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# The African Union and the Conflict in Mali: Extra-Regional Influence and the Limitations of a Regional Actor

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## Abstract

The role of regional and sub-regional organizations cannot be overstated in conflict resolution, especially in their sphere of influence. The African Union and The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have played prominent roles in places like Burundi, Darfur, Chad, Somalia, and Liberia. The success achieved in these interventions would not likely have been forthcoming if the US, European Union and its member nations, along with the United Nations had not given their support to these regional and sub-regional organizations. In other words, the cooperative, collaborative, and supportive understanding between these extra-African bodies and the regional and sub-regional organizations has recorded more success than a unilateral intervention. To elaborate, the support given to ECOWAS in Liberia led to a successful resolution of that country's war, and the AU-UN hybrid operations in Darfur is yielding some kind of modest success. Analysts have posited that at present, in the resolution of protracted conflict, there is no substitute for coherent, coordinated intervention by global power and regional and sub-regional organizations. In contrast, unilateral intervention, which, in addition to being wasteful and expensive, can be internationally controversial on the grounds of both legality and legitimacy, especially where the UN has not given its nod. This article submits that cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional African organizations should have been applied to the resolution of Mali's conflict. Even though African regional institutions lack the required expertise, logistics, diplomatic, and financial muscle to singularly mount a successful intervention without support from extra-Africa, a swift response from and the immediate engagement of the Western world in the form of willing partnership with regional African organizations would dramatically improve the outcome of peacekeeping operations in Africa.

It is the contention of this paper that France's late intervention (after the troops of African led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) were overrun) significantly weakened a proactive response to the conflict. The same resources used by France could have been more effectively and efficiently utilized if made available to the African Union. - Considering the fact that the African Union lacked the resources to effectively intervene in Mali, making such resources available to the Union would have bolstered its capacity to intervene in Mali. In this case, cooperation not for that mission alone but future missions could have been achieved.

Since the end of the Cold War, concerns have heightened about sustained violent conflicts in Africa. Conflict mitigation and resolution have become the dominant governance activities in almost every part of Africa. Many of these conflicts seem intractable; conflict mitigation and resolution initiatives are at best yielding modest success. Even so, such successes typically provide peace in the short term but hardly lay the foundation for the reconstitution of order and the attainment of sustainable peace. Although the underlying causes of these conflicts are multifarious, the fluid, shifting nature of conflicts and their underlying causes require both top-down and bottom-up approaches that ensure both external expertise and local ownership.

Peace and security have become priority issues not only for the African continent but also for the international community. Although resolving violent conflict has been recognized as one of the most urgent challenges facing the continent, until recently, many such conflicts had not gained the marked profile they are currently attaining in terms of political priority and effort (including those made from both inside and outside Africa). Thus, the parameters of conflict resolution have shifted in the direction of greater visibility and a heightened political will to act.

Conflict resolution in Africa through military intervention, although recent, has accounted for an alarming proportion of the methods attempted (though this was not the case in the 1970s and 80s). African institutions such as the former Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the international community (including the United Nations and other key regional, sub-regional, and state actors) have been willing to intervene militarily in extreme, emergency situations to protect civilian populations. However, numerous critical doubts—both from the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—have been expressed regarding military actions in Africa and the motives informing the initiatives and military actions taken by external actors in Africa.

This paper is an effort to offer a nuanced engagement with the conflict in Mali. Even though the conflict in Mali is considered one of the most devastating conflicts on the African continent, little attention has been given in the academic literature to assessing the various conflict resolution mechanisms adopted by the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), how such mechanisms are operationalized, and the challenges they face. This paper aims to fill this gap. The overarching objective is to analyze how the collaboration between the extra-African bodies and the regional and sub-organizations played out in the resolution of the conflict in Mali. In order to achieve this objective, this study triangulates both primary sources through interviews and secondary sources, including journal articles, online sources, and reports. This is enriched by historical analysis of the conflict in Mali.

### **The AU Mechanism for Conflict Resolution**

In its 1990 declaration, the OAU Heads of State and government recognized that the prevalence of conflicts in Africa was seriously impeding their collective and individual efforts to deal with the continent's economic problems. Consequently, they resolved to work together toward the peaceful and rapid resolution of conflicts. During the OAU Summit held in Cairo in 1993, African leaders established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution (MCPMR). In doing so, they recognized that the resolution of conflicts is a precondition for the creation of peace and stability, and a necessary precondition for social and economic development (UN, 2004:1).

