

**Testimony of Ambassador Johnnie Carson**  
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**House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on African Affairs**  
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***"The Tuareg Revolt and the Mali Coup"***

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to address the Committee on what is a very important and timely topic. The situation in Mali represents a microcosm of the complex problems challenging Africa as the country grapples with four distinct yet interrelated crises: a political crisis stemming from a military coup d'état that took place on March 21, a rebellion waged by armed Tuareg groups that has destabilized northern Mali, threats from terrorist and other extremist elements, and a humanitarian crisis in the Sahel exacerbated by the events in Mali. While each of these challenges requires a unique response, it is important that we address these concerns simultaneously within a broad context.

**Mali Faces Four Challenges**

On March 21, Mali, already beleaguered by a rebellion in the north, experienced a coup d'état carried out by elements of the armed forces dissatisfied with former President Amadou Toumani Touré's handling of the rebellion. Just one month before the scheduled presidential election, the coup broke Mali's twenty-year tradition of democracy, which, until then, had served as a model of democracy in West Africa. Mid-ranking officers seized control of the institutions

of government and deposed President Touré. Intensive mediation efforts led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) resulted in a framework agreement on April 6, which attempted to fully restore civilian-led, constitutional rule to Mali. Subsequently, ECOWAS heads of state on May 20 extended the mandate of the interim government to one year, during which it must organize presidential elections and put in place a new government. Bamako witnessed violence not seen in decades on May 21 when interim President Dioncounda Traoré, who is 70 years old, narrowly escaped an attack in the presidential palace by a mob manipulated by supporters of the coup. Although the situation has quieted since then, President Traoré, who left for France for medical treatment following the attack, has recovered physically but has not yet returned to Mali, citing fears for his safety. His absence remains symbolic of a lack of strong leadership by the interim government. Furthermore, the coup leaders have not definitively returned to the barracks, further threatening the transition process and efforts to reestablish stability.

Meanwhile, Tuareg rebel groups that had been fighting a rebellion in northern Mali took advantage of the political chaos in Bamako to mount southward offensives and effectively gain control over the three regions of northern Mali, an area the size of Texas. The National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) declared independence, while another armed group, Ansar al-Dine, is fighting to impose Islamic law, or sharia in Mali. We have seen reports of the violent imposition of sharia law in some cities, including Timbuktu, which historically has been home to religiously moderate populations. The MNLA has indicated that it is ready to negotiate with a legitimate Malian government, and moderate elements of Ansar al-Dine recently stated the same to ECOWAS mediators. The feasibility of a lasting negotiated settlement will depend on the presence of a legitimate government interlocutor.

Furthermore, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is using the political chaos and power vacuum as an opportunity to reinforce its stronghold in northern Mali. AQIM has clearly benefited from the proliferation of arms from Libya and the movement of heavily armed and trained fighters from Libya to several already over-burdened Sahelian countries. It has also benefited from repeated sizable ransom payments received for releasing kidnapped Europeans. While AQIM has failed to mobilize a significant number of new recruits or generate popular support in the area, it has successfully maintained its foothold in northern Mali and resisted efforts to disrupt its supply lines. The coup d'état and Tuareg unrest have hampered counter-terrorism efforts in the area although the MNLA and the vast majority of Tuaregs in the region have resisted AQIM efforts to establish closer ties. While AQIM has not demonstrated the capability to threaten U.S. interests outside of West or North Africa and it has not threatened to attack the U.S. homeland we are nevertheless working to counter its influence. We have also warned American citizens traveling in the Sahel to avoid northern Mali due to AQIM's practice of kidnapping Westerners.

The human toll of these overlapping crises has been enormous. Since the start of the fighting, more than 370,000 people have been displaced. Of these, 167,000 people are displaced within Mali, and some 210,000 Malian refugees have fled to Niger, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso and southern Algeria. This has exacerbated an already precarious situation of food insecurity in the Sahel.

### **Peace and Stability in the Sahel are Vital to U.S. Interests**

The political, security, and humanitarian crises in Mali threaten the stability of the countries of the Sahel and run counter to the U.S. principles of good governance, civilian control over the military, and respect for human rights. Mali

has been a strong partner of the United States in the areas of democracy and governance, economic development, and peace and security. Promoting the restoration of a democratically-elected government supports the Administration's first pillar in its Africa policy: build strong democratic institutions. In addition, the vast and ungoverned territory of northern Mali provides a safe haven for AQIM and other extremist groups who may prove increasingly effective at targeting Western interests or aligning themselves with those who do. We must help Mali and the countries of the Sahel counter this transnational threat.

