

Peacebuilding in Mali difficulties and challenges

بناء السلام في مالي الصعوبات والتحديات

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Abstract

the United Nations is deeply involved in the crisis in Mali. This severe crisis has prompted the UN to work actively to maintain peace and stability in the region, Peacebuilding in Mali presents a complex challenge shaped by a myriad of factors, including historical grievances, ethnic tensions, and the impacts of political instability. Since the 2012 conflict, which was exacerbated by a coup d'état and the subsequent rise of militant groups in the northern regions, Mali has struggled to establish a stable governance framework that can effectively address the needs of its diverse populations. The interplay of local, national, and international interests further complicates the peacebuilding process, as external interventions often do not align with local realities. Additionally, issues such as poverty, weak state institutions, and the proliferation of small arms have created an environment where violence can easily resurge, posing significant obstacles to the effectiveness and sustainability of peace initiatives. As efforts continue to foster dialogue and reconciliation among various stakeholders, the road to enduring peace in Mali remains fraught with difficulties and challenges.

Keywords : Mali, United nations, peace building, Algeria, crisis

ملخص:

انخرطت هيئة الأمم المتحدة بشكل عميق في الأزمة في مالي. وقد دفعها هذه الأزمة الحادة إلى العمل بنشاط من أجل الحفاظ على السلم والاستقرار في المنطقة، يُمثل بناء السلام في مالي تحديًا معقدًا تتشكل معالمه من خلال عوامل متعددة، تشمل التطورات التاريخية، والتوترات العرقية، وأثار عدم الاستقرار السياسي. منذ صراع عام 2012، الذي تفاقم بفعل الانقلاب العسكري وما تلاه من صعود للجماعات المسلحة في المناطق الشمالية، حيث كافحت مالي من أجل إرساء إطار حوكمة مستقر قادر على تلبية احتياجات سكانه، ويزيد تداخل المصالح المحلية والوطنية والدولية من تعقيد عملية بناء السلام، إذ غالبًا ما لا تتوافق التدخلات الخارجية مع الواقع المحلي. إضافةً إلى ذلك، خلقت قضايا مثل الفقر، وضعف مؤسسات الدولة، وانتشار الأسلحة الصغيرة بيئةً مواتيةً لعودة العنف بسهولة، مما يُشكل عقبات كبيرة أمام فعالية مبادرات السلام واستدامتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مالي، هيئة الأمم المتحدة، بناء السلام، الأزمة.

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Introduction

The crisis in Mali has been a pressing concern for the international community, to maintain peace and stability in the region. Mali has been grappling with political instability, ethnic tensions, and the presence of extremist groups, creating a complex and volatile situation that requires immediate attention.

The United Nations has been actively involved in peacekeeping efforts in Mali, deploying peacekeeping forces to support the government and address security challenges. Additionally, France has played a role in this crisis, providing military support and resources to combat armed groups and maintain stability. The collaboration between Algeria, the United Nations, and France is crucial in addressing the crisis and ensuring the safety and well-being of the people in Mali.

As the situation in Mali continues to evolve, it is essential for the international community to closely monitor the developments and work towards sustainable solutions that promote peace and security in the region. The coordinated efforts of the United Nations and France underscore the importance of international cooperation in addressing complex crises and upholding peacekeeping efforts.

What are the causes of instability in the Sahel region, and what is the impact of the intervention of external forces on the peacebuilding process?

This problem encompasses the following questions:

- What are the nature and causes of the crisis in Mali?
- Why did the United Nations fail to keep and build peace in Mali?
- Did Algeria play a role in resolving the crisis in Mali?

Hypotheses

- The state-building process is hindered by the lack of legitimate governance, equitable distribution of wealth, and the presence of diverse races and ethnicities.
- Foreign intervention affected the peacebuilding process in Mali.

