

Report

African-Led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA): Military ahead of Politics

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Held on 29 January 2013 under the chairmanship of Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, the 20th African Union Ordinary Session in Addis Ababa conducted a pledging conference for the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF). On 13 November 2012, the AU Peace and Security Council called for the mobilisation of resources to support the MDSF- and ECOWAS-led peace support operation, the International Support Mission for Mali (MISMA). Furthermore, UN Security Council Resolution 2071 (2012) established the Trust Fund to support the MDSF, and on 20 December 2012, it authorised AFISMA under Resolution 2085 (2012).

Funding for AFISMA

Attended by the heads of state of Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Senegal and ministers from many countries such as South Africa, Gabon, Morocco, Algeria, Japan, Bahrain as well as representatives of USA, Japan, EU, UN, China, India, Germany, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, Spain, Netherlands and many other countries and partners, the AU and ECOWAS have received pledges of a total of USD 455.53 million in addition to in-kind contributions in training, logistics, weapons and fuel.

The major contributions come from the United States (USD 96 million in addition to USD 8 million that is already in use), Japan (USD 120 million including humanitarian aid), EU (USD 75 million), France (USD 63 million including expenses of its military intervention), AU (USD 50 million), and Germany (USD 20 million). Unusual for GCC countries, Bahrain contributed USD 10 million. African countries contributed only 23 percent of the total amount. Leading African contributors include South Africa (USD 10 million), Ethiopia (USD 5 million), Nigeria (USD 5 million) and Ghana (USD 3 million). Many African countries have also pledged increased troop contributions including Nigeria, Ghana, Chad, Niger, Benin, Burundi, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone. In addition to troop and cash contributions, Equatorial Guinea has also pledged to provide fuel for AFISMA and MDSF.¹

While China contributed only USD 1 million, other countries that contributed modest sums include Netherlands, Australia, Denmark, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Senegal, Guinea, Chad, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, Morocco and Gabon have contributed between USD 0.5-6 million each.²

MISMA to AFISMA

After several reviews, the name of the mission has changed from International Support Mission for Mali (MISMA with 5500 troops) to AFISMA, and also the total troops required have increased, which at this time stands at 8000. Chad has contributed 2250 and ECOWAS has pledged 3300 with a reserve of 500 troops. The required air power remains 280 personnel with 10 helicopter, 4 logistics and reconnaissance airplanes. So far, there are 1318 African troops on the ground. The immediate finance required for 5550 troops is USD 461 million, while the full complement of AFISMA (8000) mission requires USD 959 million.³ This is much less than USD 245 million annual budget of United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) with only 4200 troops and for much less geographic area of Abyei (which is 10,546 km sq. compared to 1,094,999 sq. km). So far while the troop contribution from African countries has reached almost the total troop requirement, the financial pledges only cover half of the total financial resources required.

¹ Conclusions of Donors' Conference for the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF), 29 January 2013, the 20th AU Ordinary Summit in Addis Ababa.

² Self-Note from Conclusions of Donors' Conference for the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF), 29 January 2013, the 20th AU Ordinary Summit in Addis Ababa.

³ ECOWAS Presentation to the Conclusions of Donors' Conference for the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF), 29 January 2013, the 20th AU Ordinary Summit in Addis Ababa.

Surprisingly, the 20th African Union Ordinary Summit has without any reservation endorsed the French intervention in Mali. But why did African leaders appreciate this intervention in Mali and expressed strong reservations in the intervention by France in Côte d'Ivoire's and even condemned that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Libya? To what extent has the French intervention weakened the AU's and ECOWAS's leadership on the Malian crisis? What can we learn from the implications of the French intervention not only on the Malian crisis but also other similar crises? Why do we have serious gaps between early warning and early response mechanisms, as well as between political decision and military capability that the AU and ECOWAS have spent millions of USD for almost a decade?

