



Annette Lohmann

Who Owns the Sahara?

Old Conflicts, New Menaces: Mali and the Central Sahara
between the Tuareg, Al Qaida and Organized Crime

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List of Acronyms

ACSRT - African Center for Studies and Research on Terrorism

AFRICOM - United States Africa Command

APSA - African Peace and Security Architecture

AQMI - Al Qaida au Maghreb Islamique

ATT - Amadou Toumani Touré

AU - African Union

CTC - Counter-Terrorism Committee

CTED - Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate

ECOWARN - ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

ECPF - ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework

EDF - European Developmental Fund

ENP - European Neighbourhood Policy

EU - European Union

FIS - Front Islamique du Salut Islamic

GIA - Groupe Islamique Armé

GSPC - Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat

INCB - International Narcotics Control Board

OAU - Organization of the African Unity

OMC - Observation and Monitoring Centre

PSI - Pan-Sahel Initiative

PSPSDN - Programme spécial pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement dans le nord du Mali

R2P - Responsibility to Protect

TSCTP - Trans-Sahara-Counter-Terrorism Program

UMA - Union au Maghreb Arabe

UN - United Nations

UNODC - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNOWA - United Nations Office for West Africa

UPM - Union pour la Méditerranée

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

WANSED - West African Network for Security and Democratic Governance

Executive Summary

The conflicts in northern Mali and the region of the central Sahara are increasingly complex. The region has traditionally been a pathway for many illegal commercial activities such as drug, arms or human trafficking from West and North Africa to Europe. Due to the vast area and its inhospitality, none of the neighbouring states of the central Sahara is able to control its entire territory. This development has created an area without effective regulation and policing and has thus made the central Sahara attractive for terrorists. Al Qaida au Maghreb Islamique (AQMI) has gained a foothold not only in North Africa but also in West Africa over the past years. A formerly Algerian problem has become the problem of an entire region. AQMI destabilizes the region, from a security point of view as well as from a political one. These developments hit Mali the hardest because of its particular weaknesses.

For example, Mali is still in the process of resolving the old Tuareg conflict. The installation of special Tuareg units within the Malian army is a positive sign that the 2006 peace agreement is being implemented.

Moreover, the Malian state has yet another front to tackle: Its destabilization due to corruption and organized crime on many levels of its state and security apparatuses, both often directly linked to the trafficking of drugs and small arms in the region. In fact, the boundaries between organized crime and terrorism become increasingly blurred and threaten the stability of the Malian state.

While some experts assume that the Malian government lacks the true political will to take action and thus continues with its unofficial policy of staying still, there have been signs of a possible policy shift due to mounting pressure by the US and France. At the same time, the new strategy of fostering political and economic development of the northern regions is a positive step as AQMI cannot be solely fought militarily. This government program also supports putting the peace agreement into practice.

The emergence of AQMI has diverted international attention: The focus is now almost exclusively on the terrorist movement. However, in order to understand the

complex conflict situation in northern Mali and the region of the central Sahara, and to formulate appropriate responses, all the different conflict lines, actors and issues have to be taken into account because they are interlinked. The conflict is not simply the consequence of a security situation that is deteriorating because of AQMI.

The support of western nations has so far focused rather on strengthening the security forces' capacities of the countries of the central Sahara. This, however, falls short of solving the complex conflict situation. Only an inclusive approach which takes the complex nature of the conflict system into account, and which is supported by regional and international mechanisms, will lead to a truly peaceful situation in northern Mali and the central Sahara.

Introduction

The Sahara encompasses more than nine million square kilometres and is the world's largest hot desert. It covers large parts of Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Sudan and Tunisia. In this paper, the focus is put on the area of the central Sahara and the states most involved and concerned with the conflicts. These are Mali, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Niger and to a lesser extent also Morocco. Ever since the independence of its adjacent states, the region of the central Sahara has witnessed turmoil and often times violent conflicts. While in the debate the conflict is often referred to as "Sahel conflict", this paper deliberately uses the term "central Sahara" because it is the more precise geographic and political description as the band of the Sahel does not include the Maghreb. For an encompassing analysis, the countries of the Maghreb have to be taken in account. Furthermore, it is important to analyze the situation not solely as one conflict but to understand it is a complex picture of overlapping and self-aggravating conflicts. These conflicts are not new but are deeply rooted in older conflicts. Therefore, the histories of these conflicts have to be included into the analysis.

This paper draws upon an extensive review of primary and secondary material as well as on conversations with experts. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, not all of the sources can be specified. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my colleagues at FES for their critical feedback. Most importantly, I would like to thank my colleagues at FES Mali for countless fruitful discussions.

I. Current problems and their historic roots

An old conflict with new impact: The unresolved question of the Western Sahara

The conflict over the Western Sahara between Morocco, which annexed the territory, and Algeria, which supports the Polisario rebel group, a military and political organization, has been a severe problem for regional cooperation. The territory of the Western Sahara is divided in a larger part in the west controlled by Morocco

and the smaller eastern and southern part controlled by the Polisario. The rebels demand independence while Morocco claims the Western Sahara as part of its national territory. Clashes between the Moroccan army and the Polisario demonstrate the ongoing violent nature of this conflict, which started in the mid-seventies. As Morocco considers Algeria part of the problem, it often refuses to participate in high-ranking regional meetings if Algeria is present (and vice versa). This undermines the much needed regional cooperation in the fight against today's menaces.

The even older conflict with continuous impact: The Tuareg and the peace agreement

The historic Tuareg conflict has not yet been completely settled and thus plays into today's complex conflicts in northern Mali and the region of the central Sahara.

After Malian independence in 1960, the state had little presence in the North and did not develop the region. This lack of attention contributed to a feeling of neglect by the northern population including the Tuareg. Furthermore, the non-acceptance of the nomadic way of life by the newly created socialist state, which caused the loss of power of traditional leaders, fuelled the conflict. The first rebellion in 1962 ended with a violent defeat of the Tuareg. Afterwards, a military administration was created. The Malian state was only represented in the north by military personnel with clear orders to prevent any outbreak of violence.

In the early 1990s, the pressure on the dictatorial Malian regime mounted and gave way to a democratization process in 1991. In this context Mali witnessed the outbreak of the second Tuareg rebellion. The government was accused of having done too little for the northern regions. After negotiations mediated by Algeria, the first peace agreement - *Accord de Tamanrasset* - was signed in 1991. The agreement called for an immediate cease-fire, the abolishment of certain military posts as well as the creation of a commission to end the hostilities. The state committed itself to decentralization and to the development of the north. The transitory government which followed the dictatorial regime in 1991 continued

the negotiations which led to the *Pact National* in 1992, the second peace agreement. This agreement officially ended the rebellion. It included the integration of Tuareg rebels into the Malian army and public service as well as projects for those who did not wish to join the army. Despite this agreement, hostilities between government forces and some rebel groups continued. Only in 1996, after negotiations led to the third peace agreement, *Flamme de la paix*, the rebellion was fully ended. The arms of the rebels were destroyed in the “flames of peace” during an official ceremony.

