

**Testimony by Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson,
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“The Crisis in Mali: U.S. Interests and the International Response.”

Thank you very much Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and Members of the Committee for the chance to testify before you on this important topic. The evolving crisis in Mali is one of the most difficult, complex, and urgent problems West Africa has faced in decades. Mali’s problems reflect the fragility of governance in the region, the lack of economic development -- especially in northern Mali – the absence of meaningful opportunities for people to engage with their governments, and the widespread desperation that exists in an unforgiving, arid region with chronic food insecurity. The March 2012 coup and subsequent loss of northern Mali to Islamic extremists demonstrates all too clearly how quickly terrorists prey upon fragile states. Poor governance, weak democratic institutions, and a lack of development and economic opportunity create fertile ground for terrorism and instability.

As the Malian government, regional partners, and the international community continue to respond vigorously to the ongoing crisis in Mali, we must be mindful of the four underlying challenges Mali continues to face: al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb’s (AQIM) continued presence in northern Mali, the restoration of democracy, the need to begin negotiations with northern groups that renounce terrorism and recognize the unity of the Malian state, and a significant ongoing humanitarian crisis. Failure to address these challenges – comprehensively and simultaneously – risks perpetuating the cycle of violence and

insecurity that has plagued northern Mali for decades and threatened stability across the Sahel.

1. Threats from Terrorists in Mali and Beyond

The presence of extremists in northern Mali poses a threat to the entire Sahel region – and beyond. While the security situation in northern Mali has changed over the last month due to French intervention, we remain concerned about the continued presence of terrorist and extremist groups, including AQIM and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). The French are disrupting and dislodging terrorist enclaves, and liberating northern towns and populations after more than a year of terrorist occupation. Neutralizing the full scope of the terrorist threat in Mali, however, is a long-term effort.

We also must remember that terrorism is a threat that knows no boundaries. We are partnering with countries throughout the region to support their efforts to strengthen border security and their capacity to respond to threats. Our regional counterterrorism support is coordinated through the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). The primary goal of this program is to address the threat of AQIM. As AQIM has expanded its reach through the flow of arms, supplies, and fighters from North Africa into the region, our assistance and support through the partnership continues to evolve to meet the changing threat.

We continue to work with regional and international partners to deny terrorists safe haven wherever they attempt to operate. And while a security response is critical, we must not forget the underlying causes that drive regional instability and create opportunities for violence to thrive. Terrorists and extremist

groups exploited the political chaos created by the northern rebellion in Mali and the coup to expand their safe haven and impose their radical ideology on populations who have long considered such ideology abhorrent. Weak or nonexistent governance and a lack of development throughout the region make many countries vulnerable to such exploitation. We must therefore work collectively with the countries in the region to not only mount a strong and coordinated security response, but we must also reduce the underlying vulnerabilities to extremism by strengthening good governance and promoting economic development.

We commend and strongly support the ongoing French and African military operation in northern Mali. On December 20, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2085, co-sponsored by the United States, which recognized Mali's overlapping challenges; underscored the international community's support for restoring peace, security, stability, and territorial integrity to Mali; and authorized the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). On January 10, extremist groups, including AQIM and Ansar al Dine, mounted a surprise attack into government-held territory and captured the village of Konna north of Mopti in central Mali. Responding to a request by the Malian government, France launched Operation Serval to prevent AQIM from moving further south. From the very beginning and at the request of the Malian government, we worked closely with the French to support their efforts and those of our African partners. We continue to support their efforts by sharing information, providing airlift support for personnel and equipment, and aerial refueling. My colleague Amanda Dory will go into more detail on Department of Defense support. We continue to coordinate closely at the highest-levels with the

French on a wide-range of military and political efforts to promote long-term stability in Mali.