Methodes:

Given the historical nature of the Sahel crisis, it is advisable to employ a historical analytical approach. This approach is effective in recounting and tracing events and their order and evaluating them based on realist theory. Additionally, I used a case study approach to trace the role of the United Nations in resolving the crisis, and I utilized a forward-looking approach to offer a prospective analysis and solutions. The analyses also relied on the theory of the "Regional Security Complex," which is based on the idea that the regional level is the center of security analysis, given that the regional level of security imposes itself on regional units due to the influence of security dynamics, even if the source of the threat emanates from a single country. This applies to the crisis in Mali.

Research purpose:

This study aims to examine the factors contributing to the lack of successful state building in Mali, and the fail of the United Nations. The study aims to trace the role of the United Nations mission in Mali to keep and build peace and its failures in resolving the conflict in Mali, and the role of Algeria and France in finding a solution to the crisis it also seeks to identify the numerous challenges and issues in Mali. Moreover, it will assess the impact of foreign intervention in the crisis, determining whether it has provided solutions or worsened the circumstances.

Research originality and value: This article stands out from previous studies due to its comprehensive analysis of the multiple crises faced by the Sahel region. It aims to offer a precise account of Algeria's stance and its endeavors to seek peaceful, political, and economic resolutions for the Sahel crisis. Moreover, given the failure of the United Nations mission in Mali, the article presents valuable recommendations that can be advantageous for policymakers and researchers focusing on this subject.

1- The conflict in Mali

1.1- A brief history

Mali is currently undergoing a crucial phase of consolidation. In order to achieve stability, it is imperative to address the underlying factors that led to the significant escalation of conflict in 2012. The immediate tasks at hand involve fostering national unity, gaining a better understanding of the rebels' objectives, and effectively managing the increased autonomy of the northern region within a unified political structure. (Kumalo, 2014)

The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) was established in October 2011 by former Tuareg exiles in Libya. Its primary objective was to unite the various factions that had been divided and weakened by political disputes over time. Remarkably, the MNLA succeeded in bringing together all the major communities in the northern regions of Mali. The untimely death of Ibrahim ag Bahanga, the chief instigator of the MNLA, in a car accident near Kidal in August 2011 could have potentially jeopardized the group's military plans and led to further divisions. However, neither his demise nor Iyad ag Ghali's inability to assert himself as the political leader of the MNLA hindered the strategic planning that ultimately led to (Damme, 2015) On January 17, 2012, a fourth rebellion known as the 'Tuareg' rebellion commenced in Mali, marking three years since the last north-south peace agreement. This rebellion began with an assault on a military garrison in the northeastern town of Menaka. In contrast to previous attacks, the rebel fighters displayed enhanced preparation and organization and notably possessed a significantly larger quantity of equipment compared to their predecessors. They proudly showcased an arsenal that was deemed the most remarkable ever witnessed in the north of Mali (Morgan, 2023)

Following the military coup in March 2012, the rebel government forces successfully overthrew the Malian government, creating a power vacuum that allowed insurgents to seize control of the sparsely populated northern region. This region was then taken over by three extremist Islamist groups, namely Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Tuareg

National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), and Ansar al-Din. These groups managed to gain control of major towns in the north and demanded independence for the regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal from Mali's government. The rebellion initially originated in the capital city of Bamako and was led by Tuaregs who felt marginalized and neglected by the state, particularly during times of drought and famine. The situation further deteriorated after the military coup in March 2012, which was orchestrated by junior army officers. This coup led to the sidelining of the MNLA by other Islamists and resulted in a de facto partition of the country. Notably, this rebellion marked the first time that Islamic themes became intertwined with the rhetoric of a Tuareg-led uprising. (Kumalo, 2014)

In May 2014, the conflict resurfaced as armed groups once again seized control of extensive areas in the North. The subsequent resurgence of hostilities and the swift acquisition of power by rebels in the North highlighted the enduring grievances prevalent in these regions.

1.2- Reasons of the conflict

a) A variety of reasons

The state of Mali faces a significant crisis due to the failure of economic and social development policies. These countries are among the poorest in the world, with high levels of precarity in rural and urban areas. Demographic issues, young populations entering the labor market without employment prospects, and non-existent industrialization contribute to the situation. The absence of state control and endemic poverty have created fertile ground for drug trafficking, cigarette smuggling, arms trade, vehicle smuggling, and human trafficking through the underground economy linked to migration movements.. (Coulibaly).

