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A group affair: understanding involvement in terrorism in Mali

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Chapter 4 – The Malian context³⁸⁴

4.1 Introduction

This study empirically investigates involvement in terrorism in Mali and specifically, the role of social, psychological, cultural, and economic factors that play a role in becoming involved in terrorism in the country. The choice to study Mali is based on three reasons. First, as explained in the introduction, Mali has been experiencing a violent conflict since 2012 between different terrorist groups and the national government, which has been extended to the international level with the deployment of French troops in the country and the establishment of the UN peace-keeping mission MINUSMA, thus providing the study with a context where the international influence and impact can also be taken into consideration.³⁸⁵ Second, literature and research on terrorism in the country, its forms and connections with other crimes, is very limited and suffers from a Western bias, as demonstrated in chapters one and two. Thus, the literature requires further expansion and empirical research in the field,³⁸⁶ especially in non-Western contexts. Third, access to primary sources was facilitated through the researcher's participation in a training project in Mali, including access to individuals charged with terrorism-related crimes, local and national government actors, and international institutions working in Mali.

This chapter will describe the context within which the research took place, providing an introduction into Mali as a country and the complex conflict it is experiencing involving non-state actors including terrorist groups, organised crime networks, and external actors mandated to stabilise the country. Based on a literature review, the objective of this chapter is to provide a background to the empirical research through describing the Malian context, including its history and geopolitical situation, and identifying and analysing the elements that play a role in the on-going Malian conflict. The first part of this chapter will provide a brief overview of Mali as a country, its geography, economy, ethnic make-up, and political situation. The second part will put the current conflict in its historical perspective, tracing the evolution of the situation in Mali from the outbreak of the 2012 rebellion to the present. This background will serve as the basis for the second part of the chapter, in which the country context will be analysed from a broader historical and geopolitical perspective. The macro and meso level factors that play a role in the current conflict form the backdrop against which individual involvement occurs and will further contextualise the empirical research in this thesis. Whereas this chapter is based on both academic literature as well as information from media sources and reports by international organisations like the UN or the International Crisis Group, in chapter seven, additional contextual information on the country is provided based on interviews with professionals. However, that data functions as a background to their personal understanding of the situation in Mali and engagement in terrorism whereas this chapter provides the background within which the empirical research can be better understood.

³⁸⁴ Parts of this chapter have been published in 2018, see Elena Dal Santo and Liesbeth van der Heide. 'Escalating Complexity in Regional Conflicts: Connecting Geopolitics to Individual Pathways to Terrorism in Mali'. *African Security* 11, no. 3 (2018): 274–91.

³⁸⁵ Sergei Boeke and Bart Schuurman, 'Operation "Serval": A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali, 2013–2014', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 6 (19 September 2015): 801–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2015.1045494>.

³⁸⁶ Jackson, 'Critical Terrorism Studies: An Explanation, a Defence and a Way Forward', 18.

4.2 Country context

Mali is a large country in West Africa that borders on seven other countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger, Senegal and Mauritania. It has a population of nearly 18.4 million.³⁸⁷ It is the seventh-largest country on the African continent and is located in the north-western Sahel region that stretches from the Atlantic coast in the East to Sudan in the West. In the North, Mali's northern regions extend partially into the Saharan deserts and the country is characterized by a semi-arid climate. The southern regions account for most of the economic activity and food production as the lands in the southern region are much more fertile. The economy is mainly driven by pastoralists and agriculture and cotton and gold making up about 80 percent of exports. High annual fiscal fluctuation and the dependency on few export goods leave Mali dependent on foreign aid.³⁸⁸ Sixty percent³⁸⁹ of the population lives in the countryside and they rely mainly on the informal economy as farmers and fishermen.³⁹⁰ According to an overview of country's economic indicators, Mali's economic situation can be described as follows:

Prior to several political crises (starting in 2012) and resulting instability, Mali had been on track to reducing poverty, with gross domestic product (GDP) growth during 2007-2010 averaging at 4.9 percent per year. As a consequence of a political crisis in 2012, however, Mali experienced zero economic growth and an increase of only 1.7 percent in 2013. From 2014-2018 GDP growth has increased 5 to 6 percent amid higher rainfall and better harvests.³⁹¹

Today, despite the temporary economic stability, Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 182nd on the 2019 Human Development Index³⁹², with approximately 36 percent of the population living below the poverty line (2017 est.).³⁹³

Various ethnic communities inhabit Mali: the country comprises approximately 60 ethnic groups who speak at least 20 languages.³⁹⁴ In a simplified description, the North is mainly populated by nomadic communities, including the Tuaregs and the Arabs, while the rest of the country is populated by Sub-Saharan. The majority of the latter are sedentary farmers (such as the Songhaïs) with the exception of the Peuls, who are nomadic pastoralists, and who are also known in other Sub-Saharan countries as the Fulbe or the Fulani.³⁹⁵ As Gregory Chauzal and Thibault van Damme note in their research on the origins of Mali's

³⁸⁷ Africa: Mali — The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency', CIA -World Factbook, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>.

³⁸⁸ Francesca Bastagli and Camilla Toulmin, 'Mali: Economic Factors behind the Crisis' (European Parliament - Directorate General for External Policies, 2014); 'Export Dependence and Export Concentration' (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2010),

https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Towards%20Human%20Resilience/Towards_SustainingMDGProgress_Chapter1.pdf.

³⁸⁹ 'Mali Population (2019)', Worldometers, accessed 20 December 2019, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/mali-population/>.

³⁹⁰ 'Mali - Country Partnership Framework for the Period FY16-19', Country Partnership Framework (Washington DC: World Bank, 2015), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/839461468198005347/Mali-Country-partnership-framework-for-the-period-FY16-19>.

³⁹¹ 'Africa: Mali — The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency'.

³⁹² '2019 Human Development Report' (UNDP), accessed 20 December 2019, https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2019/To_answer_global_protests_tackle_new_inequalities_2019_Human_Development_Report.html.

³⁹³ 'Africa: Mali — The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency'.

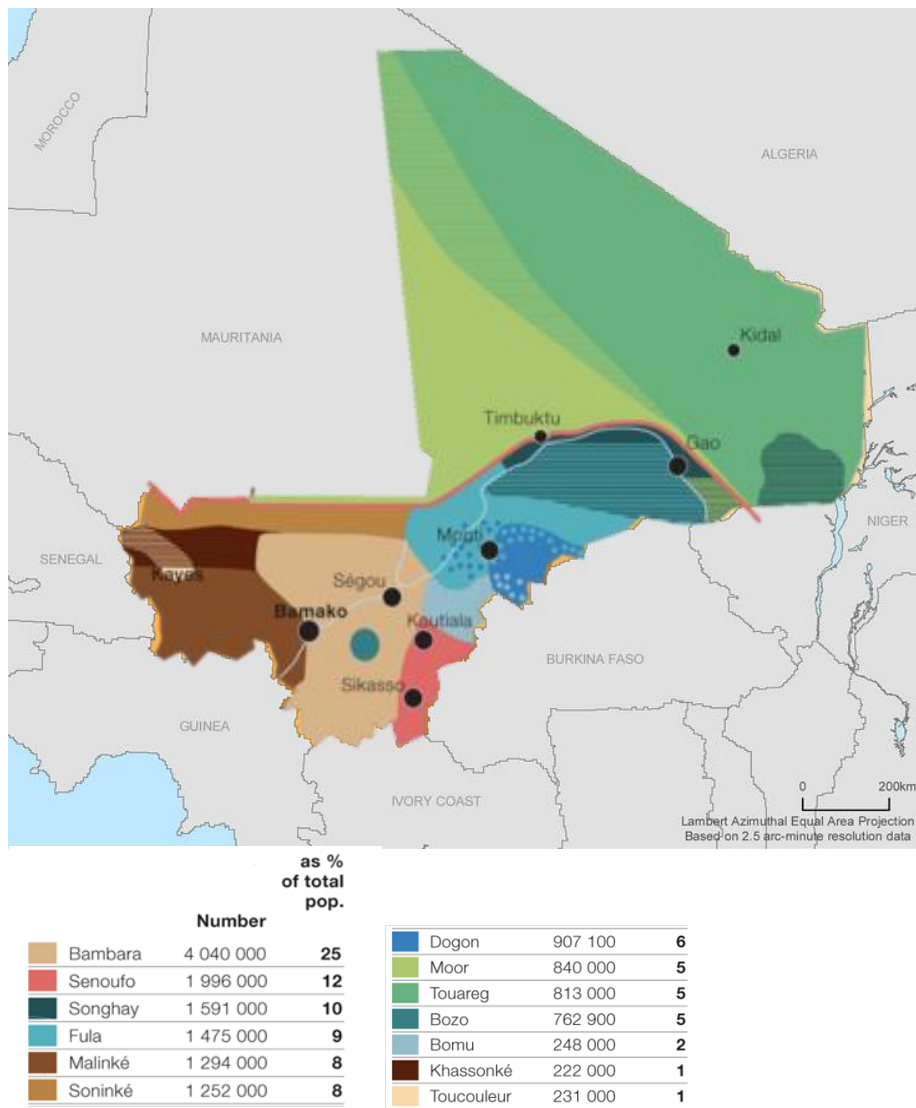
³⁹⁴ 'An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel - Geography, Economics and Security' (Paris: OECD, 2014), 187, <https://www.oecd.org/publications/an-atlas-of-the-sahara-sahel-9789264222359-en.htm>.

