

# Reconstructing local orders in Mali: Historical perspectives and future challenges

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## ABOUT THE RECONSTITUTING LOCAL ORDERS PROJECT

Led by Brookings Senior Fellows Vanda Felbab-Brown, Shadi Hamid, and Harold Trinkunas, the Brookings Seminar on Reconstituting Local Orders seeks to better understand how domestic political order breaks down and is reconstituted. It draws out policy implications and recommends more effective action for local governments and the international community. It examines these issues by bringing together top-level experts and policymakers.

The present disorder in the international system is significantly augmented by the breakdown of domestic order across a number of key states. Around the globe, the politics of identity, ideology and religion are producing highly polarized societies and deepening conflicts among non-state actors and between non-state actors and the state. In the Middle East, the Arab Spring disrupted long calcified political systems in ways that are still producing unpredictable effects on the regional order. The collapse of political order in Libya has wide-ranging consequences for governance across the Sahel, intensifying Mali and Nigeria's fragility and highlighting the many deficiencies of their states. Meanwhile, Russia's annexation of Crimea was facilitated by a breakdown of political order in Ukraine, and Russia's aggressive external posture also partially reflects and compensates for its internal weaknesses. But even emerging powers such as India and Brazil face profound and persistent governance problems, including in public safety and the rule of law. Among the topics explored in the Seminar are the construction of institutions and counter-institutions in the Middle East and South Asia; the role of external interveners and local militias in conflict settings; and forms of governance in slums and prisons, such as by criminal groups.

The Seminar is a collaborative research space that serves as a launching pad for cutting edge debate and research around questions of local and transnational order. The core of the analytical and policy-prescriptive exploration focuses on how political and social orders are reconstituted, the resulting impact on regional order and the international system, and what roles the international community should play. Among the products of the Seminar are analytical and policy papers as well as shorter articles and blog posts that examine cross-regional comparisons and identify policy implications and recommendations.

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## Introduction

Nearly two years since Malian armed groups were brought to the negotiating table in Algiers to sign a contentious peace agreement with the government in Bamako, there appears to be little peace to be found. The 2012 Tuareg rebellion—the country’s fourth since independence—shook Mali and brought down the government of President Amadou Toumani Touré. It also led to the takeover of nearly two-thirds of the country’s landmass by non-state armed groups and an eventual jihadist occupation, both in Mali’s arid north. A French military intervention in January 2013 stopped the rapid expansion of these jihadist forces into southern parts of Mali and also allowed the gradual reconquest of the territory by Mali’s armed forces. However, the process remains incomplete, and both the government of Mali and its French partner have struggled to establish a viable local order. Even as the French Operation Serval transitioned to the much more geographically expansive Operation Barkhane and then the U.N. Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) over time deployed 12,500 peacekeepers into the country,<sup>1</sup> peace and security have been elusive. In January 2017, a massive suicide car bomb ripped through a gathering of former combatants who registered with the government body responsible for coordinating joint patrols of armed non-state groups and Malian forces, which was meant to be an essential confidence-building measure between the different armed groups and

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, “MINUSMA Facts and Figures,” <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/facts.shtml>.

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the government. The attack, claimed by a wing of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), killed at least 61 combatants and Malian soldiers, though reported tolls were much higher.<sup>2</sup> At least 150 people have been killed in attacks in 2017 alone, many in attacks claimed by a fusion of jihadist groups active in Mali whose creation was announced in March 2017, the Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen, or the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM).<sup>3</sup>

The current difficulties in establishing effective and sustainable local order under the government’s control echo previous struggles in Mali to establish effective and inclusive governance. Various Malian governments have responded to rebellion and non-state violence through a mixture of repression, decentralization, reintegration of combatants, and cooptation of local elites who had their own interests and wars to fight, licit and illicit businesses to expand and defend, and political and economic scores to settle.

In response to the 2012 rebellion, the government of Mali has revived these same old policies while governance failures and corruption persist and abound. Not only has the government shown itself to be ineffective before, the situation in Mali has changed significantly since even the signing of the 2015 accords, raising further questions about the government’s ability to uphold its end of the bargain.

There is also a real danger that armed groups will once again appropriate governance in the north, whittling away at the influence of the state in an insidious manner. Such local governance by local armed groups may not always be bad for local populations in northern Mali. Some may even welcome such a development. But such a policy continues to undermine the state. Moreover, any semblance of peace between armed groups rests on a series of tenuous agreements kept in place for the moment by access to trafficking revenue and the prospect of funds from the government and international community.<sup>4</sup>

2 “Mali: Les premières patriouilles mixtes font leur apparition à Gao,” *Jeune Afrique*, February 23, 2017, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/facts.shtml>.

3 Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l’Homme and the Association Malienne des Droits de l’Homme, “Mali: Terrorism and Impunity Jeopardize the Fragile Peace Agreement,” May 2017, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/mali/mali-terrorism-and-impunity-jeopardize-the-fragile-peace-agreement>.

4 Ibid; also see “Rapport sur l’évolution du processus du paix au Mali,” *Promediation*, December 2, 2015.



This report traces the evolution of local orders in Mali. It briefly discusses past governance practices and the outcomes of prior rebellions in the 1960s, 1990s, and 2000s. It then turns to the period following the 2012 peace accords and presents analysis on the current prospects for these agreements, as well as other stabilization and state-building measures. This report also analyzes the ways in which governance shortcomings continue to undermine security in the country. Indeed, existing government and international efforts to make short-term peace in Mali are at odds with long-term stabilization goals. Counterproductively, they reinforce social and ethnic tensions and strengthen non-state armed groups while hampering efforts to establish capable and legitimate state institutions in northern Mali. Regional and international actors should not allow the state to repeat past mistakes in the hope of a creating a different outcome.

Several specific policy implications follow from this analysis and basic argument:

- Any and all local political solutions to Mali's conflict must include the central state and be buttressed with support from the Malian government.
- Long-term stability requires effective, sustained state-building efforts and security sector reform.
- The government of Mali should stop using ethnic or tribal militias to maintain security in northern Mali, as this approach has consistently backfired and only further fueled communal violence and feelings of being ignored by the state. At the same time, international agreements like the Algiers Accords must be implemented fully, including efforts at decentralization accompanied by government support and real autonomy, to allow genuine power-sharing in the north, rather than parceling out pieces of territory to armed groups.
- Finally, while local agreements can form the basis of more durable cessations of violence, these agreements must take place in consultation with diverse local populations. The Malian government and its international partners must be sensitive to the desires and concerns of these communities, rather than accommodating just the requests (or demands) of armed groups due to a mistaken assumption that these groups fully represent the interests of communities in the areas in which they operate.

