

Mali: Reform or Relapse

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Executive Summary

A year after the beginning of the French intervention in Mali, constitutional order and territorial integrity have been restored. However, the north remains a hotbed of intercommunal tensions and localised violence as both French and UN forces struggle to consolidate security gains. Expectations for president Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK) run very high. He is supposed to help elaborate consensus for the future of the northern regions as well as implement reforms to strengthen state institutions. It is time for his government to act beyond declarations of intent. An easy mistake would be to revamp, in the short term, the clientelist system that brought former regimes to a standstill. While the president cannot overhaul the state in a few months, the urgent need to stabilise the situation should not detract from implementing meaningful governance reforms and a truly inclusive dialogue on the future of the country. The opportunity to do so should not be missed.

2013 ended with renewed tensions across the north. Reported incidents include armed banditry, new jihadi attacks, intercommunal violence and frequent clashes between Malian forces and local armed groups. So far these have not led to massive violence but seeds of a more devastating conflict are being planted. Peaceful coexistence between communities remains a distant dream. So far, insecurity has prevented the restoration of state authority and the delivery of humanitarian aid in the north. As a consequence, popular resentment against the government is high, as evidenced by a series of protests in several northern towns, especially Gao. Though the legislative vote was almost incident-free, the situation is worrying, especially in Kidal, in the extreme north, where two French journalists were killed on 2 November and the army fired on civilian protesters on 29 November.

The government has been slow to restore basic services in the north as Malian authorities lack resources to do so. Moreover, they have lost the confidence of most inhabitants of these regions, though many of them do not back armed groups' separatist or autonomist plans. To bridge the gap between the government and the population, the newly started rehabilitation programs should focus primarily on providing concrete services. While redeploying in the north, Malian authorities cannot afford to repeat past, unfulfilled promises of change.

After the rather quick success of the French military Serval Operation, international intervention is finding it difficult to consolidate its gains in the longer run. France, which is now also involved in the Central African Republic, is not ready to finance, on its own, a long-term stabilisation program. The UN force (MINUSMA) has been complementing French efforts to stabilise Mali since July 2013, but an insufficient number of peacekeepers and lack of adequate means cast doubt on its capacities to carry out its mandate alone. More broadly, while security in the Sahel is a regional issue, progress in building regional cooperation has been slow and mutual distrust remains high between Mali's neighbours.

The series of national and regional conferences on decentralisation and the future of the north, held in late 2013, is a positive step toward national dialogue. It could possibly lead to more than a showdown between the government and the armed groups. For that to happen, however, the meetings should be more inclusive, as critics suggest, and result in prompt, tangible actions. For instance, the overdue transfer

of state resources to local authorities must be implemented. The regional forums, set as follow-ups to national meetings, should be community-led and not another way to impose Bamako's top-down decisions. Otherwise, the government's efforts over the past months will be no more than a communication strategy without any impact on the ground.

So far, northern armed groups have refused to attend these meetings, which they say are government-led initiatives with little room for a true dialogue. Despite the recent announcement of their imminent merger in a bid to strengthen their position vis-à-vis Bamako, they are divided over the opportunity to restore links with the government. For its part, the latter seems to have returned to the old clientelist system used by previous regimes to control the north. In the legislative elections, President IBK's party backed several candidates from or close to the armed groups. The government is rekindling clientelist links with Tuareg and Arab leaders with the aim to divide and gradually weaken the armed groups. This policy is likely to bring short-term stability at the expense of long-term cohesion and inclusiveness, vital for peace and development in the troubled north. In addition, it has deepened tensions between armed groups, thus increasing the risk of new splinter groups taking up arms.

In accordance with the June 2013 preliminary agreement signed in Ouagadougou, inclusive peace talks should take place 60 days after the formation of the new cabinet. This deadline expired at the beginning of November 2013. Contacts between the government and armed groups are still taking place but through informal channels and in an increasingly tense atmosphere. The main bone of contention is the future of combatants. The current uncertainty could threaten the ceasefire. The international community should use its influence and convince the actors that they must respect the provisions of the Ouagadougou agreement. The armed groups must accept disarmament and the full return of the Malian administration in Kidal, which could initially work with MINUSMA to maintain law and order. As for the government, it must show more flexibility and understand that national conferences are not an alternative to truly inclusive talks with all the northern communities, including armed groups.

Finally, the focus on the northern region should not overshadow the need to lay better foundations both for the state and for governance. As Crisis Group previously mentioned, the crisis in the north revealed serious dysfunctions that affect the country as a whole. Malian democracy, hailed as a regional example, collapsed suddenly. The country's new leadership and international partners agree that meaningful reforms are required to break with the past. Some believe that these reforms are too early, too soon for a state still reeling from the crisis. However, it is important not to miss the unique opportunity of implementing an ambitious reform on governance and economic development, supported by a well-coordinated international response. At the very least, bad habits of the past should not resurface.

Recommendations

To ensure security throughout the territory and better protect the populations

To the Malian government:

1. Ensure that the redeployment of the state in the north focuses on resumption and improvement of services (judicial, educational and health) and not only on restoration of the symbols of central authority.
2. Restore trust between state representatives and northern populations, particularly in Kidal, by:
 - a) investigating all potential abuses committed by armed forces against civilians and trying those individuals involved;
 - b) setting up the international investigation committee prescribed by Article 18 of the Ouagadougou agreement as soon as possible;
 - c) ensuring the professionalism and probity of the armed forces deployed in the north, in particular by using trained police forces, rather than the army, to maintain law and order; and
 - d) putting an end to the use of community-based armed groups to restore security in the north.

To armed groups in the north:

3. Respect strictly their confinement into barracks as stipulated by the Ouagadougou agreement, or otherwise accept co-responsibility for incidents happening in localities where they still operate.
4. Clarify and update their political demands.

To the Security Council and countries contributing troops:

5. Increase without delay MINUSMA's human and logistic resources, especially airborne capacity, until reaching full capacity.

To MINUSMA:

6. Fulfil its civilian protection mandate while remaining neutral to avoid being perceived as a state proxy, especially in the north.
7. Reinforce significantly its presence in the north, especially in towns where security incidents have been reported, and strengthen its patrol capacities, in conjunction with Malian forces, to secure main roads.
8. Secure the return of refugees, including in pastoral areas, through an increased presence outside of urban centres.

To the French authorities:

9. Maintain a rapid reaction contingent and intelligence gathering capacities on Malian soil to support the government and MINUSMA.

**To the African Union, Sahel, West and North African states,
the UN special envoy for the Sahel and special representative of
the European Union for the Sahel:**

10. Help revive regional cooperation for security and economic development, by supporting consultation and decision-making mechanisms to defuse tensions between the countries involved, such as the African Union-backed initiative that regularly gathers heads of intelligence services of the region.

To promote peace and reconciliation

To the Malian government:

11. Capitalise on the dialogue initiated since the Ouagadougou agreement by:
 - a) opening inclusive peace talks with representatives of northern communities, including the armed groups that signed the agreement;
 - b) opening, as soon as possible, discussions on disarmament and the future of combatants;
 - c) showing flexibility in organising negotiations so as to hold meetings outside Bamako, including in major northern cities; and
 - d) refraining from setting decentralisation as the only acceptable basis for negotiations, being open to other institutional arrangements, and implementing measures to facilitate dialogue.
12. Pursue and strengthen a sustainable national reconciliation policy by:
 - a) making sure the dialogue is held at the grassroots level rather than imposed by the state, and setting up regional and local forums as follow-up measures to the recent national conferences;
 - b) showing determination to continue discussions and to implement the recommendations of these forums, by linking them directly to a political decision-making process; and
 - c) clarifying the mission and functioning of the Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, adding to its prerogatives a fact-finding mission on crimes committed since 1963.

**To MINUSMA, ECOWAS, witnesses to the Ouagadougou
Agreement (AU, EU and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation)
and the French government:**

13. Continue to facilitate negotiations maintaining a neutral position as between the government and armed groups.

To initiate a meaningful reform of the state and governance

To the Malian government:

14. Show capacity to implement long-lasting state reforms through immediate, tangible actions mainly by:
 - a) continuing, in the short-term, to enforce discipline and a strict respect of hierarchy within the armed forces and undertaking a long-term reform of the security sector in collaboration with the EU training mission in Mali (EUTM);
 - b) implementing short-term measures to restore public services in the north and throughout the country;
 - c) implementing, in the longer term, the main recommendations of the general meetings on decentralisation, steering clear of the pitfalls of an ill-prepared decentralisation;
 - d) facilitating, without delay, judicial action against corruption, and quickly highlighting the first results of such action; and
 - e) putting in place a longer-term policy to restore the capacities and independence of the justice system.

To Mali's partners and donors:

15. Review fully the failures of past aid policies, taking into account their own responsibilities as well as those of Malian leaders.
16. Coordinate their actions, especially through the creation of frequent donor forums to define an aid policy tailored to the country's limited absorption capacities.
17. Put in place mechanisms to ensure a better monitoring of aid disbursement and to significantly reduce embezzlement.
18. Help the government set priorities and plan decisions while focusing on tangible actions to restore public services and economic development across the country and not only in regional capitals.

Dakar/Brussels, 10 January 2014

Mali: Reform or Relapse

I. Introduction

The French military intervention, launched in January 2013, had a decisive impact on Mali. The country, which was on the verge of collapse, is now relatively stable and, in recent months, it has gradually restored institutional legitimacy and strengthened an executive that had been adrift for a long time.¹ The 18 June Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement declared a ceasefire and paved the way for the election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK) with a very large majority. However, developments have cast a shadow over the optimism that prevailed in September at the presidential inauguration ceremony. Though the 24 November and 15 December legislative elections were relatively peaceful, tension is mounting and armed incidents are increasingly frequent in the north. On 28 November, the Malian army opened fire on demonstrators in Kidal, sparking anger and highlighting the limits of the ceasefire.

The remaining obstacles to stability are many: resumption of attacks in northern towns, intercommunal tensions, continuing presence of armed groups and difficulties for the government to restore its authority in the northern regions. The war in Mali has not yet been won. In addition to addressing the question of the north, the new government has embarked, with the support of its partners, on an ambitious program of national dialogue and governance reforms. These reforms are welcome but the haste with which Bamako is implementing its program gives cause for concern. Previous governments have advocated reform many times in the past only to conceal their inaction and reliance on clientelism. President IBK's government will go the same way unless he quickly takes major initiatives that go beyond the symbolic concessions he has granted to donors. The latter also bear some responsibility for the government failures and should carry out their own self-criticism.

This report is based on several dozen interviews conducted in Bamako, Gao, Niamey, Dakar and Paris with Malian political and military actors, their foreign partners and Malian civil society representatives in both the north and south of the country. It examines the challenges faced by the new government and President IBK and the other actors involved in stabilisation and institutional reform.

It first analyses the political process that, following the signature of the Ouagadougou agreement, created the conditions for the election of President IBK and the formation of a new government. After looking at the new government's first steps, this report describes the continuing violence and discontent in the north as well as the difficulties faced by the international security forces in consolidating their gains. It then examines the national dialogue launched by the government and the tensions

¹ For earlier Crisis Group analysis of the Malian crisis, see Africa Reports N°189, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, 18 July 2012; N°201, *Mali: Security, Dialogue and Meaningful Reform*, 11 April 2013; and Africa Briefing N°90, *Mali: The Need for Determined and Coordinated International Action*, 24 September 2012.

affecting the post-Ouagadougou agreement negotiations between the government and armed groups.

The report highlights the tension between attempts to address the root causes of the crisis through state reforms and the temptation to stabilise the country by resuming the clientelistic practices of previous governments. It makes practical recommendations on how to break with these practices without compromising stabilisation and get started on a more ambitious, long-term reform of the state.

II. From the End of the Transition to IBK's Mali

After months of a tense, controversial transition, Malians elected a new president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. The Ouagadougou agreement made the elections possible and offered a framework for discussion with the armed groups, but it did not resolve any of the fundamental problems.

A. *The Political Process: The Ouagadougou Agreement and the End of the Transition*

On 18 June 2013, the Malian government and two armed Tuareg movements signed a “Preliminary Agreement on the Presidential Election and Inclusive Peace Talks in Mali” in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso.² During the two-week long negotiations, the mediators, particularly the French representatives, urged the parties to sign.³ An agreement was necessary to hold the presidential election, scheduled for the end of July, throughout the country, including Kidal, a region occupied by the armed groups. The aim was to end the interlude of the transition government, which everybody agreed did not have enough authority to provide a genuine solution to the crisis.⁴

The signatories of the agreement recognised Mali's territorial integrity, the democratic, secular nature of the state and agreed to combat terrorism. The agreement declared a ceasefire and provided for cantonment of the armed groups.⁵ The signatories decided to facilitate the return of government administration throughout the country and the organisation of presidential elections at the end of July. Inclusive peace negotiations were to begin no more than 60 days after the formation of a government by the president. The deadline expired on 8 November but talks have not started.

The Ouagadougou agreement was a preliminary arrangement that avoided “addressing difficult issues”, particularly the future of combatants and the administra-

² The president of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, has mediated in the Malian crisis on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) since March 2012. The two armed groups that signed the agreement were the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA) and the National Azawad Liberation Movement (MNLA). Two other armed groups, the Azawad Arab Movement (MAA) and the Coordination of Patriotic Resistance Movements and Forces (CMFPR) were not allowed to take part in the negotiations by the other armed groups, against the wishes of the Malian government. However, the agreement includes a clause allowing these groups to join peace negotiations at a later date (Art. 24). Moreover, the MAA and CMFPR both signed a “Declaration of Support for the Preliminary Agreement on the Presidential Election and Inclusive Peace Talks in Mali” on 18 June 2013.

³ Although France voluntarily remained in the background and was not among the four witnesses that signed the agreement (African Union (AU), MINUSMA, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the European Union), it nevertheless played an important role in facilitating it. Crisis Group interview, French diplomat, Bamako, August 2013.

⁴ The presidential and legislative elections were initially scheduled for July 2013. The French authorities, which want their intervention to remain a success and not extend their stay too long, pushed for this timeframe. During a 28 March 2013 televised speech, the French president, François Hollande, said: “We want elections in Mali at the end of July. And we will not change our minds about that”. See “François Hollande: nous voulons des élections au Mali avant la fin du mois de juillet”, *Jeune Afrique*, 29 March 2013.

