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# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

# THESIS

**ENDURING ENGAGEMENT YES, EPISODIC ENGAGEMENT NO: LESSONS FOR SOF FROM MALI**

by

Simon J. Powelson

December 2013

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| Thesis Advisor: | Anna Simons |
| Second Reader: | Erik Brown |

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This thesis examines SOF's recent experience in Mali and determines where—or to what extent—it should be considered a failure. In addition to analyzing these encounters, a second aim of this thesis is to make recommendations for how SOF might better build partner capacity and capability in the future. The argument made is that enduring engagement is of enduring value; episodic engagement, on its own, is not. Examples of both types of engagement can be found in United States Special Operations Forces' recent interactions with the Malian military.

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# ENDURING ENGAGEMENT YES, EPISODIC ENGAGEMENT NO: LESSONS FOR SOF FROM MALI

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines SOF's recent experience in Mali and determines where—or to what extent—it should be considered a failure. In addition to analyzing these encounters, a second aim of this thesis is to make recommendations for how SOF might better build partner capacity and capability in the future. The argument made is that enduring engagement is of enduring value; episodic engagement, on its own, is not. Examples of both types of engagement can be found in United States Special Operations Forces' recent interactions with the Malian military.

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ACOTA | African Contingency Operations and Training Assistance |
| ACRI | African Crisis Response Initiative |
| AFRICOM | United States Africa Command |
| AQ | Al-Qaeda |
| AQIM | Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb |
| AK | Avtomat Kalashnikova |
| CF | conventional forces |
| CQB | close quarters battle |
| CSOR | Canadian Special Operations Regiment |
| CT | counter-terrorism |
| CTFP | Counter-terrorism Fellowship Program |
| DDR | disarmament demobilization and reintegration |
| DoD | United States Department of Defense |
| DoS | United States Department of State |
| EUCOM | United States European Command |
| EUTM | European Union Training Mission |
| GPOI | Global Peace Operations Initiative |
| IMET | International Military Education and Training |
| JCET | Joint Combined Exchange Training |
| JOC | joint operations center |
| JPAT | Joint Planning Assistance Team |
| JSOTF-TS | Joint Special Operations Task Force—Trans Sahara |
| LTC | lieutenant colonel |
| MOD | Malian Ministry of Defense |
| MOS | military occupational skill |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NCO | non-commissioned officer |
| OCIE | organizational clothing and individual equipment |
| ODA | Operational Detachment Alpha |
| OEF-TS | Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans Sahara |

| | |
|---|---|
| OSC | Office of Security Cooperation |
| PKO | Peace Keeping Operations |
| PSI | Pan Sahel Initiative |
| SFG(A) | Special Forces Group Airborne |
| SOCAFRICA | United States Special Operations Command Africa |
| SOF | Special Operations Forces |
| SOFLE | Special Operations Forces Liaison Element |
| TSCTP | Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership |
| U.S. | United States |
| USSOCOM | United States Special Operations Command |

**French / Malian**

| | |
|---|---|
| ATT | *Amadou Toumani Touré* |
| CCP | *Company Commandos Parachutistes* |
| CEMGA | *Chef d'état-major Général des Armées* |
| CFS | *Company Forces Spéciales* |
| COIA | *Centre Opérationnel inter-Armées* |
| DFS | *Détachement Forces Spéciales* |
| DGSE | *Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure* |
| DMHTA | *Direction du Matériel, des Hydrocarbures et des Transports des Armées* |
| DSM | *Direction de la Sécurité Militaire* |
| DTTA | *Direction des Transmissions et des Télécommunication des Armées* |
| ETIA | *Echelon Tactique Inter-Armée* |
| MNLA | *Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad* |
| MUJAO | *Mouvement pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* |
| PSPSDN | *le Programme Spécial pour la Paix la Sécurité et le Développement au Nord Mali* |
| RCP | *Régiment des Commandos Parachutistes* |
| RIR | *Régiment d'Intervention Rapide* |
| DCA | *Direction du Commissariat des Armées* |

# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. PURPOSE

In June of 2012, the international media was captivated by images of men laboring under the black flag of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), feverishly destroying ancient religious shrines in the historic Malian city of Tombouctou. For those not already focused on the dismal situation in Mali, the presence of AQIM in the fabled city of 333 saints should have raised questions about prior activities of the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of State (DoS) in the West African nation of Mali. Commentary about the United States' (U.S.) security-related efforts in Mali and the region, tended to categorize them as failures. Among the metrics used was the highly visible disintegration of the Malian military in the face of al-Qaeda affiliates and the coup d'état by Malian junior military officers that led to the overthrow of the democratically elected president of Mali. Without a doubt, these two major data points suggest anything but a successful strategy.

Considering the heavy involvement of U.S. special operations forces (SOF) in Mali, questions must be asked about the nature of SOF involvement and its implications for the recently published (May 2013) United States Special Operation Command (USSOCOM) SOF Operating Concept's emphasis on enduring engagement. Consequently, one purpose of this thesis is to examine SOF's recent experience in Mali and determine where—or to what extent—it should be considered a failure. A second aim is to make recommendations for how SOF might better build partner capacity and capability in the future.

## B. BACKGROUND

The DoD, and SOF in particular, have a long history of cooperation with the Malian military. This storied SOF lineage dates back to 1961 and the early years of Mali as an independent nation, predating the formation of USSOCOM in 1987. U.S. security cooperation in Mali subdivides into three periods delineated by the intensity of engagement; from 1961–2001; from 2001–2009; and from 2009–2012. Not surprisingly,

the first of the three periods receives the least amount of attention, to the point of disappearing from the contemporary discourse. Yet, as with most current problems, the past surely plays a role in the present. The second period of engagement receives more attention given how recent it is and speaks to the amount of documentation available on the Internet, to include commentary by key individuals active during the period. Apart from chronological and institutional linkages, the second and third periods are connected by the common threat posed by al-Qaeda, and the expanded specter of Islamic terrorism in the region. Because of its greater impact on the contemporary environment, this thesis will concentrate on the third period.

After 2001, U.S. security cooperation in Mali centered on efforts to combat AQIM and its bases of operation located in the northern deserts of Mali. It is these, AQIM-centric, security cooperation activities that are generally referred to as failures by most commentators. Post-2001, the Malian military benefited from a number of U.S.-sponsored security cooperation programs, including but not limited to the: Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), African Contingency Operations and Training Assistance (ACOTA), International Military Education and Training (IMET), Counterterrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP), Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET), and Exercise Flintlock.

The execution of British citizen, Edwin Dyer, on May 31, 2009, and the murder of Malian Colonel Lamana Ould Bou, on June 10, 2009 (in Tombouctou) served as accelerants for U.S. SOF activity in Mali. Another contributing factor to increased SOF activity in Mali was the activation of additional U.S. Army Special Forces Battalions (the 4th Battalion), which freed up manpower previously dedicated to operations in Iraq. This expanded SOF activity in Mali shrank dramatically in January 2012 when the Malian military found itself engaged in combat operations with AQIM elements in the north of the country. All U.S. security cooperation activities with Mali ended on March 21, 2012 when the coup d'état tripped the U.S. law that prevents support to undemocratically

elected governments.[1] Following the coup, AQIM and rebel elements rapidly expelled the Malian security forces from the north of the country. It is from this point forward that military and civilian agencies alike began to decide that the U.S.'s preceding efforts in Mali should be considered a failure. It will be my contention that while this assessment may appear to be borne out by events, not all SOF capacity and capability building efforts failed. Instead, episodic engagement failed; enduring engagement did not.

## C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The field is remarkably barren in terms of literature relating to past U.S. security cooperation activities in Mali. For the pre-2001 period, information can be found in Department of State records deposited in the National Archives. This consists of primary source material in the form of declassified DoS cables, from 1960 to the mid-1970s. These documents paint an active picture of U.S.-Malian security cooperation that was episodic in nature and steeped in Cold War geo-politics. Security cooperation during this period involved some SOF training and the provision of items ranging from uniform buttons to transport aircraft. From the mid-1970s until 2001, there is a dearth of source material. From what little information I could find, it is clear that the U.S. continued to provide equipment and limited training to the Malian military.

Information regarding U.S. activities in Mali during the post-2001 period comes in a variety of forms and from a variety of sources. One source of important information is the yearly, unclassified DoS and DoD reports given to Congress, listing the amount of funds expended and types of training conducted. Other important sources of information about SOF activities in Mali are media reports and public affairs releases made in conjunction with training events or exercises conducted by SOF. In general, SOF activities during this period are fairly well documented and paint a picture of numerous episodic engagements by SOF and DoD as a whole. Because SOF's presence in Mali was well documented during this period and the dollar amounts spent on programs were well

[1] John T. Bennett, "Pentagon: All U.S. Elite Commandos in Mali 'Accounted For'," *U.S. News*, March 23, 2012, http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/dotmil/2012/03/23/pentagon-all-us-elite-commandos-in-mali-accounted-for.

publicized, it is not surprising that people writing about Mali have questioned the idea of building partner capacity to head off problems before they evolve to major conflicts.

One of the first to question U.S. capacity-building efforts in Mali was Gregory Mann, a professor of African history at Columbia University. In an article published in *Foreign Policy Magazine* on April 5, 2012, Mann had this to say regarding a decade of U.S. engagement:

> What's the fruit, then, of American action in the Sahel over the last several years... The stunning fact that a decade of American investment in Special Forces training, cooperation between Sahalien armies and the United States, and counterterrorism programs of all sorts run by both the State Department and the Pentagon has, at best, failed to prevent a new disaster in the desert… Signs of the failure of U.S. counterterrorism policy in Mali abound wherever one looks. Military cooperation and training have not helped the army to hold the line in the north. [2]

In January 2013, a series of articles appeared in print that supported Mann's views. Vicki Huddleston commented in *The New York Times* that "years of training by United States Special Forces did not stop the Malian military from fleeing when the Islamist insurgency started last January."[3] She was followed by Walter Pincus in *The Washington Post* who asked, "wasn't that our Mali strategy?" His question was in response to Army Lieutenant General John F. Mulholland Jr.'s prescription for USSOCOM to engage in "preemptive efforts before the fight starts . . . done with [host country] partners."[4]

On the heels of Mr. Pincus, General Carter Ham (the U.S. Africa Command commander) provided this analysis during a January 27 speech at Howard University:

> As we look at this from a purely military standpoint, we focused—we were focusing our training [in Mali] almost exclusively on tactical or

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[2] Gregory Mann, "The Mess in Mali: How the War on Terror Ruined a Success Story in West Africa," *Foreign Policy*, April 5, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/04/05/the_mess_in_mali.

[3] Vicki Huddleston, "Why We Must Help Save Mali," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/15/opinion/why-we-must-help-save-mali.html?_r=2&. Vicki Huddleston was U.S. Ambassador to Mali from October 2002 through February 2005, she then served as U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense from June 2009 through December 2011.

[4] Walter Pincus, "Mali Insurgency Followed 10 years of U.S. Counterterrorism Programs," *The Washington Post*, January 16, 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013–01–16/world/36384128_1_malian-burkina-faso-mauritania.

> technical matters, how to operate various pieces of equipment, how to improve effectiveness of tactical operations and the like… We didn't spend, probably, the requisite time focusing on values, ethics and a military ethos… So we've learned from that.[5]

While these four examples represent only a small sampling of the commentary offered on U.S. efforts in Mali, they reflect the prevailing view. Something else they have in common is a lack of in-depth analysis. The analysis generally consists of a quick rehash of dollar amounts, forces employed, or programs executed, all tied to the coup and collapse of the Malian army. This picture they offer may thus seem to be accurate, but without further analysis it would be unwise for those involved in crafting or executing national security strategy to accept this predominant narrative at face value or use it as a guide.

## D. RESEARCH GOAL

This thesis aims to fill the analytical gap in order to provide U.S. policy makers and executers of policy (USSOCOM specifically), with the information necessary to more effectively execute future capacity building efforts. In light of the narrative suggesting that SOF capacity-building efforts in Mali were a failure, it is of the utmost importance to thoroughly examine where or how SOF may have failed (if it did) particularly as USSOCOM moves forward with its recently published (May 2013) Operating Concept. This Operating Concept calls for long term enduring engagement by small SOF teams, designed to build up the capabilities and capacity of partner security forces, as well as the institutions necessary to support them. For those concerned about USSOCOM's direction, Walter Pincus's comment that the current Operating Concept sounds a lot like what was tried in Mali, may well resonate. However, do the critics have this right? Were SOF conducting activities in Mali that could be considered in line with the latest USSOCOM Operating Concept or were they doing something different?

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[5] Carter Ham, "TRANSCRIPT: Presentation on the Role and Mission of United States Africa Command," *U.S. AFRICOM*, January 27, 2013, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Transcript/10243/transcript-presentation-on-the-role-and-mission-of.

## E. METHODOLOGY AND THESIS ROADMAP

This thesis draws extensively on personal experience and from interviews with SOF personnel, U.S. embassy cables released by WikiLeaks, and data openly available on the Internet. My personal experience in Mali covers 2009, 2010, and 2011, with nearly a year spent in the field with the Malian military, from the Ministry of Defense (MOD) level down to the private soldier level. My work with the Malian military has taken me throughout the country, and to the major cities (and surrounding areas) of Tessalit, Kidal, Gao, Tombouctou, Sévaré, and of course Bamako, multiple times. While this thesis represents the most complete picture compiled to date concerning SOF activities in Mali, it leaves out certain details that either are not available in the open domain or are not suitable for open release. Even though this information has been omitted, its inclusion would not change my findings. If anything, delving in the classified would only serve to considerably strengthen my case.

In Chapter II, I will focus on SOF's engagement with Malian *Echelon Tactique Inter-Armée* (ETIA) combat formations. This was a largely episodic effort designed to build the capabilities and capacity of the ETIAs. The ETIAs were deemed important due to their close proximity to elements of AQIM. In Chapter III, I address SOF efforts with the Malian *Company Forces Spéciales* (CFS). Here I will describe how six to 12 SOF personnel from 10th SFG(A) helped form, build, and develop a cohesive and effective fighting force comprised of soldiers drawn from the Malian *Régiment des Commandos Parachutistes* (RCP). In contrast to the episodic engagement used with the ETIAs, the approach with the CFS was enduring engagement. Conclusions and recommendations will be presented in Chapter IV.

# II. EPISODIC ENGAGEMENT EXPANDS

## A. INCREASED EFFORT

Beginning in 2009, the level of U.S. sponsored security force assistance, including activities conducted by SOF, experienced a significant increase when compared to the activity of previous years. Fiscal year (FY) 2009 saw seven JCETs or JCET-"like" events conducted in Mali, compared with two such events in FY 2008.[6] A major contributing factor to the FY 2009 increase was the end of fighting between Mali and Tuareg separatists in February 2009, and an increase in AQIM attacks: AQIM provocations during this period easily subdivide into two categories. The first was a new round of kidnapping for ransom (KFR) operations focused on Westerners, and the second was open aggression against the Malian security services. In reference to the former, one byproduct of increased operations against Westerners traveling or working in West Africa was a corresponding increase in fatalities among victims. While AQIM gained increased media attention for its actions, it also drew increased attention from the new U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), based in Stuttgart, Germany. In light of AQIM's increased activity and given steady pleas for outside support from the Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), the rationale for increasing the level of U.S. activity in Mali seemed clear. While the President of Mali had consistently asked for U.S. material and logistical support for at least the previous two years, tangible signs of U.S. support to the Malian military had remained relatively low and episodic.[7] However, while the

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[6] Based on a comparison of data (2008 and 2009) contained in the yearly U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State Joint Report to Congress posted on the U.S. State Department website under the heading of Foreign Military Training and DoD Engagement Activities of Interest http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rpt/fmtrpt/.

[7] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2008, September 29), # 000817, *Mali: Request For 1206 Equipment*. The following appears in this cable: "President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) has frequently reiterated his request, pending for nearly two years, for vehicles and communications equipment. In meetings with former Ambassador McCulley, former SOCEUR Commander Admiral McRaven, and AFRICOM Commander General Ward over the course of the last twelve months, he has remarked on his obligation to balance his commitment to fighting terrorism with his responsibilities to ensure the security of northern populations against the very real threat of retaliation. Outlining his strategy for northern security, ATT speaks first of reinforcing bases to a more distant perimeter to allow them to credibly defend themselves against attacks. He notes, too, that vehicles and communications capacity are key to Mali's ability to maneuver in support of pursuing terrorists and interposing themselves to protect the safety of citizens in the north."

events of 2009 would usher in increased levels of U.S. security assistance to Mali, the U.S. would continue its habit of providing this support in episodic fashion.

## B. ANTI-WESTERN OPERATIONS

Between December 2008 and July 2009, AQIM seized six Western hostages, while also killing an American in a failed hostage taking. The first event occurred on December 14, 2008, when Canadian diplomats Robert Fowler, Louis Guay, and their local driver Soumana Moukaila, were kidnapped on the road just outside of Niamey (the capital of Niger) while returning from an excursion outside the capital.[8] Shortly after their seizure on January 22, 2009, AQIM seized European tourists Edwin Dyer (British), Marianne Petzold (German), Gabriella Greiner (Swiss), and Werner Greiner (Swiss) near the Mali/Niger border. The four were on their way back to Niamey after attending a Tuareg festival in the Malian border town of Andéramboukane.[9] By the middle of 2009, all of the hostages gained their freedom, except for Edwin Dyer. In exchange for Dyer's freedom, AQIM demanded the release, from a British jail, of the Jordanian al-Qaeda operative/cleric, Abu Qatada. Once the British government failed to meet AQIM's second deadline to release Abu Qatada, or agree to a ransom payment, AQIM executed Dyer at one of its desert bases in northern Mali (on May 31).[10]

Continuing its crusade against Western targets in the region, members of AQIM shot and killed Christopher Leggett on June 23, 2009, in the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott—while attempting to kidnap him. Leggett had been living in Mauritania for seven years and was serving as a teacher in a local center that specialized in computer science and language training.[11] Following Leggett's murder, General "Kip" Ward, the AFRICOM commander was at a press conference in Dakar, Senegal when he was asked

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[8] Robert Fowler, *A Season in Hell: My 130 Days in the Sahara with Al Qeqda*, (Toronto: HarperColllins Publishers, 2011), p. 3–7.

