



# Institutions for Peace in Mali: Learning from Peacebuilding in Niger

By Adam Sandor

Mali and Niger share important conflict and security characteristics. The connected nature of these countries' security challenges calls for integrated solutions. This policy brief outlines three trends in conflict management undertaken by Malian and Nigerien governments that centre around the informal nature of security politics in the Sahel: militia use; peacebuilding co-option; and para-diplomacy. The Canadian government and its partners should support the creation of a formal conflict resolution institution in Mali that operates similarly to the Nigerien model based on informal modes of operation. Canadian policy-makers should pursue a two-pronged strategy for conflict resolution in Mali through increased involvement of Nigerien peacebuilding officials.

## Recommendations

◆ Canada should financially and diplomatically support the para-diplomatic efforts of Nigerien peacebuilding officials through institutions like the Nigerien HACP or the CoHo. As an UN-SRSG mandated actor for mediation efforts to resolve the Malian crisis since 2014, the government of Niger is uniquely placed to conduct para-diplomatic efforts. Para-diplomatic and conflict resolution efforts of formal Nigerien institutions are activated by informal relations between its representatives (for example, former rebels that have elite status and state recognition) and informal coercion-wielders in regions of the country far from the capital, or that are in neighbouring countries. Thus, supporting Nigerien para-diplomatic efforts not only increases the capabilities of the Nigerien state, but also supports the Malian peace process through a recognized, UN-mandated actor.

◆ Canada should help the Government of Mali to create its own institution for peace consolidation (an *Haute Autorité de Rétablissement de la Paix*) which follows the Nigerien model of minority representation and rebel elite co-option. Such an institution would include recognized informal authorities tied to the conflict, who would act as community relays to identify areas where armed conflict is likely to occur, and individuals with whom to dialogue. It is a pragmatic solution that recognizes that Sahelian politics centre around informality as a core organizing principle, but which still would increase the capacities of the Malian state. Nigerien HACP officials are incredibly well placed to identify which community representatives could be selected for inclusion in a Malian HACP due to the Sahel's long history of cross-border relations. In collaboration with Malian government actors, they can assist in

identifying which Malian coercion wielders have a status as recognized community leaders, and if these actors are amenable to dialogue. Nigerien HACP rebel elites can also identify which Malian conflict actors maintain fewer dangerous affiliations with illegitimate groups, thus assisting in vetting members of an eventual Malian peace consolidation institution. Once running, the Malian and Nigerien HACP can coordinate their peacebuilding efforts in trouble spots for armed violence, notably in borderland regions, and can share information on potential areas or individuals of common security concern.

◆ Trained Canadian technical advisors embedded in the institution can serve as institution-building support and to maintain financial accountability. The Canadian-sponsored creation of such an institution also has the benefit of Canada developing its own network of connections that can flag potential security issues for the Canadian government and its citizens.

## Rationale for the recommendations

Both governments have leveraged relations with informal armed actors in order to rebuild or retain influence in far-flung territories beyond immediate governmental control. The Malian government has either supported or directly sponsored the creation of armed militias to contain security threats in territories far from the capital. This strategy has only resulted in an intensification of inter-communal violence, thereby playing into the hands of armed Islamist groups. In contrast, the Nigerien government has mobilized formal government institutions that operate via informal mechanisms to keep a lid on security challenges from intensifying. Thus far, the Nigerien strategy has experienced important successes at conflict resolution and reduction, and displays remarkable resilience.

### ◆ *Mali*

Since the Malian rebellion of 1990-96, Malian regimes have relied on armed militias to counter rebel actions in the country's north. Some of the worst violence experienced in the 1990s conflict occurred between Tuareg rebel organizations and state-supported Songhai militias. In 2006, to counter another Tuareg rebellion, the Malian state sponsored the creation of Arab and

rival Tuareg militias. The Arab militias in particular were led by the country's most notorious drug traffickers. While the rebellion was quashed and its leaders chased from the country, these militias retained their weapons and in 2012 the majority of their members joined the ranks of armed groups that formed in late-2011. In this most recent conflict, unable to rely on the Malian Armed Forces, the Malian state has relied on pro-state militias to contain pro-independence rebels and jihadist groups, even though many of the militias' members had previously been members of enemy camps. Militia-rebel group violence has often followed community-based lines of belonging, which has intensified armed violence and hardened social boundaries between ethnic groups. The current epicenters of armed conflict in the centre of Mali and at the Mali-Niger border has followed this trend, with a sedentary group militia (Dana Amassagou), and Tuareg community-based militias, both with alleged support of state officials, targeting Fulani communities who are argued to be in league with the region's jihadist groups. Informal support, many argue 'sponsorship', of militias by the Malian government and international actors has only stoked the animosity of targeted communities.<sup>1</sup> Young men from these targeted groups have armed themselves or have joined jihadist groups out of a sense of protection or opportunity, since they view their governments as complicit in the violent actions undertaken by militias. The creation of militias has created a vicious circle of armed violence in the regions where they operate which will have lasting effects in the short and medium term.<sup>2</sup>

