The African Union and the Conflict in Mali: Extra-regional Influence and the Limitations of a Regional Actor

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Abstract

The role of regional and sub-regional organisations cannot be over stressed in conflict resolution, especially in their sphere of influence. The African Union and ECOWAS played prominent roles in places like Burundi, Darfur, Chad, Somalia and Liberia, otherwise the story of the conflicts in these countries would have been different today. It is also well-known that the success achieved in these interventions would not have been forthcoming if the US, EU and EU countries and the United Nations had not given their preponderant support to these regional and sub-regional organisations. In other words, the cooperative, collaborative and supportive understanding between these extra-African bodies and the regional and sub-regional organisations has recorded more success than a unilateral intervention. The support given to ECOWAS in Liberia led to a successful resolution of that country's war and the AU-UN hybrid operations in Darfur are yielding some kind of modest success. Analysts have posited that at present, there is no substitute for coherent, coordinated intervention by global power and that apart from being wasteful and expensive, unilateral intervention can be controversial internationally on the ground of legality and legitimacy, especially where the UN has not given its approval. This article submits that such cooperation should have been applied to the resolution of Mali's conflict. Africa, even though it lacks the required expertise, logistics, diplomatic and financial muscles to singularly mount a successful intervention without support from outside Africa, the experience of Liberia and Burundi should have been improved upon and explored in managing the conflict in Mali. This article argues that by failing to timely intervene until the troops of African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) were almost overrun, France is accused of stealing the show. Moreover, the same resources used by France could have been more effectively utilised if made available to Africa. In this case, cooperation not for this mission alone, but future missions, could have been achieved, thereby institutionalising confidence-building measures.

Keywords: conflict resolution, interventions, AFISMA, AU, ECOWAS, regional and sub-regional organisations

Sumário

O papel das organizações regionais e sub-regionais não pode ser mais ignorado na resolução de conflitos, especialmente em sua esfera de influência. A União Africano e a CEDEAO desempenharam papéis de destaqueem lugares como o Burundi, Darfur, Chade, Somália e Libéria, caso contrário, a história dos conflitos nesses países teria sido diferente nos dias de hoje. É também reconhecido igualmente que o sucesso alcançadonessas intervenções não teria sido possível se países tais

como os EUA a UE e outras nações membros dasNações Unidas não tivessem dado o seu apoio preponderante para estas organizações de níveis regional e sub-regional. Por outras palavras, a cooperação, colaboração e solidariedade entre esses órgãos extra-africanos com as organizações regionais e sub-regionais africanas já granjeou mais sucessos do que uma intervenção unilateral. O apoio dado à CEDEAO na Libéria levou a uma resolução bem sucedida do conflitonaquele país e as operações híbrida UA-ONU em Darfur estão rendendo algum tipo de sucesso modesto. Analistas têm postulado que, neste momento, não há nenhum substituto parauma intervenção coordenada coerente a nível do poder global e que para além poder vir a ser um desperdício e caro, uma intervenção unilateral poderia ser controversa internacionalmente quanto a sua legalidade e legitimidade, especialmente sem a aprovação da ONU. Este artigo sustenta que tal cooperação deveria ter sido aplicada para a resolução do conflito de Mali. África, apesar de não ter a experiência necessária na esfera logística assim como músculos diplomáticos e financeiros para montar sozinho uma intervenção bem sucedida sem o apoio de fora d continente, a experiência da Libéria e Burundi deveria ter sido melhorada e explorada na gestão do conflito no Mali. Este artigo argumenta que, ao não intervir em tempo útil até que as tropas do continente Africano, designadas de(AFISMA) Suporte Internacional da Missão no Mali, foram quase ofuscadas pelas forcas francesas que foram acusadas de roubar o protagonismo dos africanos. Para além disso, os mesmos recursos utilizados pela França poderiam ter sido mais eficazmente utilizados se colocado à disposição da missão africana. Neste caso, a cooperação não apenas para esta missão sozinha, mas também para as missões futuras, poderia ter sido alcançada, institucionalizando se assim, medidas de confiança.

