Misadventure or Mediation in Mali: The EU's Potential Role

By Paul Pryce

With a humanitarian crisis mounting in the West African state of Mali, the Council of the European Union has called on the Economic Community of West African States to deploy a stabilisation force to the northern regions of the country. But such a military intervention would have to contend with a plethora of cultural and logistical challenges. A better approach might be for the Council to appoint an EU Special Representative for the Sahel Region, employing the Union's civilian power to facilitate mediation between the central government in Mali and the Tuareg rebel groups that recently proclaimed a de facto independent state in the north, the Islamic Republic of Azawad.

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Introduction

On 23 July 2012, the Council of the European Union convened in Brussels to discuss a number of issues relating to the EU's external affairs. In a statement released at the conclusion of those proceedings, the Council expressed its concern over the deteriorating situation in Mali and called on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to deploy a stabilisation force to the country.[1] This expression of support for military intervention from the EU Member States comes shortly after calls were issued by some in the American press, such as the Editorial Board of the *Washington Post*, for NATO to act militarily to stabilize Mali.[2]

However, the Council may have been too hasty in offering its support for the deployment of such an ECOWAS stabilisation force. Given the complex relationships between communities within Mali, as well as the history shared between Mali and some of its neighbouring states, such a military intervention could very likely further exacerbate the situation in Mali, deepening the crisis in one of the world's most impoverished societies. Misperceptions regarding the nature of the Malian conflict might well have contributed to the Council of the EU's less-than-constructive call for ECOWAS to intervene militarily. Indeed, rather than the intra-state warfare in Mali being a purely religious conflict, Malian society is ethnically diverse and tensions have long existed between the Mandé peoples of the south and the sparse Tuareg communities of the north.

This work first examines the challenges with which an ECOWAS intervention would face in Mali. Having then discussed the history of the Malian conflict and the role of ECOWAS in peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations, this work subsequently considers the means through which the EU could become more constructively engaged in resolving the dispute that has emerged between the Malian government in Bamako and the 'Islamic Republic of Azawad,' a de facto independent state that has been newly proclaimed by rebels in the northern regions of the country. Chief among these potential instruments for constructive EU engagement would be the appointment of an EU Special Representative for the Sahel.

The Tuareg and Bamako

Until recently, the extent of the EU's direct involvement in Mali has largely been limited to the Migration Information and Management Centre (CIGEM), jointly established with the Malian government to '[…] provide for skill testing, training, and pre-departure information with a view to facilitating the movement of workers within African countries and to the EU.'[3] The European External Action Service (EEAS) possesses an EU Sahel Strategy, adopted by the Council of the EU on 23 March 2012, but its direct application in Mali and elsewhere in the Sahel region has thus far been limited. Interest among European leaders in the instability experienced in northern Mali seems to have grown along with the increasing frequency of reports in the international press that al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) may be responsible for the latest outbreak of violence in the Sahel region.

Yet tensions between the central government in Bamako and the predominantly Tuareg communities of northern Mali pre-date the formation of al-Qaeda itself, and the conflict can be traced back at least as far as the Kaocen Revolt of 1916. The recent emergence of AQIM and other Islamic fundamentalist groups in the Sahel region has inadvertently led to Western observers perceiving the conflict as primarily between the secular Malian state and armed groups attempting to impose Islamic fundamentalist beliefs.

In fact, rather than being a principal motivating factor for conflict, Islamic fundamentalist rhetoric has been harnessed by Tuareg groups in northern Mali to achieve select political objectives in the past. For example, during the late 1990s, tribal leaders from the powerful Ifoghas clan used Islamist rhetoric as an instrument to advance their interests in a hotly contested election for the Mayor of Kidal, one of the larger municipalities in northern Mali. A woman from the minority Idnan clan had emerged as the leading candidate in the election. It was at this time that Tablighi missionaries predominantly from South Asia arrived in the region to proselytise their views on Islam to the locals. '[...] The Ifoghas elite of Kidal, seeing that they might lose political power, willingly adopted the patriarchal rhetoric of the Tablighi in order to disqualify their female opponent, and to argue that pious Muslims would never vote for a woman.'[4]

Similar incidents in Mali and neighbouring Niger in subsequent years led to increasing alarm in the international press that Mali's Muslim religious leaders had acquired too much political power, that the Sahel was undergoing a process of steady 'Islamisation.'[5] But it is important to distinguish between the perceived role Islamic fundamentalism has had in Mali on the one hand, and the role that it actually played on the other. Mali has not undergone a process of so-called 'Islamisation from below,' in which grassroots support for Islamic fundamentalist values leads to the formation of belligerent groups like AQIM or Ansar Dine.[6] Instead, frustration with the central government and the lack of public services in northern Mali has motivated Tuareg communities to rebel repeatedly against Bamako, issuing increasingly vehement demands that culminated in early 2012 with the declaration of an independent 'Islamic Republic of Azawad.'

