Mali and its Sahelian Neighbors

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I. Introduction

The nine Sahelian countries (Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal) are among the poorest in the world, with poverty rates of over 50%, and most are seriously conflict-prone. Among these, Mali (the focus of this study) and its immediate neighbors have faced enduring conflicts since independence; these have often been induced or exacerbated by responses to extreme climatic conditions (e.g. droughts of the 1970s), institutional instability following political transitions (particularly during the 1990s), and enduring difficulties in assuring delivery of basic governance functions (including territorial, protection, human and food security and core social services).

The study focuses on Mali, explaining the nature of conflicts and conflict threats in a regional context. The study identifies and examines three main sources of conflict and insecurity in Mali’s post-independence period: 1) transborder criminal and terrorist armed activity linked to the history of armed conflict in the Northern regions; 2) historical Tuareg/Arab insurgencies from the 1960s to the late 2000s; and 3) local-level, resource-related conflicts tied to contrasting livelihood systems (especially water and pasture access and management). The study situates the sources of insecurity within the framework developed in the WDR Concept Note, including discussions of stresses, capabilities, and expectations; the role of cross-border and global dynamics; the evolution and change of forms of violence; the role of leadership; and other aspects outlined in the Concept Note. The case study also examines some ways in which conflicts have been attempted to be resolved.

Overall, Mali is a case that well illustrates the connections between development and conflict as well as the causal factors and dynamics described in the WDR. During a field-based mission, a range of government, non-governmental, and diplomatic actors strongly affirmed an essential relationship between insecurity and development, arguing that the two are empirically inseparable in the Malian context. Moreover, the contemporary insecurity in Northern Mali is an apt and timely example of the complex, adaptive, inter-connected, and cross-border nature of violence; the dynamics of insecurity in the North both in the contemporary period and over time are linked to weak state capability and difficult terrain as well as to chronic development challenges tied to a lightly-populated, poorly integrated space. At the same time, Mali is a compelling case that demonstrates how, when coupled with political will, social capital constitutes an important reserve for conflict mediation, even if formal institutional capability is weak. The resolution of armed conflict in the mid-1990s, which drew on Mali’s reserve of social capital, is a good example of political leadership, the role of non-state actors, and the value of consensus in the peacemaking process. Mali’s low-level local resource-related conflicts throughout the country illustrate the challenges of managing the commons in conditions of environmental scarcity and vulnerability combined with population growth and limited state capability. Finally, during a field visit, the WDR mission team heard numerous claims of quotidian frustrations tied directly to high expectations, disillusionment with state institutions, and limited economic opportunities, all of which constitute an important challenge for future governance. All this takes place in a country with a strong democratic record in which two
nonviolent democratic transfers of power have taken place during the past 19 years. Mali was also an early and effective decentralizing state in Africa. In short, Mali’s national democratic conviction and practice have been exemplary, as has the country’s record of non-violent solutions to various sources of conflict—in particular for a poor country in a largely non-democratic regional neighborhood full of enduring armed conflicts. Nonetheless, Mali is faced with a series of security, development, and governance challenges that remain profound and potential sources of future conflict.

II. Three Domains of Conflict and Insecurity: A Descriptive Summary

As noted in the introduction, the case study identifies three central domains of conflict and insecurity in Mali, each of which has analogs in other countries in the Sahel or is connected directly to conflicts in neighboring countries.

First is the contemporary multi-faceted insecurity in the three Northern regions of Mali (Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal), hereafter “the North.” The insecurity is a confluence of external and internal factors, including a) transnational terrorist activity led by Al Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) that uses European kidnapping as a main tactic; b) transnational trafficking of illicit goods, principally drugs and weapons but also people; and c) the presence of armed Malian actors linked to banditry and to the history of a series of armed rebellions in the region. The external/transnational factors intersect with local grievances, due primarily to the region’s poverty, isolation, and vulnerability, as well as to a large geographic, lightly-populated territory that is difficult to govern and control.

The three sources of insecurity might be thought of as overlapping networks shaped by opportunistic alliances between the various armed actors. That said, any empirical connection between the different sources of insecurity requires substantiation and cannot be assumed. For example, judging from the results of a field mission in February 2010 there is public suspicion in Bamako that armed Tuareg actors collaborate with members of the al Qaeda organization or with drug traffickers. This perception is part of what a recent report called a “growing gulf of incomprehension” between the north and other parts of the country (USAID 2009: iv). However, based on currently available evidence, there is no clear evidence of a military alliance between local insurgents and AQIM (Filiu 2010b: 9). Tuareg actors and AQIM militants do not share an ideological agenda (USAID 2009). Moreover, Malian actors are not the main illicit traffickers, who originate in other countries. At the same time, some Northern Malian actors supply information and vital resources, provide transport, or occasionally participate in kidnapping actions. The motivation of these Malian collaborators is primarily opportunistic, not ideological. In interviews, Malian political and military analysts argued that the prospect of making significant income through illicit and criminal activity distorts local incentives, creating the conditions for opportunistic alliances between traffickers and/or kidnappers, on the one hand, and Malian actors on the other. Despite important investment in the North by the Malian state since the 1990s, several analysts described the near dominance of an illicit economy in the North. Countering these overlapping sources of insecurity will not be easy. The current insecurity in the North has a transnational “Sahel-Saharan” dimension and its resolution will require sustained sub-regional, transnational cooperation. There is also need for economic and infrastructural integration between Northern Mali and Southern Mali as a long-term development solution to the contemporary insecurity.
Second is past insurgencies, led by Tuareg (and to a lesser extent by Arab) rebels and also centered in the North. There are three main periods of insurgency in Mali’s postcolonial history—a) in the mid-1960s shortly after independence, as well as in 1968; both insurgencies triggered violent repression by the state; b) in the early and mid-1990s, in which the state initially responded with violence but ultimately chose a path of mediation and non-violent resolution; and c) the period from 2006 to 2009 when a series of small-scale revolts also were initiated, which were met with an accommodationist strategy on the part of the state. The 1990s rebellion, which was the largest and most well-known of the insurgencies, is the focus in the discussion below. The causes of that rebellion resonate strongly with the dynamics described in the Concept Note; the insurgency is a classic conflict between a marginalized, resource poor, ethnically distinct region and a state with weak capability in a vast zone that is geographically difficult to control. Moreover, the peaceful resolution of the 1990s insurgency constitutes an important and largely successful example of mediation, inclusion, state-civil society interaction, and political leadership.

Third is a set of “local,” sub-national conflicts, generally around access to and management of natural resources. The local conflicts include disputes between sedentary farmers and mobile herders (as well as between sedentary herder-farmers and mobile herders); intra- and inter-village rival claims to land ownership and usage; access to water; access to fishing rights; and the rights to exploit natural resources, such as wood. Tensions over access to resources are quotidian and ubiquitous in the country. Some disputes are handled peacefully through informal arbitration and negotiation; others engender more profound conflict resolution mechanisms; and still others result in violent, murderous inter-communal attacks. Most attacks do not rise to the level of large-scale (more than 20 deaths), but the potential for local resource-based grievances to escalate exists. During field visits to rural areas south and north of the capital Bamako the WDR mission team heard evidence of innovative, bottom-up compacts that sought to regulate access to and conflict over natural resources and which are described below. Overall, disputes over access to local resources constitute an enduring challenge for Mali, given some structural constraints, including a growing population, scarce resources in arid and Sahelian environments, limited state capability in terms of financial and human resources, climatic variability, and the availability of few non-farm/non-pasture economic opportunities in rural areas. But in assessing the risk of such disputes materializing into violent conflict, it is essential to avoid any crude deterministic relationship between poverty and resource scarcity, on the one hand, and conflict, on the other. Where tensions exist and lead to violent conflict, there are usually specific problems of management, leadership (or its absence), local politics, and local history that come into play.