### **U.S. Diplomatic Efforts on Mali's Political and Security Crises**

We are addressing the complex crises in Mali separately yet simultaneously. On the political crisis, we are maintaining pressure on the coup leaders and their supporters to step aside and allow for the restoration of a democratically elected government. Following the March 21 coup, we terminated assistance to the Government of Mali (GOM) in accordance with U.S. law. We now principally provide bilateral humanitarian assistance (including food assistance), and some programs in the areas of elections support and health. The Millennium Challenge Corporation has terminated its programs. Peace Corps has removed its volunteers. We have imposed targeted travel sanctions on more than 60 individuals who were involved in the coup d'état or who continue to impede the restoration of democracy. We will maintain the pressure until Mali restores a democratic government. We are supporting the principle of regional ownership by encouraging ECOWAS-led mediation efforts, which resulted in the establishment of Mali's current interim government. I, personally, have worked to encourage further regional collaboration by traveling to Algiers to urge Algeria, a key stakeholder, to participate in regional efforts to resolve the crises in Mali. In an

effort to spur international collaboration on Mali, I met with European Union officials in Brussels on June 11, and have spoken recently with my counterparts in the French Foreign Ministry, the British Foreign Office and the Swiss Government.

I have spoken with Presidents of Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, Alassane Ouattara and Blaise Compaoré, to express support for ECOWAS's leadership and to discuss how the international community can best support these efforts.

Recently, I met with Burkina Faso Foreign Minister Djibril Bassolé in Washington, where we discussed ECOWAS's ongoing mediation efforts. The Department of State Spokesperson issued statements condemning the coup and declaring our support to ECOWAS-led mediation efforts.

We are coordinating closely with our mission in the United Nations to press the African Union and ECOWAS to define a clear mission for their proposed ECOWAS peacekeeping mission in Mali. That said, we think an ECOWAS mission to militarily retake the north is ill-advised and not feasible. We have been unequivocal in our messages to coup leader Sanogo and the Malian public about the need for Sanogo and the Malian military not to participate directly or indirectly in the political affairs of Mali or the interim government. They also encouraged the interim government to set an early date for elections. There is no reason why the interim government cannot build on the preparations for the aborted April elections and hold elections in six to nine months and certainly before the end of the 12 month extension of the mandate of the interim government in May 2013.

Our outreach to Mali's international and regional partners has also focused on addressing the second of Mali's challenges: the Tuareg rebellion. We believe the Tuareg rebellion is a political problem that requires addressing the legitimate grievances of the Tuareg groups in northern Mali. We support regional and

international efforts to negotiate a resolution with those groups who have expressed a willingness to enter into dialogue with the Malian government. Through demarches and in our conversations, we are urging Mali's neighbors and international partners to reach out and contact representatives of the MNLA and other groups who are willing to resolve their grievances peacefully. We have encouraged ECOWAS, the African Union, and our international partners to structure their engagements on Mali in such a way that will incorporate Algeria and Mauritania. The participation of these two partners, which are not members of ECOWAS, will be crucial to a lasting solution.

On the counterterrorism front, we are supporting an outside-in strategy, working with Mali's neighbors, including Mauritania, Niger, and Algeria, to increase their capacity to patrol their borders, disrupt AQIM supply lines, and contain the spread of extremist groups until such time as the Malian army is able to undertake effective operations in the north. We are increasing our support for Mauritania and Niger through the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), which is designed to support regional partner efforts in the Sahel to build long-term capacity to contain and marginalize terrorist organizations and facilitation networks, disrupt efforts to recruit, train, and provision terrorists and extremists, counter efforts to establish safe havens for terrorist organizations, and disrupt foreign fighter networks that may attempt to operate outside the region. Although they are among the poorest countries in the world, Mauritania and Niger have demonstrated critical political will to fight terrorism and will continue to benefit from U.S. assistance

In an effort to mitigate the effects of the complex humanitarian crisis threatening the Sahel, we are providing humanitarian and food assistance to those displaced by the conflict in northern Mali and those affected by the region's food crisis. To date, the U.S. government has provided more than \$315 million in

assistance to the Sahel region, \$60 million of which has gone to drought and conflict affected persons in Mali. We are working with the United Nations Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel to ensure access to affected populations and to help coordinate the UN humanitarian response.

We will continue to support the interim government in its transition to democracy. We will continue to support the leadership of ECOWAS in its mediation efforts and its efforts to plan a peacekeeping mission with clear and achievable objectives. We will continue to work with our partners in the region through TSCTP to build an outside-in strategy to contain and degrade the threat of terrorism. Finally, we will continue to encourage greater collaboration in the region and with international partners within a structure that includes the region's key partners, Algeria and Mauritania, especially as mediation gets underway. We reaffirm our commitment to the unity and territorial integrity of Mali and will provide unequivocal support for a negotiated settlement on this principle.

While the U.S. government has made positive strides in working with regional neighbors to resolve this conflict, the ongoing and overlapping conflicts outlined above are far from being resolved. If Mali is going to counter effectively the Tuareg rebellion, the terrorist threats in the north and return to a democratic example in the region, it will require sustained and dedicated effort from the U.S. government and the international community. Specifically, we will need to provide assistance consistent with U.S. law to increase economic development and provide economic opportunities to disaffected youth populations in northern Mali. We will need to continue to build the capacity of Mali's neighbors to control their borders. Finally, we will need to help build resilience in Mali's democratic institutions so that they continue to represent and serve the Malian people. Thank

you for inviting me to testify today. I look forward to your questions and comments.