In this sense, the underlying sources of conflict can be found in the aforementioned Kaocen Revolt and a series of Tuareg rebellions that broke out in northern Mali during the 1960s, 1990s, and again more

recently in 2007-2009. Whereas the rebellions of the late 20th and early 21st centuries were primarily between the central government in the south and the Tuareg communities of the north, the Kaocen Revolt saw the mostly nomadic Tuareg resisting French colonial rule and the perceived expansion of Hausa influence from Nigeria.[7] After a period of fierce fighting, the French had suppressed the uprising by late 1917. Following this defeat, Tuareg communities in Niger and Mali retreated further into the Sahel, seeming to seek seclusion from the aforementioned expansion of French and Hausa influence in the region.[8]

This has instilled a certain degree of suspicion among the Tuareg toward the Mandé peoples of the south, who have been decidedly more influenced by French and Hausa culture than the communities of the north. Furthermore, ethnic or racial identity has also been an exacerbating factor for relations within the country. The Tuareg are viewed as racially different and tend to be referred to as "reds" or "whites" by communities in southern Mali.[9] This further deepens the mutual "Othering" of the communities that share the Malian state, viewing one another in the context of differences rather than the commonalities necessary to form a coherent polity corresponding to the Malian state.

More importantly, and as previously mentioned, Tuareg rebels have repeatedly demanded public services and development assistance from authorities in Bamako for nearly a century. Indeed, '(r)ebel leaders have demanded a paved road, a second hospital, better supplies, and more access to communications, and have criticised the Malian army for 'foot-dragging' in withdrawing bases from northern areas.'[10] This is not to say that Bamako has ignored these demands, remaining aloof from affairs in the north of the country. However, many of the agreements struck between the central government and Tuareg leaders ultimately have not been realised as military officers have seized power from the civilian authorities in a number of coups, neglecting to fulfill the commitments made by democratically elected leaders of Mali.

In 1968, Moussa Traoré seized power in Bamako as part of a military coup, remaining President of Mali until 1991. Tensions continued to mount with Tuareg communities during this time, until President Alpha Oumar Konaré came to power in the country's first democratic elections since 1960 and managed to negotiate a settlement with Tuareg rebels by 1996. But further efforts toward reconciliation were undermined by a coup on 22 March 2012, in which a group of junior

Malian military officers seized power from President Amadou Toumani Touré. While this move was reversed on 01 April 2012, with the military relinquishing power to civilian authorities once again, the episode underscored for many Tuareg leaders how unreliable the central government can be as a negotiating partner.

It is therefore apparent that the principal threat to peace and stability in Mali is the poor state of civil-military relations in the country. According to Huntington, civil-military relations are shaped by three important variables: the perceived level of external threat, the constitutional structure of the state, and the ideological makeup of society.[11] A brief consideration of Huntington's criteria in the context of Mali's independent history reveals a grim prognosis. So long as the Tuareg are perceived as the "Other" by the Malian military, and so long as the constitutional structure of the state remains fragile, Mali will remain vulnerable to the destabilising effects of military coups and internecine warfare between the north and south. In order for any intervention to be successful here, it must address the antagonism between ethnic groups and set out a structure for normalised relations between the Malian military and the civilian authorities of this West African state.

This is not to understate the threat presented to peace and stability by some of the armed groups attempting to impose their political and religious views through violent means – AQIM, Ansar Dine, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). But, as we have seen here in this brief overview of the conflict between Bamako and the Tuareg, there are many factors to the crisis in Mali that were apparently not considered by the Council of the EU in calling for an ECOWAS stabilisation force. Beyond the cursory mention of the need to restructure Mali's security and defence forces, the Council's 23 July statement does not address the deeper problem of civil-military relations and the historical tensions between communities along ethnic lines.

