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ARTICLE



Explaining the failure of internationally-supported defence and security reforms in Sahelian states

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ABSTRACT

In response to the crisis in the Sahel, myriad programmes have been set up with the aim of improving the performance of the defence and security forces in the region. These programmes are often run or supported by international partners. Yet, as the security situation in the region worsens, questions have been raised about whether these programmes are relevant and effective. In this article, we will argue that most of the programmes designed to build the capacities of, restructure or reform the armed forces in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have failed to grasp that these security systems function on a fundamentally hybrid basis, with a combination of – and often a clash between – legal and rational approaches, on the one hand, and informal dynamics, on the other, and that this can often hinder implementation of reforms.

KEYWORDS

Sahel; security structures; hybrid systems; military; reforms; societal mechanisms; comparative analysis

Introduction

Since the start of the crisis in Mali in 2012, myriad programmes have been set up with the aim of improving the performance of the security and defence forces in the region. These programmes are often run or supported by international partners. In addition to fighting the terrorist groups in the Sahel, some of these international programmes, such as Operation Barkhane run by France¹ and Europe's Takuba Task Force, have sought to strengthen the operational capacities of Mali's armed forces. The EU Training Mission (EUTM)² and the EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP)³ in the Sahel had the broader aim of restructuring the security and defence forces, with a joint training and advisory mission. Other United Nations⁴ and civilian⁵ programmes have sought to provide more widespread, structural support to the process of reforming the security systems across Sahel countries.⁶

Yet, as the security situation in the region worsens, questions have been raised about whether these programmes are relevant and effective, since none of the armed forces in the Sahel – or their international partners for that matter – has been capable of taking sufficiently decisive action to improve the situation.

The strategies of many of the international missions active in the Sahel – which include the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the African Union's MISAHHEL mission, and bilateral partners – have failed, mainly because they did not sufficiently analyse

the complexity of the security context in the region.⁷ However, there is also a disconnect between the programmes to reform and restructure the States' defence and security systems and the actual functioning of those systems. Like in many other African countries, the security systems in the countries of the Sahel are fundamentally hybrid in nature, with a combination of – and often a clash between – legal and rational approaches, on the one hand, and informal dynamics, on the other, and this can often hinder implementation of reforms.⁸ The hybrid nature of these systems is also reflected in how codified and non-codified norms and practices, legally established or informal entities and official and unofficial networks complement and compete with each other within both formal and informal structures.⁹

As Céline Thiriot,¹⁰ drawing on the works of Dabezies¹¹ and Nordlinger,¹² has said:

The specific institutional and ideological features of African armies, as set out in military sociology, are often only very superficial. As such, military institutions in Africa are by their very essence hybrid institutions that are penetrable by society. [...] This makes the army more receptive to social and political issues, which are echoed in at least part of the military.

The concept of security system reform – which most of the training, restructuring and transformation programmes mentioned above adhere to – was developed in part as a way of diverging from, rather than running contrary to, the concept of 'civil-military relations'.¹³ In the Sahel, the civil-military relations approach falls short because it fails to sufficiently take into consideration the comprehensive nature of the reforms needed and the importance of governance. The security system reform approach has remedied this to some extent. Yet one benefit of the civil-military relations approach is that it looks very closely at the political economy and micro-sociology of the armed forces. Again today, there needs to be a renewed focus on power relations and strategies for mobilising the political, financial and symbolic resources required to run African military establishments¹⁴ – and this is an aspect that most security system reform processes tend to ignore.

In this article, we will analyse the link between the professional mechanisms and the socio-political and societal mechanisms prevalent in defence systems in the Sahel. The hybrid nature of the systems within these armed forces is a reflection of the power games and social inequalities specific to each State that these armies serve. For armed forces the world over, informal rules and practices can be a 'double-edged sword, reinforcing or undermining official organisational norms',¹⁵ but their influence is particularly marked within the armies in the Sahel, as the study of social and political interactions within military structures in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger has shown.

After providing an overview of the recent history of military coups in these three countries, we will look at human resources management, defence budget management and the internal divisions within the military in each country. While all of these areas are regulated by official, clearly codified rules and procedures, they are in reality governed by informal practices and therefore provide some insight into the fundamentally hybrid functioning of the armies in the Sahel.

A history of military coups in the Sahel countries

Since gaining independence, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have all had a particularly turbulent history of coups. Military interference in political matters has been a persistent and recurring theme, demonstrated most recently by the establishment of military regimes in Mali following the events of 18 June 2020 and 24 May 2021 and the coup in Burkina Faso on 24 January 2022.

Burkina Faso

On the 25 of November 1980, Colonel Saye Zerbo staged a coup against President Aouabacar Lamizana, establishing the Military Committee of Recovery for National Progress. Colonel Saye Zerbo appointed the young Captain Thomas Sankara as Minister of Information. Sankara had served as a commander of the Commando Training Centre in Pô, where Captain Blaise Compaoré was his deputy. In 1982, Colonel Saye Zerbo was deposed in another military coup, with physician and commander Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo becoming head of state. Captain Thomas Sankara was named prime minister but quickly ran into a dispute with the president, who then dismissed him in May 1983. Sankara was stripped of his military functions and sent to the provinces. Blaise Compaoré then took control of the Commando Training Centre. The officers' general assembly, held in the context of the crisis, decided that power should be returned to the longest-serving officer, Gabriel Yewa-Tamini, who was tasked with handing power over to a civilian government at the end of a six-month period. However, Blaise Compaoré refused to lay down his weapons and held a march in Ouagadougou on 4 August 1983. On national radio, Thomas Sankara declared that he was seizing power and establishing the National Council for the Revolution, which had Marxist leanings.¹⁶ Captain Blaise Compaoré then seized power on 15 October 1987 following a coup d'état in which Thomas Sankara was assassinated.

A new constitution was adopted in 1991, but that did not bring an end to the army's intrusion into political life. As formal institutions were being set up, some front-line units, such as the presidential security regiment, were entrusted with the main – and even exclusive – mission of perpetuating the regime for a further 27 years. Most of the army was marginalised in order to avoid any risk of anyone overthrowing the Compaoré regime. The country's military capacities were drastically reduced:

The weakness in the command and the armed forces' paltry equipment must be highlighted. Most personnel have received no training and there has been no professionalisation for decades. At the time of Blaise Compaoré, everything was done to prevent coup attempts rather than to combat outside threats.¹⁷

A popular uprising in 2014 led to the fall and exile of Blaise Compaoré and the establishment of a transitional, and then a democratically-elected, civilian regime. When he came to power in 2015, President Kaboré stated that he was determined to depoliticise the army and demilitarise politics. But on 24 January 2022, just one year after his re-election, he was overthrown in a coup by the Patriotic Movement for Safeguarding and Restoration led by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba.¹⁸

Niger

In Niger, the first democratic government since independence was toppled in a coup that resulted in 17 years of military regime (1974–1991), marking the start of a particularly tumultuous period for the country. From 1974 to 2010, the country experienced four military coups in total, with no constitutional transition between two elected presidents. On 15 April 1974, a military group led by Lieutenant-Colonel Seyni Kountché, then the commander-in-chief of the army, deposed President Hamani Dori and installed a supreme military council. Up to 1983, when the Council of National Development, run by a civilian, was established, the military held the highest functions of state, with some civilians nonetheless involved in running the country. On 27 January 1996, Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara, commander-in-chief under then-President Mahamane Ousmane, deposed his head of state. Baré was assassinated by his own guards and replaced by Commander Daouda Malam Wanké, chief of the presidential guard, who was appointed head of state by the National Reconciliation Council, comprised exclusively of military officers. Finally, President Tandja, who adopted a new constitution in order to remain in office for a third term, was deposed in a military coup on 18 February 2010. However, the army handed power back to a civilian government, and President Mahamadou Issoufou was elected in 2011 and then re-elected in 2016.

