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FACING CHALLENGES IN MALI**

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PRESIDENT KEITA: DEMOCRACY FACING CHALLENGES IN MALI

Abstract:

From September 4, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, known as IBK by the Malians, faces the enormous challenge of leading the convulsive future of Mali. After 18 months of conflict, the country begins a complex refoundation, and must initiate a national reconciliation process and introduce deep political, economic and social reforms. In the North, tribal rivalry, jihad terrorism and organized crime remain major threats to stability and security. Nowadays, IBK, along with his Government, is the only viable solution to the collapse of the country: he must now demonstrate that his choice has been the best option to achieve it.

Keywords:

Mali, Keita, Government, elections, democracy, security, development, tuaregs and jihadists.

INTRODUCTION: RESTORING THE CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

In an interview with Radio France International¹, the candidate at the time Ibrahim Boubacar Keita set his first priority clear if he was elected president, it would be “to start a government that brings Mali together with the Malians”. This firm intention, which became one of the most repeated slogans during his electoral campaign, holds the huge challenge the African country is facing, and at the same time it is an accurate diagnosis of the low sense of belonging that the Malian population has, mainly in the north, to a national project. Since its national independence back in 1960, ethnic rivalries, claims - especially the North with the Tuareg people-, and a widespread underdevelopment have undermined the confidence of the peoples and tribes of Mali in successive national governments. However, urged by the huge governance, security and humanitarian crisis that the country is experiencing since the beginning of 2012, Malians have yet again put their trust in democracy and political power: with a participation rate of 50% - a much higher rate compared to any previous calls² – they went to the polls to elect the one responsible for rebuilding and reconciling a country traumatized by conflict.

The elections were held on schedule, against all odds, and thanks to the strength of the Interim Government of Bamako that faced continuous requests to postpone³ the elections. Thus, the pressure of the international community⁴, which would only reactivate financial assistance to Mali after the restoration of a legitimate and democratic government, transformed the preparation of the elections into a frantic race for the transitional authorities and Malian political parties, while the population was still suffering the scourge of violence in the north of the country. On the ground, the main obstacles to holding credible and representative elections were the precarious security levels in the north, the instability in the Kidal Tuareg region, the MOJWA threat of dynamiting the electoral process

¹ Exclusive interview of RFI with Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, favourite candidate of the presidential Malian elections. RFI, 09/08/13. Available at: <http://www.espanol.rfi.fr/africa/20130809-entrevista-exclusiva-de-rfi-con-ibrahim-boubacar-keita-favorito-de-las-presidenciale>. Date consulted: 21/08/13.

² During the last presidential elections, held in 2007, only 34% of the electoral census (6,3 millions) went to exercise their right to vote. In the end, Touré was elected, back by 1,6 millions of Malians, roughly a 10% of the total population. Scanty numbers that show a lack of representation of the political power in Mali.

³ The Malian Government rules out the plan of postponing the elections to the 28th of July. Xinhua Agency, 04/07/13. Available at: <http://spanish.peopledaily.com.cn/31618/8310498.html>. Date consulted: 08/07/13.

⁴ After the democratic elections, the European Union was the first one to announce the unblocking of the aid to Mali. The United States joined this diplomatic initiative the 6th of September, once the democratic government of Keita was established. Although the US will reactivate the financial bilateral aid to Mali, at the moment the collaboration within security issues is not contemplated, as the matter is still pending on the evaluation of the events occurred. (U.S. Lifts Restrictions on Bilateral Assistance to Mali. US Department of State, 06/09/13. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/09/213910.htm>. Date consulted: 08/09/13).

and, more specifically, the difficult task of securing the right to vote to 173,000 refugees outside of the country.

During the electoral campaign, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, the leader of the Assembly party for Mali, already stood out as the favorite candidate to manage the future of the country. In the first round, the 28th of July, imposed himself to his opponents with a comfortable 40% of popular support; but on the second round, held the 11th of August with a participation close to 50% of the electoral census, he beat the ex minister Soumaila Cisee, candidate of the Union for a Republic and for Democracy, overwhelmingly –with a 77,6% of the votes-. Dramane Dembelé, representative of the political alliance in office since the establishment of democracy back in 1992 with the Alliance for Democracy in Mali, was left behind. This clear defeat –he obtained a meager 9% of the votes- meant the absolute rejection of the population towards the former government, which was blamed for the huge political and security crisis that the country is suffering. On the contrary, the majority support of Keita, as the interim government pointed out the following days, “gave him a strong term of office to start the radical reforms” that Mali needs.

During the election campaign, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, leader of the Assembly for Mali, and emerged as the leading candidate to head the country's future. In the first round, on July 28, he beat his opponents with a comfortable 40 % of popular support, while in the second, which was held on August 11 with a share close to 50 % of the electorate, beat of overwhelmingly, with 77.6 % of the vote to ex - minister Soumaila Cisee, candidate of the Union for the Republic and Democracy. Along the way, he left behind Dramane Dembelé, representing the political alliance in power since the establishment of democracy in 1992, the Association for Democracy in Mali (Adema). This blatant defeat scored a meager 9% of the votes, meaning the absolute rejection of the population at the previous council, which blamed the huge political and security crisis in the country. By contrast, the majority support for Keita, as the interim government said days later, " gave a strong mandate to undertake radical reforms " that Mali needs.

