of international interventions in the developing world, which are undertaken with explicit references to the UN-endorsed responsibility to protect (R2P) norm and justifications of the War on Terror (Bah 2017: 4–6). Both the effectiveness and legitimacy of international interventions in intrastate conflicts, especially in Africa, have often given rise to debates in academic and policy circles that focus on the motivations, outcomes, and contexts of interventions (Adekeye 2002; Bah 2017; Downes 2004; Licklider 1985; Luttwack 1999; UN Secretary-General 2009).

This article seeks to contribute to these important debates by analyzing international military interventions in the northern Mali conflict. More specifically, it tries to explain why the use of force both by the Malian state and the international community, despite the achievements made, has not halted the armed insurgency and jihadist terrorism that have been undermining Mali’s national sovereignty and security since 2012. An analysis of international military interventions in northern Mali reveals that they have had mixed outcomes in their support of local efforts to resolve the conflict. While recognizing the inherent limitations of international interventions in intrastate conflicts, the resolution of which primarily depends on local actors, this article argues that the shortcomings of these interventions may be explained by three factors: 1) the incompatible agendas and assumptions of the stakeholders, 2) the focus of international actors on security and governance issues to the detriment of critical drivers of the conflict such as the identity concerns of the parties, and 3) the very limitations of the current state-centric international system in an age of increasing global interconnectedness and of terrorist threats. Yet, despite their shortcomings, the international interventions in northern Mali, as part of a multitrack, incremental strategy

adopted by the international community to deal with the conflict, were a far better option than non-intervention.

INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS IN MALI

Notwithstanding the undeniable fact that Mali is not yet completely secured and that its neighbors (Niger, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire) have also been attacked by violent extremist groups based there, the international military interventions saved Mali and the West African region to a large extent from the disastrous consequences of Islamist control of the country. To better understand these interventions, and appreciate their rationale, achievements, and shortcomings, a brief note on the history and dynamics of the northern Mali conflict will be helpful.

The north of Mali has been the location and battleground of rebellions by the Tuaregs, an ethnic group with a nomadic pastoralist lifestyle who are found in the Saharan parts of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Algeria, and Libya. Living in Mali since independence in 1960, the Tuareg people have suffered from political and economic marginalization. Despite bloody repressions by governmental armed forces, several international interventions, and negotiated peace agreements, they have waged repeated armed insurgencies against the central government in Bamako, most notably in 1962, 1990, 2006, and 2012 (IRIN 2012). Since 2012, the Tuareg secessionists have been joined by extremist groups claiming to wage jihad for the creation of an Islamic state in northern Mali, where arms, drugs, hostage taking, and human trafficking have become a source of income for criminal networks, while causing insecurity for the population. At the root of the recurrent Tuareg-led rebellions and the jihadist movement are ethnic and religious as well as economic, political, and social concerns. Peace accords negotiated under international mediation have not addressed these concerns in a sustainable manner (International Crisis Group 2012; Flood 2012; Bøås & Torheim 2013; Farhaoui, Gulsum, and Mehmet 2013; Francis 2013; Ping 2014). The failure of international mediation to address the root cause of conflict is akin to failures of earlier international mediations (i.e., those before the Ouagadougou Accord) to address the key issue of citizenship in the political crisis and civil war in Côte d'Ivoire (Bah 2010). Though the jihadist groups share the religious concerns of the Tuareg separatists, they have different, incompatible agendas that make the conflict more complex and difficult to resolve. Instead of focusing on the Tuareg rebellion, which has been extensively studied, this article concentrates on the recent international military interventions against

the Tuareg-led armed rebellion and the violent extremist organizations in northern Mali, which are considered terrorist groups, namely Ansar Dine, Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al Mourabitoun, the Macina Liberation Front, and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (IRIN 2012; Flood 2012).¹

The main forms of international intervention in intrastate conflicts are sanctions, mediation, and the use of force under UN chapter VII and the doctrine of R2P. These have all taken place in northern Mali under the leadership of multilateral organizations and major powers, notably France. The international interventions fall broadly within the spectrum of the liberal peacebuilding agenda, even though some scholars like Roland Paris (2004) would not agree that counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations, especially when mounted unilaterally by major powers with the official intention to protect human rights and democracy, may qualify as peacebuilding activities.

The various regional and international interventions in the Mali crisis since 2012 have been convergent strategies that emerged from an international consensus to support the local authorities in their efforts to preserve Mali's territorial integrity, to protect human rights, uphold political stability and the democratic principles of governance, and fight terrorism (Avesov and Smit 2014: 2). In contrast to conflicts like the one in Syria, where proposals for intervention were first opposed by some permanent members of the UN Security Council, there was a consensus among traditional and emerging powers as well as among African regional organizations on the necessity to intervene in the Mali conflict. This consensus was mainly driven by two critical elements: first, by the focus of these interventions on fighting jihadist terrorism and defending Mali's sovereignty and territorial integrity and, second, by the explicit request of Mali's authorities (Avesov and Smit 2014: 2–4). This international consensus conferred some legitimacy on the intervention of foreign troops in Mali both in the eyes of the African Union (AU) and the rest of the international community, which supported it.

