# Fixing a fractured state?
Breaking the cycles of crime, conflict and corruption in Mali and Sahel

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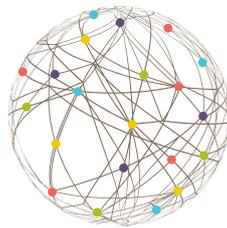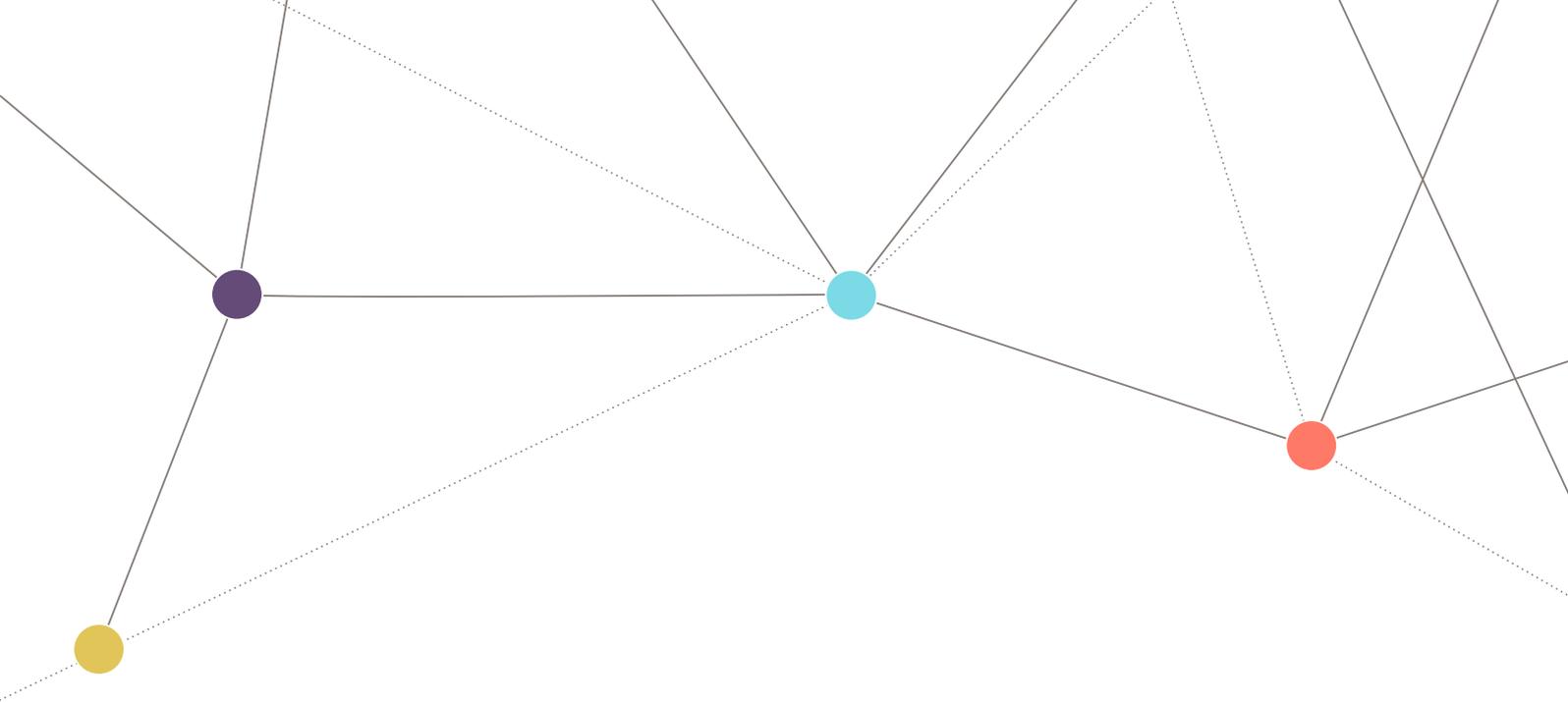
# Fixing a fractured state?

Breaking the cycles of crime, conflict and corruption in Mali and Sahel

by Tuesday Reitano and Mark Shaw

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The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime
WMO Building, 2nd Floor
7bis, Avenue de la Paix
CH-1211 Geneva 1
Switzerland

www.GlobalInitiative.net
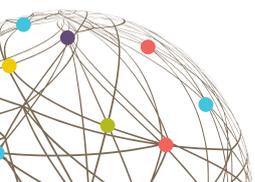
# Executive Summary

The international community has reiterated its commitment to supporting the government to rebuild the fractured state of Mali. Despite formidable investments in sponsoring the electoral process, reinforcing the security sector and convening the ongoing peace process, the complex and interwoven challenges of chronic poverty, insurgencies, criminal economies, widespread corruption and impunity and extremist groups have created fissures in the state that are an increasing challenge to resolve. Within this environment, the requirements of international assistance have arguably failed to provide the right incentives to create the foundation for genuine democratic governance, investing in state institutions, promoting the rule of law and providing sustainable development across the population. Achieving this objective will require a far more nuanced and engaged response, which draws together political, security and development objectives in a holistic manner, targeted at insulating the democratic process both from criminal flows and clientalist politics.

This report provides a thorough analysis of the antecedents of the crisis and charts the evolution of the political-economy and ideologies driving illicit trade and instability. The report concludes by proposes a new conceptual framework for policy-makers seeking to strengthen the foundation of democracy and development in Mali.

## A fragile foundation

Decisive political and economic developments have dramatically changed the nature of regional and economies and trade across the Sahara, resulting in land-based traditional trading routes constricting down to become conduits of almost exclusively illicit trade. The subsidy policies of oil-rich north African countries combined with investments in port infrastructure along the West African coast suppressed legitimate incomes for those nomadic populations who relied on cross-border commerce for a livelihoods, which left a propensity towards engagement in illicit trafficking. As these regions were characterized by limited state reach and distinct ethnic groupings, the growth and reliance on illicit activity meant that control over illicit trade reinforced local power structures and served as a disincentive to central state consolidation. Furthermore, the need to protect and control key routes or commodities, both from state attention and from competition from other groups, introduced escalating levels of violence into the community.

The separatist ambitions of the Tuaregs, fuelled by the widespread poverty, food insecurity and marginalization that characterizes the northern reaches of Mali has been a long-standing feature of the country's history, dating back several decades. Repeated cycles of violent rebellion was typically quelled by clientalism rather than genuine inclusion or resource reallocation, providing temporary respite but little genuine reform. This played out into a complex divide and conquer strategy, which was further complicated by introduction of insurgents from Algeria, Mauritania and other neighbouring countries coupled by a resource base increasingly reliant on illicit trade to which state actors turned a blind, or complicit, eye. Enriched by funds from cigarette smuggling, drug trafficking and kidnapping for ransom, the armed groups and militias formed along clan lines became better armed, more violent and more professional in their criminal activities. This in turn allowed them to become more effective at leveraging the state to consolidate both administrative and political control over their geographic and ethnic bases. The result was high levels of both corruption and violence, and the increasing involvement of the state in illicit activity on a rising spectrum that runs commensurate to the value of the illicit commodity in question.

Groups that could access illicit funds were afforded a greater capacity to buy arms, consolidate the monopoly on violence, corrupt state officials and subsume state functions, whilst at the same time building legitimacy with local populations as the dominant source of livelihoods, security and occasionally of service provision. Those groups that charted this path successfully were able to create a "zone of protection" in which the ability to provide security becomes a commodity in itself. While authority over a zone of protection confers significant advantages, it does not guarantee permanence.

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## Shifting drivers of instability

It is a common misconception of trans-Saharan trafficking that all contraband items, from smuggled flour to cocaine, are trafficked along the same routes, by the same actors, who draw little distinction between them. A closer and more granular analysis, however, highlights the risks to policymakers who assume that all flows are equal in the Sahara. While there may have been an evolution of growing criminality, and in some case synergies between actors and flows, in fact there are few incentives to combine illicit flows of higher value goods with the smuggling that occurs in the informal economy. More pertinently, documenting the evolution of illicit trafficking demonstrates that a new resource flow – either licit or illicit – will not necessarily feed into the same power structures that have developed around a pre-existing flow, and this can have a dramatic impact on levels of local violence and insecurity.

Landlocked Mali, situated in the heart of the Sahel, is particularly vulnerable to the political, economic and social shifts of its seven neighbouring states: Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal and Mauritania, with whom it shares 7,243 kilometres of land borders. National borders, drawn under colonial rule, cut through clans and ethnic groups that keep the states of the greater Sahara uniquely bound together and inter-dependent geographically, culturally and economically. A number of regional dynamics over which the state itself had little or no control, can be seen to have directly contributed to the crisis in Mali that culminated in the 2012 coup.

The first of these was the introduction of cocaine trafficking through the coastal West African states. While there had been increasing levels of illicit trade in commodities that ranged from cigarettes to cannabis, the profitability of the cocaine trade was a game changer. As noted, the higher value illicit commodities required a greater degree of protection – brought about by either violence or corruption. For traffickers to ensure the safe passage of cocaine required complicity with the highest levels of the state. Those groups able to engage successfully in the trafficking of cocaine were able to use their profits to change long established community hierarchies, significantly alter cultural and societal dynamics and leverage state infrastructure and political processes in unprecedented ways.

In parallel, the global war on terror was increasingly being brought to African soil, thanks to the alliance of insurgent groups in Mauritania and Algeria choosing to formally ally themselves to Al-Qaeda and commit to global jihad. Governments newly resourced and empowered to fight terror dispersed their insurgency threat further afield, resulting in key individuals rooting themselves into northern Mali and Niger, as well as further afield, and introducing an extremist discourse that had not been present in Mali previously. 2011 saw, for the first time, the debate around an independent Azawad become mingled with the desire to impose a caliphate, and the northern separatist began to fragment along political, ethnic and ideological lines and a number of new groups emerged, including the MNLA, MUJAO and Ansar Eddine. Kidnapping for ransom, a practice that began almost accidentally in 2003 and proliferated opportunistically over the next decade, became a convenient practice that both resourced and aligned ideologically with terrorist and insurgent agendas. Successfully concluding ransom negotiations, however, much like the cocaine trade, required engagement at the highest levels of the state, and implicating key state officials from the President downwards.

The noteworthy turning point in the narrative of insecurity and insurgency in Mali was the fall of the Gadhafi regime in Libya. Not only did this exponentially increase the quantity and caliber of arms available to militia groups across the Sahel, but it also changed the nature and direction of key trafficking routes as the capacity of Libyan authorities to manage their borders decreased dramatically.

Control over illicit resources changed hands in Libya itself, respectively changing the fortunes of ethnic groups and alliances further south, and cracking open some zones of protection and triggering conflict between northern groups over control of key nodes along trafficking routes. Cities changed hands with an ease that surprised even the aggressors, as the empty shell of the state was quickly revealed, and an uneasy coalition of northern militia groups found themselves beating a swift path to the south.

## Papering over the cracks

In a discourse dominated by fears of "narco-terrorism," in fact the rising levels of corruption, impunity and its impact on the legitimacy of governance is arguably the most deleterious consequence of the growth of criminally resourced militia groups. The trigger for the 2012 coup, which came only weeks before a scheduled democratic Presidential election, was in fact widespread disillusionment with the incumbent government and political leadership, not the northern separatist movement. What should have been understood as a signal of something deeply rotten in the state of governance was instead obscured by the rhetoric of countering terrorism.

The international community should take little pride in its policies that followed the coup in Mali. Unconstitutional regime changes require the immediate suspension of international development assistance, thereby blocking further intervention by key donor states in quelling the threat of terrorism. A rush to reinstitute "legitimate democratic governance" reinforced existing elites, as well as those with access to resources (illicit as well as licit), rather than offering the opportunity for a genuine dialogue process that might have resolved some of the underlying tensions, or for promoting the more structural reforms that would have moved the country away from the status quo of clientalist politics. In accordance with the wishes of the international community, combatting terrorism sat front and center as a principle of the peace accords but there was little there to hold authorities accountable for higher standards governance.

The international donor community's re-engagement in Mali was evidenced by the rapid deployment of an astonishing number of overlapping programmes to counter terrorism through the delivery of capacity building to state security institutions and the construction of border posts. These initiatives have largely been perceived to have done little to dampen either the drug trafficking or the potency of groups with a terrorist agenda. Instead, it has closed most neighbouring borders with northern Mali, reducing cross-border smuggling in basic foodstuffs and other commodities and delaying the delivery of humanitarian assistance in a deeply food insecure region. This has exacerbated insecurity, raised inter-communal tensions and violence in a competition for scare resources, and deepened resentment between north and south.

In his first year in office, despite promises of driving national unity, the new President has done little to engage at the community level in the north. Instead his government has been beset by nepotistic appointments and corruption scandals, many of which link directly to the President himself, to the extent that the IMF, World Bank and EU were forced to suspend budget support. With the legitimacy of the government increasingly eroded by its own behaviour, momentum or trust in the peace talks have similarly faded, and attacks on government and international installations in the north have intensified.

As things currently stand, there are few reasons to be particularly optimistic about the future of the fractured state of Mali. Ultimately the incentive structure to shift from a strategy of rapid pacification towards a longer-term structural investment in reconciliation and reform do not appear to be in place. Furthermore, the growing levels of insecurity and fragility beyond Mali's borders – from Libya to Nigeria - hold ominous portents of continued external stresses and shocks to community livelihoods and resilience, while donors continue to prioritise security over development.

## A new conceptual framework

What then can be learned from this analysis, and done differently in future? Conceptually, the report proposed two new conceptual frameworks around which organised crime and its impact on stability, governance and development could be better undertood.

The first conceptual framework observes that in a situation of state weakness or absence, where the government is unable to meet the basic requirements of the community by providing security and livelihoods, competing forms of governance will emerge. These will draw upon levers of authority and affiliation to command legitimacy amongst local communities, and progressively to capture state or political functions. The more homogenous and

coherent the group becomes, the more able they are to exploit advantages and consolidate control over territory and resources.

The second conceptual framework identifies the way that "zones of protection" can develop where legitimate livelihood opportunities are scare and the potency of criminal economies accumulate and increase in value. Protecting illicit resource flows requires protection, which is ensured by violence and corruption, both in rising levels as the value of the commodity rises. Zones of protection develop as one group manages to gain supremacy over a specific locality, and the provision of protection becomes a monetized commodity in itself. The incorporation of state actors and functions into zones of protection, either by co-option or corruption, creates a hybridity of governance and security that undermines the legitimacy of the state.

wTogether these frameworks offer a means by which both to analyze conflict dynamics and to identify entry points to respond in a peace building environment to conflicts that exhibit these characteristics. The report thus draws three main conclusions and recommendations for policymakers.

Firstly, where economies of protection have developed, the priority must be to recreate the link between governance and service provision, rather than strengthen security capacity. Given the hybrid nature of alternative governance and the state, efforts at strengthening state security actors may in fact place greater assets in the hands of compromised states or institutions to protect vested interests in illicit flows. Instead, focus on reconstituting the linkage between governance and service provision will rebuild the relevance of the state in previously marginalized and disenfranchised citizenship. Sponsorship by the international community of state consolidation efforts must come conditional not on electoral processes, but on genuine reforms which place accountability and transparency as the primary goal of a stabilization agenda. Power-sharing or decentralization similarly needs to come with requirements that will ensure transparency and tangible delivery of development dividends are realized, or else the risk is that it endorses local protection economies.

Secondly, while the appetite for addressing illicit flows and criminal economies is often absent in the early states of a peace building or transition process, the experience of Mali shows how they can seriously impact the capacity to achieve other state building goals. Addressing illicit flows earlier in peace processes avoids them serving as a centrifugal force against state consolidation. Analysis of protection networks provides a means by which to understand the vested interests in criminal economies and to monitor evolving trends.

Finally, the study highlights that in the case of Mali, there were four distinct entities in the conflict, and the conflation of these actors into "narco-terrorists" or "northern-extremists" reduced the legitimate objectives of certain parts of the conflict. Failure to understand the distinctions between separatists, terrorists and criminal entrepreneurs in Mali lead to crude security-first strategies being deployed that in fact reinforced rather than diminished to potency of key groups. Instead, greater effort needs to be made to understand the basis for community legitimacy, to leverage key actors who sit at the nexus of one or more of the interest groups are of particular importance in terms of shaping change and responding to community priorities.

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*Figure 1* Map of the Greater Sahara

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

| Acronym | Extension |
| --- | --- |
| ATT | *Amadou Toumani Touré* |
| BCEAO | Central Bank of West African States |
| | *La Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* |
| EDF | European Development Fund (EU) |
| GMPJ | Mauritanian Group for Preaching and Jihad (Mauritania) |
| | *Groupe Mauritanienne pour la predication et le jihad* |
| GSPC | Group for Preaching and Combat (Algeria) |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| IBK | Ibrahim Boubacar Keita |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| MAA | Arab Movement of Azawad |
| | *Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad* |
| MINUSMA | United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali |
| MNLA | National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad |
| | *Mouvement National pour la liberation de l'Azawad* |
| MUJAO | Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa |
| | *Mouvement pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* |
| PSPSDN | Special Programme for Peace, Security, and Development in Northern Mali |
| | *Programme spécial pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement au Nord-Mali* |
| TSCTP | Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (USA) |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |

## Introduction

In 2011, a two-fold crisis began in Mali that resulted in the collapse of the central state and the rise of Islamic extremism in the North. The international community was quick to express its grave concern that what was once a model African democracy could crumble so precipitously. There was wide commentary on the role that illicit trafficking and organised crime played in undermining governance and stability and as the crisis rose to its peak. The international news media sounded the alarm bells that "narco-terrorism" had taken hold in the Sahel, and heralded in shrill concern the growth of African Al-Qaeda.

In the aftermath, as the international community shepherded Mali swiftly into a hastily constructed peace agreement and national elections, a number of reports and articles have subsequently drawn on the benefit of hindsight to identify the warning signs that a culture of impunity for criminal acts was undermining the faith of the citizenship in a corrupt political elite. This disenfranchisement, it was argued, coupled with arms from Libya, triggered anti-state insurgencies in the North and fostered a culture of violent extremism. Policy-makers lamented the lack of appropriate tools to monitor these kinds of warning signs from the community, but at the same time quickly moved in with the classic border security and security sector capacity building programmes. Half-hearted attempts have been made at disarmament in the North, and a smattering of local peace building programmes have been introduced in the border communities. Efforts to create viable alternatives to the much vaunted "criminal economies" in the North were restricted to almost punitive labour-intensive road-building projects.

Two years down the line, international interest has moved on to other crises and conflicts, while Mali stands at the brink of signing the "Algiers Accords", the fourth such agreement in 20 years, promising investment and autonomy to the separatist North. Yet as the UN Mission struggles to scale up in Bamako, peacekeepers are threatened by car bombs and ambushes in the North, and suicide attacks and kidnappings have intensified in neighbouring countries, often targeting European citizens or interests. Less than a year into his tenure, corruption scandals dog the new President, key spoilers remain out of the discussions, and difficult issues of arms trafficking, drugs and endemic impunity remain largely off the table in favour of greater priorities, most namely the end of terrorism.

In the terror-phobic rhetoric of the international community, the crisis of governance that prompted the coup has been conflated with rise of terrorist groups in the North. And thus, it appears that solving one is the root to solving the other. While this is partially true, the relationship is too linear. Mali has dealt repeatedly with the issue of Tuareg separatism over a period of decades, and the trigger for most uprisings in each case have been harsh drought and widespread suffering by the people of the North. Their grievances: desperate poverty, barely sustainable livelihoods and marginalization by the South are not unjustified. But the military coup which unseated former President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) in March 2012 was not induced by the Northerners. It was a protest by the Malian Army against the poor leadership by the government, the overwhelming corruption and disinterest of ATT and the elites he surrounded himself with. The northern rebellion had merely thrown the paucity of governance into sharp relief, given the humiliating speed at which the Malian army lost ground to the separatists. The average citizen in both the north and south have been poorly served by the state, and lack key elements of basic human security.

There are essentially four overlapping and interlocking categories of actors in the Mali conflict: the state, the separatists, the criminal entrepreneurs trafficking illicit goods such as drugs and arms, and the terrorist groups preaching a jihadist ideology. As the state has demonstrated its weakness at delivering services and basic governance, other groups have gained legitimacy with the population. As these groups consolidate and strengthen, they serve as a centrifugal force undermining central state consolidation. Between the four groups, there are overlaps and alliances, with individuals that sit at the nexus of at least two or three, and possibly even all four of these sets of categories. What is important, however, is that the ultimate goals of these four groups are different, and the communication and interaction between these actors is critical and contact driven. As the ensuing study tries to demonstrate, no matter how blurred the lines may become, the failure to acknowledge the distinctions risks creating crude responses that will only perpetuate the cycle of conflict.