[9] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, January 23), # 000047, *Mali Army Battles Tuaregs North Of Kidal As Tourists Go Missing Along Niger Border*.

[10] Matthew Weaver, "British hostage Edwin Dyer 'killed by al-Qaida'," *The Guardian*, June 3, 2009, http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/jun/03/edwin-dyer-hostage-killed-al-qaida.

[11] Ahmed Mohamed, "Christopher Leggett Death: Al Qaida Says It Killed American In Mauritania For Proselytizing," *Huff Post World*, June 25, 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/25/christopher-leggett-death_n_220625.html.

about the killings of Dyer and Legggett. General Ward responded that the incidents "redouble our commitment, as we work with like-minded nations who also see those acts as intolerable, as we work to increase their capacity to control what goes on inside of their sovereign territories."[12] As made evident in General Ward's June 25 comments, the brutality and increased visibility of AQIM's activities in the Sahelian region provoked the AFRICOM commander to explore opportunities for increased engagement with countries such as Mali in order to help improve the capacity of its security services.

## C. ATT REACTS TO AQIM

Following ATT's repeated attempts to prod his neighbors into action against AQIM—on Malian territory if necessary—his failure and the black eye sustained as a result of Edwin Dyer's murder on Malian soil, convinced ATT that he now had little choice but to seek additional help. ATT made his plight clear in his June 10, 2009, meeting with the U.S. Ambassador to Mali, Gillian Milovanovic. In her summation of the hour-long meeting, Ambassador Milovanovic stated that:

> Throughout the meeting, President Toure returned to several core themes: Mali is ready to move on AQIM if only partner nations provide the means; AQIM is an Algerian export to northern Mali and it is unrealistic to expect Mali alone to be held responsible for an Algerian terrorist group; and the region has effectively hung Mali out to dry by denying any responsibility for addressing AQIM. President Toure also appeared to be grappling with a growing sense of isolation as AQIM's activities in Mali increase… He repeatedly blamed Algeria, Niger, and Mauritania for failing to follow through with his proposed Head of State summit and for abdicating their responsibility for policing the Sahel to an under-manned, under-equipped and under-trained Malian military.

Tellingly, among the things that ATT reveals in these remarks is that he did not view AQIM as a Malian problem; he deemed it a foreign problem. As a foreign problem, he even granted Algeria the ability to pursue AQIM up to 1,000 KM into Malian territory

[12] William (Kip) Ward, "TRANSCRIPT: Ward Describes Terrorist Acts as Deplorable during Press Conference in Senegal," *U.S. AFRICOM*, June 25, 2009, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Transcript/6724/transcript-ward-describes-terrorist-acts-as-deplor.

(though the Algerians never took ATT up on this invitation to destroy AQIM bases).[13] ATT's assessment also makes it clear why the Malian armed forces failed to consistently deny AQIM access to base areas in northern Mali. What comes through is that while ATT was ready to move on AQIM, he did not think it posed a significant threat to the Malian nation.[14]

Instead, ATT's attentions in the north remained focused on quelling bouts of indigenous unrest.[15] Even as late as January 2009, the Malian Army, under Colonel El Hadj Ag Gamou (and his Imghad Tuareg militia) and Colonel Abderahmane ould Meydou (and his Malian Arab militia) were engaged in combat operation against the rebel Tuareg leader Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, near the northern Malian town of Boughressa.[16] By the end of February 2009, Ag Bahanga had retreated into Algeria while the remaining Tuareg rebel factions officially agreed to end their fighting and disarm.[17] With the latest crisis in the north tabled, ATT could now focus more attention on AQIM and a plan for development in the north. ATT thus continued with his requests to the United States for support in combating AQIM.

During a meeting with the U.S. Ambassador on May 8, 2009, ATT stated that Mali could no longer rely on neighboring countries in the field of counter-terrorism and that Mali needed to improve the capabilities and capacity of its own forces in conjunction with U.S. assistance.[18] Following the May 8 meeting, Ambassador Milovanovic noted that "ATT's basic list of requests for empowering Malian forces to better patrol the north

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[13] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, June 12), # 000387, *President Toure Ready To Target AQIM, With Help*.

[14] Contrast this to his actions in early 2012 when the Malian government attempted to contract for fighter bomber aircraft to stop AQIM and Tuareg separatists advances, in the North. Author's interview with SOF personnel.

[15] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, July 01), # 000435, *DASD Huddleston Meets ATT: The Way Forward Against AQIM*.

[16] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, January 23), # 000047, *Mali Army Battles Tuaregs North Of Kidal As Tourists Go Missing Along Niger Border*. Ibrahim Ag Bahanga was a Tuareg rebel leader who did not partake in the July 22, 2008, Algiers peace talks.

[17] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, February 23), # 000107, *This Week In Northern Mali: Rebel Disarmament And Bahanga's Complaint*.

[18] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, May 12), # 000288, *Ambassador's Meeting With ATT: Mali's Security Needs In An Era Of Unhelpful Neighbors.*

is not new. The list, including intelligence, vehicles, equipment, and physical reinforcement of northern outpost bases, dates at least to mid-2007."[19] According to Milovanovic, in light of ATT's previous requests he "expressed some frustration [during a 10 June, 2009, meeting] that, despite conversations with Ambassador McCulley, Ambassador Milovanovic, and several with General Ward, his standard request for practical support including equipment remained both unchanged and unfulfilled."[20] ATT further impressed upon Ambassador Milovanovic that "if we had the equipment, Mali would move on AQIM tomorrow morning."[21]

It was during this same June 10 meeting that ATT "requested a team of U.S. military planners to travel to Mali to help review and refine Mali's plan to engage AQIM and to confirm what training, equipment, and support would be needed to implement it." However, while the high profile hostage drama and the killing of Edwin Dyer had a profound impact on ATT's view, it was the killing of Colonel Lamana on the night of June 10 that convinced him to finally, unequivocally commit the Malian military against AQIM.

More than just another colonel, Lamana was an important Berabiche Arab leader, a military intelligence officer in Mali's *Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure* (DGSE), and a former rebel with links throughout northern Mali. In short, Colonel Lamana represented an important link between the seat of power in Bamako and the distant desert populations of the north [apart from his reported key role in various nefarious activities].[22] Aside from being an important figure, the way in which he was killed also sparked significant outrage. According to a relative of the deceased Colonel, two gunmen "came into our house. The lieutenant colonel was sitting in the living room

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[19] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, May 12), # 000288, *Ambassador's Meeting With ATT: Mali's Security Needs In An Era Of Unhelpful Neighbors.*

[20] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, June 12), # 000387, *President Toure Ready To Target AQIM, With Help*.

[21] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, June 12), # 000387, *President Toure Ready To Target AQIM, With Help*. Throughout her cables, Ambassador Milovanovic continually expressed her support for increased levels of military assistance to Mali.

[22] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2007, August 03), # 000960, *Tuaregs And Arabs Clash Over Drugs And Cash In Northern Mali*.

and one of the men pointed at him and said to the other: 'That's him, that's him.' Then they shot him three times."[23] While theories abound concerning the reason for his murder, all blame AQIM as the culprit.[24] The killing was an especially egregious act in that the killers entered his home and killed Lamana in front of his family members; an act of this nature went against the socially accepted nature of violence in Malian culture. ATT referred to Colonel Lamana's murder as the "last straw" concerning AQIM.[25]

Rather than acting without a planning framework, the Malian military did in fact conduct anti-AQIM planning prior to June 10. Colonel Lamana's killing only accelerated the military's planning; it did not precipitate it. After all, ATT would not have asked the U.S. Ambassador for a team of U.S. military advisors to "help review and refine Mali's plan to engage AQIM" if no such plan was ready for review. However, while Operation Djigui (the name of the Malian operation to counter AQIM) existed on paper prior to execution, in all likelihood it did not exist on the ground, in the sense that forces, logistics, and intelligence were not properly positioned or awaiting the order to execute. As a result, Malian offensive actions occurred in a disjointed fashion without the coordinated support of helicopter gunships (Mi-24), or prepositioned logistical stocks.[26] Based on ATT's previous requests for U.S. support, it is clear that he would rather have acted after, rather than before, receiving the international support he sought.

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[23] "Malian al-Qaeda Hunter Shot Dead," *BBC News*, June 11, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8095040.stm.

[24] One of the dominant theories revolves around Lamana's involvement in the drug trade and collusion with AQIM. Under this theory he is supposed to have skimmed money from a deal with AQIM and they killed him for it. The U.S. Embassy, Bamako, referred to him as the "equivalent of a crooked cop" in a June 11, 2009, cable referencing his murder. U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2007, June 11), # 000383, *Armed Assailants Assassinate Col. Lamana Ould Bou In Timbuktu*. Of note (as per the 11 June cable), at the time of his murder, an ODA from 3rd Special Forces Group was in Tombouctou conducting a JCET with Malian forces. http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/1222/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo.

[25] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, June 18), # 000401, *ATT: "we're Acting On AQIM - Now We Need Your Help."*

[26] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2008, April 03), # 000325, *Mali Uses Helicopters To Attack Bahanga Near Kidal*. The Malian air force first used their Hind helicopters in April 2008 near Kidal in fighting against rebel leader Bahanga. U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, August 12), # 000538, *Mali Using Specialized Units In Fight Against AQIM.*

## D. MALI ON THE OFFENSIVE

By June 15, five nights after Colonel Lamana's killing, the Malian armed forces were engaged in fierce fighting with AQIM elements near Tin-Adema. In this engagement, two company-sized task forces augmented by Arab Berabiche militiamen ventured into the desert to attack a suspected AQIM base.[27] During this initial engagement, the Malian Army suffered five soldiers killed and inflicted an estimated 20–25 AQIM deaths. After seizing the AQIM base, elements of the Malian Army began pursuing the fleeing AQIM fighters. After a short pursuit, the Malian forces found themselves desperately low on fuel and supplies, bringing an end to the chase on June 16. Without the necessary resources, Malian forces lost the initiative and remained relatively static for about a week while awaiting resupply. Eventually, the two Malian units received the necessary supplies and began conducting localized patrols near Timetrine. However, using pre-established caches, AQIM retained the ability to maneuver and was soon on the move across the desert.[28]

In an effort to exploit their initial successes, the Malian military continued to deploy its meager resources in pursuit of suspected AQIM formations. For their part, AQIM mobile elements attempted to outrun their pursuers until reaching a suitable defensive position. From such a defensive position, AQIM could engage the Malian Army at long range with their heavy weapons; AQIM fighters would keep the Malians at bay, then retreat at an opportune time.[29] This was their pattern before the night of July 3, 2009, when a Malian army unit, after chasing a band of AQIM across undulating sand dunes north of Tombouctou (near Araouane), decided to halt for the night. The Malians failed to conduct proper patrol-base procedures, instead they haphazardly laid out their

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[27] While U.S. embassy cable traffic at the time did not reference these units as ETIAs, later on they were referred to as ETIAs (in U.S. Embassy cable of 12 Aug 2009). Regardless if the units were or were not called ETIAs by the Malians at the time, some Malian soldiers involved in these actions did participate in U.S. sponsored training for the ETIAs. Author's conversations with Malian soldiers, November 2009.

[28] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, June 25), # 000415, *Running On Fumes: Mali's Soldiers Exposed In The Desert*. U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, June 18), # 000401, *ATT: "we're Acting On AQIM - Now We Need Your Help*." AQIM's use of desert caches is well documented by Robert Fowler in his book, *A Season in Hell.*

[29] Author's conversation with a Malian soldier who participated is this period of fighting. Such a TTP was also reported by Robert Fowler (Author's conversations with Robert Fowler, November 2013).

sleeping mats and went to sleep without emplacing observation posts for early warning.[30] Consequently, early on the morning of July 4, AQIM circled back and ambushed the ill prepared Malians, overrunning the camp, inflicting a significant number of casualties, and capturing vehicles and supplies.[31] While accounts of the ambush vary with regard to the Malian force package and the number of casualties, one figure consistently used is 28 Malian soldiers killed and six taken prisoner. Among the dead was the Malian commander, Lieutenant Colonel Hamma Ould Mohamed Yahya, the cousin of Colonel Lamana.

After suffering the largest number of casualties since 1991, the Malian military recoiled back to its main bases, the shock of this defeat stopping Operation Djigui dead in its tracks. Based on the military's catastrophic losses, the U.S. embassy predicted that the Malian government would seek assistance from its international partners before resuming its offensive.[32]

## E. SOF TRAINING HAS NO APPARENT OUTCOME ON THE FIGHTING

While the disastrous July 4 ambush symbolized the inherent weaknesses of the Malian military, it also serves to discount the notion that episodic training events, on their own, can build sufficient military capability. During May 2009, four separate U.S. SOF training events occurred in Mali. 1) In Tombouctou, soldiers from the 3rd Special Forces Group conducted combat skills training with a Malian army unit. 2) In Gao, a Marine Special Operations Team of the 3rd Marine Special Operations Battalion also conducted

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[30] Author's conversations with two (Malian soldiers) survivors of the incident and a Malian officer who arrived on the scene of the ambush with the relief column.

[31] Two possibilities exist regarding AQIM's decision to double back and ambush the Malian column. According to two survivors, someone was found either with or using a satellite phone; which was out of place for the individual in question (details surrounding the circumstances of the phone incident were vague and may have been second hand information). With this information, the implication is that someone in the Malian formation called AQIM and provided details of the Malian position and the status of their defenses to AQIM. The other possibility is that AQIM noticed that their pursuers stopped for the night and decided to ambush their patrol base. The prospect that someone in the Malian formation called AQIM is high; during the combined Malian and Mauritanian operation Benkan, in 2011, it was reported that a Malian soldier called AQIM to provide them information as the operation occurred (Author's discussion with French military personal in Mali, 2011).

[32] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, July 6), # 000445, *Ambush: AQIM Inflicts Heavy Losses In Battle With Malian Forces*. U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, July 14), # 000460, *Licking Its Wounds: Mali Regroups, Hostage*.

combat skills training with a Malian Army unit. 3) In Bamako, "Air Commandos" of the Air Force 6th Special Operation Squadron conducted flight training with members of the Malian air force. 4) Also in Bamako, another 3rd Special Forces Group team conducted combat skills training with a Malian army unit.[33] Malian troops in Gao and Tombouctou received medical training, marksmanship training, and mounted/dismounted maneuver training from SOF personnel, lasting approximately four weeks. The Tombouctou training concluded just before the end of June, thereby allowing newly trained soldiers to join the Malian column prior to the ambush on July 4.[34] While it is unknown how many of the recently trained Malian soldiers, if any, were present for the July 4 action, the fact remains that the SOF-provided training did not prevent the tactical and strategic disaster.

As the Malian army engaged in recovery operations related to the recent ambush, a survey team from AFRICOM visited Mali to assess the Malian army's capabilities and requirements. As part of the assessment, from July 7–8, the team visited Malian military facilities at Sévaré, Gao, and Tessalit. Conditions at Tessalit seemed to make the greatest impact on the team, which included the U.S. Defense Attaché.[35] As Mali's northern-most major base, Tessalit remained an isolating 320-mile drive from Gao—over a rough dirt road. In short, the assessment team found the conditions on the base to be "atrocious." Electricity was available for only two hours a day (provided by an on base generator), perimeter security was poor (a stone perimeter wall was not yet built), supplies of all types were in short supply, facilities overall were lacking, the asphalt runway was in desperate need of resurfacing, and the 71$^{eme}$ *Régiment Mixte* (assigned to the base and likely undermanned or overstretched) could only bolster a token force when its maneuver

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[33] U.S. AFRICOM Photos, *U.S. AFRICOM*, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/1222/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/1212/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/1182/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/1168/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo

[34] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, June 16), # 000399, *Northern Malian Arabs Take Democracy Hostage For The Weekend.*

[35] In the 14 July 2009, U.S. Embassy Cable referencing the assessment team, a recounting of the findings at the Tessalit military camp composed the entirety of the prose relating to the actions of the assessment team. This is not to say that other reporting was lacking, but that the substance of the other reporting did not rise to prominence for inclusion in the U.S. Embassy cable.

element was out on detail.[36] Given what the visitors saw, it was little wonder that ATT had consistently asked for U.S. assistance in improving Camp Lieutenant Fanhiry Konate—the official name for the Tessalit military base.[37] While not mentioned in the Embassy cable, the logistical situation and conditions at the camp, clearly posed a problem for the central role assigned to the base in Malian operational planning.[38]

While it was the stated U.S. goal to assist the Malians to execute their plan, the July 14 cable did not address Tessalit's problems in the context of the Malian plan. Nor did it address the need for any immediate action to rectify things like the lack of reliable electrical power. Without a generally stable source of electrical power to run communications equipment, establishing any sort of effective operational headquarters or operational base would be problematic at best. Due to the remote nature of the base, another key priority for infrastructure upgrades should have been the construction of a simple aircraft hangar and the resurfacing of the runway. These upgrades could have enabled the Malians to base a pair of small reconnaissance aircraft in Tessalit, while also ensuring the possibly of resupply flights, without larger aircraft risking damage to their landing gear.

In spite of its many shortcomings, the Tessalit base was strategically located 30 miles from the Algerian border and 80 miles from the Algerian military airfield at Bordj Mokhtar; improved capacity at the Tessalit military camp could have provided the Malians significant capabilities in their fight against AQIM. Without a greater understanding of the inner workings of the Malian military, it was doubtlessly hard to develop a detailed picture of host nation capabilities and capacity, beyond the proverbial, "things are bad." The lack of more detailed recommendations in the July 14 cable, reference the Tessalit base, reflects the limitations of episodic engagement and further points to a lack of a partner-focused mindset in terms of mutually beneficial security assistance.