THE AFRICAN AND FRENCH-LED MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

In partnership with African countries, France initiated two military operations in Mali—Serval and Barkhane. In response to UN Security Council Resolution 2085, adopted in December 2012, and the request of the Malian government, France launched Operation Serval on January 11, 2013. This operation, which lasted until July

2014, resulted in the deployment of 4,500 French soldiers and African troops. Operation Serval, which started nine months after the rebel groups unilaterally proclaimed the creation of a new independent state called Azawad in northern Mali, had three main objectives: 1) assisting Mali's army to stop the progress of the armed groups toward Bamako, 2) helping Mali preserve the integrity and unity of its territory by regaining control of the northern cities conquered by insurgents, and 3) facilitating the implementation of international decisions through the deployment of two complementary missions, the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) for Mali's armed forces (French Defense Ministry 2013). There was a high risk that letting the Tuareg and jihadist groups take control of the whole of Mali would have transformed the Sahara-Sahel region into a safe haven for Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups and a source of major threat to international security. As David Francis (2013) noted, the French-led military intervention aimed at preventing the "Afghanization of Mali." Like Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, Mali was under severe risk of falling under the control of jihadists determined to implement a strict and crude form of Sharia in northern Mali. Because of the gross human rights violations, the threat to Mali's territorial integrity, and the risk of regional and international insecurity, the UN Security Council, ECOWAS, and the AU-supported Operation Serval (UN Security Council 2012; Francis 2013; IRIN 2012; Ping 2014).

Operation Serval reversed the dynamics of the conflict in favor of Mali's army, which up to that point had been failing to contain the armed insurgency (Tramond and Seigneur 2014; Gout 2015). The French-led military intervention led to the liberation of the main towns under the control of Islamist groups and the ouster of AQIM from the Ifoghas mountain range. The jihadist groups were substantially weakened as they suffered heavy losses. The Sharia rules imposed by the jihadists were reversed and overall security improved for the general population. Elections were also held, leading to the restoration of the rule of law and the strengthening of democracy in Mali as a whole (Tramond and Seigneur 2014: 76).

In terms of the objectives set by France, Operation Serval may seem successful. However, a more critical assessment of the international intervention in Mali may offer a different picture. For example, Richard Reeve (2015: 1) has noted that though the jihadists seemed to be defeated within Mali in 2013, there were "five failings of the intervention logic that suggest that this was a tactical rather than a strategic defeat." Reeve argued that the French intervention was based

on “a diagnosis of the problem in Mali as an acute incidence of Jihadist terrorism rather than a chronic or cyclical domestic political crisis” (1). Secondly, he noted that the continued deterioration of the security situation reported by UN sources in the north proved that the French, after recapturing the territory, could not protect the re-conquered territory against “the asymmetric and unconventional tactics of a dispersed terrorist adversary” (1). The third shortcoming of the French military intervention was its attempt “to destroy highly mobile transnational armed groups with a campaign limited to one country that has completely open borders,” which simply displaced the jihadist problem into neighboring countries (Reeve 2015: 2). Reeve also notes that the French-led military interventions, especially Operation Barkhane, relied on the partnership of controversial authoritarian regimes, such as the regime of President Idriss Deby in Chad, for the implementation of its counter-terrorism strategy (1). Overall, instead of strengthening democratic governance, it rather contributed to the strengthening of undemocratic regimes in the Sahel. Based on the above shortcomings, Reeve argues that

Addressing these consequences of a flawed military intervention strategy in order to build more sustainable peace and security in Mali and the Sahel will not be easy or quick. A political solution to the domestic conflict in northern Mali is the key element that was stymied by the French military intervention, and for which the responsibility lies very much with the elected Malian government. (2)

Reeve’s assessment shows that the French-led military intervention in Mali was not as successful as Tramond and Seigneur (2014) claimed. In fact, Tramond and Seigneur acknowledged that “stability in Mali will need a political settlement, not only between southern and northern ethnic groups but also within the Malian Army itself” and that “a mission is not over until the last unit is dismissed into its barracks and every piece of equipment has been turned in and accounted for” (85). The limited and temporary nature of the French success in Mali explains why Operation Serval was combined with the Chad-based Operation Epervier into a multilateral anti-terrorist operation with three thousand troops, dubbed Operation Barkhane. Operation Barkhane was launched on August 1, 2014 with the dual mission of supporting the G5 Sahel countries in their fight against terrorism and also preventing the reconstitution of terrorist sanctuaries in the Sahara-Sahel region (French Defense Ministry 2017). This was an important mission aimed at complementing the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali.

