Insurgencies in Northern Mali:
A Tentative Assessment on the Current Conflict

By

Priscyll Anctil Avoine

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Introduction

“I know I’m going to die anyway, so at least I want it to be for the sake of God.”
-Ahmed Ag Mohamed Al Ansari, a Tuareg Mujahideen (Welsh, 2012)

Recently, the Sahelian belt attracted the attention of international media due to the phenomenal propaganda of the West regarding international terrorism and their links with rebel groups from the Sahel. At present, it is estimated that about 20 European nationals are still held in captivity (Alvarado, 2012, p. 7); this picture reinforces the concerns about the regionalization of the activities of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In 20012, the security situation in the Shael region became even worse with the emergence of irregular insurgencies in Northern Mali. On 6 April 2012, the Tuareg rebels of the Mouvement National de Libération de l’Azawad (MNLA) and some jihadists from both Ansar Dine and the Mouvement pour l’unicité et le djihad en Afrique de l’Ouest (MUJAO) declared the Northern Mali as an independent state. The insurgents benefited from both the regional context of the collapse of the Gadhafi regime and the military coup that ended what used to be a stable regime of Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) (Alvarado, 2012, p. 1). While the international community (IC) is facing the dilemma of intervention, regional countries are unable to fix the situation that is getting worse. The security vacuum has favoured the religious fundamental rebel group to gain power and capture more territories at the expense of the Tuareg rebels. In the middle of those multiple insurgencies, the civilian population is the habitual and immediate victims of the conflict. Besides drought which afflicts the Shael the region this summer and other war related sufferings, it is estimated that up to 200,000 people have been displaced (AJ, 2012) during the insurgency.

Is Mali the next “Afghanistan of the Sahel” (Belmadi and Youcef, 2012) as most of the Western countries seem to think? In this paper, we attempt to nuance this widespread belief that Mali is the new safe haven for terrorism by analysing the root causes of the present conflict. We thus aim to foster preliminary answers on the current situation in Northern Mali and to evaluate the broader implications of the conflict by looking at the regional and global trends. Obviously, we do not pretend to offer an exhaustive investigation of the conflict since at the time of writing this article, the situation is still unpredictable and the regional countries are literally facing a geopolitical impasse. Also, we are conscious of the methodological obstacles because the literature on the subject
is still embryonic and we had to carefully analyse the newspapers to come up with a judgment on the current crisis while paying attention to the ambiguous role played by the media. An example is the role of Agence France Press (AFP) regarding the high tendency to qualify MNLA as part of AQIM (Alvarado, 2012, p. 7) which shows a dangerous lack of fairness.

In order to portray the current conflict in Northern Mali, we will first comment on the political and social situation that characterized the region before engaging in the analysis of the present conflict. Then, we will try to contextualize this crisis in the regional and global frameworks in order to understand the dimensions that are currently worsening the conflict. In the fourth place, we will question the dilemma of intervention to present the various obstacles confronted the peace process in Mali. Finally, we aim to study the consequences of this conflict on the civilian population so to render the reader conscious of the real impacts of this geopolitical power game over this Sub-Saharan country and its neighbours.

**Historical Background: The Socio-political Context of Northern Mali**

Mali has long been considered a good and stable “democracy” in the Sahel (Ngachoko, 2012) even if it faced some particular difficulties to maintain its sovereignty throughout all of its territory. The northern part has been particularly marked by troubles on the part of the minorities, especially the Tuaregs. They constitute a nomadic group of approximately 1.3 million people crossing “southern Algeria, southwest Libya, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali” (Cline, 2007, p. 891). In this paper, we analyse the minority of 10% of Tuaregs (Bondersholt and Gyldenholm, 2012, p. 24) that compose Northern Mali (NM) but the readers must keep in mind that other tribes, such as the Arabs and Peuls populate NM as well. These tribes neither agree with Bamako nor with the full idea of full secession (Ngachoko, 2012). Thus, this article focuses on the complexity of the Tuareg ethnic population in NM with a special focus of their struggles dating back to French colonization in order to fully comprehend the current crisis. This section is an attempt to trace these root causes in history.