An ECOWAS Quagmire

The Government of National Unity, which assumed power in Bamako after the military relinquished power in early April 2012, has already made it clear that it will not accept any kind of intervention from ECOWAS that would attempt to address the problem of civil-military relations in the country. According to these authorities, any ECOWAS deployment would have to be limited solely to the northern regions of

Mali.[12]As such, the ECOWAS stabilisation force would not be able to operate beyond a strict mandate of enforcing the disarmament of the myriad armed groups that would attempt to defend their claims to an independent 'Islamic Republic of Azawad.'

Since its inception nearly 40 years ago, ECOWAS has developed extensive experience with military intervention. Deployments to Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire have met with varying degrees of success, and ECOWAS has demonstrated a capacity to adapt its structures and practices based on lessons learned from its peacekeeping and peacebuilding ventures. As of June 2006, ECOWAS has successfully established a rapid response force (ECOBRIG) consisting of up to 6500 soldiers that can be deployed within 90 days.[13] Yet a number of variables could lead to a mission in Mali becoming a veritable quagmire for ECOWAS, expending considerable resources while only further destabilising Mali.

One of these variables is the role of Nigeria. In previous peace support missions, ECOWAS has relied heavily on Nigerian troop contributions. In the case of the ECOWAS Mission in Cote d'Ivoire (ECOMICI), that peace support mission faced significant difficulty in pursuing its mandate as Nigeria contributed only five troops, far less that was originally pledged and much less than the Nigerian military had provided for previous missions in Sierra Leone and Liberia.[14]

The likelihood that the mission's success will depend greatly on the willingness of Nigeria to contribute the backbone for the deployment becomes especially problematic in light of the suspicion with which Nigeria's motives are sometimes regarded by other ECOWAS members. In the case of ECOMICI, Nigeria's initial willingness to contribute most of the required troops was regarded by other ECOWAS members as an attempt by Nigeria to use the ECOWAS stabilisation force as a proxy to expand Nigeria's sphere of influence in West Africa.[15] No longer having to contend with Gaddafi's Libya for influence in the Sahel, some ECOWAS members may perceive a large troop contribution from Nigeria as yet another attempt by that country to expand its sphere of influence to encompass Mali. With President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria eagerly offering just such a level of support,[16] smaller ECOWAS members may be concerned that the ECOWAS stabilisation force will be effectively hijacked by the Nigerian military.

This is compounded by the disdain among some Francophone West African states for what is consistently perceived to be a crusade by Ni-

geria for regional hegemonic leadership.[17] This has frequently led to entreaties by these states for France to serve as a security guarantor in the region, rather than looking to much more local solutions for emerging conflicts, like ECOWAS and the African Union. As negotiations are held to determine precisely how ECOWAS might intervene militarily in the Malian conflict, Mali's Francophone neighbours could object to any Nigerian presence in the contested regions of northern Mali on these grounds. Nonetheless, without a significant Nigerian contingent, an ECOWAS stabilisation force in Mali will suffer from a lack of personnel.

The strain on ECOWAS and its member states' resources is further compounded by other developments taking place in the region. An April 2012 coup that took place in Guinea-Bissau has also commanded the attention of this sub-regional organisation. As such, the divided attention of ECOWAS was most apparent in a meeting of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers, the organisation's principal decision-making body, on 17 September 2012, at which the member states expressed difficulty in determining whether, and how, to intervene in Mali, Guinea-Bissau, or both.[18] If ECOWAS is to intervene militarily in one while keeping one eye warily cast on the other, there is a significant risk that any military intervention will fail due to flimsy political will, with some contributing states pulling their personnel out of a belief that their resources might be better utilised facilitating stability in Guinea-Bissau, in the case of a Malian intervention.

Aside from the difficulties ECOWAS might experience in mustering the personnel necessary to carry out a military intervention, the composition of the stabilisation force could contribute toward heightened hostilities in northern Mali. As previously discussed, Tuareg communities in the region have resisted the perceived spread of Hausa influence just as fiercely as they resisted French colonial rule. Approximately 29% of the Nigerian population is ethnically Hausa, and Hausa is one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa. In addition to the Hausa ethnolinguistic community in Nigeria, 'Hausaness' is a cultural identity that has embraced many different regional groups within Nigerian society.[19] To Tuareg militants, the deployment of a Nigerian-dominated ECOWAS stabilisation force could be seen as a pact between the Hausa and Mandé peoples to force the assimilation of the communities in northern Mali, imposing 'Hausaness' there and eradicating the cultural distinctiveness of the Tuareg clans. Instead of motivating these bel-

ligerent groups to disarm, the ECOWAS force could inspire renewed resistance due to its composition.

