



# Stabilising Mali

Neighbouring states' political and military engagement

Gabriella Ingerstad and Magdalena Tham Lindell



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| Titel                  | Stabilisering av Mali. Grannstaters politiska och militära engagemang    |
| Title                  | Stabilising Mali. Neighbouring states' political and military engagement |
| Rapportnr/Report no    | FOI-R--4026--SE  |
| Månad/Month            | Januari/ January   |
| Utgivningsår/Year      | 2015   |
| Antal sidor/Pages      | 90   |
| ISSN                   | 1650-1942  |
| Kund/Customer          | Utrikesdepartementet/Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs                |
| Forskningsområde       | 8. Säkerhetspolitik  |
| Projektnr/Project no   | B12511   |
| Godkänd av/Approved by | Maria Lignell Jakobsson  |
| Ansvarig avdelning     | Försvarsanalys   |

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## Sammanfattning

Studiens övergripande syfte är att bidra till en ökad förståelse av det politiska och säkerhetsmässiga sammanhang som FN:s stabiliseringsinsats i Mali (MINUSMA) verkar i, med ett särskilt fokus på grannländerna. Studien söker identifiera och förklara de olika drivkrafter som fått fem av Malis grannländer (Burkina Faso, Elfenbenskusten, Guinea, Niger och Senegal) att bidra med trupp till MINUSMA medan två av dem (Algeriet och Mauretanien) beslutat sig för att inte göra det. Genom en analys av de intressen och motiv som förklarar ländernas politiska och militära engagemang i Mali, uppmärksammar även studien hur grannstaterna kan påverka konfliktlösning i Mali.

Nyckelord: Afrika, afrikansk säkerhet, Västafrika, Sahel, Mali, Algeriet, Burkina Faso, Elfenbenskusten, Guinea, Mauretanien, Niger, Senegal, FN, Förenta nationerna, MINUSMA, ECOWAS, AFISMA, fredsfrämjande insatser, jihadism, tuareg, utrikespolitik

## Summary

The overall aim of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the political and security context in which the United Nations' stabilisation mission in Mali (MINUSMA) operates, with a particular focus on the neighbouring states. The study seeks to identify and explain the different drivers that have led to five of Mali's neighbouring states (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger and Senegal) contributing troops to MINUSMA, while two of them (Algeria and Mauritania) have decided not to. Through an analysis of the main interests and incentives that explain the states' political and military engagement in Mali, the study also highlights how the neighbouring states could influence conflict resolution in Mali.

Keywords: Africa, African security, West Africa, Sahel, Mali, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, UN, United Nations, MINUSMA, ECOWAS, AFISMA, peace support operations, Jihadism, Tuareg, foreign policy

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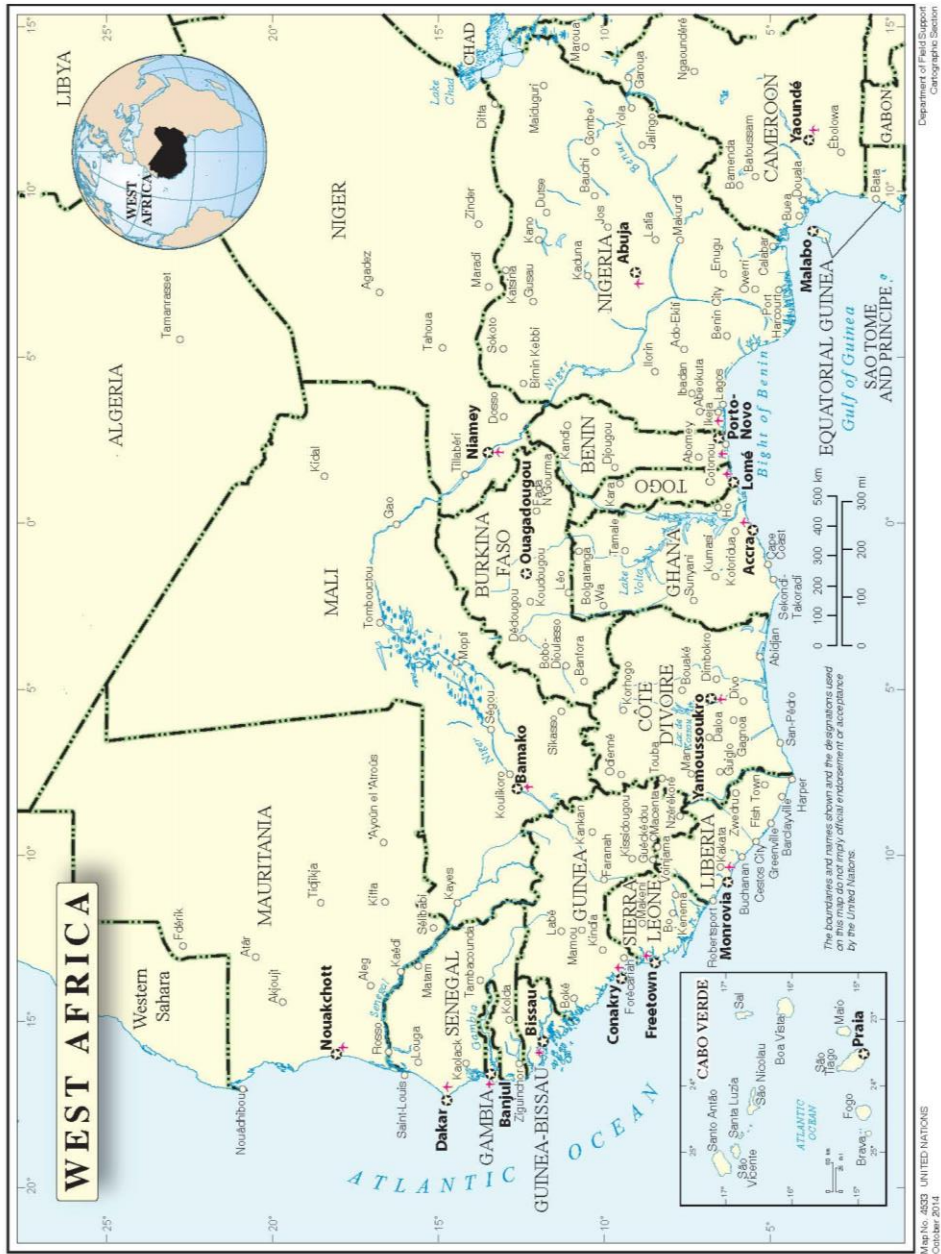


# Abbreviations

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| AFISMA  | African-led International Support Mission to Mali                             |
| AOF     | Afrique occidentale française   |
| AQIM    | Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb   |
| ASF     | African Standby Force   |
| ATT     | Amadou Toumani Touré  |
| AU      | African Union   |
| CAR     | Central African Republic  |
| CEMOC   | Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint/ Joint Military Staff Committee     |
| CEN-SAD | Community of Sahel-Saharan States   |
| CNRDR   | Comité national de redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'Etat |
| DRS     | Département du renseignement et de la sécurité                                |
| ECCAS   | Economic Community of Central African States                                  |
| ECOMIB  | ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau   |
| ECOMOG  | ECOWAS Monitoring Group   |
| ECOWAS  | Economic Community of West African States                                     |
| EEAS    | European External Action Service  |
| EFS     | Eléments français au Sénégal  |
| ESF     | ECOWAS Standby Force  |
| EU      | European Union  |
| EUTM    | European Union Training Mission   |
| FIS     | Front Islamique du Salut  |
| FLN     | Front de libération nationale/ National Liberation Front                      |
| FOI     | Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut/Swedish Defence Research Agency            |
| FRCI    | Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire   |
| G5      | Group of five   |

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| GRIP    | Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité  |
| GSPC    | Groupe Salafiste de Prédication et le Combat   |
| HCUA    | Haut conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad  |
| IBK     | Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta   |
| MAA     | Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad  |
| MFDC    | Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance  |
| MICEMA  | Mission de la CEDEAO au Mali/ ECOWAS Mission in Mali   |
| MINUSMA | Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali/ United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali |
| MONUSCO | United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo  |
| MNLA    | Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad/ National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad  |
| MUJAO   | Mouvement pour le Tawhîd et du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest/ Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa  |
| NATO    | North Atlantic Treaty Organization   |
| PNA     | People's National Army   |
| RND     | Rassemblement national démocratique  |
| UK      | United Kingdom   |
| UMA     | Union du Maghreb Arabe /Arab Maghreb Union   |
| UN      | United Nations   |
| UNAMID  | African Union/United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur  |
| UNDP    | United Nations Development Programme   |
| UNOCI   | United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire  |
| UNSC    | United Nations Security Council  |
| UNSG    | United Nations Secretary General   |
| US      | United States  |

# Map of the Region



UN, Map No. 4533, October 2014.

# Map of Mali and its Neighbours



# 1 Introduction

In 2012, stability in Mali was overturned by three separate, yet interlinked, events. Tuareg separatists launched an armed rebellion in the north, a group of army officers ousted the president in the capital Bamako, and armed Islamists took control over significant parts of northern Mali. Since then, the United Nations Security Council has repeatedly stated that the situation in Mali constitutes a threat to global peace and security.<sup>1</sup>

Following the French military intervention in January 2013, the *African-led International Support Mission in Mali* (AFISMA) deployed to Mali. When the *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA)<sup>2</sup> was launched on 1 July 2013, AFISMA was re-hatted into the UN mission. As a result, there is a strong West African dominance in MINUSMA with all ECOWAS<sup>3</sup> member states participating in the UN operation.<sup>4</sup>

Mali's neighbouring states have all been affected by the turmoil. Mali borders Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. Mali's neighbours are all engaged in the efforts to resolve the armed conflict and to stabilise the situation in the country, either by providing peacekeepers to MINUSMA or through other engagements such as mediation or bilateral military cooperation. The responses of the neighbouring countries, as well as the reasons for their engagement in Mali vary.

## 1.1 The Aim of the Study

This study has been commissioned by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The overall aim is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the political and security context in which the United Nations stabilisation mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is operating, with a focus on the neighbouring states. The study seeks to identify and explain the different drivers that have led to five of Mali's neighbouring states – Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger and Senegal – contributing troops to MINUSMA, while two of them – Algeria and Mauritania – have decided not to. Through an analysis of the main interests and incentives that explain these states' political and military engagement in Mali, the study also highlights how the neighbouring states could influence conflict resolution in Mali.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example UNSC Resolutions 2056 (2012), 2071 (2012) and 2085 (2012).

<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth analysis of MINUSMA see Tham Lindell & Nilsson, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Economic Community of West African States.

<sup>4</sup> UN, 2014, *UN Missions Summary by Country*, 31 October 2014.

The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has specifically called for an analysis focusing on three areas of concern, here translated into the following research questions:

1. *How are the neighbouring states politically and militarily engaged in the efforts to resolve the armed conflicts in Mali?*
2. *What are the main interests and incentives behind this engagement?*
3. *In view of the above, how could the neighbouring states influence conflict resolution in Mali?*

## 1.2 Research Method and Design

To answer *the first research question* an analysis of each state's political and military engagement in Mali is provided, focusing on military deployment as well as diplomatic and political efforts to influence developments.

In order to *identify the interests and incentives* that are driving each neighbouring states' political and military engagement in Mali, i.e. why they engage, an analytical framework has been developed based on previous research. The aim is to be able to concentrate the data collection and subsequent analysis along a set of carefully identified variables. In essence, the framework, which is presented in depth in chapter 3, concentrates on three categories of factors:

- National security interests and threat perceptions
- External relations and type of actor
- Domestic politics and the role of the military.

These three categories of factors are used as a guide for data collection as well as a framework to categorise the empirical findings of the study. More precisely, data for each of those three categories were collected and analysed through qualitative text analysis and semi-structured interviews. Although the framework guides the data collection, empirical findings pointing to other significant factors driving the engagement in a particular case are also presented in the analysis.

The answer to *the third research question* follows from the answers to the first two.

## 1.3 Scope

The focus of this study is confined to the examination of the neighbouring states' policy interests and policy rationale vis-à-vis Mali during the period between 2012 and 2014. In accordance with the assignment from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the objects of analysis are the states that share borders with

Mali, i.e. Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.

The scope of the research is primarily oriented to 'hard security' matters and factors that pose more immediate challenges to neighbouring states' defence and foreign policy goals. As such, the focus is on state security. Security threats that emerge from religiously motivated violence and ethnic-separatist violence are specifically analysed, since those are the security threats MINUSMA is primarily to tackle. Although each country's security interests and threat perceptions are analysed separately, the security interdependence between the countries concerned is taken into account in the analysis.

In this study, the main unit of analysis is the state. The role of interest groups, civil society and bureaucratic organisations in shaping foreign policy is not taken into account. Hence it is beyond the scope of this study to analyse the policy processes and decision-making processes underlying each country's engagement in Mali. However, the role of the military in domestic politics is analysed as a factor that may affect the governments' decisions to engage in the conflict in Mali. The rationale is that the military have a particular role in politics in most of the states analysed and are therefore of particular importance.

It can be noted that personal relationships and informal networks in the region play an important role in shaping the engagement, interests and influence of the neighbouring states,<sup>5</sup> although it is beyond the scope of this study to examine this in further detail.

## 1.4 Sources

A combination of primary and secondary sources have been utilised for the purposes of this report. These include previous FOI reports, reports from research institutes, academic articles, information from international organisations such as the UN, policy documents from neighbouring states, external actors and international organisations, newspaper articles from both international and locally well-known and reputable sources, as well as radio and TV news transcripts.

To complement this work, the study has also made use of semi-structured interviews. The interviewees comprised scholars, researchers, practitioners and journalists with profound expertise on the neighbouring states and the regional dynamics in the Sahel and West Africa. Interviews with 21 persons were carried out in Paris, Brussels and Uppsala in October 2014 and another four researchers were interviewed by telephone between September and November 2014. In

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<sup>5</sup> Interviews, 2014.

addition, interviews carried out within FOI's study on MINUSMA, have been utilised.

It was not possible, within the limitations of this study, for the researchers to travel to the seven countries studied. In order to compensate for this limitation of sources, reproductions of published speeches and statements from the countries' political leadership have been analysed.

## 1.5 Outline

**Chapter 2** provides an overview of the security challenges in the Sahel region, a description of the crises in Mali and an analysis of the development of a military response to the crises. The chapter seeks to explain the context in which the UN mission came about, contributing to the analysis of the states' decisions to engage. In **chapter 3** a review of what generally motivates states' foreign policy, in particular concerning participation in peacekeeping operations, sets the stage for the analysis in the chapter that follows.

Based on this review, each of the neighbouring states is analysed separately in **chapter 4**. In each section, a brief *summary* of how each state is engaged, what factors drive its engagement and how this could influence conflict resolution in Mali is provided, before analysing the interests and incentives in greater depth. Each country-specific case study can be read as a piece of the larger puzzle, i.e. the regional security context in which MINUSMA operates. The case studies can also be read in stand-alone fashion in order to understand each state's unique motives vis-à-vis the security situation in Mali.

While chapter 4 analyses each of the neighbouring states' engagement, interests and influence separately, **chapter 5** seeks to identify common features that can feed into an understanding of what is driving the neighbours' engagement. This final chapter also discusses how this engagement could affect conflict resolution in Mali.

The final result of this study is the outcome of a joint effort of the authors of the report and several reviewers. The sections on Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal are authored by Gabriella Ingerstad, who is also the main author of chapters 1 and 3. Magdalena Tham Lindell wrote the country studies on Burkina Faso and Niger, and is the principal author of chapter 2. The section on Algeria and the concluding chapter 5 were co-authored by Magdalena Tham Lindell and Gabriella Ingerstad. Dr Mikael Eriksson and Dr Adriana Lins de Albuquerque at FOI have given especially valuable input to the study process. The report has also benefited from the reviews by Kaan Korkmaz and Markus Derblom at FOI as well as Dr Ole Martin Gaasholt at the Nordic Africa Institute.



## 2 The State of Play

Despite 60 years having passed since decolonisation in West Africa, development has not been able to ensure stable democratic governance, state and human security, or trustful relations between neighbouring states. Politically, West Africa and the Sahel region are characterised by insufficient governance, instability and recurring violence. The weakness of the states' institutions, limited territorial control and high levels of corruption also undermine the securing of state revenues, further undermining the capacity of the states. The politics of the region continue to bear the mark of coups, election violence and political struggles.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1 The Sahel Region

The Sahel region is surrounded by, and included in, a number of different conflict clusters which are further touched upon in relation to the countries analysed in chapter 4.<sup>7</sup> Apart from Algeria, Mali and all of its neighbours are found at the very low end<sup>8</sup> of the Human Development Index, with extreme poverty levels and a lack of sustainable economic development. The Sahel is however also an important cultural and socio-economic space for the movement of people and goods, an important part of the lifeblood of the region. These movements bring dynamism to local economies and enable people to support themselves. Even though there are movements of refugees towards Europe, most such movements are within the African continent, with people seeking opportunities elsewhere to support families at home.<sup>9</sup>

In the Sahel, national interests are often seen in the framework of cooperation with external actors, not with neighbouring states, and regional security cooperation remains fragmented. This is due to the lack of interstate trust in the region and the rivalry between the region's two largest economies, Algeria and Morocco. This undermines information sharing and collective strategies to address the regional security situation. Within the ECOWAS framework, several programmes have been established to deal with regional challenges.<sup>10</sup> However,

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<sup>6</sup> Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> These include the Sahelo-Saharan (Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Algeria, Mauritania), the Mano River (Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone) and the Senegambian clusters (Senegal, the Gambia); Gorée Institute, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Niger is placed at 187 out of 187 listed countries; Burkina Faso at 181; Guinea at 179; Mali at 176; Côte d'Ivoire at 171; Senegal at 163; and Mauritania at 161; UNDP, *Human Development Report 2014*.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Ammour, 2014a, p. 40; Ammour, 2012a; Africa Confidential, 2014, *Joining up security*, Vol 55. No. 9; Tham Lindell & Mattson, 2014, pp. 34-36.

