Mali and the Sahel-Sahara: From Crisis Management to Sustainable Strategy

Executive Summary

During the first half of 2012, military officers deposed the Malian president in Bamako, Tuareg rebels declared the independent state of Azawad of northern Mali, and Islamist extremists subsequently imposed *sharia* law in the region. Now, nearly one year later, national, regional, and international actors have begun crisis management in earnest. France's armed intervention to expel Islamist fighters from northern Mali in January 2013 and the seizure of an Algerian gas field by Islamic militants have focused international attention on the crisis in Mali and the broader Sahel-Sahara region and created an urgent need for action that was previously lacking.

This issue brief examines the roots of the current crisis in Mali, which include poor governance, a constitutional crisis, and growing criminality in the north. It then outlines the responses to date: from the creation of new institutions by Interim President Dioncounda Traoré and the adoption of a roadmap for transition to the mediation process led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the international strategy for military intervention. Ultimately, the slow response to the crisis throughout 2012 enabled Islamist fighters in the north to consolidate their control, boost recruitment, and prepare for a drawn-out insurgency in the case of a future defeat.

Despite some early victories for the French and Malian troops in January and February this year, military intervention will not address the root causes of the acute insecurity that the people of Mali face. Indeed, this recent crisis is only the tip of the iceberg in Mali and in the Sahel-Sahara region as a whole. Given persistent underdevelopment, recurring humanitarian crises, and entrenched terrorist and organized criminal networks in the region, short-term crisis management is unlikely to be sufficient. A more comprehensive approach is needed—one that addresses the structural causes of the conflict in Mali, accounts for the multidimensional nature of the cross-border threats in the region, and invests in the institutions and popular participation needed for long-term peace, stability, and development.

The integrated regional strategy currently being developed for the Sahel by the United Nations is a step in the right direction in this regard. Nonetheless, amid a multiplicity of actors and strategies seeking to resolve the current crisis, the governments in the region must ultimately take responsibility for a long-term and coherent response. While the interim authorities in Mali need to lead the way in their own country, the international community's support remains essential and regional powers also have a significant role to play.

Introduction

The political and security crisis that erupted in Mali in 2012 captured the world's attention. In January, the national army engaged in fierce clashes with the opposition National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a Tuareg rebel movement formed in November in the north of the country. In March, a military coup overthrew then president Amadou Toumani Touré in the south, and by April, rebels had proclaimed an independent state of Azawad. The sudden southward push of Islamist groups at the close of 2012 led to France's military intervention in January 2013 and an acceleration of peacemaking efforts.

While facts on the ground seem to change daily, the underlying factors that threaten peace and human security in the Sahel region are not new. This narrow, semi-arid band that crosses the continent below the Sahara desert and above the southern savannas from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea has long faced an array of interlinked environmental, developmental, security, and governance challenges. These factors, combined with a population comprised of a mix of sedentary and nomadic people scattered over a vast area of ungoverned spaces, have created what has been described as "a volatile cocktail of underdevelopment and insecurity."[1]

Long-term socioeconomic challenges in the Sahel include rapid population growth, endemic underdevelopment, and persistent poverty coupled with poor social service delivery and low levels of education. Harsh environmental conditions like sporadic rainfall, periodic drought and flooding, unpredictable local harvests, and resulting high food prices worsen the situation. Indeed, once periodic food crises have now morphed into near-yearly occurrences with severe humanitarian consequences. In 2012, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that more than 16 million people were at risk of severe food insecurity, of which 1 million children were at risk of dying of severe acute malnutrition.[2]

The region is further destabilized by political and security challenges caused by weak governance and security structures, radical Islamism, and religiously driven violence—all exacerbated by the consequences of the 2011 Libyan crisis and growing transnational criminality. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 200,000 registered returnees had crossed the Libyan borders into Niger, Chad, Mali, and Mauritania by the end of 2011.[3] Governments in the affected countries estimate that there may have been up to 400,000 registered and unregistered returnees. Included in this mix were economic migrants as well as armed Tuareg and Toubou ex-combatants.

Before the fall of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in October 2011, an estimated 7 to 10 million small arms and light weapons were already traded in West Africa, rendering countries in the region prone to instability.[4] More recent evidence has shown the presence of man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS), explosives like Semtex, and vehicle-mounted anti-aircraft artillery. These successive flows of arms have plagued the Sahel with general insecurity, manifested in hijacks and hostage taking, attacks on civilians, and human rights abuses conducted by armed and Islamist groups involved in drug, arms, fuel, and human trafficking.

In Mali, prior to the French military intervention, the crisis had already forced about 204,000 people to leave their homes and become internally displaced persons, while more than 208,000 others had sought refuge in neighboring Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Togo, and Guinea.[5] These figures have increased since the offensive against Islamist groups in northern Mali, producing a dire humanitarian situation and weakening an already fragile state.

1 Luis Simon, Alexander Mattelaer, and Amelia Hadfield, "A Coherent EU Strategy for the Sahel," European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies, EU Doc. EXPO/B/DEVE/FWC/2009-01/Lot5/23, May 2011, p. 19.

2 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "New Crisis in the Sahel Region," available at www.fao.org/crisis/sahel/the-sahel-crisis/2012-crisis-in-the-sahel-region/en/ .

3 UN Security Council, *Report of the Joint African Union and United Nations Assessment Mission on the Impact of the Libyan Crisis on the Sahel Region*, UN Doc. S/2012/42, January 17, 2012.

4 Adedeji Ebo and Laura Mazal, "Small Arms Control in West Africa," *West Africa Series* No. 1, London: International Alert, 2003.