³⁹⁵ Kalilou Sidibé, 'Security Management in Northern Mali: Criminal Networks and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms', *IDS Research Reports* 2012, no. 77 (2012): 1–103.

conflict, nomadic populations from the North are often associated with violence and insecurity because of their historical tradition to conduct raids against sedentary groups.³⁹⁶ These ethnic groups do not share customs and traditions and present different socio-political, cultural, and security claims. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the predominant ethnic groups in Mali.

Figure 4.1 – Distribution of ethnic groups across Mali

Source: Adapted from ‘Atlas Jeune Afrique 2010’, in Bossard, L., *op. cit.*, OECD, Sahel and West Africa Club, 2015, 191, and SEDAC Maps



Historically, Mali was officially called the Sudanese Republic until it was renamed after it became independent from France in 1960. Modibo Keita became President in 1960 in a single-party socialist government, ousted by a military coup led by Moussa Traore in 1968. The military rule, which led to numerous border clashes between Mali and its neighbours, ended in 1991 when Traore was toppled in a military coup and replaced by a transitional committee. In 1992 Alpha Konare became the first democratically elected President in Mali’s multi-party elections, bringing slight economic prosperity, but also increasing tribal tensions within Mali. In 2002 Amadou Toumani Toure was elected President amid allegations of fraud and won his second 5-year term election in 2007, a time in which Tuareg rebellion rose

³⁹⁶ Chauzal and van Damme, ‘The Roots of Mali’s Conflict’, 19.

temporarily.³⁹⁷ A military coup in March 2012 overthrew President Toure, after Islamist militant groups executed 97 Malian soldiers after the battle for Aguelhok in late January 2012.³⁹⁸ The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) returned power to an interim civilian administration under President Traore in April 2012. In 2013 Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) won the Presidential election.³⁹⁹ The 2018 elections, held in July, led to a run-off vote between IBK, who garnered 41.4 percent of the vote, and his main rival Soumaila Cisse, who won 17.8 percent of the vote.⁴⁰⁰ In April 2019, Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga and his entire staff resigned.⁴⁰¹ The resignation came ahead of a no-confidence vote over his administrations inability to quell the rise in attacks from “Islamist militants and clashes between ethnic communities.”⁴⁰² Mali’s history political instability continued when in 2020, after weeks of civil protests against the government over insecurity and corruption, the military staged a coup and arrested Mali’s both president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, as well as the prime minister Boubou Cissé. And in May 2021, another military coup took place that toppled Mali’s president Bah Ndaw.⁴⁰³

The Sahel region has become a focal point for many insurgent and terrorist groups over the past decade⁴⁰⁴ and West African states have been faced with a range of security issues including cross-border narco-trafficking, terrorist attacks, and the rise of radical Islamic networks in the region. For Mali, terrorism and insurgent groups are the country’s number one security problem, as illustrated by the 2015 Radisson Blu attack as well as a proliferation of terrorist attacks in the central regions of Mopti and Ségou⁴⁰⁵ and in the capital Bamako⁴⁰⁶ from 2016-2020.



Figure 4.2 – Historical Tuareg Region, Economist, November 2012
 In 2012, the country experienced a Tuareg rebellion, an extremist takeover of the North, and a military coup. The context in the northern regions of Mali is marked by conflict, both along ethnic lines

news/world-africa-13881978.
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ncy’.
 le 12 août 2018 : Des Maliens contre une
 s://www.maliweb.net/politique/second-tour-
 ns-contre-une-crise-postelectorale-

and His Entire Government Resign’, CNN,

19 April 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/19/africa/mali-government-resigns-intl/index.html>.

⁴⁰²Bokar Sangare, ‘Mali’s Prime Minister Resigns After Spike in Deadly Violence’, *Bloomberg*, 19 April 2019, sec. Business, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-19/mali-s-prime-minister-resigns-as-country-sees-spike-in-violence>.

⁴⁰³ David Lewis, ‘Military detain Mali’s president, prime minister and defence minister.’, Reuters, 24 May 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/military-arrest-malis-president-prime-minister-defence-minister-sources-2021-05-24/>.

⁴⁰⁴ Grégory Chauzal and Thibault van Damme, ‘The roots of Mali’s conflict’, *Clingendael CRU Report* 11 (2015).

⁴⁰⁵ Including an attack on a hotel in Sévaré and many deadly attacks between ethnic groups such as the attack on Ogossagou in 2019.

⁴⁰⁶ Including an attack on nightclub ‘La Terrasse’ and the Radisson Blu attack in 2015 and a terrorist attack on ‘[wellness fility ‘Le Campement’ in 2019.

as as well as against government forces, all leading to an increase in the militarisation of the existing frictions. According to a World Bank report on Mali:

By mid-2012, Northern Mali was completely seized by the armed separatist and jihadist groups. The region soon fell to several extremist groups. A military force consisting of French and the Economic Community of West African States militaries assisted the Malian army in regaining control of much of the North and enabled a short-lived peace in 2013. A peace agreement brokered by Algeria was finally signed between the government, pro-government groups, and the rebel movements on 15 May and 20 June 2015.

The past and current situation in the country has persistent consequences on the regional, national, and international level. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) alone more than doubled between January 2018, when there were 48,000, to 123,574 in January 2019. As of January 2019, 71,156 refugees returned to Mali and 135,147 Malian refugees and Asylum Seekers in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger.⁴⁰⁷ Approximately 3.2 million people (18 percent of its population) are in dire need of humanitarian support.⁴⁰⁸ About 5.1 million people (more than 27 percent of the population) live in areas affected by the crisis, with one in five people suffering from food insecurity. The number of children suffering from severe malnourishment has increased more than 10 percent between 2017 and 2018 from 142,000 to 165,000⁴⁰⁹, and has increased even more to 170,000 in 2019.⁴¹⁰

The enduring turmoil in Mali's northern region, coupled with a downturn in the economic situation over the past years has led – among other things – to a decrease in foreign investments in the country by 64 percent. As mentioned earlier, most of the economic activity takes place in the southern parts of Mali – partially due to the serious dislocation of individuals in groups in the North. This, in turn, has led to an increase in illegal activities that further undermine the country's security, including drug and human trafficking and piracy.

From a Western perspective, Mali was long hailed as the African success story – as one of the few countries that posed the democratic example for Africa.⁴¹¹ After the military coup in 2012, it became clear that the civilian government enjoyed very little popular support throughout Malian society⁴¹² and that the foundations of democracy in Mali were weak at best.⁴¹³ As this chapter shows, the takeover by Jihadi rebels in the North, which is viewed as an existential threat by the Malian – as well as many neighbouring West African governments – demonstrates Mali's security dilemma. The fluid and shifting boundaries between terrorist and separatist groups, and the mutual perceptions of the other party

⁴⁰⁷ 'Mali Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #1, Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 - Mali', ReliefWeb, accessed 1 August 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-1-fiscal-year-fy-2019>.

⁴⁰⁸ 'Internally Displaced Population Falls in Mali', International Organization for Migration, 2 February 2016, <https://www.iom.int/news/internally-displaced-population-falls-mali>.

⁴⁰⁹ 'Mali: \$263 Million Sought to Assist Most Vulnerable with Humanitarian Support, Says UN Relief Official', UN News, 15 February 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/02/1002861>.

⁴¹⁰ 'Mali', UNICEF - Humanitarian Action for Children, 8 January 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/mali.html>.

⁴¹¹ Kalifa Keita, 'Conflict and conflict resolution in the Sahel: The Tuareg insurgency in Mali', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 9, no. 3 (1998): 102-128; Robert Pringle, 'Mali's Unlikely Democracy', *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 30, no. 2 (2006): 31-39.

⁴¹² R. James Bingen, David Robinson, and John M. Staatz, *Democracy and Development in Mali* (Michigan State University Press, 2000).

⁴¹³ James Traub, 'Two Cheers for Malian Democracy', *Foreign Policy* 13, no. 04 (2012); see also Morton Halperin, Joe Siegle, and Michael Weinstein, *The Democracy Advantage: How Democracies Promote Prosperity and Peace* (Routledge, 2009), 149.

(whether it be government or rival groups) as the culprit, reinforce the factors that are believed to induce and further stimulate the conflict in the country.

4.3 Mali's conflict in historical perspective

Since its independence from France in 1960, Mali has experienced four Tuareg rebellions in its postcolonial history. The most recent Tuareg rebellion of 2012 resulted in an extremist takeover of the North by the Tuareg-led National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (*Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad* MNLA). From 2012 to 2019, a number of separatist, terrorist, jihadist, and rebel groups engaged in a struggle for power in the northern and central regions of Mali. The ensuing conflict situation is characterised by shifting alliances and a proliferation of organised crime in the Malian border regions. The next paragraphs provide a chronological overview of the conflict from 2012 to 2019, as well as an overview of the main groups involved.