However, in 2006 the conflict flared up again. It began with the desertions of many former Tuareg leaders from the Malian army as well as the occupation of military posts. Again, with help from Algeria, a peace agreement - the *Accord d'Algers* - was reached soon after. However, this agreement was highly contested by some who claimed it was only a remake of the *Pact National* in 1992 which had not fulfilled expectations and did not last. The *Accord d'Algers* call for an economic, social and cultural development of the northern region of Kidal as well as for the integration of the Tuareg rebels into the Malian army, just as the *Pact National* had called for. Furthermore, the *Pact National* as well as the *Accord d'Algers* included the withdrawal of Malian military from the north.

Today, the *Accord d'Algers* are being put into practice although the process has been time consuming. The issue of integrating former rebels into the army is still of high importance. At the end of December 2010, almost the entire command structure of the Malian army in the north was replaced in order to expand and to strengthen the capacities of the army. A high-ranking army officer and former Tuareg leader during the rebellion was named head of the special Tuareg units. This marks an important step in putting the peace agreement into practice. Also, the return of the well-known former Tuareg leader Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, who had spent the previous two years in exile in Libya, could be a positive signal in this regard. One has to see, however, whether he will change his negative position towards the peace process. Tensions are rising due to verbal threats by some Tuareg factions of a new rebellion. However, as there will be presidential as well as parliamentary elections in Mali in 2012 this might

simply be a tactical manoeuvre to gain more recognition.

There has also been progress with regard to economic development – especially regarding the support of the youth in the north. However, many things still remain to be done. Most importantly, the questions of transitional justice and a reconciliation process have not yet been addressed adequately.

The fight for dominance between Algeria and Libya

Both Algeria and Libya did not want the Tuareg conflict to spread to their own Tuareg populations which are much better integrated as it is the case in Mali and Niger. Therefore, Algeria and Libya have both acted as mediators in the Tuareg conflict, using this role also to underline their ambitions as regional powers and thus competing against each other for influence in the region.

Libya has been involved in Malian politics for a long time. Gaddafi has in the past called for a Tuareg state which he envisaged to stretch from Mauretania to Iraq thus trying to exercise control over the region. Libya remains very engaged in today's Malian politics, economy and religious life and is an important partner in the areas of technical and financial cooperation. In order to promote its military cooperation Libya has opened a special office for this in the Malian capital of Bamako in early 2011. After the military intervention in Libya, many Malians – ordinary citizens as well as political and cultural leaders – have openly expressed their support for Gaddafi. The Malian government remains silent on this issue yet has officially denied any involvement in the recruitment of mercenaries to fight in Libya. As there are strong indications that AQMI was able to gain access to weapon arsenals in Libya in late March, Algeria has put its troops at the Algerian-Libyan border on alert.

From fundamentalist Islamic movements in Algeria to AQMI

In Algeria, the Front Islamique du Salut Islamic (FIS) was banned in 1992 after the first round of legislative elections because it posed a threat to the ruling regime. The ban marked the beginning of the Algerian civil war. FIS formed

itself into several armed groups, principally the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA). This group became one of the various fundamentalist Islamic movements committed to the pursuit and restoration of their version of Islam in North Africa. Its objective was to overthrow the secular national government and establish an Islamic state. A splinter group of the GIA, the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC), emerged in the late 1990s. In early 2007, the group became today's AQMI. With its drugs and arm trafficking as well as its hostage enterprise, AQMI has contributed to the internationalization of the conflict. Thus, international attention has almost exclusively focused on the terrorist movement.

II. A new dimension – Al Qaida International comes into the picture

The media has often been using the labels “Salafists” (originating from the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat - GSPC) and “AQMI” as synonyms, thereby suggesting that AQMI is principally an Algerian problem. While it is historically true that AQMI’s predecessors have their roots in Algeria, AQMI itself does not have an agenda which is primarily or exclusively concerned with Algeria: It has expanded into the vast area of the central Sahara.

AQMI had been considered rather weak and isolated, but it has successfully integrated into local communities and established cooperation with government and security officials as well as with regional drug traffickers and other criminal organizations (Goïta: 2). Thus, it is aiming for the destabilization of the entire region in order to foster its economic and political interests by “producing” insecurity.

There are several known leaders who seem to be heading different wings struggling for dominance. It is thus unclear whether AQMI actions and messages are always endorsed by all members as it is not a homogenous group. One has to take into account that AQMI is not a hierarchically organized terrorist organization in the traditional sense. Its branches are not completely controlled by headquarters and the command structure is not always clear (Farrall 2011: 133).

For the past years, the leader of AQMI has been Amir Abdelmalek Droukkel (also known as Abou Moussab Abdel Wadoud). He is originally from southern Algeria and is responsible for the emergence of AQMI in early 2007 (Tawil 2010: 14)¹. Droukkel appoints leaders for different regional units. The leader of the unit for the west is Amir Mokhtar Belmokhtar, also from southern Algeria and known as “Mister Malboro” due to his role in the illegal trafficking of cigarettes. He was associated with the abduction and killing of two Frenchmen in Niger. He was a member of the GIA as well as of the GSPC in Algeria.

1. Until 2005, according to a report by the International Crisis Group, the Sahel was “not a hotbed of terrorist activity.” Only after 2005 one can describe the events such as hostage taking as directly related to AQMI.

Belmokhtar controls an estimated 150 to 200 fighters. A fight over the control of the resources deriving from the illegal trafficking of goods as well as the hostage business has become an issue of conflict between Droukkel and his unit leaders who are competing for power and prestige.

For a long time it was not clear whether and how strongly AQMI is connected to the mother network Al Qaida. Many observers have pointed out that AQMI is primarily a criminal organization using the label Al Qaida for their operations which guarantees (international) attention. However, a video message from Osama Bin Laden endorsing the kidnapping of five French, one Togolese and one Malagasy in Niger in the fall of 2010, as well as AQMI’s demand that France would have to negotiate directly with Bin Laden, show that the organization is trying to demonstrate a unified appearance (Farrall 2011: 135) and that there are in fact ties to the international operations of Al Qaida. The repeated demand of AQMI as well as of Bin Laden in several video messages for a withdrawal of the French troops in Afghanistan creates a new linkage with the international Al Qaida network and their political demands and adds a new, very dangerous dimension. The death of Bin Laden will, however, not end AQMI’s operations as the group is operating independently. It might even contribute to a radicalization and recruitment of new members.

As France officially refuses to pay ransom and cannot give in to these political demands, it has turned to trying to free French hostages by military force. So far, this has always resulted in the death of the hostages, and it will most likely also contribute to a further escalation of the conflict as it could strengthen the radical elements of AQMI and boost further recruitment.

