

Learning from More than Mali: The Primacy of Civil Authority in Security Sector Development and Assistance

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Abstract: In the wake of NATO's long engagement in Afghanistan and the rise of internal conflicts involving terrorism in Africa, it is tempting to approach African security sector shortfalls as a function of "building partnership capacity" as focusing on training African security forces to fight "bad guys" rather than addressing the real drivers of conflict and reducing vulnerabilities in governance that violent extremist organizations look to exploit in the first place. Security sector assistance should take more of a peacebuilding approach to helping African countries build their own civil-military relations as a function of governance as they see it rather than simply "train and equip" as we see it. Above all, security sector programs and activities should demonstrate the primacy of civil authority and "military civics" as integral to these efforts. If not programmatically coordinated, Western security sector assistance should at least more mindfully leverage this fundamental democratic principle, resulting in more sustainable outcomes and lower long-term costs and risks.

Keywords: Security sector assistance; civil-military relations; civil-military coordination; Africa; Mali
Unterstützung des Sicherheitssektors, zivil-militärische Beziehungen, zivil-militärische Koordinierung, Afrika, Mali

Introduction

With the recent spate of internal conflicts involving terrorism in Africa, it is tempting especially from the point of view of NATO countries to approach African security sector shortfalls as a function of "building partnership capacity" – i.e., to improve partner nation tactical military capabilities for especially counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. After all, NATO had just spent a good part of the last dozen years and significant blood and treasure in Afghanistan to mitigate the threat of terrorism. As in Afghanistan, however, this fails to understand the nature of these conflicts, what is driving them, and therefore what the most appropriate approach may be. We build capabilities to take on threats instead of conflicts and then wonder at the results.

The coups d'état and civil wars in trans-Saharan Africa, especially in Mali and their aftermaths point to both the need and opportunity to understand security sector development – and security assistance from outside Africa – from a much broader and more strategic yet locally driven peacebuilding perspective rather than a mere exercise in statebuilding. Doing so may serve more than to avoid the pitfalls of focusing foreign assistance largely on the security sector in general and security assistance on military combat training in particular, which tends to exacerbate the internal instabilities of weak and fragile states. Rather than this threats-based approach, fostering stronger security institutions and civil-military relations as integral to such assistance comes closer to addressing the real drivers of conflict and reducing vulnerabilities emblematic of "fragile states" that violent extremist organizations look to exploit in the first place. If not programmatically coordinated, Western security sector assistance should at least find greater

common purpose centered on its inherent advantage in having institutionalized the fundamental democratic principle of the primacy of civil authority. Such more mindful efforts would result in more sustainable outcomes and lower long-term costs and risks.

Drivers of Conflict Are Not Threats

It's important to understand that, especially in the case of Africa, the drivers of conflict are not the same as threats – especially from the African point of view. In the case of Mali, for example, the main source of tension remains, as confirmed: "[President Ibrahim Boubacar] Keita's election promise to build a strong, united Mali is being undermined by his failure to start talks with the Tuaregs." The U.N. Security Council has also warned of the same kind of radicalization of Tuareg fighters unless talks resume.¹ In South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Somalia, the central causes of conflict are essentially tribal in nature. In Nigeria, the greatest de-stabilizing force is not Boko Haram. "Nigeria's abysmal physical economy is also killing its population," noted Lawrence Freeman of the Center for Media Peace Initiatives, adding that "the eminent explosion caused by the lack of a future for Nigeria's youth will be more deadly than Boko Haram."² The Foreign Affairs Committee of the British Parliament agrees: "Economic development is key to resolving instability in the Western Sahel, but more needs to be done to monitor aid programs and make sure they are on track... Concerted international action is needed to address

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1 Farge, Emma, "Tuareg leader to new government: Start talks or risk revolt, *Reuters*, 25 March 2014, Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/25/us-mali-negotiations-idUSBREA2012420140325?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews> [Accessed 25 March 2014].
2 Based on an author interview with Lawrence Freeman. See "Africa's Great Deficit: Challenges of Infrastructure Decay, Development," Center for Media Peace Initiatives, 3 June 2013, Available at: <http://cmpimedia.org/index.php/africas-great-deficit-challenges-of-infrastructure-decay-development/> [Accessed 25 March 2014].

