



CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE  
T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: [contact@chathamhouse.org](mailto:contact@chathamhouse.org)  
F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 [www.chathamhouse.org](http://www.chathamhouse.org)

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## Transcript Q&A

# Mali: From Crisis Intervention to Potential Recovery

Ibrahima Diane

Editor, BBC Afrique

Paul Melly

Associate Fellow, Africa Programme, Chatham House

Camilla Toulmin

Director, International Institute for Environment and Development

Chair: Dr Claire Spencer

Head, Middle East and Africa Programme, Chatham House

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**Claire Spencer:**

We have 20 minutes, just over, for questions. A couple of issues which I would like to flag are – the role of the West African forces in Mali, what's the future? The general aim being the handover, which I believe has already started, from the French forces – will this be something that's problematic in its own right or actually a first for ECOWAS playing a role in this region? Although I can see there are a number of difficulties associated with that.

The second thing is: you flagged gold in Burkina Faso, but also gold is present in Mali. Now we know Mali has long since been a poor country, suffering extensively from famines. What future for gold, given that the risk is likewise, where you have a lot of mineral resources, competition over their exploitation and – how shall we say – competition over who actually controls the proceeds, and how that may skew politics? I know most people are saying the French – and perhaps you can come back to this, Paul – are more interested effectively in Niger because of the uranium mining. And Mali, against what many people said was old colonial strategic interests in taking charge of Mali – they don't actually have as many economic, and as a result, strategic, interests in Mali as they do in Niger. So maybe a few words about where do the French go from here in terms of the region. So that's from me.

**Question 1:**

My question is, and it's born of scepticism in the past: how well do you think the international development and law enforcement and security donor agencies, and the ECOWAS countries assisting in Mali and indeed elsewhere – how well can they coordinate together? Because I heard last week a gentleman who's just returned from Somalia be severely critical – this was in a question and answer after the foreign secretary's speech of 14 February – and was very critical of poor international coordination. I just wonder how that's going to run. I would just add also, regarding the bit about the French tourist hostages held in northeastern Cameroon, maybe that illustrates a problem of perhaps not looking terribly far ahead, although it is obviously very difficult. Because let's not forget that two or three weeks ago there was a Nigerian security forces operation in the far northeast of Nigeria, therefore along the Cameroon border, against insurgents. So looking at a map it's quite clear something was very close to Cameroon. I think that illustrates the problem of – perhaps you've got to keep your eye on the ball all the time, it's not easy.

## Question 2:

One of the things that is missing from the current debate is something which before I retired would have been regarded as essential: namely, the coordination of activities through the African Union and other transnational organizations within the continent itself. The feeling at that time – and I'm sure it is still the same – is a feeling of resentment if coordination is always coming from the West, from NATO, from the ex-colonial powers. 'Are we incapable of doing these things for ourselves?' So I wonder if any of the panel have up-to-date news on the situation within the African Union or the countries of the African Union, in terms of them working together in this crisis.

## Ibrahima Diane:

I think it's key, as I was saying earlier on. I think it's something that would be missing in most of the operations. If you take ECOWAS alone, you have 15 countries involved, at least two languages involved, French and English, people who have never worked together – you are putting them in the same operation. So militarily it might be simple for them to operate but then you have diplomats involved, and then it becomes complicated. The forces were supposed to be African forces even before the French intervened. As you say, the French intervention happened in two days – even less than that; in the night when they were attacking Konna and they were going towards Sévaré and elsewhere, that Dioncounda [Traoré] had to call François Hollande and push him to intervene. This is because locally they were going around the table, saying dialogue and dialogue, and you have the president [chairman] of ECOWAS, Alassane Ouattara, saying, 'We will intervene very soon,' and you have Blaise Compaoré, the mediator for ECOWAS saying, 'No, we are privileging dialogue.' So there was no coordination between them.

