
AFRICAN UNION, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MALIAN CONFLICT, 2012-2022

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Abstract

This study examines the African Union challenges towards resolution of Malian between 2012 and 2022. The study was guided by international capitalism theory as theoretical framework of analysis and the idea of the theory is rooted in the historical import of colonialism and imperialism on Africa by the western nations. The study adopted qualitative descriptive research design and data were collected from secondary sources which included textbooks, newspapers, journals and the data were analyzed using qualitative-descriptive analysis. The study found out that finance, political will, complexity of the African conflicts, regional and global actors and structural challenges are the impediment factors to the efforts of the African Union in resolving the Malian conflict. The study amongst other things recommends that African Union's operations should be adequately funded. The study also recommends that African states and their leaders should be encouraged to timely and appropriately pay up assessed contributions. Furthermore, the study recommends that African countries should settle and resolve their conflicts in African way by upholding the "Ubuntu" philosophy which emphasizes interconnectedness, community and mutual support. This approach encourages conflicting parties to recognize their shared humanity and work towards a common goal.

Keywords: Malian Conflict, Conflict Resolution, African Union, International capitalism

1. Introduction

African Union (AU) as a continental organization consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of African continent was successfully launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (The African Union Commission, 2023). As observed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2022), African Union is an international organization for African states that work together to address major political, social and economic issues, including preventing and ending conflict and promoting pan-African development and integration through its ambitious Agenda 2063. Its formation as observed in Sesay (2008) is rooted in the practical expression of the dreams of generations of Pan-Africanists in their struggle to foster unity, solidarity and cooperation among African States and by the desire to curb the multifaceted challenges that confront African continent and its people in the light of the socio-economic and political challenges in the world. In the view of Murithi (2009), the right of African Union to intervene in conflict among member state is derived from the ideal of Pan-Africanism and the principle of non-indifference. Those principles stipulate that African countries can no longer remain indifferent to the persistent conflict and suffering in Africa and the fact that African nations have the major responsibility to establish and as well, maintain peace and security architecture on

the continent. So, with the regional power conferred on the AU, the Union has taken initiatives with huge success across African continent (Ndiho, 2010).

The scourge of African conflicts constitute a major threat to the socio-political and economic development of African continent and of the need to foster peace, security and stability as prerequisite factors for the development of the Union, as in the case of Mali (AU, 2002). Mali is a Sahel country within the Africa's continent that is seemingly menaced by turbulent conflict. And the current conflict in Mali has been in existence for decades and rooted in pre-colonial and post-colonial French rule characterized by consistent marginalization and unequal representation of the northern-Malians (Tuareg) by the South (Chauzal & Damme, 2015). These Tuareg depict a nomadic groups that are dispersed around the borders of some Northern and West African countries (Cline, 2013). More so, the post-colonial state's authority was highly centralized as enshrined in Mali first constitution which was initiated by France's constitution of 1958, preserving the brutal, secular and authoritarian style of governance inherited during the French colonial era (Bruce, 2021). After many years of endurance and long suffering by the North, the situation of the continuous marginalization resulted in the 4-time Tuareg rebellions of 1963, 1991, 2006 and 2012 respectively (Transparency International,

2015). Even though peace accords were signed, none of them succeeded in normalizing the tensions and disagreement between the north and Bamako. More so, the Taureg activities were linked to other Islamic extremist groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko-Haram and other rebel groups due to its connectivity. As observed by Idigo (2022), the insurgency in northern part of the country threaten security in the sub-Sahara region and its neighbouring community at large due to its radical Islamic nature and struggles to establish a Caliphate which over the years have played a significant roles in shaping Islamic politics, culture and society. And rather than Malian government addressing the uprising and non-inclusiveness agitation by Tauregs, the government adopted heavy military approach; a recurring theme in Bamako's uprising.

Furthermore, the process of externally imposed state formation during colonialism in Africa did not follow the process of organic or internal state formation where a state develops naturally over time through the interactions and consolidation of internal social, economic and political forces, instead, externally imposed state formation in Africa was characterized by arbitrary borders, imposition of foreign institutions, disruption of traditional systems and exploitation of resources. The result of it was that many African countries do not comprise a secure community and have limited capacity. Yet, they are required to democratize without the

fundamental of sufficient security and capacity being in place.

It is within this context that one can locate Malian conflict that erupted in 2012, and has continued gaining the attention of international community and led to series of military interventions by the African Union (AFISMA) and other regional and international bodies like the ECOWAS, United Nations (MINUSMA) as well European Union (EU) and others. This study specifically investigates the challenges that confronted the African Union in the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2022.