the root causes of instability and prevent the contagion of extremism from spreading further.”³

However, Western security assistance efforts have reflected an obsession with terrorism, which many locals do not perceive as their primary security challenge. Surging U.S. security assistance in Africa has been geared largely “to train and advise indigenous forces to tackle emerging terrorist threats,” all as part of the Obama administration’s focus on “training and advising African troops to deal with their own security threats, or providing help to European allies that have historical ties and forces in the region.”⁴ Military-to-military efforts to “build partnership capacity” have been resourced to “train and equip” for tactical capability versus strategic institution-building and education of officers on civic responsibilities at a 9:1 ratio. The problem with the “militarization of foreign policy” and the “securitization of aid,” of course, is that the chief focus is on threats – “bad-guy baiting” has long been the way for congressional appropriation of national security driven security assistance or foreign aid funding.⁵

Moreover, governance is not government. Government refers to formal state structures, largely top-down, whereas governance refers to both formal and informal power structures comprising civil society and residing mostly in tribes and communities, largely bottom-up. The security sector, of course, is a matter of governance. Security sector assistance thus contributes best to good governance of the security sector by clearly communicating to security forces in partner nations the benefits of democratic governance, civil authority over security forces, and the role of security forces in protecting civil society.

The Security Sector may be the Problem before it is the Solution

No doubt weak civil-military relations and institutions in Mali are chief among causal factors that led to the 2012 coup, after the Mali Defense and Security Forces (MDSF) were unable to prevent al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) from taking over a broad swath of northern Mali and then using it to mount attacks outside those borders. However, the surprisingly swift collapse of what was perceived to be one of Africa’s more enduring democracies was due more to internal than external factors. The MDSF, like so many security forces in such vulnerable states, have been poorly led, equipped, organized, and trained

as well as fragmented and incapable of keeping its soldiers from committing atrocities against civilians. There were widespread reports of human rights abuses before, during, and following the coup and French military intervention in January 2013. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others reported on MDSF reprisals when it returned to northern Mali, where it has had a history of repressive military administration. Additional reports have indicated that some military officers and other officials may be linked to the drug trade, which has been far more established and widespread than AQIM.

Herein lies the first vital lesson for security assistance in an environment and an era in which the security of tribal communities is at least as critical as the security of states and in which the security sector goes far beyond the military to include police, justice, and other internal security instruments. Poor governance and weak civil society institutions, socioeconomic shortfalls especially with respect to youth and women, illicit activities such as transnational drug and human trafficking, and poor civil-military relations evidenced by the behavior of one’s own security forces may pose an even greater threat than terrorism. These factors, in fact, exemplify the comprehensive drivers of conflict in which spoiler groups such as transnational criminal networks and terrorist organizations seek to find advantage.

The civil-military performance of forces such as the MDSF suggests that it has not been a lack of help to African militaries preparing to deal with emerging security challenges – there may have actually been too much of the wrong kind of training, relative to other security sector development requirements. The U.S. Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) initiative to shore up national forces fighting terrorists spent US \$353 million from 2005-2010, then programmed over US \$600 million more over the next five years, with a broadened mandate including: strengthening counterterrorism capabilities and institutionalizing cooperation among regional security forces; denying support and sanctuary through targeted development assistance; promoting democratic governance; discrediting terrorist ideology; and, reinforcing bilateral military ties.