For its part, the international community has unanimously supported Keita’s success in a “credible and transparent” elections” -as defined by Louis Michel, head of the EU election observation mission, which also had observers from the African Union and the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS), and monitoring from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to ensure the security of the elections. In total, more than 6,000 observers gave legitimacy to an election that should show the real beginning of Mali’s reconstruction.

In this new democratic setting, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was invested President of the Republic the 4th of September, in an official ceremony in which he swore to “preserve the democratic achievements, guarantee national unity, the independence of the homeland

and the integrity of national territory". These are for the new president the components of the red line of any political negotiation, as he has reiterated on many occasions. Days later, on September 19th, in the Stade 26 Mars in the capital, Bamako, a second public investiture was held in front of more than 40 foreign delegations and 20 heads of state: an unprecedented support in the history of Mali. Among the international representation, the attendance of the King of Morocco was especially remarkable –the first trip to Mali by a Moroccan monarch in more than 50 years- the Presidents of Algeria and Tunisia, and the Prime Minister of Mauritania. The presence of these heads of state, in addition to showing support for the new government of Mali, should be interpreted as a clear sign of determination in assisting in the eradication of threats such as jihadist terrorism and organized crime, which are common to the entire Maghreb and Western Sahel region.

Without a doubt, the most significant attendance came from the President of France, François Hollande. His constant support for the resolution of the crisis before the international community, and his decision in January 2013, to respond with a military intervention to the requests of the authorities of the transition, have made France the main architect and protector of the current stability of the country for much of the political power and Malian society. The Operation Serval - which still maintains 3,200 French soldiers in Mali - allowed for the recovery of the territorial integrity and, to a large extent, the conclusion of the electoral process that ended with the restoration of constitutional order.



President Keita's public investiture. Bamako, 19th of September of 2013.

In his speech, marked by the gratitude towards the international community -with a special reference to the presidents of France and Chad for their fight against jihadists-, the President Ibrahim Boubacar, with the slogan “le Mali d'abord” (Mali first), publicly committed to obey and respect the Constitution, as well as to prevent “Mali from never again suffering agony or threaten its neighbors.” As keys issues of his policy, he stressed the need to “rebuild the army, reconcile the Malians and build a strong nation” in order to “definitely end the black chapter that this country has suffered”.⁵

From now on, President Keita is responsible for concluding this complex transition process and move towards national unity, which is the major unresolved issue since the independence in 1960. A national project, which should focus -as it has been repeatedly stated- on increasing security, strengthening democracy and fostering development; and for which he has a technocratic government led by Oumar Tatam Ly. In the shortest possible time, the new Government of Mali will face the restoration of political institutions, through legislative elections; resuming complicated peace talks; and, especially, undertaking the difficult task of reshaping the country on the basis of an effective and credible democracy for all the Malian population.

KEITA'S PROFILE AND THE NEW MALIAN GOVERNMENT

Ibrahim Boubacar Keita⁶, popularly known as IBK, is a recognized politician with large doses of pragmatism and ambition, which to the public opinion seem to be the necessary qualities to lead Mali's future. With a long public career, built throughout more than two decades having distinguished positions of responsibilities; and with an extensive international education at the Universities of Dakar and Sorbonne, Keita has earned a solid reputation of “Iron Man”, he rises to the occasion of adversity and has a huge capacity for governing with a steady hand.

After working with French strategic institutes and humanitarian organizations in Mali, he jumped into the political arena in the early 90s, as a trusted ally and spokesman of President Alpha Oumar Konaré, leader of the party ADEMA. After being ambassador to Ivory Coast, he entered the government as the Minister of Foreign Affairs (1993-1994), and, finally, he served as Prime Minister between 1994 and 2000. During this term, he faced student protests and labor strikes in Bamako, he negotiated peace with the Tuareg rebel groups with

⁵ *Les temps forts de la journée d'investiture d'IBK au stade du 26 mars de Bamako*. Autres presses, 20/09/13. At http://www.panafricain.com/index.asp?page=detail_article&art=82947&lang=fr&pi=17 Date consulted: 20/09/13.

⁶ Bruce Whitehouse captures the detailed profile of President Keita in his article *IBK the Shapeshifter: A Portrait of Mali's Probable Next President*, published in Think Africa Press, 05/08/13. Available at <http://thinkafricapress.com/mali/ibk-shapeshifter-portrait-malis-next-president>. Date consulted: 15/08/13.

whom he signed the National Pact of 1996, and supervised the creation of decentralized local governments. All this made him earn the reputation of a great negotiator, and also of a strong decision-making politician, as harsh as these could have been. In 2000, a personal confrontation with President Konaré determined his exit from ADEMA and the creation of his own party, the Assembly for Mali (RPM, for its acronym in French), which participated in the presidential elections of 2002 and 2007: both, won by Amadou Toumani Touré.