## Historical background

It is easy but incomplete to view northern Mali as having always been separate from the country's south. However, from the colonial period through the present, much of Mali has been ruled according to various exceptional regimes that have done little to build durable local governance and a sustainable and legitimate presence of the central state. Colonial policy, especially toward nomadic populations like the Tuareg, was to keep their purportedly unique culture free of "modern" influences. What efforts were put in place to provide education in French government schools like the famous "hostage schools," set up to forcibly educate the sons of local chiefs, often failed. Concerned with the spread of French cultural and educational influences, Tuareg leaders in particular often sent only the sons of subservient families to the schools to fulfill the mandated quota. But for the majority of the Tuareg, educational opportunities were few.<sup>5</sup>

The restructuring of the French colonial state in the 1950s gave increasing autonomy to territorial governments in Africa, including in the Soudan Français, today known as Mali. But it also helped sow the seeds of discontent between the territorial government in Bamako and some northern populations, particularly certain Tuareg leaders and groupings. In 1960, an independent state of Mali centered on Bamako emerged, but uncertainties that were already present during the colonial period arose as to the ethnic composition of the new state. Moreover, late colonial French attempts to carve out a separate Saharan territory, the Common Organization of Saharan Regions (OCRS), drew support from some Saharan Arabs and Tuaregs who were opposed to living under black southern Malian rule.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Baz Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 36-40. The Tuareg from the Niger River Bend had markedly higher participation rates in education as well as territorial politics than those from the Kel Adagh and from the more northerly Adrar des Ifoghas mountain area.

<sup>6</sup> The history of racial coding and classification in the Sahara and Sahel is incredibly complex. Ideas of color classification were influenced by French imperialism and in particular 19th century ideas of scientific racism prominent among colonial officials. Still, local ideas of racial difference, particularly as related to the question of who could or could not be legally enslaved under Islamic law, long predate the colonial period. For further details, see Bruce Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 299-305. It is also important to note that many Tuareg and Arab populations supported inclusion in Mali, although the support of some figures for a specifically French Saharan enclave fueled mistrust in Bamako of the north.

These maneuvers coincided with a looming, troubled, and uncertain succession among the Ifoghas, a Tuareg tribal confederation that had benefitted under French rule. The Ifoghas were split as to whether or not to join the new state of Mali, with two brothers of the deceased confederation leader adopting different positions.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on some of the methods of the French colonial regime, the new Malian national government intervened to appoint as the new tribal leader the brother who supported remaining within Mali, despite the fact that the Ifoghas tribal council chose the brother who supported seeking independence.<sup>8</sup> These maneuverings combined with more long-standing tensions helped spark a rebellion from 1962 to 1964. Although the rebellion was rather limited in its scope and potency, the new Malian army repressed it brutally.

Thus, the Malian national government acquired early on the habit of manipulating tribal affairs when it found it expedient to do so. Even though the one-party state was officially staunchly opposed to traditional chiefs that helped control territory during the colonial period, the Bamako-centered state also maintained the rule of the chiefs in certain northern communities. Thus, in these places, the Bamako government chose to retain the social and political hierarchies that were abolished in the rest of the country.<sup>9</sup> This institutional and ideological schism, the distrust of Bamako among northern populations, and physical repression employed by the new state all strongly reinforced the perceived divisions between northern and southern Mali.

### The 1990 rebellion

Another rebellion erupted in northern Mali in 1990, eventually descending into internecine and often ethnic-based violence. The issue of local governance played a crucial role not only in the affiliations that armed groups chose, but in the conflict settlement as well. Even pro-government militia groups often acted in response to local disputes. The

**“...the Malian national government acquired early on the habit of manipulating tribal affairs when it found it expedient to do so.”**

<sup>7</sup> Lecocq, 164-166.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 124-126. Also see Thomas Cantens and Gaël Raballand, “Une Frontière très très longue, un peu difficile à vivre: le nord du Mali et ses frontières,” *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*, February 2016, <https://www.frstrategie.org/publications/recherches-documents/web/documents/2016/201603.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> See Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 65.



Malian government had only peripheral influence over some of these matters, even when it provided key support to local groups, such as the Ganda Koy (Masters of the Land), which represented largely (but not exclusively) sedentary populations.<sup>10</sup>

The 1990 rebellion had at its core fighters who had lived and often received military training and combat experience in Libya. Many of the fighters had left Mali in the preceding decades in search of work opportunities following crippling droughts and were given military training opportunities in camps set up by Moammar Gadhafi. Some even fought with Libyan forces in Lebanon and Chad.<sup>11</sup> During the 1990 rebellion, many of these fighters joined the Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad (MPA) under the leadership of Iyad Ag Ghali. The movement set out an ambitious nationalist agenda and sought to abolish many of the caste and tribal distinctions that it argued inhibited the unity of Tuareg populations.<sup>12</sup>

The leadership of the rebellion helped prompt a military coup under then-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré (known as ATT) that overthrew the dictator Moussa Traoré. The 1992 National Pact, signed by ATT and a rebel umbrella group, put a formal end to the rebellion, although the worst violence would come after the rebellion's technical conclusion. The terms of the deal included the integration of some rebels into the armed forces; increased autonomy for areas with large Tuareg populations and the creation of a new region in Kidal; and special tax incentives and development money for the north. The pact also paved the way for a broader decentralization in Mali.<sup>13</sup>

10 Interviews with Songhai and Arab notables from the Gao region, Bamako, Mali, February 2013; also see Charles Grémont et al., *Les Liens Sociaux au Nord-Mali: Entre fleuve et dunes* (Paris: Karthala, 2004), 50; Andrew McGregor, "The Sons of the Land: Tribal Challenges to the Conquest of Northern Mali," *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor* 10 (2012).

11 For a fuller discussion of the 1990 rebellion, its evolution, and its eventual resolution, see Alex Thurston and Andrew Lebovich, "A Handbook on Mali's 2012-2013 Crisis," *Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought*, September 2, 2013, <http://buffett.northwestern.edu/documents/working-papers/ISITA-13-001-Thurston-Lebovich.pdf>; also see International Crisis Group, "Mali: Avoiding Escalation" (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2012), 2-5; Stéphanie Pézard and Michael Shurkin, "Achieving Peace in Northern Mali: Past Agreements, Local Conflicts, and the Prospects for a Durable Settlement," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), 12-16, [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR800/RR892/RAND\\_RR892.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR892/RAND_RR892.pdf).

12 For details on the hierarchies, see Lecocq, 3-16.

13 On the history of decentralization in Mali, see Susanna Wing and Brehima Kassibo, "Mali: Incentives and Challenges for Decentralization," in *Decentralization in Africa: The Paradox of State Strength*, J. Tyler Dickovick and James S. Wunsch, eds. (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 2014), 117-119.