Drug trafficking is a major cause of the North's crisis and armed conflict, with rebels, transnational organized crime, and Islamic groups being the top offenders. In Gao and Kidal, rebels and Islamists are the primary offenders, with 72% and 100% scores, respectively. In Kayes and Sikasso, these groups are perceived as the two biggest drug traffickers. (Coulibaly).

The Malian crisis has been exacerbated by internal issues, including the delegation of institutions and the deterioration of the transition regime post-coup. Also, external reactions, such as those from France, CEDEAO, and the United Nations, have led to regional and international reactions, and the emergence of terrorist groups and the Mali Army's inefficiency have amplified the failures of the Mali political system

b) Peacebuilding Challenges and difficulties

Since 2012, Mali has been facing a crisis involving ethnic-based movements, jihadist groups, and transnational criminal networks. The crisis has affected political, security, socio-economic, humanitarian, and human rights aspects. Root causes include weak state institutions, ineffective governance, and marginalization. Recent factors include corruption, nepotism, power abuse, internal conflicts, and declining national army capacity. Despite a 2015 peace agreement, insecurity persists, with ceasefire violations, stagnant institutional reforms, and intensified extremist and terrorist operations. Mali continues to face ongoing insecurity three years later. Ceasefire violations persist, institutional reforms remain stagnant, and the operations of violent

extremist and terrorist groups have intensified, with the emergence of new armed groups. (Coulibaly).

In January 2012, Mali experienced a surge of violence on a large scale due to a rebellion in the northern region and a military coup in Bamako, which posed a significant challenge to the central government. Subsequently, terrorist groups occupied the northern areas but were eventually expelled by the French military intervention in collaboration with the Malian army. Furthermore, a coalition of African forces provided additional support in restoring stability to the region. The international community has played a crucial role in the stabilization process by granting authorization to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) as a peacekeeping mission of international significance.. (NOTE, 2023).

Mali has encountered considerable obstacles in its peacebuilding endeavors, especially over the last ten years. A mix of political, social, and environmental issues has made it difficult to attain enduring peace and stability in the nation. Below are some of the primary challenges:

1. **Political Instability:** Following the coup d'état in 2012 that ousted the government, Mali has faced ongoing difficulties with governance and political stability. Constant leadership changes and internal political conflicts impede unified efforts toward peace.
2. **Insurgency and Armed Conflict:** Different armed factions, such as northern separatists and jihadist groups associated with al-Qaeda and ISIS, have contributed to ongoing violence and instability. Their existence hinders peace talks and heightens the risks faced by civilians.
3. **Weak State Institutions:** Ineffective and illegitimate governance, coupled with fragile judicial and security institutions, erodes the rule of law. Corruption and a minimal state presence in rural regions intensify grievances and hinder peacebuilding initiatives.
4. **Socioeconomic Challenges:** Elevated rates of poverty, unemployment, and restricted educational opportunities lead to dissatisfaction within the community, potentially igniting conflict. Economic uncertainty undermines public trust in the government and weakens backing for peace efforts.

3. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

3.1 Stabilization and Reconciliation

Two weeks after the high-level meeting on the Sahel during which the President of the Republic highlighted the urgency of the terrorist threat in North Mali, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2071, presented by France and co-sponsored by the three African members of the Security Council (South Africa, Morocco, Togo) and by Germany, India and the United Kingdom.

Resolution 2071, adopted under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, calls on the Malian authorities to engage in political dialogue with Malian rebel groups and legitimate representatives of the local population of northern Mali. It threatens sanctions against armed groups in North Mali who do not dissociate themselves from terrorist movements.

This resolution asks the Secretary General of the United Nations to present a report, in consultation in particular with ECOWAS and the African Union, on the basis of which the Security Council can authorize in 45 days the deployment of an African operation in Mali, with the aim of allowing Malians to recover their sovereignty and the integrity of their territory and to fight against international terrorism.

