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REGIONS AT RISK

PREVENTING MASS ATROCITIES IN MALI

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Executive Summary

More than four years after the overthrow of jihadist rule in northern cities in 2013 and deployment of a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission, violence in northern Mali has continued, expanded to other regions, and, in some areas, escalated. Although mass atrocities—large-scale, systematic violence against civilian populations—are not yet taking place in Mali, early warning signs are visible and warrant immediate attention by the Malian government and international partners.

This report explains the factors behind three high-risk intercommunal conflicts, elaborates plausible scenarios that would lead to escalation in violence against civilians in the next 12 to 18 months, and proposes recommendations to mitigate the risks. We identify two conflicts that could devolve into mass atrocities: (1) the conflict between the Peul, Bambara, and Dogon ethnic groups in central Mali (Mopti and Ségou regions) and (2) the conflict between the Tolebe (Peul) and the Daousahaq (Tuareg) in Ménaka, near the Niger border. This report also assesses risk for escalation in the simmering conflict between the Ifoghas and Imghad Tuareg clans in the region of Kidal. We conclude that the Kidal conflict does not pose a plausible risk for mass atrocities over the next 12 to 18 months, but it does merit close monitoring.

Two major structural factors underpin atrocity risk throughout Mali. First, the weakness of the Malian state should not be underemphasized; its history of marginalizing populations outside the capital Bamako has and will continue to promote insecurity and to spur armed group recruitment. The state has little presence beyond the southern regions, and any influence it has is seen by many as unfairly distributed or even predatory. Second, not only has the state failed to establish effective authority or monopoly of force, it has also historically mismanaged intercommunal conflicts, piling up grievances upon grievances among communities. Historically, the Malian state has used either brutal repression to address rebellions or supported peace negotiations that favored reconciliation over justice, with perpetrators of violence rarely held accountable. This impunity is a major factor driving armed group recruitment today.

In the context of these structural issues, three factors have precipitated the escalation of preexisting intercommunal conflicts over the past decade: (1) the intensification of weapons and drug trafficking, (2) the outbreak of the jihadist insurgency in 2012 and subsequent spread of jihadism, and (3) the increasing availability of arms and proliferation of community-based self-defense militias.

We assess that the highest risk for mass atrocities is in central Mali, where violence between jihadist groups, Malian security forces, and self-defense militias operating on behalf of ethnic Bambara and Dogon communities has been on the rise since 2015. The plausible mass atrocity in the next 12 to 18 months in this case is that the violence continues to increase along the current trajectory. Central Mali is at particularly high risk because of the high population density (relative to the northern regions), prevalence of arms and extremist ideology, and number of communities with histories of conflict and grievances living in close proximity to one another. Although civilians from all central Malian communities suffer violence from armed groups, the civilian Peul are the most vulnerable, as they are targets of violence from all sides—jihadists, security forces, and especially other ethnic militias, which often attack Peul civilians in response to jihadist violence rather than targeting the perpetrators.

In Ménaka, we see a similar situation of long-standing intercommunal grievances between the Tolebe (a group of mostly pastoralist Peuls) and the Daousahaq (a Tuareg tribe) recently becoming violent in the name of self-defense and in the context of rising jihadism and rampant banditry. Ménaka has seen a surge in counterterrorism operations recently—because of rising threat and its location bordering Niger—that is expected to increase with the deployment of forces of the G5 Sahel, a regional security body. An increase in counterterrorism operations has potential to upset the tenuous balance of capabilities between militia associated with Tolebe and Daousahaq communities. A plausible mass atrocity scenario in Ménaka is that foreign governments (likely France or Niger) might encourage Daousahaq militias to act forcefully against jihadist groups and their perceived supporters (that is, Tolebe civilians). In response, Tolebe militias, whose members are motivated by multiple factors, including jihadist ideology and community protection, would likely attack Daousahaq communities, prompting Daousahaq militia to attack Tolebe communities. As in central Mali, there would be deliberate violence against civilians on both sides; however, any government-aligned militias would have more capacity to commit atrocities than their opponents.

To prevent these scenarios, we make recommendations that fall into four categories (further detailed at the end of the report):

1. **Ensure that counterterrorism operations do not exacerbate risks of mass atrocities.** All actors engaged in or supporting counterterrorism operations should incorporate the protection of civilians as a high priority. They should refrain from supporting or collaborating with ethnically aligned militia or other armed groups with poor human rights records.
2. **Support the peaceful management of intercommunal conflicts that could lead to mass atrocities.** The Malian government should pursue security and justice reforms more inclusively across the country, especially including central Mali. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union, and other international agencies (1) should ensure that programs aimed at countering violent extremism complement efforts to prevent mass atrocities and (2) should expand support for local peacebuilding programs.
3. **Promote justice and accountability.** The Malian government should take steps to harmonize its parallel systems of justice, thus prioritizing its ability to resolve disputes over management of land and other natural resources. The Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC), working with the support of MINUSMA's Human Rights and Protection Division, should continue to expand on its work in northern and central Mali.
4. **Improve information related to violence and efforts to prevent it.** The Malian government and MINUSMA should improve collection, analysis, and dissemination of information on violent incidents, human rights violations, and trends over time. Donors supporting humanitarian and peacebuilding programs should encourage their operational partners in Mali to share information with each other on violent incidents and possible atrocity warning signs.

Table 1. Actors

Armed Groups Mentioned in This Report*		
2015 Algiers Accord signatories		
Coordination of the Movement of Azawad (CMA)	Tuareg-dominated coalition of mostly Tuareg separatist movements; created in 2014 to represent the separatists in the peace negotiation process in the aftermath of the 2013 French intervention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MNLA/ National Movements for the Liberation of Azawad—Mostly Tuareg separatist group that started 2012 rebellion in northern Mali • HCUA/ Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad—Ifoghas-led CMA member group that split from Ansar Dine following the 2013 French intervention • MAA/ Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad—CMA member group • CPA/ Coalition du Peuple de l'Azawad—A faction of this group joined the CMA • CMFPR-II/Coordination des Mouvements et Fronts Patriotiques de Résistance—A faction of this group joined the CMA
The Plateforme	Coalition composed of groups, including Imghad, Arab Lamhar, and Peul-Songhai, that claim loyalty to the Malian state in the aftermath of the 2012 rebellion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GATIA/Groupe d'Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (Allied Self-Defense Group)—Mostly Imghad loyalist armed group led by Elhaji Gamou • CMFPR-I/Coordination des Mouvements et Fronts Patriotiques de Résistance—Plateforme member group • CPA—a splinter of this group (see above) joined the Plateforme • MAA—a splinter of this group (see above) joined the Plateforme
Jihadist Groups		
Jama'at Nusratul Islam wal Muslim (JNIM)	A merger of jihadist groups formed in March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ansar Dine—Among the first local jihadist movements, created and led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, today a branch of JNIM • Katiba Macina—A branch of JNIM founded by Amadou Kouffa in 2014 composed mostly of Peul herders inciting violent jihad against the Malian state • AQIM/Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb—The first jihadist group to be established in Mali, led by Algerian jihadists and today a branch of JNIM • Al-Mourabitoun—A branch of JNIM that was integrated into Katiba Macina before merging into JNIM
Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)	A faction of AQIM that split off in 2011. Eventually most of MUJAO combined with another group in 2013 to create Al-Mourabitoun while another faction became a branch of JNIM.	
Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)	A jihadist movement led by Abu Walid al-Saharawi perpetrated attacks against military and civilians in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso and pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS) in 2015. ISGS operates in Ménaka near the Niger-Mali border, as well as along the Burkina Faso border, and is composed of splinter groups of former MUJAO and Al-Mourabitoun.	
Communal Militias		
Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA)	A Daousahaq ethnic militia operating in Ménaka and led by Moussa Ag Acharatoumane.	
Tolebe militias	There is no specific name for Tolebe ethnic militias.	
Dan na Amba Sagou	The term means "Hunters who rely on God," the traditional name for ethnic Dogon militias.	

* The distinctions between various groups, sub-groups, clans, and tribes are complex. The purpose of this table is to aid readers in understanding the groups mentioned in this report, not to present a comprehensive picture of all groups in Mali.

Ethnic Groups and Subgroups Mentioned in This Report	
Bambara	The largest ethnic group in Mali—34%—lives mostly in the south and center of the country.
Peul/ Fulani	<p>Traditionally pastoralist population widespread across the Sahel; 15% of population.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolebe—Peul subgroup living in the Ménaka region • Peul rouge—Informal name for Peul herders in central Mali
Tuareg	<p>Traditionally semi-nomadic ethnic group living across the Sahel and Sahara, Tuaregs and Moors or Arabs make up approx. 10% of population.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ifoghas—Tuareg clan traditionally considered noble • Imghad—Tuareg clan traditionally considered tributaries to the nobility • Idnane—Tuareg clan today considering themselves nobility, mostly living in Kidal • Daousahaq—Tuareg subgroup living in Ménaka region near border between Niger and Mali
Moors and Arabs	Maliens living in the northern regions of Arab and Berber origins.
Dogon	Traditionally sedentary population living in plateau region of central Mali; comprises approx. 8% of population.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past quarter century, Mali has experienced a series of violent conflicts, including rebellions against the Malian state, intercommunal violence between different ethnic and tribal groups, and jihadist violence. In 2012, a coalition of jihadist groups and separatist rebels waged war against the Malian state, leading to the defeat of the national army and the occupation of two-thirds of Malian territory.¹ For nine months, the jihadists maintained control over northern Mali where they implemented a harsh interpretation of the *sharia* criminal code—amputating hands, mutilating other body parts, whipping people, and, in one case, stoning a person to death—and destroyed centuries-old mausoleums in Timbuktu. Tuareg separatists also engaged in serious rights violations during the occupation, including sexual violence, large-scale looting and pillage, and the summary execution of more than 100 Malian soldiers.² The occupation ended in 2013 after an international military coalition led by France intervened to oust the jihadists³ from the major cities, forcing them to seek shelter in the surrounding desert and rugged mountain terrain.

Despite the serious weakening of the jihadists and deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation, violence in northern Mali has continued, has expanded to other regions, and has, in some areas, escalated. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reported that 635 civilians (and 2,318 combatants) were killed as a result of unrest in Mali from 2013 to 2017, more than four times the number of civilian fatalities in the previous five years (2008–12).⁴ (See figure 1.) As of December 2017, more than 130,000 Malian refugees resided in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mauritania, and another 40,000 were displaced internally.⁵ The UN mission in Mali has

Table 2. Recent Conflict Timeline

DATE	ACTIVITY
Jan 2012	Tuareg rebellion, led by the MNLA, begins.
Mar 2012	Malian military, displeased with the government's management of the Tuareg rebellion, stages a coup. A junta takes over, but under international pressure, gives up power to interim president (Dioncounda Traoré).
Jun 2012	Jihadists and separatists in northern Mali formally part ways, citing disagreements over implementation of sharia, leaving control of the conquered regions solely to the jihadists.
Dec 2012	UN authorizes the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA).
Jan 2013	Rebels capture Kona, beginning of southern offensive.
Jan 2013	Operation Serval (France) deploys.
Feb 2013	AFISMA deploys.
Jul 2013	6,000 MINUSMA troops are deployed and take over authority from AFISMA.
Aug 2013	Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK) wins presidential election.
May 2015	Government of Mali signs a peace agreement with some rebel groups, fighting continues.
May 2015	Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, leader of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara swears oath of allegiance to ISIS.
Jun 2015	Algiers Accord is signed by the Malian government, GATIA, and the Plateforme.
Mar 2017	JNIM is formed by a merger of jihadist groups.
Apr 2017	The African Union Peace and Security Council authorizes the G5 Sahel Joint Forces (FC, G5S).
Nov 2017	The first FC, G5S mission is carried out in the border zone of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso (known as the Liptako-Gourma zone).

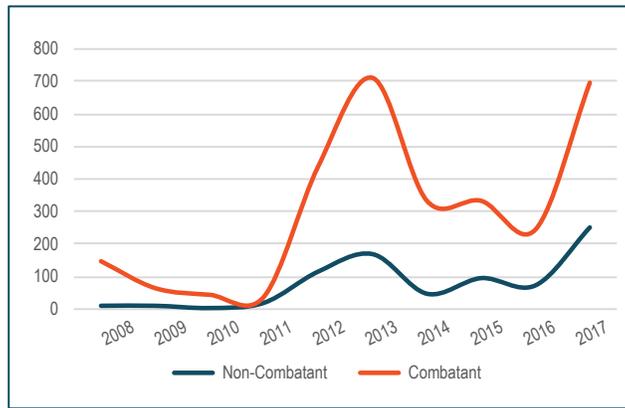
the most peacekeeper fatalities of any other active mission, with 158 fatalities since 2013.⁶ Since 2015, the conflict has expanded into the regions of Mopti and Ségou in central Mali where cleavages between Peul, Bambara, and Dogon communities have increasingly taken an ethnic connotation resulting in a sharp increase of violence against civilians.⁷

This report explores the factors behind three high-risk conflicts, elaborates plausible scenarios that could lead to escalation in systematic violence against civilians, and proposes recommendations for how to prevent or address them.

