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TUAREG REBELLION AND
ALQAEDA ROLE

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Abstract:

Mouvement National Pour la Libération de l'Azawad (Azawad being the name they give to Northern Mali), made up of some two thousand insurgents, announced on 8 April the "liberation" of the north of Mali, a territory claimed by the Tuaregs. This separatist movement, although it is alien to the claims of the Islamists of Ansar Dine led by Lyad Ag Ghali (known for his mediation in the kidnappings of Western aid workers), shares with the latter the fight against the central power and in favour of Northern Mali's secession, as seen during last month.

This accidental "alliance" between the Islamist movement and the secular has sparked suspicions inside the country and across the neighbouring countries with regard to the existing links between the Tuaregs' demands and the terrorists of AQMI. In the band Sahel-Sahariana, these kinds of criminal groups travel freely without problems. The North of Mali is a lawless territory: a failed state, which is permanently on the verge of humanitarian crises. For these reasons, the insurgent army have carried out a full strategy to save this inhospitable region. Azawad does not only include the Tuaregs, also the Arab community, the Songhais and a small group of Peulhs.

The Azawíes justify their uprising arguing that the Tuareg community has been long abandoned by the Mali Government from the 1960s. The insurgents' goal is to liberate the lands from Malian occupation, to establish again the confidence between the different communities as well as the basis for a durable peace and safety for the populations.

The question now is how these rebels are going to achieve their political and social objectives considering the fact that Islamists aim to take full control of the situation and establish a religious state, as well as a terrorist group (AQIM) that advocates a Holy War against the West.

Keywords:

Terrorism, Al Qaeda, rebellion, civil war, coup d'Etat.

***NOTE:** The ideas expressed in the **Documents of Opinion** are entirely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the thoughts of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

THE TUAREG IMPULSE AFTER THE MILITARY COUP IN THE CAPITAL CITY

The message of the Swiss writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose political ideas influenced the French Revolution deeply, reappears in the present Malian political arena. When two opposition parties come into conflict with a third one which is against them, they join together. In this case the two parties with different objectives are the Tuareg rebels, from the North of Mali, and the Islamists, from the movement Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith). They both joined to challenge the central power which has now been polarized due to the military coup carried out by a group of deserters from the Malian Army. The coup d'état, which took place on 23 March, overthrew the president, Amadou Toumani Touré, who has since become a refugee.

The military coup has created an anarchic situation in North Mali, strengthening the Tuaregs' territorial claims and permitting the Islamists to come out of hiding to stimulate their ideological claims such as the establishment of an Islamic State in this zone. In addition to the claims of these two opposition groups, there are also the threats of Al Qaeda terrorists in Islamic Maghreb. From their sanctuary they encourage many strict ideas of Islam; they call Muslim peoples to rise up in the name of freedom against foreign forces (*Yihad*) and they want to reinstate a caliphate.

The terrorists of Al Qaeda hold their western victims just in the middle of the Saharan triangle shaped by the towns of Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao. They used them as a method of funding and promotion, obtaining a big media coverage that otherwise they wouldn't have. Spanish citizens Ainhoa Fernández and Enric Gonyalons are still held by a separated group of the AQMI related with Jihadi terrorism. They will be released soon.

THE "TUAREG SPRING"

The crystallization of the Tuareg uprising is largely influenced by the revolts in Tunisia, Egypt and particularly in Libya. The Tuareg movement acts on behalf of justice, unity and freedom; its objective is the absolute control of Northern Mali and its self-independence. To understand the reasons of this conflict we have to look to the Arab Spring which encouraged Tuaregs to start once more their ancient fight for a self-independence process. Through this

process, Tuareg people, 15% of the whole Malian population (15 million people), could choose their own fate.