Even if the armed groups in northern Mali were not to regard the prevalence of Nigerian Hausa in the ECOWAS force as a threat, the peace support mission would find the disarmament of these same groups a difficult goal to achieve. This stems mostly from the fractionalisation of the armed groups in northern Mali, with infighting occurring as a power struggle is waged between Tuareg elites. Fractionalisation has interfered with similar disarmament efforts in the past, such as the ill-fated intervention in Somalia during the early 1990s that were conducted under the auspices of the United Nations. In that conflict, the principal belligerents were Ali Mahdi Muhammad and Mohamed Farrah Aidid, who both sought to succeed Siyad Barre as ruler of Somalia. Aidid obstructed the deployment of UN forces in the country from the outset on the basis that he suspected the Americans and UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali favoured Ali Mahdi's claim to the Somali presidency.[20] The disarmament of Aidid's militias only served to compound Aidid's paranoia, leading to outright acts of violence against interventionist forces.[21]

The power struggle in northern Mali is perhaps even more complex than the past rivalry between Aidid and Ali Mahdi in Somalia. Initially, most of the drive to claim the territories of northern Mali for an independent Tuareg state came from the aforementioned MNLA and Ansar Dine. The MNLA was led by Bilal ag Acherif, a young member of the Ifoghas clan. Meanwhile, the Ansar Dine was led by Iyad ag Ghali, a veteran of the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s and also a member of the powerful Ifoghas. A rivalry between these two men emerged at the inception of ag Acherif's political career, when both ag Acherif and ag Ghali sought to be elected by their peers as leader of the MNLA. Bilal ag Acherif was ultimately successful, and so Iyad ag Ghali re-directed his efforts toward building up Ansar Dine as a separate and slightly more Islamic-influenced force.[22] Despite this shared history, ag Acherif and ag Ghali were apparently able to set aside their differences in the offensive against the Malian military.[23]

But a new force was beginning to take shape in Mali that would upset the balance of power between the MNLA and Ansar Dine. AQIM had not enjoyed much influence in Mali or among the Tuareg, and this is widely suspected to be due to the predominance of Algerian militants in the leadership of AQIM and the focus in al-Qaeda on countries

further to the north, such as Libya and Algeria. As such, there have been limited opportunities for advancement among the senior ranks of AQIM for militants from southern areas of the Sahel region, such as Mali and Niger. Perhaps seeking greater opportunities for self-promotion in the militant Islamist movement, a new group broke off from AQIM in mid-2011, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA).[24] Under the leadership of Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou, also known by the alias Abu Qumqum, MOJWA soon waged a limited terrorist campaign to establish its credibility in the region. For example, it was discovered in December 2011 that MOJWA was responsible for the kidnapping of three European aid workers from a Saharawi refugee camp in Algeria in October 2011, and a number of other attacks followed in the Sahel region.[25]

Although the MNLA and Ansar Dine initially cooperated for the proclamation of their *de facto* Islamic Republic of Azawad (May 2012), by late June violence had erupted between these former allies. Fighters aligned with MOJWA and Ansar Dine clashed with MNLA forces in Gao, the provisional capital of the Azawad state. In the process, Ansar Dine and MOJWA successfully seized control of the capital, 40 MNLA combatants were taken prisoner, and Bilal ag Acherif was reportedly evacuated to Burkina Faso to receive medical treatment for wounds sustained during the fighting.[26]

The Battle of Gao clearly left the MNLA reeling from defeat as an organisation. But fulfilling a disarmament mandate in northern Mali would present an ECOWAS stabilisation force with some difficult questions. Who should be compelled to disarm first? Mounting pressure against MOJWA and Ansar Dine first might leave the leadership of these groups suspecting that ECOWAS and its member states intend to install Bilal ag Acherif as an intermediary between the Tuareg communities of the north and Bamako. Conversely, pursuing the disarmament of the MNLA first would only strengthen the bargaining position of MOJWA and Ansar Dine against Bamako. Avoiding the issue of disarmament altogether will not go over lightly with the broader international community either. It has been reported that considerable numbers of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADs) were left unsecured in the aftermath of NATO's intervention into Libya, and it is further suspected that some of these MANPADS have already made their way south to Tuareg groups in Niger and Mali as well as Boko Haram, a militant Islamist organisation operating in northern

areas of Nigeria.[27] In exchange for financial and logistical support for the mission, US and EU leaders will, no doubt, expect ECOWAS forces to obtain what information they can on the whereabouts of any MANPADs in Mali.