Compounding this perception of imbalanced security assistance is the increased operation of unmanned aerial vehicles for surveillance and targeting of terrorists in Africa, including Mali. In addition, TSCTP civil-military operations (CMO) training has been modeled on U.S. doctrine, which stresses defeating terrorists and other threats emerging from the civil sector more than helping to build governance and civil authority. Two years before the coup in Mali, a Department of Defense programme manager assessment of Trans-Sahel CMO training noted that it risked exacerbating “unhealthy civil-military balances” there. In the aftermath of the coup in Mali, U.S. State Department official Todd Moss determined that the U.S. “was too narrowly focused on counterterrorism capabilities and missed the bigger picture,” while former AFRICOM Commander General Carter Ham recognised its failure to pass on “values, ethics and military ethos” in its security sector assistance to date.⁶

3 “FCO need bigger footprint in the Sahel-Sahara,” Commons Select Committee, 21 March 2014, Available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/news/the-uks-response-to-extremism-and-instability-in-north-and-west-africa/> [Accessed 25 March 2014].

4 Schmitt, Eric, “U.S. Hones Antiterror Strategy for Africa, in Kansas,” *The New York Times*, 18 October 2013, Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/05/world/africa/us-takes-training-role-in-africa-as-threats-grow-and-budgets-shrink.html?emc=eta1&_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/19/world/africa/us-prepares-to-train-african-forces-to-fight-terror.html?_r=3&hp=&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1382112946-ReBqPfZB3s75V8dcUtxt/Q& [Accessed 28 October 2013]” and “U.S. Takes Training Role in Africa as Threats Grow and Budgets Shrink, The New York Times, 5 March 2014, Available at: <a href=) [Accessed 25 March 2014].

5 See Holshek, Christopher, “Thinking Globally, Acting Locally: A Grand Strategic Approach to Civil-Military Coordination in the 21st Century,” in *Conflict Management and Peacebuilding – Pillars of a New American Grand Strategy*, Volker C. Franke and Robert H. Dorff (eds.), United States Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA USA, 2013.

6 Lewis, David, “EU mission seeks to rebuild Mali army after U.S. faltered,” *Reuters*, 21 May 2013, Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/21/us-mali-eu-army-idUSBRE94K0F420130521> [Accessed 4 October 2013].

“Military Civics” and the Primacy of Civil Authority

This leads to the second and paramount insight with regard to security sector assistance: If the “center of gravity” (to borrow a term from Clausewitz) of peace and stability is effective governance and human security, and the central nexus of a broader security sector is the civil-military relationship, then the primacy of civil authority is at the crux of peace and security, democratization, and security sector development and assistance in conflict areas such as Mali. Establishing a strong, sustainable civil-military relationship that institutionalizes the primacy of civil authority and links security sector development to civil society peacebuilding efforts is at the heart of addressing the main drivers of conflict, as integral – and not additional – to the professionalization and capacity-building of security forces.

The primacy of civil authority – the core principle of “military civics” and the democratic civil-military relationship – must therefore be integral to all international security assistance efforts, whether in Africa or elsewhere. A key way to build confidence in, as well as the capacity of, security forces is in-depth leadership education training on military subordination to civilian rule and for military support of civil dialogue and reconciliation at community levels, as well as the designation, education, and training of civil-military specialists. Moreover, inculcating a public service ethic among junior as well as senior police, paramilitary, and military leaders as integral to their professional code, for example, helps temper poor behavior and thus improve the civil-military relationship over time. In other words, civil-military governance comes from the bottom up as much as, if not more, than the top down.

There are signs that things are changing for the better. For one, international peacekeeping and peacebuilding assistance to Mali seems to be well framed. The United Nations Multidimensional Integration Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) supports the UN’s Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, whose strategic goals include: enhancing inclusive and effective governance throughout the region; ensuring that national and regional security mechanisms are capable of addressing cross-border threats; and integrating humanitarian and development plans and intervention to build long-term resilience.⁷

Building up to 11,200 troops and 1,440 police, MINUSMA is the first UN field mission that implements UN Security Council Resolution 2086 of January 2013, which reinforces the concept of mission integration in the UN Capstone Doctrine and “multi-dimensional peacekeeping” from a full-spectrum perspective. UNSCR 2086 also sees peacekeeping as “early peacebuilding” and stresses the importance of transition management. It emphasizes that “integrated action on the ground by security and development actors requires coordination with national authorities in order to stabilize and improve the security situation and help in economic recovery, and underlines the importance of integrated efforts

