eForum: Security Council

Issue: Question of Mali

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Introduction

The crisis in Mali dates back to 2012 and is one of political instability and ethnic tensions. The Tuaregs, an ethnic group in the northeastern region of Mali, claimed independence and greater control over northern Mali. The group named the northern region of Mali, including the three largest northern cities Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu, the "Azawad" region. This movement, named the "National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)" was followed by a military coup taking place on 22 March 2022 and the Turegs taking control over the area in April 2022. President Amadou Toumani Touré, the Malian President of the time, was accused of not managing the crisis process effectively. The response to the "growing separatist insurgency by Tuareg rebels in the country's north" was considered "weak" (Klobucista and Bussemaker). Thus, the administration of the country was taken over by the "National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State (CNRDR)," a military group. Soon after, the MNLA declared the independence of northern Mali, i.e., "Azawad," from the rest of the country.

However, Islamist groups such as "Ansar Dine" started imposing strict Sharia Law in the region, conflicting with the MNLA's overall vision. This resulted in conflicts between the two parties, requiring international intervention in 2013. After the Malian government's request, the French military intervened and initiated its operations against the Islamist groups, assisting the government to once again establish its authority over the Islamist-controlled regions.

Even though ceasefire agreements and peace contracts were signed between the involved parties, the conflict and attacks continued. The 2012 coup was followed by military coups in 2020 and 2021, furthering the political and economic instability in the area. The United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Forces intervened within the scope of the "United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)," established by the Security Council on 25 April 2013 ("MINUSMA Fact Sheet"). Aiming to support the political process, the peacekeeping forces remained in the area until December 2023.

The crisis not only threatened political stability but also caused a socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis in the region. The extreme poverty rates "increased further to 19.1% in 2022," "as a result of the dual impact of the security crisis and the pandemic" ("The World Bank"). Hundreds of thousands were at high risk, with "approximately 7.1 million people [needing] humanitarian assistance, with nearly

400,000 among them being internally displaced" ("Crisis in Mali"). The crisis became a threat to many of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, including "No Poverty," "Good Health and Wellbeing," and "Clean Water and Sanitation." Political and social stability in the area is inevitable to establish sustainable development, and international cooperation is the first step towards achieving this. Building a focus on the Question of Mali is connected to the five main areas the UN defines as encompassing its work: "Maintain International Peace and Security," "Protect Human Rights," "Deliver Humanitarian Aid," "Support Sustainable Development," and "Uphold International Law."

The issue also connects closely with the theme of Robert College International Model United Nations (RCIMUN) 2024: "International Reconciliation: Resilience in the Face of Shifting Power Dynamics." Especially after the recent military coup and the withdrawal of the UN Peacekeeping Forces, the region has faced a severe shift in power dynamics. Hence, discussions on how to stabilize the area during times of changing power dynamics are crucial to establishing peace and security in the West African region as well as on the global level.

Definition of Key Terms

Political Instability: Political instability is defined as "the propensity of a government collapse either because of conflicts or rampant competition between various political parties" (Hussain). The term political stability is deeply interconnected with economic development, and instability in the regime is likely to be followed by humanitarian crises.

Coup d'État (Military Coup): A coup d'état, or a military coup, according to Britannica, is "the sudden, violent overthrow of an existing government by a small group. The chief prerequisite for a coup is control of all or part of the armed forces, the police, and other military elements."

Tuareg: Britannica describes the Tuaregs as "Berber-speaking pastoralists who inhabit an area in North and West Africa ranging from Touat, Algeria, and Ghadames, Libya, to northern Nigeria and from Fezzan, Libya, to Timbuktu, Mali." This ethnic group is connected to the start of the Mali conflict, claiming independence and greater control over northern Mali in 2012.

Azawad: Azawad is "a relatively remote parastate occupying the territories of northern Mali, currently entrapped in a low-intensity conflict involving non-state actors, local security forces, and external interveners" (Baldaro and Raineri). It expresses the northern region of Mali, which Tuaregs aimed to gain independence over.

United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Forces: According to their original mission, the United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Forces "[help] countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace. [They] have unique strengths, including legitimacy, burden sharing, and an ability to deploy troops and police from around the world, integrating them with civilian peacekeepers to address a range of mandates set by the UN Security Council and General Assembly." The Peacekeeping Forces were established in the Mali region between April 2013 and December 2023. The withdrawal occurred after Mali's

Foreign Prime Minister's request and statements on how the forces "failed" to keep their promise and help achieve stabilization in the region.