Mauritania and Algeria are not members of ECOWAS, and neither is Chad, one of the most important military actors in Mali.<sup>11</sup>

Yet in recent years, a number of regional initiatives have been launched in order to enhance cooperation among countries, with the aim of countering security threats related to the situation in Mali and the broader Sahel region. In 2013, the *Nouakchott Process*<sup>12</sup> was initiated by the African Union (AU) in order to coordinate regional security and intelligence cooperation between Sahel states. Another step forward is the *G5 of the Sahel* launched by Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad and Niger at the beginning of 2014. The G5 format may provide a new platform for regional cooperation in the Sahel. The G5 concept goes beyond the narrow security agenda and includes economic development cooperation to create jobs and promote trade, with the aim of countering the risk of radicalisation and recruitment to extremist groups. However, many previous initiatives have had only limited outcomes, such as the *Joint Military Staff Committee* (CEMOC)<sup>13</sup> set up in 2010, mainly as a result of the lack of trust between the states.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2 The Crises in Mali

In Mali, there are three main transnational threats to state and human security that are contributing to recurring outbreaks of violence. These are armed separatism, armed Islamism and organised crime – all with roots in the wider Sahel region.<sup>15</sup> While the conflicts between Tuareg rebels and the state have been an issue since Mali's independence in 1960, the armed Islamist groups are a fairly recent phenomenon and a new component in the conflict dynamics. The lack of territorial and border control and neglect by the Malian government, and the Algerian counter-terrorism policy pushing what is now al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) southwards, have led to the establishment of terrorist groups in northern Mali. The two latter features are also being exploited by organised crime. Transnational trade has always been an important part of Saharan life but the development of West Africa as a transit region for cocaine

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<sup>11</sup> Chad is a member of ECCAS as well as CEN-SAD. Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger and Senegal are also members of the latter. Mauritania and Algeria are members of the UMA.

<sup>12</sup> This process includes 11 countries – Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Chad – but excludes Morocco.

<sup>13</sup> Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint.

<sup>14</sup> Tham Lindell & Mattson, 2014, pp. 34-36; Africa Confidential, 2014, *Joining up security*, Vol. 55. No. 9; Interview, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> For more on these transnational threats in the Sahel, see the previous FOI report by Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014.

has increased the value of controlling the trading routes, motivating the creation of militias and fuelling local conflicts.<sup>16</sup>

When Libya's leader Muammar al-Gaddafi was ousted from power and killed in the Libyan revolts of 2011, the Tuareg soldiers in his presidential guard were on the losing side and returned to their countries of origin, notably Mali and Niger. In Mali, these returning fighters organised yet another armed Tuareg rebellion against the state, following the tradition of similar armed revolts that broke out in 1963, 1990, and 2006. The causes are a deep sense of political exclusion and marginalisation but also long-held aspirations among the Tuareg for a historical homeland of their own. Inadequate responses to and conflict resolution of previous rebellions have added new grievances to the already existing ones. It must also be noted that there are personal financial incentives for certain rebel leaders, and other individuals, in the rebellions and the subsequent treaties meant to regulate the conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

The Tuareg rebels who initiated the insurgency in northeastern Mali on 17 January 2012 were better armed and trained than ever before. This meant a different balance of power compared with previous rebellions against the state and led to the almost immediate collapse of the Malian army. This in turn stirred protests in the capital Bamako, with accusations that the government was letting soldiers and officers die in northern Mali without proper equipment and support. On 22 March 2012, a gathering at the military camp in Kati led to a military coup staged against the democratically elected president, Amadou Toumani Touré. A military junta named the CNRDR<sup>18</sup> led by Captain Amadou Sanogo took over power, promising to retake the northern territory from the rebels.<sup>19</sup>

However, the following weeks saw a dramatic turning point for the conflict: on 6 April 2012 the state of Azawad, including two-thirds of Malian territory and all three regions in the north, was proclaimed independent. At the same time as the creation of Azawad was being celebrated among Tuareg with aspirations to self-rule, power shifted from the Tuareg rebel groups such as the *National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad* (MNLA<sup>20</sup>) to armed Islamists who had followed in their tracks. A territory the size of France, inside the borders of a democratic state, was now in the hands of groups like *al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM), imposing sharia law on the population. Since a unilateral counter-offensive by Mali was excluded due to the weak capacity of its security forces, which had already been demonstrated, the region and the international community realised the need to prepare for international intervention.

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<sup>16</sup> Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Gorée Institute, 2013, pp. 75-76.

<sup>18</sup> Comité national de redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'Etat.

<sup>19</sup> Tham Lindell, 2012, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad.

## 2.3 The Development of an International Military Response

The West African regional organisation ECOWAS, of which Mali is a member, took immediate diplomatic action against the military coup in Mali, imposing sanctions due to the unconstitutional change of government, convening a series of high-level political meetings and nominating the Burkinabe president as mediator. ECOWAS rejected any partition of the Malian state and declared its willingness to intervene militarily to ensure the territorial integrity of its member state. Backed by this threat, ECOWAS mediation managed quickly to have a civilian interim administration replace the military junta. The rapid and decisive actions it took during the spring of 2012 showed ECOWAS' political will to act in regional crises.<sup>21</sup>

For several reasons it was important to ECOWAS also to show its ability to put up a military intervention force that could act together with the Malian government to retake the north. According to a researcher interviewed for this study, France made it clear to the Francophonie in West Africa that it was time to show the results of long-time French support for military capacity building. According to the same researcher, France also asked the United Kingdom to urge important Anglophone member states of ECOWAS, Ghana and Nigeria, to contribute troops.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from this pressure from a third party, ECOWAS wanted to prove its peacekeeping capabilities and clear its name after the previous highly problematic ECOWAS missions to Sierra Leone and Liberia. This was important not least in relation to a certain rivalry between ECOWAS and the African Union in terms of who should intervene in crises in the region within the African peace and security architecture. The ambition was also to show that the *African Standby Force* (ASF), in terms of the region's *ECOWAS Standby Force* (ESF), existed and was capable of acting in response to serious crises. Like the other regional standby forces, the ESF is neither a standing nor a co-located force, but consists of a number of military units that are identified in advance and that should be trained, equipped and standing by. The ESF is intended to be fully operationally capable by 2015.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the ambitions, the preparations for a regional military response took time. The United Nations Security Council even attempted to push the process forward through several resolutions<sup>24</sup> during 2012, aiming to create momentum.

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<sup>21</sup> Bourgi, 2012, pp. 88-89; Interview, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, 2014; Tham Lindell, 2012, p. 35, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> UNSC Resolutions 2056 (2012), 2071 (2012) and 2085 (2012).

Even so, the Mali crises exposed the structural shortfalls of ECOWAS<sup>25</sup> and the insufficiency of its military capacity to match its political will. According to researchers interviewed for this study, this insight into the state of the West African armies came as a surprise to the ECOWAS member states themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Niger, Nigeria and Togo offered substantial troop contributions – of around 600 troops each – to the envisaged ECOWAS mission MICEMA<sup>27</sup> early on, followed by promises of around 100-500 per country from Benin, Burkina Faso and Senegal. In addition, Ghana was expected to contribute to the mission. The total force of MICEMA was envisioned to be 3,000 troops. However, difficulties in planning and launching the mission eventually led to a different mission being set up, the African-led AFISMA<sup>28</sup>, which was developed in cooperation between ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations and Mali. This mission was still heavily based on the contribution of the ECOWAS states but also included Chad, a state with important military assets and knowledge of desert warfare. On 20 December 2012, the United Nations Security Council authorised AFISMA to intervene in support of the government of Mali. The mandate was, however, conditioned on further planning being checked by the UN before an actual intervention could take place.<sup>29</sup>

Once again, the situation in northern Mali took a dramatic turn in January 2013 when the armed Islamists suddenly moved southward and expanded their territorial control. The interim government of Mali now feared further offensives towards the city of Mopti, planned to be the base of the AFISMA intervention. The government therefore turned to France for assistance and the French *Operation Serval* was initiated immediately on 11 January 2013. Despite the fact that France had previously excluded the option of any French ‘boots on the ground’ and had preferred the West African states to act militarily, the former colonial power was now spearheading the offensive against the armed Islamists.<sup>30</sup>

To France, however, it was important that it did not seem to be acting on its own: it wanted to include both the region and the rest of the international community in the responsibility to counter the threat posed by armed groups in Mali. One aim for France was to avoid a replication of the situation of the NATO<sup>31</sup> intervention in Libya in 2011 when most of Africa opposed military action, and

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<sup>25</sup> See also the previous FOI report on ECOWAS’ preparations for intervention in Mali in Tham Lindell, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Mission de la CEDEAO au Mali (ECOWAS Mission to Mali).

<sup>28</sup> African-led International Support Mission to Mali.

<sup>29</sup> Tham Lindell, 2012, p. 37; Tham Lindell & Nilsson, 2014, pp. 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> Tham Lindell, 2014, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

to avoid accusations of neo-colonialism. France also managed to gain exceptionally strong African support for Operation Serval.<sup>32</sup>

Due to this French interest in building a wider international contribution to stabilise the north of Mali, the deployment of the African AFISMA forces was accelerated with contingents from Chad<sup>33</sup> and Niger acting in northern Mali from February 2013. With its 2,000 troops seasoned in fighting wars in the desert, Chad played a vital role in retaking Kidal from the Islamists together with France.<sup>34</sup> Currently, Chad is contributing more than 1,000 troops to MINUSMA, deployed in Tessalit, Aguelhok and Kidal, the most challenging areas of operation in Mali.<sup>35</sup>

Another consequence was that the planned *European Union Training Mission to Mali* (EUTM) was brought forward, starting its training of the Malian Armed Forces in April 2013 instead of half a year later.<sup>36</sup> A third diplomatic accomplishment of France was the UN Security Council decision on 25 April 2013<sup>37</sup> to transfer the functions of AFISMA to a UN stabilisation mission in Mali – MINUSMA. According to the interviewees, the francophone African community is an important caucus led by France in the UN and the participation of West Africa's Francophonie in both AFISMA and MINUSMA must be seen in the perspective of this relationship and of the states' political, economic and social dependence on France.<sup>38</sup>

The UN mission was authorised to consist of up to 11,200 troops and 1,440 police. The mandate included the stabilisation of key population centres in the north and the re-establishment of state authority throughout the country.<sup>39</sup> With the establishment of MINUSMA on 1 July 2013, the existing 6,100 AFISMA forces, and nearly 400 police, were re-hatted into UN personnel.<sup>40</sup> For the ECOWAS states, participation in MINUSMA was therefore mainly a consequence of previous political decisions to offer troops to MICEMA and later deploy to AFISMA. With the organisational change, however, the financial conditions for participation improved.

In light of the description above of the military responses initiated in 2013, how are we to understand why states engage? In the following chapter, a theoretical

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<sup>32</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> The Chadian troops officially joined AFISMA in March 2013 (RFI, 2013, *Mali: le contingent tchadien rejoint officiellement la Misma*).

<sup>34</sup> UNSG Report to UNSC S/2013/189, p. 2; Africa Confidential, 2014, *Firefighters against an inferno*; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> UN, 2014, *UN Missions Summary by Country*, 31 October 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Skeppström & Hull Wiklund, 2013, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> UNSC Resolution 2100 (2013).

<sup>38</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> UNSC Resolution 2100 (2013).

<sup>40</sup> Tham Lindell & Nilsson, 2014, p. 16.

discussion on different explanations for state engagement is provided, in order to set the stage for the analysis of the neighbours' political and military engagement in Mali in chapter 4.





### 3 Why States Engage

The research puzzle concerns what interests and incentives are driving the military and political engagement of Mali's neighbouring states in Mali. Findings from previous research, in the fields of foreign policy analysis and research on states' engagement in peacekeeping, are used here as an analytical tool in order to provide a structured analysis of the driving factors behind the neighbouring states engagement in Mali. Three categories of factors are in focus:

- National security interests and threat perceptions
- External relations and type of actor
- Domestic politics and the role of the military.

The assumption is that national security interests and threat perceptions shape a country's foreign, security and defence policy. Furthermore, foreign policy actors, such as the elites, seek to reconcile domestic interests with external circumstances. Specific domestic and external contexts, and the interaction between these two environments, are important in order to understand foreign policy. In African countries, foreign policy has essentially been a matter of deliberate actions by elites, strongly influenced by their relationship with the military.<sup>41</sup>

#### 3.1 National Security Interests and Threat Perceptions

National interests may affect a government's decision to send peacekeepers to a conflict zone, in particular when the area of conflict is located in a neighbouring country. Countries may send peacekeepers acting as a regional stabiliser in order to protect their own national interests, which can comprise a wide range of issues including security and economic concerns.<sup>42</sup>

In this study the main focus is on the neighbouring states' national security interests and their perceptions of the threats that MINUSMA is intended to counter, namely violent separatism and armed Islamism. These threats are in the political and military domains and are thus associated with hard security concerns.<sup>43</sup> However, a threat does not necessarily have to be real (objective): something can also be subjectively perceived as a threat (or not).<sup>44</sup> Hence there is

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<sup>41</sup> Khadigala, Gilbert & Lyons, 2001, pp. 1-2; Ouédraogo, 2014, pp. 18-21.

<sup>42</sup> Firsing, 2014, p. 49; Hentz et al., 2009, p. 211.

<sup>43</sup> By contrast, a wider theoretical concept of security also includes the economic, social and environmental sectors.

<sup>44</sup> Buzan et al., 1998.

a possibility that the neighbouring states perceive the threat from separatism and armed Islamism in different ways, or that other security threats are perceived as more urgent, which in turn may explain the engagement in Mali.

### 3.2 External Relations and Type of Actor

The decision of governments whether or not to contribute troops to a peacekeeping operation is driven by a wide range of issues, including regional rivalries and regional patrimonial relationships.<sup>45</sup> Power relations affect the governments' decisions. By contributing troops to UN peacekeeping operations, a country may gain greater recognition within the UN system, which in turn promotes its national interests. Countries aspiring to become a member of the UN Security Council, or that seek to gain more leverage in UN bodies, can also benefit from sending peacekeepers. This logic should also apply to regional organisations in Africa, e.g. taking on a larger responsibility will strengthen the member state's position within the AU or a sub-regional organisation such as ECOWAS.

In addition, by participating in peacekeeping operations the contributing countries could secure a positive relationship with larger bilateral partners. As such, peacekeeping involvement may enhance bilateral relations and thereby have positive economic and political effects.<sup>46</sup> The personalisation of politics in many African states may also affect a leader's choice. The decision for a country to intervene is often based on either empathy or animosity between heads of state.<sup>47</sup>

The behaviour of a state can also be understood as a manifestation of what kind of actor the state is, or wants to be, in the regional and international sphere. Some countries often contribute troops to peacekeeping operations (both UN and AU), while others rarely or never do so. This choice may be based on national security interests and threat perceptions but could also be interpreted in the light of the country's role in the international community, i.e. what type of actor the country is internationally. Some countries are active members of a number of multilateral organisations while others prefer a more reserved approach. Countries also send troops for moral or humanitarian reasons.<sup>48</sup> Some countries are driven by a wish to contribute to international peace and security. African countries, like many others, sometimes justify their interventions by the need to stop an unfolding humanitarian crisis.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hentz et al., 2009, p. 211.

<sup>46</sup> Firsiroti, 2014, pp. 48-49, p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> Hentz et al., 2009, p. 212.

<sup>48</sup> Firsiroti, 2014, p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> Hentz et al., 2009, p. 213.

### 3.3 Domestic Politics and the Role of the Military

Previous research demonstrates how domestic structures and domestic politics may affect the way in which a country engages in foreign policy in general, and in peacekeeping operations in particular.<sup>50</sup> In the African context, the elites often rely on the military rather than popular support and in many countries the armed forces, are major political actors.<sup>51</sup> As a result, foreign policy in many African states is characterised by a top-down approach with a strong influence of the military, and a marginalised civil society.

An important domestic political need in many African states has been identified as regime security.<sup>52</sup> The imperative of regime survival encourages elites to use foreign policy to garner political and economic resources from the external environment in order to manage threats to domestic security.<sup>53</sup> If a country's leader is seeking to maintain authoritarian power, he or she may decide to contribute troops to peace operations in order to try to seek the approval of Western democratic states and avoid criticism. The diplomatic and military benefits that flow from such approval would then allow the government to retard liberalisation processes, making peacekeeping a strategic tool for authoritarian leaders seeking to stay in power.<sup>54</sup>

By participating in peacekeeping, the contributing state has a chance to grow and professionalise its army since participation in peacekeeping operations helps develop military expertise and experience. Deploying troops may increase the operational capability of the military, as well as interoperability with other countries' armed forces. Sending troops also provides contributing states with a financial opportunity to the country, the military institution and individual soldiers.<sup>55</sup> Those operational, material and financial gains are, according to research, a key driver behind the rise in African peacekeeping.<sup>56</sup> Deploying troops abroad is also a way for some governments in Africa to eliminate the threat of military coups by keeping the army busy.<sup>57</sup> Diverting the attention of military leaders from problems at home and removing troops from the vicinity of the capital can reduce the threat of the army becoming involved in politics.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See for example Khadigala et al., 2001, and Firsing, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Ouédraogo, 2014, pp. 18-21.

<sup>52</sup> Victor, 2010, pp. 217-229, p. 219.

<sup>53</sup> Khadigala et al., p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Damman, 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Firsing, 2014, p. 47, p. 48, p. 51.

<sup>56</sup> Victor, 2010, pp. 217-229, p. 227.

<sup>57</sup> Firsing, 2014, p. 48.

<sup>58</sup> Victor, 2010, pp. 217-229, p. 220.



## 4 The Neighbouring Countries

An analytical framework describing why states may engage in international peace support operations having been set out, the three categories of factors presented in the previous chapter will now be analysed empirically state by state. The three categories are the influence of national security interests and threat perceptions; external relations and type of actor; and domestic politics and the role of the military on the engagement of Mali's neighbours.

Each country case study starts with a description of its political and military engagement in Mali. A summary of the state's role, interests and influence is provided before an in-depth analysis further develops the factors that have driven that particular country's engagement in Mali.

### 4.1 Algeria

Given its status as a regional political, economic and military power, Algeria is a key player in the Mali crises. With its knowledge of conflict dynamics in Mali, its influence in the northern parts of the country and its experience as mediator in the peace processes following previous Tuareg uprisings, Algeria's engagement is essential in finding a solution to the crises in Mali. In early 2012, Algeria called for an end to the violence and a secession of hostilities in Mali. It froze military cooperation with Bamako and declared non-involvement in the conflict in the north.<sup>59</sup> Following the unconstitutional change of power in Bamako in March 2012, Algeria condemned the military coup.<sup>60</sup> Since the crises in Mali began in 2012, Algeria has taken action to increase security on its borders by tightened surveillance and a military presence in the south of Algeria.<sup>61</sup> In January 2013, it closed its borders with Mali and allowed France to use its airspace for the military intervention Operation Serval.<sup>62</sup>

Algeria has opted out of contributing troops to MINUSMA but has an important role as a political and diplomatic actor in the Mali crises. Throughout the crises Algeria has promoted a political solution.<sup>63</sup> The Algerian government and security services have close relations with movements in Mali.<sup>64</sup> However, attempts in 2012 to mediate between the Malian government and the armed Tuareg groups failed. Algeria also failed to reach an agreement between Bamako, the MNLA and Ansar Dine in order to undermine the influence of

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<sup>59</sup> Arieff, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Zoubir, 2013b, p. 55.