Throughout recent history, the army has therefore played a decisive role in political life in Niger.

This heritage has created a certain amount of distrust towards the military among civilians: the officers who were in power are suspected of having their men in the barracks among the other troops so that they can be used to topple civilian governments. Fear of these military officers explains why so many people have left the country, particularly to take up positions abroad.¹⁹

Mali

In Mali, a wave of popular uprisings ended with the democratically-elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, being toppled on 18 August 2020 by members of the National Committee for the Salvation of the People. The arrival of military personnel within government and the subsequent overthrowing of the civilian transitional authorities on 24 May 2021²⁰ are the latest in a series of coups – the fourth and fifth such events – that have put power in the hands of the military.²¹ The first such coup took place on 19 November 1968 when a group of young officers led by Lieutenant Moussa Traoré, who would then become president, took advantage of people's growing discontent with President Modibo Keita, to depose the 'Father of Independence'. The new government set up the Military Committee for National Liberation which abolished the constitution and established a military, and then a single-party, regime. On 26 March 1991, Moussa Traoré was also deposed in a coup led by several officers, who set up the Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the People, headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré. Traoré then transferred power back to a civilian government, and Alpha Oumar Konaré was democratically-elected as president. In 2002, Amadou Toumani Touré was himself elected, and then re-elected in 2007. He was deposed several weeks before the end of his second term by Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, who took control of the National

Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State. He was forced by the international community to stand down as part of the transition to a civilian government, which was completed with the election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.

During these periods of military authoritarianism, army officers also held many of the administrative positions in government. In Mali, internal affairs started to be militarised in 1968, when Moussa Traoré came to power. At the same time, many civilian functions were also militarised, particular the position of regional governor, and this continued for decades and has increased since 2020.²²

Questioning the neutral and apolitical nature of the armed forces

All of the programmes aimed at restructuring or strengthening the operational capacities of the armed forces or comprehensively reforming the security system are based on the premise that the armed forces are fundamentally neutral and simply execute orders.

Yet the history of the Sahel shows that armed forces in the region cannot be considered apolitical, since they have been at the origins of deep-rooted institutional and security crises in the countries concerned. The above overview of the recent history of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger shows that those countries' defence systems are, in fact, key political entities rather than simply services that execute the orders of the civilian authorities.

One factor making the military a hybrid system is its deep penetration into the political sphere, an area that should be reserved for the civilian authorities alone, in keeping with the principle of absolute precedence recognised in the traditional approach to civilian-military relations, and in keeping with the standards of governance and democratic oversight that underpin the security system reform approach.

There are two deeply rooted trends in the Sahel that explain why the military often interferes in the management of public affairs:

- First, people are extremely disillusioned with democracy, which increasingly means that people have no hope for a better future when they cast their vote (the democratic model has been largely reduced to elections, both by African multilateral organisations and by international partners).
- Second, people are increasingly frustrated by the worsening security situation and the inability of the civilian authorities and their international backers to protect people and their belongings, both individually and collectively.

It is becoming hard not to view Sahelian militaries as political players in their own right, and their legitimacy is growing as a result of the support they receive from a large proportion of the population.

Opaque human resources management

The political functions that military officers in the Sahel have held in the post-independence era is by no means the only hybrid aspect present within military institutions. The intertwining of formal and informal dynamics within the armed forces in the Sahel are particularly evident in human resources management, and particularly the recruitment and promotion methods used.

Recruitment and promotion

In the three Sahel countries considered here, the methods for recruiting and promoting soldiers have tended to be informally established.

Nepotism and cronyism have often driven officers' rise to the upper echelons of the military, a practice that is widely condemned and criticised. Even Mali's former defence minister, Tiéna Coulibaly, has spoken about the large-scale problem posed by parallel recruitment procedures. In a 2017 speech before the National Assembly, he said that the main problem with Mali's military was its approach to recruitment, stating that:

During the recruitment process, ministers, MPs and officers come forward with their own lists and demand that their protégés are recruited without any kind of competitive process. The outcome is that these soldiers, who had strings pulled for them, are scared of the enemy when in the field. They are not in the army to fight but to get a monthly wage.²³

In Niger, too, personal connections often carry more weight than professional skill, as Djeka Salou explains:

In some cases, the hierarchy is bypassed: affinities between the leaders of each regime and the elite or a faction of the army enabled those individuals to appoint people to positions of responsibility or make one-off promotions within the army, disregarding the rules in order to by-pass the usual route to the upper ranks, which is a well-established procedure that is meant to take place annually based on seniority. One-off promotions are permitted by the rule, but they have to meet certain criteria; they have to be justified and recorded in the Official Journal of the Republic. The procedures are not always respected, which has skewed the normal functioning of the army. Certain officers have access to training abroad and are then guaranteed certain promotions, which also arouses suspicion and frustration among officers of the same rank with no such posting.²⁴

Other informal practices have also been institutionalised. For instance, throughout Moussa Traoré's regime, soldiers were automatically promoted every three years regardless of their operational experience, which explains why there are so many generals in Mali's army.²⁵ Paying bribes to successfully pass a competitive application procedure has also become common. 'Some families take out loans so that they can pay a bribe of 150,000 or 250,000 CFA francs (which is between 230 and 380 euros) to get their son in. That's the going rate', said a gendarme from Markala.²⁶ There is also a 'widespread tendency to pass on the additional cost generated by corruption to the price of degree programmes or military internships (particularly abroad) or even promotion', one officer in Burkina Faso explained.²⁷

The opaque management of human resources within the armed forces in the Sahel has for a long time been the reason why the military has been reluctant to determine the exact number of troops in a reliable and transparent manner. In 2017, the official number of men in Mali's army was around 18,000, but estimates put the number of fictitious soldiers at somewhere between 3,000 and 8,000.²⁸ As well as stating national security as the reason for hiding the actual number of troops, another reason often put forward is that the figures are inflated so that more funds are allocated for personnel and those funds can then be embezzled. This often-erratic approach to human resources management means that posts are assigned or promotions are made at random.

Integrating former combatants into the army

The conflicts in the Sahel States have made human resource management within the armies there even more complex. The process of integrating combatants from the different rebellions against the central authorities in Niger and Mali in the 1990s and 2000s also had an impact on the management of recruitment and promotion processes in the armed forces. In Niger, a significant number of former fighters agreed to the State's proposed terms for joining the paramilitary. However,

the mechanisms for implementing the agreements were complex and opaque. [...] rounding up the combatants was the job of their front-line leaders, who ended up negotiating. Each provided a list of names certifying that those fighters qualified as rebels. This method led to haggling and some families being privileged [...]. As a result, the number of fighters integrated into the army largely depended on how influential the former front-line leaders were and the financing received from foreign partners. The former fighters were joined [...] by numerous “imaginary” rebels and stationed with them in barracks often far from home. [...] The rank at which they joined the army was one of the factors that caused the rebellion to continue after the initial agreements had been reached.²⁹

In addition, the professional paths of the newly-integrated soldiers were often very different from those set out in the regulatory procedures, which even led to those procedures being amended. According to Frédéric Deycard, a large majority of the former fighters joined units created especially for them, such as the Niger Intervention and Security Forces, inspired by France's Méharistes camel cavalry units in the Sahara.

