



# Mali Analysis

## STRATEGIC WARGAMING SERIES

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7-8 November 2012



**UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE**  
**Center for Strategic Leadership & Development**  
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The findings contained in this report are based on the results of an academic wargame conducted at the United States Army War College 7-8 November 2012. Except where expressly indicated, the ideas presented are derived directly from the comments of wargame participants. The views contained in this report are intended to inform senior Army leaders including, but not confined to members of the Army Staff, Geographic Combatant Commands and Army Service Component Commands. This report does not express the policies or official views of the United States Government, the Department of Defense or the United States Army.

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## United States Army War College Strategic Wargaming Series

### Wargame 1-13 (MALI)

#### Executive Summary

On 7-8 November 2012, the United States Army War College convened a group of regional subject matter experts to assess security implications resulting from Malian instability and to identify potential U.S. Army contributions to strategic security in northwest Africa. Twenty participants<sup>1</sup> examined two alternative futures developed by wargame designers and each of two subgroups of participants developed an additional alternative future that they considered plausible. Each future was analyzed by the subgroups and presented to and discussed by the assembled participants.

Participant perceptions of the nature of the problem, what is at stake, and what might improve the situation varied widely. The discussions identified similar differences of perspective among U.S., international, regional and Malian stakeholders.

#### **Key Findings**

- U.S. African regional and global counterterrorism policies intersect in Mali. A U.S. national interest – regional stability [conflict prevention]<sup>2</sup> is threatened; U.S. counterterrorism policy objectives may be threatened if the ability of extremist groups [Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA)] to operate in the region is unchecked.
- Three distinct yet interlocking security issues coexist in Mali: 1) The lack of a legitimate or functioning government undermines both internal and regional stability; 2) Ungoverned space in northern Mali provides an environment conducive to development of a local extremist threat into a threat across and beyond the region; and, 3) Internal conflict over power and resources in northern Mali complicates and potentially undermines resolution of the north-south issue.
- Regional Partner interests – the de facto split of Mali may encourage Tuareg secession movements in other states with Tuareg minorities; ungoverned space in northern Mali facilitates transnational crime (smuggling of arms, drugs, kidnap for ransom); internal fighting for control of northern Mali could spill over to southern Mali and other neighbors; the security vacuum could worsen the humanitarian crisis by generating additional IDPs and refugees; spread of radical Islam to neighbors.
- European security interests – Extremist groups pose a direct threat to significant numbers of Europeans in the region (principally French), and pose an unacceptable

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<sup>1</sup> The participants were selected based on perceived subject matter expertise from the U.S. Army War College faculty and students, including International Fellows, Army and other DoD officers and officials, and from think tanks. The views they expressed were their own, not agency positions.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this report, material in brackets [] has been inserted by the report author to provide context or clarify the participants' views.

threat in European states with significant Malian migrant communities (principally France).

- The evolving terror threat in northern Mali is not currently a global threat; fissures between indigenous groups and AQIM exist and may be exploited; experts assert that AQIM is affiliated with but NOT Al Qaeda and also that indigenous Malian groups have separate agendas from foreign radicals; any counterterrorism actions must be informed by clear understanding of and distinction between radical Islamists and other Muslims.
- Given significant ethnic complexities in Mali, military action that may be attributed to the United States in northern Mali could be counterproductive; U.S. military action would likely fuel anti-American sentiment, and could serve to increase recruiting by radical actors.
- Addressing security issues in northern Mali will require establishment of an acceptable power-sharing arrangement between north and south; success of any power sharing arrangement must be agreed by a Malian national government in Bamako that is accepted as legitimate in both northern and southern Mali and recognized by international actors.
- Intervention of a black African force (e.g., Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) into Tuareg/Arabic/Songhai areas is very likely to be perceived as foreign intervention and met with a violent response; the currently envisioned 3300-man ECOWAS force does not appear to possess the necessary capabilities and capacity to succeed in stability and counterterrorism operations over the vast expanse of northern Mali.
- Although the U.S. should make every effort to avoid putting U.S. service members on the ground in Mali, the U.S. Army should begin planning now to undertake three high priority Build Partner Capacity tasks with ECOWAS and Sahelian countries (Increase training of ECOWAS forces for this mission; strengthen military-to-military contacts with Arab partners; and, broaden regional capacity building), and also should consider the need to prepare three specific potential Warfighting Contingency Plans (support, extract, assume mission) related to any ECOWAS intervention effort.