<sup>61</sup> Mortimer, 2015, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Le Figaro, 2013, *L'Algérie ferme ses frontières avec le Mali*.

<sup>63</sup> Mortimer, 2015, p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 3.

AQIM and MUJAO.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, since July 2014 Algeria has been the main mediator in the Malian conflict with negotiations scheduled to resume in February 2015.

### Summary

*By late 2014, Algeria was the main mediator in the conflict between the Malian government and the armed rebel groups. Preserving stability along its borders and preventing spill-over remain key objectives in its foreign policy towards Mali. Armed groups operating in Mali's north constitute one of the main security threats to Algeria. Algeria's response to the events in Mali is largely driven by its national security interests, including that of a long-term commitment to preserve regime stability. Decisions are based on calculations of what best serves those interests. The Algerian constitution officially restricts the army's ability to operate outside its own territory, and this, together with a fear of getting pulled into Mali's conflict, explains why Algeria has not contributed troops to MINUSMA. With its strong leverage, following from its role as a regional political, economic and military power, as well as its good connections with Malian actors, Algeria has an essential role as a mediator in the armed conflict between the Tuareg and the government in Bamako. With its vast intelligence network in the region, long experience in counter-terrorism operations, and partnership with the US and France, Algeria plays an important role in countering terrorism in northern Mali and the Sahel.*

#### 4.1.1 National Security Interests and Threat Perceptions

Algeria's primary security interests in view of the situation in northern Mali and the Sahel more broadly are to protect its borders and contain sources of threat outside its territory.<sup>66</sup> Algeria shares 1,300 kilometres of border with Mali and the populations on both sides have close ties.<sup>67</sup> Since independence, Algeria has perceived the Sahel as a cauldron of conflict and unrest. The sources for this unrest include regional competition over oil- and gas fields, the presence of organised crime, illegal arms flows, foreign interests in the region's natural resources, and the fact that the region currently serves as a hideout for a number of armed groups with ethnic, territorial and religious agendas.<sup>68</sup> Traditionally, the

<sup>65</sup> Mouvement pour le Tawhîd et du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest/Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa. Lounnas, 2014, p. 824.

<sup>66</sup> Zoubir, 2013b, p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Strachan 2014, p. 4; Reeve, 2014, p. 1.

rivalry with Morocco has forced Algiers to keep an eye on its western borders.<sup>69</sup> The Arab Spring in Tunisia and the Libyan civil war led to an increased military presence along its eastern border regions. With the crises in Mali in 2012, Algeria faced increased instability in the south-west as well. These events seriously affected Algeria's prospects of protecting its territory and containing threats outside its borders.<sup>70</sup> In addition to threatening social and political order, a volatile neighbourhood is also considered a threat to Algeria's economic interests and sovereignty.<sup>71</sup>

The main security threat to Algeria comes from armed groups in the neighbourhood.<sup>72</sup> The presence of armed Islamist groups, such as AQIM and MUJAO, in northern Mali is a direct security concern for Algiers.<sup>73</sup> The roots of AQIM are to be found in the Algerian civil war that broke out in 1992, following the army's decision to step in and prevent the Islamist party the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) from winning the country's first democratic election. An estimated 100,000-200,000 people lost their lives during the almost ten-year-long war.<sup>74</sup> Since its civil war, Algeria has continued to be plagued by high levels of terrorism-related violence. Between 2001 and 2011 over 900 terrorist incidents occurred in Algeria, as compared to 41 in Mali, 35 in Niger and 20 in Mauritania.<sup>75</sup> The country's own trauma has formed its harsh counter-terrorism policy, including its firm stance never to negotiate with terrorists.<sup>76</sup>

Driven by major setbacks in Algeria, parts of the *Groupe Salafiste de Prédication et le Combat* (GSPC), a splinter group from one of the armed Islamist movements fighting the Algerian government during the civil war, relocated to northern Mali in 2003.<sup>77</sup> In 2006 they aligned themselves with al-Qaeda and became AQIM.<sup>78</sup> The primary target of AQIM's different branches is still Algeria. One of the main objectives of the Sahel branch has been to supply the northern branch in Kabylie with finances and weapons. Algeria was successful in cutting off the two branches from each other until 2011, when there was an upsurge in AQIM operations in northern Algeria involving ambushes and suicide attacks.<sup>79</sup>

Algeria has also suffered from terrorist attacks due to spill-over from the developments in Mali. In April 2012, MUJAO, a splinter group from AQIM,

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<sup>69</sup> Eriksson, 2014, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> Eriksson, 2014, p. 19; Lounnas, pp. 821-822.

<sup>71</sup> Eriksson, 2014, p. 20.

<sup>72</sup> Eriksson, 2014, p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Jakobsson & Eriksson, 2012a, p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Ammour, 2012a, pp. 4-5 ; Mortimer, 2015.

<sup>76</sup> European Parliament, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Jakobsson & Eriksson, 2012a.

<sup>78</sup> Boukhars, 2012, p. 12; Jakobsson & Eriksson, 2012a, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Lounnas, 2014, p. 817, pp. 819-820, p. 822.

attacked the Algerian consulate in Gao after the city, in Mali's north, had fallen into the hands of armed Islamists. The consul and six of his staff were taken hostage; later on the vice-consul was executed.<sup>80</sup> MUJAO also orchestrated suicide attacks against targets inside Algeria in 2012. The attack by armed Islamists under the command of a former AQIM leader, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, on a gas facility close to In Amenas in Algeria in January 2013 was a tipping point for the Algerian government, demonstrating that armed Islamists still posed an immediate threat to Algeria's national security.<sup>81</sup> The terrorists had entered from Libya and after a hostage taking and an intervention by the Algerian army around 70 people died.<sup>82</sup> This attack was a serious blow to the Algerian government as it has sought to project an image of stability, which has allowed the government to remain stable despite the turbulence in the neighbouring countries, ensuring regime security.<sup>83</sup>

The presence of armed Tuareg groups such as the MNLA is considered a major security threat in Algiers.<sup>84</sup> Algeria is firmly opposed to any secessionist movements, which are seen as a threat to its national security and territorial integrity.<sup>85</sup> Algeria has a small minority Tuareg population in the southern parts of the country, estimated to be less than 50,000 out of a total population of almost 39 million.<sup>86</sup> Although the minority is small, the Algerian government has never totally discarded the possibility of a Tuareg uprising as there has been concern that the Tuareg of Niger, Mali and Algeria could unite and form a political entity.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Algeria is confronted with parts of its Berber population sharing a wish for self-determination that parallels that of the Tuareg, giving rise to a fear on the part of the government of alignments between movements challenging Algeria's territorial integrity.<sup>88</sup> Hence the aspiration to create an independent Tuareg republic in northern Mali is a very sensitive issue for Algeria.<sup>89</sup>

During every crisis in Mali's north, tens of thousands of refugees have entered Algeria to find shelter.<sup>90</sup> Due to previous examples of extremists infiltrating refugee camps and the population movements leading to increased cross-border ties between Tuareg, the refugee camps in southern Algeria are a security

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<sup>80</sup> Lounnas, 2014, p. 822.

<sup>81</sup> Ammour, 2013a, p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> Wolf & Lefevre, 2013.

<sup>83</sup> Eriksson, 2014, p. 20; European Parliament, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> Eriksson, 2014, p. 18; Interview 2014.

<sup>85</sup> Zoubir, 2013b, p. 55.

<sup>86</sup> Tham Lindell & Mattson, 2013, p. 16; CIA World Factbook, *Algeria*.

<sup>87</sup> *Ethnicity, regionalism and political stability in Algeria's Grand Sud*, 2003, p. 69.

<sup>88</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 4; Boukhars, 2012, p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> Mortimer, 2015, p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 4.



concern to the Algerian authorities.<sup>91</sup> At the height of the crisis in 2012, Algeria hosted over 30,000 refugees.<sup>92</sup>

#### 4.1.2 External Relations and Type of Actor

During the first decades following independence, Algeria's key foreign policy principles were to uphold the inviolability of the borders inherited from the colonial era, and non-interference by any state in the internal affairs of another.<sup>93</sup> As the regime has largely maintained these core principles, they are fundamental in explaining Algeria's approach to external crises. Algeria's rejection in 2012 of the MNLA's call for an independent state and the opposition to the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya are both expressions of the implementation of these principles.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the Algerian constitution precludes military intervention abroad.<sup>95</sup> Despite Algeria having Africa's largest military budget, the lack of Algerian military involvement in Mali is thus consistent with Algeria's general foreign and security policy which is often regarded as isolationist.<sup>96</sup>

During the period of the civil war in Algeria, the country was politically inward-looking, which meant that Morocco and Libya gained the upper hand in building networks of influence in the Sahel. At the end of the 1990s, the Algerian regime was therefore actively trying to reassert itself with the 1999 election of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika as the point of departure for this return to foreign politics. In international engagements Algeria now took on the role of a staunch anti-terrorist operator. Through its relatively strong intelligence capabilities, deep knowledge of armed Islamist movements and experience of counter-terrorism, Algeria quickly positioned itself as a pivotal state in the region, and a counter-terrorist partner for global powers such as the US, France and the UK.<sup>97</sup>

Even though Algeria's relationship with the former colonial power France has been complicated politically since the war of independence, it has improved lately due to their shared strategic interests in the region.<sup>98</sup> The once ambivalent relationship with the US has also developed into a strong partnership on counter-terrorism. Algeria's counter-terrorism efforts together with France and the US

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<sup>91</sup> Boukhars, 2012, p. 18; ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 4; *Ethnicity, regionalism and political stability in Algeria's Grand Sud*, 2003, p. 87.

<sup>92</sup> Boukhars, 2012, p. 14.

<sup>93</sup> Zoubir, 2013b, pp. 54-55.

<sup>94</sup> Riedel, 2011, pp. 207-208; Zoubir 2013b, p. 43.

<sup>95</sup> Mortimer, 2015, p. 14; Ammour, 2013a, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> European Parliament, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Boukhars, 2012, p. 12; Mortimer, 2015, p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> Interview Ministry of Defence, France, 2014.

more generally include special partnerships such as intelligence sharing on regional strategies for combined anti-terrorism policies.<sup>99</sup>

Algeria's resistance to a military intervention in northern Mali can be explained by its aversion to any foreign military presence in its backyard, in particular by the former colonial power, France. In addition, Algeria views ECOWAS and its member states as being strongly influenced by France, which is why it was against an ECOWAS intervention at the outset.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, Algeria has played an important role for the African Union in terms of counter-terrorism, notably by hosting the *African Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism* (ACSRT). Algeria has a historically strong diplomatic presence in the AU with highly experienced Algerian diplomats holding influential seats within the organisation. Algerians have also held important diplomatic positions in the UN.<sup>101</sup>

In general, though, Algeria favours bilateral over regional security cooperation. Furthermore, where military cooperation is concerned, Algeria focuses on the domestic arena rather than on collaboration with its neighbours. In North Africa, regional security cooperation is also severely hampered by the very strained relations between Algeria and Morocco. The two neighbours are politically very different states with different foreign policy ambitions which cause suspicion between the countries, fuelled by their disagreement on the status of Western Sahara.<sup>102</sup>

The international attention to counter-terrorism, driven by the US post-9/11, gave Algeria an important role in the region but also meant that its foreign policy had a narrow focus on the defence of territorial integrity. Currently, however, the Algerian regime seems to be reasserting itself once more. As argued by Mortimer and others, Algeria is in a process of trying to redefine itself as a "normal state" with clear links to the international security institutions, as opposed to a hesitant regional power whose actions and intentions are difficult to read. With a new political and economic reform agenda, the regime is seeking international recognition and legitimacy, and recognition as a regional leader. In this, actions that improve Algeria's image in the West are particularly important. The overall aim is improved strategic cooperation with the West and the Mediterranean countries, as well as advanced military training against the backdrop of an increased armed Islamist threat in the region.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Mortimer, 2015, p. 11; NDTV, 2014, *US, Algeria vow to cooperate in fight against terrorism*; European Parliament, 2013; US Department of State, 2014, *Remarks with Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra before their Meeting*.

<sup>100</sup> Boukhars, 2012, p. 15.

<sup>101</sup> Daemers, 2014 in EUISS report, pp. 52-54; Boukhars, 2012, p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Evers, 2014, p. 29.

<sup>103</sup> Mortimer, 2015, p. 12, p. 15; Boukhars, 2012, p. 3; Zoubir, 2013b.

This shift in foreign policy may explain why Algeria accepted the French intervention in northern Mali in early 2013. Another important factor (apart from the direct pressure exerted by France and the US) was the shift in Ansar Dine's tactics in Mali. Its attacks on Malian positions further south together with AQIM and MUJAO came as a surprise to the Algerian authorities despite its close relations to Ansar Dine (*see below*) and made the risk of an expansion of the occupied territory acute. At the same time Algeria's efforts at mediation between the Mali interim government and the MNLA had stalled. All in all, this contributed to Algeria's decision to authorise unrestricted French overflights of Algerian territory and the decision to share information to facilitate military operations in Mali.<sup>104</sup>

As the security situation in Mali got worse during late 2013 and the beginning of 2014, Algeria found itself compelled to shift towards a more active foreign policy engagement. If it allowed its southern and eastern neighbourhood – the situation in Libya was also deteriorating – to fall into further political turmoil the chances of spill-over would increase, and thus pose a threat to the Algerian regime.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, an important element in Algeria's long-term political and military rivalry with Morocco has been to fend off the rival's regional influence. Therefore, the entry of Morocco onto the scene, with King Mohammed VI meeting the MNLA in January 2014 and carrying out an official visit to Mali the month after, probably worked as a catalyst for Algeria's increased political engagement. Previously, Morocco had not played a major mediating role among Sahel countries.<sup>106</sup>

Since the 1990s the international community has come to rely on Algeria's diplomatic interventions to mediate or avert conflicts in northern Mali.<sup>107</sup> However, the relationship between Algiers and Bamako has been complex. Algeria has repeatedly criticised Bamako of lacking will and ability to counter the terrorist threat in northern Mali, but at the same time has been a loyal friend. On the other hand, Bamako has voiced concern over Algiers not having control over its intelligence services and has been suspicious over Algeria's close relationships with armed groups in the border areas.<sup>108</sup> Even so, President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) turned to Algiers in October 2011 to ask for assistance with the threat emanating from the destabilised Libya (that eventually led to his fall).<sup>109</sup> Likewise, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta met with Algerian President Bouteflika in January 2014 to discuss security cooperation, border

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<sup>104</sup> Lounnas, 2014, p. 824; Mortimer, 2015, pp. 14-15; Boukhars, 2012, p. 14; Interview 2014.

<sup>105</sup> Interview 2014.

<sup>106</sup> Jeune Afrique, *Crise malienne: Algérie, Burkina, Maroc... Un médiateur peut en cacher deux autres*, 19 February 2014; Jeune Afrique, *En visite au Mali, Mohammed VI s'impose dans le processus de réconciliation nationale*, 19 February 2014; PSC Report, 2014, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Boukhars, 2012, p. 11.

<sup>108</sup> Ammour, 2014b, p. 1; Lacher, 2013, p. 3; Interview 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Mortimer, 2015, p. 14.

management and humanitarian assistance, and encouraged Algeria to take the lead as mediator.<sup>110</sup>

Until the French intervention in January 2013, Algeria pursued a two-track policy. On the one hand Algiers tried to disconnect the Tuareg and other segments of the population in northern Mali from the armed Islamist groups, urging the Malian government to engage in dialogue with the Tuareg rebel groups such as the MNLA. The idea that the radicals could be isolated in this way has been based on Algeria's own experience from the civil war.<sup>111</sup>

On the other hand, Algiers has also been pushing Bamako to negotiate with the Islamist Tuareg group Ansar Dine in order to sideline AQIM and MUJAO. Algeria has had a special relationship with Ansar Dine due to its long-standing relations with its leader, Iyad ag Ghali. Ag Ghali is an important leader for the local Tuareg population and the Algerian intelligence services have been working closely with him for many years. Out of fear of AQIM and MUJAO gaining expanded control in northern Mali, Algeria has been supporting Ansar Dine.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the relationship has been used by Algeria also to counteract the influence of the Tuareg secessionist movement the MNLA. Algiers shares with Bamako the idea that the MNLA should be weakened, and does not hesitate to use proxies to achieve this goal.<sup>113</sup>

When President Bouteflika had been sworn in for a fourth term in April 2014, Algeria's political and diplomatic engagement in Mali increased.<sup>114</sup> In the summer and autumn of 2014, Algiers hosted a number of peace talks, taking over as the main mediator in the conflict between the Malian government and the armed rebel groups.<sup>115</sup> The negotiations provide Algeria with an opportunity to reassert itself as a responsible actor in the region, contributing stability to an unstable environment. By taking a prominent role as mediator, Algeria can also ensure that its own vision of stability in northern Mali is being taken into account, and prevent the creation of an independent Azawad.<sup>116</sup> Algeria's main success so far has been convincing the parties to sit down and negotiate for the first time. Its role in the talks has been described as pragmatic and Algeria has involved different regional actors, as well as the AU, the EU and the UN mission to Mali (MINUSMA) in the negotiations. This has not been the case in previous

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<sup>110</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 5; Mortimer, 2015, p. 15.

<sup>111</sup> Lounnas, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Yet this plan failed when Ansar Dine aligned with the armed Islamists.

<sup>113</sup> Zoubir, 2013b, p. 54; Lounnas, 2014, pp. 821-824; Boukhars, 2012, p. 12; Ammour, 2012b, p. 3; Mortimer, 2015, p. 14; Interview 2014.

<sup>114</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 6.

<sup>115</sup> Mortimer, 2015.