III. Case Study Background and Context

Contemporary Northern Mali: The contemporary insecurity in Northern Mali is a confluence of three main sources: 1) illicit trafficking; 2) global and regional terror networks; 3) to Ouéléssébougou and Jitumu Sanakoro Communes, Koulikoro region; to Sio Commune, Mopti Region; and to Dandougou-Fakala Commune, Segou Region.
and 3) armed actors connected indirectly or directly to the legacy of armed insurgencies in the region. The three sources of insecurity are interlinked. Northern Mali is a vast and lightly populated territory, constituting about two-thirds of the overall territory of the Malian state and about 9% of the population (most of which lives within immediate proximity of the Niger River). The area is historically one that depends on transborder flows of goods and people, in particular with Algeria, Niger, and Mauritania. The area is also one with limited infrastructural, economic, and governance integration with the southern regions of Mali, where the centralized Malian state is headquartered.

The precise origins of the illicit trafficking are difficult to determine. The most consistent narrative supplied by Malian experts is that beginning in the early 1990s when the Tuareg/Arab insurgencies began, the region witnessed a large influx of weapons. These weapons flowed from other armed conflicts in the region (from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Chad, in particular) as well as from a general increase in light weapons trafficking in the 1990s. During the 1990s insurgency period, some armed actors seized upon the insecurity to use their weapons to engage in banditry as well as illegal trafficking. After the insurgency ended, many weapons remained in circulation. By most accounts, the illicit commercial trade began with cigarettes—to avoid paying duty and taxes—with the general flow from Sub-Saharan Africa through Mali to Northern Africa and Europe. The drug flow began with cannabis, hashish, and most recently cocaine. A recent UNODC report on illicit trafficking in West Africa identified oil, cocaine, cannabis, cigarettes, weapons, toxic waste, people, counterfeit medicines, and other natural resources as part of the illegal trade in and through West Africa. The largest trades were in oil and cocaine, estimated at $1 billion or more per annum (UNODC 2009) in the sub-region, including Mali. A report from the International Peace Institute similarly identified West Africa as a “major hub” in the global drug economy (IPI 2009). Both reports argue that historical trade and trafficking routes, deep poverty, weak governance, and unemployed youth are key risk factors for the trade. These themes resonate with the interview evidence collected during the field visit to Mali, though again no deterministic link between poverty and unemployment, on the one hand, and illicit trade, on the other, should be assumed, given that the former are widespread in the country and the latter is not.

The terrorist organization in Northern Mali is Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (or Al Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb--AQIM). AQIM was formerly the Algeria-based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which was an offshoot of the GIA in that country, and thus AQIM should be seen as part of a long line of Algerian jihadi groups (Filiu 2009). Algerian militants still dominate the organization (Filiu 2010a). However, AQIM declares itself to be the representative of Al Qaeda in the Sahel and Maghreb, formally announcing the affiliation in January 2007 (though it should be noted that terrorist organizations in Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco maintain their independence from AQIM [Filiu 2009]). GSPC also supplied fighters to the Al Qaeda affiliate in Iraq. In short, the organization has national (primarily Algerian), regional (AQIM operates in multiple states in the region), and global dimensions. By most accounts, AQIM is now based in Northern Mali, having faced increasingly effective state-led resistance in Algeria and having found the Sahelian, lightly governed desert area in Mali more amenable as a territorial base. The presence of armed actors tied to the Tuareg rebellion and the presence of an illicit economy were also most likely magnets to Northern Mali as well. But the state was quite weak in the north (USAID 2009), and there already were large areas where criminal and armed networks operated outside the reach of the state. There appear to be
two main AQIM factions, both now based in Mali, totaling several hundred fighters. (The mission heard estimates of between 150 to 400 committed AQIM militants.)

In terms of tactics, the main success that AQIM has had in recent years is through European hostage taking. What happens to the hostages in Mali varies. AQIM has executed two European hostages, one in 2009 and the other in 2010; it has released others in exchange for prisoner releases and/or money, including a high profile case of a French hostage who was released in Mali in February 2010; several Europeans remain in custody. AQIM has also led attacks, including suicide bombings, on Mauritanian, Malian, and Algerian military and political targets. As for Mali, an important attack occurred in June 2009 when AQIM succeeded in assassinating a senior Malian intelligence figure in Timbuktu, in seeming retaliation for an early raid on AQIM positions by the Malian army (Filiu 2009b: 6). AQIM is also involved with the narcotics trade (Baldor 2010). Indeed, one expert assessment found that AQIM’s criminal activities define the organization and are crucial for its survival (Filiu 2010b: 9).

Mali’s interaction with AQIM is multi-faceted. One line of argumentation strongly distinguishes Mali from AQIM, seeing the latter’s presence on Malian soil as an imposition and as a spillover from Algeria with precious few local roots. Many Malian and international observers argue that Malian Islam has little resonance with the Salafist, integrationist, and political Islam that AQIM espouses (see Pringle 2006; Stern 2008; USAID 2009: 17). In interviews in Bamako, Tuareg political leaders argued emphatically that Tuaregs have little ideological commonalities with the Salafists. These leaders disavowed any relations with AQIM, echoing similar claims by Tuaregs in Niger. The claims resonate with findings in other studies (Filiu 2010b). Another line of argumentation is cautionary about how much political and military attention to devote to AQIM. Some critics argue that the terrorist threat is inflated for instrumental purposes in Mali (Keenan 2004a,b); others argue that too much external counterterrorism activity could create a backlash against the Malian state and in favor of AQIM (ICG 2005). But it must be recognized that AQIM’s presence on Malian soil is real, and AQIM through hostage taking has caused disruptions to development projects, diplomatic relations, and the tourism industry. A 2010 U.S. assessment found AQIM’s strength and potential to be growing (Baldor 2010). In short, the Malian state has an inherent interest in uprooting the AQIM presence in the northern parts of the country.

The Tuareg Insurgencies: Across multiple time periods, Northern-based Tuareg and Arab insurgents have challenged the authority of the central state. Tuareg actors revolted during French colonial rule on multiple occasions, as did other populations in Mali. Tuareg insurgents similarly rebelled again after political independence in the 1960s. Each of these episodes was met with repression. The 1960s counter-insurgencies were especially harsh, and the Tuareg grievances articulated at that time were not addressed after the repression. A number of Tuaregs fled Mali following the repression of the 1960s (and later after droughts in the 1970s and 1980s). A second major round of insurgency began in 1990 and lasted through 1995. After a period of formal peace, a series of small rebellions began in 2006 and officially ended in 2009. Thus, we can speak of three periods of Tuareg insurgencies in the post-independence period (the 1960s, the 1990s, and the late 2000s). Of these, the largest and that which receives the most attention in

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4 A 2011 Malian government study found that the threat of AQIM attacks had cost 50 billion CFA and 8000 lost jobs in the previous two years (see Reuters, “Al Qaeda Threat Hits Mali Tourism,” August 1, 2011.)
the conflict literature is the 1990s rebellion and its resolution; that period is the focus of the discussion below.