2. Review of Related Literature

The Malian conflict, which erupted in 2012, is a complex and multidimensional mixture of long-term fundamental grievances by diverse actors and groups. These grievances are related to the issues of political governance, particularly the issue of management of the ethnic diversity in the Malian society. *Hannah* (2013) states that Mali inherited a centralized apparatus from France and th at has left a legacy which contributes to the current status in Mali. Oddih and Emesibe (2017) on the other hand maintain that the underlying causes of the Malian conflict cannot be fully explained or resolved without resorting to issue of governance. Similarly, *Yaya* (2020) claimed that the influence of external actors, other violent groups in the Sahel, the effect of the Libyan crisis and terrorism in the Sahel,

unequal distribution of resources among the G5 nations, as well as climate issues in the geo-political zone, largely fueled the current conflict in Mali. While Koops et al (2015), linked the 2012 Malian conflict to crisis of governance and dichotomy between the northern and southern Mali, Therouz-Benoni (2014) affirmed the argument by Koops et al (2015) that internal politics and governance failures favour southern against the northern population of Mali and that it largely contributed to regional transnational terrorism, criminality and religious extremism and ultimately led to the Malian conflict in 2012. Dillon (2016) considered ethno-nationalist narrative between the southern and northern Mali, coupled with historical ethnic separatist aspiration and grievances of the Tuareg/northern population against the Malian government as the major underlying causes of the Malian conflict. However, while *Mali might be considered to be a "democracy foster child"* in the region (Reuter, 2012), it has been argued that this "proved to be a façade for institutional weakness and mismanagement (Boas & Torheim, 2013). These external actors take the advantage of the Malian weak state capacity to build their influence primarily in the north. Additionally, Idigo (2024) noted that the Malian conflict affected interactions between states in the region as it created political tension. In general, conflict of governance, dichotomy and inequality between the northern and the southern Malian authority contributed to the Malian

crisis. Furthermore, Steven and Robert (2013) considered violent extremism and volatility of the Sahel region coupled with migration of violent groups/militants as the underlying causes of the Malian conflict in 2012. Northern Mali suffered from a long-term negligence and exclusion, thus call for secession.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted International Capitalism theory of conflict rooted in the ideas of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and others. The theory provides a valuable analytical lens on the fact that colonialism has impacted on the political and economic conditions of the contemporary Africa (Bayeh, 2015). The theory is apt to the study based on the fact that post-independence African political system is characterized by ethnic based exclusion and marginalization coupled with corrupt behaviors of the contemporary African leaders and arbitrary colonial division of African borders. These contributed largely to the contemporary African problems as the blind partition of African borders resulted in disintegration of some ethnic groups into different countries and the merging together of different ethnic groups in some countries. Thus, the inability of these diverse ethnic groups to co-exist peacefully resulted into recurrent intrastate and interstate conflicts, thus northern and southern Mali, as it can also be said of Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, and some many others.

4. Methodology

The study adopted qualitative-descriptive research design orientation. This type of design helps researchers to study and examine given situation and present them the way they are. Thus, data were gathered from various secondary sources which included documented evidence such as published materials like media publications/newspapers, journal articles, African Union website, reports and textbooks.

Challenges of African Union towards the Resolution of Malian Conflict

African Union have demonstrated a favourable commitment to the resolution of the Malian conflict although, they encounter great obstacles in resolving disputes, impeding its ability to uphold stability in Mali. The obstacles encountered includes: the complexity of the Malian conflict; finance and resource scarcity; political meddling and lack of political will; regional and global factors influencing efforts of African Union towards conflict resolution in Mali; under-funding of the African Union's peace keeping mission and so many others.

a. Finance

The biggest challenge facing the African Union in resolving conflicts is the lack of finance and resources (Musau, 2023). The organization cannot carry out peacekeeping missions, provide humanitarian aids, or

support efforts or mediation in war zones due to lack of funds. Due to these budgetary limitations, the African Union cannot adequately handle disputes around the continent, which prolongs instability and insecurity (Arthur, 2017).