<sup>116</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, pp. 3-4.

mediations led by Algeria and is another example of the increased openness to international cooperation in Algerian foreign policy.<sup>117</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Domestic Politics and the Role of the Military

Since independence in 1962, Algeria has been run by a single party, the FLN.<sup>118</sup> The Algerian regime is made up of remnants of the old anti-colonial force that formed part of the fight against France in the 1960s. As a part of the legacy of the independence struggle, the will and interests of the military have dominated the political scene in Algeria since independence. Behind-the-scenes members of the security sector influence the Algerian political system by leading it from behind. Some analysts describe the government as a bureaucratic-military political elite with key influence on economic matters in the country.<sup>119</sup>

The civilian power was formally restored in Algeria in 1999, the year the incumbent president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, was installed for the first time. Through an agreement between President Bouteflika and General Mohamed Lamari the army was to refrain from engaging in Algeria's everyday politics. Even so, the intelligence services have kept control over defence and security policy while the president has dominated foreign policy and also used it to consolidate his power.<sup>120</sup>

Algeria's initial reluctance to engage fully in the Mali crises can partly be attributed to internal political turmoil. This was due first to the president's poor health in 2013, and then to internal competition within the elite ahead of the presidential elections in 2014. The internal power struggles within the government are thought to weaken Algeria's ability to act as a regional power and to gain diplomatic influence.<sup>121</sup> After the re-election of President Bouteflika in April 2014, the Algerian engagement in the Mali crises took a new turn.<sup>122</sup>

Algeria's foreign policy has to a large extent been driven by domestic concerns, with implications for Mali as well. The key objective for the Algerian regime is social and political stability in order to preserve power both domestically and regionally, and to protect its senior power-holders. Although there have been schisms between the ruling party, the FLN, and the army, they share the same political objective of the status quo in terms of regime survival.<sup>123</sup> Skilfully keeping threats contained at a comfortable distance has therefore been the long-time policy for handling security threats in Algeria's neighbourhood. Algeria has

<sup>117</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 7; Ammour, 2014b.

<sup>118</sup> Front de libération nationale.

<sup>119</sup> Haaretz, 2012, *A prolonged state of agony in Algeria*.

<sup>120</sup> Wolf & Lefevre, 2013, pp. 509-510; Mortimer, 2015, p. 12.

<sup>121</sup> Ammour, 2013a, p. 1.

<sup>122</sup> ICG, 2014, *Mali: dernière chance à Alger*, p. 6; Ammour, 2013a, p. 2; Achy, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>123</sup> Storm, 2014, p. 170.

for example sought to push AQIM, and its predecessor the GSPC, away from its borders into southern Mali.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, the Algerian security forces have traditionally not intervened against the rebels south of the Algerian border, as long as rebellions do not spread into Algeria.<sup>125</sup>

In 2011 Algeria was affected by the regime changes in the rest of North Africa due to the Arab revolts but the government responded quickly and managed to control the situation. The strategy developed since then to avoid public protests is twofold. The regime has initiated some political ‘facelifting’ reforms such as the replacement of certain individuals at high levels of government. The other tool has been to use the instability and unrest in Mali, Libya and Syria as warning examples of what can happen unless the state and the regime are preserved. Therefore it is likely that the terrorist threat, with Mali as one important source, will continue to be used on the domestic scene both to counter domestic criticism and to secure resources for and the continued influence of the military in politics.<sup>126</sup>

## 4.2 Niger

Among Mali’s neighbouring states, Niger is one of the most important actors in the Mali crises. After the armed Tuareg rebels and Islamist groups took over northern Mali in 2012, Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou clearly advocated a military intervention in Mali to recapture the northern regions from the armed groups. One week after the initiation of the French intervention, *Operation Serval*, Niger deployed a combat battalion to northern Mali which participated in fighting in the Gao region alongside forces from France, Chad and Mali. The capital Niamey was also offered as a base for both Operation Serval and AFISMA.<sup>127</sup>

In relation to Niger’s security concerns, described in the section below, it was logical for Niger to commit a substantial number of troops to the African-led mission AFISMA – about 500 – and then 865 troops and six police officers to the UN mission.<sup>128</sup> During MINUSMA’s first year a Nigerien general also held the position of deputy force commander in the mission.<sup>129</sup> The Nigerien infantry battalion is currently deployed to Gao, Ansongo and Ménaka in northeastern Mali.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Eriksson, 2014, p. 19.

<sup>125</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>126</sup> Wolf & Lefevre, 2013, p. 510, pp. 512-513; Boukhars, 2012, p. 16; Achy, 2013, p. 4; ICG, 2012, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, p. 29.

<sup>127</sup> Deltenre, 2013, p. 12, p. 16; Bøås & Torheim, 2013, pp. 417-423; Interview, 2014

<sup>128</sup> ECOWAS Peace and Security Report, Issue 7, September 2013, p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>130</sup> UN, 2014, MINUSMA map, Map no. 4506 Rev 5.

### Summary

*Niger is contributing a substantial number of troops to MINUSMA and was an early participant in AFISMA, fighting alongside France against armed Islamists. Niger is a fragile state challenged by the same security threats as Mali. A main driver of Niger's engagement in Mali is therefore the serious terrorism threat it perceives from the uncontrolled Malian territory. Furthermore, Niger's participation is a manifestation of its will to tackle security concerns multilaterally and the importance of allying militarily with France as an insurance in case it faces domestic political turmoil. Niger has chosen a different model from Mali in terms of integration of the Tuareg population in society and has, for the moment, disarmed the threat of armed separatist rebellions. Parts of the Nigerien model could therefore serve as an example for a political solution in Mali. Where a resolution to the presence of terrorism is concerned, Niger is promoting a zero-tolerance and military anti-terrorism response.*

#### 4.2.1 National Security Interests and Threat Perceptions

With its geographical proximity to northern Mali and the unguarded areas on both sides of the, mostly theoretical, borders, Niger has apparent security interests in a resolution of the Mali situation. The interest lies foremost in combating armed Islamism even though Niger has its own history of both armed Tuareg uprisings and coups d'état. However, the threat from terrorism is currently more acute to Niger. Its geopolitical location exposes the country to terrorism threats from three directions: the north of Mali, the south of Libya and the north of Nigeria.<sup>131</sup>

After the establishment of AQIM in northern Mali, Niger also has become yet another area of operations for kidnappings of Westerners<sup>132</sup>, either for ransom or to exchange prisoners.<sup>133</sup> According to researcher Mathieu Pellerin, there are also trafficking and ideological links between one of the main Islamist actors in Mali, MUJAO,<sup>134</sup> and some Arab groups in western Niger, probably accentuating Niger's interest in deploying within MINUSMA to the sector bordering its own territory.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Interviews, 2014; ECOWAS Peace and Security Report, Issue 7, September 2013, p. 1.

<sup>132</sup> In 2008 a UN envoy was abducted, and one French national and seven employees of French company Areva were kidnapped during 2010, followed by two French citizens in the capital Niamey in 2011.

<sup>133</sup> Graham IV, 2010, p. 529; Deltenre, 2013, 6; Interview, 2014.

<sup>134</sup> Mouvement pour l'unicité et le djihad en Afrique de l'Ouest.

<sup>135</sup> Pellerin, 2013, p. 4; Interview Pellerin, 2014.

Niger's engagement in Mali and the French military and economic presence in Niger contribute to making the country a target for terrorism. In 2012 armed Islamist groups in Mali warned any state sending troops to Mali or collaborating with France that they would face retaliation. In Niger, these threats materialised into armed violence soon after the French intervention in Mali and the Nigerien deployment to AFISMA. A suicide attack was aimed at Niger's military base in Ménaka in Mali in May 2013. During the subsequent weeks, Niger suffered four terrorist attacks on home ground targeting a military barracks, the French nuclear company Areva, a prison and a gendarmerie camp. The attacks in Niger resulted in some 30 deaths and in the escape of prisoners claimed to be terrorists. In November 2014, MUJAO took responsibility for an attack that killed one soldier in Niger close to the Malian border.<sup>136</sup>

The French intervention in Mali in January 2013 meant that armed Islamists were pushed into Niger or through Niger into southern Libya, which has become a new safe haven for terrorism and organised crime. The unstable Libya is a direct threat to Niger's territory, especially since Niger has little control over groups and illicit activities in its far north. In 2011, Niger opposed the international military intervention in Libya out of fear of the effects on regional stability if Gaddafi were removed from power without a negotiated settlement. The events that followed in Mali in 2012 clearly showed that this apprehension was well founded.<sup>137</sup>

Attacks by the terrorist group Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Nigerian military offensives against the group have provoked a flow of several thousand refugees seeking protection on Niger's side of the border. Boko Haram is present in the southeast of Niger and the kind of radical Islam the group promotes is gaining increased influence in border towns. In relation to Niger's involvement in combating Islamist groups in northern Mali, the Nigerien government fears reprisal attacks from Boko Haram.<sup>138</sup>

Niger is the country with the largest Tuareg population and, like Mali, has experienced several violent Tuareg uprisings against the state. There is a latent threat of new revolts in Niger, but at present the Tuareg are not perceived as a security threat. One reason is that the political grievances among the Tuareg have been partly met in Niger through greater decentralisation and earnings for the Tuareg from the uranium mining. Furthermore, former rebels have been integrated into society and the Tuareg have greater representation within state

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<sup>136</sup> ECOWAS Peace and Security Report, Issue 7, September 2013, p. 1-2; Gazibo, 2013, p. 2; Deltenre, 2013, p. 2; Jeune Afrique, *Niger : au moins un soldat tué à l'ouest dans une attaque revendiquée par le Mujao*, 20 November 2014.

<sup>137</sup> ECOWAS Peace and Security Report, Issue 7, September 2013, p. 2; Interview, 2014.

<sup>138</sup> Global Program on Forced Displacement, 2013, p. 14; Stratfor Analysis, 2013; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Niger*, 2014, p. 8; ECOWAS Peace and Security Report, Issue 7, 2013, p. 2.



functions and agencies than in Mali. Another reason is that the government's response to the latest rebellion in 2007-2009 was fierce and continues to be a trauma to the Tuareg. This has decreased the will to take up arms once again. Niger also handled the returning fighters from Libya in 2011 differently, imposing disarmament and reintegration measures. However, a Tuareg secession in Mali would risk triggering similar claims in Niger and would therefore not be in the interests of Niger.<sup>139</sup>

#### 4.2.2 External Relations and Type of Actor

Niger's main concern in external relations is to prevent a spillover of conflict from neighbouring states.<sup>140</sup> Since they erupted in 2012, the Mali crises and their resolution have been Niger's main preoccupation within foreign and security policy. When the armed uprising started in January 2012, Niger increased the surveillance of its borders with Mali to the extent that almost half the army, 5,000 troops, was deployed to the frontier. Niger supported ECOWAS in the negotiations with the putschists in Mali in the spring of 2012, and President Mahamadou Issoufou would have been a probable ECOWAS mediator had not President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso taken on the role. Despite the fact that nine Nigerien peacekeepers were killed in an attack in October 2014, the Nigerien participation in MINUSMA is not questioned at home. Niger continues to be a key player in the Mali conflict but its role is first and foremost military, and less significant in terms of for example influence on peace negotiations.<sup>141</sup>

Even though its resources are scarce, Niger has a clear political will to play a role in security issues concerning the Sahel-Sahara region and is taking an active part in international cooperation in this field. Under President Issoufou, Niger has increased its participation in the United Nations' peacekeeping operations, from 550 troops in 2011 to 1,130 in 2012, due to UNOCI in Côte d'Ivoire, and then to 1,869 personnel in 2014 due to MINUSMA. The participation in ECOWAS' regional peacekeeping missions is also an important priority, as manifested in Niger's immediate willingness to participate in the planned MICEA mission to Mali and eventually in AFISMA.<sup>142</sup>

An important pillar in Niger's external relations is also particularly strong bilateral relations with France and the United States with the aim of increasing

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<sup>139</sup> Lins de Albuquerque, 2014, pp. 11-12; Deltenre, 2013, p. 10; Haysom, 2014, p. 5; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>140</sup> Apart from the threats mentioned above, the possibility of a renewed Toubou rebellion in Chad is a risk in relation to the Nigerien Toubou population in the north, which also shelters some Toubou leaders and former rebels (Pellerin, 2013, p. 1, p. 5).

<sup>141</sup> Deltenre, 2013, p. 10; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Niger*, 9 September 2014, p. 9, p. 12; Aljazeera, *Nine UN peacekeepers killed in Mali ambush*, 3 October 2014; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Deltenre, 2013, p. 16; ROP, 2014, *Toutes les participations de l'État : Niger*.

Niger's military capabilities. This is, however, a recent development: Niger has actively approached France for closer cooperation during the Hollande presidency. Both France and the US have an expanding military presence in Niger. The United States is using Niger as a base for counter-terrorism operations in the region, with surveillance drones and about 120 troops. The US trains and equips elements of the Nigerien armed forces, for example the contingents that are sent to serve in MINUSMA.<sup>143</sup>

France is using Niger as a base for drones, air assets and intelligence, with about 300 troops deployed. An important economic asset to both Niger and France is the uranium mines in northern Niger where the French company Areva has extraction operations that provide France with one third of the fuel used for its nuclear energy, which accounts for 75% of the country's electricity. During the Mali crises, France deployed troops to Arlit and Agadez to protect the mines and to assist the Nigerien army since a destabilised Niger would be detrimental to French strategic interests.<sup>144</sup>

The participation in Mali is an example of Niger's engagement to promote regional cooperation, especially on security issues. Another illustration is the joint force that Niger has agreed to mobilise in response to the threats from Boko Haram, together with Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. Apart from being an active member of the African Union and ECOWAS, Niger is, together with Chad, actively engaged in the renewal of the *Community of Sahel-Saharan States* (CEN-SAD). Niger is a minor power, and engagement in multinational organisations and cooperation with more influential actors like France and Chad are a means to advance Niger's interests in the region.<sup>145</sup>

#### 4.2.3 Domestic Politics and the Role of the Military

Since gaining independence from France in 1960, Niger has had a turbulent political record. Apart from four realised military coups in 1974, 1996, 2005 and 2010, additional plots have either been unsuccessful or been aborted. The latest coup, in February 2010, eventually led to democratic elections that were won by now President Mahamadou Issoufou in March 2011.<sup>146</sup>

Niger's national strategy for development and security emphasises security as a prerequisite for development. An important part of the strategy is the securing of

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<sup>143</sup> Reuters, *Niger buys 'spy plane' to combat Sahel militants*, 22 October 2014; Deltenre, 2013, p. 16; Sahel Intelligence, 2014; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Niger*, 9 September 2014, p. 9; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Niger*, 9 September 2014, p. 9, p. 13, p. 21; Deltenre, 2013, p. 16; Interview 2014.

<sup>145</sup> Deltenre, 2013, p. 17, p. 19; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Niger*, 9 September 2014, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> Graham IV, 2010, p. 527; Deltenre, 2013, p. 2, p. 10.

borders and enhanced governmental control of remote zones where the state previously has not had much ambition for a presence. Since 2009, Niger has increased its military spending fourfold and a main political priority for resisting security threats is to enhance its defence capacities radically. Therefore, it seems reasonable that participation in peacekeeping also serves this policy stand. During the deployment of AFISMA to Mali in 2013, France donated three Gazelle combat helicopters and the US two Cessna 208 transport aircraft to Niger. At the same time, Niger purchased its very first attack aircraft (the Ukrainian Sukhoi Su-25).<sup>147</sup>

In addition, the participation in Mali is garnering political resources. The international support gained thanks to that participation, as well as the military cooperation with the United States and France, strengthens the government's position domestically. The military has interfered in Nigerien politics for many decades and the possibility of future coups cannot be excluded. According to interviewees there is currently no threat from the armed forces to the president or government. Tensions have however risen during 2014 between the government and the opposition after the detention of opposition members accused of conspiring against the state. Student protests ended in violent confrontations with the security forces.<sup>148</sup>

Niger's international military cooperation and the partnership in combating terrorism can be viewed as an attempt to secure external support for the government if it comes under pressure. With increased suppression of opposition and media, and with presidential elections in 2016, Niger, which has never experienced a peaceful democratic transition of power, might very well face serious political turbulence. If domestic political unrest were to return to the still politically fragile Niger, it would also be a threat to French and American interests.<sup>149</sup>

### 4.3 Mauritania

Although Mauritania is not contributing troops to MINUSMA, it is an important player in the region. As one of the countries most affected by terrorism over the last ten years, it is a key actor in countering terrorism in the Sahel. Mauritania was engaged militarily in the fight against armed Islamists on Malian territory before those groups occupied northern Mali in 2012 and has conducted joint counter-terrorism operations with Mali's security forces, as well as with France.

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<sup>147</sup> Deltenre, 2013, p. 8, pp. 10-11; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Niger*, 9 September 2014, p. 16.

<sup>148</sup> Questions internationales, No 58, November-December 2012, p. 59; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Niger*, 9 September 2014, p. 8; Interview, 2014.

<sup>149</sup> Interviews, 2014; ECOWAS Peace and Security Report, Issue 7, September 2013, p. 3; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Niger*, 9 September 2014, p. 15, p. 17.

In 2013, President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz promised to send 1,800 peacekeepers to MINUSMA but did not deliver. However, six staff officers are deployed to the mission.<sup>150</sup>

In 2014, Mauritania's political role in the conflicts in Mali gained in importance. In his capacity as chairman of the AU, President Abdel Aziz brokered a ceasefire between the government and armed Tuareg groups in May that year. Mauritania has also been involved in the peace talks between the armed groups and the Malian government in Algiers. Furthermore, President Abdel Aziz seems to have played a lead role in the creation of the G5, which, among other things, aims to counter radicalisation through development projects in the Sahel. On a closer look, a number of factors explain the president's reluctance to send troops to MINUSMA, as well as what interviewees described as Mauritania's "ambiguous", "bizarre" and "ambivalent" role in the conflict in Mali.<sup>151</sup>

### Summary

*Mauritania is engaged in counter-terrorism operations and bilateral security cooperation in order to fight armed Islamists in the Sahel and Mali. Controlling its borders and preventing infiltration of terrorist networks into Mauritanian territory is the main driver behind the country's approach to Mali. Decisions are based on calculations of what best serves this interest. The country's engagement is driven by the threat terrorism poses to its national security and the counter-terrorism cooperation with France and the US, as well as the complicated relationship between Mauritania and Mali. Mauritania's engagement in countering terrorism could have a stabilising effect on the security situation in northern Mali and reduce the prospects of armed groups using Mauritanian territory as a safe haven. Politically, Mauritania has gained in importance lately and President Abdel Aziz has demonstrated a will to take on a stronger role in contributing to finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict between the Tuareg separatists and the Malian government.*

## 4.3.1 National Security Interests and Threat Perceptions

Terrorism is a major threat to Mauritania's national security and drives its approach to the conflict in Mali. Mauritania has one overarching objective with its engagement: to keep armed Islamists out of Mauritanian territory. The country has been plagued by terrorist attacks long before the crises in Mali. The first

<sup>150</sup> Tisseron & Pigné, 2012; Africa Research Bulletin, 2010, *Algeria-Mali-Mauritania-Niger Combatting al-Qaeda*; Africa Confidential. 2014, *Abdel Aziz plays it safe*; UN, 2014, *UN Missions Summary by Country*.

