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# FACTS & FINDINGS



PROSPECTS FOR GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

## Security and Development in the Sahel

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GERMAN AND EUROPEAN FOREIGN  
AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

**Andrea Kolb**

**In the course of the past year, the Sahel has developed into a regional crisis trouble spot, which will continue to affect Europe even once the current conflict in Mali has been resolved. Ethnic conflicts are weakening the region, thereby providing fertile ground for extremist groups and their terrorist activities. This paper proposes recommendations for action for German foreign policy, based mainly on the developments in Mali.\***

### Contact person at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Sebastian Barnet Fuchs  
Coordinator Development Policy and Human Rights  
Department of European and International Cooperation  
Phone: +49(0)30 2 69 96-34 67  
Email: [sebastian.fuchs@kas.de](mailto:sebastian.fuchs@kas.de)

### Postal address

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 10907 Berlin

[www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de)  
[publikationen@kas.de](mailto:publikationen@kas.de)

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## **THE AUTHOR**

*Andrea Kolb is head of the KAS Senegal/Mali field office.*

*Further information see:*

*<http://www.kas.de/senegal-mali/>*



## 1. SITUATION

Since the early days of the “Arab Spring” in 2011, North Africa and the Sahel have experienced far-reaching political and social upheavals. Gaddafi’s fall in Libya has had a direct impact on the Sahel. Tuareg mercenaries equipped with modern arms, who had been recruited by Gaddafi, left Libya to return home. Some countries were successful in reintegrating them into society. But in Mali, they took up the fight for the independence of the Azawad region. This separatist struggle triggered the Mali crisis. With numerous conflicts arising in other Sahel countries as well, the situation has since escalated into a crisis of terror, which is threatening to destabilise the entire region and potentially have an even wider impact.

The Sahel is highly significant for European security and foreign trade policies. The terrorism proliferating in the region also poses a danger to the neighbouring continent of Europe; streams of refugees considerably exceed the capacity of European countries to absorb them. The crisis also adversely affects German and European investors. The share price of the Frankfurt investment company Pearl Gold, for instance, which has a stake in a Malian gold company, dropped by 25 per cent after the military coup in March 2012. A resolution to the crisis in the Sahel is therefore in the fundamental interest of Europe and Germany.

The Sahel is a region that extends through the countries of Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. There are conflicts taking place in all these states. Some pre-existing ones have intensified and several new ones have emerged.<sup>1</sup>



Source: European Commission

## 2. ANALYSIS

While there are regional differences between the individual conflicts in the Sahel, separatism and Islamic radicalisation are two central conflict drivers. The attempts made so far to resolve the situation by military means have not proved sufficiently effective. In view of this, other steps are therefore required to bring the crisis in the Sahel to an end, including above all the integration of minorities, preventative measures to curb Islamist endeavours through an active and reform-minded state as well as safeguarding internal security

through a more effective military presence and security cooperation.

### a) Drivers of conflict and their causes

The majority of the multi-faceted conflicts in the various states of the Sahel can be explained by two phenomena: separatism and Islamic radicalisation. The causes of these two drivers are a weak state combined with poor governance.



There are **separatist conflicts** taking place in Senegal, Western Sahara, Mali, Chad, South Sudan, Sudan and Ethiopia. They are exacerbated by the fact that many national borders take no account of cultural and ethnic entities. This enables Islamist groups to operate across borders and exploit local conflicts to further their own ambitions for power.

The main cause of separatism and radicalisation lies in the **combination of weak statehood and poor governance**. States with large territories and low levels of political and social stability have few means of control, badly trained armed forces, a weak opposition and a high proportion of the population living in inhospitable areas below the poverty line and with poor prospects. The lack of effective state governance and neglect of minorities allow rebellious, separatist and extremist groups to come in and engage in violence and criminal activity. They utilise the absence of law and order to expand their power – usually to the detriment of the civilian population.

**Mali** is a case in point. The former government has not been capable of resolving the Tuareg issue in the north of the country. By neglecting to take charge of local development there, it allowed religious structures to replace state structures. The old government was not able to calm ethnic tensions. The government is also accused of corruption, nepotism, involvement in abductions, and the embezzlement of development aid and state revenues from gold extraction.<sup>2</sup>

#### **b) Past attempts at conflict resolution by military means**

Various national and regional forces proved too weak to resolve the conflict. The Economic Community Of West African States **ECOWAS** is disunited due to diverging interests and power struggles, and is poorly equipped and very limited in its capability of taking action against rebels. During the Mali crisis, ECOWAS hesitated for too long, which resulted in France launching Operation **Serval** at short notice on the request of the Malian leadership. The **Malian armed forces** are split into supporters and opponents of the coup. The coup in March 2012 was initiated by a small military unit headed by Captain Sanogo and did not have the support of the entire military leadership by any means. In spite of the EU training mission, they are still nowhere near capable of securing the north in the long term without international assistance.