In late February 2011, three of the hostages taken in Niger in the fall 2010, were released most likely due to the payment of ransom by their employer, the French company Areva. The freed hostages included the Togolese and the Malagasy as well as the only woman in the group who suffers from a serious illness. The four other French hostages remain in captivity. Apparently, AQMI is demanding 90 million Euro ransom as well as the withdrawal of the French troops of Afghanistan. Thus, AQMI is using an attack against western interests for

political reasons as well as to pursue a local agenda by demanding ransom to finance their operations. This is, however, not to be mistaken as a sign that AQMI is abandoning the global agenda in favour of local goals (Farrall 2011: 135). The kidnapping of an Italian tourist in southern Algeria in early February which is linked to AQMI underlines that the industry of kidnappings continues to flourish in the region.

AQMI's spread throughout the region

AQMI is not only spreading from its country of origin, Algeria, to the central Sahara and most notably to Mali and Niger – but also gaining a stronghold in other countries of the Maghreb.

In early January 2011, 27 terrorists were arrested by Moroccan authorities including a Moroccan member of AQMI. While Moroccan police had previously arrested radical Islamist militants planning terrorist attacks, this was the first time the Moroccan authorities found an arsenal of weapons on their territory. It has been assumed that the terrorists were preparing attacks against the security forces of Morocco as well as targeting foreigners in Morocco. Interestingly, the weapons were found very close to the defence wall separating Morocco from the Polisario rebels. Earlier, there had already been reports of collaborations between the Polisario and AQMI with regards to the trafficking of goods and the taking of hostages.

Mauretania has also had its share of AQMI terrorists who assaulted and kidnapped western foreigners as well as attacked the military. Mauretania has become very engaged in the fight against AQMI. For instance, it has refused negotiations with kidnappers and does not release any captured terrorist for possible exchanges. It has entered into an agreement with Mali about joint counter-terrorist patrols. It is most likely due to this tough stand on terrorism that AQMI tried to assassinate the Mauritanian president Ould Abdelaziz in early February in the capital Nouakchott accusing him of his close relations with France. The attempt failed, yet it shows how tensions are rising and the situation is beginning to escalate. Notably, two of the suspects fled to Senegal which so far

has not been involved in the conflict with AQMI but might in the future provide a space for retreat.

The situation in Libya is rather unique after the beginning of the fighting and the military intervention to enforce a no-fly-zone. As early as February 2011, AQMI expressed its support for the rebels and their “legitimate demands.” Shortly afterwards, Al Qaida called for the support of the rebellion in Libya. This comes as no surprise as Al Qaida is on bad terms with Gaddafi because he had ordered an assassination attempt of Bin Laden. Gaddafi’s claim that the rebels were fighting for Al Qaida thus do not have to be necessarily propaganda but can be seen as a legitimate concern. However, the rebels have clearly distanced themselves from Al Qaida.

It has been estimated that AQMI has financial resources of about 100 Mio. US Dollars based on its proceeds from drug trafficking, the kidnapping business and other operations. Observers point out that while AQMI is still in the “money collecting phase”, it could soon begin using these revenues for other terrorist attacks. Furthermore, there are strong indications that AQMI has gained access to weapon arsenals in Libya². These weapons are assumed to have been transported into the region of the central Sahara – including Mali. Both the continued flow of income and the access to new weapons are likely to lead to a strengthening of AQMI and a major shift of the security situation in the central Sahara. A first indicator is the updated French travel advice in April 2011, which does not any longer restrict its warning to certain parts of Mali but expands it to the entire Malian territory.³

AQMI's exclamation of support for the recent uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East is not to be mistaken as evidence that AQMI is an “Algerian” or “North African” phenomenon but rather as an attempt to establish its stronghold in the entire region of North and West Africa by searching popular support in political vacuums. So far

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2. **It is unlikely that the rebels have handed out the weapons to AQMI. Most likely, due to the chaotic situation, many different people and groups have gained access, including those not close to the rebels.**
 3. **The travel advise also includes Niger without exceptions. Other foreign nations, such as Germany, have expanded their warning to other parts of Mali, yet have not included the entire Malian territory.**

the events have, however, not at all promoted Al Qaida's standing in the region, although AQMI is trying to jump on the bandwagon, exclaiming its support for the protesters. Currently, Al Qaida politically irrelevant. If, however, the soon-to-be-democracies in North Africa and the Middle East will not deliver — especially with regard to economic demands and expectations — and thus not fulfil the high expectations, Al Qaida could be considered a political alternative in the future by significant parts of the populations.

Mali pays the price for the unresolved question of AQMI

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world which has always been militarily weak and which has been in the past politically weakened by the aforementioned rebellions. Thus, AQMI has very strategically chosen northern Mali as a safe haven as opposed to Algeria or Mauritania. AQMI is deliberately taking advantage of Mali's fragile infrastructure. The attempt to develop the tourism industry in the Sahara has come to an abrupt halt with the appearance of AQMI. The presence and activities of AQMI thus ended one of the very few possibilities for economic development in the underdeveloped and neglected northern regions of Mali. This is now substituted by providing logistical support to AQMI. Furthermore, any (economic) development is undermined by AQMI's presence because it hinders international cooperation. This development is, however, much needed to end the logistical support for AQMI by the local population who lack alternative sources of income.

So far no support for AQMI in Mali

Although there is some logistical support for AQMI by local communities, the Malian population shows little signs of sympathy or ideological support for AQMI. Until now, the Malian society can be characterized as a multi-ethnic as well as multi-religious society which has managed to avoid conflicts of this nature in contrast to many other countries. Though Islam in Mali is very tolerant, there is the possibility to mobilize the masses, as

was seen in 2009 when the family law *Code de la famille* was to be reformed in order to give more rights to women. Within a very short time, religious leaders organized mass protests, some of them violent. Many of the demonstrators were not even aware of the details of the reform but perceived it as western intervention against Muslim tradition and were willing to protest against that. This shows that if AQMI succeeds in positioning itself as representing traditional Islam under attack by western powers, the attitude against AQMI might change. The presence of western forces could trigger this perception. Together with high rates of unemployment among the youth and a lack of an economic perspective, this could become a serious political problem for Mali.

III. Growing engagement of international actors: The quest for natural resources?

The central Sahara is witnessing a growing international presence. France has stationed special forces in Mopti, Mali, as well as in Niger and Burkina Faso, after the kidnapping in northern Niger in September 2010. It has collaborated with the Mauritanian army, e.g. in the case of the failed attempt to free a French hostage in July 2010. After this failure, France declared "war" on AQMI and announced it would intensify military support for the governments in the region.

In 2007, AFRICOM (United States Africa Command), the first US combat command dedicated solely to Africa was established with the aim of promoting US national security objectives in the region. It remains subject to controversy as some observers have criticized it as a possible sign for a militarization of US policy in Africa (Bellamy, William Mark 2009: 24). So far, no African country is willing to host AFRICOM which for now remains in Stuttgart, Germany.