⁵ In order to guarantee implementation of the Ouagadougou agreement, two structures were created: a joint technical security commission responsible for supervising the ceasefire and cantonment issues, and a monitoring and evaluation committee responsible for facilitating and evaluating implementation of the entire agreement. See “Accord préliminaire à l'élection présidentielle et aux pourparlers inclusifs de paix au Mali”, Ouagadougou, 18 June 2013.

tive status of northern regions.⁶ It made two major contributions. First, it created a monitoring and evaluation committee to facilitate dialogue between all parties, including the international mediators.⁷ Secondly, it allowed the two rounds of the presidential elections to take place, on 28 July and 11 August 2013.

Despite threats made by jihadi groups and the constraints imposed by a very tight electoral calendar, the presidential election was generally a success.⁸ The turnout, 49 per cent in the first round and 45.73 per cent in the second round, was good for a country in which it has traditionally been particularly low.⁹ It reflected the public's wish to participate, though it was lower in Kidal.¹⁰ IBK, who based his campaign on the restoration of state authority, easily won the first round by more than 20 points over his rival Soumaïla Cissé.¹¹ His clear-cut, unchallenged victory in the second round with 77 per cent of the votes gave him an historic legitimacy.¹² The Ouagadougou agreement achieved its immediate objective – facilitating the presidential election – but no progress has been made toward its more long-term objectives: disarmament and peace talks.

B. *President IBK: Rupture or Continuity*

A former prime minister under President Alpha Oumar Konaré (1994-2000) and former president of the National Assembly under President Amadou Toumani Touré

⁶ Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Bamako, August 2013.

⁷ In late 2012, the different mediation and facilitation efforts seemed to be competing with each other, but the Ouagadougou agreement included them all in a joint monitoring framework. It did not dispel all the tensions between Mali's partners but provided them with a framework in which to meet on a regular basis. Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Dakar, October 2013. The monitoring and evaluation committee chaired by the special representative of the UN Secretary-General meets once a month and includes representatives of the government, the armed groups, Blaise Compaoré (ECOWAS mediator), Goodluck Jonathan (associate mediator), the ECOWAS Commission, the AU, UN, EU, OIC, Algeria, France, Mauritania, Niger, Switzerland and Chad. The joint technical security commission includes representatives of the Malian defence forces, the signatory armed groups, MINUSMA, Operation Serval, the ECOWAS and AU mediators. See "Accord préliminaire ...", *op. cit.*

⁸ However, there were significant problems, notably the very low turnout of Malian refugees, many of whom were either not issued with voting cards or were not registered on the electoral roll; the lack of any meaningful campaign between the two rounds; and incidents in some parts of the north. The opposition sometimes questioned the impartiality of the local authorities and security forces. For more on the technical and political obstacles to holding the elections in July 2013, see Louise Arbour and Gilles Yabi, "Au Mali : ne pas rajouter une crise à la crise", *Le Figaro*, 8 July 2013.

⁹ The EU Election Observation Mission to Mali described the first round turnout as "unprecedented under the Third Republic". "Rapport final – Election présidentielle 2013", EU Election Observation Mission to Mali, 2013, p. 41.

¹⁰ In the Kidal circle (administrative division), only 10.6 per cent of registered voters cast their votes in the first round. However, more than 52 per cent voted in the Gao region and 43 per cent in Timbuktu's. See "Résultats du premier tour des élections présidentielles", territorial administration and development ministry, August 2013.

¹¹ Soumaïla Cissé, president of the Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD), is now IBK's main political opponent. Like IBK, he was previously a member of the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) and a minister under Alpha Oumar Konaré in the 1990s.

¹² Cissé conceded defeat the day following the election, without waiting for the end of vote counting, and visited IBK's home, which was filmed by Malian state-owned television. Special broadcast on the presidential election, Malian Radio and Television Office (ORTM), 12 August 2013.

(ATT) (2002-2007), IBK is not a newcomer to politics.¹³ Many Malians believe he has the authority necessary to restore order to the government and stand up to the armed groups in the north.¹⁴ He owes part of his success to alliances with influential economic, religious and security sectors.¹⁵ However, his clear-cut victory gives him a certain autonomy vis-à-vis the groups that supported him.¹⁶ His biggest asset is his popularity but it will gradually erode if socio-economic problems persist and the changes he promised are overdue.

The government formed in early September represents a compromise between renewal and continuity. The president chose as his prime minister Oumar Tatam Ly, a Malian born in Paris, who has no government experience but, after almost twenty years at the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO), is a specialist in economic and financial affairs.¹⁷ He has formed a government composed of 34 people, both old figures and newcomers.¹⁸ There are undeniable elements of continuity, including with the period of the junta: seven ministers, among them two military officers, served

¹³ He does not embody a genuine rupture with the old regime. Yet he has had tense relations with Alpha Oumar Konaré, who refused to recognise him as his heir apparent, and with ATT, against whom he stood twice in presidential elections. See "IBK, le nouvel homme fort du Mali", *Le Monde*, 31 July 2013.

¹⁴ Appointed prime minister in 1994, IBK acquired a reputation for tenacity, whereas his two predecessors, Younoussa Touré and Ahmed Sékou Sow, quickly failed and abandoned their task. He restored order in the military by dissolving the coordinating committee of non-commissioned officers and the rank and file. He also dealt with a delicate period of community tensions and clashes following the National Pact in 1992. Crisis Group interview, Malian sociologist, Bamako, August 2013. Also see "IBK, le nouvel homme fort...", *op. cit.*

¹⁵ SABATI 2012, a forum for religious associations, publicly called on people to vote for IBK. The Chérif of Niéro, one of western Mali's senior religious leaders, provided financial support for the organisation. Moreover, its president is a member of the High Islamic Council of Mali (HCIM). Crisis Group interviews, Malian sociologist, Bamako, August 2013; president of SABATI 2012, Bamako, September 2013. Interview with Gilles Holder, anthropologist and a specialist on Islam, *Le Monde*, 27 July 2013.

¹⁶ Some observers saw IBK as the candidate of religious groups, other as the army's candidate. He undoubtedly has such ties but his strong legitimacy for the moment ensures he is relatively independent vis-à-vis the groups that helped to elect him. After supporting IBK's campaign, SABATI 2012 was disappointed by the appointment of Oumar Tatam Ly as prime minister and by the composition of the government. The choice of Tierno Amadou Omar Hass Diallo as minister with responsibility for religious affairs surprised some supporters of IBK. Diallo is not as well known in religious circles as he is in the NGO sector where he has been particularly active with the singer Salif Keïta in support of albinos. Crisis Group interviews, president of SABATI 2012, Bamako, September 2013; member of Malian civil society, Brussels, November 2013.

¹⁷ Son of a famous Peul student unionist, himself holder of a history degree from the Higher Institute of Economic and Business Sciences (ESSEC), Ly was director at the BCEAO, where he has worked since 1994 until his appointment as prime minister. "Qui est Oumar Tatam Ly, le nouveau Premier ministre malien?", *Bamada.net*, 5 September 2013 and "Le Banquier Oumar Tatam Ly nommé Premier ministre du Mali", *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*, 6 September 2013.

¹⁸ Among the new faces were Moussa Mara, 38, urbanisation and town planning minister, and Boubou Cissé, 39, industry and mines minister, who were part of a limited but nevertheless real renewal of political personnel. A chartered accountant who became mayor of Bamako's commune IV, Moussa Mara became known for his fight against petty corruption. For instance, he publicised the fees for official acts delivered by municipal officials. One of Boubou Cissé's first steps on taking office was to announce an audit of mining contracts. However, it is still too early to know whether the emergence of a new generation will clean up political practices. See "Biographie des membres du gouvernement", *primature.gouv.ml*, 10 September 2013 and Crisis Group interview, mayor of Bamako's commune IV, Bamako, April 2013.

in the transitional government; four others were ministers under President ATT; and two others under Alpha Oumar Konaré. Although the new government does not represent a break with the past, most ministers had never held senior government positions before.

The government also includes representatives of northern minorities but not so many as during the presidency of ATT, who was himself from Timbuktu. More than a third of ministers were born or brought up in Bamako and the immediate vicinity. Despite the current priority given to decentralisation, the Malian urban elites, dominant for many years, remain overrepresented.¹⁹

From the first weeks of his mandate, IBK focused on bringing the transition to a definitive end. The first Council of Ministers set dates for legislative elections on 24 November and 15 December 2013. The president wanted a legitimate national assembly to return to institutional order.²⁰ Mali certainly needed a new assembly but holding legislative elections so quickly posed significant problems. Only a minority of refugees returned in time to vote. In the northern constituencies where they are from, this did not help restore public confidence in their elected representatives.²¹

President IBK's Rally for Mali (RPM) won 66 seats (out of 147) and became the largest political party in the new assembly. Although it does not have an overall majority by itself, it is expected to have a majority of more than 115 seats thanks to support from its allies. Given the small size of the opposition and the opportunist nature of electoral alliances, there are fears of a return to the consensus politics that characterised the ATT presidency.²²

At the same time as the return to institutional normality, President IBK set out to reduce the influence of the former junta. While rival groups confronted each other at the Kati military base on 30 September, he planned a robust move to regain control of the armed forces. On 3 October, a military operation called Saniya launched at

¹⁹ The government also includes several ministers related to the president's family or in-laws, including a nephew by marriage and his wife's brother-in-law. Moreover, IBK's son, Karim Keïta, has entered politics and was elected to parliament for Bamako for the RPM. It is unclear the extent to which family ties will continue to be more important than competence as a criterion for government appointments. See "Mali: radioscopie du nouveau gouvernement: les Ibékistes, les militaires et la famille", Koaci.com, 10 September 2013.

²⁰ There were undoubtedly other reasons to organise the legislative elections so quickly. The opposition suspects IBK of wanting to benefit the incomplete electoral roll, which it believes was favourable to him. Crisis Group interview, opposition leader, Bamako, September 2013.

²¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, international NGO representative supporting the electoral process, October 2013. The regions of Timbuktu and Gao, home of most Malian refugees, elected only one Tuareg parliamentarian, compared with six in the previous assembly. The usual balance between parliamentarians from nomadic and sedentary populations was broken. In addition, the turnout (37.24 per cent) was low for the second round of these elections and contrasts with the high turnout for the presidential election in August.

²² Under ATT's presidency, the policy of consensus meant neutralising the political parties through patronage and clientelistic relations with their leaders. See Virginie Boudais and Grégory Chauzal, "Les partis politiques et l'indépendance partisane d'Amadou Toumani Touré", *Politique africaine*, n°104 (Paris, 2006), pp. 61-80. After the December 2013 legislative elections, opposition parties such as Soumaïla Cissé's URD and Tiébilé Dramé's National Renaissance Party (PARENA) have seventeen and three seats respectively. No less than nineteen parties are represented in the assembly. This diversity makes it hard to understand the political positions of the representatives. "Législatives au Mali: le RPM largement en tête", Radio France Internationale (RFI), 18 December 2013 and results of the 2013 legislative elections, territorial administration ministry, December 2013, www.matcl.gov.ml.

Kati resulted in the arrest of several members of the former junta.²³ General Sanogo was taken to Bamako and a summons was served on him at the end of October.²⁴ He was eventually arrested and imprisoned for complicity in kidnapping on 27 November.²⁵ In the weeks following his election, IBK showed his desire to regain control of the military hierarchy by making appointments to the most senior positions in the army, notably the appointment of General Mahamane Touré, former ECOWAS commissioner for political affairs, peace and security as the new army chief of staff.²⁶

Some senior officers appointed when the junta was influential were moved out to posts abroad or dismissed. Although President IBK gradually manoeuvres the army back to barracks, it remains an influential political actor. Some recent promotions illustrate the president's need to show a certain level of flexibility toward the heavy-weights in the security apparatus.²⁷ Moreover, the government cannot reverse every single promotion made by the junta.²⁸ Some of these appointments were legitimate

²³ During the violence and clashes in late September and early October 2013, some members of the army were physically eliminated. It is difficult to say now whether those responsible were all drawn from among General Sanogo's supporters or whether some disappearances were related to Operation Saniya. "An agenda for human rights in Mali", Amnesty International, November 2013, p. 11 and Crisis Group telephone interview, journalist, October 2013.

²⁴ A new military chief was also appointed for the third military region, Kati, to restore order to the former junta's main rear base. "Mali: nouvelle hiérarchie militaire au camp de Kati", RFI, 9 October 2013. In addition, the military committee for the monitoring of defence and security forces reform, led by Captain, then General Sanogo, was dissolved at the council of ministers meeting in November 2013. See "Compte rendu du Conseil des ministres", primature.gouv.ml, 8 November 2013.

²⁵ Sanogo's arrest led to demonstrations on 28 November organised by the Patriots' Collective (COPA), whose president was briefly arrested on 2 December. Demonstrators erected barricades of tyres across the road between Bamako and Kati. Abdoulaye Diakité, "L'affaire Sanogo bat son plein", *Malijet*, 2 December 2013 and Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Paris, December 2013. On 4 December, a mass grave of 21 corpses was discovered near Kati. There is no doubt that these were the bodies of the "red berets", close to former president ATT, who had tried to overthrow the junta on 30 April 2012 and had not been seen since the beginning of May 2012. See Crisis Group report, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁶ This appointment was felt to be a positive gesture, especially by Mali's foreign partners, many of whom recognised General Touré's integrity and competence at ECOWAS and as head of the peace-keeping school in Bamako. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Dakar, November 2013. In addition, Didier Dacko, promoted to general in August 2013, was appointed deputy army chief of staff on 9 October 2013. Generals Touré and Dacko replaced two other generals appointed when the junta was particularly influential. In October 2013, the director general of state security, Sidy Alassane Touré, in post since April 2012, was replaced by Colonel Moussa Diawara, who had been appointed chief of staff of the national guard in May 2012 but was said to be close to the new president. Before dismissing him, and shortly after his inauguration, President IBK had taken the trouble to promote Colonel Touré to the rank of general. See "Comptes rendus des Conseils des ministres des mois de septembre et d'octobre 2013", primature.gouv.ml.