From the outset, the issue of peacekeeping on which the OAU mechanism was predicated was controversial. It was widely felt within the OAU political leadership that peace and security

were the preserve of the United Nations, which was mandated to keep peace globally and which possesses more resources than the OAU. The OAU defined its objective narrowly as that of primarily anticipating and preventing conflicts and left large-scale peacekeeping to the UN and Africa's sub-regional organizations. Nonetheless, with respect to conflict mitigation and resolution, the continental body identified three aims regarding the resolution of those conflicts in which it was willing to become involved: first, to anticipate and prevent situations of potential conflict from developing into full-blown wars; second, to undertake peacemaking and peace building efforts if full-blown conflicts should arise; and third, to carry out peacemaking and peace building activities in post-conflict situations. While this initiative thrust the OAU into the center of conflict management efforts in Africa, the reality is that the pan-African organization never became a principal player in the peace processes in Africa (CSIS, 2004:2). Despite its deficiencies, the OAU had the potential to coordinate the evolving early warning systems in Africa's various sub-regions. It went further to develop the potential to act as an information bank with sub-regional desks or other alternative systems where information about the activities of each sub-region and its organizations can be coordinated.

However, on July 9, 2001, the OAU made the decision to transform itself into a continental African Union (AU) following the 2000 signing and ratification by fifty Heads of State and Government of the Constitutive Act of the African Union (hereafter, "the Act") in Lusaka, Zambia. However, it remains to be seen whether the AU will build on the capacity of its predecessor in the area of conflict prevention, management, and resolution. Unlike the OAU Charter, the constitutive act of the AU allows for interference in the internal affairs of member states in cases of unconstitutional changes of governments, genocide, and conflicts that threaten regional stability (Herbst and Mills, 2003:21). Furthermore, the Act also provides for the participation of African civil society actors in the activities of the organization, establishes a Pan-African Parliament, and provides for an Economic and Cultural Commission. One year after the establishment of the new union, African Heads of State and Government adopted a protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) in Durban, South Africa. The council replaced the former OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution, incorporating relevant structures and methods in order to serve as the continent's collective security and early-warning mechanism.

The Protocol Relating to the Peace and Security Council of the African (hereafter, "PSC Protocol") states the rationale for and delineates the interlocking components of the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), in which the PSC is the principal decision-making organ for conflict prevention, management, and resolution and is supported by a Continental Early warning System (CEWS), a panel of the Wise (PoW), a Special (Peace) Fund (the Fund), an African Standby (Peacekeeping) Force (ASF), including a Military Staff Committee (MSC), and the AU Commission (AUC), through the chairperson of the AUC, along with the Commissioner for Peace and Security and his/her Peace and Security Directorate (PSD). All these components aim to provide an all-encompassing set of instruments to address African security needs by African actors (Keenan, 2004:478).

### **The African Union Peace and Security Architecture**

Although the APSA has evolved over a period of four decades, the period from the formation of the OAU in 1963 to the 4<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Summit of the OAU in September 1999 in Sirte (where African leaders agreed to transform the OAU to AU) could be described as the

background context of the establishment of Africa's new security mechanism. The approval of the Constitutive Act of the African Union in July 2000 and the creation of the AU represents a significant milestone in the vision, goals, and responsibilities entrusted to the new pan-African institution. The AU still upheld the principles that directed its weak predecessor that placed a premium on sovereignty, "African solutions to African problems," non-interference in member states' internal affairs, and non-use of force for the peaceful settlement of African disputes. However, the act brought with it significant normative changes, particularly in the areas of peace and security, human rights and democracy, respect for the sanctity of human life, the condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional governments, and an openness to intervention. It is instructive to note that with the transformation from the OAU to AU, the maintenance of peace and security became the primary issue on the AU agenda. These new norms and standards form the basis on which the PSC Protocol and the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP) were to be enacted. Indeed, as Engel and Gomes argued, both the PSC Protocol and CADSP could be seen as the APSA's legal foundation (EU, 2003:3).

One aspect of the African Union that represents a clear departure from the OAU is the principle of the AU's right of intervention. According to Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the AU has the right to intervene in member states' activities in cases of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. Furthermore, the article was amended in 2003 by the Protocol on Amendments to the Act to include other serious conditions under which the AU could intervene, particularly those that included threats to legitimate order. In such cases, according to the amendment, the AU was permitted to restore security to any AU member state based on the recommendation of the PSC. Specifically, Article 4(j) provides for "the right of member states to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security." With the provisions outlined in various sections of Article 4, Africa has moved away from unqualified respect for state sovereignty to an approach where the duty to protect populations and the right to intervene shapes Africa's security management agenda. Ethiopian scholar Dersso sheds light on the importance of Article 4 with respect to post-Cold War African security needs when he asserts that the new security architecture, with Article 4(h) at its core, is not just a mere commitment to the promotion of peace and security, but it shows Africa's determination to avoid a repeat of the "Rwanda experience." According to Dersso, the article in question not only creates the legal foundation and justification for armed interventions in member states' violent conflicts, but it also imposes an obligation on Africa's foremost institution to intervene in such cases in order to prevent the occurrence or stop the perpetration of atrocious international crimes in Africa (The Commission for Africa, 2005).