Tuareg is an identity marker that refers to a people that share a language and, to a degree, political and cultural history. Tuaregs reside in five African states (Mali, Niger, Algeria, Libya, and Burkina Faso), with the greatest concentrations in Mali and Niger. Tuaregs are principally nomadic pastoralists who maintain a distinct identity vis-à-vis the population of southern Mali, which is dominant in political, demographic, and economic terms in Mali (and Niger). Tuaregs comprise less than 10% of the Malian population, but they, along with Arabs and Maurs who also were instrumental in the 1960s and 1990s rebellions, dominate the far northern region of the country (Humphreys and Ag Mohamed 2005: 267). That said, it is important to note that the Tuareg are internally sub-divided across regions as well as by lineage and by hierarchical status. The regional and internal status cleavages within Tuareg society are critical, and in contemporary Mali observers frequently note important differences between Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal-based Tuaregs—indeed, the insurgencies of the late 2000s were all based around Kidal.

There is a broad consensus that a mix of grievances and opportunity drove the rebellions, in particular in the 1990s (Ag Mohamed et al 1995; Lode 1997; Poulton and Youssouf 1998). In post-independence Mali prior to 1990, Tuaregs lacked any significant political representation in the national government, national army, in the national civil service and throughout the education sector (Humphreys and Ag Mohamed 2005; Lode 1997). Moreover, the colonial state and the post-independence state until the 1990s in Mali favored sedentarization and agriculture over the nomadic pastoralism that the Tuaregs and northern Arabs practiced (Abdalla 2009, Humphreys and Ag Mohamed 2005; Krings 2005. In the colonial and post-independence states, the general favoritism toward sedentary farming practices shrunk the pastoral space available, including some of the best pasturage land, leading to greater vulnerability of the Tuareg herders (Abdalla 2009, Krings 2005) The northern region also received fewer resources in terms of official development assistance, education funds, and other measures of public goods provision during the first three decades of post-independent rule. In an important study, Macartan Humphreys and Habaye ag Mohamed conclude that the northern regions were in “exceptionally poor condition” relative to other regions before the 1990s (Humphreys and ag Mohamed 2005: 274). Before 1990, many Tuaregs expressed a feeling of identity-based discrimination, namely that Southern-based governments did not respect their identity as pastoralists or as Tuaregs and practiced a form of reverse discrimination. That is, as one former southern army colonel attested, southern groups demeaned Tuaregs, in part in response to Tuareg’s self-perceived superiority and pre-colonial history of slave running in southern areas (Keita 1998). In short, while some short-term factors precipitated the conflict (see below), the underlying long-term factors driving the 1990s insurgency were group- and region-specific exclusion, deprivation, and discrimination. The Tuareg were a minority who maintained a distinct identity, vis-à-vis southern populations, and who fared poorly in the French colonial and post-independence states until the 1990s. The case is a good example, in the language of the Concept Note, of horizontal inequality.

That said, inequalities in Mali cannot be reduced to a simple North-South or Tuareg/non-Tuareg divide (USAID 2009). Poverty is widespread in the country. In terms of absolute poverty levels, the main axis of disparity is between center and periphery, whereby Bamako has considerably lower poverty rates than the rest of the country. Judging from data from the United Nations Development Program, absolute poverty in the late 1980s in northern Mali was on par
with other regions in Mali (USAID 2009: 13). Since the late 1980s, in part due to investment by the state, donors, and NGOs after the insurgencies, northern regions have some of the fastest rates of poverty alleviation (USAID 2009: 13). Nonetheless, the state maintains a very weak presence in the north, especially outside the main cities, and there continues to exist a strong perception in the north of neglect by the south (USAID 2009). In short, as with the other types of violence discussed in this working paper, poverty, inequality, and lack of economic opportunities are interrelated facilitating conditions for violence, but they do not uniquely explain where, why, when, or how violence occurs.

Several short-term situational environmental, regional, and political factors precipitated the outbreak of violence in the 1990s. In particular, the repression of the 1960s revolts led some Tuaregs to flee the country. Sustained droughts in the 1970s and 1980s (1969-1973 and 1981-1984) led to migration of other Tuaregs from northern Mali into Algeria and Libya. The effects of the droughts should be seen in the context of general prior policies toward the North, which left Tuaregs and other Northern groups with fewer opportunities to respond to rainfall variation. In Libya, General Qaddafi incorporated Tuaregs into the Islamic Legion and into the regular army, and Tuaregs in turn fought in wars in multiple countries in the Middle East and Afghanistan. The deployments in particular afforded Tuaregs a certain level of military experience. The situation in Libya would take a turn in the mid to late 1980s, with the contraction of oil prices as well as Libya’s battlefield losses in Chad. Libya in turn decommissioned Tuaregs from the armed forces; civilian Tuaregs also were retrenched from key economic sectors, namely the petroleum sector. These various factors (environmental, regional, and political) prompted Tuareg insurgents to attack a government post in June 1990 under the banner of the Mouvement Populaire de Libération de l’Azawad (MPLA). Claiming to fight for an independent state and political rights for Northern Malians, MPLA fighters initially succeeded in gaining and holding some territory.

On the opportunity side, in addition to the regional dynamics in Libya described above, the insurgency persisted in part because of state weakness and geographical remoteness. The Northern regions were and remain remote with limited state penetration, in particular outside the main towns. Given the size of the territory, the lack of infrastructural development, the porous borders, and the desert conditions, the Northern regions are and were difficult to control and survey from a military/tactical perspective. These conditions in turn facilitated the survival of the rebel organizations in the 1990s, as they favor the survival of criminal and terrorist networks in contemporary Mali. State weakness also prompted civilians to form anti-insurgent self-defense units and in some cases discipline among soldiers was poor, both contributing to the dynamics of the conflict.

In addition to the structural and political (grievance) conditions that facilitated violence, it is crucial to consider the conflict dynamics after the rebellion began—the actions of rebels, government forces, and civilian groups that had escalating or sustaining effects on the trajectory of violence. On the one hand, the initial government response was heavy-handed. Under the leadership of the then-embattled General Moussa Traoré, who was operating a significantly financially weakened state and faced a significant domestic democratic opposition, the counter-insurgency campaign targeted civilians as well as combatants (Poulton and ag Youssouf 1998: 56). The brutality of the counter-insurgency operations in turn alienated Tuaregs and northerners, prompting more popular support for the insurgency and more recruits (Lode 1997; Poulton and
ag Youssouf 1998). The switch to violent counter-insurgency signaled a shift in policy from President Traoré, who had in earlier phases sought to integrate Tuareg traditional authorities into the second Republic and again turned to them for mediation assistance (ag Mohamed et al. 1995: 10). But it became clear in this period that there was an internal split between traditional authorities and younger, angrier Tuaregs (Poulton and ag Youssouf 1998: 57; ag Mohamed et al 1995: 10).

The initial phase of conflict would be followed by significant gains in peace negotiations. In 1991, the two sides signed the first of several agreements, the Accords of Tamanrasset, with mediation from Algeria (which worried about a domestic Tuareg insurgency). The Accords called for a series of security, decentralization, and special development provisions for the North, including a promise of 47.3% of development funds for the north (ag Mohamed et al. 1995: 13). The Accords faced a number of obstacles. Having been conducted in secret and then having appeared to have offered significant concession, the Accords were met with disapproval from public opinion in the south; sedentarists in the north had been left out of the negotiating process and worried about their fate; and soldiers on both sides found reason to fault the agreement (ag Mohamed et al 1995: 13; Lode 1997: 413; Pouton and ag Youssouf 1998: 60). Moreover, in this period, the main rebel group factionalized into four organizations. Three splinter groups disavowed the Accords, including two Tuareg groups claiming to fight for independence as did the Front Islamique et Arabe de l’Azawad (FIAA), which claimed to fight on behalf of Arabs. The continued fighting precipitated new cycles of violence, including attacks on Tuareg civilians by army soldiers.