²⁷ Colonels Ould Meydou and Gamou, two senior officers from Gao, who remained loyal to the Malian government during the crisis, were listed for promotion to the rank of general in September 2013. During President ATT's government, these two soldiers, at the head of the Joint Services Tactical Group ETIA, fought the Tuareg insurrections. In 2012, they vainly tried to halt the advance of the MNLA and jihadi groups. Ould Meydou is particularly influential within Mali's Arab community. Gamou comes from the Imghad clan of the Tamasheq. Crisis Group interview, Colonel Ould Meydou, Bamako, August 2013 and "Mali using special units in fight against AQIM", U.S. embassy in Bamako cable, 12 August 2009, as made public by WikiLeaks.

²⁸ Around 80 officers from different security forces were appointed to senior government or administrative posts between May and October 2012. See ml.telediaspora.net, which used the appointment orders to compile an exhaustive list.

but others reflected deals made by previous governments, a practice that should rapidly end.²⁹

To restore the government's authority, President IBK is seeking to build a more balanced relationship with international partners. Mali is more than ever dependent on foreign aid. A UN mission with a broad mandate is now present on its territory. Interference in internal affairs by partners generates tensions. The government has every right to restore its sovereignty but it does not have enough resources to do so without foreign aid.³⁰ Partners are disposed to continue providing aid but they will not sign a blank cheque for a country where corruption and poor governance persist. There is no doubt that foreign aid is necessary, but creating a multitude of projects and imposing control mechanisms could also suffocate the government. In Mali, the main problem is not the lack of grand plans and strategies but rather the capacity and political will to implement them.

It is especially important to ensure that the government's plans lead to coherent security and development initiatives. Donors must not only coordinate their interventions but also adapt to Mali's limited capacity to absorb their assistance.³¹ The government and its partners must accept that they share responsibility for past failures in aid and development policies.³²

²⁹ The first four prefects appointed by the IBK government in the north were civilian administrators, and some replaced army officers. See "Compte rendu du Conseil des ministres du 14 November 2013", primature.gouv.ml. The appointment of civilians, especially in Gao and Abeïbara, was a positive gesture aimed at improving the government's image among the population. In June 2013, the civilian civil servants' union had protested at a bill proposed by the territorial administration ministry aimed at facilitating the appointment of army officers as prefect and subprefect. Crisis Group interview, civilian civil servant, Bamako, August 2013.

³⁰ General and sector budgetary aid accounted for 13 per cent of public expenditure in Mali in 2009, in addition to loans made by the government (about 13 per cent of revenue in 2012) and aid to projects implemented by national and international NGOs. "Joint Evaluation of Budget Support Operations in Mali, 2003-2009", Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2011, p. 26 and "Budget citoyen du Mali 2012", economy and finance ministry, Bamako, 2012.

³¹ Bamako allocates too many resources to strategic planning. More decisive and practical aid is needed to restore the government's presence and effectiveness in the regions, closer to the ground. Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Dakar, September 2013.

³² For a critical analysis of relations between the Malian government and its main donors during the presidency of ATT, see Isaline Bergamaschi, "Appropriation' et 'lutte contre la pauvreté au Mali'. Interprétations, pratiques et discours concurrents", *Revue Tiers Monde*, no. 205 (Paris, 2011), pp. 135-150.

III. Persistent Tensions in the North

The recapture of major northern towns allowed the gradual redeployment of the administration throughout the country. However, peace has not returned to the north and the situation remains to some extent unstable, especially in the Kidal region, where the state's presence is challenged. Intercommunal tensions have not flared up into massive violence but continue to cause concern. Armed groups are still active and the security forces that rapidly recaptured the territory now face a long-term challenge. The question of the north is not only about Tuareg separatism, however. The population of northern Mali is heterogeneous: groups differ in their relations with the state and suffer from major internal divisions that the conflict has exacerbated.

A. *The Jihadi Threat, Communal Tensions and Social Protest in the North*

The euphoria generated by the ouster of jihadi groups from the major northern towns was short-lived. Attacks targeting mainly military installations have been frequent in the north: a car bomb at the Timbuktu military camp on 28 September; military installations and Gao airport shelled on 7 and 30 October; Bentia bridge blown up on 8 October; attack on Chadian peacekeepers at Tessalit on 23 October; suicide attack on Menaka barracks on 30 November; attack on a bank guarded by peacekeepers in Kidal on 14 December and further shelling of Gao, although with no victims, on 25 December.³³ The jihadi groups who claimed responsibility for these attacks are still in Mali, though some have moved to neighbouring countries, including Libya and southern Algeria.³⁴

Jihadi cells can count on local support from segments of the population who, without necessarily supporting their political agenda, share their criticism of the state and its foreign partners.³⁵ Occupation was a difficult time for most residents and they were glad to see the jihadi groups leave, but they recognise that the provision of certain services by the jihadis was a positive outcome of that period.³⁶

The jihadi groups have adopted a low profile for several months in order to reorganise and adapt to the new situation. On 22 August 2013, the Movement for One-

³³ Before that, the last suicide or bomb attacks were on 10 May in Gao and 4 June in Kidal. There was a lull in the summer of 2013, with some clashes between French forces and jihadis in rural zones. The number of confrontations fell after the north was recaptured, mainly because the jihadi groups acted more discreetly but also because the French forces reviewed their rules of engagement. Crisis Group interviews, French army officers, Bamako and Gao, August 2013.

³⁴ Many observers noted that AQIM leaders moved to Libya, but other sources said that many remained in northern Mali. Crisis Group interview, private security consultant, Paris, November 2013.

³⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Malian teacher and humanitarian official, Gao, August 2013.

³⁶ In Gao, community leaders and residents said that the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) was instrumental in driving the MNLA out of town. They also acknowledged that the jihadis brought some form of justice and security. An anti-MUJAO Songhai teacher in Gao said, "the Islamists received praise for two reasons. First, they liberated us from the MNLA, second, they introduced a justice system where the official one was dysfunctional". That did not prevent the same people criticising the jihadis for their hardline actions and abuses due to their interpretation of the Quran. Crisis Group interviews, residents and prominent figures, Gao, August 2013. In Timbuktu, Abou Zeid, head of AQIM, wanted to keep a hospital functioning and asked the health workers to continue working, said he would pay some of them and offered help with the supply of medicines. The hospital was undoubtedly useful to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) combatants but it also showed the public that the group had the capacity to run basic services. Crisis Group interview, Malian humanitarian worker, Dakar, July 2013.

ness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and the Moulathamounes unit led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar merged to form a new group called the “Mourabitounes”. It is active in the Gao region where MUJAO claimed responsibility for the October and November shelling. In the Timbuktu region and around Kidal, the most active are those with ties to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).³⁷ These various groups have for the moment abandoned the idea of controlling northern Mali and have adopted a strategy of harassing Western troops and their African allies. Their recent activity probably explains why the French contingent rescheduled its plan for withdrawal.³⁸

The violence in northern Mali is not due only to jihadis. Intercommunal tensions are rife, with the killing of a prominent Tuareg in Léré on the day of the presidential election; the killing of five Peul shepherds in the same region on 17 August; death threats made to Tuareg and Arab men on their return to Gao in August and September; clashes between Arabs and Tuaregs on the Mali-Algeria border at the end of August; the murder of Tamasheqs in Menaka and Djebok in November and of Peuls in the area between Menaka and Ansongo on 24 November.³⁹ Although these were localised incidents, their recurrence gives cause for concern and indicates the situation is deteriorating. Perpetrators of these crimes are rarely identified and prosecuted.⁴⁰ More than the jihadi threat, the local population is worried about increasingly frequent, widespread armed robberies, especially by so-called “road-cutters”, which also fuel intercommunal tensions.⁴¹

Malian refugees in neighbouring countries still hesitate to return to areas where security is not fully guaranteed.⁴² Many nomads, particularly “red skins”, see most

³⁷ Sultan Ould Bady, leader of an AQIM-linked group, claimed responsibility for the 23 October 2013 attack on the Chadian peacekeepers in Tessalit. See “Mali: l’attentat de Tessalit revendiqué par un groupe proche d’AQMI”, *Jeune Afrique*, 24 October 2013. He also claimed responsibility for the 14 December bomb attack that killed two Senegalese peacekeepers in Kidal. “Mali: législatives sous tension après un attentat meurtrier à Kidal”, AFP, 15 December 2013.

³⁸ This was suggested by Zone militaire, a website specialising in defence. Rescheduling of the French withdrawal was also apparently related to the resumption of activities by jihadi groups and the slow deployment of MINUSMA. “Le président Hollande a donné un nouveau calendrier de retrait du Mali aux forces françaises”, *opex360.com*, 21 September 2013. Initially set for the end of December, the drawdown of French forces to 1,000 was postponed until the beginning of 2014. On a visit to Gao on 31 December, the French defence minister announced the forthcoming signature of a new defence agreement between France and Mali to define the status and missions of a prolonged military presence. “Jean-Yves Le Drian au Mali pour la première étape de sa tournée africaine”, RFI, 31 December 2013.

³⁹ Crisis Group telephone interviews, Arab resident, MINUSMA official and regional humanitarian official, September and November 2013.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, member of the dialogue forum in the town of Gao, Gao, August 2013.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Malian representative of an NGO working in Gao, Gao, August 2013. Insecurity caused by crime dates back further than the jihadi threat. Moreover, it is also why prominent figures in the Gao region, irritated at the authorities’ failure to act, created a forum for dialogue in 2010. This was initially restricted to representatives of the sedentary populations and later opened up to nomadic leaders. The forum became the main point of contact between the local population and the MNLA and MUJAO during the occupation of Gao. For having played this mediation role, some members of the forum were accused of being members or, at least, of supporting, the armed groups. Crisis Group interviews, Malian representative of an NGO working in Gao, Songhai teacher in Gao, August 2013 and researcher specialising on Tuareg issues in Mali, Dakar, September 2013.

⁴² According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were still around 168,000 Malian refugees in the sub-region compared to 176,000 in August before the presidential election. After three months of IBK presidency, only a small minority of refugees (about 5 per cent)

towns as hostile places.⁴³ Inversely, sedentary groups feel it is dangerous to cross some pastoral areas.⁴⁴ Their resentment is often directed at the MNLA, which they blame for the crisis, but this sometimes extends to the entire Tamasheq community even though it did not provide unanimous support for the rebellion. Similarly, the entire Arab community is stigmatised because some of its members supported the jihadis in Timbuktu and Gao.⁴⁵ There were less civilian casualties in the recent conflict than in the 1994-1996 clashes,⁴⁶ but the gap between the communities has widened, partly because of accumulated resentment, a sense of impunity and the gradual erosion of local reconciliation mechanisms.⁴⁷

The divide between sedentary and nomad populations in the north, largely inherited from the colonial period, is becoming more acute. It is spreading across the north, whereas tension was previously localised.⁴⁸ As elsewhere in the Sahel, this is partly due to competition for the control of increasingly scarce resources. Other factors also fuel this radicalisation. For example, local elections frequently split voters along community lines.⁴⁹ Moreover, preceding governments often exploited inter-communal tensions to create community-based militias in order to address security problems.⁵⁰ More recently, these antagonisms have tended to fuel an increasingly worrying sense of racial divide.⁵¹

There is no reason why nomadic and sedentary populations should necessarily confront each other. Their common history rests as much on cooperation and inter-

had returned. It is estimated that there are around 66,000 refugees in Mauritania, 50,000 in Burkina Faso and Niger and, officially only 1,500 in Algeria. See "Opération Sahel. Vue d'ensemble", UNHCR, <http://data.unhcr.org>.

⁴³ The "red" or "light-skinned" Tamasheq hesitate to return to towns such as Gao and Timbuktu. For trading purposes, some of them send Bellah, who are Kel Tamasheq known to have servant status and generally black skins, in their place. Crisis Group interview, member of the Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission, Bamako, August 2013.

⁴⁴ A local official from the north said the Malian administration had trouble redeploying further than 20km above the river. Crisis Group interview, Malian local authority worker, Bamako, April 2013.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Arab resident and elected Arab representative, Bamako and Gao, August 2013.

⁴⁶ Amnesty International estimates that since the crisis began in 2012, "at least 14 civilians were unlawfully killed by armed groups who suspected them of being supporters of the government or of being in favour of the French army's intervention". See "An agenda for human rights in Mali", op. cit., p. 33. By comparison, researchers estimate that more than 2,500 civilians were killed during the Tuareg rebellion between 1990 and 1995. See Baz Lecocq, *Disputed Desert* (Leiden, 2010), p. 259.

⁴⁷ See the Oxfam survey, "Piecing the jigsaw together", October 2013.

⁴⁸ Writing about current intercommunal tensions in northern Mali, the anthropologist Charles Grémont stated that "there is a clear difference between 'precolonial' history and the current situation, with regard to the extent of the phenomenon. Formerly very localised conflicts between people seem to mobilise much more extensive chains of solidarity a century later This 'ethnicisation' of power relations reveals a profound change in social and political loyalties". Charles Grémont, *Les Touaregs Iwellemmedan (1647-1896)* (Paris, 2010), p. 442.

⁴⁹ Questions need to be asked about the way decentralisation can sometimes promote the "ethnicisation" of local politics. Community leaders in the north now want to negotiate the creation of "their region" and defend the interests of "their community". The same applies to Arab representatives who are pushing for the creation of the region of Taoudeni, and the Iwellemmdan Tuareg, who want to give Menaka regional status, in order to create a counterweight to the dominance exercised by the Kel Adagh from "their" region, Kidal. Crisis Group interviews, Arab and Tamasheq inhabitants, Bamako, August and September 2013.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Lecocq, op. cit., p. 338.

⁵¹ There is a clear tendency to see the Kel Tamasheq as a "white race". However, historians have demonstrated the great diversity of phenotypes among them. Ibid, pp. 79-91.

dependence as it does on conflict. Moreover, the focus on the nomad/sedentary divide should not overshadow other fault lines in northern Mali.⁵² The crisis has revealed strong latent tensions between, for example, the Bérabiches and the Idnan for control of the trade routes linking Ber, north of Timbuktu, and In-Khalil, north of Tessalit on the Algerian border. Far from being united, Tamasheq society also displays acute internal tensions.⁵³

There will be no peace unless something is done about the major divisions that set northern societies against each other, including the nomad/sedentary divide but also more localised conflicts.⁵⁴ Support for reconciliation mechanisms should be as close to the ground as possible. Unlike past experiences, the authorities should also ensure that recommendations made by intercommunal forums are communicated directly to political decision-making bodies.⁵⁵

In addition to the terrorist threat and intercommunal tensions, local populations feel a strong resentment toward the government and its prominent local interlocutors, who they feel abandoned them during the occupation.⁵⁶ The demonstrations in Gao on 10-14 October and 1 November, and in Ansongo on 2 November and Menaka on 5 November, indicate growing popular discontent against the government, which the public distrusts, and local authorities, which it believes are just as ineffective and corrupt as before the rebellion.⁵⁷ Sectors of the population are angry at continuing

⁵² These local conflicts partly explain why some communities joined one side rather than another during the 2012-2013 crisis. For example, in the Gao region, tensions between Peul herders and Dawsahak nomads were simmering over the theft of livestock. In 2012, this encouraged young Peuls to join MUJAO because they saw it as a force capable of opposing the MNLA, supported by the Dawsahak. Intercommunal tensions and membership of armed groups, even jihadi groups, are thus intertwined. Crisis Group interview, association representative, close to the Peul self-defence militias, Niamey, April 2013.