At the heart of the APSA lies the PSC. The latter is a standing decision-making organ for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts, defining and directing the AU conflict management agenda. It is equally responsible for the overall implementation of the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP) purposely to protect the sanctity of human life and also to lay the foundation for sustainable development in Africa. The PSC Protocol acknowledges that the PSC is to function in accordance with the UN and within the framework of the UN activity, as the UN remains the principal custodian of international peace and security. In return, the PSC Protocol requests the UN's acknowledgement of the role and obligations of regional organizations in the management of regional conflict.

According to Article 7 of the PSC Protocol, the PSC, in consultation with the chairperson of the AU Commission, is mandated to

- Anticipate and prevent disputes and conflicts, as well as policies that may lead to genocide and crimes against humanity;
- Undertake peace making and peace building functions to resolve conflicts where they have occurred;
- Authorize the mounting and deployment of peace support missions;
- Intervene on behalf of the AU in a member state's conflict under grave circumstances, namely those involving war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, as defined in relevant international conventions and instruments;
- Institute sanctions whenever an unconstitutional change of government takes place in a member state, as provided for in the Lome Declaration;
- Implement the common defence policy of the African Union;
- Follow-up on the progress made towards the promotion of democratic practices, good governance, the rule of law, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for the sanctity of human life, and the upholding of international humanitarian law by member states; and
- Support and facilitate humanitarian action in situations of armed conflicts or major natural disasters (UN, 2004).

The PSC has been granted the authority to make decisions on its own on a wide-range of security related issues in Africa, ranging from preventive diplomacy to post-conflict peace building. However, in serious crisis situations such as those specified under Article 4(h) or when action is needed in a non-consenting member state, it is only the AU assembly that can make the ultimate decision regarding whether or not to intervene based upon the PSC's recommendations. The council is also responsible for facilitating close collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)/Regional Mechanisms (RMs)<sup>1</sup> and the UN.

Since its inauguration, the PSC has made crucial political decisions in response to peace and security challenges in Africa, with the mixed result of both shortcomings and achievements. It should be understood that most of these responses have been in the areas of condemning violence and the use of political and economic sanctions against unconstitutional changes of government, particularly the coup d'état in the Central African Republic (2003), Guinea Bissau (2003 and 2012), Sao Tome and Principe (2003), Togo (2005), Mauritania (2005 and 2008), Guinea (2008), Madagascar (2009), and Niger (2010), the post-election crisis in Cote d'Ivoire (2010-2011), and the post-election violence in Kenya (2013). The council has also been able to authorize peace operations in Burundi, Somalia, Sudan, and the Comoros.

In spite of these efforts, the development of the African Standby Force (ASF) is being challenged by a number of problems, hampering its full operationalization. Problems ranging from regional differences, questions about mandating modus operandi and coordination, intuitional capacity building, funding, equipment, logistics, and training are slowing the pace of progress towards the full operationalization of the ASF. These problems have been identified and must be critically addressed in the next phase of ASF implementation, which lasts until 2015. There are clear disproportions in the readiness of the RECs/RMs in terms of their capabilities for peace operations and their capacity to effectively manage that with which they have been charged. While the regional body, the AU, has not made any appreciable progress in preparing the RECS/RMs to achieve their objectives, two sub-regional bodies, ECOWAS<sup>2</sup> and SADC, are making substantial progress in this (Volt and Shanahan, 2005).

The PSC Protocol calls for the establishment of a continental-wide Early Warning System (CEWS) as part of the APSA to "facilitate the anticipation and prevention of conflicts"

through gathering and analysis of information that will help the AU to prevent conflicts in a timely manner. The CEWS, which operates as the early warning component of the APSA, builds on the RECs/RMs' early mechanism. The idea behind it is to boost the AU capacity to prevent conflict by providing the chairperson of the AU commission with information and to enable him/her to use the data gathered to advise the PSC on potential conflicts and threats to African peace and security and, finally, to recommend the best course of action to be used by the Peace and Security Council (Volt and Shanahan, 2005:16).