The military uprising was caused by almost the same reasons that provoked the Arab revolution in Libya: high prices, unemployment, chronic corruption, concentration of wealth in hands of elite. Ignominy. The overthrew president, Amadou Toumani Touré, gradually won the disregard of his multi-ethnic people, especially the one of the Tuareg community in Northern Mali that felt abandoned to its own fate, excluded by the Central Administration. Poorer social classes in process of impoverishment have grown last years and thousands of families don't even have a euro per day. However, Tuareg indignation is not only caused by socio-economic conditions but also by the fact that their identity, culture and language (different from other Malians who are just united by a piece of land) are not recognized.

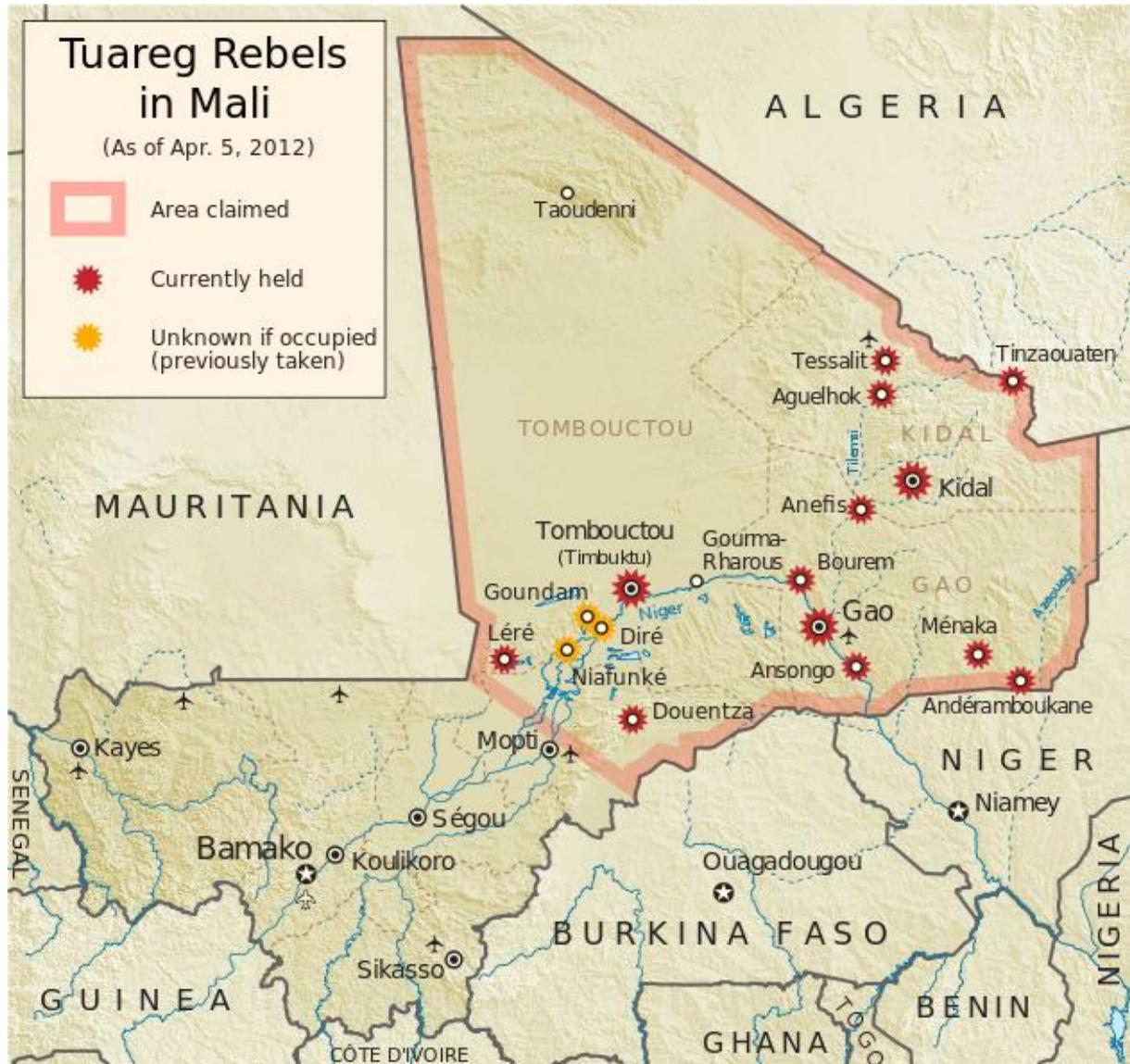
The armed uprising against the central power was expected since the rebels from the north of the country undertook their own *Spring*, over a year ago, and claimed self-determination for the north of Mali. The political negotiations with the ex-president of Mali stopped and the young people who were rebelling chose to resort to violence and assault, using a Kalashnikov, key cities in the region, such as Menaka or Kidal which along with Gao and Timbuktu constitute a main enclave in the region.