As a result of the combined factors mentioned here, a mission in Mali has considerable likelihood of becoming a quagmire for ECOWAS. Mustering sufficient numbers of troops to respond to the crisis will be a significant obstacle in itself, made even more so because of the deepening instability in Guinea-Bissau. Even if regional antagonisms can be overcome and ECOWAS member states are willing to entrust Nigeria with the responsibility of deploying the bulk of troops for the mission, the restriction of the mission in mandate and location, the tensions between Hausa and Tuareg, and the fractionalisation of the northern militants present some daunting prospects for such a deployment. Significant risk remains that the arrival of ECOWAS forces in northern Mali will only intensify the violence while also deepening distrust in Bamako among the Tuareg people.

The EU Alternative

Having briefly examined the numerous challenges an ECOWAS stabilisation force would experience in Mali, it is worthwhile considering what steps the EU could take instead of continuing to exhort this African sub-regional organisation to intervene. Many authors have indicated that the EU has emerged as a civilian power, possessing tremendous capacity to influence outcomes on the international stage through non-military means.[28] Certainly, one means by which this civilian power can be utilised in the Malian context would be to provide non-military support to an ECOWAS mission, including financial backing and strategic airlift. Both NATO and the European Union provided just this form of assistance in the deployment of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), which was intended to facilitate an end to hostilities in the volatile region of Darfur.[29] But the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has one particularly promising diplomatic tool that could contribute much more meaningfully toward the peaceful resolution of hostilities in Mali: the appointment of an EU Special Representative for the Sahel Region.

In fact, the appointment of the first EU Special Representative, then known as a Special Envoy, was brought about by an emerging African conflict. As territorial disputes between some countries in the African

Great Lakes region threatened to result in open warfare, the EU established the office of Special Envoy for the African Great Lakes Region during the late 1990s. The mandate of this Special Envoy was 'to support conflict resolution efforts there and report on developments [...] The Special Envoy assists national, regional, and international initiatives to find a lasting solution to the economic, humanitarian, and political problems facing the region.'[30] At the time, this was an unprecedented step by the EU member states to pool their efforts and resources in order to better influence events in Central Africa. The Special Envoy was left with a particularly general mandate, as detailed above. But, 'given the inexperience of member states with such an instrument, the EUSR's working mandate was deliberately left broad, if not vague.'[31] This offered considerable flexibility in pursuing a diplomatic solution.

Since the appointment of that first EUSR, the High Representative now has the support of ten EUSR's in total, whose areas of responsibility range from Afghanistan to the Middle East peace process to Kosovo. But there is not, as yet, a EUSR responsible for Mali, the Sahel region, or any other state within the Sahel region. This presents a missed opportunity as the resources and expertise of a EUSR could greatly benefit efforts to mediate between not only Bamako and the Tuareg groups of northern Mali but also between Tuareg communities themselves. Roundtable talks that bring together Malian civilian and military authorities with parties from the de facto Islamic Republic of Azawad would be an important step toward facilitating the disarmament of groups like the MNLA and the normalisation of relations within Mali. Assistance for Mali in the area of civil-military relations could also be broached through such EUSR-led talks.

This sort of breakthrough could only be achieved through the appointment of a EUSR for the Sahel Region. This is because a EUSR must maintain a permanent presence in the region, allowing for sustained interaction with relevant stakeholders.[32] This sustained interaction itself is integral to confidence-building efforts, increasing trust among the myriad actors in both the EU and the broader peace process. The deployment of some other measure, such as a delegation from the European Parliament would be far too impermanent a measure, lacking the sustained interaction facilitated by a EUSR. At the same time, the provision of a small group of experts under the auspices of the EEAS, without the leadership of a EUSR, would lack the prestige necessary

to demonstrate to the relevant actors in the region that the EU seeks a serious role as a mediator in the conflicts of the Sahel region.

Of course, the appointment of an effective and successful Special Representative would also require coordination between the Council of the EU and the European Commission. Relations between the EU and African actors have demonstrably improved when the executive bodies of the EU have shown a willingness to present a clear and united front in relations with such external parties. An example of this coordination in practice can be found in the 2007-2011 appointment of one EUSR to liaise between the EU and the African Union.