AFRICOM has been closely observing the events in the central Sahara with a particular focus on AQMI. Under the Operation Enduring Freedom Trans Sahara, which AFRICOM took responsibility for in 2008, US forces cooperated with their counterparts from Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia to improve intelligence, command and control, logistics and border control, and to carry out joint operations against terrorist groups. US and West African forces have jointly conducted exercises such as Exercise Flintlock in spring 2010 to improve the security partnerships initiated under the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) in 2002 and the Trans-Sahara-Counter-Terrorism Program (TSCTP) in 2005. These military efforts are designed to support complementary development activities led by the US State Department and USAID (United States Agency for International Development) (Ploch 2010: 24).

The US has been present in Mali since 2001, with a training centre for the Malian army in the northern region of Gao. The Malian army receives equipment by the US and France. Lately, the US has also put pressure on Mali to

intervene militarily in the north. Both the US and France are training Malian combat units and are thereby preparing for a military encounter.

This state of affairs begs the questions why international actors take such a high interest in the security situation of the region. Of course, with the worldwide linkage of drugs, arms and human trafficking, the events in the central Sahara are affecting Europe and the US. However, there is another possible reason for the engagement: The search for natural resources such as gas, oil, uranium etc⁴. The US, France, China and other Asian countries, as well as Algeria, are now trying to gain control over the natural resources in the region without making much noise about it. Africa is becoming an important source of oil and natural gas for Europe, which has become concerned about its over dependence on Russia, as well as for the US, which is increasingly relying on oil imports from Africa (Goldwyn, David L. 2009: 67). Sub-Saharan African oil production now accounts for about one fifth of US oil imports (Van de Walle 2009: 8). Experts are estimating that Africa will become the second important supplier region after the Middle East for oil and gas. With the ongoing events in the Middle East, the oil supply via the Suez Canal could be threatened.

A Trans-Sahara-Pipeline is currently economically infeasible but this might be reconsidered in the future. This project, however, could only be accomplished if a minimum of security for the personnel as well as for the hardware and especially the transport can be guaranteed. Organized crime and terrorism pose a clear threat to this.

IV. New approaches by the Malian Government

For a long time the Malian government has faced open accusations by regional as well as international actors that it is not determined enough in its fight against AQMI. This was no coincidence, as the Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré (called ATT) was reluctant to act because of

4. The official search for oil in Mali began as early as 1963 and remains ongoing until today. Currently, two-thirds of an area which represents 65% of the Malian territory is still available for exploitation mostly in the region of Timbuktu. First contracts exist and call for the beginning of exploitation in 2011. It remains unclear if and when this endeavor will be put into practice.

limited resources⁵ and, more importantly, because of the fear of a further destabilization of the country if military actions of western nations were allowed, or more so if he began a Malian military offensive against AQMI with foreign support. In early 2010, he even allowed, for the release of four militants from a Malian jail in order to free a French hostage. This sparked outrage in Algeria and Mauritania and led to a temporary recall of the ambassadors of these countries. Yet at the same time, Mali is indeed hit very hard economically by a sharp decline of tourism revenues⁶, and suffers from organized crime and corruption linked to AQMI and its illegal trafficking.

While some experts assume that the Malian government lacks the true political will to take action and thus continues with its unofficial policy of staying still, there have been signs of a possible policy shift due to the mounting pressure by the US and France. There are indications that the Malian army is beginning to position itself against AQMI. Details are not known and there is no official confirmation. But just the mere fact that ATT gave a green light to the French in early January 2011 to pursue the kidnapers of two young Frenchmen from Niger into Malian territory is a clear and official sign of a repositioning of the Malian government. Furthermore, the updated French travel advice puts more pressure on the Malian government to take action. First steps have been taken by intensifying the regional cooperation. Algeria has pledged 10 Million US Dollars to the Malian government to develop its northern regions. By doing so, the proliferation of arms as well as the infiltration of AQMI in the region is to be stopped.

Observers point out that a massive military engagement would lead to a deterioration of the security situation and could be followed by terrorist attacks in Bamako.

5. The Malian army consists of 8,000 soldiers and lacks resources and equipment.

6. In 2009, the number of European tourists to Timbuktu estimated at about 10,000 annually was halved due to the threats by AQMI. As the travel warnings by foreign governments are increasingly becoming more urgent, the number of tourists continues to decrease. However, some observers are voicing doubts about the travel warnings and point out that western governments are using these to exercise pressure upon the Malian government to act.

Allegedly, AQMI has “sleepers” in Bamako. While an attack in early January 2011 on the French embassy in Bamako turned out to be the deed of an amateur not commissioned by AQMI, it did receive much attention as it was the first of its kind in the so far rather peaceful Malian capital.

Unexpected Support: Tuareg vs. AQMI?

In 2010, high-ranking former Tuareg rebel leaders indicated their willingness to the Malian government to fight against AQMI and to kick the terrorists out of “their desert” [sic!]⁷. The offer, however, has not been taken up by the Malian government. The underlying problem here is the lack of trust between the government and the Tuareg, as the government would have to provide the Tuareg with arms. Interestingly, the Tuareg have demanded a “green light” by the government before any intervention although they must have been aware that it was rather unlikely to be given. The fact that the Tuareg have demanded governmental approval can be interpreted as a signal to the government, as well as the Malian society, that the Tuareg want to integrate and not act on their own, so that they are no longer considered criminals as they have been during and after the rebellions. Of course, it could also be a sign that they are preparing to claim ownership of the oil in the desert. With the return of former Tuareg rebel leader Ag Bahanga to Mali speculation is rising whether he is going to play a significant role in the fight against AQMI.

Needed: Political and Economic Development

The question of peace in the north is not solely a question of security and of defeating or at least containing AQMI but also of greater political importance with regards to putting the peace agreement into practice and to finally end the Tuareg conflict. Therefore, the Malian president has launched a new program to foster the political and

7. The peace process calls for the integration of former Tuareg rebels into the Malian army. However, not all former fighters can - or want to be - integrated into the special units formed for this purpose.

economic process in northern Mali. The *Programme spécial pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement dans le nord du Mali (PSPSDN)* consists of five components: Security, Governance, Development, Communication and Management. ATT has pledged 32 billion FCFA (about five million Euros) for his remaining presidency, i.e. until mid-2012. The program is supported by the European Union's stability instrument as well as bilaterally by EU member countries.

Poverty, unemployment especially among the young in the north, economic underdevelopment and the feeling of exclusion from decision-making provide a hotbed for fundamentalist ideas.

The development program is much needed as the lack of presence of the state in the northern regions has created an environment of criminality and a culture of impunity (not necessarily to be confused with AQMI activities although there might be some overlap between "regular" criminality and activities associated with AQMI). The intentions of two peace agreements with the Tuareg, the *Pact National* and the *Accord d'Algers* (which included the withdrawal of the Malian army) have turned into the opposite: Instead of improving the security situation for the residents of the northern regions, the absence of the Malian army has now led to a very insecure environment. Residents have been increasingly complaining and protesting about assaults and the lack of security. The Malian government therefore must strengthen its visible and effective presence in the north and fight against lawlessness.⁸ Furthermore, the *Accord d'Algers* call for economic development – something the new program is intended to do. Finally, by creating a political and economic perspective in the north, the government hopes to reduce the logistical support for AQMI by offering alternatives and to help prevent the creation of a hotbed for future terrorists.

