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Reclaiming the North and Restoring Democracy

Contextual analysis:

Early in January 2012, the rebellion started under the label of MNLA (National movement of Azawad liberation). It took three months for the army to be defeated and sent back to the capital, Bamako; the national army was at the threshold of its capacity to sustain security and national integrity. Therefore, the moral of the troops was seriously undermined, and the military was horrified by exactions of the insurgents mainly in Aguel Hoc and Tessalit. Accordingly, the army claimed munitions and guns to be more equipped to face the insurgents; this demand was followed by demonstrations and riots from the army which led to the coup in March 2012.

However, the northern part of the country was really occupied by all kinds of networks (drugs trafficking, arms smugglings, hijacking, tribal conflicts and so on). The national security forces had never controlled the area for the last twenty years, and therefore, the GISP had found a no man's land to operate and implement his terrorism activities. They enrolled and trained many young people coming from many countries.

The GPC (The Salafist Group for Call and Combat) became AQIM (Al-Qaeda of the Northern Maghreb) and developed an international network of recruitment of jihadists. Furthermore, AQIM became the most important security actor in northern Mali and controlled all roads of drugs trafficking and arms smuggling. AQIM leaders also developed a strong connection with security officials, politicians, traders and some local chiefs tribes. This situation turned AQIM into an important actor within the local communities by delivering some basic services such as healthcare and water supply, and later on, the group started offering equity and justice through the soft application of shariah law.

Meanwhile, officials of the central government were very reticent to talk or hear about these issues because of their strong involvements in drugs trafficking, arms smuggling, and the liberation of western hostages. As a result, community leaders became more and

more skeptical of the role of the central government to take charge of the local security issues and deliver justice and equity all over the country, especially where controlling drugs trafficking and AQIM are concerned.

Alternatively, leaders in the north started to concert and organize themselves to determine the best way to face the terrorist activities and take control of drugs trafficking. In December 2009, all community leaders and stakeholders from the north held a meeting in Kidal to share information and debate about the best approaches to deal with terrorist activities. The three-day meeting resulted in the formation of the **CHIEFS NETWORK FOR LOBBYING FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT**.

GROUPS CONTROLLING THE NORTHERN PART

Since the clashes between MUJAO and MNLA, there remain only three main groups controlling the area: ANSAR DEEN, MUJAO and AQMI. These different groups have one common interest – the implementation of the sharia law. MNLA, on the other hand, was claiming the independence of the AZAWAD REPUBLIC.

- **MNLA** currently has no control of any territory in the north but they are claiming to adhere to the values of democracy and “laïcité” (secularism) unlike the three other groups. MNLA is composed of former touareg rebellion officers and intellectuals and is reinforced by the former Libyan Leaders Legion. This organization was the most popular among the youth community, but today, it has lost its credibility as it has lost its ability to control the north. During the last months, MNLA has lowered its own political ambitions, and instead of claiming the independence of Azawad, MNLA members are now talking about federalism.
- **Ansar Deen** was created by Iyad Ag Aghaly to balance the leadership of rising MNLA which did not accept him as a leader. On the other hand, Ansar Deen was created to protect the interests of the Ifoghas community, and it has benefitted from the protection of AQIM where Iyad Ag Aghaly used to be an important intermediary with the central government to free hostages. Ansar Deen is today controlling two main regions (Kidal and Timbuktu). This group is joined by some jihadists of AQIM and MNLA fighters. Ansar Deen has tried to combine forces with MNLA many times without success up until now. This failure of having a single Touareg organization has demobilized too many fighters from MNLA to AnSar Deen.

It seems today that Ansar Deen has integrated militants and fighters from MNLA and built credibility within the Touareg community.

The relationship between Ansar Deen and AQIM is a tactical deal to consolidate the leadership of the Ifoghas communities and create a connection between AQIM and local leaders. In reality, Ansar Deen had no sound political agenda, and this explains the will of Ansar Deen to join jihadists in the implementation of sharia law. This practice does not fit with the expectations and traditions of the Touareg community. Ansar Deen has the strongest military position compared to MUJAO and MNLA. To get Ansar Deen out of the influence of AQIM, we need to create a space of debate for the Touareg community as a whole in order to decide what will be the most appropriate future of the society, the ruling system, and the spiritual and cultural dimensions.

The strategy to create the space and framework for people to talk would help dilute the role of the actual Ansar Deen leaders.

- **MUJAO** is an international network of jihadists hosted by the LAMHAR community of GAO. It is composed of Arabs who are specialized in drugs trafficking and who have a strong connection with AQIM leaders. The only agenda held by Mujao is to create terror beyond the Malian borders and to impose their local leadership on other communities in the region. This is the most criminal organization and will never give up drugs trafficking and terrorism as activities.

PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

The majority of people living under the occupation and who are in refugee camps want to see an end to AQIM's activities and living in a strong state which can insure freedom, equity and justice. WAR is the last wanted solution because terrorists and others groups could easily escape and leave the people under the bombs of international community.

HOW TO GET THE NORTH BACK TO THE COUNTRY

-First of all, we need a legitimate and credible central government in south. We have to organize free and independent elections .this does not mean that the north is neglected but it's the part of starting point.

-To engage talk with Ançar Deen and MNLA

- To create spaces for people and local leaders to debate on the future of their lives
- To change the national governance which could allow freedom of choices