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[36] This description was much the same during the author's visit to the base in early summer of 2010.

[37] Based on author's visit to the camp in mid-2010. The situation remained essentially unchanged from the July 2009 report; author's initial meeting with the base commander was conducted in a mud hut.

[38] In meetings with the U.S. Ambassador, ATT discussed the importance of the Tessalit location as a hub for operations against AQIM (12 June 2009 Cable for example).

## F. ETIA

In late 2006, Joint Special Operations Task Force—Trans Sahara (JSOTF-TS) was created to synchronize the counter-terrorist objectives of the U.S. DoD in West Africa. At the time, AFRICOM did not yet exist and JSOTF-TS belonged to the U.S. European Command (EUCOM). According to Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Chris Call, former JSOTF-TS operations officer for the unit's inception and early development, "the overarching role of the JSOTF-TS is to orchestrate all Dept. of Defense efforts and activities toward accomplishing the [Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership] TSCTP objectives, which included increasing bilateral and regional capacity in the region to defeat terrorist and extremist organizations." According to LTC Call, the initial focus was on four countries but soon expanded to 10 countries under the umbrella of the Department of State's TSCTP and the DoD's supporting effort, Operation Enduring Freedom Trans-Sahara (OEF-TS).[39] JSOTF-TS's portfolio thus expanded to include responsibility for managing all U.S. military efforts in the region, in coordination with the various U.S. Ambassadors, and host country governments, inclusive of Algeria, Tunisia, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Morocco, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad.[40]

Following AFRICOM's creation and acquisition of JSOTF-TS and JSOTF-TS's subsequent alignment under Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA) in May 2009, the SOCAFRICA commander, Brigadier General Higgins, traveled to Mali in August 2009 to meet with Malian senior defense officials. In preparation for the first training events with Malian *Echelon Tactique Inter-Armée* (ETIA) combat formations, General Higgins wanted to impress on the Malians that only legitimate members of the

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[39] Max R. Blumenfeld, "Training in Trans-Sahara Africa," *U.S. AFRICOM*, December 13, 2010, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/7896/training-in-trans-sahara-africa.

[40] Information taken from an on line jobs posting. "Streamline Defense is accepting resumes for Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) Analysts able to operate in multiple capacities …. while deployed to JSOTF-TS Area of Responsibility (defined as Algeria, Tunisia, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Morocco, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad)," (Contingent upon award of contract (Sep2013)), http://www.jobscore.com/jobs/streamlinedefense/open-source-intelligence-analyst-usafricom/cnhjuO4Oyr4O-BeJe4iefn.

Malian armed forces would receive SOF training—not members of the various militias.[41] It was well known that Malian army formations in the north, especially ETIAs and "ETIA-like" units, conducted operations in conjunction with local militia fighters. Based on U.S. legal restrictions, it was critically important that members of the militia were not intermixed with regular forces participating in U.S. SOF training. The first training event with an ETIA then began when U.S. Army Special Forces deployed to Gao, Mali later in August.

The ETIAs were composite units designated primarily in name only and manned on a rotational basis by soldiers assigned to the regiments from bases where the ETIAs originated. Drawn mainly from the northern regiments, the ETIAs also contained Tuareg soldiers and officers from those northern Malian units. Simply put, an ETIA was a company-sized, ethnically mixed, combined arms task force of approximately 160 men manned on a "pick up" basis—therefore not cohesive units. Basically motorized infantry formations, the ETIAs comprised infantry, armored reconnaissance, artillery, and support platoons/personnel. At the outset, as per Mali's request, it was decided that SOF forces would train ETIAs 1, 4, and 6. Another unit, ETIA 2, was added to the training program in late 2009 / early 2010, while a fifth (ETIA 7) first received training in October 2011.[42] Reflecting the dispersed disposition of regiments in the north, the ETIAs were not co-located; ETIA 1 came from Tessalit, ETIA 2 from Kidal, ETIA 4 from Tombouctou, and ETIA 6 from Nampala. Located in three separate military zones (Tessalit was part of the Kidal Zone), the ETIAs reported directly to their respective Zone commander. On paper, the ETIAs fell under the operational headquarters in Gao, but in practice the Zone commander exerted more day-to-day control over the ETIAs in the absence of a Gao operational headquarters tasking.[43]

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[41] Max R. Blumenfeld, "Training in Trans-Sahara Africa," U.S. AFRICOM, December 13, 2010, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/7896/training-in-trans-sahara-africa U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, August 12), # 000538, *Mali Using Specialized Units In Fight Against AQIM.*

[42] Author's interview with a SOF operator with extensive experience in Mali during 2010 and 2011.

[43] Author's conversations with various ETIA commanders, Kidal Zone staff officers, and Gao operational headquarters staff personnel.

Each individual's parent unit appeared next to his name on the ETIA personnel roster. For example, in November of 2009, ETIA 4 contained personnel from 16 different military organizations, to include soldiers from a different military region.[44] In the summer of 2011, ETIA 2 consisted of 21 of the 99 personnel assigned to the 724th artillery battery in Kidal.[45] Complicating matters, individuals would rotate back to their units, such as the 724th, after about six months of service in the ETIA. Meanwhile, a new batch of soldiers from the 724th and other units in the regiment would rotate into the ETIA for a six-month tour of duty. As might be expected, the constant rotation of personnel in and out of the ETIAs presented a significant challenge when trying to build unit capabilities. In general, most Malian soldiers served in the north on a rotational basis, much as members of the U.S. military have done in Afghanistan. The north was considered a hardship tour. Approximately every three years, soldiers were replaced en masse with new soldiers from the south. While it is unclear when SOF first learned about the three year en masse turnover of personnel (for sure by October 2010)[46], it was clearly understood at the time of General Higgins's visit that personnel would rotate through the ETIAs every six months.[47]

In a military without a developed culture of training, six-month turnovers within the ETIAs, and an overall turnover every three years, presented significant and essentially insurmountable problems for those attempting to assist the Malians to improve their capabilities.

## G. ETIA EQUIPMENT PROBLEMS

Rotation of ETIA personnel also had a significant impact on efforts to equip the ETIAs. When U.S. soldiers receive individual equipment, select items will remain with the soldier for the rest of his/her military career. Likewise, when soldiers require unit or

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[44] Based on the ETIA 4 personnel roster dated November 6, 2009. According to the roster, some of the soldiers serving in the ETIA hailed from the 62nd Regiment which belonged to the Mopti military region (south of the Tombouctou region).

[45] Author's discussion with the commander of the 724th while in Kidal, 2011.

[46] Author's conversations with Malian officers at the MOD.

[47] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, August 12), # 000538, *Mali Using Specialized Units In Fight Against AQIM.*

military occupational skill (MOS)-specific equipment, it is issued and then turned in when the soldier departs the unit or changes his/her MOS.[48] Generally speaking, the Malian system resembled the American system. Therefore, if a Malian soldier serving in an ETIA received an individual item, such as a camelback, boots, uniform, or a magazine pouch, that soldier would retain the equipment on rotating out of the ETIA. This would leave the new ETIA soldiers with little or no equipment, beyond a smattering of Malian-issued items. In order to ensure that all the soldiers in the ETIA had a standard suite of serviceable equipment, all of the northern regiments would require new issues of individual equipment. If an ETIA received an issue of U.S.-provided equipment during one six month rotation, by the next rotation the shortages previously addressed would recur with a new complement of soldiers.

### 1. Individual Equipment

An excellent example of the ineffectiveness of U.S. ETIA equipping efforts occurred with ETIA 4. In December 2009, members of ETIA 4 received individual equipment upon completing a joint combined exchange training (JCET) with an operational detachment-alpha (ODA) from 10th Special Forces Group. The ODA helped facilitate the issuing of the equipment arranged by the U.S. Office of Security Cooperation. Included in the issue, was a complete set of U.S. desert combat uniforms (DCUs), including desert boots for each soldier.[49] By June 2010, fewer than half of the soldiers standing in the ETIA 4 formation resembled those who had been fully uniformly in December 2009, and a few months later that number had shrunk to zero. Malian black leather boots and solid green uniforms now cloaked most in the formation.[50] While an entire unit dressed in DCUs does not speak to any increased capability to combat AQIM, the case of the DCU uniforms disappearing in such a short period of time speaks to the problems associated with issuing important pieces of individual equipment.

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[48] In the U.S. Army, once a soldier receives an issue of equipment from a Central Issue Facility (CIF), that soldier is thereby responsible for maintaining that equipment as the soldier moves from one assignment to another. Examples of equipment is this category, excluding uniform items, are ballistic helmets, magazine pouches, and other equipment pouches.

[49] Author's involvement in the distribution of the supplies and equipment.

[50] Author's observation of the unit.

One piece of individual equipment that *can* directly contribute to combat effectiveness is the spare magazine pouch, which in the case of the Malian Army was a pouch for the Avtomat Kalashnikova (AK) magazine (with the Chinese AK chest pouch being most prolific). Without a pouch to carry additional magazines beyond the one in the rifle, soldiers would easily loose spare magazines while trying to carry them in their pockets or they would end up going into battle with only the magazine in the rifle. Without the ability to reload rapidly, individual and unit firepower immediately slackened or ceased following the initial fusillade—a dangerous prospect when reacting to enemy contact. During the first training event with ETIA 1, the ODA conducting the training recognized that few soldiers had a magazine chest pouch and most did not have a single spare magazine.[51] In early 2010, a smattering of ETIA personnel received U.S.-made AK chest pouches; unfortunately, the quantities were not sufficient to outfit all four ETIAs.

Unfortunately, during the distribution conducted by the Malian chain of command, attention was not given to what type of rifle the soldier had.[52] As a result, some soldiers armed with AK rifles did not receive a AK pouch, while some armed with a SKS rifle received an AK magazine pouch instead. Since the soldiers considered the pouch individual equipment—in other words, theirs—talk of making the pouches unit equipment or redistributing them through the ranks based on who had what type of weapon provoked a vocal and negative response from the soldiers—something bordering on a small riot. Adding to the soldiers' angst, the Gao operational headquarters attempted to keep equipment that had already been issued to ETIA 1, as unit property in Gao—300 miles from the ETIA's home base in Tessalit.[53] As in the case of the uniforms, when a soldier left the ETIA he took his AK chest pouch (and any other individual equipment) with him, thereby generating the need for more equipment.

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[51] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, September 24), # 000619, *President Toure Ready To Target AQIM, With Help;* and author's conversation with SOF personnel involved in training ETIA 1 during this period.

[52] ETIA rifles were a mix of the SKS and the AK rifle. The SKS has a fixed 10 round magazine with no provision for a detachable magazine. The rifle is loaded at the top of the action using ammunition on a 10 round stripper clip, much like the bolt action German Mauser of WW2.

[53] Author's interview with a SOF operator working with the ETIA during this period.

### 2. Unit Equipment

Based on norms and conditions of equipment issue in the ETIAs, one would had to equip entire regiments—the feeder units of the EITAs—to ensure each ETIA was fully equipped with magazine pouches. In contrast, equipment considered unit property by the Malians tended to stay with the ETIAs, irrespective of personnel changeovers. For instance, in late 2009, the ETIAs received their first tranche of 37 new Land Cruiser 4X4 pick-up trucks.[54] Based on the rough condition of the ETIAs' existing vehicles, the new trucks provided an instant boost to unit capacity. Conducting movements in the ETIA's older vehicles was slow due to repeated breakdowns, or flat tires, all of which required the convoy/patrol to move at slower speeds and halt often to fix issues. A portion of the new vehicles were also equipped with vehicle mounted Harris tactical radio systems. Considering that the Harris radio, while an excellent piece of equipment, is complicated to use, the radios did not have the same effect as the vehicles. Malian soldiers were very familiar with the Land Cruiser platform through years of operational experience and could employ and maintain the vehicle immediately upon receipt. Harris radios were entirely new. Furthermore, the initial issue did not coincide with the start of JCET training. With no SOF facilitated training on how to operate the radios, the Malians piled

[54] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, September 24), # 000619, *President Toure Ready To Target AQIM, With Help.* This case consisted of 37 vehicles, radio and communications equipment, clothing and other individual equipment, worth approximately USD 5.5 million. The equipment was officially presented to the Malian Chief of Defense on 20 October 2009. "U.S. Government Provides Equipment to Malian Army," *U.S. AFRICOM*, October 20, 2009, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/6953/us-government-provides-equipment-to-malian-army This equipment was part of a FY 07 "Section 1206" security cooperation case designed for Mauritania that was redirected to Mali due to the recent coup in Mauritania. "Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans Sahara (OEF-TS) Culture of Maintenance and Logistics Course," (Power Point Presentation), *U.S. AFRICOM*, September 2011, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCkQFjAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fcommunity.apan.org%2Fcfs-file.ashx%2F__key%2Ftelligent-evolution-components-attachments%2F13–6201–00–00–00–08–33–29%2FAFRICOM-OEF_2D00_TS-Brief.pptx&ei=X-5qUoKINuHniAL3uoGYCA&usg=AFQjCNG7HhrHwTR4Vofs9UxkyN3j886Hpg&bvm=bv.55123115,d.cGE.

teapots and other individual equipment on top of them as they sat for the most part unused.[55]

Some ETIAs did display a more sophisticated ability to operate the radios and maintain their vehicles. In these cases, so long as the radio was booted up with talk settings familiar to the operators, they could use them for FM communication. When the radio settings deviated too far from the familiar settings, either because buttons were accidently pushed, or for other reasons, the radio operators did not know how to re-configure the radio. In one instance, a three vehicle section guarding the Tessalit base had no idea how to operate its Harris radios; on one vehicle, a GPS receiver was attached to the underside of the vehicle because the crew thought it was some sort of battery![56]

While the radios remained in the ETIA, the platform was too unwieldy for easy operation by ETIA soldiers—especially considering the pace of personnel rotations and too ineffective a train the trainer program. On the other hand, vehicle maintenance on the Land Cruisers was generally good. One reason for success was the provision of a robust spare parts package and the fact that similar vehicles were already in service with Malian security services and are extremely common throughout Mali and surrounding countries. ETIA 4, for example, maintained an accurate logbook for each vehicle documenting all the work conducted on the vehicle. Additionally, spare parts were inventoried and securely stored, requiring multiple signatures for release to vehicle mechanics.[57] Considering the vastness of the northern desert, mobility was essential to any operation. There is no question that U.S.-provided vehicles granted the ETIAs an increased capacity for rapid and reliable movement.

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[55] The training plan for the radios involved training a core group of trainers from the *Direction des Transmissions et des Télécommunication des Armées* (DTTA) and select members of the ETIA. It was then the responsibility of these individuals to train the unit on the use of the radios. However, in a military absent a culture of training and lacking on personal initiative, this plan was less than successful for obvious reasons. DTTA trainers failed to ensure the unit personnel received adequate training and the individuals trained in the units, either forgot, or never really learned how to operate the radios in the first place.

[56] Author's observation, 2010.

[57] Author's viewing of maintenance log books and discussion with vehicle mechanics at the Malian military camp in Tombouctou, 2010.

Crew-served weapons (while not provided by the U.S.) were another type of equipment that remained with the ETIAs. During the first three ETIA JCETs with 10th Special Forces Group ODAs, one of the recurring issues noted by the trainers was the lack of crew-served weapons (machine guns in calibers 7.62, 12.7, and 14.5 mm). In 2009, ETIA 4 fielded two Chinese Type 57 (7.62mm) machine guns, two Chinese Type 54 (12.7mm) machine guns, and one 14.5mm machine gun; five other PKM (7.62mm) machine guns belonged to individual soldiers and not the ETIA, so their owners tried to hide them in their living quarters to prevent their collective use during training. Of the five crew-served weapons owned by ETIA 4, both of the Type 54s would not fire, the two Type 57s would not fire reliably by the end of training, and the 14.5mm was not safe to fire due to the lack of a serviceable firing pin. In response to ODA provided feedback and action by the U.S. Ambassador, the Malian Ministry of Defense provided all of the ETIAs with new Chinese 12.7mm (Type 85) and 7.62mm (M80 PKM) machine guns in 2010. With the new weapons, most ETIA vehicles were able to field some type of functional crew-served weapon—which marked a substantial increase in their offensive and defensive firepower. However, even with new crew-served weapons, ETIA firepower continued to suffer from the improper storage of linked ammunition on the vehicles.[58] Still, despite continuous shortcomings of this type, the ETIAs successfully managed to retain possession of their crew-served weapons for unit use in a manner similar to the vehicles.

One Malian military practice that the crew-served weapons exemplified, was their propensity to store new equipment and supplies rather that issue them out to troops in need.[59] This tendency to store supplies rather than issue them stems from the fact that, as an underfunded military, there was never any guarantee a replacement item would arrive if something broke, wore out, or was lost. When a supply officer received supplies, he

[58] Soviet style ammunition cans do not seal, allowing dirt, water, and moisture to degrade the ready linked ammunition. This is the type of ammo can in service with the Malian military. In November of 2009, this author found that much of the pre-linked ammunition in ETIA 4 to be unserviceable and rusty due to storage in the non-sealing Soviet style ammunition cans. Even the non-rusted ammunition failed to reliably ignite due to prolonged exposure to the elements.

[59] Weapons in Mali fall under the responsibility of the MOD department *Direction du Matériel, des Hydrocarbures et des Transports des Armées* (DMHTA).

would lock them away until ordered to issue them; correspondingly, once the supplies were locked up, the list of people who knew that a particular item was on hand remained extremely short. Many officers and soldiers alike further accepted the fact that if they did not have something, well, that was just the way it was in their under-resourced army (little did they know that some supplies were on hand, just sitting in various warehouses).

