

# **INTRODUCTION: POST-GADDAFI REPERCUSSIONS IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA**

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## **1. Introduction**

The areas south of Libya have experienced more than their fair share of conflict and rapid social change. In earlier times, the main routes of trade, commerce and pilgrimage between West African and the Arab Peninsula passed through this region, also once inhabited by mighty warrior empires (see for example Bawuro 1972). However, as the empires along these routes faded away, and international ocean shipping opened up this part of Africa to the forces of global trade and capitalism, the centres of authority that once controlled this region also vanished. What remained was an almost open territory: unwelcoming and hard, but also a place of possibilities and the freedom to roam for those who had mastered the art of survival under such difficult conditions. This was the land of the Tuareg and other semi-nomadic groups who controlled cities and important trading posts such as Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal in contemporary Mali. This is the world of the Sahel and the parts of Western Africa that straddles Libya, and a region that currently includes Southern Algeria, Northern Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania and parts of Northern Nigeria. These are therefore also the countries and areas that have come to experience the full effect of what we define as post-Gaddafi repercussions.

## **2. Gaddafi and the Sahel/West Africa**

How can we speak of such a thing as post-Gaddafi repercussions, may well be asked? A dictator is gone, and not just any dictator, but a source of regional and global instability who used his oil wealth to support all kinds of rebel movements around the world; from trafficking weapons, to the Irish Republican Army (IRA), to establishing training camps for warlords such as Liberia's Charles Taylor and Sierra Leone's Foday Sankoh. Gaddafi was a man who on more than one occasion went to war against Chad to claim the Aozou Strip in the North on the border with Libya (see St John 2011). This is one part of the Gaddafi legacy we do not deny, and we are neither trying to revise his international image. However, we also claim that in his later years Gaddafi's Libya was much less a source of regional instability. In fact, increasingly, it had become not only a bastion of stability in a volatile and unruly region, but also at times a constructive actor in peace agreements in neighbouring countries (for example in the cases of Mali, Niger, and in the troubled relationship between the rulers in Chad and Sudan that includes the issue of Darfur). In the latter case, Gaddafi intervened several times using his influence to moderate the positions taken as the rulers of Chad and Sudan harboured and made use of rebel groups with bases in each other's territory. If not necessarily a peacemaker, Gaddafi and his Libya played a role in bringing some stability to the region, recognised by President Idriss Déby of Chad and his external opponents (for example, Sudan's Bashir), but also by Chadian opponents to Déby who themselves tried to gain Gaddafi's attention (Bøås 2013).

Thus, during his later years in power (particularly after 1995), Gaddafi and Libya went through a marked transition. From being a centre of violent manipulation and subversive actions directed against a series of regimes in the region, Gaddafi gradually started to play a different role, prioritising diplomatic approaches and foreign direct investments (FDI) over his previous military interventions and support for insurgencies. His prominent role in the African Union (AU) attests to this. Regionally it is also vividly illustrated by the relationship between Gaddafi and Idriss Déby of Chad. Even if never intimate or close, they still managed to establish a working relationship as they both had reached the conclusion that they needed each other (ICG 2011). Thus, in the case of Chad, we clearly see the two faces of Gaddafi. The military

approach from the 1970s and 1980s that slowly changed during the 1990s to a softer approach, combining diplomatic measures through negotiations and foreign direct investment. Chad is therefore, Mali apart, the country in the region that has been most significantly affected by Gaddafi's fall and the continued instability in Libya in the aftermath of his death. However, there is not a single country in the region that has completely escaped post-Gaddafi repercussions as his Libya was also a magnet for labour migrants from all over the region, and he pumped much needed FDIs into neighbouring economies.