7 United Nations Security Council Report of the Secretary General on the situation in the Sahel region, 14 June 2013, Available at: http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/docs/2013/2013-09-20_SG_Report_Sahel_EN.pdf [Accessed 28 October 2013].

among all United Nations entities in the field to promote coherence in the United Nations’ work in conflict and post-conflict situations.”⁸

MINUSMA has assumed the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) charge to “contribute to the rebuilding of the capacity of the [MDSF]” to meet concerns about “continued interference” of some MDSF in the work of the transitional authorities. Under UN Security Council Resolution 2100, MINUSMA’s mandate includes the protection of civilians, humanitarian assistance, and “national and international efforts towards rebuilding the Malian security sector.” Some of the original French intervention force remains to perform counterterrorism support, while Mali’s newly-elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita has called on nearby nations to create a regional multilateral force that could intervene quickly to respond to these threats rather than depend on Western forces.

Meanwhile, hundreds of British and European Union Training Mission (EUTM) troops have deployed to “train and advise ... under the control of legitimate civilian authorities, in order to contribute to restore their military capacity with a view to enabling them to engage in combat operations aiming at restoring the country’s territorial integrity.”⁹ The EUTM falls under the EU’s Strategy for Security Development in the Sahel, which focuses on development, good governance, internal conflict resolution, rule of law, and preventing radicalization among youth. Although most of the military training is tactical in nature, the EUTM is taking care to include leadership training and professional ethics instruction, even though such changes in organizational culture require intensive steady state engagement for years and not just months. Still, at the closing ceremony for EUTM training of the “Elou” Battalion, MDSF Chief of Staff General Ibrahim Dahirou Dembele, exhorted graduates of the first 10-week course “to give the best of yourselves to earn the trust placed in you” and set the example that symbolizes the new Malian army.¹⁰

The U.S. is also taking a new approach. The lifting of the suspension of foreign assistance to Mali was predicated on the new government having taken “tangible steps to assert civilian authority over the military.”¹¹ The third of six assistance priority areas is to support rebuilding security institutions and security sector reform in coordination with multilateral partners and the government of Mali, with greater emphasis on institution-building, commensurate with a new approach to security sector assistance under Presidential Policy Directive 23. In anticipation of this, AFRICOM Director of Strategy, Plans and Programs, Major General Robert Hooper, noted the “underlying premise of our institutional capacity-building efforts is that

8 United Nations Security Council S/RES/2086, Resolution 2086, 21 January 2013, p. 5.

9 European Union External Action Fact Sheet (2013), “EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali),” EUTM Mali/1, January 2013, Available at: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_factsheet_eutm_mali_en.pdf [Accessed 28 October 2013].

10 EUTM Press Release, “Mali: End of Training Ceremony for the Elou Battalion in Mali,” *allAfrica*, 15 September 2013, Available at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201309161968.html> [Accessed 4 October 2013].

11 Pecquet, “US won’t restore aid to Mali until military cedes power,” *The Hill*, 22 August 2013, Available at: <http://thehill.com/blogs/global-affairs/africa/318347-obama-administration-p> [Accessed 28 October 2013].

military forces must be subordinate to civil authority and accepted as legitimate members of a civil society based on the rule of law.”¹²

While none of these international efforts are necessarily working at cross-purposes, they are not coordinated at policy or operational levels in any serious way. In order to overcome mistrust among regional partners, obtain greater return on investment, and perhaps most importantly, mitigate the overwhelming effects of all these activities on the absorptive capacity of recipient countries, “it would be beneficial to increase the coordination of program activities with the complementary efforts of other bilateral and multilateral donors,” such as through the Global Counterterrorism Forum, as one study on the TSCTP proposed.¹³ The absorptive capacity issue in particular takes in the understanding that security sector development, as any form of governance, must come from the bottom as much, if not more, than the top down.