In this period and separately from the rebellion, Mali was experiencing a significant political transition. In March 1991, the Traoré government was overthrown in a military coup, followed by the initiation of a National Conference to craft a new democratic constitution (Wing 2008). During this period, the government, insurgent, and Algerian leaders set up a series of meetings to resolve the civil war (Ag Mohamed et al 1995; Lode 1997). These resulted in the so-called National Pact, which was signed in 1992. The National Pact recognized and sought to redress Northern marginalization. The agreement called for the cantonment, disarmament, and integration of insurgents into the national armed forces and police; incorporation of former rebels into the civil administration; a special development fund for the North; repatriation of refugees; and elimination of certain northern military posts, among other provisions.

The final phase of violence followed the signing of the National Pact. Three dimensions to the conflict drove its escalation. First, the implementation of the Accord was slow (in part because of political changes in Bamako); second, some insurgents or armed actors claiming to be insurgents resorted to banditry and some insurgents fought amongst themselves, with lack of apparent discipline and lack of top-down control among the insurgents; and third, sedentary farming groups in the North, especially the Songhoi who were not a central part of the negotiation and peace process and who were worried both about their own livelihoods in the midst of conflict and about Tuareg domination in a post-war arrangement, formed a militia called the Mouvement Patriotique Ganda Koy (Ganda Koy) (Ag Mohamed et al 1995; Lode 1997; Poulton and ag Youssouf 1998). Fighting between Ganda Koy and insurgents as well as attacks on civilians ensued. The period is generally recognized as one of the most violent, including combatant-on-combatant fighting, but also greater lawlessness, intra-rebel fighting, and
intercommunal conflict. In January 1994, the FCFA was also devalued by 50%, triggering student strikes, and adding other sources of stress.

The violence and violent conflict ended in 1995 for a mix of reasons. First, there was general and genuine political will on the part of the Malian state and military to resolve the problems giving rise to the insurgency. That political will is evident from the earliest negotiations in 1991, but continued through the 1990s and was pronounced in 1994 and 1995 (Ag Mohamed et al 1995; Lode 1997; Poulton and ag Youssouf 1998). Second, the peace agreement itself was comprehensive and addressed many of the key grievances on the part of the Tuareg (including security, political representation, economic development, and cultural recognition). While some Tuaregs wanted full political independence or fought for other reasons, many Tuareg political and social elites were pleased with the settlement terms and pushed to end the conflict. Moreover, for both sets of actors (government and insurgent) there was exhaustion from fighting. Third, the new democratic government in Bamako empowered younger, more culturally sensitive officers who sought to work with, rather than fight, Tuaregs. These officers also initiated a series of workshops within the military, at least according to one military insider (Keita 1998). Fourth, in the 1994 and 1995 period, local community-based actors initiated dialogue amongst themselves (in particular, between pastoralists and farmers in the Northern region) to resolve differences and to end the fighting (Lode 1997; Poulton and Youssouf 1998). These were called “regional concertations” (Lode 1997; Wing 2008). Fifth, significant international funds were supplied to make good on peace agreements (Poulton and Youssouf 1998). Finally, in 1995 the most hardline insurgent groups that refused the terms of the peace settlement were militarily defeated. In 1996, a “flame of peace” ceremony was held, in which weapons were burned, and that ceremony marked the end of the conflict. In short, a political emphasis on a negotiated solution, a comprehensive agreement, personnel, multi-track and funded peace initiatives, including local-level talks, as well as final victories contributed to the ending of the conflict.

Peace in the north lasted until 2006 when a Tuareg rebel organization under the banner of Democratic Alliance of 23rd May for Change launched an assault on a military post in northern Mali. The central grievances that the insurgents articulated were that the terms of the National Pact had not been properly implemented, in particular that Tuaregs in the army faced discrimination and had not been adequately promoted. Behind those grievances were lingering feelings of discrimination and a general perception that the government had not lived up to its commitments (USAID 2009: 6). The government response to the 2006 rebellion was conciliatory; an agreement was signed in July 2006. However, in 2007 a break-away faction led by Ibrahim Bahanga struck. In 2008, the insurgents changed their name to the Tuareg Alliance of North Mali for Change (ATNMC). The low-intensity fighting ended in 2009 after international mediation from Algeria. The rebellion is now officially concluded, and several Malian analysts and Tuareg leaders in Bamako confirmed that direct fighting between government and insurgent forces is no longer present—but they said a future flare-up was certainly possible.

Local Natural Resource Conflicts: Across Mali, there is significant pressure on key resources that are essential to the main livelihood activities in rural areas—farming, herding, fishing, and firewood harvesting. The pressure on the rural natural resources is a background condition for different forms of conflict that materialize in specific locations for a complex mix of reasons, including improper resource management, lack of mediation and leadership, local
politics, and local history. Disputes over access to key resources remain a constant source of insecurity in the country, especially in rural areas and they deserve recognition in any analysis of insecurity and conflict in the region. The main disputes identified in the case study are 1) over access to high-quality land for pasturage or farming, including conflicts between sedentary herders and sedentary farmers as well as between herders practicing transhumance and sedentary communities; 2) over damage to resources, such as when animals destroy crops or cropland or farmers degrade pasturage areas—this is commonly an issue when transhumance pastoralists move their animals and come into contact with sedentary farmers who want to protect their crops from livestock damage, but it also happens between sedentary herders and sedentary farmers; 3) over access to and use of water, including conflicts between farmers and herders but also between farmers in different locations (for example, rice farmers downstream of another rice farming community worry about water flow interruptions from overuse and damming); 4) over access to fishing rights, including conflicts over who has the authority to fish in particular places; over the rental or sale of rural property; 5) over ownership of land, including who has the right to sell or lease valuable land; and 6) over access to and management of woodland areas—in particular over who has access to firewood, how much and which kind of wood can be cut, and for what purpose wood can be cut (see also Bagayoko 2009; Beeler 2005).

The rural natural resource disputes are endemic in the country. They are particularly acute in areas where there is intense pressure on shared highly valued space, such as the Niger Delta floodplain areas in the Mopti region where farmers, herders, and fishermen all cohabit and utilize the same general territory for essential economic activities. Rain-fed areas, however, are hardly immune to these multiple forms of local conflicts. In most cases, the disputes do not rise to violent, lethal confrontations, but in some cases they do result to beatings and even murder. National-level data on the frequency and severity of local level violent conflicts do not readily exist, but in interviews experts in this domain estimated that there are at least several dozen deaths every year. There is anecdotal evidence of some violent incidences reaching 30 or 40 deaths. Some conflicts divide along ethnic cleavage lines, but others do not—the principal source of conflict concerns access to the key livelihood resources. While local-level cycles of violence over access to livelihood resources in Mali have not reached the levels seen in other countries, the long-term challenge of managing and mitigating the potential for violence remains serious and represent a quotidian source of insecurity in rural areas.