That's just one part of the situation. As I was saying, the international community... before the France intervention you had the US in those areas already training the military in those areas. Then you have the French bases almost around Mali – that's one of the things explaining the quick intervention. They have a base in Chad, they have a base in Senegal, they have a base in Abidjan. So quickly they can come. They even have a base in Burkina Faso. So if this was well coordinated – and because there is an issue right now about these African troops, they want to put them under the UN so that they become blue helmets. Within Mali, people are reluctant to [do] that kind of thing because it means that the authority of those in the region would be under the UN. The Malians, as you said, are very sensitive to those kinds of situations. You might remember that Mali was – the name of Mali is the name

of the empire. They are still proud of that name. Before Mali, at the independence, you had Mali and Senegal together and then they were split. So that situation is not – the easy bit is the French intervention stopping the Islamists. Then we have to ask ourselves: where are they? Because so far we have just heard that maybe 2,000 or – some of them have been killed. Where are the others? That's a big issue.

But the coordination between Africans locally and the coordination at the international level – for the first time I'm seeing an operation where you have Germans, French and everybody saying, 'We are supporting this.' But they are all going to Mali, training Malian troops, and what's happening in the other part? Except Algeria, where the gas plant was attacked. In Niger, they are trying to protect Niger. But Boko Haram was there before this Malian situation. All the kidnappings and abductions in the region – Cameroon was today, I think over the weekend there was already a kidnapping of foreign workers in Nigeria. So that situation is there. And it looks like there is kind of competition between those small groups of Islamists or jihadists in that region, because we all knew about Boko Haram and then there is this new group called Ansar... something trying to create its own movement. We had Ansar Dine at the beginning in Mali and then we had MUJAO (Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa).

So the coordination would be key and so far it is not – it doesn't exist. The only chance we have in Mali is that France has a very good leadership in there. They seem to be driving. Because if they waited until the deployment of the 5,000 or so African troops, I think Mali – we would have been in another situation. They said, 'We are sending 800 troops,' and then they quadrupled. I think now they have almost 4,000 and something. So the French leadership is very good in this and everybody is lucky that it seems to be appreciated in the region and by the Malians. Until they start talking about politics, and then I think there will be another situation to talk about.

### **Paul Melly:**

I would just make a point about the African intervention force. I think in political terms, West Africa, compared with some other regions, has achieved a level of political coordination in at least making some key decisions in the aftermath of the coup and the collapse of the state in the north of Mali – ECOWAS leaders did hold a series of summit meetings. When you compare it with the way Europe managed the Bosnia crisis and how long it took to decide what should happen there, or the disarray in the Arab world over how

to deal with Syria, actually achieving the political decisions and therefore giving a political cover for the deployment of intervention forces was quite well pulled together.

But where the big challenges come is that many people have thought, since West Africa had previously done its own interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone with the ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group) forces two decades ago – and although they were sometimes criticized, they certainly saved a certain number of lives that would have been lost if they hadn't intervened. Actually this time, the ECOWAS force – it's not so much that the soldiers didn't exist but the structures and the mechanisms to actually organize, plan the logistical detail and send them in, didn't function. So from about June/July onwards, the international community – the sort of vibe coming out of the UN was to basically say: 'We can't give a green light on this; come back with some detailed plans as to how you're actually going to get the soldiers here, get them organized on the ground, ensure that they're supplied, etc.' That was the bit that four or five months later still wasn't there.

Now, as Ibrahima mentioned, because of the French deployment, the organization has sort of happened and the African countries have been able to deploy – I think the latest figures are perhaps 5,000 troops or something like that, from quite a wide range of countries. So it's not that they lack the soldiers but the system, the equivalent as it were of a NATO command headquarters or the UN peacekeeping machinery that actually pulls the thing together and takes the decisions. That's the bit that hasn't functioned.

### **Camilla Toulmin:**

But it's interesting that there are a certain number of leaders in the ECOWAS group who have a very strong incentive in trying to make this work. It's great to have people, like particularly Ouattara, being a key figure in all this. But at the same time, serious concerns maybe about the role of some of the other West African leaders, particularly Compaoré in Burkina, around the sorts of games that he seemed to be playing in the negotiations.

In terms of the African Union, there was a big meeting on 29 January in Addis that brought a lot of the main actors together at the African Union headquarters to talk through both immediate help on the military/security front and also longer-term plans on development. I haven't, to be honest, seen any kind of official outcome from that but it was very much an attempt by both the wide range of international cooperation agencies to recognize the value that

the African Union could bring to this and the need to use it as one of the main areas for coordination.