Palavras chave: resolução de conflitos, intervenções, AFISMA, UA, CEDEAO, organizações Regional e sub-regional

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, concerns have heightened about sustained violent conflicts in Africa. Conflict mitigation and resolution have become the dominant governance activities in almost every part of Africa. Many of these conflicts seem intractable; conflict mitigation and resolution initiatives are at best yielding modest success. Even so, such successes typically provide peace in the short-term but hardly lay the foundation for the reconstitution of order and the attainment of sustainable peace. Part of the problem is the failure to acquire a deep understanding of the multifarious and hydra-nature of conflict and fashion-appropriate responses. (Amos Sawyer, 2003:1)

Peace and security have become priority issues not only for the African continent, but also for the international community. Although these issues were recognised in the past as urgent challenges facing the continent, until recently, they had not gained the marked profile they are attaining now as political priorities for concrete political approaches and efforts inside and outside Africa. Thus, the parameters have clearly shifted in the direction of greater visibility and a heightened political will to act. (Dirk Kohnertt, 2007:37)

The dynamics that Africa has developed on its own as well as the dynamics currently involved

in external assistance in support for Africa, are concerned in large with military and humanitarian capabilities. In fact, there are examples that in the past, mechanisms put in place by African institutions themselves, for example, the former organisation for African Unity, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) or by the international community (for example the United Nations, and other key regional, sub-regional and states actors) have been either unwilling or unable to intervene militarily in extreme emergency situations to protect civilian populations. Furthermore, numerous critical doubts have been expressed regarding the *raison d'etre* for military actions from regional and sub-regional organisations in Africa and the motives questioned in informing initiatives and military actions by external actors in Africa. (Thomas Frank, 2007:87)

This paper offers a nuanced engagement with the conflict in Mali. Even though the conflict in Mali is considered one of the most devastating conflicts on the African continent, less attention has been given in the academic literature in assessing the various conflict resolution mechanisms adopted by the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), how this framework has been operationalised, and the challenges of these mechanisms so far. This paper aims to fill this gap.

The AU Mechanism for Conflict Resolution

In its 1990 declaration, the OAU Heads of State and government recognised that the prevalence of conflicts in Africa was seriously impeding their collective and individual efforts to deal with the continent's economic problems. Consequently, they resolved to work together toward the peaceful and rapid resolution of conflicts. During the OAU summit held in Cairo in 1993, African leaders established a mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution (MCPMR). In doing so, they recognised that the resolution of conflicts is a precondition for the creation of peace and stability, and a necessary precondition for social and economic development (UN Panel, 2004:1).

From the outset, the issue of peacekeeping on which the OAU mechanism was predicated, was controversial. It was widely felt within the OAU political leadership that peace and security were the preserve of the United Nations, which was mandated to keep peace globally and possesses more resources than the OAU. The OAU defined its objective narrowly as that of primarily anticipating and preventing conflicts, and left large-scale peacekeeping to the UN and Africa's sub-regional organisations. (John Erikson, 1996:15)

With respect to conflict mitigation and resolution, the continental body identified three aims: first, to anticipate and prevent situations of potential conflict from developing into full-blown wars; second, to undertake peacemaking and peace building efforts if full-blown conflicts should arise; and third, to carry out peacemaking and peace building activities in post-conflict situations. While this initiative thrust the OAU into the centre of conflict management efforts in Africa, the reality is that the pan-African organisation never became a principal player in the peace processes in Africa (African Policy Advisory Panel, 2004:2). Despite its deficiencies, the OAU had the potential to coordinate the evolving early warning systems in Africa's various sub-regions. It went further to develop the potential to act as an information bank with sub-regional desks or other alternative systems where information about the activities of each sub-region and its organisations could be coordinated. (Connie Peck, 1998:45)

However, on 9 July 2001, the OAU took the decision to transform itself into a continental African Union (AU), following the signing and ratification by fifty Heads of State and Government, of the Constitutive Act of the African Union in Lusaka, Zambia. However, it remains to be seen whether the AU will build on the capacity of its predecessor in the area of conflict prevention, management and resolution. Unlike the OAU Charter, the constitutive act of the AU allows for interference in the internal affairs of member states in cases of unconstitutional changes of governments, genocide, and conflicts that threaten regional stability (Herbst and Mills, 2003:21).

Furthermore, the Act also provides for the participation of African civil society actors in the activities of the organisation, establishes a Pan-African parliament, and provides for an Economic and Cultural Commission. One year after the establishment of the new Union, African Heads of State and Government adopted a protocol relating to the establishment of a Peace and Security Council in Durban, South Africa. The Council replaced the former OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, incorporating relevant structures and methods in order to serve as the continent's collective security and early-warning mechanism.

The Peace and Security Council (PSC) Protocol states the rationale for, and delineates the interlocking components of, the APSA in which the PSC is the principal decision-making organ for conflict prevention, management and resolution, and is supported by a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), a Panel of the Wise (PoW), a Special (Peace) Fund (the Fund), an African Standby (Peacekeeping) Force (ASF) including a Military Staff Committee (MSC), and the AU Commission (AUC) through the Chairperson of the AUC, the Commissioner for Peace and Security and his/her Peace and Security Directorate (PSD). All these components aim at providing an all-encompassing set of instruments to address African security needs by the African actors (Keenan, 2004:478).