<sup>151</sup> ISS, 2014; Assemblée Nationale, 2014; Maghreb24, 2014, *Algeria hosts Mali peace talks*; Africa Confidential, (014, *Sahel/European Union Joining up security*; Interviews, 2014.

major attack took place in 2005 against a military installation in Lemgheity in the north. Between 2005 and 2011 more than 12 major attacks were carried out against security forces, foreign nationals and embassies in the country.<sup>152</sup>

Radical Islamism, extremism and terrorism are an internal security matter for Mauritania. A significant number of members of AQIM are of Mauritanian origin. MUJAO, an offspring of AQIM, was created by the Mauritanian Hamada Ould Khairou and includes Mauritanian fighters. Although President Abdel Aziz claims that AQIM and other armed Islamist groups have moved out from Mauritania, those groups still constitute a major threat to the country's national security. In 2010, Mauritania changed its strategy against AQIM, shifting its focus from fighting it on its own territory to attacking the organisation's strongholds in northern Mali. The Mauritanian army has conducted military operations and air raids in northern Mali several times over the past few years in order to eliminate the threat from the terrorist group. As a key actor in counter-terrorism operations, Mauritania could also contribute to the stabilisation of northern Mali by making sure that its territory does not serve as a safe haven for armed groups.<sup>153</sup>

The potential risk of returning extremists was behind Mauritania's position against a military intervention by ECOWAS in 2012. Mauritania has had good reason to worry about armed Islamists establishing rear bases on its vast territory, which is difficult to fully control and monitor. The fear that terrorists might return to Mauritania following an armed intervention in Mali reportedly materialised following the French intervention in 2013. Following the crises, Malian refugees have crossed into Mauritania over the 2,200 kilometre-long border. Whether armed Islamists came with them is hard to say, although there are indications that this may be the case. Currently, almost 55,000 Malian refugees are seeking shelter in Mauritania.<sup>154</sup>

Border control is a priority for Mauritania's government and within two days of the French intervention in Mali President Abdel Aziz demanded that the army secure Mauritania's borders. The army does not have the capacity or resources to control the territory while at the same time deploying troops to Mali. Therefore, Mauritania was prepared to send troops to MINUSMA under the condition they would be deployed close to Mauritania's border. This request was turned down by the UN and Mali. Hence, Mauritania does not view participation in

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<sup>152</sup> ISS, 2013, *Mauritania National Counter-Terrorism Training Course*; N'Diaye, 2013, pp. 118-119; Jourde, 2011; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>153</sup> Lacher, 2013, p. 1; Gorée Institute, 2012, p. 136; Jeune Afrique, 2014, *Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz : "Nous avons éliminé la menace jihadiste" en Mauritanie*; Africa Research Bulletin, 2010, *Algeria-Mali-Mauritania-Niger Combatting al-Qaeda*, vol. 47, no. 9; RFI, 2013, *L'état des forces militaires étrangères déployées au Mali*.

<sup>154</sup> Lacher, 2013; Africa Confidential, 2012, *Aziz's power game*; Jourde, 2011; Haysom, 2014, p. 5; Africa Confidential, 2013, *Nouakchott on the spot*; UNHCR, 2014, *Factsheet Mauritania*.

MINUSMA as serving its main national security interest, which is to secure its borders and keep the armed Islamists out of its territory.<sup>155</sup>

### 4.3.2 External Relations and Type of Actor

Historically, Mauritania's foreign policy has often been clouded in ambiguity. Its ambitions to navigate between the Arab world, the West and sub-Saharan Africa have sometimes resulted in what may appear as inconsistent decisions. Mauritania has been trying to frame itself strategically as a bridge between sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world. A member of the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), Mauritania situates itself in the North African geopolitical area and has deliberately reduced its ties with West Africa in recent years. It became a member of the Arab League in 1973 and by leaving ECOWAS in 2000 anchored itself firmly in the Arab world. The fact that Mauritania is no longer a member of ECOWAS can partly explain why the country is not contributing troops to MINUSMA.<sup>156</sup>

After more than a decade of suspended military cooperation, relations between France and Mauritania were normalised in 2009 as the coup d'état the year before gave France an opportunity to regain its position as a privileged partner. Today France considers President Abdel Aziz and Mauritania an essential partner in the fight against terrorism, judging the Mauritanian army efficient in counter-terrorism operations. France is the main bilateral donor of development assistance to Mauritania, which also benefits from French support in capacity building of the security forces and law enforcement agencies. Since 2009, France has been training the Mauritanian Special Forces in counter-terrorism and it has provided technical and logistics support to Mauritanian operations against AQIM in Mali. Furthermore, Mauritania is covered by the French regional counter-terrorism operation *Barkhane*,<sup>157</sup> and French forces are using the airport in Atar.<sup>158</sup>

Mauritania is receiving military support from France, without contributing troops to MINUSMA, within the framework of counter-terrorism operations. In addition, Mauritania has developed a very strong relationship with the US and has been a key partner in the American war on terror since 2001. As an ally in

<sup>155</sup> Africa Confidential, 2013, *Nouakchott on the spot*; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>156</sup> Girod & Walters, 2012, p. 184; N'Diaye, 2013, pp. 109-110; Africa Confidential, 2013, *Nouakchott on the spot*; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>156</sup> Pazzanita, 1992, p. 304; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>157</sup> Operation Barkhane was launched in July 2014 and is the successor of Operation Serval. The operation covers Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger with its main bases in Mali and Chad, and supporting bases throughout the region.

<sup>158</sup> N'Diaye, 2013, p. 121 ; RFI, 2014, *Mauritanie: la réélection du président Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz*; France diplomatie, 2014, *La France et la Mauritanie*; RFI, 2010, *Raid sur la base d'AQMI au Mali : réactions et questions*; RFI, *Les forces françaises en Afrique*; Interviews, 2014.

the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, Mauritanian security forces receive training and equipment from the US. As a key ally of both France and the US the Mauritanian regime does not have to participate in MINUSMA in order to avoid criticism from external partners for its authoritarian rule or lack of democratisation. Even though terrorism is a real problem in Mauritania, the president has also used the terrorist threat to fend off criticism against authoritarian rule and human rights violations, including the continued practice of slavery.<sup>159</sup>

One explanation for Mauritania's decision not to participate in MINUSMA is the country's relations with Mali. Although the relationship between the two has improved, the lack of trust between them and their armies probably affected President Abdel Aziz's decision not to participate in AFISMA. Under former Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), Mauritania accused Mali of being soft on terrorism and not addressing the threat from AQIM sufficiently. As AQIM carried out attacks on Mauritania from bases in Mali, suspicion that Mali's government was turning a blind eye to their presence rose in Mauritania. ATT was reluctant to move against AQIM in northern Mali, which created growing tensions between the two neighbours. Joint operations were suspended as Mauritania accused Malian officers of leaking information to AQIM, providing the terrorist group with intelligence.<sup>160</sup>

Several interviewees pointed out that relations have been very complicated and there is still a lack of trust between the two armies. However, after the election of Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK) as president of Mali in 2013, the relationship has developed in a positive way and diplomatic relations have improved with the G5 initiative. At the beginning of 2014 the two countries resumed security cooperation. This may indicate that Mauritania is breaking its isolation and is ready to increase its engagement in Mali.<sup>161</sup>

Furthermore, Mauritania has had a close relationship with Tuareg groups from northern Mali, which has complicated the relations between the two countries. There is no evidence that President Abdel Aziz has supported the current Tuareg rebellion. For many years the MNLA's political bureau was based in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania, but it was closed down by the government in 2012. Prior to this, local media in Mali reported that Tuareg rebels were able to operate out of Mauritania's east and Malian officials privately accused

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<sup>159</sup> N'Diaye, 2013, p. 121; RFI, 2014, *Mauritanie: la réélection du président Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz*; Interview, 2014.

<sup>160</sup> Interviews, 2014; Lacher, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>161</sup> Interviews, 2014; RFI, 2014, *La Mauritanie et le Mali relancent leur coopération en misant sur la sécurité*.

Mauritania of supporting the MNLA. Mauritania was still hosting senior MNLA cadres in early 2014.<sup>162</sup>

According to an interviewee, members of the separatist group were still present in Nouakchott in November the same year. Following the fall of Burkina Faso's leader, Blaise Compaoré, who had a close relationship with the MNLA, the leadership may turn to other countries, such as Mauritania, to find sanctuary. However, the Malian press reported that Mauritanian authorities had stopped MNLA leader Bilal Ag Achérif from holding a meeting in November 2014, arguing that no armed groups were authorised to undertake political activities on Mauritanian soil. The closing down of the armed group's political office, and the reluctance to (at least openly) allow the MNLA to hold meetings on Mauritanian territory, could indicate that Nouakchott wants to show stronger support for Bamako.<sup>163</sup>

In general, Mauritania is not an actor well known for its multilateralism, but rather isolated with a preference for bilateral security cooperation. Before the deployment of formed police units to UNOCI in Côte d'Ivoire in 2014, Mauritania had not contributed any significant numbers of peacekeepers to UN operations. It has also announced the deployment of a contingent to the UN mission in the Central African Republic (CAR). In both Côte d'Ivoire and the CAR there is a regional-religious dimension to the ongoing conflicts (Muslim north vs Christian south) which may explain the engagement of Mauritania, given the country's strong Islamic identity. In Mali, on the other hand, engaging in MINUSMA could be interpreted as supporting the West in a war against Islam, something that is discussed in greater detail below.<sup>164</sup>

#### 4.3.3 Domestic Politics and the Role of the Military

In Mauritania the military is a dominant political actor that has been involved in politics since the coup d'état in 1978.<sup>165</sup> Since then, military officers have ousted the government four times, and attempted to do so on at least three other occasions.<sup>166</sup> The last military coup occurred in 2008 when General Abdel Aziz

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<sup>162</sup> N'Diaye, 2013, p. 115; Tisseron & Pigné, 2012, p. 4; Interview, 2014; Reuters, 2012, *Mauritania denies collusion as Mali rebels advance*; Africa Confidential, 2014, *Mali Peace process slows down*.

<sup>163</sup> Interview, 2014; Maliactu, 2014, *Mali: MNLA : Bilal Ag Achérif empêche par les autorités mauritaniennes de tenir son meeting*.

<sup>164</sup> Africa Research Bulletin, 2010, *Algeria-Mali-Mauritania-Niger Combatting al-Qaeda*; Interviews, 2014; UN, Data Dashboard - *Statistics Mauritania*; UN, 2014, *UN missions' summary detailed by country*, 31 October 2014; La Nouvelle Centrafrique, 2014, *Mauritanie : Pour l'envoi d'un contingent à la MINUSCA*; Jeune Afrique, 2014, *La Mauritanie "n'exclut pas d'envoyer des forces en Centrafrique"*.

<sup>165</sup> N'Diaye, 2013.

<sup>166</sup> N'Diaye, 2013 ; Ouédraogo, 2014, pp. 7-8.



ousted the country's first democratically elected president, Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, under the pretext that he was soft on terrorism.<sup>167</sup> Hence President Abdel Aziz is well aware of the importance of keeping the military content. The president is quite popular within the army as he has raised salaries and improved the quality of the equipment, in order to assure regime security. The Mauritanian army is not interested in engaging in battles outside Mauritania and deployment could alienate and aggravate parts of the military. To the soldiers, it makes sense to risk their lives in combat protecting Mauritanian territory and Mauritania, not fighting a war in Mali. By keeping the army out of Mali, and MINUSMA, President Abdel Aziz reduces the potential risk of a coup d'état staged by dissatisfied officers.<sup>168</sup>

Mauritanian society is organised on Islamic principles, the legal system is influenced by sharia and sections of the population are sympathetic to the Islamists in Mali. This stands in sharp contrast to the state's threat perceptions. The president has to navigate this political minefield and supports moves against armed Islamists as strongly as he can without eliciting domestic opposition over it. It is crucial for him not to be perceived as an ally in what the population views as the "global war on Islam", while at the same time ensuring the continued support of his Western allies. The decision not to send troops to Mali may help to deflect Islamist objections and avoid such accusations.<sup>169</sup>

## 4.4 Burkina Faso

With 862 military personnel and 11 police officers, Burkina Faso is one of the main troop contributors to MINUSMA. The Burkinabe infantry is deployed to Timbuktu and Goundam in MINUSMA's Sector West. Burkina Faso also leads the headquarters of Sector West, the sector to which the Swedish troop contribution is designated. France's anti-terrorist operations have been allowed to use Burkinabe air space and Burkina Faso is a partner to France in the regional anti-terrorism operation *Barkhane*. Military engagement aside, Burkina Faso has, through former President Blaise Compaoré, played an important role as ECOWAS' mediator in the Malian conflict.<sup>170</sup>

While this study was in progress, Burkina Faso's long-time President Compaoré was ousted from power in a popular uprising at the end of October 2014. At the

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<sup>167</sup> N'Diaye, 2013, p. 107.

<sup>168</sup> N'Diaye, 2013, p. 107; Ouédraogo, 2014, pp. 7-8; Africa Confidential, 2014, *Mauritania Ould Alliance*; Interviews, 2014; Rao, 2014, p. 11; Africa Confidential, 2014, *Abdel Aziz plays it safe*.

<sup>169</sup> Africa Confidential, 2013, *Nouakchott on the spot*; Africa Confidential, 2012, *Aziz's power game*; Interview, 2014.

<sup>170</sup> ROP, 2014, *Toutes les participations de l'État : Burkina Faso*; UN, (2014), *MINUSMA map*, Map No. 4506 Rev 5, September 2014; ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré*, *Times of Uncertainty*, p. 36.

time of writing, in December 2014, a transitional government headed by diplomat Michel Kafando and Lieutenant Colonel Yacouba Isaac Zida was administering the country. These dramatic developments are at present assessed by the researchers interviewed not to affect Burkina Faso's will or capacity for a military presence in Mali.<sup>171</sup>

### Summary

*Burkina Faso is a main troop contributor to MINUSMA and leads the mission's Sector West. The rationale behind its political and military role in the Mali crises is the combination of President Blaise Compaoré's personal ambitions as regional mediator, the quest for regional political influence, the prioritisation of relations with France, and the participation in general in international peacekeeping, all contributing to polishing the image of Compaoré. A recent game changer, however, has been the fall from power of Burkina Faso's long-time president in October 2014. This will not affect the peace negotiations as such since Compaoré had already been replaced by Algeria as the main mediator, but could have consequences for the coordination of the armed rebel groups that had the support of Compaoré and often met in Ouagadougou.*

## 4.4.1 National Security Interests and Threat Perceptions

Unlike Mali, Burkina Faso does not have to struggle with separatist demands or terrorism on its territory. On the contrary, the creation of the independent state of Upper Volta (today Burkina Faso) in 1960 had strong popular support, bringing together a community whose territory had been divided between what is now Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Mali. Furthermore, any radical Islamist groups have remained marginal and it is deemed unlikely that internal extremist movements could constitute an important security threat at this point in time.<sup>172</sup>

Despite its not sharing sources of instability with Mali, the risk of spillover from the Malian conflicts poses a real danger to Burkina Faso. Therefore stability in Mali is important to Burkinabe security and influences the country's role in political negotiations on the Malian situation. The French military intervention that followed on the armed Islamists' advance towards southern Mali in January 2013, increased the risk for armed groups taking refuge in bordering countries. In response, Burkina Faso deployed 1,000 soldiers along its borders to Mali and Niger to monitor developments.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Interview, 2014; Seminar Bjarnesen.

<sup>172</sup> ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré*, *Times of Uncertainty*, p. 2, p. 35.

<sup>173</sup> Interviews, 2014; Lecocq, 2013, p. 61; ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré*, *Times of Uncertainty*, p. 36.

The fear of on the one hand spillover and on the other hand reprisal attacks for the military deployment to Mali remains. The refugees from Mali, bringing their cattle herds, caused fear among Burkinabe agencies that already existing local conflicts would be aggravated. The refugee camps are also viewed by the government as a possible breeding ground for extremism or Islamist infiltration. The mines located towards the Malian border, where many employees are from Western countries, are cited as potential targets for vengeance attacks but so far this concern has not been translated into actual outbreaks of violence.<sup>174</sup>

#### 4.4.2 External Relations and Type of Actor

The foreign policy of Burkina Faso has for the past 27 years been dominated by President Blaise Compaoré himself, constituting one of the most obvious examples of personalisation of politics in the region. Compaoré's ambition to change the constitution so as to prolong his presidency, instead of stepping down in 2015, as stipulated, eventually led to his precipitate departure in late October 2014. What regional role the current interim administration and a future leadership will take on remains uncertain at the time this report is published. The role of Burkina Faso in the region and in the Mali crises up to November 2014 must however be explained by focusing on the former president.

To ensure his political survival, Blaise Compaoré had a strategy of securing international support for his presidency and his government. The most important pillar in this was Compaoré's career as mediator in West African conflicts with the aim of gaining respect and appreciation as a just and important peace envoy. Through this "mediation industry", Burkina Faso became an important diplomatic power in West Africa, which gave the country weight within ECOWAS. It also ensured influence over regional politics through the participation in negotiations and the establishment of links with important political elites across the region. Apart from political benefits the engagement in peace talks and the hosting of conferences provided Burkina Faso and individual mediators with economic dividends. The dependence on Compaoré in handling regional crises also contributed to Burkina Faso securing Western economic support, such as extensive development aid.<sup>175</sup>

For the past 15 years Blaise Compaoré or other political or military representatives of the Burkinabe government have mediated in conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Libya, Niger, Sierra Leone and Togo. Within ECOWAS, Compaoré's mediation has been criticised for a lack of results and for freezing conflicts rather than resolving them, and there have been accusations

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<sup>174</sup> ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, pp. 35-36; Interview, 2014.

<sup>175</sup> Interviews, 2014; ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, pp. 19-21, pp. 25-26.

that peace negotiations have served the interests of Burkina Faso rather than the region as a whole. Even so, the position of Compaoré as ‘a big man’ in the region meant that it was expected and logical for ECOWAS to turn to him for the mediation between the Tuareg rebels and the Malian state in 2012.<sup>176</sup>

Through mediation, and the threat of a military intervention, ECOWAS managed to have the military junta in Mali step down peacefully after two weeks and hand over power to a civilian interim administration. The Burkinabe capital Ouagadougou has been the setting for several major international conferences, and became the centre for mediation for this conflict as well. The *Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement* was signed in June 2013. The centrepiece of the treaty was an immediate ceasefire between the Malian interim government and the Tuareg rebel groups the MNLA and HCUA<sup>177</sup>. The agreement also included conditions for elections and a road map for sustainable peace, but was not an agreement regulating the subjects of conflict.<sup>178</sup>

As mediator, Compaoré was criticised for having too much of a personal impact, placing friends and allies in crucial political positions<sup>179</sup> in the Malian interim government rather than taking note of the constitutional order. Despite being the official ECOWAS mediator and despite Burkina Faso harbouring its own Tuareg minority, President Compaoré appeared to support the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in Mali. The leadership of the armed separatist groups in Mali was offered sanctuary in Ouagadougou and groups such as the MNLA, the HCUA and the Arabic movement MAA<sup>180</sup> prepared their positions there before formal negotiations in Algiers during 2014.<sup>181</sup>

According to interviewees, Compaoré’s engagement with the MNLA is more about being ‘the Mediator’ than about sharing a common cause. Another theory is that Compaoré was acting on behalf of French policies. Even though the logic may not be apparent, it is consistent with Compaoré’s actions in other conflict zones, often sympathising with one of the parties. Moreover, Compaoré has been accused of turning a blind eye to the delivery of arms to the Islamist group

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<sup>176</sup> Interview, 2014; ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, p. 19, p. 21; Africa Confidential, *Burkina Faso: A brutal family business*, Vol 50 No 5, 6 March 2009.