THE UN PEACEKEEPING AND STABILIZATION MISSION

To pursue the work started by Operation Serval, a United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established by Security Council Resolution 2100 in April 2013. The mandate of MINUSMA, renewed each year since 2013, has included ensuring security and stability in the country, protecting civilians, monitoring and promoting human rights, and supporting national dialogue and reconciliation. However, counter-terrorism is not part of the mission (MINUSMA n.d.). MINUSMA's 2014–15 budget was planned to be around \$830,701,700, with an authorized strength of 12,640 total uniformed personnel, not including civilian personnel. However, the actual resources provided were below the original plan. By March 31, 2015, for example, there were only 11,510 personnel, while the approved budget for July 2014 to June 2015 stood at only \$628,724,400 (MINUSMA n.d.). As the mission continued to struggle, there have been growing calls to increase troops and equipment (UN News Centre 2016; Associated Press 2016).

Given the security and stabilization needs of Mali, one may wonder whether the size of the peacekeeping force deployed by MINUSMA, the mandate it was given, and, more generally, the traditional peacekeeping mandate could have met the needs of the local population in such a protracted political and ethno-religious conflict. Peace, for example, was not really restored in Sierra Leone until the international community took a clear stance against Revolutionary United Front (RUF) as a spoiler of the peace process and shifted from orthodox humanitarian intervention to a more holistic approach anchored in R2P doctrine. The enhanced intervention in Sierra Leone vigorously protected civilians from the rebels and mobilized resources to promote postwar reconstruction, including democracy, economic recovery, security and justice sectors reforms, and the Special Court for war crimes (Bah 2013: 21–22). MINUSMA has greatly contributed to the protection of civilians in northern Mali and the stabilization of the country, but the intervention had shortcomings that are inherently related to the limitations of the current international regime for dealing with violent conflicts. One example that illustrates this state of affairs is the difficulty that the UN always has to mobilize human and financial resources in a timely and sufficient manner for peacekeeping missions. For instance, until June 30, 2015, the authorized strength of MINUSMA's uniformed personnel was 12,640, with 80% of them deployed in the cities of Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal, and Mopti (MINUSMA n.d.; Fainke and Sogodogo 2015). In

spite of the deployment of this sizable peacekeeping force, complaints about insecurity in the north and other parts of Mali have persisted.

In a briefing to the UN Security Council, the commander of the UN peacekeeping force in Mali indicated that his force, which has been repeatedly targeted by jihadists, did not have the mandate, the training, and the right equipment to engage in anti-terrorist or counter-insurgency operations (UN News Centre 2015a). At least eighty-nine UN peacekeepers have been killed and 166 injured in Mali since 2003, which makes MINUSMA one of the most perilous UN peacekeeping missions (Carayol 2016: 23). Being an impartial peacekeeping force, MINUSMA's mandate has been quite restricted in terms of military engagement with the armed groups. As Arnaud Akodjenou, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General at MINUSMA, made clear to the members of Mali's parliament, MINUSMA's "action is limited to patrolling, to monitoring the cease-fire, and other agreed-upon security arrangements. MINUSMA is not mandated to use force. Force can only be used in cases of imminent danger against MINUSMA and civilians" (Fainke and Sogodogo 2015: 1).

In a hostile environment where armed insurgents violate human rights and international humanitarian laws by targeting everyone, including civilians and UN peacekeepers, there has been no peace to keep despite the agreed-upon cease-fire. International actors have had to take sides and use force to protect civilians as well as themselves. Understandably, when there is no peace to keep and peacekeepers themselves are threatened by warriors who ignore noncombatant immunity, stabilization based on impartial peacekeeping becomes an almost impossible mission, especially when it must be carried out by individuals who are given guns but have a very limited offensive mandate to protect defenseless civilians and stabilize an immense territory against violent jihadists.

However, as I argued in the introduction, the shortcomings of the international interventions alone do not explain their mixed outcomes. Indeed, while there was a consensus among international actors on the goals to be achieved, divergence has prevailed among the insurgent groups, both the Tuareg secessionists and the jihadist movements. First, the insurgents disagree on the nature of the separate state to be created, whether it should be secular or Islamic. Second, among the Tuaregs themselves and the Coalition for the Movements of Azawad (CMA), there is no agreement on how autonomy for the North should be reached, whether it should be pursued within a federal state or within a completely new independent state called Azawad. These deep divergences partly explain why negotiations between the Malian government

and the insurgents did not include the jihadist groups with whom the Malian government and the international community refused to negotiate, considering them terrorists, and, on the other hand, why the agreements reached have not been accepted and respected by all stakeholders.

Finally, as regards the shortcomings of the UN intervention, it is worth asking the question whether it is not time to review the doctrine and design of UN peacekeeping and military operations in conflict zones affected by terrorism. Evidently, the various military campaigns against terrorist groups in Mali, Nigeria, Iraq, and Syria have thus far had only limited success. Despite the elimination of thousands of Jihadist fighters in Mali, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and their affiliates continue to mobilize militants for what they consider a just and holy war.