But you're right; there are a whole number of different processes underway. I think there are four or five different envoys from the UN, from the EU, from the African Union, from ECOWAS. The melee of envoys may well create a bit of a problem.

On gold, it's mainly South African firms so far as I know who are producing gold out of Mali. It is Mali's first, most important export. So gold is really important. But it's largely in the southern half, so far as I'm aware, though there are a whole number of explorations for oil in northern Mali. The Italians are there in particular.

I wanted to say something about the whole drugs question. In late January the vice president of Ghana has launched a West African drugs initiative which is aiming to see how you can address the fact that there seem to be all of these networks, particularly coming through from Guinea-Bissau up across the desert – what can be done at a West African level? I hope that that will also spur thinking in Europe around decriminalization and around ways in which we can address the hugely adverse backwash from our drugs policy here, in terms of the incomes and profits that can be generated by the narco-trade in West Africa.

### **Question 3:**

The question I have is for Paul and Camilla, as you have witnessed development programmes in Mali yourselves. I'm kind of frustrated, as a Malian, to see that for ages donors gave a lot of money and a lot of programmes were in place to help Mali to go further. Then the Addis Ababa meeting resulted in an extreme amount of money to be given in Mali, but then we know that development programmes failed. Nothing has changed in the past 20 years. So what do you think these programmes should do? How should they become more efficient in Mali and other parts of Africa as well?

### **Question 4:**

I'm intrigued by the fact that West Africa and the Middle East are very similar. They have a nomadic diaspora. You have the Tuaregs in West Africa and you have the Kurds in the Middle East. Is a possible solution to follow the Americans' approach and make a quasi-autonomous state in Iraq, which is Kurdistan, similar to a quasi-autonomous state in northern Mali?

### **Question 5:**

You've all mentioned the political, military and economic restructuring that needed doing. I just wondered what the panel thought, if that was possible while Captain Amadou Sanogo is still so powerful apparently in the military, and his fellow coup-makers of course.

### **Question 6:**

A lot of issues have been mentioned about ECOWAS. As mentioned before, ECOWAS actually already has a track record of interventions. But I would suggest maybe the key is, as ever, Nigeria – obviously, I'm Nigerian, so I would say that. But the key is Nigeria. Obviously Nigeria drove the Sierra Leonean and Liberian interventions and now with the advent of democracy is slightly less interested in foreign adventures, with our own issues. Also in the 1970s and 1980s, Nigeria had a lot of technocrats who worked around in different West African countries. Wouldn't that maybe be the way forward? You were mentioning the unpalatability of having French administrators in Malian ministries – you could instead have, as happened before, West African technocrats embedded in some Malian ministries. I know the French are embedding into the Malian army. The same thing could happen – the Sierra Leoneans had the Nigerian GOCs (General Officers Commanding), Nigerian chiefs of staff. The same kind of thing could happen in Mali with West Africans, as was the original plan, embedding into their ministries.

Also, just touching again on the development issues about the river Niger. Again, as a Nigerian, I don't want to emphasize hydroelectric plants taking water away from us further down. But following on maybe from what happened in Afghanistan in the 1950s along the Helmand River valley, where the Americans developed a huge land development scheme – wouldn't a similar approach be something that could be tried in Mali? Where the coasts of the river Niger, a kind of a green zone is created on either side, which would create a labour-intensive job creation scheme and also suck away a lot of labour from the drugs trade.

### **Question 7:**

I'd like to ask Camilla Toulmin in particular for an assessment of the degree of legitimacy of Tuareg grievances in Mali. There's obviously now a major backlash against those Tuareg who took up arms and precipitated the current crisis – essentially the MNLA, although they're now fighting on the side of the French and declaring allegiance to the state. People make the point that they

come from only one section within the Tuareg, that the population of northern Mali includes many other groups, with the Tuareg only a minority in the population of northern Mali as a whole – which I think answers the Kurdish autonomy analogy. People also – moderate politicians in the south – claim that since the national pact that came out of the second Tuareg uprising, there's been considerable implementation, with substantial numbers of Tuareg in state functions, in the army itself, in the legislature. And this points not to privileging those who took up arms in a negotiation but to a dialogue in northern Mali as a whole to look for solutions for the future of the area. I'd be interested in your own assessment as to how legitimate Tuareg grievances have remained against 20 years of implementation since the national pact.