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Fixing a fractured state? Breaking the cycles of crime, conflict and corruption in Mali and the Sahel

The goal of this report is, through a comprehensive analysis of the underlying conditions of the crisis and the key events of the conflict in Mali, to unpick the interwoven strands of the four conflict actors in Mali, and to analyze how each of them has gained – or lost – legitimacy with their constituent communities.

The report is based upon an extensive set of field visits and more than 150 interviews with both state and non-state actors undertaken between October 2013 and June 2014 in several key states, including Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia.[i]  Field research is complimented by a detailed and exhaustive review of the secondary literature.  There is a significant body of work detailing the challenges of conducting research work on illicit or illegal activities.  As with other efforts of this nature, the authors recognise that this process is far from perfect, but a combination of an extensive literature review, a series of overlapping periods of interviews and related work in the wider region provides a framework with which to analysis a series of critical trends.

The report argues that communities are fundamentally seeking two objectives from governance: security[ii] and livelihoods. In an effective and functioning state, service provision is the role of a democratically elected government. However, in the absence (or weakness of a state) there is space opened for alternative or competing forms of governance.  Whichever governance structure can provide these two fundamental conditions will gain primary legitimacy with a community. However, when there are multiple potential providers of security and livelihoods, other "pillars of legitimacy" come into play: authority and affiliation, and the strength of the coherence and identity of the group is arguably an indicator of their ability to effectively insert themselves into this space.

Competing groups can leverage ethnic or clan-based loyalties, invoke religious authority, or they can capture political or state functions to exert authority over a community.  This narrative in Mali explains very clearly how the failure to provide security and livelihoods, the key tenets for basic human security, has created not only the conditions for the growth of insurgency in the north, but also the motivation for the coup in the south.  Furthermore, the space created by a weak state and a corrupt and self-serving political elite opened opportunities for other actors to gain legitimacy with communities, which allowed them to create "economies of protection," control key resource flows, and further consolidate their positions, to the greater detriment of central state consolidation.

The report focuses its analysis on the drivers of instability in Mali, but it cannot do so without understanding the interdependencies and influences of the greater Saharan region.  Even in a situation of perfect governance, external stress factors and shocks will impact the capacity of a state to provide security and livelihoods to its people.  Mali sits landlocked at the heart of the Sahel, sharing 7,243 kilometres of land borders with seven neighbouring states: Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal and Mauritania, and situated on the edge of the vast Sahara desert.  These states that make up the greater Sahara are countries uniquely bound together and inter-dependent geographically, culturally and economically.  National borders, drawn under colonial rule, cut through clans and ethnic groups who live in different states but remain bound together by identity and affiliation.

As the analysis will show, the dynamics in regional states have significantly impacted on stability and livelihoods for the Malian people, particularly in the north.  This has had implications for the competing local power brokers and key actors at the community level.  The report thus includes analysis on the evolution of trade patterns across the Saharan region, including the introduction of trafficking of some high value illicit commodities that have impacted regional stability.  It identifies some seminal events in neighbouring states that have impacted on stability in Mali, including for example the changing approach to Algerian separatism, or the collapse of the Libyan state. In doing so, the report includes analysis across the Sahel: Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Sudan; the Maghreb

i    In most cases the name of the interviewee has not been given, rather a general description is provided, along with the date and place of interview.  Interviews were conducted by Tuesday Reitano in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Senegal; Mark Shaw in Mali, Niger and (with Fiona Mangan) in Libya; Peter Tinti in Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria; Jonas Klange in Chad and Burkina Faso; and Matt Herbert in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria.  In each case the research team is grateful to a series of "fixers" and interpreters who assisted with the work.

ii    By security we mean freedom from harm for themselves, their households and their possessions.

and North African states of, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and to some extent Egypt, as well as the West African coastal states, including Guinea Bissau and Nigeria. A map of the greater Sahara region covered by the report, with an overview of the main zones of conflict is below.
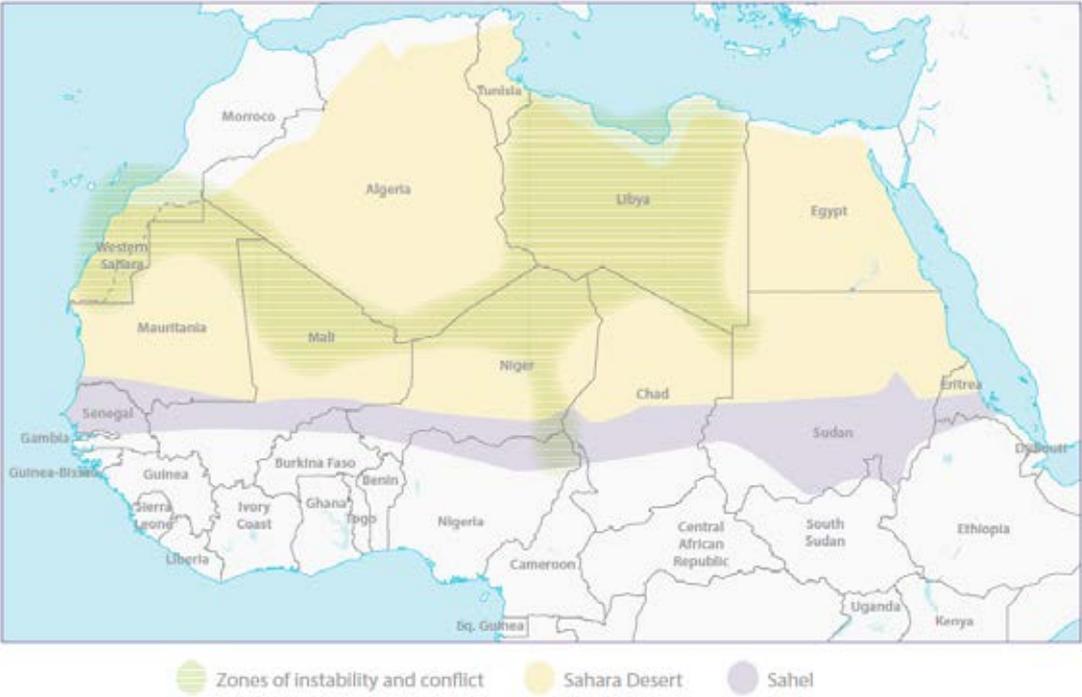


*Figure 2* Map of the Sahara with an overview of the main zones of conflict

The analysis presented in this report highlight how difficult it can be to fix a fractured state. The interlocking challenge of weak governance, disenfranchised populations and both domestic and regional security threats exacerbate fissures in the state, and providing incentives to for actors to disengage, rather than engage in state consolidation and peacebuilding. By providing this analytical framework to the narrative of conflict in Mali, the report seeks to support policy makers and practitioners to identify the leverage points for instituting change and building up a new and stable state of Mali that can provide genuine development opportunities to its people, both in the north and in the south.
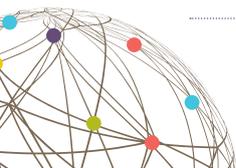
# A Fragile Foundation

## Informal economies and livelihoods of the Sahara

Poverty, inequality and massive under-development are characteristics of all the countries in the Sahara, even those that are resource rich, and the populations the countries that sit along the Sahel band in particular, are among the poorest and most vulnerable in the world, with absolute poverty rates over fifty per cent. Niger is in fact the country that ranked on the bottom of the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) in 2013. In 2012 Mali was ranked at 182 out of 186.

Mali sits landlocked at the heart of the Sahel, sharing 7,243 kilometres of land borders with seven neighbouring states: Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal and Mauritania, and situated on the edge of the vast Sahara desert. These states that make up the greater Sahara are countries uniquely bound together and inter-dependent geographically, culturally and economically. National borders, drawn under colonial rule, cut through clans and ethnic groups that live in different states but remain bound together by identity and affiliation. Large stretches of the borders fall into harsh desert or semi desert areas with little or no state presence. Failure to project state authority into these regions has resulted in the vacuum being filled tribal leaders and armed groups vying for local power and control.

Historically the Sahara was once a thriving commercial zone, with a vibrant transit and export trade in a range of commodities from silk to salt. The Sahara has long served as a crossroads, a place where ideas, people, and goods from sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and Europe are exchanged. Though the fabled caravans have long ceased being profitable, and cities such as Timbuktu and Chinguetti are no longer centers of global commerce, those who categorise the states of the Sahel as sparsely populated, desert backwaters, overlook the extent to which the states in the region remain inextricably linked by their regional economies and to the broader global economy.

Thanks to porous borders and a history of open exchange, much of the trade in which these communities engage takes place within informal and semi-formal structures, which along with pastoralism, artisanal fishing industries in the coastal states and limited artisanal mining industries, form the basis of the Saharan economy. These structural realities mean the region is particularly susceptible to fluctuations in resources, as well as transnational threats, especially those emanating from transnational organised crime.

Another shared characteristic is the significant and growing informal economies, of the countries in the region. Informal trade across borders is an established and longstanding part of the informal economy, and often takes place with the tacit endorsement – if not encouragement - of the Saharan governments. In the oil rich North African coastal cities, wealth from the central state is being used as a tool to ensure acquiescence of border communities, and a blind eye has largely been turned to smuggling activities. In some cases, for example in the south of Tunisia on the border with Libya, both governments at different times, and with differing strategies, have tolerated or even encouraged informal trade rather than attempt to find legitimate sources of revenue and stimulus for economic growth.[1] Libya's Gadhafi took this one step further, using access to illicit markets and resources as a means to secure the continued allegiance of favoured allies and tribes.[2]

The scale and impact of these flows should not be underestimated. The informal economy is thriving, particularly in the framework of increased political instability, with significant levels of cross border smuggling based around subsidised price differentials between oil producing states and their neighbours. Research has noted that Algeria provides transport subsidies in the range of $12.5 million annually to ensure that subsidised commodities can reach communities in the southern reaches of the state, and this has created a healthy cross-border smuggling economy, estimated at approximately $50 million, with the communities in Northern Mali.[3] As the graph below demonstrates, the majority of commodities that appear to be crossing borders illegally in the Sahel are basic items necessary for survival, or, as a citizen from Gao was quoted as saying in a recent report, *"Smuggled goods that come from Algeria are some of the only products we can afford – without them we would probably die."*[4]
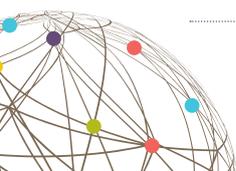
As the economies of border communities are increasingly engaged in and dependent on informal trade for their livelihoods, this increases the complexity of distinguishing illicit trafficking from the overall informal economy.[iii] It further confers legitimacy for the groups and individuals that can control key trafficking routes, or significantly enrich themselves through trafficking, as that wealth is then distributed to those of their affiliation.



| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Fresh Food | 70% |
| Processed Food | 55% |
| Clothing | 53% |
| Animals/Cattle | 39% |
| Cigarettes | 24% |
| Petrol | 20% |
| Drugs | 17% |
| Machinery/Appliances | 16% |
| Automotive | 14% |
| Other | 13% |
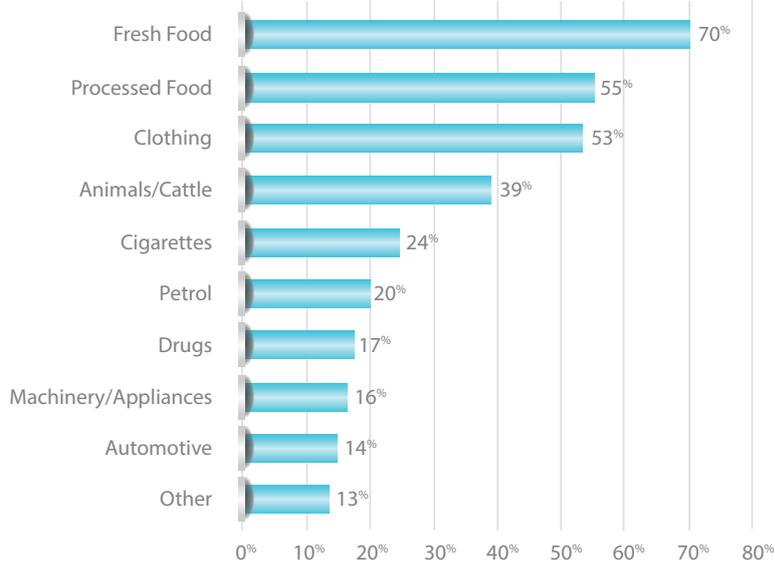
*Figure 3* Community perceptions of type of goods crossing borders illegally[5]

## Zones of Transit

The Sahel, which is a broad semi-arid strip of land that stretches from East to West across Africa at the base of the Sahara desert, dividing the desert from the African Savannah, is characterised by dramatic variations in rainfall and is prone to cyclical drought that will affect some, but rarely all simultaneously, of the countries that sit along it. This severely affects the sustainability and livelihoods of the predominantly pastoral economies of the region and placing stress on its populations.[6] As a consequence, the populations of this region have traditionally been highly dispersed and mobile, migrating between communities in response to environmental factors, taking with them livestock, goods or other livelihood mainstays.[7] Migration is also, of course, triggered by conflict and instability, to which the Saharan countries are prone.

The seminal study by Judith Scheele on the people and trade of the Sahara emphasised that as a consequence, geographic space matters less than connectivity, and that people's relationships, identity and dominant drivers *"are inherently flexible and developed through sustained communication. They can at times include places situated at considerable distance, while excluding areas close by."*[8] The result is that the free movement of people and goods has long served both as an economic and social resilience strategy, and ethnic, clan and kinship networks dispersed across the Sahara and the Sahel remain an important social organizing principle, perhaps more important than geographic proximity.

Decisive political and economic developments have dramatically changed the nature of regional economies and trade. The first development was the discovery of oil in the North African states of Algeria and Libya in the 1950s, and in Nigeria slightly later in the decade. The second was containerization and the growth in global trade by sea, which has lead to a significant investment in port infrastructure in the coastal regions from West to North Africa. These two dynamics combined to constrict the trading routes in legitimate goods that crossed through the Sahara by land, whilst at the same time further fostering the dynamic informal cross-border smuggling trade that was

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iii   While precise definitions of informal trade are hard to achieve given the range of practices prevalent in the region, for the purposes of this report, informal trade is defined as the flow of goods that are unreported or incorrectly reported by the country's customs authorities. Smuggling, where goods cross the border without the knowledge of customs authorities, is thus a subset of informal trade.

driven by the heavy subsidies offered by the Algerian and Libyan governments on basic commodities. Inland cities, such as Gao and Timbuktu in Mali, or Agadez in Niger, which had previously stood as key trading posts for legitimate goods across the Sahara desert, found the reduction in volume of trade insufficient to sustain the communities living along the inland trade routes.

Current evidence suggests that the result of these trends is that very little licit trade now traverses the Sahara by land. Legal commodities through the formal economy can be easily supplied or extracted through the seaports that have proliferated around the coastline particularly in West Africa. Thus, it is now almost exclusively illicit goods that would attempt to completely traverse the Sahara in any direction, and this is due to reasons of necessity: a requirement for secrecy in the case of drugs, and desperation in the case of human migrants.[9]

Many different populations in the Sahara rely on cross-border commerce as a livelihoods strategy. Various Arab and Moorish communities benefit from cross-border commerce with concomitant communities in neighboring Mauritania, Mali, Western Sahara, and Algeria. Transit across the Sahara desert, however, is an arduous, perilous, challenge, and therefore both the migration of people and the movement of goods (licit and illicit) and those seeking to transit illicit goods across the Sahara would need to draw upon the assistance, favour and networks of the communities resident in the desert. This would either be to facilitate the transit itself, by the nomadic tribes of the desert who are experienced in the crossing: the Berber Arab Tuareg, and the African Tebu predominantly, but among others, or to pay for the right to pass through controlled areas. For example the Tuaregs, even during French colonial rule, historically had the right to collect taxes and to offer protection services for trans-Saharan caravans.[10]

Tuareg populations have played a considerable role in internationalizing various types of trade, acting as transporters and traders that link Mauritania to Algeria, Mali, and Niger. "Black African" populations concentrated in the south and along the Atlantic coast, particularly the Tebu, the Halpulaar, Soninke, Bambara and Wolof, form critical links between the Mauritania, Senegal, Mali and as far afield as Chad. As these regions were anyway characterised by limited state reach and distinct ethnic groupings, the growth and reliance on illicit activity often means that the control of illicit trade feeds strongly into local power structures, particularly in border communities where central government influence is weakest and ethnic cross-border relationships stronger.

It is for this reason, therefore, that the growth of criminal economies in Mali was so detrimental to the foundations of the state. Due to the paucity of other legitimate means of securing livelihoods, the introduction of illicit resource flows became the only compelling source of income for communities in the north.[iv] Unlike licit economies, however, illicit economies are covert and require "protection" to continue their activities. The most basic means to achieve protection is through violence, or the threat of violence. Violent competition builds over the desire to control routes, which introduces a dimension of insecurity for the community.

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[iv]  While not all members of the community are necessarily traffickers, a range of collateral industries built up to serve the traffic, and the local economies are largely driven by funds from trafficking as the major source of revenue.

## Greed or grievance? The Tuareg Rebellions

Analysts have long debated the causal factors that trigger conflict: whether the prevailing motivator is a sense of "grievance", injustice, deprivation or inequality, or a trait of "greed" – the desire and ability to raise, secure or control economic interests. The capacity of state institutions to provide social services, generate economic opportunity and garner value from natural resources, guarantee human rights within an overarching rule of law framework (indicating integrity, civil rights and access to justice), and monopoly over the use force in order to provide security, have all been cited as pre-conditions for a thriving state that has the resilience to prevent and recover from conflict. Certainly in the northern reaches of Mali, few of these preconditions exist.

When, in January 2012, fighters from the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA), attacked the towns of Tessalit, Menaka and Aguelhok in Northern Mali, it was the next episode in the northern independence saga that had been playing out in Mali over the last five decades. This rebellion, like other Tuareg led uprisings, reflected long-held grievances and bitter historical memories: *"Fighters in 2012, in some cases the same men who had fought the Malian army in 1990 and 2006, or whose fathers had fought in 1963, felt that post-colonial Mali had marginalised and victimised them. The MNLA dreamed of founding an independent state, "Azawad," comprising the northern Malian regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu."*[11]

Where in fact only 10% of Mali's approximately 15 million strong population is Tuareg,[v] their rebellions have strongly impacted the country's post-colonial history. Concentrated predominantly in the northern towns of Kidal and Timbuktu, the Tuaregs are the hardest hit by the region's droughts, which is one trigger for their sense of grievance. It is noteworthy that each of the Tuareg rebellions has followed a particularly prolonged drought. Exclusion from the central state and sense of inequality in the distribution of the country's natural resources are other rationale given to justify the rebellions. This is not without cause. Unlike in Niger, Tuaregs in Mali have largely been excluded from the central state: there has been only one Tuareg prime minister, though a number of Tuareg leaders won elections as deputies to the National Assembly in the 2002 and 2007 elections.

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[v]  Approximately 1.5million Tuaregs are resident in the Sahara, divided between Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Algeria and Libya. They are also known by the language they speak, Tamasheq.

Formation of the Republlic of Mali — 1960

First Tuareg rebellion – violently suppressed, prompting migration North and to Algeria

Military Coup

1970

Extreme drought prompting migration North

1980

Government of Moussa Traoré

Extreme drought

Unopposed re-election of Traoré prompts widespread rebellions

SAP

Attack by Tuaregs in Northern Niger prompts harsh military action — 1990

Second Tuareg rebellion

Transitional administration headed by ATT

Bourem Accords

Government of AOK

2000

AQIM holds 32 EU hostages
Drought
New rebel movement attacks cities in the North; 750kg of cocaine vanishes
Algiers Accords; Clashes over cocaine smuggling
"Air Cocaine" - 10 tons found in Gao

2010

Government of ATT

Third Tuareg rebellion

AQIM holds 42 hostages

*Figure 4* Timeline of key events in post-colonial Mali, 1960-2012
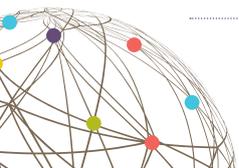
In an effort to quell uprising and rebellion, various Malian leaders have exploited ethnic tensions to try to keep the north under control, and in some cases facilitating access to certain criminal markets as a reward for militia support. The divide and conquer strategy played out into a highly complex and ever-shifting network of alliances and rivalries among Tuareg nationalist groups; Islamist groups run by Malians, Algerians, Mauritanians and others. The proliferation and fragmentation of militia groups in the north and south has created generations of ethnic tension and inter-communal violence in Mali. Driven often by key figures, this process has interwoven with elements of the state, particularly in local authorities, but also with association to influential persons in central government.