Finding the right policy tools and strategies to address terrorist threats and armed violence within sovereign states is a serious challenge to individual states and the UN system. The current UN system, which was created to deal with interstate conflicts after two devastating world wars, is still poorly equipped, both militarily and doctrinally, to manage complex intrastate conflicts and violent extremism despite the official endorsement of the R2P norm by the UN General Assembly in 2005. MINUSMA is thus impacted by the inherent limitations of the UN system, limitations that reduce the UN's capacity to provide effective global governance to ensure sustainable peace and security in a world that has become a global village. Thus, the limitations of the international system partly account for the limited and mixed outcomes of international interventions in Mali.

THE OUTCOMES AND LIMITATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS ON CONFLICT DYNAMICS

International military and non-military interventions have led to observable positive changes not only in conflict dynamics, but also in the overall situation in Mali, especially in the North. For example, the African, French, and UN-led interventions in 2013 reversed the dynamics of the conflict by stopping the insurgent groups that were advancing toward Bamako and helping the government and its army regain control of the North where the jihadist movements had started to implement their version of Sharia law. Moreover, the reunification of the whole country under the control of the central government of Bamako and relative securitization of the North made possible the organization of the presidential elections in 2013 after the negotiations between the government and the insurgents in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Though the security situation has improved in general, compared to what it was

in 2012 before the intervention of foreign forces, the conflict is not yet resolved and there are still terrorist attacks and violent confrontations between the armed groups, the Malian army, and the international forces. Distrust still undermines the relationships between the belligerents in the North as well as in the South while the agreed-upon cease-fire and the disarmament of the armed groups are still poorly implemented (UN Secretary-General 2014, 2015; ICG 2015: 3, 9).

In terms of the human rights and humanitarian situation, there have been some modest improvements as compared to before the international interventions, particularly in northern Mali, which was in a disastrous condition. As Human Rights Watch (2014: 18) noted:

The Islamist occupation in the north and chaos in the south saw a drastic deterioration in respect for human rights, with Malians suffering grave abuses from all sides. Islamist groups tried to enforce their brand of Sharia law through beatings, amputations, killings, and the destruction of religious landmarks. Separatist Tuareg rebels engaged in sexual abuse and looting before leaving the area they earlier controlled. Elements of the Malian army have tortured and summarily executed alleged rebel collaborators and members of rival military units.

Likewise, the humanitarian situation before the deployment of MINUSMA, as the UN Secretary-General (2013) reported to the Security Council, was critical with more than 4.3 million Malians, including refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), in need of urgent assistance, the delivery of which was impeded by insufficient funding and the inaccessibility of the northern region by humanitarian agencies. The international interventions have brought some relief by stopping the brutal implementation of Sharia in the North. Yet, in spite of the laudable efforts made by international actors, crimes and human rights violations were still perpetrated by both sides of the conflict in 2014 and in 2015. Moreover, the north of Mali, which was still in need of humanitarian assistance, was difficult to access (Amnesty International 2014; UN Secretary-General 2015). In early June 2016, there were popular demonstrations in Kidal, one of the main cities in northern Mali, against the lack of progress in the implementation of the last peace accord signed in Algiers. The demonstrators called for the quick return of the state administration and the restoration of basic social services, mainly water and electricity (Sogodogo 2016). These demonstrations contrasted with the rejection of the Algiers accord by some of the armed groups, illustrating again the strong disagreements and divisions among them.

Lastly, important changes have happened in terms of political stability, democratic governance, economic growth, and rule of law in Mali after the international military and non-military interventions. These interventions, as I mentioned earlier, have helped to restore constitutional order in Bamako through free and fair elections in 2013. Similarly, the interventions have been beneficial to the economy, which has started to recover and grow again. From 0% in 2012, the annual GDP growth rate of Mali climbed to 1.7% in 2013 and to 6.8% in 2014 and is predicted to remain above 5% until 2017 (World Bank 2015).

The achievements of the international interventions in support of the local efforts to protect citizens, liberate the north, stop gross human rights violations, and restore the rule of law with a constitutional order reflect the focus of international actors and Mali's government on the security and governance aspects of the crisis. However, both local and international endeavors have underestimated the important identity factors of the conflict. As a matter of fact, the conflict is driven, among other things, by the strong desire of the Tuareg secessionists to defend the rights of an ethnic minority that they consider marginalized and by the determination of the jihadist groups to uphold their vision of cultural and Islamic authenticity. This partly accounts for the persistence of jihadist and secessionist claims after the signing of various peace agreements and after several counter-insurgency or anti-terrorist military operations.

The area in which international interventions has had very limited success is the fight against jihadist terrorism, which has repeatedly targeted civilians, the armed forces of Mali, MINUSMA, and the Barkhane Operation (UN Secretary-General 2015: 4–8). Ten days after the signing of the Algiers Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, there were attacks claimed by Ansar Dine and AQIM not only in the North, but also in the South and West of the country as well as threats of terrorist attacks by the same extremist groups in the neighboring states of Cote d'Ivoire and Mauritania. Iyad Ag Ghaly, the leader of Ansar Dine, stated that he had not yet abandoned his project of establishing a caliphate in the Sahel (Dicko 2015).