In Mali, many of the rebels from the first wave of armed protests in the north of the country joined the army or the national guard as officers.³⁰ In 1993, in keeping with the Tamanrasset Peace Accords,³¹ President Alpha Oumar Konaré took the decision to integrate hundreds of rebel fighters into the regular army.³² However, in 1994, those soldiers, suspicious of the government, went underground with their weapons. A similar situation occurred in 2006 after the Algiers Peace Accords when 3,000 former fighters were integrated into the army. Around 200 of them were promoted to the rank of officer. They were then the first ones to massively desert the army in January 2012.³³ The integration of troops from rebel ranks into the security and defence forces in 1993, 1996 and 2006 had varying repercussions: first, serving troops, and particularly officers, were frustrated and very unhappy to see new recruits being promoted to high ranks. Many of the new arrivals were given ranks (corporal, commander)³⁴ for which they did not have the required skills or qualifications. In addition, there was bitterness because large numbers of these new recruits deserted the army during each subsequent revolt. Lastly, there were fears that factions would emerge within the army based on community rivalries. Moreover, the military programming act³⁵ did not set out a budget for the integration of the new troops, as provided for in the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process of 2015.³⁶

Budget and payroll management

Budget management within the defence sector also reflects the informal and hybrid nature of the armies in the Sahel. It can be seen through large-scale embezzlement of defence budgets by certain ruling elites in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, and through the individual and collective survival strategies and criminal practices at other levels of the military.

Large-scale embezzlement of defence budgets

Between 2014 and 2020, defence budgets were misused on a massive scale in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.³⁷ The extent of the embezzlement was revealed at a time when troops in the three countries were involved in almost daily fighting and severely lacked the proper equipment and logistics supplies.

In Niger, the case of the Ministry of Defence's procurement practices is particularly revealing. Those practices were uncovered in a provisional audit report published by the General Army Inspectorate on 17 February 2020. The report entitled 'retrospective control of procurement practices within the Ministry of Defence' revealed that 76 billion CFA francs (around 116 million euros) had been embezzled between 2014 and 2019.³⁸ Over-invoicing amounted to 48.3 billion CFA francs (66 million euros) and undelivered equipment accounted for 27.8 billion CFA francs (42 million euros), based on the details published on the *Mondafrique* website.³⁹ Twelve companies (including several fictitious companies) are cited in this damning report, which provides details of the contracts deemed fraudulent by the army inspectors. The audit⁴⁰ listed dozens of contracts that had not been fulfilled even though the suppliers had been partially or fully paid for the goods and services ordered. The contracts related to the purchase of vehicles (including lorries, armoured vehicles and vehicle parts), the construction of hangars and military buildings, the purchase of marking and lighting equipment, the maintenance of MI-35 helicopters, and the purchase of an anti-missile system for the presidential plane; this latter contract was entered into in 2015 but the system was never installed even though fake delivery notices and reports were found.⁴¹ The inspectors also raised concerns about the Ministry of Defence's lawless management of the delivery of certificates to end-recipients, i.e. documents used in the international transfer of weapons and munitions (including those provided as aid) to certify that the buyer is the end-recipient of the equipment and does not intend to transfer it to another party. The report was submitted to the Office of the President of the Republic of Niger in February 2020. The government initially said that it intended to prosecute the perpetrators in an administrative court and would merely request repayment of the embezzled funds. A second audit report, dated 29 March 2020, mentioned the negotiations underway between the authorities and the suppliers concerned.⁴² Bowing to media pressure, the authorities finally filed a case with Niger's justice system on 7 April 2020. There are 177 instances in which the awarding, execution and payment of contracts could constitute criminal acts that violate, in particular, Decree No. 2013-570/PRN/PM of 20 December 2013 on special terms and conditions for the awarding of work, equipment, supplies and service contracts concerning national defence and security needs. The case was handed to the State Prosecutor at the High Court in Niamey. However, the government ultimately decided not to file a civil case.⁴³

In Mali,⁴⁴ the Office of the Auditor General (known as VEGAL) – even though the code on public procurement significantly limits its interventions in the area of security and defence – published an audit report in 2014 on the purchase of an aircraft and clothing, bedding, camping and food supplies for Mali's armed forces, as well as vehicles and spare parts,⁴⁵ in relation to an agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the company GUO-Star.⁴⁶ The VEGAL report revealed

several instances of non-compliance concerning primarily the choice of intermediary for the purchases in question and the financing terms. After the parliamentary opposition called for an inquiry, the National Assembly adopted, on 5 October 2019, a resolution to create a special parliamentary inquiry committee to look into embezzlement and financial misuse in the defence sector.

In a letter to the president of the National Assembly, the then-leader of the opposition and member of parliament, Soumaila Cissé, had requested that a parliamentary inquiry be held into the crimes of corruption, embezzlement of public funds, cronyism, fraud and fraudulent use, insider influence, unlawful accumulation of wealth and non-assistance to people in danger. The actions included the purchase of the presidential plane and military equipment, the purchase and repair of Puma helicopters, the purchase of Super Tucano planes and the training of pilots at exorbitant prices.⁴⁷ The term of the special inquiry committee, made up of 15 members of parliament, was set at two months, but it has not yet completed its work.⁴⁸

In March 2020, the prosecutor Mahamadou Kassogu  announced that his team's inquiries had uncovered embezzlement of funds amounting to close to 15 million euros and over-invoicing of more than 45 million euros.⁴⁹ The fraud-related not only to the purchase of equipment but to staff wages as well:

Under the military programming act of February 2015, 1.23 billion CFA francs were made available to the army. The act covered the purchase of equipment but also aimed to increase the number of troops, improve soldiers' living conditions and ensure they received high-quality training. In August 2016, the Ordinance on the general status of troops⁵⁰ was adopted, establishing an improved pay scale and several allowances and bonuses, such as a residence allowance, an allowance for military expenses, an accommodation allowance, a function-related bonus, a graduation bonus and several special bonuses. The payroll for the army, the national guard and the gendarmerie went from 65 billion CFA francs in 2015 to 156 billion CFA francs in 2020, 2.4 times higher; this served in part to cover the large-scale recruitment of troops but also the pay rises and allowances received by the troops [...]. With their wages increasing (+15 per cent), as well as the allowances and bonuses, the living standards of the soldiers and of their families improved considerably.⁵¹

However, between 2017 and 2020, there was a double payslip system in place for some units of the ground and air forces in various military regions – the amounts listed on the payslip sent to the soldier were different from the ones listed on the payslip sent to the Treasury.⁵²

In Burkina Faso, a former defence minister was arrested for unlawful accumulation of wealth after a complaint was lodged by the national anti-corruption network (REN-LAC) and transferred directly to an Ouagadougou prison facility. The former minister was charged with fraud and fraudulent use, money laundering and unlawful income. Many of the public contracts that the army had awarded under that minister – for both individual equipment (such as bullet-proof vests and riot vests) and collective projects (such as the construction of barracks) – were entered into by mutual agreement, in violation of the law. The cost of the equipment procured was considerably overestimated, with the knowledge of the defence minister, and private networks allegedly provided false military equipment to the army. The former minister's arrest reflects the broader context of corruption. The army in Burkina Faso was for a long time run by the ultra-rich elite of generals, colonels and colonel majors who, for years, enjoyed a certain number of both lawful and unlawful advantages. Under the regime of Blaise Compaor , high-ranking officers were able to purchase homes in the new Ouaga 2000 neighbourhood through dummy

corporations. One of the roads in the neighbourhood was ironically referred to as ‘the generals’ road’. Some of the houses belonging to the high-ranking officers were rented out at prohibitively high prices to public institutions. The officers were also allegedly involved in the business world. Many high-ranking officers had major interests in the wood transport sector, for instance.⁵³