5 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Mali Situation Update No. 12," November 1, 2012, available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/50a35d509.pdf .
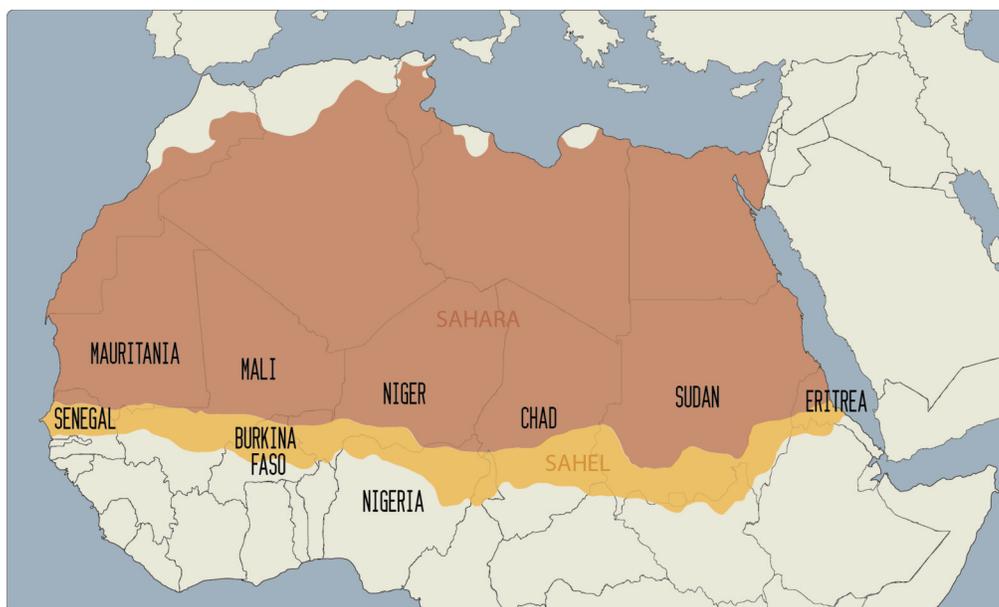
Source: Peel, Finlayson, and McMahon, *Updated World Map of the Köppen-Geiger Climate Classification* | Chris Perry

Because of these factors, the United Nations Security Council considers the conflict in northern Mali a threat to international peace and security. However, the response by regional and international bodies has been mixed. An African Union–United Nations interagency assessment mission in December 2011 was followed by a report in early 2012. The report recommended, among other measures, that the UN "strengthen its security capacity and presence on the ground [and] develop integrated programs to fight drug trafficking and organized crime." It also suggested that the world body help develop "an overarching mechanism or framework" for countries in the region to address the underlying issues at stake.[6] In addition to African Union (AU) and UN efforts, national actors, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the European Union (EU) have also attempted to address the situation in Mali.

Yet, nearly all of this attention has been focused on the short-term crisis in Mali, with little room for discussion of the longer-term implications for both governance and human security. Regardless, the current multiplicity of actors and response strategies in the crises in both the Sahel and Mali necessi-tate enhanced coordination and the harmonization of military and non-military options alike. This report seeks to bridge this gap. We begin by examining the current crisis in Mali in detail. We then pivot to overarching regional concerns that tend to be lost in crisis-management considerations. Ideally, these two views can be synthesized toward a comprehensive approach to the region that deals with acute crises as they arise while maintaining focus on the long-term challenges to human security.

The Roots of the Crisis in Mali

Mali represents an acute combination of the challenges of poor governance, constitutional crisis, armed rebellion, and growing criminality, especially drug trafficking and illicit flows of small arms and light weapons.[7] These factors in turn led to Mali's "twin crises": a fragile interim government after a March 2012 military coup and an occupation by Islamist groups in the north that sought to impose their strict application of *sharia* law.

Following the establishment of a multiparty

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6 See note 3.

7 Kwesi Aning and Sarjoh Bah, "ECOWAS and Conflict Prevention in West Africa: Confronting the Triple Threats," New York: Center on International Cooperation, September 2009.

democracy two decades ago, Mali was—until recently—considered a peaceful and stable country. Regular elections were declared generally free and fair. Despite socioeconomic challenges, Mali achieved notable milestones: political space for freedom of expression with numerous political parties and civil society organizations; improved institutions that seemed to strengthen the fledgling democracy; economic development that witnessed the emergence of a new generation of entrepreneurs; and a flourishing tourist industry that attracted foreign investment.[8] However, this democratic and economic growth was interrupted by the March 2012 military coup that overthrew the president, Amadou Toumani Touré.

The coup took place only weeks before the presidential election scheduled for April 29th—an election in which the incumbent had already announced he would not participate, in order to cede power peacefully. In reality, many saw democracy as merely a cover for a corrupt system, and the coup received little condemnation from local groups. A poll conducted one month after the putsch showed that about two-thirds of Bamako residents supported the junta and its leader, the US-trained army captain Amadou Sanogo.[9] The junta, which called itself the National Committee for the Recovery of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDRE), justified its action by citing public disappointment with a corrupt and weak government, especially with regard to the president's handling of the decades-long recurring Tuareg rebellion, the most recent manifestation of which began in January 2012.

Soon after the military coup, and encouraged by the political vacuum in Bamako, the MNLA took control of northern Mali. The Tuareg rebel group proclaimed the independence of Azawad, an area that forms about 60 percent of Mali's territory and comprises the regions of Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao. Northern Mali had gone through several rebellions soon after the country's independence in 1960. The most recent northern rebellion ended with the 2006 Algiers Accord brokered by Algeria. This agreement stipulated the reintegration of Tuareg rebels into the Malian army and the reduction of troops in the north. Unfortunately the agreement was never fully implemented, which is considered to have made the situation worse and to have fuelled Tuareg grievances. The January 2012 situation, however, was different in that there was a strong Islamist current running through the traditionally nationalist northern rebel groups. Groups like Ansar Dine (Defenders of Faith) had ties to ideologically motivated external groups such as Algeria-based al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Added to that was the proliferation of heavy weapons after the downfall of Libyan leader Qaddafi, making for a volatile situation.[10]

After a series of successful military victories by the rebels early in the year, the secular MNLA was quickly sidelined by local and external Islamist groups. This was due at least in part to the MNLA's lack of legitimacy vis-à-vis local populations. By mid-July, all major northern towns were under Islamist control and in the process of implementing a strict interpretation of *sharia* law. Serious human rights violations were reported, with cases of arbitrary arrests, torture, public flogging and amputations, sexual and gender-based violence, summary executions, and the use children in armed groups. Ansar Dine also destroyed a number of ancient holy sites in Timbuktu, some of which were listed as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites.

In addition to Ansar Dine and AQIM (which is also active in northeastern Mauritania, Niger, northern Nigeria, and southwestern Algeria[11]), a third Islamist group operating in northern Mali is the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), an offshoot of AQIM. The recruitment of militants from neighboring countries like Libya, Mauritania, Niger, and Tunisia and the likely existence of dormant Islamist cells in the region have helped to internationalize the crisis, as has the alleged presence of Boko Haram. Since launching sectarian violence in 2009 in northern Nigeria, Boko Haram has carried out terrorist attacks and killed hundreds of people, posing a growing threat

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8   Bruce Whitehouse, "What went wrong in Mali?," *London Review of Books* 34, No. 16 (August 30, 2012): 17.