General Overview

Political Overview

Mali is a country based in West Africa, as shown in Figure 3.1.1. It is neighbored by Algeria, Mauritania, Senegal, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea. The tensions in the Mali region started when the ethnic group Turaegs asked for independence or greater control over the northern region of the country. This movement was named "Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO)," or, in other words, "National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad" (MNLA).
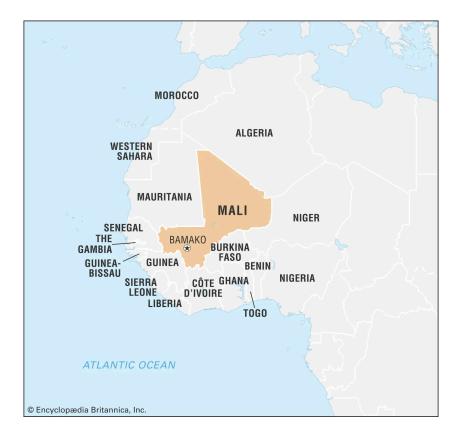

Fig. 3.1.1: "Mali." *Britannica,* 7 Mar. 2024, https://www.britannica.com/place/Mali. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.

After a period of conflict, "rebels—bolstered by arms from Libya and fighters with ties to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—declared an independent state of 'Azawad' in the north" (Congressional Research Service). These acts of the separatists were followed by a military coup in the same year, accusing the government of not taking effective control over the rebellious acts. Thus, President Amadou Toumani Touré lost authority over the country, and the administration was taken over by the military group "National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State (CNRDR)". The coup, however, accelerated the government's loss of control in the northern region against the rebellious groups.

Nevertheless, later in 2013, Mali's security and stabilization were once again threatened as the Islamist forces including Ansar Dine proceeded to the southern region with support from Al-Qaeda, another Islamist group. After these developments and the Islamist groups' strict Sharia rule over the northern region, the transitional government of Mali requested international assistance to help reach political stabilization. "Operation Serval," initiated by France in 2013, was a support to Mali's security forces. Similarly, African countries' military forces and the UN Peacekeeping Forces "Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)" intervened, aiming to help the Malian government stabilize the case. The Peacekeeping Forces had different central aims, including a focus on "major population centers and lines of communication, protecting civilians, human rights monitoring, the creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the return of displaced persons, the extension of State authority and the preparation of free, inclusive and peaceful elections" ("MINUSMA").

As the military aid continued, in 2014, France's "Operation Serval" was transformed into "Operation Barkhane," aiming "to provide continued counterterrorism support to the G5 Sahel member states" (Doxsee et al.). "Operation Barkhane" was, in simple terms, a response to the Malian administration's request for military aid from France. This support included "France and its allies [strengthening] the Malian armed forces and [employing] their specialized air and ground technologies" (King).

The crisis in the area proceeded with military takeovers in 2020 and 2021, two consecutive coups in less than one year. Meanwhile, the political conflict became severe, resulting in constant attacks between the Islamist groups and the pro-government forces. France, African Union countries, and UN Peacekeeping Forces continued to intervene; however, the France operation ended on 9 November 2022 and the UN Peacekeeping Forces were withdrawn in December 2023 upon the request of the Malian government. The country has been trying to return to its elections and democratic governance since the beginning of the conflict.

While the political crisis severely influenced the region, the economic and humanitarian conditions of the area were threatened by the Mali War.

Economic Overview

The World Bank describes Mali's economy as "a low-income economy that is undiversified," especially after the political crisis. The extreme poverty rate has increased as a consequence of the "security crisis and the pandemic," reaching "19.1% in 2022" ("The World Bank"). It is also reported that the region suffers from health and education issues, food insecurity, and environmental threats due to the economic impacts of the crisis. Mali is a landlocked country with nearly half of the highly dispersed population living in extreme poverty. Most Malians work in agriculture, as portrayed in Figure 3.2.1, and "nearly half of the highly dispersed population [live] in extreme poverty" ("Mali Country Profile").

Fig. 3.2.1: USAID/Mali. "USAID helps Malian farmers to adopt new approaches and improve productivity." *United States Agency for International Development,* https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/mali/our-work/agriculture-and-food-security. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.

The country has also faced sanctions from the "Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)" following the military coups in 2020 and 2021; however, the sanctions were lifted in 2022. The increased violence and instability in the area result in "fragility" and "inflationary pressures" in the region's economy, causing the "per capita GDP [to stagnate]" (Yan et al. 6-7).