The Tuaregs mainly practice a moderate but conservative Sufi Islam (Cline, 2007, p. 892) and the allegations of Wahhabi preaching are completely new and far from being proven. Therefore, the suppositions regarding the evolving threats of terrorism in the current crisis need to be nuanced as “past and current insurgencies of the Tuaregs in Mali emanate from a number of historical and
current circumstances, some of which date back to the pre-colonial era” (Zounmenou, 2012).

In Mali, the French utilized a “divide-and-rule” strategy as they organized the state to function in relations to the Tuaregs which were the first to be under French rule (Cissoko, 2011, p. 8). From the early years of independence, both the Tuaregs and the central government entered into a conflictual relationship since the former complained about lack of infrastructure and the latter viewed nomadism and pastoralism as obstacles to national development (Zounmenou, 2012). Consequently, since Mali’s independence, the Tuaregs opposed the central government of Bamako by demanding better integration or autonomy. On the one hand there were stark regional inequalities between the North and South Mali – wealth was concentrated in the South while the north remained in abject poverty (Cissoko, 2011, p. 9). On the other hand, integration of the arid region of the north with the rest of the country has remained a major challenge for the country which lacks institutional capacity to do so. In addition, it is argued that the cultural differences in the country have always been an obstacle in the process of national integration since the Tuaregs are perceived by the rest of Malians as violent, unpatriotic and as having a slave mentality (Zounmenou, 2012; Cissoko, 2011, p. 15). This may suggest that, while marginalized by the central government, the Tuaregs were also part of their own marginalization (Ngachoko, 2012) as a vicious cycle of colonial consequences and misconceptions about cultural differences continue to be reinforced.

The first uprising which occurred between 1962 and 1964 (IRIN, 2012) mirrored the systemic challenges that were responsible for polarising the Malian society. The rebellion reached its climax in 1963 before the government troop completely crushed it within a year. The Mali government counter-insurgency which targeted the Tuaregs communities destroying their sources of subsistence (IRIN, 2012; Alvarado, 2012, p. 3) left the poorly armed Tuaregs with abject poverty and with no social base and power among the population. Furthermore, the 1970s and 80s were economically difficult period for the northern rural populations since extreme drought displaced many and affected all the pastoral communities like the Tuaregs (IRIN, 2012).

The second Tuareg uprising began in June 1990 and was “triggered by an attack on a police post in Menaka ordered by Iyad Ag Ghali” (Alvarado, 2012, p. 3) who created the Mouvement populaire de l’Azawad (MPA) in Libya two years earlier (IRIN, 2012). Unlike the first insurgency, the second one was
proved more difficult to handle as the rebels were better armed. The conflict resulted in significant losses to both sides of the belligerents and so were the impact on the number of displaced civilians. On 11 April 1992, a National Pact that ended the conflict was finally reached under the leadership of Algeria (IRIN, 2012).

The 1992 peace agreements were never entirely implemented and both parties never really respected their full engagement. Although the National Pact provided some level of autonomy to NM, Bamako never became deeply involved in executing its main clauses and the Tuareg movement was thus broken apart in multiples organizations based on plenty of cleavages (Alvarado, 2012, p. 3). The various initiatives to stabilize and develop NM became infructuous and tensions flared between communities once again. The signing of the Accords d’Alger in 2006 was aimed at fostering security and economic growth in Kidal but violence never ceased. As tensions continued to grow from 2011 to 2012, well-armed leaders and insurgent returnees from Libya following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi regime (IRIN, 2012; Alvarado, 2012) contributed to the complex security dilemma of northern Mali.

Al-Jazeera provides a detailed account on how the people of NM endured hardships prior to the latest conflict (Welsh, 2012). Thus, the conflict in NM did not seemingly emerge from nowhere as Laurent Bigot asserts in his video presentation that the Western countries just decided to close their eyes on the structural and recurrent corruption behind a façade democracy (Bigot, 2012). Moreover, even if some of the Tuaregs were part of armed rebellions and certainly committed crimes, they suffered a lot from the brutality of the Malian army during their engagement in diverse rebellions since independence. The Tuaregs suffered from “severe government security force operations, including destruction of their villages and reported massacres” (Cline, 2007, p. 891). In addition, the integration of the Tuaregs remained largely weak since they always lacked connections with Bamako, infrastructure and economic development opportunities (Cissoko, 2011, p. 50 & 57).