Structurally, the CEWS consists of the Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC), known as "The Situation Room," housed at the Conflict Management Division (CMD) at the AU Commission, and the Observation and Monitoring Units (OMUs) of the RMs. According to Article 12 (2b) of the PSC Protocol, the Situation Room is to be linked directly to the RMs' OMUs through appropriate means of communication. The OMUs are to continuously collect and process data at their respective levels and transmit all data to the Situation Room. The AU takes prompt actions in response to a threat of any violent conflict that has the propensity to disturb African peace and security (Report of the Secretary General of the UN 2012: 1-10).

Since the AU's peace and security activities need to be financed, the PSC Protocol, as part of the APSA, provided for the establishment of a Special (Peace) Fund (hereafter, "the Fund"). This fund has been described as anaemic, with a weak governance structure. One of the six parts that make up the African Peace and Security Architecture, the Peace Fund and the need for its enhanced funding cannot be overemphasized. The Fund is envisioned as a standing pool on which both the AU and the RECs/RMs can call in emergency situations and to meet unexpected priorities. Relevant financial rules and regulations of the continental institution govern the operations of the Fund, and it is financed directly from the requisitions from the AU's regular budget, including arrears of contributions and voluntary contributions from states and private sources within and outside the African continent. The Fund has been in existence since 1993, under the OAU regime, at which time 6% of the OAU budget was allocated to it. Due to the precarious nature of African economies, however, a number of AU member states find it difficult to honor their financial obligation of the organization, thereby limiting the AU in its activities, including those relating to peace and security. Between 2004 and 2007, AU member states' contributions to the Fund amounted to an average of 1.9% of the total resources mobilized, while the remaining amounts were provided by external partners. This scenario became worrisome, as its negative consequence on the AU-mandated peace operations were significant. This concern was presented by the 2007 High-level Panel Audit of the African Union:

African countries should endeavour to contribute substantially to AU peace operations. The assessed contributions of member states to peacekeeping operations should be paid regularly. The percentage of regular budget allocated to the Peace Fund should be increased, and the AU commission chairperson should also intensify his efforts at mobilizing funds and resources for AU peacekeeping operations from within the continent and the Diaspora. (AU, 2007)

Acknowledging this frustrating development, African leaders, in August 2009, decided at the AU summit in Tripoli to gradually increase the statutory transfer from the AU regular budget to the Fund from 6% to 12% by 2012. This transfer is intended to avoid the crippling of the AU in its peace and security functions due to lack of funding. Even prior to these recent efforts, the African heads of state, realizing the continent's financial limitations, adopted a resolution during

the AU Summit in Maputo, Mozambique in July 2003, calling on the European Union to establish a Peace Support Operation Facility (PSOF) from funds allocated to African countries under the existing cooperation agreements with the European Union. In response to this request, the EU African Peace Facility (APF) was established in March 2004, with the initial sum of Euro 250 million, under the 9th European Development Fund (EDF) budget (2000-2007) to support the APSA and Africa's vision of transitioning itself from the sufferer of protracted conflict to the builder of sustainable peace. The European Union APF is one of the main sources of finance for the APSA project, which, according to the European Union Commission, puts the European institution at the forefront of international support to the APSA, African peace operations, and capacity building activities at the levels of both the AU and RECs. Due to the AU's wide-range of peace and security activities, especially peace operations in the field, the money originally designated for the establishment of the APF became insufficient and was increased four times to a total of Euro 440 million by 2007 (AU, 2010). Considering the fact that international donors provide as much as 98 percent of the funding for AU peace keeping efforts and activity, it is questionable whether this regional body can assert its independence and autonomy in peacekeeping. This has remained one of the most visible Achilles heels of the AU in proactively responding to conflict in the region.

### **The Roots of Mali's Conflicts**

The roots of Mali's conflicts lie in two decades of poor governance after a 1968 military coup, followed by a fragile democratic transition in 1992. The country has been characterized by weak state institutions and a nepotistic, corrupt, and sometimes insensitive ruling elite. Mali ranked 105<sup>th</sup> out of 182 countries profiled in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International, 2012). The roots of the rebellion against the ruling elite can also be pointedly traced to ethnic-political tensions, which developed into a separatist movement in the northern part of the country. The tensions came to a head in 2012, when armed Islamist extremists joined the rebellion. The 500,000-strong Islamic Tuaregs in the north felt that they had been marginalized since independence from France in 1960, alleging that the development needs of the northern region had been long neglected and that the region lacked representation in the central government of Bamako. They therefore initiated a rebellion that raged particularly strongly in the early 1990's. They felt that neither the National Pact for Re-establishment of Peace nor the Brotherhood and National Unity in Northern Mali in 1992—nor the Algiers Accord of 2006—had addressed their grievances (UN, 2012). In addition to the grievances alleged by the Tuaregs, Mali as a whole, nearly 80 percent of the population of 14 million live below the poverty line in 2013 (Ibid), suggesting that the central government was also neglecting other regions and groups in the country. The more proximate cause of the Mali conflict lay in the perception of junior officers of the Malian army that their senior officers were diverting resources meant to fight the counterinsurgency in Northern Mali into their own pockets. This led to low morale among government troops and manifested in the inability of the troops to work together, even to operate equipment, for example. The president, Amadou Toumani Toure, himself a former general and head of state between 1991 and 1992, was seen as having mismanaged both this situation and the militant threat in the north. On 10 January 2012, the Tuareg group, the *movement pour la liberation de l'Azawad* (MNLA); Ansar Dine, an Islamic splinter group from the MNLA (whose political leadership was based in Mauritania); as well as Islamic extremists, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the *mouvement pour l'unicite et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO), launched attacks on government forces,