Though the jihadist groups were expelled from the cities of northern Mali, with many of their fighters scattered or killed along with some of their key leaders by the French-led military operations, the jihadists who survived by hiding or fleeing the country are back again. Since the beginning of 2015, no less than two hundred terrorist attacks have been recorded in the North and center of the country, with a death toll of about 210 people, mostly civilians (Carayol 2016: 24). In January and March 2016, AQIM militants crossed Mali's border and attacked

neighboring Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, respectively leaving thirty-three and twenty-two people dead (LeFaso.net 2016; AIP 2016).

Indeed, terrorist attacks by Jihadist groups have persisted and spilled over the borders despite the continued presence of Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA, the trans-border cooperation among the G5 Sahel countries, and the enhanced security measures taken by the individual states of the region. This suggests that the military response to terrorist threats, though necessary to deny them safe haven, is insufficient to eradicate such threats. Evidence to support this claim is provided by the fact that military campaigns against Boko Haram in northern Nigeria and against ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Middle East have thus far only weakened them but failed to end jihadist terrorism. In Libya and other North African countries that experienced regime changes as a result of the Arab Spring, ISIS has been spreading at a worrying pace (Saint-Perier 2016: 18). This spread of the terrorist threat occurs in a context of internal conflicts and of youth complaints about unemployment and unchanged economic conditions that must be factored into counter-terrorism strategies.

Whether in northern Mali or other countries, the resort of many governments to military solutions against jihadist terrorism seems only to fuel the hatred and hostility of these militants against those who fight them (Cortright and Lopez 2007; Francis 2013; Thérroux-Bénoni 2015). As one security analyst noted, it is as if the military, state-centric management of terrorism takes for a cure what in fact worsens the crisis (Nana 2015). The unpleasant truth is that the resort to guns to fight terrorism only helps to kill individual terrorists, but not the extremist ideologies and identity concerns that motivate them. These extremist ideologies and identity concerns survive bombs and continue to mobilize new jihadist militants who are eager to die as martyrs. As Janice Gross Stein (2001: 203) rightly observed, "If threatened identities facilitate the creation of hostile imagery and contribute to violent conflict, then securing these identities must be a fundamental component of conflict resolution."

In fact, the use of heavy force and the increase of military expenditures to stem the terrorist wave have not dissuaded further attacks in Mali and other parts of the world. The figures and facts below clearly demonstrate it. According to the *Global Terrorism Index 2015*, "Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been over a nine-fold increase in the number of deaths from terrorism, rising from 3,329 in 2000 to 32,685 in 2014" (Institute for Economics and Peace 2015: 33). Worldwide, this has meant a scaled up direct economic cost, which reached the peak of US \$52.9 billion in 2014 and an increased flow of

refugees and IDPs fleeing terrorist attacks, ongoing violent conflict, and political violence, which are all correlated (Institute for Economics and Peace 2015: 2, 60).

Concomitant to the increasing destructive impacts of terrorism both at the human and economic levels worldwide, the military expenses and other securitization measures favored by governments have been growing exponentially. For instance, it is estimated that during the first six years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States alone spent more than \$500 billion to fight terrorism worldwide with an “overemphasis on tactical counter-terrorism (in which the objective is to find, destroy, and defeat operative terrorist groups) and an under-emphasis on strategic counter-terrorism (which includes multiple policy responses designed to eliminate the sustaining and underlying conditions of extremist terrorism)” (Cortright and Lopez 2007: 2). Similarly, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the military expenditure of Mali has doubled since 2006. It jumped from \$58.5 million in 1990 to \$125.5 million in 2006 and \$167.8 million in 2014 (SIPRI n.d.). Mali’s security apparatus has been strengthened since the outbreak of the rebellion in 2012 through an increase of the military budget and personnel as well as training of Mali’s security forces by foreign instructors. Thus, four battalions of seven hundred Malian soldiers have been trained per year since 2013. Also, the Mali state plans to purchase new military equipment for about 1.9 billion Euros and recruit ten thousand more soldiers between 2015 and 2019.

As regards the military budgets, they have followed an upward trend for most African states, whose military expenditures, mostly on small and light arms, have been increasing since 1990—rising, for the African continent, from \$17.7 billion in 1990 to \$46.5 billion in 2014 (SIPRI n.d.). More generally, arms transfers to African destinations in most cases serve the security needs of African states who use the imported military equipment to contain rebel movements or participate in UN peace operations (SIPRI n.d.). Yet, these transfers also fuel and perpetuate armed violence, especially when some of these arms fall into the hands of non-state actors that challenge the state’s monopoly of legitimate force (Wezeman, Wezeman, and Beraud-Sudreau 2011: vi–vii; Vines 2005: 345–46). Even though there is no evidence that such transfers occurred in the case of Mali, it is known that some of the armed groups in the northern region acquired most of their heavy, sophisticated military equipment from Libya, which they fled after the collapse of Gaddafi regime (Ping 2014: 23). Consequently, efforts to resolve Mali’s crisis should not continue to focus only on strengthening security and governance. Such efforts would be more effective if

they invested more to tackle the root causes of the crisis. To that end, a stronger international operation that includes cooperation among states; between states, the private sector, and civil society organizations; and that goes beyond democracy promotion and military assistance in fragile states will be required.