The Cardinal Sins of the AU and ECOWAS

It should be clarified from the outset that these questions point more toward the failure of the AU and ECOWAS than France's swift intervention which at least in the short-run has averted dangers on Bamako. Nevertheless, French intervention has once again proven that Africa, the AU and ECOWAS are not ready to take on the responsibility of implementing their own decisions which aim at African solutions to African problems. African leaders' weakness in responding effectively to the crisis contravenes the spirit and objectives of the Pan-Africanism that AU would like to celebrate in May 2013. Like the Libyan crisis, Africa's failure to deal with its own problem invited external intervention, and France has done what is within its capacity and interest. AU Standby Forces were under construction for nearly eight years and have conducted exercises for almost ten. Thus, an additional benefit of French intervention is that it exposed the weakness of ECOWAS and the AU in bridging the gaps between early warning and early response, the mismatch between their sluggish political decision-making and deployment capacity. The absence of solid African political leadership and swift capacity to deploy for substitution may delay the resolution of the Malian crisis. Deployment has been postponed a couple of times. What use are standby forces if they are not ready to be deployed? Will AU and ECOWAS Standby Brigades ever be ready for deployment?

The appointment of the president of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaore, as mediator in the Malian crisis was another cardinal failing of ECOWAS that allowed a president that came through a coup to deal with a problem that partially resulted from a coup itself. The recent appointment of the former president of Burundi, Pierre Buyoya, as special representative of the AU Chairperson and Head of Mission of AFISMA may mitigate this failing.⁴

Another critical failing is the stand taken against the instigators of the March 2012 Malian coup, the interference in their work, and the intimidation, manipulation and physical attacks on their transitional leaders. While the AU rejected "the unconstitutional change of government in Mali including seizure of power by force," it failed short of condemning, sanctioning and holding the authors accountable for their deeds. In April 2012, the AU actually requested an "end to the unacceptable interference of the military junta and their civilian supporters in the management of the transition and the effective dissolution of the National Committee for the Recovery of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDRE)."⁵ It called for the sanctioning of individuals interfering and imposing their will on the transitional government.⁶ It also rejected the coups in Mali and Guinea-Bissau though it took a much stronger stand on coup instigators in Guinea-Bissau than on those in Mali.⁷ Moreover, it proposed "additional sanctions against the perpetrators of the coup d'état and their civilian and military supporters, including travel ban, asset freeze and other measures, as provided for by the Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance...In this respect, the [AU PSC] Council

⁴Appointment of Former President Pierre Buyoya as the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission, Head of the African-Led International Support Mission In Mali, Addis Ababa, 30 January 2013, <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/auc-mali-30-01-2013.pdf> (Accessed 2 February 2013).

⁵Assembly of the Union, Nineteenth Ordinary Session 15 - 16 July 2012, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Assembly/AU/Dec.416-449(XIX), Assembly/AU/Decl.1-4(XIX), Assembly/AU/Res.1(XIX), Assembly/AU/Motion.1-2(XIX).

⁶Ibid.

⁷Communiqué on the Situation in Mali, 315th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 23 March 2012, PSC/PR/COMM(CCCXV).

reaffirms the relevant provisions of article 25 of the Charter, which states that authors of unconstitutional changes of government will be liable to prosecution.”⁸ The AU was more strict and clear in its condemnation of the coup in Guinea-Bissau and decided “to show firmness commensurate with the seriousness of the acts committed by the perpetrators of the coup d’état and its consequences for Guinea Bissau, the region and for Africa as a whole.” In defiance of the principles of the AU Constitutive Act and other relevant instruments on unconstitutional changes of government, ECOWAS bestowed immunity to the instigators of the coup. Some of the forces behind the coup carried out under the leadership of Amadou Sanogo first preferred military support to any foreign military intervention. They may have also preferred French military intervention to that of ECOWAS peacekeepers.⁹ The total undermining of constitutional institutions like the Malian courts in Mali compounds was another one of ECOWAS's mistakes that will affect the entire region.

The Alienation of International Terrorists from Local Grievances

Justifiably, the January pledging conference called for a more robust political process initiated by the Malian government and people for a long-term solution to the crisis. The crisis is primarily a political one and as such the long-term solution lays in political resolution not military intervention. Accordingly, responses should target the different elements of the rebel groups. Comprehensive responses to terrorism in this context need to have three pronged strategic interventions. The first intervention is the prevention of violent extremism through the reduction of breeding grounds of terrorism and by denying extremist groups the followers they recruit from poor communities. This can be achieved only by striking the necessary balance between soft-security – such as the eradication of poverty and the provision of education for all – and hard security via military and criminal justice measures. In addition, by way of responding to the roots of extremism, it is important to bring socio-economic development to the agenda. The second strategic intervention is the protection of civilians by respecting and ensuring the respect of human rights and humanitarian norms. Ultimately, a peaceful nation is built on a regime that protects human rights. The third intervention is prosecution that takes into account both deterrence and retribution. Terrorism is a local act with global impact and thus measures should be both local and global. The mismatch between priorities and targets based on national interests for local, national and global actors may also affect the efficacy of counter-terrorism measures.