9   Ibid.

10   See note 3.

11   Global Counterterrorism Forum, "Sahel Working Group: Co-Chair's Summary," Algiers, November 16-17, 2011, available at www.state.gov/documents/organization/184042.pdf .

to Nigerian national security. These developments have helped to highlight the emergence of terrorism as a serious threat in the West African Sahel-Sahara region, which needs to be taken into account when addressing insecurity in Mali and the region.

Adding to growing security threats in Mali is a flourishing criminal ecosystem, which at times earns the tacit support, and even participation, of Islamist groups. Weak security structures, limited state control over territory, and the previous administration's rampant corruption and collusion with criminal networks facilitated the development of an underground economy based on a range of licit and illicit goods. Exploiting largely porous national borders and building on old social and commercial networks established by nomadic families and communities across the Sahel-Sahara region, armed groups utilize trade routes from the old salt caravans to move various supplies including food, petrol, cigarettes, arms, and cocaine.[12]

In fact, West Africa and the Sahel-Sahara region have become major transit hubs for the cocaine trade from South America to Europe and beyond.[13] The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that since 2006, twenty to forty tons of cocaine per year have been trafficked through West Africa to Europe.[14] This amounts to a minimum value of about $1 billion per year.[15] In Mali, MUJAO in particular was identified as being involved in illegal activities and using religion only as a cover for drug and cigarette trafficking. Other criminal activities that generate cash flows include human trafficking (in particular, trafficking of migrants trying to reach Europe through the desert) and hostage taking and the payment of ransoms. These large flows of foreign currencies, especially euros, illustrate the growing economic power of Islamist and criminal groups across the Sahel-Sahara region.

Against this backdrop, it is perhaps not surprising that a coup, an attempted secession, and an Islamist insurgency would derail Mali's budding democracy. However, largely due to the complicated and multifaceted nature of the crisis, the international community was slow to respond.

Crisis Management by National Actors

Much as there was opposition to what the public largely perceived as the creation of a "fictitious," self-proclaimed state of Azawad, Malians repeatedly denied predictions that their country would turn into a new Afghanistan or another Somalia. Malians and regional observers instead expressed concern that, though the issue could reach the international stage, little in the way of a concrete solution or plan would be offered. Until France's military action to stop the Islamist push toward Bamako in January 2013, the slow response to the crisis seemed to give the northern Islamists time to consolidate their control and recruitment efforts, and to prepare for a drawn-out insurgency in the case of future defeat. It also delayed much needed local capacity-building activities and impeded humanitarian and development efforts to address longer-term issues.

In July 2012, Interim President Dioncounda Traoré announced the creation of new institutions, including a "High Council of State" and a "National Committee on Negotiations." These new institutions are expected to foster dialogue among the national stakeholders in the transition and with rebel groups in the north, with a view to seeking a negotiated solution to the crisis. While these institutions have yet to be fully implemented, efforts are underway to bring the major players together. For instance, a transition roadmap was endorsed by the Malian parliament in late January 2013, after its adoption by the government. The roadmap is expected to fully restore constitutional order and national unity by initiating an inclusive dialogue, preparing for the re-establishment of the authority of the state in the north, restructuring the army under civilian control, and organizing a democratic and credible electoral process.

Elections are an important element in consolidating state authority in Bamako and across the country and will formalize the return to constitutional order. Initially anticipated by April 2013, the

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12 Wolfram Lacher, "Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region," *The Carnegie Papers*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2012.
13 See, for example, James Cockayne and Phil Williams, "The Invisible Tide: Towards an International Strategy to Deal with Drug Trafficking Through West Africa," New York: International Peace Institute, October 2009.
14 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Regional Programme for West Africa 2010–2014," New York: United Nations, 2010.
15 Ibid.

post-coup elections are now scheduled to take place in July, and the government has reaffirmed budgetary plans for holding elections this year. The issue of the participation of members of the interim government in the next elections was discussed prior to former prime minister Cheick Modibo Diarra's forced resignation in December 2012, when soldiers arrested him, acting under orders from Captain Amadou Sanogo. Shortly thereafter, the prime minister announced his government's resignation. Despite an ECOWAS decision in July 2012 that rendered members of the transitional government ineligible to contest the 2013 election, former prime minister Diarra had announced his intention to run for president. This had raised significant questions about his participation in the interim government and risked jeopardizing the transition process.

Reconciliation among Malians, both civilians and those in the military, is another critical step in moving forward. In the north, where the secular Tuareg have called for better integration, the government claims to have implemented affirmative-action and decentralization policies. These were supposed to have facilitated the participation of all ethnic groups in the development of their communities. Nevertheless, the need to address the long-standing "Tuareg question" remains crucial. Genuine grievances associated with sociopolitical marginalization and the failure to implement successive peace agreements must be dealt with. Moreover, with the military intervention in the north and reports emerging of looting and reprisal attacks by Malian troops and civilians against Tuareg and Arab communities in the freed cities of northern Mali, further reconciliation efforts will be needed.

At the same time, all the communities in the north continue to be affected by the weak state structures, poor governance, and organized crime that existed pre-crisis. These issues need to be addressed, not only by negotiating with Tuareg rebels but also in the context of the society at large. Such reconciliation efforts could also involve the various civil society groups that have emerged to fill the void left by the absence of state authority—including sedentary populations in the north, who fear exclusion from future negotiations between the government and the rebels.

Within the army, two key factors contributed to the military's failure to counter the Tuareg rebellion in the north: division and corruption. The significant division in the security sector is between the "red berets," who support former president Amadou Toumani Touré and led the military coup against former president Moussa Traoré in 1992, and the "green berets," who orchestrated the March 22nd military coup that overthrew then president Touré. Tension between the two factions further increased following a failed counter-coup led by the red-beret paratroopers in April 2012. This left some twenty people dead, and was followed by a series of arbitrary arrests, allegations of torture, and regular clashes between the red berets (and their families) and the green-beret unit. Likewise, years of corruption and negligence left the soldiers in the north weakened by poor training, inadequate equipment, and low morale.

In the long term, reconciling the divided military and comprehensively restructuring the army will be critical to stability. To this end, a military committee for monitoring and reforming the defense forces was established in July 2012. Chaired by ex-junta leader Captain Sanogo, the committee is charged with preparing a reform program for the defense and security forces, as well as training troops and supervising military operations. The choice of Captain Sanogo to lead national efforts on security-sector reconciliation can be justified by political considerations. However, it also raises questions about the continuing ascendancy of the military over a weak government and the likelihood that the army will submit to the civilian authority.