4.3.1 2012 – the Tuareg rebellion

In January 2012, a Tuareg rebellion began in Northern Mali, mainly led by a secessionist movement formed in 2011.⁴¹⁴ A few months after the rebellion, a coup d'état was launched by the Mali's armed forces in the capital, Bamako, to overcome the president's failure to suppress the MNLA-led uprising. Contrary to the army's expectations, the situation deteriorated quickly and as a result, MNLA took control of Northern Mali in alliance with a second violent extremist group: Ansar Dine.

Iyad Ag Ghali, a former leader of the MNLA, founded Ansar Dine in 2012. The MNLA broke publicly with Ag Ghali, branding him a “criminal whose efforts to establish a theocratic regime were anathema to the foundations of our culture and civilization.”⁴¹⁵ After having been rejected by both the Ifoghas and the Tuaregs in his attempt to gain power, and once the North was under its control, Ansar Dine overthrew MNLA, with the support of two other violent extremist groups, AQIM and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (*Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest*, MUJAO), Ansar Dine and its affiliates Katiba Ansar Dine Macina and Ansar Dine du Sud,⁴¹⁶ MLF, AQIM, MUJAO, and al-Mourabitoun, led by the Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar, thus became the main terrorist groups in the country.⁴¹⁷ Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the situation in North Mali right after the Tuareg rebellion, including the four main terrorist groups and the areas under their control.

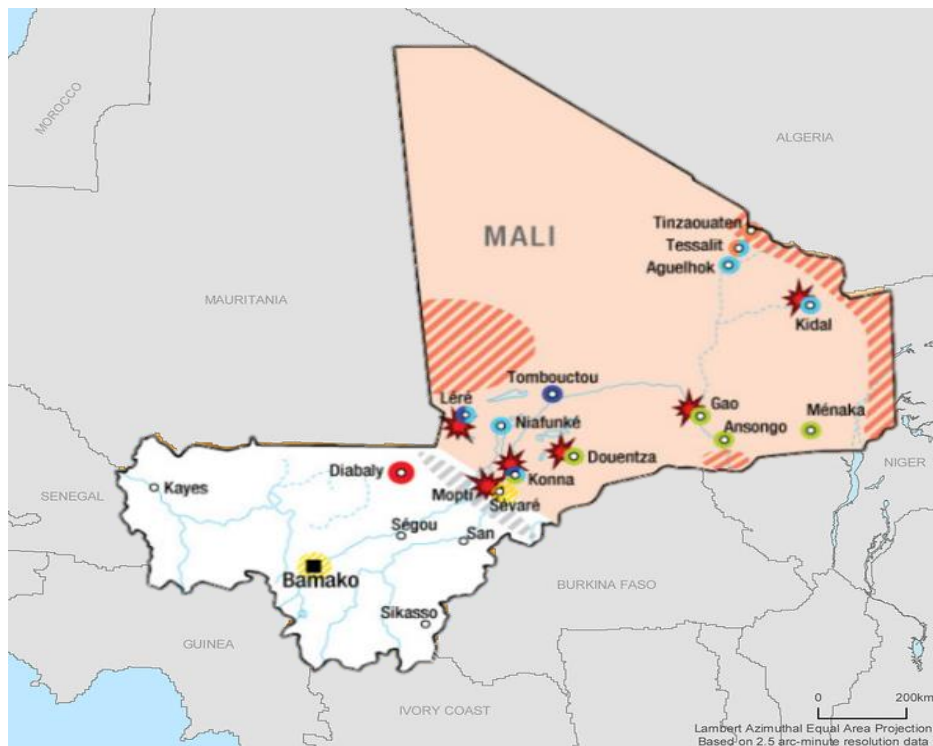
⁴¹⁴ Stephen A. Harmon, *Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region: Corruption, Contraband, Jihad and the Mali War of 2012-2013* (Routledge, 2016), 175.



⁴¹⁵ Julius Cavendish, 'The Fearsome Tuareg Uprising in Mali: Less Monolithic than Meets the Eye', *TIME Magazine* 30 (2012).

⁴¹⁶ Ibrahim Maïga, 'Armed Groups in Mali: Beyond the Labels', 2016, 7–8.

⁴¹⁷ Sergei Boeke and Antonin Tisseron, 'Mali's Long Road Ahead', *The RUSI Journal* 159, no. 5 (2014): 33.

Figure 4.3 – The situation in North Mali in 2012, adapted from © France24 and SEDAC maps (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/54545503@N04/5457016047>)



-  French army bombings
-  City mainly controlled by AQIM
-  City mainly controlled by MUJAO
-  City mainly controlled by Ansar Dine
-  City mainly controlled by MNLA
-  City outside of governmental control
-  Azawad, or North Mali, zone claimed by MNLA
-  Zone where army is said to have strengthened its positions
-  Zone under MNLA influence
-  French troops ground deployment areas

4.3.2 2012-2015 – fragmentation of the conflict

The unstable situation that unfolded represented the ideal breeding ground for several self-defence and/or pro-governmental armed groups to flourish.⁴¹⁸ Some locals joined *Platform*, a coalition of movements engaged in the peace process with the government. Among the main actors within *Platform* are Imghad and Allied Touareg Self Defence Movement (*Groupe*

d'autodéfense des touareg Imghads et alliés, GATIA), Coordination of the Movements of Patriotic and Resistance Fronts (*Coordination des mouvements et fronts patriotiques de résistance*, CMFPR),⁴¹⁹ Arab Arab Movement of Azawad (*Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad*, MAA), Popular Movement for the Salute of Azawad (*Mouvement populaire pour le salut de l'Azawad* MPSA), Popular Front of Azawad (*Front populaire de l'Azawad* FPA), and Movement for the Defence of the Country (*Mouvement pour la défense de la patrie* MDP). Maïga, a consultant in the Conflict Prevention and Risk Analysis division at the Institute for Security Studies, adds that the second main coordination effort in the country, aimed at

⁴¹⁸ Susanna D. Wing, 'Mali: Politics of a Crisis', *African Affairs* 112, no. 448 (2013): 481.

⁴¹⁹ Including Ganda Koy, Ganda Izo and FLN-Forces de libération des régions Nord du Mali.

establishing a network among the so-called “rebels”, is the Coordination of Azawad Movements (*Coordination des mouvements de l’Azawad*, CMA), which consists of the MNLA, Higher Council for Azawad (*Haut conseil pour l’unité de l’Azawad*, HCUA), the Coalition for the Azawad People (*Coalition pour le peuple de l’Azawad*, CPA) and a section of the Coordination of Patriotic Resistance Movements II (*Coordination des mouvements et fronts patriotiques de résistance*, CMFPR II.)⁴²⁰

4.3.3 2015-2018 – the Peace Agreement

The outcome of a long peace negotiation process, the Algiers Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, was signed respectively on 15 May by the government and Platform, and on 20 June 2015 by the members of CMA. Between the Algiers Peace Agreement in 2015 and 2017, the country was held hostage by an increasingly volatile security situation in which many violent armed groups were established and disbanded and many individuals changed alliances in the process.⁴²¹ Security in the country further deteriorated and Mali has witnessed a continuous stream of violent and terrorist attacks, including the high profile terrorist attacks on the café La Terrasse and the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako in March and November 2015,⁴²² the attack on a military camp in Gao in January 2017,⁴²³ the attack on Le Campement, a resort popular with expats for weekend outings near Bamako in July 2017,⁴²⁴ and most recently 14 soldiers being killed in a suspected Islamist attack on an military base in Soumpy, and 26 civilians being killed when their vehicle hit a land mine.⁴²⁵

In March 2017, Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoune, Katiba Ansar Dine Macina, and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb announced the establishment of a new alliance, under the guidance of Ag Ghali.⁴²⁶ According to the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (CAERT), the union, as well as the choice of its leader, reflects al-Qaeda’s strategic attempt to expand by empowering local actors,⁴²⁷ creating social ties through marriages,⁴²⁸ and protecting civilians from governmental injustices.⁴²⁹ Besides this proliferation of terrorist and militia groups, Mali has also witnessed an increase in connections between violent extremist groups and organised crime in the Sahel region.⁴³⁰ According to criminologist Erik Alda and researcher Joseph Sala, who wrote a joint article on

⁴²⁰ Maïga, ‘Armed Groups in Mali: Beyond the Labels’, 2–6.

⁴²¹ Baz Lecocq, ‘Northern Mali: A Long and Complicated Conflict’, *ZiF-Mitteilungen* 3 (2013): 1–6.

⁴²² Mamadou Tapily Peter Walker and Matthew Weaver in London, ‘Mali Hotel Hostage Situation over as UN Troops Report Seeing 27 Bodies’, *The Guardian*, 20 November 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/20/gunmen-take-hostages-radisson-hotel-mali-bamako>.

⁴²³ ‘Dozens Killed In Suicide Attack Against MOC Military Camp In Gao’, United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed 3 December 2018, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/dozens-killed-suicide-attack-against-moc-military-camp-gao>.

⁴²⁴ Joseph Netto CNN Farai Sevenzo and Darran Simon, ‘Gunmen Attack Mali Luxury Resort, at Least 2 Dead’, CNN, accessed 3 December 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/18/africa/urgent--gunfire-heard-at-mali-tourist-resort/index.html>.

⁴²⁵ ‘Mali Profile’.

⁴²⁶ Par Madjid Zerrouky, ‘Les groupes djihadistes s’unissent au Sahel’, *Le Monde*, 4 March 2017, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2017/03/04/les-groupes-djihadistes-s-unissent-au-sahel_5089337_3210.html.