<sup>177</sup> Haut conseil pour l’unité de l’Azawad.

<sup>178</sup> ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, p. 19; Elowson & Tham Lindell, 2013.

<sup>179</sup> Examples are the installation of Dioncounda Traoré as interim president and Cheick Modibo Diarra becoming prime minister.

<sup>180</sup> Mouvement Arabe de l’Azawad.

<sup>181</sup> Lecocq, 2013, pp. 60-61; Bourgi, 2012, p. 86; Interviews, 2014.

MUJAO in Mali, which was also implicated in kidnappings and organised crime.<sup>182</sup>

Compaoré's way of mediating rendered him widely unpopular in Mali. From the perspective of Bamako, Compaoré favoured the armed groups and was therefore met with distrust. After Mali had returned to constitutional order, the newly elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK), decided to change mediator to Algeria and according to media reports the downfall of Compaoré in October 2014 was openly celebrated by the IBK government.<sup>183</sup>

The military contributions to the peacekeeping missions of the UN, the African Union and ECOWAS are also a vital part of the foreign policy of Burkina Faso. Apart from the presence in Mali, Burkina Faso is contributing on the same scale to the UN mission to Darfur (UNAMID) and with 140 military personnel to the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB), bringing the total number of peacekeeping troops abroad to 1809.<sup>184</sup>

Another important part of the foreign policy of Compaoré was the support from France and the United States. Both countries are using Burkina Faso as a base for surveillance operations and the US provides troops with training and equipment for peacekeeping. Burkina Faso is an important ally in the fight against terrorism in the region and the Burkinabe president's network has been used for the release of Westerners abducted by AQIM. The Burkinabe participation in MINUSMA is in line with these partnerships against terrorism.<sup>185</sup>

In sum, Compaoré's international role, based on mediation, peacekeeping contributions and strong bilateral partnerships, has helped the presidency to appear internationally acceptable despite illegal collaboration with actors<sup>186</sup> in various conflicts in the region. The engagement in Mali was a natural continuation of this policy.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Interviews, 2014; Berghezan, 2013, p. 28; Jeune Afrique, *Sahel : qui livre les armes au MUJAO ?*, 5 September 2012.

<sup>183</sup> Interviews, 2014; Africa Confidential, *West Africa: Firefighters against an inferno*, 7 November 2014, Vol 55 No 22.

<sup>184</sup> ROP, 2014, *Toutes les participations de l'État : Burkina Faso*.

<sup>185</sup> Africa Confidential, *Burkina Faso: A brutal family business*, Vol 50 No 5, 6 March 2009; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Burkina Faso*, 9 September 2014, p. 10; BBC, *How Burkina Faso's Blaise Compaore sparked his own downfall*, 31 October 2014; ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, p. 26.

<sup>186</sup> The former president provided armed groups in Angola, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire and the Taylor government in Liberia with arms in violation of UN arms embargos. In Côte d'Ivoire Compaoré supported rebels, only to take on the role of mediator later. (Berghezan, 2013, p. 28; Africa Confidential, *Burkina Faso: A brutal family business*, Vol 50 No 5, 6 March 2009; ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, pp. 23-25).

<sup>187</sup> Interview, 2014; Africa Confidential, *West Africa: Firefighters against an inferno*, 7 November 2014, Vol 55 No 22; ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, p. 19.

#### 4.4.3 Domestic Politics and the Role of the Military

Emphasising the lack of stability of Burkina Faso's neighbours, in contrast to the country's own solidity, was one of President Compaoré's main strategies to gain domestic support and prove himself indispensable to the country and the population. Moreover, the former president systematically used his regional endeavours to divert attention at home from domestic grievances. By sending troops to Mali, the president aimed to show force, decisiveness and the ability to act when needed. The involvement with Malian armed groups has also been portrayed as an attempt to increase the president's support among Burkina Faso's increasingly Muslim population.<sup>188</sup>

The political and military engagement in Mali, bringing Compaoré once again to the centre of regional politics, was particularly important in 2012. The president had been challenged by several crises during recent years such as violent public protests and attempted mutinies within the armed forces in 2011. Moreover, he was in his final presidential term, which meant uncertainty about the future and a stress on the importance of securing regional and international allies.<sup>189</sup>

Even though the armed forces were a key institution of Blaise Compaoré's regime, its relationship with the military has been ambiguous. At the same time as the army has been the guarantor of the presidency, it has remained a security threat to the regime as well as to the population. Therefore it has been structured in such a way as to prevent the risk of coups and the former president is claimed to have used peacekeeping missions as an opportunity to send problematic officers abroad. Researchers interviewed said that this is similarly true for the contribution to MINUSMA. Notably, according to a report from the International Crisis Group, some soldiers dismissed following the 2011 mutinies have worked as mercenaries for the armed Islamist groups in northern Mali.<sup>190</sup>

The Mali crises were Compaoré's last mediation mission as president of Burkina Faso. Since the role of mediator had already been taken over by Algeria, the ousting of Compaoré will not have an impact on the leadership of the peace negotiations. However, for the armed rebel groups that have had Ouagadougou as their base and Compaoré as their political facilitator, this could mean an important change to their opportunities for coordination. At present, however, it is too early to assess the long-term effects.

So far, Burkina Faso appears willing to maintain its troop contribution to MINUSMA. Its participation in peacekeeping missions has also been used, as in

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<sup>188</sup> Interviews, 2014; Stratfor Analysis, *Burkina Faso Sending Presidential Security Forces to Guinea, Ivory Coast*, 8 January 2011; Tisseron & Pigné, 2012, p. 4.

<sup>189</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>190</sup> ECOWAS Peace and Security Report, Issue 9, August 2014, p. 7; ICG, 2013, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, pp. 12-13, p. 34; Interviews 2014.

many countries, to professionalise the army. Furthermore, participation in a UN mission is a means to increase the country's defence resources through the reimbursements provided for the troop contributions. These benefits remain even as Burkina Faso is governed by an interim administration and its political leadership is undefined.<sup>191</sup>

## 4.5 Senegal

Politically, Senegal has had a secondary role in the resolution of the armed conflicts compared to that of the countries bordering northern Mali. However, its significant military contribution and deployment to the northern parts of Mali make Senegal an important actor in MINUSMA. As of October 2014, Senegal had deployed 474 contingent troops, as well as forming police units with 280 officers, based in Bamako, Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal.<sup>192</sup>

At first President Macky Sall was reluctant to contribute troops to an operation in Mali (to the envisaged ECOWAS operation MICEMA), saying that the Senegalese army was overstretched contributing to peace support operations elsewhere in Africa. At that time, Senegal was contributing more than 2.300 troops and police officers to UN missions.<sup>193</sup> In addition, Senegalese security forces were participating in the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB). In the end, Senegal agreed to contribute some 500 troops to MICEMA, which was later transformed into the African-led operation AFISMA, followed by the re-hatting into MINUSMA.<sup>194</sup>

### Summary

*Senegal is contributing significant numbers of peacekeepers to MINUSMA, most of them deployed in northern Mali. Regional and international cooperation has been a cornerstone of Senegalese foreign policy since independence and it is in this context that the Senegalese engagement in Mali should be understood. Three main factors related to the country's foreign policy can explain Senegal's engagement in Mali: its role as a promoter of peace and regular contributor to peace operations; its relationship with*

<sup>191</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>192</sup> Interviews, 2014; UN, 2014, UN Missions' Contributions by country, 30 September 2014.

<sup>193</sup> The majority of these were deployed to MONUSCO in the DRC, UNAMID in Darfur and UNOCI in Côte d'Ivoire. See UN, 2012, *UN Missions Summary Detailed by Country*, 31 July 2012.

<sup>194</sup> Maliactu, *Mali : Le Sénégal Ne Prévoit Pas D'envoyer Des Troupes*, 9 July 2012; ROP, 2012, *ECOMIB*; RFI, 2012, *Intervention internationale dans le nord du Mali : à quoi ressemblera la «Micéma»?*; Panapress, 2013, *Macky Sall exclut l'envoi de troupes sénégalaises supplémentaires au Mali*.

*France; and its membership of ECOWAS. The continued engagement of Senegal in MINUSMA is important if the security situation in Mali's north is to improve, in particular in view of the reluctance of many troop-contributing countries to deploy troops to those parts of the country.*

#### 4.5.1 National Security Interests and Threat Perceptions

The main security issue in Senegal over recent decades has been the low-intensity conflict in Casamance, a region in southern Senegal located between the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. The instability of Guinea-Bissau has been of concern to the Senegalese government, as the neighbouring country has served as a rear base for the separatist movement the MFDC<sup>195</sup>. Despite the internal armed conflict over the status of this region, Senegal is one of few stable countries in the region. Although there is no direct link between the Senegalese engagement in Mali and the conflict over the status of Casamance, the Senegalese government has experience of having its territorial integrity challenged by a secessionist movement, which may enhance its sympathy for the Malian government.<sup>196</sup>

Senegal borders southern Mali to the east, but the deteriorating situation in northern Mali has not directly spilled over into Senegal and there are no Malian refugees in the country.<sup>197</sup> However, lately the risk of radicalisation and of influences from foreign Islamists has been acknowledged in Senegal. Senegal is a moderate Muslim country and the Islamic Sufi brotherhoods, which dominate religious and political life, are perceived as providing a barrier against the spread of fundamentalism, Salafism and Wahhabism. However, Senegal is not immune to the spread of extremist rhetoric. Suspected members of terrorist networks were arrested in Senegal as early as in 2010 and 2011. Nevertheless, the risk of Islamist extremism and terrorism had largely been absent from the debate in Senegal until early 2013.<sup>198</sup>

The crises in Mali were a wake-up call for the Senegalese government. At the beginning of 2013 President Macky Sall called for religious leaders to stay vigilant against the external influence of radical Islam and the minister of foreign affairs, Mankeur Ndiaye, warned that there were dormant terrorist cells in the country. Ndiaye also said that Senegal's vital interests were threatened by the presence of terrorists in Mali and the engagement in Mali was described as

<sup>195</sup> Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance.

<sup>196</sup> Gorée Institute, 2012, p. 64, p. 67.

<sup>197</sup> UNHCR, 2014, *Senegal Factsheet*, August 2014.

<sup>198</sup> Africa Research Bulletin, 2013, *Senegal Warning on Creeping Radicalism*; ISS, 2013, 'Overview of religious radicalism and the terrorist threat in Senegal'; RFI, 2013, *Guerre au Mali: y a-t-il un risque d'attentat au Sénégal?*, Interview, 2014.



necessary in order to prevent this danger from spreading to the country. However, Senegal does not face the same level of terrorist threat as countries like Algeria, Niger and Mauritania, which border Mali's northern parts. Participation in MINUSMA may actually increase the risk of retaliation from armed Islamists, and some analysts attribute Sall's initial reluctance to send troops to Mali in 2013 to fear of reprisals from terrorists. There is a real risk of radicalisation of impoverished youth in Senegal if extremists exploit their frustration. Senegalese citizens are reportedly already in the ranks of armed Islamist organisations such as AQIM. The decision to send troops to Mali despite the potential risk of such deployment increasing the terrorist threat can be explained by Senegal's foreign policy and external relations, in particular its relationship with France.<sup>199</sup>

#### 4.5.2 External Relations and Type of Actor

Since independence from France in 1960, Senegalese foreign policy has been guided by four principles: the promotion of the Francophonie; African unity and regional cooperation; non-alignment;<sup>200</sup> and the promotion of a moderate brand of Islam. A crucial part of Senegal's foreign policy has been to promote stable and prosperous relationships with its immediate neighbours. Senegal has also taken a lead role in promoting regional integration.<sup>201</sup> The ties with Western democracies, in particular France, are central to Senegalese foreign policy and Senegalese policy-makers have been active proponents of a strong community of French-speaking peoples, the Francophonie. The engagement in AFISMA, and subsequently MINUSMA, converges with all those foreign policy principles.<sup>202</sup>

Franco-Senegalese relations are characterised by close cooperation and dependency. France is the main economic partner of Senegal, which also receives significant amounts of development assistance from the former colonial power. Following the election of Macky Sall in 2012, the two countries signed a new defence agreement which allowed France to maintain a presence in Senegal with a permanent military base. The French detachment EFS,<sup>203</sup> which is France's only permanent base in West Africa, comprises around 300 troops that

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<sup>199</sup> Le Monde, 2013, *Macky Sall : "Il est inacceptable d'appeler des soldats européens pour régler nos problèmes"*; RFI, 2013, *Guerre au Mali: y a-t-il un risque d'attentat au Sénégal?*; Africa Review, 2012, *Senegal changes mind on sending soldiers to Mali*, 11 July 2012; ISS, 2013, 'Overview of religious radicalism and the terrorist threat in Senegal'; Jeune Afrique, 2013, *Guerre au Mali: le Sénégal face à la menace terroriste*, 29 January 2013; Interview 2014.

<sup>200</sup> This non-alignment had a strong pro-Western tilt and evolved around Senegal's preferential relationship with France.

<sup>201</sup> This has ranged from the creation of formal federations with neighbouring countries (Mali in 1960 and the Gambia from 1982 to 1989) to engagement in regional organisations such as ECOWAS. At independence President Léopold Senghor promoted a federation of the eight territories that were a part of the AOF.

<sup>202</sup> Schraeder, 1997, pp. 491-495, p. 502, pp. 505-506.

<sup>203</sup> *Éléments français au Sénégal*.

work in close cooperation with the Senegalese armed forces. The EFS have also played a crucial role in training African troops ahead of deployment to AFISMA and MINUSMA. President Sall has clearly demonstrated an intention to re-establish a privileged relationship with France. Although France may not have put direct pressure on Senegal to contribute to the operations in Mali, the engagement is “logical and natural”, according to the interviewees, in view of the relationship between the two countries. With the French decision to intervene in Mali, Senegal did not have much of a choice but to provide support given its dependency on France.<sup>204</sup>

To promote peace is an important part of Senegalese foreign policy, which explains the country’s regular participation in international peace support operations. Senegal has contributed around 33,000 troops to UN, AU and ECOWAS operations over the last 50 years. Given this engagement, its participation in MINUSMA is not surprising. Senegal has managed to portray itself to the international community as a “haven of peace”<sup>205</sup> and a model of democracy. The regular participation in peace operations adds to this image and strengthens the role that Senegal wants to play, both in the region and on the international arena. Senegal was among the top ten troop-contributing countries to UN peace operations in 2014. Its participation in MINUSMA should be interpreted as a part of this policy.<sup>206</sup>

However, the regional engagement precedes that of the UN. The decision of ECOWAS to intervene militarily in Mali in 2012 was supported by Senegal, which finally promised to contribute 500 troops to the operation. Senegal is historically a strong promoter of regional cooperation and integration, starting with Léopold Senghor, the country’s first president, who wanted to strengthen West Africa as a region and advocated maintaining a political federation of the countries of French West Africa. Regional cooperation is one of the cornerstones of Senegal’s foreign policy and Senegal is one of the founding members of ECOWAS. This also explains its engagement in Mali. Senegal, like many of the other ECOWAS countries, decided to act when ECOWAS’ reputation as a capable regional actor was at stake.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> RFI, 2014, *French Defence Minister Le Drian in Senegal to boost west Africa anti-terror efforts*, 12 May 2014; RFI, 2014, *Infographie: les forces militaires françaises en Afrique*, 17 February 2014; France diplomatie, *La France et le Sénégal*, 9 August 2014; Assemblée Nationale, 2014, p. 236; Le Monde, *Macky Sall : “Il est inacceptable d’appeler des soldats européens pour régler nos problèmes”*, 29 June 2013; Sall, 2013, p. 20; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>205</sup> Bagayoko-Peneone Niagale, 2011, ‘Senegal’.

<sup>206</sup> ROP, 2014, *Fiche d’information de l’État: Sénégal*; UN, *Data Dashboard - Statistics Senegal* ; Interview, 2014.

<sup>207</sup> RFI, *Intervention internationale dans le nord du Mali : à quoi ressemblera la «Micéma»?* 12 November 2012; Martin, 2005, pp. 58-79; Interview, 2014.

### 4.5.3 Domestic Politics and the Role of the Military

Senegal has never been subjected to military rule, being one of two West African countries that have never experienced a coup d'état.<sup>208</sup> It has experienced a relatively peaceful democratisation process compared to many of its neighbours. Democracy was further consolidated following the presidential elections in 2012 when incumbent President Abdoulaye Wade handed over power peacefully to the winner, Macky Sall.<sup>209</sup> The military is not involved in domestic politics, which makes the Senegalese military an exception in the region. The army is a state army with a strong adherence to the republican ideal of civilian control of the military. Hence the Senegalese military engagement in Mali does not seem to be significantly influenced by domestic politics or any political interests of the military.<sup>210</sup>

On the other hand, financial benefits and opportunities for obtaining equipment may be an incentive for the Senegalese participation in MINUSMA. Although Senegal maintains a moderate defence capacity, the army lacks funding and equipment.<sup>211</sup> One interviewee expressed the view that Senegal seemed to be “very happy to get reimbursed”, which is logical and a common incentive for developing countries to contribute troops to UN peace operations.<sup>212</sup>

## 4.6 Côte d'Ivoire

President Alassane Ouattara was the chairman of ECOWAS as the crises erupted in Mali in 2012. The one-year mandate was renewed in 2013, meaning that the Ivorian president also chaired ECOWAS during the deployment of *Operation Serval* and AFISMA, and the transformation of the latter into MINUSMA. In this capacity, President Ouattara was responsible for the regional organisation's efforts to stabilise the situation in Mali. However, his diplomatic role diminished significantly when Côte d'Ivoire handed over the ECOWAS chairmanship to Ghana. His political engagement should therefore be interpreted as ECOWAS' engagement, rather than that of Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>213</sup>

At the beginning of 2013, Côte d'Ivoire promised to contribute 500 troops to MINUSMA's predecessor AFISMA. This promise has not been fulfilled and by late 2014 only some 120 contingent troops, a significantly reduced logistics

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<sup>208</sup> The other is Cape Verde.