As there is an overall paucity of legitimate economic drivers in Mali - as noted the majority of the country is subsistence agricultural or pastoralist, and the only mineral resources, gold mining in the south, have been of declining value since for the last century – the political system in Mali also became vulnerable to the influence of illicit funds, creating an impenetrable barrier to entry for legitimate democratic process. Enriched by funds from cigarette smuggling, drug trafficking and kidnap for ransom, the armed groups and militias formed along clan lines became better armed, more violent and more professional. Key figures associated with these flows lobbied the government for administrative control over specific ethnic groupings: the Lamhar in the Gao region and the Berabiche in Timbuktu. Both corruption and violence increased, as clashes related to cocaine smuggling, for example, played out throughout 2007–2008, sometimes with the direct intervention of state officials. For example, in August 2007 a Lieutenant Colonel Lamana Oult Bou, a Malian army officer with close ties to the then-head of state security, allegedly arranged the return of a sizeable drug shipment in exchange for a large payment.

What is important in this analysis is the dynamics that allowed the state to be sucked into the illicit economy. As it had become the dominant source of revenue in the north, competition over the control over illicit resources was strong and attracted both state and non-state actors. To gain control over and protect illicit flows, traffickers employ two strategies (that would not be necessary in the legitimate economy): violence and corruption. As the next section will show, the greater the value of the illicit flow the higher the costs of protection become, i.e. the greater the levels of violence, and the more senior and thus more expensive the levels of the corruption required to continue operations.

# Shifting Drivers of Instability

A number of analysts have described how the informal smuggling economy of the Sahara laid the foundations for trafficking increasingly high-value and illicit goods.[12] This analysis, however, typically concludes with the assertion that all contraband items, from smuggled flour to cocaine, transit along the same routes, by the same actors, there is little distinction made between licit and illicit goods by those who traffic them.  It is here, however, that the conventional wisdom increasingly appears to have broken down, and there is a risk to policymakers who assume that all flows are equal in the Sahara.

While there was indeed an evolution of growing criminality, and some synergies between actors and flows, as the narrative below will demonstrate, there are few incentives to combine illicit flows of higher value good with the smuggling that occurs in the informal economy, and more pertinently, a new resource flow – licit or illicit – will not necessarily feed into the same power structures that have developed around pre-existing flows.

## Criminal economies and illicit flows

There is an increasingly diverse range of illicit flows now traversing across the Sahara.  This includes smuggling of licit commodities, including stolen cars, luxury goods, petrol, and since the breakdown of central state control in Libya, there has been a growth in smuggling of pharmaceutical goods.[13]   But it also includes more pernicious flows, including arms, drugs and people, and these are having a profound impact on stability and security across the region.  A number of cities have developed in the remote regions, which have become hubs for smuggling and illicit trade.  For example, Tamanrasset in Algeria, is, *"an example of a city in a place you would not expect a city to be."*[14]  Situated nearly 2,000km south of Algiers, has swelled to three times it size in the last ten years on the profits of illicit trade, and In Mali, the towns of Gao and Kidal play the same function, in Niger, it is Agadez and Arlit; in Libya it is Sebha and Kufra.
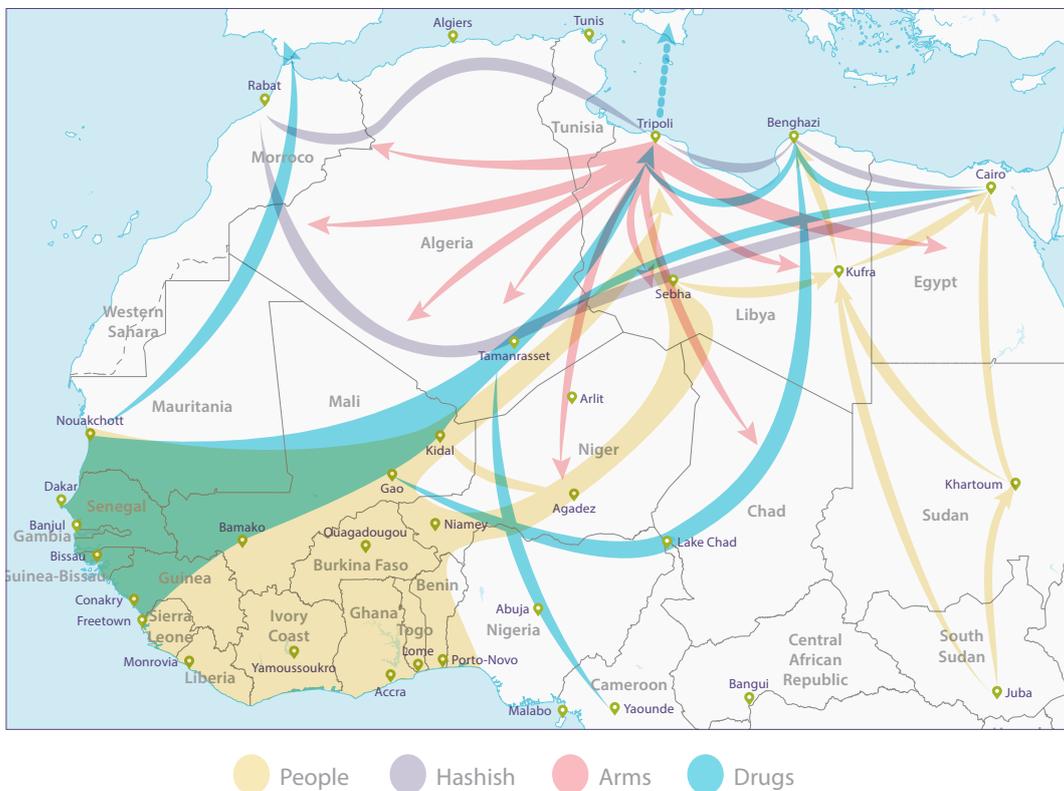


*Figure 5 Major trafficking flows across the Sahara*[15]

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### Arms trafficking

During the 1990s, conflicts in Algeria, northern Niger and Mali turned the region into a major arms trafficking hub. Weapons smuggling was sometimes run by the same networks controlling the commodities smuggling, and moved in every direction, from North to South, East to West and back, fuelling the various conflicts and strongholds of powerbrokers in the region. The scale of the region's smuggling of weapons truly peaked following the collapse of the Gadhafi regime, when a number of the dictator's caches of arms were *"looted by militias, opportunists, and agents of organised criminal networks. There is evidence that weapons from Libya have made their way from Sinai to the Sudan".*[16]

Gadhafi's arms caches changed the nature and direction of flows of the region's arms smuggling, and has made it one of the greatest threats to security. Residents in the Algerian border city of Tamanrasset, for example, indicated that over the last two to three years, the rate of weapons trafficking through the area had increased dramatically, and the majority of the weapons transiting through that hub are intended for distribution in Mali, among others.[17] Control of and access to arms in the Sahel and the Sahara has become a critical factor in the ability to control trade routes, establish territorial control and challenge the state's monopoly over the use of force. Certainly as far as the repeated secessionist attempts by the Tuareg populations in Northern Mali were concerned, access to weapons stocks was almost directly correlated with the degree of success of each rebellion.

### Cigarette trafficking

Illicit trafficking of cigarettes, which began as a strategy by cigarette importers and distributors to circumvent tax regimes and break state control over cigarette distribution, is seen to have greatly contributed to the emergence of the practices and networks that later allowed drug trafficking to grow.[18] It is also one of the organised criminal enterprises most closely linked to the financing of terrorist groups in the Sahel.

The smuggling of illicit cigarettes is reported to have begun in the early 1980s, and relatively quickly became a tightly controlled criminal enterprise that targeted the richer North African countries of Libya, Algeria, Egypt and to a certain extent Morocco, which are the heaviest smokers of the region – industry estimates suggest that these four countries, plus Algeria smoke upwards of 44% of the continent's cigarettes.[19] In 2009, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that the Saharan trade in illicit cigarettes in Libya and Algeria alone was worth more than $450 million per year.[20]

The reason that illicit cigarettes are often pointed to as having paved the way for higher value illicit flows is that, whereas the informal trade in subsidised commodities and foodstuffs was broadly ignored by the governments in the region, the heavily taxed tobacco industry was of greater concern. Cigarette smugglers were required to bribe customs officials and border guards to ensure the smooth passing of their load, and over time state officials and members of the security apparatus became intimately involved in the trade.[21] Once these networks of corruption and collusion were established, they were well placed to adapt to flows of other illicit goods, assuming that the price was right.

### Drug trafficking

The first genuinely illicit commodity to begin to transit the Sahara, which has had an enormous impact (albeit under-analysed) on the region, is cannabis resin from Morocco. Moroccan production, considered the world's largest or second largest, and a significant quantity of it transits the Sahel states, partly to circumvent the closed border between Algeria and Morocco. Reports by the UNODC show that the trafficking of cannabis resin traverses the whole region following two major routes. The first follows the north African coastline, the second moves southwards from Morocco across the Sahel, then eastwards. Both routes converge in Egypt for transportation to the Balkans for onward delivery to Europe, or distributed into the wider Middle East and the Gulf. The Mauritanian government has estimated that annually, one third of the Moroccan cannabis crop transits across its border, and in 2007, UNODC noted a rise in seizures of cannabis in Niger, there is very little recent analysis on the volumes being trafficked, the main actors in the trade, or the profits which remain in the Sahara region. A 2012 report by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace identifies that the cannabis trade as *"dominated by mixed networks of Moroccan, Sahrawi, and Mauritanian*

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*nationals – as well as, allegedly, Algerian army officers – until it arrives in Northern Mali. Across northern Mali and Niger, the bulk of cannabis resin smuggling is run by networks from Malian Arab communities that can often draw on family and tribal ties in Mauritania and Niger.*[22] Whether the reference to "Malian Arab communities" indicates Tuaregs – the dominant ethnic grouping in AQIM and MUJAO is unclear.

The other drug that moves through the Sahara, and by all accounts generates the greatest margin of profit, is cocaine. Cocaine began transiting through sub-Saharan Africa in the early 2000s, as the European market for cocaine grew, and interdiction efforts increased in the Caribbean. Latin American traffickers targeted several coastal states in West Africa, the most well-known and vulnerable being Guinea-Bissau. Finding complicit states and protection, West Africa quickly became a major stage along the route to Europe. In his opening address to the Security Council in December 2013, the UN Secretary-General said that the region was a transit corridor for $1.25 billion of cocaine.[23]

In the past year, there have been a number of drug seizures at the airport in Bamako reported by the Malian authorities.[24] In late December 2013, a Bolivian coming from Brazil was found with approximately 5 kilos of dissolved cocaine. A Nigerian coming to Mali from Brazil, passing through Madrid, was apprehended in Bamako with 30 capsules of cocaine. There have also been recent seizures of methamphetamine and heroine. On the road outside the airport in Bamako, a Nigerian carrying two kilograms of heroine was arrested. Malian officials said at least 36 kilos of methamphetamine were seized at the Bamako airport in 2103, where couriers were hoping to bring the product to Asian markets, where the mark-up on meth ($40,000 to $200,000 per kilo depending on the country) is considerably higher than other parts of the world. According to Malian officials, the majority of those caught at the airport are Nigerian nationals, many of whom were travelling with fake passports from other ECOWAS nations. Security sources in Bamako also indicated anecdotal evidence that passengers who hold dual Franco-Malian citizenship may be acting as drug curriers with more frequency then before. Though narcotics are probably moving in both directions, one theory is that Malians who live abroad are bringing product to Bamako for domestic markets.

The west African drug market, but particularly the land route north from Guinea-Bissau and the West African coast, has had a significant impact on stability in northern Mali and more recently in Libya, as the profitability of cocaine vastly exceeded any commodity that had previously passed through the region. It has necessitated the complicity of state actors, including at high-levels, to ensure the safe passage of this high-value flow, as unlike cannabis or illicit cigarettes, the cocaine trade is considered a threat to the security of European interests, and is thus more highly monitored. This monitoring, however, was restricted to the size of the flow, the modus operandi and the direction of the route. Its impact on governance, stability and community dynamics was largely ignored, and it was not until the crisis in 2012, that the impact of the cocaine trade on the Sahel countries really came to the fore. Those groups able to engage in the trafficking of cocaine – and it appears that this has largely been established on ethnic or clan lines – were able to use illicit resources to change long established community hierarchies, significantly alter cultural and societal dynamics, and leverage state infrastructure and political processes in unprecedented ways.[25]

## The rise of extremism and jihad

While some consider the emergence of terrorism in Africa to be a relative recent phenomenon, which has come to prominence only in the last five years, longstanding watchers of Africa have argued by contrast that *"Africa is the continent most affected by domestic or sub-national terrorism, if not (yet) by its transnational variant"* and that the root causes of this brand of terrorism, in which armed groups with political motives enact acts of violence against non-military targets intended to provoke terror, is *"partly a hangover of the process of decolonization, but is more intimately linked to the failure to effect sustained development and to consolidate accountable and effective governance."*[26]

International attention only turned to this issue as domestic terrorism began to interact or affiliate with international or transnational terrorist movements. This refers to Al Qaeda alliances by the Somali extremist group Al-Shabaab and to AQIM in Sahel. This cast previously domestic African insurgent movements using terrorist tactics squarely into the spotlight of the global "war on terror" that emerged as the dominant security threat following the attacks on the

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World Trade Center in September 2001.  However, the extent to which these groups genuinely sought transnational objectives, or were influenced by international actors is questionable.  AQIM, which evolved from the hardline salafist Algerian Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), began the process of alignment with Al Qaeda in 2003, officially affiliating and changing its name in 2006.  Apart from the name, however, the group showed little practical attachment to the global terror organization before 2011, and even the subsequent expansion beyond national borders has been confined largely to the immediate sub-region, rather than the designs on international targets seen in other theatres.

Certainly in the Sahel, despite the rhetoric of "Africa's war on terror", the root causes of cultural or economic marginalization that caused the growth of armed movements appear to remain dominant:   *"In Mali, Niger and the subregion, global counter- terrorism and local counter-insurgency objectives are easily blurred. This is made more complex by factors such as perceived state illegitimacy, aspirations of autonomy, racial and ethnic divisions and reconciliation problems, organised crime and foreign intervention."[27]*

As international, and predominantly American, discourse focused on stamping out global terror, the focus on the Sahel's "ungoverned spaces" and the perceived "arc of instability" across the Sahara and the greater Sahel band grew to prominence.  As the number of terrorist incidents grew in the period since 9/11 (see graph below), despite the fact that the vast majority were domestic acts of terror concentrated in Algeria, efforts by international actors to respond to the perceived terrorist threat in Africa expanded.  It was not until the fall Gadhafi in 2011, and the resultant surge in weapons and militias moving across the region, that the volatility of the Sahara was genuinely realised.  By 2012, a report by NATO in 2012 stated that northern Mali has become *"the largest Al Qaeda stronghold since the fall of Afghanistan in 2001,"* transforming the Sahel *"from a rear logistical base to the locus of jihadist activity in North and West Africa."[28]*
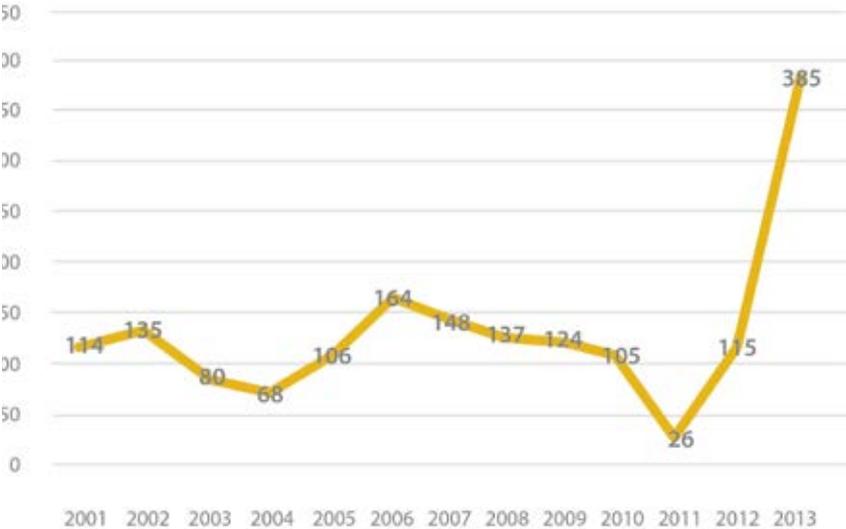


*Figure 6 Terrorist Incidents in the Sahara, 2001-13[vi]*

The linkages made to transnational terrorist movements not only drew international attention, but also changed the nature of domestic interaction.  Firstly, the affiliation by GSPC signaled a changing strategy by the Algerian group.  While the primary agenda remained Algeria, having a pan-Sahelian basis of operations and support in neighbouring countries provided a stronger basis from which to recruit and coordinate attacks.  For the debate around the Azawad, however, this was the first time that the desire for independence became mixed with a desire to impose a caliphate.  The Tuareg separatist movements both in Mali and in Algeria had always been secular, as was the MNLA even in 2011, and this partly explains the continued lack of coherence and unity perceived in the "northern movements".  As the table below demonstrates, not all groups were fighting the same fight.

[vi]    Data drawn from the Global Terrorism Database, including Algeria, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Tunisia and the Western Sahara, citing all acts of terrorism, with the exclusion of ambiguous cases and unsuccessful attacks.

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| Rebel Group | Political Beliefs | | | Ethnic Group | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Independence | Sharia Law | Secular | Foreign | Tuareg |
| Ansar Eddine | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| AQIM | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| MNLA | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| MUJAO | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |

*Figure 7 Differing aims of rebel groups in the north*

For governments in the region, however, branding insurgent independence movements as "terrorist" had considerable advantage.  By changing the nature of the threat, however, Maghreb and Sahel governments were better positioned to leverage international support for their domestic counter-terrorism efforts.  As the "war on terror" scaled up, a number of governments, including Mauritania, Algeria, Mali and Niger, welcomed foreign assistance in strengthening their security capacity, which focused on capacity building of military, border control and law enforcement institutions.  It has been argued, however, that some governments in the region embraced the war on terror, and the subsequent reinforcement of their security forces, as justification to quell political opposition and suppress dissent, and this may in turn have inflamed domestic rhetoric.  In Mauritania in 2003, for example, the now deposed president, Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya used the war on terror justification to arrest twenty-one people, including the militant activist Hamada Ould Muhammad Kheirou (who would later rise to prominence as a leader in both AQIM and MUJAO), for their association with the Mauritanian Group for Preaching and Jihad (GMPJ), which was in turn linked to the GSPC.  Analysts, however, described the motivation for the arrest as more of an opportunistic attempt to remove political opponents rather than any interest in combatting global terror, but Kheirou's move to join Al Qaeda training camps in Iraq followed shortly thereafter.  As was recently noted, *"In many cases such men do not move from country to country voluntarily, but one step ahead of the security forces."*[29]

Subsequent studies and thinking around the evolution of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted by the General Assembly in 2006, have emphasised that an overly securitised framework of intervention to respond to the challenges of violent extremism, without a commensurate investment in the overall rule of law, are counter-productive, as they serve to polarise domestic insurgencies, and exacerbate rather than calm the interest in affiliating with international jihad.  A report of the Center on Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation focusing specifically on the challenges of West Africa and the Sahel cited:  *"Terrorism cannot be addressed through military force alone.  It requires a broad range of policy responses, including capacity building, promotion of human rights, and development assistance, both to strengthen state capacity to combat terrorism and address underlying conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism."*[30]  Thus the countries of the Sahara and West Africa are perceived as having a propensity towards extremism that is rooted in the paucity of economic options and poor and repressive governance.

It should be clearly emphasised that jihadist ideologies were not born in Mali, they were imported.  The fact that they managed to gain traction reverts back to the key principles of community legitimacy: that the strategies that these predominantly Algerian groups attempted to exert authority and affiliation, but fundamentally they provided livelihoods and create security where the state had not.

## Unpicking the Crime-Terror Nexus

The crisis in Northern Mali brought the use of the term "narco-terrorism" to common usage in the context of the Sahel, as media outlets confidently assumed the involvement of AQIM and MUJAO in the drug trade though provided little evidence to support their claims.[vii] But the assertions did not rest with just the media. At a briefing to the Security Council, Téte António, Permanent Observer for the African Union, said *"'narco-terrorism' had given rise to new forms of 'mercenarism' in Africa, with fighters motivated more by financial gain than ideological persuasion."*[31] The terminology was particularly prevalent in the French press, where some analysts have suggested that the term was intentionally chosen to cast aspersions over the genuine ideological motivations of the jihadists intent in northern Mali. Similarly, analysts in Bamako reported that Malian and French government officials would dismissively refer to the groups in northern Mali as 'narco-jihadists'.[32]

The extent to which there is a genuine intersection between the jihadist agenda and that of criminal groups remains debated, it has been questioned whether the term "narco-terrorist" has any evidence basis. A court case against three Malians in 2009, which received considerable coverage, may have laid the foundation for this perception. The case was based upon a sting operation by the DEA, in which three Malians – not affiliated to any Sahel based terrorist organization – claimed that they would be able to arrange protection from AQIM for a cocaine shipment across the Sahara, for the benefit of the Colombian FARC, (US Attorney Southern District of New York: 2009) an insurgent group listed by the US as a terrorist organisation. Since the initial case was filed, evidence gathered has shown that there was little substance behind the case, where the assertions by the Malians was seen more as greed and bluster rather than any intention to further any terrorist cause – neither in the Sahel nor in Colombia. The three Malians were eventually convicted of other crimes, but the narco-terrorism conspiracy charges were dropped.