After the pact was signed, however, the rebellion splintered into several groups, each dissatisfied in their own way with the outcome of the peace deal. Even though each of the groups represented certain ethnic, tribal, or caste groups, political and power concerns were also high on the groups' agendas.<sup>14</sup> With the penetration of conflict into Mali's communities, local populations found it necessary over time to choose sides and align themselves with armed groups regardless of whether or not they supported the initial rebellion. These alignments in turn empowered armed groups to seek greater political concessions for themselves and their constituencies, such as their families and members of their tribal confederations.<sup>15</sup> Reprisals by the Malian army against local populations in the north only exacerbated the communities' needs to ally with armed groups in order to ensure self-protection. In some areas, the absence of the central state thus helped local populations feel more secure. But the problematic state presence or outright absence also reinforced armed groups, allowed for a greater presence of armed actors, and over time deepened, rather than defused, the civil war.<sup>16</sup> In short, the failure of the state to provide security and conflict resolution support forced local populations into dependence on local armed groups. The central government thus inadvertently codified their perceived legitimacy to defend local communities and provide benefits for them. This also formally removed the state from some aspects of governance in the north without providing communities the means to pursue real autonomy, instead leading the state to govern through chosen local actors.

### Failures of governance, economies of violence, and rebellion renewed

On paper, at least, the Malian government in the late 1990s and early 2000s proceeded according to its promises in the 1992 National Pact to integrate ex-combatants from the 1990s rebellion into the armed services and continue the process of decentralization. But soon after the return of ATT to power—this time by the ballot box in 2002—the methods and

<sup>14</sup> The ARLA, headed by the Imghad Tuareg El Hajj Gamou, protested against the predominance of traditional chiefs and elite groupings within Tuareg society. While seen as representing the communal interests of the Chamanamass Tuareg, the FPLA also opposed what it considered as the ARLA's abandonment of the goals of the rebellion. See Grémont et al., 50.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 26-30.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 47-48, Lecocq: 280.

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patterns of governance in central and northern Mali began to shift again. Instead of enforcing and implementing the national accords negotiated to end the rebellions, ATT and successive Malian governments pursued irregular policies to maintain order amid growing instability and a rising drug economy. Even the international community succumbed to this veneer of democratic stability in Mali, ignoring the deep and increasing governance deficiencies and communal tensions that would continue to fuel conflict.

While the decentralization of institutions, particularly of communal governance, took place in Mali, the newly-formed administrative districts received few of the promised and necessary resources to actually govern.<sup>17</sup> This problem arose in part from the limited wherewithal of the central state to empower the new decentralized units and in part from the fact that the central state itself lacked resources and capacity.<sup>18</sup> As one local mayor from the Timbuktu region explained, “you need to have a state before you can decentralize it.”<sup>19</sup> By around 2003, ATT abandoned genuine efforts at decentralization. He abolished centers created to provide training to local officials and kept power and money in central government institutions.<sup>20</sup> This meant that decentralized institutions were deprived of the tools necessary to function autonomously from the central government, or even to function at all.

This hollowing out of local state institutions came amid the arrival in 2003 of the Algerian jihadist group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), in northern Mali. The predecessor to al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the GSPC established a major kidnapping economy in the region that by 2014 would grow to at least \$91.5 million, and probably more.<sup>21</sup> Local government officials came to play key roles as intermediaries in hostage negotiations for Europeans kidnapped first by GSPC and later on AQIM. That role made them invaluable allies for the Malian government, but also strengthened their independent

17 Susanna Wing, “Mali’s Precarious Democracy and the Causes of Conflict,” *United States Institute of Peace*, May 2013.

18 *Ibid.*, 7.

19 Author’s interview with Timbuktu-area official, Bamako, Mali, February 2013.

20 Joseph Brunet-Jailly, “Le Mali sous tutelle de la ‘communauté internationale’: une impasse!” *Médiapart*, July 18, 2016, <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/joseph-brunet-jailly/blog/180716/le-mali-sous-tutelle-de-la-communaute-internationale-une-impasse>.

21 Rukmini Callimachi, “Paying Ransoms, Europe Bankrolls Qaeda Terror,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 2014, [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/30/world/africa/ransoming-citizens-europe-becomes-al-qaedas-patron.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/30/world/africa/ransoming-citizens-europe-becomes-al-qaedas-patron.html?_r=0).

resource base as they could keep a cut of the ransom revenues. Beyond local officials, local communities also benefited from ransom income as well as growing narcotics trafficking, so much so that formerly subordinate communities could upend previously dominant social orders, refusing to pay traditional taxes to elite groups and sometimes kidnapping leaders from these traditionally dominant groups.<sup>22</sup>

Not just armed anti-state actors, but local officials also became increasingly involved in the growing drug trafficking economy, which was augmented by the rerouting of cocaine smuggling to Europe through West Africa.<sup>23</sup> Eventually, national government officials also became deeply implicated in the region's various illicit economies. Prominent military leaders like Colonel Lamana Ould Bou—who helped lead largely Arab fighters organized along ethnic lines—also became entangled in the illicit economies, and by extension implicated in jihadist networks.<sup>24</sup> Both local and national government officials found it profitable to tolerate the presence of jihadist groups like the GSPC and AQIM, even though such groups deeply threatened local order and the national state.

This decay of national and local state institutions, combined with long-simmering resentments and grievances, provided the backdrop to yet another rebellion in the mid-2000s. In 2006, a Tuareg officer reintegrated into the Malian national military, Hassan Ag Fagaga, deserted with a group of his men and took up arms against the government.<sup>25</sup> Iyad Ag Ghali, who had assumed a role as a key interlocutor between the Tuareg and the central government, took charge of the rebellion in an attempt to bring it to a conclusion. However, other groups persisted with attacks on government forces. With the national forces proving unable

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22 This change in social order is detailed in Judith Scheele, "Tribus, États et fraude: la région frontalière algéro-malienne," *Etudes Rurales* 184 (July 2009): 79-94, <https://etudesrurales.revues.org/10486>.

23 See, for example, Peter Tinti, "Illicit Trafficking and Instability in Mali: Past, Present, and Future," *The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, January 2014, <http://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2014-Crime.pdf>; and Wolfram Lacher, "Challenging the Myth of the Drug-Terror Nexus in the Sahel," *West Africa Commission on Drugs*, September 2013, <http://www.wacommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Challenging-the-Myth-of-the-Drug-Terror-Nexus-in-the-Sahel-2013-08-19.pdf>.

24 International Crisis Group, "Mali: Avoiding Escalation." According to one Arab notable and businessman from north of Timbuktu, Ould Bou's illicit activities and dealings with AQIM were made possible precisely because he had helped constitute groups of Arab fighters to oppose Tuareg rebels after 2006. Interview with Arab notable and businessman from the Timbuktu region, Bamako, Mali, January 2017.

25 See Pézard and Shurkin, 16-17.

to effectively put down the rebellion, the ATT government resorted to raising ethnic militias to fight the rebels. One of the militias was under the leadership of El Hajj Gamou, while the Arab officer Abderrahmane Ould Meydou led another group. The militias' extortion and brutality toward local communities alienated local populations from local and national elites, and also strained local communal relationships. In an echo of colonial policies for managing conquest in the desert, the state thus again sought to play tribal and ethnic groups against each other.

