

MALI'S TEACHABLE MOMENT: THE PRIMACY OF CIVIL AUTHORITY IN SECURITY SECTOR DEVELOPMENT AND ASSISTANCE

BY CHRISTOPHER HOLSHEK



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As Kenya, Niger, Nigeria and other countries contend with a newly surging threat of terrorism, it is tempting, especially from outside Africa, to look at African security sector shortfalls as essentially a function of improving military capabilities at tactical and operational levels, particularly for counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. Yet, the May 2012 *coup d'état* in Mali and, more importantly, the restoration of civil governance going on there now, offers an opportunity to understand the problem of security sector development – and especially security assistance provided from outside Africa – from a much broader and more strategic peacebuilding perspective. Doing so may

serve more than to avoid the pitfalls of focusing foreign assistance largely on the security sector in general and security assistance efforts on military combat training in particular, which turns out to exacerbate the internal instabilities of weak and fragile states. It may also lead to stronger security institutions and civil-military relations that come closer to addressing the real drivers of conflict, thus reducing the vulnerabilities emblematic of fragile states

Above: Renegade Malian soldiers appear on state television to declare that they had seized power in the country (22 March 2012).



Malian soldiers undergo training in urban combat, conducted by the European Union training mission in Koulikoro (August 2013).

that violent extremist organisations look to exploit in the first place.

The Security Sector may be the Problem before it is the Solution

No doubt, weak civil-military relations and institutions in Mali are chief among causal factors that led to the 2012 coup, after the Mali Defence and Security Forces (MDSF) were unable to prevent Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) from taking over a broad swath of northern Mali and then using it to mount attacks outside those borders. However, the surprisingly swift collapse of what was perceived to be one of Africa's more enduring democracies was due more to internal than external factors. The MDSF, like so many security forces in such vulnerable states, has been poorly led, equipped, organised and trained, as well as fragmented and incapable of keeping its soldiers from committing atrocities against civilians. There were widespread reports of human rights abuses before and during the coup, as well as for months following French military intervention in January 2013. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others reported on MDSF reprisals when it returned to northern Mali, where it has had a history of repressive military administration. Additional reports have indicated that some military officers and other officials may be linked to the drug trade, which is far more established and widespread than AQIM.

Herein lies the first vital lesson for security assistance in an environment and an era in which the security of tribal communities is at least as critical as the security of states, and in which the security sector goes far beyond the military to include police, justice and other internal security instruments. Poor governance and weak civil society institutions; socio-economic shortfalls, especially with respect to youth and women; illicit activities, such as transnational drug and human trafficking; and poor civil-military relations, evidenced by the behaviour of one's own security forces, may pose an even greater threat than terrorism. These factors, in fact, exemplify the comprehensive drivers of conflict in which spoiler groups such as transnational criminal networks and terrorist organisations seek to find advantage.

The civil-military performance of forces such as the MDSF suggests that it and other African security forces may have been trained with an improper focus. Much European and most United States (US) involvement in Mali and the rest of Africa has zeroed in on terrorism, which most locals do not perceive to be their main existential challenge. Despite more recent US Africa Command (AFRICOM) rhetoric, military-to-military efforts to build partnership capacity have been overwhelmingly resourced (by as much as 9:1) for tactical train and equip programmes for partnership warfighting capability, rather than more strategic institution-building and the education of officers on their civic responsibilities.



The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was launched with a ceremony in Bamako marking the transfer of authority from the forces of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) to the United Nations mission (1 July 2013).

It is not that there was a lack of help to African militaries preparing to deal with emerging security challenges – there may actually have been too much of the wrong kind of training, relative to other security sector development requirements. The US Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) initiative to shore up national forces fighting terrorists spent US\$353 million from 2005 to 2010, then programmed over US\$600 million more over the next five years, with a broadened mandate including strengthening counterterrorism capabilities and institutionalising cooperation among regional security forces; denying support and sanctuary through targeted development assistance; promoting democratic governance; discrediting terrorist ideology; and reinforcing bilateral military ties.