<sup>209</sup> Incumbent President Abdoulaye Wade decided to stand for a third term despite constitutional term limits, which provoked violent popular protests. In a run-off election on 25 March 2012, Macky Sall defeated the incumbent and the country saw a peaceful transition of power to the new administration. (EU EOM, 2012, *Senegal: Final Report, Presidential Elections*).

<sup>210</sup> Schraeder, 2001; Interview, 2014.

<sup>211</sup> *The Military Balance*, 2014, 'Chapter Nine: Sub-Saharan Africa', 114:1, p. 454.

<sup>212</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>213</sup> Interviews, 2014.

battalion, were deployed in Timbuktu. In view of the Ivorian engagement, France has trained hundreds of troops. However, all the units trained have not yet received the equipment needed for them to be deployed. The reason for this may be that since 2004 Côte d'Ivoire has been under a UN arms embargo, imposed as a reaction to frequent breaches of a ceasefire agreement and a deteriorating humanitarian situation. Although transit through Côte d'Ivoire of supplies intended for the support of UN peacekeeping operations (such as MINUSMA) is exempted, arms cannot be imported to supply the Ivorian army directly.<sup>214</sup>

### Summary

*Côte d'Ivoire is mainly engaged in Mali through its troop contribution to MINUSMA. As a member of ECOWAS, with President Ouattara being the chairman during 2012-2013, Côte d'Ivoire's decision to engage in Mali was logical. The close relationship with France and a wish to represent Côte d'Ivoire as a country past violent conflict, able to contribute to regional stability, also provided incentives to engage in Mali. Côte d'Ivoire does not have any significant political influence on conflict resolution in Mali, but is contributing to stability there mainly as a contributor of troops to MINUSMA.*

## 4.6.1 National Security Interests and Threat Perceptions

Côte d'Ivoire is still in a post-conflict situation following political instability in the 1990s and the civil war that was fought between 2002 and 2004. Unresolved issues and tensions over nationality and citizenship surfaced during the recent violent post-election crisis, which escalated into renewed armed conflict in 2011.<sup>215</sup> The overall political and security situation in the country is still fragile and the presence of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) remains necessary in view of the persisting challenges and threats the country is facing.<sup>216</sup>

Côte d'Ivoire is sensitive to regional instability but not directly threatened by any spillover from southern Mali, which borders its northern parts. Rather, the main security threat in Côte d'Ivoire comes from its western region, bordering Liberia, where intercommunal tensions over land, nationality and identity have regularly led to deadly incidents since the post-election crisis in 2011. Nevertheless, in order to consolidate peace in Côte d'Ivoire, stability in the region, including in Mali, is important. The countries bordering Mali's south perceived the

<sup>214</sup> Le Monde, *Qui participe à l'opération Serval au Mali ?* 29 January 2013; RFI, 2013, *La participation de la Côte d'Ivoire à la Misma prend forme*; Interview, 2014; SIPRI, 2014; UNSC, 2014, S/RES/2153.

<sup>215</sup> For more on the civil war and violent post-election crisis see Elowson, 2011.

<sup>216</sup> UN, 2013, *Special Report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire*, S/2013/197.

unconstitutional change of power in Mali in 2012 as the main threat to regional stability, in contrast to the northern neighbours, which were more worried about the armed groups in northern Mali.<sup>217</sup>

As for any other country militarily engaged in the conflict in Mali, the presence could potentially increase the terrorist threat as radical elements may perceive this engagement as supporting France in a “war against Islam”. Even though armed Islamism does not constitute any major threat to the national security of Côte d’Ivoire, indications that terrorist cells were present in the country in 2013 led to heightened security on the northern borders and surveillance of radical imams. However, the threat from armed Islamists is not a main driver behind the Ivorian engagement and radicalisation does not seem to be a major issue.<sup>218</sup>

#### 4.6.2 External Relations and Type of Actor

The military cooperation between Côte d’Ivoire and France, the economic ties between the two countries and France’s expectations of West African military engagement in Mali, are all factors that can explain Côte d’Ivoire’s contribution to MINUSMA. The Ivorian military engagement in Mali is logical in view of this relationship. At first Côte d’Ivoire was reluctant to send troops to Mali, but the former colonial power insisted. Historically, Côte d’Ivoire has had a particularly close relationship with France, even in comparison with other West African francophone countries. The country’s first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, embraced the strengthening of economic ties with France after independence and identified himself as more French than African. After a period of strained ties between the two countries following the election of Laurent Gbagbo in 2000, relations improved under President Alassane Ouattara, who assumed office in 2011. Côte d’Ivoire is France’s fourth largest trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa and France is Côte d’Ivoire’s second most important trading partner after Nigeria.<sup>219</sup>

In early 2012, France and Côte d’Ivoire signed a new defence agreement, replacing the old one from 1961, as well as a new agreement for development assistance. France continues to play a crucial role in training and equipping the Ivorian armed forces. Operation *Licorne*, which was deployed in 2002 in order to support UNOCI and train and reform the Ivorian armed forces, occupies a central place in the new French military strategy in Africa. Base Port-Bouët, near the economic capital Abidjan, will become the logistical hub for operations in the

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<sup>217</sup> Interviews, 2014; ICG, 2014, *Côte d’Ivoire’s Great West: Key to Reconciliation*.

<sup>218</sup> RFI, 2013, *France warns nationals in Côte d’Ivoire of terror threat*, 1 June 2013; Interview, 2014.

<sup>219</sup> Martin, 2005; Schraeder, 2001, p. 45; EIU, 2014, *Country report Niger*, 9 September 2014, p. 20; France diplomatie, *La France et la Côte d’Ivoire*, 31 July 2014; Interview 2014.

region and provides logistic support and troop reserves for the French counter-terrorism operation *Barkhane*.<sup>220</sup>

Regional dynamics may also have had an impact on the Ivorian engagement in Mali. In view of the Nigerian troop contribution to AFISMA it would have been strange if Côte d'Ivoire, the largest and richest francophone country in the region, had decided not to participate in the operation. There is an element of competition between Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria within ECOWAS, which surely added to the incentives for Côte d'Ivoire to participate. As a member of ECOWAS, and with President Ouattara being the chairman of the organisation during 2012 and 2013, it was logical to contribute troops to the envisaged ECOWAS operation in Mali.<sup>221</sup>

Reshaping the image of Côte d'Ivoire internationally is a cornerstone of Ivorian diplomacy under President Ouattara, who wants to promote Côte d'Ivoire as a "haven of peace and a model of economic and social progress".<sup>222</sup> To a certain extent, Côte d'Ivoire's engagement and decision to send troops to Mali should be understood as a way to demonstrate that the country is beyond conflict and has solved its own internal problems, although that is not the case. Sending troops to MINUSMA provides an image of Côte d'Ivoire as stable and ready to lead in the region. This image is also evoked by President Ouattara who emphasises that Côte d'Ivoire has played a dominant role within ECOWAS, in the crises in Guinea-Bissau and Mali. In 2008, Côte d'Ivoire started to contribute troops and police to UN missions regularly.<sup>223</sup> Since then, the number has been rising every year,<sup>224</sup> indicating a change towards a stronger engagement in international peace support operations.<sup>225</sup>

#### 4.6.3 Domestic Politics and the Role of the Military

In 2002, a failed coup against President Laurent Gbagbo developed into a rebellion with its base in the northern parts of the country. The civil war that raged between 2002 and 2004 left Côte d'Ivoire divided in two, with a clear line between the rebel-controlled north and the government-controlled south.

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<sup>220</sup> France diplomatie, *La France et la Côte d'Ivoire*, 31 July 2014; TV5 Monde, 2012, *Un nouvel accord de défense franco-ivoirien*; Ministry of Defence, France, 2014, *Les forces françaises en Côte d'Ivoire*, 22 October 2014; EIU, 2014, *Country report Niger*, 9 September 2014, p. 20.

<sup>221</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>222</sup> Ministère d'État, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères de Côte d'Ivoire, *Lettre de cadrage MEMAE*.

<sup>223</sup> In 2008 the monthly average contribution exceeded 100: see UN, *Data Dashboard - Statistics Côte d'Ivoire*.

<sup>224</sup> In September 2014 the total contribution was 257 personnel, putting the country at 54th place among the countries contributing troops to UN operations. See UN, *Data Dashboard - Statistics Côte d'Ivoire*.

<sup>225</sup> Interviews, 2014; Ministère d'État, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères de Côte d'Ivoire, *Présentation de la politique étrangère*.

Following the presidential elections in 2010, the division between the north and south escalated into renewed armed conflict between military forces who supported Ouattara (the winner, from the north) and those loyal to Gbagbo (the incumbent, from the south), before Gbagbo was arrested and Ouattara assumed office in 2011.<sup>226</sup>

The coup d'état in Bamako in March 2012 represented a real danger to regime stability in Côte d'Ivoire. Stability there remains fragile and sporadic attacks from pro-Gbagbo forces based in Liberia and Ghana have continued. The new insurgency by forces loyal to Gbagbo in October 2012 may have increased Ouattara's determination to intervene in Mali, as the insurgents were accused of teaming up with dissident Malian fighters and armed Islamist groups. In 2012, people from Gbagbo's side had meetings with the military junta in Bamako, as well as with representatives from Ansar Dine, in order to discuss cooperation aiming at destabilising Côte d'Ivoire. Mali is part of a vast regional network of exiled pro-Gbagbo partisans. Hence, instability in Mali may have an impact on regime security in Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>227</sup>

Furthermore, security in the northern parts of the country bordering Mali is important to President Ouattara, who has a large part of his constituency in the north. Nevertheless, the Ivorian political engagement in Mali has been limited. One explanation is that President Ouattara is preoccupied with internal problems and busy preparing for the presidential elections in 2015.<sup>228</sup>

The state, and role, of the army could explain why Côte d'Ivoire is contributing to MINUSMA, but they could also explain why the military engagement has been limited. On the one hand, the Ivorian armed forces are disorganised and under reconstruction, which may explain the initial reluctance to send troops. The Ivorian armed forces, the FRCI,<sup>229</sup> were officially created on 17 March 2011 by President Ouattara and are a merger between Gbagbo's security forces and the coalition of rebel forces. On the other hand, sending troops to Mali may be a way to professionalise and unite the army, which is poorly trained with clear divisions between the two forces.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Elowson, 2011, pp. 19-20; Memier, 2012, pp. 5-6; Memier, 2012, pp. 5-8.

<sup>227</sup> ICG, 2012, *Côte d'Ivoire: Defusing tensions*; ICG, 2013, *La Côte d'Ivoire a disparu des radars, pourtant rien n'y est réglé*; EIU, 2014, *Country report Côte d'Ivoire*, 9 September 2014, p. 3; Africa Confidential, 2012, *Regional confrontation looms*; UN, 2012, *Midterm report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 16 of Security Council resolution 2045 (2012)*, S/2012/766, pp. 8-9; Gorée Institute, 2012, p. 25; Interview, 2014.

<sup>228</sup> Interviews, 2014.

<sup>229</sup> Les Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire.

<sup>230</sup> RFI, 2013, *L'état des forces militaires étrangères déployées au Mali*, 21 January 2013; Gorée Institute, 2012, pp. 34-35; ICG, 2012, *Côte d'Ivoire: Defusing tensions*; Interviews, 2014.

## 4.7 Guinea

Guinea is not a key actor in the conflicts in Mali. However, Guinea's President Alpha Condé has promised that Mali can count on full support from Guinea, which never will accept any armed group taking power by force in the neighbouring country. Currently, the Guinean military engagement in Mali is limited to a contribution of 164 contingent troops to MINUSMA, deployed in Kidal in northeastern Mali. Additional troops have been trained, but the Ebola crisis and delayed delivery of equipment have hindered rapid deployment. The deployment of a reserve battalion of 425 Guinean soldiers had to be postponed awaiting vehicles.<sup>231</sup>

### Summary

*Guinea is engaged in Mali through its participation in MINUSMA. While this participation is limited in scope, solidarity with Mali, the relationship with France and fear of regional instability are the main drivers behind Guinea's engagement in Mali. The potential influence of Guinea on conflict resolution is limited to its military engagement in MINUSMA.*

### 4.7.1 National Security Interests and Threat Perceptions

Regional stability is important to Guinea and there is a fear that conflicts in neighbouring countries will spill over, which explains the military engagement in Mali. Guinea still suffers from the trauma it experienced with the extension of the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s and 2000 into Guinea. Therefore, the authorities in Conakry, the capital, were seriously concerned with the outbreak of conflict in Mali and the potential risk of infiltration of armed elements onto its territory. Guinea has moved its army closer to the Mali border in order to protect its territory. There are already internal problems with intercommunal violence and tensions in the southeastern parts of the country, where there are large numbers of refugees from neighbouring Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. The government does not want a further destabilisation of the east with the northeastern parts bordering southern Mali. However, Guinea does not face any direct threat from armed Islamists, although its participation in MINUSMA may increase the terrorist threat.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>231</sup> Interviews, 2014; Le Soleil, 2013, *Crise malienne : Le président Alpha Condé promet le soutien total de la Guinée à Bamako*; Gorée Institute, 2012, p. 45; UN, 2014, *MINUSMA map*; UN, 2014, *UN Missions Summary Detailed by Country*; Assemblée Nationale, 2014, p. 188.

<sup>232</sup> Interviews, 2014; Gorée Institute, 2012, pp. 44-45, p. 49; ROP, 2014, *Toutes les participations de l'État : Guinée*.



#### 4.7.2 External Relations and Type of Actor

As an ECOWAS member state, Guinea announced its participation in AFISMA together with seven other West African states in January 2013. Already in March the same year Guinea had deployed 160 troops to Gao in northern Mali. Guinea's participation in AFISMA and MINUSMA is logical due to it being a neighbouring country and an ECOWAS member state. The Guinean engagement also demonstrates the country's solidarity with Mali, its government and its people, which is one of the main drivers behind the engagement. Throughout the crises in Mali, President Condé has declared his firm support for the government in Bamako. He and his Malian counterpart IBK have a close personal relationship, which adds to the historical and cultural ties between the two countries. According to IBK it is in this context that the Guinean troop contribution to MINUSMA should be understood, as he declared during a joint press conference with President Condé.<sup>233</sup>

Furthermore, participation in MINUSMA is a way for Guinea to improve its image internationally. Guinea aims to become an active contributor to improved security on the African continent, including beyond its immediate neighbourhood. In the 1990s it contributed troops to ECOWAS' operation, ECOMOG, in Liberia and Sierra Leone. At the beginning of the millennium, the Guinean average monthly contribution to UN peace operations was 800 troops, with a radical drop in 2004 to only an average of 25 troops per month. President Condé seems eager to re-engage in international and regional peace and security operations as he has approved the training of battalions for such deployment. As a part of the process of improving the country's international image, it is important to make visible contributions to peace operations like MINUSMA.<sup>234</sup>

France expected the countries in the region to contribute troops and was able to exert pressure on its former colonies without making any express demands. Hence Guinea did not have much of a choice but to contribute troops. France is the main bilateral donor in Guinea, supporting projects in a number of different sectors. Historically Guinea has had a complicated relationship with France. It claimed independence in 1958 and France immediately withdrew its support and departed from the former colony, but only after destroying infrastructure and archives. The country's first president, Ahmed Sékou Touré, strongly opposed a continued French presence in West Africa after independence, criticising France for neo-colonialism. During Sékou Touré's dictatorship Guinea isolated itself

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<sup>233</sup> RFI, 2013, *L'état des forces militaires étrangères déployées au Mali*; RFI, 2013, *Mali : 160 soldats du contingent guinéen sont à Gao*; Gorée Institute, 2012, p. 45; Guineenews.org, 2014, «La Guinée d'Alpha Condé ne peut jamais rester indifférente au sort du Mali », *dixit le président IBK* ; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>234</sup> RFI, 2014, *Alpha Condé: «Ebola nécessite une mobilisation internationale»*; ROP, 2014, *Toutes les participations de l'État : Guinée*; UN, *Data Dashboard - Statistics Guinea*; Interviews, 2014.

from the West and turned to the Soviet Union and communist China for support. For a long period Guinea distanced itself from the former colonial power.<sup>235</sup>

Diplomatic relations were restored in 1976 and in 1985, after President Touré's death, the two countries signed a military cooperation agreement. Since then France has provided training and been involved in projects to support the security forces, except between 2009 and 2010 when military cooperation was suspended following a massacre of civilians by the security forces. Under President Condé the relationship has improved significantly. The election of President François Hollande in France has perhaps further strengthened the ties between the two countries as both presidents' parties are members of the Socialist International and already acquainted. France probably has enough influence to make sure Guinea contributes troops to the operation in Mali, despite the historically complicated relationship between the two countries.<sup>236</sup>

#### 4.7.3 Domestic Politics and the Role of the Military

Guinea's limited engagement in Mali is perhaps not surprising in view of the internal political turmoil the country has experienced over the past few years. In 2010, Alpha Condé assumed office as Guinea's first democratically elected president following 25 years of military rule and over 50 years of post-independence authoritarianism. Increasing ethnic tensions and political mobilisation along ethnic lines sparked clashes following the contested presidential elections. Legislative elections were postponed several times, further exacerbating political and ethnic tensions, which only eased with the elections in 2013 and the opening of the National Assembly in 2014.<sup>237</sup>

The military junta that took power in 2008 exacerbated the already critical situation in the military. The military is a constant threat to domestic political processes, peaceful democratisation and stability. The country's first two presidents manipulated the armed forces to their own political ends, resulting in the security forces being divided along ethnic and generational lines, and notorious for their indiscipline, human rights abuses, insubordination and criminality. The legacy of 50 years of political violence, authoritarian rule and mismanagement of the security forces has left the country with a dysfunctional security sector in need of reform. Deploying troops to the operations in Mali may be seen as a way to contribute to the reform of the security sector. In general,

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<sup>235</sup> France diplomatie, *La France et la Guinée*, 26 September 2014; Martin, 2005; Schraeder, 2001, p. 45; Gorée Institute, 2012, p. 42; France diplomatie, *La France et la Guinée*, 26 September 2014; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>236</sup> Bangoura, 2011, p. 102; France diplomatie, *La France et la Guinée*, 26 September 2014; Jeune Afrique, 2012, *Guinée - Alpha Condé : "J'ai hérité d'un pays sans État"*; Interviews, 2014.