Regional and International Efforts to Address the Crisis

Regional and international conflict-management efforts in Mali have followed a two-pronged approach. The first, and most preferable, is an ongoing political process to find a negotiated solution to both the constitutional crisis and the conflict in the north. Even in light of the recent military intervention, this process remains necessary for devising a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the conflict. The second prong initially coalesced around plans for a possible military intervention to neutralize the armed groups should the first prong falter. The military option was obviously accelerated (and somewhat

supplanted) by the French intervention. It is important to remember, however, that political negotiations initiated before the intervention are ongoing and remain an important and necessary component for sustainable peace. Likewise, military preparations that had begun before the French intervention will play a crucial role as France seeks to disengage now that the rebels have been pushed out of the major towns of the north, at least for the time being.

THE ECOWAS MEDIATION PROCESS

For eight months after the March 2012 military coup in Mali, regional political efforts to address the crisis proceeded along two parallel negotiation tracks led by the ECOWAS-appointed mediator, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso. First, negotiations with the coup authors sought to facilitate the restoration of constitutional order and complete the transition process; second, negotiations with actors in the north aimed to address the crisis there.

Just days after the military coup, ECOWAS leaders suspended Mali from the regional bloc and imposed legal, economic, and diplomatic sanctions on the country. These were followed by additional AU sanctions imposed against the leaders of the military junta and all those involved in attempts to destabilize Mali. Pressure from ECOWAS and the international community quickly led to the signing of a framework agreement in early April, which enjoined the military junta to restore constitutional order by handing power over to the speaker of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traoré.[16] However, suspicions about the continuing interference of the junta, an attack on the interim president by a violent mob, and the prime minister's close links to the junta leader contributed to weakening the first post-coup government.

Following further ECOWAS pressure, the interim government was expanded in August 2012 to mobilize broader political forces and civil society. Though radical Islamists in the north were sidelined, the new cabinet included a minister of religious affairs—an attempt to account for the rise of Islam in a traditionally secular society. Five

ministers close to the military junta kept their posts, as did the then contested prime minister Modibo Diarra. Despite his initial lack of experience, the prime minister retained power principally due to his perceived legitimacy, derived from his familial legacy. However, the ex-junta leader later deposed him, and Diango Cissoko was appointed as the new prime minister in December 2012.

Having facilitated the restoration of constitutional order with the appointment of an interim government, the mediation role entrusted to President Compaoré seemed to temporarily lose momentum with regard to the situation in the north. Some Malians, particularly those concerned about regional leaders' interests, criticized the process. For the interim government, negotiation was only possible with the Tuareg rebels on the basis of respect for Mali's territorial integrity. Initially, only the MNLA was recognized as a rebel group, while AQIM, Ansar Dine, and MUJAO were considered criminal factions. The question of a specific part of the territory that would be considered as Tuareg was also omitted, on the grounds that northern Mali is home to other non-Tuareg ethnicities.

It had been suggested that serious negotiations were not possible as long as the Malian government was unable to exert pressure on the various armed groups.[17] Nonetheless, the ECOWAS mediator, the UN Office for West Africa, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General in West Africa Said Djinnit began talks with secular MNLA and the Islamist Ansar Dine in November 2012, with the support of Algeria and Mauritania. The two groups were encouraged to disassociate themselves from terrorists and engage in negotiations with the transitional authorities. Ansar Dine in turn announced its rejection of terrorism and organized crime, and its readiness to join the political dialogue. These efforts led to direct talks between MNLA, Ansar Dine, and the transitional government: a preliminary meeting took place in early December in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, which brought representatives from the three parties together for the first time.

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16 See, for example, "Statement by H.E. Alassane Ouattara, Chairman of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government on the Positive Development of the Political Situation in Mali," April 6, 2012, available at http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=101&lang=en&annee=2012 .

17 Participant remarks during the roundtable discussion "Peace and Security Threats in the Sahel-Sahara Region: Assessing the Response, Devising the Way Forward," held at the International Peace Institute in New York on September 7, 2012.

The Malian government, the MNLA, and Ansar Dine recognized the need to establish an inter-Malian dialogue framework, involving representatives from the various communities in the north. In preparation for this dialogue, the parties committed to ending hostilities, avoiding all forms of abuses and violence against civilians, facilitating the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and establishing a secure environment devoid of terrorism and transnational organized crime.[18] Far from gaining the agreement of all Malian actors, these initial talks broke down in early January 2013, after Ansar Dine called off a ceasefire and launched an attack on the central town of Konna on January 10th. The new split within Ansar Dine between moderates seeking a political solution and radicals with strong links to al-Qaida made prospects for a political resolution look dim. This is especially true in light of the ongoing military offensive. Negotiators will now likely need to focus on the newly formed Islamic Movement for Azawad, which called for negotiations and asked for autonomy rather than independence for northern Mali.[19]

MILITARY INTERVENTION

In parallel to the ECOWAS negotiation track, a military strategy was devised. This track, cautiously agreed on by multiple actors, threatened the possible deployment of an ECOWAS-led international force to resolve the situation in the north if the rebels did not cede power peacefully. The plan was soon superseded, however, when the sudden southward move by Islamists toward Bamako and the strategic Sévaré military airport precipitated France's swift decision to respond to Interim President Traoré's call for military assistance.

With the understanding that a peaceful solution was the ideal and that the use of force should remain the last resort for dealing with terrorist groups that are excluded from the political process, the UN Security Council provided the legal framework for the planned intervention. Since the beginning of the Malian crisis in 2012, the Security Council has adopted three resolutions on the situation: Resolutions 2056 (July 2012), 2071

(October 2012), and 2085 (December 2012). In Resolution 2071, the Security Council declared its readiness to respond to the Malian transitional authorities' request for an international military force to assist the national armed forces in recovering the occupied territories in the north. Following the UN Secretariat's presentation of a "strategic concept" for resolving the crisis and a harmonized concept of operations (CONOPs) in compliance with Security Council Resolution 2071, the Security Council authorized the deployment of the proposed African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) for an initial period of one year in Resolution 2085. The council called on member states to contribute troops to the international force and on regional and international organizations to provide training, equipment, and other logistical support.[20]

Upon the request of the UN Security Council, the ECOWAS leaders adopted a harmonized CONOPs for the deployment of AFISMA.[21] The CONOPs was developed by the Malian military and ECOWAS officers and planners, with the assistance of military experts from the AU, the United Nations, and the European Union, as well as Algeria, Canada, France, Germany, Mauritania, Niger, and the United States. The regional bloc announced the availability of a 3,300 inter-African force ready to intervene as soon as it would be authorized, with troops coming mostly from Nigeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso, as well as other West African countries and some non-African states.