⁴²⁷ Sahel-Sahara Region and Ansar Eddine, ‘Preliminary Analysis: Merger of Terrorist Groups in Mali’, *AFRICAN CENTRE FOR STUDY AND RESEARCH ON TERRORISM (ACSRT/CAERT)*, n.d., 2.

⁴²⁸ Modibo Goita, *West Africa’s Growing Terrorist Threat: Confronting AQIM’s Sahelian Strategy* (Africa Center for Strategic Studies Washington, DC, 2011), 3.

⁴²⁹ Alta Grobbelaar and Hussein Solomon, ‘The Origins, Ideology and Development of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’, *Africa Review* 7, no. 2 (2015): 153.

⁴³⁰ Luca Raineri and Francesco Strazzari, ‘State, Secession, and Jihad: The Micropolitical Economy of Conflict in Northern Mali’, *African Security* 8, no. 4 (2015): 250.

the crime-terror nexus in the Sahel, in that region, wealth and power rely on transportation and commercialisation of goods rather than on the possession of land: movements of money and goods “shape the political economy of state unmaking and remaking.”⁴³¹ Furthermore, although the region can be characterised as mainly consisting of unpopulated desert, “all human activity – legitimate and illicit – relies on these same routes.”⁴³² In the last years, illegal trafficking of drugs and weapons and smuggling of migrants towards the Mediterranean has generated huge revenues for organised crime groups in Northern Mali.⁴³³ In line with these dynamics, local and regional terrorist groups have embarked on various forms of trafficking, especially smuggling and drug trafficking.⁴³⁴ Synergies between organised crime and terrorist groups in the region are promoted by an environment characterised by weak or even lack of governance,⁴³⁵ and a homogeneous demographic group composed of what Alda and Sala labeled as “young and dissatisfied men.”⁴³⁶ The regional linkages between organised crime and terrorism represent an example of Shelley’s concept of the “unholy trinity” between terrorism, organised crime and corruption.⁴³⁷

4.3.4 2019 – the current situation

Since the beginning of the 2019, the country has continued to experience great levels of instability due to continued attacks from the Dogon and Fulani clash. The largest attacks occurred in March and June.⁴³⁸ In March, around 134 individuals were killed in a massacre by the Dogon militia in Ogossagou, exacerbating the anti-Fulani motivated violence. The June attack was perpetrated by Fulani members against a Dogon village where gunmen set fire and fired shots throughout the village.⁴³⁹ A total of 95 bodies have been counted so far. Amidst the ethnic clashes, the political instability in the country has continued. On 18 April, Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga resigned from office along with his entire cabinet.⁴⁴⁰ In May, the new Prime Minister Boubou Cisse formed his new cabinet of 38 members.⁴⁴¹ Alongside him, a new Health Minister was appointed, who had previously been clouded by accusations of enabling a “culture of harassment” during his time as UNAIDS chief.⁴⁴²

In late April, a video message was released by the terrorist group Islamic State’s leader Baghdadi that lasted 18 minutes, which according to local security staff indicated al-Zahrawi as the new emir for the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). The overall

⁴³¹ Alda and Sala, ‘Links Between Terrorism, Organized Crime and Crime: The Case of the Sahel Region’, 1–2.

⁴³² Alda and Sala, 5.

⁴³³ Bruce Whitehouse and Francesco Strazzari, *Introduction: Rethinking Challenges to State Sovereignty in Mali and Northwest Africa* (Taylor & Francis, 2015), 216.

⁴³⁴ Jessica M. Huckabey, ‘Al Qaeda in Mali: The Defection Connections’, *Orbis* 57, no. 3 (2013): 470.

⁴³⁵ Oumar Diarra, ‘Insecurity and Instability in the Sahel Region: The Case of Mali’, *Army War College*, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA561296.pdf>, 2012.

⁴³⁶ Erik Alda and Joseph Sala, ‘Links Between Terrorism, Organized Crime and Crime: The Case of the Sahel Region’, *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 3, no. 1 (10 September 2014): 7, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.ea>.

⁴³⁷ Shelley, ‘The Unholy Trinity: Transnational Crime, Corruption, and Terrorism’.

⁴³⁸ Stephanie Busari and Sharif Paget, ‘At Least 95 Killed in Attack on Mali Village’, CNN, 10 June 2019, 95, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/10/africa/mali-village-massacre-sobane-intl/index.html>.

⁴³⁹ Liesbeth van der Heide, ‘Dumping One Government Won’t Fix Mali’, *Foreign Policy*, accessed 1 August 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/20/dumping-one-government-wont-fix-mali-security-west-africa-sahel-ogossagou-fulani-dogon-tuareg-azawad-terrorism/>.

⁴⁴⁰ Bokar Sangare, ‘Mali’s Prime Minister Resigns After Spike in Deadly Violence’, *Bloomberg*, 19 April 2019, sec. Business, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-19/mali-s-prime-minister-resigns-as-country-sees-spike-in-violence>.

⁴⁴¹ Michele Cattani, ‘Mali Gets New Government after Protests’, *News24*, 7 May 2019, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/mali-gets-new-government-after-protests-20190506>.

⁴⁴² Nellie Peyton, ‘UNAIDS Chief Charged with Enabling “culture of Harassment” Joins Mali Government - Reuters’, *Reuters*, 8 May 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-aid-harassment-mali/unaid-chief-charged-with-enabling-culture-of-harassment-joins-mali-government-idUSKCN1SE26L>.

message from Baghdadi focused on three main elements: raising funds, recruitment, and lone wolf terrorism. In 2019, the most impacted area by attacks is the central Mopti region (see Figure 3.3), where about two thirds of the attacks take place. This region is most susceptible for a number of reasons: it is institutionally weakened, it has a dense population with a mix of various ethnic groups, it holds great wealth in the region, and thus it presents a major strategic interest. The overall resentment of the population towards authorities is also changing. Overall there is a lot of pressure from terrorism, resulting in many schools having to close.⁴⁴³ However, with the help of the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the local women, communities have put pressure on schools to reopen.⁴⁴⁴ Eighty percent of the country’s population consists of youths under the age of 20,⁴⁴⁵ with a literacy rate of 50.13 percent among the population aged between 15 and 24 years.⁴⁴⁶

4.4 Historical and geopolitical perspectives on Mali’s conflict

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise the research by providing an overview of Mali as a country, its history, and the current conflict, which is “highly context-specific and embedded in longer-term political, social, and economic processes.”⁴⁴⁷ Given that the situation in Mali is complex and eludes simple explanations,⁴⁴⁸ the institutional level, including the role of ethnic tensions, regional instability, the proliferation of terrorist groups, and impact of major counterterrorism operations will first be discussed to provide the context on the macro level. On the meso level, the role of socioeconomic deprivation that may lead to frustration and aggression will be analysed.

4.4.1 Ethnic tensions

Many authors trace back the origins of the current conflict in Mali to the 2012 Tuareg rebellion.⁴⁴⁹ However, as Andrew Alesbury, a researcher and author on Tuareg history notes, the 2012 revolt was simply the latest among various rebellions promoted by a number of Tuaregs clans against the government for the independence of the country.⁴⁵⁰ Contrary to usual representations⁴⁵¹ of the conflict, rebellions have also resulted from what political scientists with a focus on West Africa and the Sahel Pezard and Shurkin call “competition among northern Malians to advance their individual and group interests.”⁴⁵² The use of violence has become such common practice that it is often perceived by scholars as the only way to promote economic and socio-political changes: professor of African history Baz

⁴⁴³ Nadia Adam, Ekaterina Golovko, and Boubacar Sangaré, ‘Terrorism Puts Education on Hold in Mali’, ISS Africa, 17 October 2017, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/terrorism-puts-education-on-hold-in-mali>.

⁴⁴⁴ ‘Protracted Crisis in Central Mali Impacting All Aspects of Children’s Lives’, UNICEF, 26 April 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/protracted-crisis-central-mali-impacting-all-aspects-childrens-lives>.

⁴⁴⁵ ‘Mali Age Structure - Demographics’, Indexmundi, accessed 21 November 2019, https://www.indexmundi.com/mali/age_structure.html.

⁴⁴⁶ ‘Mali’, UNESCO, 27 November 2016, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ml>.

⁴⁴⁷ Caitriona Dowd and Clionadh Raleigh, ‘The Myth of Global Islamic Terrorism and Local Conflict in Mali and the Sahel’, *African Affairs* 112, no. 448 (2013): 507.

⁴⁴⁸ Huckabey, ‘Al Qaeda in Mali: The Defection Connections’, 467.

⁴⁴⁹ ‘Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?’, Africa (International Crisis Group, 6 July 2016), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/central-mali-uprising-making>.

⁴⁵⁰ Andrew Alesbury, ‘A Society in Motion: The Tuareg from the Pre-Colonial Era to Today’, *Nomadic Peoples* 17, no. 1 (2013): 106–25.

⁴⁵¹ That have a tendency to portray the 2012 revolt as mainly being a conflict of the North vs the South and the government, rather than a conflict resulting partially from internal tensions among Tuareg factions.

⁴⁵² Stephanie Pezard and Michael Shurkin, *Achieving Peace in Northern Mali: Past Agreements, Local Conflicts, and the Prospects for a Durable Settlement* (RAND Corporation, 2015), 21, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR892>.

