

## *The Security Dilemma in Northeast Mali: Part Two*

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### **The Advancement to Terrorism**

Prior to last March, Mali was deemed to be by most Western countries as one of the most democratic, stable and peaceful nations in Western Africa. The Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure had only another month of office before he stepped down and elections were to be held throughout the country.

In March 2012, disgruntled soldiers on several military bases had a coup, led by Captain Amadou Sanogo, who was a little known officer and instructor at a military college in Bamako.

Sanogo stated to the media the reason for the anger amongst the soldiers was the widespread perception of corruption and looting of government funds by senior military personnel and government officials.<sup>1</sup> He also cited “a lack of training and equipment” provided to the troops in an attempt to thwart Tuareg rebels in the Northeast of Mali, many who fought as mercenaries for Gaddafi during the Libyan conflict. With sophisticated weapons, the Tuareg in January drove many of the Malian army units from several key towns in the region, such as Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu.

The heavily armed Tuareg force, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad is known by its French acronym, MVLA.<sup>2</sup> The Tuaregs, being primarily

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<sup>1</sup> Los Angeles Times, March 24, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Los Angeles Times, April 4, 2012, pg. A-3.

nomads, have never accepted a central government in Bamako and fought with the Malian Army in a revolt in the 1990s.

The coup by the Malian Army now allowed the Tuareg to expand their power and control in the remote north-east of the country, as army units abandoned towns and villages in an area covering more than 776,000 square kilometers. This is a territory three times the size of Britain complete with airports, arms dumps and training camps.<sup>3</sup> The MNLA in April proclaimed the three regions as an independent state called Azawad.

Later in the spring the MNLA worked out a deal with Islamic fundamentalists called Ansar Eddine.<sup>4</sup> The two groups agreed to join forces and set up a transitional government. Unfortunately, it quickly became noticeable that Ansar Eddine became indistinguishable from Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which favoured an Islamic state. Many of the MNLA supporters were concerned that such a position was a betrayal of their core principles of their rebellion against the Malian government: a secular state offering freedom of religion and lifestyle.

The MNLA chose to deal with Ansar Eddine because these fundamentalists had both money and guns; whereas the Tuareg had neither. AQIM at first allowed MNLA to take the lead, helping them capture the three northern regions in April. Since that time, AQIM has thrust the Tuaregs aside and have become the dominant force in the area.

AQIM and its offshoot Ansar Eddine quickly imposed sharia or Islamic law in the area. In many towns black flags were raised to show who was in control. In Timbuktu, eight of the city's sixteen mausoleums were razed; some dating back to the 1400s.<sup>5</sup> Clashes soon broke out in several towns between various factions of the MNLA and AQIM, as both groups pursued different objectives and ideologies. Needless to say, the tourism industry has been severely impacted from the power grab by al-Qaeda in this remote area.

On July 2, 2012, the chief prosecutor with the International Criminal Court stated: "My message to those involved in the destruction of the mausoleums in

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<sup>3</sup> Calgary Herald, July 14, 2012, p. A-18.

<sup>4</sup> The Economist, June 2, 2012, p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., footnote 3.

Timbuktu is clear – stop the destruction of the religious buildings now. This is a war crime which my office has authority to fully investigate.”<sup>6</sup>

With respect to intense pressure from the nations bordering Mali, Captain Sanogo signed an accord on April 6, 2012 agreeing to return the nation to constitutional rule. Under Article 36 of Mali’s constitution, the head of the national assembly becomes interim president in the event of a vacancy of powers.<sup>7</sup> On May 21, 2012, the interim President, Dioncounda Traore was set upon by angry protestors and beaten up at the presidential palace in Bamako. Mr. Traore left shortly thereafter for medical treatment in Paris and returned to Mali on July 27, 2012. He then announced the shape of a transitional authority government on his arrival.

On August 20 Mali’s Interim President D. Traore approved a new transitional government. The 31 member government replaced the transitional authority which was crippled by political infighting and failed to make progress in setting elections.

The President stated to the media the government has two priorities: to re-establish territorial integrity of Mali in the north and the second priority is organizing elections.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2012, a French official reported the following: “President Traore formally sent a request to the Economic Community of West African States to provide a military contribution to stabilize the country and especially to reconquer the north,” said France’s special representative for the Sahel Region, Jean Felix-Paganon.<sup>8</sup>

As in the past several months, ECOWAS said it is prepared to send a 3,300 strong force into Mali, but still hopes to get a U.N. mandate for such a deployment. Such a move would have to be requested by the Malian transitional government, which to date has been reluctant to allow foreign troops on its soil.