CHALLENGES FOR PEACE IN MALI

The case of Mali reveals critical challenges that are pervasive in many international security promotion efforts in Africa. Too often, international interventions aimed at combating terrorism fail to fully take into account domestic economic, political, and identity drivers of the violence. Moreover, international interventions tend to have missions that are not well aligned with the local roots of the political violence. Mali is a very good case of where terrorism dovetails with historical political and economic marginalization problems. Unfortunately, the international military intervention is largely driven by the global war on terror agenda. The case of Mali points to the importance of addressing socioeconomic grievances, aligning peacekeeping missions with the root causes of the conflict and promoting local ownership of the solutions to the conflict.

Envisioning Non-Military Policy Options in Addition to the Use of Force

Even though Mali has been reunified under the control of a democratically elected government, the international military interventions have not yet fully reached their goals. Security and peace are still shaky all over the country because of the persistence of terrorist attacks, non-compliance of belligerents with the cease-fire agreement, and the very slow implementation of the latest peace accords. The heavy international military engagement with the armed groups and the presence of MINUSMA have not prevented terrorist attacks or murderous confrontations between Mali's army and some insurgents (Doumbia 2015). Although the use of force and multilateral peacekeeping are necessary to protect civilians, they are unlikely to end jihadist terrorism. This is because national and multilateral forces are trained to fight and function in a traditional warfare mindset within an identifiable territory whereas the enemy is a non-state actor, who is difficult to identify. The jihadists operate across national borders with warriors coming from different countries. They shift tactics and use unconventional warfare such as terrorist attacks against hotels, shrines, and military bases.

Moreover, military interventions deal only with the symptoms of the multidimensional problem highlighted above instead of the root causes of the grievances. In particular, the identity and economic concerns that mainly drive the armed groups are not properly addressed. If sustainable security and peace are to be achieved in Mali and the Sahara-Sahel region at large, the root causes of the repeated Tuareg rebellions and violent jihadism must also be addressed through non-military measures, which would include policies to improve political and economic governance, fight corruption, and to reduce the economic gap between the North and the South as stated in the Algiers accord. Though some militants joined jihadist groups in northern and central Mali for security reasons—to seek protection for themselves, their families, and property—it was also due to the lack of economic opportunities, local conflicts and grievances, and the weakness and absence of the state in these parts of the country (Theroux-Benoni et al. 2016: 1, 3).

If one agrees that violent jihadism that kills innocent people, including peaceful Muslims, is a distortion of Islam and results mainly from flawed political theologies and from the radicalization of frustrated, desperate, and revengeful individuals often indoctrinated by extremist preachers, then it makes sense to think of remedying this evil through programs that would disrupt the radicalization process. The challenge here is first to explore ways of promoting a change of attitude and behavior by identifying and stopping jihadist preachers, leaders, or movements that inspire terrorist attacks. Second, even though not all militants join violent extremist groups because they got indoctrinated or radicalized, another challenge is to identify strategies that prove to be the most effective for tracking and preventing radicalization through the rigorous evaluation of programs designed to address its factors, such as youth unemployment, poor religious education, religious intolerance, and frustrations due to feelings of exclusion and marginalization in some regions or among certain ethnic groups. In this area, both in programming and program evaluation, more attention needs to be paid to inter-religious dialogue and peacebuilding initiatives, a number of which already exist across Africa. Such initiatives could be strengthened to promote dialogue, mutual understanding, religious freedom, and tolerance in communities plagued or threatened by jihadist radicalization (Lado 2014: 6).

To meet the challenges mentioned above, non-military anti-terrorist strategies to supplement the use of force could include, for example, 1) counter-narratives to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies through the most popular media in vulnerable regions, 2) a strategic engagement of religious leaders as far as possible with extremist preachers and

leaders in view of patiently helping them to critically reevaluate their hermeneutics of sacred texts, and 3) strategies to disrupt the channels of recruitment and mobilization utilized by extremist organizations.

The Aarhus model, a Danish program for deradicalizing prospective and returning jihadists, has proved that logical persuasion, individual mentoring, psychological counseling, and the granting of better opportunities for social integration may be, in many cases, more effective than repression in preventing and curing violent religious extremism (Mansel 2015). It is critical that the anti-radicalization programs seek to weaken the recruitment and mobilization capacity of terrorist groups by reaching out to current and potential jihadist militants, talking with them, and offering them better alternatives, such as economic opportunities in the form of funding for income-generating activities or social business projects. Since non-military measures against terrorism and armed insurgency exist, and they may be more effective and less costly than military campaigns, it is urgent to rethink multilateral military interventions and peacekeeping in terrorism-afflicted conflict zones in order to integrate such measures and, consequently, reallocate funds.