Against the backdrop of this large-scale misuse of State funds, soldiers continue to die courageously on the front line. There has been condemnation of the misuse of funds that were meant to be used to safeguard the State’s institutions and its integrity and protect the people and that first and foremost harms the military itself and its troops. The message to the judge presiding over the case of the misuse of funds by the Niger defence ministry, that a soldier named Irkoy-Tamo, who was fatally wounded on 18 May 2020, had the strength to write on a paper marked with his blood before he died, is particularly poignant:

Sir, here, a soldier has died on mission for the Republic; he does not want any military honours, tears or lamentations. Like all those who died before him, in Diffa, Tillabery, Tahoua and other places, he wants only one thing: to be reassured that you, too, will fulfil your mission with dignity and put forward a solid case against those who turned this war into a business.⁵⁴

Individual and collective survival strategies within the military

In addition to the embezzlement by the upper echelons of the political-military hierarchy, it is also important to look at how the resources of military institutions are allocated among the lower echelons. Some frequent practices within the armies in the central Sahel countries reflect those described by Anna Dessertine concerning the Guinean army: ‘power in the army is structured around the management and control of resources, creating internal and often competitive fragmentation’.⁵⁵

The embezzlement of wages and equipment is not unusual within army units. The monopoly of certain leaders is common, as Denis Tull described in his work highlighting the condemnation by foreign partners of the resistance to reforms:

[S]elf-serving elites who seek to perpetuate an opaque and unaccountable mode of governance that allows them to illegally appropriate significant resources: in one case to seize part of the salaries of military staff or even of fictitious personnel; in another to appropriate FAMA [the Mali armed forces] equipment to engage in illicit activities in informal markets.⁵⁶

However, it is also important to underscore that some of the embezzlement is carried out in order to redistribute the funds – rather than benefiting a limited number of individuals, the embezzled funds benefit all of the men in the unit:

A higher-ranking officer will artificially inflate the number of soldiers under his command by adding fictitious posts in order to increase the budget, which all of his men will then benefit from.⁵⁷

In addition, within the military, supply offices also play a central role. An officer in the gendarmerie in Mali explained how:

You have to avoid falling into the same trap as so many other articles and reports, which cite the embezzlement without making the effort to understand how it works. The finance people and other administrators are a class of their own within the army, and they know how to build solid relations with both politicians and the military hierarchy. Researchers only seem to look at the hierarchy without trying to decipher the systems in place. Where wages are embezzled, in most cases, the

operational hierarchy in the field and the chiefs of staff are not involved. In reality, the administrators are the main perpetrators of this practice, although they may sometimes be colluding with other people higher up. The most frequent and widespread form of embezzlement is the falsification of the number of troops: this is true in the security forces and out in the field, whenever bonuses are paid proportionally to the number of personnel involved. The Arte report⁵⁸ into the falsification of payslips reflects this national practice by finance managers in payroll services.⁵⁹

As there is no bank-based system enabling troops to receive their wages directly by bank transfer, particularly in more remote areas, wages are paid directly in cash by the administration. So service heads can easily engage in embezzlement. However, the mechanisms at work are often much more subtle. For instance, an administrative worker may informally grant loans to soldiers then suddenly decide to change the repayment terms, bringing forward the payment of loan and the related interest, which is often arbitrarily set. Many soldiers, particularly the rank and file, then find themselves part of the informal debt system.⁶⁰

As is the case elsewhere in Africa, there is also an

organisational way of thinking, primarily at the camp level, which is considered a resource-generating space [...] The camp can be thought of as a resource-generating space in which it is important to be as well-positioned as possible, either by occupying an income-generating position or by being close to one of the people who does.⁶¹

This is how both predatory and non-predatory relations of economic power and competition develop. Examples include⁶²:

- The management of fuel stocks, with unit heads not using all the fuel they have for their battalion so that they can resell part of it.
- The management and resale of equipment, including logistics equipment such as spare parts.
- Small-time trafficking of basic office supplies.
- The commodification of benefits, such as general food allowances and the preferential prices paid by the military. Bags of rice – bought at a lower price – are, for instance, sold on at a higher price to boost income.
- Access to accommodation in barracks is also a challenge – in many barracks, there is no distinction between the living and the working quarters and many soldiers who do not have access to the barracks live in the local town and must therefore pay rent.
- Access to health care, including in the event of an injury on the front line – some soldiers stated that the principle of free health care is not necessarily complied with in military hospitals, with some doctors sometimes charging high amounts for their consultations.⁶³
- The use of rank-and-file soldiers for service-related functions by the upper echelons of the army – in Burkina Faso, for example, for decades, the military elite used rank-and-file soldiers as cleaners, couriers, cooks, drivers, etc. The rank-and-file soldiers are therefore aware of some of the unlawful practices their superiors engage or engaged in. It is these rank-and-file soldiers who were the main instigators of the 2011 mutinies.
- Parallel work – in Burkina Faso, for example, a large number of army officers also hold civilian positions (in a business, hospital, etc.), which takes up more of their time than their military function.

- Positions within the army also create redistribution mechanisms that are external to the military. A World Bank report on the social obligations created by a career in the army showed that a job in the army is perceived as a way to a privileged social position with financial and material benefits that have to be shared with a broad circle.⁶⁴ Such practices often form part of the soldier's broader family duties and obligations, including as part of the extended family-based systems of solidarity within society.

Yet despite this often biased image of military officers as privileged civil servants, the social situation of members of the armed forces, and particularly the rank and file, has in fact been quite dire in recent decades. A number of reforms have sought to improve the situation, such as the Ordinance of 12 June 2017,⁶⁵ which redefined the general status of soldiers in Mali. The ordinance, in particular, took account of soldiers who had fallen victim to the security situation (the dead and wounded, in particular) and their families by, for example, raising the food allowance and the risk premium for soldiers deployed to the front line (50,000 CFA francs, or 76 euros).⁶⁶ Boisvert stated that:

The army has made the effort since 2012 to strengthen its social services department and support its soldiers, and the resources allocated to widows and wounded soldiers have increased since 2017. But soldiers continue to feel that there is nothing to support them in their mission.⁶⁷

Protests by soldiers' widows have multiplied, condemning the poor or non-existent assistance they received after their husbands were killed on the front line. This is a clear sign of the high levels of dissatisfaction that still prevail.⁶⁸ However, the attack on the Inata base in Burkina Faso on 14 November 2021 highlighted the state of abandon in which the officers had been left. Their repeated calls for fresh supplies went unanswered and they were left to hunt for food and to survive before finally being massacred by a jihadist group without receiving the reinforcements that they had ask their superiors to provide.⁶⁹

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that there are also lawful ways in which soldiers can increase their income, but there is fierce internal competition for these opportunities. They include:

- Internationally mandated missions – competition for positions within multilateral operations, such as those run by the UN, the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force, is fierce, even though the military hierarchy has made efforts to ensure there is a balanced rotation of troops.
- Serving as a military escort – escorts increasingly accompany ex-patriate staff (working for private companies or international agencies, for example) travelling in the Sahel owing to the worsening security situation, and this is a highly sought-after source of income. As an example, in Niger, two days of work as a military escort in the town of Zinder, with a pick-up and seven soldiers represents on average 650,000 CFA francs, or close to 1,000 euros.⁷⁰ In practice, however, the staff often spend much more and regularly do transactions with the security and defence forces. Negotiations (number of vehicles, number of armed men, amount covered by the organisation and the rates) often take place directly in the field with the soldiers or security personnel deployed.