Following the start of French operations on January 11, AFISMA began expediting the deployment of African troops to Bamako. Troops from Nigeria, Niger, Benin, Togo, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Chad are already in Mali. Subject to Congressional notification, the Department of State intends to provide up to \$96 million during Fiscal Year 2013 to support AFISMA. As part of this assistance effort, we provided strategic airlift for the deployment of the Togolese contingent to Mali and are providing logistics support for AFISMA troops deployed in Mali. We have sent teams from our Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program to those ECOWAS states that have pledged troops to AFISMA to identify gaps in training and equipment and to accelerate training and equipping of deploying troops.

We welcome the continued progress of French and African operations in Mali. And we agree that the challenge now is to stabilize northern Mali and protect civilians and human rights while maintaining pressure on terrorist groups and advancing the political track. We believe a transition to a UN-authorized and UN-led effort – which brings to bear all the UN comparative advantages of an integrated mission – would be suitable under the right conditions to solidify French gains on the ground. Such a transition will take time, as French and AFISMA operations on the ground continue, and as the UN plans, in consultation with Malian and African partners, for an integrated UN mission in Mali. But the goals of any UN mission would include helping to stabilize those parts of Mali where the French have successfully pushed out extremist and terrorist elements, supporting

the Malian political transitional government in its efforts to implement a comprehensive political roadmap and build effective governing institutions, monitoring and reporting on human rights, and supporting regional and international efforts to address the humanitarian crisis.

It is critical that the Malian Defense and Security Forces be adequately trained and equipped to effectively partner with the international force. Consistent with applicable legal restrictions, we terminated our foreign assistance programs with the government of Mali following the March 2012 military coup, including foreign assistance activities with the Government of Mali; with a few limited exceptions in election support, humanitarian work, and life-saving health programming, our full assistance programming with the government cannot resume until a democratically-elected government is in place. The European Union (EU) is leading efforts to reform and rebuild the Malian military through an EU Training Mission which has already begun deploying to Mali. Many other countries have stepped up to provide support. During a January 30 donors' conference attended by over 90 countries and international organizations, and organized by the African Union in Addis Ababa, countries pledged over \$455.5 million in support for Mali, AFISMA, and regional development.

2. Restoring Democratically-Elected Government

The gains achieved by French and African forces on the battlefield in northern Mali will be short-lived if not accompanied by elections, strengthened institutions, and national reconciliation to restore Mali's tradition of democratic governance. Democratic elections will give the Malian government the credibility

it needs to effectively partner with regional militaries, negotiate with northern populations, and reassert civilian rule. We welcomed the Malian National Assembly's January 29 unanimous approval of a political road map to restore democracy and promote national reconciliation. We also welcome interim Malian President Dioncounda Traore's commitment to implement this roadmap and hold presidential elections by July 31, 2013. The road map is a critical first step towards legitimate and inclusive governance; an absolute necessity for any durable solution. We urge the interim Malian government to implement the plan seriously and expeditiously.

The road map provides a framework to quickly move the political process forward, and clearly states that members of the current transitional government are not eligible to run for office, as called for by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). While the road map reflects an important commitment by many of Mali's political actors to hasten the return to constitutional rule, we call on the Malian authorities to provide greater detail and clarity on the sequence of steps necessary to prepare for credible, free, transparent, and inclusive elections. We also urge the Malian government to move ahead in developing the necessary legislation called for in the road map, including amendments to the electoral law.

Elections must be conducted free from intimidation and interference by military and security forces. We continue to unequivocally state that coup leader Captain Sanogo and the rest of the military junta members must remove themselves - completely and permanently - from Malian politics. We have imposed targeted travel sanctions on 87 individuals who were involved in the coup, who supported its authors, or who continue to impede the restoration of democracy. Any continued interference in Mali's progress towards the restoration

of democracy is unacceptable and risks the imposition of further sanctions from the United States, partner countries, and international organizations.

We have strongly condemned all human rights abuses in Mali by any group and call for the perpetrators to be held accountable. We support the statements from Malian officials and civil society leaders that there will be no impunity for human rights abuses. All actors – military, rebel, and otherwise – in Mali have an obligation to adhere to applicable international law and respect human rights. We support the African Union’s commitment to send human rights monitors to Mali and welcome the Swiss government’s pledge of \$1 million to support the team’s deployment. Ensuring the protection of its own citizens must be the foundation of any credible and legitimate government.