Despite the many visible shortcomings of the Malian military, supply accountability was generally much better that the casual observer might assume. A senior supply NCO, somewhere, would often have a list of which equipment was stored in a specific storage area. However, an officer culture of digging through warehouses and bunkers to find supplies that could increase unit effectiveness was lacking.[60] Consequently, without an overall plan to ensure that U.S.-provided equipment was integrated into combined SOF / ETIA training, some equipment never left storage sites while other equipment went unused or underutilized for lack of knowledge or understanding about how to employ it.[61] Rather than this being just an ETIA-specific problem, these equipment fielding issues pervaded the Malian military.

### 3. Overly Complex Equipment (Falcon 3)

Another equipment-related issue involved the nature of the provided equipment. The vast majority of ETIA personnel did not have a technical background or a familiarity with basic computing technology. For communication within the unit, simple hand-held Motorola radios or similar brands remained the order of the day. These radios are simple to operate and maintain, and had a proven track record of reliability as far as soldiers in the ETIAs were concerned: The problem was that the units did not have nearly enough of these hand-held radios. To solve this problem, U.S. security cooperation efforts provided around 50 Harris Falcon 3 hand-held radios to the Malians for the ETIAs, in the 2009–2010 timeframe. As with the vehicle mounted Harris radios this bulk radio delivery did

[60] Based on author's experience dealing with various facets of the Malian military supply system.

[61] Equipment meant for the ETIAs, such as electric generators, pumps, 2 quart canteens, and other items, remained in their packing boxes, neatly stored in a Kidal military warehouse. While meant to increase ETIA capabilities, the equipment was handed over to the Malians and never integrated into SOF training events—so it remained warehoused gathering dust.

not coincide with SOF training events and, as a result, when the Malian soldiers field tested the radios they found them to be less than acceptable. The major complaint when they could get the radios to operate was severe transmission problem even at short range. To the Malian soldiers, the expensive Falcon 3 was a paperweight compared to their preferred Motorola. After a subsequent issuance of Harris radios in 2011, a Harris trainer provided a number of classes to select Malian soldiers. Based on his interactions with his Malian students he commented that the Falcon 3 was far too advanced for the needs of the Malian army.[62] Prior to the arrival of the Harris instructor, a pair of SOF instructors, with no specialty communications training attempted to field test the Falcon 3s. Having never used the radios previously and with no instruction manuals, these SOF instructors found it difficult to figure out the radio's basic functions. These individuals also experienced similar range limitations when attempting to communicate with a clear line of sight. It was clear that the Malian's assessments of the radios were not unfounded and that a simpler piece of technology would have been better suited to their requirements. Furthermore, beyond the technical aspects of the radios, the costs associated with maintaining such equipment was also not suited to the financial situation of the Malian military. The disconnect between Malian requirements, the type of equipment they could absorb, and U.S. train and equip efforts again epitomizes the danger in attempting to build capability and capacity through episodic engagement.

## H. INDIVIDUAL OR UNIT EQUIPMENT

Another problem arose over which equipment was considered individual vs unit. For instance, rifles belonged to the ETIA feeder units and not the ETIAs. Unfortunately, the overall condition of rifles in the hands of northern units was remarkably poor. It was common to see soldiers carrying AK rifles without stocks; these same soldiers then showed up at the firing range expecting to conduct training—something SOF personnel disallowed for good reason. Beyond rifles with no stocks, ETIA soldiers carried AK rifles with missing hand guards, no front sights, broken rear sights, wobbly stocks, etc. Those not armed with AK rifles, had SKS rifles. The SKS entered service with the Soviet armed

[62] Author's conversation with the Harris trainer and observation of his class, 2011.

forces in 1949 and has long passed its prime as a viable frontline infantry rifle. Without stripper clips, SKS armed soldiers resorted to carrying loose ammunition in their pockets in order to reload after firing the ten rounds held in the SKS's internal magazine. Needless to say, SKS-armed soldiers were easily outclassed by AK-wielding AQIM fighters.

Ways to address the serious shortcomings with individual weapons involved either providing the ETIAs with new unit level AK rifles or re-equipping the northern regiments altogether (which, as previously noted, would only offer a temporary solution). SOF trainers appealed to the MOD to provide ETIAs with serviceable AK rifles numerous times. Those discussions generated resistance over the idea of making rifles ETIA equipment, since rifles in the north occupied a gray area between individual and regimental unit property. For instance, soldiers in the Kidal region, which was considered a "red zone," were expected to have their weapon with them at all times. Making the rifle unit property would mean that the soldier would have to be issued a new rifle on rotating out of the ETIA if the ETIA's AK rifles were unit rifles. While providing the ETIAs with unit rifles would have ensured that Mali's "operational" units were equipped with serviceable rifles, the Ministry of Defense never effectively addressed the question of substandard personal weaponry in the hands of the ETIAs and soldiers continued to carry weapons with various deficiencies.[63] American attempts to provide new rifle stocks also failed because a lack of familiarity with AKs meant the wrong stocks were ordered by those who executed the ordering. As the wrong spare parts were ordered and engagement with the MOD continued, thousands of new Chinese AKs sat crated in a Bamako supply depot.[64]

Given the conditions described above, the ETIA construct did not present the ideal situation for building a proficient Malian counter AQIM-capability. In 2009, it was

[63] It is assumed that the Malians had the required weapons on hand in early 2010—at the same time they issued new crew served weapons to the ETIAs (part of a Chinese arms shipment received by the Malians). On September 22, 2010, the presence of hundreds of new Chinese AK rifles in Malian storage was confirmed when they were issued to most participants in the 50th anniversary Independence Day parade.

[64] Author viewed the rifles on display during the 2010 Independence Day parade and crated in a military warehouse in late 2011.

thought that further engagement through the Ministry of Defense would provide solutions to the inherent weaknesses with the ETIA construct. Unfortunately, these efforts were unsuccessful. Solutions were not forthcoming in regard to the problems associated with the ETIA construct mainly, because the changes sought were outside accepted norms of operation for the Malians. Given the various institutional changes necessary to retool the ETIA, this goal was beyond the capacity of the Malian system to accomplish in the short term and would have required herculean efforts to accomplish over the long term.

## I. SOF BEGINS TRAINING THE ETIAS

On August 25, 2009, a bilateral training event involving ODA 0126 and 113 members of the Tessalit based ETIA 1 began training in Gao, Mali.[65] The 30-day training event consisted of dismounted and mounted patrolling, marksmanship training, medical training, and planning exercises.[66] As part of the culminating exercise, the combined forces conducted a vehicle movement to the town of Ansongo where the ETIA conducted a humanitarian assistance operation at a local school. While the combined training event provided value to both parties, two major observations were, 1) the capability of the EITA was extremely low, and 2) if JCET training was expected to increase ETIA capability, then the length of the training events had to be increased—30 days was wholly insufficient. Due to extreme deficiencies displayed at the basic level and beyond, a full thirty-day period would need to be devoted to just one or two aspects of training, such as rifle marksmanship or squad dismounted movement.

Based on the recommendations of ODA 0126, the next two JCETs, conducted simultaneously in Gao and Segou, were extended to 45 days in length.[67] These next two JECTs, also conducted by 10th Special Forces Group ODAs, involved training with

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[65] "End of Military Bilateral Training in Gao," *U.S. Embassy Bamako*, September 25, 2009, http://mali.usembassy.gov/end_of_bilat_25_09_09.html.

[66] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, October 22), # 000686, *A Trip To Gao Highlights Mission Objectives.*

[67] U.S. AFRICOM Photo, *U.S. AFRICOM*, "SEGOU, Mali - U.S. Ambassador to Mali Gillian Milovanovic and Malian Army Colonel Eloi Togo review the troops of the 6th Echelon Tactique Interarmes December 10, 2009, during the closing ceremony for a Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) exercise conducted near Segou. Taking part were members of the 10th Special Forces Group from Fort Carson, Colorado," http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/1767/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo.

ETIA 6 and ETIA 4, based in Nampala and Tombouctou, respectively. As with ETIA 1, the capability of ETIAs 6 and 4 also ranked much less than expected. Soldiers in these two ETIAs displayed an almost total lack of basic soldier skills. Some soldiers claimed never to have fired their weapon before the JCETs. Others could not disassemble their weapon. And still others were perplexed why their rifle would not fire when filled with sand! Furthermore, during initial rifle firing, the ODA observed some soldiers firing with their eyes closed! There were individual exceptions, but overall the poor skill level was, to some extent, shocking.

Echoing recommendations made by ODA 0126, the subsequent two ODAs also recommended lengthening the ETIA training events. In response to these findings and recommendations made during late 2009, JSOTF-TS worked to address the length of training events with the force provider. As 10th SFG(A) JCETs with Malian ETIAs continued through 2011, they became longer and more frequent. Nevertheless, a constant after action review (AAR) comment was that the capabilities of the respective ETIAs continued to remain poor despite participation in multiple JCETs.

Unfortunately, the stagnation of ETIA capabilities resulted from the episodic nature of U.S. training events, not from a lack of effort by SOF trainers. By the summer of 2011, each JCET lasted roughly three months and they were occurring back-to-back. Therefore, for most of 2010 and 2011 a SOF element was in Mali conducting training with an ETIA.[68] To the casual observer this may sound like it epitomized enduring engagement, as SOF forces were in-country for the majority of the year training with the ETIAs. However, this was not the case. For the most part, only one ETIA would receive training at a time due to various constraints. At times, more than one ETIA would conduct simultaneous training with more than one SOF element; this mainly occurred during the conduct of the JSOTF-TS sponsored regional exercise, Flintlock. With four ETIAs, an ETIA might go six to nine months (or more) without participating in a SOF JCET. During this period, ETIA personnel would rotate out of the ETIA, personnel

[68] Resume of an interpreter posted on the website traduguide.com, detailing his work history as a translator with the 10th SFG(A) in Mali, traduguide.com, http://www.traduguide.com/en/portrait.asp?g=47048&f=fr&s2=1&t=en&e=&all=1&pg=128&Screenname=Ogomoman&Slogan=.

would forget what skills they might have learned during prior training ("if you don't use it you lose it") and, all the while, Malian mechanisms to sustain and improve upon previous training remained nonexistent. Thus, when a previously trained ETIA engaged in follow-on training with U.S. SOF, the SOF trainers would find that it was not possible to build on previous training and that training would have to start with basic soldier tasks.

In this context, basic soldier tasks essentially amounted to the conduct of a basic training course, which involved such things as weapons safety, individual movement techniques, basic rifle marksmanship (to 100m), driver's training, crew-served weapons familiarization, and a plethora of other similar tasks. While some ETIA personnel would carry over from prior training events, their presence did not translate into any significant increase in unit capability or negate the necessity to start training from square one. Upon conclusion of a JCET training cycle, the ETIAs did demonstrate increased capability, but the increase was not much of an increase. Oftentimes, training never moved beyond squad or platoon battle drills and, even at that, not to a high skill level. Proficiency at performing any semblance of a coordinated assault on a fixed position was nonexistent. Thus, while the Mali JCETs provided SOF excellent training and extremely valuable operational experience (the primary purpose of the JCET), the inherent residual benefits to host nation forces was not yielding Malian units that could root out AQIM bases from northern Mali.

### 1. ETIAs Found Lacking

Based on the many factors that contributed to the Malian army's low levels of capability and capacity (as the feeder for ETIA personnel), episodic training did not and should not have been expected to create good units. Organized much like the French Army (at least on paper), any professional military officer could easily understand the Malian army's organizational chart. Platoons (*sections* in French) make up companies, companies make up regiments, and regiments make up district and regional commands. Aside from the physical differences between French and Malian soldiers, the most drastic difference was in their military culture—every military has one.

By January 2012 (and no doubt at some point before then), the Malian military culture was no longer in line with the organization's design, even though the design was still in place. Instead of military culture that valued honesty, discipline, self-sacrifice, decisive action, initiative, and duty to country (a culture Mali's military was designed to have), an opposite culture emerged that created an environment that did not support sound individual initiative or discipline—a culture overrun by apathy. Malian soldiers would generally act only when given a direct order by an immediate superior. For all intents and purposes, acting on commander's intent did not exist. For example, it is an implicit intent that company commanders ensure that their soldiers are mission ready. In the case of Malian infantry units, officers did not attempt to conduct daily training to ensure unit competence and readiness. This is not to say that the Malian military did not contain high quality or competent individuals, because it did, but a military organization is ultimately measured in a collective sense not on an individual basis.

A lack of resources is often cited as the *raison d'être* for low skill levels of militaries in poor countries, but the fact remains that not all training requires extensive expenditures. For instance, dismounted training is not costly—and at times, requires nothing more than maybe water. Even in a poor military, infantry units have the ability to conduct training on basic infantry tactics and maneuvers, especially following increased exposure during a JCET. Similarly, even in a resource constrained environment, initiative and discipline have the power to maintain unit efficiency at a higher level than doing nothing otherwise achieves. One example of non-existent initiative previously noted was Malian soldiers armed with rifles without stocks. It was common to see Malian soldiers conducting guard duty with rifles without stocks. In spite of this obvious deficiency, requisitions for new stocks or new rifles did not happen, nor were officers active in finding creative solutions to the problem. This culture of apathy pervaded every aspect of the Malian army in one way or another. Consequently, not even three-month-long blocks of training with the ETIAs were sufficient to address the wide array of factors required to transform ETIAs into capable counter AQIM-units.

Throughout the remainder of 2009 and into early 2010, various individuals in the U.S. military engaged the Malian Ministry of Defense to find an alternative to the

constant personnel turnover within the ETIAs. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation in the various regiments feeding into the ETIAs did not lend itself to preventing these continuous personnel rotations. By the summer of 2010, it was clear (to some) that conducting JCETs with the four ETIAs would not succeed in creating effective counter-AQIM forces; based on Malian and U.S. constraints, the ETIAs were incapable of ever being transformed into formations with the ability to unilaterally prevail against AQIM units. In spite of this fact, as 2011 dawned, JSOTF-TS continued allocating more resources (JCETs / equipment / exercises) due to the ETIAs' proximity to the enemy (AQIM)—a mindset that would continue up through the eventual jihadi onslaught in 2012.

However, recognition of the inherent weakness of the ETIA construct did ultimately lead to a new training effort that fit an enduring rather than episodic model.

# III. ENDURING ENGAGEMENT BEGINS

## A. JPAT AND THE 33RD RCP

Beginning in June 2010, a 10th SFG(A) ODA (minus) assigned to the recently codified enduring missions in Mali, the Special Operations Forces Liaison Element (SOFLE) and the Joint Planning Assistance Team (JPAT), began to seek alternatives to the ETIA JCET construct.[69] In terms of command and control, the JPAT worked for the SOFLE, while the SOFLE reported to JOSTF-TS. Based on previous training of an ETIA and understanding the capabilities an ETIA would require in order to remove AQIM from its bases in northern Mali, this SOF element began to assess how best to apply its resources for maximum effect. Initially, the SOF team was tasked by JSOTF-TS to conduct small, short duration, episodic training events with the four ETIAs in order to provide continuity between JCETs. As the element conducted its initial assessment (armed with prior operational experience in Mali) its leadership traveled throughout northern Mali and concluded that episodic JCETs with the ETIAs would not produce the capabilities needed to succeed against AQIM.[70]

With AQIM's bases in the rocky and rugged expanse of the Tigharghar Mountains, ETIAs would need to be able to conduct coordinated attacks on fortified positions using effective indirect fire, synchronized with mounted/dismounted fire and maneuver.[71] For the ETIAs to conduct such operations—unilaterally—they would need

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69 While personnel were previously assigned to serve as a Special Operations Forces Liaison Element (SOFLE) in Mali, beginning around March of 2011, codified SOFLE and Joint Planning Assistance Team (JPAT) missions were established in Mali and further assigned to 10th SFG(A). Max R. Blumenfeld, "Training in Trans-Sahara Africa," *U.S. AFRICOM*, December 13, 2010, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/7896/training-in-trans-sahara-africa. John Vandiver, "Small team of U.S. troops still in Mali, on 'stand-by'," *Stars and Stripes*, April 4, 2012, http://www.stripes.com/news/small-team-of-u-s-troops-still-in-mali-on-stand-by-1.173547.

70 The team was small in size and was restricted from staying at the remote ETIA bases as a result.

71 The Tigharghar Mountains are generally referenced by the Malians as the mountainous area north of Kidal, and south of Tessalit. The Tigharghar Mountains are contained within the greater, Adrar des Ifoghas (which is the name given to the mountainous area running from south of Kidal, north to the Algerian border).

to reach or come close to the proficiency of a Army rifle company.[72] Given the enduring nature of the JPAT's mission and the resulting potential for long-term training, which could produce results that episodic training could not, the JPAT began exploring opportunities for building an enduring relationship with a Malian unit.

Conceptually, the idea was to work with the Malian MOD to identify a force whose members would stay in the unit and would be available for training with the JPAT for most of the 52 weeks in a year, for a number of years. After a number of meetings with various individuals within the MOD (including the Chief of Defense) and drawing on the previously mentioned travel, these efforts resulted in a lash-up with the 33rd *Régiment des Commandos Parachutistes* (RCP), based in the Malian capital, Bamako.

The 33rd RCP proved to be an ideal organization from which to draw personnel for a new highly trained counter terrorist force, especially since the unit had a history of creating a special forces element in times of crisis. When certain situations arose that called for the highest quality soldier, the *Régiment* would gather the best officers and men from the *Régiment's* four companies and bring them together under an ad hoc organization called the *Détachement Forces Spéciales* (DFS). The DFS was a platoon-sized element of roughly 40 men. When their specific mission concluded, the personnel returned to their respective companies within the regiment. Furthermore, the *Régiment* already had a history of service in the north of the country; on a rotational basis, one company remained deployed in the Kidal Region.[73] Finally, when compared to other units in the Malian army, the 33rd RCP displayed an extremely high level of esprit de corps, along with higher levels of organization, training, and property accountability. This higher level of esprit is no doubt attributable to the fact that the 33rd RCP was and is the only airborne force in the Malian military.

