

## **Mali Watch Group**

*A non-partisan coalition concerned about restoring peace, security, and democracy to the people of Mali*  
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### **Enhancing the Primacy of Civil Authority in the Security Sector in Mali and Africa**

#### Executive Summary:

The primacy of civil authority is at the crux of peace and security, democratization, and security sector assistance in conflict areas like Mali. It best gets to the real drivers of conflict and thus reduces the vulnerabilities emblematic of “fragile states” that violent extremist organizations look to exploit in the first place. Establishing a strong, sustainable civil-military relationship that institutionalizes the primacy of civil authority and takes a more strategic, peacebuilding approach to security sector development will be the key component of national reconciliation with implications for conflict transformation in most of Africa and not just Mali, as well as for emerging U.S. security assistance policy under Presidential Policy Directive 23. The primacy of civil authority must be integral to all international security assistance efforts in Africa. However, U.S. security assistance efforts including civil-military operations have overly focused on terrorism, which many locals do not perceive as their primary security challenge. Despite recent U.S. rhetoric, military-to-military efforts to “build partnership capacity” remain overwhelmingly resourced for tactical “train and equip” building of partner-nation warfighting capability rather than more strategic institution-building and education of officers on civic responsibilities. This must change on the ground as well as in policy. In addition to being coordinated, Malian, international, regional, and bilateral security sector programs and activities should demonstrate the primacy of civil authority in how the security sector supports and is integral to local government, diplomatic, political, economic, and development efforts in-country. This includes the military leadership level and the *gendarmerie* and police as well as regular military forces in ensuring the security of the civilian population and communities rather than the security of state instrumentalities, as well as inclusion of reconcilable armed groups. Inculcating a public service ethic among these personnel as integral to their professional ethic will, over time, help temper their behavior towards civilians and thus improve the civil-military relationship. More appropriate multilateral civil-military coordination models should also be adopted.

#### Background:

- Mali Defense and Security Forces (MDSF) have been [poorly led, equipped, and trained](#) as well as [fragmented and incapable of preventing its soldiers from committing atrocities](#) against civilians, as evidenced in widespread reports of [post-coup](#) human rights abuses. [Following French military intervention](#), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch reported MDSF reprisals in northern Mali, where it has had a history of [repressive military administration](#). Some military officers and others may be [linked to the drug trade](#), which may pose an even greater threat to Mali’s security than terrorism. MDSF [spending](#) was \$170-180-million the past five years, about 2% of GDP.