While this section attempted to present the historical root causes of the conflict, the section which follows will try to draw the principal lines of the current crisis in NM by showing how it is much more complex than just alleged terrorist threat.

**Present Conflict: A Tentative Assessment**

As mentioned above, the contemporary insurgency is not the first rebellion in NM based on Tuareg identity. However, what differentiates the present conflict from the previous is the fact that, with
their association with armed religious groups, the Tuaregs succeeded in defeating the Malian army and proclaimed independence. The dynamics of the present crisis are various and complex and very much related to the geopolitical situation in the Sahel. This paper is written in the middle of this crisis, so the principal objective of this section is to have an overview on the latest events of this year (2012) as well as to understand the major components of the conflict.

The present conflict has been nourished by political dissatisfaction from the northern peoples of Mali, but has also been sustained by the geopolitical evolution in North Africa and particularly in Libya. The fall of the Gadhafi regime provoked a regional destabilization and some of the Tuaregs who fought for this regime returned from Libya around August 2011 (IRIN, 2012). They arrived in Mali with arms and logistical support and the government of Bamako didn’t do anything to assimilate them into the regular army; president Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) completely failed to reintegrate them into Malian society (Keenan, 2012). The radicalization of certain parts of the Tuareg movement was then more than obvious in October 2011 (IRIN, 2012). In January 2012, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawa (MNLA) was ready to engage in the rebellion (D’Almeida, 2012) that began as a quest for independence and ended up in multiple insurgencies since the MNLA made temporary alliances with the Islamists groups as Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and AD. In February, it began to be clear that ethnicities were being instrumentalized by the different armed groups and it became possible to establish links between those groups and AQMI regarding logistical support (IRIN, 2012). However, it was the coup d’État, on 21 March 2012, that facilitated the process through which the insurgencies won against the Malian army in merely two months (Alvarado, 2012, p. 4). This culminated in the independence of Azawad, in NM, on the 6th of April 2012.

In the meantime, the Malian army suffered several defeats by the insurgencies, was humiliated (Keenan, 2012) and, as will be argued later on, this is why they are so reticent to an external intervention since it is matter of national pride as well. On the one hand, it first gave power to the MNLA to impose its domination on the three principal areas in the north (Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao). On the other hand, this lasted for a short amount of time since religion took on a stronger central role in the crisis, notably due to the difficulty for northern Malians to accept the democratic model, which failed to provide answers to their needs (Bigot, 2012). The
ideological shock between all the groups involved regarding NM’s independence and the imposition of Shari’a Law is very important and uneasy to obscure. The MNLA now lost almost all its territory gained in April to the hands of the Islamists groups (Berthemet, 2012) and it has become a question of who is going to be the privileged interlocutor with Bamako (Diffalah, 2012). Currently, it is very difficult to properly predict the next trajectory of the conflict. Nevertheless, it became clear in the month of August that the population does not appreciate the radical interpretation of Islam preached by the MUJAO or the AD. Many demonstrations have since taken place which show that the general population resent the violent means of punishments imposed by the Shari’a Law (Idoumou, 2012a) that the insurgents have been implementing. Thus, the conflict is quite difficult to evaluate since it is oscillating between civil war, guerrilla insurgencies, secession and communal disorders.

In conclusion, Bamako did not succeed in re-establishing their control over NM due to three important factors: the Tuaregs formed the MNLA which was much more well-armed in comparison to previous insurgencies, the coup d’État permitted them to declare independence and, finally, because of the geopolitical situation in the Sahel (Castillo, 2012). For the same reasons, the crisis in Mali is a geopolitical problem as will be demonstrated in the next section.