The fall of Gaddafi and the repeated instability in Libya since his death have changed all of this. Libya is no longer a bastion of stability with comparatively well-controlled borders in a conflict-ridden and volatile regional neighbourhood, as was the case in a relatively coherent state under Gaddafi. Libya has become factionalised around the sub-national structures that existed prior to Italian colonialism; that is, Tripolitania in the northwest, Cyrenaica in the east and Fezzan in the south (see also Wright 2010). Thus, the region may be in the making of becoming a source of instability itself, as Islamist rebels who are fleeing from international intervention in Mali increasingly attempt to regroup in Libya's southern Fezzan region. This not only has a negative effect on peace and reconciliation efforts, but is also creating new regional dynamics.

For example, regional dynamics have clearly posed a new challenge to Déby. Whereas Bashir (his main regional opponent) almost immediately gave his support to the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC) when the rebellion against Gaddafi started in Benghazi, Déby only recognised the NTC after the anti-Gaddafi rebels had captured Tripoli. This was clearly a matter of Déby finally embracing the inescapable reality that whoever wants to rule Chad cannot have hostile relations with its northern neighbour (ICG 2011). However, this attempt at mending ties with the forces of post-Gaddafi Libya does not mean that nothing has changed. The regional dynamic is different after the fall of Gaddafi and the question is how changes in regional patterns of alignment, allegiance and alliance will affect not only the dynamic of conflict in Chad, but also in the region at large. The conflicts in the Sahel and West Africa are of course local (as discussed in detail by Klute, Gaasholt and Whitehouse in this issue), as is the case of all conflict everywhere,<sup>1)</sup> but no local conflict exists in isolation from regional dynamics in this part of the world.

This is something that is vividly obvious when we turn our attention to Mali. Gaddafi's Libya was a magnet for young men seeking employment that was completely lacking in their country of origin. It is estimated that about one million labour migrants from African countries were forced to leave Libya when Gaddafi lost control of Libya (Bøås 2011). These people, mostly young men, returned to their home of origin to almost nothing, and with very little — a situation that was bound to have destabilising effects in itself (see Danjibo in this issue). However, in the case of Mali, returning Tuaregs were also able to bring with them considerable quantities of weapons and ammunition from former army storages that suddenly nobody controlled when the Gaddafi state crumbled (as discussed by Danjibo).

### **3. Post-Gaddafi repercussions and Mali's home-grown 'Desert Blues'**

The French military intervention assisted by troops from Chad and Niger was able to beat back the Islamist rebels in the northern part of Mali relatively easily; however, a number of challenges remain. In military terms, the Islamists are not totally defeated, even if they lost control of the major cities of northern Mali and have experienced casualties that include prominent figures such as the al-Qaeda leader Abou Zeid, in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). They still have the capacity to resist surrender and also to mount counter-attacks, not only in Mali, but also in neighbouring Niger and Mauritania. Thus, whereas recapturing large parts of northern Mali from the Islamists may have been a relatively easy military operation, controlling this vast territory will be much more difficult and time-consuming for the French forces, and not least for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) that is left to police this area as France is scaling down its number of troops on the ground.

It is tempting to compare the current situation to the conflict in Mali in the 1990s, but this crisis is far too complex for such comparisons. The crisis is no longer only local. It has been internationalised through a combination of criminal networks and 'global jihad'. Thus, not only is the conflict in the north far more complex than in the past, but it also has become much more intimately linked to the political manoeuvring in Bamako. During the 1990s, Mali was heralded as a

model for democratisation in Africa. However, the reality on the ground was a far cry from the idealised picture of the 'flames of peace' ignited in Timbuktu on 27 March 1996 as a model for peace, reconciliation and democratic conflict resolution in Africa. On the contrary, the experiences of reform in Mali in the 1990s indicate that conducting combined political democratisation, economic liberalisation and administrative decentralisation in a weak state such as Mali runs the risk of being hijacked by a combination of national elites and regional 'big men'. This is precisely what happened in Mali, and the events in 2012, the military *coup* included (which is analysed in detail by Whitehouse in this issue) are an unintended consequence of this (see also Bøås and Torheim 2013).

