

# Mali

## Prime Minister Arrested

In an apparent second coup, soldiers arrested Prime Minister Cheikh Modibo Diarra at his home late on Dec. 10, 2012. Hours later, a grim faced Mr. Diarra went on national television announce his government's resignation.

A military spokesman said that Mr. Diarra had been "playing a personal agenda" and "calling for subversion."

Mr. Diarra had been an advocate for seeking international help for immediate military action against the rebels who have seized the country's north. But the military has rebuffed any suggestion that it cannot handle the situation on its own.

On Dec. 13, a new prime minister, Diango Cissoko, was sworn in and took office.

## . Authorizes Mali Force

The next week, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved a resolution to send thousands of African troops into Mali to help oust Islamist extremists who have turned its northern half into a vast Qaeda enclave and training ground.

But the resolution also made clear that such a military intervention will not happen until Mali's own dysfunctional army is adequately trained and a framework for political stability and elections is restored in the country, which has been in turmoil since a military coup in March.

## Overview

Mali, a former French colony, is a West African nation that had often been cited as a democratic model. But in March 2012, mutinous soldiers in Bamako, the capital, rose up in a coup, overthrowing the elected government of President Amadou Toumani Touré.

The soldiers were angry over the government's mishandling of a rebellion by nomadic Tuareg rebels in the country's vast northern desert. Shortly after the coup, the Tuareg rebels seized much of the north, but they were soon pushed out by radical Islamists.

In April, under international pressure, the military junta — led by Capt. Amadou Sanogo — agreed to a civilian government led by an interim president, Dioncounda Traoré, the former leader of the national assembly; and an interim prime minister, Cheick Modibo Diarra, an unlikely Malian-American astrophysicist who once worked at NASA, a political neophyte known for emotional outbursts.

Mr. Traoré's future as president came into question in May, when a mob of angry protesters stormed the presidential palace and beat him into unconsciousness. He spent two months after the assault receiving medical treatment in Paris. In late July, Mr. Traoré returned to Mali.

The military coup left the Malian Army rudderless and unable to defend the vast northern region. While the south is still controlled by the military-led government in Bamako, the north has emerged as a haven for terrorists. It has been taken over by radical jihadi factions, including Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, who have imposed a brutal application of Shariah law that includes public whippings, beatings, amputations and stonings.

## **Background**

The Tuareg are a nomadic people who live largely in the Sahara Desert, spanning Niger, Mali, Algeria and Libya. For centuries they plied caravan routes across the desert, but colonial borders turned them into citizens of several different nations. In the 1960s and 1990s, Tuareg rebellions erupted in the Sahara, seeking autonomy or independence. Violence flared again in 2007 in Niger, when Tuareg rebels seeking to wrest control of the country's rich uranium deposits mounted a rebellion.

Libya's former leader, Col. Muammar el Qaddafi, supported Tuareg rebellions in Mali and Niger over several decades, and analysts in the region say the most recent uprising in Mali is closely linked to the fall of Colonel Qaddafi, whose weapons are suspected of playing a major role in the Malian rebels' success.

That success led to intense frustration in the 7,000-strong Malian Army, which blamed the government of Mr. Touré, a former general, for the military's shaky position.

## **In the North, a Radical Islamist Takeover**

In the days after the military coup, the Tuareg rebels seized much of the desert expanse in northern Mali, declaring it an independent state called Azawad. But the Tuareg rebels — called the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, known as the [REDACTED] — were then pushed into the background by the fierce ascendancy of radical Islamists, who have imposed a strict form of Shariah law on the region and now control the principal towns of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal.

The Islamists have also embarked on a campaign of destroying religious shrines that has drawn condemnation from the United Nations and the International Criminal Court. The group is trying to stamp out what it sees as examples of decadent Western influence, and has gone after the monuments that have symbolized Timbuktu's eminence as a center of broad-minded Islamic teaching for centuries.

In the wake of the Islamist takeover, more than 90,000 Malian refugees have fled to camps in Mauritania's remote eastern edge. Some of the Tuareg rebel leaders have taken refuge in Nouakchott, the Mauritanian capital. In interviews, several said that despite considerable military assets and deep knowledge of the tricky desert terrain, the Tuareg would not take up arms against the Islamists unless they received assistance, diplomatic recognition and unspecified guarantees from outside powers.

On July 18, the government of Mali formally asked the International Criminal Court to investigate atrocities attributed to groups of armed rebels, including Islamic extremists.

One of those atrocities occurred on July 29, when Islamists in control of a town in northern Mali stoned a couple to death after accusing them of having children outside of marriage, according to a local official who was one of several hundred witnesses to the killings.