which led to the taking over the northern two-thirds of the country, including the towns of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal.<sup>3</sup> The coup was reminiscent of the military uprising staged by military officers in Sierra Leone in April 1992, when junior officers toppled the regime of former general Joseph Momoh, who, it was felt, neglected the needs of the Sierra Leone military as they were fighting Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels.

The Malian government's ability to respond to the threats being posed at that time by the *mujahedin* was weakened by the coup staged by US-trained Malian Captain Amadou Sanogo in March 2012. In the same month, ECOWAS appointed Bukinabe head of state and Blaise Compaore, as its mediator. The sub-regional body also announced plans to deploy a 3,000-man strong standby force if the rebels refused to settle the situation peacefully. The following month, an ECOWAS deal forced the resignation of the Malian president, Amadou Toure, and saw the appointment of Dioncounda Traore as interim president. Compaore urged the MNLA and Ansar Dine to negotiate collectively with Bamako. Led by Sanogo, the insurgents, however, continued to wield tremendous influence over the interim government.

### **The Politics of Intervention and the Conflict in Mali**

Following the March 2012 coup, a support and follow-up group on the situation in Mali, consisting of representatives from ECOWAS, the "core countries" (Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger), the AU, the EU, and key bilateral donors, started to meet regularly. The AU pushed for better coordination of domestic and international efforts and stressed the need to restore state authority, security sector reform, and elections. Even as 412,000 Malians were displaced by the conflict (including 208,000 refugees in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, and Togo), by November 2012, tensions erupted between the rebels in the north, with Ansar Dine and MAJAO repelling the MNLA out of the main towns that it had occupied. AQIM notoriously destroyed many historic and cultural sites in Timbuktu. These attacks closed down the country's gold mining industry. ECOWAS' leadership was, at the time Mali crisis erupted, francophone-dominated, allowing France to wield great influence among the conflict's major players. Blaise Compaore, Burkinabe leader who positioned himself as a key mediator in regional conflicts, it was argued, hosted French gazelle helicopters in his country before they were deployed for military combat in Mali in January 2013 (Wright & Okolo, 1999). The Chairman of ECOWAS since February 2012 was Alassane Ouattara, leader of Cote d'Ivoire, whose presidential mandate had been largely restored by the French army. The ECOWAS president since February 2012 was former Burkinabe prime minister and a member of Compaore's Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) Party, Kadre Ouedrogo. All three individuals were, in a sense, closely aligned with France and can be seen as French Trojan horses within ECOWAS. This placed Nigeria in tight corner since it was diplomatically encircled and linguistically different than its Francophone neighbors. Apart from the power play that has always manifested between France and Nigeria in West Africa, Nigeria's interest in intervening in Mali, it was argued was to curtail the perceived links between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda's northern African wing. In the words of President Goodluck Jonathan, "We believe that if we stabilise northern Mali, not just Nigeria but other countries that are facing threats will be stabilised. The terrorists have no boundaries. They don't respect international boundaries" (Madike, 2013). Beyond this claim, however, has been Nigeria's attempt in furthering her leadership position in Africa, to serve the strategic best interest of the country.

In June 2012, the ECOWAS commission started to discuss the possibility of deploying a stabilization force to re-establish state authority in northern Mali. The UN and external donors provided support to ECOWAS' planning. The Malian army, ECOWAS, and the AU all requested that the UN Security Council authorize deployment of an ECOWAS stabilization force with a peace-enforcement mandate (under chapter VII of the UN charter) to restore the country's territorial integrity and also to secure its border areas, while the Malian army would attempt re-established state authority. The concept behind the operations of the ECOWAS force was refined at two meetings involving senior Malian military officers, ECOWAS, the "core countries" (Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger), the AU, the UN, and other partners such as France, the US, and the EU in Bamako in August and October/November 2012. From that emerged a harmonized concept of joint operations—the "strategic operational framework"—which sought to align the plans of the Malian army with those of a sub-regional force, the African led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). The joint mission would back the poorly- equipped 5,000-member strong Malian army in three phases: to build its capacity; to recover occupied parts of the north of the country and reduce the terrorist threat therein; and to transition to stabilization activities in order to consolidate state authority in northern Mali. The plan also stressed the importance of longer-term security sector reform of the Malian army.<sup>4</sup> A joint coordination mechanism was established involving the ministers of defence of Mali, ECOWAS troop-contributing states, the neighboring "core countries," the AU, the UN, and other international donors (The Economist, 2013).