- In some localities in the north, [paramilitary units](#) (*gendarmerie*) have accompanied regular units to question detainees and investigate disciplinary lapses by soldiers. The MDSF is accepting this practice, with Human Rights Watch encouragement, although it is still unclear if this is universal.
- The [Multidimensional Integration Stabilization Mission in Mali](#) (MINUSMA) of 11,200 troops and 1,440 police assumed the [African-led International Support Mission to Mali](#) (AFISMA) mission to “contribute to the rebuilding of the capacity of the [MDSF],” to meet concern about “continued interference” of some MDSF “...in the work of the Transitional authorities.” Under UN [Security Council Resolution 2100](#), its mandate includes the protection of civilians, humanitarian assistance, and “national and international efforts towards rebuilding the Malian security sector.” With a core of 8,000 ECOWAS troops, it includes China’s first combat troops in the UN, while 2,000 French troops remain for counterterrorism. Meanwhile, 500 [U.K.](#) and [European Union Training Mission](#) (EUTM) troops “train and advise... under the control of legitimate civilian authorities, in order to contribute to restore their military capacity with a view to enabling them to engage in combat operations aiming at restoring the country's territorial integrity.”
- New president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita has dismissed the [military committee on MDSF reform](#), comprised of officers who led the 2012 coup. He also called for a Sahara regional multilateral force and a [common security plan](#) to face resurging transnational terrorism. In addition to [tackling corruption](#), the [Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission](#) is looking to: assess political and social movements involved in the reconciliation process; identify the armed groups eligible to participate in the national dialogue; record human rights violations; propose all necessary means to help the war victims overcome the traumas of conflict, and propose actions to “help strengthen social cohesion and national unity and focus on dialogue and peace.”
- U.S. aid has [resumed](#) since Mali has taken “tangible steps to assert civilian authority over the military.” Of the State Department’s six assistance priority areas, the third is to support rebuilding security institutions and security sector reform in coordination with multilateral partners and the Government of Mali, with greater emphasis on institution-building.
- Still, U.S. security assistance has looked “to train and advise indigenous forces to [tackle emerging terrorist threats](#),” which most locals do not perceive as an existential threat. The [Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Partnership](#) (TSCTP) spent \$353-million from 2005-10, then programmed \$620-million more (\$93-million in FY14 for Mali) and a broadened mandate: strengthening counterterrorism capabilities and institutionalizing cooperation among regional security forces; denying support and sanctuary through targeted development assistance; promoting democratic governance; discrediting terrorist ideology; and, reinforcing bilateral military ties. Reinforcing this perception is increased basing and operation of [unmanned aerial vehicles](#) for surveillance and targeting of terrorists in Africa, including Mali.
- Military-to-military efforts to “build partnership capacity” have been resourced to “train and equip” for tactical capability versus strategic institution-building and education of officers on civic responsibilities at a 9:1 ratio. *Foreign Policy* said such efforts have been “[unhinged](#), in large part, from broader U.S. foreign policy objectives in Africa, and provide a sneaky way of pulling the United States into security relationships that may not serve our long-run goals for African state building or development.” TSCTP civil-military operations (CMO) training, based on U.S. doctrine, stresses defeating threats over building governance and civil authority. A 2010 DoD program manager assessed that it risked exacerbating “unhealthy civil-military balances.”
- “The U.S. was too narrowly focused on counterterrorism capabilities and [missed the bigger picture](#),” said former State official Todd Moss, while former AFRICOM Commander Gen. Carter Ham admitted a failure to pass on “[values, ethics and military ethos](#).” That may be changing. AFRICOM Director of Strategy, Plans & Programs Maj. Gen. Robert Hooper said the “underlying premise of our institutional capacity-building efforts is that military forces must be subordinate to civil authority and accepted as legitimate members of a civil society based on the rule of law.”

## Assumptions:

- In addition to the obsession with terrorism, the large-scale outside military intervention in Mali may have [upset the balance](#) of a more comprehensive approach and led to overemphasis on security. The Bridges Institute [noted](#) in *The New York Times* that while “in the short term this may be the only recourse, addressing poverty, disparity and a bulging youth population with no hope has to be another priority for the future” as well as regenerating counterproductive, unintended consequences, as the 2012 coup after years of “train-and-equip” already showed.
- Transition from security operations to peacebuilding in Mali is thus paramount. Outside military intervention can “[hold the ring](#) while the core work of building peace and stability unfolds.” But the military should not “do the whole job and provide solutions to problems that are not military and have deeper roots than short-term security needs.” One [study](#) advised “pursuing a grass-roots (i.e., ‘bottom-up’) approach to conflict resolution as opposed to the more typical ‘top-down’ approach often associated with recourse to the international community.”
- The primacy of civil authority is at the crux of peace and security, democratization, and security sector capacity development. It best gets to the real drivers of conflict and thus reduces the vulnerabilities emblematic of “fragile states” that violent extremist organizations look to exploit in the first place. A key way to establish popular confidence is robust civil-military education and training, to include for civil-military specialists and programs where the military supports dialogue and reconciliation at community as well as national levels. Moreover, inculcating a public service ethic among security personnel as integral to their professional ethic will, over time, help temper bad behavior and thus improve the civil-military relationship.
- The primacy of civil authority must be integral to all international security sector related efforts in Africa. More an application of strategy than tactics, it helps mitigate the “slippery slope” of deepening and unending security engagement through overemphasis on counterterrorism.
- Establishing a strong, sustainable civil-military relationship that institutionalizes the primacy of civil authority and takes a more strategic, peacebuilding approach to security sector development will be the key component of national reconciliation and addressing the main drivers of conflict, as will be the professionalization and capacity-building of the MDSF.
- The emerging best practice of using the *gendarmerie* as a civil-military check and balance has merit and promise; but, it is not clear this is universal, effective, and sustainable or whether the *gendarmerie* is appropriately organized, trained and authorized to perform this role.
- Inclusion of the Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA) and other offshoots of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) that have declared their willingness to participate in collective dialogue will be essential to the reconciliation process as well as to the reconstitution of the MDSF as a force more representative of Malian society.
- U.S. interests as such are better pursued through more indirect and sophisticated strategies than in Afghanistan. As threats, challenges, and opportunities to Mali – organized crime, drug and human trafficking, economic development, as well as terrorism – are more regional, U.S. approaches must also be more regional and multilateral rather than mainly bilateral. This includes the Global Counterterrorism Forum and the UN Integrated Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel. Demonstrative U.S. multilateral leadership in balancing security assistance and peacebuilding will also help ensure a more coordinated international approach to security sector reform, civil-military institution-building, and military training in Mali and Africa.
- While U.S. or NATO civil-military training and assistance would be no doubt helpful, neither civil-military model is best in Mali or Africa. They are not African, are threats-based and military-centric, and do not emphasize transition management or peacebuilding. They also do not stress sufficiently the primacy of civil authority. Referring to a more universal framework would go far to mitigate the delivery of differing and often confusing concepts in countries such as Mali.