Lecocq and professor of Cultural Anthropology of Arica Georg Klute, coined the neologism “demokalashi”, democracy and kalashnikov, to describe local politics.⁴⁵³ The nomadic and tribal nature of Tuaregs manifests itself in a scattered use of force and a refusal of formal national boundaries; a nature that is in stark contrast to the notion of state as conceived in Weberian terms, as the “political organization which claims a monopoly over the legitimate use of force in a particular territory.”⁴⁵⁴ As a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the geography, economy and security situation in the Sahel states: nomadism implies a “netlike concept of space”: that refuses the concepts of land property and sovereignty.⁴⁵⁵ In addition, Gregory Chauzal and Thibault van Damme, who wrote extensively on the origins of Mali’s conflict, note that resentment and frictions between nomadic and sedentary groups is not only linked to a different cultural conception of the notion of space and power, but can also be partially traced back to the establishment of the state after decolonisation, “which promoted aggressive unity and the constant marginalization, in economic and political terms, of the north.”⁴⁵⁶

Ethnic frictions in the country are not related exclusively to the claims brought forward by Tuareg clans but also to other conflicting relationships and identity clashes between groups. The cultural and historical divisions between ethnic groups present a major obstacle to peace and are partially the result of the policies promoted since the colonial ruling system to govern the North.⁴⁵⁷

4.4.2 Regional instability

According to Peter Cole, in his paper on stabilising Libya’s periphery, another important factor that influences destabilisation in Mali is the country’s surrounding environment. A major aspect of the instability of the region can be traced back to Libya, where, during Gaddafi’s regime, thousands of Tuaregs from Mali entered the country because of drought periods,⁴⁵⁸ and forms of political and economic discrimination in Mali.⁴⁵⁹ Many of them were recruited as soldiers in the Islamic Legion, an Islamic pan-Arabist military force created by Gaddafi to unify the Arabs in the northern parts of Africa.⁴⁶⁰ As Harmon, a researcher with a focus on France colonialism in West Africa, writes: after Gaddafi’s regime was overthrown in 2011, Tuareg soldiers ransacked weapons depots in Libya, taking vehicles and Russian guns⁴⁶¹ back into Mali.⁴⁶² As a result, the already severe proliferation of arms in the North increased substantially.⁴⁶³ The abundance of weapons also impacted the

⁴⁵³ Baz Lecocq and Georg Klute, ‘Tuareg Separatism in Mali’, *International Journal* 68, no. 3 (2013): 428.

⁴⁵⁴ Theodore J. Lowi and Edward J. Harpham, ‘Political Theory and Public Policy: Marx, Weber, and a Republican Theory of the State’, in *Contemporary Empirical Political Theory*, ed. Kristen R. Monroe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 260.

⁴⁵⁵ ‘An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel - Geography, Economics and Security’, 148.

⁴⁵⁶ Chauzal and van Damme, ‘The Roots of Mali’s Conflict’.

⁴⁵⁷ Chauzal and van Damme, 30–42.

⁴⁵⁸ Peter Cole, *Borderline Chaos?: Stabilizing Libya’s Periphery* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 18.

⁴⁵⁹ Thomas Krings, ‘Marginalisation and Revolt among the Tuareg in Mali and Niger’, *GeoJournal* 36, no. 1 (1995): 60.

⁴⁶⁰ The Islamic Legion was created and sponsored by Gaddafi’s as a pan-Arabist paramilitary force aimed at establishing the Great Islamic State of the Sahel

⁴⁶¹ Harmon, *Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region: Corruption, Contraband, Jihad and the Mali War of 2012-2013*, 175.

⁴⁶² Ricardo Larémont, ‘After the Fall of Qaddafi: Political, Economic, and Security Consequences for Libya, Mali, Niger, and Algeria’, *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 2 (2013): 1.

⁴⁶³ Nicolas Florquin and Eric G. Berman, eds., *Armed and Aimless. Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region*, Small Arms Survey (Small Arms Survey, 2005), <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/publications/by-type/book-series/armed-and-aimless.html>.

availability of weapons among terrorist groups: AQIM is believed to have taken possession of several “abandoned Libyan stocks, including surface-to-air missiles.”⁴⁶⁴ Although international relations scholars Strazzari and Tholens argue that the impact of the collapse of Gaddafi’s regime has often been overestimated, providing a scapegoat to explain instability in the region, arms availability is a crucial aspect to understand tactics development and conflict dynamics in the region.⁴⁶⁵

Anouar Boukhars, a Carnegie scholar and consultant on Middle Eastern and African matters, writes about how Algeria represents a second exogenous factor that has a significant impact on Mali’s situation.⁴⁶⁶ Algeria suffered a decade of bloody violence in the 90s, when various armed groups were founded with slightly different objectives, ranging from opposing the government to implementing Sharia law. While initially the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut*, FIS) acted as the major representative of a social and political movement looking for an Islamist alternative, several other armed groups were established in the early 90s, such as the Armed Islamic Movement (*Mouvement Islamique Armée*, MIA), the Movement for the Islamic State (*Mouvement pour l’Etat Islamique*, MEI), the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (*Groupe Islamique Armé*, GIA), known for its cruelty,⁴⁶⁷ and the (*Armée Islamique du Salut*, AIS).⁴⁶⁸ The predecessor of AQIM, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat*, GSPC), was also born during the conflict in Algeria and easily expanded its activities in neighbouring countries, especially Mali and Mauritania, at the beginning of the new millennium.⁴⁶⁹ GSPC gradually transferred its operations into North Mali not only because of the counter-measures adopted by the Algerian security services but also with the purpose of gaining revenues from contraband and trafficking.⁴⁷⁰ The result is the development of a “hybrid group” that, exploiting weak governance, is involved both in crime and Islamist insurgency.⁴⁷¹

4.4.3 Proliferation of terrorist groups

The Sahel region harbours various and diverse paramilitary groups and (violent) extremist organisations. Besides local insurgents fighting for territorial control (such as MNLA), regional Salafist organisations and more global jihadi-affiliated groups, such as Boko Haram or AQIM, are active in the region. These groups, according to Rem Korteweg, a researcher who wrote about terrorism in the Sahel, are seeking to implement their interpretation of Islam in the region, harm Western interests, and create a caliphate.⁴⁷² In the aftermath of 9/11, there was a growing fear, especially in the US, that terrorists from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East were moving towards Africa and, in particular, to the Sahel region to connect with Islamists in the Maghreb.

⁴⁶⁴Grobbelaar and Solomon, ‘The Origins, Ideology and Development of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’, 154.

⁴⁶⁵Francesco Strazzari and Simone Tholens, “‘Tesco for Terrorists’ Reconsidered: Arms and Conflict Dynamics in Libya and in the Sahara-Sahel Region’, *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 20, no. 3 (2014): 358.

⁴⁶⁶Anouar Boukhars, *The Paranoid Neighbor: Algeria and the Conflict in Mali*, vol. 22 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 93–94.

⁴⁶⁷Mohammed M. Hafez, ‘Armed Islamist Movements and Political Violence in Algeria’, *The Middle East Journal*, 2000, 584–85, 572–91.

⁴⁶⁸Guolo Renzo, ‘Il Fondamentalismo Islamico’, *Laterza, Roma-Bari*, 2002, 167–99.

⁴⁶⁹Bøås and Torheim, ‘The International Intervention in Mali: “Desert Blues” or a New Beginning?’, 419.

⁴⁷⁰Stephen Albert Harmon, ‘From GSPC to AQIM: The Evolution of an Algerian Islamist Terrorist Group into an Al-Qa’ida Affiliate and Its Implications for the Sahara-Sahel Region’ (Association of Concerned Africa Scholars, 2010), 17.

⁴⁷¹Harmon, 20.

⁴⁷²Rem Korteweg, ‘Traacherous Sands: The EU and Terrorism in the Broader Sahel’, *European View*, 1 December 2014, 254, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-014-0327-1>.

This theory, dubbed the “banana theory of terrorism” because of the shape of the route,⁴⁷³ has received strong criticism because of the lack of empirical data and scientific analysis.⁴⁷⁴ Despite lack of evidence concerning the terrorist route from East Asia to the Sahel, North Mali has long provided a safe haven⁴⁷⁵ and fruitful territory for recruitment for various terrorist groups,⁴⁷⁶ who according to Basar, took advantage of regional insecurity, local tensions, fragile governance, and fast population growth.⁴⁷⁷

According to Francis, a Professor in Peace Studies, terrorist groups have, on the one hand, exploited local grievances against the central government and its repressive measures and, on the other hand, organised or collaborated with criminal networks involved in drug, cigarettes and arms trafficking, migrants smuggling, and kidnapping for ransom.⁴⁷⁸ Sidibe, a professor at the Faculty of Political and Legal Sciences at Bamako University, notes that young people have been recruited for terrorist groups both through brainwashing as well as through offers of money and benefits.⁴⁷⁹ At the end of the 1990s, the GSPC ensured support of the population through providing a broad range of social services, from distributing money, to providing medical care, and selling SIM cards.⁴⁸⁰

Bøås and Torheim, two researchers from the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs who have written extensively on conflict, terrorism, and ethnicity in Africa, describe how AQIM’s strategy to infiltrate the northern region of Mali has evolved over the years from granting economic benefits, providing services, and getting married local people to promoting a new and more conservative interpretation of Islam with the support of local religious teachers, known as marabouts.⁴⁸¹ In addition, AQIM built its reputation by providing protection: in Timbuktu, for example, a toll-free emergency number was provided to the local population in case of attacks from bandits or MNLA.⁴⁸² As South African political scientists Grobbelaar and Solomon note in their article tracing the role of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, from a macro perspective, AQIM cannot be viewed as just an external force, but should be considered as an actor that over time has managed to integrate itself within local communities.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷³ Jeremy Keenan, ‘The Banana Theory of Terrorism: Alternative Truths and the Collapse of the “Second” (Saharan) Front in the War on Terror’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25, no. 1 (1 January 2007): 31–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589000601157055>.

