

Mali:

A Timeline & Factsheet

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On October 12, 2012, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted Resolution 2071, demanding that armed groups in northern Mali cease their activities, and requesting detailed plans for joint military intervention by international forces.¹ One month later, the African Union approved an ECOWAS plan for a military intervention that may eventually expand to include elements from the EU and UN.²

Though the plan still requires UN endorsement, it is increasingly clear that military operations are soon to commence in Mali.

Current Crisis

The current crisis in Mali has developed from a March 2012 coup d'état in which the legitimate Malian government was overthrown. However, the crisis has been driven and exacerbated by a confluence of factors at play throughout much of Africa.

The proliferation of militant Islam as hardline groups are pushed out of their traditional safe havens in Somalia³ and Nigeria, the wide availability of arms from the recent Arab Spring, as well as social, economic, and environmental issues⁴ have contributed to the persistent instability now gripping Mali's northern region.

The present instability in Mali carries serious security implications on the regional and global scales, from the probability of a new ground war in Africa, to the potential for increased terrorist activity.

The American Security Project has compiled this factsheet to trace the development of the crisis in Mali and understand the implications of the potential military intervention.



Mali, the nation

- Mali is a landlocked West African nation with a population of approximately 15.8 million people.⁵
- The country is approximately 1.24 million square kilometers in size, the areas Texas and California combined.
- Much of the country is part of the Sahel, a semi-arid transition zone between 12° and 20°N, with the Sahara Desert lying to the north and the savannas to the south.⁶
 - In 2010, cotton exports accounted for nearly 50% of trade revenues and the livelihood of approximately 40% of its population, making it the second largest African cotton producer behind Egypt.⁷
 - In recent years, however, it has been noted that Mali's cotton industry has been significantly impacted by economic reforms,⁸ as well as environmental and security issues plaguing the Sahel region.
- Mali's GDP in 2010 is estimated at US\$9 billion. However, with a GDP per-capita of \$691 (2010), the country is among the ten poorest nations in the world and remains reliant on foreign assistance.⁹
- Until the coup on March 21, 2012, Mali was among the oldest democracies in Africa, having emerged from the dictatorship of Moussa Traoré in 1992.¹⁰

The coup of March 21st: background and a timeline of events

- The coup was precipitated by the Tuareg Rebellion in **January 2012**, in which Tuareg rebels in Mali's north launched a war of independence against the Malian government in Azawad.¹¹
 - The rebel offensive was led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA),¹² a group of Tuareg rebels and insurgents newly returned and heavily armed from the conflict in Libya.¹³
 - The MNLA was soon joined by other militant groups, including Ansar Dine and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) affiliates.¹⁴
 - However, relations amongst these groups are unstable and have shifted several times over the course of the crisis.¹⁵
 - Malian government forces were ill-equipped to fight the rebellion in the north. Suffering an embarrassing defeat in the rebellion, a faction within the Malian military mutinied against President Amadou Toumani Touré's **government**.



Rebels from the militant Islamist sect Ansar Dine in Mali (VOA)

- **March 21, 2012:** Mutinying military forces storm several sites in Bamako. The following day, President Toure's government is overthrown and replaced by the National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State (CNRDR), led by Amadou Sanogo.¹⁶
- **March 23, 2012:** The African Union suspends Mali's membership,¹⁷ while other international actors move to enact harsh sanctions against the nation to encourage the restoration of a civilian government.¹⁸
- **April 6, 2012:** The MNLA declares, illegitimately, Azawad's independence from the Malian government in Bamako. While the central government had limited control over the northern region of the country, this event signifies the inability of the interim government to wrest control of the Mali's north from Islamist militants.¹⁹
 - Consequently, Mali's North fall under strictly-enforced Sharia law.²⁰ Reports indicate Islamist extremists routinely engage in such abuses as the destruction of religious iconography,²¹ the threatening of unmarried mothers,²² and public executions.²³
- **April 8, 2012:** Overthrown President Amadou Toumani Touré submits his formal resignation as part of the political transition mediated by Burkina Faso's foreign minister, Djibril Bassole.²⁴
- **April 12, 2012:** Dioncounda Traoré is sworn as interim President, and with Cheick Modibo Diarra as interim Prime Minister, assumes responsibility for leading Mali's transitional authority in the country.²⁵
- **August 20, 2012:** A new "caretaker" government, comprised of 31 members, forms after the preceding transitional authority succumbed to political infighting and its inability to call elections.²⁶



Dioncounda Traoré, the interim President of Mali (DioncoundaTraore2012)

Planning the intervention

- Discussions of possible military intervention, which began circulating soon after the coup, became more focused following Malian President Traoré's appeal on September 5 to ECOWAS for military assistance.²⁷
 - A letter from Traoré on September 18 elevated Mali's request for assistance to the UN. The UN agreed in late September to consider Mali's situation and provide assistance.²⁸
- The UNSC passed Resolution 2071 on October 12, honoring the Malian government's request for assistance by asking for detailed plans for military intervention from interested parties.²⁹
- On October 24, the African Union reinstated Mali as a member in anticipation of planned military intervention.³⁰
- On November 13, following a series of meetings and negotiations between African, European, and

UN military planners,³¹ the African Union backed an ECOWAS plan to deploy 3,300 ground forces to aid Mali in retaking the north.³²

- Military operations are aimed at ousting Islamist militants from the North, then stabilizing and returning the region to Bamako's control.
- The 3,300 troops will be primarily provided by Nigeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso.
- The plan covers a six-month period that allows for preparatory training and base establishment in the southern Mali. Combat operations in the north will follow.
- The EU is set to discuss sending military trainers and providing logistical support, but has not given any indication of sending forces to the country.
- Neighboring Algeria, one of the largest military presences in Western Africa, has expressed concerns that military conflict will spill over into surrounding areas, exacerbating existing security issues. While Algeria has signaled its support for a resolution to the Mali crisis, it has expressed a preference for a negotiated settlement to a military intervention.³³
- The plan requires endorsement from the UN, which is expected before the end of 2012.



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Endnotes

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Building a New American Arsenal

The American Security Project (ASP) is a nonpartisan initiative to educate the American public about the changing nature of national security in the 21st century.

Gone are the days when a nation's strength could be measured by bombers and battleships. Security in this new era requires a New American Arsenal harnessing all of America's strengths: the force of our diplomacy; the might of our military; the vigor of our economy; and the power of our ideals.

We believe that America must lead other nations in the pursuit of our common goals and shared security. We must confront international challenges with all the tools at our disposal. We must address emerging problems before they become security crises. And to do this, we must forge a new bipartisan consensus at home.

ASP brings together prominent American leaders, current and former members of Congress, retired military officers, and former government officials. Staff direct research on a broad range of issues and engages and empowers the American public by taking its findings directly to them.

We live in a time when the threats to our security are as complex and diverse as terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, failed and failing states, disease, and pandemics. The same-old solutions and partisan bickering won't do. America needs an honest dialogue about security that is as robust as it is realistic.

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