These pent-up and growing grievances provided fertile ground for new political entrepreneurs to mobilize against the national government and local elites aligned with the central state, even after the 2006 rebellion subsided. In 2010, young northern students and intellectuals established the National Movement of the Azawad (MNA) and announced their intention to seek the eventual independence of northern Mali.<sup>26</sup> Embracing the idea of an independent Azawad, thousands of Malian fighters returning from Libya in late 2011 joined the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA), formed in late 2011 after a series of meetings at Zakak, in northern Mali. That was partially the consequence of the government's failure to deal with the returning combatants even-handedly. While Imghad Tuareg<sup>27</sup> fighters were welcomed back and many immediately reintegrated into the armed forces under the command of El Hajj Gamou, other Tuareg fighters were not.<sup>28</sup> The MNLA's ranks were also crucially reinforced by soldiers deserting the Malian army.

On the military battlefield, the MNLA quickly proved successful in seizing territory in northern Mali. In April 2012, it declared the independent state of Azawad and formed its government, publishing a list of cabinet appointees. However, the MNLA, too, could not overcome

<sup>26</sup> Andy Morgan, "The Causes of the Uprising in Northern Mali," *Think Africa Press*, February 6, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Tuareg social and family groupings are not the subject of this paper, but "Imghad" is a largely social distinction within the traditionally hierarchical categorizations of Tuareg society, denoting a status beneath "noble" groupings. Over time and especially recently, these tensions have helped solidify the identity of social classes into something closer to communal distinctions, and the tensions remain an important part of the conflict between Tuareg groups. See Baz Lecocq, et al., "One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts: A multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided republic of Mali," *Review of African Political Economy* 40 (2013), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03056244.2013.799063?journalCode=crea20>.

<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that other Tuareg fighters may not have felt welcome under Gamou's command, or simply may not have wanted to be reintegrated. Arnaud Jouve, "Touaregs, les rebellions," *RFI*, April 15, 2016; interview with Tuareg notable close to the MNLA, Paris, France, July 2015.

the fundamental challenges, divisions, and rivalries of the region. Thus, the MNLA was soon swept aside by a coalition of jihadist groups including AQIM; the Movement for One and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), a splinter group from AQIM;<sup>29</sup> and Ansar al-Din, largely composed of Ifoghas Tuareg.

Each of these groups sought to deliver basic governance and provide rudimentary social and public services, particularly in Kidal and Timbuktu. With resources from the region's smuggling economies, including the taxation of smuggling convoys, AQIM financed development projects such as house construction and well digging. AQIM also organized medical clinics for nomadic populations, handing out medicine and performing free examinations for both people and animals.<sup>30</sup> The quality of services and governance delivered varied widely among the groups, in part reflecting the varied physical and social environments where each group ruled, and in part reflecting the complex relationships between the armed groups and the different cities and towns that they occupied.<sup>31</sup>

To varying extents, the armed groups, in particular MUJAO, also played on local rivalries to recruit fighters. By joining the jihadist groups, the recruits felt they were protecting their communities from the alleged abuses committed by MNLA fighters.<sup>32</sup> Despite the purported claims of the jihadists to represent local communities, and despite the region's deep and decades-long sense of marginalization, many members of local communities nonetheless expressed their anger at being abandoned by the central state in Bamako.<sup>33</sup>

29 MUJAO split from AQIM in December 2011. In the summer of 2013, most of MUJAO merged with fighters of the AQIM commander Mokhtar Belmokhtar to form the group al-Mourabitoun, which in turn rejoined AQIM in December 2015. See Mohammed Mahmoud Abou al-Ma'ali, "Al-Qaeda and its allies in the Sahel and the Sahara," *Al-Jazeera Center for Studies*, May 1, 2012, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/mritems/Documents/2012/4/30/2012430145241774734Al%20Qaeda%20and%20its%20allies%20in%20the%20Sahel%20and%20the%20Sahara.pdf>; and Andrew Lebovich, "The Hotel Attacks and Militant Realignment in the Sahara-Sahel Region," *CTC Sentinel*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-hotel-attacks-and-militant-realignment-in-the-sahara-sahel-region>.

30 Author's interviews with local officials and notables, Bamako, February 2013; and author's correspondence with a U.S. Special Forces officer formerly deployed to Mali, March 2012.

31 For a detailed study of the governance and services provided in the context of the complex politics in northern Mali, see, Luca Raineri and Francesco Strazzari, "State, Secession, and Jihad: The Micropolitical Economy of Conflict in Northern Mali," *African Security* 8, no. 4 (December 2015): 249-271.

32 Author's interviews with residents of Gossi and Bourem, Bamako, Mali, February 2013 and August 2015. See also Raineri and Strazzari; and Sangaré.

33 Author's interviews with northern Mali residents, Bamako, February 2013, August 2015, January-February 2017.



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Even (or especially) with the arrival of ostensibly international or pan-regional jihadist groups, different political ideologies and social and community cleavages within new and old armed groups in the region remained salient. Local agendas and local constituencies also continued to drive the behavior and decisions of the groups. Thus, not surprisingly, alignments remained fluid, and in turn, divisions among the armed groups proved malleable. Groups would split apart and fight each other, but even sworn enemies could find a way to come back together and renew their alliances or form new groupings when it was politically advantageous or when local or external conditions necessitated it.<sup>34</sup>

### Efforts to restore government authority and local order after the 2013 French intervention

As detailed above, the government’s long-term failure to effectively and even-handedly deal with non-jihadist and jihadist armed groups prepared a fertile ground for the 2012 rebellion, one that emerged from a series of confluent local and regional events. The social and communal tensions that worsened in the 1990s, and which the Malian national state failed to address, could not be suppressed through the divide-and-rule approach to the ethnic communities that the state had engaged in for years. In fact, as the state became more dependent on armed proxies and the rule of local strongmen, it only exacerbated the divisions and their explosiveness.

To be clear, the 2012 rebellion and its aftermath in Mali cannot be reduced to simple ethnic or communal rivalries. Nor can they be reduced to rivalries over trading and trafficking. Although both played significant roles in fostering and shaping the environment around the rebellion, the social and political fabric in northern Mali (as well as the country’s center) are more complex. They are also at times fluid, and thus they defy simplistic characterizations. Nor does the delineation of northern and central Mali capture the overlapping relationships and migration of individuals and groups between these geographic and political spaces. Although analysts and even locals use terms like “the north” and “the center” to delineate complex areas, these terms are at

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<sup>34</sup> One could equally argue that this malleable formation and flexibility applies just as well to regional jihadist groups as it does to non-jihadist armed groups.

best approximations and must be understood as such.

Having established this, during the rebellion and after the French intervention in January 2013, the communal, economic, and political alignments became more concrete and took on new importance.