⁴⁷⁴ Jeremy Keenan, ‘Conspiracy Theories and “Terrorists”: How the “War on Terror” Is Placing New Responsibilities on Anthropology’, *Anthropology Today* 22, no. 6 (December 2006): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8322.2006.00470.x>.

⁴⁷⁵ Cristiana C. Brafman Kittner, ‘The Role of Safe Havens in Islamist Terrorism’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 3 (4 July 2007): 307–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550701246791>.

⁴⁷⁶ David J Francis, ‘The Regional Impact of the Armed Conflict and French Intervention in Mali’ (NOREF, April 2013), 4, http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/7911~v~The_regional_impact_of_the_armed_conflict_and_French_intervention_in_Mali.pdf.

⁴⁷⁷ Eray Basar, ‘Unsecured Libyan Weapons: Regional Impact and Possible Threats’ (Norfolk: NATO Civil-Military Fusion Centre, November 2012), 2, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20121031%20Libya%20Weapons%20Update_final.pdf.

⁴⁷⁸ Francis, ‘The Regional Impact of the Armed Conflict and French Intervention in Mali’, 4–5.

⁴⁷⁹ Sidibé, ‘Security Management in Northern Mali: Criminal Networks and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms’, 77.

⁴⁸⁰ Jean-Luc Marret, ‘Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb: A “Glocal” Organization’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 6 (13 June 2008): 541–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100802111824>.

⁴⁸¹ Bøås and Torheim, ‘The International Intervention in Mali: “Desert Blues” or a New Beginning?’, 419.

⁴⁸² Bøås and Torheim, 420.

⁴⁸³ Bøås and Torheim, 420.

4.4.4 Challenges of counterterrorism operations

The perturbing presence of Islamist insurgent groups eventually led to a French military intervention in 2013: Operation Serval.⁴⁸⁴ The official objective of the intervention was to impede the advance of jihadi groups towards the South through the deployment of air forces as well as more than 2,000 infantry troops.⁴⁸⁵ Meanwhile, ECOWAS also launched the African-Led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and deployed approximately 1,500 troops. A few months later, in April 2013, the UN Security Council established MINUSMA, mandated to support the “stabilization of key population centres and ... the reestablishment of State authority throughout the country”, enhance political dialogue, foster national and international justice, and protect civilians as well as UN personnel.⁴⁸⁶ In 2014, the reorganisation of French military forces in the region led to a second French military intervention: Operation Barkhane, consisting of 3,000 specially trained counterterrorism troops, armed vehicles, aircrafts, helicopters, and intelligence assets deployed in the Sahel region in Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.⁴⁸⁷

In response to the spreading military conflicts and the increase in the number of attacks in both the northern and the central parts of Mali, an international counterterrorism force was established in 2014, the so-called G5 Sahel Joint Force. The G5 Sahel Force was supported by the African Union as well as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), with its main financial resources provided by the European Union (EU), the US, and Saudi Arabia. Generally due to the colonial history, Mali remains a political priority for France.⁴⁸⁸ France and the US together lead military efforts, while the EU leads training and security sector reform, and the UN leads rule of law and political stability efforts.⁴⁸⁹ A resulting challenge is that an increasing number of peacekeepers have been targeted in north and central Mali. Amnesty International reported that in the first three quarters of 2017:

MINUSMA recorded at least 155 attacks against peacekeeping forces, Malian security forces, and French Barkhane soldiers. Throughout the year more than 30 MINUSMA personnel were killed. In June, 5 people were killed and 10 wounded during an attack on a hotel in Bamako; in July armed men beat 10 women at a wedding; and in August, 12 women were flogged for not wearing a veil in Mopti.⁴⁹⁰

Additionally, during 2017 MINUSMA registered “252 cases of human rights violations by security forces and armed groups, including 21 cases of extrajudicial executions and deliberate and arbitrary killings; 12 cases of enforced disappearances; and 31 cases of torture and other ill treatments”.⁴⁹¹

Many of these incidents have occurred due to a lack of solidified intelligence, which, according to intelligence researchers Rietjens and De Ward, has led to the establishment of an All Sources Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU) within the UN mission in Mali. ASIFU’s

⁴⁸⁴ Grobbelaar and Solomon, ‘The Origins, Ideology and Development of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’, 155.

⁴⁸⁵ Larémont, ‘After the Fall of Qaddafi: Political, Economic, and Security Consequences for Libya, Mali, Niger, and Algeria’, 4.

⁴⁸⁶ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2100 (2013), S/RES/2100 (2013)

⁴⁸⁷ Korteweg, ‘Traacherous Sands’, 256.

⁴⁸⁸ Marina E. Henke, ‘Why Did France Intervene in Mali in 2013? Examining the Role of Intervention Entrepreneurs’, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23, no. 3 (2 September 2017): 307–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2017.1352004>.

⁴⁸⁹ ‘Mali: Events of 2017’, Human Rights Watch, 21 December 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/mali>.

⁴⁹⁰ ‘Mali 2017/2018’, *Amnesty International*, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/mali>.

⁴⁹¹ *Id.*

mission can be summarised as “significantly improving the timely processing and production of MINUSMA broad accessible and usable (fused) information and intelligence in order to support the decision making process on the operational and tactical level.”⁴⁹² In broad terms, ASIFU is tasked to “contribute especially to traditional non-military intelligence analysis, such as illegal trafficking and narcotics-trade; ethnic dynamics and tribal tensions; corruption and bad governance with Mali and MINUSMA area of interest.”⁴⁹³

A number of challenges have been identified in the counter-terrorism efforts promoted by the international community in Mali. First of all, the role played by President Compaoré (president of Burkina Faso from 1987 to 2014), ECOWAS’ official mediator, has been contested by the Malian population: President Compaoré was accused of exploiting this function to strengthen his power in Burkina Faso and was considered unable to promote a democratic process.⁴⁹⁴ The lead of negotiation process was subsequently attributed to Algeria. According to political scientist Bergamaschi, who investigates the sociology of development and foreign aid, specifically in the context of Mali, operation Serval, along with efforts of the international community to fight the advance of terrorist groups, has been perceived as a simplistic approach to a conflict that is complex, multi-dimensional, and not restricted to the North alone.⁴⁹⁵ Initiatives promoted by various international actors within the security-sector-reform (SSR) generally aim to address the tensions between the North and the Central government, the intercommunal rivalries, and the conflict between international actors and terrorist groups.⁴⁹⁶ In that context, the military operations can be viewed as one element of a broader strategy aimed at promoting peace in the region through dialogue and mediation.⁴⁹⁷

4.4.5 Socio-economic factors

The Sahel is a porous space where diverse forms of insurgency, connect to local grievances, in the words of Bøås and Torheim: “loosely allied through a combination of ideological and pragmatic concerns.”⁴⁹⁸ Economy in the Sahara has always been based on the transport of goods⁴⁹⁹ and the difference between trade and trafficking is exceptionally unclear and ambiguous.⁵⁰⁰ Trafficking is particularly attractive in a region where industry-related activities do not exist,⁵⁰¹ where natural resources are limited, and the impact of climate change is severe.⁵⁰² While goods- trafficking in North Mali initially concerned subsidised goods from Algeria⁵⁰³ (mainly food and fuel), this was slowly replaced by

⁴⁹² Sebastiaan Rietjens and Erik de Waard, ‘UN Peacekeeping Intelligence: The ASIFU Experiment’, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 30, no. 3 (3 July 2017): 535, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2017.1297108>.

⁴⁹³Rietjens and de Waard, 533.

⁴⁹⁴ Isaline Bergamaschi, ‘French Military Intervention in Mali: Inevitable, Consensual yet Insufficient’, *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2 (1 June 2013): 5, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.bb>.

⁴⁹⁵ Bergamaschi, 9–10.

⁴⁹⁶Marina Caparini, *DDR and SSR Challenges in Mali*, 2015, 25, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4499.0164>.

⁴⁹⁷ Kalilou Sidibé, ‘Criminal Networks and Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms in Northern Mali’, *IDS Bulletin* 43, no. 4 (2012): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2012.00336.x>.