ATT has recognized the importance to integrate the different Tuareg factions into the program in order to gain their support for the implementation. One challenge to the initiative, however, is the question of equal

distribution of funds among the different Tuareg groups in the north. The Tuareg society is a class-based society and the highest class is being accused by the other classes of being favoured by the Malian government. Thus, what is also needed is the intent among the different social classes to cooperate with each other. The danger lies in the possibility of legitimizing and strengthening traditional mechanisms of exclusion.

Moreover, the Malian state has yet another front to tackle: Its destabilization due to organized crime and corruption on many levels of the Malian state and security apparatus, often directly linked to the trafficking of drugs and small arms in the central Sahara (Lacher 2011: 2). Mali has ratified the 2009 ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons and installed a national commission to fight against the proliferation of small arms. However, the commission lacks funding and Mali still has to harmonize national law with the convention (Sperling 2010:8). Furthermore, Mali has created a new office to fight against drug trafficking.

8. Outside the larger cities there are no police forces, no courts and no prisons.

V. Regional cooperation: A shared intention?

Certainly, Mali has to do its part but a regional challenge does require regional and international cooperation. First steps have been taken by the stakeholders: In April 2010, Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger agreed to cooperate to fight terrorism and in September 2010 created a shared anti-terror command in Tamanrasset in the south of Algeria for its coordination. In May 2011, the four states decided to create a common intervention force in the next year and a half comprising of at least 25.000 soldiers. Morocco and Libya, however, are not part of this cooperation which certainly is an obstacle to regional cooperation against terrorism⁹.

Furthermore, in September 2010, Mali and Niger agreed on a military cooperation to reinforce the collaboration of their armies and to secure their shared border. In May 2011, the four States decided to create a joint intervention force during the next year and a half. After the kidnapping and killing of two French citizens in January 2011, Niger is trying to limit the damages especially regarding its relations with France which has been accusing Niger of being involved with AQMI. However, as Niger is a structurally weak and poor country lacking so far a strategy on security and terrorism, these security threats present a big challenge for the newly elected President Issoufou. He has, however, announced to use military means solution as well as economic development to counter terrorism in his country.

Despite this attempt to reinforce regional cooperation it remains unclear whether all concerned states share the same intentions.

Algeria for instance, criticizes the Malian response to AQMI as too lax and indecisive and tries to establish itself as a regional power by refusing any international interference. At the same time, however, Algeria has declined to take part in regional meetings on the issue due to the Moroccan presence. Rumour has it that the Algerian intelligence service has connections to AQMI

and might support it in order to keep the region destabilized. A region destabilized by terrorism puts Algeria in the comfortable position to receive US support for the fight against terror. In January 2011, US president Obama renewed the partnership with Algeria by sending the Algerian president Bouteflika a letter stating his support for the Algerian fight against terror in the Sahara and calling for intensifying the bilateral cooperation. At this time, the revolution in Tunisia was already under way. An instable region and the threat of international terrorism spreading in North and West Africa give Algeria the opportunity to remain an ally of the US. This creates the paradox situation in which Algeria on the one hand is required to be tough on terrorism to convince the US of its willingness and capability and on the other hand needs the instability in order to remain relevant to the US and thereby receiving political and military support required for the regime to stay in power. Though it needs the American support, Algeria has made it clear that it does not wish for any western presence in the region. Furthermore, Algeria is aiming to become a regional hegemon by exercising control over the exploitation of oil for instance in northern Mali¹⁰. The exploitation of the oil reserves in northern Mali is, however, highly dependent on a secure environment. Also, a volatile situation in southern Algeria allows for a strengthening of the military forces in that region. This is necessary to consolidate the security system and is even more necessary during the times of popular uprisings throughout the region. In sum, Algeria's role is far from clear and it appears that it plays a double game. As Algeria is widely considered to be a key actor this is a severe obstacle to peace and security in the region.

The role of Libya is equally unclear as it is also aiming for influence in the region. Libya has acted as mediator in the Tuareg conflict but also hosted the most important Tuareg rebel leader, Ag Bahanga, who returned to Mali in early 2011. With the crisis in Libya and the military intervention, there is a regional cooperation of a different kind happening: While Malian and African refugees from Libya are arriving in Mali, at the same time, a new form of

9. Libya at first agreed to take part and later withdrew for unknown reasons. Morocco, the long-term rival of Algeria, was apparently left out deliberately.

10. As the oil fields of southern Algeria and northern Mali might be connected underground, Algeria fears that the exploitation in Mali could threaten its own reserves.

mercenaries is emerging: Young Tuareg, from Mali and Niger are following the call of Gaddafi to defend him. The most important reasons for the men to join the Libyan army – with an average age of 18 – are unemployment, misery, political frustration and the feeling of owing something to Gaddafi. An agreement dating back to 1980 obligates Gaddafi to protect the Tuareg refugees from Niger and Mali in Libya while in return the Tuareg are to guarantee the security in southern Libya. Gaddafi is now using this obligation to defend his regime. In doing so, he can not only count on the new arrivals of fighters but also on those who have stayed in Libya in the 1970s and 80s after they fled due to droughts, famine and the lack of support of their governments. Many were integrated into the Libyan army and are now fighting on Gaddafi's side. Their number is estimated in the tens of thousands. However, there are no reliable figures of how many of the former Tuareg rebels remain loyal to Gaddafi and how many have joined the rebels or deserted. If these men were to return to Mali and Niger – for instance after an overthrow of Gaddafi – this could quickly lead to a threat to national security if their integration failed. Apparently, the first Tuareg fighters are already returning to Mali. It is, however, difficult to predict whether this would lead to a new Tuareg rebellion or rather to a rise of petty crime due to the lack of economic alternatives. At the same time, however, there is not at all a united Tuareg front regarding the question of supporting Gaddafi. Their reactions are manifold. Interestingly, the positions voiced via Internet against the regime of Gaddafi are prevailing. All in all, this creates a rather paradox situation of regional entanglements.

VI. A problem with a bigger scope: Approaches by multilateral actors

In the following, different regional and multilateral organizations which are, or could be, playing a role in this conflict will be examined. First, ECOWAS as the regional organization which also has experience in the area of conflict resolution will be analyzed¹¹. As ECOWAS is, however, reluctant to take concrete action, the question of the role of the African Union (AU) will be addressed. Furthermore, the approaches of the European Union (EU)

as an external, multilateral actor which is running programs on ground which via the representation of the commission as well as the United Nations (UN) will be analyzed.