Security Sector Development Begins at Home

Perhaps the most significant change is in how Mali itself is approaching its own efforts to lead security sector development – reflecting another principle that, first and foremost, security sector development begins at home. Although the new government has stressed advancing the operational effectiveness of the MDSE, it has also recognized the need for much better civil-military governance than before the coup. Al Maamoun Baba Lamine Keita, Ambassador of the Republic of Mali to the U.S., pointed out that the crisis in Mali demonstrated the need for “African governments to become more transparent about defense spending and budgeting. Taking greater ownership of African security will require that the defense sector becomes more accountable to parliaments than is currently the case.”¹⁴

Among its first acts, the new government dismissed the military committee on reform, comprised of officers who led the 2012 coup, including General Amadou Sanogo. In addition to tackling corruption, the government’s Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission is looking to identify the armed groups eligible to participate in the national dialogue, record human rights violations, help strengthen social cohesion and national unity, and focus on dialogue and peace. Inclusion of the Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA) and other offshoots of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) that have expressed their willingness to participate in collective dialogue will be essential for the reconciliation process as well as to the reconstitution of the MDSF as a force more representative of

Malian society. Despite recent Tuareg unrest, the government is reaching out to them in reconciliation, including the partial release of political prisoners charged with war crimes and other abuses.

In some localities in the north, paramilitary units (gendarmerie) are accompanying regular military units to question detainees and investigate disciplinary lapses by soldiers as a confidence-building measure. The MDSF has been accepting this practice, with encouragement of Human Rights Watch and other groups. Using the gendarmerie as a civil-military check-and-balance in the field has merit and promise, but it is not yet clear whether this is effective and sustainable or whether the gendarmerie is appropriately organized, trained and authorized to perform this role. Nevertheless, such practices are tacit recognition of the division of labor between police and gendarmerie forces, whose primary mission is internal community security and the military, whose main task is to protect against external threats.

It’s Not About Us; It’s About Them

The development of security sector capacity based on the imposition of a foreign nation state system on natural (that is, tribal) boundaries has proven to be counterproductive. Disaggregated operational doctrines and civil-military models can simply overwhelm the absorptive capacity of host nation institutions as well as run counter to national cohesion and unity of purpose, contributing to the cleavages that characterize weak and fragile states. Western countries and organizations must therefore resist the tendency to reach into doctrinal formula or their own recent operational experiences that are familiar to them but not necessarily appropriate for those they are assisting.

U.S. CMO training in Africa, for example, is very much a carryover of U.S. counterinsurgency and counterterrorism practices from Iraq and Afghanistan, slanted towards “winning hearts and minds” in order to find the “bad guys” and eliminate them. NATO and EU civil-military cooperation (EU CIMIC) doctrine is likewise more tactical and operational than strategic and has as its core aim to assist fulfillment of the military mission rather than uphold civil governance and authority and develop civil society. In any case, these operational practices are based on a Western view of the problem and not on an African perspective.

While U.S., EU, or NATO security sector tactical training and civil-military capacity development assistance are no doubt helpful, none of these civil-military models alone is best suited for security sector development assistance in Africa. In addition to being not African, threats-based, and military-centric, they do not sufficiently stress the primacy of civil authority, lack robust transition management strategies, and do not incorporate a more strategic peacebuilding approach that features civilian leadership, bottom-up human security, local ownership, and “whole-of-society” capacity development.

Greater reference to a more appropriate, universal civil-military model would go far to mitigate the unintended impacts of

12 Hooper, Charles W., “Going Farther By Going Together – Building Partner Capacity in Africa,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 67, 4th Quarter 2012, Available at: <http://www.ndu.edu/press/capacity-in-africa.html> [Accessed 21 September 2013].

13 Warnerm Lesley Anne, *The Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership*, Washington, DC: The CNA Corporation and Center for Complex Operations, 31 March 2014, 91, Available at: <http://www.cna.org/research/2014/trans-sahara-counter-terrorism-partnership> [Accessed 31 March 2014].

14 Keita, Al Maamoun Baba Lamine, “What Mali Can Teach Us: A Discussion on the Primacy of Civil Authority in Rebuilding the Security Sector,” Keynote Address at the Henry L. Stimson Center, Washington D.C., 8 July 2013, Available through: <http://www.stimson.org/events/what-mali-can-teach-us/> [Accessed 12 September 2013].

differing and often confusing concepts in countries such as Mali and help get the multilateral act together. Specifically, civil-military capacity development to peacekeeping troop contributing country forces in Africa should be based on international frameworks such as UN Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CIMIC), which was developed and validated largely in Africa.