⁴⁹⁸ Bøås, M. and Torheim, L. E., ‘The international intervention in Mali’, p. 423

⁴⁹⁹ Raineri, L. and Strazzari, F., ‘State, Secession, and Jihad’, p. 250

⁵⁰⁰ Sidibé, K. ‘Criminal Networks and Conflict-resolution Mechanisms in Northern Mali’, pp. 83-84

⁵⁰¹ Sidibé, K. ‘Security Management in Northern Mali’, p. 75

⁵⁰² Tor A. Benjaminsen, ‘Does Supply-Induced Scarcity Drive Violent Conflicts in the African Sahel? The Case of the Tuareg Rebellion in Northern Mali’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 45, 2008, pp. 819–836

⁵⁰³ Sami Bensassi et al., ‘Algeria-Mali Trade: The Normality of Informality’, *Economic Research Forum Working Papers*, No. 960, 2015, [internet] available at: <https://erf.org.eg/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/960.pdf> [last accessed: 01 June 2017]

cigarettes, and later weapons and drugs.⁵⁰⁴ The spread of newer and faster means of communication and transportation led to the replacement of traditional food, fuel, and arms traders by modern smugglers.⁵⁰⁵

Terrorist groups have been successful in addressing local practical concerns and proposing alternatives.⁵⁰⁶ AQIM, in particular, has taken advantage of financial vulnerabilities to establish itself as a credible actor and a point of reference for several local communities: as Carnegie Fellow and professor of international relations Boukhars describes, historically, GSPC used to provide remuneration to local tribe leaders “in exchange for safe passage or sanctuary”,⁵⁰⁷ while involvement in AQIM-connected smuggling networks has ensured revenues for local populations. AQIM acts as “an attractive employer for impoverished desert youth”, as Grobbelaar and Solomon explain, where AQIM takes advantage of the regional instability for its operations.⁵⁰⁸ Because of their knowledge of the terrain, local young people are often exploited both by terrorists and by criminal groups who recruit them as informants, drivers, or couriers. Although initially youth involvement was mainly restricted to drug trafficking, more recently concerns have been expressed regarding increasing drug abuse among youths.⁵⁰⁹ Furthermore, as Malian professor Sidibé explains, while AQIM’s recruitment strategy mainly revolves around offering money, other groups rely on brainwashing youngsters as a recruitment tactic.⁵¹⁰ These macro and meso dynamics, besides increasing active participation in terrorist and criminal groups, have affected what Boukhars describes as “the traditional socio-political patterns and the balance of power between and among communities”:⁵¹¹ the combination of poverty, unemployment and trafficking creates a vast “potential for instability” in the Sahara-Sahel region.⁵¹²

4.5 Relevant research on terrorism for the Sahelian context

The macro and meso perspectives provide an initial framework to further identify push and pull factors that play a role at the individual level, leading people to join terrorist or paramilitary groups in a continuous cycle of violence. Although the micro level of analysis has usually been attributed to psychological research, it is now generally accepted that the study of terrorism should take into consideration both “psychological predispositions ... and the external environment”⁵¹³ because terrorism is “*always* determined by a combination of innate factors, biological factors, early developmental factors, cognitive factors, temperament, environmental influences, and group dynamics”,⁵¹⁴ as Victoroff, a professor in terrorism studies, states.

Terrorism scholar Horgan, in his research on radicalisation, for instance, focuses on the features of an environment conducive to involvement in terrorist activities and identifies some “predisposing risk factors”: emotional vulnerability; dissatisfaction with current

⁵⁰⁴ OECD, ‘An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security’, p. 235

⁵⁰⁵ Strazzari, F. and Tholens, S., ‘“Tesco for Terrorists” Reconsidered’, p. 354

⁵⁰⁶ François Heisbourg, ‘A Surprising Little War: First Lessons of Mali’, *Survival* 55, no. 2 (2013): 8–9.

⁵⁰⁷ Boukhars, A., ‘The Paranoid Neighbor: Algeria and the Conflict in Mali’, p. 94

⁵⁰⁸ Grobbelaar, A. and Solomon, H., ‘The origins, ideology and development of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’, p. 152.

⁵⁰⁹ http://www.osiwa.org/wai_drugs/drug-use-effects-youths-west-africa/

⁵¹⁰ Sidibé, K., ‘Security Management in Northern Mali’, p. 77

⁵¹¹ Boukhars, A., ‘The Paranoid Neighbor: Algeria and the Conflict in Mali’, p. 94

⁵¹² Harmon, S. A. *Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region*, p. 133

⁵¹³ Martha Crenshaw, ‘The psychology of political terrorism’, in John T. Jost and Jim Sidanius, *Political psychology: Key readings*, eds., 2004, New York: Psychology Press, p. 414

⁵¹⁴ Jeff Victoroff, ‘The mind of the terrorist: A review and critique of psychological approaches’, *Journal of Conflict resolution* 49.1 (2005), p. 34

activity; identification with the victims; conceptualisation of violence as not immoral; sense of reward arising from the engagement; family/social ties to people sharing similar feelings and experiences.⁵¹⁵ Regarding the implications of the historical background described in this chapter for the individual level the academic literature points towards the lack of perspective and the (economic) opportunities presented by criminal and terrorist networks.

4.5.1 On the unemployment-terrorism relationship

In North Africa, youth unemployment is expected to reach 29 percent by 2019, double the global average.⁵¹⁶ As a consequence, in the Malian and larger Sahelian context of unemployed youths, some youngsters turn to illegal activities to make a living. These activities range from drug and human trafficking to engagement with terrorist or other armed groups.⁵¹⁷ Especially since paid employment is generally not a common characteristic in Northern Mali, where most inhabitants are self-sustainable and create their own livelihoods through farming and trading.

Youths often form a majority demographic in African fragile states but at the same time, they “exist on the political and social fringe.”⁵¹⁸ What motivates youths to join or become involved with violent groups according to the academic literature is not *just* lack of jobs and opportunities but rather the perceived injustices associated with it, often related to poor or corrupt governance. Past research on what drives participation in civil war showed that youths who do not feel they are represented in the political arena are two to three times more likely to turn to violence.⁵¹⁹ All in all, while the link between poverty and the lure of terrorism is often mentioned, the academic literature has challenged generalised assumptions about this relationship and agreed that poverty on itself does not provide a justification for why individuals engage with terrorism in general, or specifically in Africa.⁵²⁰ Certain studies have emphasized how terrorists are not generally poor, drawing attention to other motivational factors such as the prospects of political gain or status.

4.5.2 On state citizen relationships

The relationship between the state and terrorism is a topic that has been studied from the perspective of how the two relate to each other conceptually and historically;⁵²¹ what the state’s monopoly of force or broader coercive capacities entails;⁵²² and how all of this relates to processes of democratisation.⁵²³ More specifically, studies have zoomed in on the importance of both governmental as well as civil society institutions and how they relate to the effects of government and the potential for violence in societies.⁵²⁴ Overall, the body of

⁵¹⁵ John Horgan, “From profiles to pathways and roots to routes: Perspectives from psychology on radicalisation into terrorism”, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, nr. 1 (2008): 84–85.

⁵¹⁶ Middle East youth jobs crisis “lures recruits to extremism”. *The National*. Retrieved from <http://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/middle-east-youth-jobs-crisis-lures-recruits-to-extremism>

⁵¹⁷ Morten Bøås (2015) Crime, Coping, and Resistance in the Mali-Sahel Periphery, *African Security*, 8:4, 299-319.

⁵¹⁸ Marc Sommers, *Fearing Africa’s Young Men: The Case of Rwanda* (Citeseer, 2006).

⁵¹⁹ Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, “Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War,” *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (April 2008).

⁵²⁰ UNDP report journey to extremism

⁵²¹ Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵²² James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, ‘Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War’, *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75–90.

⁵²³ Jack A. Goldstone et al., ‘A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability’, *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 1 (2010): 190–208.

⁵²⁴ Anke Hoeffler, Syeda Shahbano Ijaz, and Sarah Von Billerbeck, *Post-Conflict Recovery and Peacebuilding* (World Bank, 2011).

research on states and violence asserts that “states with weak institutions run the greatest risk of the onset and recurrence of civil war, and of extreme levels of criminal violence”.⁵²⁵ However, the relationship between states and violence is more complex than that. First of all, there is no agreement on the definitions of states and governance. In the body of literature, indicators of governance outcomes such as democratic participation or representativeness of government, transparency and corruption) are often blurred with the effects or indicators of institutions and the level of institutionalization (such as the (democratic) rule of law, civil society, free press et cetera).

According to economist Kaufmann et al., many studies tend to analyse a mixture of the two actually measure both: the systematic underpinnings or institutionalization of governance in the form of legal frameworks, constitutions or more intangible factors such as culture and norms; coupled with measures of effects, such as levels of welfare, transparency and corruption, fair elections, levels of impunity and accountability. often imperfect, of whether these systems deliver good governance outcomes in practice.⁵²⁶ So a state can have a well-established institutional system to *do* good governance while still failing to deliver good governance outcomes. As a result, the presence of good governance institutions does not equate good governance or a lack of violence. Nonetheless, research on state institutions has established a clear link between lower levels of institutionalisation and a higher likelihood of violence.⁵²⁷ Taken together, even though the body of literature still lacks empirical scrutiny, it provides support for the importance of institutions as playing a critical role in avoiding violence. In line with this, numerous studies established a positive correlation between state instability – as is the case in Mali – and the frequency of terrorist attacks.⁵²⁸

4.5.3 On the impact of events in Libya

The repercussions of the Libyan crisis are numerous in the Sahelian zone following the dispersion of weapons from Libya and the return of the mercenaries to their country of origin. The French National Assembly, in an information report on arms trafficking in the Sahel stated: “Pickups, heavy machine-guns and other weapons constitute dangerous luggage”.⁵²⁹ Other authors concluded that the weapon stockpiles left behind by Gadhafi’s regime ranged from assault rifles, rockets and mines to shells, chemical weapons, and ground-to-air missiles.⁵³⁰ The establishment of the armed group MNLA is generally viewed by experts as result from, among other factors, the return of these armed Tuareg of Libya.⁵³¹ Aside from the arms that flowed freely back into Mali and other neighbouring countries; under Gadhafi, Tripoli had also provided monetary assistance to a number of Sahelian countries. As a result, the end of the regime hampered the development of a number of

⁵²⁵ Goldstone JA, Ulfelder J. How to Construct. Stable Democracies. *The Washington Quarterly*.2004;28(1):9-20. 19; see also Besley, Timothy and Persson, Torsten (2009) The origins of state capacity: property rights, taxation and politics. *American economic review*, 99 (4). pp. 1218-1244.