The African Union Peace and Security Architecture

Although the APSA has evolved over a period of four decades from the period of the OAU's formation in 1963, the Fourth Extraordinary Summit of the OAU in September 1999 in Sirte, where African leaders agreed to transform the OAU to AU, could be described as the proximate background context to the establishment of Africa's new security mechanism. The approval of the Act in July 2000 represents a significant milestone in the vision, goals, and responsibilities entrusted to the new pan-African institution. The AU still upheld the principles that directed its weak predecessor and placed a premium on sovereignty, 'African solutions to African problems', non-interference in member states' internal affairs and non-use of force/peaceful settlement of African disputes.

However, the Act brought in enormous normative changes, especially in the areas of peace and security, human rights and democracy, respect for the sanctity of human life, condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional governments and intervention. It is instructive to note that with the Act, peace and security became the primary issue on the AU agenda. These new norms and standards form the basis on which the PSC Protocol and the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP) were to be enacted. Indeed, as Engel and Gomes argued, both the PSC Protocol and

CADSP could be seen as the APSA's legal foundation (Council of the European Union, 2003:3).

One remarkable aspect of the Act that represents a clear departure from the OAU is the new principle of the AU's right of intervention. According to Article 4(h) of the Act, the AU has the right to intervene in a member state in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. Furthermore, the Article was amended in 2003 by the Protocol on Amendments to the Act to also include other serious threats to legitimate order, to restore security to AU member states based on the recommendation of the PSC, and Article 4(j) provides for "the right of Member States to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security."

With the provisions of the various sections of Article 4, Africa has moved away from unqualified respect for state sovereignty to an approach where the duty to protect populations and the right to intervene shapes Africa's security management agenda. (Alhaji Sarjoh Bah *et al*, 2014: 16) sheds light on the importance of the Article for the post-Cold War African security needs when he asserts that the new security architecture, with Article 4(h) of the Act at its core, is not a mere commitment to the promotion of peace and security, but it shows Africa's determination to avoid the repetition of the Rwanda's experience. According to this Ethiopian scholar, while the Article creates the legal foundation and justification for armed interventions, it also imposes an obligation on Africa's foremost institution to intervene in order to prevent the occurrence or stop the perpetration of atrocious international crimes in Africa (Report of the Commission for Africa, 2005).

At the heart of the APSA lies the PSC. The latter is a standing decision-making organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, defining and directing the AU conflict management agenda. It is equally responsible for the overall implementation of the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP), purposely to protect the sanctity of human life and to also lay down the conditions for sustainable development in Africa. The PSC Protocol acknowledges that the PSC is to function in accordance with, and within the framework of, the UN's principal role as the principal custodian of international peace and security, and also its UN's acknowledgement of the obligations of regional organisations.

According to Article 7 of the PSC Protocol, the PSC, in consultation with the Chairperson of the AU Commission, is mandated to:

- Anticipate and prevent disputes and conflicts, as well as policies that may lead to genocide and crimes against humanity;
- Undertake peacemaking and peace building functions to resolve conflicts where they have occurred;
- Authorise the mounting and deployment of peace support missions;
- Recommend to the Assembly, pursuant to Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act intervention on behalf of the Union, in a Member State's grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, as defined by relevant international conventions and instruments;
- Institute sanctions whenever an unconstitutional change of government takes place in a Member State, as provided for in the Lome Declaration;
- Implement the common Defence Policy of the Union;

- Follow the progress towards the promotion of democratic practices, good governance, the rule of law, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for the sanctity of human life and international humanitarian law by member states; and
- Support and facilitate humanitarian action in situations of armed conflicts or major natural disasters (UN Department of Public Information 2004).

It is obvious that the PSC has enormous powers to make decisions on its own on a wide-range of security-related issues in Africa, ranging from preventive diplomacy to post-conflict peace building. But, in serious crisis situations such as the ones specified under Article 4(h) of the Act, or when action is needed in a non-consenting member state, it is only the AU Assembly that can take decisions based upon the PSC's recommendations. The Council is also responsible for facilitating close collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)/Regional Mechanisms (RMs) and the UN. (Ibid)

Since its inauguration, the Council has taken crucial political decisions in response to peace and security challenges in Africa, with the mixed result of shortcomings and achievements. It should be understood that most of these responses have been in the areas of condemning and using political and economic sanctions against unconstitutional changes of government, particularly the coup d'état in the Central African Republic (2003), Guinea Bissau (2012; 2003), Sao Tome and Principe (2003), Togo (2005), Mauritania (2005 and 2008), Guinea (2008) Madagascar (2009) and Niger (2010), and the post-election crisis in Cote d'Ivoire (2010-2011). Also, the Council has been able to authorise peace operations in Burundi, Somalia, Sudan and the Comoros, and the post-election violence in Kenya.