Compounding this perception of imbalanced security assistance is the increased operation of unmanned aerial vehicles for surveillance and targeting of terrorists in Africa, including Mali. In addition, TSCTP civil-military operations (CMO) training has been modelled on US doctrine, which stresses defeating terrorists and other threats more than helping to build governance and civil authority. Two years before the coup in Mali, a Department of Defense programme manager assessment of Trans-Sahel CMO training noted that it risked exacerbating unhealthy civil-military balances there. In the aftermath of the coup in

Mali, US State Department official Todd Moss determined that the US “was too narrowly focused on counterterrorism capabilities and missed the bigger picture”, while former AFRICOM Commander General Carter Ham recognised its failure to pass on “values, ethics and military ethos” in its security sector assistance to date.¹

The Primacy of Civil Authority

This leads to the second and paramount insight of this article: if the central focus of peace and stability is effective governance and human security, and the central nexus of a broader security sector is the civil-military relationship, then the primacy of civil authority is at the crux of peace and security, democratisation and security sector development and assistance in conflict areas such as Mali. Establishing a strong, sustainable civil-military relationship that institutionalises the primacy of civil authority and links security sector development to civil society peacebuilding efforts is at the heart of addressing the main drivers of conflict, as integral – and not additional – to the professionalisation and capacity-building of security forces.

The primacy of civil authority must, therefore, be integral to all international security assistance efforts, whether in Africa or elsewhere. A key way to build confidence in, as well as the capacity of, security forces is in-depth leadership education training on military



The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali provides training in crowd control for the Malian police force (June 2013).

subordination to civilian rule, and for military support of civil dialogue and reconciliation at community levels, as well as the designation, education and training of civil-military specialists. Moreover, inculcating a public service ethic among junior as well as senior police, paramilitary and military leaders as integral to their professional code, for example, helps temper poor behaviour and thus improve the civil-military relationship over time. In other words, civil-military civics comes from the bottom up even more than the top down.

There are signs that things are changing for the better. For one, international peacekeeping and peacebuilding assistance to Mali seems to be well-framed. The United Nations (UN) Multidimensional Integration Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), building up to 11 200 troops and 1 440 police, is the first UN field mission that implements UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2086 of January 2013, which reinforces the concept of mission integration in the UN Capstone Doctrine and multi-dimensional peacekeeping from a full-spectrum perspective. UNSCR 2086 also sees peacekeeping as “early peacebuilding” and stresses the importance of transition management. It emphasises that “integrated action on the ground by security and development actors requires coordination with national authorities in order to stabilize and improve the security situation and help in economic recovery, and underlines the

importance of integrated efforts among all United Nations entities in the field to promote coherence in the United Nations’ work in conflict and post-conflict situations”.²

MINUSMA has assumed the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) charge to “contribute to the rebuilding of the capacity of the [MDSF]” to meet concerns about “continued interference” of some MDSF in the work of the transitional authorities. Under UNSCR 2100, MINUSMA’s mandate includes the protection of civilians, humanitarian assistance and national and international efforts towards rebuilding the Malian security sector. Some of the original French intervention force remains to perform counterterrorism support, while Mali’s newly elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, has called on nearby nations to create a regional multilateral force that could intervene quickly to respond to these threats, rather than depend on Western forces.

Meanwhile, hundreds of British and European Union Training Mission (EUTM) troops have deployed to “train and advise... under the control of legitimate civilian authorities, in order to contribute to restore their military capacity with a view to enabling them to engage in combat operations aiming at restoring the country’s territorial integrity”.³ Although most of the training is tactical in nature, the EUTM is taking care to include leadership training and professional ethics instruction, even though such changes

PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IS IN HOW MALI ITSELF IS APPROACHING ITS OWN EFFORTS TO LEAD SECURITY SECTOR DEVELOPMENT – REFLECTING ANOTHER PRINCIPLE THAT, FIRST AND FOREMOST, SECURITY SECTOR DEVELOPMENT BEGINS AT HOME

in organisational culture require intensive steady-state engagement for years, not just months. Still, at the closing ceremony for the EUTM training of the Elou Battalion, MDSF Chief of Staff General Ibrahim Dahirou Dembele exhorted graduates of the first 10-week course “to give the best of yourselves to earn the trust placed in you”, and set the example that symbolises the new Malian army.⁴