Geopolitical Puzzle
The analysis of the Malian conflict is a heavy task since it implies “a clear source of problem for the neighboring states” (Alvarado, 2012, p. 6). Beginning from 2001, the geopolitical situation in the Sahel has been facing increasing destabilization. Security is extremely volatile and the UN estimated in 2009 that 21 tons of cocaine worth US$ 900 million transited through West Africa (Abderrahmane, 2012). The end of the Gadhafi regime also worsened the geopolitical panorama of the Sahel, giving opportunity to criminal groups to obtain arms more easily. Thus, the conflict in Mali can be dangerous at the regional level since it can extend itself to other neighboring countries (Abderrahmane, 2012) and “the shock wave […] could even reach Nigeria” (Alvarado, 2012, p. 7).

The Sahel has always been part of migration processes and trade routes
It is a “confluence of a complex historical and human dynamics” with an increase of arms and drugs trade during the last decade (Roussellier, 2011, p. 8). The numerous antiterrorist programs and stabilizing interventions completely failed to recuperate the volatile situation in the Sahel (Roussellier, 2011, p. 8) as the Malian crisis risks to worsen the current situation. In the meantime, these regional programs also served Bamako because ATT used them as an excuse to get economic and military aid from foreign countries. In fact, at “no time did ATT seriously take on the Tuareg demands, whose threat he did not hesitate to exacerbate in order to obtain aid and additional resources for the struggle against terrorism” (Alvarado, 2012, p. 6).

On the one hand, it seems like Mali insurgency is now taking the route of a nationalist conflict that is transforming itself into an ethno-religious crisis, similar to those in Somalia or Algeria. On the other hand, if the threat is considered real, the governments in the Sahel are also instrumentalizing and amplifying the terrorist threat of AQMI in order to respond to their interests and grab attention and funds from the West (Cline, 2007, p. 891). This is why it is crucial to situate the Malian crisis in a wider context since it also plays a part in the general geopolitical imperative.

Otherwise, if the indications of the links between AQMI and AD are still weak, it appears that the US is increasingly present in the Sahel, taking a more extensive role in the region (Cline, 2007, p. 893). Is Mali falling in the eternal vicious cycle of the dichotomy US-terrorism (Cline, 2007, p. 896)? It is difficult to know for the moment, but what is sure, is that the terrorism threat in Mali might have been too exaggerated. Those links still must be proven since the rebellion is still limited to NM (Alvarado, 2012, p. 6). For the moment, the Tuaregs are forming tactical alliances with AQMI and enjoying their trafficking networks (Zounmenou, 2012;
Roussellier, 2011, p. 8) but we cannot talk about “terrorism” yet. Finally, we need to ask ourselves about the role of Algeria, France or the US in this crisis. In the case of the latter, Mali is believed to be a future site of oil exploitation even if this is not confirmed (Cline, 2007, p. 896). Equally, France has never been an impartial actor in Mali and the US is not well perceived since the increase of its military presence in the region. Natural resources such as uranium and oil that are found in Niger and Mali are mostly in the areas of Tuaregs. This raises yet another question regarding whether the huge militarization of the Sahel is driven by natural resource motives. One must thus be very careful with the power balance in the Sahel, which is way more complex than it is thought to be. Concerning Algeria, it is even more complicated to understand its position. A new state in the region, the Azawad, is a direct threat to the Algerians (Alvarado, 2012, p. 6). Its reluctance to engage in intervention is surprising because it would have been thought that Algeria would be afraid of a more important terrorist threat in the region since there are already seven Algerian diplomats that are captives of the MUJAO (Belmadi and Youcef, 2012). Also, it was believed that Algeria would have tried to affirm its leadership after the fall of Gadhafi regime in order to appear as the only regional power (Alvarado, 2012, p. 6). Is this crisis in Mali an answer to some long-term interests of Algeria (Keenan, 2008, p. 459)? This geopolitical puzzle is thus far from being resolved.