The criminalisation of certain networks

The criminalisation of certain military networks, mainly as a result of officers' connections with drug-trafficking networks, has been a frequent problem in Mali, particularly when President Amadou Toumani Touré⁷¹ was toppled, as he had been accused of not doing enough to dismantle those networks.

Some observers have also said that there were links between the former fighters who were integrated into the armed forces following the rebellions in the north in the 1990s and 2000s, in keeping with the relevant peace accords, and the involvement of some military personnel of varying ranks in the drugs trade.⁷² Some of those former fighters maintained close ties with the northern communities involved in drug-trafficking.

More recently, a report by the Panel of Experts on Mali stated that a powerful former head of state security (intelligence service) under Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's regime, who mysteriously disappeared after the regime was toppled, was involved in drug-trafficking.⁷³

Cracks in the cohesion of military institutions

The hybrid processes for managing and controlling resources within the armies in the Sahel region are intimately linked with the power relations that prevail within those same military institutions. Cracks often appear in the unity of the armed forces, with the internal dynamics brought about by parallel chains of command and different forms of internal solidarity undermining cohesion.

Parallel chains of command

Systems of allegiance within the military are in part governed by the informal human resource management procedures described in the first part of this article. These dynamics often have repercussions on how the chains of command function, particularly at the local level, as the following anonymous statement by a Mali soldier clearly shows:

The lack of respect for the hierarchy should prompt the leaders to take a look at themselves, at those who use the army to get rich off the backs of poor soldiers by embezzling in all sorts of ways. And let's not forget that cronyism is the rule of thumb.⁷⁴

A corollary of the influence of these parallel chains of command is the lack of discipline from the established hierarchy, which the troops often stand up to. In Mali, the Rules of Service in the Army state that:

As discipline is the main strength of the army, it is important that all superiors obtain from their subordinates full obedience and submission in all instances, that all orders are executed literally, without hesitation and without complaint; the authority that gives these orders is responsible and the subordinate is only allowed to make a complaint once they have obeyed.⁷⁵

Yet in Mali distrust between the troops and their hierarchy is a major issue.

It is not unusual for orders to be debated when there is social discontent within the ranks. This attitude was catastrophic during the 2012 crisis and is still present in 2016. In late February and early March 2016, students at the GTIA 8 abandoned their training course. They said that they hadn't

received their risk premium. This behaviour is linked to the fact that for some recruits the army is just a way of escaping civilian life and to the contempt of certain officers for their sub-officers and soldiers.⁷⁶

The emergence of these parallel chains of command has also been driven by the absence of any institutional memory within certain military institutions. In a country like Burkina Faso, almost nothing is written down: often, all that remains is the memory of the men exercising power. The head of the intelligence service under President Compaoré, who was reputed to be one of the most well-informed men in the West African subregion, is still perceived as a mine of information when it comes to the functioning of the security services. His arrest brought a brutal end to a security system built on a vast network of family, clan and regime intelligence, yet the new national intelligence agency has no duly structured and organised archive system to refer to. Some believe that only collaboration with the former leaders of this informal intelligence system will make it possible for the security services to ensure continuity.⁷⁷

Lastly, the abuse and ill-treatment committed by soldiers against civilians is another shortcoming in the chains of command: various reports by MINUSMA in Mali,⁷⁸ the national human rights committee in Niger⁷⁹ and Human Rights Watch in Burkina Faso⁸⁰ have covered in great detail the allegations of abuse and ill-treatment by members of certain army units. Repeated human rights violations by members of the military – which the number of which has multiplied in 2020⁸¹ – raise the fundamental question of whether these armies actually have any disciplinary power to remedy and punish rule-breaking within the ranks.

In Mali, there is no functioning court martial, or strict punishment system.

Some members of the military are punished, but in an opaque manner, or the punishments are lifted, lost or simply not applied. It is more important to have a godfather who will protect you from punishment or a godmother who loses your file than to follow the rules.⁸²

The military's refusal to demoralise the troops by leaving soldiers and officers open to potential proceedings in the event of "blunders", the term often used in the army, also explains the absence of any effective military justice: 'officers cited in cases of ill-treatment are very often the ones who were the most enterprising in the field and who are supported by their troops'.⁸³

Internal solidarity

Within military units, authority is meant to go from top to bottom, from the commanders to the rank and file and can be imposed because of the threat of punishment.⁸⁴ Internal organisational dynamics within the armies in the Sahel are, however, largely governed by solidarity, which prevails over officially established hierarchies or manipulates those hierarchies in an underhanded way.

Corporatism

Corporatism, while present in all armies, is particularly prevalent in the armies in the Sahel. The solidarity created during training, and the resulting socialisation, are extremely powerful within the military hierarchy.

The role of military schools is particularly important within these institutions. Under the Sankara regime, the School for Cadets of the Revolution was of key importance. It then became the military school attended by a whole generation of Burkina Faso's military, political and

intellectual elite. The longevity and strength of the ties of solidarity, and even friendship, forged by this generation now aged between 50 and 70 years should not be underestimated. In Niger, most officers in the army attend military schools for children. In Mali, the military school in Kati serves as a melting pot. As a lieutenant, Moussa Traoré instructed militiamen at the Kati camp put in place by Modibo Keita; he was also an instructor of officers at the Inter-Army Military School (EMIA), which at the time was based in Kati before being moved to Koulikoro in 1983.⁸⁵ Following that, many of the men who were still serving joined the army under Moussa Traoré's regime. Two thirds of the soldiers in the first round of graduations from the school are part of the current military hierarchy: many were close to Moussa Traoré, which explains why he continued to exercise moral authority over the army – and the political class – until his death in September 2020.

Furthermore, as demonstrated during the clashes between the rival Green Beret and Red Beret factions when Captain Sanogo seized power in Mali, there is a strong team spirit among paratroopers, who maintained their solidarity and their very strong identity even after being disbanded and subsequently re-established. The Red Berets were a special unit created at the end of the 1970s to protect the president of the Republic, to whom they were exclusively accountable. They “claimed to be on the margins of, or even in opposition to, the rest of the army. They were favoured by the regime of Moussa Traoré and by that of Amadou Toumani Touré, who himself had been a Red Beret and former chief of Moussa Traoré's presidential guard; they enjoyed higher wages, more frequent premiums and better training than the Green Berets, who made up the bulk of the army. Better paid, dressed in a specific uniform and safeguarding the resident of the Koulouba presidential palace, whoever they were, the soldiers of the 33rd regiment based at the camp known as “Djicoroni-para” in Bamako for years took full advantage of their purple-coloured berets and the prestige they granted’.⁸⁶ The special force unit within the Red Berets sparked the most envy. The privileged status and treatment that the Red Berets received caused much resentment throughout Mali's army.⁸⁷ This is why the anti-Red Beret rhetoric of the lower-ranking officers in the National Committee for Democratic Recovery and the Restoration of the State led by Captain Sanogo was so successful.