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[72] Based on the U.S. Department of State's policy of containing AQIM, and therefore, the DoD's subsequent adoption of such a containment strategy to deal with AQIM; there was no apatite in U.S. State Department policy for the introduction of U.S. military personnel as combat advisors to the Malian military. Likewise, the Malian government was also not calling for the introduction of U.S. combat advisors to deal with AQIM.

[73] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, September 17), # 000608, *CODEL Marshall Meets With Malian President.*

Beyond the 33rd RCP's internal strengths, the expansionist goals of the 33rd RCP Regimental Commander, Colonel Ould Issa, coincided with likeminded goals expressed by officers within the MOD.[74] Specifically, these goals converged around the idea of developing a rapid reaction battalion based in the center of the country that would complement French efforts to build and develop the 62nd *Régiment d'Intervention Rapide* (RIR) based in Sévaré. Colonel Issa envisioned the creation of a second battalion under the 33rd RCP that would serve as an operational battalion, while the Bamako based companies would continue to run the airborne course and conduct duties related to providing security to the president. This synergy in thinking between the 33rd RCP and the MOD, presented the SOFLE with an opportunity to assist the MOD in creating an operational battalion in the 33rd RCP that could serve as a highly trained force capable of operations in the north. The SOFLE proposed to facilitate the training of the first company of this new 33rd RCP operational battalion through the JPAT.

Simultaneous with the discussions taking place at the 33rd RCP and at the MOD, the JPAT engaged in a multi-week training/assessment of the DFS. This assessment was intended to ascertain the viability of using the DFS as a base for beginning to build a company-sized force called the *Company Forces Spéciales* (CFS)—which would eventually become the core of the new 33rd RCP operational battalion and the MOD's new battalion sized reaction force in the north. As discussions with the Malians continued, the SOFLE / JPAT submitted their concept of JPAT employment to the JSOTF-TS J3 for approval. With approval to proceed granted, the SOFLE again met with the Malian Chief of Defense, General Gabriel Poudiougou, to gain final approval for the JPAT to begin training the CFS. An important point to emphasize is that the concept of forming a specialized unit, already existed, to some degree, and resonated with the right key Malian leaders.

In July 2010, following an assessment period and with approvals from various levels in place, all parties (the SOFLE/JPAT, the 33rd RCP Commander, the Malian Chief of Defense, the Malian G3, the U.S. Ambassador, and JSOTF-TS J3) agreed that the DFS

[74] Specifically within the Malian G3 section at the MOD.

personnel would serve as the core building block for the new CFS. The JPAT thus embarked on an enduring relationship with a charter to grow and develop the CFS as Mali's first special forces unit. Over the course of several meetings involving the SOFLE, the JPAT, and Malian key leadership, a consensus developed that the CFS would adopt an organizational template similar to that of a U.S. Army Ranger Company. Under this rubric, a 152 man ground element would be supported by two mobility platoons (with a combined strength of 89 men and 46 4x4 trucks); this arrangement would allow the 152-man ground force to operate entirely dismounted if necessary. Under the CFS task organization, all drivers and vehicle gunners resided in the mobility platoons so vehicle manning requirements would not dilute the combat power of the ground element [also included in one of the mobility platoons was an 11 vehicle logistics and maintenance support cell].[75] While the task organization of the ground force was slightly different from that of a standard Malian infantry company it was not a radical departure. The amount of mobility and firepower intended for the unit and their planned level of capabilities did, however, represent a departure from standard Malian organizational practice.

An above average number of vehicles allowed for greater distribution of combat power and enabled the carrying of a significant amount of supplies—allowing the unit to operate deep in the desert for protracted periods. The CFS design further reflected the realities of previous Malian military engagements with AQIM and the nature of the threat environment in northern Mali; the environment required proficiency in classic maneuver warfare of a protracted nature. When JPAT training with the DFS began, "Afghan good enough" was considered unacceptable. Despite the fact that the DFS was entirely deficient in every category, from personnel staffing to minimum material requirements, it was still determined that the bedrock of the CFS would rest on the standards of a U.S. Army Rifle company, inclusive of all specialty skills and then some. The SOFLE / JPAT projected that given the realities of the Malian military culture, this transformation would take five years, but that if the CFS reached full operational capability according to U.S.

[75] Author's wire diagram of the CFS's organizational template (as agreed to with the Malians).

Army standards, then it would be a truly viable special forces unit and would stand out as an example to other African countries.

A major driving force behind the decision to use the DFS rather than an existing company within the 33rd RCP, was the need to conduct training with individuals unhindered by competing responsibilities. While there were four companies in the 33rd RCP (the 331, 332, 333, and 334), these companies were allotted against a repetitive and rotating tasking schedule, broken down into four six month blocks. Two blocks consisted of presidential security duties (static guard posts), one block was duty in the Kidal region, and one block was a down cycle. This meant that even if one company conducted training for six months with U.S. SOF, it would not be available for training for another year and a half, during which time whatever skill level had been achieved, would quickly atrophy.[76] Also considering training that was needed to reach proficiency goals for the force, six months was insufficient. Furthermore, the four companies suffered from manning problems, effectively relegating their strength to that of a company minus. These manning issues meant that an entire company could not exit the rotation cycle without causing serious disruptions to the status quo. Therefore, any endeavor to build the desired capabilities under these conditions amounted to a never-ending cycle of episodic training, similar in nature to the ETIA construct—something the SOFLE / JPAT had no desire to replicate.

Using the DFS as the building block also served to spread the initial 'tax' of personnel throughout the 33rd RCP. New Malian privates fresh out of initial entry training were also folded in. When new groups of privates arrived at the 33rd RCP, the Regimental Commander allocated a certain number to the CFS. Following a selection process, some of these were then selected for further CFS training. Under this growth model, experienced Malian NCOs of DFS lineage would train new CFS soldiers with the assistance of the JPAT.

[76] Presidential security and the deployment to the Kidal region were dominated by the practice of staffing static security positions or guard posts.

## B. PRIOR EPISODIC TRAINING

During the initial DFS assessment period, the JPAT was struck by their low level of proficiency in the conduct of basic infantry tasks. Considering the 33rd RCP's location in the capital, the unit and the DFS in particular, was by far the best "trained" unit in the Malian army. These soldiers were the recipients of numerous U.S. and French training events since 2001. In May 2009, members of the 33rd RCP (DFS personnel included) conducted training with elements from the 3rd Special Forces Group, and then again with U.S. Navy SEALs in August. Following the training by U.S. Navy SEALs, in a cable sent September 17, 2009, the U.S. Ambassador said that, "the recently completed Navy SEALS training of the 33rd paratroop brigade was largely successful. The SEAL commander had reported that the Malian troops performed eagerly and professionally and would be an ideal force to work with the ETIAs in the fight against AQIM. They appeared to be well prepared for airborne operations but also performed very well on ground maneuvers."[77] Members of the DFS conducted further training with U.S. Navy SEALS in November 2009 and then again in February 2010.[78]

By November 2009, the amount of U.S. training conducted with the 33rd RCP prompted LTC Louis Sombora, deputy commander of the 33rd RCP, to state that, "more than 95 percent of his soldiers have received U.S. military training."[79] What LTC Sombora did not clarify is that all that training was episodic in nature.

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[77] U.S. Department of State Cable, U.S. Embassy Bamako, (2009, September 17), # 000608, *CODEL Marshall Meets With Malian President.* The cable states that the soldiers performed well on ground maneuvers, but does not qualify what that means. It is most likely that "performing well" still earns a low rating when compared to a like U.S. element.

[78] U.S. AFRICOM Photo, *U.S. AFRICOM*, "GAO, Mali - A U.S. Navy SEAL advisor watches a Malian special operations vehicle unit run through immediate action drills for counter-terrorism missions during training February 26, 2010, near Gao, Mali," http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/1959/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo.

[79] Paula Kurtz, "Air Forces Africa Conducts Senior Leader Engagement to Mali, Senegal," *U.S. AFRICOM,* November 5, 2009, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/6991/air-forces-africa-conducts-senior-leader-engagemen.

In May 2010, the DFS in conjunction with an ODA participated in exercise Flintlock 2010.[80] Even with all the previous SOF training, the DFS rated poorly in areas from close quarters battle to weapons safety and handling.[81] Following on the heels of the Flintlock training, the JPAT's assessment of the DFS, found its conduct of even the most basic tasks to be severely deficient. However, the JPAT considered the men of the DFS themselves, excellent candidates for further training; the men were highly motivated and willing to learn.

Based on findings from the initial June 2010 JPAT assessment, it was determined that training for the CFS must begin at square one, with soldier common tasks. While members of the DFS had participated in numerous prior training events with U.S. SOF, what they revealed and what their performance indicated is that most of their prior training consisted of a higher percentage of advanced skills, such as CQB and close range snap shooting designed for CQB, rather than skills more suited to fighting in northern Mali.[82] For instance, the DFS soldiers did not know how to zero their AK rifles, claimed to have never seen the AK zeroing tool, and still based their shooting on Kentucky windage—serious issues considering the long engagement ranges in the northern desert. It was immediately obvious that the DFS was incapable of effectively operating as a cohesive and effective dismounted infantry platoon, much less as a peer adversary to AQIM.[83] As a result, training began with a focus on soldier common tasks such as first aid, map reading, compass use, land navigation, weapons zeroing, etc.

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[80] U.S. AFRICOM Photo, *U.S. AFRICOM*, "BAMAKO, Mali - Malian soldiers learn fast-rope drills with U.S. Special Operations Forces trainers during a military training engagement May 11, 2010 in Bamako, Mali as part of Exercise Flintlock 10," http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/2218/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo U.S. AFRICOM Photo, *U.S. AFRICOM*, "BAMAKO, Mali - Malian soldiers conduct close-quarter battle drills with U.S. Special Operations Forces trainers during a military training engagement May 5, 2010 in Bamako, Mali as part of Exercise Flintlock 10," http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/2219/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo.

[81] Report viewed by the author in the presence of a Malian staff officer.

[82] U.S. AFRICOM Photo, *U.S. AFRICOM*, "BAMAKO, Mali - Malian soldiers conduct close-quarter battle drills with U.S. Special Operations Forces trainers during a military training engagement May 5, 2010 in Bamako, Mali as part of Exercise Flintlock 10," http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Photo/2219/U.S.-AFRICOM-Photo.

[83] Author's conversations with those conducting the assessment.

One of the fundamental advantages to the enduring training model is that it affords the ability to build a solid base of soldier skills through repetition before individuals move on to the next task; training proceeds to standard rather than time—essentially there is no pre-determined end to the training in the short term. If it takes a month for the trainees to master compass reading and terrain association, then that is how long training on that subject lasts. As the JPAT focused on building a solid base of skills with the initial CFS cadre, they also confronted the logistical challenges associated with the Malian system, where daily training was not standard. Consequently, beyond just building the unit's tactical capabilities, the JPAT was also involved in stimulating Malian staff actions and processes required to support daily CFS training.

As JPAT training with the CFS progressed to dismounted squad training, the JPAT began utilizing a three-part training methodology. This three-part methodology revolved around the three basic rank groups of the CFS cadre: lower enlisted, NCOs, and officers. In addition to collective blocks of instruction, separate blocks of instruction were provided to the three groups. Before each day's training concluded the officers and NCOs would conduct training on the following day's subject. The NCOs and officers would then be responsible for executing the next day's training, with the JPAT providing oversight. As training progressed in this fashion, and the NCOs and officers gained confidence, NCOs and officers would be "killed" off during training iterations and the corresponding lower ranks were required to fill in the leadership voids. This process of instruction aimed to develop leaders, promote and create a culture of individual initiative, and develop young soldiers for future leadership roles. The process also sought to develop the senior NCOs as trainers who could provide quality instruction to the 33rd RCP or other Malian army units.[84] Derived from identified shortcomings in the ETIAs and the 33rd RCP, this method required long-term application and it continued throughout the 1st JPAT rotation with the CFS.[85]

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[84] By the summer of 2011, the senior NCOs in the CFS were conducting training for other elements of the Malian army. In the summer of 2011, this author witnessed these NCOs providing training (even using interpreters) to members of the Malian army in Kidal; remarkably similar to U.S. SOF.

[85] Author's participation in the 1st JPAT rotation to conduct enduring engagement in Mali (roughly June—October 2010).

Throughout the remainder of 2010 and into 2011, SOF teams deployed on successive JPAT rotations (none shorter than six months). They continued to build the capability and capacity of the CFS core cadre while simultaneously running selection courses to integrate new members into the unit. As training continued to proceed, the NCOs and officers of the CFS began to take on an ever-increasing role in facilitating the training. Furthermore, leadership and a culture of individual and collective initiative continued to grow. By February 2011, a number of the more senior NCOs were demonstrating a level of competence recognizable to U.S. Army NCOs—a significant accomplishment considering the prior state of affairs. With a core of increasingly competent NCOs and officers, a platoon of the CFS partnered with Canadian SOF and a small JPAT cell in Senegal for the conduct of exercise Flintlock 2011 (February 21–March 11).[86]

During Flintlock 2010, the Malian contingent (including the DFS) performed at the bottom of the regional pack based on JSOTF-TS observations during the various tactical exercises. However, in Thies Senegal, for Flintlock 2011, the Malian CFS soldiers were recognized as top performers (if not the top performers).[87] The excellent performance of the CFS in Senegal speaks to the effectiveness of the enduring SOF engagement model executed by the Mali JPAT, especially since these were the same (former DFS) soldiers who performed poorly just one year prior; then, the product of years of episodic engagements

Following the conclusion of Flintlock 2011 and the redeployment of the CFS platoon to Bamako, JPAT trainers continued to work with the CFS to enhance their

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[86] Bryan Purtell, "Flintlock 11 Kicks Off February 21 in Senegal/Media Opportunities," *U.S. AFRICOM*, February 3, 2011, http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/7979/flintlock-11-kicks-off-february-21-in-senegal-medi Exercise Flintlock (conducted by Special Operations Command Africa) "is a joint multinational exercise to improve information sharing at the operational and tactical levels across the Saharan region while fostering increased collaboration and coordination."

David Pugliese, "Canadian Special Forces mentor Mali's Military," *National Post*, March 12, 2011, http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/12/03/canadian-special-forces-mentor-malis-military/.

David Pugliese, "Canadian-trained soldiers behind failed coup in Mali tortured and killed by regime forces," *Ottawa Citizen*, January 25, 2013, http://www.ottawacitizen.com/news/Canadian+trained+soldiers+behind+failed+coup+Mali+tortured+killed+regime+forces/7875176/story.html.

[87] Author's conversation with the JSOTF-TS Command Sergeants Major following the exercise.

repertoire of skills and build new ones. In the summer of 2011, with a high degree of proficiency in the conduct of basic tasks and dismounted operations achieved, joint training began between the CFS and the Malian air force. During this period, the Malian air force maintained a fleet of four Bulgarian-sourced Mi-24 (HIND) attack helicopters and a number of light two-seater Tetra reconnaissance aircraft provided as part of a French train and equip program.[88] A unique feature of the Mi-24 is its ability to act as a troop carrier, with the capacity to move eight troops. This allowed the CFS and the Malian air force to practice moving small elements or casualties by air, something also practiced using the small, Tetra aircraft.

Throughout the remainder of 2011, the CFS continued to conduct training to integrate air assets into ground maneuvers while also refining the Malians' ability to conduct mission planning for such operations. Joint air and ground training facilitated by the JPAT also complimented and enhanced the work of French *coopérants* to develop the Malian air force through the Tetra reconnaissance program.[89] During this same period, the CFS also conducted a training deployment to the northern city of Kidal, where they executed a combined arms demonstration in conjunction with the Malian air force, for the Malian Chief of Defense and other Malian general officers. Inclusive to the demonstration was the use of blank small-arms ammunition and live aircraft-delivered ordnance. The 1500-kilometer-long, one-way movement provided CFS leaders with valuable experience in the logistical aspects of moving over long distances followed by operations of short duration. Furthermore, this demonstration was instrumental in

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[88] The Tetra is a small single engine propeller driven aircraft. "Pathfinders 'get the goods'" http://www.dvidshub.net/image/529259/pathfinders-get-goods#.UmrTYdzn8dU.

"L'armée de l'Air malienne : un Mirage," Août 5, 2012, http://maliactu.net/larmee-de-lair-malienne-un-mirage/.

The French provided similar Tetra aircraft to Burkina Faso in October 2012. "Burkina Faso," *Defenseweb*, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29375:burkina-faso&catid=119:african-militaries&Itemid=255.

[89] French LTC Lionel Damestoy Conseil Air & Chef de project Reconnaissance Air Malian Air Force Juillet 2010—Juillet 2013 (3 ans 1 mois), *linkedin.com*, http://www.linkedin.com/pub/lionel-damestoy/55/a61/a77. For more information on the French *coopérant* concept, see the article: "Perspectives: A French idea worth stealing," by Jean-Philippe Peltier, (December 1, 2011).