Rethinking UN Peacekeeping

Three critical lessons may be drawn from the UN experience in Mali to enlighten future peacekeeping missions, especially in the areas of communication with the local people, mandate design, and strategy for fighting terrorist groups. First, it should be observed that ignorance of the decision-making processes at the UN and MINUSMA's mandate has generated unrealistic expectations and negative reactions among the local population toward the UN peacekeeping operation. But, on this topic, Mali is not unique because negative reactions toward UN peacekeeping missions were also observed in other war-torn African countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Côte d'Ivoire where local people often expected too much from the UN peace operation and became disappointed. These misunderstandings between UN peacekeeping missions and local populations highlight the great challenge of communicating more effectively with the local people about what the UN and its peace operations can do. For anyone who knows the UN system, how it works, and its inherent limitations—limited funding, little leverage on local actors, disagreements among the Security Council members in making decisions, and lack of a permanent standing force, to name but a few—is more likely to understand why it was difficult to deploy peacekeeping troops in the early moments of the crisis in 2012 before it escalated and why a UN peacekeeping operation in the current state of affairs is unable to meet certain expectations.

Second, given the new threats and challenges facing peacekeeping missions in conflict zones such as northern Mali, the international community is challenged to revisit the way mandates are designed as well as the UN's strategy for fighting jihadist terrorism. As the force commanders of the UN missions in South Sudan and Mali and the Chief of Staff of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) told the Security Council in June 2015, the experience of the UN peacekeeping in Mali and in other war-torn countries clearly suggests that specially trained and better equipped peacekeepers are needed to deal with terrorist and other asymmetric threats (UN News Centre 2015b). This recommendation must be, however, critically examined in light of one of the conclusions reached by a high-level independent panel of experts that

UN peacekeeping missions, due to their composition and character, are not suited to engage in military counter-terrorism operations. They lack the specific equipment, intelligence, logistics, capabilities and specialized military preparation required, among other aspects. Such operations should be undertaken by the host government or by a capable regional force or an *ad hoc* coalition authorized by the Security Council. (UN Secretary-General 2015: 117)

Third, besides the emergence of new threats, the increasing demand for UN peacekeeping, and the growing number of fatalities among peacekeepers suggests that the UN is perhaps challenged to rethink the traditional method of acquiring, training, and deploying its peacekeeping personnel. For example, peacekeeping personnel in Africa could be recruited by African states or regional organizations—ECOWAS, G5 Sahel, or African Union—and be given special training with the partnership of the international community. This special training, which might be a combination of police and military training for protection and offensive operations, would provide these troops with the capacity, skills, and equipment required to deal with armed insurgents and jihadists as well as to closely protect civilians. Recruits from UN member-states in war-torn regions like Africa could be offered this special training under UN leadership with logistical, technical, and financial contributions from the international community. This would provide a permanent force, readily available for deployment in conflict zones. There is already the African Standby Force, which can serve as a starting point. The critical challenge, however, has been establishing a transnational framework with effective funding and decision-making mechanisms and a new warfare approach to tackle the security issues posed by

terrorist and criminal networks, which operate across national borders and fight unconventional warfare.

To sum up, the shortcomings of the UN peacekeeping and stabilization mission in Mali reveal the limitations of the UN itself in its attempt to provide effective security governance, particularly in countering threats to international peace that now mostly emerge within the borders of failing and impoverished sovereign states. It will not be enough to find more effective ways of recruiting, training, equipping, and deploying the peacekeeping personnel; the UN must also invent a more effective model of peacekeeping and broaden the traditional concept and mandate of peacekeeping so as to uphold the demands of international humanitarian law and reduce the number of fatalities both among non-combatant civilians and peacekeepers in conflict zones. Ideally, this new model of peacekeeping, or better, “peace sustaining,” should aim not only at the “securitization” and stabilization of war-torn countries, but also at a more comprehensive peace agenda. Such an agenda, as often repeated, must emphasize local ownership and the building of regional capacities to address the root causes of armed conflicts or promote reconciliation among belligerents. This is a huge and complex challenge given the weak (financial and technical) capacities of local actors and, on the other hand, the political character of peacebuilding efforts initiated by international actors with vested interests for a limited period of time.

Emphasizing Local Ownership of Peace and Democratization Processes

Peace, just like democracy, cannot be imposed from outside, whatever the power and resources of external actors who intervene. Consequently, it is imperative that local people own and lead democratization and peace processes (UN Secretary-General 2009: 9). Peace, democracy, compliance with human rights standards, and the fight against corruption will require changes in attitudes, structures, and cultural systems, which will take time to occur and should be patiently promoted. International interventions in sovereign states can do little in this area unless there is a strong local political will to comply with human rights norms and to favor negotiated solutions for the sake of peace.