3. Negotiations with the North

We condemn those in northern Mali who continue to align themselves with terrorists. There can be no dialogue with those who support terrorism. We also recognize that the indigenous populations of northern Mali, who have a history of resisting foreign Islamic extremists and have welcomed the arrival of French forces, have legitimate political, social, and economic grievances. The Tuareg rebellion that started in northern Mali in January 2012 is part of a longstanding cycle of rebellion and failed attempts to address these grievances. Stopping northern Mali’s cycle of instability will require a serious and sustained effort by Malian authorities, non-extremist northern groups, regional actors, and international partners to address the legitimate political and economic grievances of non-extremist northern groups from Timbuktu to Gao to Kidal. We applaud the political roadmap’s support for long-term negotiations and its openness to dialogue

with those groups that renounce armed struggle, adhere to the principles of democracy and the rule of law, and accept without condition Mali's territorial integrity. We call on Malian authorities to follow through on this commitment to address the political and economic needs of northern populations that reject terrorism and accept Mali's territorial integrity.

We strongly support the resumption of negotiations with all parties who have cut ties to terrorist organizations, have renounced violence, and who recognize, without conditions, the unity and territorial integrity of the Malian state. We are encouraging the Malian government to quickly establish the Commission for Negotiations, as called for in the roadmap. We commend Burkinabe President Compaore, the ECOWAS-appointed mediator, for his leadership in the negotiation process and support his continued efforts in this regard. We are also working closely with neighboring countries and the international community to lend support to the negotiating process. Any successful process must address the short-term need to restore Mali's territorial integrity, while at the same time laying the foundation for the long-term, open dialogue needed to address legitimate grievances and build trust between the northern populations and their government.

4. Humanitarian Crisis

Mali and the rest of the Sahel region have long suffered from chronic food insecurity. The conflict in Mali exacerbated an already difficult humanitarian situation caused by drought and poor harvests followed by flooding. Since the start of the fighting in Mali, more than 400,000 people have become refugees or internally displaced. This includes over 240,000 people displaced within Mali and nearly 170,000 refugees in Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Algeria. These

numbers also include the more than 22,000 new refugees who have fled Mali and the more than 14,000 newly displaced persons within Mali since the extremist offensive and French counter operations began last month. We commend the neighboring countries that have welcomed Malian refugees despite their own food security challenges.

The United States continues to work to mitigate the effects of this humanitarian crisis. In fiscal year 2012 and to date in fiscal year 2013, the United States provided more than \$120 million in humanitarian assistance to address the emergency in Mali. This is part of the more than \$467 million in humanitarian assistance we have provided to the Sahel region in fiscal years 2012 and 2013. The humanitarian situation is and will likely remain very fluid, requiring strategies and programs to adapt in order to meet changing conditions on the ground.

We continue to call on the international community to support a comprehensive humanitarian response, including assistance for the displaced and conflict-affected in Mali and in the broader region. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recently issued its 2013 consolidated appeal, seeking more than \$370 million to assist 4.3 million vulnerable Malians countrywide. We are also urging the international community to respond comprehensively and adequately to the humanitarian needs across the whole Sahel region.

In closing, we must remember that any military success will be fleeting without a democratic and credible government that is responsive to the needs of all Malians. We will continue to urge the interim Malian government to implement the political road map seriously and expeditiously. We are asking our partners to

urge the same. Any military gains will be eroded if political instability and uncertainty return. The French and African intervention has created a valuable opportunity that must not be missed. We will work to ensure that military success can be translated into long-term stability by encouraging expedited elections, marginalizing the military junta, holding perpetrators accountable for human rights abuses, and supporting a national reconciliation process that addresses the longstanding and legitimate grievances of northern populations. By continuing to address Mali's multiple challenges simultaneously and comprehensively, we aim to break the cycle of conflict in favor of a just, lasting and prosperous peace.