### **Ibrahima Diane:**

I think Sanogo, the reform of the army, the politics – it's important that this is a wakeup call for Mali but also for the region. We have Sanogo in Mali, we had the [Moussa] Dadis Camera in Guinea and you had several military – you had Amadou Toumani Touré himself, who did a *coup d'état* and a few years later became a politician and we applaud for him. In the case of Sanogo, from my understanding the guy seems to be controlling the situation. He has 50 per cent of the control. He seems to be happy. He's been put in charge of the reform of the Malian army. I'm not sure he's the right person for that and that's one of the first mistakes in this roadmap the Malians say they are putting in place to reform their country and solve the situation they have.

I also think the Malians need really to talk through what they have. They had several talks in Algeria with the Tuareg community and the government, and elsewhere they had I think a peace celebration when Alpha Oumar Konaré was president. This didn't solve the problem. We always think that northern Mali is Tuareg – it's not. Northern Mali is more broad than just the Tuareg region. So they need to sit down with everybody in the north and solve the situation with everybody in the north, not just the Tuareg, as they've been doing. They've been talking to the Tuareg only, and some of the Tuareg, then taking them to the army, taking them to different administrations. Then 10 years later you have new people coming, or probably the same people who have been having money in the government and everywhere, and then taking arms again because they want more. So the reform of the state needs to be discussed by the Malians themselves. I don't think they have been discussing this really truly.



So the reform of the army: I really like your idea, having Africans helping the Malians themselves. I'm not sure how it will be implemented but it's one of the solutions. In Guinea they had difficulty organizing the second round of the elections – for several months they couldn't organize, because the electoral commission was kind of hijacked by either side of the political spectrum. So they chose a Malian to be president of the electoral commission. It worked, even though I think there are still problems, but it worked at that time. They had an election, they had a president; it worked. But it needs to be really thought through, because sometimes they are kind of proud about the national situation. That makes things difficult for an African coming to help with Africans, than bringing an American to help them. So that also is a reflection. But coordination between all actors intervening in Mali needs to be at optimum. Otherwise we will solve for 10 years and we'll have the same discussion in 10 years.

**Paul Melly:**

I think I would pick up on Ibrahima's point there. One of the critical things that's being discussed a lot at the moment but hasn't yet come to fruition, but may have a huge influence on whether progress really is made, is whether the Malians can build an indigenous, national, broad-reaching political discussion process. To a large extent, a gap has developed between the Malian political class and Malian citizens in general. So even during the last 20 years of democracy – and it had certain flaws but, yes, there were elections and there was an actual choice of different parties, a choice of candidates and so on – and yet election turnout was very low. The gap between the political elite, between senior officials and ordinary people, seemed to widen. That means that at the present time, the political wrangling that's going on between different faction leaders in Bamako – of whom Captain Sanogo and the military putschists are now probably the most powerful, but they are one of several – doesn't necessarily unblock the whole situation.

There have been a lot of discussions about building a sort of national consultation process, a bit reminiscent of the national conferences which in Anglophone Africa – they are not really a phenomenon we are familiar with here. But in the beginning of the 1990s, right across Francophone Africa, there was a wave of mass civil protest. The way people moved from old-style dictatorship to democratic models of one kind or another was mostly through a sort of open consultation conference with a very wide range of civic groups, political groups, trade unions, churches, all sorts of people involved, to try and

build some sort of consensus over what shape a new political system should take. It may be that Mali will have to go through this all over again, to try to re-forge a new model.

This may also be the model that's required for the negotiations in the north. One person I spoke to in Paris last week said apart from excluding people who are actually currently using violence, the discussion over the negotiating process about the new shape of the north has to include as many people – basically everyone. Because the north is ethnically complex – even within different social groups and different ethnicities you have many different groups and social classes and political interest groups, business groups, whatever. One northern activist told me a few months ago, the problem with the deals that we've had in the past is that Bamako did a deal with a big man or one or two big men in the north, and as long as that vested interest deal worked it held, but it excluded most people's interests. And when it broke down you just got a new wave of instability. So both in dealing with the northern situation and in dealing with the situation in the south, consultation is going to be critical.