METHODOLOGY

The Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide launched the Early Warning Project to provide governments, civil society, development partners, and vulnerable communities with advanced and reliable warning. The project aims to highlight situations where mass atrocities—“large-scale, systematic violence against civilian populations”⁸—are not yet taking place but where early warning signs are visible. The main elements to date have been an annual statistical risk assessment⁹ and a public opinion pool to aggregate individual assessments of risk. This report is the third in a series of studies on selected countries facing relatively high risk of mass atrocities, yet insufficient policy attention on ways to address atrocity risks, designed to delve deeper into country-specific contexts and help inform preventive action.

Figure 1. Fatalities in Mali



Source: Data extracted from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. <https://www.acledata.com/data/>.

We selected Mali for this study mainly because our annual global risk assessment has consistently placed it in the top 10 percent of countries, ranking 9th, 13th, and 8th of 162 in 2014, 2015, and 2016, respectively. Note that the rarity of mass atrocities means that a country such as Mali, whose risk is high relative to others, is still unlikely to experience an episode of systematic violence against civilians that meets our operational definition of large-scale—at least 1,000 civilian fatalities over a single year. Our most recent statistical analysis estimated Mali’s risk of mass killing at about 4 percent over the subsequent year.¹⁰



The research team, consisting of a Simon-Skjoldt Center staff member and an Early Warning Fellow who is an expert on Mali, conducted interviews and desk research starting in spring 2017, including several weeks of field work in Niger and Mali in June 2017. The findings are based primarily on interviews and discussions with 93 interlocutors¹¹ from the Malian government, armed groups, civil society, and domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Mali as well as country experts working in government and NGOs internationally. The researchers sought to interview a wide variety of stakeholders representing a spectrum of views for a comprehensive understanding of the local context.

The report’s conceptual framework and research questions draw from atrocity prevention frameworks developed by the United States and the United Nations.¹² We begin by detailing structural factors—that is, characteristics that are slow to change but create the context in which conflict and mass atrocities might occur. We then discuss recent precipitating factors that generated momentum toward crisis. On the basis of this analysis, we describe two plausible mass atrocity scenarios.

STRUCTURAL RISK FACTORS IN NORTHERN AND CENTRAL MALI

Here we highlight two structural characteristics at the root of the conflicts in Mali: (1) the weakness of the state, especially in providing security and justice, leading people to rely on their communities for these core governance functions and (2) historical mismanagement of intercommunal conflicts, which leaves numerous simmering tensions at risk of flaring into large-scale violence. Although these factors are present in many countries and largely resistant to change in the near term, they are important aspects of the context that spawn specific conflicts and potential atrocities in Mali.¹³

VACUUM OF STATE AUTHORITY

Governing from the southern capital of Bamako, the Malian state has been incapable of establishing effective security throughout the country. Numbering around 15,800—about 8,000 military and 7,800 paramilitary—Malian security forces are undersized for securing a 478,841-square-mile territory (almost twice the size of Texas). For comparison, France is half the geographic size of Mali but has 19 times more security personnel—one for every 217 people compared to Mali’s one for every 1,186 people.¹⁴ Mali is also the least policed country in the world, with a ratio of 38 police officers per 100,000 people (compared to what is considered the globally accepted ratio of 255 police officers for every 100,000 people).¹⁵ In addition to being undersized, the Malian security forces have historically been ill equipped, lacking basic military equipment such as vehicles, fuel, and bullets.¹⁶ Security forces often overcompensate for their personnel and equipment deficiencies by using excessive force against civilian populations.¹⁷

Shortages and mismanagement in human and financial resources by the Malian civil service, exacerbated by widespread corruption, have been most serious in the northern and central regions. Civil servants have often refused to go to these areas owing to insecurity, remoteness, and difficult climates.¹⁸ Many view their assignment to these regions as punishment and some only accept such assignments because of the higher opportunity they offer for corruption. The northern and central regions are often called the “El Dorado of corrupt public officials” where officials, often in complicity with the security services, extract inducements from the local population without worrying about regular inspections from the central government.¹⁹ The justice system is also severely affected; lack of central oversight creates a permissive environment for corrupt judges to take money from litigators and rule in favor of the highest bidder.

The state’s ineffectiveness, neglect, and abuse have left a vacuum of authority that local communities and other nonstate actors compete to fill. A public attitude survey conducted by Afrobarometer in 2014 showed that 43 percent of Malians disapprove of their local counselor and 71 percent think leaders of political parties are in their positions more to serve their own political ambitions than to help the population. The same survey showed that 63 percent of Malians put “a lot” of trust in traditional leaders, compared to 29 percent putting “a lot” of trust in their elected officials.²⁰ Malians,

particularly in the northern and central regions, have entrusted their security and the protection of their businesses to their closest community: family, clan, or ethnic groups. In the vacuum of state authority, strong reliance on communities can trigger intercommunal tensions over leadership and control over natural resources²¹ and trade routes.

DECADES OF MISMANAGED INTERCOMMUNAL CONFLICTS

Although ethnic diversity itself has not been shown to be a general risk factor for mass atrocities, the mixture in Mali of (1) deep ethnic and clan divisions leading to widespread competition over power and natural resources and (2) mismanagement of these conflicts by the state has left Mali with numerous intercommunal conflicts at risk of significant escalation.

There are many ethnic groups in Mali,²² and each is subdivided into socially or regionally stratified clans or fractions.²³ (See Table 1.) No formal authority structure ties these quasi-autonomous clans under one rule. To the contrary, intense rivalry between clans, each acting in its own interest and competing with one another for power and influence, has resulted in deeply divided communities.

The conflict for power is largely rooted in the tension between a traditional system of leadership that is based on social stratification and the modern system of leadership that stands on popular democratic representation. Traditionally, ethnic communities in northern and central Mali are organized hierarchically: (1) at the top of the hierarchy are lineages of warriors and religious clergy who are considered nobles, (2) in the middle of the hierarchy are lineages of dependents or tributaries who are non-nobles but are free, and (3) at the bottom of the hierarchy are enslaved people. As the transition from traditional to modern social and political organization takes place, it has generated tensions between the noble lineages who have benefited from the traditional system and the lower stratum who struggle to end the domination.²⁴

As is common across the Sahel, other conflicts exist between communities over the management and control of natural resources. There is the conflict between Daousahaq (a Tuareg clan) and Tolebe (a Peul clan) over pastoral resources in the region of Ménaka in the east of Mali along the Niger border and another conflict between seminomadic Peul and sedentary Bambara and Dogon in central Mali. Competition for control over land, pasture, and water has always driven conflict; however, conflict over natural resources is exacerbated during periods of drought when pressure on grazing land and water is higher.²⁵

The mismanagement of these conflicts by the Malian authorities has laid the ground for their continuation and escalation. Malian authorities have used two tactics to address conflicts in northern and central Mali. First, the state has used brutal repression to address rebellions. During the 1963–64 Tuareg-led rebellion, for instance, the Malian army attacked civilian populations, including women and religious persons; poisoned wells; and killed livestock in an attempt to crack down on the rebellion.²⁶ Whereas the army was able to stop the rebellion in 1964, the brutal repression left strong grievances and resentment in the Malian state, particularly among Tuareg communities. Tuareg rebels have capitalized on the memory of these past atrocities to mobilize support for subsequent Tuareg uprisings.

THE 2012 CRISIS IN NORTHERN MALI

In 2011, the collapse of Libya severely destabilized North Africa and the Sahel, leading to an influx of arms and the return of Tuareg mercenaries—who had fought for the former prime minister of Libya, Muammar al-Qaddafi—to northern Mali. In 2012, a coalition of separatist and jihadist insurgent groups—including the secular separatist National Movements for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the jihadist movements Ansar Dine and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)—launched a joint military operation to conquer northern Mali.¹ The insurgents won decisive military victories and inflicted severe casualties on Malian soldiers. News of the violence prompted protests in Bamako to the government's handling of the situation that led to a military coup that ousted president Amadou Toumani Touré. The sociopolitical chaos that ensued allowed the insurgents to quickly invade the regions of Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu, which together make up two-thirds of the Malian territory.

By March 2012, Ansar Dine, led by Iyad Ag Ghaly (who is now the leader of JNIM, or Jama'at Nusratul Islam wal Muslim), gained control of Kidal, while MUJAO and MNLA initially shared control of Gao before rivalry between the two groups—one jihadist and one nationalist—led to confrontation and the expulsion of MNLA (the secular group) combatants from the city.² Between June 2012 and January 2013, the jihadist insurgents extended their control over the northern regions, implementing a radical interpretation of sharia over the population. Comforted in their position of power in the face of a collapsing state and an indecisive international community, the jihadists decided to further advance toward the capital city of Bamako. Their move precipitated the French military intervention in January 2013, followed by the deployment of a multinational force. The jihadists were subsequently ousted from the major cities of northern Mali, although they continue to pursue their struggle through guerrilla warfare in rural areas and rugged mountains to the present day.³

The Malian government regained control over all the liberated territories, except Kidal, which fell under the control of a coalition of separatist movements led by members of the Ifoghas clan, which is traditionally considered Tuareg nobility. This coalition included the MNLA and was called the Coordination of the Movement of Azawad (CMA). The major contenders of the CMA regrouped in an opposing coalition called the Plateforme, composed of groups that claim loyalty to the Malian state, including the Imghad and Allied Self-Defense Group (GATIA). A peace agreement was negotiated in Algiers and signed in 2015 by the warring parties; however, today, more than two years after the signature, implementing the Algiers Accord has stalled.

The relevance of the 2012 crisis extends far beyond the northern regions. Although central Mali was not part of the rebellion, it saw spillover of displaced persons, arms, and jihadist influence. The Peuls of central Mali were not included in the Algiers Accord negotiations and the planned disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) because they were not party to the conflict. Additionally, the severity of conflict in the north and the risk it posed of a jihadist takeover of Bamako attracted the attention and the extensive aid and development resources of the international community. The perceived marginalization of the Peuls of central Mali by the government in the peace negotiations became a grievance that jihadists emphasized in recruitment campaigns around Mopti and Ségou as they thought the Tuaregs were unfairly benefiting from aid, DDR, and international attention.

¹ Alexander Thurston and Andrew Lebovich, "A Handbook on Mali's 2012–2013 Crisis" (working paper 13-001 The Roberta Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 2013).

² Patrick Gonin Patrick, Nathalie Kottok, and Marc-Antoine Pérouse De Montclos, *La Tragedie Malienne* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2013).

³ Rob Malley, "10 Conflicts to Watch in 2018," *Foreign Policy*, January 2, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/02/10-conflicts-to-watch-in-2018/>.

Second, the Malian government has used negotiations to end conflicts. However, peace negotiations have more often privileged reconciliation over justice, with perpetrators of violence rarely held accountable. As a result, peace agreements have perpetuated the problem of impunity, leaving deep grievances among communities. Because of the lack of state-led justice, victims of atrocities seek opportunities to take revenge on their aggressors outside of the law. When those opportunities are realized, they create more victims, thereby contributing to the vicious cycle. Since 1990, Mali and various armed groups have signed four peace agreements and countless other community-based peace agreements—also called “peace from below”—but in most cases they have failed to secure lasting peace.²⁷ The Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC), “tasked with investigating all gross human rights violations committed in Mali between 1960 and 2013,” is a fledgling effort to address impunity, but its effect is yet to be seen.²⁸

PRECIPITATING FACTORS OF CONFLICT IN NORTHERN AND CENTRAL MALI

Three factors have precipitated the escalation of preexisting intercommunal conflicts in Mali over the past decade: the intensification of illicit drug and weapons trafficking, the spread of jihadist ideology, and the proliferation of arms and armed movements.

INTENSIFICATION OF SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING

Northern Mali has been an area of intense trade for centuries, and today it is a hub for smuggling and trafficking, providing a crucial source of income for youth, especially. Drug traffickers take advantage of the vacuum of state authority, subcontracting the transportation of drug cargo to well-trained armed groups and community militias. Militias’ involvement in the drug business provides them with income to buy weapons, vehicles, and pay combatants’ salaries; protection of smuggling interests is often the real issue behind militias’ claims of community protection.²⁹ As groups transition from smuggling goods to trafficking drugs, the business becomes more and more lucrative, increasing the competition for control over routes and passage points.³⁰ Controlling these routes has become a crucial element in the power struggle between various criminal groups, armed groups, and community leaders and militias. Furthermore, this dynamic raises the stakes—and likelihood of violent conflict—in district elections because those who consolidate political power wield control over lucrative trafficking routes and waypoints.