<sup>237</sup> Diouma, 2013; ICG, 2011, *Guinea putting the transition back on track*; ICG, 2013, *Guinée: sortir du bourbier électoral*; EIU, 2014, *Country Report - Guinea*, p. 10.

contributing troops to peace operations is a way of receiving training and equipment, and in that way professionalising the army (*see chapter 3*). France has been training Guinean soldiers ahead of their participation in the peace operations in Mali, and the US has contributed equipment. Although it is difficult to assess how much importance this factor has in explaining Guinea's decision to deploy troops to AFISMA and MINUSMA, it surely has not been an obstacle to its participation.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> ICG, 2010, *Guinea: Reforming the Army*; Gorée Institute, 2012, p. 45, p. 55; Bangoura, 2011; Interviews, 2014.



## 5 Concluding Analysis

This report has aimed to provide an enhanced understanding of the context in which the UN stabilisation mission in Mali is operating through the analysis of neighbouring states' political and military engagement in Mali. Chapter 2 has described developments during 2012-2013 and explained the political processes leading to the launching of the UN mission. Chapter 4 has given an account of the seven states' engagement and the main incentives behind it, as well as how the neighbours could influence conflict resolution in Mali. This analysis was done based on factors identified in previous research as especially important in explaining why states engage in international peace support operations, categorised in chapter 3.

This final chapter concludes the study by first summarising how the neighbouring states are engaged in Mali, then discussing overall observations on the states' incentives for engagement and finally reflecting further on their potential influence on conflict resolution.

### 5.1 Political and Military Engagement

The first research question this study set out to answer was how the neighbouring states are politically and militarily engaged in the efforts to resolve the armed conflicts in Mali. The analysis in chapter 4 demonstrates that the neighbouring states are engaged in Mali to different degrees and in different ways. Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal are contributing significant numbers of troops to MINUSMA, deployed in the northern parts of Mali. Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea are also contributing peacekeepers to the UN operation, although more limited in scope. While Algeria has opted out of being a part of MINUSMA, Mauritania is contributing staff officers but no troops. However, Algeria and Mauritania are important military actors in countering terrorism in the Sahel, which has an impact on the crises in Mali.

Politically, during 2014 Algeria has obtained a key role as mediator in the armed conflict between the Malian government and the armed rebel groups. Burkina Faso has also had a political role in the crises, mainly through former President Blaise Compaoré's role as ECOWAS' mediator. The political engagement of Niger and Mauritania has been more limited, while Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Senegal have had no significant political role in the crises in Mali.

### 5.2 Common Features of Incentives

What are then the main interests and incentives driving this engagement, as the second research question asks? The analysis in chapter 4 demonstrates that the

interests and incentives behind each state's engagement in Mali vary. Some states are engaging in order to counter external threats to their national security, while others are more concerned about regime security. Some are trying to improve their international standing, whereas others want to extend their influence in the region.

Each neighbouring state is driven by its own logic and concerns. In all cases a mix of internal and external factors is driving the neighbours' engagement in Mali. While different interests and incentives drive the engagement of the neighbouring states, some common features can feed into the understanding of what drives this engagement, in particular with regard to understanding the troop contribution to MINUSMA, or lack thereof.

### ***The importance of ECOWAS***

ECOWAS' membership can to a large extent explain the engagement, or lack thereof, of Mali's neighbours in MINUSMA. As described in chapter 2, MINUSMA was preceded by attempts by ECOWAS to intervene militarily. The five neighbouring countries that are currently contributing troops had already indicated a will to participate in the ECOWAS operation before the initiative was altered into the African-led mission AFISMA, and later on re-hatted into MINUSMA.

The importance of the ECOWAS membership becomes clear in light of the fact that all ECOWAS member states are contributing peacekeepers to MINUSMA. Mauritania, which is contributing staff officers, and Algeria, which is not participating at all, are not members of the organisation. Although MINUSMA is a UN operation, the ECOWAS aspect is significant in order to understand what has been driving the neighbouring states' engagement. ECOWAS is an important framework for cooperation in the region and serves as a platform for its member states to forward their national and regional interests.

### ***The relationship to France and the community of the Francophonie***

The neighbouring states' engagement in Mali must also be understood in relation to France and the larger community of the Francophonie. The neighbouring states that are contributing troops to MINUSMA have very close relationships with France in many areas: defence cooperation, development assistance, trade and not least a shared language and culture, at least among the elite. The analysis in chapters 2 and 4 clearly demonstrates that France put pressure on the neighbouring states, and in particular on the francophone ECOWAS members, to intervene militarily in Mali. The fact that the process of deploying troops to Mali accelerated after the launch of the French operation *Serval* further demonstrates this connection. Algeria on the other hand has a very complicated relationship with France, which has only limited influence on the country's foreign policy. Mauritania has managed to satisfy its national interests in relation to the French influence in other ways than contributing troops to MINUSMA.

The French regional counter-terrorism operation *Barkhane*, which covers Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, and the ongoing transformation of the French military presence in Africa, illustrate the importance of the Sahel region to French foreign and security policy. As a result, France rewards those countries that contribute to the French efforts to stabilise the Sahel – a strong incentive for Mali’s neighbours to contribute troops to MINUSMA.

### ***Threat perceptions and the north/south divide***

It becomes clear that geography matters to the threat perceptions of Mali’s neighbours, which in turn drives their engagement in Mali. The countries bordering northern Mali, i.e. Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger, are largely driven by the desire to contain or eliminate immediate security threats from armed Islamists, unlike the countries to the south. The threat from armed Tuareg separatist movements is mainly a national security concern for those countries that also have substantial Tuareg populations, namely Niger, Algeria, and to some extent Burkina Faso. This is particularly so in the case of Niger, which has experienced recurring Tuareg rebellions in the past.

While Mali’s southern neighbours are also concerned with regional stability, the areas of tension that may affect the stability of Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Senegal are mostly located elsewhere. While Senegal faces a risk of increasing radicalisation and recruitment to radical Islamist groups, the direct threat to it from armed Islamists in Mali is limited. Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire are not threatened by instability in northern Mali. Rather, those two countries are preoccupied with internal security challenges, disconnected from those of northern Mali, and instability in the areas bordering Liberia. In those three cases, as explained in chapter 4, other interests drive the engagement in MINUSMA.

### ***Financial incentives and professionalisation of the military***

The armies of Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Niger and Senegal are in need of professionalisation. Hence the financial benefits and the opportunity to receive training and equipment for the armed forces have surely added to the incentives to send troops to MINUSMA, although they may not have been the main driver. As mentioned above, the troop-contributing neighbouring countries had already envisaged participation before the United Nations Security Council had taken any decision on acting. Contributing troops to an ECOWAS or AU operation does not offer the same financial benefits as participation in a UN mission.

Financial benefits are a well-known incentive valid for all UN operations and not specific to MINUSMA. Developing countries, as opposed to Western countries, benefit financially by contributing troops to UN operations. In these countries, the state, not only the individual soldier, has a financial incentive to contribute troops as it provides a net income to the state treasury. In addition, when donors and international partners are in favour of such participation, bilateral agreements

concerning training and equipping in relation to deployment may further increase the incentive, which is the case for the countries analysed in this study. However, such external support to capacity building can also be assured exclusively through bilateral cooperation, which the Mauritanian example demonstrates.

### 5.3 Influence on Conflict Resolution

The study's third and final research question was how, in view of the above, the neighbouring states could influence conflict resolution in Mali. Before discussing this, a brief update on the current situation is warranted.

In 2013, Mali returned to constitutional order after having been assisted by MINUSMA in holding presidential and legislative elections. Through the deployment of French and UN troops to northern Mali, the Malian government's presence has been expanded to the bend of the River Niger, including the regional capitals Gao and Timbuktu. Even so, state agencies risk armed resistance if they try to assert a presence in the third regional capital, Kidal, which is still outside governmental control.<sup>239</sup>

During the second half of 2014 a series of peace talks took place hosted by Algeria in the capital Algiers. Apart from previous treaties on a ceasefire, these were the first actual negotiations between the Malian government and the armed rebel groups since the outbreak of the rebellion in 2012. Currently, however, the main armed threat in northern Mali comes from groups that are not parties to negotiations or the prospect of peace treaties, namely the armed Islamist groups. During 2014, armed attacks against the population have increased and MINUSMA troops have progressively become a target.<sup>240</sup>

Below follows a brief summary of each neighbouring state's potential influence on conflict resolution.

#### *Potential influence of the neighbouring states*

The potential for the neighbouring states to influence conflict resolution in Mali varies. Algeria has a particularly important role as mediator and is likely to continue to have a strong impact on Mali's conflict resolution process. Aside from its conventional force and military capacity, it is also probable that Algeria will use its political, economic and diplomatic influence to settle Mali's conflicts. Through its networks with the region's leaders, and its political and economic strength, it has leverage to bring parties together and to influence any final conflict settlement. The peace negotiations in Algiers during 2014 indicated for example that in mediating Algeria had an interest in avoiding agreements on far-

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<sup>239</sup> Tham Lindell & Nilsson, 2014, pp. 23-24.

<sup>240</sup> Tham Lindell & Nilsson, 2014, p. 37; Jeune Afrique, *Mali: ouverture du troisième round de négociations à Alger*, 21 October 2014.



reaching decentralisation in Mali, to avoid inciting similar claims in Algeria. This clearly illustrates that the Algerian mediation, led by the Algerian military, is not neutral to the outcome of the Malian negotiations.<sup>241</sup> Concerning security, Algeria's efforts to control its border may hinder armed groups from using it as a safe haven.

Niger prioritises counter-terrorism measures and is using its bilateral cooperation and multilateral participation to secure its own territory and promote regional stability. This is also due to the fact that Niger lacks both economic resources and political muscle to exert major influence on its own. Since Niger, in contrast to Mali, managed to disarm and integrate the Tuareg fighters returning from Libya in 2011, and is not experiencing an immediate armed separatist threat at the moment, it could serve as an inspiration for conflict resolution in Mali. So far, however, the Malian government has not expressed any great interest in the Nigerien model.

Mauritania is mainly engaged in the Mali crises as a key actor in combating terrorism and could contribute to stabilising northern Mali. Its efforts to secure its territory could also have a positive effect on stability since the possibility of armed groups using Mauritanian territory as a rear base diminishes. Given that the conflict in Mali is much more than simply a war on terror, it is difficult to see what role Mauritania would have in resolving the complexity of Mali's conflicts. Lately, however, there have been some indications that Mauritania is ready to end its isolation in the region and might want to take on a larger political role in order to contribute to conflict resolution in Mali.

A recent game changer has been the exit of Burkina Faso's President Blaise Compaoré, which has brought a new dynamic to the Mali conflict given his support for the MNLA. With the departure of Compaoré it is hard to assess how Burkina Faso could influence future conflict resolution in Mali. The country's involvement in mediation has not been limited to President Compaoré alone, which makes it probable that his successors will try to build on this legacy. Another question, however, is how successful they will be in securing this role.

The altered political situation in Burkina Faso has also changed the terms for the MNLA and the HCUA which previously enjoyed Compaoré's support and were allowed to use the country's capital for pre-negotiation meetings. At the time of writing, it was unclear whether Ouagadougou will be prepared to continue providing such a platform. Since the armed rebel groups are now searching for a new host country, Mauritania might gain an increasing role in the Mali conflict. So far, however, Mauritania has declined to allow the MNLA to engage in political activities on its territory.

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<sup>241</sup> Interview, 2014.

Some of the neighbours, notably Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Senegal, mainly influence conflict resolution through their participation in MINUSMA, with its broad political mandate to stabilise Mali and support the government's return to all regions.

These three countries, as well as Burkina Faso and Niger, could influence conflict resolution through its membership in ECOWAS. However, the essential political role of Algeria, and increasing importance of Mauritania, indicate that forums outside the ECOWAS framework may be more appropriate for conflict resolution at this stage.

In a broader perspective, the potential influence of the neighbouring states on conflict resolution in Mali should also be analysed in the light of the internationalisation of the conflicts and an increasing emphasis on counter-terrorism. This will be further elaborated below.

### ***Internationalisation of the conflicts***

One effect of MINUSMA's and the French anti-terrorist operation's presence in Mali is an internationalisation of the conflicts and the addition of a wide range of new external actors. This affects the conflict dynamics and adds to the complexity of the political and security situation in the Sahel. It also complicates the analysis of the influence of individual states, especially when they have only limited political and military leverage, as is the case with Mali's neighbouring countries (with the exception of Algeria).

France has taken an active role in shaping Mali's security landscape and is currently the dominant external actor in the region. The French operation *Serval* ended in June 2014 and was replaced by a French anti-terrorism force with a regional approach, *Operation Barkhane*. This means that the French anti-terrorism effort continues with 1,000 troops in Mali alongside the 8,300 troops that by late 2014 were deployed within MINUSMA.<sup>242</sup> By investing political prestige and military resources, France will be vital in any future settlement of the conflicts. Indeed the very presence of France has brought the region's actors more closely together in finding a common solution to the instability in Mali.<sup>243</sup> As demonstrated in chapter 4, the majority of Mali's neighbours are working closely with France in its efforts to stabilise Mali.

The neighbouring states' engagement is strongly influenced by French interests, which in turn could have a positive impact on conflict resolution if it results in external actors working together to reach a common solution to the crises. This is important in view of the myriad of external actors engaged in Mali such as the AU, ECOWAS, the UN and the EU, as well as numerous bilateral partners.

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<sup>242</sup> Tham Lindell & Nilsson, 2014, p. 19; Interview, 2014.

<sup>243</sup> Interview, 2014.

### ***Emphasis on a counter-terrorism agenda***

Whereas historically the major conflicts in northern Mali have involved a political conflict between minority groups and the state, the changing dynamics have brought the issue of counter-terrorism to the heart of the security agenda. This circumstance is further emphasised by the main external actors drawn to the region specifically to counter this threat, namely France and the US. This also influences what kind of counter-measures are prioritised, where resources are added and through which lenses the conflicts are analysed.

With the important transnational effects of the conflicts in Mali, the number of external actors involved, and the emphasis on the transnational threat from terrorism, there is a risk that there will be too much focus on containment, and less on resolution of the root causes of the conflicts. Another risk is too much emphasis on border control in an area that for centuries has been characterised by cross-border movements, constituting a node for various social and cultural exchanges, commerce and trade routes. In this region it is hardly possible to control borders, only to control people.<sup>244</sup>

A third consequence is the militarisation of conflict management. The neighbouring countries most affected by the terrorist threat – Algeria, Mauritania and Niger – all have a firm policy stand on anti-terrorism. Their engagement in combating terrorism may have a stabilising effect on northern Mali in the short term, in particular through increased control of their own territory. However, for counter-terrorism operations to have a long-term effect, such measures should also include efforts to counter violent extremism by addressing its root causes. The *G5 Sahel* initiative, mentioned in chapter 2, provides a promising example in this regard. Among other things, the initiative aims to counter radicalisation through development projects in the Sahel.<sup>245</sup>

The presence of armed Islamist groups and the threat they pose have augmented the general sense of threat among the neighbouring states, while at the same time encouraging increased coordination between them on counter-measures. It is highly probable that the appearance of terrorist groups will continue to mark the region in the long term. At present, however, no actor, whether regional or international, is close to implementing any kind of sustainable solution to this threat to state and human security. The ongoing civil war in Libya will also continue to provide conditions for safe havens for armed Islamists as well as other violent groups.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Interview, 2014.

<sup>245</sup> Africa Confidential, 2014, *Sahel/European Union Joining up security*.

<sup>246</sup> Lecocq, 2013, p. 66.

***Concluding remarks***

When discussing the possible influence of neighbouring states on conflict resolution in Mali, it is essential to accentuate that a multitude of factors affect the quest for peace, stability and security. The aspirations of neighbouring states aside, the will of other external powers and the role of local actors, including the government in Bamako, the armed rebel groups and armed Islamist groups, are all crucial to the process. It is also important to acknowledge that the crises in Mali emanate from internal political and security problems. Although the involvement of external actors is important, it is the responsibility of Malian actors to find a durable resolution to the conflict.

While the engagement of Mali's neighbours and other external actors has had a positive effect on stability in Mali, there is also a risk of the international presence being exploited in order to preserve the status quo. It could be used by the Malian government to avoid implementing necessary reforms of the state and reaching agreements on for example decentralisation or forms of self-rule in the north. It could also be utilised by the armed rebel groups to continue to, in practice, rule the region of Kidal and escape disarmament and governmental control. In this, the United Nations and all the states providing assets to MINUSMA, should have a great interest in both encouraging the Malian government to take responsibility for a sustainable political solution, and putting pressure on other parties to the conflict.

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## Interviews

Interview, Dr. Ole Martin Gaasholt, Senior researcher, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 9 October 2014.

Interview, Mathieu Pellerin, Associate Researcher Africa Programme Ifri, Paris, 27 October 2014.

Interview, Rear-Amiral Megna Diomande, Defence Attaché, Côte d'Ivoire Embassy in France, Paris, 27 October 2014.

Interview Dr. Christina Barrios, Senior Analyst, Dr. Thierry Tardy, Senior Analyst, Julien Daemers, Associate Fellow & Jose Luengo-Cabrera Junior Analyst, EUISS, Paris, 28 October 2014.

Interview, Francis Laloupe, Journalist, Africa1, Paris, 28 October 2014.

Interview, Dr. Philippe Hugon, Research Director, IRIS, 28 October 2014.

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Interview, Dr. Frederic Charillon, General Director, IRSEM, 29 October 2014.

Interview, Dr. Alain Antil, Research Fellow, Head of Sub-Saharan Africa Programme, Ifri, 31 October 2014.

Interview, Rouppert Bérangère, Research Fellow & Claire Kupper, Project leader Africa, GRIP, Brussels, 30 October 2014.

Interview, Jérôme Spinoza, Political Advisor to the EUSR for Sahel, EEAS, Brussels, 30 October 2014.

Interview, Rinaldo Depagne, Head West Africa, International Crisis Group, Brussels, 30 October 2014.

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Telephone interview, Dr. Baz Lecocq, Professor of African History, Humboldt University of Berlin, Institute of Asian and African Studies, 11 September 2014.

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## **Other**

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This report aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the political and security context in which the United Nations' stabilisation mission in Mali, MINUSMA, operates, with a particular focus on the neighbouring states. The study seeks to identify and explain the different drivers that have led to five of Mali's neighbouring states – Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger and Senegal – contributing troops to MINUSMA, while two of them – Algeria and Mauritania – have decided not to. Through an analysis of the main interests and incentives that explain these states' political and military engagement in Mali, the study also highlights how the neighbouring states could influence conflict resolution in Mali.