One analyst cited *"battlefield reports … of sedated jihadists fighting without fear or pain when wounded,"* and the case of a MUJAO ordered judicial amputation in Gao that was reportedly *"generously preceded by an anesthetic: cocaine,"* as proof of the linkages between MUJAO, AQIM and the illicit trade in narcotic drugs.[33] However, no sources were provided to substantiate the latter claim, and the first linked to a self-proclaimed exclusive in the French press describing the use of the prescription drug ketamine, not illicit narcotics.

In the last year, there have been a number of reports that have sought to verify the claim that AQIM or MUJAO are involved with drug trafficking, and most have failed to pin down a definitive link. When interviewed, European security officials in the region make clear that there has never been a seizure of narcotics from any known terrorist associate, and in an input paper for the West African Commission on Drugs, Lacher systematically goes through the various incidents that are used of evidence of either AQIM or MUJAO being active in cocaine or cannabis trafficking. This included a 2010 seizure that turned out to be a case of mistaken identity; a case brought to court in Mauritania, where the conviction was actually made on associations with kidnapping for ransom, not drug trafficking; and a highly spurious link made to a April 2013 seizure of 168kg of cocaine from Senegal to the UK.[34]

Thus the term "narco-terrorism" does not adequately describe the reality of the relationships and dynamics amongst insurgent, terrorist and criminal groups. Furthermore, as Lacher strongly concluded in his emphatic deconstruction of the narco-terrorist myth, *"Talk of an alleged drug-terrorism nexus diverts attention from the much more profound problems that allowed drug trafficking to thrive in the region: the deep involvement of state agents and members of local elites in organised crime, including narcotics smuggling."*[35]

While it is unlikely that either AQIM or MUJAO are strategically or logistically involved in the trafficking in illicit drugs, funds are almost certainly generated through established zones of control where they can tax the passage of goods and provide "protection" for their passage. A spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of State, was quoted on record

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[vii]    See, for example though there are numerous others, Mann, G., "Africanistan? Not exactly," Foreign Policy, July 24, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/07/24/africanistan_not_exactly, where he states, "If anything makes Mali like Afghanistan, it's the drug trade, which Ag-Ghali and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) control."

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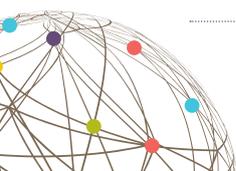
as having said of AQIM's role in the drugs trade: *"They do not control the means of production, but they do provide 'protection' and permissions for traffickers moving product through areas they control."*[36]

By contrast, where there is considerable evidence of the nexus between criminal practices and terrorist groups, however, is with arms trafficking, cigarette smuggling, and kidnapping for ransom. The evolution of the practice of kidnapping for ransom appears to have played a much more important role in the rise of AQIM and MUJAO, not only because it providing significant levels of funds, but also because the crime itself largely intersects with the ideological message of the groups.

### Kidnapping for ransom

The kidnapping of 32 tourists, for whom the German government is reported to have paid a ransom of 5 million (approximately US$6 million), has often been seen as the turning point for Sahel-based terrorists. *"The first taste of illicit money was 2003, when they paid for the hostages. That is when everyone developed a taste for illicit money,"*[37] goes a quote by a community leader in Timbuktu. The injection of funds far outstripped what groups had been able to secure in the past, which permitted a significant upgrading of arms and equipment. The success of the enterprise spurred a further spate of apparently largely opportunistic kidnappings of Western tourists, diplomats, aid workers and employees of energy or extractive industry companies. In total, analysts estimate that AQIM as a group is estimated to have made between *$90-125 million in total ransoms from 2003 to 2013*.[38]

A number of pertinent observations can be made from a close analysis of the changing patterns of kidnapping for ransom over the last decade.[viii] The relationship of the groups to ransom taking appears to evolve over time. Following the seminal event in 2003, the early few kidnappings appear to be largely opportunistic: tourists or aid workers of any nationality seized along the road. A number of reports written during or before 2010 noted that the modus operandi usually involved local criminal groups kidnapping European tourists and then selling them on to AQIM groups. Cables from the US Embassy in Bamako apparently documented that AQIM was prepared to buy hostages for $100,000, knowing they could then be ransomed for more.[39]

The focus on the financial payout also appears to have grown over time. In some of the earlier cases, western hostages were released in exchange for AQIM fighters with no money seeming to have changed hands. This practice stopped after 2008, and thereafter hostages were either held until "diplomatic negotiations" concluded, or they were killed. It appears that AQIM is now ready to hold hostages indefinitely, pending the successful conclusion of negotiations. Hostages have been held for more than three years – for example the September 2010 case of the French workers in Arlit, Niger, did not conclude until October 2013, when it was reported that the French government paid a multi-million dollar ransom. *"There is no hostage that has been released without a ransom. You have to be realistic,"* a senior West African official who has direct knowledge of hostage negotiations was quoted as saying. [40]

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[viii]    A full account based on multiple sources is laid out in Annex A, which provides a comprehensive documentation of AQIM, and then later MUJAO's practice of kidnapping for ransom.
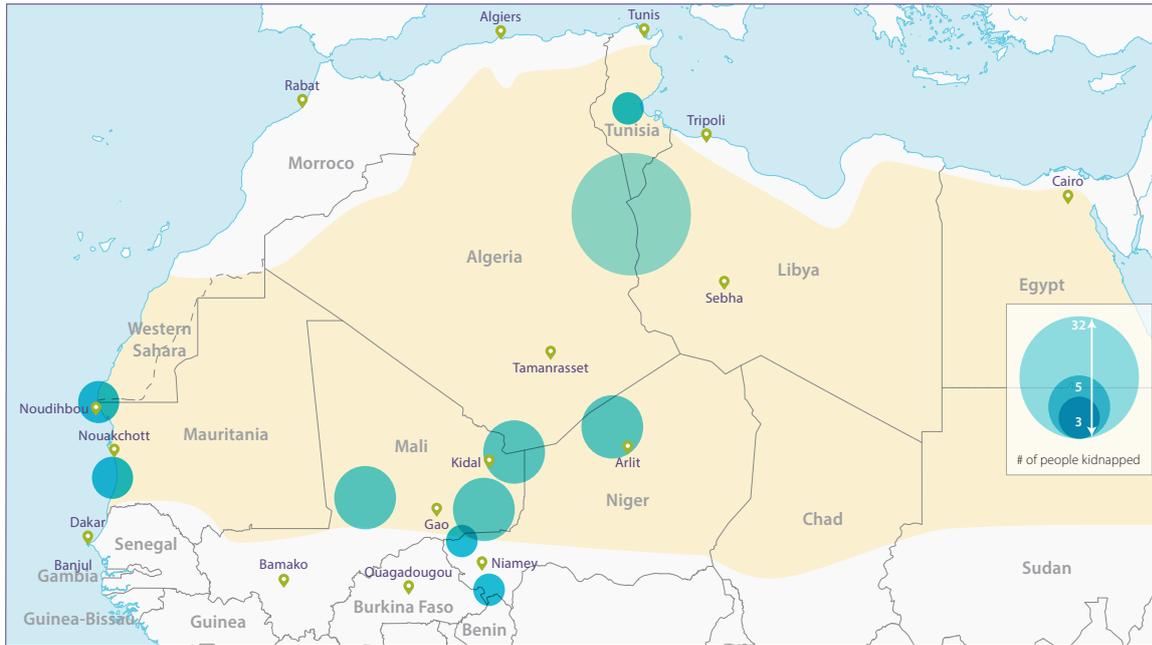
*Figure 8* Locations of kidnapping and abduction in the Sahara, 2003-13**41**

This emphasis on the financial nature of kidnapping for ransom is further reinforced by the fact that the majority of those seized were European, rather than American, who are typically a favoured target of Al-Qaeda and groups motivated by jihad. The USA has a longstanding policy not to pay ransoms for its citizens, and in the period between 2003-13, only one American was ever kidnapped in the Sahel. Globally, of the 53 western hostages kidnapped for ransom by Al Qaeda affiliates, only three of these were American.**42** The January 2009 case of the four tourists taken in Mali also highlights the financial motivations of the kidnapping: like the Americans, the British Government refuses to pay ransoms, and thus the British hostage was swiftly executed while the three other Europeans were held until a payment was made.

Where this pattern appears to have shifted, is in the incidents that have occurred since the inception of the French military operation, Serval in Northern Mali, which began in January 2013. While the French were frequently the targets of kidnapping for ransom in the Sahel, after January 2013 there was no apparent attempt to take hostages. The full frontal attack on the power plant in Aménas in Algeria, which would have required considerable logistical preparation, was certainly planned before Operation Serval commenced, thus making the motivation more complex to discern, but in the two successive attacks, firstly the double suicide bombings in Niger and then the swift execution of two French journalists, there was no attempt made to take hostages or to negotiate, thus suggesting that the motivations were indeed overtly political.

Thus, while the practice of kidnapping for ransom is longstanding, and its connection to terrorism and violent extremism was known from 2010 onwards, it is curious that it was only after the Mali crisis in 2012 that the linkage between organised crime and terrorism was thrown to prominence.
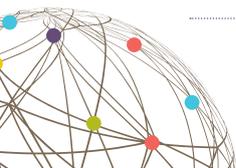
# Communities, Criminal Interests and the State

One of the key questions that this report examines is why century old practices that provided stability and resilience to communities have instead become a source of insecurity. Cross-border smuggling, migration, and to some extent even the strength of clan-based affiliation have become practices which have increased levels of community violence, introduced influences that are harmful for families and communities, and have warped systems of local government and reduced the legitimacy of the state.

The turning point appears to have come in the ability of criminal groups to use access to weapons and violence to create a "zone of protection" by which they have the capacity to control access to security. As the narrative in the previous section showed, emulating the very classic mafia pattern of control, these zones of protection have been used to tax trade, crowding out legitimate trade and favouring the higher value illicit flows. The illicit funds create an increased capacity to buy arms and consolidate a hold on the monopoly of violence, corrupt state officials and subsume state functions, and then earn build legitimacy with local populations as the dominant source of livelihoods, of security and occasionally of service provision.

In this history of Mali and the Saharan region, there are numerous examples of how protection networks have developed and consolidated by drawing on the three pillars of violence, corruption and legitimacy.

## Migration: from resilience to resource

Migration across the Sahara is by no means a new phenomenon. As noted in the introduction, migration has proved a resilience strategy for the vulnerable populations living in the countries across the Sahelian band. Given the formidable challenges of crossing the vast territory of the "Saharan sea", migrants almost universally will employ the services of smugglers to help them transit north. The facilitated movement of people was considered a positive economic opportunity, which was broadly overlooked by the states through which the migrants transited, and thus became closely ingrained into the economies of the border towns along the route.

Up until recently this trade did not produce transnational networks on a significant scale. In the last year, however, the political and civic unrest that has followed the Arab Spring movement, but most notably the crisis in Syria, has prompted an extraordinary up-scaling of the level of migration across north Africa at levels that are unprecedented. Between 2012 and 2013, Frontex, the European border agency recorded a 288% increase in the number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean from the North African coast, and this is only a fraction of those who are pooling in key North African cities. The Italian Interior Minister recently estimated that there are upwards of 600,000 migrants from Africa waiting in Libya, hoping to make a crossing to Europe.[43]

While the growth in migration to unsustainable levels that are currently being seen is of concern from a humanitarian perspective, perhaps the more serious and longstanding concern comes in the implications that changing dynamics in protection economies in the Sahel and North Africa will have for stability and governance in the region.

The Tebu, who have historically played a role in the smuggling of migrants, are now realizing substantial resources from the trade and, as the map above indicates, have expanded their zone of protection as far south as Agadez. Interviews with Tebu smugglers in March 2014 indicate that dozens of convoys leave locations on the outskirts of Agadez and its environs every week, typically on Mondays. Each vehicle in the convoy – usually a Toyota 4x4 – is filled with 28-30 migrants, sometimes as many as 35. For the network in which these particular smugglers operate, passengers pay between $200 and $300, depending on their final destination in Southern Libya.[44]

Even at a conservative estimate, this flow is generating the Tebu groups facilitating the trade $60,000 per week, which is a significant and steady inflow of resources that the group has used to buy arms, trucks, and consolidate and expand their reach. Recent reports from the region are further indicating that they are now professionalizing their services to offer a more comprehensive, end-to-end migration service, and reaching through their Diaspora

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communities to recruit new migrants from Chad and elsewhere.[45]  The wealth and arms also allows the Tebu to consolidate and expand their zone of influence for other illicit purposes.

## Evolving zones of protection

The capacity to secure a territorial zone of influence, either through gaining the monopoly on violence, permission of the central state, or through the tacit support of the community, allows a criminal group to levy protection taxes. At the furthest end of the spectrum, criminal groups take on state-like characteristics, resulting in what has been described in the context of other mafia environments as "criminal governance".[46]

According to a large number of accounts, it appears this is what AQIM, its predecessors and its associates have achieved in the remotest areas of the Sahel.[ix] Analysts describe a process of integration into the communities of northern Mali over more than a decade.  Using their profits from kidnapping for ransom and cigarette smuggling, the group forged alliances with local community leaders based firstly on money, and secondly on marriage. Belmokhtar, the notorious Algerian terrorist, took four wives, all from local clans and typically not those high on the pecking order (BBC: 2013).  AQIM also offered people security: in Timbuktu they created "a 'green' cell phone number to people that they could call if they were harassed by MNLA members or ordinary bandits."[47]  Accounts of focus groups conducted in Gao in 2013 noted that AQIM had been taxing trafficking convoys since 2005, and that AQIM's precursor, the GSPC had being doing so from as early as 1999.[48]

The concept of protection in these areas is not new.  Even prior to French colonial times, the Tuaregs historically had the right to collect taxes and to offer protection services for trans-Saharan caravans.  However, it is important to note that while authority over a zone of protection confers significant advantages, it is by no guaranteed.  A number of very recent studies have noted that since 2011, the Tuareg dominance in northern Mali has been on the wane, with the previously marginalized Tebu coming to the fore.  The Tebu were another nomadic group indigenous to the Sahelian belt, but of African rather than Arab descent, with presence in Libya, Niger and Chad. According to an old political agreement signed between the Tebu and the Tuareg in 1875, Tuaregs are in charge of territory to the west of the Salvador Triangle (which is situated where the borders of Algeria, Libya, and Niger intersect, and is often considered to be the hub of all trans-Saharan trafficking) and Tebus to the east of it.[49]  Thus, the Tebus sit astride an area of land that crosses four borders: Algeria, Libya, Niger and Chad (see map below).
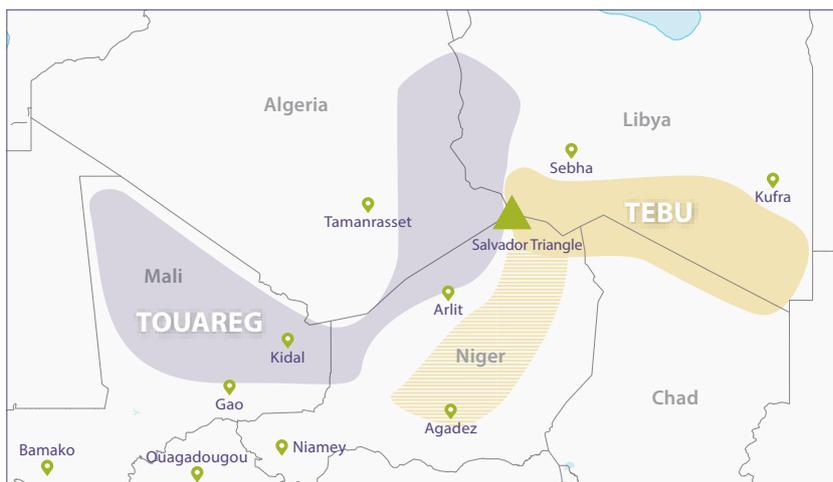


*Figure 9* Zones of Protection: Tuareg and Tebu[50]

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[ix]    It is perhaps worth reminding the reader that the GSPC (which transitioned into AQIM in the mid 2000s) was an Algerian group, not native to Mali or the cities in which they were later to make their stronghold.

The map above shows the Tuareg influence at their highest, following the fall of Gadhafi and prior to the French operation Serval. But while much has been made of how the Libyan arms stockpiles enriched the fortunes of the Tuareg, the Tebu also gained significantly with the fall of Gadhafi. The tribe had a complex relationship with the Gadhafi regime initially, in the 1970s, they were a tribe preferred by the mercurial leader, but then being marginalised in favour of the Arab Zwaye, who were financed by Gadhafi to supersede what were historically Tebu trafficking routes.[51] As Gadhafi's regime began to crumble under the popular resistance, he appealed to the Tebu for military support, promising citizenship in exchange. The Tebu used this opportunity to re-assert their authority over their prior ground, but also to expand their zone of influence from Kufra to the Salvador Triangle (in the process securing some key oil fields in the east) as well as southwards into Niger.[52]

Those concerned with stability and human security have every reason to fear the creation and consolidation of zones of protection by criminal groups. While this may appear obvious to some, others have put forward the argument that illicit trafficking is a necessary livelihood strategy, and thus brings positive benefits, particularly in areas like the Sahel where few alternative livelihood opportunities exist. Furthermore, it has been observed, as described above, that criminal groups will often provide social services for those communities that fall within their zone of protection. While this may be true to a limited extent, these are short-lived benefits that come at a high cost: "*the inherent difficulty with this perspective contending that transnational organised crime is not threatening but instead is beneficial is that it seems to ignore how these benefits are achieved, how the rights and lives of legitimate individuals and groups may end up being trampled, and how crucial stabilizing societal norms may be eroded in the process*."[53]

All criminal acts will require protection to maintain their covertness. Their ability to enforce a zone of protection within a specific geographic or economic area requires that the dominant group has the means to use force, irrespective of their other economic activities. Therefore, because the basis to the creation of a zone of protection is fundamentally violence, it creates an inextricable link between the production of violence with the production of value from economic activity. Thus, there is an inherent propensity towards violence in situations of criminal governance, and this impacts on human and state security.

Furthermore, as the Tebu example shows, criminality accumulates. There is a structure required to facilitate criminal acts which is part of the zone of protection, this includes the identification of appropriate associates, the means to enact violence, in some cases, the means to transport goods illicitly, but universally it requires the corruption of key officials. Once this structure is in place, it needs to be maintained and financed, and there is only an incremental increase to the cost of diversifying illicit operations into new markets. As such, for example, a group smuggling commodities may comfortably expand operations to the smuggling of pharmaceutical products. A boat transiting with migrants in one direction will see no net cost to returning with a cachet of arms.

That said, however, the costs of maintaining the zone of protection will rise as the value of the commodity rises. As we have seen in the Sahel, the smuggling of subsidised commodities goes largely unremarked on, and the number of actors in the market is numerous. However, in the high value traffic of cocaine, the requirement of secrecy is much higher, the competition in the market similarly higher (though the barriers to entry will also be higher), and this will require greater capacity for physical violence, and corruption networks at higher levels to ensure smooth passage.

Finally, groups who have established an effective zone of protection will see little incentive to invest in the consolidation of central state authority. As the current challenges with militia groups in Libya very effectively demonstrates: "*funding from illicit activities is a centrifugal force that encourages armed groups to continue to recuse themselves from the central state building process.*"[54] While criminal groups may not seek to destabilize the state, as this creates instability which increases the costs of doing business and creates entry points for new criminal actors, maintaining a zone of protection requires access to arms, which ensures that groups are unlikely to be interested in a formal demobilisation process which would return monopoly of force to state institutions; the
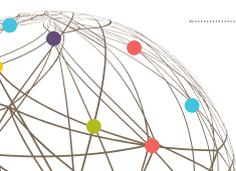
maintenance of networks of corruption and patronage which are easier to purchase in the context of a weak state with low capacity for regulation; and the complicity of local populations, which is easier to achieve in contexts where state service delivery is low and the sense of disenfranchisement from the central state is high.

## Complicity and Corruption

The issue of corruption and the impact on legitimate governance is arguably where the deleterious impact of criminal governance in a zone of protection is most serious.[55] But the relationships between states, criminal groups and zones of protection are not as straightforward as they may initially appear. The common assumption that states control the capital, perhaps major urban hubs and transport nodes, while militia controlled zones of protection exist only in the periphery of states is fallacious and overly simplistic.