Since the mid-2000s, traffickers have used routes through West Africa and the Sahel to transport drugs from Latin America and Asia to Europe.³¹ Unlike in northern Mali, drug trafficking has not been strong in central Mali; however, in August 2016 about \$20,000 USD worth of cocaine was seized in Mopti, suggesting a connection from Bamako to Mopti to Kidal.³² And in central Mali, the trafficking of weapons through the border with Burkina Faso and the money, arms, and competition for control that brings to communities have contributed to the current violence.³³

SPREAD OF JIHADIST IDEOLOGY

The introduction of jihadist discourse is another important factor behind the escalating conflict and rising violence against civilians since 2012. Communities in northern and central Mali are overwhelmingly Muslim, and Islam has often been the sole unifying factor across otherwise divided communities. Reference to Muslim fraternity often provides a powerful argument for the diffusion of

tensions. Yet, with the spread of jihadist ideology, religion has increasingly become a divisive rather than a unifying force. Jihadists often view people who agree with their own version of Islam as the “true” Muslims and those who disagree with them as “infidels” and potential targets of violence. The influence of jihadism serves as a precipitating factor for intensifying conflict and atrocity risk because the ideology encourages an us-versus-them mentality and incites violence.

The jihadist ideology was first introduced in northern Mali in the early 2000s as a result of spillover from the Algerian civil war (1991–2002). Algerian jihadists moved into northern Mali around 2004 and established camps in the remote areas of Kidal and Timbuktu. They used charity, trade, and proselytizing to seduce local populations, spread their ideology, and recruit followers.³⁴ Local populations then viewed the Algerian jihadists positively as they married local women, treated communities with respect, and provided security while also bringing economic opportunities.³⁵ Some individuals from the Da’awa—the Malian branch of the Tabligh movement—and the Salafi sects embraced the jihadist ideology. But it should be stressed that the Da’awa and the Salafi sects themselves are vocal critics of jihadism, and they have banned or at least distanced themselves from their members who joined the jihadist groups.³⁶

Jihadism today has taken hold in both northern and central Mali. Its spread is partly a result of the vacuum of state authority, corruption and abuses committed by the Malian military,³⁷ and longstanding grievances among communities. The jihadist discourse has emphasized the unity of Muslims regardless of ethnicity against the Malian state and the so-called crusaders.³⁸ These themes have appealed to certain social groups, particularly Peul herders, also called “Peul rouge,”³⁹ who for a long time have suffered discrimination within the Peul community and oppression by Tuareg groups and state officials.⁴⁰

During the past three years, violence has increased in central Mali as the region became a hotbed of jihadism. Today it is dominated by *Katiba Macina*, a branch of JNIM. *Katiba Macina* was founded by Amadou Kouffa, an influential preacher who began in 2014 to incite his followers—reportedly mostly Peul herders—to wage violent jihad against the Malian state, international forces, and any civilian populations who collaborate with them.⁴¹ As a result, the military has withdrawn to a few posts, and local authorities, government officials, and even some traditional elites have vacated many districts. When jihadists take control they close the schools, implement sharia, and threaten the population to not collaborate with the Malian security forces.⁴² Because of strict laws implemented by the jihadists, women are no longer able to conduct their normal activities—that is, travel to markets, work, or engage in commerce. And although Malian women generally wield little power outside the home, they are very influential in family decisions, including the decision to send sons to fight for various armed groups. Women who ascribe to jihadist ideology or who believe that the only way to protect themselves is for their sons to join jihadist or other defense groups contribute to armed group recruitment and the continuation of violence.⁴³

Despite the role of jihadists in exacerbating conflict in northern and central Mali, not all local populations view the jihadist takeover entirely negatively. Our field research suggests that many people appreciate the jihadist efforts to crackdown on corruption, to manage natural resource conflicts, and to administer some form of justice, compared with the corruption of the Malian state

officials. Describing the jihadist rule in central Mali, a human rights activist based in Youwarou, a district in northern Mopti that is under jihadist control, said,

*[T]he jihadists are good administrators. They have cancelled all the taxes and fines that government officials charged the poor population. They also cancelled the fees that landowners charged herders for access to the “bourgoutiere” [grazing zone]. They said all land belongs to God and it’s free for everyone to use it. But they delineated areas for pasture and areas for farming. They have resolved disputes over resources that lagged in the courts system for decades. Today there is no more conflict over natural resources and everyone is happy for that.*⁴⁴

To the extent that this perspective represents local populations, it presents a serious challenge to strategies aimed at starving jihadist groups of recruits and support from local communities.

PROLIFERATION OF ARMS AND ARMED MOVEMENTS

The total breakdown of state authority in 2012 transformed northern and central Mali into a lawless territory where armed groups vie for control and influence, using both political and violent means. Whereas the widespread presence of armed groups is problematic in and of itself, it does not necessarily precipitate atrocities. However, in the context of competition between ethnic and social groups fueled by rhetoric around intergroup grievances, the formation of an armed group on one side typically triggers the formation of an armed group on the other side. In some cases, external actors lend legitimacy and support to these groups, which can increase the groups’ capacities to commit atrocities.⁴⁵

Although lines between them are sometimes blurry, three types of armed movements, in general, operate in northern and central Mali: (1) the so-called “Signatories Groups of the Peace Agreement” with the Malian government (CMA and the Allied Self-Defense Group [GATIA]), (2) jihadist movements, and (3) countless small armed groups assembled for the sake of protecting villages or specific communities throughout northern and central Mali. (See table 1.) The decision to create militias is often made by community leaders to compensate for insufficient protection from state security forces and thus guarantee protection from violence by rival groups. However, many communities have struck alliances with jihadist movements—not necessarily because they believed in the ideology, but mainly to get military training and weapons.⁴⁶ Such an alliance was particularly the case with Tolebe in Ménaka and Peul rouge in central Mali who feared the rising influence of their Tuareg rivals.⁴⁷ Communities sometimes encourage young men to join these movements. According to a report published by Mercy Corps in early 2017, the majority of young combatants said they joined armed groups out of a sense of duty to and solidarity with their community and because they thought fighting on behalf of their community would increase their respectability in their community.⁴⁸

Additionally, the capacity of armed groups to commit atrocities has increased thanks to money earned in trafficking and banditry as well as increasing arms flows. Recent proliferation of firearms in the region has changed the dynamics of conflict. Although intercommunal tensions go back decades or even centuries, violence used to be small in scale as belligerents fought only with cold weapons, such



A woman walks on the roof of the Great Mosque of Djenné after praying. The Great Mosque of Djenné was designated a World Heritage Site by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1988, along with the old town of Djenné, in the central region of Mali. *UN Photo/Marco Dormino*

as sticks and machetes. During the civil war in Libya (2010–2011), insurgent groups plundered military bases in Mali and Niger; the civil war also has generated a massive influx of weapons throughout the region. Almost anyone can access firearms with relatively little cash. As a judge in Mopti put it, “Today a Peul herder can purchase a Kalashnikov with ammunitions just by selling one cow.”⁴⁹ With all communities armed with Kalashnikovs, conflicts have become more lethal, and altercations have become more frequent. With firearms easily available, the growth of banditry has also occurred.⁵⁰

PLAUSIBLE MASS ATROCITY SCENARIOS

On the basis of the risks discussed above, we sought to identify potential scenarios over the next 12 to 18 months that would be considered plausible and would include large-scale, systematic attacks on civilian populations. We discuss two such mass atrocity scenarios in this section: (1) in central Mali, the Dogon and Bambara militia attacks on Peul civilians and (2) in Ménaka, Tuareg militia attacks on Tolebe civilians. We then briefly discuss the conflict between Imghad and Ifoghas in Kidal, although we do not see a plausible mass atrocity there in the near term.

PEACEKEEPING AND COUNTERTERRORISM FORCES: MINUSMA, OPERATION BARKHANE, AND G5 SAHEL

Currently, three international forces—the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Operation Barkhane, and G5 Sahel Joint Forces (FC, G5S)—operate in northern and central Mali to help stabilize the region, protect civilian populations, and alleviate the threat of terrorism. Their successes, thus far, have been limited, and although each mission has its own challenges, they face some common problems. First, given the proliferation of armed movements and constant collusion between jihadist and nonjihadist, missions face difficulties in identifying the real enemies, which they all define as jihadist groups. Second, although these forces appear well equipped to wage conventional warfare, they are ill adapted to deal with the type of asymmetric warfare that insurgent groups have used. Third, their approach of considering armed groups who have adopted jihadist discourse as illegitimate, and those who do not use jihadist discourse as legitimate (that is, appropriate to work or to negotiate with), overlook the complexity of intercommunal dynamics and threaten to exacerbate the conflicts by empowering certain ethnic communities over their rivals. Although international forces can do little to stop small-scale violence, their presence serves as a factor of restraint in that, presumably, they would respond if one group were to pursue systematic large-scale violence against civilians.

MINUSMA: The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali is a Chapter VII United Nations peacekeeping mission established by UN Security Council Resolution 2100. It was officially deployed on July 1, 2013, to stabilize northern Mali after the 2012 crisis. UN Resolution 2364 renewed MINUSMA's mandate for the fourth time and focused its mission on supporting and monitoring the ceasefire, thus supporting the implementation of the Algiers Accord, protecting civilians, and promoting human rights. MINUSMA has expanded its areas of operation, with three bases in Timbuktu, three in Gao, three in Kidal, two in Mopti, one in Ségou, one in Ménaka, and one in Bamako. It has a total of 10,981 military personnel and 1,707 police in country as of June 2017.¹ MINUSMA is considered the deadliest peacekeeping mission for peacekeepers, and its forces are often accused of focusing on their own self-protection rather than protecting civilians. In fact, UN forces often only control urban centers where they have their bases, while armed groups control rural areas.²

Operation Barkhane: Barkhane is a French military operation with 4,000 soldiers that started in 2014 to oppose terrorism across the Sahel. The operation was launched at the end of Operation Serval (2013–2014), which had contributed to the liberation of northern Mali from the jihadist occupation. The main focus of Barkhane is to eliminate jihadist groups and deny them potential sanctuaries. Barkhane forces conduct military operations in northern and central Mali, including Kidal, Ménaka, and Mopti. The operation pledges to support the Malian army to secure the Malian territory, but it does not focus on providing security to communities.³ Confronted with a difficult, vast, and unfamiliar terrain, Barkhane forces have strong incentives to collaborate with local actors—most often Tuareg rebel groups involved in the Algiers Accord.⁴ This collaboration can indirectly boost these forces' legitimacy, empowering them and their communities over rivals.

G5 Sahel Joint Forces: The FC, G5S is a regional military force composed of armies from five Sahelian countries—Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Chad—that became operational in November 2017.⁵ Its mandate is to combat terrorism, organized crime, and human trafficking across the Sahel region. Unlike MINUSMA, the FC, G5S is an offensive operation to enforce government authority as opposed to peacekeeping.⁶ The deployment of the FC, G5S is widely viewed as a positive development given that it allows for national armies from the Sahel region to take charge of counterterrorism operations, which have until now been led by foreign military forces, notably French and UN forces. Although the FC, G5S is in its early stage, it has yet to secure full funding, and some have raised concerns over human rights violations and its ability to negotiate a place in the “crowded security field.”⁷

¹ “MINUSMA Deployment,” Map No. 4506 Rev. 21, United Nations, December 2017, <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/dpko/MINUSMA.pdf>; “Fast Facts—Uniformed Personnel,” United Nations, June 2017, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/personnel>.

² International Crisis Group (ICG), “Mali Central: la fabrique d’une insurrection?” (Africa Report no. 238, ICG, Brussels and Dakar, July 2016) 17, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/west-africa/mali/central-mali-uprising-making>.

³ Ministère des Armées, “Dossier de Presse: Operation Barkhane,” December 2017, 7,

<https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/operations/sahel/dossier-de-presentation-de-l-operation-barkhane/operation-barkhane>.

⁴ Authors’ interviews with French officials and an officer in the Malian army (January 2018), confirmed that there are ongoing contacts between French officials and armed groups in northern Mali, particularly the groups that are signatory of the Algiers peace accord. Most of these contacts are aimed at facilitating the implementation of the peace agreement. But French forces involved in operation Barkhane—and Servat previously—often collaborate with these armed groups, particularly in intelligence sharing and pathfinding to conduct their counterterrorism operations.

⁵ In 2014, five Sahelian countries—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger—agreed to create a joint military force with the purpose of fighting the jihadist forces that operate across the Sahel region. For more on composition, and mission, visit the website of the permanent secretary of the G5 Sahel, <http://www.g5sahel.org/>.

⁶ International Crisis Group (ICG), “Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force” (Africa Report no. 258, ICG, Brussels, December, 12, 2017), 2, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/burkina-faso/258-force-du-g5-sahel-trouver-sa-place-dans-lembouteillage-securitaire>.

⁷ Ibid.