	MALI
Extension	1,240,192 Km²
GDP	18.6 million \$
GDP structure	Agriculture: 38.8%
	Industry: 21.9%
	Services: 39.3%
GDP per capita	1,300 \$ (2011 estimated)
GDP growth rate	5.3% (2011 estimated)
Population	14,500.00 (2011 estimated)
Population growth rate	2.613% (2011 estimated)
Infant mortality	109.08 per thousand

Life expectancy	53.06 years
Literacy rate of the population	46.4%
Doctors per 1.000 inhabitants	0.049
Prevalence rate of AIDS	1% (2009 estimated)
Population living under the poverty line	36.1% (2005)
Age structure	0-14: 47.3%
	15-64: 49.7%
	Over 65: 3%
Commercial relations (Exports):	China, 27.2% Indonesia, 8.2% Thailand 5.3% Burkina Faso 5.2% Morocco 5% South Korea 4.9%
Commercial relations (Imports):	Senegal, 13.6% France 11% Ivory Coast 10% China 6.8% South Korea 5.2%

Fuente: [CIA World Facts Book](#)

Probably inspired by the Libyan uprising, they entered cities raising the Azawad (coined expression for the north of the country) flag and barely encountered military resistance. One of the spokesmen of the pro-independence Tuareg group **National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad** (MLNA), Moussa Ag Acharaotumane, with whom this author has held several conversations, has expressed that the combat in favor of self-determination of the territory is “unstoppable” and has admitted that the attempted coup of March 21 against the ex-president, Amadou Toumane Touré, has helped them to continue with the launch of offensives against the Malian Army. He also denied there being any relation between the rebellion and Al Qaeda terrorists.



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Azawad_Tuareg_rebellion_2012.svg

Colonel Mamadou Mangara, the governor of the region of Timbuktu, has admitted on several occasions to be concerned about the control “de facto”- of the pro-independence Tuareg rebels of the region of Azawad and the power gained by the sympathizers of the Islamic group, Ansar Dine (Defenders of Islam) who have joined the Tuaregs to protect the secession of the region. Unlike the group MLNA- opponent of political Islam- Islamists fight for the establishment of an Islamic State, which is feared by part of the Tuareg community which does not share the religious ideas conceived by Ansar Dine and claims, for this reason,

an intervention by the NATO because of the existing risk of the country breaking into a civil war¹.

It is at this point that Bamako has lost control of the northern provinces while captain Amadou Sonogó, leader of the recent coup d'état, has asked desperately and unsuccessfully for international help to stop the new positions the Tuaregs are consolidating in the inhospitable lands of the Sahel where the terrorist group Al Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb has established itself since seven years ago. The International Community and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) maintains pressure on the Coup Military Regime so that it restores the previous power. The political crisis has caused numerous fatalities and over two hundred-thousand refugees in neighboring countries, such as Mauritania or Burkina Fasso.

At the moment, it seems difficult that the North of Mali will go back to normality, at least, as long as, in the capital, the power remains held by military rebels and the Constitution is not reestablish in order to enable that legislative elections can be held and that people can democratically choose the head of the Government. The instability in the capital city intensifies the sense of insecurity in the North Part of the country. A country which future is been designed by an independent movement that, at this moment, lacks a political project and which formation is liken to the guerrillas.