Several structural conditions underlie and shape the local-level resource conflicts in Mali and the Sahelian region more generally. First is an ecologically harsh zone, especially in the Sahel, which is marked by unstable climatic conditions, irregular rainfall patterns, and drought (de Bruijn and van Dijk 2003). Water and high-quality farmland and pasturage are scarce and precious resources. Second is demography, in particular Mali’s rapidly growing population (estimated at 3.6% growth per annum), which creates new pressure on the scarce resources. Third is limited non-farm, non-herding economic opportunity in rural areas combined with a high incidence of poverty. Nationally, herding and sedentary farming (and fishing) are the dominant economic activities for most Malians. In rural areas, by one count the poverty rate is 79% (GPRSF 2009: 15) Fourth is the degradation of rural natural resources over time, tied in part to growing demographic pressure as well as pressure to create sources of family revenue. Finally, a number of interviewees and some literature argue environmental and climatic changes (in particular precipitation fluctuations over time, as well as desertification, some of which may
be related to climate change) contribute to the degradation of resources as well as to increased pressure on the high-quality resources that exist.

However, while environment, demography, poverty, and natural resource quality are structural conditions that underlie and shape disputes, many conflict resolution practitioners and scholars who closely study local resource conflicts in the Sahel argue that other factors determine when, why, and how disputes over access to resources materialize into specific instances of physical violence. In particular, such observers resist reducing the conflicts to one of “environmental scarcity” or to demographic pressures alone (Turner 2004). Chief among the intervening or precipitating factors are the management of public and private spaces (in particular whether there are properly designated transhumance routes or adequate fencing to avoid crop destruction), the mediation of low-level non-violent disputes where they occur, complex historical political and social relationships between groups in communities, access to land tenure, and not the least the actions of national and local political actors who may instrumentalize resource disputes for electoral or other reasons (Turner 2004). A similar argument about not reducing the occurrence of conflict to environmental scarcity applies to the Tuareg insurgencies. While climatic changes and drought were short-term precipitators of the 1990 insurgency, for example (Maiga 2007), the causes of the conflict cannot be reduced to such changes (Benjaminsen 2008).

The management of the various forms of local resource conflicts is diverse, reflecting in some ways the decentralized local governance structures in the country. The most common method is for customary village authorities to manage disputes within their villages or for communal officials to manage disputes between villages or when village authorities cannot resolve a conflict. If communal level authorities fail to find a remedy and solution, the conflict often moves to the courts, which many local-level actors argued in interviews was a sub-optimal outcome. In many locations, communal and village authorities with civil society assistance created “peace committees” composed of leaders from different segments of the local community. In a number of locations, local actors also agreed to Conventions that theoretically regulate access to and usage of the key natural resources or that designated farming or herding zones and calendars and pathways for pastoral transhumance. Often these Conventions grew out of peace committees, as well as from development projects focused on conflict resolution, but in some cases the Conventions emerged from more informal meetings between local stakeholders. A number of local-level actors argued in interviews that, while not foolproof, the existence of inter-village peace committees and resource conventions eased tensions when disputes arose or clarified usage rules, thereby reducing the probability of violent conflicts arising from disputes. Nonetheless, the pressure on scarce natural resources remains great and a flashpoint for future conflict in Mali and other Sahel states.

IV. WDR Themes of Stress, Capability, and Expectations

By and large, the tri-partite framework that the Concept Note develops for analyzing conflict and development resonated with the case study findings.

Stresses: Internal Sources

With regard to the current insecurity in the north, many observers interviewed during the mission to Mali argued that poverty, lack of economic opportunity, physical/economic isolation,
and environmental vulnerability that is recurrent in the Sahel-Saharan region were critical sources of stress. Weapons also circulated in the region after the end of the 1990s rebellion and as spillover from other conflicts in the West/Central Africa region. The availability of weapons in turn contributed to the presence of armed groups and insecurity, which in turn facilitated illicit traffic. The North is also vulnerable to climatic changes, and the absence of rainfall, and the mission learned of growing humanitarian concern about drought in the contemporary period.

With regard to the historical conflicts in the North, regional isolation, marginalization, exclusion, perceived and real discrimination, past repression, as well as drought and its ineffective management all were important stressors that contributed to the onset and dynamics of the 1990s rebellion. Unmet expectations following the end of the 1990s war also played a role in engendering the 2000s conflict, at least according to one former rebel and current Member of Parliament.

With regard to local resource-related conflicts, a lack of economic opportunities especially in rural areas; environmental vulnerability due to rainfall patterns, soil quality, and general fragility of the Sahelian space; a growing population; degradation of the natural resources from overuse and pressure; and endemic poverty all put stress on the rural commons, leading in many locations to daily tensions and in some locations to violent confrontation. But, as noted above, there are often complex reasons why conflict breaks out in particular places that undermine a simple association between population pressure and resource scarcity, on the one hand, and conflict, on the other.

With regard to the country as a whole as it faces potential for conflict in the future, many of the same themes emerge—in particular, poverty and the absence of economic opportunity, as well a youth bulge in the population. In addition, as a landlocked country and food importing country, Mali is vulnerable to commodity price shocks (Joseph and Wodon 2008). A number of consumer goods are also expensive to import, all creating conditions for unmet expectations. In interviews, a range of Malians spoke of corruption, deteriorating governance, and a general lack of confidence in formal institutions; these are sources of dissatisfaction, and if left unaddressed they pose a threat to future stability.

**Stresses: External sources**

In the contemporary North, the porous and lightly governed areas of the North have contributed to an influx of external actors, notably AQIM members, drug traffickers, and gun-runners. There is also spillover from conflicts in neighboring countries. The core AQIM members in Mali are Algerian and who originally were in the Algeria-based GSPC. Many experts in interviews argued that weapons traffic and circulation in Northern Mali can be traced to the presence of armed conflicts in the sub-region, including not only Algeria, but also Chad, Libya, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d’Ivoire.

With regard to the Tuareg insurgencies, many of the rebels who attacked in the 1990s crossed into Mali from Libya, where they had trained in the Islamic Legion and had fought in wars in the Middle East. They or their families had left Mali initially because of the 1960s repression or because of drought conditions in the 1970s and 1980s. That said, today’s insecurity in the North is more embedded in transnational dynamics than the conflict in the 1990s.
With regard to Mali in general, in terms of risks for the future, global information flows and integration inflate expectations and create stress, as discussed below. Climate change is another concern for Mali and the Sahelian regions, which remain vulnerable to changes in rainfall precipitation patterns. Another important source of external stress has been the political paralysis and civil war in Côte d’Ivoire, which ended in April 2011. More than two million Malians live in Côte d’Ivoire, and many Malians had sent home remittances prior to the Ivoirian crisis. While those remittances still flowed, there is evidence of shrinking remittance revenue.

Capability

Mali is an arresting example of a place where social capital for conflict resolution remains high, and indeed has been quite present in different levels of state-led mediation, while formal state capability remains low. One of the most consistent themes in field interviews across a range of actors concerned the quality and capability of the state, which most saw as fundamental to managing and resolving a host of problems in Mali linked to security and development. This theme emerges clearly in other studies (e.g. USAID 2009).

On the social capital side, informants consistently emphasized the importance of informal mechanisms of dispute resolution rooted in Malian culture and history. Malian cultural frameworks value dialogue, consensus, and compact-making. Numerous observers of Mali and much of the academic literature on Mali emphasizes the importance of Malian political culture and social capital as providing a critical reservoir for peace making (Lode 1997; Poulton and Youssouf 1998; Pringle 2006; Wing 2008). Mali has a number of mechanisms, including “cousinage” or “joking relationships” that create cross-ethnic ties (Konaté 1999; Dunning and Harrison 2009). These relationships are rooted in Mali’s history of empires, dating to the 11th century, and in which many Malians express considerable pride.