JIHADISM AND PASTORALISM: PLAUSIBLE MASS ATROCITY SCENARIO IN CENTRAL MALI

The most plausible scenario in central Mali in the next 12 to 18 months is continually escalating violence between jihadist groups, Malian security forces, and self-defense militias operating on behalf of the Bambara and Dogon communities—in essence, a continuation along the current trajectory of steadily rising violence against civilians. Central Mali is at particularly high risk owing to the density of population, prevalence of arms and extremist ideology, and number of opposing communities living close to one another. Between January 2016 and April 2017, human rights organizations have identified at least 117 people killed, 87 wounded, and more than 10,000 displaced in violence between Peul communities and the Bambara and Dogon communities.⁵¹ Although this scale is well below a threshold at which we would consider it a mass atrocity, it could represent the early stage of an escalatory spiral of attack and counterattack targeting civilians, with few effective restraints if this dynamic were to take hold.

Target group: Peul civilians

Although civilians from all central Malian communities suffer violence from armed groups, the civilian Peul are the most vulnerable, as they are targets of violence from all sides—jihadists, security forces, and other ethnic militias. Jihadist groups have attacked sedentary Peul elites and other civilians whom they suspected of collaboration with the Malian and international security forces. Also, given that the majority of the jihadists’ recruits are from the Peul community, rival ethnic militias and the Malian security forces have attacked Peul civilians, often accusing them of collusion with the jihadists. The

narrative of victimization is strong within the Peul community. One Peul militia leader contends that the Peul are “victims of mistaken affinity,” explaining, “Today, for the Malian security forces, every Peul is a *de facto* jihadist. They are killed and attacked for that. Not only civilian Peuls are targeted by the army, they are also the target of militias close to the government.”⁵²

Potential perpetrators: Dogon and Bambara militias

As indicated previously, Dogon and Bambara self-defense militias view Peul civilians as either jihadists or in collusion with jihadist groups and have allegedly deliberately targeted Peul civilians.⁵³ When jihadists attack a member of a Dogon or Bambara community, the victim community’s strategy is not to confront the jihadists who are responsible for the attack but rather to aim at soft targets—in this case, Peul civilians. Also, sometimes armed groups take advantage of the context of conflicts to settle old accounts and disputes, including conflicts over natural resources. In February 2016, a clash between Bambara and Peul produced more than a dozen casualties. A reporter covering the event said that it was clear that the conflict started when “a group of well-armed Bambara attacked their neighboring Peul,” although a series of jihadist attacks on Bambara likely precipitated the clash. He said the exact motive of the attack was unknown, although it has become clear today that in central Mali “unfortunately when one sees a Peul, one assumes he is a jihadist.”⁵⁴

As jihadists consolidate their hold over central Mali, attacks against Dogon and Bambara militias as well as against individuals accused of collaboration with the Malian state are likely to increase. These attacks increase the motivation for the Dogon and Bambara militias to continue attacking Peul communities and, as the conflicts progress, to become better organized and more effective. The leader of a Dogon militia, *Dan Na Amba Sagou* said the following:

*We are not safe, nobody is asleep. Each time, people come to commit assassinations with impunity and leave without being worried. We saw this for months at Bankass, Bandiagara, and Koro. The Dogon movement Dan Na Amba Sagou intends to protect these four districts against armed bandits and jihadists.*⁵⁵

Potential perpetrators: Jihadists and Malian security forces

Jihadist groups and Malian security forces are both responsible for civilian fatalities since 2015, but we do not assess either as plausible perpetrators of mass atrocities in the next 12 to 18 months. Whereas jihadists do perpetrate violence against Peul civilians, to date they have strategically targeted individuals who opposed their rule rather than systematically attacking civilians on a massive scale.

Malian security forces can be expected to violate human rights because of their lack of capacity and training, but not to deliberately attack large numbers of civilians. Because state security forces lack crucial investigative skills and equipment, they have difficulty producing legal evidence that proves the culpability of suspected jihadists and criminals. Many arrested suspects are eventually freed for lack of evidence. Frustrated by this outcome, some members of the security forces have resorted to torture to force confessions and to extra-judicial killings of suspected jihadists they arrest. Although these incidents serve as another driver of conflict and armed group recruitment in central Mali, we do not see them reaching a massive scale.⁵⁶

Key assumptions

Our assessment rests on the following three assumptions:

1. The Malian government will be unable to reestablish its authority over the more rural areas of the Mopti and Ségou regions. The government has developed a plan to do so—the *Plan de Sécurisation Intégré des Régions du Centre*—but financial support has been lacking, and we see no evidence of a significant change in the near future.⁵⁷ If the Malian government and supporting international community were to prioritize implementing the plan, the scenario would become less likely.
2. Counterterrorism and peacekeeping forces (FC, G5S; Barkhane; and MINUSMA) are deployed but are unlikely to staunch the escalating intercommunal violence, in part because of limits on operational capacity and the challenges of mobility throughout the delta region.⁵⁸
3. Neither jihadist groups nor ethnic militias will expand their occupation south of the Nampala and Niono areas of the Ségou region (which are already partially occupied by jihadists). Such a move would likely warrant another massive international intervention similar to the 2013 French intervention; anything short of that will likely continue to be viewed as a problem but not a top priority.

Background and drivers of conflict in central Mali

Disputes over natural resources

Conflict in central Mali primarily revolves around competition between pastoralist and sedentary populations over the control of natural resources. The abundance of natural resources in the Inner Delta, relative to surrounding areas, attracted diverse populations, including Peul (pastoralists), Dogon (farmers), and Bambara (farmers). For centuries, these populations have used the same natural resources—land, water, and pasture—to perform different economic activities.

Increased land pressure caused by climate changes, rapid population growth, and shifting demographic distribution generates disputes between farmers and herders for two reasons. First, as available grazing land shrinks and farmers occupy corridors that animals had used to reach to water points, herders have begun to take their animals through the farms to access water, causing significant damage to crops.⁵⁹ Second, a system set up by the *Diina*⁶⁰ in the 19th century organizes the exploitation of natural resources so that farmers use the land during the wet season and herders access it during the dry season. But during periods of drought, herders have to bring their animals to the wetlands early, before the crops are harvested. Disputes arise because farmers accuse herders of intentionally bringing their animals into the farms and destroying crops and herders complain that farming has encroached on pastoral land leaving no choice for herders but to enter the farms either for passage or for grazing.⁶¹ As one herder puts it, “people only see animals moving to enter farming lands; but they fail to see the way in which farming land has ‘moved’ toward the animals.”⁶²

Whereas a certain level of tension between herders and farmers is endemic, the proliferation of arms and jihadist ascendance in central Mali has transformed these tensions into conflict explicitly framed around ethnicity.⁶³ Among their primary reforms, the jihadists are canceling the fees for access to

grazing zones and opening corridors for animal passage. Unsurprisingly, these policies are widely supported by herders (mostly Peul), who see this as a righting of years of unfairness, but disparaged by farming population (Dogon and Bambara) who are notably the main beneficiaries of land colonization. The fact that jihadist policies disproportionately benefit Peuls is interpreted by sedentary communities as further evidence that all Peuls are working with the jihadists and, furthermore, that there is a need for Dogon and Bambara communities to take action to protect their interests.⁶⁴

Failure of conflict resolution mechanisms

It is not competition over natural resources itself, but the failure of conflict resolution systems, and importantly the judicial system, to address disputes in a satisfactory way that transforms tensions into communitarian conflicts. There are two resolution mechanisms for disputes related to natural resources in central Mali: one is traditional, based on customary norms of reconciliation and implemented by traditional authorities, whereas the other is modern, based on positive law and implemented in the formal court system. The first is widely accepted as legitimate although not formally legal, and the second is legal but popularly viewed as less legitimate. This duality of the system of conflict resolution, combined with rampant corruption, provides loopholes for the losing sides of any litigation to escape final resolution by navigating between the two systems.

As a result, numerous disputes over natural resources remain unresolved, pushing litigants to take it upon themselves to address what they perceive as injustice, often relying on the support of their communities. When that community support has involved acts of violence, an issue that should be a minor complaint within the justice system can escalate to violence involving entire communities. Overall, the problem of impunity and the feeling of injustice have reinforced each communities' resolve to rely only on themselves to repair damages committed by members of rival communities against them, further aggravating communal tension.

History of atrocities feeding current insecurity

Collective memory of mass atrocities committed by jihadists long ago together with current jihadist coercive tactics have contributed to a perception of extreme threat among local communities. The current wave of jihadist insurgency in central Mali has revived narratives of atrocities from the 19th-century jihad that created the Macina Empire when pastoralist Peul perpetrated mass violence against civilian Dogon and Bambara populations.⁶⁵ The Dogon were victimized by the 19th-century jihadist violence to such an extent that they took refuge in inaccessible rocky plateaus and mountainous areas.⁶⁶ Until today, many current and former enslaved people held by Peul—called *Rimaybe*—are descendants of Dogon and Bambara who were captured during the 19th-century jihad.⁶⁷ Although most Dogon later embraced Islam, strong resentment of the Peul has remained alive and encrusted in Dogon culture and language and can be found in rituals, funeral ceremonies, masks, and dances.⁶⁸

Dogon and Bambara fears have today come to fruition. During the jihadist occupation in 2012, some Peul members of jihadist groups took advantage of the security vacuum to settle accounts with Dogon and Bambara communities. Justifying their actions by accusing Dogon and Bambara of extorting grazing land and collaborating with the Malian army, jihadists destroyed cultural symbols of Dogon communities.⁶⁹ In response to these attacks, and in the absence of an effective state, Dogon and Bambara communities organized militias⁷⁰ to provide for their own security.⁷¹ Other non-jihadist Peul

have also established militias on communitarian bases, for example, the Association Dewral Pulaku created in 2014 by pastoralist Peul “to protect the interest of nomadic herders.”⁷²

COUNTERTERRORISM GONE AWRY: PLAUSIBLE MASS ATROCITY SCENARIO IN MÉNAKA

A surge in counterterrorism operations against jihadists in Ménaka risks inadvertently exacerbating a longstanding intercommunal conflict in a context with increasing availability of arms, little government capacity, and blurred lines between combatants and civilians.

For the past 20 years, two pastoralist communities, the Daousahaq (a Tuareg tribe) and Tolebe (a group of mostly pastoralist Peuls), inhabiting the area of Ménaka near Mali’s southeastern border with Niger have engaged intermittently in violent conflict. Today, Malian and international forces are stepping up counterterrorism operations against Tolebe militias, some of whom are part of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).

A plausible scenario in Ménaka in the next 12 to 18 months is that the governments of Niger and France could increase their collaboration with Tuareg (including Daousahaq and Imghad) militia as part of a counterterrorism coalition against majority Tolebe jihadist groups. In response, Tolebe militias would likely attack Daousahaq communities, prompting Daousahaq militia to attack Tolebe communities. Because of an imbalance in external support, in this scenario the Daousahaq would have the means and impetus to commit atrocities against civilians.

Target group: Tolebe civilians

If intercommunal violence were to escalate, many civilians on both sides of this conflict would be killed. We can expect, however, that the group with greater military capacity—in this scenario the foreign-supported Daousahaq—would in the long run exact more violence on Tolebe civilians than the inverse.

As in many conflicts in Mali and throughout the region, the line between armed groups and civilians is often blurred making it difficult for counterterrorism forces to distinguish between combatant and noncombatant. A general lack of training, intelligence capacity, and motivation on the part of Malian and regional armed forces operating in Ménaka has led to indiscriminate targeting of Tolebe civilian populations for their alleged collusion with jihadist groups, thereby further feeding recruitment and incentive for Tolebe defense forces and associated jihadist groups to target Daousahaq communities.

Potential perpetrators: Foreign-supported Daousahaq militias

Given that national armies have been unsuccessful in their fight against the ISGS, some evidence suggests that the Nigerien government has attempted to rally the Tuareg armed groups of Ménaka, which include GATIA (led by the Imghad Tuareg clan) and a Daousahaq armed group called the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) to engage them in the effort to fight ISGS.⁷³ Additionally, according to several interlocutors, including those from the French government, Operation Barkhane is maintaining some level of collaboration with these Tuareg armed groups, particularly in intelligence sharing. French officials deny suggestions that they might materially support local militias.⁷⁴ However, there is precedent for a strategy of collaborating with separatist

armed groups in counterterrorism campaigns; indeed, it has been effective toward short-term counterterrorism goals, particularly in the region of Kidal.⁷⁵

Beginning in September 2016, GATIA and MSA started a joint military patrol to “secure the region of Ménaka.”⁷⁶ In May 2017, Moussa Ag Acharatoumane and Elhaji Gamou, the leaders of MSA and GATIA respectively, participated in high-level meetings in Niamey, Niger’s capital, and in Paris. Several interviews, including with an interlocutor who participated in the Niamey meeting, noted Niger’s and France’s effort to engage MSA and GATIA in counterterrorism operations. The extent and details of their support is unknown. Soon after their return from Paris, the MSA and GATIA forces multiplied attacks against ISGS, killing many alleged Tolebe jihadists, who retaliated by attacking Daousahaq armed groups and communities.⁷⁷

In late June 2017, Abu Walid al-Saharawi, leader of ISGS, issued a statement declaring war against the Daousahaq and Imghad communities, accusing their leaders of collusion with France and Niger.⁷⁸ He wrote an open letter addressed to Ag Acharatoumane and Gamou:

*You have declared war to us on more than one occasion by protecting Niger and its defiant protector of France... We promise you that we will wage a war of extermination of all your species on earth by all means... We can hurt you to an extent that you have never imagined possible. You will soon feel what we are capable of. We will disperse and exterminate you until you disappear from the region of Ménaka. This is the reward of every traitor who collaborate[s] with unbelievers, and we ask God that you may be the last of his creature.*⁷⁹

Acharatoumane replied with the following:

*Al-Saharawi is in a weak position. Today he marches with some Peul bandits. They are engaged in banditry. We are not afraid of him... We have already conveyed our message: do not disturb our communities. If you do, we will go after you.*⁸⁰

This verbal escalation—in particular, the perceptions of extreme group threat, with responsibility pinned to another entire community—should raise concerns about potential atrocities between Tolebe and Daousahaq. Although France and Niger have legitimate interests in this counterterrorism campaign, any support to or coordination with Daousahaq militias to fight the Tolebe jihadists—even if only intelligence sharing—without effective mechanisms for protecting civilians, risks upsetting the balance of capacity and escalating the cycle of violence that has occurred between these groups for the past quarter century.