The **African Union (AU)**, which has a military force of its own in the form of the African Standby Force (ASF), has mainly provided financial backing during the Malian crisis.

The **UN peacekeeping mission in Mali**, into which the ECOWAS troops were integrated, will only be of limited use in securing northern Mali, as the troops are not permitted to

intervene militarily. A complete withdrawal of French troops could easily result in the return of the Islamist terrorists and pose a significant threat to the local population. Greater co-operation with North Africa has so far failed due to the tensions between the countries of that region.

#### **c) Steps required for resolving the crisis**

In view of the examined causes of the conflicts and the lack of success of military action, the most promising way forward would comprise the following necessary steps towards conflict resolution:

##### **■ Integration of minorities**

Governments must allow all groups of the population and all minorities to take part in the state, in development and in processes of change. This requires a public political debate, in which representatives from all groups of the population, political parties, the media and civil society participate. At the same time, efforts should be made to establish representative, pluralist parliaments, which will also attend to the concerns of disadvantaged groups.

During peace negotiations in Mali, participation by all affected groups of the population should be guaranteed (inclusivity). The negotiating parties should include not only the armed Tuareg but also moderate Tuareg groups as well as representatives from the other ethnic groups living in the north, who jointly form the majority of the population in the north. An inclusive approach must also extend to the level of local administration throughout northern Mali.<sup>3</sup> That is the only way to find a solution to the ethnic problems.<sup>4</sup> Such a negotiating framework would allow room for a debate on different political concepts, such as greater decentralisation or “autodetermination” (self-determination). This kind of approach would also enjoy a high level of social acceptance.<sup>5</sup>

##### **■ Take preventative measures to counter Islamist endeavours and offer statehood as an alternative**

Measures must be taken to deny the Islamist groups the breeding ground for their proselytising activities. Economic prospects and education are the main factors preventing people from becoming radicalised by religious extremism and engaging in criminal activities. To combat the radicalisation of Islam, there need to be alternatives to the Koranic schools without, however, prohibiting them altogether. The state school system needs to be expanded and improved.

To enable economic, social and political progress, the Sahel countries must also implement fundamental reforms in the areas of decentralisation, social security systems, resource



management, the rule of law, the separation of powers, financial administration and tax policy. In Mali, there is a need to (re-)establish state institutions and social services in the north, particularly at a local level.

- **Expedite the safeguarding of internal security through a more effective military presence and security cooperation**

The only way to combat criminality and terrorism is to dramatically strengthen control over the affected areas and borders. To this end the military and the police require better basic and further training, better equipment and, above all, sensitisation to local states of mind. Ultimately, the resolution of the regional crisis in the Sahel will require a regional approach. Even though security cooperation between North and West Africa appears to be difficult in view of the tensions existing between individual Maghreb states, it should be a long-term aspiration.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY MEASURES IN MALI AND THE SAHEL

Recommendations for action should be based on the new strategic approaches for the Sahel crisis that have been under discussion in Brussels since January 2013. The **European Union** envisages the following steps<sup>6</sup>:

- Strengthen the police, particularly in northern Mali, thereby strengthening internal security
- Implement preventative measures against the radicalisation of Islam, particularly for future generations
- Enforce criminal prosecution of terrorists
- Create platforms for the political education of civil society, for instance through projects involving radio broadcasting
- Provide funding for development cooperation projects

Based on these strategic approaches, the German government should promote the following measures:

- **1) Germany should make efforts to push the topics of good governance and reconciliation higher up the bilateral agenda.** The German involvement in Mali is strongly focused on technical rather than political matters. But the crisis has demonstrated that the areas of good governance and reconciliation are also significant. Due to its good reputation, Germany is in an excellent position to further political debate in Mali. It is regarded as a neutral and reliable partner. This should be built upon by raising the topics of good governance and reconciliation as universal themes within discussions on the existing key topics.

- **2) In this context, the German political foundations must be empowered to work in the countries to encourage public political debate even more effectively as this is prioritised by hardly any of the Sahel states.**

The 3.65 million euros of special funding earmarked for Mali by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) provide adequate justification for Germany's greater involvement on the ground. One way to implement this is to hold public debates with media coverage or to work with the numerous local radio stations. Providing support for young politicians is also of great importance for the formation of an elite that takes its responsibilities seriously.

- **3) Where the key issue of decentralisation is concerned, German technical cooperation should promote education programmes more strongly as children's education is the responsibility of the local authorities in Mali.**

This can be particularly helpful in preventing the radicalisation of Islam. There must be high-quality and easily accessible schools available as alternatives to Koranic schools. In the event that the EU draws up an education programme for use throughout Mali, which the country badly needs, Germany should be even more proactive in offering its expertise for the project, because Germany has an advantage over other donors in the Sahel where decentralisation and the dual education system are concerned.

- **4) The EU should provide financial and technical resources in support of the required reforms of state institutions (genuine separation of powers).** There was no effective control mechanism in place to keep the old regime in check, and so the strengthening of parliament in particular will play a key role.

