

ISSUE BRIEF

No. 3850 | FEBRUARY 13, 2013

United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Mali: Only After Stability Is Restored

Morgan Lorraine Roach and Brett D. Schaefer

After launching a counteroffensive against Islamist forces in Mali earlier this year, French President François Hollande is eager to transfer ownership of the mission to the African International Support Mission (AFISMA) under the direction of the United Nations. While the United States should continue to support French efforts to stabilize Mali, history shows that the U.N. is not effective at peace enforcement.

A U.N. peacekeeping operation should be deployed only after French and African forces have restored stability. Moreover, the U.N. should not lead the effort in Mali but instead be a complementary partner to an African-led AFISMA.

Game Changer. Immediately after the Malian army toppled the government of Amadou Toumani Touré last March, a coalition of Islamist groups¹ occupied northern

Mali's three administrative regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal. In a belated response, the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) approved Resolution 2085 in December 2012, authorizing the use of force to reclaim Mali's northern territory.

Earlier this year, Islamist militants launched a southward offensive, capturing the town of Mopti on Mali's north-south demarcation line. In response, France, Mali's former colonial ruler, took swift action, launching Operation Serval and deploying 500 troops to stall the militants' advance toward Bamako. The force was later increased to approximately 4,500 troops.

Despite Islamist forces' advance to Diabaly, well below the north-south demarcation line, French and Malian armed forces pushed the militants out of northern Mali's captured regions. Currently, French and Malian forces claim to have recaptured the three administrative regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal.

While progress has been made, the situation is far from resolved, and there is still a substantial risk of renewed conflict. Prior to French intervention, militants had secured resources and constructed camps in northern Mali's desert in case they were forced to retreat. Some

reports indicate that militants are also seeking refuge near the Algerian border. This sets the stage for a guerrilla insurgency following French withdrawal.

Furthermore, some reports suggest that militants have blended in with the local population and are waiting for an opportunity to re-emerge. A recent spate of suicide attacks in conjunction with a counterattack on Gao by the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa is the first sign of the Islamist coalition's transition from an occupying force to an insurgent movement.

France's Intentions. As Mali's former colonial ruler, France regards Francophone Africa as its near abroad. Many French nationals live, visit, or are active in the region. They are also targeted for kidnapping by criminal and terrorist groups. Additionally, France fears the radicalization of its African immigrant community, many of whom maintain ties to their homeland.

Hollande's government has had to clarify French intentions and objectives in Mali. While Hollande initially stated that French forces would be in Mali "as long as necessary,"² Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius announced that French forces would be on the ground only for a matter of

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib3850>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies

The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

“weeks.”³ While France has achieved most of its objectives—including halting the militants’ progress toward the capital and aerial attacks on targeted sites—restoration of governance and restoring peace and stability in the North will be a difficult task and will require prolonged engagement.⁴

America’s Role. Although the U.S. lacks France’s historical connection to Mali, the proliferation of terrorism throughout the region is a threat that should not be underestimated.

Indeed, the crisis in Mali is partly the result of the Obama Administration’s failure to aggressively address threats to stability and security posed by the fall of the Muammar Qadhafi regime in Libya in September 2011.⁵ Specifically, the Obama Administration failed to secure and account for weapons from Qadhafi’s large stockpiles. Many of these weapons have fallen

into the hands of Islamic militants or criminal groups throughout the region.

With respect to Mali, the Obama Administration was correct in its decision to refuse support to Mali’s transitional government—which is heavily influenced by the military that overthrew President Touré last March—prior to reinstatement of an elected civilian government. However, the Administration’s passivity as security conditions deteriorated exacerbated the crisis. The sudden move by Islamist militants in the North toward Bamako clearly caught the Administration and the international community flat-footed.

The U.S. ultimately voted in favor of the UNSC’s Resolution 2085 in December 2012, months after the coup. In recognition of the need for stronger action, Resolution 2085 ran counter to the U.N. Secretary-General’s recommendation urging military force as a “last resort”⁶ and

did not condition military force on government restoration.

Although France is taking the lead in Mali, Washington has provided air transport and other non-lethal support to French troops and African forces, including refueling capabilities, intelligence, and logistical support. Last week, the Obama Administration also finalized a status-of-forces agreement with Niger, allowing a more permanent U.S. presence in the region.

Wrong Move: United Nations Peace Enforcement. In recent weeks, the UNSC has considered the possibility of a U.N. peacekeeping mission in Mali. In their deliberations, the U.S. and other UNSC member states should heed the past lessons and tragedies that led the U.N. to conclude that “the United Nations does not wage war. Where enforcement action is required, it has consistently been entrusted to coalitions of willing States.”⁷