In spite of these efforts, the development and full operation of the ASF is being hampered by a number of problems ranging from regional differences, questions about mandating modus operandi and coordination, institutional capacity building, funding, equipment, logistics and training. These problems have been identified and need to be critically addressed in the next phase of the ASF implementation till 2015. There are clear disproportions in the readiness of the RECs/RMs in terms of their capabilities for peace operations. For example, while the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and SADC are making progress in this endeavour, other regions are lagging behind (D. Volman 2003-2004).

The Peace and Security Council Secretariat (PSCS) gives the needed operational and administrative support to the PSC to facilitate its work. The Secretariat acts, according to the AU, as the custodian of the 'institutional memory' on the PSC's activities. The PSC Secretariat also facilitates the PSC's relations and dealings with other institutions on matters relating to African peace and security. The PSC Protocol calls for the establishment of a continental-wide Early Warning System as part of the APSA to 'facilitate the anticipation and prevention of conflicts' through gathering and analysis of information that will help the AU to prevent conflicts in a timely manner. The CEWS, which operates as the early warning component of the APSA, builds on the RECs/RMs' early mechanism.

This idea is to boost the AU capacity to prevent conflict by providing the Chairperson of the AU Commission with information and also enabling him/her to use the valuable data gathered, through the CEWS, to advise the PSC on potential conflicts and threats to African peace and security and also to recommend the best course of action (Holt and Shanahan, 2005:16).

Structurally, the CEWS consists of the Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC) known as 'The Situation Room', housed at the CMD at the AU Commission, and the Observation and Monitoring Units (OMUs) of the RMs. According to Article 12 (2b) of the PSC Protocol, the Situation Room is to be linked directly to the RMs' OMUs through appropriate means of communication. The OMUs are to continuously collect and process data at their respective levels and transmit them to the Situation Room. The AU takes prompt action in response to a threat of violent conflict that has the propensity to disturb African peace and security based on the data collected through the multi-levelled African early warning system (Report of the Secretary General of the UN 2012: 1-10).

The Panel of the Wise (PoW) has met on several occasions to deliberate and act on the situations in the Central African Republic (CAR), Somalia, Mauritania, Zimbabwe, the DRC, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar and Sudan. This process has undertaken confidence-building missions to the CAR and South Africa. For example, due to the tense political and deteriorating security situations in the CAR, the PoW embarked on a mission to the country where it consulted widely with the politicians and civil society groups on the need for an inclusive dialogue to solve the country's perennial political crisis. Although the dialogue was held in December 2008, fighting resumed. Also in February 2009, a PoW member, Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, was in South Africa ahead of the country's April 2009 election as part of the PoW's efforts to ensure violence-free elections in Africa.

While the lack of conceptual clarity in the PoW's role is a challe.g. the non-appearance of the Panel in the AU commission structure is limiting the activities of the PoW. Such non-appearance means that its activities need to be financed through external donors rather than from the AU's regular budget. This scenario presents the PoW with the twin problems of sustainability and ownership. Meanwhile, donors' funds are not predictable and there is too much conditionality attached to it; it also possesses the propensity of compromising the African ownership of the PoW. (Sarjoh Bah *et al*, 2014).

Since the AU's peace and security activities need to be financed, the PSC Protocol, as part of the APSA, provided for the establishment of a Special (Peace) Fund (The Fund). The Fund is envisioned as a standing pool on which both the AU and the RECs/RMs can call upon in emergency situations to meet unexpected priorities. Relevant financial rules and regulations of the continental institution govern the operations of the Fund and it is financed directly from the requisitions from the AU's regular budget, including arrears of contributions and voluntary contributions from states and private sources within and outside the African continent. The Fund was established in 1993, under the OAU Mechanism regime where 6% of the OAU regular budget was allocated to the Peace Fund. This scenario has become worrisome, as its negative consequences on the AU-mandated peace operations are enormous. The 2007 High-level Panel Audit of the African Union graphically presented this and therefore suggested that:

> African countries should endeavour to contribute substantially to AU peace operations. The assessed contributions of Member States to peacekeeping operations should be paid regularly. The percentage of regular budget allocated to the Peace Fund should be increased and the AU Commission Chairperson should also intensify his efforts at mobilizing funds and resources for AU peacekeeping operations from within the Continent and the Diaspora (High-Level Panel Audit of the African Union, 2007:173).