The intensity of the divisions became apparent in the various peace negotiations and political stabilization efforts that took place after the French intervention nominally took northern Mali back from the overt control of jihadists and Tuareg separatists. For example, the Ouagadougou Accords signed by the MNLA and the movement that ostensibly broke away from Iyad Ag Ghali's Ansar al-Din, the High Council for the Unity of the Azawad (HCUA),<sup>35</sup> and the government of Mali in June 2013 were never meant to provide a permanent resolution to the rebellion. Instead, they were only intended to pave the way for the 2013 Mali presidential elections, encourage further talks between the government and the rebels, and allow for the reinsertion of Malian security forces and officials in the north.<sup>36</sup> Although the accord created enough space for the elections to take place, they failed in the other limited objectives and reflected the accelerated international push for normalcy in Mali at the cost of a more deliberative political process.

Moreover, a deadly battle between Malian armed forces and pro-independence Tuareg and Arab fighters in Kidal in May 2014 dealt a significant blow to these limited and halting efforts to reinstall state authority in the north. It also led more directly to the creation of the Groupe Autodéfense Toureg Imghad et Alliés (GATIA),<sup>37</sup> an Imghad Tuareg militia believed to be led by loyalist Malian army Colonel El Hajj Gamou. This new militia closely resembled a prior one constituted to suppress the Tuareg rebellion of 2006. For the following several months amid political negotiations in Algiers, GATIA as well as an anti-separatist

35 Although the HCUA publicly broke away from Ansar al-Din after the French intervention, many of the group's main leaders had long-standing ties to Ag Ghali, and some, like the group's military chief Cheick Ag Aoussa (assassinated by still-unknown parties in Kidal in October 2016) were widely believed to have maintained close ties to Ag Ghali. See for instance "Mise en oeuvre de l'Accord: la France accuse le HCUA de 'proximité avec ançardine,'" *Studio Tamani*, June 9, 2016, <http://www.studiotamani.org/index.php/politique/7951-mise-en-oeuvre-de-l-accord-la-france-accuse-le-hcu-a-de-proximite-avec-ancardine>.

36 "Accord Preliminaire à l'Élection Présidentielle et aux Pourparlers Inclusifs de Paix au Mali," June 2013, <http://scd.rfi.fr/sites/filesrfi/accord%20signé%20à%20Ouagadougou%20le%2018%20juin.pdf>. See also Pézard and Shurkin, 5-7 and 24.

37 "Un nouveau groupe armé créé par les Touareg dans le nord du Mali," *Agence France-Presse*, August 14, 2014.

wing of the Arab Movement of the Azawad (MAA),<sup>38</sup> fought on multiple occasions with units from the MNLA, HCUA, and the anti-government wing of the MAA. These anti-government forces formed an umbrella group—the Coordination of Movements of the Azawad (CMA)—in the summer of 2014. In June 2014, the GATIA, the anti-separatist MAA, and several other groups formed a counter-umbrella body called the Plateforme.

Despite this ongoing fighting, the Plateforme and CMA moved in fits and starts toward a peace deal under at times intense political and financial pressure from the international community. Especially France and Algeria once again tried to shepherd Mali's various combatant groups to negotiate a settlement.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless the international community never developed adequate control over the warring parties and their constituencies to force settlements or make them stick.

Thus in May 2015, for example, a peace deal was signed in Bamako between the central government and Plateforme, but without the CMA present. In June 2015, another deal—the Algiers Accord—was signed between the two main armed umbrella groups (the Plateforme and the CMA) and the Malian government. But once again, there were notable absences among other key militant groups.<sup>40</sup> The deals often ended up being peace arrangements only on paper, with the armed groups having little inclination to actually make peace. As with previous accords, external pressure was related to creating a peace deal, with the hope of resolving underlying political and social tensions afterwards. These piecemeal steps taken to resolve the conflict have in turn created breakaway groups, spurred more internal violence, and accelerated competition for access to resources and benefits.

The Algiers Accords offer a wide-ranging set of prescriptions for the future of Mali in line with past peace accords. These include a revision of Mali's constitution, increased decentralization and autonomy, the

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38 This is not to be confused with the wing of the MAA associated with the Coordination of Movements of the Azawad (CMA).

39 See International Crisis Group, "Mali: la paix à marche forcée?" (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2015), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/west-africa/mali/mali-imposed-peace>.

40 For example, despite his role as secretary general of the MNLA and later of the CMA, Bilal Ag Acherif was not in attendance and did not sign the final Accord on behalf of the CMA. Ag Acherif claims illness kept him away from the signing, though it is also possible that his absence reflected ongoing dissension among MNLA commanders over the terms of the Accord and prospects for peace with Mali.

integration of fighters into Mali's government and armed forces, and the eventual return of Malian armed forces and government throughout the north.<sup>41</sup> But these accords replicated some of the same problematic arrangements established in prior peace deals and implemented policies that echoed those of ATT. These include a recourse to decentralization as a solution to all problems, a de facto ceding of political space and territorial governance to armed groups, and an effort to coopt armed groups by offering them slots in the armed forces. One example of this troubling continuity is the creation in 2016 of the new regions of Taoudeni and Ménaka, sparsely populated areas of northern Mali with little to no governing infrastructure.<sup>42</sup> In fact, in March 2012, Mali's National Assembly passed a law to establish these new regions, and already at that time, the move was widely seen as an attempt to buy off powerful traffickers and businessmen by giving them official governmental posts as well as control over resources and the movement of people and goods within their regions.<sup>43</sup> Yet once again, the Malian government and the international community did not learn from past mistakes and simply resurrected that approach four years later.

Despite the deal, July and August 2015 witnessed brutal combat as well as the capture of the strategic town of Anéfis by GATIA forces.<sup>44</sup> Fighting continued into September 2015, before a combination of government pressure and local mediation from community and religious leaders helped calm tensions and organize a series of local meetings.<sup>45</sup> These meetings subsequently gave way to a set of local agreements first signed near Anéfis in October 2015 that aimed to settle differences between different communities through similar joint declarations.<sup>46</sup>

41 "Accord pour la Paix et la Reconciliation au Mali, Issu du Processus d'Alger," signed June 20, 2015, <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/mali/328671/peace-accord-translations/1-accord-paix-et-reconciliation-francais.pdf>.

42 In the cases of both Taudeni and Ménaka, despite the appointment of governors in early 2016, they initially resided in Timbuktu and Gao, both for security reasons and because government buildings to house the new regional authorities had not yet been built. Ménaka's Interim Authorities were sworn in in Ménaka in March 2017, while Taudeni's governor remains in Timbuktu at the time of writing.

43 Interviews with Malian political observers and former officials, Bamako, Mali, February 2013; also see Florent Blanc, "Ménaka nouvel enjeu de dénouement de la crise politico-sécuritaire du Mali," *Territoires de Paix*, June 12, 2015, <http://territoires.ecoledelapaix.org/mali/analyse-menaka-nouvel-enjeu-du-denuement-de-la-crise-politico-securitaire-du-mali>.