In this regard, understanding the anatomy of the Azawad rebels is crucial. In a nutshell, rebels in Azawad belong to three major groups: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)¹⁰, and the Movement for Unity, and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA). Their members come from many countries including Niger, Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Libya, Nigeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Somalia, Yemen and Canada.¹¹ Inspired by Al Qaeda ideology, with grievances on the entire international system and determined to make use of terrorism as their weapon, these international elements are ‘nomadic’ terrorists always on the move in search of ungoverned space in failed states to establish a niche in which they can launch their terrorist and criminal activities. Internationally nimble and regionally nomadic, they will try to go elsewhere to create crises in other more vulnerable states if they were to be defeated in one battle. There are reports indicating that Somalia’s *Al Shabaab* may move to the Sahel region to join the insurgency.¹² They exploit state failure to carry out piracy and traffic any items such as drugs and arms to generate funding for their activities. These groups “pose a serious threat to regional and international peace and security and, as such, call for urgent and effective action by the

⁸ Communiqué on the Situation in Guinea-Bissau, 318th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 17 April 2012, PSC/PR/COMM(CCCXVIII).

⁹ Leela Jacinto “Is Mali’s Captain Sanogo losing control of the ship?”, <http://www.france24.com/en/20130116-mali-captain-amadou-sanogo-army-coup-power-france-intervention> (accessed 2 February 2013).

¹⁰ “Diplomat knew Algeria attack leader as his captor, one-eyed ‘Jack’,” Reuters, Washington, USA, 20 January 2013.

¹¹ “Algeria: militants from at least 6 countries”, Reuters, Algiers, Algeria, 20 January 2013.

¹² Katrina Manson and William Wallis, “Fears grow that Islamist defeat in East Africa will spread jihad,” 31 January 2013, www.on.ft.com/U5UGLS (accessed 2 February 2013).

entire international community.”¹³ As Islamist groups who are hell-bent to make use of genuine localised grievances for their Jihadist aims, the best way to address these international terrorist elements is through military measures aided by criminal justice. Consequently, this would require regional and global responses that aim not only at war against terrorism but also prevention of state failure and capacitating states to deliver and democratise.

Interested in imposing its interpretation of the Qur'an on the local population by violent means if necessary, local Islamist groups such as *Ansar Dine* could be easily dealt with through a combination of public engagement in the political process, denying the social base upon which these extreme violent groups thrive, and criminal justice measures that aim to alienate them from their social base. A consequence of the undemocratic nature of states in the Sahel region, with a genuine request for democratic accommodation of the Tuaregs' grievances, the Tuareg insurgency could only be addressed through inclusive political dialogue with the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and autonomy for the population. The best response to the Tuareg rebellion is reform in Bamako.

Putting the military action well ahead of the political, French intervention may delay the political processes, swaying more toward short-term military success. However, with this military advance, rebels and terrorist groups have melted away into the society and the desert. In addition to its undermining effect on African intervention, French intervention will certainly attract more terrorists and complicate African intervention and the conflict on the ground as extremist Islamist groups – particularly AQIM, MUJWA and *Ansar Dine* – will try to depict French intervention as alien and anti-Islamic, and make use of it to attract recruits and funders of terrorism inside and outside of Africa. The intervention also makes the political process more problematic as the military operation sets the tone and the Islamists may gain the upper hand in impeding political progress between Malian rebels with genuine grievances in Azawad and the elite in Bamako. This is the very situation the international elements of the terrorist groups are interested in. By hindering the potential inclusive dialogue between those with genuine governance grievances and the Malian government, the international elements of AQIM, *Ansar Dine* and MUJWA will make use of the intervention to their advantage. They will hold legitimate Tuareg demands hostage. The loser in this case will be Mali and those with legitimate demands. As long as the international terrorist elements in the Azawad movement are not alienated from the local population, the military intervention of regional and international forces and the actions of the Malian Defence and Security Forces will not address the threat of rebellion in Azawad sustainably.