## Report on Mali War Game

For purposes of this report, we use the terms northern and southern Mali. These are not formal political divisions but are two distinctly different regions separated by the narrow waist of Mali, a line running roughly NW to SE through Mopti that approximates the division of territory under GoM control from territory not under its control. The arid north, about two thirds of the territory of Mali, is sparsely populated by Tuareg, Arab, and Songhai tribes that amount to 10% of Mali's population. The south, primarily savannah, only one third of the territory, has the bulk of Mali's resources and 90% of the population, which is predominantly black African.

The political situation in Mali is extremely complex, with multiple actors competing with one another for power at multiple levels. Much of this competition predates the arrival of AQIM in northern Mali, making it better to think of AQIM and its Islamist allies as complicators of existing tensions rather than the cause of the current conflict. Competition in the north, primarily over power and resources, and northern dissatisfaction with the central

government in Bamako have from time to time resulted in political violence, most notably the Tuareg rebellions of the 1960s, 1990s and the middle of the last decade. In addition, the alignment of factions in the north constantly shifts as elements within society alternately compete and cooperate with one another to advance their goals and protect their interests. Therefore, when talking about the various parties to the conflict in northern Mali, it is better to think of the current groups as temporary coalitions among multiple factions rather than unitary actors with fixed membership bases and agendas.

Parties Involved in the Malian conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AQIM – Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb</li><li>• AD – Ansar Dine or Ansar ad Din</li><li>• MOJWA – Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa</li><li>• MNLA – National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad [Tuareg nationalists]</li><li>• GoM – Government of Mali</li></ul>

One significant factor is common to and influenced outcomes for all futures both subgroups considered: the impact of weak political institutions at all levels in Mali. Participants concluded that stronger institutions are needed for agreements to endure beyond the tenure of the individual leader signing the agreement. Given the lack of strong institutions, if an agreement between northern and southern Mali could be achieved a durable north-south agreement is extremely unlikely. They cited the low likelihood that strong leaders will emerge (or be able to hold power) in either region as the primary reason for this assessment and also questioned the viability of any north-south agreement reached before the situation in Bamako is settled.

### **Potential Mali Futures:**

Participants assessed alternative plausible futures using subject matter expertise and informed judgment of the complex variables influencing Mali and the region. The futures experts envisioned for Mali are briefly described, likely implications for the United States and indicators that each future may be emerging are identified.

**Future #1: Islamist [AD, AQIM, MOJWA] Attacks into Southern Mali.** Participants characterized this future as Tuareg separatists [AD] and AQIM/MOJWA elements conducting isolated attacks into southern Mali and then retreating to the north. Potential motives were to use spoiling attacks to buy time or deter ECOWAS intervention or gain supplies through raids. An alternative motive was to generate leverage during negotiations. They viewed attacks intended to seize and hold territory as very unlikely. Although unlikely, participants viewed this future as very dangerous because it would change the fundamental nature of the Mali crisis. If this future arose, it would:

- Create an existential threat to Bamako government (Failed States Dynamic) [They reasoned that if the political crisis in Bamako remains unresolved, there is high potential for Mali to devolve into a failed state.]
- Globalize the problem [by increasing the stakes of regional and international actors].
- Spread radical Islam to southern Mali, threatening other states in the region; and potentially increase external actor incentive to intervene (Regionally/Globally).
- Generate large scale increase in the number of IDPs and refugees.
- Increase the likelihood of mass atrocities.
- Lead to possible emergence of local militias; these groups may later be hard to disband/disarm or integrate into Malian Armed Forces.
- Require more refugee camps that could:
  - Become recruiting grounds for jihadists
  - Become transfer points for [illicit] arms, drugs and radicals
  - Generate crime
  - Enable imported ideologies [especially Salafi jihadism]
- Increase transnational crime
- Threaten critical resource generation such as Nigerian hydroelectric production if flow of the Niger River were disrupted.

### Indicators

- That would show movement toward this future
  - Infighting among the factions, especially between AD and MOJWA/AQIM.
    - Ideological elements within AD gain control over pragmatists; signs of AD fragmenting into pro- and anti-AQIM factions.
    - Outbreak of revenge attacks between AD and MOJWA/AQIM.
  - Influx of foreign fighters/stockpiling heavy weapons by AQIM/MOJWA.
  - Increase in rhetoric [indicating radicalization of AD elements].
  - Increase in bombings [in southern Mali].
  - Severe food/fuel insecurity in AD controlled areas [provides motive to raid southern Mali for supplies].
  - Collapse of government in the south – increases the likelihood of an opportunistic attack.