1. *Ansar Dine*: Led by Iyad ag Ghali, a former Malian diplomat and fighter in the Tuareg rebellions, Ansar Dine is comprised predominately of Malians nationals. There have reportedly been fractures within the group. *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)*: “The best-known of the groups operating in northern Mali is... led by Abdelmalek Droukel.... Renamed in 2007 after officially merging with al-Qaeda, AQIM was previously known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat...itself created in 1998 as a rejection of the brutal behavior and takfirist stance of the Algerian Armed Islamic Group.” *Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO or MUJWA)*: “The Movement for Tawhid and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO, in French) is an AQIM splinter group that publicly appeared in December 2011, when they claimed the kidnapping of three European aid workers in Tindouf, Algeria.” Andrew Lebovich, “Primer on Jihadi Players in Algeria and Mali, Pt. 1: AQIM,” *Jihadica*, January 19, 2013, <http://www.jihadica.com/primer-on-jihadi-players-in-algeria-and-mali-pt-1-aqim/> (accessed February 5, 2013); and Andrew Lebovich, “Primer on Jihadi Players in Algeria and Mali Pt. 3: Movement for Tawhid and Jihad in West Africa,” *Jihadica*, January 22, 2013, <http://www.jihadica.com/primer-on-jihadi-players-in-algeria-and-mali-pt-3-movement-for-tawhid-and-jihad-in-west-africa/> (accessed February 5, 2013).
2. BBC, “French President Holland Pledges to Help Rebuild Mali,” February 2, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21308310> (accessed February 5, 2013).
3. Steven Erlanger, Alan Cowell, and Adam Nossiter, “Malian Rebels Take Town and Vow to Avenge French Attack,” *The New York Times*, January 14, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/15/world/france-mali-intervention.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed February 5, 2013).
4. See Morgan Lorraine Roach and Caitlin Poling, “Misadventures in Mali: Implications for Trans-Sahel Terror,” *Huffington Post*, February 5, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/morgan-roach/misadventures-in-mali_b_2624018.html?utm_hp_ref=tw (accessed February 5, 2013).
5. Following the fall of the Qadhafi regime, well-armed Tuareg fighters, once loyal to the regime, returned to northern Mali from Libya. Contributing to the pre-existing Tuareg rebellion, approximately 3,000 well-armed men joined the ranks of the separatist National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and imposed significant losses on the Malian army. Frustration among the army’s ranks led to the March 2012 coup and then to the power vacuum in the North, which was eventually exploited by a coalition of Islamist groups. See Morgan Lorraine Roach, “Fixing Mali: Stabilized Governance Should Be the Priority,” *Heritage Foundation Issue Brief* No. 3757, October 16, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/10/fixing-mali-stabilized-governance-should-be-the-priority>.
6. See Morgan Lorraine Roach, “Mali: Military Force Is Not the Solution,” *Heritage Foundation Issue Brief* No. 3809, December 21, 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/12/mali-military-force-is-not-the-solution>.
7. Fumbuka Ng’wanakilala, “Southern Africa Pledges 4,000-Strong Force for Eastern Congo,” *Reuters*, December 8, 2012, <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSL5E8N83SM20121208?irpc=932> (accessed December 13, 2012).

As troubling as instability is in Mali, the U.N. is not the proper instrument for peace enforcement. A U.N. operation should proceed only after French and African forces have overcome the militants and restored basic peace and security and with Malian consent.

In that second stage, the U.N. peacekeeping role should not be to lead but to serve as a complement to the African-led mission. Previous U.N. peacekeeping missions have resulted in the international community using a top-down approach to resolving crises that have ill-served unstable situations in Africa, such as the U.N. mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

With this in mind, the U.S. should rethink Vice President Joe Biden's announcement along with President Hollande that AFISMA, which has already begun deploying its approximately 8,000 troops, should be under the auspices of the U.N.⁸ Malians, in conjunction with neighbors and regional stakeholders, should lead the development of a concrete road map for a way forward.

What the U.S. Should Do.

- **Beware** of mission creep. The U.S. should continue to assist France in its current capacity but refrain from deploying combat troops.
- **Urge** France to maintain military engagement in Mali until peace and stability are restored and the threat of resumed militant violence is minimized. Recent suicide bombings and other attacks clearly indicate that the situation remains volatile.
- **Insist** that the U.N. peacekeeping operation be limited and act in partnership with AFISMA and not assume control.
- **Send** trainers to regional capitals. While many regional governments have provided troops to the AFISMA mission, they are limited in capacity and training.
- **Condition** the resumption of bilateral support to Mali on the transition to an inclusive civilian government. Certain benchmarks should also be met to ensure that Mali's government is committed to democratic governance.
- **Urge** the Malian civilian government, once established, to hold the military accountable. Allegations of human rights abuses by the Malian military ought to be addressed, and those who are responsible for such crimes should be charged.

America's Security Interests.

France's military intervention changed the course of events in Mali. While it is clear that the Obama Administration has no intention of dictating events in the region, the U.S. has a responsibility to guarantee America's security interests. These interests would be best served by a longer French presence to counter militant activity, using assistance to ensure a civilian transition, and encouraging African nations to assume greater responsibility for regional security.

—*Morgan Lorraine Roach is a Research Associate in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, and Brett D. Schaefer is Jay Kingham Fellow in International Regulatory Affairs in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, a division of the Davis Institute, at The Heritage Foundation and editor of ConUNdrum: The Limits of the United Nations and the Search for Alternatives (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).*

8. News 24, "Call of U.N. Peacekeeping Force in Mali," February 4, 2013, <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Call-for-UN-peacekeeping-force-in-Mali-20130204> (accessed February 5, 2013).