The inadequate funding capacity made the African Union to be dependent on foreign institutions and nations for its financing operations and not only preventing conflicts but also resolving ongoing ones. The largest Africa-led peace operations have been almost entirely dependent on external donors such as the European Union, the United States, and the United Nations, which collectively spend billions of dollars a year on multilateral peace operations. (Nate, 2023).

b. Political Will

African Union's efforts to resolve conflicts are weakened by political meddling and a dearth of political will among member states (Akech, 2020). National political ambitions frequently trump international efforts to promote security and peace. This meddling can potentially undermine the authority and efficacy of the African Union in resolving disputes by impeding the execution of judgments and resolutions (Magara, 2022). This lack of political will on the part of regional leaders to invoke the collective security responsibility of the AU in the face of political crises clearly suggests that the commitment to "non-indifference," which is a founding principle of the AU, has waned

(Nantulya, 2019). In January 2007, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance outlined punitive measures against leaders that refuse to leave power after losing elections, or those that seek to change and alter constitutions and laws so to remain in office at all costs. The Charter entered into force with 15 countries in 2012 as a legal instrument and by later years, it was ratified by 32 countries and signed by 46 heads of state (AU, 2017). However, even with the legal authority discussed above, political leaders usually trump the ability of nations to effect those punitive measures.

c. Complexity of the Conflicts

The Malian conflict is a complex issue with multiple actors, including the Islamic extremist groups, separatist movements and criminal networks, making it difficult for the African Union to develop an effective and efficient response to the conflict. As noted by (Sixpence et al, 2021), the conflicts in Africa usually has a very strong complexity and this dimension poses great difficulty to the African Union in achieving its mandate of preventing and resolving conflict in the continent. Due to the complexity and ambiguity inherent in violent conflict in Africa with its too many faces, peace building processes tends to be multifaceted, with several processes overlapping or running in parallel with the danger of one process derailing the entire plan if knocked off the line.

These complex conflict factors can include political transition in election process, where political actors must sort out their differences, level the playing field and work together in a common geographical territory. In many situations, to complicate matters, the politicians may not be in favour of political co-existence and might be opting for secession and self-determination as a separate nation divorced from the existing one; as was the case in South Sudan, which attained independence in 2012 (Sandy, 2020). This complexity usually makes it difficult for peace building process as just resolving the electoral dispute will not be enough to satisfy the players.

d. Regional and Global Actors

The African Union's capacity to resolve disputes successfully is impacted by its interactions with the United Nations, and other international players like China, and regional economic groups like ECOWAS, (Nieuwkerk, 2011). The African Union Peace and Security mandate is made more difficult by coordinating with numerous parties, handling conflicting interests, and navigating power dynamics at the regional and global levels (Bokeriya, 2022). The AU's inability to get involved in supranational affairs of member countries limits its ability to enforce its decisions and resolutions unlike the European Union (EU). This lack of authority hampers its ability to ensure compliance with agreed-upon measures. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and slow decision-making

processes, which hinder its ability to respond promptly to emerging crises and issues (Mayamba, 2024).

The efforts of peace building and resolution of conflict in Africa often involves multiple international stakeholders that fail to coordinate their efforts because of different interests and organizational expediency. Because African conflict resolution are always dependent on external funding, the post-conflict countries seeking to conduct conflict resolution process are confronted with a multitude of global actors and benefactors that seek to shape that process the way it can suit their own agenda. The interests of individual participating countries impact on the decisions being taken by multilateral organizations being used in the conflict resolution. Emerging powers such as China, India and Brazil have become increasingly involved in African conflict resolution usually in development assistance which will always reflect different interests and conditions. Formal peace building processes are typically driven by large, well-resourced actors that direct their attention to elite actors that are easier to identify and work with in the recipient country and others involved. (Mayamba, 2024)

The initial responses of ECOWAS and the AU demonstrated limitations of the APSA in Mali. While ECOWAS was initially quick to respond to Mali's crisis, it was limited in what it could do, due to its membership and its lack of resources. When AU came in and decided

to continentalize the intervention, it had to balance competing priorities, including among the neighboring ECOWAS states, Algeria, and Chad. The question of which of the neighboring states should provide leadership to the peace process was a complex and sometimes fractious issue, as those neighbors had differing views on which Malian insurgent groups should be included in the peace process, and which excluded under the label terrorist (Andrew, 2018; Sophie, 2024). However, lack of clear responsibilities affected the AU and limited its ability in resolving the Malian conflict.

This raises substantive issues of coordination, synergy and policy coherence vis-à-vis the role of the AU. In the case of Mali for example, ECOWAS Initially approached the UN Security Council directly and not through the AU. AU involvement came about in part because of UN concerns, alongside the demands of non-ECOWAS neighbors for a role. The rivalry and mistrust between the two organizations was also reflected in the lack of consensus on the division of assets and liabilities accrued while managing AFISMA. Much of the tension and rivalry was over the management of resources that had been received to support peacekeeping operations.