Despite ECOWAS's insistence on the urgency of the planned intervention, some observers and countries in the Sahel and Sahara considered the regional bloc inadequate to intervene in northern Mali. Many of those who would contribute to a force face their own interrelated challenges domestically. Niger, for instance, has a similarly marginalized Tuareg population and a history of northern rebellions that is intertwined with Mali's. Likewise, both Algeria and Mauritania face an insurgency by AQIM and initially expressed reservations about a military intervention. Algeria's

18 "Press Communiqué of the ECOWAS Mediator for Mali on the Occasion of the First Meeting Between the Transitional Government, Ansar Dine and MNLA," December 4, 2012, available at http://presidence.bf/pageArticle.php?id=4084&sid=2 .

19 Xan Rice, "Mali Rebel Faction Calls for Peace Talks," *Financial Times*, January 24, 2013, available at www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/62d9bf86-661f-11e2-bb67-00144feab49a.html#axzz2JVRgH1Qp .

20 UN Security Council, Resolution 2085 (December 20, 2012), UN Doc. S/RES/2085.

21 ECOWAS "Final Communiqué," Extraordinary Session of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, Abuja, November 11, 2012, available at www.ecowas.int/publications/en/communique_final/session_extra/comfinal11112012.pdf .

fears materialized in January 2013, when al-Qaida-linked militants seized dozens of hostages at an internationally managed gas field for four days, leading to the deaths of thirty-nine hostages and twenty-nine kidnappers. Though the Algerian government indicated the attack had been planned for more than two months, likely for ransom motives, the kidnappers claimed their action was in retaliation for the French intervention against Islamist militants in northern Mali launched five days prior and in reaction to Algeria granting France permission to use its airspace.

Due to its military capabilities, intelligence services, and experience battling Islamist extremism along its lengthy border, Algeria is one of the most important actors for any military operation aimed at neutralizing the Islamist and criminal groups operating in northern Mali. Before the French intervention, any military action by ECOWAS without Algeria's explicit support was deemed to carry serious risks of failure and indeed of escalation, with Algiers possibly playing a proxy game with any of the myriad groups active in the region. With the need to include a reluctant Algeria in a regional strategy, an effective response to the Malian crisis will probably need to be found with the inclusion of the Sahel's "core" countries or in conjunction with the AU. ECOWAS would continue to support the restoration of constitutional order, while the AU would handle the situation in the north.

The AU provides a broader forum than ECOWAS, bringing together the core countries from the Sahel that are not ECOWAS members. The AU can also play a key coordinating role, as it facilitates the involvement and support of powers further afield, like South Africa and Egypt, in a pan-African effort. In addition, the AU serves as a bridge between the subregional ECOWAS and the international community. For instance, the AU endorsed the ECOWAS CONOPs prior to its submission to the UN Security Council. The AU Peace and Security Council also requested that the UN Security Council authorize the planned deployment of AFISMA for an initial period of one year.

With CONOPS, the AU also submitted a Strategic Concept for the Resolution of the Crises in Mali to the UN Secretary-General, which backstops the two-pronged efforts taking place under the auspices of ECOWAS. The strategic concept was presented as an important step toward greater coordination between Mali and the international community in efforts to restore stability in Mali and the Sahel-Sahara region as a whole.[22]

One critical issue is the funding of a proposed operation, initially estimated to cost $300–500 million. To this end, the UN Security Council invited member states to provide financial support and in-kind contributions to facilitate the deployment and implementation of its mandate by AFISMA. The council also planned to consider options for the provision of voluntary and UN-funded logistics support packages to the mission. It further requested the establishment of a trust fund through which member states could provide earmarked and non-earmarked financial support to AFISMA, and it called for the organization of a donor conference to solicit contributions to the trust fund.

Organized on the margins of the AU summit in late January 2013 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the donor conference concluded with pledges amounting to $455 million. The AU itself earmarked $40 million for both AFISMA and the Malian Defense and Security Forces, and pledges were made by the European Union, China, Germany, India, Japan, Sierra Leone, and the US, among others. Additional contributions were promised in the form of training, equipment, and ammunition.[23] With the number of troops raised to 5,700 by ECOWAS leaders and additional troops pledged by Chad, Burundi, and Tanzania, the initial mission's budget has more than doubled and now stands at $950 million. The AU has asked the UN Security Council to provide AFISMA with the necessary support package funded through assessed contributions, to ensure its reliability and sustainability.[24]

At the EU level, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and France endorsed the ECOWAS CONOPs

22 African Union, "Strategic Concept for the Resolution of the Crises in Mali," Addis Ababa, October 2012.

23 African Union, "Conclusions of the Donors' Conference for the African-Led International Support Mission in Mali and the Malian Defense and Security Forces," Addis Ababa, January 29, 2013, available at www.peaceau.org/uploads/auc-conclusions-donors-conference-29-01-2013.pdf .

24 Remarks by Ambassador António Téte, AU permanent observer to the United Nations, to the UN Security Council debate on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, December 5, 2012, available at www.peaceau.org/en/article/remarks-by-ambassador-antonio-tete-au-permanent-observer-to-the-united-nations-to-the-security-council-debate-on-the-report-of-the-secretary-general-on-the-situation-in-mali .

following its adoption. In December 2012, the EU approved a Crisis Management Concept for a fifteen-month military operation, which will see up to 500 troops sent to Mali for training and reorganization of the national security and defense forces to allow for the restoration of the country's territorial integrity under civilian authority. Following the French intervention, European countries—including Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom—also committed to contribute to military efforts by France and West African countries present in northern Mali by offering logistical and material support, as well as financial assistance for the African-led intervention force being set up. Moreover, as part of its partnership with the AU, the EU has replenished its funding allocations for activities supported under the African Peace Facility to about $250 million until 2014, of which more than $150 million have been earmarked for peace support operations, including the operation in Mali.[25] For AFISMA, the African Peace Facility will cover non-military expenditures including daily allowances and transport costs of the troops deployed on the ground.

As of late February, close to 5,800 African troops and nearly 4,000 French troops have been deployed to Mali.[26] Having retaken the main cities of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal, France anticipates handing over responsibility to African forces soon. However, the relative ease with which France, the Malian army, and African troops retook the north after nearly a year of occupation has caused concern that rebels are biding time to launch an insurgency-style conflict. Additionally, worries about human rights compliance by various national contingents, the unpredictability of funding, and the ability to draw in more diverse troop contributions have all lead some UN Security Council members, including France, to suggest the establishment of a UN peacekeeping force.[27]

Regardless of the final composition of the new peacekeeping force, the critical challenge remains to create the political conditions necessary for a consol-idated and sustainable peace. The Malian crisis is considered by many to be the tip of an iceberg that carries serious long-term consequences for physical and human security in other Sahelian countries.