⁵³ The armed clashes between Ifoghas and Imghads in the 1990s are therefore still reflected in current antagonisms and partly explain the reservations of groups like the MNLA and the HCUA vis-à-vis a Malian army suspected of using a militia composed of Imghads. Crisis Group interviews, researcher specialising in northern Mali, Dakar, October 2013; Malian Arab resident, Bamako, September 2013.

⁵⁴ In a context marked by factionalism between combatants, it is difficult to draft peace agreements that satisfy all sectors of the armed groups. The signature of agreements causes splits if some factions are not involved in the negotiations and believe that their interests are insufficiently represented. Inclusive talks must therefore be more than just a confrontation between the government and the northern populations but must also help the different communities of the north to rebuild relations. Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher specialising in northern Mali, November 2013.

⁵⁵ In 2008, a seminar on intercommunal dialogue in Mali stressed that "Mali has developed a fair number of institutions, of mechanisms to promote a culture of peace. The communities ... play an important role in these mechanisms. However, the decisions made by these communities have no legal standing". See "Rapport de l'atelier n°2, Dialogue intercommunautaire sur les droits de l'homme et la promotion de la culture de la paix Mopti", 27-29 November 2008, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, members of the forum for dialogue and member of the Ganda Izo (a mainly Peul and Songhai self-defence militia), Gao, August 2013. Local populations also feel that relations with the state are controlled by local chiefs who use this to their own personal advantage. At the opening of the national conference on the north in Bamako on 1 November 2013, demonstrators violently protested in Gao and Menaka against the composition of a local delegation that they felt was not representative of the region. In Gao, they attacked the mayor's property. See "Mali: manifestations à Gao contre la composition de la délégation locale", AFP, 1 November 2013.

⁵⁷ Demonstrators have many grievances. On 5 November, demonstrators in Menaka complained about insecurity on the roads, the inefficiency of the local authorities and the proposed cantonment of MNLA combatants at a site near the town. In Ansongo, demonstrators from the "We're Not Moving" group, an association of young people in sedentary communities, attacked a symbol of the

insecurity and the re-emergence of petty corruption. Insecurity also hinders economic activities and the deployment of aid workers and administration personnel.⁵⁸

The public, especially the youth, are also demonstrating against socio-economic hardship. They criticise the government for resuming contact with the same local intermediaries used by previous regimes. The government is also struggling to provide basic services that have been neglected for years – the only way it can restore its credibility and authority and prove the public that it is useful.⁵⁹

B. *Armed Groups, Present but Divided*

Operation Serval did not end armed group activities but led to changes in the political and military landscape in northern Mali. The government has accepted to negotiate with armed groups that did not embrace or who have renounced the jihadi struggle.⁶⁰ The groups that signed the Ouagadougou agreement agreed to gather their forces at temporary sites and facilitate the return of the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA).⁶¹ The latter returned to the north but their presence is limited in Kidal. Doubts remain as to their operational capacities and their possible desire for revenge.⁶² Moreover, the army's control over territory is weak: as with other government services, military contingents are concentrated in towns and regional capitals.⁶³

Cantonment of the armed groups remains theoretical.⁶⁴ Even though combatants move around more discreetly, they kept their weapons. In a constantly shifting pattern

state's (weak) presence by wrecking a government building. "La préfecture d'Ansongo détruite par les manifestants", Alhabar.tv, 5 November 2013.

⁵⁸ In the Gao region, most sub-prefects live in the regional capital and only visit the area they administer occasionally. Crisis Group interview, member of the forum for dialogue, Gao, August 2013.

⁵⁹ Plans to rebuild public infrastructure are welcome. However, the government must ensure that it restores public services as well as repairing symbols of authority (governor's houses, prefectures, barracks). Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher specialising in northern Mali, November 2013.

⁶⁰ Henceforth in this report, the expression "armed groups" will refer to non-jihadi groups (MNLA, HCUA, MAA and the self-defence militias of sedentary populations), though some elements of these groups, including within the MNLA, promote political Islam and a minority sympathise with the jihadi groups to which they once belonged.

⁶¹ See "Accord préliminaire...", op. cit.

⁶² The memory of the massacre of about 100 Malian soldiers in Aguelhoc in January 2012 remains very present in the army. Many Malian leaders accuse the Tuareg rebels of being responsible. Crisis Group interviews, Malian army officers, Bamako, August 2013. The two battalions trained by the EUTM have been deployed in the north. However, their involvement in some incidents indicates that the chain of command is still weak. Of greater concern, some sources have noted the creation of army units on an ethnic basis, notably the Imghad in the regions of Gao and Kidal. The military hierarchy has not confirmed this information. Crisis Group interviews, Arab resident, Bamako, September 2013; Western officer, Bamako, August 2013.

⁶³ At the time of its return to Kidal in July 2013, the army only deployed one company, which was not accompanied by heavy weapons. The Elou battalion, the second unit trained by the EUTM, was due to be deployed in the Kidal region but this has been postponed and the battalion is currently on duty in the Gao region. This battalion contains elements reported to be close to Colonel Gamou, an Imghad officer who remains loyal to the government. Its deployment in Kidal could rekindle antagonisms between the Imghad of the Gao region and the Ifoghas of the Kidal region. Crisis Group interviews, close associate of Colonel Gamou and member of MINUSMA deployed in Kidal, Bamako, August 2013; researcher specialising on northern Mali, Dakar, September 2013.

⁶⁴ The cantonment sites identified lack the basic infrastructure required to receive combatants who, moreover, still do not know what they will become. A little less than 2,000 men have registered for cantonment but most of them only visit the sites when food and water is distributed. Crisis Group

of allegiances, they move from one group to another depending on opportunities and the balance of forces. But all the armed groups should not be lumped together; they are complex coalitions with converging and diverging interests. There has been significant tension between them in recent months in the regions of Ber, In-Khalil and Aguelhoc.⁶⁵ Armed incidents are relatively frequent in the towns and camps in the Kidal region.

The MNLA, marginalised by jihadi groups at the end of 2012, gained new momentum in the wake of the French intervention.⁶⁶ It does not represent all Tuareg communities, much less other communities, but it has a social base in Kidal, the Menaka region and the refugee camps. Composed of groups with diverse origins, the MNLA suffers from internal tensions that have become more acute since the election of President IBK.⁶⁷ It is difficult today to know who really controls it and what its positions are.⁶⁸ Some of its leaders seem ready for a rapprochement or at least to negotiate an agreement allowing the administration to fully deploy in Kidal. However, young combatants and civilians are opposed to the return of a government they hate. They could provide support for sectors of the MNLA that feel they will not gain anything from renewing links with Bamako and that are therefore tempted to pursue the armed struggle.⁶⁹

The High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA) is the newest Tuareg movement, formed in May 2013 by Intallah ag Attaher, the Amenokal of the Kel Adagh, and two of his sons, Mohamed and Alghabas.⁷⁰ The movement, controlled by the Ifoghas, is mainly composed of elements loyal to the reigning family (Kel Effele) and other

interviews, member of MINUSMA and French officer, August 2013. However, in his most recent quarterly report, the UN Secretary-General notes that MINUSMA is helping the Malian government to develop a more comprehensive cantonment strategy. "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali", UNSG S/2014/1, 2 January 2014, p. 5.

⁶⁵ The In-Khalil region saw clashes between combatants of the MAA and the MNLA, who were disputing the control of trade routes. In Aguelhoc, tensions are mostly related to the difficult relations between the MNLA's Idnan combatants and the army's Imghad soldiers reportedly close to Colonel Gamou. Crisis Group interviews, Malian Arab and Tamasheq residents, Bamako, August 2013.

⁶⁶ It currently has a presence in the Kidal region. It also has close ties with some refugee camps in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. Crisis Group interview, MNLA officer in Kidal, Niamey, April 2013; Malian Arab and Kel Tamasheq resident, Bamako, August and September 2013. Crisis Group telephone interview, Kel Tamasheq refugee in Burkina Faso, August 2013.

⁶⁷ It also includes young intellectuals who have left the country, former members of Qadhafi's army and women's groups in the Kidal region. While the movement has demonstrated a rather strong attachment to secularism, it also includes elements that advocate a greater role for Islam in politics. Crisis Group telephone interview, academic, specialist on northern Mali, November 2013.

⁶⁸ See the contradictory reactions of MNLA leaders following the 27 November incidents in Kidal. "Mali: remous et tensions après la fusillade de Kidal", RFI, 30 November 2013.

⁶⁹ At the end of November, rumours circulated that Colonel Hassane ag Fagaga, former rebel leader responsible for internal security for the Transitional Council of the State of Azawad (CTEA), had left Kidal with his men to return to the Adagh mountains. Some observers interpreted this as preparations for the resumption of hostilities with the Malian army. Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher specialising on the Kidal region, November 2013.

⁷⁰ The Amenokal is the title of the traditional Kel Tamasheq chiefs in Mali. For more on the political organisation of Kel Tamasheq society, see Lecocq, op. cit. Although the MNLA and HCUA seem united, they represent different Tuareg interests and factions. The former has more Idnan and Chamanamas militants, while the latter tends to represent the Ifoghas of Kidal. Crisis Group interview, former member of the Patriotic Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FPLA), Bamako, August 2013 and Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher specialising on the Kidal region, November 2013.

close associates of Iyad ag Ghali (Irayakan). The HCUA has provided a home for former members of Ansar Dine who want to rejoin the political game and who were previously members of the Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA), formed in January 2013.⁷¹ Some HCUA members now seem more ready than the MNLA to negotiate with the new government in Bamako if the latter recognises their influence in the Kidal region.⁷²

The Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA) comprises various armed groups linked to Arab communities in Mali. It is also alleged to include members of the former Arab militias in Timbuktu and Gao, which were formed under ATT, and elements linked to drug trafficking as well as former supporters of the MUJAO. The movement also defends the economic interests of part of the Arab community.⁷³ The MAA initially clashed with the MNLA, especially after the attack on In-Khalil. The acute tension between the two movements reflects both intercommunal animosity and commercial rivalry. However, the two movements met in Nouakchott in August 2013 and initiated a rapprochement. Mali's Arab community is divided, however, and many Arabs do not support the MAA. Some sectors have joined Arab civil society organisations, favour an alliance with Bamako and reject the MNLA's agenda.

The patriotic forces are an amorphous mixture of self-defence groups formed by sedentary Songhai populations, Peul nomads and Bellah groups.⁷⁴ The movement, disrupted by internal divisions and a lack of financial resources, is now less active on

⁷¹ The MNLA has also reclaimed elements that spent some time in jihadi groups. However, after the French intervention, the MNLA got involved much more than the others in the fight against AQIM. The MNLA has a strong secular faction, partly based on women's groups, which makes relations difficult with the more problematic Salafi jihadis. Crisis Group interview, MNLA officer, Niamey, April 2013.

⁷² Two members of the HCUA, Mohamed ag Intallah and Ahmada ag Bibi, stood as candidates for IBK's party, the RPM, in the Kidal region. They were elected in the first round. A third candidate close to the HCUA, Inawèlene ag Ahmed, stood in Kidal but lost in the first round to Ahmoudane ag Iknass, an independent who called for reconciliation and national union. Results of the first round of the legislative elections, local government ministry, November 2013.

⁷³ Like other members of the Arab community, he called for Taoudeni to be given regional status. Many Arab chiefs in Mali believe this would allow their community to have "their own region" and "parliamentarians". According to the electoral law, each circle has at least one seat in parliament, whatever the size of its population. It is planned to create four circles in the region of Taoudeni, a mainly Arab and Tamasheq area with low population density. See "Communiqué du Conseil des ministres du 14 December 2011" and Crisis Group interviews, Malian Arab residents, Bamako, August 2013.

⁷⁴ These groups are partly federated in the Patriotic Forces of Resistance (FPR), a coalition of six movements created in July 2012 and including the following self-defence groups: Ganda-Koy, Ganda-Izo, National Liberation Front (FLN), Alliance of Communities in the Timbuktu Region (ACRT), Reflection and Action Circle (CRA) and the Armed Force Against Occupation (FACO). The federation's president is the lawyer Maitre Harounah Touré, who has acted as General Sanogo's lawyer since his arrest. "Reconquête du Nord-Mali: les forces patriotiques prennent date", *L'indicateur du renouveau*, 24 July 2012 and Crisis Group interview, local leader of the civilian wing of Ganda Izo, Gao, August 2013.

the military front.⁷⁵ However, it should not be ignored; it still has a strong capacity to mobilise young people in the towns and villages of the Niger Belt.⁷⁶

C. *International Security Forces: A Long-Term Commitment*

Operation Serval allowed the government to wrest control of northern Mali from the jihadi groups and to destroy their main bases. However, it was never designed to deal with the causes of insecurity.⁷⁷ The challenge now is to consolidate the gains made by the successful French intervention. International military forces have reorganised to secure France's achievements and prepare the return of government control. MINUSMA's mandate is the "stabilisation of key population centres and support for the reestablishment of State authority throughout the country".⁷⁸ A second force, mainly comprising French troops, carries out military activities against terrorist groups.⁷⁹

These two military forces face two major security risks. First, the attacks carried out by the jihadi groups in the north since the end of September show they still have the capacity to act and retain some support among the local population.⁸⁰ Secondly, the forces must work with non-jihadi armed groups that are officially engaged in a dialogue with the government but regularly clash with Malian forces.⁸¹ In fact, the French forces and MINUSMA have the difficult task of keeping the peace between groups that regularly accuse them of a lack of impartiality.