Timbuktu legendary fame- known as the rich city that controlled travelling trade in the deeps of the Sahara desert- came to notice of Europe and appealed many Europeans. For this reason, between 1588 and 1853, at least 43 western travelers tried to reach the city. Only four of them made it, and the first one to set foot in Timbuktu, year 1826, was murdered by the Tuaregs, who feared that they land would attract European Colonization that, with the course of time, took form in the area.

This is not the only historical episode explaining the combat of the Tuareg community, there were more along contemporary history that show the relation of the Tuareg people with weapons. The persistent drought and hunger that considerably affected the Tuareg

¹ Conversation with Tuareg activists disassociated from the MNLA Rebellion.

community during the Humanitarian Crisis of 1991 brought Arabs and Tuaregs face to face, living a final balance of death victims and people injured for life. Still today both communities drag the memory of the thousands of deaths.

During the last twenty years, they have been disarmament and reconciliation programs for Arabs and Tuaregs. And right when it seemed that the region was prospering together with both entities and tourism was achieving a slight economical benefit for the region, the defeat Bin Laden started in 2005 to spread his influences in the area and sank the only source of income of the locals; people who have already suffer episodes of instabilities brought by the Tuareg rebellion and who know have lived in extremely poor socio-economic conditions.

The urgent need of the central power to reunite all different ethnical communities in order to fight the terrorism of Al Qaeda in the AQMI, has been destroyed after the recent communicate of independence of the Azawad State made by Tuareg rebels. This separatist proclamation condemns the totally of members of Malian political class that defends the existence of a single country. A country often shook by internal conflicts of a multi-ethnic land. Today's capital division due to the military coup, and the fracture at the heart of the Tuareg 's community in North Mali between those pro- independence (majority) and those against the creation of an independent State, has given free way to Al Qaeda terrorist, who have benefit from a broken landscape, to obtain political advantages.

A succession of questions and concerns arise in the middle of a defiant scenario: what would happen with the Pentagon's base in which, within the framework of the *Trans Sahara* program that United States developed, terrorism is being fought? Since Al Qaeda terrorism established its bases on the Sahel desert, more than one hundred Americans have been training day after day those natives part of a weak Army poor in resources. Malian army soldiers have suffered constant breakdowns on their information system as well as on their vehicles and light weapons. And what is even worse is their lack of a competent formation.

But this same soldiers- frighten off by the Tuaregs, who took over their territory two weeks ago- were withdraw in the capital. Likewise, the Tuaregs and the Arabs- the two biggest

ethnic groups that take part on this special antiterrorism mission because of their knowledge on the land and its adaptation to nomad live- have taken different ways. Some have joined the rebels to fight for the creation of Azawad, and others have fled to Bamako. The next question and concern would be: Who is now in charge of the mission that aimed to eradicate extremist's bases, bases that conform the perfect hideout for the traffic of drugs and weapons, and to hide western hostages? Are those Tuaregs trained by United States and that once belong to the program against terrorism and that collaborated with Mali's central power the same ones that now are allies to the Tuareg's rebellion? The indigenous of Mali's Northern population have confirmed to this author that some Tuaregs have joining the Revolutionary army, while others have deserted.

The North of Mali with an extension of 528,000 miles is controlled by the "azawíes" guerrilla. The question is: would they be able to avoid the threats from Al Qaeda terrorists? How would they be able to guarantee safety in a region with mile long frontiers full of cracks? And how are they going to stop those collaborators- many of them Tuaregs- eager to somehow profit from the terrorist net?

AQMI, ANSAR DINE'S AND BOKO HARAM'S ISLAMISTS

Therefore, general concern lies in the worry that destabilization in Sahel could translate into a stronger Al Qaeda terrorist organization in Islamic Maghreb (AQMI), and of its nets on the stripe took by the rebels. In this place, around one thousand terrorists work for the recruitment of new mujahidin and in the ideological and physical training of jihadist. This territory is also the hidden place for western hostages while they negotiate their liberation. For the last ten years, terrorist have succeed in cultivating the loyalty of an important part of Northern Mali population that have become their accomplice in exchange for economic contribution.