44 International Crisis Group, "Mali: La Paix Venue d'en Bas?" (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2015).

45 "Mali: les dessous d'une reconciliation," *Jeune Afrique*, October 27, 2015, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/274396/politique/mali-les-dessous-dune-reconciliation/>.

46 The texts of these agreements were circulated widely on social media accounts affiliated with the CMA, Plateforme, and their component groups, as well as the accounts of various spokespeople and regional observers. However, as far as the author knows, these documents have

Since the Anéfis Accords, both the Plateforme and CMA have publicly committed themselves to the implementation of the Algiers Accord.<sup>47</sup> Specifically, they embraced the creation of interim authorities and the implementation of U.N.-backed processes including joint patrols; operational mechanisms of coordination (MOC);<sup>48</sup> and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants.

Under these interim authorities, finally put in place in April 2017, each armed movement has named counselors to support reconstituted regional and local authorities to assist with DDR, elections organization, and other matters related to the implementation of the Algiers Accord. These authorities are intended to work alongside governors appointed by Bamako, with mixed security patrols made up of members from competing armed groups, which started under the supervision of French and U.N. forces after the deadly bombing in Gao in January 2017.<sup>49</sup>

However, these arrangements have already broken down several times<sup>50</sup> and the interim authorities were at various times delayed due to protests from armed groups and local populations unhappy with the process of establishing the authorities. These protests in some cases physically prevented the arrival of officials and personnel meant to establish the authorities, while in the case of Taoudenni the authorities have been established but are not seated in the region itself due to continuing security threats and lack of physical infrastructure.<sup>51</sup> Some argued that they did not include a wide enough cross-section of the population, especially in Gao and in Timbuktu, as well as the resulting composition of the authorities themselves.<sup>52</sup>

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not been compiled in any centralized and accessible manner online.

47 They have also at various times clashed, only to come back to the negotiating table when convenient. See for instance “Mali: à Kidal, le Gatia et les rebelles tombent d’accord,” *RFI*, February 7, 2016, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160207-mali-kidal-gatia-rebelles-tombent-accord-bamako>.

48 The MOC is intended to be a coordinating body for mixed patrols composed of the armed group signatories to the Algiers Accords.

49 “Mali: les premières patrouilles mixtes font leur apparition à Gao.”

50 “Plus de 50 morts au Mali au cours de cette semaine,” *Studio Tamani*, July 23, 2016, <http://www.studiotamani.org/index.php/politique/8395-plus-de-50-morts-au-mali-au-cours-cette-semaine>.

51 Baba Ahmed and Rémi Carayol, “Mali: un an après sa création, la région administrative de Taoudeni toujours sous le contrôle de la CMA et d’Aqmi,” *Jeune Afrique*, February 1, 2017.

52 In Kidal, for instance, the Plateforme balked at the naming of MNLA member and longtime influential rebel figure Hassane Ag Fagaga to the presidency of the regional council, before finally giving their ascent. In Gao, multiple armed groups initially blocked the installation in protest of their exclusion from the process. In Timbuktu, the authorities’ implementation has similarly been delayed due to opposition to the authorities’ composition and concern from different largely Tuareg and Arab groupings that they would be disadvantaged by the authorities’ creation. In

## Conclusions and key takeaways

The decades of on-again, off-again conflict and problematic approaches to the management of the Malian conflict have repeatedly produced a set of significant dynamics that have now come to fruition:

*First, both traditional leaders as well as commanders of armed group have managed to use the repeated phases of conflict to increase and consolidate their power or elevate their status as community leaders.*

To some extent, for example, El Hajj Gamou has managed to transform his rebel commander role of the 1990s into a position of an integrated military commander supporting Malian unity. This transformation allowed him to develop support among the Malian public during the rebellions of 2006 and 2012 and position himself as an emblematic community representative.<sup>53</sup> His election in February 2016 as the head of a new governing body of the Imghad Tuareg was a demonstration of his success in striking this balancing act and the consolidation of his power.<sup>54</sup> Thus, he has succeeded in reaffirming his role as a community leader and a representative of the communal identity of Imghad Tuareg, while managing to please Mali's government and southern Malian populations.

Similarly, other armed group leaders have taken on more overt roles within their respective communities. A founding member of the MNA and later the MNLA, Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, has at various times in 2015 and 2016 established local militias from the Dawsahak community.<sup>55</sup> In mid-2016, he announced the creation of another group, the Mouvement pour le Salut de l'Azawad (MSA).<sup>56</sup> Since then,

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Taoudéni, meanwhile, Malian authorities remain completely absent, and AQIM fighters as well as those belonging to the CMA maintain effective control of the region. "Mali: La nouvelle région de Taoudéni hors de contrôle," *Jeune Afrique*, June 17, 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/332903/politique/mali-nouvelle-region-de-taoudenni-de-contrôle/>.

<sup>53</sup> For years Gamou has frequently received hagiographic coverage in much of the Malian press, especially in contrast to formerly "integrated" army officers who deserted before the 2006 and 2012 rebellions.

<sup>54</sup> "Les Imghads s'organisent: El Hadj Gamou désigné chef de la communauté," *Maliweb*, February 29, 2016, <http://www.maliweb.net/nouvelles-brevs/les-imghads-sorganisent-el-hadj-gamou-designe-chef-de-la-communauté-1441042.html>.

<sup>55</sup> The Dawsahak are generally considered ethnically separate from Tuareg (Kel Tamasheq) as they speak a different language, but they are still seen as part of the broader Tamasheq world.

<sup>56</sup> The MSA, based largely in Ménaka but also in Gao, reportedly sought to counterbalance the HCUA within the CMA, although it subsequently fragmented into different components, again roughly along communal lines. See "Mali: Le mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad, nouveau groupe politico-militaire," *RFI*, September 11, 2016, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160911-mali-creation-msa-nouveau-mouvement-politico-militaire>.



he and Ag Gamou have worked more closely together to implement joint security patrols (not including the rest of the CMA) and to work with the Malian government in Ménaka.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, Tuareg fighters from the Timbuktu region (largely but not exclusively from the Kel Antessar tribal confederation) left the CMA in October 2016 to form the Congrès pour la Justice de l'Azawad (CJA) under the leadership of Colonel Abbas Ag Mohamed Ahmed and Kel Antessar Chief Abdoul Majid Ag Mohamed Ahmed.<sup>58</sup>

Other more problematic figures also managed to use the conflict to increase and consolidate their power. Alleged drug and cigarette traffickers such as Hanoune Ould Ali and Dina Ould Daya became leaders of the “anti-government” wing of the MAA and assumed or already occupied prominent communal roles.<sup>59</sup> Ould Ali signed several interim agreements on behalf of the MAA.<sup>60</sup> Ould Daya's name was present on early lists of the interim authorities in Taoudéni, and in March 2017 he seized checkpoints in Timbuktu along with the “pro-government” MAA wing to force new negotiations over who would control Taoudéni's regional council.<sup>61</sup> Both Ould Daya and Ould Ali previously helped organize Arab militias in the north, and they have also allegedly maintained ties to jihadist groups in the past.<sup>62</sup>

57 Katito Wadada, “Mali: Sécurité locale à Ménaka et Talatayt: Le tandem Acharatoumane-Gamou pour un ‘sauve qui peut,’” *Le Combat*, May 16, 2017.