Potential perpetrators: Tolebe jihadists

Although Tolebe jihadists have intentionally targeted Daousahaq civilians, we do not assess them to be plausible perpetrators of mass atrocities in the next 12 to 18 months. At the leadership level, ISGS rhetoric focuses on the Malian government and foreign forces as its primary targets. Thus, while rank-and-file group members may join for access to arms and ability to settle intercommunal scores, the leadership would be against such actions. Additionally, while ISGS does have the material capacity to commit large-scale violence, the presence of French and Malian (FC, G5S) forces in Ménaka limits jihadist ability to commit violence on a massive scale. If counterterrorism operations occur as planned

(see key assumptions in the following section), the jihadists will be forced into a weaker defensive position with their capacity to commit violence severely circumscribed.

We do not assess it to be plausible that ISGS would receive sufficient external support to change the balance of power. Although ISGS has officially pledged allegiance to ISIS, ISGS remains a local insurgency focused on its struggle with local governments and other armed groups that it perceives as governments' allies. Material ties to ISIS are likely minor if they exist at all. Some have expressed concern that ISIS fighters fleeing Syria and Iraq may seek shelter in the region, but thus far there is no evidence that is occurring.

Key assumptions

Our assessment relies on the following four assumptions:

1. Counterterrorism operations in Ménaka, including those of the FC, G5S, will continue to target the Tolebe-dominated jihadist group, the ISGS.
2. Counterterrorism forces will continue to collaborate with local armed groups—especially GATIA and MSA—in intelligence sharing and military operations.
3. Local jihadist groups will not receive material external support to the extent that it would significantly tip the balance of power.
4. The implementation of the Algiers Accord, particularly the DDR program, will have little effect on insecurity in the border region.

Background and drivers of conflict in Ménaka

History of resource conflict and intercommunal violence

Tuareg pastoralists, particularly the Daousahaq clan, consider themselves to be the first settlers in the area of Azawak—near the Mali-Niger border—and thus the owners of the land. Starting in the 1930s, a group of Peul pastoralists named Tolebe, who are originally from the southern and western parts of present-day Niger, migrated to the region, initially for periodic transhumance (seasonal grazing) before they settled permanently.⁸¹

Although historically they cohabited in the Ménaka region peacefully, the Tolebe resented the fees that Daousahaq charged to allow them to graze their animals in the area; the Daousahaq often accused the Tolebe of disrespecting local norms and cultural values when grazing their animals in Daousahaq territories. Skirmishes erupted a few times, particularly during periods of drought when pressure on resources intensified, but these were small scale with parties usually using only sticks and machetes to fight.⁸²

Increasing militarization

In the 1990s, many young Daousahaq enrolled in the Tuareg rebellion and gained military training and weapons.⁸³ Abusing their newfound power, some Daousahaq rebels engaged in armed banditry, predominantly targeting the Tolebe.⁸⁴ Tolebe communities were particularly vulnerable because, despite the fact that many of them had lived in Ménaka for generations, they were still perceived as

aliens coming from Niger. Thus, the Malian authorities were less inclined to protect the Tolebe or to hold accountable the Daousahaq bandits.⁸⁵

In reaction to these attacks, some Tolebe acquired weapons and started to retaliate. In 1991, when a Peul killed one of three Daousahaq bandits who raided his camp to steal his cows, the Daousahaq formed a militia that targeted all the Tolebe in the region, killing dozens⁸⁶ and chasing many others across the Nigerien border.⁸⁷ Between 1990 and 2007, the Tolebe estimate their loss at 316 deaths; 157 persons mutilated; and more than 30,000 camels, cows, and cattle stolen.⁸⁸ Although the Daousahaq also suffered casualties, the majority of the victims were Tolebe.

The Tolebe enrolled in jihadist movements starting in 2012, initially motivated by interest in military training and weapons to protect themselves from attacks by Daousahaq militias.⁸⁹ Starting in 2015, they joined the ISGS, a jihadist movement that has perpetrated attacks against military and civilians in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, and pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State in (ISIS).⁹⁰ Although interviews indicate that the Tolebe's major concern was the local conflict with Daousahaq communities, the Tolebe have been propelled to the center of counterterrorism operations in the region by enlisting in international jihadist groups—whose agendas are much broader and more extreme.

Absence of justice, accountability, and reconciliation

In 2008, a series of negotiations facilitated by the governments of Niger and Mali brought the Daousahaq and Tolebe to agree to a ceasefire, but the negotiations were not followed by measures to establish justice, accountability, and reconciliation. Although violence stopped for a short time between 2008 and 2010, the problems of impunity and old grievances were soon to fuel another cycle of violence.⁹¹

The outbreak of the 2012 crisis created the conditions for violence between the two communities to resume. The Tolebe are conscious that the violence they suffered in the 1990s rebellion began when the Daousahaq gained weapons. Thus, in 2012 when a new Tuareg rebellion started, many Tolebe assumed that once the Daousahaq armed groups regained military power they would again turn on Tolebe civilians, using their arms and training to engage in banditry, kidnappings, and rape with impunity.⁹²

When the 2012 insurgency started, many Tolebe joined the jihadist group MUJAO while Daousahaq joined Tuareg separatist movements. After the 2013 French intervention, the MNLA was invited to participate in the Algiers negotiations and peace agreements, while the jihadists of MUJAO were excluded.⁹³ As part of the counterterrorism campaign led by France and Mali's neighboring countries, MUJAO was disbanded and its members, including many Tolebe, were arrested or killed.⁹⁴

TOLEBE JIHADISTS AND THE ISLAMIC STATE IN THE GREATER SAHARA

On October 4, 2017, four American soldiers were killed in an ambush in Tongo Tongo, a village in northwestern Niger near the border with Mali. Although no group has claimed responsibility for the attack, all fingers point toward the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, a jihadist movement created in 2015 by Adnan Abu Walid al-Saharawi. Al-Saharawi is a notorious jihadist who formerly was a member of MUJAO during the jihadist occupation of northern Mali between 2012 and 2013. After the French-led military intervention ousted the jihadists from their strongholds, Al-Saharawi joined forces with Moctar Bel-Mokhtar to create Al-Murabitun, establishing its base in the border area between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. In 2015, a dispute over leadership led the group to split into two factions. Mokhtar Bel-Mokhtar's faction reaffirmed its allegiance to Al-Qaeda, whereas al-Saharawi pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and named his group the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). ISIS made official its recognition of the ISGS on its website a year later in 2016.¹

Despite its affiliation with ISIS, interviews suggest that the ISGS remains first and foremost a local movement. The majority of the ISGS's rank-and-file combatants are young Peul from the Tolebe community, and interviews for this report indicate that their primary concern is their local intercommunal conflict with the Daousahaq, not waging global jihad.² The Peul Tolebe and Daousahaq have fought for decades over control of pastoral resources, but the governments of both Mali and Niger neglected the conflict as it occurred far in their periphery. Each rival community established self-defense militias to protect themselves against attacks from the other and violence escalated throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The collapse of the Malian state in 2012 brought in a wave of jihadists, including Adnan Abu Walid Al-Saharawi who is a Moorish Arab originally from Western Sahara. The new heightened insecurity pushed the Tolebe militias to establish alliances with the jihadists, while the Daousahaq joined other Tuareg separatist movements. Initially, these alliances were purely strategic and had nothing to do with religion or ideology.

After the 2013, French-led military intervention put an end to the jihadist occupation, antiterror operations by the Malian and Nigerien armies targeted the Tolebe communities who were accused of alliance with the jihadists. Many Tolebe civilians suffered abuses, including arrests, tortures, and extrajudicial killings.

Under the banner of the ISGS, the Tolebe have participated in several attacks across the region, including in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The number of Tolebe jihadists is unknown, but it is safe to say that they constitute a minority within the larger Tolebe community. Their role as community defender—especially in the absence of the Malian state—has earned them the support of many Tolebe.

¹ Thomas Joscelyn and Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State Recognize Oath of Allegiance from Jihadist in Mali," *FDD's Long War Journal*, October 31, 2016, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/10/islamic-state-recognizes-oath-of-allegiance-from-jihadists-in-west-africa.php>.

² The recent attack on U.S. soldiers, however, suggests that even though Tolebe might join the group for communal reasons, they then become radicalized and are capable of conducting operations further afield.



A member of the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) secures the perimeter of the CMA headquarters in Kidal. September 2015. *UN Photo/Marco Dormino*

Another cycle of violence between Tolebe and Daousahaq occurred in November 2013.⁹⁵ Attacks by Tolebe were described in the media as terrorism, yet Tuareg attacks against Tolebe were not. This seeming lack of fairness feeds the Peul and Tolebe narrative that they are being discriminated against by the Malian government and international forces and continues to push them to join any armed group available (usually jihadist groups) to defend their communities.

TO WATCH: DISTRICT ELECTION IN KIDAL AND THE RISK OF VIOLENCE BETWEEN THE IFOGHAS AND IMGHAD

We assessed the potential of mass atrocities in Kidal—Mali's most violent region since at least 2012⁹⁶—and did not identify a plausible mass atrocity scenario over the next 12 to 18 months. Nevertheless, we provide the following brief assessment of conflict risk because Kidal is currently in the spotlight of the international community. In the past conflicts there have had devastating effects on the rest of the country—precipitating the spread of jihadism, large-scale displacement, and widespread availability of arms throughout Mali, not to mention diverting the vast majority of international attention and investment away from other parts of the country. From the perspective of preventing atrocity, the situation in Kidal is one to watch closely, both to track the evolving risk of atrocities there and to analyze whether the dynamics there might affect the previously assessed scenarios in Mopti and Ménaka.

Since the beginning of the 2012 crisis, the region of Kidal has been occupied and administered by different armed coalitions in which the Ifoghas leaders played a dominant role, including the current Coordination of the Movement of Azawad. One of the CMA members is the Ifoghas-dominated armed group, the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA), and together they are considered one of the most lethal armed groups in northern Mali. They have benefited from the influx of weapons from Libya, as well as from plundering Malian military barracks, as a part of widespread pillaging, following the defeat of the Malian army in 2012. Additionally, the HCUA controls lucrative trafficking routes through the region, further bolstering them economically and incentivizing others who benefit from trafficking not to oppose them.⁹⁷ On the other side, the government-aligned Imghad and GATIA have unsuccessfully attempted on multiple occasions to violently topple the CMA from Kidal. The 2015 Algiers Accord calls for gradual steps toward the return of Malian authorities and the organization of elections as the last step toward achieving peace.

The potential perpetrators of atrocities in Kidal are the CMA and GATIA. Both clearly have the capabilities and ample opportunities to perpetrate atrocities; in fact, they are among the most militarily capable forces in the country. We find little evidence, however, that either group currently has or will plausibly develop the motive or interest to deliberately attack civilians on a large scale. First, it is in neither the armed group's best interest to target civilian populations, as doing so would hurt their bargaining position in the ongoing negotiations around Algiers Accord implementation. Furthermore, because of the population distribution with Imghad villages in Ifoghas-controlled territory and vice versa, any attacks would inevitably result in the targeting of each armed group's own people. Second, there is a longer legacy of formal armed groups with specific political goals in Kidal than in other parts of the country. Thus, although no one group has a monopoly of force, a general understanding exists of which groups control what territory and that significantly fewer ad-hoc militias and unaligned armed groups are present in Kidal than in, for example, central Mali. This situation results in a more organized command structure and more coherent group goals and operational norms. Third, regarding operational norms, conflicts in Kidal mainly involve formal armed groups, and no armed group has engaged in large-scale, systematic, and deliberate attacks against civilian populations.⁹⁸ Thus there is no history of atrocities that might be exploited to incite future acts. Finally, although competition between clans is intense, almost all combatants are from the Tuareg ethnic group, thereby resulting in a conflict framed primarily around competition for resources and power rather than identity.