Under President Touré government, Keita was president of the National Assembly from 2002 to 2007. During this last period with a political responsibility, Keita initially supported the “consensus policy” advocated by Touré, who later rejected it because it caused institutional instability and favored political patronage. In addition, he also denounced the Algiers Accord of 2006, which put a brief stop to the Tuareg revolt from a few months before, and which -in their opinion- excessive privileges were granted to the rebels at the expense of national unity and stability. Since then, Keita has been obsessed with finding a fair and viable solution to the claims and the development of the north of the country, as a basis for national reconstruction; that, along with national reconciliation, have now become the “priority of priorities” being the most ambitious project of its newly established government.

During all this time, IBK has proved to be a real expert in keeping the balance on the various political, religious and social factions in Mali, and changed the pragmatism to become the best partner to achieve their goal -now achieved- of leading the country. However, local media have highlighted the lack of consistency of his political views, and his ability to form alliance with the most disparate sheds and factions. And, despite being a member and former vice president of the Socialist International, he has never shown any ideological commitment to this ideology: on the contrary, and as Prime Minister, he presided the liberalization of the national economy. In addition, during his electoral campaign, and although he publicly professes a moderate Islamism, many local newspapers announced - and criticized- that Keita had the tacit support of Mahmoud Dicko, leader of the Higher Islamic Council: a religious organization that is Wahhabi self-proclaimed and is backed by Saudi Arabia.

Although Islam has always been plural in Mali, not at all strict and traditionally out of the political decisions, the most conservative religious power became especially significant in 2009, when thousands of Muslims -led by the Higher Council- opposed to the liberalizing measures of President Touré, that wanted to give more social prominence and rights for women, which he was eventually forced to withdraw. Although many advocate that during his govern the role of Islam will increase, it seems that the Malian society -which during the crisis experienced the cruelty of Salafi strictness- will reject the initiative.

His position with the military coup of March 2012 has also been controversial. As pointed out by Bamako journalist José Naranjo, IBK was amongst the few politicians who were

benevolent to the military coup of Captain Sanogo, about whom said: “I condemn it, but I understand it.”⁷ However, he also asked him to renounce to his claims of leading the country through a military junta and urged him to ease the democratic transition through an electoral process. It appears that, for the military dissidents, Keita was the best choice to lead the country, and even more after reiterating during the electoral campaign, his “zero tolerance” towards corruption: a priority claim of Sanogo to end with the political instability and misgovernment of Mali.

And although Keita’s policy remains, largely, a mystery yet to be solved, the formation of his first Government was established as the first achieved commitment of his Presidency. On September 5th, with Oumar Tatam Ly’s appointment as prime minister, he certified his intention of electing national leaders based on merits, not on cronyism or political affiliations. Ly, born in Paris 49 years ago, is an experienced economist with a strong international profile. During the electoral campaign he was the main financial advisor of IBK, but was never officially a member of a political party. During his career, his long term at the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO)⁸ is remarkable, where he held various positions of high responsibility between 1994 and 2013. With little political experience, his only goal is to bring stability to a country fractured by a military coup, by the jihadist insurgency and –as deeper causes- poverty and inequality. To achieve this, their contribution should focus on reducing corruption and reforming the financial sector. His appointment has been welcomed in Bamako, even more after a round of hearings conceded to the leaders of the political parties represented in the National Assembly⁹, which he urged to participate in the rehabilitation of the state and work towards the upcoming legislative elections, scheduled for November 24th¹⁰, culminating with the restoration of the democratic institutions in the country.

⁷ Naranjo, J. *Keita, a firm President for a Malian reconstruction*. El País, 13/08/13. Available at: http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/08/13/actualidad/1376375460_640073.html. Date consulted: 01/09/13.

⁸ The Central Bank of West African States (*Banque centrale des États de l’Afrique de l’Ouest*, in its original name), is a public international institution that groups the 8 French-speaking West African members of the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa. All these countries have the same currency, the CFA Franc, with a guaranteed conversion to euros by the French treasury.

⁹ *Rencontres du Premier ministre avec les partis politiques*. Government of Mali. Press note, 18/09/13. At http://www.primature.gov.ml/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10778:rencontres-du-premier-ministre-avec-les-partis-politiques--une-initiative-bien-appreciee&catid=5&Itemid=100037. Date consulted: 19/09/13.

¹⁰ *Mali will celebrate legislative elections the 24th of November*. EFE Agency, 18/09/13. Available at http://www.hoy.es/agencias/20130918/mas-actualidad/internacional/mali-celebrara-elecciones-legislativas-noviembre_201309182123.html. Date consulted: 18/09/13.

The Malian Government, appointed by the Presidential Decree 2013/721 of the 8th of September¹¹, consist of 34 ministers that represent an authentic amalgam of ideologies and political parties. In fact, only 11 ministers belong to Keita's Assembly for Mali, the rest are: representatives from three former governments and from Traoré's transitional government; also, there are four military offices -a small number compared to the previous governments-, and also four women: one of them, Bouaré Fily Sissoko, at the head of the transcendental Ministry of Economy and Finance. Among those that come from the previous executive, general Coulibaly stands out -criticized for his proximity to the captain Sanogo-, who repeats as Minister of Territorial Administration in recognition for the excellent organization of the presidential elections, looking towards preparing for the next elections to renew the General Assembly.