The African leaders realised this frustrating development in August 2009, and decided at the AU summit in Tripoli to gradually increase the statutory transfer from the AU regular budget to the Fund from 6% to 12% by 2012. This transfer is intended to avoid the crippling of the AU in its peace and security functions. Before then, the African Heads of State had adopted a resolution during the AU Summit in Maputo, Mozambique in July 2003, calling on the European Union to establish a Peace Support Operation Facility (PSOF) from funds allocated to African countries under the existing cooperation agreements with the European Union. In response to this request, the EU African Peace Facility (APF) was established in March 2004, with the initial sum of Euro 250 million, under the ninth European Development Fund (EDF) budget (2000-2007) to support the APSA and Africa's vision of transition from protracted conflicts to sustainable peace (African Union Summit in Tripoli, 2010).

From the analysis thus far, the APSA's establishment epitomises the African leaders' commitment to prevent, manage and resolve, and thus take greater ownership of the continent's security challenges. This focus is based on their conviction that sustainable peace and security is a precondition for African development. Certainly, this security precaution of the AU is a clear departure from the ad hoc responses to specific African security problems as practiced under the previous OAU regime, as it creates a unifying framework to address these kinds of problems. Within the short period that the APSA has been in existence and, despite the fact that it is still being developed, the AU has been able to respond to and take several initiatives in Africa's trouble spots. This is a positive development that makes the new security mechanism promising for solving African security problems.

Within the APSA framework, the AU has applied its new norms and standards to condemn the unconstitutional changes of government in some African states as well as having suspended these countries memberships from the organisation. It also took decisive steps ranging from peacemaking to the supervision of elections in a number of African countries. As part of the APSA's implementation, the AU deployed peace missions in Burundi, the Comoros, Somalia and Darfur (Sudan) with varying degrees of success. However, some of the AU peace operations have been taken over by the UN by 're-hatting' the AU peacekeepers into the multi-dimensional UN peace missions. The AU's proactive stance of deploying peace missions to stabilise the security situations in both Burundi and Darfur and filling in the gaps created as a result of the UN's reluctance to get-involved before comprehensive peace agreements were put in place, is a credit to the organisation.

The roots of Mali's conflicts

From the 1968 Military Coup

The roots of Mali's conflicts lay in two decades of poor governance after a 1968 military coup, followed by a fragile democratic transition from 1992. The country has been characterised by weak state institutions and a nepotistic, corrupt, and sometimes insensitive ruling elite. The roots of the rebellion can also be pointedly traced to ethnic-political demands that developed into a separatist movement in the northern part of the country. A turning point was reached in 2012 when armed Islamist extremists joined the rebellion. The 500 000-strong Tuaregs in the north felt that they had been marginalised since independence from France in 1960, with allegations of neglect of the development needs of the region and a lack of representation in the central government of Bamako. They therefore initiated a rebellion that raged, particularly in the early 1990's. They felt that neither the National Pact for Re-establishment of Peace, Brotherhood and National unity in Northern Mali in 1992 nor the Algiers Accord of 2006 had addressed their grievances (Report of the Secretary General of the UN 2012:1-10). These plans had integrated some Tuareg elements into the Malian army and police (many would later defect to join armed militants in 2013).

In Mali as a whole, nearly 80 percent of the 14 million-strong population lived below the poverty line in 2013 (Ibid), suggesting that the central government was also neglecting other regions and groups in the country. The more proximate cause of the Mali conflict lay in the junior officers' perception that their senior officers were diverting resources for counterinsurgency in Northern Mali into their own pockets. This led to low morale and inoperable equipment among government troops. The president, Amadou Toumani Toure, himself a former general and Head of State between 1991 and 1992, was seen as having mismanaged both this situation and the militant threat in the north. This coup was reminiscent of the military putsch staged by military officers in Sierra Leone in April 1992, when junior officers toppled the regime of former general, Joseph Momoh, who it was felt, neglected their military needs in fighting Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels.

On 10 January 2012, the Tuareg group, *the movement pour la liberation de l'Azawad* (MNLA); Ansar Dine, an Islamic splinter group from the MNLA (whose political leadership was based in Mauritania); as well as Islamic extremists, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the *mouvement pour l'unicite et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO), launched attacks against the Malian army forces that led to them taking over the northern two-thirds of the country, including the towns of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal. Several thousand heavily armed Tuareg fighters had returned to Mali in October 2011, having fought with Libya's deposed Muammar Qaddafi: this was a blow-back from the French-led military intervention in that country. Ansar Dine worked with AQIM towards its goal of imposing *Sharia* law across the Sahel, and was fighting against the MNLA (Mali Economic Intelligence Report 2012:18-19). The MNLA declared what is called the 'independent state of Azawad', which no country recognised. These groups numbered around 3 000 core fighters and also involved criminal networks. MUJAO and Ansar Dine were reported to be fighting alongside Nigerian militants, Boko Haram, giving Abuja a direct stake in defeating this rebellion.