The official said the bearded Islamists, armed with Kalashnikov rifles, brought the couple into the center of the town of Aguelhok from about 12 miles away in the countryside. The young man and woman were forced into holes about four feet deep, with their heads protruding, and then stoned to death.

In early August, Islamists publicly amputated the hand of a man they accused of robbery. The amputation took in the small town of Ansongo, just downriver from the provincial capital, Gao, which is under the rule of a group called the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, or Mujao, splintered off from Al Qaeda. It was confirmed by a Mujao spokesman in Gao in a telephone interview, and by the Malian government in a statement later from Bamako, the capital.

## **In the South, a Climate of Violent Repression**

While much alarm has been expressed about the extremist minstate in northern Mali, the situation in Bamako, the capital, is dire in its own way, with a worsening climate of repression and intimidation.

Hooded gunmen have abducted and beaten journalists at night. Soldiers who opposed the military junta have been tortured or forcibly “disappeared.” Those who beat the country’s elderly interim president have escaped without charges.

Rather than taking on the Islamists who have seized northern Mali, the military in the south appears intent on striking back at rivals who carried out a failed coup in late April.

Human Rights Watch accused the army of engaging in a campaign of “horrific” abuse against opposing soldiers at the junta’s headquarters outside Bamako. One witness reported to the group that Captain Sanogo was seen kicking a detainee who has since disappeared.

“Torture, sexual abuse and inhumane and degrading conditions” are reported by Amnesty International, at the base where Captain Sanogo has his headquarters, in a report to be released soon.

The press, mostly critical of the junta and the country’s military, has been singled out for attack. In June and July, two of the country’s most prominent journalists were hauled at gunpoint into the backs of pickup trucks and beaten with clubs and rifle butts. The attackers were not in uniform, but some wore army boots and carried weapons common with the Malian army. The beatings followed summonses to state security issued to two other prominent journalists.

Much of the opposition, having given up on the Malian Army, wants an outside force to come in to clean up the mess in the north. The Economic Community of West African States, known as Ecowas, is willing, and said in late July that it had secured Mali’s consent to go ahead with plans for a 3,000-soldier intervention force to help take back the north.

Johnnie Carson, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs, said in an interview that military force would likely be needed to roll back the Islamists' gains in the north, but he said the Malian troops would have to take the lead in any such effort, something he acknowledged they were incapable of at present.

## **■. Chief Expresses Support for Military Action**

In late November, Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary general, recommended that the Security Council endorse a plan by the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States to deploy a security force at the request of the Mali government to reclaim the north from the extremists. But the action did not offer financial support from the United Nations.

While a detailed military plan has yet to be drafted, the idea has been for about 3,300 troops from Nigeria and other African countries to help Mali's military mount a campaign against the militants. France, the United States and other countries would help with training, intelligence and logistics.

General Ham acknowledged that Qaeda fighters would probably solidify their gains in northern Mali — an area the size of France — in the months that it would take to train and equip an African force to help Mali's fractured military oust the militants from the north.

General Ham said that pursuing a diplomatic solution should be the first avenue for resolving the conflict. Malian diplomats had recently met with some ethnic Tuareg rebels in neighboring Burkina Faso in an attempt to resolve some long-standing complaints by the Tuareg people and isolate the Arab foreign fighters from the Qaeda franchise.

General Ham, a former Iraq war commander who oversaw the initial American-led air campaign against Libya last year, identified hurdles that an African force would face in evicting the extremists. Most of the African militaries likely to participate in such an operation have largely been trained and equipped for peacekeeping missions, not offensive operations, he said.

The region's desert terrain, vast distances and the likelihood of an extended conflict would pose significant challenges to an African force, as well as to any Western militaries playing supporting roles, General Ham said. He also noted that most of the African militaries likely to participate in such an operation have largely been trained and equipped for peacekeeping missions, not offensive operations.

## **Al Qaeda Link**

In early December, the top American military commander in Africa said that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was operating terrorist training camps in northern Mali and providing arms, explosives and financing to Boko Haram, a militant Islamist organization in northern Nigeria.

The Al Qaeda affiliate has used the momentum gained since seizing control of the northern part of Mali in March to increase recruiting across sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Europe, said the commander, Gen. Carter F. Ham, in remarks at the Homeland Security Policy Institute at George Washington University.

## **General Information on Mali**

**Official Name:** Republic of Mali

**Capital:** Bamako ([Current local time](#))

**Government Type:** Republic

**Population:** 11.995 million

**Area:** 474,764 square miles; the size of Texas and California combined

**Languages:** French (official), Bambara, numerous African languages

**Literacy:** Total Population: [19%] Male: [27%]; Female: [12%]

**Year of Independence:** 1960