### **International Organizations and Governments' Intervention in Mali Crisis**

Both ECOWAS and AU leaders endorsed the plan in November 2012 and asked the UN Security Council to authorize an African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA)<sup>5</sup> a 3,300-member strong African-led international support mission in Mali—with infantry units, air assets, and formed police units—for an initial one-year period. The force was authorized in December 2012 in a resolution drafted by France (ECOWAS, 2012), with the UN Security Council urging AFISMA forces to take all necessary steps to rebuild Mali's army; help the government to extend its authority to the north; protect civilians; and help stabilize the country after military operations (UN, 2012). In order to ensure efficient deployment of AFISMA to Mali, the AU asked for a logistical support package to be provided to the mission through assessed UN contributions, as had occurred with the AU/UN Hybrid operation in Darfur in 2007.

This plan was great on paper, but it would be difficult to implement in practice given the logistical and financial challenges of sub-regional armies, along with Nigeria's over-commitments with respect to peacekeeping efforts. From Congo crisis, Nigeria had contributed both military and police personnel to more than forty peacekeeping operations in Africa and across the world. During the onset of the conflict in Mali, Nigeria had a high contingent of military, police, and civilian personnel in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Darfur. Additionally, AFISMA was mandated to train, equip, and provide logistical support to the Malian Army, but it could hardly equip or provide logistics to sustain itself in the field without substantial external assistance. The UN Secretariat and Department of Peacekeeping Operations, headed by Frenchman, Bernard Miyet, had been particularly hostile to the Nigerian peacekeeping presence in Sierra Leone (The Economist, 2013) and later and was later (under another Frenchman, Jean-Marie Guehenno) critical of the AU/UN hybrid model in Darfur.<sup>6</sup> Due to its rather severe limitations, the AFISMA mission was received by the UN only lukewarmly, as reflected in Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's reports to the UN Security Council. He regarded AFISMA as

an instrument of “last resort” (despite the fact that it was clearly time for last resort measures, as only military force would clearly dislodge hardened militants in the northern Mali). He continually warned that ill-conceived intervention by AFISMA could worsen the situation on the ground, and he noted that the deployment of such a force could result in human right abuses. He persistently cautioned that AFISMA troops would have to be “held accountable” for their actions and called for UN human rights monitors to be deployed to effectively “police” AFISMA peacekeepers (The Namibian, 2012). Instead of providing AFISMA logistics and funding, the UN was more concerned with human rights observance. By March 2013, the consolidated appeals process to secure funding for the AFISMA mission to support Mali had received only \$73.3 million, representing only 20 percent of its \$368 million target (UNSC, 2013:5). While the UN Secretary-General was hesitant to provide the logistical support package that AFISMA was requesting, the provision of such support would have been in the interest of not just the West Africans but of the entire international community, including particularly powerful western states like France and the US (UNSC, 2013:4).

Undermining AFISMA viability, Ban Ki-Moon called for funding of its military operations to be done by bilateral or voluntary contributions: a clearly unsustainable approach for such a dangerous mission. Similarly, he authorized France to intervene only if the UN troops are “under imminent and serious threat and at the demand.”

### **The Strange Reappearance of the French**

France’s strategic interests in West Africa clearly informed its influence over the UN’s Ban Ki-Moon. First, France has historical and structural relations with regimes and elites in the sub-region. Second, it also has deep economic interest and extensive economic ties.<sup>7</sup> Last, it regards the region as falling under French geopolitical influence. This combination of facts has lent credence to claims that France’s “finger-prints” are to be found over several of the UN Secretary-General’s reports.

The history of France’s involvement in the region is lengthy. Most recently, on 10 January 2013, as militants from Ansar Dane, MUJAO, and AQIM came to within 680 kilometres of Bamako, routing weak and demoralized Malian government forces, President Dioncounda Traore requested French assistance to prevent a march on the capital. The fact that a supposedly sovereign African country was turning to a former colonial power to protect its sovereignty was itself the greatest indictment of *pax Africana*. The same day of this attack, Paris pushed the UN Security Council to declare Mali’s crisis a “threat to international peace and security,” thus legitimizing France’s impending military actions.