Political Solution: Reform in Bamako and Democracy and Delivery in Azawad

Mali is facing two crises: a crisis of governance in the whole of Mali emanating from the corrupt elite in Bamako, and the Azawad rebellion due to terrorist actions and bad governance of the Tuareg area. Addressing the former could help significantly in dealing with the latter. The absence of any credible institutional resistance against the coup last year indicates the weakness of the military and democratic institutions that are compromised and undermined by criminal business groups, imbecilic military leadership and a self-serving, fragmented and corrupt political elite. The aim of the Malian elite has sadly been reduced to amassing wealth through any means.

Vital intervention in this regard comprises soft intervention – Malian transitional political process that aims at addressing the three different causes and responding to the three interests in the rebel groups and provision of humanitarian aid – and hard intervention through AFISMA and MDSF to provide a secure and stable environment for the soft intervention.

¹³ Assembly of the Union, Nineteenth Ordinary Session, 15-16 July 2012, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Assembly/AU/Dec.416-449(XIX), Assembly/AU/Decl.1-4(XIX), Assembly/AU/Res.1(XIX), Assembly/AU/Motion.1-2(XIX).

With French intervention, the advances at the military front and the delays in the political process create an administrative, political and security vacuum. Aided by an environment facilitating political dialogue, this vacuum could be filled only by the Malians themselves. Malian authorities and MDSF in Bamako need to work on the re-establishment of local administrative units and the mobilisation of the public in denying the international terrorist groups the support they had in the local population, and build and maintain the support of the population. Military intervention is meaningless without a solid political process in Bamako. Bamako has to carry out radical political reform. It needs to build resilient democratic institutions willing and able to maintain civilian control of the armed forces and fight corruption and organised crime. Willing to accommodate diversity, the Malian state structure should grant sufficient political autonomy to Azawad and respond to legitimate demands and deliver public services. The long term stabilisation, reconstruction and development of Azawad will determine the peace and security of Mali but depends on whether change occurs in Bamako – and this remains the duty of the Malians themselves.

The End State of and Challenges for AFISMA

The end state of AFISMA should be clearly stated to ensure its efficacy as well as determine the exit strategy at this stage. The prime tasks ahead of AFISMA are: destroying the military capabilities and blocking the main supply routes of the AQIM and MUJWA, deplete the armed elements of *Ansar Dine*, liberate areas that are yet not free, stabilise and secure those liberated areas and state structures; provide support for the re-establishment of MDSF under democratically elected civilian control; create an environment conducive to a long-term political process; and facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance.

To AFISMA, the challenges will be to strike the balance between the objectives of various actors aiming at nation re-building, peace-building, the participatory inclusive transitional political process, counter-violent extremism, and the interests of regional countries and international actors. These various end states are not necessarily compatible. Sometimes, participatory and inclusive transitional political processes could be contrary to counter violent extremism measures. The interests of regional actors may contradict the wishes of international forces that seek military action and criminal prosecution. Based on its national security interest, Algeria expressed its serious concerns on any military intervention in Mali or the Sahel region. Another serious challenge for AFISMA will be insufficient and unpredictable funding for its operations and fight against organised crime particularly by blocking arm supplies, ammunition, and combat materials in Azawad. Thus, lack of actionable intelligence due to uncooperative local community may hamper its efforts.

Conclusion

The challenges that Mali is facing is not unusual to Malian society. Organised crime, terrorism, violent extremism, lack of effective delivery of public goods, and lack of accommodation of diversity prevail in many African countries and perhaps elsewhere. As long as Azawad hosts groups that can be easily inflamed and manipulated through religion or genuine grievances of marginalisation, it will serve as breeding grounds for violent extremism and rebellion; and as long as governing elites are infiltrated by organised criminals and state institutions are unable or unwilling to perform their constitutional mandates, such extremist movements and revolts may have the chance to resurrect. To ECOWAS, the AU and the UN, the crisis in Mali indicates the need for shift of mission and focus from purely hard security focused on responding to current crisis to building a legitimate democratic state that can deliver. Securitising and democratising Mali requires more resilient democratic states in the Sahel region.

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