Another part of the APSA that affected and limited the resolution of the Malian conflict by the AU is the issue of the non-existence of an African Standby Force. The ASF was established through Article 13 of the Protocol

Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. This Article describes the capabilities of the ASF as multi-dimensional, including military, police and civilian on standby in their countries of origin. While the ASF is supposed to be able to function in a variety of ways from observation to humanitarian assistance, it was intended to facilitate the rapid deployment of troops to conflict areas on the continent, avoiding the delays often experienced when waiting for countries to volunteer troops and deploy them. But the AU and its RECs have spent years trying since 2002 to get the ASF up and running. Yet it exists more as a concept than a fully operational facility. Had it been operational during the crisis in Mali, it would have been deployed there. So this lack of the existence of the ASF limited the African Union in the intervention and resolution of the Malian conflict.

e. Structural Challenges

The AU operation is also complicated and affected by the overbearing role played by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. On paper, the African Union Commission (AUC) is supposed to foster more technocratic and evidenced-based decision-making. The Peace and Security Council was designed to be independent to ensure that its functions were not politicized. Functions like instituting sanctions and recommending interventions in member states to protect human rights and prevent mass atrocities are

part of what it is supposed to determine without political undertones. On paper, the PSC has independence in identifying its agenda items, which cannot be opposed by any member state, including those subject to possible intervention. In practice, the authorities of the PSC, AUC, and Assembly of Heads of State, are not clear cut, resulting in confusion and overlapping authorities. Usually, when there is consensus on an issue, the PSC takes the lead but when there is no consensus, the Assembly tends to overturn PSC decisions, undermining both PSC and other independent institutions (Nantulya, 2019). The hierarchy and role of the AUC in decision-making are also unclear. Its effectiveness for the most part is dependent on the initiative of its chairperson and the level of consensus or lack thereof on a particular matter before the Assembly. A typical example to show the above in action is found in AU's engagement in Burundi. When the crisis began unfolding in April 2015, the PSC, with the backing of the AUC, took a proactive stance, meeting monthly and issuing strong resolutions that applied pressure on the Assembly to act. In response to massacres that had been carried out by security forces and militias aligned with Burundian leader Pierre Nkurunziza in December 2015, the PSC adopted a decision to deploy a 5,000 strong civilian protection force. The AUC invoked Article 4(h), which allows intervention without the host government's consent, and gave Burundi 96 hours to accept the force. However, this

resolve evaporated after some members claimed they had not been “properly briefed by their envoys.” Others accused the AUC and the PSC of overstepping their bounds. Tanzania and South Africa that had initially been supportive of the PSC decision later expressed reservations, further eroding consensus and undermining the decision to intervene. The move to invoke Article 4(h) was attacked by several leaders, led by Yahya Jammeh of Gambia, and a policy reversal was championed by them. Others who stood with him claimed they had been misled by Western media reports that exaggerated the seriousness of the crisis. This rift in the AU emboldened the Burundian government who warned the AU to stay away or their troops will be shot. The plan for intervention was then scrapped eroding the organizations credibility.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Malian crisis which had engulfed the nation for decades led to dismemberment of the country, humanitarian and refugees crisis, coups and counter coups within the country, despite numerous peace deals of Algiers agreement, Bamako agreement, Tamanrasset agreement, National pact, Ouagadougou agreement, Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, as well as deployment of troops by African Union and others, there appears to be no end in sight for the nation as the conflict has continued. The African Union has many agencies and policies for the resolution and prevention of conflict in

Africa which were deployed in Mali. The efforts of these agencies and their activities were shortchanged due to some impeding factors which range from finance, complexity of African conflict, regional and global actors, structural challenges and many more.

Recommendations

The study recommends that African states and their leaders should be encouraged to pay up assessed contributions in a timely manner in order to fund their peace-keeping operations effectively and efficiently without external interference. Large dependence on foreign entities for funding limits the AU capacity to independently and autonomously implement its policies and programs that can meet the specific local needs of the continent based on its values and priorities

The study also recommends that African countries should settle and resolve their conflicts in African way by upholding the “Ubuntu” philosophy which emphasizes interconnectedness, community and mutual support. This approach encourages conflicting parties to recognize their shared humanity and work towards a common goal (conflict resolution)

Equally also, the study recommends that duties of AFISMA and ECOWAS should be spelt out to avoid one encroaching into each other. This will increase efficiency and effectiveness in African Union peace keeping mission in Mali

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