The Malian government's response to the *mujahedin* threat was weakened by the coup staged by the United States-trained Captain Amadoun Sanogo in March 2012. In the same month, ECOWAS appointed Burkinabe head of state, Blaise Compaore, as its mediator. The sub-regional body also announced plans to deploy a 3 000-strong standby force if the rebels refused to settle the situation peacefully. The following month, an ECOWAS deal forced the resignation of the Malian president, Amadou Toure, and the appointment of Dioncounda Traore as interim president. Compaore urged the MNLA and Ansar Dine to negotiate collectively with Bamako. Led by Sanogo, the putschists, however, continued to wield tremendous influence over the interim government.

The Politics of Intervention and the Conflict in Mali

Following the March 2012 coup, a support and follow-up group on the situation in Mali consisting of representatives from ECOWAS, the 'core countries' (Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger), the AU, the EU, and key bilateral donors, began to meet regularly. The AU pushed for better coordination of domestic and international efforts, and stressed the need to restore state authority, security sector reform, and elections. Even as 412 000 Malians were displaced by the conflict (including 208 000 refugees in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, and Togo) by November 2012, tensions erupted between the rebels in the north, with Ansar Dine and MAJAO repelling the MNLA out of the main towns that it had occupied. AQIM notoriously destroyed many historic and cultural sites in Timbuktu. Anecdotal evidence also shows that these attacks also closed down the country's gold mining.

ECOWAS' leadership was, at the time the Mali crisis erupted, francophone-dominated, allowing France to wield great influence among its major players. The organisation's key mediator was Burkinabe leader, Blaise Compaore, who had hosted French gazelle helicopters in his country before they were deployed for military combat in Mali in January 2013 (S. Wright and J.E. Okolo 1999:125-30); its chair since February 2012 was Alassane Ouattara, leader of Cote d'Ivoire, whose presidential mandate had been largely restored by the French army; while the ECOWAS president since February 2012, was former Burkinabe prime minister and a member of Compaore's congress for democracy and progress (CDP) party, Kadre Ouedrogo. All three were, in a sense, French Trojan horses within ECOWAS. Nigeria seemed diplomatically encircled and linguistically threw its weight around.

In June 2012, the ECOWAS commission started to discuss the possibility of deploying a stabilisation force to re-establish state authority in northern Mali. The UN and external donors provided support to ECOWAS' planning. The Malian army, ECOWAS, and the AU all requested that the UN Security Council authorise deployment of an ECOWAS stabilisation force with a peace-enforcement mandate (under Chapter VII of the UN charter) to restore the country's territorial integrity and also to secure its border areas, while the Malian army re-established state authority. The concept of the ECOWAS force operations was refined at two meetings involving senior Malian military officers, ECOWAS, the 'core countries' (Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger), the AU, the UN and other partners such as France, the US, and the EU in Bamako in August and October/November 2012.

A harmonised joint concept of operations – the 'strategic operational framework' – emerged which sought to align the Malian army's plan with those of a sub-regional force, African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). The mission would back a poorly-equipped 5 000-strong Malian army in three phases: to build its capacity; to recover occupied parts of the north and reduce the terrorist threat; and to transition to stabilisation activities in order to consolidate state authority in northern Mali. The plan also stressed the importance of longer-term security sector reform of the Malian army (telephone interview with General C. Obiakor, 2012). A joint coordination mechanism was established involving the ministers of defence of Mali, ECOWAS' troop-contributing states, the neighbouring 'core countries', the AU, the UN, and other international donors (*The Economist*, January 2013).

International Organisations and Governments' Intervention in the Mali Crisis

Both ECOWAS and AU leaders endorsed the plan in November 2012, and asked the UN Security Council to authorise a 3 300-strong African-led international support mission to Mali – with infantry units, air assets, and formed police units – for an initial one-year period. The force was authorised in December 2012 in a resolution drafted by France (Communiqué of ECOWAS Heads of Government, November 2012), with the UN Security Council urging AFISMA to take all necessary steps to rebuild Mali's army; help the government to extend its authority to the north; protect civilians; and help stabilise the country after military operations (Reports of the UN Secretary General on the Situation in Mali 2012:11-17). The force was to be deployed by September 2013, crucially signalling to armed militants that they had nine months in which to defeat the Malian army. In order to ensure efficient deployment of AFISMA to Mali, the AU asked for a logistical support package to be provided to the mission through assessed UN contributions, as had occurred with the AU/UN hybrid operation in Darfur in 2007.