Moreover, as pointed out by Gaasholt and Klute in this issue, the current conflict is not only complex but also old; in Mali as elsewhere, the past and the present are connected in parallel as well as overlapping historical trajectories. Northern Mali is originally the homeland of the Tuaregs, a people whose position in the Sahel was turned upside-down by French colonialism. The Tuaregs, who once controlled the inter-Saharan trade routes and saw themselves as 'masters of the desert', became minorities in several colonial states. In Mali this meant that the Tuaregs became a minority group ruled by a population they had previously viewed as inferior and had repeatedly looted. The Tuareg 'problem' is therefore something of a Gordian knot; ever since Mali became an independent state, the Tuaregs have repeatedly rebelled (issues in particular discussed by Gaasholt). The latest uprising, which began in 2006, remained relatively small until late in 2011, when armed Tuaregs who had lived in Libya for years, started returning to Mali following the fall of the Gaddafi regime. The arrival of these rebels gave the uprising new momentum, and yet another Tuareg rebel movement was formed — the Movement for the National Liberation of Azawad (MNLA).

However, what little Tuareg unity may have existed quickly disappeared. As MNLA fighters looted and plundered in the north, and the Malian army took flight and launched the 21 March *coup* in Bamako, other forces stepped in and effectively side-lined MNLA. These forces were the Tuareg Islamist organisation Ansar ed-Dine, led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, a veteran Tuareg fighter from the 1990s, and two other regional movements: AQIM and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). The latter two are not Tuareg movements *per se*, but

both, and AQIM in particular, have been in the area for such a long time that viewing them as alien invading forces would be wrong. As a result of local alliances and the length of time they have been in the area, AQIM and MUJAO have become integral parts of the conflict mosaic in northern Mali.

The initial MNLA combatants were all of Tuareg origin, but many of them had stayed abroad for a considerable period of time and only returned to Mali after the fall of Gaddafi. This may explain the fact that these MNLA combatants have committed brutal acts against their Tuareg kin, including looting, killings and sexual violence. The political leaders of MNLA may have had an agenda of Tuareg nationalism, but many among the rank-and-file may have been more motivated by opportunism — a distinction from the more ideologically-motivated Islamists rebels.

#### **4. AQIM: from Algeria to Mali (onto Libya?)<sup>2)</sup>**

AQIM came into being during the Algerian civil war in 1998 as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). The group moved into Mali at the turn of the millennium. The relationship between GSPC and al-Qaeda is not easy to qualify as its history has been punctuated by both statements of mutual collaboration and open conflict. When GSPC was established, the organisation expressed support for al-Qaeda; in 2001, it claimed to have broken ties with al-Qaeda. GSPC reaffirmed its loyalty to al-Qaeda in 2003, was blessed by al-Qaeda in 2006, and then finally took up the al-Qaeda banner in 2007 in changing its name to AQIM (Bøås 2012; ICG 2005). The latter decision may have been driven by ideology, though more pragmatic concerns about the organisation's branding may have played a role. After all, AQIM consisted of men who had completely lost the war in Algeria and were on the run in the desert of northern Mali. No political body wanted to talk to them and no negotiated settlement, not even an honorary surrender, was in sight. This meant that AQIM had little to lose and something to gain from taking up the al-Qaeda name: it would make the organisation look deceptively more global and powerful in the eyes of local communities.

However, when AQIM emerged in northern Mali, the organisation had more than an efficient brand name. AQIM fighters also had money procured from hostage-taking, and they used their funds wisely.