The region's nomads, as well as the Tuaregs, keep a narrow relation with the defenders of the defeat Bin Laden. This is due to the relation of dependency that local people have developed with the terrorists in order to survive. In addition to this, terrorists also enjoy,

thanks to enormous money contributions, complicity of members from Mali and the Mauritanian Army, who have sold fuel and even weapons to AQMI's terrorists.

The reason Al Qaeda terrorists have remain extremely watchful inside their fortress or *katibas* during these last years was their fear to be trapped in one of their "enemies" ambushes. Now that the region is going through a moment of maximum fragility and that factual power in northern Mali is hold by rebels, cells could presumably work with less stress. During one of her investigation carried out in the cities of Gao y Timbuktu, this author learnt that these cells are divided in different groups. Groups that received a 45 day military course during which the leaders train them hard and indoctrinate them from morning till night on the Islamic ideas, Arab language or the Jihad values.

These courses foment the ideas of <Islamize the world> and <fight heathens, apostates and invaders>, including Muslim-Arabic countries, considered allies of the western enemy, as well as those States with troops in Muslim land. Likewise, Al Qaeda terrorists have magnificent communication systems, having important multimedia devices. Their technological equipment equals or beats any western Army, in fact, some reformed terrorist² have even affirmed that AQMI is a perfectly hierarchical army of almost one thousand islamists, not only composed by Jihadist but also by bandits manipulated by Salaf discourses.

It is still too early to assess what really can be represented in terms of recruitment or assaults this prevailing northern region anarchy but the radicals win a new pulse in its physical and ideological battle with this absolute freedom movement. What is clear is that even before the Tuareg rebellion, the members of Al Qaeda just hardly encountered resistance when penetrate different corners of Sahel by the ease which it travels in the desert strip. Kilometrical land borders, which are porous and military impossible to seal, raid the way for the of Al Qaeda terrorists in the drug and weapon trade development and in the search of their own supplies. They are a huge breeding ground in a region lacking of

² Conversations held by this autor with AQMI reformed terrorists in the Mauritanian capital, Novembre 2010.

opportunities, resources and empty of serious educational structures.

Tuareg rebels accuse tyrannies that have been control the region of eviction, which have been submitted to new generations of northern Mali and neighbouring countries and have been tempted by terrorist groups. The social uprooting or the outbreak unemployment not only explains the conversion of these youths to fundamentalism. The identity crisis, religious and political conviction are key elements in the study of this bias towards radicalism. They seek integration into an organization in which they could ideologically identify and at the same time offers them prominence, shelter and a place where they doesn't feel any kind of political oppression.

The most optimistic analysts believe that the creation of the State *Azawad* will be used as a retaining wall to the rise of terrorism in the area. Pessimist opinions are the opposite, especially after the announcement that another not less important group was presented at the lawless city of Gao. It is the Nigerian Islamist movement *Boko Haram* the one whose tentacles continue spreading in the country. Neighbours and their effects are increasingly successful. In turn, this movement has managed to get the media coverage every terrorist group want because of the bloody attacks that have been committed in recent months. Two crusades are controlling the ranks of this terrorist organization linked to the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb organization (AQIM), using anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist speeches like the ones used to recruit Muslims by the deceased Bin Laden.

Boko Haram continues executing the degrading crimes against Muslim fellows and Christian fellows, now stronger and more faithful than before. Since 2009, the Islamic organization has killed at least a thousand people and the crimes have passed from being summary attacks against military to bloody attacks against Christian churches using car bombs or suicide bombings. This *modus operandi* resembles the Al Qaeda structure and its franchise in North Africa. Nigerian terrorists have copied from the franchise of Al Qaeda's way to point loyal, which is sowing fear and try a find to move bloody messages to the apostate or heathen world. Their method is to broadcast videos on the Internet. So the presence of some Boko Haram elements in the city of Gao has raised new alarms of concern in the area.