The only other thing looking forward that we need to remember – I think Camilla is right, they probably can't have an election in the rainy season. They'd get an even worse turnout than usual and it would be very hard to campaign. They may need to push it back into the period after the harvest has been collected, in the latter months of the year. But it could well be, given the depth of anger on all sides and the degree of bitter feeling among many people in Bamako and parts of the north, that some sort of election, however imperfect, will then be needed to choose a president who can then be the leading player in trying to pull some sort of consensual negotiating process together. Because if Traoré, the current interim president who basically was appointed out of a deal, with ECOWAS pressing the military putschists to accept some sort of civilian – it's better than having a military leader but he doesn't actually have any popular legitimacy or mandate. He doesn't have the political strength to make the difficult political deals that will be required. So at some point they're going to have to develop a consensual discussion process that may have to start quite soon to develop some momentum, and at some point toward the end of the year have an election to produce a leader who has the legitimacy to actually kind of lead a deal.

### **Camilla Toulmin:**

So there's a big pot of cash that will be put together by different development actors. The question is: can it be managed and spent in a way that breaks the mould with past experience in Mali? A Malian friend of mine who was in the National Audit Office said that the amount that had been lost through leakage was larger than the amount of aid that had come in. So a much more accountable, transparent system and scrutiny of the aid spend would be needed, with a much stronger parliament, media, other forms of oversight.

Of course in the pre-colonial period, the Tuareg were semi-promised an autonomous state by the French. There was a lot of discussion about kind of carving out a circum-Saharan state for them. I think that is still behind quite a lot of the political demands being made today.

I think Sanogo is a real problem. Somebody needs to offer him a training programme somewhere a long way away from Mali, I think. While he's there I think it's incredibly difficult for the army to move on, to become more professional and to establish a different ethos. It was really interesting reading the Twitter responses to the announcement that he'd been put in charge of the reform. They were universally critical.

On the river Niger, there is of course the Niger Basin Authority, which is seeking to deal with the fact that you've got now at least 20 different dam projects planned along the river, from Guinea all the way down through Nigeria. Some mechanism for making sure that you've got added value from each one, rather than each taking the water that the other one might have liked to have had but hasn't, is pretty key. There's a big dam project, Tossaye, just along from Timbuktu and Gao, plus Kandadji in Niger, which both have got huge potential if they're managed right and if the phasing of their construction and filling is managed right. So greater coordination on that front would be great. And Nigeria, as the kingpin of the Niger Basin Authority, has got I think a really important role to play if it chooses to do so.

Your point about – I think I agree with your analysis pretty much. I think that there's a real impatience in Bamako about yet another set of Tuareg grievances and the sense that the national pacts had offered them a lot in terms of political representation and integration into the army and so on. I'd agree with Paul that a lot of the money that had been pledged for development of the north never seems to have actually arrived. I was rather taken aback though in conversations a couple of weeks ago with a Tuareg colleague of mine, who said he'd got a list of several thousand Tuaregs that

had been shot by the Malian army over the last 30 or 40 years, with all of the chapter and verse.

I think there's a lot of stuff we don't yet know which is likely to come out in that process of, hopefully, peace and reconciliation. What is needed is somebody of real stature to lead that process, in the way of course that [Nelson] Mandela was able to do in South Africa. We haven't seen a figure like that coming out of the Malian political classes as yet but I think that would make a huge difference in terms of having that conversation. A lot of my Malian friends in the south say, 'We are eager to have that conversation; we've got things we know we need to talk about.' Doing that in a way that allows then these ghosts to be buried and to be able to look forward, I think is critical.

**Claire Spencer:**

Thank you very much indeed. We started late so we've ended late, but I'd like to invite you to join me in thanking the panel. Before I do, I've got my own personal thanks: you've managed an hour's discussion without mentioning Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb once, which I'm mightily relieved, so thank you very much. This is a story that will continue so do be aware, we'll be doing a number of activities. Please do join me in thanking the panel this evening.