Evidence of the value placed on dialogue and mediation is found at all levels, from local conflicts, to inter-communal dialogue during the 1990s Tuareg rebellions, as well as high-level strategies of moderation during the 1990s and the present (Wing 2008). Indeed, the effectiveness of Mali’s social capital reserve on reducing or mediating conflict is most effective when it is incorporated into formal governance processes. Even if there is widespread recognition of the importance of this culture source of conflict resolution, some Malian and international observers argued in interviews that the cultural references are weakening in contemporary Malian society and that informal mechanisms cannot substitute for governance or the creation of greater economic opportunity. In other words, social capital is important for limiting and managing conflict, but it alone is not sufficient for solving the sources of conflict.

While social capital remains high in Mali, the military and administrative capacity of the state is weak. The relative absence of a formal state presence is especially apparent in the North, which is a very large territory (600,000 square kms) with a small population. The area is demonstrably challenging to govern, and the infrastructure in the North remains quite limited. Mali has an active decentralization program, one that was linked both to the advent of democratization in the early 1990s as well as to the resolution of the 1990s Tuareg rebellion. A number of civil society actors, as well as local and national officials, expressed confidence in decentralization that could lead to greater proximity of the state to society and to generating improved legitimacy for the state. However, a number of experts and civil society actors
expressed reservations about the current decentralization system, arguing that the resources to govern remained limited and the state still remained aloof from the population.

Expectations

The role of expectations as they relate to security and development surfaced in two main forms. First, a number of informants recognized that unmet expectations—when there is a gap between expectations and the capability to meet them—is an important source of stress and frustration, leading to friction and potentially conflict. The main sources of expectations discussed in the interviews during the field Mission were: democratization, decentralization, globalization, and a peace dividend. Mali has registered significant democratic gains since the early 1990s, and the country is appropriately recognized as a successful case of democratization—with four elections since the overthrow of dictatorship in 1991 and two peaceful handovers of power. Yet many observers argued that democratization created expectations of a new era of prosperity, which has not been met. Mali was similarly one of the early decentralizing African states, a pioneer, yet decentralization has also engendered disappointments. Globalization—or more specifically the flow of information—creates consumer expectations that are very difficult to meet in a poor state with relatively few sources of employment. Finally, unmet expectations from the 1990s peace agreement, in particular in the 1990s in the North, played a role in some Tuaregs and Arabs taking up arms in the 2000s or engaging in illicit activities.

The second main expectations theme that emerged in the interviews addressed the question of reasonable expectations on the part of the state and of donors. Northern Mali, for example, is a very large territory where formal state presence has been weak for a long period and where trafficking has historically been integral to the economic system. The various problems of the North are resistant to simple, off-the-shelf solutions. As one Malian expert said, “There is no magic recipe.” Mali remains one of the poorest states in the world, and both citizens and donors should be sanguine about what is possible in the state. A final point: a Malian civil society actor argued emphatically that almost all the supply and demand for illicit drugs remain external to Mali. The expectation for remedying the problem should not fall disproportionately on Mali’s shoulders, given its limited resources and given that the supply and demand are external to the country.

V. Other Themes in the WDR Concept Note

Cross-Border Dimensions of Conflict

The cross-border dimensions of the contemporary insecurity are clear. Mali borders seven countries, and the Northern regions have porous borders with the surrounding countries. AQIM originated as an Algerian Salafist organization. Most of the products that are trafficked in the North are produced and consumed outside of Mali. The weakly governed desert space of the North means that armed groups can move across borders if one state launches an offensive. There is widespread recognition that any solution to the terrorist and trafficking sources of insecurity will require a regional solution. A long-term solution to historical Tuareg grievances will also likely require some coordination with neighboring states, including Algeria, Niger, and Libya, which each have sizable Tuareg populations. In 2010 and 2011, the states most affected by the trafficking and terrorist activity—Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and Algeria—have held a
series of meetings to coordinate their actions. These have included high-level meetings in Mali and Algeria. In coordinating these meetings, Mali has taken a leading role. Mali and Mauritania have also engaged in joint military operations.

While such regional cooperation is promising, a lingering obstacle for sustained bilateral or multilateral cooperation is that the Sahel-Saharan region also falls geographically between regional organizations. ECOWAS is primarily composed of Sub-Saharan states, while the Arab Maghreb Union is composed of North African states and which remains effectively defunct.

Even if many recognize the need for a regional solution, several civil society representatives and political actors argue that the cross-border nature of the problem should not deter the Malian state from acting against armed groups in the North. Several interviewees expressed a concern that the state was not doing enough to confront the roots of the problem. Allegations of a lack of political will are difficult to verify, but they are widely articulated in interviews, thereby indicating a lack of trust in how national authorities are confronting the sources of insecurity. To be fair, Malian authorities are caught in a bind. On the one hand, they face significant constraints on their ability to confront the Al Qaeda/trafficking problem—the problem is clearly regional in nature; the Malian state lacks sufficient resources to combat the militants and traffickers in a vast, geographically challenging territory; and the state risks overplaying its hand by using indiscriminate military force. On the other hand, they face domestic, regional, and international pressure to demonstrate that they are cracking down on the sources of insecurity, and indeed given that the insecurity is taking an evident toll on the tourism industry and on development projects, confronting the problem is in the interest of the state.

**Evolution and Interaction of Violence**

There are a number of ways in which the dynamics of violence have changed over time and in which they intersect. There also different points of view on the question. A number of actors insist that the different periods and forms of violence be distinguished from each other. For example, several Northern-based actors, including a former rebel, emphasized that the historical Tuareg insurgencies were fundamentally about political grievances and demands. They distinguished between these largely internal political movements, and those such as Al Qaeda that have a stronger criminal, Jihadist, and international dimension. Similarly, the growing traffic in drugs is quite different in form from the insurgencies, according to these informants. The contemporary insecurity is thus different in form (more transnational and criminal now than before) from earlier periods of insecurity and fighting.

At the same time, there are clearly connections between different episodes and cycles of conflict, as well as between different forms of violence in each period. First, while each had specific triggers and specific incarnations, the repeated episodes of Northern-based insurgency (1960s, 1990s, 2000s, as well in the colonial period) are a good example of what the Concept Note describes as “cycles of violence.” Second, in terms of connections between different episodes, the structural conditions facilitating insecurity and insurgency in the North are constant across time, and they constitute an enduring opportunity for conflict, illicit trafficking, and in the contemporary period for terrorist bases. The northern region is a large geographical space that is lightly governed with light population density, and the area that has only limited infrastructural and economic integration with the south. In short, there are structural, underlying conditions that favor the implantation of armed groups and are consistent across time. Third, in terms of the
evolution of violence, during the 1990s rebellion a number of armed actors emerged who engaged in banditry; after the war ended, despite the integration of former combatants and a symbolic burning of weapons in a Flame of Peace ceremony, many weapons remained in circulation. In the 1990s, there also formed a militia against the Tuareg and Arab rebels. Their weapons remained afterwards. In short, despite peace, the onset of armed conflict increased the demand and circulation for weapons, and many weapons remained in place after the formal end to the conflict. The presence of those weapons in turn facilitated illicit trafficking, first of cigarettes (to avoid levies and taxes), then of hashish and cannabis, and currently of cocaine. In its evaluation of security concerns in the North, the UNDP also connects the rebellion to the formation of an illicit economy (UNDP 2007). Finally, there is a vicious circle between lack of economic opportunities, insecurity, the presence of armed groups, and an illicit economy. Lack of formal economic opportunities creates incentives for illicit economic activity, and illicit economic activity requires weapons. It would seem that this interaction flows in multiple causal directions; empirically, it is difficult—based on currently available data and information—to see where the causal chain begins. However, it seems clear that there is an interaction between insecurity and development, as well as between different forms of violence and insecurity.