- That could show movement toward or away from this future.
  - Entry of AD into the political process.
    - Could motivate MOJWA/AQIM attack to undermine the process
    - Could indicate denial of this future

**Future #2: Terrorist Safe Haven.** Participants characterized this future as AQIM consolidating a level of control in far northern Mali where it threatens the Malian government, ECOWAS neighbors, the United States and the West. AQIM and extremist affiliates [MOJWA, radical elements within AD] carry out or support suicide bombing attacks in southern Mali and neighboring states. AQIM plans and recruits for suicide attacks in Europe and their messaging threatens attacks on U.S. “after Europe conquered”.

Experts viewed this future as plausible and considered the threat serious: The prospect of de-facto division of Mali into two parts, with northern Mali controlled by “negative forces” would be perceived as a threat by some regional partners [those with significant Tuareg minorities]. Participants described the complex threat environment in this future in terms of both internal and external ones.

Perceived internal threats were viewed as minimal, less important than the Bamako government crisis [aftermath of 2012 coup]. This perception could change if external players are believed to be undermining interests of Bamako dispute stakeholders. Within southern Mali, the situation in the north and control of the north are viewed entirely through the lens of the Bamako crisis.

Perceived Regional Threats are viewed as serious. These threats are:

- Establishment of a Tuareg separatist precedent that in itself threatens all Mali’s neighbors. [Although use of ‘all’ went unchallenged in the final discussion, the group that did not present this future had discussed that this is only to neighbors with significant Tuareg minorities.]
- An uncontrolled northern Mali region serves as a major drug and arms trans-shipment hub that threatens neighbors (and ultimately the United States and EU partners).
- If the “Azawad” split were recognized, that region would itself descend into a bloody power-struggle between Tuaregs, Arabs and Songhai, with negative 2nd and 3rd order effects on southern Mali and neighboring countries.
- Regional spin-offs include worsened humanitarian crisis, increased drug flows, and possible nexus/synergy among currently disparate terrorist groups (Example: Boko Haram with AQIM, AD, and MOJWA).

Perceived External Threats: De-facto split of Mali was not perceived as a problem in itself, but...

- Partners are concerned with the threat of terrorism staged from northern Mali, especially if disparate groups’ interests, goals, and capabilities coalesce.

- AD is not perceived as a threat, but AQIM's ability to operate freely in northern Mali poses a serious, if not immediate, threat to regional and U.S. interests and those of our EU partners.
- Destabilization of the region counters stated U.S. policy goals – but are not VITAL U.S. interests.

### **Indicators**

- Low interest by regional states to support mediation efforts leads to Islamists being emboldened for further aggression.
- Increased but poorly planned GoM arming of northern militias increases inter-group friction and violent competition.
- Deployment of foreign troops leads to increased violence in northern Mali and/or the perception of external interference evokes anti-foreigner (ECOWAS partners, European, U.S.) sentiments in southern Mali.
- Major increase in drugs and arms smuggling.
- Expulsion of non-Islamic NGOs from northern Mali; this will also exacerbate the humanitarian situation.
- Major increase in hostage-taking.
- Foreign Islamists begin to cite northern Mali in their rhetoric.

**Future #3: Early 2013 Regional Intervention.** This future was developed by a group of exercise participants as a plausible alternative to the futures 1 and 2; it results from early ECOWAS intervention into northern Mali without resolution of the GoM coup crisis and establishment of a government in Bamako that enjoys domestic legitimacy and international recognition. Participants offered the following issues with near-term intervention.

- ECOWAS partners currently lack the capabilities to effectively conduct stability and counter-terror operations. [equipment, intelligence support, transportation, and logistics, to include ammunition]
- Maintaining effective control over the vast area of northern Mali is beyond the capacity of the 3300-man force proposed by ECOWAS.
- ECOWAS partners should expect introduction of a black African force into northern Mali will be resisted violently, causing significant casualties.

### **Indicators**

- [Passage of a UN Security Council Resolution to authorize the mission.]
- [Actual commitment by national decision authorities of ECOWAS troop contributing countries of forces for this mission.]
- AD breaking ties with AQIM or signs of AD fragmenting into pro- and anti- AQIM factions. [This would indicate success on the part of the GoM and ECOWAS as a weakening of support for AQIM by some [fragmenting] or all [breaking ties] AD elements.]