‘While our sons died in Kidal, Tessalit and Aguelhok, the Red Berets stayed in Bamako in their barracks or at the presidential residence’ – this was a statement made in January 2013 by the father of a soldier killed during a rebel advance. ‘Rather than an elite unit, they were protectors of the burgeoning bourgeoisie that Amadou Toumani Touré and the political class represented’, added with bitterness a civil society leader, whose brother was a Red Beret. ‘This “bourgeoisie” was marred by numerous political and financial scandals, such as the embezzlement of international aid that should have been used to combat tuberculosis and malaria’.⁸⁸

In addition, schools and training centres play an important role and can influence career paths more than operational experience can, with large numbers of officers traditionally attending schools based on the French model and system of hierarchy. Thus, graduates of the Special Military School of Saint-Cyr (known as Saint-Cyriens) and Ecole de Guerre in France have wielded great influence within the upper echelons of the armies in the Sahel in recent decades – these are the schools usually attended by the army elite, particularly in Mali. However, the coup on 18 August 2020 represented a break from this trend. The National Committee of Public Salvation (CNSP) – which has now been disbanded but whose members still hold important positions within the Mali authorities – was made up of officers who all

had similar educational backgrounds and operational experience. They all attended the EMIA military school in Koulikouro. None of them was a Saint-Cyrien or a graduate of the Ecole de Guerre in France. They all gained combat experience through their role in the military operations run by the Mali armed forces from 2012 onwards. As such:

- Colonel Assimi Goita, appointed president of the CNSP, then vice president for defence and security affairs and then president of the transition from 24 May 2021, had been deployed several times to the north of Mali before taking command of an autonomous battalion of the special forces in 2018.
- Colonel Malick Diaw, appointed vice president of the CNSP before becoming president of the National Transition Council, was deputy commander of the military base in Kati, where a revolt began in the hours before the coup and the arrest of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.⁸⁹
- Colonel-Major Ismaël Wague, appointed CNSP spokesperson and then minister for national reconciliation, comes from the air force and served in Sévaré in central Mali.
- Colonel Modibo Konem, appointed minister for security and then director of state security, commanded units of the national guard deployed in central Mali.
- Colonel Sadio Camara, appointed minister of defence, came top of his class at EMIA and then stayed in the north of the country until 2012. He was a supervisor in the national guard and director-general of the military school in Kati.

The solidarity between the *promo* (classmates), the *affreux* (the elders) and the *bazars* (the youth) from the same training programmes in Mali is strong, while some officers who trained or gained experience in France, the USA, or within the African Union or Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) seem to be less favoured than before.

Lastly, it is worth pointing out that there is no such team spirit in the lower levels of the army. In a particularly striking contrast, the rank and file and sub-officers are often transferred from one posting to the next, particularly in the most dangerous areas, without any transparent professional logic.

Generational differences

Clashes between officers from different generations are increasingly evident in the armies in Burkina Faso and Mali in particular.

In Burkina Faso, the aborted coup attempt after the popular uprising in 2014 revealed a division between young and old. The simmering conflict pitted the upper echelons of the military against the generation of subordinate officers who came from the provinces in 2015 and sought to stop the coup attempt in 2017. For the days that the attempted coup lasted (from 16 to 23 September), the military hierarchy watched on in silence. The spontaneous popular resistance did not immediately have the backing of the army. Regional commanders had, it would seem, received orders not to intervene and not to leave their positions. But the troops deployed in the regions, particularly the region of Dori, who were primarily young, low-ranking officers, were able to stop the coup attempt by members of the presidential security regiment. Without receiving orders from the commander-in-chief, forces loyal to the transitional government came from the provinces to fight the forces of the 'men in the leopard uniform' (i.e. the uniform of the former presidential security regiment). A group of young officers who had trained at the military school in Kadiogo played a key role in opposing the regiment from the outset of the

coup.⁹⁰ President Roch-Marc Christian Kaboré used members of this group to refresh the military hierarchy around him⁹¹ after the Inata attack (see above). Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba, who took power after President Kaboré was deposed, was also part of this group.⁹² More broadly speaking, young officers in Burkina Faso do not always have the same training or even the same career path as more senior members of the military. Given the widespread unemployment in the country, young graduates, often with a degree in hand, have increasingly sought to join the army. This has greatly altered the relations with the military hierarchy, as recruitment was previously based primarily on physical aptitude, particularly within the presidential security regiment (which explains the very rigid hierarchy and strict discipline within that group). The younger officers also have a different mindset because of the events that occurred in 2011 and 2014 in Burkina Faso, while the more senior officers were crushed by the Sankara revolution and then politicised during the Compaoré regime. The old hierarchy appears to have been, if not discredited, then called into question by the young officers. The perception by the troops and the young officers is that the military hierarchy has grown ‘paunch and tense from its advantages’, to take the expression used by one young officer, while another said ‘we feel there is a lack of respect for the hierarchy and frustration among young officers’.⁹³ However, even though the young officers are clearly unhappy with the hierarchy, others feel that it is important not to underestimate the power of the little brother/big brother relationship that has always existed within the army in Burkina Faso. The upper echelons of the military consider the young officers to be impatient, stating that, back in their day, they had to wait before getting to positions of responsibility, which they were not awarded when they were just 30 or 40 years old.⁹⁴ Moreover, it is important in their eyes not to systematically idealise the younger generation. It is rumoured, for instance, that Salif Diallo,⁹⁵ who headed a small army clique, paid some young officers from the provinces to counter the attempted coup in Ouagadougou in 2015. These young officers (captains and commanders) wanted recognition for their efforts through accelerated promotions and were very unhappy and frustrated when that did not happen.

In Mali, the generational mindset is also prevalent. In addition to the heritage left by Moussa Traoré, who, as we mentioned above, was one of the key officers of the generation that joined the higher echelons of the army in the 1980s, some of the decisions made by President Amadou Toumani Touré during his two terms in office, from 2002 to 2012,⁹⁶ helped to create certain divisions:

Amadou Toumani Touré reinforced the imbalance within Mali’s army, with, on the one hand, a plethora of generals and officers who were covered with distinctions and accumulated wealth quickly and with great opulence and, on the other, troops living in a cycle of poverty and precarity that joining the army did not break. Between these two groups, the Mali army lay primarily on the shoulders of 40-year-old captains. These captains received – or some of them would say “suffered” – orders from their superior officers and had to apply them to the rest of the army. They had to fight on two fronts: for the social issues affecting the troops and against the rebellion in the north. In February 2012, these captains held positions and deployed the army in conflict areas [. . .]. [Many soldiers] only identify their 40-year-old captains with leadership, and those captains have become the incarnation of the entire army.⁹⁷

These words, written by Eros Sana in 2013, were particularly resonant in the aftermath of the coup instigated on 18 August 2020 by young officers who arrested the senior members of the military hierarchy under President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita,⁹⁸ before releasing them to meet the demands of ECOWAS.

Community imbalances within the army

While these are often more tacit, community and family relations have an undisputed influence on organisational structures within the armed forces in the Sahel.

The case of the Burkina Faso army is quite striking in this regard. According to some people,⁹⁹ Blaise Compaoré was convinced that he would be deposed by a member of the Mossi community because of the central role played by traditional chiefs in power relations in Burkina Faso. As a result, he is said to have always ensured that the army was headed by officers belonging to leaderless ethnic groups.