- **5) The EU and Germany should support the Malian government in devising and implementing a national strategy for the integration of minorities.** The EU has a vast wealth of experience in this area. The neighbouring country of Niger should also offer its experience as best practice. To deny terrorists a fertile breeding ground for their extremist activities in the Sahel, it will be necessary to integrate the Tuareg successfully into society. That is the only way to restrain their pursuit of autonomy in the long term.

- **6) Germany should exert its influence more strongly to prevent the EU disbursing the retained 250 million euros from the MDG Contract through General Budget Support.**<sup>7</sup> Mali is a fragile state, which very clearly does not fulfil the criteria for General Budget Support, such as efficient and effective budget management.



- **7) Germany and Europe must back up their development programmes consistently with a presence on the ground and monitor compliance with stipulated conditions.** Europe has had little involvement in the fight against corruption and poor governance in Mali to date. The provision of financial aid invariably provides opportunities for embezzlement. Particularly in Mali, there is a danger of overfunding as it is doubtful that the promised 3.25 billion euros of aid can be absorbed appropriately. Germany should assert its influence more strongly at a European level than it has done in the past where the defining and monitoring of conditions is concerned.
- **8) The EU must give moral support to its EU election observers and encourage them to report objectively and truthfully. European election monitoring is an important tool, but it has to be utilised in a way so as to encourage democracy.** If international election observers rate obviously deficient elections as successful overall, the election outcome can generate a great deal of frustration and result in the population and political parties rejecting state-run systems.
- **9) At the same time, European efforts to promote democracy in the countries of the Sahel should not merely concentrate on holding elections and on monitoring them.** Above all, Germany and the EU must promote pluralism through political parties, the media, civil society and parliaments. That is the only way to allow a constructive political opposition to emerge and to demonstrate the added value that parliament can provide to a country's citizens. Germany and the EU should urge for regular parliamentary elections at least as strongly as for presidential elections.
- **10) Germany should speak out for political education to be integrated into the training programmes for the armed forces.** To achieve regional stabilisation and reform its security sector, Mali requires further funds in addition to the EU training programme. Germany can offer appropriate expertise for the prevention of human rights violations by the military, for instance through the German concept of "Internal Leadership".
- **11) Germany should generally exert greater influence on the EU's policy for Africa, which has been dominated by France.** Germany should not shy away from being more proactive in exploiting the edge it has as an honest broker without postcolonial interests.
- **12) The EU should take a more critical look at the role played by the countries of the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, in the Wahhabi proselytisation in the Sahel conflict and not treat it as a taboo subject.**
- **13) To encourage local value creation in the countries of the Sahel, the reduction of EU agricultural subsidies initiated by the BMZ and the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV) must be continued purposefully.** With continued preferential customs treatment and free access to industrial markets, the countries of the Sahel would be in a better position to hold their own in the global market with their local products. European agricultural subsidies are damaging to agriculture and food security in the Sahel.

- 1] Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC): *Conflict Barometer 2012*.
- 2] Thomas Scheen: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/afrika/mali-die-alten-herren-und-die-islamisten-12052308.html>, 2013 – translated quote: "One of the reasons ATT gave the Islamists in Mali free rein is that some people from his entourage benefited financially from their hostage-taking activities."
- 3] *The parties to be involved should include representatives from the districts and regions as well as local politicians, traditional authority figures and religious leaders as well as women's and youth movements, particularly those that opposed the Islamist occupation and acted as intermediaries between the population and the armed groups. They should all be given the opportunity to play a part in deciding the future political, social and economic structures of the north.*
- 4] *The agreement made in Ouagadougou on 18 June between the government and the rebels of the MNLA (Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad) and the HCUA (Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad) under the mediation of the Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré is merely an initial interim agreement. It removed the crucial obstacle to the holding of presidential elections by allowing voting to take place in the town and region of Kidal as well. As the MNLA and the HCUA are representative of the Kidal region to some extent, inclusivity was not yet absolutely necessary in the interim agreement. Negotiations about a conclusive peace agreement will have to wait until the new government is in place.*
- 5] *While the interim agreement makes a claim to inclusivity, this is not much more than lip service. Representatives from other groups of the population appear as second-class participants; they are to be included in the discussions, but the agreement names the "armed groups in the north" as the main negotiating partner of the Malian government. This disadvantages those groups that did not defend their interests by military means.*
- 6] Dr. Christiane Höhn (Council of European Union, Adviser to the EU and Counter-terrorism Coordinator), 4 July 2013.
- 7] For further information on Budget Support see Andrea Kolb: *Eleven Recommendations, D+C, 04/2009*: <http://www.dandc.eu/en/article/adenauer-foundations-11-proposals-more-successful-budget-support>, and: Andrea Kolb: *Budgethilfe – ein geeignetes Instrument zur Umsetzung der Pariser Erklärung?*, 2008: <http://www.kas.de/wf/de/33.14383/>