- AD efforts to engage in meaningful dialog in order to preclude ECOWAS military action in the north [would indicate that AD perceives a negotiated settlement as a better outcome than facing an ECOWAS presence in the north or that it sees dialog as a means to delay deployment of ECOWAS forces in the north]. [Author note: participants' assumption that adversary intent 'in order to preclude ECOWAS military action in the north' could be known is probably not sustainable.]

**Future #4: Semi-Autonomy.** This future was developed by the other half of the exercise participants as a plausible alternative to the futures 1 and 2. Participants characterized this future as ECOWAS facilitated discussions lead to the de-facto establishment of an effective non-state entity north of the Niger River with symbolic reestablishment of Mali's borders. AD and MNLA receive effective semi-autonomy and political control of northern Mali in exchange for limited central government presence in northern Mali for border security, repudiation/isolation and ejection of AQIM/MOJWA from northern Mali and formal integration of MNLA and AD into the central government in Bamako. This future assumes:

- AD are Tuareg 'nationalists' – ideological narrative is a front.
- Conflict between AD and MNLA is an issue of Tuareg internal politics.
- Bamako accepts the solution.
- Algeria and Niger accept the solution.
- Basic Human Rights are respected as part of agreement [sufficiently to satisfy members of the international community, i.e., the Salafist interpretation of Shari'a regarding corporal punishment would not be imposed on the people of northern Mali].

**Indicators** [This break-out group did not provide indicators; however, the exercise team derived the following indicators based on facilitator and data collector notes.]

- AD and MNLA elements realign with elements that favor autonomy gaining power in northern Mali.
- AD breaking ties with AQIM or signs of AD fragmenting into pro- and anti- AQIM factions with the anti-AQIM elements ascendant.
- Initiation of dialog between AD/MNLA and Bamako or integration of some AD/MNLA elements into the Bamako government.
- Lack of a hostile response to GoM forces reestablishing a presence in northern Mali.

#### **U.S. Roles and Consequences:**

Consequences for the United States and potential roles for U.S. Army forces and other assets will occur within the context of two U.S. policies that intersect in Mali, Regional Policy for Africa and Global Counterterrorism Policy.

- Regional Policy for Africa: "There are five pillars that serve as the foundation of U.S. policy toward Africa:
  - 1) Support for democracy and the strengthening of democratic institutions on the continent, including free, fair, and transparent elections.

- 2) Supporting African economic growth and development.
- 3) Conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution.
- 4) Supporting Presidential initiatives such as the Global Health Initiative, Feed the Future, and the Global Climate Change Initiative.
- 5) Working with African nations on transnational issues such as drug smuggling, money laundering, illicit arms, and trafficking in persons.”<sup>3</sup>
- Counterterrorism policy: “To disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qa’ida and its affiliates, we are pursuing a strategy that protects our homeland, secures the world’s most dangerous weapons and material, denies al-Qa’ida safe haven, and builds positive partnerships with Muslim communities around the world.”<sup>4</sup>

In response to each future, participating experts advised on actions the United States might consider in response to the Mali crisis and offered counsel on actions it should specifically avoid regarding the crisis. These recommendations are offered in the context of “Prevent, Shape, and Win” actions. These actions may occur simultaneously to both prevent conflict and shape the security environment for success while increasing interoperability with regional partners and increasing partner capacity.

**Prevent.** Regional partners face a regional terrorist threat that must be addressed in the near-term but lack the capabilities and/or capacity to do so effectively. They need increased security cooperation efforts focused first on counterterrorism capabilities. The GoM institutions that would underpin an enduring political and security solution in Mali are either undeveloped or underdeveloped. Any intervention represents short-term mitigation without institution-building to improve the Malian capacity to govern. There is a need to seek a stable political arrangement in Mali in concert with counterterrorism and stability actions in northern Mali to prevent further exacerbating the crisis. The following describe actions that might prevent unfavorable outcomes.

- Deepened understanding of the actors, especially in the highly segmented society of northern Mali is essential prior to actions (increase intelligence/situational awareness).
- Intelligence sharing is essential with border countries.
- A shift in data exchange from tactical to strategic level is critical to regional partners’ ability to cope with threats.
- A detailed analysis of current Malian capabilities is needed.
- The region around Mopti should be monitored [for movement of forces].

**Shape:** Experts emphasized the need for increased security cooperation efforts to improve partner capabilities to affect and enforce a regional solution to Mali. Discussion also revealed the absence of highway infrastructure, the landlocked position of Mali, and the austerity of the operational environment as factors requiring preparatory actions to set the theater for ground operations. The most urgent among these is strategic and theater airlift that will be critical

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<sup>3</sup> Department of State website for Bureau of African Affairs, <http://www.state.gov/p/af/index.htm>, accessed 19 November 2012.