Long-Term Challenges in the Sahel

The acute crisis in Mali takes place against the backdrop of a number of long-term challenges. While Mali presents a situation in urgent need of attention, these long-term regional challenges provide an environment ripe for further crisis. In addressing the situation in Mali, the international community runs the risk of letting these long-term challenges fall by the wayside, to the detriment of long-term stability, peace, and human security.

While the difficulties facing the Sahel present a complex and intertwined set of circumstances, it is possible to identify three dominant categories of challenges:

- chronic underdevelopment due to a combination of demography, environment, and weak institutions;
- periodic humanitarian crises, such as the one related to current food insecurity; and
- underlying political and security concerns, such as terrorism and organized crime.

UNDERDEVELOPMENT

One of the core challenges facing the countries in the Sahel region is the problem of pervasive underdevelopment. The eleven countries that are touched by the Sahel are faced with a wide variety of socioeconomic contexts. There are, however, some shared characteristics. For instance, all of the Sahelian countries scored in the bottom quarter of the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI) and most have done so consistently.[28] Of the bottom ten countries in the HDI, fully one-third overlap with the Sahel. Likewise, while the Sahelian countries have made huge strides on some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), most have a relatively low chance of achieving their

25 African Union and European Union, "Joint Communiqué," Eighth Meeting of the Joint Coordination Committee of the African Peace Facility, Addis Ababa, November 28, 2012, available at www.peaceau.org/uploads/au.eu.jcc.apf.28.11.2012.pdf .

26 French Ministry of Defense, "Operation Serval: Situation Update on Monday, 25 February 2013," www.defense.gouv.fr/english/content/view/full/194802 .

27 Louis Charbonneau, "UN Security Council to Discuss Peacekeepers for Mali," *Reuters*, January 30, 2013, available at www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/31/us-mali-rebels-un-idUSBRE90T1GU20130131 .

28 United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Index 2012*, available at http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi/ .

targets. In fact, of the eleven, only Ethiopia seems likely to achieve the MDGs, with some countries like Niger and Chad off track on all but one or two goals. This is due in large part to failures in areas like education and maternal and infant health, and to a lesser extent in food security.

Examining individual indicators adds depth to this picture. There is only one country in the Sahel with a life expectancy of more than 60 years—Sudan. By comparison, the global average is just below 70 years. In fact, most Sahelian countries have life expectancies in the low 50s, with Chad experiencing an astonishingly low 48.9 years. Further, the countries of the Sahel experience maternal mortality rates two, three, and even five times the global average due to the combination of a low number of skilled birth attendants and a high proportion of mothers below 18 years of age. Infant and under-five mortality rates are more than twice the global average in countries like Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Nigeria. Between 11 and 18 of every 100 children in Mauritania, Niger, and Mali don't live to see their fifth birthdays.[29]

While the causes of this are complex, it is possible to identify some of the key problems. First, weak institutions and public service provision play a role in these socioeconomic outcomes. For example, access to improved sanitation and potable water are well below the global averages of 60 percent and 86 percent respectively. In Burkina Faso, 11 percent of the population has access to adequate sanitation; in Chad and Niger, only 9 percent has such access. In Chad, Mauritania, and Niger, less than half the population has access to clean drinking water.[30] This—coupled with lack of access to doctors, medicine, and medical facilities in many areas—has clear implications for public health. While HIV infection rates remain relatively low in many of the landlocked countries of the Sahel, other diseases like malaria and tuberculosis are prevalent.

Furthermore, weak state capacity has implications for the absence of a well-functioning economy. Basic infrastructure, like roads and electrical grids, lags in most countries, to the detriment of manufacturing and trade. Weak rule of law and sometimes rampant corruption similarly impede broad-based economic growth in the region. These factors, coupled with volatile political institutions, also hinder foreign investment. The outcome is a high level of unemployment, low economic growth, and extreme poverty.

Second, demography poses a major challenge for the region. The Sahel is home to some of the highest fertility rates in the world despite, or possibly because of, high infant and child mortality rates. Home to 115 million people, the Sahel population is estimated to reach 150 million by 2040.[31] Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Nigeria all have fertility rates more than twice the global average, and Niger is the most fertile country in the world with more than seven births per woman.[32] As a result, a number of countries now find themselves in the throws of a youth bulge.[33] Every single country in the Sahel falls in this category, and Mali has the sixth largest youth bulge in the world behind countries like Yemen, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.[34]

Finally, much of the Sahel is agriculturally marginal land under intensive subsistence cultivation. This leaves the region highly susceptible to unpredictable rainfall shocks. When it comes to renewable freshwater sources, Burkina Faso and Sudan each has less than one-tenth the global per capita average, and Niger and Mauritania have less than 5 percent. Often, agriculture in the Sahel also represents an inefficient use of already marginally productive land. Cultivation is highly labor intensive and, for a variety of reasons, there doesn't seem to be a corollary of the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s emerging. Few of the Sahelian countries have major exploitable natural resources to offset poor agricultural productivity and water shortages. While there has been some development in the way of oil and gas exploration, the problem of logistics remains.

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29 Ibid.

30 World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2012*, available at http://data.worldbank.org/ .

31 Mehdi Taje, "Vulnerabilities and Factors of Insecurity in the Sahel," Sahel and West Africa Club, August 2010, available at www.oecd.org/swac/publications/45830109.pdf .

32 World Bank, *Indicators 2012*.

33 This is a condition that occurs when a disproportionate segment of the population is aged between fifteen and twenty-nine years. Extreme stress cases, where 45 percent of the adult population is in this age range, can experience a number of security and economic threats.

34 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: 2011 Revision*, April 2012, available at http://esa.un.org/wpp/ .

FOOD SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES

On top of the longer-term development challenge, there are sporadic and increasingly frequent acute humanitarian crises, such as the 2011 food crisis. In 2012, the Sahel region was confronted with the third large-scale humanitarian crisis since 2005, a phenomenon that has become more frequent over the last decade. These crises are one of the main challenges facing the region today. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, more than 18 million people in the Sahel were directly at risk of malnutrition in 2012 due to the 2011 drought.[35] In this context, no country in the region can do without international emergency aid, which requires the assistance of the states to ensure its delivery.

Sporadic rainfall, periodic drought, and volatile food prices have left food systems in the Sahel vulnerable to crisis. It seems the "hungry season" that occurs between harvests is becoming longer, leading to increases in the frequency of these crises. In addition to these sporadic or yearly crises, there are also high levels of chronic undernourishment. While in Niger and Sudan one in five people is undernourished, in Chad more than a third of the population is chronically undernourished. Indeed, even in "good" years, 250,000 children die of severe acute malnutrition in the region, and in a crisis year like 2012, 1 million children were at risk.