The resolution invites the new Special Envoy for the Sahel, Mr. Romano Prodi, to participate in the development of a global solution to the Malian crisis, as part of the implementation of the United Nations strategy for the Sahel (Nations, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/736069>, 2023).

In 2015, a peace accord was signed between the government of Mali and a coalition of armed groups in an effort to put an end to the recurring violence and enhance the integration of the northern regions into the nation-state. Nevertheless, several obstacles hinder the complete implementation of the Algiers Accord and regional development plans. These obstacles include stalled negotiations among the signatories of the Peace Accord, the government's limited presence in many communities, slow progress towards decentralization, ongoing attacks by violent extremist organizations, and a complex landscape of ethnic rivalries and distrust.

In order to address these challenges, the Mali Peacebuilding, Stabilization, and Reconciliation project has been initiated. This project, which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and implemented by Creative Associates International, aims to transform the relationship between citizens and the government. Over the course of five years, the project endeavors to foster trust and communication between communities and the government, support communities in identifying and responding to early signs of conflict, and facilitate collaboration between citizens and local leaders to promote peace.

The project specifically targets 46 communities, known as "communes," located in the Mopti, Ségou, Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, Taoudénit, and Timbuktu regions. Through its comprehensive approach, the project strives to overcome the existing challenges and contribute to the sustainable peace and development of Mali. (MALI, 2023).

The project promotes the idea of collective responsibility and mutual achievement, which allows both the local community and government institutions to cooperate in identifying needs and working together to find solutions. This collaborative approach aims to rebuild trust, reduce conflicts, and enhance the provision of services to the citizens. Additionally, the project actively involves various stakeholders such as youth organizations, civil society groups, community and religious leaders, schools, and families in order to address the underlying factors that make individuals susceptible to recruitment by violent extremist organizations. Through raising awareness about the drivers of violent extremism, providing counter-messages, and engaging youth in civic activities, both young men and women, as well as the wider communities, develop resilience against these groups (MALI, 2023).

3.2- Role of MINUSMA

In 2013, the deployment of MINUSMA took place, authorized to assume control from AFISMA, the African-led International Support Mission in Mali. Its primary objective is to provide assistance in the restoration of state authority across Mali and to bring stability to

crucial regions, particularly in the northern part of the country. The reconstruction of the Malian security sector is deemed crucial and forms a fundamental aspect of the mission's mandate.. (Nations, 2023)Tieman Coulibaly, Mali's former Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, sees MINUSMA as an important factor in efforts to stop the activities of the MNLA and similar groups (Kumalo, Building the capacity of the Malian police Why MINUSMA needs to think outside the box, 2014), He has appealed for better coordination of the international response to Mali's needs and maintains that there can be no sustainable development without peace and stability.

The mandate of MINUSMA emphasizes the need for restoring democratic governance and constitutional order in Mali. The transitional Malian government is primarily responsible for resolving challenges and protecting citizens, while MINUSMA supports the authorities in engaging with political groups advocating for independence. The mission aims to support the capacity of police services in Mali and assist the return of Malian authorities to the north. MinusMA and the national police are developing a strategic plan to strengthen the Malian police's capacity through training and infrastructure development. However, the mission struggles to extend its presence in Malian territory, particularly in terms of deploying approved military, police, and civilian personnel. Military deployment reached only 74% of capacity in the first year, while police deployment reached 38% in May 2014 (Kumalo, Building the capacity of the Malian police Why MINUSMA needs to think outside the box, 2014).

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali had achieved remarkable success as a peace operation until 2016. It played a crucial role in enhancing stability in northern Mali, minimizing civilian casualties, and facilitating the safe return of displaced individuals to their homes. Regrettably, the mission's effectiveness has waned since 2016, primarily due to escalated violence perpetrated by armed groups targeting MINUSMA. It is important to note that MINUSMA, which has been solely tasked with assisting the Malian government since June 2018, has yet to receive the necessary resources to fulfill its mandate adequately.

(Lijn, 2019).