**Leadership**

A number of Malian observers readily agree that political leadership is vital for successful management of conflict. The 1990s period, in particular, can be seen as an example of successful mediation, in part due to leadership on several levels. The 1990s armed conflict took place in a general climate of destabilization, in which there was a 1991 coup d’etat that ousted a military dictatorship, followed by a national conference, followed by a democratic election and new government. The rebellion itself began in 1990 and there were multiple phases of fighting, including a very tense period in 1994 (as described above). Throughout this period, former President Alpha Konaré opted for a principal strategy of mediation and negotiation. That strategy centered on intercommunal dialogue, as well as on local-level leadership among heads of different communities. Three principal dynamics underpinned the strategy of conciliation in the 1990s—the importance of Malian culture, which emphasizes dialogue, dispute resolution, and consensus; the importance of a general democratic conviction in the period on the part of political leaders; and the importance of national and local-level leadership. One actor involved in the negotiations emphasized that local community-level authorities (and their leadership) were absolutely critical in building peace, and that the wisdom of the Konaré regime was to support the local-level process of conflict mediation. The peaceful resolution of the 1990s conflict thus constitutes a qualified success, even if some informants argued that the implementation of the terms of the accord were lacking and a source of the rebellion in the 2000s. The importance of the leadership of mediators in tense moments of conflict is also a point that should not be forgotten.

For the contemporary insecurity in the North, a number of stakeholders interviewed for the study argued that national authorities should be more active in demonstrating leadership. That said, the Malian state’s response to the Tuareg political demands in the mid to late 2000s emphasized political, rather than military, responses, and in so doing demonstrated leadership. Leadership will be critical to developing and maintaining a regional response to the crisis. Finally, local-level leadership can be essential to managing and mediating tense disputes over access to local resources, so that they do not escalate into violent confrontations.
VI. Mediation, Peace-Building, and Conflict Resolution

Short-Term Confidence and Peace-Building

Short-term peace-building has primarily occurred in relation to resolving the Tuareg/Arab insurgencies and the local resource conflicts. The criminal/terror/bandit networks sources of insecurity remain unresolved. With regard to the insurgencies, the consistent government decision was to opt for a negotiated, political solution rather than a military solution (Ag Mohamed et al 1995; Lode 1997, 1998; Poulton and Youssouff 1998; Wing 2008). The terms of the peace agreements also addressed the expressed grievances, including the need for greater development funds dedicated to the north, political decentralization that allowed for local Tuareg and Arab representation, incorporation of former rebels into the army, and political incorporation in Bamako. The government military forces also withdrew to a series of military posts, rather than maintaining a strong military presence through the Northern areas. In addition, the importance of specific individuals who served as mediators—individuals who commanded respect, who had “cousinage” relationships with armed actors, who were former professors, or who were married into families with ties in the north also were important, according to actors involved in the negotiations. In other words, the characteristics of specific individual mediators and negotiators mattered.

Several former government officials interviewed for the case study also emphasized the democratic conviction at the time shared by Amadou Toumani Touré who took power in the 1991 coup, as well as by Alpha Konaré who became the first elected president in the democracy period and by many other high-ranking officials in this period. These former officials emphasized that the then Malian political leadership saw the Tuareg insurgency as part of a general dissatisfaction with the authoritarian policies of former regimes; hence, they saw the conflict not in terms of irresolvable differences but rather as two sides of the same effort to create a better and more inclusive political system in the country. Finally, Mali initiated a cantonment and demobilization process. The demobilization process culminated in the 1996 Flame of Peace exercise, which, while symbolic, marked an official end to the conflict. In the academic literature and in interviews, these actions and attitudes were among the most crucial for building short-term confidence on the government side.

In addition, one should note that the short-term measures took place in a normative cultural environment in Mali that emphasizes dialogue, consensus, interethnic cooperation, and pact-making. The academic literature strongly emphasizes the importance of Malian political culture for both successful democratization but also for peace making and dispute resolution (Konaté 1999; Poulton and Youssouf 1998; Wing 2008). Many interviewees—especially former officials directly involved with the mediation process—argued that the cultural emphasis on tolerance, dialogue, and consensus strongly aided the mediation process. It should also be noted that the rebels made demands that could be met: they asked for greater development funds, political inclusion and decentralization, military incorporation and changes to surveillance, among other demands.

As for issues that had the opposite effect, namely of having an escalating effect on the conflict and creating lack of trust, three issues surface most consistently in relation to the 1990s rebellion. First, in the peace negotiations in 1990, 1991, and 1992, sedentary populations from the north, in particular the Songhoi, were not included. Having felt excluded and having suffered
in some cases from insurgent attacks, sedentary actors took up arms to protect themselves, leading to an escalation of violence in 1994 and 1995 in particular. Second, internal divisions among Tuareg and Arab groups in the early 1990s led to factionalism and rivalry among them, which created a more complicated conflict and eroded trust on multiple sides of the conflict. Some Tuareg armed actors also participated in banditry, which, even if political leaders claimed the banditry was independent of the rebellion, undermined the peace-making process and led to private arming. Third, the slow implementation of the agreements signed in 1991 and 1992 led to frustration on the part of Tuareg and Arab insurgents, prompting greater arming and an erosion of confidence on multiple sides.

With regard to local resource disputes, three main issues surfaced in the research for the case study, although the diversity of situations should be remembered. First is the importance of “peace committees” composed of representatives from different activity sectors (fishing, farming, herding, and so forth), local traditional authorities, and communal (or in some cases prefectural) authorities. When disputes occurred, the existence of peace committees facilitated dialogue across disputing parties, as well as the ability to calm agitated actors, according to officials. Many involved in local mediation efforts stressed the importance of articulating grievances and mutual respect when seeking to calm tensions. Second is the neutral involvement of state officials who could serve as honest brokers in disputers—and by contrast where one party felt that the local state authorities favored one side in a dispute resolution that in turn escalated conflict and decreased confidence. Third is the importance of clearly designated rules for blocking off, for example, pasture and farming zones, for creating transhumance corridors and calendars, for establishing fishing access and zones, and for regulating the number of dams allowed over a length of space. Most often the rules were encapsulated in a local Convention that would be translated into the relevant local languages and that reflected a negotiated consensus in the community. Among local actors, there was a widespread claim that when disputes over access to local resources entered the formal court system trust was substantially eroded; many rural Malians interviewed for the case study expressed doubt in the neutrality of the judicial system and they felt that they had lost control over the dispute.

Medium- and Long-Term Confidence and Peace-Building

When discussing long-term solutions to the full range of conflict and insecurity, the two most consistent themes were the importance of reinforcing state capacity and improving economic conditions, i.e. creating opportunities for employment and reducing poverty. When considering potential future challenges, many observers argued that an effective and capable state that is proximate to, and integrated with, the population is fundamental. A number of Malians used the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Malian independence to argue that the Malian state needs to be better adapted to local conditions, whether in the North or outside, and a process of adaptation, creating an effective presence, and ownership remains one of the great challenges for Mali in the future. Mali’s poverty remains endemic, and there are evidently relatively few salaried job opportunities outside the capital and the government sector, i.e. in rural areas. Even in Bamako, job opportunities remain weak.