In addition, the deployment of MINUSMA in Kidal limits the opportunity that potential perpetrators have. Although MINUSMA, in part because of its limited mandate, does not necessarily stop acts of violence, its presence would likely dissuade groups from committing a series of large-scale systematic attacks if they were motivated to do so.

The situation in Kidal is volatile. Because the main armed groups clearly have capabilities to commit atrocities, observers should look for indications that potential perpetrators might judge deliberate attacks on civilians to be in their interest. Such a decision could be precipitated by the complete collapse of the peace process and return to full-scale war. In that scenario, the risk of mass atrocities in Kidal should be reassessed.

THE ALGIERS ACCORD, 2015

In June 2015, an alliance of Tuareg rebel groups and the Malian government and allied militias signed a peace accord to formally end the conflict that began in 2012. The deal was brokered by Algeria and signed by the Coordination of the Movement of Azawad (CMA) and the Movement of the Plateforme (the Plateforme) in Bamako. Provisions of the accord that have been particularly contentious include the following:

- Establishment of interim governing authorities in the five northern regions. After difficult negotiations, the interim authorities were finally established in March 2017.
- Deployment of the joint military patrol (MOC). This effort has proven more contentious, as the sides disagree on the composition of the force, and the CMA resists ceding its hold on Kidal without gaining much in return.¹
- Return of refugees. This provision is similarly problematic and unlikely in the near future as both sides continue to perpetuate a situation of insecurity and fear. As of December 31, 2017, approximately 130,000 Malian refugees, mostly Tuaregs from the north who fled in the 2012–13 crisis, are living in camps in Niger, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso, while 63,000 have returned.²

The Algiers Accord is a compromise between the Malian government's claim of sovereignty over its entire territory and the anti-Mali rebel groups' claim for autonomy and independence of the northern regions, which they call the Azawad. The accord's main goal, therefore, was to create the conditions that allow Mali "to maintain [its] national unity and territorial integrity" while respecting the "cultural, ethnic, geographical and socio-economic specificities" of its northern population in particular.³ To this end, the accord prescribes a number of major reforms in the domain of governance, security, economic development and justice including enhanced decentralization reform, the disarmament and integration of rebels in the Malian defense and security forces, and an ambitious development program for the northern regions. The parties agreed that implementing these reforms is necessary to stabilize the country and to alleviate the causes of conflict.

However, over the two and half years since the agreement was signed, implementing the reforms has stalled. The difficulties can be attributed to persistent violent conflict between the CMA and GATIA, proliferation of new armed groups, mistrust between the signatory parties, and lack of financial resources to implement the reforms. Furthermore, a growing opposition to the accord by nonsignatory groups, including opposition parties, civil society organizations, and jihadist movements, has played a role in obstructing its implementation.

Since Mali became independent, the country has faced four rebellions. Three rebellions ended with the rebels and the government signing peace accords (1991–92, 2006, and 2015). All of the previous agreements required the same stipulations in the current accord, suggesting that the problem is not the adoption of the agreement but the parties' willingness to abide by it.

Every time the implementation of the peace agreement seems to advance, violence between the two groups intensifies, further delaying peace. The violence that erupted in July 2017 between the CMA and GATIA and resulted in dozens of casualties was largely viewed as an attempt to obstruct the deployment of the joint military forces scheduled to take place at that time.¹

¹ The CMA has three main reservations on peace accord implementation: (1) The MOC is planned to be composed of 200 members each from the CMA, Plateforme, and Malian government, which means 400 pro-Mali versus 200 anti-Mali forces. (2) By allowing the deployment of MOC, the CMA would be giving up their military control over Kidal before progress is made in the implementation of the political side of the Algiers Accord, effectively ceding their primary point of leverage, meaning they are giving up a lot and not getting much in return. (3) They know that the first experience with the deployment of the MOC in Gao was not very successful.

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Mali Situation," UNHCR, Geneva, October 31, 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/situations/malisituation>.

³ "Agreement For Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process," PA-X, Peace Agreement Access Tool (Translation© University of Edinburgh), <http://www.jurist.org/paperchase/Agreement%20on%20Peace%20and%20Reconciliation%20in%20Mali.pdf>.

⁴ Jules Crétois, "Mali: In the Region of Kidal, 'The Tension Is Enormous,'" *Jeune Afrique*, June 14, 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/447822/politique/mali-a-kidal-tension-enorme/>.

The risk for return to war is highest around district elections, which were initially scheduled to take place in November 2016 but have been significantly delayed.⁹⁹ District elections have emerged as an important battleground where elites from both clans compete over elected positions, notably the four legislative seats in the region, the presidency of the Regional Assembly, and the position of mayor for the 11 municipalities in the region.

For both the Ifoghas (today represented by the CMA) and Imghad (today represented by GATIA) elites, elections are only welcome if candidates from their clans are the winners. Because of the winner-takes-all relationship, no matter which group wins, there is a risk for return to widespread violence, as the losing party is likely to contest the results. Whereas stakes are high for both sides, the Ifoghas have more to lose; Kidal is their ancestral homeland which they have ruled for more than a century, and their current hold on Kidal is the only leverage that they have in peace talks with the Malian government. Says a CMA spokesperson, “At this time, it is impossible for us to accept pro-GATIA Imghad to take control over Kidal, even if they win the elections.”¹⁰⁰

An additional factor that might change atrocity risk is the deterioration of interclan relations. As the conflict drags on, we have seen cases of intercommunal relations worsening and rhetoric taking an increasingly acerbic tone. Communities have, on occasion, reacted and targeted members of other clans, such as the violence between Imghad and Idnane communities in Kidal in June 2017.¹⁰¹ Although this is currently rare and immediately responded to and diffused by the armed groups, watchers should monitor the frequency of these attacks as well as the rhetoric employed to determine if the situation warrants a reevaluation. In the long run, these actions could shift the norms in targeting civilians.

RESILIENCIES AND MITIGATING FACTORS

Although this report describes a grim situation across Mali, certain resiliencies at the national level as well as within each community and conflict lessen the likelihood of atrocities. Resiliencies are “social relationships, structures or processes that are able to provide dispute resolution and meet basic needs through non-violent means.”¹⁰² The following section highlights some of the relevant resiliencies, with a particular eye toward those that could be bolstered to help reduce the risk of mass atrocities.

CULTURE OF NEGOTIATION AND RESPECT FOR CIVILIAN LIVES

Multiple interviewees noted that Mali is a country of negotiators and peacemakers. Although there is extensive history of conflict throughout the center and north, for the most part intercommunal issues have been resolved through negotiation or, at worst, small-scale fighting. In Kidal, both sides of the peace agreement insist that they and their counterparts are adamantly opposed to civilian targeting, with one leader explaining that members of the opposite side’s clan live in their land and vice versa, thereby discouraging attacks on civilians. Unfortunately, especially in Mopti and Ménaka, group-level protection strategies have, in many cases, already become violent. However, in villages or parts of the regions where violence has not yet taken hold, emphasis on community conflict resolution might still be effective.

EXISTING LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS

Traditional chiefs have played a significant role in bridging the gap between the Malian state and the local population, particularly in remote areas where the state's presence is limited. Traditional chiefs are the representatives of their communities and serve as the interface between their communities and the state and other actors. They also perform important tasks, including reconciliation between individuals and communities, implementation of customary laws, and so forth. In the past, conflict between communities was managed by chiefs through local governance, suggesting that the current risk of violence arises as this traditional reconciliation system erodes in the absence of effective replacement. Yet, despite their crucial role in society, traditional chiefs do not have an official status that organizes and protects their position, thus making it highly precarious. Many of them had to invest themselves in local politics to secure their positions; this politicization of chieftaincy can severely undermine its legitimacy, in some cases.

NONGOVERNMENTAL NETWORKS SUPPORTING JUSTICE

Efforts have been increasing in recent years to build Malian civil society's services and capacity, especially in the justice sector. Numerous international NGOs work with local victims associations and local human rights organizations and with legal aid organizations across the country. However, their effectiveness is limited because of resource constraints and lack of a functioning justice system at the national, regional, or local level. Human rights groups are providing legal assistance to victims and even, in some cases, paying their transportation fees to access judges and courts. Yet if there is no judge to hear that case or the existing judge is corrupt, those efforts are in vain.

RELIGIOUS COHESION AND MODERATION

In deep ethnic, tribal, and racial divisions, Islam has often been the sole unifying force between communities. Reference to Muslim fraternity often provides a powerful argument for the diffusion of tensions and for conflict resolution. The version of Islam traditionally practiced in Mali is Sufi, which in its contemporary expression appears to be nonviolent and less political. As detailed in the section on central Mali, even communities who accept the jihadists apparently do so more out of lack of better options than enthusiasm for the ideology. This lack of ideological motivation suggests that communities susceptible to jihadist teachings might actually be effectively dissuaded if given alternative options for security and justice services.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Malian state is closely tied to regional and international governments through networks of support¹⁰³ and donor relationships. These connections can be seen as a resiliency in that the Malian government is incentivized to maintain political, economic, and military relationships and has historically shown that it responds to international pressure. Although human rights groups have criticized the Malian military for abuses, evidence indicates that in recent years it has made efforts to incorporate human rights norms and to professionalize its forces. The Malian government, although in many cases is unable to implement reforms, has repeatedly stated its interest in mitigating the jihadist risk and bringing peaceful resolution to the conflicts in the north and stability to all its territory. Our consultations with government and civil society stakeholders revealed a range of ongoing and planned



The Cité Administrative (Administrative City), from King Fahad Bridge, Bamako. USHMM/Mollie Zapata

interventions addressing the causes of violence and promoting grassroots peacebuilding. Yet, almost all actors had a sense that their actions alone seemed insufficient to address the massive and complex conflict.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mali's challenges are vast and, as this report details, the risks of mass atrocities are grounded in multiple complex factors, some of which will require many years to change. The long-term project of improving the effectiveness and legitimacy of the state, especially in administering security and justice, is vital, even while shorter-term strategies are needed to address immediate risks of mass atrocities. The recommendations detailed here include a mix of longer- and shorter-term actions, organized around four key objectives.

1. Ensure that counterterrorism operations do not exacerbate risks of mass atrocities.

- *All actors engaged in or supporting counterterrorism operations* should incorporate the protection of civilians as a high priority, including through military doctrine, training, targeting decisions, and clear communication with local communities about the missions' goals and decisions.
- *All actors engaged in or supporting counterterrorism operations* should refrain from supporting or collaborating with ethnically aligned militia and other armed groups with poor human rights records.
- *Governments providing support to counterterrorism forces*, particularly the FC, G5S, should make their support contingent on those forces' receiving training in human rights and international humanitarian law.

2. Support the peaceful management of intercommunal conflicts that could lead to mass atrocities.

- *The Malian government* should assess how to implement the principles of the Algiers Accord—that is, military inclusiveness, justice system, security sector, and electoral reforms—more inclusively across the country, involving populations and groups outside the official signatories and beyond the geographic boundaries of northern Mali.
- *The Malian Parliament* should strengthen the perceived legitimacy of the state among local communities by conducting commissions of inquiry or listening sessions on communal tensions, thereby focusing first on central Mali and Ménaka where atrocity risks are highest.
- *USAID, the European Union, and other international agencies* should ensure that programs aimed at countering violent extremism complement efforts to prevent mass atrocities. Program designs should be informed by assessments of conflict and mass atrocity risks as well as community vulnerability to jihadist recruitment. Program evaluations should assess effects on intercommunal tensions as well as individual radicalization.
- *The G5 Sahel* should use its position as a regional body to direct resources toward economic development in marginalized areas of central and northern Mali and address transnational issues affecting security, such as food security, drug trafficking, and refugees.
- *The Malian government and international donors* should expand support for local peacebuilding programs, such as community radio stations to ensure people have accurate information, and programming focused on social cohesion and constructive management of intercommunal tensions.

3. Promote justice and accountability.

- *The Malian government* should take steps to harmonize its parallel systems of justice—traditional (based on customary norms of reconciliation and implemented by traditional authorities) and modern (based on positive law and implemented in formal courts). Efforts should prioritize improving the ability to resolve disputes related to management of land and other natural resources because these are frequently at the root of violence that could spiral into mass atrocities.
- *The Malian government* should create a permanent specialized unit, supported by external experts in postconflict justice issues, to conduct impartial investigations of allegations of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed by Malian security forces. The unit would also ensure that elements of these forces that have been identified as alleged perpetrators are made available to judicial authorities, in accordance with Malian law, by the Ministry of Defense and Veterans Affairs.
- *The TJRC, working with the support of MINUSMA's Human Rights and Protection Division,* should continue to expand its work in northern and central Mali. The Malian government

should grant the TJRC the political latitude to operate independently to collect victims' testimony.

- *The Malian government* should pay specific attention to justice issues if it undertakes future peace negotiations, in contrast to past agreements that contributed to a culture of impunity.
- *The Malian government* (with the encouragement of MINUSMA, France, and the United States) should ensure that investigations and prosecutions for abuses committed during the 2012 crisis continue.