Complicating crisis response are the thousands of refugees and IDPs fleeing the security crisis in Mali. Most of these refugees and IDPs resettle in drought-affected areas, adding more strain to the local food situation. Insecurity in northern Mali and northern Nigeria makes delivery of humanitarian aid difficult, as does the shortfall of international assistance. With an estimated need of $1.6 billion in 2012, only 54 percent was met.

POLITICS AND SECURITY

The confluence of underdevelopment and sporadic crises has led to increasing conflicts over smaller shares of shrinking resources. Existing ethnic tensions are being exacerbated in, for instance, northern Nigeria, Western Sudan, and Mali. Additionally, many of the countries of the Sahel face the combination of weak states and vast stretches of sparsely inhabited territory. This makes vital basic state functions like the provision of security in the outer regions and border areas especially difficult. And though many states in the region experienced sustained periods of democratic rule, events over the course of the last few years have called into question the durability of their democratic institutions. Chad, Mali, and Niger have all experienced sporadic separatist fighting. Coups in Mauritania, Niger, and Mali represent challenges to democratic continuity. Challenges such as transnational organized crime and terrorism arise from many factors, but one of the main factors is simply the availability of ungoverned territory and the ease of operation.

The lens of transnational terrorism is currently focused on the gains made by AQIM and Islamist affiliates in northern Mali and northern Nigeria. However, a distinction must be made between acts that are ideologically driven and those that are linked to longer-running nationalist grievances. These are not mutually exclusive and are often found occupying the same space, but they also compete for "hearts and minds," as we are seeing in northern Mali at the moment. There are a variety of factors at play that influence local-level support for these groups: the perceived lack of state legitimacy from a nationalist standpoint, the inability of the state to supply basic services, and grievances over distribution of state resources. In fact, a perceived lack of legitimacy seems to have bolstered claims by rebels in some contexts and helped to bring about coups in others. In cases like the Tuareg rebellions, a national government's lack of legitimacy helps the rebels, but rebels' interactions with local populations can also decrease the rebels' legitimacy, opening the way for other nonstate actors (such as AQIM) to fill the gap.

Indeed, the focus on Islamist elements may be somewhat misplaced in light of the grip that transnational organized crime has on the region. As noted in reference to Mali's flourishing criminal ecosystem above, the permeability of many Sahelian countries makes it extremely easy to traffic contraband including drugs, commodities, and people. Funds from trafficking are in turn used to finance rebels and terrorists alike.

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35 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Situation Update: The Sahel Crisis 2012," October 5, 2012, available at www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/sahel/docs/SITUATION%20UPDATE%20TCE%2005%20October.pdf .

Toward a Comprehensive Approach to the Sahel Crisis

In response to these long-term challenges, those interested in the region have increasingly called for a coordinated and comprehensive framework to address the intertwining threats to the region. This has manifested itself most prominently in the EU and UN, at least in part because the donor role played by these institutions lends itself to coordination in the development and security sectors.

EUROPEAN UNION

In response to the deteriorating political, security, humanitarian, and human rights situation in the region, the EU adopted a comprehensive development and security strategy for the Sahel in July 2011.[36] The strategy was prepared in partnership with the countries concerned. It covers four lines of action: (1) development, good governance, and internal conflict resolution; (2) political and diplomatic activities; (3) security and the rule of law; and (4) the fight against violent extremism and radicalization. The strategy is currently being implemented in Mauritania, Niger, and Mali. Though the EU has suspended its development cooperation to Mali, it plans to gradually resume development assistance soon after the adoption of the transition roadmap. Meanwhile, humanitarian assistance and direct aid have been reinforced to respond to the humanitarian crisis, and the strategy gives particular consideration to the human rights situation.

In July 2012, the EU launched a capacity-building mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel-Niger). The mission is a training program that assists Nigerien security forces to improve control of their territory and fight terrorism and organized crime. The EU strategy is seen as a useful tool that has facilitated the EU's coherence in the Sahel, as well as the union's careful articulation of policies under the framework of the international Support and Follow-Up Group on the Situation in Mali.

UNITED NATIONS

Called upon to play a stronger role in the larger crisis unfolding in the Sahel, the United Nations responded with the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2056 in July 2012, which asked the UN Secretary-General to develop an integrated regional strategy for the Sahel covering security, governance, development, human rights, and humanitarian issues, in consultation with regional organizations and the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA). The integrated strategy will seek to coordinate and build on existing initiatives developed by the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations.

Such initiatives include efforts to fight the expansion of cross-border threats such as drug and arms trafficking, and other transnational criminal activities. After ECOWAS leaders adopted a declaration on the prevention of drug abuse, illicit drug trafficking, and organized crime in the region in December 2008, UNODC developed a regional program for West Africa, which brings together UNOWA, the UN Departments of Political Affairs and Peacekeeping Operations, and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL). The West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) provides advice, equipment, technical assistance, and specialized training to law-enforcement officials at national and regional levels in West Africa, with a view to strengthening human and institutional capacity to combat organized crime and drug trafficking more effectively. Primarily focusing on postconflict countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, WACI aims to cover all fifteen ECOWAS countries, as well as Mauritania. A useful tool that can address transborder issues of drug trafficking and money laundering in the Sahel region, the program needs more attention from member states to ensure adequate funding.[37]

Transborder terrorist activities have also prompted countries in the region to join efforts in tackling this security threat. At the policy level, ECOWAS has prepared a draft counterterrorism strategy and implementation plan, which aims to give effect to various regional, continental, and international

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36 European Union External Action Service, "Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel," available at www.eeas.europa.eu/africa/docs/sahel_strategy_en.pdf . In addition to the EU, the International Organisation of La Francophonie and the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have joined international efforts to address the multiple crises in Mali and the Sahel.

37 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "West and Central Africa," available at www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/west-and-central-africa.html .

counterterrorism instruments and to provide a common operational framework for action.[38] The draft strategy condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations including acts of kidnapping, hijacking, hostage taking, ransom demands, bombings, sabotage, and the desecration of religious and cultural sacred places. However, additional efforts are required to ensure the adoption and effective implementation of the proposed strategy.