The approach of ECOWAS

Beyond the engagement of the directly concerned states, observers have asked why the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has developed elaborate mechanisms and instruments to prevent violent conflicts, to address security threats, and to maintain peace in the sub-region, has not yet stepped up. Article 3(d) of the 1999 ECOWAS protocol for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security expressly proclaimed the organization's commitment to "strengthen cooperation in the areas of conflict prevention, early-warning, peace-keeping operations, the control of cross-border crime, international terrorism and proliferation of small arms and anti-personnel mines." The Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security enables ECOWAS to intervene in conflicts in its member countries. An Early Warning mechanism (ECOWARN) was created which comprises an observation and monitoring centre (OMC) where data based on early warning indicators are collected. The Mediation and Security Council as a key decision-making organ, regular meetings of Chief of Defence Staffs, the ECOWAS Standby Force and the Council of the Wise have been established and constitute important elements of the regional security architecture.

In its 2008 Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), ECOWAS furthermore developed the basis for a comprehensive action plan in the field of peace and security. The overall aim of the ECPF is to strengthen the human security architecture in West Africa. For instance, cross-border initiatives are envisioned in order to reduce cross-border crime. Moreover, the ECPF implicitly refers to

11. As the Union au Maghreb Arabe (UMA), which was founded in 1989, is still in the making and does not have any security or peace related instruments, its role will not be further discussed.

the principle of the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P)¹² by addressing the necessity for:

- **The Responsibility to prevent** – actions taken to address the direct and root causes of intra and inter-state conflicts that put populations at risk.
- **The Responsibility to react** – actions taken in response to grave and compelling humanitarian disasters.
- **The Responsibility to rebuild** – actions taken to ensure recovery, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation in the aftermath of violent conflicts, humanitarian or natural disasters.

The fact that the ECPF does not explicitly refer to the R2P principle indicates an intentional openness to apply the ideas behind the principle in a broader context. As the four categories of mass crimes R2P refers to are of high importance with regard to the “Responsibility to react” which contains the option of a military intervention, an often highly contested approach, a broader approach for the two other categories is to be appreciated. Especially the “Responsibility to prevent” which contains approaches and mechanisms such as Preventive Diplomacy and Early Warning – Early Action must not be restricted to grave human rights crimes only. However, there remains a gap between the written intent of the ECPF and ECOWAS policy on the ground.

Several aspects hinder the engagement of ECOWAS in the conflicts in the central Sahara. First of all, not all concerned states - especially the important actors Algeria and Libya - are members of ECOWAS. Any kind of engagement is thus more difficult. Also, ECOWAS has limited resources and capacities, and other conflicts and crises have demanded its attention in the past (e. g. Sierra Leone, Liberia) and present (Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Ivory Coast).

It is also very unlikely that ECOWAS would consider a military intervention. As this concerns the highly sensitive

question of national sovereignty, certain conditions have to be met. ECOWAS could intervene militarily in the case of a conflict between its member states, in the case of an internal conflict which could lead to a humanitarian disaster or constitutes a serious threat to peace and security in the region and in the case of mass violence and mass human rights violations, among others (Konadje no date: 12). In the case of the conflict in the central Sahara these criteria are clearly not met. Also, ECOWAS could only intervene militarily if the concerned states agree. At this point it seems rather unlikely that Mali and Niger would agree because this would equal an official surrender of their policies.

One would furthermore have to factor in the reaction of Algeria or Libya to a military intervention in a conflict they are involved in by an organization they are not part of on grounds that they would most likely refuse. As Algeria seems to be playing a double game it seems highly unlikely that it would agree to a military intervention. The role of Libya is now fully unpredictable due to the uprising and military intervention.

ECOWAS is, however, closely monitoring the conflict. At a meeting of the Chiefs of the Defence Staff of ECOWAS in Bamako in early 2011, the question of AQMI was discussed. It was decided to develop an action plan in order to strengthen border control and the sharing of information by the intelligence services of the respective countries. This development is, however, overshadowed by the crisis in Ivory Coast which is receiving more attention. Furthermore, the West African Network for Security and Democratic Governance (WANSED), a regional network bringing together institutions and experts working on security policy and advising the ECOWAS commission, has decided to put the question of the conflict on its agenda as a priority in order to enhance the dialogue among the actors working on the conflict.

The approach of the African Union

When a regional organization does not become active in a conflict, the next higher institution – in this case the African Union (AU) – is considered to be responsible. However, again not all of the concerned states are

12. The principle of the “Responsibility to Protect” redefines the concept of sovereignty: If a state is not willing or capable to protect its citizens in the case of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity, the international community becomes responsible. In the case of the conflicts in the central Sahara the categories defined by the “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine are not met.

members¹³. Due to disputes over the Western Sahara with other AU members, Morocco has not joined.

The Peace and Security Council of the African Union, which has been set up for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, oversees peace support operations and can institute sanctions as well as facilitate humanitarian action. Even more, the African Union has a standby brigade available. The commitment of African countries to counter-terrorism resulted in the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Combatting of Terrorism at the Summit of the OAU (Organization of the African Unity), the predecessor of the AU, in 1999. This commitment was further reiterated in the Dakar Declaration against terrorism in 2001. African leaders identified terrorism as an impediment to peace and development of the continent and consequently resolved to collaborate effectively to combat the phenomenon. The African Union also has created an Early Warning System for the observation and monitoring of conflicts.

In 2004, the African Center for Studies and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) was established in accordance with the provisions contained in the AU action plan for the prevention and fight against terrorism in Algeria. It aims at complementing international efforts by strengthening cooperation between African countries to prevent and combat terrorism, assisting in the full implementation of international conventions relating to terrorism and playing the role of a monitoring and alerting tool by incorporating in its approach the concept of preventive management of conflict situations (African Journal for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism 2010).

In December 2010, the African Union announced the adoption of a law condemning terrorism and prohibiting the payment of ransom to terrorist groups. This new law allows for the persecution and extradition of terrorists between the member states of the African Union. One has to see how this law will be implemented and whether the African Union might consider taking further steps.

With the crisis in Libya, the role of Gaddafi as main contributor to the African Union – Libya pays 15% of the

contributions to the AU and invests into many projects in AU member states – is critically discussed as the African Union does not seem to be able to use its influence to mediate the conflict. It remains unclear if and how Gaddafi might have used his dominant role in the past to exercise influence upon the AU's policy on the central Sahara.

The approach of the European Union

The European Union is capable of a comprehensive approach for crisis prevention, conflict management und peace building. It is financially well prepared and has also developed the necessary instruments. Based on the Cotonou Agreement, the EU is using an array of instruments supporting the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) on its various levels. Specifically, the instrument of the African Peace Facility aims to strengthen African capacities for crisis prevention, conflict transformation and the consolidation of peace. In 2010, new security threats such as organized crime, piracy and the trafficking of drugs, humans and weapons were added to the agreement. As agreed upon in the Cotonou Agreement, the EU and its African partners are aiming for an active, comprehensive and integrated policy regarding peace consolidation and crisis prevention. To ensure both sides developed the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, a wider political framework for cooperation and consultation. It aims at coordinating the various policies and instruments, on the regional as well as on the national level. In the partnership on Peace and Security, Africa and the EU discuss and define specific measures to jointly address problems in this field.

