

The Crisis in Mali: U.S. Interests and the International Response

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Mister Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the crisis in Mali and how the Department of Defense is working to secure our interests there.

The Department of Defense is concerned about the conflict in Mali and is working with international and interagency partners to counter extremists and restore Malian sovereignty. The French are operating in Mali following a request from Bamako to counter the threat posed by al Qaeda and affiliates and to help the Malians regain control of their territory, consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2085. We are supporting the French by providing intelligence, aerial refueling services, and airlift, and are pursuing a range of funding options for our contributions. The counterterrorism effort in Mali complements the parallel U.S. strategic objectives to support a sustainable solution to northern grievances, help Mali transition back to democracy, and ameliorate the humanitarian situation.

As you know, DoD engagement with the Malian Armed Forces is restricted by interagency policy agreement as a result of the coup last March. However, we continue to work to support Mali's neighbors to contain and degrade shared threats. We are also working with the State Department to support the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) authorized by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2085 on December 20. AFRICOM and the Department of State are engaged with AFISMA to refine the requirements for the mission and match them with international contributions.

DoD's broader efforts in North and West Africa are focused on building the capacity of partners to counter shared threats and provide security for their people. We incorporate military professionalism, ethics, and human rights training throughout our engagements and that training yields positive results. As you know, intervention by the military in politics is anathema to our values and the importance we place on civilian control of the military.

The military coup in Mali was an outgrowth of the January 2012 rebellion and the Malian government's response to it. This rebellion is the fourth since Mali gained its independence in 1960 and was the result of long-standing, unresolved conflicts between the government in Bamako and its northern population. Unlike in previous rebellions, northern Tuaregs with legitimate political grievances began working with hardened and armed extremists, some associated with AQIM. Drawing on weapons and fighters from North Africa, this new rebellion resulted in an armed advance on population centers, destruction of world heritage sites and the imposition of brutal rule.

DoD was actively engaged in Mali prior to the coup, but part of the challenge we encountered was that the Malian government was not as focused as we were on countering AQIM. From Fiscal Years 2009 to 2012, the USG spent approximately \$41M in training and equipping a

limited number of units in the Malian Armed Forces to enable them to put pressure on AQIM. However, rather than moving against AQIM – despite indications that the terrorist threat was growing – the Government of Mali focused primarily on the threat posed by the Tuaregs. As a result, we began to shift our efforts to countries like Mauritania and Niger, which were more focused on the counterterrorism mission.

In the period following the rebellion and coup, northern Mali became a safe haven for AQIM and affiliates, that made it easier for these groups to recruit supporters and export extremism. This is part of a growing terrorist presence in the region that threatens U.S. citizens, interests, and partners, as we saw in Benghazi, Libya and In Amenas, Algeria. While we have not seen indications that AQIM is capable of attacking the United States directly, the group maintains the ability to attack western interests, and to attack or kidnap westerners for ransom. AQIM is part of a network of violent extremist organizations in Africa, from Egypt to Libya to Somalia to Nigeria. The risk of cross-fertilization and cross-pollination between affiliated groups is one we're very concerned about. The threat is dynamic and evolving and our efforts to counter it must be as well.

France's intervention in Mali has contributed to shared strategic objectives in multiple ways. These include shrinking AQIM's safe haven, contributing to the restoration of Malian territorial integrity, and setting the enabling conditions for elections. We support the French military action, but there is no consideration of putting U.S. combat forces on the ground in Mali. We are also continuing U.S. capacity building activities to enable regional partners. Notwithstanding the setbacks DoD faced in Mali, our model of building the capacity of African partners to take responsibility for their own security remains appropriate, and has been successful with other states in the region. We have built strong security relationships with Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and elsewhere, and believe that persistent engagement with these partners will continue to yield benefits.

As the French transition from leading combat operations to a stabilization mission, it will be critical that the international community help Mali craft a sustainable African-led solution that addresses legitimate grievances, maintains pressure on extremists and ensures protection of civilians. The DoD strongly believes in the need to address parallel political, security, and humanitarian crises, and will continue to provide requested support to international and interagency efforts to do so.