The US is also taking a new approach. The lifting of the suspension of foreign assistance to Mali was predicated on the new government having taken “tangible steps to assert civilian authority over the military”.⁵ The third of six assistance priority areas is to support rebuilding security institutions and security sector reform in coordination with multilateral partners and the government of Mali, with greater emphasis on institution-building, commensurate with a new approach to security sector assistance under

Presidential Policy Directive 23. In anticipation of this, AFRICOM Director of Strategy, Plans and Programs, Major General Robert Hooper, noted the “underlying premise of our institutional capacity-building efforts is that military forces must be subordinate to civil authority and accepted as legitimate members of a civil society based on the rule of law”.⁶ Still, surging US security assistance in Africa is geared largely “to train and advise indigenous forces to tackle emerging terrorist threats”.⁷

Security Sector Development Begins at Home

Perhaps the most significant change is in how Mali itself is approaching its own efforts to lead security sector development – reflecting another principle that, first and foremost, security sector development begins at home. Although the new government has stressed advancing the operational effectiveness of the MDSF, it has also recognised the need for much better civil-military governance than before the coup. Al Maamoun Baba Lamine Keita, Ambassador of the Republic of Mali to the US, pointed out that the crisis in Mali demonstrated the need for “African governments to become more transparent about defense spending and budgeting. Taking greater ownership of African security will require that the defense sector becomes more accountable to parliaments than is currently the case.”⁸

Among its first acts, the new government has dismissed the military committee on reform, comprised



Malian *gendarmerie* check the luggage of passengers on a bus at a checkpoint in Sarakala (18 January 2013).



A military delegation from Bamako meets with the commander of the Chadian contingent of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali, during the delegation's visit to northern Mali (27 July 2013).

of officers who led the 2012 coup, including General Amadou Sanogo. In addition to tackling corruption, the government's Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission is looking to identify the armed groups eligible to participate in the national dialogue, record human rights violations, help strengthen social cohesion and national unity, and focus on dialogue and peace. Inclusion of the Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA) and other offshoots of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) that have expressed their willingness to participate in collective dialogue will be essential for the reconciliation process, as well as to the reconstitution of the MDSF as a force more representative of Malian society. Despite recent Tuareg unrest, the government is reaching out to them in reconciliation, including the partial release of political prisoners charged with war crimes and other abuses.

In some localities in the north, paramilitary units (*gendarmerie*) are accompanying regular military units to question detainees and investigate disciplinary lapses by soldiers, as a confidence-building measure. The MDSF has been accepting this practice, with the encouragement of Human Rights Watch and other groups. Using the *gendarmerie* as a civil-military check-and-balance in the field has merit and promise, but it is not yet clear whether this is effective and sustainable or whether the *gendarmerie* is appropriately organised, trained and authorised to perform this role. Nevertheless, such practices are tacit recognition of the division of labour between police and

gendarmerie forces, whose primary mission is internal community security, and the military, whose main task is to protect against external threats.

Getting the Multilateral Act Together

While all of these efforts at security assistance and security sector reform are indeed promising, they remain largely uncoordinated. This poses the risk of being at cross-purposes and diminishing the intended outcome of both better operational performance and civil-military governance. The development of security sector capacity based on the imposition of a foreign nation-state system on natural (that is, tribal) boundaries has proven to be counterproductive. Disaggregated operational doctrines and civil-military models can simply overwhelm the absorptive capacity of host nation institutions, as well as run counter to national cohesion and unity of purpose, contributing to the cleavages that characterise weak and fragile states. Western countries and organisations must, therefore, resist the tendency to reach for what is familiar to them but is not necessarily appropriate for those they are assisting.

US CMO training in Africa, for example, is very much a carry-over of US counterinsurgency and counterterrorism practices from Iraq and Afghanistan, slanted towards winning hearts and minds in order to find the 'bad guys' and eliminate them. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and European Union (EU) civil-military cooperation



French soldiers look on as Malian soldiers practice manning a checkpoint and arresting a suspect (May 2013).

(CIMIC) doctrine is, likewise, more tactical and operational than strategic, and has as its core aim to assist fulfilment of the military mission, rather than uphold civil governance and authority and develop civil society. In any case, these operational practices are based on a Western view of the problem, and not on an African perspective.