The Dilemma of Intervention

The now recurrent question regarding the crisis in Mali is: does it warrant an external intervention? If yes, who should be in-charge of the intervention: an African regional force, such as an AU force or an international one? Who should decide? Is the Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which authorizes the supranational entity to send blue helmets to re-establish constitutional order, applicable in the Mali case (Gonin and Pérousse de Montclos, 2012)? It seems as though the answer is not so obvious since the Sahel is posing a number of logistical problems that are difficult to manage.
Moreover, the IC faces a multitude of intervention problems. While the Somali and Afghan cases are still uneasy to manage, the Congo is in complete ebullition and Syria is facing a tragic and unprecedented bloodshed while Russia is vetoing intervention. Moreover, the intervention in Libya has been criticized for its numerous civilian casualties while the “responsibility to protect” provoked even more victims under the auspice of NATO. The intervention dilemma is now reaching a climax point in international debates and Mali finds itself at the very heart of it.

The question of intervening in Mali poses numerous problems. It is argued that the military branch, Cédéao, of ECOWAS is better placed to intervene in Mali's internal security that continues to threaten the entire Sahel region. The regional countries, mostly Nigeria, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, have been contemplating sending a stabilizing force of approximately 3,000 to 3,300 men in an attempt to consolidate the transitional institutions in Bamako and re-establish the territorial integrity of Mali (Alvarado, 2012, p. 2; Gueye, 2012a). However, some heads of state, such as Niger, view military intervention as the only possible solution to the conflict (Gueye, 2012a; Idoumou and Oumar, 2012). It the military mission is to be deployed, it would mostly comprise of Senegalese and Nigerian troops (MICEMA) (Gueye, 2012b). However, even if it would be an African solution to an African problem, the mission raises a number of important issues.

First of all, the NM region offers a hostile condition for intervention due to its desert climate, arid terrain and vastness. An ECOWAS operation is largely destined to fail in this context without counting on any support from the Malian army. In addition, ECOWAS’ logistical means for operationalizing the mission are largely insufficient (Alvarado, 2012, p. 2). In the meantime, the Sahelian region continues to experience serious security problems and so are countries bordering Mali with “other significant internal security issues” to deal with (Cline, 2007, p. 891). Therefore, the ECOWAS security framework fails to offer a safe and solid base for a strong consortium to intervene. The other problem with the regional tactical force is that it still has not received the authorization and legitimation of Bamako. No formal demand has been given from Mali for them to engage in a military operation (Abderrahmane, 2012). This is partly why all the regional actors are still prioritizing political dialogue (RFI, 2012) with the different insurgencies in NM.

However, the situation is more complicated as it is difficult to understand which group it is better to talk with. The West
African strategy presents a third logistical problem: Algeria (Belmadi and Youcef, 2012) is totally opposed to the military option yet it is the only regional power with the capacity to respond to the crisis by force. Without Algeria, the mission is more likely to fail. Algeria was opposed to the intervention in Libya, is more than reticent to a military operation in Syria, so it appears to be obvious that the intervention in Mali is not an option for the Algerians. Even if the USA and France are hardly pushing Algeria to intervene by offering logistical support (Belmadi and Youcef, 2012), Algeria is more likely to pursue a political solution. This paper thus concludes that the possibility of a regional intervention lacks seriousness and has resulted in severe divisions in strategic foci. In addition, critics argue that ECOMOG’s previous interventions in Nigeria and Liberia were marred with sexual violence perpetrated by the soldiers who were supposed to restore order (Gonin and Pérousse de Montclos, 2012).

The political negotiations to end the deadlock have also failed to yield solution to the security dilemma in NM as contested issues remain complex and barely understood. While the MNLA lost power, the possibility of holding further negotiations with the religious groups seem predictable (MJAO & AD). However, what is questionable is whether negotiation is a viable option in dealing with the insurgents (Le Pays, 2012)? Although the MNLA may be open to dialogue, it is adamant to change its decision on independence of Azawad. The Islamist groups, too, openly oppose the partition of Mali yet are determined to unconditionally apply the Shari’a Law to the region (Oumar, 2012a). Moreover, much as Blaise Compaoré’s role as the mediator in the conflict catapulted him into international fame and prestige, critics have argued that his agency has instead worsened the conflict.