⁵²⁶ Kaufmann, Daniel and Kraay, Aart and Mastruzzi, Massimo, *The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues* (September 2010). World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 5430.

⁵²⁷ De Soysa, Indra. "Paradise is a bazaar? Greed, creed, and governance in civil war, 1989-99." *Journal of Peace Research* 39.4 (2002): 395-416.

⁵²⁸ Elbadawi, Ibrahim, and Nicholas Sambanis. 2002. How much war will we see? Explaining the prevalence of civil war. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46:307-34; cf Bhavnani, Ravi, and Dan Miodownik. 2009. “Ethnic Polarization, Ethnic Saliency, and Civil War.” *JOURNAL OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION* 53: 30-49.

⁵²⁹ Rapport d’information de l’Assemblée nationale française n° 4431, La situation sécuritaire dans les pays de la zone sahélienne, 6 March 2012, p. 29.

⁵³⁰ Laurence Aida Ammour, “Les enjeux de securite emergence au Maghreb et au sahel depuis le ‘Printemps Arabe’”, *Annuaire de l’Institut Européen de la Méditerranée (IEMED)*, 2012, p. 3.

⁵³¹ Harvey J. Sindima, “Salafi-Wahhabi Islam in Africa”, in: *Major Issues in Islam: The Challenges Within and Without*, Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books, 2018, p. 123.

Sahelian countries dependent on the investment and financial flows of the Libyan companies.⁵³²

However, the intervention of the armed forces following the victory of the Islamists in the first election round eventually led to a serious legitimacy crisis. As a result, the security situation worsened rapidly as Algeria plunged into what has been labelled as the Dark Period. Even though from the end of the 1990s onwards Algeria has taken the stance that it has settled its issues with “Islamist” terrorism, many critics have noted that the state failed to eradicate militancy within its own territory.⁵³³

4.5.4 Opportunities presented by criminal and terrorist groups

Lack of perspective for the Malian population, and the opportunities presented by criminal and terrorist groups, is something mentioned by several authors. For instance, Lacher, a senior associate at the German Institute for International and Security Studies in the Middle East and Africa division, has demonstrated that terrorist groups use various forms of trafficking to acquire weapons, vehicles, and other equipment.⁵³⁴

Malian researcher Sidibe has argued that “the transformation of Sahara into a cocaine highway from Latin America allows AQIM to levy tax on merchandise destined for Western Countries.”⁵³⁵ Political scientist Lounnas explains that AQIM finances its activities through two activities: abduction and release against ransom of Western hostages.⁵³⁶ These different financing sources have also been highlighted by reports from the International Crisis Group and the French senate in its report “Mali : Comment gagner la paix?” (“Mali: how to win/obtain peace”).⁵³⁷ It has also been noted that none of these criminal trades would have been possible without the complicity of high-level state officials.⁵³⁸

In line with this argument, some scholars note that the implementation of terrorist groups in North Mali has been facilitated by their collusion with local populations. In an attempt to explain the acceptance of terrorist groups like AQIM by the Tuareg populations, the International Crisis Group in its report “Islamist terrorism in the Sahel: fact or fiction”⁵³⁹ argues that the main explanation to the welcoming of AQIM by the Tuareg is of economic nature. Poverty in the region has pushed young Tuareg in the ranks of AQIM. American sociologist and political scientist Larémont follows the same logic: he argues that AQIM’s implementation in the region can be understood in the context of the strategic methods of al-Qaeda (central) in Afghanistan and Pakistan where it was able to obtain shelter among the Pashtun tribes.⁵⁴⁰ Because of the government’s withdrawal in North Mali, AQIM and other terrorist groups have been given the opportunity to function as a government unto itself.⁵⁴¹

⁵³² Laurence Aida Ammour, “L’après-Gaddafi au Sahara et au sahel”, *Notres Internationales du CIDOB*, January 2012, p.1.

⁵³³ Gray, David H., and Erik Stockham. "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: The evolution from Algerian Islamism to transnational terror." *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 2.4 (2008): 091-097.

⁵³⁴ Wolfram Lacher, *Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region*, vol. 1 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Washington DC, 2012).

⁵³⁵ Sidibé, ‘Security Management in Northern Mali: Criminal Networks and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms’, 77.

⁵³⁶ Djallil Lounnas, ‘The Regional Fallouts of the French Intervention in Mali’, *Mediterranean Politics* 18, no. 2 (2013): 325–32.

⁵³⁷ Jean-Pierre CHEVÈNEMENT and Gérard LARCHER, ‘Mali : Comment Gagner La Paix ?’, Pub. L. No. 513, § Sénat Français (2013), <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r12-513/r12-513.html>.

⁵³⁸ Interview of an anonymous advisor to Amadou Toumani Touré, transcribed by Djallil Lounnas (2013).

⁵³⁹ Group, ‘Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?’

⁵⁴⁰ Ricardo René Larémont, ‘Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism and Counterterrorism in the Sahel’, *African Security* 4, no. 4 (2011): 242–68.

⁵⁴¹ Larémont, 247.

French government reports have noted that the money AQIM has gained from their different forms of trafficking has been invested in buying the goodwill of local populations (buying goods for twice the price, paying for weddings etc.).⁵⁴² A report by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) on Mali also emphasized the existence of a link between youth unemployment and youth's involvement with violent extremist or armed jihadist groups.⁵⁴³

Within the context of fighting terrorism and arresting suspected terrorists, it is important to note that despite the financial incentives offered by terrorist groups, not all individuals who join terrorist groups in Mali fall into the category of what Orsini, the Director of the Observatory on International Security in Rome, calls "vocational terrorists."⁵⁴⁴ The Malian case study supports the idea that a number of elements are conducive to terrorism, including political frustrations,⁵⁴⁵ socioeconomic, cultural, and historical conditions.⁵⁴⁶ The UN and the OSCE, in separate reports, identified a number of factors that may lead to terrorism in the Sahelian context, including "prolonged unresolved conflicts, dehumanization of victims of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, lack of rule of law, violations of human rights, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and lack of good governance".⁵⁴⁷ This is in line with findings by anthropologist De Bruijn, who concludes that especially young people in Mali and Chad, do not feel protected by their governments and are increasingly questioning the legitimacy of their governments.⁵⁴⁸

4.6 Conclusion

As has become clear from the above, the Malian context is a complex one. The current conflict poses multidimensional challenges, ranging from terrorism to intra-state tensions, historical marginalization, discrimination of certain groups, and organised crime operations. Many factors are identified by researchers as conducive to Mali's conflict situation. On the meso level these range from ethnic tensions between groups and the proliferation of the terrorist groups. On the macro level, the spill over effect to and from other countries' conflicts as well as military operations to counter terrorist insurgencies have partially contributed to peace on the macro level, yet are also seen as a conflict-escalating factor on the individual/micro level. Finally, socioeconomic frustrations on the individual/micro level play out again on the group level where terrorist and non-state armed groups present themselves as alternatives to government rule.

⁵⁴² CHEVÈNEMENT and LARCHER, Mali : comment gagner la paix ?

⁵⁴³ Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni et al., 'Mali's Young "Jihadists" Fuelled by Faith or Circumstance?', 2016.

⁵⁴⁴ Alessandro Orsini, 'Interview With a Terrorist by Vocation: A Day Among the Diehard Terrorists, Part II', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 8 (2013): 672–84.

⁵⁴⁵ Nischler and Morefield, 'An Actor Oriented Empirical Model of the Roots of Terrorism', 53.

⁵⁴⁶ Domenico Tosini, 'Sociology of Terrorism and Counterterrorism: A Social Science Understanding of Terrorist Threat', *Sociology Compass* 1, no. 2 (1 November 2007): 664–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00035.x>.

⁵⁴⁷ UN General Assembly, 'The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy', *Resolution* 60 (2006): 4; see also 'Ministerial Statement on Supporting the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy | OSCE', 1, accessed 20 November 2018, <https://www.osce.org/mc/29544>.

⁵⁴⁸ Mirjam de Bruijn and Jonna Both (2017) 'Youth Between State and Rebel (Dis)Orders: Contesting Legitimacy from Below in Sub-Sahara Africa', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28:4-5, 779-798, DOI: 10.1080/09592318.2017.1322329.