Firstly, in some cases state entities may themselves have been involved in the creation of a zone of protection, in an effort to manage local dynamics. As the Tebu case highlighted, Gadhafi frequently used control over territory and illicit resources to control ethnic conflict and maintain authority over the peripheries, and he is not unique in this regard. State actors typically have only limited ability to project their influence into peripheral areas, and thus state control may necessarily be a form of negotiated compromise with local actors, mainly because the latter have a strong presence in the area concerned and thus must be engaged with to maintain some control over the territory. The basis of that engagement may well depend on a sharing of resources to ensure a balance of stability, whereby the state may recognise that local actors acquire resources by protecting illicit activities. But precisely such agreement and involvement, and its resulting profits, blunts the desire of local actors to disengage from or actively attack the central state.

The former Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), found accommodations with Tuareg leaders by decentralizing authority in such a way that it would permit and sustain control over key trafficking routes. ATT reportedly created a new administrative region in northern Mali in order to allow overt control over trafficking routes and access to the state: *"Traffickers used their influence to persuade the government to create new factions,*[x] and decentralization provided cover for narco-traffickers who could buy all the local offices,"*, a prominent Arab from Timbuktu reported.[56] The central state selected which local actors would be in control of illicit trade, while ensuring a cut also for those in Bamako, and this policy by the Malian state *"exacerbated rivalries by operating an arm's length policy that selected favourites, rewarded them with illicit revenues, and did nothing to control losers' grievances over exclusion from local circuits of power."*[57]

Manipulations by the central state notwithstanding, in weak states like those in the Sahel, there are little incentives for state actors at lower levels to serve as a bulwark against criminal interests. The costs of making a genuine effort to counter criminal influence are considerable, given the use prolific use of violence and intimidation by criminal groups, and as resources are generally low, there seems little credibility of fronting such a challenge. Therefore, given a range of circumstances, including most prominently weak allegiances to the center and poor resourcing, state actors often themselves become key players within zones of protection. In the Sahel and the Sahara, the issue of allegiance is an important dynamic, as ethnic or clan identity may be far more potent than any allegiance to the central state. In the borderland regions of Mauritania, in the military, in the customs administration and in other administrations, positions and resources are primarily used to further private or clan's business interests, and state officials, trafficker or terrorists could easily belong to the same clan.[58]

A highly corrosive effect of criminal groups on governance and the state, which has been frequently noted within the context of Mali, is the undermining of the state's legitimacy in the eyes of its population, and the creation of an aura of impunity for criminal acts. Ivan Briscoe, in his recent study of the illicit networks and the state in the aftermath of the Mali crisis, reflected, *"it is rare to find crises in which illicit revenues serve to weaken and delegitimise so many critical areas of state authority, including the armed forces, intelligence services and the offices of the Presidency."*[59]

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[x]    Fractions are administrative units of local government that were created primarily in relation to the nomadic communities in Northern Mali under the ATT administration. Tinti, op.cit, pg.13

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When political and bureaucratic control is weak, whole institutions – local governments, police institutions, can become organised crime groups themselves.  In Niger, for example, while President Issoufou himself has remained largely free of any aspersions towards involvement with criminal groups, high levels of the state and the security apparatus is suspected of being infiltrated by criminal interests.[60]  The impact of this is obvious: state actors that engage less in enforcing the law and more in contravening it to secure resources for themselves, are ill-placed to provide even basic services for their community.  State involvement in zones of protection will generally result in the interests of ordinary people being neither protected nor served.

The sharp contrast to the debate on ungoverned spaces in the Sahel is the case of Mauritania.  Unlike the other two core Sahel countries, the Mauritanian government and its brutally efficient military retains the monopoly on the use of force, even in the borderland areas.  Since coming to power in 2009, Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz has made counterterrorism and security a centerpiece of his presidency, and his efforts have been well-supported by investments in security capacity by allies such as France, the EU, and the United States.  While the human rights record of the country, and of the military particularly, is appalling, the terrorism threat has largely stopped at Mauritania's border.

This zero tolerance policy seems not to extend to the trafficking of narcotics, however, which appears to take place with endorsement and engagement of the highest levels of the state.  Several well-documented incidents suggest from the late 2000s suggest complicity between organised criminal networks and high-level government officials.  In 2010, for example, Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya, a former officer for Interpol and nephew of former President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, was sentenced to seven years in jail in 2010 for his involvement in a drug trafficking ring.[61]  Sidi Mohamed Ould Haidallah, the son of another former president, Khouna Ould Haidallah, was arrested in Morocco in 2007 in possession of 18 kg of cocaine.  Ould Haidallah was wanted by Interpol at the time for his connections to a large quantity of cocaine found in the Mauritanian city of Nouadhibou earlier that year.[62] Further evidence of the tacit complicity of the state can be drawn from the fact that the majority of trafficking of cocaine in Mauritania transits through the countries two deep-sea ports in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, rather than taking more covert but complex land routes.[63]  Though there were large seizures of cocaine en route to Europe in 2008 and 2009, there have been no notable seizures since that time.  This either indicates that the flows have entirely stopped, which both Interpol and UNODC have suggested is unlikely, or they pass with full government protection, making Mauritania a criminalised state with a tight hold over its zone of protection.

In weaker states, state actors may be co-opted or complicit into criminal zones of protection, and the role and form of the zone of protection continues to be shaped by its "official" functions.  State actors may nominally control major trade nodes (border controls, ports and airports) and are the only institution able to produce the relevant documentation required by other states.  Thus, migrants passing through Niger across Libya's southern border may still be required to engage with immigration or customs officials, who in exchange for an accepted payment, will "process" the movement of what should be regarded as an illegal flow of people.  Similarly, trafficking of goods – for example stolen cars, or environmental products – will require stamped permits to allow them to integrate into legitimate trade routes and the economy at a certain point, for example at a seaport for onward transit to their destination market.

Because the very control of such "outposts of the state" are a generator of resources in their own right, they are a target for criminal groups.  When the state becomes so weak as not to be able to assert effective influence over them, or the "outposts" become delinked from the state altogether (as a result of both political or technical reasons, such as the failure of communication equipment), they are likely to become subject to the control of the most powerful interests in the area even if they still carry the external imprint of the central state. Therefore, even in the areas in which the state is seemingly absent, as a zone of protection is formed it fills the vacuum of an area previously claimed by the state, often perpetuating the semblance and key organs of the state, whilst at the same time subverting them for their own interests.[64]

Influence and control over these key functions becomes a pivotal objective for criminal groups and access to the state is, in fact, one of the principle levers of a protection economy. In order to consolidate control over criminal markets and to dominate rival groups, criminal groups need to gain proximity to the state and state officials, and find means by which to signal their political patrons. Thus, in expanding their framework of criminal governance in a zone of protection, criminal groups must: … *move beyond traditional market-based organised criminal activities to incorporate corporate crime and bribery that commoditise and objectify things; e.g. previously non-commoditised items such as influence and political connections are now commoditised. As influence and connectivity have become marketable, so the linkages among crime, politics and economics have been strengthened.*[65]

Political office is one of the pillars of authority that confers legitimacy to governance. Thus, in what is essentially a criminal patronage scheme, criminal groups barter for political influence and protection, identifying members of the state architecture who can be prevailed upon to represent their interests, or working to place their own candidates within institutions, through buying offices or elections. This must be done with care, as a basis of trust is required to strike a deal that can compromise both parties, and thus the kind of relationships that lead to significant strategic alliances between criminal actors and state officials are often formed on the basis of clan or family ties, or relationships formed in childhood. The result is that zones of protection and criminal networks of patronage center around one or two key individuals who will sit at the nexus of criminality and governance, serving as a bridge between the two worlds, or, *"the very nodal points in emerging shadow-like semi-hidden informal networks of governance and control (social, economic and political)."*[66]

## Key Actors

As the introduction explained, there are four key actors in the conflict in Mali, the state, the separatist groups, the terrorist groups and the criminal entrepreneurs:
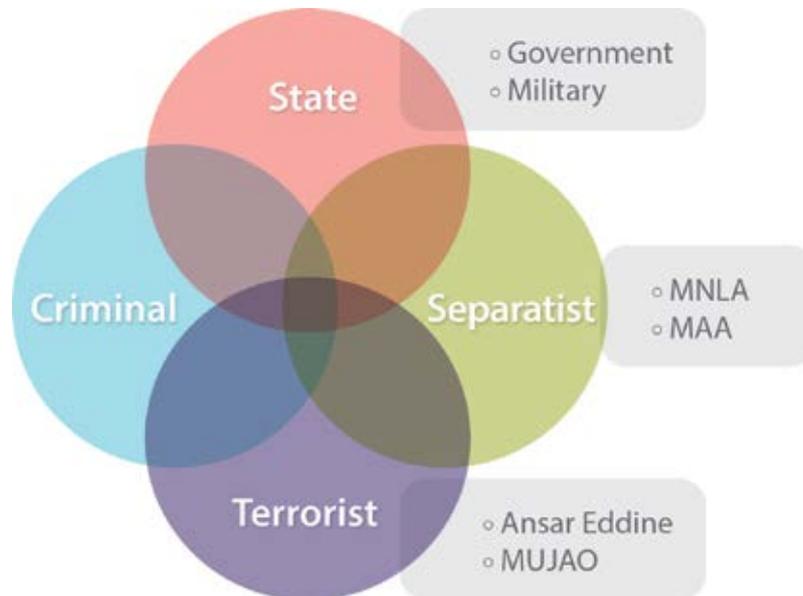


*Figure 10 Identifying the key actors in the Mali conflict*

On the most part, the affiliation of the group is clear, and leaders and key members can be identified. Within these four groups, there are overlaps and alliances, and these have changed over the course of the conflict narrative. Of the four, criminal groups are the hardest to identify and name, though this is possible with systematic analysis of the flows and discussions with an extensive number of local interlocutors.

What stands out, however, is that there are a number of key actors who have emerged in Mali and the broader region who sit in multiple camps. These individuals can been seen to be playing roles of strategic influence in pivotal events, leveraging ethnic/tribal affiliations and access to arms to secure political influence and consolidate economic control over key cities, including licit and illicit flows. In any political economy analysis, the role of key actors is pivotal in understanding both vested interest and identifying possible agents for change – both positive and negative. Highlighted here are a selection of key figures that have featured as shaping key events, and leveraging their authority and affiliations to play between the state, separatist and jihadist groups, and criminal acts.

The first notable character was Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, who died in 2011, but had been known as one of the most intransient of the Tuareg separatists who, according to account, was instrumental in bringing back a cadre of fighters and their weaponry from Libya and inciting the most recent Tuareg rebellion. Ag Bahanga rose to prominence as charismatic young Tuareg leader who, following the second Tuareg rebellion in 1996, was able to leverage popular support and his ability to use force, to secure leadership of a commune in the north of Mali under the Decentralisation Commission that was established as part of the peace agreement. However, frustrated with the failure of the ensuing peace agreement failing to deliver tangible results, in 2006 he lead an armed insurgency in the north under his group, Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC), just as AQIM was trying to establish itself and a new Tuareg rebellion was also underway in the Niger, allowing the opportunity for strategic alliances to be forged.

With his stronghold in Kidal, a reasonably marginal town in the middle of the desert in the north east of Mali near where the borders of Mali, Niger and Algeria intersect, Ag Bahanga sat on a pivotal locale along the major trafficking routes north through to Tamanrasset in Algeria, which includes the West African cocaine routes, and reportedly close members of his clan controlled three of five drug trafficking routes through the area. While Ag Bahanga never openly allied with AQIM, and was quoted in an interview as having claimed to have chased them out of Kidal though whether this was for ideological motives to prevent their encroachment into his zone of protection is unclear. Other accounts have cited a longstanding agreement with AQIM over weapons smuggling, and connections to Belmokhtar in that regard, though in the pragmatic politics of the Sahel, there is no reason why both could not be true. Having died so early in the latest Tuareg uprising, it is hard to say what role he would have played in the MNLA or in the ongoing negotiations for an independent Azawad, but Ag Bahanga pivotal in maintaining the resistance of the Tuaregs to central state integration.

The murky distinction between terrorist group and government is highlighted very strongly in the role of ransom negotiators in the region. Following the kidnapping of 32 European tourists from southern Algeria in 2003 by GSPC, Iyad Ag Ghali, a brother-in-arms of Ag Bahanga, emerged as a key figure in the ransom negotiations, where he facilitated on behalf of the Government of Mali, but made contact and gained trust with the group that was later to become AQIM.[67] In the 1990 Tuareg uprising, following the settlement, the "Tamanrasset Accords", which he is said to have been instrumental in pushing the Tuareg movement to sign, Ag Ghali became increasingly spiritual and fundamentalist. In 2007, despite his involvement in the 2006 Tuareg rebellion, he served an intermediary between the government and the rebels to negotiate the peace accord, and as an apparent reward was sent to serve as the Ambassador of Mali to Saudia Arabia, an official state function which he held until 2010.[68] Shortly thereafter, in December 2011, Ag Ghali was to found Ansar Eddine, a jihadist organization with proven strategic and military links to AQIM and MUJAO, which was listed by the UN as a terrorist organization in March 2013.[69] In January 2012, as the latest round of peace talks with the north were being negotiated, one proposal from Bamako included "a special offer aimed directly at Iyad Ag Ghali to create a new post of cadi, or Muslim judge."[70]

Baba Ould Cheikh, the mayor of Tarkint, in the Gao region of Mali, is a character well known for having straddled the divide between terrorism, trafficking and government. He was the intermediary on ransom negotiations three times, including securing the release of Robert Fowler, the Canadian diplomat held by AQIM for 130 days in 2008-09. In his accounts of his abduction and the subsequent negotiation for his release, Fowler has described the camaraderie between his captors and Ould Cheikh, reporting upon his release that ATT referred to Ould Cheikh

as *mon bandite*, or "my bandit."[71]   As a negotiator, Cheikh would have been eligible for a susbtantial percentage of the ransom paid, and it was reported by U.S. diplomats at the time that "an enormous influx of cash likely linked to the Canadian and European hostage crisis" had complicated the local elections in Tarkint, where several of the intermediaries were themselves running."[72]

Ould Cheik is also alleged to have been part of the infamous 2009 "Air Cocaine" incident, when an incinerated Boeing 727 was found in the desert north of Gao that was believed to have been transporting up to 10 tonnes of cocaine.  In the case of transportation of cocaine by air, evidence has been given by UN Agencies and other Western security liaisons for the region, that in fact it is the Malian military, as well as Government officials under ATT that facilitated the trade.  The perception of high-level government support was further reinforced by the fact that Europeans supposedly connected to the incident were released from prison.  Gao is also the town that hosts the notorious "cocaine-bougou" (cocaine-ville), an area with a number of luxury villas owned by businessmen who reportedly "made the bulk of their fortune in trafficking fuel and cigarettes" but whose neighbourhood is nonetheless monikered by its links to the drug trade.[73]

One of the most notorious figures in the Sahel is Mokhtar Belmokhtar, also known as "Mr Malboro" for his close linkages to the illicit trade in cigarettes and other organised crime.  He is Algerian by nationality, and one of the founding members of the GSPC, and later was also affiliated with AQIM and MUJAO.  While reportedly committed to jihad from an early age, Belmokhtar found his niche in the violent extremist groups as a reliable procurer of arms and other supplies in which role he reportedly consolidated strong local networks and connections with Algerian southern borderland communities.  When GSPC affiliated to AQIM in 2006, Belmokhtar commanded two battalions in the southern border with Mali, and he served as a key facilitator with Algerian jihadi groups and al-Qaeda, reportedly having been tasked with securing financing to continue jihadist activities.  To raise funds, Belmokhtar leveraged his strong relationships with local Tuareg communities to both run an extensive smuggling network and to levy protection tax on other traffickers traversing the region.  It has been suggested that over time his smuggling activities began to dominate his jihadist work, and that this was part of the rationale for his detachment and then split from both GSPC and later Al-Qaeda which took place in the mid to late 2000s.  Regardless of the ideological or political differences that may have distanced Belmokhtar from these groups, he allegedly continued to be a key supplier of weapons and funds, remaining a prominent figure in the criminal economy of the Sahel-Sahara, surfacing repeatedly in relation to kidnappings and terrorist attacks.  When MUJAO gained control of Gao in the north of Mali in 2012, Belmokhtar was reportedly given control over the administration of the city.[74]

The value to knowing these powerbrokers, their affiliations and their interests, is to understand how these individuals could serve as potential spoilers or change agents.   The international community, always swift in its desire to promote political processes and return nominal stability, is rarely sufficiently engaged in understanding the vested interests and networks that are at play, and largely tend to reinforce existing power structures rather than identify more nuanced, negotiated settlements.
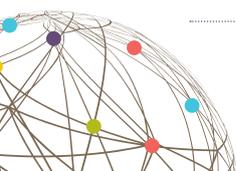
# Papering over the cracks

The process by which the status quo unraveled in Mali was surprisingly fast. In a short year, the fragile foundations of the state, and the extensive corruption of its leadership came to light. As a military coup unseated the self-aggrandizing and self-enriching Malian President ATT, disenfranchised northerners, empowered by arms from Libya and enriched by criminal funds, quickly took control of key northern cities and announced the creation of the long-awaited Azawad.

## Stability Unravels

On August 9th, 2011, ATT launched his Special Programme for Peace, Security, and Development in Northern Mali (PSPSDN), a delayed response to the settlement of the 2006 Tuareg uprising. The PSPSDN, funded by the European Union (EU), was, however, foremost a security strategy, designed to position Mali as a key partner in the global war on terror, rather than development strategy. The funding that was realised against the plan was predominantly deployed for security activities, such as the training of military and police for the North, rather than the limited number of development activities that the programme also contained.[75] Instead of achieving pacification (development notwithstanding) of the North, the PSPSDN instead seem to highlight how shallow were the promises, and within months three new Northern movements were created: the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in October, and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Ansar Eddine in December 2011.[76]

The MNLA began its efforts to seize control of the north in January 2012, emboldened by Tuareg fighters returned from Libya and weapons from the Gadhafi stockpile. In the meantime, frustrations were mounting in Bamako. Apparently embarrassed by relative success of the separatists in initial skirmishes with the army, and frustrated by the lack of leadership and demonstrated by ATT in supporting them to quell the uprising, in early February, the Malian army initiated the military coup on March 22, 2012.[77] This was less about unseating the President, as it came only a few short weeks before a democratic Presidential election was scheduled in which ATT had clearly indicated his intention not to seek another term, but was a clear signal that there something deeply rotten in the state of governance.

Taking advantage of the apparent chaos, the MNLA began their offensive, taking control of Kidal by March 30th. At an astonishing rate, the MNLA secured key cities: control of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu was achieved over three successive days, from March 30 to April 1st, 2012. By April 6th, the MNLA considered its crusade over, and declared the independence of northern Mali as the Azawad. Its charge, however was then quickly superseded by an alliance between MUJAO and Ansar Eddine, who proceeded to impose Sharia law on apparently reluctant populations of Timubuktu, Gao and Kidal. Displacing the MNLA as they went, by September, MUJAO and Ansar Eddine were advancing on Mopti, a small town at the narrow waistline between North and Southern Mali, and given the speed at which the Malian military had crumbled, the fall of Bamako appeared likely.

In December 2012, the UN Security Council approved resolution 2085, authorizing a unilateral French intervention to drive back the insurgent jihadists. On 11 January 2013, the French responded with an aerial and ground assault, "Operation Serval", accompanied by troops from Chad authorised under a previous UN resolution to establish an African-led force to stabilise Mali. The operation was quickly successful at both halting the advance and ejecting the rebel authorities out of key Northern cities. This then ushered in an astonishing flurry of heavyweight international assistance aimed at stabilization.

**2011**

**9 Aug:** President Touré launches his Special Programme for Peace, Security, and Development in the North

**20 Oct:** Muammar Gaddafi captured and killed

**12 Dec:** MUJWA announces creation

**16 Oct:** Announcement of formation of MNLA

**20 Dec:** Announcement of formation of MNLA

**2012**

**30 Mar:** MNLA take control of Kidal

**30 Mar-1 April:** MNLA takes control of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu

**6 April:** MNLA declare the independence of Northern Mali as the Azawad

**22 Mar:** Military led coup

MNLA Offensive

**20 Dec:** UN Security Council approved resolution 2085

**2013**

**11 Jan:** French aerial and ground assault, "Operation Serval"

**25 April:** Security Council Resolution 2100 approved the creation of MINUSMA

**29 Jan:** Roadmap for Mali's return to constitutional democracy published

**28 July:** Elections were held by July electing IBK

*Figure 11 Timeline of key events in the precipitation of the Mali conflict*

## Democracy reconstituted

The first order of business and immediate statements following Operation Serval and the re-securing of the key northern towns was a call for democratic elections. Under OECD-DAC rules, much of international assistance is suspended after an unconstitutional change in government and, as such, in order to engage with and support the Malian government elections were a priority. Mali had been less than five weeks away from Presidential elections at the time of the coup,[xi] and the international community were keen to see Mali's democracy returned. With stabilizing the north understood as the cause of the coup, and the priority for stabilization, little heed was paid to the overwhelming frustration that had been felt in both the north and the south with the previous regime.