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<sup>6</sup> Globe and Mail, July 2, 2012, p. A-11.

<sup>7</sup> Desert Sun, April 7, 2012, p. A-11.

<sup>8</sup> Globe and Mail, September 5, 2012, p. A-10.

### **Foreign Intervention – N.E. Mali**

On June 7, 2012, Niger's President M. Issoufou stated that Afghan and Pakistani jihadis were training recruits for northern Mali.<sup>9</sup> Issoufou said Niger had evidence that Boko Haram, which has become an Islamist security threat in Nigeria and fostered links with AQIM, were running training camps in the town of Gao. "If terrorists implant themselves in Africa, they will threaten Europe", Issoufou said.

On the same day, talks on a possible military intervention in Mali opened in Abidjan between officials from the U.N., the African Union and the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS). The Ivory Coast Foreign Minister Daniel Koblán Duncan remarked that "participants at the talks will discuss whether to ask the U.N. Security Council to authorize military action in Mali".<sup>10</sup>

In the week of June 18, 2012, it was reported that West African leaders were intensifying their plans for military intervention in Mali.<sup>11</sup> The plan was to mobilize a force of nearly 3,300 soldiers supported by Nigeria, Senegal and Niger.

According to the Ivory Coast's army chief, the aim is to "reconquest of the north – where Islamists and separatist rebels have seized power. The mission would be to dislodge rebels who have captured two-thirds of the country, turning it into a haven for Islamist terrorists."

The African Union also was pushing for military action and asking for U.N. Security Council for its urgent support. The U.N. Security Council stated it would "examine" the African Union's proposal for intervention in Mali, but refused to give formal approval and requested further information on the logistics and financing of a possible military intervention.

At the end of July West African leaders were poised to submit a new request for military intervention in Mali to the Security Council.<sup>12</sup> Ivory Coast President A. Ouattara told the French Weekly Journal du Dimanche "if the situation does not change for the better, yes, there will be military intervention in Mali within weeks, not months."

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<sup>9</sup> Ottawa June 8, 2012, p. A6.

<sup>10</sup> AFP Reports, June 8, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Globe and Mail, June 18, 2012, p. A-10.

<sup>12</sup> Calgary Herald, July 29, 2012, p. A-10.

The Africans are not alone for the push for military action in Mali. France has already declared it would support military intervention if approved by the U.N. Security Council.

The U.S. is also concerned with al Qaeda's build-up of their operations in the remote areas of the Malian desert. They have already established AFRICOM to assist African countries with their security interests to prevent the expansion of terrorist interests on that continent. The U.S. has spent millions of dollars on anti-terrorism military training in Mali and other African countries. It is also likely that American technology, such as drones and satellites are being used from various sites to locate and track possible AQIM bases and military targets in northern Mali.

It was reported on July 27, 2012 that Michael Sheehan, who is the Pentagon's Assistant Secretary for Special Operations, the U.S. must first find ways to work with the Malian government to combat the militants.<sup>13</sup> At the same time Mali's military said that it would welcome a West African military intervention force to help recapture the north.

Although many of Mali's neighbours are advocating military action to reclaim the territory in the north-east of the country, Mr. Traore on his return to Mali stated that he intends to establish a committee to attempt to negotiate with the armed groups in the north.<sup>14</sup> As reported, it appears to indicate that his government is prepared to engage in a dialogue with AQIM. The question which now has to be asked is whether the African Union, Mali's neighbours, France and the U.S. will agree with the Malian government's stance to negotiate with al-Qaeda.

The other important issue concerning the reacquisition of Mali's north-east regions is the military capability of 3,300 African troops against MNLA and Ansar Eddine forces. Many Toureg acted as the personal body guard of Gaddafi while in power. After his death, many of these same soldiers departed Libya with superior training, weapons and military equipment. It is also likely that Ansar Eddine through al-Qaeda are being equipped with the latest military hardware. In addition, al-Qaeda can recruit Arab terrorists from countries throughout the Middle East.

Without French or U.S. assistance to combat the terrorists in north-east Mali, the question must be addressed as to whether an all-African force alone can militarily subdue al-Qaeda in this very remote area of the Sahara.

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<sup>13</sup> Calgary Herald, July 27, 2012, p. A-11.

<sup>14</sup> Globe and Mail, July 30, 2012, p. A-12.