Humanitarian Overview

The Mali War was followed by a severe humanitarian crisis, threatening the lives of the most vulnerable. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 7.1 million of the 23.7 million population were in need. The same report established that 2.4 million people were to be deprived of access to water, hygiene, and sanitation, 2.5 million adolescents were to face malnutrition, and 1.8 million children were to be deprived of their right to education. These statistics not only illustrate the severity of the crisis but also demonstrate how the political affair has influenced the socioeconomic living conditions of millions in the region. A photo of the women and children in the area is included in Figure 3.3.1 for further reference.

Fig. 3.3.1: UNOCHA/Michele Cattani. "Displaced women prepare food at an informal camp in Bagoundié, Mali." *United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund,* https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1111962. Accessed 11 Mar. 2024.

The crisis has specifically affected access to health and education services, with "1,726 schools [being] closed [in October 2022], leaving close to 520,000 children and 10,000 teachers out of school" ("Mali Factsheet"). The European Union has mentioned that one of five health centers is not functioning in the North and Center, creating an obstacle to the accessibility of health services. Access to sufficient quantity and quality of water, vaccination, and nutrition have been unavailable for millions. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) underlined that it "requires $133.5 million to address the immediate critical needs of the 3.3 million most vulnerable girls and boys in Mali, to support their rights to basic social services," highlighting the significance of international financial support. The humanitarian personnel in the area have also faced human rights violations, and some were killed during the conflict.

"A UN Special Representative who heads the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali reported that 'insecurity has expanded, the humanitarian situation has deteriorated, more children are out of school and the country has been affected by an endless cycle of instability," emphasizing the gravity of the problem ("Mali Humanitarian Response Plan").

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Malian Government

The Malian Government has faced rebellions by the Tuaregs and Islamist rebels, experiencing three coups since 2012, losing its control over the northern region, then eventually gaining back its authority over the area with the help of international intervention. The government has requested international support, which was offered majorly by France and the United Nations. However, the military government, which seized power in 2020, recently "demanded the departure of the decade-old mission" by the UN as well as the withdrawal of the French forces, stating that the efforts have not been progressive ("UN peacekeeping mission in Mali").

Tuaregs

The Tuaregs have sought greater agency over the northern region of Mali (Azawad), starting the "National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)." The movement has been a fight for the rights of the ethnic minority, and some Tuaregs brought weapons from Libya to Mali which were used during the conflict. Ethnic tensions have also been fueled by accusations of the involved parties in humanitarian crimes such as looting and rape.

Islamist Groups

The Islamist groups in the region have been against the Malian government's ruling in the northern territory. The Al-Qaeda-linked Group for the "Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM)" and the "Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)" are two major groups involved in the conflict. The groups have been facing adversities from pro-government forces as well as the international parties involved.

France

France has been one of the mediators of the conflict, providing military aid upon the request of the Malian government. The country has started "Operation Serval" followed by "Operation Barkhane," aiming to provide military assistance and strengthen the Malian armed forces. This support played a crucial role in the Malian government regaining its control over the northern region. However, upon the Malian government's request, the French troops were withdrawn on 9 November 2022, a decade after the first coup d'état in the region. During the withdrawal, France, contrarily, accused Mali's military junta of being unwilling to solve the growing security issues.

Timeline of Events

31 March 1960	Mali gained independence from the Franc zone in France's accordance.
April-May 2002	Amadou Toumani Toure was elected as the President of Mali.
2007-2009	Tuaregs' rebels start and soldiers get killed as a result of the rebellious activity.
March-April 2012	Rebellious acts intensifying in the northern region cause civilians to flee to Mauritania, one of the neighboring countries. Tuareg rebels declare independence for the northern Mali region. Meanwhile, the 2012 Military Coup occurs and President Amadou Toumani Toure is deposed.
2012	Tuareg rebels and the Islamist Ansar Dine groups merge and declare their control over the northern Mali region, which they name "Azawad."

2013	France and regional African forces respond to the Malian government's request for international military assistance. On 25 April 2023, the UN MINUSMA is established by the Security Council Resolution 2100.
May 2013	At an international conference, more than $4bn of donations are collected to help rebuild Mali.
2013-2020	Attacks proceed, with civilians, humanitarian personnel, and soldiers dying. ● In 2015, seventeen people were killed in an attack on a hotel, ● In 2018, fourteen soldiers were killed in an attack on a military base ("Mali Profile").
18 August 2020	President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita is deposed as a result of a coup d'état.
24 May 2021	The third coup in Mali in the recent decade takes place in 2021.
The political, economic, and humanitarian instabilities in the area still continue.	