⁷⁵ The self-defence militias are not as well funded as the Arab and Tamasheq movements. In particular, they do not have the regular support of the main Songhai political leaders, some of whom are, however, close to the government. Crisis Group interview, member of the Songhai self-defence militias, Gao, August 2013.

⁷⁶ They also played a role in organising the demonstrations in Gao and Ansongo in November 2013. See "La préfecture d'Ansongo détruite par les manifestants", Alhabar.tv, 5 November 2013.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, specialist in security issues at an international organisation, Dakar, July 2013.

⁷⁸ In order to do this, it must "deter threats and take active steps to prevent the return of armed elements to those areas". See "UN Security Council Resolution 2100", 25 April 2013, p. 7.

⁷⁹ The legal framework for this intervention was defined by agreements with the Malian government and by Resolution 2100. Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Bamako, August 2013.

⁸⁰ Operation Serval forces were more active against jihadi groups during the final three months of 2013 than during the summer, when they focused on securing the elections and spent less time seeking out jihadi groups, which had adopted a lower profile. Crisis Group interview, political adviser, Bamako, August 2013. In response to the September-October attacks, French forces launched Operations Constrictor (north of Gao) in mid-September, Hydre (Niger Belt) in mid-November and an operation north of Timbuktu on 10 December which killed about twenty jihadis. See the French defence minister's assessment of Operation Serval (www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/mali/actualite).

⁸¹ On 14 August, exchanges of fire between the MNLA and FAMA were reported in Aguelhoc, with the presence of elements linked to Colonel Gamou. Some saw the resurgence of an older, local conflict between the Idnan and the Imghad. On 11 September, the FAMA and MNLA clashed again near Léré, where the latter had established an unofficial cantonment site. On 29 September, shooting was heard in Kidal, two days after a grenade attack on the Malian Solidarity Bank. On 8 November, several Tamasheq combatants died in a clash between the MNLA and FAMA to the east of Menaka. Ecowarn Daily Highlights, 12 September 2013; "Paix fragile au Mali: accrochage entre soldats maliens et combattants du MNLA", RFI, 8 November 2013; and Crisis Group telephone interviews, Malian Arab resident and MINUSMA personnel, August and September 2013.

MINUSMA officially took over from the International Support Mission for Mali (MISMA) in July 2013.⁸² It has a presence in the main northern towns, patrols the main roads and helped maintain security during the elections. However, it faces considerable obstacles. It does not yet have the human and logistical resources, especially airborne capacity, that it needs to fulfil its mandate.⁸³ This prevents it from having a significant presence in some towns, such as Ber and Léré where several incidents have occurred.⁸⁴ Some have also criticised the mission for having a greater presence in Bamako than in the rest of the country.⁸⁵

MINUSMA's problems are not only due to a lack of personnel. The sensitive context in northern Mali poses specific challenges to the UN force, which is criticised by both the government and the armed groups.⁸⁶ It is mandated to provide support for a government whose legitimacy is contested by parts of the north. MINUSMA must ensure that it does not become an auxiliary of the state's security forces in northern Mali, where the government's presence is not widely accepted.⁸⁷ It must balance the different components of its mandate by supporting the reestablishment of the state while facilitating political dialogue and protecting the civilian population.⁸⁸

An important but delicate task of MINUSMA is "to protect civilians under immediate threat of physical violence".⁸⁹ The government forces that the mission is mandated to support have posed and perhaps still pose such a threat. The mission should react more firmly to recent disappearances or murders of civilians in the north.⁹⁰ For example, it could strengthen its human rights department, especially in the Kidal region.⁹¹

⁸² For more on MISMA, see Crisis Group Report, *Mali: Security, Dialogue and Meaningful Reform*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁸³ On 31 October 2013, it had 50 per cent of its mandated troops. See "MINUSMA. Faits et chiffres", www.un.org. However, in his first quarterly report in 2014, the UN Secretary-General said he was confident that troops and military equipment would soon be available in sufficient quantity to fully achieve the mission's objectives. "Report of the Secretary-General", op. cit., p. 11.

⁸⁴ However, the Dutch government's recent decision to send about 400 men, including commandos and attack helicopters, will strengthen MINUSMA's military component. "A Gao, Chinois et Néerlandais vont déployer des blindés, des drones et des hélicoptères Apache", *Ouest-France*, 1 December 2013. A first contingent of fourteen Dutch soldiers arrived in Mali on 6 January 2014. "Les premiers soldats néerlandais s'envolent vers le Mali", atlasinfo.fr, 6 January 2014.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Dakar, October 2013 and "Incident de Kidal: le communiqué du gouvernement", Mali presidency's official Facebook page, 29 November 2013.

⁸⁶ The Malian government has criticised MINUSMA several times for its ineffectiveness in stabilising Kidal. Following the 28 November incidents in Kidal, the presidency strongly regretted "MINUSMA's failure to deploy adequate forces to secure the airport and the town, despite having prior information". Ibid. Meanwhile, the armed groups criticised MINUSMA for providing material and political support to the inter-Malian dialogue initiatives organised by the government but not supporting the initiatives taken by armed groups to clarify their demands in Ouagadougou. Crisis Group interview, mediation specialist, November 2013.

⁸⁷ Comfort Ero, "Using Force to Promote Peace", article written for the African mediators' retreat organised by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Zanzibar, November 2013.

⁸⁸ MINUSMA's logistical support for the Bamako meetings was widely praised. However, it did not provide support for the meeting of armed groups in Ouagadougou to discuss their proposal to merge. Others criticised MINUSMA, last to arrive on the scene, of wanting to centralise facilitation efforts and marginalise a number of undoubtedly more modest but more firmly rooted local mediation initiatives. Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher specialising on northern Mali, November 2013.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, humanitarian actor, Bamako, August 2013.

⁹⁰ See "An agenda for human rights in Mali ...", op. cit., pp. 12-16. On 21 November, the Association for the Revival of Livestock Farming in Niger (AREN) noted the murder of 24 Peul shepherds by

Finally, MINUSMA's role in the fight against jihadi groups is ambiguous.⁹² The Serval force is responsible for most of that task, but MINUSMA cannot remain passive in the face of attacks carried out by jihadis, who have already claimed responsibility for two lethal assaults against peacekeepers.⁹³ It intends to acquire an intelligence capability to protect the towns and its own personnel. There is sometimes a fine line between anti-jihadi operations and stabilisation activities. In November 2013, the Serval force carried out Operation Hydre to identify and neutralise jihadi cells north of Gao. According to French sources, Malian forces and MINUSMA had a role in the operation.⁹⁴ The UN mission acknowledges the deployment of its troops but denies active participation in this anti-terrorist operation.⁹⁵ The reality on the ground contradicts the UN's desire to avoid direct involvement in the fight against jihadi groups in Mali.

D. *Kidal, A Town Under Pressure*

The abduction and murder of two French RFI journalists on 2 November 2013 drew attention to the particularly explosive situation in the town of Kidal. The continued presence of armed Tuareg groups is the result of a compromise made with France during the offensive phase of Operation Serval.⁹⁶ The town became the new MNLA stronghold even though it initially had little presence there.⁹⁷ Kidal is one of the epicentres of Tuareg rebellions in Mali, where memories of military repression are especially keen.⁹⁸ Located in the northernmost region, it is one of the country's few towns where the Tuareg, mainly the Kel Adagh, are in the majority.⁹⁹ However, local

unidentified elements in the area between Ménaka and Ansongo. "AREN condamne l'exécution, en fin novembre, de bergers entre Ménaka et Ansongo", *tamtaminfos.com*, 4 December 2013. On 24 November, the Twitter account of the International Federation for Human Rights Afrique (FIDH) reported sixteen deaths. MINUSMA has never publicly mentioned this case, though it occurred three days before the first round of the legislative elections.

⁹¹ Despite its relatively ambitious mandate, the capacity of MINUSMA's human rights office still seemed inadequate at the end of 2013. In the north, its personnel are rotated too often to be able to give continuity and be effective. Crisis Group telephone interview, MINUSMA official, October 2013. Generally, the mission's lack of personnel is more significant for its civilian than its military component, even if the latter is also undermanned. Crisis Group interview, UN official, New York, December 2013.

⁹² Moreover, Resolution 2100 conditioned MINUSMA's initial deployment on a significant reduction in the capacity of terrorist forces to pose a major threat to the civilian population and international personnel. See "Resolution 2100 ...", *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁹³ See footnote 38.

⁹⁴ See "Tuer l'hydre djihadiste au Mali", *Le Monde*, 4 November 2013.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, UN official, New York, December 2013.

⁹⁶ In an interview with RFI, President Hollande explicitly described the MNLA as "an auxiliary in the reconquest". RFI interview with President Hollande, 7 December 2013. France maintained especially close relations with the MNLA during the recapture of the north. It now supports the return of the legitimate authorities even though doubts remain about their capacities to ensure law and order in the north. Although the Malian media often accuse France of supporting the Tuareg cause, MNLA militants view its change of position as a betrayal. Crisis Group interviews, MNLA officer, Niamey, April 2013; diplomats, Bamako, August 2013 and Paris, November 2013.

⁹⁷ Ansar Dine controlled the town in 2012.

⁹⁸ Lecocq, *op. cit.* and Crisis Group interview, MNLA officer, Niamey, April 2013.

⁹⁹ However, there is a large community of Songhai and "métis" whose parents were originally from the south. Crisis Group interviews, Kidal regional council member, Bamako, April 2013 and shopkeeper, Gao, August 2013.

society is diverse and there are many divides between communities, generations and interest groups.¹⁰⁰ Most residents carry a lot of resentment towards the state but there is no unanimous support for the separatist cause.¹⁰¹

The Ouagadougou agreement planned to restore the government's presence in Kidal through the redeployment of the army and the cantonment of armed groups, as a first stage in their disarmament. But the situation remains volatile.¹⁰² Crisis Group interviews reflect the ongoing state of tension. Demonstrations are frequent and there have been several exchanges of fire between the Malian army and armed Tuareg groups.¹⁰³ In Kidal, the cantonment of armed groups is theoretical: "it is the Malian army that is cantoned".¹⁰⁴ In fact, the army only patrols the streets of Kidal accompanied by MINUSMA forces. The presence of MINUSMA and Serval has stopped the situation from deteriorating. Incidents are likely to occur as resentment between the groups runs deep and all the combatants do not yet appear to be fully under control.

The murder of the RFI journalists has weakened the position of the armed groups, particularly the MNLA.¹⁰⁵ The Malian army has sent reinforcements to Kidal.¹⁰⁶ Under international pressure, the MNLA has agreed to hand over the premises of the governor and the national radio station. Its combatants and some civilians who op-

¹⁰⁰ The Ifoghas, who form the backbone of the HCUA, continue to dominate in Kidal but are not unanimously supported. Lecocq, op. cit. and Crisis Group interview, Kidal regional council member, Bamako, April 2013. In Kidal, nearly 28 per cent of residents on the electoral roll voted in the first round of the legislative elections. The Aménokal of the Ifoghas and the MNLA called for a boycott, but electors voted massively for an "independent list for peace and national union" led by Ahmoudene ag Iknass, an Imghad, a group that are supposedly servants of the Ifoghas. It received more than 60 per cent of votes. See "Résultats du premier tour ...", op. cit.

¹⁰¹ Not all residents support the MNLA but the concept of Azawad appeals to sectors that do not want to remain under the authority of the Malian state. Crisis Group interview, Ifogha intellectual, Bamako, August 2013 and Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher specialising on northern Mali, November 2013. This rejection was shown when residents threw stones at three ministers of the new government on a visit to the town last September. Crisis Group telephone interview, MINUSMA official deployed in Kidal, September 2013.

¹⁰² No less than five armed forces are present in the town and intend, one way or another, to have a share in controlling it. They are the French forces, MINUSMA, the Malian contingent, the MNLA and the HCUA. The latter two groups continue to circulate in the town and retain control of their weapons. The Malian army made a discreet return to Kidal only in July after the Ouagadougou agreement.

¹⁰³ There was an exchange of fire at the end of September when armed groups provisionally suspended their participation in the Ouagadougou process. Moreover, demonstrations organised by women and young people, and even children, are common in Kidal, such as on 14 November to protest about the evacuation of the governor's building and its return to the authorities. More recently, demonstrators protested at the visit of the prime minister to Kidal on 27 November 2013. Not all town residents support these demonstrations and the armed groups sometimes put pressure on people to join them, though these are not merely the result of manipulation of the civilian population by armed groups. Crisis Group telephone interviews, MINUSMA official, October 2013 and researcher specialising on northern Mali, November 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Bamako, August 2013.

¹⁰⁵ The two journalists were abducted as they were leaving a meeting with Ambeiry ag Rhissa, an MNLA leader. The main suspect is a Tamasheq drug trafficker who reportedly collaborated with an AQIM unit before returning to Kidal as a "repentant jihadi" after the French intervention. His reintegration was facilitated by family ties with local MNLA members. See "Qui est Ag Bakabo, le suspect n°1 du meurtre des deux journalistes de RFI à Kidal?", *Jeune Afrique*, 18 November 2013.

¹⁰⁶ It initially only deployed a company without any heavy weapons. Crisis Group interview, MINUSMA official deployed in Kidal, Bamako, August 2013.

posed the decision wrecked the buildings on 14 November before they could be returned to government hands.¹⁰⁷ On 27 November, shortly before the prime minister's visit to Kidal, Malian Armed Forces opened fire on a group of demonstrators, wounding several civilians and killing one.¹⁰⁸ The MNLA's vice president, Djéri Maïga, subsequently declared that his movement had suspended the ceasefire. A few hours later, his comments were disowned by Ambeiri ag Rhissa, member of the MNLA and the Transitional Council of the State of Azawad (CTEA).¹⁰⁹

The situation in Kidal mirrors the tensions in northern Mali.¹¹⁰ There is an urgent need for clarification as to who is responsible for maintaining order. According to the Ouagadougou agreement, the armed groups should direct their combatants to cantonment sites, but this requires a plan to disarm and reintegrate them. The Malian security forces must take responsibility for maintaining law and order. In order to reduce tensions, and as a temporary measure, they could carry out this task jointly with MINUSMA. Soldiers should also gradually be replaced with police officers and gendarmes, who are normally in charge of maintaining law and order. In more general terms, the situation in Kidal requires a quick follow-up to the Ouagadougou agreement and the opening of genuine inclusive peace talks.