To secure this local compliance with internationally accepted standards and promote peace and security, there are in fact three main approaches that correspond to different theories of conflict management and peacebuilding. The realist approach considers military might

and balance of power as key instruments for maintaining stability and peace in the international system (Morgenthau 1978), while the liberal approach thinks that promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law through multilateral institutions are better ways to reach that end (Newman 2009: 26–53). A third approach, which may be called idealist or constructivist, insists on the role of ideas, beliefs, norms, and cultural systems in understanding and transforming conflicts (Wendt 1999: 1–2). In the case of Mali, the interconnectedness of identity, political, environmental, and economic factors in the emergence and persistence of the conflict in Mali has shown that understanding and addressing it through exclusively liberal or realist peacebuilding models is unlikely to bring about a sustainable peace. In fact, neither the realist nor the liberal approaches of peacebuilding provide a complete picture of the complex, protracted crisis in northern Mali and the Sahel region. The conflict in Mali, just like other intra-state conflicts of the developing world, cannot be diagnosed only as symptoms of a democratic deficit or state failure, even though both would be predictors of violent conflict in fragile states (Fund for Peace 2015). This type of diagnosis has led to the prescription of liberal solutions (promotion of multiparty democracy, free market economy, and of human rights) as the best strategies to promote international peace and security. Whether motivated by major powers' interests, genuine concerns for regional and international security, or simply the desire to help the state of Mali in its counter-terrorism and peacebuilding endeavors, international interventions have only addressed the armed violence, terrorist threats, and human rights aspect of the problem. Though this effort is laudable, it will be more effective if followed by supplementary initiatives to address the identity drivers of the conflict, namely the fact that both the Tuaregs and the Islamist armed groups fight to restore what they believe to be a lost authentic cultural and religious order and space. Unlike constructivist theories of international conflict, the liberal and realist assumptions behind most international interventions have paid little attention to the identity factor, more precisely its religious, ideological, and cultural dimensions, which have been motivating the Tuareg and jihadist insurgents and playing an influential role in the perpetuation of the armed violence.

No doubt, freedom of religion and conscience is non-negotiable; there is little, if anything, to negotiate with terrorists who use religion to justify their criminal activities. States must unite their forces and resources, both military and non-military, to counter jihadist terrorism that has become like organized crime and pollution, to borrow a term from former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, “a problem without passport” (Annan 2009). But, as far as the recurrent Tuareg secessionist

rebellions are concerned, their resolution will primarily depend on Mali's citizens, on their capacity to manage diversity and conflicts among them constructively, and on the quality of the political and economic governance that will be established to strengthen their resilience as one nation in the coming years. The challenge for the UN, AU, and Mali's international partners will be to help the people of Mali move faster in this direction, particularly in carrying out the required reforms, developing the right attitudes toward each other, as well as constructive narratives around their religious and ethnic identities so as to promote reconciliation and sustainable peace in their country. In brief, reconciliation between the North and the South and sustainable peace in Mali will depend on the capacity of both indigenous and external actors to achieve changes that meet the social, political, and economic needs of Mali's citizens as well as the identity concerns of the armed insurgent groups of the North. In any case, short of ending a violent conflict, international actors who intervene to help the local people must design and implement their intervention in a conflict-sensitive way, which implies that they understand the context of the conflict, be attentive to the impacts of their interventions, and ensure that they do not fuel further conflict or violence (Woodrow and Chigas 2009: 1).

CONCLUSION

In sum, this article critically examines the international counter-terrorism and peacekeeping operations in Mali under the French-led Serval and Barkhane operations and the UN-led MINUSMA. In light of the official objectives of these different interventions, their evolution over the years, and the changes observed after these interventions, it appears that they have had only very limited success even though they greatly contributed to stalling the jihadist and Tuareg insurgencies aimed at taking over the northern part of Mali. Unfortunately, terrorist attacks and insecurity have persisted in Mali, which is still a springboard for terrorist attacks in neighboring countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger, and Côte d'Ivoire.

I argued that there are three main reasons for these mixed outcomes and shortcomings of the international military intervention in Mali. First, the incompatibility of the agendas pursued by the different stakeholders who excluded, for understandable reasons, the jihadist groups from the negotiating table led to persistent distrust among the stakeholders. Second, there has been little attention from international actors, and a lack of viable solutions, to the underlying identity issues involved in the conflict, which successive peace agreements have not

resolved due to inadequate resources and strong political will. Third, there are substantial problems associated with the current state-centric international system.

Because military intervention in support of the Malian state has proved unsuccessful in resolving the complex crisis in Mali, it is important to explore non-military strategies to prevent the radicalization or recruitment of individuals by jihadist groups. Also, there should be proper strategies for the deradicalization and social reintegration of militants. There is also a need for more effective communication and warfare strategies aimed at reducing misunderstandings with the local population and to secure their cooperation. Finally, the Security Council needs to design suitable peacekeeping mandates that respond more to the needs of the local population than to the interests of external powers who intervene. Because democracy and peace cannot be imposed from outside, international actors must ensure local ownership of peace processes. In the case of Mali, it will be essential to empower its citizens to lead and own peacebuilding efforts that will satisfactorily address the diverse drivers of the conflict, including its religious and cultural sources.

NOTES

1. Al Mourabitoun and the Macina Liberation Front merged in March 2017 into a coalition called Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa-al Muslimin (Group to Support Islam and Muslims).

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