In Niger, since independence, the army has been quantitatively dominated by members from the Zarma community (around 23 per cent of the total population), who historically held all of the key positions. Attempts to reset the balance in favour of the Hausa community (which makes up 53 per cent of the population) in the 2010s did not fundamentally change the makeup of the army's elite. Efforts were made to reset the balance within the army by integrating members of other communities: Tuaregs and Toubous have a special status under the 1994 peace accord, which means that they have increased representation within the army, based on the principle of positive discrimination.¹⁰⁰

In Mali, all communities are represented in the army. In the 1960s, recruitments were made from all social levels. The only criteria at the time related to size and physical build, which were seen as signs of aptitude for a career involving weapons. The proportion that each community made up in the army was, in theory, related to that community's geographical and demographic representation: the 'selection of men' (or *Tchè ta* in Bambara) was done from village to village, mainly on a voluntary basis. However, the minority groups in the north of Mali – the Tuaregs and the Songhai – were underrepresented at the time. After the rebellions in the 1990s, and to support their integration into the armed forces, the proportion of members from the communities in the north was revised upwards at all levels of the military, in keeping with the abovementioned peace accords. It is interesting to note that not all communities had the same historical relationship with or attitude towards the army. During colonial times, the Fulani community ferociously opposed the French army. They were defending Islam against an armed force that they perceived as being a vector for another religion. After that, Fulani communities tended, on the whole, to distrust the army, which they perceived as being composed of bad Muslims: Fulani leaders then tried to convince members of their community to join the army, not without difficulty. Still today, there are few members of the Fulani community in the army, particularly among the officers.¹⁰¹ However, there are no palpable community-related issues within the armed forces, although some have stated that since the coup on 18 August 2020, officers from the minority Bobo and Mianka communities are more highly favoured.¹⁰²

Conclusion

Is it possible to rationalise the functioning of the armed forces in the Sahel? One of the main difficulties encountered when international partners seek to reform defence and security structures in the Sahel are the obstacles to putting in place rationalised and IT-based human resources management and payroll systems. The virtues of this type of management system are clearly explained in a Transparency International report:

A digitalised system would eliminate the opportunities for unit commanders and defence officials to skim off small percentages of soldiers' salaries and allowances. It would also reveal how many people each commander has under their authority and curb the opportunities for unit leaders to pocket the salaries of non-existent, deceased or retired soldiers.¹⁰³

Yet major players in the reform process, such as the EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel missions, found it impossible to introduce these reforms. As Denis Tull explains,¹⁰⁴ the introduction of the electronic system was cancelled in 2016 by the Directorate of Human Resources of the Ministry of Defence.¹⁰⁵ Implementing a computerised system for human resources and payroll management was made impossible by the fact that 'men are the ones who ultimately manipulate these IT systems',¹⁰⁶ in all senses of the word.

This example demonstrates how difficult international partners find it to truly grasp the complexity of the power relations and micro-social dynamics¹⁰⁷ within defence structures in the Sahel, in terms of both their internal functioning and their relationship with the political sphere. Without a better understanding of and response to the hybrid functioning of the governance and regulatory systems of Sahelian militaries, the massive investments made to improve their effectiveness will continue to fall far short of their expected impact.

Notes

1. Ministère des Armées, "Opération Barkhane", website of the Ministère des Armées de France.
2. European Union Training Mission in Mali.
3. The EUCAP Sahel mission worked with domestic security forces in both Mali and Niger.
4. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was tasked with supporting the reform of the country's security system, although its work focused primarily on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. See MINUSMA website: <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-ddr>. In Burkina Faso, UNDP is in charge of the security systems reform process.
5. Civilian reform programmes have been run in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger by organisations such as the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) and the African Security Sector Network (ASSN) or have received bilateral support from international partners.
6. This article will focus on reforms to the land army and will not look at other sections of the armed forces.
7. Bagayoko, *Pour une perspective stratégique africaine*.
8. Bagayoko, Eboe Hutchful and Robin Luckham, *Hybrid security governance in Africa, Conflict, Security & Development*.
9. Bagayoko, Eboe Hutchful and Robin Luckham, *Hybridité et gouvernance de la sécurité en Afrique*.
10. Thiriot, *La place des militaires dans les régimes post-transition d'Afrique..*
11. Dabezies, *Les armées africaines..*
12. Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*: see chapter 1 in particular.
13. The "civil-military" approach is inspired by the concept developed by Samuel Huntington known as "objective civilian control" (Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, Belknap Press, New York, 1981) the first edition of which dates

back to the 1950s. According to Huntington, the democratic model of civil-military relations consists of institutional and professional rules that require soldiers to accept and respect the supremacy of civilians and that require civilians to respect the professional autonomy and authority of the army. The works of Samuel Edward Finer (Samuel Edward Finer, *The Man on the Horse Back: The Role of the Military in Politics*, Pall Mall Press, Oxford, 1962) and of Morris Janowitz (Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960) are also key references on the US concept of civil-military relations.

14. Hutchful, *Reconstructing civil-military relations*; Bathily and Eboe Hutchful, *The Military and Militarism in Africa*.
15. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *The Roots of Restraint in War*, 30.
16. The country, known at the time as Upper Volta, was renamed Burkina Faso the following year.
17. Anonymous interview, Ouagadougou, April 2017 [our translation].
18. Malagardis, *Coup d'état au Burkina Faso*; France 24, lieutenant-colonel Damiba déclaré président par le Conseil constitutionnel.
19. Djeka, *Economie politique du secteur de la sécurité au Niger*, 28.
20. In a second coup, the transitional president Bah Ndaw and his prime minister Moctar Ouane were removed from office by the vice president for defence, Colonel Assimi Goïta (cf. *infra*), who then became the new transitional president.
21. For more on the political role of the military in Mali's modern history, see *The Legacy of Military Governance in Mali*. See also Mathurin C. Hounnikpo, *Africa's Militaries: A Missing Link in Democratic Transitions*.
22. Blanchard, *Au Mali, la plupart des gouverneurs sont des militaires, encore des militaires*.
23. RFI, *Mali : le nouveau ministre de la Défense veut réformer l'armée*, [Author's translation].
24. Djeka, above note 20, [Author's translation].
25. Anonymous interview, November 2020.
26. Eros, *L'armée malienne, entre instabilité, inégalités sociales et lutte de places*, Galy (éd.), *La guerre au Mali. Comprendre la crise au Sahel et au Sahara : enjeux et zones d'ombre*, 107.
27. Anonymous interview, Ouagadougou, October 2020 [our translation].
28. Anonymous interview, Bamako, September 2017 [our translation].
29. Deycard, *Les rebellions touarègues du Niger*, 276, [Author's translation].
30. Poulton and Ibrahim ag Youssouf, *La paix de*, XXII-424; Lode, *The Peace Process in Mali*.
31. Agreement on the cessation of hostilities between the Government of the Republic of Mali, on the one hand, and the Popular Movement of the Azawad and the Arab Islamic Front of Azawad, on the other (Tamanrasset, 6 January 1991), available at: http://www.unesco.org/culture/fr/indigenous/Dvd/pj/TOUAREG/TouaregC4_2.pdf.
32. Thiénot, *Le blues de l'armée malienne*, 13.
33. Châtelot and Guibert, *Une armée malienne tombée en ruines*.
34. For example, the impact of the large numbers of former fighters integrated into the army in 1993 was not felt until much later, when the members of the Imrad and Ifogha tribes clashed over the ranks awarded to them – the Ifoghas were unhappy that the Imrads were awarded ranks similar to theirs.
35. Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process.
36. For more on the challenges of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process, see Niagalé Bagayoko, *Le processus de réforme du secteur de la sécurité au Mali*, 77–79.
37. Poulton and Ibrahim ag Youssouf, *La paix de Tombouctou*, XXII-424; Lode, *The Peace Process in Mali*.
38. Jeune Afrique, *Niger : ce que contient l'audit du ministère de la défense*.
39. Prevost, *Best Of Niger* (8), 76 milliards de Fcfa détournés à la défense; AFP, *Surfacturation à l'armée nigérienne*.
40. "Niger: révélations accablantes sur l'audit du ministère de la défense", RFI, 29 May 2020, available at: <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200529-niger-r%C3%A9v%C3%A9lations-accablantes-l-audit-minist%C3%A8re-la-d%C3%A9fense>
41. Aksar, *Niger – Malversations au Ministère de la Défense*.
42. Actuniger, *l'Etat renonce à se constituer partie civile, l'affaire gérée à l'amiable*.
43. RFI, *Deuxième rapport d'audit sur les marchés publics au ministère de la défense*.