58 The President of the CJA is Azarock Ag Inaborchad, also of the Kel Antessar, but Abdoul Majid Ag Mohamed has represented the group publicly and acted in part as an interface with the Malian government. See Kassim Traoré, “Présidence du CJA: Azarock Ag Inaborchad est le président actif” *aBamako*, February 1, 2017.

59 Ould Ali is a prominent member of Gao's Arab community and is related to a Ouled Idriss, an Arab tribal grouping located primarily east and north of Timbuktu. Boris Thioly, “Cocaïne: révélations sur la poudrière Malienne,” *L'Express*, May 28, 2015, [http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/afrique/cocaine-revelations-sur-la-poudriere-malienne\\_1683121.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/afrique/cocaine-revelations-sur-la-poudriere-malienne_1683121.html); “Mali: Plateforme, CMA et trafic de drogue,” *Jeune Afrique*, September 7, 2015, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/262348/politique/mali-plateforme-cma-et-traffic-de-drogue/>; Alpha Mahamane Cissé, “Départ mouvementé d'Aly Ould Hamaha du MAA: Des proches de Dina Ould Daya contestent son appartenance au mouvement,” *L'Indicateur du Renouveau*, February 23, 2015.

60 Thioly, “Cocaïne: révélations sur la poudrière Malienne”; Wolfram Lacher, “Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 13, 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/13/organized-crime-and-conflict-in-sahel-sahara-region-pub-49360>.

61 “Tomboctou et Taoudéni: Vers un consensus autour de l'installation des autorités intérimaires,” *L'Indicateur du Renouveau*, March 10, 2017.

62 Ould Daya's militia, the Front National de la Libération de l'Azawad (FNLA), seized parts of Timbuktu in April 2012 before being forced out by AQIM. Other members of the “pro-government” MAA were MUJAO commanders during the occupation, including Yoro Ould Daha. Ould Daya and Ould Ali both come from clan groupings from which some young men reportedly joined jihadist groups, though this should not in any way be interpreted to mean that the communal groupings as a whole joined or supported jihadist groups.

To sum up, as the conflict in Mali has fragmented, the continued recourse to arms as protection for communities and as a means to make demands of the government has either pushed traditional leaders to align themselves with armed groups or elevated leaders of armed group to positions of community leadership. This repeated militarization and securitization of communities, already present in the 1990s and after the 2012 rebellion, will make it harder for Mali's government to re-implant itself or assert a real presence in areas controlled by armed communities.<sup>63</sup> This response can be understandable given the threat posed to communities by other armed groups as well as the Malian security forces, and in the short term it may be the best option for restoring a modicum of local security. It nonetheless has long-term implications for creating any stable, broad-based governance in northern Mali. It will also become even more pronounced if, as some Malians want, negotiations are ever seriously undertaken with Iyad Ag Ghali.<sup>64</sup>

*Second, traffickers have been similarly able to use the conflict and their illicit proceeds to increase and consolidate their power.* Over time, armed activism came to overlap strongly with contraband smuggling. The traffickers and businessmen involved in illicit trades, particularly drug trafficking, have sought to convert their financial profits into social capital with local communities, as described above. They do so through a variety of means—paying for new mosques; reinvesting in other businesses; and also buying herds of camels, sheep, or cattle, which are forms of material wealth and social capital that remain highly salient in the Sahel.<sup>65</sup> Their illicit proceeds are thus welcomed by local communities which also benefit economically from the smuggling enterprises, although drug trafficking is still seen somewhat differently than other forms of illicit trade.<sup>66</sup> These actors that were formerly

**“... as the conflict in Mali has fragmented, the continued recourse to arms as protection for communities and as a means to make demands of the government has either pushed traditional leaders to align themselves with armed groups or elevated leaders of armed group to positions of community leadership.”**

63 Already in early 2013, for instance, Arab community leaders already indicated in interviews that communities were stockpiling arms in order to protect themselves, just as was the case in the 1990s. Interviews with Arab community leaders, Bamako, February 2013.

64 Negotiations with Iyad Ag Ghali have been a point of contention among different Malian political parties since the rebellion. A national conference held in Bamako in late March and early April 2017 passed a series of non-binding resolutions, two of which recommended talks with Ag Ghali and Amadou Kouffa, formerly the head of Ansar al-Din's Katibat Macina and now part of the GSIM, a movement born of the merger of Ansar al-Din, AQIM, and al-Mourabitoun. Ag Ghali leads the new group, whose announcement in March 2017 has been followed by near-daily attacks in northern and central Mali against French, Malian, and U.N. forces. See for instance Cyril Bensimon, “Parler ou ne pas parler avec les djihadistes, un dilemne malien,” *Le Monde*, April 25, 2017; also see Yvan Guichaoua, “L'Horizon compromis de la force Barkhane au Mali,” *The Conversation*, May 10, 2017.

65 International Crisis Group, “Mali: La paix venue d'en bas?”

66 On the complicated moral calculations of traffickers and their communities, see Judith Scheele, “Garage or Caravanserais: Saharan Connectivity in al-Khalil, Northern Mali,” in *Saharan*

confined to the economic sphere have thus taken on direct governance roles and increased their legitimacy.<sup>67</sup>

Increasingly, these local “big men” need to be included in peace accords in order for the agreements to function. However, their inclusion should not be interpreted as being only about the division of the spoils of the drug trade and other trafficking, as is sometimes alleged. These figures have political power and govern local areas. Yet their continued operations also pose long-term risks to stability in the region, creating a catch-22 that requires sustained attention and needs longer-term solutions to avoid recreating past overlaps between government and illicit or semi-licit gains.<sup>68</sup>

*Third, the very structures of peacemaking can create potential hindrances to lasting and effective governance.* On one hand, the interim authorities provision and the division of political posts among the armed groups embraced in the July 2016 agreement may represent a chance to calm tensions and lay the groundwork for future communal governance in Mali. On the other hand, local officials can, as they have in the past, use reintegration into government and security services to solidify their power and voters’ allegiance ahead of eventual elections since these posts provide opportunities for largesse and influence. Thus they also put power and local governance in the hands of armed groups, undermining the central state and minimizing opportunities for nonviolent local actors to participate in governance. In some areas like Gao, local officials and civilians resent the interim authorities as being forced upon them without consultation and without there being a need for them.<sup>69</sup>

Ad hoc or temporary measures tend to become engrained, and they require constant maintenance of a very careful balance of power among armed groups. These arrangements are therefore very fragile and constantly at risk of breaking down.