"Cérémonie au ministère malien de la Défense (13 juin 2013)," *ambafrance-ml.org*, http://www.ambafrance-ml.org/Ceremonie-au-ministere-malien-de.

graphically showcasing CFS capabilities to the Malian General Staff and increasing awareness of their existence.[90]

## C. EQUIPAGE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

Following the short deployment to Kidal, equipment ordered for the CFS by the JPAT in September 2010, arrived in Mali. During the initial JPAT assessment of the DFS (June 2010), it had been determined that the DFS, and its parent unit (the 33rd RCP), lacked the equipment necessary to properly equip the CFS. The shortage of basic equipment was so bad in the 33rd RCP that all available individual equipment was classified as unit property and stored for issue when needed; even this equipment exhibited frays, tears, and heavy soiling from years of use. As a further example, the unit did not possess enough magazines to provide even one magazine for every AK rifle; nor could it provide more than sixty magazine pouches for the *Régiment* as a whole.[91] To meet this severe shortage, SOF leadership in Mali (in the summer of 2010) developed a comprehensive list of equipment that corresponded with the CFS table of organization and was designed to note everything from vehicles to rifle slings—some items on the list were even field tested to confirm their acceptability.[92] The SOFLE submitted the list to JSOTF-TS in late fiscal year 2010; it was approved, put out for bid, and subsequently resulted in the award of a contract prior to the end of October 2010. In terms of responsiveness, the *33rd Augmentation and OCIE* case, was particularly fast, in part

[90] During the Kidal capability demonstration a number of non-CFS, 33rd RPC, soldiers were attached to the CFS element during the demonstration. These non-CFS soldiers had recently participated in a separate JCET event with U.S. SOF. To the complete dismay of U.S. personnel present, these non-CFS soldiers demonstrated their low level of proficiency when one of their numbers began firing his rifle sideways in front of the reviewing VIPs. The actions of the non-CFS personnel clearly stood apart from the seasoned veterans of the JPAT trained CFS.

[91] Author's viewing of 33rd RCP weapons and material storage locations (2010 and 2011).

[92] This list also covered the necessary training ammunition to conduct training an all organic weapons over a number of years. Field testing of equipment involved JPAT personnel buying pieces of equipment out of their own pocket; the equipment was then issued out for training in order to ascertain suitability for inclusion in the equipment case.

thanks to its sourced funding through the peacekeeping operations (PKO) funding stream.[93]

It was the SOFLE / JPAT's intent that the CFS equipment case would provide all the equipment and supplies necessary to bring the CFS to full operational capability. Even though the material and equipment was not expected to arrive in Mali for at least a year or more, the quantities requested reflected the future size of the CFS and the long term vision for the JPAT association with the CFS. Unfortunately, unknown actors, without consulting the Mali SOFLE or JPAT, diluted the intent and scope of the case, and reduced or deleted items from the case in a fashion that defied common sense. A prime example was the inclusion of blank ammunition but the deletion of the blank adapters from the case; without AK blank adapters (which the Malians did not have) the gas-operated AK rifle will not cycle blank ammunition.[94] Another item deleted was the non-disintegrating link sections for the PKM machine gun, even though half of the U.S. style ammunition cans remained in the case; 7.62x54R caliber ammunition for the PKM does not come linked like U.S. machine gun ammunition. The combination of the links and the cans was intended to provide the CFS a large amount of pre-linked ammunition (stored in sealable U.S. cans) for use during operations. ETIA personnel had explained previously that once they fired their small amount of pre-linked ammunition, the ETIA would have to pull back to link up new ammunition before continuing the fight. With large amounts of serviceable pre-linked ammunition, the CFS could aggressively fire and maneuver on AQIM positions.

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[93] The PKO funding account is derived from the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act (Title IV, International Security Assistance). The Department of State controls the funds and the DoD implements. The speed of PKO funding results from direct contracting for the required supplies, on the open market, rather than obtaining the items through the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA)—which is the agency responsible for administering the DoD Section 1206 train and equip program (among others). The DSCA has been criticized for slow (two or more years) and poor performance in fulfilling their portfolio of programs. Incidentally, in this Author's discussions with foreign military officers, they second the long wait times on Section 1206 equipment. Nina Serafino, "Security Assistance Reform: Section 1206," *Congressional Research Service*, April 19, 2013. Curt Tarnoff and Alex Tiersky, "State, Foreign Operations Appropriations: A Guide to Component Accounts," *Congressional Research Service*, August 1, 2013. In U.S. security cooperation speak, a *case* is the term given to a package of items and services provided to a partner nation for a specific purpose—as specified in the *case*.

[94] As a stopgap measure out of necessity and using personal finances, a small number of blank adapters were procured on the civilian market to meet mission requirements.

In the personnel protection category, body armor for the unit was cut to fifty pieces—barley enough for a third of the ground element. Examples such as these occurred with other equipment as well. By the time the equipment began to arrive in the summer of 2011, the CFS already fielded over 50 men and was therefore under equipped, despite the best intentions of the SOFLE / JPAT.[95]

In addition to nonsensical reductions and deletions of material originally submitted, problems also developed in the type of items actually received. When the equipment arrived in Mali, some items matched what was originally requested, while other items did not. Items that did not correspond to those in the original request were invariably cheaper versions of substandard quality—which this author found unfit for personal combat service much less issuance to the CFS. Just to cite one example, a substitute rifle sling arrived, which was of such poor construction and design that it appeared to have been cobbled together by a five-year-old and of course did not function as required. While top of the line items are not always necessary and lower cost substitutes will suffice at times, some items cannot be replaced given the need to meet an identified requirement. While many of the items that arrived in the case matched what was requested, other important items did not, were of substandard quality, and required reordering.[96]

Compounding the two issues already discussed, a further problem developed around the desire to issue equipment ordered and received for the CFS to the ETIAs. The equipment case covering the CFS is generally referred to as the *33rd Augmentation and OCIE* case in AFRICOM documentation. Language in the case stated that, "funding will provide Mali a fully trained and equipped CT finishing force of approximately 150 personnel [the CFS]… The CT finishing force in Mali will have the mobility, communications, personal and unit equipment required to prosecute CT operations both within their borders and with other regional forces." Also, written into the case language

[95] Author thoroughly involved in case development and approval; author was also present to view inventory of equipment received in Mali.

[96] Another key deficiency was in the AK magazines provided. A steel magazine was requested but instead, a civilian aftermarket magazine was provided. The aftermarket U.S. made civilian version did not meet the specifications and should be considered unfit for combat use due to reliability problems.

was the provision of OCIE items for the ETIA B teams[97], hence the OCIE language seen in the case title.[98] While the JPAT-generated list of equipment and material corresponded to the language and intent of the case, a reduction in items and quantities undercut the intent before the equipment arrived; the intent was further undermined when JSOTF-TS sought to shift CFS equipment to the ETIAs.

U.S. SOF personnel with significant experience in Mali were strongly opposed to redirecting the equipment. JSOTF-TS's rationale was that the ETIAs were located near the enemy and were engaged in the "fight" whereas the CFS was not. Using this reasoning, JSOTF-TS decided to shift most of the vehicles, many AK magazines, and a number of other items to the ETIAs.[99] Both the U.S. office of security cooperation (OSC) chief and the SOFLE fought to preserve the majority of CFS equipment for the CFS. Their efforts succeeded in preserving 25 of the new Toyota Land Cruisers for the CFS, while the other half of the shipment continued on to the ETIAs (originally, the JSOTF-TS plan was to give the CFS fewer than 12 Land Cruisers).[100] Considering the distances involved in Mali, the SOFLE's efforts to retain the CFS vehicles proved vital to future operations against AQIM—while a number of the reallocated vehicles ended up in the hands of the enemy.

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[97] ETIA B teams were a conceptual idea designed to provide two sets of individuals against each ETIA. This way, every six months, group A and B would rotate manning the ETIAs, instead of forming an ad hoc compilation of ETIA personnel every six months. The MOD agreed to the concept in principle, but the units in the north did not have the personnel to execute this concept, therefore it was never instituted in practice.

[98] Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans Sahara (OEF-TS) Culture of Maintenance and Logistics Course, September 2011 (Power Point Presentation) https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCkQFjAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fcommunity.apan.org%2Fcfs-file.ashx%2F__key%2Ftelligent-evolution-components-attachments%2F13–6201–00–00–00–08–33–29%2FAFRICOM-OEF_2D00_TS-Brief.pptx&ei=X-5qUoKINuHniAL3uoGYCA&usg= AFQjCNG7 HhrHwTR4Vofs9UxkyN3j886Hpg&bvm=bv.55123115,d.cGE.

[99] Interview with U.S. SOF personnel.

[100] Interview with U.S. SOF personnel.

## D. THE CFS DEPLOYS FOR COMBAT

### 1. Background

In yet another of life's unintended consequences, the Libyan uprising against Muammar Gaddafi and its subsequent success, in no small measure assured by NATO intervention, ignited a chain reaction that would destabilize Mali's restive north and unleash al-Qaeda from its remote desert hideouts. As the tables began to turn on Gaddafi's forces in April 2011, AQIM and various Tuareg factions began organizing weapons transfers from the massive and newly looted Libyan stockpiles to cache sites in northern Mali. Along with arms and munitions, people soon began to migrate out of the Libyan conflict zone. Following Gaddafi's fall in the summer of 2011, thousands of Tuareg fighters of Malian origin who had previously fought in or for the Libyan regime began returning to Mali, likewise encumbered by stocks of looted weapons.[101]

While the Malian government was aware of the returnees and weapons, no viable effort was made to prevent the arms from entering Mali; however, joint Malian military and political delegations were active in meeting with returnee key leaders by mid-August 2011.[102] As the returnees re-entered the Malian political and social landscape they merged with local Tuareg separatists to form the *Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA) in October of 2011.[103] In addition to those rallying around the banner of the MNLA, other factions coalesced along jihadi / Salafi ideological lines. In addition to the long established elements of AQIM operating in northern Mali, new

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[101] Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, Bruce Whitehouse, Dida Badi, Lotte Pelckmans, Nadia Belalimat, Bruce Hall, Wolfram Lacher, *One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts: A multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali Extended Editors Cut*, p. 3. http://www.hum.leiden.edu/history/news-events/mali-crisis.html.

[102] Author's first-hand information.

[103] Baz Lecocq, *One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts*. Azawad is the name given to northern Mali by Tuareg separatists. Historically and physically the Azawad is the wide valley formed by two large wadis (the Azawad and the Azawagh) located between the Adagh and Air mountains. Therefore, the name is somewhat of an artificial development when used to refer to a Tuareg state in northern Mali and dates to the Tuareg separatists of the mid-1970s. Baz Lecocq, *Disputed Desert* (Boston: Brill, 2010), p. 276.

groups arose in November and December 2011, such as the *Mouvement pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO), and Ansar Dine—led by Iyad ag Aghali.[104]

As the Tuareg separatist movement gathered renewed strength in late 2011 as an outgrowth of the Libyan conflict, the various jihadi / Salafi movements saw an opportunity in the form of an alliance with the MNLA—albeit for competing goals under the overarching principal of seizing the territory of northern Mali.[105] In an attempt to promote its legitimacy, the MNLA dominated the media space, while the jihadi organizations remained content to refrain from attracting publicity. As tensions in the north increased, senior Malian military officers, such as Colonel El Hadj Ag Gamou and the Region 1 military commander, met (December 18–20) with different Tuareg factions regarding the prospects for their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR).[106] These attempted negotiations did not bode well for the future. That same month, the Malian military forward positioned some of their aerial reconnaissance assets to the military airfield at Gao. With the New Year, preparations of the various armed groups to seize northern Mali ultimately culminated on January 16, 2012, with the attack on the northeastern city of Menaka, opening declared hostilities.[107]

### 2. CFS Prepares

As the situation in the north developed, the SOFLE / JPAT continued working with the 33rd RCP, the MOD, and others to grow, train, and develop the CFS. From November 1–10, 2011, the JPAT facilitated a CFS training deployment to Tombouctou, a

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[104] While the group names were new, some of the key individuals involved in both groups were long time member of AQIM—casting doubt on the notion that the new groups can be considered "new." One individual, Oumar Ould Hamaha, who kidnapped Canadian diplomat Robert Fowler as a member of Mokhtar Belmokhtar's AQIM *katiba*, became active in both Ansar Dine and MUJAO. November 7, 2013 presentation by Robert Fowler at the Naval Postgraduate School.

[105] Baz Lecocq, *One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts.*

[106] Author's interview with U.S. SOF personnel.

[107] Scott Stewart, "Mali Besieged by Fighters Fleeing Libya," STRATFOR, February 2, 2012 http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/mali-besieged-fighters-fleeing libya?0=ip_login_no_cache%3De637bedbba 5653924fa5861bc015c63f While the assault on Meneka is considered the opening attack on Mali, smaller shaping attacks on remote outposts did occur previously, but the attacks were not openly publicized. In November 2011 the *le Programme Spécial pour la Paix, la Sécurité et le Développement au Nord Mali* (PSPSDN) infrastructure at Abeïbara was attacked and from 8–16 January 2012, the Malian Army was also forced to conduct an operation to relieve the military garrison at Tin Zaouatene. (Authors interview with U.S. SOF personnel).

one-way distance of just under 600 miles. Employing the recently arrived vehicles from the initial CFS equipment case, the combined training event proved immensely valuable to both new and senior members of the CFS. Given the unit's habitual location in Bamako, many of the soldiers were unfamiliar with the desert environment and were apprehensive. Upon reaching Tombouctou, the unit set out into the desert and began conducting various training iterations covering everything from dismounted maneuvers, drivers training, patrol base operations, and live fire full mission rehearsals. The desert sands surrounding Tombouctou added a new dimension to the training, not replicable in the south of the country. The long-range movement also provided an opportunity for the JPAT to help develop the capability of the 33rd RCP headquarters to conduct effective battle tracking of its subordinate unit. As part of the exercise, the JPAT helped establish a small operations room within the 33rd RCP headquarters that could monitor and receive reporting from the CFS. This link helped to build further CFS confidence in their ability to reach back for support when required. Exercising their functionality as a link building mechanism within the Malian military, the JPAT also helped to facilitate coordination between the *Direction de la Sécurité Militaire* (DSM) and the 33rd RCP headquarters, thereby creating an embryonic link between operational units and the intelligence apparatus.[108] In addition to internal benefits, the training event further demonstrated to the MOD the expeditionary capability of the Bamako-based CFS.

Against the backdrop of a deteriorating situation, on December 20, 2011, the Malian MOD finally recognized the CFS as an official unit within the Malian army with the official designation as the 335th CFS. Until this point, the members of the CFS remained assigned on paper to the other companies of the 33rd RCP. The lack of official designation as a unit had caused some consternation at JSOTF-TS in the past, and even led some to want to end the training relationship with the CFS in favor of switching to a different unit—an idea not shared by the Mali SOFLE / JPAT, who assessed that the CFS's designation would eventually come but was just slowed by the bureaucratic process.

[108] Interview with JPAT operator from this period. The DSM is the Malian's military intelligence organization.

Shortly following their designation as an official unit, the 335th CFS and the 333rd *Company Commandos Parachutistes* (CCP) received orders to prepare for deployment to Gao. The 333rd CCP recently participated in training with Canadian Special Operations Forces.[109] In support of this assignment, the JPAT helped to facilitate pre-deployment activities. For the CFS, this meant outfitting a portion of the unit with their recently received reflex rifle sights and other specialized U.S.-provided equipment [in quantities of 50, even though the original request was for 150].[110] The JPAT also conducted improvised crew drills and instruction on Malian-provided SPG-9 recoilless rifles. The SPG-9s came new in the crate and thankfully included English instruction manuals as that particular weapon is not included in the 18B (Special Forces weapons sergeant) repertoire.[111] Following pre-deployment preparations, the combined 33rd RCP Task Force (as it was now called), led by the CFS, conducted a ground movement from Bamako to Gao over 3–7 January.

### 3. CFS Operations in the North

Not long after their arrival in Gao, the CFS found themselves conducting combat operations, precipitated by the seizure of Menaka by enemy forces on January 17. The Malian operational headquarters in Gao directed the 33rd RCP Task Force to recapture and hold the city of Menaka. Over a two day period (January 19–20), the 33rd RCP Task Force did just that.

With the CFS in the lead and the 333rd in support, the Task Force was ambushed as it moved between Ansongo and toward Meneka. Reacting as trained, the CFS immediately maneuvered, dismounted the SPG-9s, and unleashed a furious barrage of

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[109] "Mali to receive Canadian special forces to fight al Qaeda," *DefenceWeb*, 06 December 2011, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21855:mali-to-receive-canadian-special-forces-to-fight-al-qaeda&catid=56:diplomacy-a-peace&Itemid=111.

David Pugliese, "Soldiers Trained by Canadian Special Forces Hunted, Tortured in Mali After Failed Coup," *National Post*, January 27, 2013, http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/01/27/soldiers-trained-by-canadian-special-forces-hunted-tortured-in-mali-after-failed-counter-coup/. The CSOR trained soldiers belonged to the 333th Company of the 33rd RCP (Author's interview).

[110] Author's comparison of what was ordered for the CFS and what actually ended up on contract and arrived in Mali.

[111] Author's interview with SOF personnel involved in this training.

fire. Under the combined firepower of the counterattacking RCP Task Force, the ambushing force broke off the engagement and fled, allowing the task force to continue toward Menaka.

The Task Force gained control of the town and attacked enemy elements located on the periphery of town with the assistance of the Malian air force. As a byproduct of enduring engagement and numerous JPAT-enabled exercises with the Malian air force, the CFS was the sole Malian force proficient in air / ground operations utilizing the Tetra reconnaissance aircraft and Mi-24 helicopter gunships. The CFS worked closely with Malian reconnaissance and attack aircraft, aggressively attacking enemy forces outside of Meneka, ultimately forcing the rebels to retreat due to losses and the constant pressure. The 33rd RCP Task Force continued to hold the town of Menaka until February 3, when it ran low on supplies following the failure of the operational headquarters in Gao to meet repeated requests for resupply.[112] With supplies running low and no prospect for resupply, the 33rd RCP Task Force returned to Gao and hostile elements retook Menaka without opposition.

Upon returning to Gao, the CFS and the 333rd began to refit in preparation for follow-on operations. Following the fall of the Tin Zaouatene garrison on February 7, the Tessalit garrison was surrounded and subsequently cut off the following day. In an attempt to resupply the Tessalit garrison, the 33rd RCP Task Force under the command of Colonel-Major El Hadj Ag Gamou, with his militia, sortied from Gao in an unsuccessful attempt to reach Tessalit. On February 25, the same force set out on a nontraditional route to Tessalit designed to avoid ambush locations and explosive devices planted on the main road. As the column neared Tessalit, after maneuvering through the desert, combat ensued and both sides hotly engaged one another. By the time the fighting died down, the Ansar Dine elements were forced from the field and the Malian force retained control of the ground.