While Washington is acting with a lot of caution (Berthemet, 2012), the AU is trying to support a military intervention with the help of the UN. The UN critically examined the AU military proposals and rejected it twice on the basis that the text was not precise enough (Guèye, 2012c). It claimed that the demand made to the Security Council will need to be more specific regarding material and human needs and strategies (Journal du Mali, 2012). This is a very questionable option because of the current situation of the UN, which faces multiple fronts at the global level. The UN also received a lot of criticisms regarding the intervention in Libya and its delegation of the dossier to NATO. The “responsibility to protect” has been largely criticized for being a semantic euphemism (Galy, 2012) to legitimize invasion and killing
of civilians. It is also criticized for supporting neo-colonial interests of the superpowers (Galy, 2012). The AU thus proposes a similar intervention to that in Somalia, which means that it would receive the financial and logistical support of the UN but would assume the development of the mission on the ground by itself. However, the effectiveness of AMISOM is another debatable issue. Moreover, since the intervention in Somalia in 1992, the UN adopted a regional approach by disengaging themselves from directly intervening in Africa in general. The perspective of an international intervention is then also improbable.

Additionally, it seems that the Malians are very reticent to an international intervention and are looking for recuperating their national pride. In that sense, they seem not to be interested in waiting for an international or regional operation (Sanou, 2012). It is believed that Bamako is trying to mobilize a special force in order to confront the crisis in NM (RFI, 2012a). However, this might also be a failure as they risk their young recruits to confront something similar to urban guerrilla.

Voices from Victims

“War loves to seek its victims in the young.”
-Sophocles

As the insurgencies in NM have become more complex and radicalized, civilians suffer from multiple forms of violence as international organizations face difficulties in accessing the region. It is not very clear as to which group perpetrates the violence, or which group protects the civilians from the other. It seems that the situation more closely resembles a civil war rather than a political declaration of independence. The civil disorder and multiple radical organizations in the region make an explosive cocktail for the population that is already confronted with a number of structural problems. This section explores the different ways in which the population has become the victim of the events that have taken place since the beginning of the year.

In the introduction of the present work, we mentioned that it is estimated that 200,000 people needed to escape from their homes due to the growing violence between the different groups. In Gao alone, 35,000 people have fled since January 2012, which totals half of the population (Libération, 2012). The people that are still in the region of NM continue to face harsh reality. Men, women and children are the victims of what can be perceived as a mixture of religious and nationalist demands that are less clear each day as the violence is, on the contrary, getting worse.

While the civilian men cannot do anything against the violence because the
groups are well armed, women and children are the primary victims of the conflict. Human Rights Watch and UNICEF denounce the various violations perpetrated by the different factions in NM. Whereas organizations such as UNICEF cannot access the region due to the volatile security situation of NM (UN, 2012), they have been conducting diverse investigations in partnership with local organizations in order to document the abuse. On the one hand, it is reported that women are victims of sexual abuse. These sexual crimes are committed by both the Islamists groups and the separatists even if data are still missing to determine exactly how many cases are attributed to each group (RNU, 2012). The instances of sexual abuses are not isolated and are increasing throughout the northern region. Young women are also abducted and raped repeatedly. In Gao alone, 17 cases of violent sexual aggression have been reported and there is thought to be many more undocumented. The abuses seemed to have been perpetrated more so by the MNLA in this region, however, this has not been officially proven (Marièke, 2012).

On the other hand, UNICEF, Human Rights Watch and the UN cited the recruitment of children in the militias of the Islamists groups and the MNLA factions (UN, 2012; RNU, 2012). It is still difficult at the moment to determine the number of children that have been recruited in the various groups, but UNICEF claimed that at least 175 of them already part of the armed group ranks and are estimated to be aged between 8 and 12 years old (UNICEF, 2012). The fact that most of the schools are closed also worsens child recruitment since the children are more vulnerable when they do not have a productive activity that retains their attention. It is estimated that the basic education of over 300,000 students might be in danger and this also increases the chance that they will fall victims of armed resistance (UNICEF, 2012). Moreover, the situation in NM is increasingly volatile and the children are also victims of the collateral damage. Many of them have been mutilated or killed by explosive devices. In fact, half of the mutilated victims are children (RNU, 2012).