Whilst US, EU or NATO security sector tactical training and civil-military capacity development assistance are no doubt helpful, none of these civil-military models alone is best suited for security sector development assistance in Mali or Africa. In addition to being threats-based, military-centric and not African, they do not stress the primacy of civil authority sufficiently, lack robust transition management strategies and do not incorporate a more strategic peacebuilding approach that features civilian leadership, bottom-up human security, local ownership and ‘whole-of-society’ capacity development.

Greater reference to a more appropriate, universal civil-military model would go far to mitigate the unintended impacts of differing and often confusing concepts in countries such as Mali, and help get the multilateral act together. Specifically, civil-military capacity development to peacekeeping troop-contributing country forces in Africa should be based on international frameworks such

as UN Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CIMIC), which was developed and validated largely in Africa.

UN-CIMIC, which is more about coordination among the civilian, police and military components of the international presence than a function of military command and control, is not a doctrine. Rather, it is the international civil-military framework for UN-mandated peacekeeping forces, including the African Union and other regional peace and security organisations. Based on international legal frameworks, peacekeeping principles and international criteria on the use of force, its leading principle is the primacy of civil authority and it centres its activities on civil-military transition management – from peacekeeping to peacebuilding. Adaptive and culturally sensitive, it integrates universal principles for peacekeeping and peacebuilding, the protection of civilians, humanitarian assistance, human rights, security sector development and so on.⁹

Accordingly, security assistance programmes such as the US State Department Global Peace Operations Initiative and Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance should refer first to international peacekeeping frameworks as the baseline for training and building partnership capacity, rather than rely primarily on US doctrines and

then bring in multilateral norms. In addition, in order to foster greater sustainability, the effort should be more indirect – the training of trainers and building civil-military education and training institutional capacities, rather than direct training to military personnel and units. The implied task, of course, is that EU, NATO and US government civil and military players in Africa will need to be more familiar with UN-based peacekeeping and peacebuilding, security sector development and civil-military coordination if they are to help their clients learn them.

All of this illustrates another important insight. For the US in particular, its interests in Mali, the region and Africa per se are better pursued multilaterally, through more sophisticated strategies than employed in the Middle East and Central Asia – in a careful balance between multilateral and bilateral approaches that are more sensitive to regional and local determinants than one's own national security imperatives. As threats, challenges and opportunities impacting Mali and Africa take on more multilateral and regional dimensions, security assistance approaches must correspondingly incorporate more multilateral and regional approaches – working by, with and through such partners as much as possible to minimise the foreign military footprint. In the Sahel, this means working through the Global Counterterrorism Forum to identify capacity-building needs in the region and mobilise the necessary support and expertise needed to meet these challenges. It also means full implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel.

At all levels of interaction, the delivery of security assistance must itself be a demonstration of the primacy of civil authority as the paramount principle of security sector reform, and any advisory efforts should take into account more local and legitimate human security concerns, rather than externally driven anxieties about terrorism and insurgency. Rebalancing security assistance towards institution-building under a broader, civil society-centric understanding of security; referring to multilateral frameworks to improve regional collaboration on security challenges; and, most of all, integrating the primacy of civil authority in all aspects of the applied civil-military relationship, is not just something external actors should look to do. Africans should, likewise, lead their own security sector development based on these principles, in order to demand adherence to them from security assistance providers.

Precisely because of the recent spate of terrorism in Africa, Mali offers a teachable moment in conflict transformation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. The primacy of civil authority – a key component of any democratic civil society – must be integral to all international security sector-related efforts in Africa, in practice as much as policy. More an application of strategy than tactics, it helps mitigate the 'slippery slope' of deepening and unending non-African security engagement

on the continent, driven by a constant obsession with 'bad guys' that leads to the exacerbation of the drivers of conflict, which opens opportunities for terrorists and other illicit organisations to exploit. What this all portends, especially for external actors, is a more humble, collaborative and demonstrative form of security assistance and thus security sector development in Africa. **A**

Christopher Holshek, a retired US Army Civil Affairs Colonel, is a Senior Fellow at the Alliance for Peacebuilding in Washington, DC, where he has contributed on security sector matters with the working groups Mali Watch and Mali Moving Forward.

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