In order to evacuate the Malian wounded, the CFS set up a makeshift Tetra landing zone and coordinated with the Malian air force for their evacuation; in this

[112] Author's interview with SOF personnel who were in contact with CFS personnel during this period.

manner, all Malian wounded requiring further treatment were successfully evacuated to higher levels of care. With the enemy driven from the immediate area, and Colonel-Major El Hadj Ag Gamou contemplating the final push into Tessalit, Ag Gamou received information that a large enemy force was threatening his position. Unable to verify the veracity of this information, the combined force moved to a more advantageous position north of Tessalit. After maneuvering and fighting for a number of days, the combined force found itself low on water, ammunition, and food.[113]

In a repeat of the Meneka experience, the Gao operational headquarters, again, could not respond to repeated requests for resupply. Logistically unable to resume active operations and reluctant to stay stranded in the desert, the CFS appealed directly to the 33rd RCP headquarters in Bamako for assistance. Leveraging previous training and relationships, the 33rd RCP in conjunction with the JPAT, worked with the Malian air force to ready air delivery bundles for air drop to Colonel-Major El Hadj Ag Gamou's force using the lone cargo plane (BT-67) of the Malian air force.[114] With guidance from CFS on the ground, the BT-67 crew successfully delivered the air resupply bundles. The joint force now had enough supplies to return south: Unfortunately, without additional parachutes for a follow-on resupply drop, Ag Gamou's force could not logistically risk another round of intense combat around Tessalit.

Even though the overall mission to relieve the isolated Tessalit garrison (February 25–March 6) proved unsuccessful, the CFS again proved their competence to conduct aggressive action to seize enemy-held terrain, work in conjunction with other friendly elements, and integrate air assets in support of ground operations.

Despite a resupply drop from a U.S. Air Force C-130, the Tessalit garrison fell to Ansar Dine on March 12 and on March 22 junior Malian Army officers based in Kati (a

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[113] Author's interview with SOF personnel who were in contact with CFS personnel during this period.

[114] In November 2011, a select group of personnel from the 33rd RCP participated in a pathfinder training course conducted in the United States by 19th SFG(A). Upon completion of the course, the JPAT ensured that the skills learned in the U.S. were incorporated into the CFS. This serves as a perfect example of how episodic training should support the enduring engagement. Allison D. Hill, " Malian Defense soldiers learn logistics with U.S. Army Special Forces," *U.S. Army Africa*, December 05, 2011, http://www.usaraf.army.mil/NEWS/NEWS_20111205_PATHFINDER.html.

military garrison on the outskirts of Bamako) overthrew the elected government of Mali in a coup d'état—thus ending U.S. military cooperation with the Malian military.[115]

As an aside, and as a testament to the professionalism of the CFS, one of its officers in Bamako at the time of the coup endeavored to talk the mutineers down as they attempted to move on the presidential palace from the Kati military base. Commanding a small detachment of new CFS soldiers, the officer in question set up a roadblock between the presidential palace and the Kati military camp. Instead of firing on the column of approaching mutinous soldiers, the officer attempted to reason with them and convince them to return to the Kati military camp. For his efforts, this officer was rewarded with a rifle butt to the face and a firefight ensued. After initially repelling the mutineers, the CFS element was forced to retreat when the coup-hungry soldiers brought up armored vehicles and renewed their assault on the roadblock—eventually leading to the sacking of the presidential palace.[116] Members of the CFS viewed themselves as professionals, loyal to the ideals of Malian democracy, the Malian people, and to the military organization they were a part of.

## E. CFS vs ETIAs

From January to April 2012, SOF's efforts with the CFS and the 33rd RCP were indirectly pitted against those directed toward the ETIAs. As some had predicted, the ETIAs completely failed to live up to even the lowest of expectations and completely disintegrated as cohesive fighting units. Equipment formerly belonging to the ETIAs came to figure prominently in videos of MNLA and jihadi fighters.[117] With the disintegration of the ETIAs, the two ground maneuver units left in the north were the

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115 "Logistics: American Robots Sustain The Siege of Tessalit," *Strategy Page*, March 8, 2012, http://www.strategypage.com/htmw/htlog/articles/20120308.aspx.

"Malian forces battle Tuareg rebels," *News24*, March 4, 2012, http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Malian-forces-battle-Tuareg-rebels-20120304.

116 Author's interview with SOF personnel who met with the CFS officer manning the roadblock, after the incident.

117 Oumar Diakité, "Nord-Mali : Iyad Ag Ghaly Rencontre sa Base à Gao," *Maliweb.net*, May 11, 2012, http://www.maliweb.net/news/armee/2012/05/11/article,65846.html U.S. provided Land Cruiser pickup trucks with the letters ETIA on the side are easily recognizable in both Ansar Dine and MNLA videos. You Tube, مـالي شـمال الــدين أنصــار فيـــــديولمعارك, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiLmr3zA-_Q.

Tuareg fighters under Colonel-Major El Hadj Ag Gamou and the 33rd RCP Task Force. While elements from the 62nd RIR and other Malian units were in the north, they remained in defensive roles around population centers.

In contrast to the ETIAs, the CFS put the past year and a half's worth of JPAT training to great effect. The CFS consistently demonstrated their ability to operate as a combined arms team and defeat rebel elements of larger size.[118] Although the CFS was three and a half years away from the date originally projected for it to be fully operationally capable, their combat performance was remarkable. While well trained as basic light infantry, the CFS had yet to receive extensive training on mortar, sniper, or RPG systems; training involving the complete integration of these systems had not yet come to fruition.[119] Furthermore, the unit build was not yet complete with the (support) mobility platoon zero percent complete. Unfortunately, the biggest limiting factor to greater CFS success, was the complete failure of the Malian logistical system to meet their sustainment requirements in the harsh and remote desert environment. Without an effective means of resupply, the RCP Task Force was forced to pull back to the nearest base of supply in Gao. Apart from the logistical challenges over which they had no control, the CFS stands as impressive a proof of concept as one could ask for, when it comes to enduring engagement as the primary vehicle to build partner capacity.

[118] Based on after action reporting the men of the 333rd fought bravely but did not display the resilience or the same dynamic abilities resident in the CFS. Their staying power was also not as great as that of the CFS; following refit operations in Gao, the 333rd remained unready to continue operations while the CFS was quickly ready for follow on operations. Author's interview with U.S. SOF personnel.

[119] Author's interview with U.S. SOF personnel.

# IV. SUM AND SUBSTANCE

Overall, U.S. capacity-building efforts in Mali from 2009 until the 2012 military coup, represent a bifurcated effort and reveal a divided view of how to build the capability and capacity of Malian security forces. Capability and capacity building efforts initiated by SOF and others, remained dominated by an episodic approach. Even in light of ETIA structural weaknesses and a growing body of ODA feedback that indicated the ETIA construct was sub-optimal, ETIA-focused efforts continued given the ETIAs' proximity to the enemy—and even though this proximity did not lead to actions focused on the enemy.[120] To be clear, this does not mean that the ETIAs were unworthy of some type of episodic training relationship. Episodic training remains valuable in the larger context of enduring engagement since it helps reveal what assistance the host nation military system requires. But, the provision of training does not automatically equate to capacity building; training is a component of capacity building, not an automatic indicator of capacity building.

Building partner capacity requires instead an enduring engagement approach that is partner-focused rather than enemy focused. SOF enduring engagement with the CFS epitomizes the power of this kind of engagement and demonstrates that true enduring engagement simultaneously spans all three levels of war—tactical, operational, and strategic. Under the enduring engagement rubric, SOF personnel conducting enduring engagement conduct more than just tactical training; tactical training serves as the vehicle to stimulate increased synaptic activity within the broader security infrastructure. Increased stimulation and connectivity between nodes directly boosts the capacity of the entire system, and contributes to effectively supporting those at the fighting / operating unit level, which then translates into effects on the enemy. In the end, SOF's enduring engagement approach proved a success in Mali, whereas episodic engagement did not.

[120] Monthly reports of Malian force movements throughout the north served to further validate this point. Even when ETIAs were dispatched on occasion the almost 100 percent total of these movements were convoy escort type missions rather than combat patrols. Over some monthly periods the ETIAs never left their bases. Author's review of Malian monthly reports at the MOD in late 2010. Based on Author's conversations with ETIA member in the August of 2012, this dynamic remained unchanged over roughly a year.

Worth noting too, it that the coup leader, Captian Amadou Sanogo, was a product of the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET)—episodic—training program.[121] It should also be remembered that Captain Sanogo played no part in U.S. capacity building efforts internal to Mali.

## A. WHAT HAPPENED IN MALI

What was not clear but should have been clear to all involved is that episodic engagement by itself does not build real or lasting capability and capacity. This is as true today in the U.S. Army as it was in the Malian Army. In the case of Mali, the starting level was extremely low and, as a result, any attempt to build real and lasting capability would take years, not months, of enduring training. Meanwhile, the very nature of the ETIA construct precluded the prospect of enduring engagement with the ETIAs, thereby relegating the SOF training effort with these units to a continual repeat of basic skills training. By contrast, the JPAT's enduring engagement with the CFS clearly demonstrated the power of this approach to build both capability and capacity. Over the course of roughly a year and a half, a contingent of SOF operators smaller than an ODA helped create a Malian army formation capable of conducting unilateral operations to a high degree of proficiency—something that episodic engagement failed to do.

Unique to the situation with the CFS, was the constant opportunity to compare the merits of both strategies: episodic and enduring engagement. Therefore, rather than describe U.S. efforts in Mali as a complete failure, what transpired in Mali should highlight the limitations of episodic engagement and what little long term value it really provides in terms of building capability and capacity. The outcome of SOF activity in Mali further demonstrates that failure to employ an enduring engagement strategy early will limit what can be achieved even in the short term, as various constraints cannot be overcome without sufficient time.

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[121] Joshua Keating, "Trained in the U.S.A.," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, March 28, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/03/28/trained_in_the_usa.

## B. WHAT IS AN ENDURING ENGAGEMENT?

In a military organization that lacks a culture of quality and productive training, in an organization that is under-performing at even the most basic levels, U.S. sponsored episodic training is an anomaly that occurs outside of that host nation military system. When the training occurs away from the unit's (host nation) habitual base or region, the training further departs from the normal state of affairs (something akin to an out of body experience). As departure from normal modes of operation, there is also a corresponding end date, the date when an individual or unit can/will return to the status quo.

The status quo can exert a powerful gravitational pull for any number of reasons, leading some individuals to go through the motions of training because that's what others expect them to do, with the understanding that they are one step closer to returning to the status quo. Even if some individuals do not regard a return to the status quo as desirable, they may not have the power or resources to achieve an effective break. Some IMET - trained Malian officers clearly personify this point; while competent individually, once returned to their status quo environment, their skills either atrophy as the system around them completely fails to make use of their knowledge, or they prove unable to export their skills to their parent organization.

In order for SOF-provided training to supplant the status quo of non-existent, or ineffective training, a culture of effective training must go from being considered a departure from the norm, to the new status quo. As one might expect, this cannot happen overnight and therefore speaks to the need for a long-term enduring SOF strategy.

Enduring engagement, and by association an enduring training presence, aims to be implemented from within the partner's military system. Outsiders remain detached (or less inhibited) from normative constraints imposed on members of the host-nation military. Their outsider perspective helps U.S. SOF operating on the inside break barriers, transcend boundaries, and connect nodes that counterparts otherwise may not be able to achieve alone. The intent is not to radically supplant the existing system, but to enable the system to function more efficiently and effectively. Since the intent is to institute a new "normal," enduring engagement should start small. People, after all, are resistant to

change, especially when outsiders help propagate it. By starting small, immediate and visible value-added effects permeate outward, while relationships with counterparts develop and expand. For emerging enduring efforts, starting small also allows SOF to gain a better understanding of the partner's requirements and prevents an adverse negative reaction by shocking the system with an overwhelming or overbearing effort.[122] In terms of preventing shock, U.S. SOF assistance must embody the collaborative rather than a directive approach.

## C. PARTNER-FOCUSED, NOT ENEMY-FOCUSED

Above all, an enduring SOF engagement has to stay partner-focused rather than-enemy focused. This is not to say that focusing on the enemy is not important, but rather that it is the partner force that should focus on the enemy while U.S. SOF focuses on the partner, to enhance the partner's ability to operate against the enemy. Strategically, the end state of an enduring engagement is to develop the capability and capacity of a partnered unit or units to conduct unilateral operations at a high level of proficiency (to a level that is recognizable in professionalized militaries), while also having the ability to generate, sustain, and maintain those high standards. Of primary importance is building capability and capacity where it is needed, irrespective of the enemy. Such a strategic goal has wider reaching effects than say, just enabling the removal of today's threat without building the capability and capacity of the partner nation to defeat threats that may emerge tomorrow.

When conducting theater campaign planning, the question that must be addressed is what is the desired end state for a SOF enduring relationship with partner X? What is the partner's desired end state and does this nest with greater U.S. strategic objectives? Long-term U.S. objectives that speak to enemy-centric metrics do not have the partner in mind. Once a partner-focused end state is determined—in conjunction with the partner—intermediate military objectives should fall out in terms of defeating/deterring/reducing/containing enemy forces. To be clear, the enemy must be countered but countering the

[122] Small in this context refers to the scope of SOF engagement across the host nation military in question. In terms of personnel numbers, the size of enduring SOF engagement should always remain small or smaller, with episodic engagements leveraged when a surge of personnel is necessary.

enemy should be a byproduct of the desired end state with reference to the partner. It is much more valuable, strategically, to build / leave a highly capable security force in a country rather than simply displace an "enemy" force. After all, what happens when U.S. assistance dries up due to competing strategic priorities? When the enemy force returns, and the local security forces do not have the capacity to deal with the threat, the cycle of instability will repeat itself. Therefore, of what use was all the U.S. money spent? On the other hand, if the country in question possesses highly capable security assets and the ability to effectively wield them, then the return of the enemy is less likely or can more likely be mitigated.

A byproduct of this long-term effort is the provision of a highly capable force multiplier to the host nation security force, which can be employed against mutually convergent security threats. If the foreign unit/military selected for an enduring engagement is currently involved in combat operations, great—and if not, the time may come when it will be. Even though tactical training features prominently in such an effort, tactical training is the vehicle that the SOF team should be using to reinvigorate or build connections between various segments of the local security apparatus. These connections are required for long-term self-sustainment by the partner, and are a necessary component of any successful action taken by the U.S. to counter security threats that affect mutual interests. For example, rifle training requires ammunition; if the existing infrastructure is unable to meet this requirement, it is the duty of the enduring SOF team to explore the reasons why. In this case, the problem could be that there is no formal request process, that requests are not reaching the right individuals, or that the military in question is not allocating money for the purchase of ammunition. Whatever the case may be, through examining the problem, the enduring SOF team is simultaneously engaging and developing relationships at all levels of the partner's military structure—again, this process takes time and may not provide any immediate results other than an increased knowledge base, but at some point this will undoubtedly be of use. Enduring engagement is not a process of confined engagement, but should operate on the principles of top-down and bottom-up (even middle-out), all at the same time.

All actions associated with enduring engagement should prove value-added to the partner. If the partner is not benefiting in some way from a SOF action then that represents an effort diluted, and may result in no local buy-in or prospect for sustainment in the future. This premise holds true whether for the seemingly most insignificant act to much larger and more expensive undertakings. Sometimes, before a SOF action can prove beneficial to the partner, SOF must take steps to demonstrate how such an action will bring value. Take a provision of equipment for example. If a particular piece of equipment is completely foreign, not used, or habitually under-used by partner security forces, then SOF must integrate the particular piece of equipment in such a manner that its true value and capabilities are demonstrated. Just providing an expensive piece of equipment will achieve little if the partner does not recognize its utility; it may never leave the storage room.

This same concept applies to ideas as well as hardware. A SOF-proposed idea may sound great, but the counterpart may view it as of no value. Modification of the idea or a demonstration of its value to the partner may be required before it is recognized to be of value. Meanwhile, if true buy-in does not occur then the idea may have to be shelved or rethought. Even better results occur for both parties when discussion prompts partners to develop their own ideas. Ultimately, SOF's and the partner's aim should be for the partner to take ownership of the systems and processes that will make its forces attain high standards of professionalism and be operationally capable.

## D. SMALL FOOTPRINT

By nature, a SOF enduring engagement is a small-footprint affair with size varying by location as dictated by both broader and localized constraints. Generally, the engagement centers around a SOF detachment involved in tactical training with additional members focusing on higher and lateral points of engagement. In terms of personnel, 8–18 offers a level of flexibility and sustainability over the long term, with the ability to rotate these individuals where and when needed. Furthermore, under the enduring engagement concept, SOF teams remain deployed on a rotational basis, year-round. In addition to year-round presence in the partner nation, the SOF element must be

involved in nearly year-round training/advising with their host nation partner forces—SOF in a partner country year-round who only work with the "partner unit" for seven months out of the year, are still only conducting an episodic engagement.[123] Engagements billed as enduring that are purported to focus on building capability, yet are merely episodic in substance, are a poor return on investment given their limited ability to build more than residual capability and capacity.

## E. HOW DOES EPISODIC ENGAGEMENT FIT?

Even though episodic engagement does not provide a mechanism for capacity building on its own, episodic engagements can still play an important role when synchronized with an ongoing enduring SOF engagement. As the scope of the enduring engagement expands and the requirement to provide more specialized training or engagement to more people grows, episodic engagements will help meet these requirements. Delivery of episodic engagement in support of the enduring effort can vary from a single individual to a larger and more robust team and come in the form of civilian, SOF, joint, or conventional forces. Using conventional forces (CF) from the regionally aligned brigades (RAB), for instance, would expand the speed and scope of engagement while also focusing their mil-to-mil engagements on sectors that contribute to building lasting partner capability and capacity. Furthermore, CF episodic support to SOF enduring engagements exemplifies SOF and CF interdependence and the role it plays in strengthening SOF enduring engagements. In this fashion, the RAB's mil-to-mil engagements would contribute to the enduring engagement, instead of becoming disparate episodic engagements.