> In December 2007, the EU appointed the experienced Belgian diplomat, Koen Vervaeke, as both the EU Special Representative (EUSR) to the African Union as well as the Head of Mission of the European Commission Delegation to the AU, thus combining the representation of the Council and Commission in one person.[33]

No longer presented with mixed messages from the EU, the AU was able to engage with the EU on a deeper level through the diplomatic offices of Koen Vervaeke. This is not to say, however, that the Commission and Council should be solely concerned with the crisis in Mali and thus appoint an EUSR to contend only with the crisis in Mali. Most of the currently appointed EUSR's are actually responsible for geopolitical regions, such as Central Asia or the Horn of Africa. Afghanistan, Sudan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo are the only exceptions to the rule at the time of this writing. Appointing a EUSR concerned exclusively with Mali would set a worrying precedent, whereby the High Representative could be pressured into appointing a new EUSR for any and every state in the world undergoing some period of instability.

Rather, a more prudent course of action would be to appoint a EUSR for the Sahel Region. This would also acknowledge the realities of the Sahel, where porous borders allow for conflicts to spread to neighbouring states, much as previous Tuareg rebellions have come to affect both Niger and Mali. Such a EUSR would essentially come to serve as a hub for mediation efforts within the region, coordinating with actors in both Mali and Niger while also liaising with stakeholders in nearby Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania as necessary. Like the first EU Special Envoy to the African Great Lakes Region years ago, the EUSR to the Sahel Region would require a broad and vague mandate from the Council and possibly the Commission in order to address the complex

dynamics of the conflict and the potential for the violence to spill-over into those neighbouring states mentioned.

As indicated, the EUSR would not be operating alone and in a diplomatic vacuum; having to actively seek out partners for negotiations. Mahmoud Dicko, a popular Malian imam and head of Mali's High Islamic Council, has been actively attempting to position himself as a mediator between Bamako and the Tuareg/Islamist groups in the north.[34] This could be designed to position himself as a power broker within Malian society, increasing his popularity both within the southern and northern regions of the country and establishing himself as an alternative to the political forces behind the Government of National Unity. But Dicko is only one potential partner for an EUSR seeking to bring all the myriad factions of the Malian conflict to the negotiating table.

For example, the AU, ECOWAS, or both, could make a valuable contribution to diplomatic efforts in Mali by appointing a mediator of their own. Former President of the African Union Commission, Alpha Oumar Konaré, is well-positioned to serve such a role. Also being the former President of Mali who successfully negotiated with Tuareg rebel groups in the 1990s, the prestige of Konaré's most recently held offices in ECOWAS and the AU would allow him to carry further weight both at home and abroad as a mediator. In the context of African politics, Konaré occupies a position not unlike that of José Manuel Barroso or Romano Prodi in the EU. Appointing such a personage to mediate within Mali would be a powerful demonstration of the AU's commitment to the peaceful resolution to hostilities.

Whatever allies the EUSR might identify in Mali and the wider region, the practical aims of these diplomatic efforts ought to be twofold. On the one hand, it is apparent that Mali requires EU technical assistance in the areas of civil-military relations and developing the constitutional structure of the Malian state. This assistance appears to go above and beyond what is set out in the EU's Sahel Strategy. The EEAS may lack the capacities and competencies to effect the kind of transition needed in Mali, though this affords some opportunity for it to develop ties with other actors that possess the relevant specialisations, such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), an organ of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concerned with such diverse issues as election observation and combating intolerance.

After all, one of the recurring complaints from Tuareg leaders has been that, whenever Bamako has agreed to afford greater autonomy to Tuareg communities, greater responsibility has been delegated to local authorities without an attendant delegation of budgetary power and, 'the current policy of decentralisation has become largely a matter of deconcentration of state power.'[35] The OSCE/ODIHR might well have developed a series of best practices regarding such core-periphery tensions from its institutional experiences in resolving emerging conflicts in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, which could be adapted for application in the Sahel region. Doubtless other potential partners could be found to assist the EEAS in Mali and elsewhere, allowing this conflict to serve as a test for the projection of the so-called "European security toolbox" to other regions of the world.