The mission faces disapproval from the local population and must not be used as a bodyguard service for the Malian government. The work of MINUSMA police in Mali is conducted by individual police officers (IPOs) and formed police units (FPU). IPOs perform specialized tasks and functions, while FPUs are organized in units of 140 armed police officers. Despite expectations of MINUSMA dealing with a dynamic and complex environment, the mission's available funding is considered inadequate by some stakeholders. The mission's efforts are aimed at consolidating stability, enhancing a culture of national reconciliation, and fostering social cohesion within the country. (Kumalo, Building the capacity of the Malian police Why MINUSMA needs to think outside the box, 2014).

The Malian government and key regional players are considering a readjustment to a counterterrorism mission, which could involve integrating the military counterterrorism efforts of the JF-G5 Sahel into MINUSMA. This could be done as a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) or a regional counterterrorism force supported by UN logistics. Both models offer benefits such as better integration into the international approach, better resourced, accountability, and

legitimacy. However, the JF-G5 Sahel is not yet reconstituted, and the breakdown of the social contract cannot be solved militarily. Alternatively, MINUSMA could continue as a peacekeeping and stabilization operation, but better resourced. This would ensure the protection of civilians in central regions and prevent the collapse of the Sahel region. The choice of strategy depends on the willingness of Malians to strive for an effective and inclusive government, and missions like MINUSMA cannot continue to do more with the same or less resources (Lijn, 2019).

MINUSMA's performance in facilitating peace in Mali has been mixed, with modest achievements but a significant portion of its resources allocated to self-defense due to frequent attacks. The UN Security Council has not adjusted the mission's mandate and resources to the evolving situation, resulting in MINUSMA's primary focus on the northern part of the country. The mission's mandate should be adapted to protect the civilian population, but it is uncertain whether this would receive approval from Bamako. (Tull, 2022).

3.3- Consequences of the UN Withdrawal

The UN's departure from Mali has raised concerns about the security of the Malian people, with MINUSMA contributing to the protection of civilians through patrols, convoys, and bases. The mission has also helped develop local conflict prevention systems and human rights monitoring. However, the mission's departure could increase risks to civilians due to inadequate coordination with local actors and reprisals against civilians who collaborated with the UN. The conflict between political armed factions in northern Mali, including ethnic-based movements, Islamist organizations, and international criminal organizations, has intensified since 2012. The 2015 peace pact remains in effect, but the factions that signed it continue to use violence. Jihadists could find safe havens to attract recruits, while attacks against security personnel and civilians increase. More Malians may be domestically displaced, potentially leading to a refugee catastrophe. The crisis also provides Russia and China with adversarial possibilities against the West's influence in Mali and the Sahel region. Mali is being used as a test bed for China's arms sales and private security corporations in Africa, with mercenaries likely setting up camps and autonomous regions for illegal operations. Russia and China intervened in January 2022 to prevent the UN Security Council from imposing additional sanctions against Mali. (Namatovu, 2023).

The UN's withdrawal from Mali raises concerns about the need to review UN peacekeeping mandates in armed conflict. The UN's decision to switch missions after just one year during an armed conflict has led to a situation where the military regime has developed coping mechanisms. The UN needs to rely on ECOWAS and the AU to forge new conflict management mechanisms and pressure Mali to restore civilian governance. Collaborating with ECOWAS and the AU could help break away from Wagner mercenaries and Russian and Chinese influence.

4. The role of external parties in the crisis

4.1 AU and France

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) faced a conflict over the responsibility of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) in Mali. ECOWAS was involved in the conflict after President Amadou Toumani Touré's coup d'état in 2012, which divided Mali into a southern and northern part. The AU responded tardily, but France provided military and security planners to assist ECOWAS and the AU. The conflict reflected the strained relations between the AU and African regional economic communities. The AU took the lead, using ECOWAS as its delivery mechanism. However, the AU's planning lagged as security deteriorated in early 2013. France launched Opération Serval, involving massive air strikes and ground troops. The Malian government requested the French intervention, and ECOWAS was never considered the appropriate organization to undertake it. (WELZ, 2014)