However, in the case of the conflicts in the central Sahara, the EU has been searching for an adequate response to the mounting threats and is only slowly formulating a development and security policy approach (Renard 2010: 5). This is in part due to the lack of political consensus among its member states.

In October 2010, the EU announced that it would draw up a strategy for the Sahel by 2011. The EU intends "to make use of various instruments at its disposal in a coherent way to foster security, stability, development and good governance in the Sahel-Saharan strip." In March 2011, the High Representative presented a draft of the European

13. In 2010, the AU as well as ECOWAS suspended Niger due to the coup d'état. In March 2011, both organizations readmitted Niger after the successful presidential elections.

Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel. It states that its purpose is "... a framework for the coordination of the EU's current and future engagement in the region with the common objective of reinforcing security and development..." (European Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel: 3). Thus, the EU wants to build on and support existing political and operational initiatives for security and development in the Sahel (ibid: 5).

Linking security and development is the overarching subject of the strategy. It defines four key themes:

1. "(...) security and development in the Sahel cannot be separated, and that helping these countries achieve security is integral to enabling their economies to grow and poverty to be reduced.
2. (...) achieving security and development in the Sahel is only possible through closer regional cooperation. (...)
3. (...) all the states of the region will benefit from considerable capacity-building, both in areas of core government activity, including the provision of security and development cooperation.
4. (...) the EU therefore has an important role to play both in encouraging economic development for the people of the Sahel and helping them achieve a more secure environment in which it can take place, and in which the interests of EU citizens are also protected." (ibid.: 1)

The strategy is an integrated approach containing all the important challenges and issues as well as responses. As it is very comprehensive and tries not to leave out any possibly relevant issue, the interrelations between security and development approaches are not always clear and well developed. The strategy reads at times rather like an accumulation of problems and approaches. As the strategy rightly puts security and development in its centre, the question of how exactly its claim of a coherent approach encompassing both aspects and initiatives remains unanswered.

The approach of the United Nations

Without exception, all the concerned states of the conflict in the central Sahara are members of the United Nations. The UN has legitimacy and a convening power which

allows for an important role in any conflict setting. The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy provides a framework for combating terrorism. Its pillars include measures to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; measures to prevent and combat terrorism; capacity building; and measures to ensure a human rights and rule of law based approach to countering the threat. Thus, the UN strategy is encompassing rather than exclusively focusing on security approaches (Renard 2010: 4).

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) plays an important role in dealing with counterterrorism. In December 2010, together with partner organizations, it launched a comprehensive program to combat drug trafficking and organized crime in West Africa¹⁴. This program focuses on peace building, security sector reform, and national and regional institution and capacity building; as well as on strengthening action in the areas of organized crime, trafficking and terrorism, justice and integrity, drug prevention and health, and awareness raising and research. The UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) also has been active through the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED). The focus is on the ratification of international conventions and protocols on the prevention and suppression of terrorism, financial law practice, law enforcement and border control. CTED has also involved Mali, Mauritania and Niger in its efforts to bring West African states together to address the lack of resources for counter-terrorist measures (ibid.: 3). Furthermore, UNOWA (United Nations Office for West Africa) is also concerned with drug trafficking and organized crime.

14. UN Office on Drugs and Crime Regional Program for West Africa 2010–2014.

VII. Recommendations

The support of western nations has so far focussed on strengthening the security forces' capacities of the countries of the central Sahara. This, however, falls short of solving the complex conflict situation which consists not only of the terrorist threat posed by AQMI but also of organized crime, the Tuareg conflict and questions of socio-economic and political development. Therefore, the focus has to be on creating coherent and overarching approaches which deescalate the conflict and establish a peaceful and prosperous environment. The use of military force, especially by western nations, has to be extremely carefully considered. Western nations – most notably France and the US – are regarded with suspicion due to their history in the region and suspected hidden agendas. Also, any military intervention causing civilian casualties would immediately spark a strong public response. Only an inclusive approach which takes the complex nature of the conflict system into account, and which is supported by regional and international mechanisms, will lead to a truly peaceful situation in northern Mali and the central Sahara.

At the international, multilateral and regional level

The following recommendations are addressing the United Nations, the European Union as well as its members and finally ECOWAS on the regional level.

- **Intensify the fight against drugs:** UNDOC has implemented various initiatives in 2009 and 2010 to provide technical assistance to West Africa in the areas of drug control and the fight against organized crime, most notably the development of the UNODC Regional Programme for West Africa for the period 2010-2014. The report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) which is monitoring the implementation of the United Nations drug control conventions from March 2011 draws attention to the increase in cocaine trafficking through Africa to Europe illustrated by large-scale seizures in West Africa. Thus, the fight against drugs needs not only to be continued but to be intensified.
- **Support the socio-economic development of northern Mali:** Poverty, unemployment especially among the young in the north, economic underdevelopment and the feeling of exclusion from decision-making provide a hotbed for fundamentalist ideas. The key challenge for stabilizing northern Mali are public investments and to provide for alternative sources of income and thereby creating economic, social as well as political perspectives. This will also serve the implementation of the peace agreement with the Tuareg.
- **Support the strengthening of the Rule of Law in northern Mali:** The Malian state needs to be further supported in its political approach to the conflict. Especially the strengthening of the state presence with a functioning judicial system and rule of law is imperative.
- **Strengthen the democratic institutions in Mali and Niger:** Malian democracy has yet to be consolidated, thus international actors active in the country need to continue the strengthening of democratic institutions, and to support the mechanisms for the rule of law. As Niger is facing a fresh democratic start, its democratic institutions also need to be strengthened.
- **Revive the Union pour la Méditerranée:** Currently, the UPM is politically dead due to the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Also, the conflict between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara hinders an effective cooperation. However, with the recent developments in North Africa, the European Union could try to revive the union for dialogue among its members on political reforms.
- **Make use of the European Neighbourhood Policy:** Another potentially promising approach, is the use of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) through which the EU offers “privileged relationships” and which contains bilateral action plans of the EU with selected countries such as Morocco. Recently, the European Union has decided to link the ENP more closely to visible reforms. As the Moroccan king Mohammed VI has announced political reforms including strengthening the role of

parliament and of political parties, this is an opportunity to engage Morocco in a regional dialogue. Furthermore, the Association Agreement (AA) from 1996 with Morocco can be an important tool in this regard.