Even before the militants’ push into Bamako, French special forces had already reportedly been fighting in Mali alongside the Malian army (BBC, 2013). In a well-coordinated move, France launched “Operation Serval,” the aim of which was to oust the Islamic militants from the northern region, the day after the French-drafted UN Security Council resolution, with its troops eventually reaching 4,000. In a *Blitzkrieg* conducted closely thereafter, with 2,000 troops from autocratic Chad (rather than from the AFISMA forces), France retook major northern towns like Gao, Konna, and Timbuktu by the end of January 2013, as the militants withdrew farther north into the desert and the Adrar des Ifoghas Mountains. Some of the jihadists staged suicide bombings and hit-and-run strikes against French and Malian units, as well as against the MNLA (Roggio, 2013). Despite French efforts, by March 2013, the militants still retained a presence in Kidal, Gao, and along the Niger River and Ouagadou Forest, with some also retreating to neighboring countries. Northern Mali had been rendered a “wild west,”

featuring drug cartels, cross-border banditry, ransom kidnapping, human trafficking, and money-laundering (Rice, 2013:5). The US, Britain, Germany, Canada, and Denmark rushed to provide France with the logistical support that AFISMA had earlier been denied.

French President Francois Hollande, confronted with low domestic poll ratings, pledged that France would stay in Mali as long as it took to defeat the terrorists (Aljazeera, 2013). He argued in January 2013 that “Mali would have been entirely conquered and the terrorists would be in a position [not only] to force ... the Malian population to [submit to] a regime it did not want but [also] to put on pressure on all countries of West Africa” (Economist Intelligence, 2013:9). This placed France in a position enviable to that of Nigeria, as the former was no longer seen solely as a guarantor of peace in Mali (Milne, 2013: 27) but in West Africa as a whole. Despite the popularity of Operation Serval, a critical analysis of France’s foreign policy efforts in Mali may not be unconnected to its economic interests in Mali. With 14 percent of France’s imports coming from Mali in 2012, France had reason to want to protect both the social stability and the industrial productivity of Mali. Indeed, French foreign minister Laurent Fabius’ announcement that Paris would maintain a 1,000-man strong garrison in Mali (Rice, 2013:5) did not come as a surprise to many observers.

The long-delayed AFISMA deployment moved into Mali by February 2013, following assurances of the logistical and financial support that had previously been withheld. By March 2013, a 6,288-member strong AFISMA force (smaller than the originally authorized force of 9,500) was expanding its presence in parts of north and central Mali under the leadership of Nigeria’s General Shehu Abdulkadir. Other ECOWAS troop-contributing countries included Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. Predictably, the troops faced logistical challenges including the securing of food, fuel, and water, requiring bilateral donor support to overcome these deficiencies (Melly and Darracq 2013:13). A hastily-created UN Trust Fund provided AFISMA with \$26.7 million by March 2013 (Economist Intelligence, 2013:6) and in April, the UN officially formed the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (*Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali*), MINUSMA. By June 2013, five logistics bases were established in Mali and Niger to supply, in addition to the military, intelligence and logistical support provided by key Western nations: Britain, Belgium, Canada, and the U.S (Francis, 2013). Serious questions were raised in Africa as to why these arrangements had not been put in place to support the regional troops before the French military intervention. The AFISMA mission’s struggle to mobilize troops served only to legitimize the cynicism of the Western countries. In June 2013, the UN Secretary General confirmed what everyone had known all along—that AFISMA lacked the enabling units to act as an effective peacekeeping force. The troops were given four months to reach UN standards (UNSC, 2013:16).

A surprising voice of support for French efforts in Mali came from Nigeria’s foreign minister, Olugbenga Ashiru, who noted in April 2013, “If the French had not intervened at the time they did, the situation in Mali would have been different today. Nigeria and indeed all members of the AU are grateful for the intervention” (Ohia, 2013). At their summit in the Ivorian town of Yamoussoukro in February 2013, ECOWAS leaders also expressed “profound gratitude” to Paris for its “decisive action” (ECOWAS, 2013). Despite this favourable press, however, France’s intervention in the conflict in Mali, especially its role in pressuring the UN Security Council, has tended to strengthen its hegemonic stance in West Africa, particularly with respect to Nigeria.

## Conclusion

Mali provides a good example of the machinations and the politics behind peace making missions. Far from being altruistically motivated, interventions in conflict in Africa are often colored with parochial and self-serving interests. In the case of the role played by France in Mali, one cannot fail to see how the former sought to multilateralize its past discredited unilateral interventions on the continent. While stability may have occurred as a result of some of these efforts, it was incidental to primary French interest of maintaining its own economic stakes in the area.