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*Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa*, James McDougall and Judith Scheele, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of the complexities surrounding this issue, see Andrew Lebovich, “The Risks of Deeper Engagement in Mali,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, August 3, 2016, [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_the\\_risks\\_of\\_deeper\\_engagement\\_in\\_mali\\_7089](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_risks_of_deeper_engagement_in_mali_7089).

<sup>69</sup> Maliki Diallo, “Sadou Harouna Diallo, Maire de Gao: ‘Les autorités intérimaires ne doivent pas concerner ma commune,’” *L’Indicateur de Renouveau*, July 22, 2016.

*The absence of the central state from large parts of the northern regions is particularly problematic, repeating deficiencies of the past.* The absence of the central state could reinforce the past feeling that the state has abandoned northern communities to armed groups even as the central state is needed to provide basic security.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, other communities justifiably fear repression and mistreatment at the hands of security services. Improving human rights practices of Malian security forces and more close supervision of Malian forces by their EU trainers in particular may help alleviate this issue to some extent.

*Paradoxically, the DDR process itself is fraught with challenges and increases the potential for conflict.* Tentative lists of fighters from armed groups to be reintegrated into the security services, or given other jobs or assistance, far exceed any reasonable estimates of fighters currently in the various armed groups active in Mali.<sup>71</sup> Even if initial lists are reduced, DDR will still need to base, demobilize, and pay a large number of fighters, well beyond what the international community has anticipated. In particular, the monetary incentive of salaries and other benefits from the process has caused various groups to enroll community members who never fought,<sup>72</sup> while others demand their own inclusion in the process.<sup>73</sup> It is not clear that the Malian government has the resources and wherewithal to integrate and support rival combatants at levels that would satisfy the armed groups and not set off instability among them. Additionally, this approach further confirms the pernicious sentiment among many Malians that the only way to make the government respond to political and social demands is to take up arms.

Rather than satisfying the extensive demands of each group, *the creation of these lists and potential posts in the military and government also*

70 Such disenchantment with state absence was commonly voiced by diverse northern populations during and after the 2012 rebellion and jihadist occupation of northern Mali. Author's interviews and personal communication with residents of Gao and Timbuktu regions, Bamako, Mali, February 2013 and January-February 2017.

71 Selma Mihoubi, "Mali: Un an après la signature de l'Accord d'Alger, quel avenir pour le nord?" *Jeune Afrique*, June 20, 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/334516/politique/mali-paix-ans-apres-signature-de-laccord-dalger/>; United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali," May 31, 2016, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/498](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/498).

72 Numerous interviews with armed group representatives and government officials, for instance, suggested that at least some of the fighters killed in the suicide bombing of the MOC in Gao were not fighters, but young herders or other local community members enrolled to fill the ranks and provide a source of income. Interviews conducted in Bamako, January-February 2017.

73 After the end of the 1990 rebellion, nearly 2,500 fighters were integrated either into the army or government. An additional 10,000 received some variety of financial assistance from the government and international community. Pézard and Shurkin, 15; Wing, 5.

*prolongs and deepens the potential for conflict between rival armed groups, political groups, and communities.* In the early 2000s, for example, such military posts provided the opportunity to control (or hamper) trade and trafficking routes. They also provided opportunities to exact retribution for past grievances against opponents and rival communities. That is all the more the case since the DDR process provides no answer to fighters and activists who still believe in an independent Azawad.

Moreover, despite the 2015 Algiers Accords and subsequent local agreements, insecurity has increased dramatically in the north as well as in Mali's center. Assassinations of rivals and score-settling among armed groups have continued despite these accords and other previous truces. And Mali today is awash in more weapons than ever before.

In the past, neither repression nor overly ambitious peace deals signed under international auspices have brought lasting stability to Mali. International aid for democratization, decentralization, and the integration and demobilization of fighters has not tangibly enhanced Mali's stability. Local initiatives for peace have had a more sustained impact.<sup>74</sup> Some of the communal agreements signed among armed groups since late 2015 promise to work toward social cohesion and conflict resolution, backed up by mixed security patrols comprising Malian forces and rival armed groups, some of which are already underway. These initiatives have a chance of making a genuine difference in resolving conflict and maintaining security.

### Policy recommendations

Rather than repeating failed approaches of the past, the international community should adopt these policy recommendations:

- Even when armed groups are given a license to be involved in short-term security arrangements in the north, the government of Mali should enforce peace equally among different communities, rather than leaving some communities in the hands of armed groups.

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<sup>74</sup> This was the case, for instance, with the 1994 Bourem Pact that led to a series of local peace arrangements that finally helped bring the 1990 rebellion to a close.

- Reinstating central government authority in northern Mali must also come with a thorough reform and reorganization of the Malian armed forces. These reform efforts must go beyond the training currently underway under the auspices of the EU Training Mission (EUTM), and EU member states should consider relaxing restrictions on troops to allow trainers to accompany Malian soldiers into the field after the end of their training cycles.
- For the near future, the international community will need to live with the persistence of smuggling economies in Mali. Any large-scale efforts to disrupt illicit economies will likely generate backlash from local communities and the armed groups linked to the targeted networks, which would be highly detrimental to peace processes. In the long-term, however, the government of Mali and the international community must undertake robust efforts to replace the illegal economies with viable, legal ones. The Malian government should also not selectively turn a blind eye to trafficking that benefits local allies, only while attempting to suppress that of its rivals. This would simply allow some groups to solidify their economic and military power over others, which could further fuel tension and violence between groups and communities.
- The U.N.-led DDR process must properly manage expectations related to the processes of cantonment, mixed patrols, and the number of combatants who can realistically be integrated into the Malian security services. It must also seek to provide other forms of financing, training, and job opportunities for legitimate combatants, understanding fully the difficulties inherent in assessing who did or did not fight. Crucially, integration efforts must be acceptable to Mali's populations. They must be accompanied by a genuine truth and reconciliation process and address the deep-seated anger at crimes committed during the rebellion.
- The international community must disburse its development aid and other assistance—planned at several hundred million dollars through the end of 2017—judiciously and with diligent monitoring. The assistance should foster Malian institutions and community processes to establish durable foundations for peace and development, rather than encourage corruption, waste, and further destabilization of the country.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Lebovich is a doctoral candidate in African history at Columbia University, as well as a visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). His dissertation focuses on Islamic reformist movements in Algeria, Mali, and Senegal during the late colonial and postcolonial periods. He has written extensively on security and politics in the contemporary Sahel and Maghreb. He has worked for the Open Society Initiative in Dakar, Senegal (OSIWA) and for the New America Foundation in Washington, DC. He has also lived, studied, and conducted field research in Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, Mali, and Niger.

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