Perhaps the advantage of UN-CIMIC, which is more about coordination amongst the civilian, police, and military components of the international presence than a function of military command and control, is that it is not a doctrine. Rather, it is the international civil-military framework for UN-mandated peacekeeping forces, including the African Union and other regional peace and security organizations. Based on international legal frameworks, peacekeeping principles, and international criteria on the use of force, its leading principle is the primacy of civil authority and centers its activities on civil-military transition management – from peacekeeping to peacebuilding. Adaptive and culturally sensitive, it integrates universal principles for peacekeeping and peacebuilding, the protection of civilians, humanitarian assistance, human rights, security sector development, and so on.¹⁵

Accordingly, security assistance programs such as the U.S. State Department Global Peace Operations Initiative and Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance should refer first to international peacekeeping frameworks as the baseline for training and “building partnership capacity” rather than rely primarily on U.S. doctrines and then bring in multilateral norms. Additionally, in order to foster greater sustainability, the effort should be more indirect – the training of trainers and building civil-military education and training institutional capacities rather than direct training to military personnel and units. The implied task, of course, is that EU, NATO, and U.S. government civil and military players in Africa will need to be more familiar with these more international peacekeeping and peacebuilding, security sector development, and civil-military coordination if they are to help their clients learn them.

All of this illustrates another important insight. Western interests in Africa *per se* are better pursued through more sophisticated strategies than employed in the Middle East and Central Asia – in a careful balance between multilateral and bilateral approaches that are more sensitive to regional and local determinants than one’s own “national security” imperatives. As threats and opportunities impacting Africa take on more multilateral and regional dimensions, security assistance must correspondingly incorporate more multilateral and regional approaches – working indirectly, or “by, with, and through” such partners as much as possible in order to minimize the foreign military “footprint.”

Beyond working more conscientiously with the Global Counterterrorism Forum or the UN Integrated Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel to identify capacity-

building needs in the region and mobilize the necessary support and expertise needed to meet these challenges, it means taking a more strategic, patient, and more principled approach that leverages the transatlantic community’s greatest comparative advantage in that it is primarily a community of democratic values and offers numerous successful models of the democratic civil-military relationship.

At all levels of interaction, delivery of security assistance must itself be a demonstration of the primacy of civil authority as the paramount principle of security sector development. Any advisory efforts should take into account more local and legitimate human security concerns rather than externally driven anxieties about terrorism and insurgency. Rebalancing security assistance towards institution-building under a broader, civil society centric understanding of security, referring to multilateral frameworks in order to improve regional collaboration on security challenges, and most of all integrating the primacy of civil authority in all aspects of the applied civil-military relationship is not just something external actors should look to do. Africans should likewise lead their own security sector development based on these principles – in order to demand adherence to them from security assistance providers.

Precisely because of the recent spate of terrorism in Africa, Mali in particular offers a teachable moment in conflict transformation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. African national, regional, international, and bilateral security sector programs and activities should demonstrate the primacy of civil authority and “military civics” in how the security sector supports and is integral to local government, diplomatic, political, economic, and development efforts in-country. More an application of strategy than tactics, it helps mitigate the “slippery slope” of deepening and unending non-African security engagement on the continent driven by a constant obsession with “bad guys” that leads to the exacerbation of the drivers of conflict that opens opportunities for terrorists and other illicit organizations to exploit.

What this all portends, especially for external actors, is a more humble, collaborative, and demonstrative form of security assistance and thus security sector development in Africa through leadership by example. It’s not about us; it’s about them.

15 Holshek, Christopher, “United Nations Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CIMIC),” *Peace Operations Training Institute Newsletter*, May 2013, p.3, Available at: http://cdn.peaceopstraining.org/2013/enewsletter_may_2013.pdf [Accessed 12 September 2013].