UN Involvement

The United Nations has played a significant role in both being a military mediator and providing humanitarian assistance to the region. The "United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)" was established by UN Security Council resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013, and the Peacekeeping Forces remained in the territory until 31 December 2023. In addition, UN-based organizations including the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank have been involved in the matter to provide humanitarian and financial assistance. The WFP, for example, reported that "in 2019, [it] carried out emergency food assistance to more than 700,000 people including refugees and internally displaced persons," and "[supported] the Government's National School Meal Programme by providing nutritious school meals and reinforcing the capacities of national counterparts" in Mali. According to its recent article, UNICEF, similarly, "supported the return to school of more than 200,000 out-of-school children and more than 30,000 children benefited from early learning activities" in 2019, in Mali ("Education").

Relevant UN Documents

The United Nations Security Council has adopted the following resolutions on the "United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission In Mali (MINUSMA)," which are all significant in terms of the developments in the issue:

- S/RES/2690 (30 June 2023)
- S/RES/2640 (2 July 2022)
- S/RES/2584 (30 June 2021)
- S/RES/2541 (1 September 2020)
- S/RES/2531 (10 July 2020)
- S/RES/2480 (2 July 2019)
- S/RES/2423 (3 July 2018)
- S/RES/2391 (8 December 2017)
- S/RES/2374 (5 September 2017)
- S/RES/2364 (29 June 2017)

Treaties and Events

The United Nations resolutions listed in the "Relevant UN Documents" section are highly significant, and carry importance in demonstrating the international community's response to the conflict. The UN Treaty Body Database also contains a list of treaties and documents on the situation in Mali, covering the humanitarian aspect as well as addressing the political crisis.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

In terms of politics and military intervention, as explained in the previous sections, both France and the United Nations have intervened in the conflict, assisting the region in achieving political stability and protecting human rights. The interventions were effective in terms of providing an international perspective on the issue and helping the Malian government regain its control over the northern region. However, the forces were removed recently, in December 2023, upon the request of the Malian authorities.

Regarding the humanitarian aspect, UN organizations including UNICEF, WFP, WHO, and the World provided resources and services in the area that helped civilians access their rights in education, health, and nutrition. As aforementioned, the involvement of these organizations has been significant in helping the vulnerable in the region, primarily children and women. Continued assistance from the international community is necessary to ensure that basic human rights are reached by everyone.

Possible Solutions

The conflict in Mali is one that is complex and multifaceted. Bringing international attention to the topic while taking into consideration the perspectives of all internal parties is essential in resolving this conflict. However, the recent remarks of the Malian government which requested the withdrawal of

international forces should be kept in mind. International involvement should not be established to a degree that intervenes with the national sovereignty of Mali.

Involved parties, including the Malian government, Tuaregs, and the Islamist groups should be encouraged to negotiate on common terms. Conferences and meetings can be organized to facilitate this dialogue. International mediators, such as the UN, members of the African Union, or neutral Member States, can be involved, based on the parties' preferences. In addition, a political body and a security system where various ethnic groups are represented in the government can be established, in order to prevent further rebellion due to issues related to ethnic representation. Initiatives and dialogues that encourage communication between different ethnic groups can be formed.

Infrastructures should be improved, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, decreasing the unemployment rate in the region to facilitate economic growth. International donations and support should also be organized and urged to alleviate problems such as poverty, malnutrition, and lower-quality health and education services. Likewise, international collaboration should be incited to provide humanitarian aid to the area, especially to the most vulnerable ones, including children. UN-based organizations', such as UNICEF, WFP, and WHO's continued assistance to the area should be ensured. The articles of the Sustainable Development Goals can be taken as a reference while determining the format of humanitarian assistance provided. Human rights violations in the area should be recorded, and any violations should be addressed immediately. This can be ensured through legislation, judicial reforms, or the involvement of international actors, such as the United Nations, as necessary.

Raising awareness globally about the issue and the importance of establishing cooperation between different ethnic groups can also be a progressive step. Plus, Member States and international organizations could be invited to take financial and logistic action, helping resolve the crisis.

Notes from the Chair

The conflict requires international cooperation as well as the consideration of different perspectives. Delegates should keep in mind the controversies, and develop clauses that address multiple perspectives. However, the level of international involvement should be to a degree that does not interfere with the national sovereignty of the Malian government. The importance of involving different ethnic groups' views throughout the resolution process should be underlined. While political instability can be the focus, the economic and humanitarian aspects of the issue should be kept in mind. Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations can be taken as a reference while providing suggestions for humanitarian assistance to the region. The previous resolutions adopted by the Security Council should be researched in order to gain a better understanding of the "United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission In Mali (MINUSMA)."

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