¹⁰⁷ See "Le MNLA évacue les locaux du gouvernement et de la Radio-télévision nationale à Kidal", RFI, 14 November 2013.

¹⁰⁸ The government accused the demonstrators of being manipulated by the armed groups and of throwing stones and firing shots, allegations that MNLA representatives at the scene denied, saying the demonstration was peaceful. "Incident de Kidal: le communiqué du gouvernement", Malian presidency's official Facebook page, 29 November 2013. "L'armée malienne ouvre le feu sur la population civile", mnlamov.net, 28 November 2013. MINUSMA deplored the violence and called for restraint but did not publicly apportion blame for the incident. See "Communiqué de presse de la MINUSMA du 29 November 2013", <http://minusma.unmissions.org>.

¹⁰⁹ "Mali: remous et tensions ...", *op. cit.*

¹¹⁰ However, the national reconciliation minister, Cheikh Oumar Diarra, said in a rather warlike tone that "Kidal is the Gordian knot that must be cut". Interview with Cheikh Oumar Diarra, RFI and TV5-Monde, 10 November 2013.

IV. Negotiating the Future of the North

After the presidential election, Mali entered the most sensitive stage of the Ouagadougou agreement. The parties must now build on the ceasefire to reach a lasting settlement and disarm combatants in the north. The government is engaged in national dialogue and has convened conferences in Bamako and the regions. However, there is a risk that these initiatives will remain no more than a declaration of intent and will replace the peace talks envisaged by the Ouagadougou agreement.

A. *The Government's Plan: A National Dialogue to End the Crisis*

President IBK adopted a proactive stance with regard to the crisis in the north. He appointed one of his close advisers, Cheikh Oumar Diarra, to the head of a new ministry for national reconciliation and development of the northern regions with a broad remit.¹¹¹ Together, they planned an ambitious timetable of meetings to quickly launch a national dialogue.

The government convened a national forum on decentralisation on 21-23 October 2013 in Bamako. Although the armed movements decided not to participate, more than 600 people from all over Mali attended the meeting.¹¹² The main objective was to relaunch decentralisation. Bamako believes this is the best response to the sense of marginalisation experienced by northern populations and, more generally, the best way to address the country's governance problem.¹¹³ In addition, the government convened a national conference on the development of the northern regions on 1-3 November to address issues of reconciliation, decentralisation and economic development.¹¹⁴ In order to complete the return to institutional order, the government organised legislative elections throughout the country on 24 November and 15 December. It is also planning to convene regional conferences to continue the discussions begun in Bamako.¹¹⁵

This approach contrasts with the interim government's relative inertia. President IBK has expressed his desire for Mali to take control over the process of dialogue and

¹¹¹ The ministry's remit includes "conduct of the process of national dialogue and national reconciliation", "conduct of negotiations with a view to achieving lasting peace" and the "definition of development strategies for the northern regions". See "Décret du 24 septembre 2013 fixant les attributions spécifiques des membres du gouvernement, Article 4". The ministry, initially based in the prime minister's offices, still has no staff or offices of its own. Its general secretary, Zeidan ag Sidalame, appointed on October 2013, is a Tamasheq from Gao and has long experience in negotiations between the government and armed movements. He was present at the signature of the 1992 National Pact. Crisis Group interview, Malian political consultant, Bamako, August 2013.

¹¹² MINUSMA provided logistical resources to the government to transport participants from the north or from refugee camps in neighbouring countries. Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher specialising on northern Mali, November 2013.

¹¹³ The discussions were lively. Many participants complained of the insufficient transfer of resources by the government to regional authorities. Others stressed the inadequate attention given to developing skills and institutions. After three days of meetings, the government promised to relaunch the decentralisation program. "Recommandations des Etats généraux de la décentralisation", undated document.

¹¹⁴ "Assises nationales sur le Nord. Termes de références", ministry of national reconciliation and development of the northern regions, October 2013.

¹¹⁵ A regional forum was held in Gao on 30 November and 1 December 2013 in the presence of Sada Samaké, internal security minister, and Malik Alhousseiny, minister with special responsibility for decentralisation and originally from Gao.

take it to the rest of the country.¹¹⁶ He also intends to deal with the specific issues in the north in conjunction with the problems of governance and development faced by the whole country. The two national conferences held in Bamako were an interesting attempt to begin negotiations without leading to a political showdown between the government and the armed groups. Civil society organisations, particularly those in the north, also took part in the debates.¹¹⁷

However, there are two major sets of problems with the government plan. Some of Mali's partners are concerned about the haste with which these meetings have taken place.¹¹⁸ Such national conferences have been organised in Mali before on several occasions but their impact has been very weak because of a lack of political will.¹¹⁹ An assessment of the two national conferences gives a strong sense of "déjà vu".¹²⁰ The government must persuade its partners and the general public that, unlike its predecessors, it will turn words into action.¹²¹

Another problem is that the government's desire to make quick progress has led it to steer the process entirely from Bamako. It adopted a rigid attitude towards the timetable and did not seek a genuine dialogue with groups that were proposing alternatives to its plans.¹²² The president set the agenda for the discussions: he affirmed at his inauguration that "everything is negotiable except for autonomy and independence" and he imposed decentralisation as the main institutional response to the

¹¹⁶ Meetings of the Ouagadougou agreement monitoring and evaluation committee, as well as the conferences on the north, are held in Bamako. The government itself defined the terms of reference of these meetings and sought funding, but no advice, from international partners. The president and his foreign minister insist on holding negotiations in Mali and no longer abroad. Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Dakar, October 2013.

¹¹⁷ For example, the Collective of Foreign Nationals in the Kidal Region (COREK) and the Azawad Civil Society Organisation (OSCA). The presence of such organisations provides two major advantages. First, it helps northern communities who do not necessarily support the armed groups to communicate their specific demands. Secondly, it shows that taking up arms is not the only way to obtain a seat at the negotiating table, a way of breaking the habit of only rewarding those who resort to violence.

¹¹⁸ There is some regret at the confusion and precipitation associated with the conference on decentralisation. Many observers have commented on the limits of decentralisation in Mali and that these three days could hardly make a decisive contribution to the debate. On the positive side, the conference encouraged civil society to set out its demands. It did so in a rushed and inexact manner but the meeting consolidated its role in future negotiations. Crisis Group telephone interview, member of COREK, October 2013.

¹¹⁹ In 2005, Bamako hosted the conference on security and peace in Mali, which hardly made any contribution to preventing the resurgence of armed groups or addressing problems in the security forces. In 2008, President ATT launched the Ten-Year Development Program for the Northern Mali Regions (PDDRN). In 2013, President IBK launched the Accelerated Development Program for Northern Regions (PDARN).

¹²⁰ The summary produced at the end of these two major national meetings, only a few pages long, was short and relatively insignificant. See "Recommandations des Etats généraux de la décentralisation", national reconciliation ministry, November 2013. In retrospect, some observers view them as part of a communications strategy that allowed the government to take control of the dialogue and include groups that are either close or loyal to it. Such criticism is exaggerated but not unfounded. Crisis Group telephone interview, mediation expert, November 2013.

¹²¹ Diplomats are concerned about the inability to learn lessons from past failures. They also regret the continued absence of a genuine action plan for the north. Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Dakar, October 2013.

¹²² The government's selection of regional representatives for the national conferences provoked demonstrations in Ménaka and Gao in early November. See "Marche de protestation à Ménaka", *Le Républicain*, 6 November 2013.

crisis.¹²³ The Ouagadougou agreement set a deadline of 60 days after the formation of the government to open inclusive peace talks with “all northern communities” in order to address “administrative and institutional organisation of the north”. This has expired and it is difficult to see how these discussions can take place given that the national conferences have already endorsed the new government’s policies.¹²⁴

President IBK and his government have taken responsibility for promoting national dialogue. However, their monopolisation of the process may turn it into only a semblance of dialogue. The priority given to decentralisation has not left room for serious discussion of other options to redefine relations between the northern regions and central government. Without prejudging the choices taken by Mali, other institutional arrangements, such as federalism and even a form of regional autonomy strengthened by the election of governors, might be worth discussing. The national and regional conferences were a step in the right direction but they are no substitute for genuine and open peace talks on the proposed reforms, involving all northern communities and the armed groups that have remained excluded.

B. *Continued Negotiations with the Armed Groups*

After his election, President IBK was determined to regain control of the negotiations and transfer them from Ouagadougou to Bamako. The government’s wish to continue the dialogue on Malian territory was understandable but it could have shown greater flexibility by choosing a town in the north as the venue for future meetings and by not imposing its own agenda on negotiations.¹²⁵ Moreover, the new government manipulated rivalries within the armed movements to weaken them and include, often on a clientelistic basis, the leaders of groups it considered it could “bring back”.¹²⁶ This accentuated tensions and provoked uproar within the movements.¹²⁷

¹²³ Since his 19 September 2013 inaugural speech, President IBK has repeated this on several occasions. For example, when opening the conference on the north in Bamako on 1 November, he said “except for autonomy, it is independence. Everything is negotiable within the framework of a Mali, an indivisible Mali”. See “Une nouvelle main tendue du président malien aux rebelles touareg”, RFI, 1 November 2013. In an interview with Alakhbar, a Mauritanian media company, the foreign minister said that, at their meeting in Bamako on 15 September, President IBK told armed groups that he would not cross three red lines: respect for Mali’s territorial integrity, respect for the principle of secularism and the contribution to sub-regional stability. The third of these red lines is aimed at preventing specific demands from creating protest movements in neighbouring countries. Interview with Zahabi Ould Sidi Mohamed, Alakhbarnews, <http://fr.alakhbar.info>, 9 October 2013.

¹²⁴ See “Accord préliminaire ...”, *op. cit.*

¹²⁵ Some armed group leaders refused to attend discussions held in Bamako, symbol of the south’s authority. The split between those who accepted and those who refused intensified internal tension and distrust. It sidelines the most influential interlocutors in the armed groups who are precisely those who still refuse to travel south. Crisis Group telephone interview, technical expert present at meetings with the armed groups in Ouagadougou, November 2013.

¹²⁶ Some Malian political advisers believe it is necessary “to bring back those among the HCUA and the MNLA who can be brought back”. Crisis Group interview, project director in Kidal, Bamako, August 2013. However, other diplomats deplore that the process is being conducted on a clientelistic basis, with money offered to those northern elites who support the government. Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher specialising on northern Mali, November 2013.

¹²⁷ In mid-September, President IBK held a first pre-meeting in Bamako with representatives of the armed groups. However, participants were accused of starting direct negotiations without a mandate from their organisations. The MNLA vice president, Mohamed Djéri Maïga, had hard words to say about the movement’s president, Bilal ag Cherif, whom he accused of selling out Azawad by supporting the nomination of Mohamed ag Ibrahim Assaleh as MNLA representative on the moni-

On 26 September, the main armed movements issued a joint statement suspending their participation in the Ouagadougou process. They criticised the government for not complying with the provisions of the agreement concerning prisoners of war.¹²⁸ On 5 October, they rejoined the process after the president imposed his will on the government and judges and insisted on releasing prisoners detained in Bamako.¹²⁹ Despite this gesture, the MNLA, meeting in Ouagadougou on 11-13 October, rejected the government's timetable for negotiations and elections.¹³⁰ The MAA, for its part, met in Ouagadougou on 22-23 October, made organisational changes that indicated major internal tensions¹³¹ and also rejected the government's timetable.¹³²

The HCUA had a more ambiguous attitude to the new government. At the end of October, the RPM officially registered three of its members as its candidates in the legislative elections.¹³³ On 29 October, the Malian judiciary cancelled arrest warrants against four Tuareg leaders, two of whom were HCUA members and RPM candidates.¹³⁴ However, the movement's president, Alghabas ag Intalla, parliamentarian

toring and evaluation committee. See "Bilal ag Achérif fuit ses responsabilités", *toumastpress.com*, 20 September 2013. Meanwhile, Ould Ghalem, leader of the MAA's military wing, disowned the initiative taken by the Arab chiefs who attended the meeting in Bamako. He denounced the marginalisation of Ould Siddat, the movement's assistant general secretary, who travelled to Bamako but was prevented from participating in the negotiations. Crisis Group telephone interview, Malian Arab resident, Dakar, October 2013.

¹²⁸ Joint statement by Mossa ag Attaher (MNLA), Boubacar Taleb (MAA) and Ahmada ag Bibi (HCUA), *siwel.info*, 27 September 2013.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Malian judge, Bamako, August and October 2013 and "Libération de 23 criminels du MNLA: Daniel Tessougue va-t-il démissionner?", *L'indicateur du renouveau*, 4 October 2013. Despite protests by the chief public prosecutor, IBK's decision to release the prisoners was consistent with the commitments made by the transitional government in the Ouagadougou agreement. For more on the tensions between justice and reconciliation in Mali, see Section V of this report, particularly Sub-Section D.

¹³⁰ The movement reviewed its internal structure and replaced its delegates on the Ouagadougou agreement monitoring and evaluation committee, whom it accused of cooperating with Bamako. Mohamed Djéri Maïga replaced Mohamed ag Ibrahim Assaleh. On 19 October, the latter announced he had suspended his participation in the MNLA. Moreover, an MNLA member who wanted to stand as candidate for Kidal was discouraged from doing so by the movement's decision-making bodies. The MNLA presented no candidates at the 2013 legislative elections. Crisis Group telephone interview, member of COREK, October 2013.

¹³¹ The deputy secretary general, Ould Sidatt, announced he was replacing Mohamed Ould Sidi Mohamed, the founder of the movement, who was relieved of his duties. See "Les contradictions du mouvement arabe de l'Azawad divisé", *Fasozine.com*, 24 October 2013 and Crisis Group telephone interview, Malian Arab resident, October 2013.

¹³² Although the MAA has rejected the timetable proposed by the government since Ouagadougou, other Arab leaders, such as Mohamed Ould Mataly, RPM candidate for Bourem circle in the legislative elections, attended the national conference on the north on behalf of the MAA. "Assises pour la réconciliation: les Maliens veulent se donner les moyens de la paix", *RFI*, 2 November 2013.