In 2008, France took a strategic decision to commence its Plan in Mali, Niger, and Mauritania, with the primary goals of countering terrorism and supporting local development initiatives. A significant budget of €58 million was assigned to this program, which has since expanded to include more countries in the Sahel region, aiming to strengthen security measures. In addition to the Plan Sahel, a rapid response force called Operation Sabre was established, along with the establishment of a permanent military presence in Dakar, Senegal, and Libreville, Gabon. The success of the Plan Sahel has been an inspiration for other endeavors, notably the European Union's Strategy for Security and Development in 2011 (Damme, 2015).

The French and US initiatives have, however, turned out to be almost exclusively security oriented and, intentionally or not, served to sideline other issues that they had initially pledged to deal with.

The Malian government requested military aid from France after extremist militants encroached on its capital, Bamako. The French arrived and recaptured Timbuktu and Gao. Operation Barkhane, a joint operation between France and its allies, expanded its footprint across the Sahel region, with two additional permanent bases in Niamey, Niger, and N'Djamena, Chad. However, the allies have failed to address the region, resulting in thousands of civilian and military casualties and over 2.5 million displacements. In August 2021, French President announced the withdrawal of all 2,400 French troops from Mali, out of the total 4,300 stationed in the Sahel. The withdrawal ended six months later, with the last French soldiers crossing into Niger (King, 2023).

4.2 Algeria's apparatus

4.3 Implementing the Algiers Agreement (2015)

In January 2014, the Algerian Government took the initiative to engage in a political process with armed groups in northern Mali, aiming to facilitate a peace agreement. Despite ongoing military engagements on the ground, these discussions persisted. However, in May 2014, government forces faced defeat and were forced to withdraw from the northern town of Kidal

by a coalition of armed groups. This confrontation and the subsequent retreat of the Government had a significant impact on the negotiating positions of all parties involved and had a notable influence on the Algiers process. As a result, the armed groups reorganized themselves into two coalitions: the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), primarily consisting of armed groups that had previously fought against the Government in 2012, and the Platform, primarily composed of armed groups that had not engaged in direct military clashes with the Government. (Zahar, 2017).

The Algiers Agreement, signed in 2015, aimed to recognize Mali as a unified state, increase decentralized power for the north, reduce economic inequality, and promote national reconciliation. However, the agreement was unable to reach specific details in critical areas, leaving much to be clarified during implementation. (Zahar, 2017).

Conclusion

The United Nations have been involved in a peacekeeping mission in Mali with the goal of stabilizing the country and preventing the spread of terrorism. However, recent events have highlighted the failure of these efforts, as the region continues to grapple with conflict and insecurity. Despite the presence of international forces, Mali remains a hotbed of violence and political instability, raising questions about the effectiveness of the peacekeeping mission.

The ongoing unrest in Mali has exposed the limitations of the international community's intervention, with Algeria and the United Nations struggling to quell the violence and maintain peace. The failure of these efforts has prompted concerns about the long-term prospects for stability in the region, as well as the potential implications for neighboring countries. As the situation in Mali continues to evolve, it is crucial to examine the underlying factors contributing to the lack of progress in achieving lasting peace and security.

Recommendations

The short-term recommendations for Mali include addressing impunity and corruption, undermining criminal networks, removing military juntas from politics, initiating national dialogue, and holding perpetrators accountable for human rights violations. The government should take serious action against organized crime and pursue criminal activity, with the International Criminal Court assisting. The military should be removed from politics to reestablish civilian government. National dialogue should involve a variety of stakeholders and involve an international jury to oversee the process. A military solution to the situation in the north will not secure long-term peace. Zero tolerance for human rights violations must be held accountable, and accusations of targeted attacks by the military or mistreatment of captured extremists must be addressed immediately. Addressing the humanitarian crisis is crucial, as many Malian refugees fear reprisals based on their ethnicity. The international community can provide aid for basic needs and facilitate communal dialogues to rebuild trust and reintegrate refugees.

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