44. Bensimon, *Une armée malienne rongée par les crises*.
45. Office of the Auditor General, *Acquisition d'un aéronef et fourniture de matériel*.
46. Sy Dolo, *Mali : la société Guo Star accusée de surfacturation*.
47. Sogodogo, *Le Républicain*.
48. This initiative attests to the efforts of the parliamentary institution as a whole to exercise the powers granted to it by the Constitution, going beyond the single role of the National Defence, Security and Civil Protection Commission (CDNSPC), chaired by Karin Keïta, son of President Ibrahim Boubaçar Keïta, which did not investigate.
49. Schmauder, Soto-Mayor, Goxo, *Strategic Missteps: Learning From a Failed EU Sahel Strategy*.
50. Ordinance No. 2016–020/P-RM of 18 August 2016 on the general status of troops.
51. Le Sphinx, *Armée Malienne : Au moins 44 Milliards de FCFA de primes volatilisés*. Marc-André Boisvert also explains how, with the military programming act, “the government increased the budget, making it possible to buy better equipment and improve the living standards of soldiers. A soldier who received 45,000 CFA francs in 2012 now receives 75,000 CFA francs as their basic wage, as well as various allowances, including a risk bonus of 1,200 CFA francs per day and a bonus for being stationed in the north of 50,000 CFA francs”; Boisvert, ‘Forces armées maliennes, une lente reconstruction’, 87, available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-afrique-contemporaine-2016-4-page-87.htm>.
52. Le Sphinx, *Armée Malienne : Au moins 44 Milliards de FCFA de primes volatilisés*, above note 51.
53. Anonymous interview, Ouagadougou, October 2020 [our translation]. The instances described above are part of the “informal process of accumulating wealth”.
54. Tchangari, *Questions outre-tombe d'un soldat mort pour la République*, [Author's translation].
55. Dessertine, *L'État, ce n'est personne? Les relations de pouvoir dans l'armée guinéenne*, 1, [Author's translation].
56. Tull, *Rebuilding Mali's army*.
57. Boisvert, *Forces armées maliennes* [Author's translation].
58. ARTE, *Mali : une armée dans le collimateur*.
59. Anonymous phone interview, November 2020 [our translation].
60. Anonymous interview, Bamako, March 2020 [our translation].
61. See A. Dessertine, above note 55 [Author's translation].
62. The practices mentioned below were identified following a series of interviews conducted by the author in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger between October 2018 and June 2021.
63. If a soldier is injured in combat, the State usually provides first aid but is often incapable of ensuring the mental and physical care needed until the patient is medically considered healed.
64. World Bank, *Recommandations visant à renforcer le programme anti-corruption*.
65. Ordinance No. 2016–020/P-RM of 18 August 2016 on the general state of soldiers, see above note 50.
66. It is known as the “operational presence premium” and depends on the budget line for the area of operation. The amount, determined by the chief of staff, can increase or decrease based on the efforts made.
67. Boisvert, “Forces armées maliennes”, 88.
68. Macé, *Au Mali, le poids du deuil et de l'oubli*.
69. Le Cam, *Au Burkina Faso la colère monte après l'attaque meurtrière du poste d'Inata*.
70. Interview with an international expert who has conducted assignments in Niger [our translation].
71. Ba, *Guerre au Mali et drogue*; Thioly, Thiénot, *Mali: la guerre de la cocaïne*.
72. Interview with Mahamadou Diouara, independent researcher, Bamako, September 2017 [our translation].
73. Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and extended pursuant to resolution 2432 (2018), UN doc S/2019/636*, 7 August 2019, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/220/34/PDF/N1922034.pdf?OpenElement>.
74. Bamada, *Dossier: l'armée malienne face à la hiérarchie*.
75. Document cited during an anonymous interview, Bamako, October 2020 (Author's translation).

76. Touchard, *Forces armées africaines*. Concerning the GTIA 8 incident, one Mali officer said anonymously that “it was a fictitious unit under the responsibility of a general from the Tuareg community” [our translation].
77. Interviews, Ouagadougou, May 2018 and October 2020.
78. MINUSMA, *Note on Trends of Human Rights Violations and Abuses in Mali*.
79. CNDH-Niger, *Report on the inquiry, investigation and verification mission*.
80. Dufka, *We Found Their Bodies Later That Day*.
81. Bagayoko, *Sahel: les forces de défense et de sécurité, nouvelle menace pour les populations?* See also: People’s Coalition for the Sahel, *The Sahel: What Needs to Change..*
82. Boisvert, *L’étrange défaite de l’armée malienne*, [Author’s translation].
83. Anonymous interview, Bamako [our translation].
84. International Committee of the Red Cross, *Integrated Armed Forces*.
85. The first class graduated from the EMIA in 1961.
86. In Sana.
87. Some people believe that this perception of the Red Berets is distorted: “There’s no proof that they were pampered more than others. They were perhaps better trained but they weren’t more pampered” – anonymous interview, Bamako, October 2020 [our translation].
88. Eros, above note 26 [Author’s translation].
89. The individuals behind the 2012 coup also came from this military base.
90. Anonymous interviews, Ouagadougou, April 2018.
91. RFI, *Le président Kaboré nommé de nouveaux commandants*.
92. Baché, *Burkina Faso: qui est Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba*.
93. Anonymous interviews, Ouagadougou, May 2018 [our translation].
94. Anonymous interview, Ouagadougou, October 2020.
95. Salif Diallo, who died in 2017, was considered one of the most influential men in Burkina Faso for close to 30 years. Nicknamed the “alternative minister of foreign affairs” under Blaise Compaoré, he broke from him in the late 2000s.
96. Amadou Toumani Touré appointed 45 generals.
97. Eros, above note 26, 110, 113 [Author’s translation].
98. Le Monde, *Mali: libération des personnalités civiles et militaires arrêtées lors du coup d’état*.
99. Anonymous interview, Ouagadougou, October 2020 [our translation].
100. The composition of the national guard is more diverse.
101. See N. Bagayoko, *Le processus de réforme du secteur de la sécurité au Mali*, above note 37, 5.
102. Anonymous interview, Bamako, November 2020 [our translation].
103. Smith, *Building Integrity in Mali’s Security and Defence Sector*, [Author’s translation].
104. D. Tull, above note 56.
105. According to the director of the Malian army’s Directorate of Public Relations, “the process of setting up a bank-based system for the payment of wages was in process [...] and the vast majority of military personnel were in favour of it; they say the barriers are the lack of inadequate banking coverage in deployment areas and a certain level of illiteracy among personnel”, cited in “Armée Malienne: Au moins 44 Milliards de FCFA de primes volatilisés Comment la LOPM a servi de couverture à la plus grande escroquerie au sein de l’armée”, *art. cit.* (52); in addition, the company chosen by EUTM to execute the project was not to the liking of the authorities at the time (telephone interview with an officer in Mali, November 2020).
106. Anonymous interview with a officer in the gendarmerie, Bamako, October 2020 [our translation].
107. See also Nina Wilén, “Formal Relations and Networks in Security Force Assistance: The case of Niger”, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*.

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