- **Engage Algeria in a dialogue via the Road Map:** The current popular uprisings and democratic revolutions in Northern Africa and the Middle East should be used as an opportunity to convince the Algerian regime to slowly open up. By ending the state of emergency and announcing reforms, the Algerian president has signalled his willingness to concede some of his powers. This should be encouraged. It remains, however, uncertain, how far the regime is willing to go. The Association Agreement with Algeria from 2002 lays down the contractual relations. The Road Map agreed with Algeria in 2008 sets objectives in sectors of mutual interest such as the fight against terrorism. The dialogue with Algeria needs to be continued and reinforced.
- **Promote a coherent European approach on security and development:** Ensure that the different strategies (including European Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, European Security Strategy, EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy), the national cooperation strategies as well as the existing mechanisms and instruments (especially the European Developmental Fund, the Instrument for Stability, the ENP, the African Peace Facility), are used in a coherent approach. This is especially important with regards to defining the relationship between security and development approaches. The institutions within the Joint Africa-EU Strategy need to be used for such an integrated approach.
- **Support the soon-to-be-democracies in North Africa / the Middle East:** The uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries of the region have sent clear demands for political participation as well as economic and social progress. Especially the lack of perspectives of many young people has been an important catalyst.

For the new democracies to be successful, they will

have to “deliver” not only politically but also economically. If economic and social progress does not keep pace with political progress, Al Qaida and other extremist groups could profit in the future from these disappointments and be considered political alternatives.

- **Make use of the Africa-EU Partnership:** Use this existing partnership to foster dialogue on the conflicts in the central Sahara by bringing together all the relevant actors. Common grounds and understanding of the conflict situation among the concerned actors are the prerequisite for coherent approaches. To be successful, the EU and its African partners need to find political consensus on how to deal with the conflicts in the central Sahara.
- **Enhance regional dialogue and cooperation in West Africa:** As discussed, the complex conflict system requires regional dialogue and cooperation. As not all of the concerned states are members in the different regional organizations, it is of high importance to not limit the dialogue to the membership. Dialogue and cooperation should serve the aim of harmonizing national policies with regard to counter terrorism approaches.
- **Strengthen diplomatic and civil approaches:** The existing regional security architecture should be supported by strengthening diplomatic and civil approaches for conflict prevention. Most specifically:
- **Operationalize the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF):** The ECOWAS standard needs to be put into practice. As ECOWAS embraces the principle of the “Responsibility to Protect”, it has to prepare answers to put this into practice. This refers especially to the “Responsibility to prevent”. Necessary instruments for its implementation do exist, however, they are either rarely applied or have not functioned properly. A more coherent approach is necessary for its operationalization.

At the national level

Besides the needed international and regional engagement, Mali will have to do its part. The following recommendations are thus addressing Malian governmental as well as non-governmental actors.

- **Continue the socio-economic development of northern Mali:** Poverty, unemployment especially among the young in the north, economic underdevelopment and the feeling of exclusion from decision-making provide a hotbed for fundamentalist ideas. The key challenge for stabilizing northern Mali are public investments and to provide for alternative sources of income and thereby creating economic, social as well as political perspectives. This will also serve the implementation of the peace agreement with the Tuareg.
- **Continue the implementation of the peace agreement:** While socio-economic development is an important part of the peace agreement, there is also a greater socio-historical gap to close: The cleavage between the north and the south. This includes a national dialogue and the building of trust as many problems from the past rebellions have not been properly discussed in public debates. This is also to serve the continued building of the nation.
- **Sensitize the local leaders and communities in northern Mali:** The local as well as the religious and the traditional leaders have to be included in the programs of the Malian government and be sensitized about their important role in the conflict setting. If they engage in order to create a more prosperous, stable region together with the Malian state and international actors, AQMI will lose its needed logistic support. Also, these leaders can exercise influence upon the youth and educate them about the consequences of the insecure situation on their everyday life.
- **Include the trade unions in the process:** To achieve social stability in northern Mali as a prerequisite for an overall stabilization, a socially just socio-economic development is needed. This cannot be achieved without the trade unions. Poverty reduction and employment policy are the corner stones of Malian social and economic policy. The governmental approach focuses solely on how to achieve growth. While it is true that growth is the necessary prerequisite to fight poverty, it also has to be taken into account that growth and social justice are closely interlinked.
- **Continue the strengthening of the Rule of Law in northern Mali:** The Malian state needs to continue its political approach to the conflict. The strengthening of the state's presence with a functioning judicial system and rule of law is imperative.
- **Strengthen the democratic institutions in Mali:** Malian democracy has yet to be consolidated, thus Malian actors need to continue the strengthening of democratic institutions, and to support the mechanisms for the rule of law.
- **Promote the democratic governance of the security sector:** Security policy in Mali is almost exclusively dominated by the president. While his engagement is to be welcomed, for a democratic governance of the security sector other relevant actors need to be included. Therefore, strengthening the capacity and the role of the Assemblée Nationale (and especially the Commission on Security and Defence) and thus of parliamentary oversight is imperative.
- **Continue the legal fight against small arms by supporting the Assemblée Nationale to harmonize national law with the convention:** Mali has ratified the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons but has yet to translate it into national law. Supporting the Assemblée Nationale in harmonizing national law with the convention will create a more profound legal basis in the fight against small arms.
- **Foster debates about the complex nature of the conflict:** As there is a lack of public debate as well as of debate among the political elites, the issue needs to be put on the agenda to create more awareness of the complex nature of the conflict. This requires analyses taking all actors and lines of conflict into consideration.
- **Foster regional dialogue and cooperation:** The regional security architecture and regional dialogue and cooperation are of high importance, as the conflict

and security situation has only recently become a Malian problem. While regional dialogue and cooperation have to take place on many levels, the Malian president has planned for a conference of Heads of State on the conflict since 2007. This initiative needs to be taken up.

- **Sensitize the media:** Balanced and impartial media coverage is necessary in order to foster a public debate. However, the Malian media sector lacks many essentials such as training for journalists and appropriate compensation as often journalists are not properly paid by their employers. This hinders generally more qualified media coverage. In a conflict situation this might trigger an escalation by, for instance, the spreading of rumours or partial coverage.
- **Fight against corruption and organized crime:** in order to prevent a further destabilization of the country, corruption and organized crime need to be fought as these are obstacles in the fight against AQMI. International donors should put this topic higher up on the agenda.
- **Start an open debate on the future exploitation of oil in Mali:** As the question of oil is most likely to become of high importance in the future, an early and open dialogue about this highly sensitive question is needed. This includes the question of the distribution of revenues as well as the oil's relevance to the conflict situation. Experiences from other countries should be included to avoid the "resource curse."

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About this study

Al Qaida au Maghreb Islamique (AQMI) has gained a foothold in West Africa and destabilizes the region. This development hit Mali the hardest because of its weaknesses as it is still in the process of resolving the Tuareg conflict by putting the peace agreement into practice. Furthermore, corruption and organized crime

contribute to an environment of insecurity. Only an inclusive approach which takes the complex nature of the conflict system into account, and which is supported by regional and international mechanisms, will lead to a peaceful situation in northern Mali and the central Sahara.

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