All episodic training engagements generally should remain highly focused on specific skills for their follow-on integration into building enduring capacity. For example, an episodic engagement that focuses solely on a specific skill (mortar gunnery, sniper training, advanced radio training, airborne operations, warehouse supply operations, or air planning), provides highly quality and focused training to select

[123] Other multi-year SOF engagements in Africa demonstrated this form of episodic engagement as late as April 2012.

individuals. The enduring SOF engagement would then integrate that specialized training into standard day-to-day capability and capacity-building efforts. At least one member of the element conducting the enduring engagement should be present during the episodic training to ensure coordination and continuity. Using an integrated engagement method like this would ensure that all activities are designed to build capacity and remain focused and synchronized to achieve lasting and long term effects.

## F. FIELDING OF EQUIPMENT

The provision of equipment represents another central component of building capacity and capability. Not only can new equipment help improve the capabilities of a force, but the provision of equipment/supplies, can also provide a vehicle to further engage with, and enhance, sectors of the partner's security apparatus. Radios may fall under a communications directorate, vehicles may fall under a transport directorate, and soldier OCIE may fall under another directorate. As equipment is provided to the partner forces, engagement is assuredly required with the respective departments responsible for this equipment, thereby permitting the enduring SOF element to exercise its boundary spanning function and assist the partner's system to function more efficiently—without impelling them to alter their system to resemble ours.

Providing grant-based equipment represents an investment designed to strengthen partner security forces; however, equipment is only value added when used, and when used properly (which usually requires training). Providing equipment and not tying or integrating that equipment to an enduring engagement plan is tantamount to committing fraud, waste, and abuse for not providing effective oversight of our investment. If the equipment never makes it out of storage after receipt or is never integrated properly into the partner's security infrastructure, then the dollars spent are wasted dollars. The enduring engagement team must be involved in the equipment delivery process every step of the way, from drafting the requirements to ensuring the items are integrated appropriately. This deep involvement will also help prevent the provision of overly complex equipment, which may be unsuited to the partner's reality, when less technical items will suffice. Assuming that all partners can integrate new equipment on their own is

a poor assumption and does not represent effective security assistance policy. With in-depth knowledge of the partner's security apparatus and daily contact with a wide sector of that apparatus, SOF teams conducting enduring engagements represent an effective mechanism for effectively requesting, receiving, and helping to integrate U.S.-provided material and equipment for maximum effect.

### 1. SOCOM Equipment Gap

Larger and more expensive security cooperation cases, that can take a year or more to deliver, create a gap. Partners may not have even a basic level of equipment, such as canteens, magazine pouches, magazines, rifle slings, assault packs, or wet weather gear. While training can continue without such items, their absence hampers and degrades SOF training efforts. Items, such as these, are relatively inexpensive and can significantly enhance the level of engagement in a number of ways, to include in less obvious areas like property accountability, maintenance, and leader development.[124] It is difficult to teach concepts of fire discipline and resource redistribution without spare rifle magazines or pouches in which to carry them. Considering that in many areas of the world, armies are armed with like models of weapons, hence, purchasing immediate impact items for the wider audience of partners is possible. This is the case in Africa, where the AK rifle predominates. In the African example, many African countries also fall on the developing country index and are therefore eligible for U.S. SOF assistance in terms of training supplies. A responsive option for meeting immediate field needs is to establish an on-hand stock of supplies, with 10 to 15 basic or standard items in sufficient quantities to equip several company-sized elements. As needed, the SOF team could request release of the requisite supplies from the repository, with the intention that the supplies would arrive in fewer than 30 days. Being able to draw on this base of supply would allow tactical trainers to begin teaching and reinforcing basic principles from the outset of training. Without the ability to begin training with what partner forces need, the team then has to regress when supplies arrive a year or more later—this training regression is illogical and must be avoided.

[124] As an example, Chinese Type 81 magazine chest pouches, from suppliers in China, sell for less than ten dollars on ebay. Buying in bulk, from the source, would likely lead to an even lower price point.

## G. CONCLUSION

To the critics of U.S. efforts in Mali: at no time was SOF involved in consistently training more than five, company-sized ground tactical elements army-wide. Anything, that implies or suggests that a comprehensive SOF or DoD-wide program to train the Malian army existed, is misleading and incorrect. Indeed, the current European Union Training Mission to Mali (EUTM Mali) is more representative of broad effort to train the Malian army than were U.S. efforts in Mali. Furthermore, prior to the U.S. SOF focus on the ETIAs in 2009, SOF training events averaged around two, 45 day-long training events per year, with various units. Over the course of the decade, the Malian military benefited from a number of U.S.-sponsored programs, including but not limited to the: Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), African Contingency Operations and Training Assistance (ACOTA), International Military Education and Training (IMET), Counterterrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP), Flintlock exercise, and the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). A common characteristic of these varied programs was their episodic and/or one-of nature. As a result, these efforts did not result in a measurable increase in the overall effectiveness of the Malian army (or of individual units for that matter). Training that was episodically provided rarely diffused or even took hold. If one were to count up dollars spent and events participated in, a lot of effort was expended. But, what all these efforts added up to was not consistently focused over the long term.[125]

Returning to the original question—about whether U.S. efforts in Mali should be considered a success or failure—clearly the answer depends on which effort one looks at. As discussed above, there was no concerted effort, by SOF, or anyone else, to build the capability of the Malian army writ large. As for SOF we can compare across two distinct lines of effort, one of which was episodic and the other enduring. In terms of resources expended, significantly more was spent on the ETIA (episodic) construct, as opposed to the CFS-focused (enduring) training. When we compare the combat records of the ETIAs

[125] U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State Joint Report to Congress posted on the U.S. State Department website under the heading of Foreign Military Training and DoD Engagement Activities of Interest http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rpt/fmtrpt/.

and the CFS, the nod clearly goes to the CFS. As the Malian military disintegrated following the March 2012, military coup and northern Mali territory to the black flag of al-Qaeda, it is understandable that casual observers would have blamed U.S. efforts for failing to help the Malian military prevent this. In reality, however, the case of Mali demonstrates the effectiveness of SOF enduring engagement and the validity of the recently released SOCOM operating concept—which stresses the concept of enduring engagement as the way to build capacity. Mali should also stand as a further lesson to those in the SOF community who may not yet understand that episodic engagement will not build true capacity independent of its being nested in an enduring effort.

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# APPENDIX. MAPS

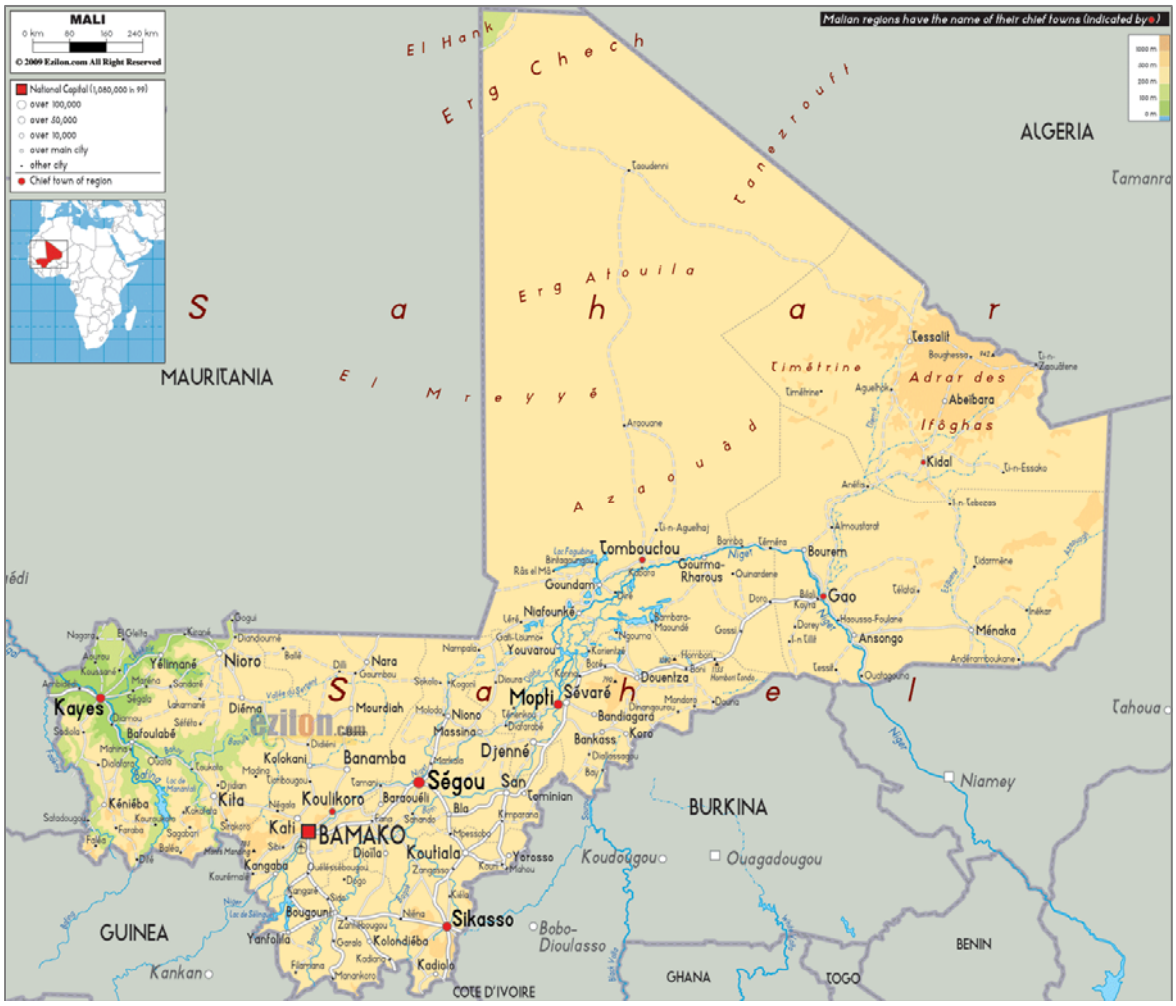


Figure 1. Map of Mali.[126]

[126]Mali Map - Physical Map of Mali, *ezilon Maps*, http://www.ezilon.com/maps/africa/mali-physical-maps.html.

Figure 2. Map: Enlarged view of northern Mali taken from Figure 1

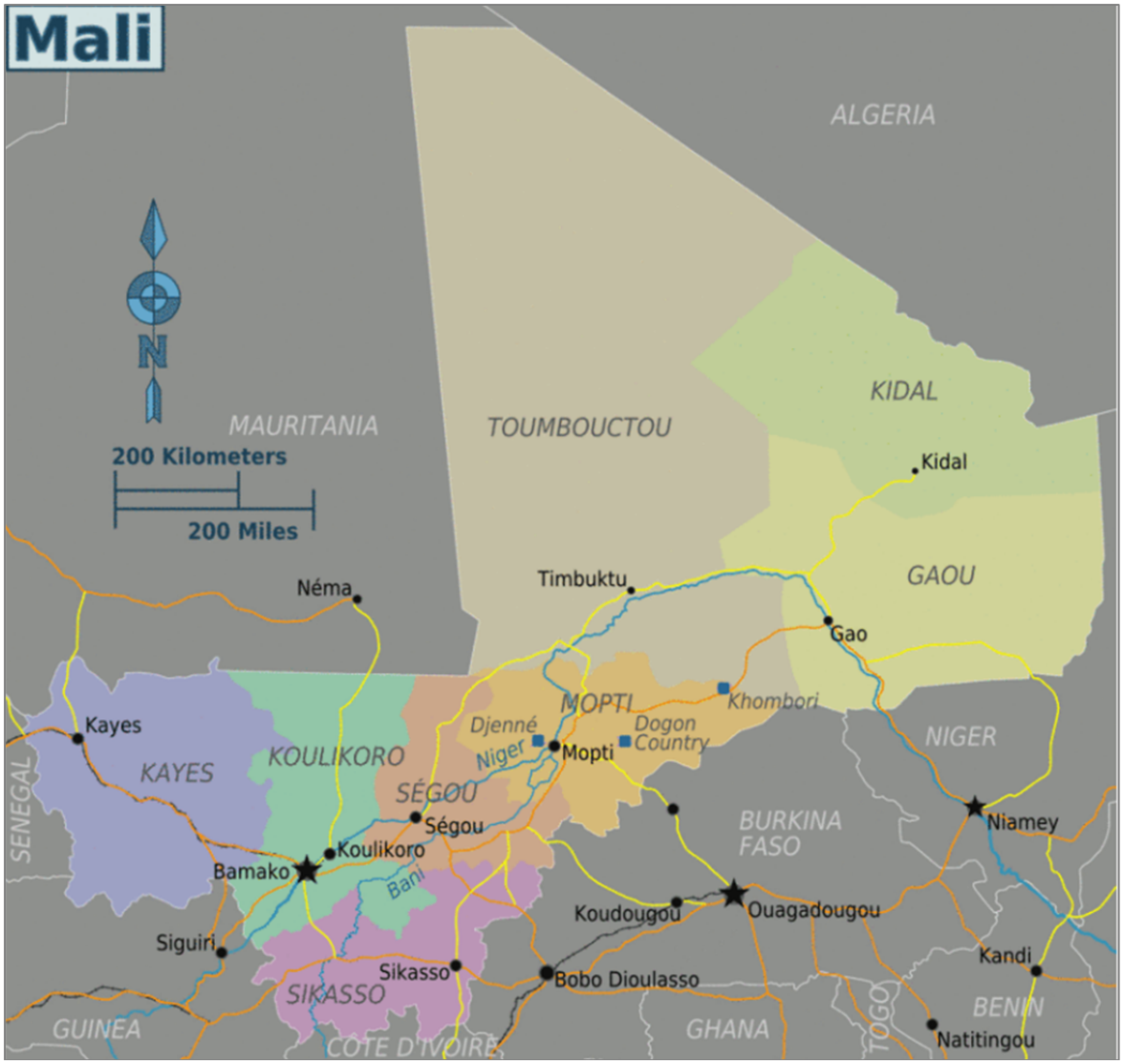


Figure 3. Map highlighting the regions of Mali.[127]

[127] Map of Mali (Map Regions), W*orld of Maps*, http://www.worldofmaps.net/typo3temp/pics/961cf680e3.png.

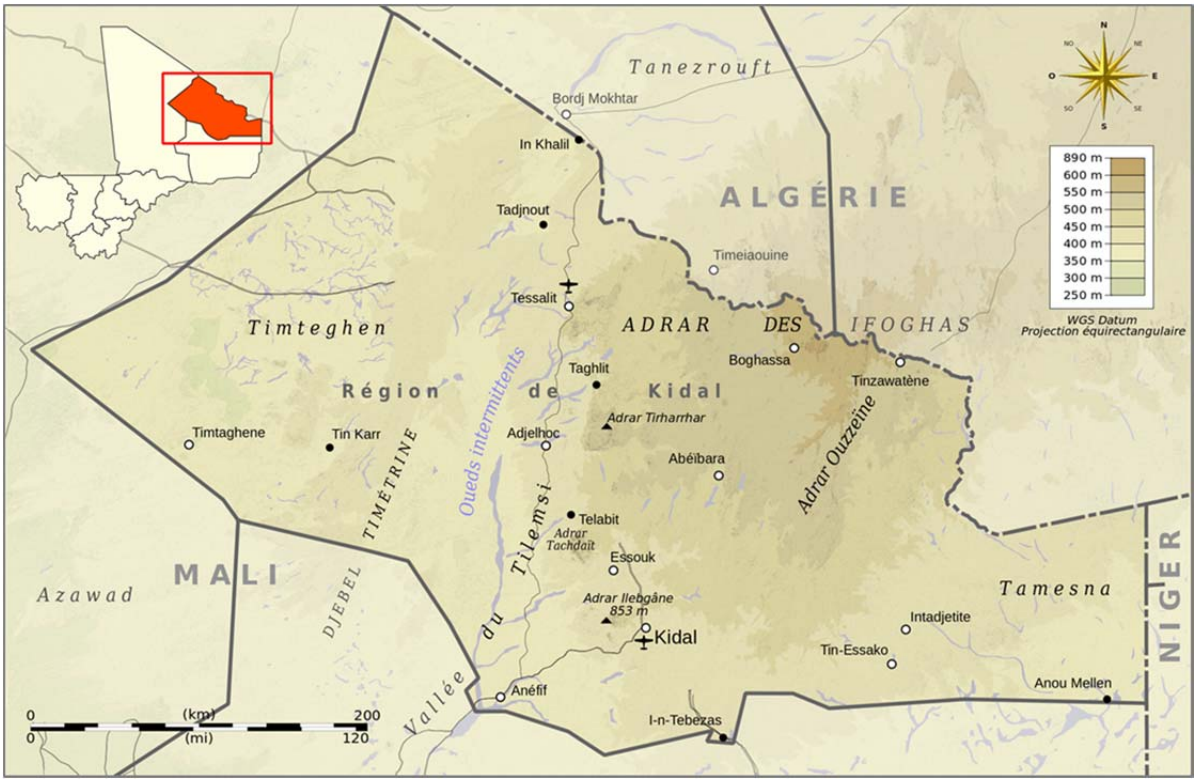


Figure 4. Map of the Kidal region in northern Mali.[128]

[128] Notes on the Periphery, http://noteontheperiphery.wordpress.com/2013/03/09/malis-mountains-an-impenetrable-safe-haven-for-jihadists/.

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