Other leading figures of the new government are Soumeylou Boubèye Mađga, arrested after the coup d'état and who now holds the Defense portfolio; and Zahabi Ould Sidi Mohamed, who leads the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The appointment of Sidi Mohamed -not without criticism in Bamako- contains a strong symbolic nuance, but also strategic. This former rebel leader, of Arab origin, participated in the riots of 1990 as head of the Arab Islamic Front of Azawad, and has become the first Arab to run the Malian diplomacy. In 1992, as coordinator of all Arab and Tuareg armed movements, he participated actively in the signature of the National Covenant; and, since leaving the armed militancy, he has accumulated an extensive experience within the United Nations, especially in operations in Africa, and is an expert in the Maghreb region. In addition to his full international schedule, he is expected to have a prominent role in the negotiations with the Tuareg rebel groups, who have received his appointment with certain optimism and expectation.

But surely, Cheick Oumar Diarra is currently - along with President Keita and Prime Minister Ly- the most relevant political authority of Mali, as on him falls the priority objective of the Government. As head of the new Ministry of National Reconciliation and Development of the Northern Regions, this political scientist and jurist educated in Bordeaux (France) assumes the enormous challenge of dealing with the Tuareg groups, especially with the MNLA, not to mention the legitimate claims of other northern peoples. A risky "work of social engineering" that will determine, to a large extent, the success or failure of the new national project backed by the polls. To overcome this challenge, the minister Diarra has extensive experience in national politics, and has also participated in the 90s and under the direction of at the time, Prime Minister Keita, in various peace talks with the Tuareg rebel

¹¹ Decree of the Presidency of the Republic 2013/721, 8th of September. Available at: http://www.primature.gov.ml/images/stories/gouvernement_otl.pdf. Date consulted: 09/09/13.

movements. Also, he knows well the world of diplomacy, in which he cultivated his mission as an ambassador to the United States between 1995 and 2002.

However, and as in internal matter, it seems that President Keita has managed to save the first major obstacle, of establishing a national government of practically a national coalition and therefore maintain a careful balance of power, in which all will find comfort and will feel part of the resolution of the challenges that the nation is facing. As for the Malian society, they are expectant and hopeful: the social reconciliation, security -with jihadism and organized crime as the major threats- and the social and economic development have turned into key factors in order to move towards national reconstruction.

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Without an accurate process of national reconciliation, any other policy action will be sterile. The initial negotiations should focus on the Tuaregs, a minority that barely reaches 10 % of the population and that is based in the Kidal region, and at the same time they will have to attend the Arabs and, mainly, to the majority black tribes, constituting almost 90 % of the Malian society. Definitely, one of the toughest challenges is getting the back up of the bitterest enemies of the Tuareg: the black population, and any concession will result in protests in other regions, especially in Gao and Bamako. Therefore, all the political and security systems of the State, that have the collaboration on the field of international UN forces, should monitor and guarantee that the negotiation process occurs in the best possible conditions and in absence of social violence: any outbreak of conflict will increase the ethnic rivalry, an existent reality in the country.

According to the peace agreements of Ouagadougou (in Burkina Faso) from the past June 18th ¹², signed by Traoré's transitional government and, by the Tuaregs, by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and by the Higher Council for the Unity of Azawad, the final peace talks should begin within 60 days. A countdown which began on September 8th, with the formation of the current government and the appointment of Minister Diarra as the maximum government official to face this challenge. In the June agreements, both parties agreed on some provisional measures that would facilitate the holding of presidential elections: the quartering of the Tuaregs in Kidal and the return of civil authorities in the region, but for now it's time to finally face the negotiations. In this context, we must rule out any MNLA rebel's separatist claims or other related groups and, as for the government, to establish a territorial administration with a degree of autonomy that

¹² *Mali reaches an agreement with the Tuaregs.* Europa Press, 18/06/13. Available at <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-gobierno-mali-alcanza-acuerdo-tuaregs-permitira-regreso-ejercito-kidal-20130618140344.html>. Date consulted: 19/06/13.

satisfies all of the northern populations: Arabs, Blacks and Tuaregs. In order to achieve this, it is a *conditio sine qua non* ensuring the ceasefire; to undertake a process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of all armed groups; and, certainly the thorniest issue, will be assuring that justice will prevail in the whole process.