Under Algerian leadership, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger have developed joint efforts to combat terrorism and criminal networks through a joint operational command (CEMOC) and a "fusion and liaison unit" (UFL) set up in April 2010. Based in Algeria, the two bodies are charged with monitoring, coordination, and analysis of security in the region, as well as conducting operations to search, localize, and dismantle terrorist groups. In Mali, which shares a 5,000-kilometer border with Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the previous administration's lack of military coopera-tion contributed to weakening counterterrorism efforts in the region. However, critics have also blamed Algeria for its lack of action, hindering the fight against AQIM in the region.[39]

Transnational organized crime has spread across the Sahel-Sahara region due to weak state structures, particularly at the local level. Thus, beyond the hard-security approach, a comprehen-sive solution to tackle transnational criminality in the Sahel will need to address the challenges to governance and the rule of law. In Niger, decentral-ization is considered to have facilitated integration, specifically of the Tuareg population, which consti-tuted an important peacebuilding factor. Such national solutions could be shared as good practices for fostering public participation and advancing peace and security in Mali and other countries in the region. These solutions could also inform the UN integrated strategy, which is currently being prepared, and help it to address the challenge of weak local structures in northern parts of Mauritania, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Cameroon, for example. Regional platforms could be established to share lessons and experi-ences among countries in the Sahel. This could reinforce the countries' capacities to address challenges relating to local governance, political parties, civil society participation, strengthening of the judiciary, and dialogue and reconciliation.

To respond to pressing humanitarian demands, UN and partner humanitarian agencies have scaled up their programs and teams on the ground to move from a traditional development focus to a stronger humanitarian approach. In addition, support is being provided to governments in the region that have developed ambitious plans to respond to food security and nutrition challenges, such as Niger and Chad.[40] In April 2012, OCHA appointed a regional humanitarian coordinator for the Sahel, David Gressly. The regional humanitarian coordinator works closely with the UN resident coordinators and humanitarian coordinators at the country level to devise and implement a strategic response to the Sahel crisis. The regional humanitarian coordinator also has an advocacy role to mobilize funding.

Acknowledging the need to address the underlying causes of the recurrent crises in the Sahel through improved coherence between the emergency humanitarian response and longer-term develop-ment activities, the regional humanitarian coordi-nator and development agencies in the region have developed a UN action plan for building resilience in the Sahel, under the leadership of the Secretary-General's special representative in West Africa and in close consultation with governments. Aimed at breaking the cycle of chronic food insecurity, resilience constitutes an important component of the UN integrated strategy for the Sahel. The concept provides an opportunity to do things differently—by supporting the households and communities most vulnerable to humanitarian crises so that they can better absorb shocks and rebuild after a crisis, and by supporting a longer-term transformation through broader coverage of basic social services, improved agricultural productivity, livelihood diversification, and stronger early-warning and risk-management systems.[41] For the action plan to succeed, govern-

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38 ECOWAS, "ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan for Review," press release, May 6, 2011, available at http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=064&lang=en&annee=2011 .

39 Serge Daniel, "Unsupportive Algeria Is a Setback for Terror Hunt," *The Gulf Today*, November 27, 2011, available at http://gulftoday.ae/portal/7290a6aa-db61-4f50-9210-ca05a7bfa5af.aspx .

40 In Niger, the government has launched an ambitious program called the 3N Initiative, *Les Nigeriens nourissent les Nigeriens*, or Nigerians Feeding Nigerians. In Chad, the government has committed to raising $400 million for agriculture. IPI roundtable, "Peace and Security Threats."

41 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Special Humanitarian Bulletin: Sahel Crisis," Issue 4, September 19, 2012.

ments in the region will need to be firmly engaged, UN member states will need to provide political and financial support, and the UN itself will need to work coherently, avoiding the "silo" approach.

Indeed, one significant challenge facing the UN in the development of its integrated strategy for the Sahel is the multiplicity of actors within the UN system and their difficulty working with each other. To finalize its Sahel integrated strategy, the UN will need to overcome the challenge of "making the whole bigger than the parts." Since October 9, 2012, this task falls under the responsibilities of Mr. Romano Prodi from Italy, whom the Secretary-General appointed as his special envoy for the Sahel. Mr. Prodi's mandate includes, among other things, the coordination of UN systemwide efforts to finalize and implement the proposed UN integrated strategy for the Sahel, which is due to be presented to the Security Council in March 2013.

The UN alone cannot provide all the support needed in the region. Neither can it maintain the integrated strategy as a living document on its own, nor ensure the region's ownership. As such, partnership with regional and subregional organizations covering the Sahel is a fundamental component of the integrated strategy. This calls for exchange of information on what is already being implemented at various levels, to identify and address the persisting gaps. It also calls for the involvement of all the countries in the Sahel. Beyond bringing on board ECOWAS and other subregional organizations, such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), a larger platform needs to be created to facilitate direct exchange between people in the region—one that is not constrained by the institutional groupings. And beside the programmatic and bottom-up coordination, the UN special envoy will need to help harmonize the various mandates and strategies of special envoys appointed by individual countries, including France and the United Kingdom, as well as that of the recently appointed AU high representative for Mali and the Sahel.

Conclusion

The fact that the Sahel-Sahara region—one that for so long has undergone slow-motion crises with little attention—is now finding a more prominent place on the agenda of the international community is, on the whole, a positive development. But, the multiplicity of actors, positions, and strategies seeking to resolve the crises in both Mali and the Sahel-Sahara region add new challenges to the multidimensional nature of the cross-border threats to peace, stability, and development in the region. While the French intervention in Mali has shown some initial success, responsibility for a long-term solution to the persistent insecurity in the country and the broader Sahel-Sahara region ultimately lies with the governments in the region. The divergence of views among these countries over the most appropriate approaches demands a step forward from the interim authorities in Mali, whose ownership and leadership in addressing the crisis have been acknowledged, despite their limited legitimacy, capacity, and resources. At the same time, because the government is highly unlikely to succeed if it acts alone, enhanced support and further mobilization of the international community remain essential.

Regional powers can also play an important role in addressing this crisis. For the leading Sahelian countries to remain in charge of their own agenda, they must take up their responsibilities. At the regional level, a consensus seems to have emerged, which advocates for a combination of national efforts to restore constitutional order and facilitate reconciliation while also pursuing military action in Mali's north to enforce peace and tackle the growing threat of terrorism. While the ongoing intervention has temporarily weakened the joint criminal and Islamist threat in Mali, the military intervention will not address the structural causes of the conflict in the West African country, nor the recurring crises in the Sahel and Sahara. The Malian crisis has helped to shed light on the region's multifaceted challenges. However, for countries in the region and the international community, the challenge remains to make the quantitative and qualitative investments that will ensure sustainable growth, strengthen state institutions, and facilitate broad popular participation as preconditions for long-term peace, stability, and development.

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