Another dilemma now is if religious leaders, that in recent years were very restrained when it comes to put together their speeches and obviated any terms that could go into violence, take sides in this crisis and adopt the Islamist group speeches or simply integrate the cause of independence of Tuareg. Or maybe they will remain on the sidelines. The delicate position of the magnets in the area is very substantial because their harangues have a very powerful influence among Muslims. The role they will play in the middle of a circumstantial "pact" between Islamists and Tuareg people for the conquest of northern Mali is essential to the future of "Azawad".

These are not the only concerns of the international community and the rest of the countries of the Sahel. A real partition of the territory and a cracked national unity can influence the rest of the Tuareg communities of border states such as Algeria and Niger, which also seek rest on a land where they can express his own identity. In fact, Tuareg people from the rest of neighbouring countries have already given their support to the northern Mali movement and it looks they will be actively involved in the *cause*.

There are many unsolved riddles that have slowed the international recognition to the independence declaration "Azawad". United Nations has refused to legitimize the African rebel movement. E.E.U.U. was one of the first countries to oppose the Tuareg claim. "We reject the independence declaration and we reiterate our support to the Mali territorial integrity", said the State Department spokesman, Patrick Ventrell. He was referring to the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). France joined this refusal but stated the rebels' claims were taken into account.

By their own way, Tuareg people insist there is no turning back in their struggle after decades of humiliation, adding over 50 years of disastrous and corrupt government. This is only the first success of a revolution to MLNA, whose aim is to overthrow the whole system, which accumulated privileges, concentrated the country's wealth in the hands of very few people and consecrated the rights to one elite at the expense of an entire people. Like Libya, Tuareg people have not only wanted to bring down a president, but get a new state to the

northern town of Mali which is the mirror of Tuareg culture and thus return to regain the right to nomadic within the borders set by Europe. "Berlin conference and the colonial division that meant, divided them between different countries. Since then, Tuareg people and Nigerians of Mali, Burkina Faso and Algeria are fighting for self-determination. The problem is violence is not the method to create a country⁴".

The ultimate goal is to transform the company from its origins; in their annals are referred the desire to establish a political system of Democratic and Popular Civil Republic, to launch urgent social policies towards a fairer distribution of wealth and a fairer scarce natural resources that houses the country. But they have miscalculated. Ansar Dine Islamists have been integrated into their secular ranks to keep in touch with the Al Qaeda terrorist group, and the purposes they are looking for are very different. For this reason, rebels have established an "impasse" to internally reorganize the MNLA structure to leave questions about his possible ties to Islamist groups⁵ apart.

The power struggle between Tuareg people and Islamists is just the beginning. Tuareg people are about two thousand legionaries while on the second there are no numbers. But people still cannot decide their own destiny. Arabs of the area and unhappy Tuareg people with the armed uprising fled to Burkina Faso and Mauritania to insecurity escalation. So have thousands of Malians of other ethnicities and faiths. However, most *azawíes* (Tuareg people, Arabs, soul, etc.) have protected territorial claims of Tuareg community.

MLNA is aware time is on their behalf if instability continues in the capital of Bamako, thus, increases the scope for consolidating Azawad declaration of independence. Self-government guerrillas hatch in desperation diplomatic strategies to win the confidence of the international leaders they follow, asking for support. The ultimate goal is to bring separation between northern and southern Mali. Tuareg people are served as the example of Sudan to shake the conscience of the masses and make understand to international community that

⁴ Statement to this author by Claudia Barona; university professor in Mexico and specialist in Tuareg community.

⁵ Interview with Moussa Ag Achatonue, Army of Tuareg Revolution spokesman.

this is the time to repair the historical damage this is the moment to repair de historical damage that was committed against African Tuareg community.

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Journalist⁶

⁶ The ideas included in the **Opinion Documents** are responsibility of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the thought of the IEEE (Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies) or the Ministry of Defence.