## Recommendations:

- Reconstitution of the MDSF should feature institution-building and civil-military relations alongside tactical and technical proficiency in force and professional development, in full recognition of threats to the security of the Malian people (and not just the state) that go beyond terrorism – as well as the overriding need for national reconciliation and addressing the institutional and civil-military factors that led to the coup to begin with.
- Malian, international, regional, and bilateral security sector programs and activities should accordingly demonstrate the primacy of civil authority as part of a more strategic, peacebuilding approach – showing how the security sector is integral to especially local governance and in support of diplomatic, political, economic, and development efforts in-country. This includes prioritizing security sector development and institution-building over “train-and-equip” activities, especially at the leadership level, as well as featuring the *gendarmerie* and police forces in ensuring the security of the civilian population and tribal communities rather than military forces. It also means careful inclusion of MIA and other reconcilable armed groups.
- Strong, visible linkages between security sector and civil society peacebuilding, especially along the lines of the mandate of the Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission, must be established by both multilateral, bilateral, and especially indigenous partners to close the significant civil-military gaps in Malian civil society that continue to threaten peace and security there.
- Civil-military education, training, and capacity building should go to *gendarmerie* and police leadership and units as well as to regular military forces – as integral to any counterinsurgency or counterterrorism instruction or training, rather than as extracurricular.
- Security sector reform in Mali has implications for much of Africa as well as for emerging U.S. security assistance policy under [Presidential Policy Directive 23](#) – it should stress more working by, with, and through multilateral/regional partners, leadership by example of the primacy of civil authority in security institutions, local ownership, and minimal U.S. military “footprint.”
- U.S. executive and operational security sector guidance in Africa must emphasize, at all levels of person-to-person interaction, demonstration of the primacy of civil authority as the paramount principle in security advisory and assistance at regional, national, and community levels. State, USAID, DoD, AFRICOM, and country teams should communicate this down to the tactical level.
- The “good examples” of military-to-military engagement in [Niger](#) and elsewhere aside, any security assistance or advisory efforts in the region should take more into account local and legitimate human and community security concerns rather than terrorism as seen from outside.
- Civil-military capacity development to the MDSF and peacekeeping troop contributing country forces should be based on international frameworks such as [UN Civil-Military Coordination](#) (UN-CIMIC). Developed and validated largely in Africa, it is the [international civil-military template](#) for UN-mandated peacekeeping forces, including the AU and ECOWAS. It emphasizes the primacy of civil authority and civil-military transition management, is adaptive and culturally sensitive, and integrates humanitarian and peacebuilding imperatives, human rights, protection of civilians, DDR/SSR, etc. Security assistance programs like the State Department funded Global Peace Operations (GPOI) and Africa Contingency Operations Training & Assistance (ACOTA) and the EUTM should refer to UN-CIMIC and other UN operations standards as the training baseline.
- EU, NATO, and U.S. government civil and military players in Africa will need additional education and training in both peacekeeping and peacebuilding from the civil society perspective as well as non-U.S./NATO approaches to civil-military coordination, security sector development, etc.