In April 2013, Security Council Resolution 2100 approved the creation of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). With a planned force deployment of 12,640, MINUSMA was given the mandate of ensuring security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; and assisting the reestablishment of State authority, the rebuilding of the security sector, and the promotion and protection of human rights in Mali.

Regrettably, however, the Mission has been beset by challenges. It was never able to exceed more than 9,000 in troops, and with the withdrawal of Nigeria's troops in July 2013 (following the declaration of a state of emergency in the North as Boko Haram related violence has escalated), currently stands at 8,000.[78] Throughout most of northern Mali, MINUSMA and the Malian army have almost no presence outside major towns, and even there they are restricted to operations only during daylight hours. While it claims to nominal control over Gao and Timbuktu, Kidal remains a no-go zone under the control of MUJAO. In May 2014, 50 soldiers from the Malian army were killed trying to re-take the city.[79]

In the meantime, however, political developments under the watchful eyes of the UN and EU, continued apace. The roadmap for Mali's return to constitutional democracy was published early in 2013, and elections were held by July, with seeming little regard for the cracks in the foundations of democratic governance that had prompted the 2012 coup in the first place. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) was elected following two rounds of Presidential elections. Though the veteran career politician had little in the way of a substantive political platform, his relations with the international community were said to be excellent. Legislative elections followed in November and December, in which IBK's party, Rally for Mali, winning an overwhelming majority. During the November 2013 Legislative elections (which followed the Presidential elections in June and July), IBK's party conspicuously backed a number key Tuaregs who were linked with armed groups in the North. While on the surface this appeared positive, it raised concerns that this was the quite traditional "clientalist" politics by which political accommodations are made to key elites, but without the broader governance that would underpin representation for the north in central government.[80]

There were many criticisms of this rush to elections, which it felt would reinforce existing elites, as well as those with access to resources (illicit as well as licit) rather than offer the opportunity for a dialogue process to resolve some of the underlying tensions, and perhaps offer a chance for engagement within a broader spectrum of the population. A preliminary peace agreement between the Malian state and the groups representing the Tuareg-led rebellion in the north needed to be signed before elections could take place. While the agreement took weeks of negotiation, hosted in Ouagadougou under the good offices of the (ex) President of Burkina, Blaise Compaore's good offices. The agreement was signed by Bilal Ag Cherif, General Secretary of the MNLA, and Alghabass Ag Intalla, son of the traditional chief of the Ifoghas clain, but for the reasons of their terrorist affiliation, excluded both MUJAO and Ansar Eddine, the groups that had de facto control of the key Northern cities.

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[xi]     Elections had been scheduled for the 29 April 2012. Unlike in many countries in West Africa, Mali had not had an unconstitutional change in government since 1991, and ATT had long indicated that he had no intention of seeking an extension of his Presidency beyond the term limit. Mali was considered one of the least likely countries in Africa for a coup attempt.

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Fixing a fractured state? Breaking the cycles of crime, conflict and corruption in Mali and the Sahel

The Ouagadougou Accord had three essential principles: firstly to promote national reconciliation and a unified Mali (as opposed to separatism); to fight terrorism, and to continue a more lasting dialogue.[81] The extent to which either of these individuals, or the groups that they claimed to represent, were in a position to commit to any of these three principles was questionable at the time, and the experience of the last year has only highlighted the lack of credibility invested in the process. Furthermore, there was little in the Accords that would hold either side of the agreement to higher standards of governance than had previously been demonstrated.

## International responses

With the ink barely dry on the Ouagadougou Accord, IBK was in place leading a new government of national unity, which permitted international assistance to recommence in Mali. Consistent with the prevailing chatracterization of the challenge of the North as a terrorist security threat, the vast majority of the interventions that have been rolled out in the transition period have been security-first initiatives. Unsurprisingly, according to an independent mapping exercise undertaken for the EU in 2013, the dominant actors in the post-conflict period were the UN, the EU and the French. However, the nature of the interventions were deeply unbalanced:
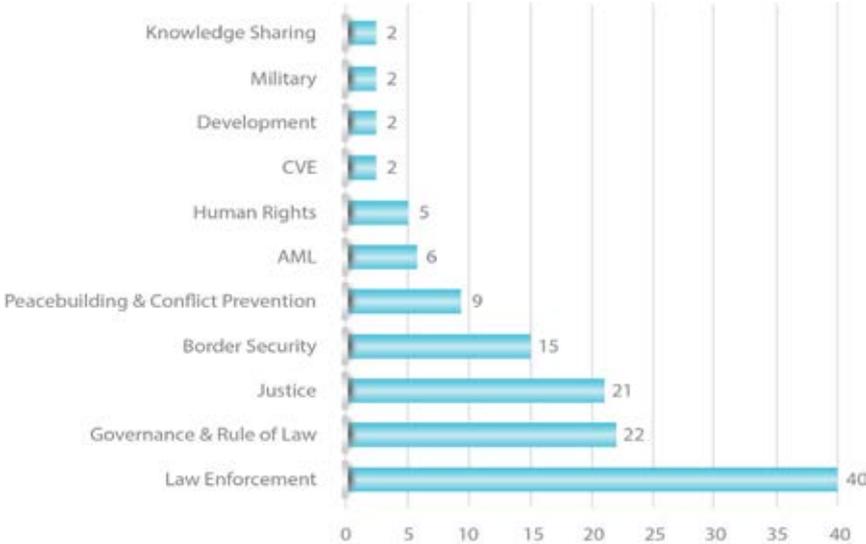


*Figure 12 Typology of interventions in the governance and justice in the Sahel[82]*

The vast majority of the interventions continued to focus on the "classic" security interventions of training for security and justice institutions, and on reinforcing capacity for the policing of borders.

The European Union, the largest donor to Mali, established in February 2013 an EU Training Mission (EU-TM) for Mali, providing basic training for the Malian Army for deployment in the North.[83] In April 2014, this was supplemented with a civilian mission, EUCAP Sahel-Mali, with a mandate for two years to strengthen the capacity of Mali's civilian security forces (the police, the national guard and the gendarmes).[84] This is in addition to the deployments through the European Development Fund (EDF), and a dedicated counter-terrorism project, CT Sahel. As well as the 1,500 troops that remain in Mali under a focused counter-terrorism mandate, following the completion of Operation Serval, the French provide a number of implanted advisors into the justice and security sectors. The primary intervention of the United States is the Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a multi-year, interagency program to counter violent extremism and terrorism across ten countries in the Sahel and Maghreb.[85] A number of new donors also entered Mali, including the Moroccans, Russians and the Turks, in each engaging in security sector capacity building in counter-terrorism.
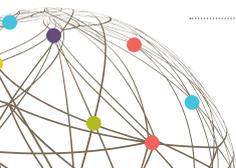
Unsurprisingly given its hastily contrived foundation, following the signing of the Ouagadougou Accords, the peace process with the North quickly crumbled. The groups negotiating with the government, the Tuareg MNLA, the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA) and others linked to Al-Qaeda are occupying territory and committing abuses against civilians and peacekeepers. A total of 30 UN peacekeepers have been killed by direct attacks, in attacks usually timed to coincide with discussions around the ongoing peace accords in Algiers, or debates in the UN Security Council. In a briefing to the Security Council in October 2014, Hervé Ladsous, the Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations, observed that the rate of attack against MINUSMA operations has increased "substantially and steeply" such that MINUSMA is currently the main target for all jihadist groups at the present time. He concluded saying that the situation faced by the UN is no longer peacekeeping, but asymmetrical warfare. [86]

The prevailing focus of the majority of interventions is counter-terrorism with the occasional reference to organised crime, though with little evidence that this is a genuine objective. With the Malian army and MINUSMA barely present and the remaining French forces focusing on counterterrorism within a context of troop withdrawal after Operation Serval ended on the 15th July 2014 , interviews with national and international security officials confirm that drug trafficking networks have been able to adapt their activities to the new security environment and continue operating.[87] Negotiations over cantonment, which was a feature of the Ouagadougou Accords continue to be a key sticking point in negotiations going forward, and the regions of geographic dispute tracks very closely with competition over contested trafficking routes.

## Security for whom?

All of this analysis begs the question, who is the genuine focus of efforts to create "security"? In a community perceptions survey undertaken by the Danish Demining Group in border regions of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, community members ranked security almost bottom in their list of priorities, far below other more pressing developmental and livelihood concerns:
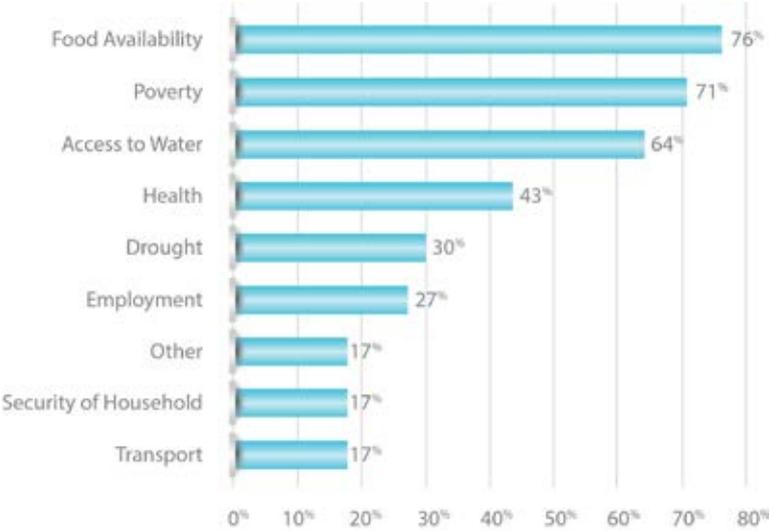


*Figure 13 Priorities identified by the communities[88]*

Where armed violence was expressed as a concern, it was less conflict related insecurity and violence, than a growth of banditry and theft as a result of a proliferation of firearms. Community members in border regions perceived a greater threat to their property than to themselves.[89]

However while the unrest may not directly attack local populations, it has closed most neighbouring borders with northern Mali reducing cross-border smuggling, and has delayed delivery of humanitarian assistance to the increasingly food insecure regions of the north, exacerbating both the seasonal drought challenges, but also the

deep sense of resentment between north and south.[90] Thus, the interventions by the international community have, in many ways, more severely impacted the ability of communities to achieve stability and livelihoods. This reduces their legitimacy and the government which they purport to support, and in doing provide additional collateral to the alternative governance providers: armed and terrorist groups.

Perhaps more importantly, the efforts by the international community and the rush to elections have failed to address one of the most critical dimensions of state weakness and lack of credibility, the widespread corruption. Analysis following the coup has repeatedly asserted that the confidence of the average Malian in the state was eroded by the privileged elite that was ATT's government, and that a sense of frustration and disenfranchisement had developed due to the widespread corruption and perceived impunity in the state. Here again the findings of the community perceptions surveys are instructive. Whereas the community perceptions survey undertaken nationwide by the ISS supported the finding that endemic corruption amongst the government and the civil service had disenfranchised citizens from the state, DDG's border security assessment that focused only on the remote border regions found that: *"In the Sahel region, where arms and drugs smuggling appear to be in the hands of criminal groups, corruption reinforces insecurity. DDG's findings indicate that communities see formal security providers as a potential threat to safety and security."*[91] This reinforces the fact that where a criminal group can establish a zone of protection, it is able to co-opt or capture the structures of the state to the detriment of the population.

Analysts have even proposed that the growing traction of fundamentalist Islam across the Sahel has its roots in government corruption and the region's many economic and social problems.[xii] Yet despite this, efforts of the international community continue to focus on quickly checking the boxes on the facets of democracy, with little effort to address the fundamentals of governance beneath it. Across the North, state services (schools, medical facilities, police, military) remain entirely absent, and despite aid pledges from the international community of €3.25 billion.[92] While some of the international NGOs are implementing programmes at the local level to encourage social cohesion and conflict mitigation, these are far from systematic or sustained efforts. Instead, the continued emphasis on state border security over human security exacerbates ethnic tensions and reducing the coping mechanisms of the communities that make their livelihoods and achieve security in the borderlands.

Perhaps in an effort to address this gap, months have seen a dramatic growth in the number of community perceptions studies commissions (with results still pending), seeking to better understand the motivations of the community. These come, however, as too little too late, as the political process continues apace, and issues such as the trafficking of arms, drugs and other organised crimes remains a secondary issue. The integration of transnational organised crime into the informal economy is poison in the water that will fundamentally prevent the widespread dissemination of democratic governance and the rule of law, as well as the achievement of stable and prosperous lives for Malian citizens.

Recent experiences in Algeria has shown this process is not straightforward. The Algerians state has begun to recognise that smuggling is extremely deleterious to the economy and security of the country, and have deployed a range of strategies to address the issue. On the Moroccan border, the military has begun digging large trenches in order to prevent the movement of smugglers, which has had some success, especially in countering vehicle born smuggling. A number of observation posts are being constructed in some areas. Finally, the government has sought to bolster the integrated activity of its forces, via joint patrols between the GGF and the Customs administration. But while these efforts have had an impact on smuggling, they have also upped political tensions in some areas, as they have suppressed access to key livelihoods without provision of a viable alternative. Algerian state officials have indicated that rock throwing incidents are fairly common, especially after an arrest of a smuggler has been made. The killing of several smugglers outside of Tindouf recently sparked large-scale unrest in one of the Polisario camps.[93]

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xii   This was a finding in the community perception survey published by the ISS in April 2014, and is also raised in the International Crisis Group report, "Mali – avoiding escalation," Africa Repot No. 189, 18 July 2012, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/west-africa/mali/189-mali-avoiding-escalation-english.pdf

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Fixing a fractured state? Breaking the cycles of crime, conflict and corruption in Mali and the Sahel

Genuine efforts to promote stability in Mali will need to take community perceptions and priorities into greater consideration, and will need similarly to address the root causes and drivers of instability by reconstituting the state as a provider of livelihoods and security. This will mean prioritizing the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance, creating genuine and sustainable alternative livelihoods in the regions where the informal economy is prevalent. Given the reliance on informal trade for livelihoods in pastoralist and border communities, de-facto labeling all un-reported or un-regulated cross-border trade could result in unintended negative consequences on human security in the region, as well as dampening economic activity.

# Prospects for Stability

The ultimate goal for a successful transition should be to build the capacity of the state to provide both security and livelihoods for its people.  On current evidence, for a number of reasons the future prospects of Mali do not look spectacular.

## Bringing peace, ending conflict

While creating the conditions for stability in the north is a worthwhile objective, this is something the Malian army is a long way from being able to achieve.  Thus the support of the international community will be integral for the foreseeable future.  Northern Mali has already become a theater for protracted low-intensity conflict between jihadist fighters and the international community.  Key figures in the conflict – Belmokhtar, Al Ghali and others remain free and perpetuating terrorist attacks across the region, and in the case of the former, significantly consolidating his stronghold in Gao, which was previously far from the epicenter of the troubles.

MINUSMA has yet to achieve full strength, either in troops or in its political mission, and as crises proliferate in the region, including the widespread public health crisis in West Africa, UN resources are spread even thinner and staffing Mali as it falls out of the international spotlight will become more challenging.   Bert Koenders, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of the mission, left in October to take up a new and a successor has yet to be named.[94]  The Tuareg nationalist cause, for its part, has only been emboldened by Bamako's weakness, and its leaders are pressing their advantage at the Algiers negotiations.[95]  The issue of organised crime and illicit trafficking, while a part of the MINUSMA mandate remains a secondary concern, despite the recognition of it as a significant cross-cutting threat.  In October 2014, an organized crime task force was created under the leadership of the police division, UNPOL, and a strategy to engage with actors and objectives beyond the immediate security domain.[96]

The strategies of the jihadists and the international community are at odds: the international community and particularly peacekeeping missions seek a time limited stabilization objective, to then withdraw.  Particularly in the current times of financial austerity, protracted peacekeeping missions are no-ones ideal scenario.  The EU missions may have a longer trajectory, but not significantly so.  By contrast, the jihadists are playing a long game, cultivating support with local populations. Like most insurgent conflicts, victory from their perspective does not require defeating French or UN forces in battle; it merely requires outlasting them on the ground and eroding their legitimacy.

That said, however, while armed Islamist groups, continue to pose a threat in the north, there are several indicators that sporadic violence throughout the north, which in several cases has spiraled into retaliatory, tit for tat episodes, are driven by local criminal activity (vehicle theft, cattle theft, robbery, etc.)[97]  Inter-communal tensions are also rising.  A number of localised conflicts have been recorded over the last year, including clashes between Arabs and Tuaregs, that gives the indication that the security situation across the north is unsettled and deteriorating. ICG's report noted that friction between nomadic and sedentary populations has been exacerbated, mostly by the classic competition over scare resources, but heightened by the local election process which divided voters along community lines, thereby facilitating a growing racial antagonism.[98]  This kind of violence, which increases insecurity for the community itself, can be a beneficial entry point for reducing the legitimacy of armed groups in the community.  However, during a time of stability, armed groups will play more heavily on the alternative pillars of legitimacy, in particular affiliation.

Ongoing competition and collaboration between and within various armed groups in the north — most notably the Arab MAA, the Malian Army, and the Tuareg MNLA — align with strategic trafficking corridors in northern Mali.  The MAA is a composite of a number of armed groups linked to Arab communities in the North, and is alleged to also include members of the former Arab militias from Timbuktu and Gao with strong linkages to drug trafficking and to MUJAO.  Tensions between the Berabiches and the Idnan for control of the trade routes linking Ber, north of Timbuktu, and In-Khalil, north of Tessalit on the Algerian border displays acute internal tensions even within the Tamasheq.[99]

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Fixing a fractured state? Breaking the cycles of crime, conflict and corruption in Mali and the Sahel

It is important to remember that though the possibility of inter-communal, ethnic violence in northern Mali is very real, ethnicity often serves as an organizing principal by which criminal networks and economic competition form. Policymakers should be careful in assuming that an incident between combatants from different ethnic or sub-ethnic communities is necessarily driven by ethnic animosity. Rather, they should be viewed through several possible lenses, of which control over resources, i.e. trafficking and organised crime, *must* be one.

## Elites and Impunity

The positions of the government and the separatists on the degree of autonomy that the North should be permitted, remain far apart.[100] The Malian government, for its part, has done nothing to win the support of neglected Songhay populations in the north, let alone disaffected Tuareg. While claiming to stand for national unity, the furthest north the President has ever been in his own country is Mopti, 300kms short of the dividing line between north and south, and even this took him more than nine months into his tenure to achieve.[101] The process of national reconciliation, with national and regional conferences, has been a Bamako driven, top-down exercise, with little genuine effort to engage at the community level in the north.

IBK's government has been beset by corruption scandals, many of which link directly to the President himself, and show little indication that he plans to uphold the pledge that he made at his swearing in speech to ensure that, *"Restoring state authority will coincide with a tireless fight against corruption… Let no one enrich themselves illicitly at the expense of the Malian people."*[102] Yet government spending remains under the control of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) following an investigation into a no-bid defense contract worth an estimated $136 million which was awarded to a crony of the President, Sidi Mohammed Kagnassi, including an alleged $14 million overhead payment to his private company.[103] While defense-related purchases do not require public tender for reasons of "national security", the IMF investigation found that the overwhelming majority of the contract was for non-military items such as trucks, cars and clothing.[104] This was shortly followed by a greater scandal – the purchase of a new $40 million presidential jet, again without a tender process. Not only did the President already have a jet at his disposal from the previous regime, unlike the Malian military which has no air capacity, but it coincided with a renewed humanitarian appeal by the UN in which it was estimated 1.4 million Malians were in need of food assistance.[105] These scandals have prompted the IMF, World Bank and the EU to suspend their direct budget support programmes – with a combined value in the region of $280 million.[106] Under such evidence, it is not hard to see why the Tuaregs are sticking fast to their position in the Algiers negotiations that donors should be able to channel funding directly through to local coffers, rather than having to go through the central state.

IBK's handling of a key appointments and his political agenda has also raised some concerns, where again he appears to be a little too faithful to "old-school" ATT style of leadership. Whilst the reformist programme looked good on paper, it was quickly seen to be more of a symbolic effort.[107] Behind the rhetoric, it appears IBK has very much maintained business as usual as his governance style. He appointed his son as chair of the defense committee in the National Assembly (which subsequently saw and approved the dubious defense contracts mentioned above), and appointed his father-in-law as President of the Assembly.[108]

The initial selection of Oumar Tatam Ly, a technocrat with 20 years of experience in the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) but no government experience, appeared to bode well for reform measures and fiscal management. One of Ly's stated priorities was to make good on the president's pledge to unite Mali and end endemic corruption. However, this goal ended ignominiously, when Ly resigned along with the entire Malian government, less than six months into the post.[109] While no official reason was given, Ly was later reported as explaining it was due to the inability to achieve reforms.