Decentralization emerged as an important theme in the discussion about state capability. The idea of decentralization enjoys widespread support in Mali, a country that was an early decentralizer in Sub-Saharan Africa. Decentralization has the potential to ground the state in local realities, create proximity between officials and local populations, and ultimately increase
accountability and authority of the state. That said, there exist reservations about the actual practice of decentralization. During the field mission, actors at both national and local levels of authority noted the absence of adequate resources; budgetary support remains highly centralized. Moreover, local and sub-national government institutions need greater human capacity, in terms of training. Several well-placed Malians argued that donors should provide funds directly to local entities, bypassing the central state. Some also argued that the local-level state institutions remained poorly integrated with traditional authorities. Finally, a number of interviewees noted how the decentralization processes, in which new administrative units were created and for which representatives were popularly elected, engendered new forms of occasionally violent conflict. In short, the consensus view was that Mali’s pioneering decentralization process could and should be central to dispute resolution and to developing an effective presence of the state; yet the current practice was incomplete and in some cases engendered disputes. One stakeholder referred to the decentralization program as decentralizing governing responsibilities but without the necessary resources and capacity to govern.

With regard to the situation in the North, a recurring theme is economic and infrastructural integration between the Northern region with southern Mali, on the one hand, and neighboring countries, on the other. In interviews with a range of actors, infrastructural development, in particular a paved road network that would reach Kidal (which has been the center of the most recent rebellions), emerged as the single most important need. Many senior Malian officials and non-governmental actors, including Prime Minister Modibo Sidibé in an interview, claimed that a road network would have a dramatic effect on reducing insecurity. Others stressed the importance of providing greater access to water, in particular by creating a greater network of wells for both people and livestock, as well as improving education opportunities. The Prime Minister argued that a northern military post, which was destroyed in the 2006 revolt, should be rebuilt. Two documents serve as focal points for these development efforts. The first is the Algiers Accord, which is the agreement signaling the end of the 2006-2009 revolts; the agreement calls for changes in development (infrastructure, water, and education); self-management of security affairs (notably the formation of a special security unit dominated by Tuaregs); and special political status for Kidal. The second is a 10-Year Development Plan for the Regions of Northern Mali (PDDRN), which envisages a series of development projects focused on food security, natural resource protection, infrastructure and commercial development, and access to social services, among other areas.

The central long-term solutions to local conflict over resources are two-fold. First is creating alternative livelihood and economic opportunities. Second is developing state capability to manage disputes. With regard to dispute resolution, the most commonly articulated principle, as voiced both by local government officials and NGO representatives working in the area, concerns community initiative, dialogue, and participation. There is common recognition that solutions imposed from above do not last. As described above, the most common local-level solutions are creating “peace committees” as well as natural resource Conventions that regulated access to and usage of local resources. Several local-level actors noted with caution that the key to the success of such pact-making was its level of participation. For example, the creation of a herding zone or a transhumance pathway depends on the input of herders; should they not be consulted, the designated zone or pathway might not be attractive and could lead to a diminution of the herd, thereby engendering conflict. Another consistent theme in rural field visits was the
importance of human capacity training in conflict mediation, with which organizations such as CARE, Helvetes, and other NGOs have engaged.

Regional and International Assistance

Given the trans-border nature of the problem of illicit trafficking and terrorist sources of insecurity in the North, there is need for a regional solution. Malian political actors from the North and in Bamako argue that Mali is not at the origin of the illicit economy or terrorist problems. They also argue that if Mali were to mobilize against the traffickers or Al Qaeda militants, the latter groups would shift to another country, only to return to Mali. The Sahel-Saharan space is largely porous, without clear national borders, and long histories of exchange and trade across formal country units. Thus, almost universally interviewees emphasized the need for a “Sahel-Saharan” regional solution. However, despite recent gains in developing a regional approach, how different states will overcome their differences and sustain a unified policy remains to be seen. As noted above, the Sahel falls between two regional organizations, ECOWAS and the Arab Maghreb Union, the latter being effectively defunct since the 1990s (Mortimer 1999). Any long-term regional solution will likely have to be crafted and sustained outside existing regional organizations, which creates another layer of obstacles.

On the international side, the United States and the European Union have engaged the countries of the region, including Mali, in counter-terrorism activities. The emphasis is on enhancing military and administrative capacity. The U.S. in particular has been active in training and supplying Malian military units in counter-terrorism, first through the Pan-Sahel Initiative and now through the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative. The TSCI has provided $100 million of funding per annum, starting in 2005. The program engages Mali, Mauritania, Chad, and Niger—the original four countries in the Pan Sahel Initiative—as well as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal, and Nigeria. In addition to training and supplies, the program dedicates resources for development and emphasizes regional cooperation. The European Union similarly considers the region strategically important, and the EU is now working to increase the sovereign effectiveness—increasing their capacity and legitimacy—of the Sahelian states (Charles 2010). Yet bilateral and multilateral actors also are aware of the many challenges of developing an appropriate strategy, one that accounts both for the nature of the illicit-terrorist threat in a vast territory and for the limitations of existing capability.

With regard to resolving local conflicts over natural resources, the communal, village, and NGO actors associated with dispute mediation emphasized the importance of donor assistance with logistics and capacity building. The process of mediation and constructing Conventions in some cases required multiple meetings in a communal space that could be quite large. Donor assistance, several argued, in helping to bring people together and helping to train local government or customary authorities was seen as critical. However, all local actors stressed that external support cannot create the local will to resolve conflicts, but rather only serve to reinforce it.
VII. Future Challenges

A last theme that emerged across a number of interviews with different actors, but chiefly among diplomats, opposition leaders, and civil society actors, is a deep and longer-term concern about the ability of the contemporary Malian state to manage the society and economy. The main thread of critique is that Mali remains a very poor country, with a high population growth rate, and limited financial and sometimes human resources to manage a number of complex actors. Many actors cited a slow deterioration of the quality of governance, and many expressed low trust in state institutions and perceived corruption at various levels of government. There are a range of concerns that surfaced in these conversations, in addition to corruption, from access to food, the quality of education, the access and quality of health care, the availability of jobs, security, to access to water and electricity. Yet based on the mission visit and supplementary interviews there appears to be an erosion of trust in institutions and governance, and a perception of corruption and state ineffectiveness. In short, the study finds evidence that Mali’s model of consensus, democracy, and accommodation is being weakened. Of course, any state with limited resources and high poverty rates faces a gap between social expectations and its capacity to meet those expectations.

At the extreme, there is a remote risk of destabilization and radicalization. Even though Al Qaeda’s religious agenda is not a good fit with Malian Islam and culture, some Malians articulated a fear that unmet expectations could pave the way for greater embrace of more radical and religious approaches to society and politics, leading to greater insecurity. Similarly, a general malaise—the disaffection and quiet disillusionment—could unravel the Malian model of democratization and decentralization in the face of deep demands on the part of the population and the state’s inability, willful or not, to meet them. While remote, these possibilities constitute a diffuse but nonetheless important concern for future stability. That concern should be balanced by noting Mali’s strong record on democratization and its consistent embrace of dialogue, mediation, and accommodation when confronted with national and local conflict.
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Other Forms of Violent Conflict, including Terrorism and Illegal Trafficking


**Local Conflicts over Natural Resources**


**Background on Mali (Economy, Political History, Identity)**


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