¹³³ The two elected RPM candidates, who are also HCUA members, are Mohamed ag Intallah and Ahmada ag Bibi. Mohamed ag Intallah is the oldest son of the Aménokal of the Kel Adagh, former parliamentarian for the ADEMA representing Tin Essako, RPM candidate in 2013 and reportedly close to the MNLA in 2012. Ahmada ag Bibi was also parliamentarian for Abeibara, a former spokesman for the 23 May Movement rebels and a negotiator for Ansar Dine in Algiers in 2012. The third member of the HCUA who stood as a candidate for the RPM, Inawelène ag Ahmed, a former customs officer who some sources say is close to Iyad ag Ghali, lost in the first round in Kidal. Crisis Group telephone interview, member of COREK, November 2013.

¹³⁴ Three were HCUA members (Alghabas and Mohamed ag Intallah, Ahmada ag Bibi) and one was an MNLA member (Mohamed ag Ibrahim Assaleh). The government imposed this decision on senior judges, who were extremely hostile to the idea. "Le procureur général Daniel Tessougé exaspéré

for Kidal, did not stand as a candidate in the legislative elections and the movement still favours autonomy for Azawad. In early November, while the government was organising the northern conference, the HCUA, MNLA and MAA met in Ouagadougou and planned to merge their organisations after a 45-day consultation with their members.¹³⁵ The proposal aimed to strengthen their position vis-à-vis Bamako but divided militants, especially in the MNLA, which seemed on the verge of breaking up.¹³⁶ The movements had still not merged by the start of 2014.

For the moment, it appears there is deadlock. The 60-day period at the end of which the government was due to organise inclusive peace talks expired in early November. The monitoring and evaluation committee created by the Ouagadougou agreement has not met since October.¹³⁷ President IBK no longer displays the openness that he showed in September. In the corridors at the December 2013 France-Africa summit in Paris, IBK indicated his irritation at external pressure to negotiate with the armed groups.¹³⁸ In some quarters, it was anticipated that he would soften his position after the favourable results in the legislative elections. However, on a visit to Kayes, he maintained a tough line towards the armed groups.¹³⁹

The government wants to prevent the discussions becoming another official confrontation with the armed groups, as happened during the Ouagadougou talks. It prefers to pursue a dialogue on its own terms using national and regional conferences. Meanwhile, it is reestablishing clientelistic links with some northern Tuareg elites through informal contacts outside the framework created by the Ouagadougou agreement.¹⁴⁰ This revives the governance system that prevailed under preceding re-

après la libération des prisonniers MNLA à Bamako”, *L’indépendant*, 27 September 2013 and Crisis Group interviews, senior judges, Bamako, August and September 2013.

¹³⁵ Attempts at rapprochement had already taken place in August during meetings between the armed groups in Nouakchott. These meetings led to a first joint statement, which emphasised the armed groups’ support for the idea of an independent Azawad, and defused the mounting tension between some northern Arab and Tamasheq communities. Crisis Group interview, Arab representative, Bamako, August 2013 and telephone interview, researcher specialising on northern Mali, November 2013.

¹³⁶ Some groups are keen supporters of the union, others reject it. Even if they are not in complete agreement, the Idnan groups are the most hostile to the merger, which some see as entailing a loss of influence by their group and a betrayal of the rebellion’s ideals. The Ifoghas are generally favourable because they hope to form a more coherent group under their leadership and defend their vision of the local order. Crisis Group telephone interview, academic, specialist on northern Mali, November 2013.

¹³⁷ One snag at these meetings was the issue of disarmament and the future of combatants. Crisis Group telephone interview, Western political adviser, December 2013.

¹³⁸ Interview with President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, *Le Monde*, 4 December 2013.

¹³⁹ See “IBK à Gouna (Kayes): je ne négocierai plus avec les groupes armés”, *Les échos*, 19 December 2013. However, the Malian president blows hot and cold. During New Year celebrations, he said “I only want peace, nothing but peace ... in all Mali’s communities” and launched an appeal to rebel groups to comply with the Ouagadougou agreement. Extract from President IBK’s New Year speech, RFI, 31 December 2013.

¹⁴⁰ As in the past, the most influential members of the Ifogha faction, following the example of Ahmada ag Bibi and Mohamed ag Intallah, are recognised as guarantors of local security and order. This way of governing the Kidal region prevailed for many years but was questioned during President ATT’s second mandate. In fact, the former president chose to support other groups. In 2005, he appointed non-Ifoghas to senior posts in the region, notably Colonel Gamou, as commander of the first military region, and Alhamadou ag Ilyène, who became governor of Kidal. Crisis Group interviews, Kidal regional council member, Bamako, April 2013; Malian diplomat, Niamey, April 2013 and former project director in Kidal, Bamako, August 2013.

gimes. This may help to pacify the north in the short term but will not address the root causes of the crisis. As in the past, some groups may feel disadvantaged by Bamako's policy and take up arms again.¹⁴¹ In order to break this cycle of rebellions, the government should remain true to the Ouagadougou agreement and engage in genuine peace talks that include the greatest possible number of communities, including groups that have already accepted disarmament.

¹⁴¹ Some groups like the Idnan, which formed a significant part of MNLA combatants, seem to have been marginalised by the recomposition of alliances. They are undoubtedly among the most hostile to reestablishing relations with the central government, at least in the current circumstances. In general terms, the MNLA's military wing does not benefit from a gradual return of the central government's authority to Kidal. However, that could change as a result of the discussions on disarmament and the reintegration of combatants, some of whom arrived in Mali at the end of 2011 and have since returned to southern Libya. Others are still in the region, including former leaders of the 23 May Movement, such as Colonel Hassan ag Fagaga. Crisis Group interviews, researcher specialising on northern Mali, Dakar, September 2013 and expert on security issues in the Sahel-Sahara area, Paris, November 2013.

V. State Reform and National Reconciliation: An Opportunity that Should Not Be Missed

The priority that is given to the north must not obscure the need for comprehensive reforms to address the serious governance problems at the heart of the crisis. The entire country, and not only the north, needs stronger government and economic revival. Prioritising immediate stabilisation – a laudable goal in light of current difficulties – should not lead to a return to corrupt and poor governance practices. The new government talks a lot about reform but it must turn words into action. Meanwhile, rather than demand a sudden overhaul of a country where everything seems to be under construction, Mali's partners should help the government prioritise and stagger its decisions. There has rarely been such a good opportunity for reform and it should not be missed.

A. Decentralising and Bringing Public Services Closer to the People

Decentralisation is the priority policy of the government and its partners, not only to respond to the sense of marginalisation in the north but also to undertake a broader governance reform.¹⁴² The October national conferences reviewed the decentralisation policies since 1999. They noted, in particular, the insufficient transfer of resources by the government to the regions, the need to develop regional government and to re-evaluate the role of traditional authorities, especially with regard to dialogue and reconciliation.

However, the government must tread carefully when implementing decentralisation. Devolution of prerogatives and resources to regional authorities often creates fierce local power struggles. Communities have not always developed ways of ensuring that elections are peaceful. Decentralisation sometimes radicalises community demands and increases violent tensions over territorial boundaries.¹⁴³ It is a useful tool but its capacity to relieve intercommunal tensions in the north remains to be seen.

The main issue at stake in the decentralisation debate is provision of public services and resources to communities. The government must prioritise the resumption of basic social services, especially education and health.¹⁴⁴ Despite government state-

¹⁴² When opening the national conference, President IBK said he saw decentralisation as a way of “providing definitive responses to the frustrations that fuel the irredentism of our Tuareg brothers”. See “Etats généraux de la décentralisation au Mali: IBK veut répondre aux ‘frustrations des Touaregs’”, RFI, 22 October 2013.

¹⁴³ Charles Grémont showed how, at the end of the 1990s, decentralisation policies intensified territorial rivalries among northern Mali's Tuareg societies. Charles Grémont, “Villages and crossroads. Changing Territorialities among the Tuareg of northern Mali”, in James McDougall & Judith Scheele, *Saharan Frontiers* (Bloomington, 2012). The former Tuareg military leader, Ibrahim ag Bahanga, began his career as a rebel at the end of the 1990s by manipulating a conflict over the delimitation of borders between communes in the Gao and Kidal regions. Crisis Group interview, researcher specialising on northern Mali, Dakar, September 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Jihadi groups also understood the importance of providing essential services in occupied towns. For example, a humanitarian worker who stayed in Gao said: “Under the Islamists, there was no incident that required a humanitarian response; they had an extraordinary security capacity. No more cattle thefts, no more injustice The Islamists were furious with the wealthy, they took the side of the poor”. He warned of what could happen if the government does not address these questions: “If people start to steal again and if there is no justice, the public will wonder. Local people talk about it on the local radio stations: the Islamists provided security”. Crisis Group interview, Gao, August 2013.

ments, its presence in the north is still weak and too often associated with the army and gendarmes and not enough with nurses and teachers. Deploying resources and personnel will not be enough; it is also crucial to restore public confidence in the government's representatives and public services.¹⁴⁵

B. *Ending Impunity in the Fight against Corruption*

At his 4 September 2013 inaugural address, President IBK said that “no longer is anyone going to get rich illegally on the back of the Malian people”.¹⁴⁶ His statement echoed warnings made by Mali's partners at a 15 May donor conference in Brussels: international aid will not resume without a meaningful reform of governance and a determined fight against rampant corruption and embezzlement of public funds.¹⁴⁷ This has been said before. Mali's government and its partners have been aware of the disastrous management of public funds in Mali for a long time. For several years now, reports by the auditor general have pointed out the malfunctions of the administration.¹⁴⁸ It remains to be seen to what extent the new president is determined to take effective action.¹⁴⁹

The solution does not so much lie in the development of new institutions but rather in the enforcement of existing mechanisms, which have been paralysed by a lack of political will and the overwhelming impunity enjoyed by corrupt officials. The president needs to give fresh impetus to this fight. The government must let justice take its course.¹⁵⁰ It must also have realistic objectives: nobody is expecting corruption to disappear overnight but the first significant prosecutions should take place

¹⁴⁵ For example, in some places in the north, it is not only the sub-prefects who cannot go to work without an army escort, but also health service staff appointed by Bamako and whose legitimacy is disputed. Crisis Group interview, humanitarian worker whose organisation operates in northern Mali, Dakar, November 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Inaugural speech, President IBK, www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3yaA2FihYs.

¹⁴⁷ Joint Chairs' Conclusions, Donor Conference for Development in Mali “Together for a new Mali”, Brussels, 15 May 2013, <http://donor-conference-mali.eu>.

¹⁴⁸ In the conclusions of his annual report for 2009, the auditor general estimates that the government lost close to CFA 112.37 billion (about €171.3) in 22 structures. In the 2011 annual report, he wrote that “the government is purely and simply fleeced and robbed”. “Rapport annuel du vérificateur général 2009 et 2011”, www.bvg-mali.org. The auditor general position was created in 2003 and its mission is to “evaluate public policies by auditing the performance and quality of public services and agencies and particularly development programs and projects”. Extract from the 25 August 2003 law creating the position of auditor general. The 8 February 2012 law extended its remit to include the procedure for judicial assignments. Crisis Group interview, former member of the auditor general's office, Bamako, April 2013.

¹⁴⁹ The arrest, on 27 December 2013, of the PMU-Mali's director, whose management was questioned by the auditor general's most recent report, showed the government's willingness to take action against corruption and poor governance. It remains to be seen whether these efforts will be sustained in the future.

¹⁵⁰ For an example of these pressures, see “Rapport annuel du vérificateur ...”, op. cit. The government referred recent reports on the management of public agencies to the judiciary. Interview with Cheikh O. Diarra, national reconciliation minister, TV5-Monde, 10 November 2013. The mines minister's decision to audit contracts signed by the previous government is another positive sign. However, such statements are fairly typical of governments at the beginning of their term; these initiatives must now become a long-term policy. The former auditor general said, “since the post of auditor general was created, we have referred a good number of cases to the prosecutor responsible for economic affairs. We have heard nothing more about them, either about the amounts recovered or the punishments handed down”. Interview with Sidi Sosso Diarra, *Jeune Afrique*, 28 June 2011.

soon. In addition, prosecutions must not only target opponents of the current government or risk being seen as political manipulation by the government.

Responsibility for the fight against corruption does not only lie with the Malian authorities. International partners want to introduce new mechanisms to guarantee transparency in the use of international funds allocated to Mali.¹⁵¹ The technical procedures contemplated are not useless but they ignore the responsibility of donors themselves in weakening governance in Mali.¹⁵² The macroeconomic framework that forms the basis of development policies has, for example, led to the production by development agencies of “fictional reports” on the state of the economy and society. These reports facilitate the disbursement of aid but are often disconnected from the reality on the ground and underestimate the extent to which foreign aid is embezzled.¹⁵³ It would be useful to conduct a hard-hitting review of why the government and its partners have maintained the illusion of Mali as a model country.

C. Undertaking Security Sector Reform

The 2012 crisis showed the need for an overhaul of the organisation and mission of the Malian army.¹⁵⁴ The urgency to secure the north should not detract from the need for wide-ranging reform of the armed forces.¹⁵⁵ Such reform should have two objectives: reconstructing an efficient security apparatus capable of protecting the national territory and guaranteeing the democratic and non-political character of the army.

After the junta episode, it is vital to rebuild an effective and respected chain of command while reducing internal divisions. The security forces must also be depoliticised – the junta showed that they have a tendency to interfere in politics and economics. For one thing, the government could review, without necessarily banning, the practice of appointing senior army officers to senior positions in local government and national ministries.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Pascal Canfin, French development minister, proposed the creation of a website allowing Malians to fight corruption by reporting problems with the implementation of development projects funded by France. This is an interesting initiative but it perhaps overestimates the access of a large majority of the population in the north to communications networks, including mobile phones. See “La France lance une opération transparence sur son aide au Mali”, RFI, 25 September 2013.

¹⁵² Structural adjustment policies in the 1990s cut the number of civil servants by one fifth, which contributed to its ageing and demoralisation. The Malian elites undoubtedly bear some responsibility for the country’s failure but those who formulated and promoted aid policies since Mali’s democratisation are also partly to blame. For a more detailed analysis of the Malian case, see Isaline Bergamaschi, “L’agenda de Paris pour l’efficacité de l’aide”, *Afrique contemporaine*, no. 223-224 (Paris, 2007), pp. 219-249.