In this regard, from the renamed Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, Minister Diarra has established the basic foundation of the process: “the restoration of justice and the establishment of truth” to “end the culture of impunity.” For this, he pointed out that “everyone must be listened; all the crimes shall be investigated -in reference to terrorism, crime and armed secessionism-, as well as the destruction caused in northern Mali; and seek social reparation with compensation for all the affected.” Ibrahim Ag Mohamed Assaleh, on behalf of MNLA, falls in the same direction, but stresses that “the truth must come to all crimes committed in northern Mali since the independence of our country.”¹³

Nothing will be easy, and the ancient ethnic rivalries will continue to threaten blowing up the national reconciliation. The visit of a MNLA delegation to the Interim President Traoré in Bamako, last July, provoked anger and outrage of the black population, accusing the Tuareg rebel movements of opening the door to the north to jihadist groups and of provoking the political and social collapse of the country¹⁴. As for the Tuaregs, the 15th of September, they received the government delegation with stones –led by the minister Diarra- who visited for the first time the bastion of Kidal. Thanks to the UN forces, the plane managed to land at the airport, but the hostility of the local population was obvious. Despite this, the government is flexible in its purpose: “It was a very minor incident -Diarra declared-. Nothing will divert us from our determination of uniting all the loose ends of the Malian nation and of reconciling to take Mali out of the current crisis.”¹⁵

THE JIHADIST THREAT AND THE ORGANIZED CRIME

The consolidation of any jihadist sanctuary, regardless of the location, is one of the major concerns for the international community, but it is even more when it is just over 1,000 km

¹³ *Le ministre Cheick Oumar Diarra l’a déclaré hier: «La Commission dialogue s’appellera désormais Commission vérité et réconciliation».* Mali Actualités, 18/09/13. Available at <http://maliactu.net/le-ministre-cheick-oumar-diarra-la-declare-hier-la-commission-dialogue-sappellera-desormais-commission-verite-et-reconciliation/> Date consulted: 19/09/13.

¹⁴ “In Bamako there’s a strong opposition towards any agree that implies political concessions to MNLA, (...) whose political leaders will face arrest orders for war crimes in the north of Mali”. *The EU backs the “crucial” and “historical” agreement in Mali and offers facilitating its implementation.* Europa Press, 18/06/13. Available at http://www.expansion.com/agencia/europa_press/2013/06/18/20130618203052.html. Date consulted: 21/06/13.

¹⁵ *Mali’s government trusts in the reconciliation even though the last “minor incidents” in the north.* Europa Press, 16/09/13. Available at <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-gobierno-mali-confia-reconciliacion-pese-ultimos-incidentes-menores-norte-20130916231125.html>. Date consulted: 18/09/13.

away from the European continent. This global threat has settled in northern Mali by the confluence of certain factors, that the present government should address: the lack of control and safety in the desert and in the northern populations; the frustration of the population, which suffocated in poverty, received from the Salafist groups what they did not receive from Bamako; and organized crime, which allows the financing of violence, armed struggle and jihadist recruitment.

As part of The Operation Serval, the French and Chadian troops, in support of the Malian regular forces, struck hard at the extremists, but the terrorist threat remains very latent in the field and the Salafi Islamist terrorists have repeatedly stated that they will return when the circumstances are favorable, to northern Mali. According to Army sources, more than 600 terrorists would have died in combat¹⁶ during the main phase of the offensive to regain territorial integrity, between January and March of 2013. But, in late 2012, many analysts pointed out that the total number of jihadists could reach up to 6,000, so, according to these figures, the key question is where they are hiding after escaping without facing the battle.

Many of them left Malian territory, especially al Qaeda militants in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI), and mainly refuge in Libya -a country that France has baptized as the “black hole” of jihadism-. In addition, these assault barracks and uranium plants in Niger (May 2013) and, as noted by Ignacio Cembrero¹⁷, now they threaten Tunisia (August 2013), where the remains of the brigade of terrorist Abu Zeid have settled, whom fell during the French offensive. Others are still in northern Mali: in Malian inhospitable desert areas or infiltrators among the population. The Movement for Unity and Jihadism in West Africa (MUJAO), the only one to integrate black terrorists, is still active in the region of Gao. Therefore, due to their ability to go undetected, this Salafi militia today becomes the most dangerous and elusive threat for the military and for the police forces deployed in the north, and is likely to continue with their sporadic attacks, and even attempting attacking in Bamako.

The third jihadist group, Ansar Dine, led by Iyad Ag Ghali and which led the offense to Bamako on January 10th, is virtually gone. After being chased by the MNLA, and after suffering the dissident Islamic Movement of Azawad, Ansar Dine seems to have given up, as

¹⁶ Towards the end of March, with the north almost regained, the Malian Army spokesman, Suleimán Maigua, declared that the balance of deaths among the military forces was 63 Malians, 26 Chadians, five French, two Togolese and a Burkinese; facing around 600 downed jihadists since the beginning of The Serval Operation. *The Malian Army counts around 600 downed terrorists since January*. *Abc/EFE*, 27/03/13. Available at: <http://www.abc.es/internacional/20130327/abci-balance-guerra-mali-201303271833.html>. Date consulted: 09/04/13.

¹⁷ “Al-Qaeda opens a new front: Tunisia. The assassination, on Monday night, of eight elite soldiers beheaded on the skirts of the Chaambi mountain is the tangible demonstration of the first time they are stepping in the smallest country in the Maghreb”. Cembrero, I. *The jihadist terrorism opens a new combat front in Tunisia*. *El País*, 03/08/13. At http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/08/03/actualidad/1375558570_882396.html. Date consulted: 05/08/13.

for now, his goal of imposing the Salafist strictness through terror: an extremist doctrine rejected by the vast majority of the Tuareg people.