The history of AQIM's mission creep in northern Mali is therefore instructive in illustrating the *modus operandi* of the Islamists in northern Mali. When AQIM fighters (then known as GSPC) first started to arrive in this part of Mali in 1998, they bought themselves goodwill, friendship, and networks by distributing money and medicine, treating the sick, and buying SIM cards and cellular phone minutes for Malians. AQIM members also married locally, not into powerful families but poor local lineages in an effort to win the support of the poor. AQIM's penetration of northern Mali has therefore been going on for more than a decade, but its tactics have changed from simply distributing money and small benefits, to also arguing strongly for a particular interpretation of the virtues of Islam. In order to carry out the latter, AQIM established alliances with local *marabouts* (religious teachers) who would preach AQIM's brand of Islam. Thus AQIM co-opted a traditional cultural component for its own purpose, transforming the relatively powerless *marabouts* into wealthy preachers by giving them money, cars, weapons and bodyguards (Bøås and Torheim 2013).

After the MNLA offensive in early 2012, AQIM began to offer the population of the north protection. In Timbuktu, AQIM communicated a 'green' cellular telephone number that individuals could call if they were harassed by MNLA members and/or ordinary bandits. The AQIM strategy was a careful and gradual one of integration and penetration into local communities, based on a combination of military, political, religious, economic and humanitarian means. AQIM can therefore not be seen as an invading external force only, but as an actor that over time has managed to become integrated with local communities (Bøås and Torheim 2012).

It was not the Tuareg rebellion *per se* that turned northern Mali into an international concern, but the 'ghost' of militant Salafism (see also Vium in this issue). The origin of this ghost is not mysterious: militant Salafism has been present in northern Mali since at least 1998 and has expanded gradually. It is therefore of utmost importance for domestic policy actors and international responses to the current crisis to understand the historical trajectory of AQIM — its roots in the Algerian civil war, its level of organisation, along with its rifts and rivalries.

The current AQIM supreme leader (emir) is Abdelmalek Droukdel *aka* Abou Mossab Abdel Woudoud, headquartered in northern Algeria. Droukdel demoted Mokhtar Belmokhtar from his position as the supreme commander of AQIM in northern Mali in 2004. This event eventually

brought about the final split between Belmokthar and AQIM in December 2012. Nevertheless, the period from 2004 to the present has been characterised by intense rivalry between Droukdel and Belmokthar; and since this rivalry began, Belmokthar has operated relatively autonomously from the AQIM command structure. Key actors apart, membership in AQIM and other related Islamist groups is constantly in flux. Much is uncertain, but it is clear that AQIM sees itself as here to stay: they know that the French will eventually leave, as will MINUSMA. For AQIM and the other Islamists, it is therefore just a matter of holding ground one day longer than the international forces do. The current instability in Libya, particularly in the Fezzan region of the country which nobody seems to control or care very much about, increases the possibility of waiting out international intervention from relatively safe bases. This is the logic of asymmetric warfare (see Thornton 2007). The Islamists are convinced of this, as is a considerable part of the local population. This is an issue that international intervention must keep in mind if it is to have any chance of contributing to restoring peace and stability to Mali.

## **5. The summer of the 2013 Malian presidential elections**

The elections that took place during the summer of 2013 are a step in the right direction. Against almost all odds, Mali was not only able to organise an election, but an election that is most likely the best the country has ever experienced. The voter turn-out was high (by Malian standards) and the elections were generally praised as free and fair by all observers (national and international). Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) of the Rally for Mali won a confident victory in the second round, and the runner up, Soumaïla Cissé, expressed political maturity and accepted defeat. IBK was according to most observers the best choice for enhanced stability in the country. Now it is up to IBK and his incoming administration to repair what has been broken and bent for such a long time. And that is a lot. Although democratic institutions hardly ran as deep as Western observers wanted to believe, and the rapid dismantling of state institutions after the military takeover proved that point, still the (re)building of state institutions will be an arduous task. In Bamako there is furthermore still tension between political



groupings/power hubs; although the *coup* leader erstwhile Captain Amadou Sanogo and his followers were soothed by Sanogo officially being promoted to a four-star general (pinpointing an alliance between Sanogo and civilian power), there is still much unresolved tension behind the façades in Bamako (the political backdrop to this is discussed by Whitehouse in this issue).