Although the objective of setting up AFISMA was clearly noble, it was inevitable that AFISMA would not achieve its mandate. Apart from being grossly underfunded, it had inadequate military troops to match the strength of the rebels. It could thus better be described as a “phantom force” that was dead on arrival in Mali and had to be resurrected as the UN’s MINUSMA. The question of why ill-equipped African peacekeepers were allowed to flounder before their well-equipped counterparts from Europe were deployed complicates the puzzle. Additionally, knowing that the AFISMA force lacked the size, logistics, and financing to sustain itself in the field also begs the question why it was deployed in the first place. The fact that after the French military intervention in 2013, the UN authorized a force that was four times as large as the proposed African AFISMA force exposed the apparent insincerity of the Western-dominated Security Council. Its initial strength of 3,300 was tripled to 9,500 as soon as the French intervention occurred, and the support that had previously been denied it suddenly appeared. As with previous African-led missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and Darfur, the Africans felt that the UN’s efforts in the region served to steal the glory of victory after the Africans themselves had attempted to conduct tortuous regional peace making and peacekeeping efforts that the world body failed properly to recognize.

The undesirable trend in which organizations lacking the necessary capabilities are left to bear the brunt of peacekeeping efforts (particularly with respect to providing an initial response), while other, more capable international entities only engage after sufficient losses have been sustained or other political interests are at stake have been condemned (Adebabo, 2011:13). The approach of first deploying ill-equipped African peacekeepers and then transforming peacekeeping efforts into a larger, better-resourced UN operations (Adebabo, 2011:13) had previously been practiced with the conversion of a 13,000 ECOWAS force in Sierra Leone into a UN force of 20,000 by 2000; an AU force of 2,645 in Burundi into a UN force of 5,650 by 2004; and an AU force of 8,000 in Darfur into a UN/AU hybrid force of 26,000 by 2008. In all of these cases, the Western world only belatedly supported the deployment of sufficient forces after ill-equipped and poorly-funded regional peacekeepers had been out-gunned. No immediate offers of international support or funding were forthcoming (despite the serious nature of the violence in each of these cases) until regional efforts had imploded. This hesitance to provide support was also evident in the deployment of AFISMA in Mali. The consistent demonstration by the international community of hesitation to support regional peacekeeping efforts in Africa.

Critically, however, *pax Africana* will not be achieved through an alphabet soup of acronyms, but by greater political commitment and resources being provided by the international community, led by Africa’s regional powers.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> RECs refer to all the eight Regional Economic Communities recognized by the African Union. The RMs refers to Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in Africa.

<sup>2</sup> The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional group of fifteen West African countries, founded on 28 May 1975, with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos. Its mission is to promote economic integration across the region.

<sup>3</sup> Several thousand heavily armed Tuareg fighters had returned to Mali in October 2011, having fought with Libya's deposed Muammar Qaddafi; this was a blow-back from the French-led military intervention in that country. Ansar Dine worked with AQIM towards its goal of imposing *Sharia* law across the Sahel, and was fighting against the MNLA (Mali Economic Intelligent Report 2012:18-19). The MNLA declared what is called the "independent state of Azawad," which no country recognized. These groups numbered around 3,000 core fighters and also involved criminal networks. MUJAO and Ansar Dine were reported to be fighting alongside Nigerian militants, *Boko Haram*, giving Abuja a direct stake in defeating this rebellion.

<sup>4</sup> Telephone Interview with General C. Obiakor 2012

<sup>5</sup> The African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) is an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)-organized military mission sent to support the Malian government against Islamist rebels in the Northern Mali conflict.

<sup>6</sup> The French have headed the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations since Ghana's Kofi Annan promised it to them in 1996 in order to win their support to secure the post of the UN Secretary-General that year. This has led to French dominance within AU/UN peacekeeping operations.

<sup>7</sup> Despite its supposedly "humanitarian" intervention in Mali, France has historically had economic interests in both Mali and Niger's uranium sectors. About a quarter of French electricity production relies on uranium. On April 2013 French government white paper on Defence and National Security – with an advisory group chaired by Jean-Marie Guehenno, the former French UN Undersecretary-General for peacekeeping – specifically singles out Africa (the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea, and the Maghreb) as a priority area for French defence and security policy. While the white paper noted that France would help strengthen African peacekeeping capacity, Paris envisaged undertaking future interventions like the one in Mali and planned to maintain at least four military bases on the continent. The white Paper also recognized Africa's economic potential, while urging the EU to acknowledge that African security was a key interest for the whole organisation (Melly & Darracq, 2013: 13)

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