4. Improve information related to violence and efforts to prevent it.

- *The Malian government and MINUSMA* should improve collection, analysis, and dissemination of information on violent incidents, human rights violations, and trends to inform strategies to prevent violence and rights abuses and to facilitate immediate responses to egregious incidents.
- *All security forces operating in Mali*—at least including Malian armed forces, MINUSMA, G5 Sahel, and Operation Barkhane—should share with each other information and analysis related to violent incidents and possible warning signs of atrocities, such as stockpiling of weapons by ethnically aligned militia.
- *Donors supporting humanitarian and peacebuilding programs* should encourage their operational partners in Mali (1) to share information with each other on violent incidents and possible atrocity warning signs, such as sharp increases in armed group recruitment, and (2) to coordinate programs to ensure minimal overlap and sustained attention to the areas most at risk

¹ The insurgency started on January 17, 2012, when the separatist movement, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) attacked a Malian military garrison in Ménaka. A week later, a jihadist movement, Ansar Dine attacked Aguelhoc military base in Kidal. The insurgent groups then moved to conquer Tessalit, Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu. At the beginning, the MNLA claimed responsibility for the attacks using its strong media presence, but in reality they were not alone, and jihadists quickly co-opted control. In June 2012, the jihadists and separatists formally parted ways citing disagreements over implementation of sharia, leaving control of the conquered regions solely to the jihadists. See “UPDATE 1—Mali Tuareg Leaders Call Off Islamist Pact,” Reuters, June 1, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/mali-rebels/update-1-mali-tuareg-leaders-call-off-islamist-pact-idUSL5E8H1CXZ20120601>.

² “Mali: Ensure Justice for Grave Abuses,” Human Rights Watch, New York, March 21, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/21/mali-ensure-justice-grave-abuses>.

³ Although the insurgency was staged by a coalition of jihadist and separatist rebel groups, subsequent rivalry between the two groups led the jihadists to expel the separatists and consolidate their hold over the entire northern territory. Thus, by the time the French military intervention started, only jihadists were in charge and the intervention targeted them specifically.

⁴ We interpret these numbers only as directional, as reporting fatalities throughout Mali is limited. Data are extracted from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), <https://www.acleddata.com/data/>.

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “UNHCR Mali: Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Returnees,” UNHCR, Geneva, December 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/61702>.

⁶ Of the 158 fatalities, 95 were due to “malicious acts,” while the rest were attributed to “accident,” “illness,” and “other.” United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre, “Fatalities by Mission and Incident Type,” United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, New York, January 31, 2018, http://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/statsbymissionincidenttype_4_9.pdf.

⁷ Notable incidents include 21 Peul civilians killed in Ke-Macina in February 2017, see “Mali: Spate of Killings by Armed Groups,” Human Rights Watch, New York, April 5, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/05/mali-spate-killings-armed-groups>; Twenty to thirty killed in Korogouiri and Maleimana, Mopti, see, the Renewal Indicator, “Inter-communal Clash: Tenekou’s Carnage Below,” *Bamako.com*, May 5, 2016, <http://news.abamako.com/h/128965.html>; and Thirty-one killed in Koro Circle, Mopti, see *Jeune Afrique* with AFP, “Mali: Thirty Dead in Violence Between Fulani and Dogon in the Center of the Country,” *Jeune Afrique*, June 20, 2017, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/449583/politique/mali-trentaine-de-morts-violences-entre-peuls-dogons-centre-pays/>.

⁸ Scott Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (Washington, DC: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016), 31, <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Fundamentals-of-Genocide-and-Mass-Atrocity-Prevention.pdf>.

⁹ The statistical risk assessment is currently designed to forecast the onset of state-led mass killings, defined as deliberate actions of state agents, or other groups acting at their behest, that result in the deaths of at least 1,000 noncombatant civilians in a year or less. Evidence indicates that countries at high risk for state-led mass killings also tend to be at high risk for mass killing by nonstate groups (for example, the Islamic State in Iraq or Boko Haram in Nigeria).

¹⁰ Early Warning Project, “Countries Most Likely to Experience State-Led Mass Killing: Statistical Risk Assessment 2016,” Early Warning Project Blog, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, April 12, 2017, <https://www.earlywarningproject.org/2017/04/10/countries-most-likely-to-experience-state-led-mass-killing-statistical-risk-assessment-2016>.

¹¹ The researchers conducted interviews with 93 people total: 17 in Niamey; 11 in Gao; 8 in Mopti; 24 in Bamako; 23 by phone; and 10 in Washington, DC.

¹² U.S. Department of State and USAID, “Working Draft, Atrocity Assessment Framework: Supplemental Guidance on State/USAID Conflict Assessment Framework,” <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/241399.pdf>; United Nations, Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention (New York: United Nations, 2014), http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Framework%20of%20Analysis%20for%20Atrocity%20Crimes_EN.pdf.

¹³ For a discussion of universal risk factors for atrocities, see Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention*, 53–71. Common findings include large-scale instability, armed conflict, transformative or exclusionary ideology, and prior discrimination or violence against a particular group.

¹⁴ The World Bank reports that France has 306,350 armed forces personnel and Mali has 15,800. For another African comparison, Ghana is five times smaller than Mali but has approximately the same (15,500) military personnel. “Armed Forces Personnel, Total,” The World Bank Group, Washington, DC, 2015, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.TOTL.P1>.

¹⁵ The UN considers the world median of 300 officers per 100,000 inhabitants. Mali’s police force is estimated at around 7,000 personnel according to Interpol, <https://www.interpol.int/Member-countries/Africa/Mali>.

¹⁶ “Entraînement de l’armée Malienne—C dans l’air, Mali: en attendant la guerre,” France 5 television, January 14, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw_fwHTB26U.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Mali: Unchecked Abuses in Military Operations,” Human Rights Watch, New York, September 8, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/08/mali-unchecked-abuses-military-operations>.

¹⁸ According to the UN Secretary General, “Only one-third of state officials, including judicial and correction personnel, have been redeployed to the northern regions.” See UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali” (report, United Nations Security Council, New York, March 30, 2017), 5, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1707892.pdf>.

¹⁹ Adam Thiam, *Centre du Mali: Enjeux et Dangers d’une Crise Négligée*, (Geneva: Centre pour le Dialogue Humanitaire, March 2017), <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Centre-du-Mali-Enjeux-et-dangers-dune-crise-n%C3%A9glig%C3%A9e.pdf>.

²⁰ Ariel Ben Yishay, Renee Rotberg, Jessica Wells, Zhonghui Lv, Seth Goodman, Lidia Kovacevic, and Dan Runfola, 2017. “Geocoding Afrobarometer Rounds 1–6: Methodology & Data Quality,” AidData, Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations, the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, <http://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/pdfs/geocodingafrobarometer.pdf>.

²¹ For more on how natural resource competition feeds conflict, see Shreya Mitra, “Mali’s Fertile Grounds for Conflict: Climate Change and Resource Stress,” The Planetary Security Initiative at the Clingendael Institute, The Hague, Netherlands, December 2017, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/PB_Malis_Fertile_Grounds_for_Conflict.pdf.

²² A full list of ethnic group distribution in Mali is as follows: Bambara 34.1%, Fulani (Peul) 14.7%, Sarakole 10.8%, Senoufo 10.5%, Dogon 8.9%, Malinke 8.7%, Bobo 2.9%, Songhai 1.6%, Tuareg 0.9%, other Malian 6.1%, from member of Economic Community of West African States 0.3%, and other 0.4% (2012–13 estimated). Mali has 13 national languages, the most widespread ones being: French (official), Bambara 46.3%, Peul/Foulfoulde 9.4%, Dogon 7.2%, Maraka/Soninke 6.4%, Malinke 5.6%, Songhai/Djerma 5.6%, Minianka 4.3%, Tamasheq 3.5%, Senoufo 2.6%, Bobo 2.1%, unspecified 0.7%, other 6.3%. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Factbook: Mali*, (Langley, VA: CIA), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>.

²³ Ethnic groups in northern Mali are visually distinguished and usually characterized by skin color. The Tuareg and Moors are usually light skinned, whereas the Songhai, Bambara, and Dogon have darker skin and the Peuls have skin tones that are generally in between. Considerations related to racial differences between the predominantly “white” populations in the north—Tuareg, Moors, and some Peul—and “black” populations in the south—Songhai, Bambara, and Dogon—have fueled tensions for centuries.

²⁴ The conflict between the Ifoghas (noble) and Imghad (tributary) in Kidal is one of the most salient manifestations of this transitional crisis. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, “Quelle Sécurité pour le Nord? Cas Spécifique de Kidal,” report prepared for Moussa Ag Intazoumane, November, 2005, 10, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mali/03534.pdf>.

²⁵ Author’s interview with a former paramilitary forest officer, “Agents des Eaux et Forêts,” in Mopti, June 2, 2017.

²⁶ Baz Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*, (Leiden, Netherlands: Afrika-Studiecentrum Series, 2010), 175.

- ²⁷ Stephanie Pezard and Michael Shurkin, *Achieving Peace in Northern Mali: Past Agreements, Local Conflicts, and the Prospects for a Durable Settlement* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2015), xii, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR892.html.
- ²⁸ International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), “Mali’s Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission: Opening the Way Towards Sustainable Peace?,” ICTJ, New York, April 7, 2016, <https://www.ictj.org/news/mali-truth-justice-reconciliation-commission-peace>.
- ²⁹ Arthur Boutellis and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, “A Process in Search of Peace: Lessons from the Inter-Malian Agreement,” International Peace Institute, New York, 2017, 32, <https://www.ipinst.org/2017/06/lessons-from-inter-malian-peace-agreement>.
- ³⁰ Key smuggling passage points, such as Tabankort in the district of Tarkint in Gao, as well as Anefis and In Khalil in the region of Kidal, have been a theater of intense conflict between different militias. For more discussion on smuggling, see Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- ³¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*, Vienna: UNODC, 2013, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West_Africa_TOCTA_2013_EN.pdf.
- ³² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *An International Drug Trafficking Network Dismantled in Mali* (Vienna: UNODC, 2016), https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/2016-10_mali-drug-trafficking-network-dismantled.html.
- ³³ Interpeace and Mali Institute of Action Research for Peace (IMRAP), *Analyse locale des dynamiques de conflit et de résilience dans la zone de Koro-Bankass* (Ottawa: Interpeace and IMRAP, 2017), 47–48, <http://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-Interpeace-IMRAP-Portraits-Crois%C3%A9s-Koro-Bankass.pdf>.
- ³⁴ Morten Bøås, “Crime, Coping, and Resistance in the Mali-Sahel Periphery,” *African Security* 8, 4 (2015): 312.
- ³⁵ Abou al-Maali M. Mahmoud, *Al Qaeda and Its Allies in the Azawad* (Doha, Qatar: Ajazeera Center for Studies, 2014).
- ³⁶ Author’s interviews with leaders of Da’awa and Salafi sects in Bamako and Gao, July 2015.
- ³⁷ For more on Malian military abuses, see Worldwide Movement for Human Rights (FIDH) and Association malienne des droits de l’Homme (AMDH), “Terrorism and Impunity Jeopardize the Fragile Peace Agreement” (position paper, FIDH, Paris, May 11, 2017), <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/mali/mali-terrorism-and-impunity-jeopardize-the-fragile-peace-agreement>; Human Rights Watch, “Mali: Unchecked Abuses in Military Operations.”
- ³⁸ For example, Iyad Ag Ghaly, Amadou Kouffa, and an Arab cleric make the point in online videos that racial and ethnic difference do not matter and that all ethnic and racial groups should unite in fighting the Malian state and the “crusaders.” The fact that the video shows all three leaders from different ethnic groups—Tuareg, Peul, and Arab respectively—is a powerful message in favor of the unity that they want to portray. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXJXmYFczjI&t=735s>.
- ³⁹ Thiam, “Centre du Mali: Enjeux et Dangers,” 34–36. The Peul herders are called “Peul rouge” in reference to their skin color burned by force of following the animals always and everywhere under the sun.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 21–22.
- ⁴¹ One resident of Youwarou district in central Mali says, “The jihadists circulate throughout the villages on motorcycles. Everywhere they go they gather people in the mosques. They preach first, and then announce all the new laws that will apply in the areas. They also warn people to not seek settlement of disputes in the government court system. Any disputes must be settled in the sharia court that they established.” Authors’ interview with a resident of Youwarou district, Bamako, June 2017.
- ⁴² Remi Carayol, “Mali: Dans le Macina un jihad sur fond de révolte sociale,” *Jeune Afrique*, June 20, 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/332806/politique/reportage-mali-macina-tombait-aux-mains-jihadistes/>.
- ⁴³ Authors’ interviews with women’s activists and members of the National Council of Northern Conflict’s Victims, Bamako, July 2017. Parental influence is a crucial factor in youth’s decision to join violent movement in Mali. For more discussion on parents’ role in youths’ enrollment in violent movements in Mali, see Lisa Inks, Annalies Veldmeijer, and Abdoul Kassim Ibrahim Fomba, “‘We Hope and We Fight’ Youth, Communities, and Violence in Mali” (report, Mercy Corps, Portland, OR, 2017), <https://www.mercycorps.org/research/%E2%80%9Cwe-hope-and-we-fight%E2%80%9D-youth-communities-and-violence-mali>.
- ⁴⁴ Authors’ interview with a resident of Youwarou district, Bamako, June 2017.
- ⁴⁵ Interpeace and IMRAP, *Analyse locale des dynamiques*, 50–52.
- ⁴⁶ Boukary Sangaré, “Le Centre du Mali: épicerie du djihadisme?” (Note d’Analyse du GRIP, May 20, 2016, Brussels), http://www.grip.org/sites/grip.org/files/NOTES_ANALYSE/2016/NA_2016-05-20_FR_B-SANGARE.pdf.
- ⁴⁷ Tim Cocks and David Lewis, “Why Niger and Mali’s Cattle Herders Turned to Jihad,” Reuters, November 12, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-niger-mali-security-insight/why-niger-and-malis-cattle-herders-turned-to-jihad-idUSKBN1DC06A>.
- ⁴⁸ Mercy Corps, “We Hope and We Fight: Youth, Communities, and Violence in Mali,” September 2017, <https://www.mercycorps.org/research/%E2%80%9Cwe-hope-and-we-fight%E2%80%9D-youth-communities-and-violence-mali>.
- ⁴⁹ Author’s interview with a judge based in Mopti, June 2017.
- ⁵⁰ A March 2017 UN report stated, “Armed groups have become more sophisticated, complex, and lethal, employing tactics such as suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, remote-controlled explosive devices, small arms fire, and indirect fire. These types of attacks almost doubled in frequency from 2015 to 2016.” According to the UN in late 2017, “attacks on high-ranking state officials and institutions in central Mali also increased,” and “terrorist groups” conducted 71 attacks, up from 53 in the previous reporting period. See UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali,” March 30, 2017; and UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali” (report, United Nations Security Council, New York, December 26, 2017), <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1744691.pdf>.
- ⁵¹ Worldwide Movement for Human Rights (FIDH) and Association malienne des droits de l’Homme (AMDH), “Mali: Terrorism and Impunity Jeopardize the Fragile Peace Agreement” (joint position paper, FIDH and AMDH, May 2017), <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/mali/mali-terrorism-and-impunity-jeopardize-the-fragile-peace-agreement>.