However, the quality of the 2013 elections and the victory of IBK could also signal a break with the political culture of patronage and corruption that had come to dominate in Mali. The challenges are, however, still substantial. Political and administrative institutions must be rebuilt. The army must be brought under constitutional control, and IBK must find a constructive way of dealing with the Tuareg rebels in the North.

The announcement in late September that MNLA is pulling out of the Ouagadougou Accord is just as worrying as the gun battles that erupted in Kidal immediately thereafter. IBK's main challenge in this regard is that his room for manoeuvring and negotiating is quite limited as many of his own supporters will not accept a deal that gives much autonomy and wealth transfer to the Tuareg areas of the north. MNLA, on the other hand, has high expectations concerning what they want to achieve from the peace process. Ideally, IBK should have had the time to organise his administration, reorganise the army and bring it firmly back under constitutional control, and construct a transparent agenda for the negotiations that he could communicate to the electorate. But time is not on his side. He will have to rush into this as trying to postpone the negotiations could lead to an escalation of violence, particularly in the Kidal region. It is therefore of immense importance that IBK also brings the political opposition into this process in order to avoid the very issue of the negotiations becoming politicised. In this regard, it will be important for the IBK government to signal that the issue of the north is not only a Tuareg question; attempting to strike a balance between the northern and the southern parts of the country will instead make this a question about Mali. Any development initiative towards the northern regions should therefore include all marginalised groups that inhabit this area, and not only the Tuaregs. This is the only way that IBK can manage speedily to build a national coalition of credibility around the peace process (Ba and Bøås 2013).

The transition to democracy that the election of IBK represents will also entail that large amounts of aid money return to Mali. This

may at first appear as a blessing and a chance to rebuild the country. However, it may also be just another breakdown if groups within the government and state sectors once more start misappropriating such funds. Thus questions remain: remembering that state governance in Mali was weak prior to the *coup* and the war, and that the past year's conflicts have made it even weaker, how can Mali's institutions control the new found aid wealth? Are state checks and balances sufficient? If not, resources may well flow in the wrong directions, strengthening certain 'big men', criminalising the state and actually creating new conflicts between the haves and have-nots. If this moment is ground zero on a timeline, then all actors working to rebuild Mali must work carefully, and hand in hand, to secure a sustainable future for Mali.

## 6. The Neighbourhood

Even though Mali has been most directly affected by the repercussions of the fall of Gaddafi, the impact has also been on other states, including Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Niger, Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria. These states have also experienced further problems due to the conflict in Mali. What have been the more general effects for North Africa is discussed in the article by Danjibo in this issue. In turn, the ways in which Mauritania has been severely affected is discussed by Vium. Furthermore, Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria has taken advantage of the unrest in the region, not least in Mali, and is said to have used the state void in Mali to train and arm militia (see Danjibo). Most recently the armed takeover of power in CAR by Seleka rebels during the spring of 2013 must be seen as a partial repercussion of shifts in the balance of power that were brought about by the fall of the Gaddafi regime.

Apart from Mali, there are however, two other Sahelian countries that should be given special attention: Niger and Chad, and for concerned stakeholders, it is important to note that Niger is not Mali. The Tuaregs are better integrated in Niger, and there is little to suggest that the peace agreement of 2009 between the state and the Niger Justice Movement (NJM) will fall apart over the short-term horizon.<sup>3)</sup> Unlike the case of Mali, the Nigerien state was present at its border following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime and disarmed Tuareg returnees from Libya. Niger's new role as a strategic partner of the United States (US) (for example, as a base for American drones)

should strengthen the regime's power, but also makes the country a potential target of AQIM and other Islamist groups, as was the case in the attacks that the country suffered in May 2013.