### ◆ *Niger*

When the Nigerien government experienced a rebellion in 1990-1995, its recourse to the use of informal militias was very limited. In 2007, with the development of a small-scale rebellion in the Agadez and Arlit regions, the government did not use militias to contain its rebel challengers. Instead, the regime mobilized both formal and informal mechanisms to deal with the rebels: its Armed Forces, its peacebuilding institutions, and its regional leaders (notably Muammar Qaddafi). Arguably

<sup>1</sup> See UN Panel of Experts Report on Mali 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Sandor, Adam. 2017. Insecurity, the Breakdown of Social Trust, and Armed Actor Governance in Central and Northern Mali. August ; Campana, Aurélie. 2018. Destabilization and Local Embeddedness: Jihadist Groups in the Malian Conflict since 2015. March.

the most important relay for ending the rebellion was by sending the previous rebellion's elites to conduct diplomatic efforts via the *Haut Commissariat à la Restauration de la Paix* (HCRP). This combined effort contained the 2007 rebellion quite successfully.

Created in 1995 following the last rebel group taking up arms against the government signing a Peace Accord, the HCRP was attached to the Office of the Presidency. It was staffed by rebel elites from northern Nigerien regions, other community representatives, and Armed Forces officers from minority backgrounds to expand inclusion of minority groups in national politics. This tactic was seen as a way of short-circuiting the development of new rebellions. The HCRP's name was changed to the *Haute Autorité de Consolidation de la Paix* (HACP) in 2011. When acts of insecurity, or tensions between communities over limited resources begin to brew in rural areas, HACP rebel elite officials are activated to dialogue with conflict participants in order to find solutions to common problems. This also involves the use of rebel elites to co-opt local coercion wielders into government service. This formal institution relies on funding from international donors, but is operated by officials under the authority of the Office of the President. Therefore, it is locally-owned and driven. But the informal modes of communication that the HACP officials utilize and their recognition as rebel elites by populations in outlying regions allows the HACP to adapt to new security developments on the ground. The informal ways that these officials select community representatives (signed off by the President) also ensures representation of local community stakeholders with strong followings that are capable of defusing conflict. The inclusion of community representatives as state officials in this 'peacebuilding' institution complements other forms of minority community inclusion in the country. Arguably, the HACP's dialogue efforts, undertaking quick impact projects, and conducting national surveillance and intelligence gathering in a non-military form have augmented the means of the Nigerien state to increase

its visibility and legitimacy in many rural areas. The HACP successes with conflict resolution results in undermining the implantation of armed Islamist groups in Niger who themselves seek to arbitrate in local conflicts in order to increase their local authority. Arguably, the HACP's 2018 efforts to include influential members of Fulani communities that border Mali into its ranks have *begun* to reduce tensions between Fulani and Tuareg-Daoussahak groups aligned to competing armed groups (Malian militias, and armed jihadist elements). This has created new, grassroots dialogue initiatives amongst these conflict participants.

Finally, in 2013 the Nigerien government created the Commissariat à l'Organisation du Hadj et de la Oumra (CoHo) to facilitate Nigerien citizen pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. This year, CoHo Tuareg administrators held informal para-diplomatic talks in Saudi Arabia between competing Malian Tuareg groups. While the talks were exclusive (Malian conflict actors from Arab, Fulani, and Songhai backgrounds were explicitly excluded from the informal talks), the common ground setting in Saudi Arabia facilitated important and frank conversations between Malian Tuareg adversaries. Informal talks were also held in Ingall, Niger, during the *Cure Salée* cultural festival in September 2018. Malian Tuareg conflict actors were invited by the Nigerien Prime Minister (attended by several HACP officials and Nigerien Tuareg notables) to this event, recognized for its cultural importance, to consolidate peace efforts in Mali. Such informal, para-diplomatic mechanisms complement the formal mechanisms of the 2015 Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Inter-Tuareg armed group conflict has been minimal since this time.

Over time, building an *Haute Autorité de Rétablissement de la Paix* in Mali will reduce tensions between Malian communities, reduce the reliance on supporting non state militias, and reduce the spread of armed insecurity in the country, and arguably the region.

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