This plan was great on paper, but would be difficult to implement in practice given the logistical and financial challenges of sub-regional armies, and Nigeria's peacekeeping over-commitments, exemplified in its current global, regional, sub-regional and national commitments. AFISMA was mandated to train, equip, and provide logistical support to the Malian Army, but could hardly equip or provide logistics to sustain itself in the field without substantial external assistance. The UN Secretariat and Department of Peacekeeping Operations – headed by Frenchman, Bernard Miyet – had been particularly hostile to the Nigerian peacekeeping presence in Sierra Leone (The Economist, January 2013), and was later (under another Frenchman, Jean-Marie Guehenno) critical of the AU/UN hybrid model in Darfur. (The French have headed the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations since Ghana's Kofi Annan promised it to them in 1996 in order to win their support to secure the post of UN secretary-General.)

The UN was therefore lukewarm towards AFISMA as reflected in its Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon's reports to the UN Security Council. He regarded AFISMA as an instrument of 'last resort' despite the fact that only military force would clearly dislodge hardened militants in northern Mali. He continually warned that ill-conceived intervention by AFISMA could worsen the situation on

the ground, and noted that the deployment of such a force could result in human right abuses. Furthermore, the Secretary-General condescendingly and persistently cautioned that these troops would have to be 'held accountable' for their actions, and called for UN human rights monitors to be deployed who would effectively 'police' AFISMA peacekeepers. Ban Ki-Moon also kept asking for more details of how AFISMA would be led, financed, equipped, and coordinated. As he noted, "A United Nations logistics support package deployed in Government-controlled territory would be used to meet the life-support needs of the international forces, including the provision of rations, fuel, engineering works, communications and medical support, as well as the strategic deployment and rotation of forces and the movement of equipment and supplies (UNSC, 2013:2).

In addition, the UN Secretary-General refused to consider the logistical support package that AFISMA was requesting to fulfill a task that was clearly in the interests of not just West Africans, but of the entire international community, and particularly powerful western states like France and the US (UNSC Report January 2013: 4). He also clearly displayed an unsustainable approach to such a dangerous mission. Critics, however, have pointed out that France's fingerprints appear to be all over several of the UN Secretary-General's reports. Jonah (2004) for example, notes that presented the possibility of member states directly supporting military action to combat armed groups in Mali (Jonah 2004: 331). Instead of the logistics and funding needed by AFISMA, the UN instead offered platitudes about human rights observance. By March 2013, the consolidated appeals process for Mali had received only $73.3 million, representing only 20 percent of its $368 million target (UNSC Report January 2013:5).

The Strange Reappearance of the French

As militants from Ansar Dane, MUJAO, and AQIM came to within 680 kilometres of Bamako on 10 January 2013, routing weak and demoralised Malian government forces, President Dioncounda Traore requested French assistance to prevent a march on the capital. The fact that a supposedly sovereign African country was turning to a former colonial power to protect its sovereignty was itself the greatest indictment of *Pax Africana*. The same day of this attack, Paris pushed the UN Security Council to declare Mali's crisis a "threat to international peace and security", thus legitimising its impending military actions.

Even before this militant drive to Bamako, French Special Forces had already reportedly been fighting in Mali alongside the Malian army (BBC News, 2013). In a well-coordinated move, France launched 'Operation Several' a day after the French-drafted UN Security Council resolution, with its troops eventually reaching 4 000. In a *Blitzkrieg* conducted closely with 2 000 troops from autocratic Chad rather than AFISMA, France retook major northern towns like Gao, Konna, and Timbuktu by the end of January 2013, as the militants withdrew north into the desert and the Adrar des Ifoghas mountains. Some of the jihadists staged suicide bombings and hit-and-run strikes against French and Malian units, as well as the MNLA (Roggio, 2013). By March 2013, the militants retained a presence in Kidal, Gao, and along the Niger River and Ouagadou Forest, with some also retreating to neighbouring countries. Northern Mali had been rendered a 'wild west'

featuring drug cartels, cross-border banditry, ransom kidnapping, human trafficking, and money laundering (X. Rice, 2013:5). The US, Britain, Germany, Canada, and Denmark rushed to provide France with logistical support that AFISMA had earlier been denied (Business Day, 2013).

French President Francois Hollande, suffering from low domestic poll ratings, pledged that France would stay in Mali as long as it took to defeat the terrorists (Aljazeera, 2013). He argued in January 2013 that: "Mali would have been entirely conquered and the terrorists would be in a position to force not just to submit the Malian population to a regime it did not want, but to put pressure on all countries of west Africa". (Economist Intelligence Second Quarter 2013:9) Commentators pointed out that France was astonishingly – and humiliatingly for Nigeria – presenting itself not just as a guarantor of peace in Mali (Milne 2013: 27), but in West Africa as a whole. French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, announced that Paris would maintain a 1 000-strong garrison in Mali, a country that obtained 14 percent of its imports from France in 2012 (Rice, 2013:5).