To all of this, there is the problem associated with the intention of the Islamist groups applying a strict Sharia interpretation to NM. Reported cases of flagellations and forced ways of dressing (not usual for the ethnic groups in NM since their traditional dresses do not conform to the rigid Sharia’s requirements) have been seriously taken into account and a number of civilians are fearing this sudden change in their way of living (Oumar, 2012).
Finally, it is also difficult to identify who is perpetrating the violence. It is argued that both the Islamists of MUJAO and Ansar Dine, and the nationalists of MNLA are implicated in violence and acts of terrorism. However, the military forces and the central government in Bamako are so weak that they cannot respond to this juridical problem, leaving the perpetrators unpunished. Consequently, Bamako is seeking the help of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in addressing the problem since severe violations of International Humanitarian Law have been perpetrated within the past months in NM. The ICC has been asked to investigate the war crimes occurring in the Sahel on the basis of a number of allegations of human rights violations denounced by various NGOs and international organizations (Gueye, 2012a). In addition to the insecurity, an outbreak of cholera has been reported in Mali: out of the 34 reported cases, at least 2 known fatalities have been recorded (RNU, 2012). In general, the population suffers from the absence of the state to ensure their most basic rights. The hospitals lack medical supplies and most of the furniture they receive from the International Committee of the Red Cross is given to the combatants and not the civilians (Idoumou, 2012). The appalling sanitary situation coupled with food crisis aggravated by the worst drought since the beginning of the insurrections in January 2012 are affecting about 18 million people in the Sahel (CARE, 2012). This paints a pretty dark and uncertain future for the Northern Malians.

**Concluding Thoughts**

At the time of compiling this paper, the political crisis in Mali was far from being resolved. On the 14th and 15th of August 2012, the Malian government and its army met the heads of state of the Cédéao in order to establish a concrete plan that would be implemented under the auspice of the UN (Kamguia K., 2012). The outcome of the meeting was not successful since the Malian government did not accept one of the three proposals of the plan. Mali did not accept the fact that external actors would take charge of the transitional institutions of Bamako. To the Malian army and government, this is a war that nobody can conduct except the Malians themselves (Kamguia K., 2012). However, they accepted the logistical support offered by the Cédéao with the aim of reorganizing the military forces and reconquering the northern part of the country that is currently monopolized by Tuareg Islamists.

The most recent data concerning the displaced people are even more alarming. More than 436,000 people fled from their homes due to the crisis and around 140 cases of cholera have been documented with 11 deaths (AFP, 2012). A rapid solution is necessary in order to avoid a degradation of
the situation as was the case with Somalia. The good news is that, at least, the extremist groups are not enjoying a lot of credibility among the Sufi culture that characterizes Mali’s population. In fact, the Islamists are having trouble in convincing the population that their ideology can be an alternative to democracy and are thus trying to reach new sections of the Malian society in order to gain support, but in vain (Idoumou, 2012a). Moreover, the population in NM is now organizing itself to protect people from the exaction perpetrated by the insurgents (Powelton, 2012). The unique preoccupation would be that the links between AQMI, Al-Shabaab or Boko Haram become more pronounced (Griswold, 2012) to the point that they could be involved in huge criminal activities such as drug trade to finance their organisations or through kidnap.

What should be done in Mali? Is an international or regional intervention necessary? Is the Malian army giving too much of a chauvinist connotation to the crisis by prioritizing the pride over the security of the civilians? Why is Algeria so reticent regarding intervention? Why is the Cédéao so insistent? This paper was an attempt to portray the actual situation in Mali and to open up new avenues to understand the crisis. It is important to specify that the Tuaregs never formed a united political entity (Castillo, 2012) and this is why this paper chose to discuss multiple insurgencies. Mali is confronting a very fragile and volatile situation that is geopolitically not easy to manage. The truth is that, even if a regional approach might be the best solution, the Malians still face a huge and unanswered question regarding democracy.

ACRONYMS

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<td>AFP</td>
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