<sup>4</sup> National Security Strategy of the United States, 2010

enablers. The following describe shaping actions that might support regional security objectives.

- Pending resolution of the GoM coup crisis, provide full support to ECOWAS military efforts to prepare for intervention.
- Strategic messaging – encourage distrust/fissures [among the opposition northern factions]; also inform and reassure local populations and regional partners.
- Assist with refugees [and IDPs].
- Aid planning and build-up of ECOWAS forces in Mali in a non-threatening way.
- Support local militias; coordinated with GoM.
- Facilitate financial support toward Mali and ECOWAS efforts to mitigate crisis.
- Deepen backing of the negotiations process.
  - Socialize possible future(s) with elites in Bamako to increase awareness and understanding.
  - Exert influence at international level to bring in additional partners.
  - Provide venues for addressing non-ECOWAS regional interests.
  - Pro-actively support all beneficial [to the United States] UN efforts.
- If an extra-regional state has a leading or major role in possible intervention, this should not be the United States.
- Develop understanding of potential sustainment infrastructure, to include basing and support for strategic and intra-theater airlift.

**Win.** The complex nature of three interlocking, essentially political problems in Mali, which created an environment conducive to the evolution of AQIM into a threat across and beyond the region, leads to the conclusion that these problems may not be resolved through direct U.S. military action. Indeed, most participants recognized significant risk that deployment of U.S. forces would exacerbate the existing problems and focus hostility toward the United States.

Winning in Mali will hinge on shaping an acceptable political solution while successfully marginalizing radical elements [AQIM, MOJWA, elements within AD] by driving a wedge between them and Malian groups that do not share their radical agenda. This must first and foremost be achieved by Malians themselves. The United States and its regional and international partners can encourage the Malians toward resolution, help increase their capacity and provide missing critical capabilities. To this end, participants recommended the following actions the United States might consider to positively influence the Mali crisis and the region, and identified actions it should avoid.

The United States might consider:

- Planning and implementing long-term training of Malian forces, particularly in regard to military leadership and institution development.
- Investing in long-term security cooperation and capability building among regional partners to enable effective regional responses to regional issues.
- Advocating for support of complimentary economic incentive programs to recruit and retain capable Malian forces.

- Recognizing that any type of U.S. forces [other than trainers] will be viewed as an unwelcome intervention.

The United States should not:

- Push for a pre-mature election; a zero-sum political process will not help the GoM resolve the coup crisis and may, in fact, lead to increased violence in southern Mali.
- Deploy forces [other than trainers] to Mali.
- Use broad definitions of “terrorists” [either in strategic communication or operational planning] that preclude dialog with elements of AD willing to engage in dialog.
- Become the leading extra-regional state.

### **Potential U.S. Army tasks**

Given the likelihood that deployment of an ECOWAS force to Mali will occur and that the currently projected ECOWAS force will lack critical capabilities and the capacity to effectively control all of northern Mali, U.S. Army planners need to consider undertaking three Build Partnership Capacity tasks that would be best performed by culturally aware regionally aligned forces:

1. Increase training of forces for ECOWAS partner countries for this mission;
2. Strengthen military-to-military contacts with Arab North African partners;
3. Broaden regional capacity building with ECOWAS and Sahelian partners;

U.S. Army planners need to consider developing CONPLANS for three distinct Warfighting missions:

4. Provide intelligence, aviation, sustainment and other critical capabilities for the ECOWAS force in Mali;
5. U.S. military intervention to enable Extraction of the ECOWAS force;
6. U.S. military intervention to assume the ECOWAS force mission.
7. To enable this planning and if not already done, survey available facilities for strategic and theater airlift.

### **Doctrine and Force Structure**

Based upon observation during wargame, the following potential gaps in doctrine and Army force structure may exist.

- There is a potential gap in joint doctrine that would guide joint support to security cooperation, countering threat finances, and preventing civilian casualties.
- U.S. support to Mali crisis resolution is essential, however no approved Army force structure exists to address requirements for essential Theater Military Advisory and Assistance Groups, Human Terrain Teams, Counter-Threat Finance Teams, and Ministerial Advisory Teams; Army planners and force managers should address these requirements.
- The Army should develop doctrine it currently lacks on setting, maintaining, and closing a theater; and on employment of regionally aligned Army forces.