The long delayed AFISMA deployment also started to move into Mali by February 2013, following assurances of logistical and financial support that had previously been withheld. By March 2013, a 6 288-strong AFISMA (out of a revised authorised strength of 9 500) was expanding its presence in parts of north and central Mali under the leadership of Nigeria's General Shehu Abdulkadir. Other ECOWAS troop-contributing countries included Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. Predictably, the troops faced logistical challenges including food, fuel, and water; and required bilateral donor support to overcome these deficiencies (P. Melly and V. Darracq, 2013:13). A UN Trust Fund, which was hastily created, provided AFISMA with $26.7 million by March 2013 (Economist Intelligence Second Quarter 2013:6). Five logistics bases were established in Mali and Niger to supply the force by June 2013 in addition to the military, intelligence and logistical support provided by key Western nations – Britain, Belgium, Canada and the US (D.J. Francis, 2013). Serious questions were raised in Africa as to why these arrangements had not been put in place to support the regional troops before the French military intervention. Confirming the cynicism of powerful Western countries in watching AFISMA struggle to mobilise troops, the UN Secretary-General confirmed in June 2013 what everyone had known all along: that AFISMA lacked the enabling units to act as an effective peacekeeping force. The troops were given four months to reach UN standards (Report of the UNSG March 2013:16).

A surprising voice of support for French efforts in Mali came from Nigeria's Foreign Minister, Olugbenga Ashiru, who noted in April 2013: "if the French had not intervened at the time they did, the situation in Mali would have been different today. Nigeria and indeed all members of the AU are grateful for the intervention." (*This Day*, 25 January 2013) At their summit in the Ivorian town of Yamoussoukro in February 2013, ECOWAS leaders had also expressed "profound gratitude" to Paris for its "decisive action". (Communique of ECOWAS Leaders, 2013). A poll conducted by the Washington D.C.-based Pew Research Centre in March and April 2013 suggested that these leaders did not always accurately reflect the views of their populations. While 42 percent of Nigerians approved of the French intervention, 25 percent disapproved; 39 percent of Ghanaians

approved, while 41 percent disapproved; in Francophone Senegal, 91 percent approved, while only 5 percent disapproved (Peace Research, July 2013).

Concluding Remarks

The Malian conflict, as well as the mode of intervention, has exposed the politics behind peacemaking missions in Africa. Growing evidence shows that France has been successful in using UN-sanctioned missions in Rwanda, the CAR, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, and now Mali to propagate its parochial interests in Africa under the cover of a UN flag. It has also effectively sought to have its past discredited unilateral interventions on the continent seen as multilateral. While one cannot discount the fact that stability may have occurred in some of these cases, it was incidental to primary French interest of maintaining its own political, strategic, and economic interest in its African *chasse gardee.*

Thus, it can be argued that AFISMA had clearly been set up to fail. It was a phantom force that was stillborn in Mali that clearly had to be resurrected as MINUSMA. In the international community's grisly 'aristocracy of death', the lives of African peacekeepers are still considered to be of lesser importance to those of Western peacekeepers. It is intriguing that the UN waited until after the French military intervention in 2013 before authorising a force that was four times as large as the proposed African force. This has further exposed the duplicity of its western-dominated Security Council. It can be discerned that AFISMA was indeed a cheap way of sending African troops as sacrificial rams to be slaughtered in the full knowledge that the force lacked the size, logistics, and financing to sustain itself in the field. Its initial strength of 3 300 was tripled to 9 500 as soon as the French intervention occurred, and the support that had previously been denied it suddenly appeared. As with previous African-led missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and Darfur, the Africans felt that the UN was coming to steal their glory after tortuous regional peacemaking and peacekeeping that the world body failed to properly recognize, (A. Adebajo 2011:13).

Despite its supposedly 'humanitarian' intervention in Mali, France has historically had economic interests in both Mali and Niger's uranium sectors. About a quarter of French electricity production relies on uranium. On April 2013, the French government White Paper on Defence and National Security – with an advisory group chaired by Jean-Marie Guehenno, the former French UN Undersecretary-General for Peacekeeping – specifically singled out Africa (the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea, and the Maghreb) as a priority area for French defence and security policy. While the white paper noted that France would help strengthen African peacekeeping capacity, Paris envisaged undertaking future interventions like the one in Mali, and planned to maintain at least four military bases on the continent. The White Paper also recognised Africa's economic potential, while urging the EU to acknowledge that African security was a key interest for the whole organisation (Melly and Darracq, 2013:13).

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