

Addressing Developments in Mali: Restoring Democracy and Reclaiming the North

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Mister Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the overlapping challenges in Mali and how the Department of Defense is responding to the situation.

The Department of Defense is extremely concerned about the instability in Mali and is working closely with interagency partners, especially in the State Department, to strengthen our efforts at countering al Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and supporting Malian efforts to restore its territorial sovereignty. Our policy is to support Mali's neighbors to isolate the terrorist threat, and concurrently to enable the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to degrade AQIM while working to restore Malian sovereignty. This approach is consistent with the Section 7008 of the FY 2012 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, which proscribes certain assistance to the government of any country whose duly elected government is deposed by military coup d'état. As a result of the coup in Mali, DoD has ceased mil-to-mil capacity building efforts with the Malian military.

Since January 2012, northern, primarily Tuareg, groups, have waged a rebellion, driven by longstanding political and economic grievances. This rebellion is the fourth Tuareg rebellion since Mali gained its independence in 1960. Although the rebellion was not caused by instability in Libya, the flows of militants and weapons from Libya strengthened the rebellion and made it more difficult for the Malian authorities to combat it.

In late March, President Ahmadou Toumani Toure was overthrown by forces loyal to Captain Amadou Sanogo, who then installed a junta government. In response, ECOWAS imposed sanctions, and the State Department reached the conclusion that a military coup d'état had occurred, triggering the appropriations act restriction on most assistance to that government. As stated before, the Department of Defense followed suit, ceasing all DoD capacity building efforts in Mali. ECOWAS brokered an agreement with the parties involved to establish an interim government, with Diounounda Traore as President and Cheick Modibo Diarra as Prime Minister. Captain Sanogo continues to influence decision-making in Mali as head of a military reform committee.

Northern Mali has become a safe haven for extremist and terrorist groups, including AQIM and affiliates. As the Government of Mali lost control of its northern territory, these groups took over the administration of northern cities and began imposing a harsh version of Islamic Sharia law. This expanded safe haven and control of territory allows al Qaida and its affiliates to recruit supporters more easily and to export extremism. It also gives them greater control over illicit trafficking networks that provide part of their funding.

The growing terrorist presence in Mali threatens U.S. citizens, interests, and partners in the region. AQIM maintains the ability to attack regional embassies and other western interests, and

to attack or kidnap westerners in the region for ransom. Indeed the group is currently holding western hostages. Although AQIM has not demonstrated an ability to attack targets in the United States, it does have a history of attacks in the Sahel and Maghreb, and has expressed an intent to target Europe.

The U.S. approach is focused on restoring democratic governance and security in Mali. This will require democratic elections, a political settlement of legitimate northern grievances, the restoration of Malian sovereignty, increased pressure on AQIM, and continuing a civilian-led response to the humanitarian situation. The Department of Defense is working through African partners to enable ECOWAS to conduct military planning and limit the threat posed by AQIM. Failure to provide robust support to local partners at this stage could allow the threat to grow to a point where regional states could no longer address it. This is very much an African-led process and our efforts are aimed at making our partners more capable, both at combating the terrorist threat in their territories and at providing better security for their people generally.

The worsening situation in Mali is also a risk to the surrounding governments in the region, especially Mauritania and Niger. The lack of Malian control in the north, the increasing number of refugees and internally displaced persons, and a history of Tuareg grievances in the region, raise the possibility that the situation in Mali could destabilize neighboring states. The food insecurity across the region further underscores the fragile political situation in the region.

The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) is the interagency mechanism for coordinating U.S. Government capacity-building efforts to enable governments in the Maghreb and Sahel to counter AQIM and has 10 regional partners. The Department of Defense, the State Department, USAID, and others work closely to coordinate our capacity-building efforts to ensure unity of effort. Mauritania and Niger are both critical partners in TSCTP and are acting proactively to defend their territories, but their capacity is limited. For those reasons, the Department of Defense – in close coordination with the State Department – is providing capacity-building assistance to these governments. These efforts include enhancing Mauritania's ability to collect intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and to project power throughout its territory. We are also supporting Niger to help it better control its borders and project power within its territory.

ECOWAS, with the support of other partners, is planning for a military intervention in northern Mali in tandem with the African Union's Strategic Concept for the Resolution of the Crises in Mali. The Department of Defense, through U.S. Africa Command, is actively supporting the military planning effort through the provision of planning expertise. The broad strategic concept for that deployment is sound; more specific planning is underway to address operational shortfalls. We understand that the ECOWAS mission in the north will have the dual objectives of restoring Malian national sovereignty and countering al Qaida and its affiliates. The United States strongly believes in the need to address the parallel political, security, and humanitarian crises simultaneously.

The U.S. Government is considering options for supporting countries that contribute forces to the ECOWAS mission. This could include the provision of training and equipment to countries that would contribute forces to deploy as part of the international military force and additional planning and advisory support. France and the European Union are also planning to provide significant support, and it will be critical to coordinate our efforts closely. The specific needs of

troop contributing countries are not clear yet. Once we better understand the needs of the ECOWAS troop contributing countries, we will be able to assess how the U.S. Government and other international partners can best support that effort.