Some of the same could be said about Chad. President Idriss Déby sent troops to northern Mali following the French intervention, possibly in an effort to rewrite his bad record on good governance and human rights; however, the democratic deficits and bad governance that characterise Déby's rule give Islamist rebels political ammunition against Chad. The African partners in the international coalition against the Islamist rebels operating in Mali may therefore have put their own security at risk. While the possibility of spill-over conflict from Mali should be taken seriously, it should also not be overstated. The Sahel is not a warzone of a coherent Islamist rebellion; it consists of different insurgencies with local grievances, loosely allied through a combination of ideological and pragmatic concerns.

## **7. Concluding remarks: MINUSMA and the African response**

The fact that African countries will be playing a leading role in MINUSMA may give credence to pragmatic political solutions that are less influenced by the 'War on Terror' rhetoric that tends to put all armed Islamist forces into the 'al-Qaeda' category. Nevertheless, it will be African forces, mostly but not exclusively from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries, that will have to carry much of the burden as France scales back its forces on the ground.

Nigeria will be one of the main contributors of troops to MINUSMA. Nigeria's military leadership capacity and military professionalism have improved since their initial deployment within regional peacekeeping operations in the 1990s. This raises some hope that they will appear more neutral and less involved in economic extraction than what they were in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau. However Mali is an unknown terrain (with an unfamiliar climate and topography) to Nigerian troops. Fortunately, the troops from Chad and Niger have extensive battle experience in this type of terrain, but there is a risk that these troops, which have had little exposure to international peacekeeping operations, will not view the protection of civilians as a core objective. The recent accusations about sexual violence committed by traversing

Chadian troops in northern Mali is therefore clearly worrying. Thus, if the international community does not take great care in mitigating these risks, there is the distinct danger that the local population will turn against the UN peacekeepers.

Mali constitutes the most dramatic example of the effects of the end of the Gaddafi regime. Yet as is discussed by Vium and Danjibo in this issue, it is also having severe ramifications and repercussions elsewhere in the region. In June 2012, a number of international scholars gathered at the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping and Training Centre in Accra to discuss this topic.<sup>4)</sup> The discussions were further enriched by West African civil servants in the security sector and experts from ECOWAS. Some of the papers presented at this workshop are included in this issue. The workshop took place after the military *coup* in Mali, but prior to the rebel push southbound and the French intervention. At the point of the workshop the focus was still very much on Mali, and participants from the West African security sector were eagerly discussing an ECOWAS intervention. However, at the meeting on 5 July 2012, the United Nations (UN) Security Council did not endorse the ECOWAS proposal to send troops, and even if the crisis spread rapidly during the fall of 2012, no such UN endorsement was made. Thus, when France intervened in the conflict in Mali in early 2013, it became clear to ECOWAS that they would have to be part of a UN mission rather than leading it. Clearly this has annoyed people within the military top brass of ECOWAS states. For example, Nigerian Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Ola Sa'ad Ibrahim, noted wryly that the "UN has no business in Mali anymore" as the AU and ECOWAS "were able to broker ceasefire and conduct the elections. Nigeria thought that their job were done in Mali that is why we pulled out but still left some forces to do some jobs that are left".<sup>5)</sup> Yet recent fighting in the Kidal region shows that despite democratic elections and MINUSMA's continued presence in the north, the level of volatility remains high in Mali, and this will not only affect the country itself but also the neighbouring countries.

## Endnotes

1. Klute warns us not to draw too far-reaching conclusions concerning regional repercussions of the fall of the Gaddafi regime, and to maintain a focus on local conflict dynamics within historical continuities.

2. Parts of this section draw on Bøås and Torheim (2013).
3. In his article Klute discusses connections between Tuareg groups in Mali and Niger.
4. The conference was co-organised by The Nordic Africa Institute and a report from the conference can be downloaded on <http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?searchid=1&pid=diva2:609824>.
5. See: <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/nigeria-faults-un-intervention-in-mali/157038/>.

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