The connections between illicit trafficking and the state persist. Several individuals directly involved or connected to trafficking networks are members of the new Malian government (either as elected officials or through appointment to prominent positions). Local officials say that several small gangs have emerged which seek to
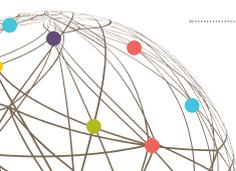
control burgeoning domestic drug markets for cocaine, cannabis resin and crack. They seem to be limited to certain neighborhoods within Bamako, but their impact and influence could spread. Most of the cannabis resin and cocaine entering Bamako is believed to enter Mali from Guinea and Senegal, or through the airport, and as noted, there have been a number of seizures of cocaine. Despite this, however, anti-narcotics measures in Bamako continue to be weak and or non-existent, while questions of political will remain. When asked if the fight against drug trafficking in Bamako was a question of will or means, one of the anti-drug police units in Bamako was quoted as responding, "if there were will, I would have the means."[110]

Ultimately, the incentive structure to shift Mali from a strategy of rapid pacification and security, to addressing the longer-term structural issues that might actually bring long-term stability does not seem to be in place. While the punitive measures in place against IBK for his corruption are a step in the right direction, they need to be maintained and intensified. Pressures to achieve "reconciliation" in the North are receding in the face of over-zealous efforts to end terrorism, without really focusing on the root causes of conflict in the north.

## Regional Tensions

While many fingers can be pointed at actors in Mali, both national and international, for failing to achieve the pre-conditions for stability in Mali, it must be recognised that this is a period of intense and widespread fragility for the Sahara, and other regional dynamics will continue to place external stresses and shocks onto security and livelihoods in Mali. Internal dynamics in Libya, in Nigeria and in Burkina Faso will contribute significantly to volatility in the countries of the Sahel. The growing public health crisis of Ebola in the west African countries has already spread to Mali, and this may strain even further the Government's capacity to demonstrate leadership, inspire confidence and prove its capacity to deliver services when they are most needed. Furthermore, Ebola is a particularly insidious disease that, due to the nature of its contagion, has a particularly damaging impact on familial and traditional cultural structures.[xiii]

This study has clearly shown the capacity for new resource flows to change the nature of local power dynamics. The growth of cocaine trafficking through West Africa was one such flow, the practice of kidnapping for ransom was a second, the enormous increase in the number of migrants smuggled across the Sahara is a third. There are a number of emerging flows, both licit and illicit, that might similarly have a destabilizing impact, and emphasises the need for strong political-economy analysis that is both geographic and ethnographic in order to understand the potential future impact. The recent discoveries of oil, and the opening of a new uranium plant are both potential game changers and flash points for conflict,[111] in particular given the targeting by MUJAO of energy sector investments in the country.[112] Emerging trends in synthetic drug production,[113] oil bunkering and maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea countries are also worthy of monitoring.[114]

Events in Libya have always had an impact on the Sahel, given the networks of kith and kin that exist across the Sahelian band. The realpolitik of the Gadhafi era, his grace and favour policies with both licit and illicit commodities, and his manipulations of both the Tuareg and Tebu groups, and the asylum he offered to insurgents and ideologues from the Sahel remain political legacies that have deeply shaped recent events and changed fortunes. The civil strife that currently grips the country as this report nears its conclusion will certainly have significant spillover effects, as the central state lies fractured by increasingly powerful, armed and resourced militia groups. The ability of interconnected ethnic groups capacity to secure resources, either in the Sahel or in the Maghreb, will impact the other in turn. The consolidation of control by the Tebu in Niger is an important dynamic that requires monitoring, particularly if they seek to challenge the Tuareg for control of territory west of the Salvador triangle. One of the most powerful warlords in

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xiii Ebola is spread through contact with bodily fluids, thus making the primary carers particularly susceptible to contagion, and these are often immediate and extended family members. It furthermore intensifies in contagiousness over the duration of the disease until death, thereby making family death rituals a particularly vulnerable point for spread. For a very powerful depiction on the impact that this has on African society, see Norimitsu Onishi, "For a Liberian family, Ebola turns loving care into deadly risk," New York Times, 13 November 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/14/world/africa/in-ebola-outbreak-in-liberia-a-familys-strength-can-be-its-fatal-flaw.html

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southern Libya at the moment is Barka Wardougou, a Nigerien national who led ethnic Tebu rebel groups during past rebellions in northern Niger, and thus could be a key powerbroker in regional conflicts in the Sahel.

Burkina Faso has under the rule of Blaise Compaoré played an ambiguous and often controversial role in West Africa's many conflicts. Seizing power in a bloody coup, that saw the assassination of his predecessor and ally, Thomas Sankara, some suggest that Compaoré's rise to power was aided by Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, France and even Liberian warlords as Charles Taylor and Price Johnson.[115] During his long rule Compaoré has maintained a range of friendships with some controversial heads of state, for example Gadhafi and Charles Taylor, which have given rise to numerous accusations of varying nefarious misdeeds. The Burkinabè involvement in crises throughout the region has manifested itself it various ways. Burkina Faso, embodied by President Compaoré, has played the role as the mediator of different crises in West Africa most recently in the negotiation of the Ouagadougou Accords, where Compaoré was the official ECOWAS mediator.[116]

It has not been long, however, since Burkina, and particularly its president, were seen as a regional pariah deeply involved in trafficking of conflict diamonds while providing arms and mercenaries for civil wars in the region thus breaking international embargoes. Illicit activities in Burkina Faso, affecting neighboring states, have hence first and foremost been orchestrated by individuals central to the Burkinabè Government. For example, the most privileged of the hostage negotiators is Mustafa Ould Limam Chafi, a Mauritanian national who serves as a longstanding advisor to Campoaré. There is little doubt that both Chafi and the President have been enriched by the mediatory role that they have played in the kidnapping for ransom situations over the last decade, and there have been repeated accusations brought forward that Compaoré supported and might possibly have armed Tuareg groups during the conflict, including AQIM, MUJAO and Ansar Eddine. Though no tangible evidence has ever been brought forward rumors persist. Chafi and General Diendéré of the Burkina Faso Presidential Guard retain connections with militant groups throughout the Sahel-Sahara and many of the leaders of the primary Azawad movements own and reside in lavish mansion in Ouaga 2000, a satellite city of the Burkinabe capital of Ouagadougou, near the Presidential palace, where the high-ranking Burkinabe government officials also have their residences.[117]

Now that Compaoré has been unseated, power lines in Burkina will be shifting, and while thus far the transition appears to have been handled relatively smoothly, there will nevertheless certainly be some politicking by Compaoré's favoured and the elites to maintain their privileged access to influence or resources. Others may seek havens in neighbouring states, of which Mali may well prove to be one.

Niger is the final unhappy bedfellow in the melting pot of crime, corruption and fragility in the Sahel. Sharing many of the structural characteristics of Mali, Niger is a weak state by almost any conceivable measure, inhibited by mutually reinforcing challenges of limited resources and limited state capacity. As another landlocked nation straddling the southern edge of the Sahara, Niger's political economy is inextricably linked to broader, regional economic systems. Different populations within Niger orient themselves with concomitant communities in neighboring states: in the north, Nigerien Tuaregs link with Tuareg communities in Mali, Libya and Algeria, as do Niger's Arabs, who share commercial and cultural ties with ethno-linguistic kin in Mali, Libya and Algeria. Ethnic Tebu, concentrated primarily in Niger's north and east, control specific commercial exchanges with Tebu communities in Libya and Chad, while ethnic Songhai and Djerma communities in Niger's southwest trade with similar communities in Mali, Burkina Faso and Benin. Hausa merchants in the south - specifically those concentrated in the urban centers of Maradi and Zinder - and Kanuri traders in the southeast, rely on commercial exchange with equivalent populations in northern Nigeria.

In the last three years alone, Niger's government has scrambled to maintain stability amid the collapse of the Gadhafi regime and the ensuing civil war in southern Libya; the rebellion, Islamist takeover and subsequent French-led intervention in neighboring northern Mali; and the ongoing violence in northern Nigeria. All of these pressures, both internal and external, have had a profound impact on the way in which Niger is governed and the relationship between the government and its citizens, as well as on Niger's relations with its neighbours.

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In response to the incipient Mali crisis, at a time when most governments in the region were advocating a negotiated solution to the quagmire in northern Mali, but Nigerien officials – who had expressed frustration with regional responses to the proliferation of armed Islamist groups – were among the first and most vocal to call for an armed intervention, and proceeded to support the French in Operation Serval.[118] In late May of 2013, however, the battles that Issoufou's government had been urging its neighbors to fight abroad came to Niger, when Belmokhtar twin bombings in northern Niger, targeting military barracks in the city of Agadez and a uranium mine near the town of Arlit.

As a consequence of Issoufou's activism, Niger has become the preferred security partner for Western allies increasingly concerned with the threat posed by jihadist groups in the region, and finds itself at the center of a host of external actors' regional security strategies.[119] In the name of countering terrorist threats, Niger's security partners, namely the US and France, have encouraged Niger to upgrade its military capabilities and significantly increase its military expenditures at the expense of social expenditures.[120] This risk becoming a fault line in a country that is beset with poverty and hardship, and which has absorbed seismic shockwaves from its conflict-riven neighbours: "Everyone converges on Arlit and Agadez, because the rural communities think all the jobs are here," said a representative of the Mayor's office in Agadez, who cited the fact that though Agadez only has about 100,000 official residents, as many as 150,000 crowd the city at any given time. *"The conflict in Libya is at our door. Southern Libya is full of terrorists,"* he continued. *"If we don't have projects that reach out to our young people, they will join the terrorists."*[121]

Agadez itself has emerged as a multidirectional hub for the smuggling of licit and illicit goods. Arms, vehicles imported into Libya, construction equipment, subsidised fuel and foodstuffs, are all smuggled from Libya down to Niger. Cocaine and hashish are smuggled east to west, but also south to north. Migrants are smuggled south to north. Alcohol, pharmaceuticals, cigarettes and an array of licit goods smuggled south to north. Though trafficking networks do not necessarily track along ethnic lines, there have been recent clashes over cargo that have taken on an ethnic domination, particularly between the Tuareg and Tebu. Traditionally, ethnic Tuaregs dominated many of these trafficking networks, but the ascendency of Tebu networks represents a potential flashpoint. Young Tebu, who are increasingly viewed in a negative manner due to their new wealth and perceived reckless behavior, are increasingly assertive in certain towns and cities, such as Agadez where they previously maintained low profile and were few in number.

The same names are regularly referenced as the most powerful and influential narco-traffickers, who are purported to have associates at every level of government. Meanwhile, sources in Niamey regularly speak of an influx of trafficking money into politics. Organised criminal interests are widely believed to hold significant sway within Issoufou's government. They fund parties, purchase seats in parliament, and set the parameters for certain security initiatives pursued by the government in Niamey.[122] This style of politics is inherently vulnerable to corruption. Not only does it provide a disincentive to develop state institutions, it erodes state legitimacy in the eyes of those who resent the fact that certain individuals have undue, illegitimate influence. *"We know who the traffickers are, and they live a life of peace. Nothing is done against them,"* said an exasperated local leader from outside Tahoua during a meeting in February.[123]

Nonetheless, while this does not bode well for long term stability in the short term with blind eyes turned for the moment, Niger remains relatively stable – a feat given all that has happened around it. That said, no study of Sahelian insecurity is complete without a reference to the Nigerian violent extremist groups, Boko Haram and its 2012 splinter group, Ansaru.

The terrorist actions of Boko Haram have escalated to unprecedented levels in the past year. While the linkages between the Maghreb jihadist movements and Boko Haram have been largely dismissed, this is perhaps erroneous. Since Boko Haram affiliated to Al Qaeda in 2009, the links to AQIM have only grown, including alignments in modus operandi, statements of mutual support, and training.[124] The kidnapping of a French energy sector worker

by the Nigerian Islamist group Ansaru in December 2012, had reportedly been taken in retaliation for France's imminent military action against jihadi insurgents in nearby Mali.[125] Boko Haram is currently a potent threat that the Government of Nigeria cannot contain, and it has created enormous insecurity in its northern border with Niger.[126] Given the pragmatic capacity of Sahelien groups to build alliances even without ideological alignment, this is an area that warrants urgent analysis.

An EU official warned that elements within Boko Haram who want to prove themselves, or who want to raise their status within the organization may attempt to do so through attacks in Niger.[127] One prominent flow of licit and illicit goods from West African ports into Niger is from Nigeria, where criminal networks from southern Nigeria link with other networks based in northern Nigeria and southern Niger. These flows mirror that of the formal economy, which links major population centers in northern Nigeria with cities in southern Niger, where the vast majority of the Nigerien population lives. While assessing the threat of Boko Haram in southern Niger is difficult, in part because its incoherent structure allows it to thrive as an anti-state insurgency, a purification movement, and an organised criminal network all at the same time, as a UN official based in Niamey said: *"It could manifest itself as any of these three, or all three at once."*[128] A high-ranking military official in Diffa also categorised the risk of infiltration as "very serious," citing the fact that the tens of thousands of refugees pouring into Niger to flee violence from northern Nigeria are the same ethnic group as those who live in southern Niger. *"They are mostly Kanuri, Peuhl, and Hausa, so Boko Haram has no trouble blending in with them."*[129]

Several UN and European officials, as well as a Nigerien government officials expressed concern that youth gangs, which have emerged in cities such as Zinder, Maradi and Diffa, are becoming increasingly active in organised crime. Their emergence coincides with, but is not necessarily linked to, the ascendency of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. There is increasing evidence that "gangs" based in these cities have collaborated with Boko Haram elements, whose funding is heavily predicated on criminal activity.[130] The youth gangs, which for the moment are primarily engaged in low-level crime could become intertwined with Boko Haram, who is already present in southern Niger. A government official in Diffa, a region in southern Niger where Boko Haram fighters are widely believed to seek refuge and regroup before launching attacks in northern Nigeria, highlighted several instances in which local gangs acted as facilitators for Boko Haram fighters.[131]

A journalist with extensive experience in Maradi and Zinder spoke at length about preachers and religious scholars, both from northern Nigeria and southern Niger who support Boko Haram or who preach variants of Islam that are potentially compatible with Boko Haram's message of rejecting Western influence and secular government. When asked if there is a potential that Nigeriens themselves would begin to join Boko Haram or if a similar, homegrown movement could emerge, the same journalist insisted that *"all of the precursor elements are already in Maradi, Zinder, and Diffa. This is something the government will have to manage very sensitively."*[132]

## Conclusion: Cycles of conflict

Mali has been caught in cycles of conflict due large to a series of systemic and structural factors, including endemic poverty, complex ethnic divides and weak and corrupt state institutions. These structural weaknesses are further compounded by the fact that as a landlocked nation straddling the southern edge of the Sahara, Mali's political economy is inextricably linked to broader, regional economic and social systems. Different populations within Mali orient themselves with concomitant communities in neighboring states -- where longstanding cross-border ties predicated on kinship and language predate and transcend state boundaries – to engage in trade.

The capacity of Malians to achieve security and livelihoods, particularly though not exclusively in the north, has been compromised by the penetration of transnational crime and terrorist groups. While this has been recognised as a grave threat to security, it has not been for its capacity to co-opt and undermine state structures and create competing forms of governance. The fear of the terrorist rhetoric and attacks on foreign targets has resulted in an overshadowing of the development priorities by security interventions that are designed to enhance border

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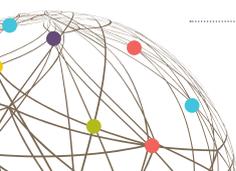
security.  Little has been done to break down the pillars of legitimacy that terrorist and armed groups have created at the community level, or even to require the institution of basic principles of governance by the newly elected state.  The result is an incentive system that rewards measures to create short-term stability and over longer-term structural reform and the building of state institutions for governance.  Thus while the cracks of the latest crisis have been papered over, the foundations for longer-term peace and stability have yet to be laid.
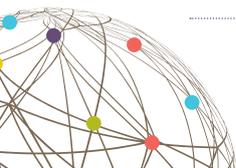
# A New Conceptual Framework

Prior efforts that have sought to understand the link between organised crime and conflict, have generally been drawn their analysis from the perspective of how criminal actors use openings within changing political or economic environments – transitions for example from war to peace, and/or from authoritarian rule to democracy – to control markets and extract "criminal rents".[133] What has been missing is an explanation of how illicit accumulation is linked to or associated with armed violence and instability itself.

Where conceptual clarity to describe a phenomenon is lacking, it is often easy to resort to describing "how much," rather than attempting to explain "what is" occurring and the impact that it is having.[134] The debate on the nature and influence of illicit trafficking in the greater West African region has at times been constrained by too heavy a focus on attempting to measure the volumes of illicit goods moving through the region.[xiv] The search for an overall conceptual framework in the context of illicit trafficking and its impact on violence and instability is therefore of great importance, and success in achieving this clarity will have important policy implications.

## A conceptual framework for understanding crime, conflict and corruption

Conceptually then, the analytical framework proposed by this study laid out that in a situation of state weakness, where the government is unable to provide the two basic requirements of security and livelihoods to its people, competing forms of governance will emerge. These will draw on two pillars to assert their legitimacy to govern: authority and affiliation. Where legitimate livelihood opportunities are scarce, the potency of illicit flows and criminal economies increases. Alternatively, illicit economies can be a means for non-state actors to secure the necessary resources to challenge the state for control.

By their nature, illicit activities require protection, which is provided in two ways, through violence and through corruption. The greater the value of the illicit commodity, the higher the costs of corruption and violence required to protect the flow. It should therefore be understood that there is an inextricable link between criminal economies, armed force and conflict, and this lies at the heart of understanding how instability is linked to illegal activity.

Competing groups will use the pillars of the legitimacy that they can draw upon (ethnic or clan based and/or religious) to secure their zone of protection, and will supplement these with violence, the delivery of services and corruption (which is the co-opting of political/electoral authority). In doing so they endeavor to create a zone of protection, or protection economy, in which they have full control.[135] While the nature of protection economies and the actors involved may vary, in the absence of effective state structures, the provision of protection is monetised, becoming a commodity in its own right.

Violence, and the threat thereof, is critical to the formation of protection economies, particularly in their earliest stages, as it is a commodity much easier to achieve than corruption, particularly at higher levels. The identification of an appropriate candidate for bribery and building their trust to accept the illicit exchange is a process that takes time and incremental development. Violence, on the other hand, is relatively easy to secure and control, and is a commodity that is generally delivered and charged for by a set of actors who are specialists in violence.

Having noted that security is also one of the fundamental pillars of service delivery, the ability to wield violence also impacts on the ability of criminal groups to gain legitimacy and wield influence over communities. As Ken Menkhaus, one of the foremost scholars of Somalia, possibly the world's most prolonged example of state failure, has said

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xiv    For example, in 2012 local law enforcement officials disputed a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) assessment that volumes of cocaine being trafficked through West Africa were declining. The UNODC assessment, based predominantly on seizure data, failed to account for the high level of state complicity in the cocaine trade that was protecting the flow. In this case, not only was the focus on "how much" misleading, but arguably it diverted attention from the more important issue of the impact that the cocaine trade was having on governance and integrity in the region.

*"Communities that have been cut off from an effective state authority – whether out of government indifference to marginal frontier territories, or because of protracted warfare, or because of vested local and external interests in perpetuating conditions of state failure – consistently seek to devise arrangements to provide for themselves the core functions that the missing state is supposed to assume, especially basic security. […] local communities are not passive in the face of state failure and insecurity, but instead adapt in a variety of ways to minimise risk and increase predictability in their dangerous environments."[136]* Mafia groups the world over create situations of insecurity, through "protection rackets," by which the organised crime group creates insecurity in local populations by directly threatening them, which requires that those populations then have to pay for security to be returned.

The level of violence in absolute terms cannot be used as a reliable measure of crime's infiltration into society, much as seizures cannot be used exclusively to measure the scale of illicit flows. As protection economies consolidate and other pillars of legitimacy solidify, actual levels of violence may fall as the threat of violence, coupled with authority and affiliation related factors, becomes sufficient to maintain control. The subsequent growth of violence after a period of calm may then indicate challenges for control within a zone of protection.

## The fusion of state and non-state actors and the provision of protection economies

The link between state actors and the provision of protection is however much more complex than a relationship where in the absence of one the other is constituted. State actors, given a range of circumstances, including most prominently weak allegiances to the centre and poor resourcing, are key players themselves within protection networks. In some cases, state entities may themselves have created the conditions or provided the resources for local strongmen to emerge.[137]

At a local level, state actors may have central government "permission" to provide protection for illicit activities; and even where the state may not be present in any force, it may still play the role as an interface with different groups. Protection networks, as has been shown, therefore often include the intimate involvement of government officials and institutions. The impact of this is obvious: state actors that engage less in enforcing the law and more in contravening it to secure resources for themselves are ill-placed to provide even basic services for ordinary people. State involvement in protection networks generally means that the interests of ordinary people are not protected.