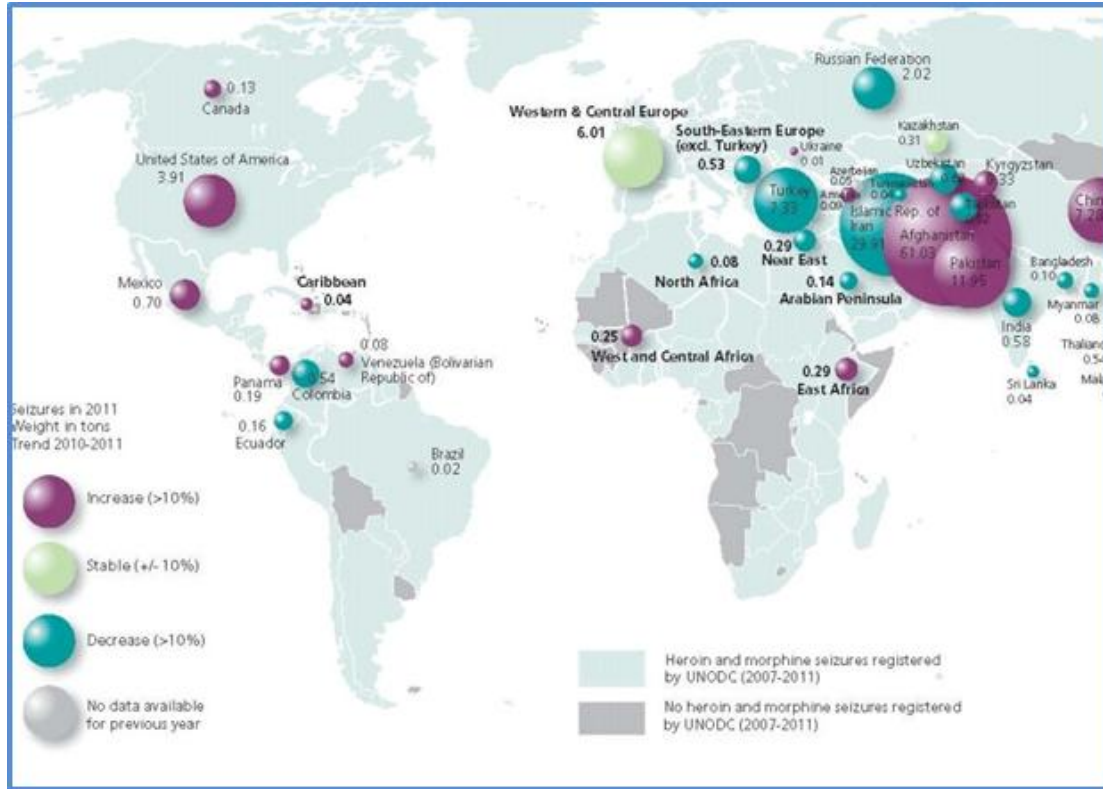
In August, through a statement posted on the Mauritanian news agency ANI, the Algerian terrorist Mokhtar Belmokhtar, jihadist leader of AQIM's splinter group "Those who Sign with Blood Brigade" and Ould Ahmed Amer, head of MUJAO, announced their merge into a new militia: Al-Mourabitoun (the Sentinels), whose objective is "the unity of Muslims from the Nile to the Atlantic, to address the Zionist campaign against Islam and Muslims", although his staunch and declared enemy still remains as France¹⁸. With this new alliance, jihadist terrorists, far from considering the battle lost, they show their determination of becoming stronger. Currently, his main opponents are still the French forces, who continue to harass the Salafists. For this reason, the most dangerous moment will come when The Operation Serval withdraws from Mali: according to President Hollande's announcement, only 1,000 French soldiers will remain in Mali starting from December. Thus, they will cede all security responsibility to the northern Malian army and the MINUSMA¹⁹ peacekeepers (6,294 military and police), which, for the moment, are far from being prepared to prevent or repel attacks by Salafi militias.

Along with jihadist terrorism, organized crime is another major threat that the new government should eradicate to consolidate security in Mali. The north of the country has become, in the last two decades, a regional hub for arms, tobacco or drug trafficking, as well as human trafficking in West Africa. The incessant traffic of weapons has been favored by the disarmament agreements that followed the Tuareg revolts, by defections in the ranks of the regular army, and by external factors, such as the fall of the Libyan regime of Gaddafi or the arrival of foreign Salafists. As for the lucrative drug business, and although Mali is not categorized as a consuming country, the trade of cannabis, cocaine and methamphetamine - which mostly comes from Central America through the Gulf of Guinea-, has grown ostensibly, as reported in the World Drug Report of 2013.²⁰

¹⁸ *Belmokhtar's militants "merge" with Mali's Mujao.* BBC, 22/08/13. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-23796920>. Date consulted: 25/08/13.