In addition to facilitating appropriate technical assistance, the EUSR will need to work closely with potential allies like Dicko and Konaré to convince Tuareg groups like the MNLA, Ansar Dine, and even MOJWA to voluntarily disarm. This may seem a staggeringly difficult task to achieve under the current conditions in Mali. Yet, as was referred to previously, Konaré was able to attain such a seemingly insurmountable goal in 1996. His mediation efforts alone were not the only element which precipitated a disarmament agreement with the Tuareg groups. A socioeconomic reintegration program facilitated by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) assisted in training and absorbing more than 10,000 ex-combatants into the civilian population. But Konaré's negotiations culminated in some powerful gestures that could be understood as constituting a subtle confidence and security-building mechanism. Chief among these was 'the dramatic "*La Flamme de la Paix"* (Flame of Peace) of 27 March 1996, at which 3000 weapons collected from the former rebels were burned in Timbuktu at a ceremony attended by President Konaré and other West African and international officials.'36 With the appropriate application of the EU's civilian power through the work of a EUSR for the Sahel Region, the Malian people could soon gather around the hearth of a *Nouvelle Flamme de la Paix* (New Flame of Peace).

Such a course of action would require a commitment from the Council of the EU to a long-term peacebuilding process in Mali and its neighbouring states. But such a commitment would be ultimately more likely to render a positive outcome than a haphazard military intervention into northern Mali. ECOWAS remains an invaluable tool

for conflict resolution in West Africa. ECOBRIG, ECOWAS' rapid reaction force, is currently the only operational brigade within the AU's envisioned African Standby Force.[37] ECOWAS has also established a number of other structures for early detection, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution, including the ECOWAS Council of the Wise.[38] But the unique circumstances surrounding the Malian conflict requires a more nuanced and considered reaction from the international community than a knee-jerk military response. Appointing Konaré or a similarly prestigious and influential figure as an ECOWAS Special Mediator would be far more appropriate and far more effective, much as the appointment of an EUSR for the Sahel Region to serve as both backup to the ECOWAS Special Mediator and as a regional networker would be the best use of the EU's capacities in resolving this conflict.

Conclusion

With al-Qaeda displaced from its previous headquarters in Afghanistan, and presented with the risk that this terrorist organisation could find a new home base in the Sahel from which to operate, the Council of the EU most clearly wished to adopt a strong position on the instability in Mali by inviting ECOWAS to intervene militarily. As demonstrated here, however, the deployment of an ECOWAS stabilisation force is not a viable means for addressing the factors that have contributed toward conflict in Mali. In addition to the logistical challenges that have undermined the effectiveness of some ECOWAS missions elsewhere in West Africa, the troops of the ECOWAS stabilisation force would become entangled in the complex web of ethnic, religious, and clan identities of northern Mali as they attempt to compel the disarmament of the MNLA, MOJWA, Ansar Dine, and other organisations. ECOWAS must also contend with emerging instability in Guinea-Bissau, creating potential competition for the organisation's already limited resources. Ultimately, preserving the territorial integrity of Mali requires more than a military intervention limited to the northern regions of the country. Attaining this goal also requires more than the current terms of the EU's Sahel Strategy.

Should the Council of the EU have the opportunity to revisit the issue before ECOWAS forces are deployed to the region, the member states must adopt measures that will utilise the EU's considerable civilian power to guarantee a kind of "deep" conflict resolution in the region. It is only through the complementary diplomatic efforts of an

EUSR for the Sahel Region and an ECOWAS Special Mediator, building on the lessons learned from the successful negotiations in 1996, that Tuareg groups can be convinced to disarm. Even more importantly, assisting the Malian state in cementing its constitutional structures and establishing a relationship between civilian and military authorities that meets the highest democratic standards will ensure a lasting peace, rather than a brief respite before yet another Tuareg rebellion in the north. The permanent presence and sustained interaction of the EUSR in the region will also allow for the EU's Sahel Strategy to be updated so as to better reflect the current conditions in Mali and Niger.

Convincing Tuareg communities to abandon their now half-realised independent state, the de facto Islamic Republic of Azawad, will be a long and arduous process. But the first steps toward ensuring the integrity of the Malian state must not be made in jackboots, but through an inclusive diplomatic initiative. If the Council of the EU maintains its current position on the crisis, it will be a missed opportunity for a relatively peaceful resolution to the conflict in Mali and a blow to the EU's accumulated soft power in Africa and elsewhere.

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Notes

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