¹⁵³ See Boris Samuel’s analyses of Mauritania and Burkina Faso, which are also very relevant to Mali. Boris Samuel, “Calcul macroéconomique et modes de gouvernement: les cas de la Mauritanie et du Burkina Faso”, *Politique africaine*, no. 124 (Paris, 2011), pp. 101-126. Today, Mali’s partners denounce the level of corruption and poor governance under President ATT, but during his rule the country received U.S. aid under the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which was, in theory, allocated according to rigorous good governance criteria. In February 2012, a few weeks before hostilities commenced in the north, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which administered the MCA, published an article entitled “Prosperity takes root in Mali”. It is testimony to the astounding discrepancy between the donors’ assessment and the reality on the ground, www.mcc.gov.

¹⁵⁴ See Crisis Group Report, *Mali: Security, Dialogue and Meaningful Reform*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁵⁶ The fact that the majority of governors and prefects in the north are army officers is perhaps not the best way for the government to restore its legitimacy and popularity among populations who

The other priority is to determine the future of the combatants of the armed groups, some of whom were previously members of the Malian armed forces. The authorities and, in particular, the armed forces are hostile to the integration of combatants along the lines of previous agreements.¹⁵⁷ However, the longer the uncertainty on this issue, the greater the risk of violent incidents. Combatants should be provided with choices that will reduce their frustration and the likelihood that they will join the ranks of the already worrying number of criminal or more radical groups.¹⁵⁸ There are few examples of completely successful reintegration programs in the sub-region but the experience in Sierra Leone and Niger might be a useful reference.¹⁵⁹

Decisions on what to do with the combatants are inseparable from the task of developing a more long-term vision for security and economic development in northern Mali. Everybody seems to agree with the idea that recruitment procedures and missions should be tailored to the specific challenges faced by the security forces. However, many questions remain: should members of the security forces be recruited from the area they are supposed to protect? What reintegration options can be offered to combatants who do not join the security forces? How can the government build trust between the security forces and local communities? Should priority be given to the fight against terrorism, crime or drug trafficking? Resolving these questions will require more than a few months but the government and its partners must reduce uncertainty by disclosing their plans.

The government must not neglect the fight against crime on the roads, which hinders economic activity and poisons communal relations in the north, because international actors believe the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking is more important. While there are links between them, criminal and jihadi networks are two different issues. Neutralising a jihadi unit is a different task than dismantling a drug trafficking network or dealing with “road cutters”. The Malian security forces must be trained to address all these different challenges and not only those that Western partners see as priorities.¹⁶⁰

The government can count on support from its partners, especially the European Union Training Mission (EUTM), as it sets about the task of reform. Created in Jan-

feel abandoned and marginalised. Crisis Group interview, member of the Malian civil service, Bamako, August 2013.

¹⁵⁷ They also reject the idea of reintegrating Tuareg and Arab combatants who deserted during the crisis and, more generally, all other irregular combatants. Crisis Group interviews, senior officers of the Malian army, Bamako, August 2013. Cancellation of the November meeting of the Ouagadougou agreement monitoring and evaluation committee was largely due to the tension between the government and the MNLA on the issue of joint patrol units. Crisis Group interview, mediation specialist, Paris, November 2013.

¹⁵⁸ As the special representative of the UN Secretary-General, Bert Koenders, indicated, MINUSMA’s demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) program experts can contribute with their experience. Methods tried in other countries, notably in Niger, where locally recruited unarmed municipal police forces are deployed, could be tried in Mali. However, there is no experience that can easily be applied to northern Mali. “Rebuilding Mali’s Future”, lecture by Bert Koenders, International Peace Institute, New York, 18 October 2013.

¹⁵⁹ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°208, *Niger: Another Weak Link in the Sahel*, 19 September 2013, p. 31. In Mauritania, the government has awarded retired army personnel a monopoly on the private security sector. Such an arrangement could provide an honourable exit for officers who lost their jobs due to the most recent rebellion. Crisis Group interview, researcher specialising on Mauritania, Dakar, December 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Crisis Group interviews, member of the forum for dialogue, Gao, August 2013 and researcher specialising on northern Mali, Dakar, September 2013.

January 2013, this mission initially focused on training four Malian combat battalions. It involves the secondment of military advisers to the general staff, but the EUTM's role is evolving toward providing support for a more ambitious reform of the Malian military.¹⁶¹ This project is undoubtedly welcome but it involves painful choices if the army is to adapt its personnel, deployment and training programs to new missions. Some would prefer to postpone these reforms to give the government time to restore its authority over the security forces.¹⁶² Others feel that the government should seize the opportunity provided by the availability of funds and the new government's legitimacy.¹⁶³

Security sector reform must also involve the police force, the national guard and the gendarmerie, in particular because the government must strengthen the police rather than continue using the army to maintain law and order in northern towns.¹⁶⁴ It is also important to increase efforts to fight against organised crime, including drug trafficking. This activity has weakened the state and penetrated senior levels of the government but the fight against terrorism has so far been prioritised.¹⁶⁵

Finally, Mali should fully participate in current efforts to build a regional security architecture. In the past, some neighbours saw the country as the weak link in regional security.¹⁶⁶ It should now participate in the relaunch of regional cooperation initiatives on security. However, this is a difficult task: although everyone agrees that threats are cross-border, there is strong mutual distrust between the countries concerned.¹⁶⁷ Some initiatives, such as the AU-backed "Nouakchott process", have managed to bring together representatives from security services in the sub-region and elsewhere.¹⁶⁸ They deserve to be pursued and encouraged.

¹⁶¹ The aim is to encourage the Malian authorities to produce a document similar to France's "white paper on defence". The Malian army general staff has so far welcomed this initiative but there is a risk of complications further down the line when the jobs and careers of military personnel are under review. Crisis Group interview, senior Western officer, Bamako, August 2013. Relations between the Malian and French armies are mostly good, but they could deteriorate because some Malian officers believe some of their French counterparts sympathise with the MNLA. Crisis Group interviews, Malian army officers, Bamako, August 2013.

¹⁶² Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Bamako, August 2013.

¹⁶³ Crisis Group interview, senior Western officer, Bamako, August 2013.

¹⁶⁴ Forces better equipped for crowd control of urban demonstrations could perhaps have avoided the 28 November 2013 incidents when the army opened fire on civilians protesting at the prime minister's visit to Kidal.

¹⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Western political adviser, Bamako, August 2013.

¹⁶⁶ Mauritania and Algeria believed Mali to be particularly reluctant to deal with the problem of the establishment of jihadi groups on its territory. Crisis Group interviews, specialists on Mauritania and Algeria, December 2013.

¹⁶⁷ Morocco's announcement that it would train Malian imams and strengthen links with Bamako worries Algeria, which disapproves of its rival playing a role in a region it believes to be in its sphere of influence. Northern Mali could become the scene of an indirect struggle between the two countries. Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ In March 2013, the "Nouakchott process" was attended by representatives of the security services of Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, members of the Joint Operational General Staff Committee (CEMOC) and observers from China, the U.S., France, the UK and Russia. This first meeting aimed at "the operationalisation of the African peace and security architecture" in the Sahel-Saharan region. Crisis Group interview, African Union political adviser, Bamako, August 2013 and "Sahel: pour une approche globale", French Senate proceedings, senat.fr.

D. *Harmonising Reconciliation and Justice*

In the spring of 2013, the National Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation was appointed in accordance with the transition roadmap.¹⁶⁹ It has so far done very little and its role in negotiations is controversial.¹⁷⁰ The government has made it clear that it intends to review the commission's composition and mandate. In early November, Minister Diarra announced the creation of a new commission, to be appointed for three years and given the task of establishing the truth about crimes committed in the north since 1963.¹⁷¹

This decision is welcome. However, similar experiences in the sub-region have not been very conclusive. The government and its partners should avoid setting up an expensive agency that is disconnected from what is happening on the ground. They should also resist the temptation to impose an artificial reconciliation on the country. They should adopt a long-term approach that involves providing support for communities so that they can define how to coexist peacefully. This will require the government to create the conditions for collective local dialogue and ensure that local forums are not controlled by any one community or group.¹⁷² Northern societies, particularly the Tuareg, need to do more than redefine their relations with the state. They must also find a more peaceful way of addressing their many internal divisions.

This requires first establishing and recognising the truth about the past violence that fuels resentment.¹⁷³ Crimes have remained unpunished and have never been officially recognised. The government's decision to go back as far as the first Tuareg revolt in 1963 is therefore particularly welcome even though it has not yet defined how this process will be conducted in practice.¹⁷⁴

However, in Mali, as elsewhere, the need for dialogue and reconciliation sometimes clashes with the need for justice. To facilitate negotiations with the armed groups, the government cancelled arrest warrants in October, provoking the anger of Malian judges. Some felt that this decision was necessary and an indication of the new government's determination to promote dialogue even if this meant making unpopular decisions. However, others regretted what they perceived as a selective measure that was perhaps influenced by electoral considerations.¹⁷⁵ In general, the government should avoid promoting a two-tiered justice system, which spares those

¹⁶⁹ See "Feuille de route pour la transition, cabinet du Premier ministre, République du Mali", January 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Malian experts responsible for negotiating agreements with northern rebellions since the 1990s have questioned the commission's role, saying it encroaches on their remit, lacks negotiating experience and does not understand technical issues. Crisis Group interview, senior Malian official originally from the north, Bamako, August 2013.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Cheikh Oumar Diarra, *op. cit.* The minister reiterated his intention at the council of ministers on 13 December 2013. "Compte rendu du Conseil des ministres du 13 décembre 2013", *op. cit.*

¹⁷² The government must avoid entrusting reconciliation tasks exclusively to the traditional authorities on the grounds that they are skilful at peacemaking. The crisis is partly due to conflict between the generations caused by the way in which traditional chiefs control resources and power. Crisis Group interview, representative of a Malian anti-slavery NGO, Bamako, August 2013.

¹⁷³ See Crisis Group report, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁴ Commenting on the South African model, Minister Diarra admitted the possibility of an amnesty but only after establishing the truth. Interview with Cheikh Oumar Diarra, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁵ The measure worried two candidates in particular, Mohamed ag Intallah and Ahmada ag Bibi, but they were elected shortly afterwards in the first round of the legislative elections. "Mali: levée des mandats d'arrêt contre quatre responsables touareg", RFI, 27 October 2013.

who support the government and pursues those who oppose it. It may be necessary to make concessions to promote dialogue but the general impunity that has been partly responsible for the current crisis must end.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ It is regrettable that not one signatory of the Ouagadougou agreement is calling for the implementation of Article 18, which provides for the creation of an international commission of inquiry as soon as possible. Moreover, the International Criminal Court (ICC) decided to look into the Malian crisis in January 2013. However, during her October 2013 visit to Mali, the prosecutor recognised that ten months later, it had still not identified suspects. See “La CPI n’a pour l’instant identifié aucun suspect de crime de guerre”, *Jeune Afrique*, 1 November 2013.

VI. Conclusion

The new government and its partners now face the fundamental choice of defining the state and nation they want for Mali. Faced with this daunting task and the urgency of restoring short-term security, there is a strong temptation to tolerate the return of old practices and postpone more substantial government reforms. Clientelism and patronage may help bring short-term peace between the central government and some of the northern elites. Some of Mali's partners are tempted to tolerate these practices on the grounds of political realism and because they do not believe it is possible to reform the government along the lines so often proclaimed. However, reform is the only key to lasting stability and a genuine resolution of the crisis.

Mali's leaders must resolutely break with past practices, not only in words but also in deeds. The government must involve all communities in the reconstruction of Mali, not simply by continuing current efforts to encourage them to express themselves publicly, but by associating them to political decision-making mechanisms. The international community should continue its efforts in Mali and recognise its responsibility in the failures of past development cooperation policies. It should also tell the government that establishing security in the short term will not be enough to persuade anyone to tolerate a return to corrupt and clientelistic practices. Finally, everybody needs to understand that finding a solution to the crisis is a long-term task that did not end with the organisation of legislative elections.

Dakar/Brussels, 10 January 2014

Appendix A: Map of Mali



Appendix B: Glossary

ACRT	Alliance des communautés de la région de Tombouctou, Alliance of Communities in the Timbuktu Region
ADEMA	Alliance pour la démocratie au Mali, Alliance for Democracy in Mali
AREN	Association pour la redynamisation de l'élevage au Niger, Association for the Revival of Livestock Farming in Niger
ATT	Amadou Toumani Touré
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
BCEAO	Central Bank of West African States
CEMOC	Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint, Joint Operational General Staff Committee
CMFPR	Coordination des mouvements et forces patriotiques de résistance, Coordination of Patriotic Resistance Movements and Forces
COPA	Collectif des patriotes, Patriots' Collective
COREK	Collectif des ressortissants de la région de Kidal, Collective of Residents in the Kidal Region
CRA	Cercle de réflexion et d'action, Reflection and Action Circle
CTEA	Conseil transitoire de l'Etat de l'Azawad, Azawad Transitional Council
DDR	Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ESSEC	École supérieure des sciences économiques et commerciales, Economics and Business School
ETIA	Échelon tactique interarmes, Joint Services Tactical Group
EU	European Union
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FACO	Force armée contre l'occupation, Armed Force Against Occupation
FAMA	Forces armées maliennes, Malian Armed Forces
FIDH	International Federation for Human Rights
FLN	Front de libération nationale, National Liberation Front
FPLA	Front patriotique de libération de l'Azawad, Patriotic Front for the Liberation of Azawad
FPR	Forces patriotiques de résistance, Patriotic Forces of Resistance
HCIM	Haut Conseil islamique du Mali, High Islamic Council of Mali
HCUA	Haut Conseil de l'unité de l'Azawad, High Council for the Unity of Azawad
IBK	Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta
ICC	International Criminal Court
MAA	Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad, Arab Movement of Azawad
MIA	Mouvement islamique de l'Azawad, Islamic Movement of Azawad
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali
Misma	African-Led International Support Mission to Mali
MNLA	Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad, National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest, Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
PARENA	Parti pour la renaissance nationale, National Renaissance Party
PDARN	Programme pour le développement accéléré des régions du Nord, Accelerated Development Program for Northern Regions

PDDRN	Programme de développement décennal des régions du Nord, Ten-Year Development Program for Northern Mali Regions
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
ORTM	Office de la radiodiffusion télévision du Mali, Malian Radio and Television Office
OSCA	Organisation de la société civile de l'Azawad, Azawad Civil Society Organisation
RFI	Radio France internationale
RPM	Rassemblement pour le Mali, Rally for Mali
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
URD	Union pour la république et la démocratie, Union for the Republic and Democracy