¹⁹ At MINUSMA (information from the 31st of July of 2013), apart from troops of 15 different African countries; troops from USA, France, Sweden and the UK will also be deployed along with police from Germany, Belgium, the US, France, Italy and Jordan. <http://www.un.org/es/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/resources.shtml>.

²⁰ Report by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. Available at: <http://www.unodc.org/wdr/>. Date consulted: 15/09/13.



Global map of heroin and morphine trafficking in 2011

Source: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNDOC)

Finally, Mali has also become an illegal broker of human beings, which go through the Sahara to reach Europe. Although this execrable business starts in criminal networks based in Bamako that facilitates false identity documents; the thousands of people fleeing from misery and violence must also pay to go through the Malian desert towards Algeria or Niger. The increase in sub-Saharan illegal immigration at European borders in the last months is a clear indication, which shows that, far from diminishing, the illegal smuggling has revived through the region.

The combination of these two threats: terrorism and organized crime, has increased the security level and the danger in the region, and it also complicates even more its neutralization. Both are characterized by its adaptation and mobility capacity: if they are eliminated in Mali, they would sure look for open spaces and other failed or weak states where to settle down. Currently, the broad deployment of military forces in the north is slowing down these illegal activities; but only a solid government and a tight security, as well as the increase of the development levels and the regional and international cooperation will be capable of finishing with this terrorist and criminal ulcer that suffocates not only Mali, but also destabilizes the whole region and threatens Europe directly.

SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2012, the international community has reinforced the cooperation with Mali. Within the security field, The Operation Serval, the EU's mission (EUTM Mali), and the UN mission MINUSMA, which in July relieved the African force AFISMA²¹, constitute the 3rd biggest military effort –after Congo and Sudan- deployed up to now in Africa, with over 10,000 soldiers on the ground. After the restoration of the constitutional order, the foreign financial aid was also activated (more than 4,000 million dollars) for development and national reconstruction. However, Mali will not be a completely viable country until it is capable of autonomously guaranteeing the population's security, as well as of introducing economic policies that favor the fight against poverty and that increase the levels of development. In this regard, the restructuring and effectiveness of the Malian security forces constitute the most important and urgent challenge that the government has to face: it is essential to guarantee a peaceful national reconciliation, as well as to eradicate the jihadist threat and the organized crime.

Since April, in the military base of Koulikoro, the European instructors of the EUTM mission are training the decimated and meager Malian Army, which consists of only 7,350 troops²² for an area of 1.2 million square kilometers. French General Bruno Guibert, current head of the mission, has defended extending the European mission a year more –the term expires on May 15th, 2014- to train the eight battalions that form the Malian Army, instead of the four that the EU committed with at first: “Mali still needs to acquire autonomy to ensure the security and stabilization of its territory in the long term,” and this requires restoring the effectiveness of “almost all of its military units and rebuilding an effective chain of command”²³. Although it is up to President Keita to take the initiative of asking to the European Union the permanence of EUTM in Mali. For this mission, the maximum allowed is 550 troops, Spain provides 110 soldiers: 76 in terms of protection and 33 instructors as well as the deputy chief of the mission.

In addition to meeting the restructuring and efficiency of the Mali Army, the government should recover the internal cohesion as well as the trust of the military and, at the same time, prevent them from interfering in the political decisions. That was the case of the

²¹*African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA)*. The authority transfer, according to the Security Council's Resolution 2100/2013, took place in Bamako, the 1st of July of 2013, under the presidency of at the time minister of Defense, general Yamoussou Camara. In spite of the importance of this relieve, in terms of effectiveness and financing of the operation, it only implied the immediate change in the command of the African forces, from the structure of the CEDEAO to the UN, as there was no increase of the deployment.

²² The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2013*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, Philadelphia, 2013.

²³ *The new chief of the EU mission asks extending it for one more year to train all of the Malian Army*. Europa Press, 17/09/13. Available at <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-nuevo-jefe-mision-ue-pide-prorrogarla-ano-mas-formar-todo-ejercito-mali-20130917194934.html> Date consulted: 18/09/13.

Tuareg revolt of 2012, which led to the defeat and frustration of the regular forces deployed in the north (the “Green Berets”), whose members blamed Touré’s government of not supporting them and leaving them to their fate; while his presidential guard (the “Red Berets”) remained quartered in Bamako. The coup of Captain Sanogo (22nd of March 2012) made obvious the division and frustration of the majority of the Army, but also the desire for power of the military. Within a few weeks, the military junta passed the power over to the interim authorities, but their role has been ambiguous until the presidential elections, which seem to have ended the military interference in the political sphere.

This goal seems to justify the promotion of coup leader Sanogo to the highest rank (four star general), last August²⁴, although no official justification has been offered. Not without controversy, especially since he has guaranteed immunity from being prosecuted, this rise is seen as a viable professional subterfuge to facilitate his professional retirement as well as his definite separation of the political power. Meanwhile, Traoré’s interim government ceased him in his position of head of the military committee that carried out the reform of the Armed Forces. With the departure of Sanogo, President Keita -who has maintained a relative and ambiguous distance with the military junta after the coup- may start his term without the hindrance involving this particular military officer and his followers.