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- ⁵⁴ Aboubacar Dicko, “Tenenkou: Intercommunal Clashes between Fulani and Bambara Make about Fifteen Dead,” Maliweb.net, May 3, 2016, <http://www.maliweb.net/insecurite/tenenkou-affrontements-intercommunautaires-entre-peulhs-bambaras-quinzaine-de-morts-1563942.html>.
- ⁵⁵ Olivier Dubois, “The Slow Twilight of Dogon Hunters,” *Journal du Mali*, August 21, 2017, <http://www.journaldumali.com/2017/08/21/lent-crepuscule-chasseurs-dogons/>.
- ⁵⁶ For more on Malian military abuses, see FIDH and AMDH, “Mali: Terrorism and Impunity Jeopardize the Fragile Peace Agreement”; and Human Rights Watch, “Mali: Unchecked Abuses in Military Operations.”
- ⁵⁷ Authors’ interview with a MINUSMA official, Bamako, June 2017.
- ⁵⁸ Although Senegalese QRF (quick reaction forces) as part of MINUSMA have deployed in central Mali, their presence has thus far not prevented violence. A MINUSMA official voiced pessimism around MINUSMA’s ability to stop violence in central Mali, citing the difficulty of the terrain challenging troop’s mobility particularly during the rainy season. Author’s interview with a MINUSMA official, June 2017.
- ⁵⁹ Boubacar Oumarou, *Pasteurs Nomades face à l’Etat du Niger* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2011), 119–21.
- ⁶⁰ The *Diina* is the system of governance established by Ahmadu Seku in the Macina in the 19th century to manage the use of natural resources in the Inner Delta between communities of herders, farmers, and fishers. For a detailed treatment of the Diina system, see Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk, *Arid Ways: Cultural Understandings of Insecurity in Fulbe Society, Central Mali* (Amsterdam: Thela, 1995), 52–55.
- ⁶¹ Authors’ interview with a Peul activist and former president of the Union of Herders in Mopti, Mopti, June 2017.
- ⁶² Authors’ interview with a judge based in Mopti, Mopti, June 2017.
- ⁶³ Authors’ telephone interview with a scholar of Mali, February 2017.
- ⁶⁴ Recent intercommunal dialogues between leaders of Peul, Bambara, and Dogon communities have eased up tensions between Peul and Bambara for the present, while violence between Peul and Dogon persists.
- ⁶⁵ Many Dogon and Bambara in the early 19th century practiced animism—a variety of traditional African religions—thus they were considered pagans and infidels by the Peul jihadists, making them legitimate targets of plunder and slave raids on behalf of Islam.
- ⁶⁶ Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk, “Resistance to Fulbe Hegemony in Nineteenth Century West Africa,” in *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History*, edited by Gerrit Jan Abbink, Mirjam de Bruijn, and Klaas Van Walraven (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 61–62.
- ⁶⁷ Mirjam de Bruijn, Wouter E. A. van Beek, and Han van Dijk, “Antagonism et solidarite: les relations entre Peuls et Dogons du Mali Central,” in *Peuls et Mandingues: Dialectique et Construction Identitaires*, edited by Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk (Paris: Karthala-ASC, 1997), 243–45.
- ⁶⁸ De Bruijn and van Dijk, “Resistance to Fulbe Hegemony,” 62.
- ⁶⁹ Fabien Offner, “In Dogon Country, the Time of Survival,” *Slate Afrique*, March 12, 2012, <http://www.slateafrique.com/99231/mali-pays-dogon-survie-crise-mali-alimentaire-religion; Abdoulaye Diarra, “Douentza: Islamists Destroy Toguna in the City,” L’Independent, October 10, 2012, http://news.abamako.com/h/6760.html>.
- ⁷⁰ For the Bambara, these militia are called Donso (also spelled Dozo or Dosso), whereas the Dogon equivalent is known as Dan na Amba Sagou (hunters who rely on God).
- ⁷¹ ICG, “Mali Central: la fabrique d’une insurrection?” 16.
- ⁷² Sangaré, “Le Centre du Mali: épicentre du djihadisme?” 9–10.
- ⁷³ Jules Crétois, “Nord du Mali: Ag Gamou et Ag Acharatoumane en visite de travail à Paris,” *Jeune Afrique*, May 21, 2017, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/441394/politique/nord-mali-ag-gamou-ag-acharatoumane-visite-de-travail-a-paris/>.
- ⁷⁴ Authors’ telephone interview with a Malian military officer, January 2018; authors’ telephone interview with officials at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 2018.
- ⁷⁵ In 2013, French and Chadian armies collaborated with the Tuareg separatists of MNLA to track down Iyad Ag Ghaly’s jihadist followers.
- ⁷⁶ Radio France Internationale (RFI) Africa, “New Alliance Game in Northern Mali,” RFI Africa, September 18, 2016, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160918-mali-alliance-amsa-gamou-plateforme>
- ⁷⁷ Jules Crétois, “Mali—Ag Acharatoumane: ‘I Am Not Afraid of Abou Walid Al-Sahraoui,’” *Jeune Afrique*, June 29, 2017, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/452135/politique/mali-ag-acharatoumane-nai-peur-de-abou-walid-al-sahraoui/>.
- ⁷⁸ Radio France Internationale (RFI), “Jihadist Leader Al-Sahraoui Accuses and Threatens Two Communities in Mali” RFI, June 28, 2017, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20170627-chef-jihadiste-al-sahraoui-accuse-menace-communautaires-mali-imghad-idaksahak>.
- ⁷⁹ A letter published in Arabic (author’s translation) on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/sidikounta7/status/879980177824133120>.
- ⁸⁰ Crétois, “Mali—Ag Acharatoumane.”
- ⁸¹ The name *Tolebe* is a surname given to the Peul pastoralists of Ménaka for their profound attachment to the Hausa culture. For more discussion on the history of the implantation of Peul in the region on Ménaka, see Angelo M. Bonfiglioli, *Dadal: Histoire de famille et histoire de troupeau chez un group de Wodaabe du Niger* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 113–39.
- ⁸² Author’s interview with a Tolebe community leader, Niamey, May 2017.

⁸³ Baz Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali* (Leiden, Netherlands: Afrika-Studiecentrum Series, 2010), 165, 282.

⁸⁴ Yvan Guichaoua, “Mali-Niger: A Border between Community Conflicts, Rebellion, and Jihad,” *Le Monde Afrique*, June 20, 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/06/20/mali-niger-une-frontiere-entre-conflits-communautaires-rebellion-et-djihad_4954085_3212.html.

⁸⁵ Authors’ interview with an NGO official in Gao, June 2017.

⁸⁶ Interviewees reported around 36 people killed, but it was difficult to verify the accuracy of this number.

⁸⁷ Author’s interview with a Tolebe community leader, Niamey, May 2017.

⁸⁸ Author’s interview with a Peul activist and president of National Council for Northern Tillabery herders, Niamey, May 2017.

⁸⁹ ICG, “Mali Central: la fabrique d’une insurrection?” 7–8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹¹ Author’s interview with a civil society activist advocating for the rights of Peul herders, Niamey, May 2017.

⁹² Guichaoua, “Mali-Niger: A Border between Community Conflicts.”

⁹³ Many observers believe that MUJAO would be willing to negotiate if extended a serious offer from the government, but no offer has been made yet. Additionally, an independent initiative by Muslim leaders in Mali to mediate between the government and the jihadists has failed owing to resistance from both sides.

⁹⁴ Sangaré, “Le Centre du Mali: épice de la djihadisme?”

⁹⁵ Hubert Ledoux, “Tuaregs-Peulhs: Resurgence of a Latent Conflict,” *La Revue de Presse*, February 11, 2014,

<https://revuedepressecorens.wordpress.com/2014/02/11/touareg-peulhs-resurgence-dun-conflit-latent/>

⁹⁶ Data extracted from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, <https://www.acledata.com/data/>; Fakoro Traoré, “Kidal: What You Need to Know about the War between Imghads and Ifoghas,” *Tamoudre*, August 23, 2017,

<http://www.tamoudre.org/touaregs/territoire/kidal-quil-faut-savoir-de-guerre-entre-imghads-ifoghas/>

⁹⁷ Focus group with Tuareg activists in Gao, including supporters of GATIA and MNLA, Gao, June 2, 2017.

⁹⁸ Secessionist rebel groups are less likely than nonsecessionist rebel groups to target civilians in civil war. Tanisha Fazal, “Secessionism and Civilian Targeting” (paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, August 2013), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2300126>.

⁹⁹ The CMA refused to allow elections to happen in Kidal, arguing that elections can only be organized after the implementation of key dispositions of the peace agreement, particularly the establishment of interim authorities, the deployment of joint military patrols, and the return of refugees and displaced persons. See Radio France Internationale (RFI), “Mali: la CMA dénonce toujours l’organisation des élections communales,” RFI, November 16, 2016, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20161030-mali-obstacles-organisation-elections-communales>. The elections were rescheduled for May 2017, again postponed to July, and finally adjourned to an undetermined date. See Aguibou Sogodogo, “Mali: Elections communales partielles et régionales: Un nouveau report,” *MaliActu.net*, June 1, 2017, <http://maliactu.net/mali-elections-communales-partielles-et-regionales-un-nouveau-report/>.

¹⁰⁰ Author’s interview with a CMA official, Bamako, June 2017.

¹⁰¹ The Idnane is one of the most significant Tuareg factions in Kidal, along with the Ifoghas and the Imghad. For more about the violence between Imghad and Idnane, see Radio France Internationale (RFI), “Mali: les exactions contre les civils se multiplient dans la région de Kidal,” RFI, June 16, 2017, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20170616-mali-exactions-contre-civils-multiplient-region-kidal>; Cretois, “Mali: In the Region of Kidal, ‘The Tension Is Enormous.’”

¹⁰² U.S. Department of State and USAID, “Working Draft, Atrocity Assessment Framework: Supplemental Guidance.”

¹⁰³ Mali is a member of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, the International Telecommunication Union, the Universal Postal Union, and the International Criminal Court. It belongs to the African Union, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the African Development Bank. Mali is an associate member of the European Community. Regionally, Mali is a member of the Economic Community of West African States, the West African Economic Monetary Union, the Liptako-Gourma Authority, the Niger River Commission, the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, and the Senegal River Valley Development Organization.

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Cover: MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) fighters around Tessit, Gao in January 2013. They have heard that the Malian army is advancing in their direction, and are training in case they have to fight them. *Credit: Veronique de Viguier/ Getty Images Reportage*



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