It is important to emphasise that state actors may have only limited ability to project their influence into peripheral areas; state control may therefore be a form of negotiated compromise with local actors, mainly because the latter have a strong presence in the area concerned and thus must be engaged with to maintain some control over the territory. The basis of that engagement may well depend on a sharing of resources to ensure a balance of stability; the state may recognise that local actors acquire resources by protecting illicit activities, precisely such agreement and involvement, and its resulting profits, blunts the desire of local actors to disengage with the state.

The role of the state in providing protection is also strongly shaped by its "official" functions. State actors, even in very weak states, may still control the main choke points of trade and are able to produce the relevant documentation required by other states. Thus, migrants passing through Libya's southern border may still engage with immigration or customs officials, who in exchange for an accepted payment, will "process" the movement of what would be regarded as an illegal flow of people. Because the very control of such "outposts of the state" are a generator of resources in their own right, when the state becomes so weak as not to be able to assert effective influence over them, or the "outposts" become delinked from the state altogether (as a result of both political or technical reasons, such as the failure of communication equipment), they are likely to become subject to the control of the most powerful interests in the area even if they still carry the external imprint of the central state.

The critical point here is that, as Keith Krause has described in an essay on the emergence of what he terms "hybridity" in post-conflict settings, *"the goals and intentions of external actors are bent and fused with the interests*

*and power of local actors into new forms of governance*.[138]  In the context of illicit flows, those new forms of local governance are about the protection of the flows themselves. Without that protection, there is no hope of resource generation.  Local control of illicit trafficking is often the result of the evolution of state weakness, and its mutation or fusion with the interests of non-state actors.  But even in this evolution there often remains a role for the state at the centre.  In the case of kidnapping for ransom in the Sahara for example, the evidence suggests that it is often the weak central states who retain some links to those seeking the ransoms, and who collect "a fee" for acting as the interface with the outside world.[139]

In short, local control is central to illicit accumulation, but local control may only emerge after a period in which state weakness has become pronounced.  Indeed, that weakness is often a result of the accumulation of illicit resources at the local level and the subversion of state structures into local forms of control.  Nevertheless, even in cases where the state has withdrawn it retains connections, either to mediate external engagement (such as for example the payment of ransoms) or retaining the will and ability, sometimes with outside help, to intervene in the form of "fireforce" interventions; an entry with force that is withdrawn after a period. But even in such cases direct confrontation seldom targets illicit accumulation, allowing protection networks to reform once the external force has been withdrawn.[xv]  As Antonio Giustozzi has pointed out in a study of how states employ coercion, a strengthening state and armed groups may reach an accommodation *(pax Mafioso)* where they are equally matched, allowing illicit activities to continue, rather than engage in violence where the outcome may be unclear.[140]

This greying of the role of state actors and other armed or violent groups, and the illicit activities they protect, suggests that analyses of civil war and armed conflicts must take into account that central states are not generally in such circumstances *"homogenizing, monopolizing Leviathans".*[141]  There may be considerable collusion and cooperation between state actors and armed groups, in particular with the objective of achieving economic benefits.[142] There may be a tacit understanding therefore as to who may benefit economically from illicit activities, and a "protection equilibrium" where violent completion is reduced, but resource benefits shared, may result.

The table below provides an overview of the six typologies of protection groups or networks and their engagement with the state. The table provides a summary of the roles of different actors; identifies those who provide protection; outlines to whom resources flow; and briefly explores the implications for governance more generally. What emerges from this review is the key role states themselves play in shaping the nature of protection networks, even if this is only by their absence.

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[xv]    Neither the American intervention in Afghanistan nor the French one in Mali showed any enthusiasm for confronting illicit activities, in both cases because this would have undermined local livelihoods and created greater opposition to the foreign military presence.

| | State control | Devolution | Mixed control | Indirect links | Mixed local control | Local control |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Roles** | Full involvement of selected state actors. Direct protection or withdrawal of state forces at crucial times. | State as "gatekeeper" for regional and local control. Selects partners. | Agreements between state and local actors on the ground where both have a presence. | Weak state positions itself as interlocutor and receives payment. | Local state security actors and local strongmen based on agreement. | Full local provision of protection. No state involvement. |
| **Provider of protection** | State security forces | State forces and local armed groups linked to "system of devolution" | Local militias and state actors, often in agreement as to "spheres of control". | Armed group, with "quiet channel" to the state in exchange for payment. | Security forces without central state "permission". Local armed actors. | Local armed groups. |
| **Resource flow** | To senior levels of the state and/or security establishment. Small payouts at lower levels. | Senior state officials take a cut or an agreed tribute paid to state to maintain the system. | Local players, with tribute paid at central state level. | Armed groups, but also to state actors who facilitate outside access. | Local security actors, state and non-state. | Local players and leadership. |
| **Implications** | "Criminal state". Limited violence as easily quashed by dominant state. | Potential to resource local strongmen or promote conflict with those excluded from the system. | Local state presence in parallel with | State further compromised in ability to respond. Acquiring resources strengthens armed group. | Increasing delinkage from the centre. Poor local service delivery. Conflict if alliances/ agreements weaken. | Acquiring resources reinforces local territorial control. |
| **Example** | Guinea-Bissau | Northern Mali before the 2012 coup | Northern Niger | AQIM, Mali – response to kidnapping | Southern Libya, Northern Nigeria | Tebu in Southern Libya |

*Figure 14 A typology of state engagement in protection economies*

In summary, under this framework, it is clear to see why corruption becomes a particularly pernicious force. Not only does it undermine state service delivery in a way that is very clear to the citizenship, which is then disenfranchised. It further more allows the capture of the political/electoral pillar of affiliation and places it in the hands of the alternative governance structures: namely in this case, criminal or terrorist. With all of the pillars of legitimacy in place, the alternative governance structure becomes very entrenched and difficult to displace.

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# Implications for Policy and Prioritisation

The value in putting forward an analytical framework is to strengthen the capacity for response. What then does an acute understanding of the drivers of legitimacy and the creation of protection economies provide us in terms of prioritising responses within the context of post-conflict Mali? Breaking down the means by which armed groups and the state have gained or lost legitimacy with their constituent communities is the key to understanding how to change the drivers of instability and reverse the cycles of conflict.

While every situation is unique and complex, the model, which is human security centric, puts the delivery of services at the core of the analysis. This has a number of implications for the response:

**1. It requires the recreation of the link between governance and service provision.**

The central state primarily, but any authority vested with governance responsibilities, must have as its primary role the creation of security and livelihoods for the constituencies which it serves. Thus, international community sponsorship of state consolidation efforts must come conditional not on electoral victories, but on genuine reforms which place accountability and transparency first as part of the stabilisation agenda. Placing aid conditional on the establishment of independent corruption commissions, sound fiscal management, etc. is a minimum first step.

Similarly, it makes clear that power-sharing agreements such as decentralisation or federalism, are not panaceas for ending conflict. In fact, if decentralisation is awarded in the context of criminally funded or terrorist insurgencies, it provides the final pillar of legitimacy for "warlord" style protection economies with no incentives towards central state consolidation. If rights to self-govern are to be transferred, then they too must come with the requirement that systems of civilian oversight and transparency are in place, and that tangible benefits are seen by the population.

If this connection between governance and service delivery is not rebuilt, there is essentially no foundation to the state building process, and the cycles of conflict are guaranteed to continue. Community perceptions surveys are useful, as they provide a means by which to understand which groups have gained legitimacy in the eyes of the population. Questions that address citizens' perceptions and sources of insecurity can highlight windows of engagement. For example, in the border survey cited in the study, while considering criminal groups trafficking not to be a direct threat to their security, the community recognised that there has been a growth of banditry that they consider to be their primary threat. Highlighting the linkages between criminality, availability of arms, and the rise of banditry is a way of reducing the legitimacy of trafficking groups in the community. Community perceptions surveys of state institutions also have value, as they allow the optimal service-delivery agent to be identified. In this survey, people's trust in the army was considerably higher than the police. While strengthening the capacity of civilian policing is an important long-term goal, this finding might indicate that initial overtures to build credibility with local populations might be best delivered with or through the army.

**2. It highlights the importance of addressing illicit flows and provides an alternative means of analysing them.**

Rarely in a peace building or transition process does the international community have the energy or appetite for addressing illicit flows and criminal economies. These are often issues that are left "for later". This framework demonstrates that alternative, illicit income sources have a number of effects that can seriously impact the capacity to achieve other peace building and state consolidation goals.

Firstly, if access to resources is a key principle in bringing actors to the able, then their ability to secure alternative sources of revenue from the illicit economy is already a significant disincentive to negotiate or engage with the central state. Secondly, because the illicit activity, by its very nature, requires protection, it will raise the levels of violence and corruption in the community. Over the long term, this can result in the creation of protection economies, which are very potent and negative forces both for human security and state building, but will also result in the increasing criminalisation of states.

The study has shown that illicit flows have a rising cost of protection depending on the value of the commodity – i.e. the higher the value of the illicit commodity or resource flow, the greater the levels of violence and corruption are required. Therefore when prioritising responses to organised crime, the priority should be on the highest value flows and particularly when control of those flows is concentrated in a small number of hands.

Protection economy analysis also allows a more facile entry-point to understanding the nature of the criminal economy, the impact that it is having and for monitoring evolving trends, as protection becomes a commodity in its own right, for example:

- The more illicit the nature of the good, the higher the protection fee is required to be paid, and analysis of the costs of protection is one way of understanding the nature of the flows that might be passing through that territory.

- The influence of individual actors or groups can be charted by the "protection fee" that they can command.

- Levels of violence can indicate how well illegal economies are protected, and the degree of control: typically violence indicates an immature protection economy.

Analysis of protection can be used as an entryway to better understand the dynamics of illicit flows, to chart trends and monitor and measure the impact of specific interventions. For example, in the example given earlier of migration between Agadez in Niger and Sebha in Agadez, recent research on the ground has indicated that the Tebu are consolidating control over the migrant smuggling along that route. Research has shown that the price of the leg has been rising over time, despite rising supply of migrants, which can be used to indicate that the Tebu are increasingly gaining a monopoly position. It also becomes a way of identifying the groups with which it is critical to work. Thus, with the example above, the illicit flow of migrants cannot be suppressed without engaging with the Tebu who control the trade. Political, economic or social incentives must contingent upon a clear and demonstrated commitment to end illicit activity.

The typical interpretation of the challenge of organised crime and illicit trafficking is to see it as a security threat. With it that understanding comes a quite binary notion that the state must be strengthened to combat insurgents and traffickers (that is, nonstate actors). Instead, as this report has demonstrated, the reality is more complex. With the endemic levels of corruption and the interweaving of trafficking groups into the state, and the state into the protection economy, the interests of the two groups may not be clear. State officials themselves may follow economic, social, and political incentives not congruent with the interests of central state consolidation, indicating that the problem is less technical than political. With that lens then, the knee-jerk response to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement and state security institutions, or to provide more technology, surveillance materials, vehicles, and capacity building, may empower the protection economy rather than the state.

To undercut the protection economy there is a requirement to delink armed groups from the protection economy, which requires both political and economic interventions. Reducing the prevalence of and access to small arms and weaponry will be essential, but this cannot be achieved without also applying social and economic interventions that look at reducing the legitimacy that trafficking groups have gained with local populations.

It is also worth noting the linkages between informal trade and illicit trafficking. There is a spectrum of illegality, as well as a spectrum of negative implications of the various flows. Illicit and informal trade have inter-dependencies, and policymakers need to carefully review incentive structures to promote and protect licit trade to the extent possible, control for the most damaging forms of illicit trade and trafficking, and transition informal economic activity into the formal sector. Punitive measures applied to informal trade have increased the level of violence and engagement of criminal actors in formerly relatively harmless local practices.

**3. It requires a nuanced understanding of the distinctions between key actors.**

The study highlighted that in the case of Mali there were four distinct entities in the conflict, and the conflation of key actors: "narco-terrorists", "northern-extremists" are often political strategies used to reduce the legitimacy of the objectives of key parties of the conflict. Without a clear and nuanced understanding of the key actors at play, and the pillars of legitimacy that they are drawing upon in a conflict, the ability to find effective strategies to engage with them becomes increasingly complex.

While the long term, the goal should be to reinforce the capacity of the central state to provide both security and livelihoods, there may be some actors in the conflict who are providing both of these things to their constituent communities. In this case the group will have achieved a degree of legitimacy with the population that is very hard to replace, unless alternative sources of livelihoods and security can be found. Interventions that increase insecurity for the local populations, even if it is in the short term, will draw criticism and build resentment with local populations, particularly if there is no livelihood dividend attached. This threatens the buy-in and credibility of a peace building process and will serve to strengthen the legitimacy of the alternate governance provider.

Understanding the basis for legitimacy indicates possible entry points for breaking down that legitimacy in the long-term. Populations that are influenced by groups that are drawing primarily from a religious authority may respond well to moderate or alternative religious groups. Diaspora populations could be used to influence those who are drawing primarily on an ethnic affiliation.

Individual power brokers, or key actors, who sit at the nexus of one or more of the groups are of particular strategic importance. Their ability to bridge one more parties to the conflict can make them an important ally. However, overtures or accommodations made with these individuals will have a defining impact on the long-term trajectory of the peace building or state consolidation process, either positively or negatively. Thus, automatic "clientalist" accommodations of these individuals into the central state may not achieve the intended goal if they do not come with explicit conditions of engagement.

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Fixing a fractured state? Breaking the cycles of crime, conflict and corruption in Mali and the Sahel

**Annex 1: Instances of kidnapping for ransom by AQIM in the Sahel, 2003-13**

| Date | Location | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **2003 February 22 – March 23** | Algeria, Illizi | Over a four-week period, 32 tourists were kidnapped in southern Algeria travelling in an area between Illizi, Djanet and Tanjanrasset. The group comprised 16 Germans, 10 Austrians, four Swiss, a Swede and a Dutchman. Their release was negotiated in 2 stages, the first group in May 2003 and the second in August 2003. It alleged that the German government paid in the region of $8 million for the release of the Germans. |
| **2007 December 24** | Mali (north) | French citizen is kidnapped near the Niger border. AQIM claims responsibility. The hostage is released on February 23 2008, following the release of 4 AQIM members in exchange. |
| **2008 February 22** | Tunisia, near Marmara | 2 Austrian tourists are kidnapped in Tunisia and held in Mali for six months. AQIM claimed responsibility, and negotiated a ransom of $3-4 million plus the release of a number of AQIM members. |
| **2009 January 22** | Mali (north) | 4 European tourists, are kidnapped in Mali on the border with Niger, with AQIM taking responsibility. 2 Swiss, 1 German and 1 British. The two women are freed on 22 April, reportedly in exchange for 4 AQIM fighters. The British hostage is executed when it is made clear that the British government will not pay a ransom. The final Swiss citizen is freed on 12 July 2010, with the Swiss having reportedly paid in excess of $12 million for their release. |
| **2008 December 14** | Niger, Niamey | 2 Canadian diplomats are kidnapped 25km north-west of Niamey, Niger. Their release is negotiated with AQIM in April 2010, for an alleged ransom of $1.1million and the release of a number of AQIM members. |
| **2009 June 23** | Mauritania, Nouakchott | American aid worker is killed during an attempted kidnapping attempt. AQIM claims responsibility. |
| **2009 November 29** | Mauritania, Nouadhibou | 3 Spanish aid workers are kidnapped near Nouadhibou in northern Mauritania. One is released on March 10, 2010 and the further two on August 22, 2010. The Spanish government denied paying a ransom after the first release, but was silent on the issue following the release of the second two. Estimates are that around $6 million was paid by the Spanish government for their release. |
| **2009 December 18** | Mauritania | Assailants kidnap an Italian man and his Burkinabe/Italian wife travelling by road from Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania. AQIM claims responsibility. The couple are released on April 16 2010, following "diplomatic negotiations" with the Italian Government, but it is not known if a ransom was paid. |
| **2010 April 19** | Niger (north) | Assailants kidnap a French aid worker in northern Niger and moved to Mali. AQIM claimed responsibility and threatened to kill him unless some of its members were released from prison. Following a French and Mauritanian army raid on AQIM members in Mali that reportedly killed six militants, AQIM announced it had killed the hostage on July 25. |
| **2010 September 16** | Niger, Arlit | Assailants enter the dormitories of a mining company in Arlit, in northern Niger and kidnap 5 French employees. AQIM claims responsibility. Held captive for more than three years, the negotiation of 4 of the hostages was secured in October 2013, for a reported ransom in the range of $40 million. The 5th died in captivity due to poor health. Some accounts stated that the French government was put under pressure to secure the release before they were used as a reprisal for Operation Serval. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **2011 January 7** | Niger, Niamey | Assailants enter a restaurant in Niamey city, Niamey state, Niger, and kidnap two French aid workers. The hostages a day later during a failed rescue attempt by the Niger security forces. AQIM claimed responsibility for the attack. |
| **2011 February 2** | Algeria (south) | Assailants abduct a female Italian tourist travelling in Southern Algeria on the border with Niger. An audio is released by AQIM two weeks later, and a further video in July. She is released in April 2012 thanks to mediation by the Burkina Faso government, though the details of the terms of her release are unclear. One estimate was that the Italian government paid between $2-3 million for her release. |
| **2011 November 24** | Mali, Hombori | Assailants abduct two French geologists from their hotel in a northern Mali town of Hombori. Two weeks alter, AQIM publishes photos of the two in captivity. In July 2013, the body of one geologist was confirmed as having been identified by the French, after AQIM claimed to have beheaded him in March. A video of the other was released in May 2014 pleading the French government to intervene for his release. |
| **2011 November 25** | Mali Timbuktu | Assailants abduct four tourists from Amanar restaurant in the city of Timbuktu, Timbuktu region, Mali. One (German) is shot during the abduction, the other three, a Dutchman, a Swede and a British/South African were abducted. A video was released in September 2013 showing all three men alive, and in September 2014, more than 1000 days after their abduction, their whereabouts is unknown. |
| **2012 April 4** | Mali, Gao | Assailants attacked the Algerian consulate and abducted seven diplomats in Gao city, Gao region, Mali. MUJAO claimed responsibility for the attack in a video and demanded that Algeria pay a ransom of 15 million euros and free prisoners in exchange for the release of the kidnapped diplomats. Three hostages were freed in July 2012; one was killed in September 2012. The status of the remaining victims is unknown. |
| **2012 April 15** | Mali, Timbuktu | Assailants abducted a Swiss missionary from Abaradjou neighborhood in Timbuktu city, Timbuktu region, Mali, after it appears the Swiss government paid ransoms in the region of $2 million, though they have officially denied any ransom was paid. The missionary was released on April 24, 2012. Ansar al-Dine (Mali) claimed responsibility for the incident. |
| **2012 November 20** | Mali, Kayes region | Assailants kidnapped a French citizen, in Diema town, Kayes region, MUJAO claimed responsibility for the incident, stating that the French government was responsible for military action against Muslims. MUJAO claimed that they executed him in March, and the French Government released a statement in April 2014 confirming that he was most probably dead. |
| **2013 January 16** | Algeria, Aménas | Assailants attack a gas plant near Aménas, Algeria holding more than 800 hostages. 39 hostages were killed, before the plant was liberated by the Algerian military forces. In a video, Belmokhtar claimed responsibility on behalf of Al-Qaeda, justifying the attack as a reprisal for the French operation Serval in Mali that had begun days before. |
| **2013 May 23** | Niger, Arlit and Agadez | Assailants made two simultaneous truck-bomb suicide attacks on a French-owned uranium mine in Arlit, as well as a military base 150 miles south in Agadez, killing 26 and wounding many more. Belmokhtar claimed responsibility for the attacks on behalf of MUJAO, justifying them as linked to the continued French opertion in Mali. |
| **2013 November 11** | Mali, Kidal region | Assailants abducted two French journalists interviewing Taureg separatists in Kidal town, Kidal region, Mali. The two captives were killed the same day. AQIM claimed responsibility for the incident, stating that the deaths were in retaliation for operations by African and international authorities targeting Muslims in the Azawad region. |

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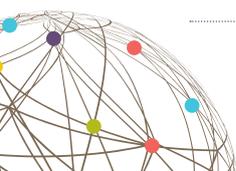
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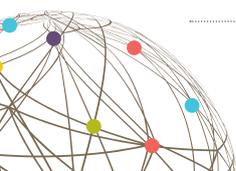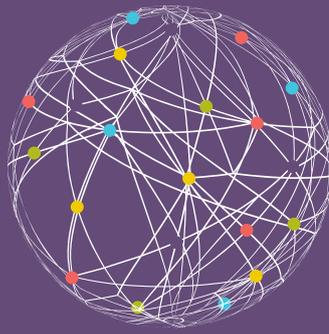
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