On the other hand, increasing development must also be a primary concern of the new government of Mali; it is essential to restore the society's trust in democratic values and in the political administration. Without security there will never be development; and, if this is neglected, violence and crime will return to the north. Mali is nowadays one of the ten least developed countries, where 35% of its population scrapes with 2 dollars per day. The current conflict has further aggravated the economic situation, as well as causing a huge humanitarian crisis, with more than 400,000 displaced persons and refugees that must return to their populations as soon as possible.

The public infrastructures (health and education) are completely insufficient and there are barely any paved roads in the northern region. Creating public youth employment is necessary, as it is condemned to scarcity and frustration: guaranteeing food security –always threatened by the harsh desert and the continuous droughts-; creating a distribution system of drinkable water and for irrigation, that allows for the sustainment of the agriculture and stockbreeding; as well as incentivizing the Malian production industry to lower the bulky foreign dependency. All these precarious economic conditions favor the jihadist recruitment groups, the armed revolts and organized crime. Without a doubt, president Keita has to

²⁴ The Government promotes the captain that lead the coup in 2012 to general. Europa Press, 18/08/13. Available at <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-gobierno-asciende-generalato-capitan-lidero-golpe-estado-2012-20130815142135.html#AqZ1CQLxFUOo71Nh>. Date consulted: 21/08/13.

urgently face this colossal challenge, which demands for deep reforms of the economic, industrial and social policies of Mali.

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Mali faces a new and very complicated transition. New political leaders must confront, urgently, the enormous and complex challenges that rebuilding a country devastated by a still very present conflict imply; as well as restoring a true democracy and good governance that can overcome the state flaws that accumulate since the independence back in 1960. However, the Malian population, the main victim of the national collapse, still has to wait long to confirm the return from this incipient and relative peace, and also to start believing in the feasibility of a unified and safe country that progresses toward the development of all of its inhabitants.

On the field, especially in the north, tribal rivalry and jihadist threat will persist, and will try to undermine the government's action. Organized crime will also continue to be a major burden for the stability of the country, as it is not easy to eradicate an evil business that has been very lucrative for a large sector of the population, and that –unfortunately– has allowed the survival of many Malians that otherwise would not have had another way of subsisting. As for national reconciliation, and despite the determination shown by the Government, it is still too early to make an assessment, when the process has not even begun and the different positions are very heated. It will not be easy for the majority of the society to accept the decisions destined to a minority, the Tuaregs; but the reconfiguration of the state administration is necessary, which should allow higher levels of self-governance and autonomy to the eight regions that form the country, and therefore promote the formation of a sense of belonging and of national identity still nonexistent.

In this long process, which also requires major legal reforms, the tensions and clashes will be very present; and only through dialogue and firmness, in a scenario of security and stability, the newly elected political authorities may be able to carry out a new national project. However, the military response can only meet the safety standards; and the definite solution has to come from a political, democratic and inclusive process, that encourages development programs all over the country. The external financial aid must have a direct impact on the society in the shortest time possible, or it will risk wrecking all the progress made in recent months. The restoration of democracy has been the first step, and of great importance, but just an electoral process will not change the structural problems, nor the reasons, deep and close, which led to the total collapse of Mali, and the uprooting and despair of its population.

As for now, Mali has an enormous external support that should not lose. International missions deployed in the country should become the guarantor of stability in the north, but, above all, it should avoid the false closure of this conflict. Predictably, the European Union will extend its mandate to also assist the police training, the internal security and the justice reform²⁵. MINUSMA will continue to suffer significant operational deficiencies, in a still very complex scenario, and its effectiveness will be subjected to increase of international contingents, which will not reach ground shortly. And, despite of the progressive withdrawal announcement, the French Government will not hesitate to stay in the north while the jihadist remains, and whenever the Malian National Assembly requires it. However, all this international effort cannot become another actor in the country's future, and its stay should be subjected to the progress of the full recovery of the constitutional order, in the process of national reconciliation, and the implementation of policies aimed to encourage development.

Redefining a country, after all these years of crisis and conflict, is a complex and very long-term oriented issue. Everything is yet to be done, but the society has once again put its trust in the political power and has gone to the polls to elect the leader who has to take the control of the national reconstruction. With an overwhelming majority, president Keita assumes, from September 4th, the responsibility and the huge task of rescuing Mali from ashes. For many Malians, and also for the international community, IBK today represents hope and a viable solution to the political, military and social collapse of the country. Having said that, he has to prove that his appointment was the best option to reach it. It is easy to envision the consequences of the success of his ambitious project, but so it is noting that their failure will have unpredictable repercussions far beyond the borders of Mali.

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²⁵ *EU/AFRICA: PSC studies options for police mission in Mali*. Europe Diplomacy & Defence. The Agence Europe Bulletin on CSDP and NATO No.623, 16 July 2013. Editions de l'AGENCE EUROPE, Bruxelles.