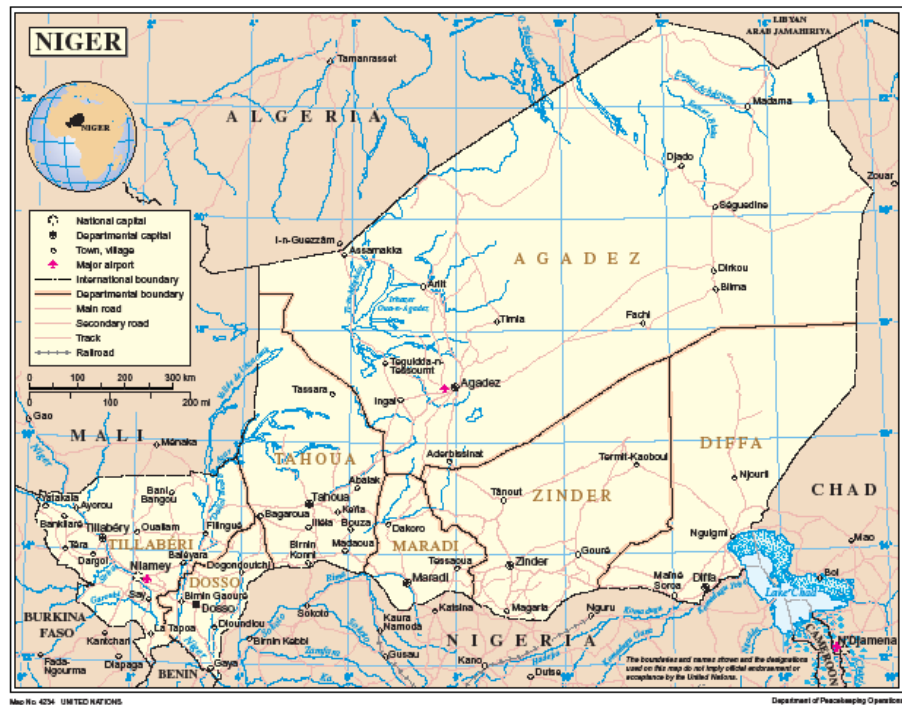


Tuareg rebellions in Mali and Niger, 1990 – Today
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Mali and Niger are neighboring countries in West Africa. The northern parts of both countries are dominated by the Sahara desert, while the south reaches into the Sahel and is irrigated by the Niger river. Both former French colonies, they are among the poorest nations in the world, ranking fifth- and fourth-from bottom in the 2007/2008 Human Development Index rankings.

Maps taken from the UN Cartographic Section Web Site.



Introduction and Summary

The “Insecurity of the North” is a constant political and security issue in both Mali and Niger. The Tuareg nomads who live in the Sahara were among the last to be “pacified” by French colonialism, with some Tuareg resisting until 1922.¹ Ever since independence from France in 1960, the southern-dominated governments of Mali and Niger have both had difficulty controlling the remote reaches of the Sahara. Tuareg have been historically resistant to being ruled by their southern neighbors. Demands for autonomy and/or more resources invested in the region from the central government have resulted in Tuareg rebellions in 1963 in Mali, in both countries from 1990 to approximately 1996, and the current insurgencies in both countries.

This paper examines five influences on those rebellions:

- the social and economic marginalization many Tuareg feel that serves as the main grievance of the rebellions,
- environmental factors such as drought and desertification,
- resource extraction such as uranium mining,
- smuggling routes that criss-cross the Sahara, and
- the proliferation of terrorist networks and the Global War on Terror, the lens through which the world's superpower views the conflict.

With the increasing attention insurgency and counterinsurgency is gaining in academic literature, these five factors are likely to increase in importance in the study of insurgency and low-intensity conflict in the future. This paper asks the question: *How have marginalization, environmental degradation, resource extraction, smuggling, and the Global War on Terror impacted the Tuareg*

¹ Niger. Department of State background note.

insurgencies since 1990? Answering this question requires investigating the triggers for Tuareg political violence that flared up in 1990 – triggers that date back decades, but most importantly to the first post-colonial Tuareg rebellion in 1963. This paper finds that while marginalization, smuggling and the environment have proved more important than terrorism and resource extraction, the interaction between these five factors, especially how environmental variables, resource extraction, smuggling and terrorism reinforce Tuareg perceptions of marginalization, provide the driving force behind the insurgencies.

An Explanation of the Factors

A standard line in many journalistic accounts of civil conflicts is that the participants have 'ancient hatreds' going back centuries.² Grievances such as marginalization typically dominate explanations of conflicts, especially civil wars.³ While the explanatory power of grievances and 'ancient hatreds' is poor,⁴ it often forms part of or even dominates the discourse of conflict. This paper examines social and economic marginalization to see whether the grievances of social and economic marginalization hold any explanatory power over Tuareg insurgencies since 1990.

Thomas Homer-Dixon puts forth a logic in which environmental scarcity can lead to conflict through decreased economic security and voluntary or forced migration, which leads to weakened states, ethnic conflicts, coups d'etat, and deprivation conflicts.⁵ Environmental factors cause or

2 Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts* is one prominent example.

3 Stathis Kalyvas argues that the discourse of the "master cleavage" dominates outsiders' understandings of civil wars. Kalyvas 2003.

4 Fearon & Laitin 2003.

5 Thomas Homer-Dixon provides a causal logic leading from environmental scarcity to sub-state conflict. Homer-Dixon 1991.

contribute to conflicts around the globe, from ancient conflicts in China⁶ to the current conflict in Darfur.⁷ In the Sahara, environmental scarcity chiefly takes form in droughts, but environmental scarcity can apply to other resources such as farmland, and can broadly apply to almost any conflict.

There are three predominant logics that connect natural resources with civil wars and insurgencies: the control over natural resources providing motivation and incentive for conflict,⁸ altering the conduct of the war to gain or maintain control over resources,⁹ or the reliance on a single source of revenue causing structural weakness among states that have abundant resources.¹⁰ The Tuareg rebellion provides a good opportunity to study how the presence of large-scale uranium mining has or has not impacted the Tuareg insurgencies, and thus an opportunity to evaluate these three logics.

Beyond controlling conventional natural resources like oil or uranium, many insurgencies are sustained or profit off of illicit economic activities, including smuggling. Some analysts argue that many insurgencies are actually political cover for illicit economic activity.¹¹ Indeed, some are. Smuggling and trafficking of illicit materials affects insurgencies from the FARC in Columbia to the former RUF in Sierra Leone to the Taliban in Afghanistan. There is also concern that terrorist networks, attracted by illicit economic opportunities, can get involved in otherwise irrelevant insurgencies.¹² The presence of a major smuggling route through Tuareg areas in Mali and Niger provides an opportunity to study the impact of illicit commerce on insurgency.

Finally, the Global War on Terror has a significant impact on how the world's last superpower

6 Zhang et al, 2007.

7 Climate change – only one cause among many for Darfur conflict. *IRIN News*. June 28, 2007.

8 Collier 2000.

9“While it would be an error to reduce armed conflicts to greed-driven resource wars, as political and identity factors remain key, the control of local resources influence the agendas and strategies of belligerents.” Le Billon 2001, page 580.

10“Beyond motivating or financing conflicts, the level of dependence, conflictuality, and lootability of a resource can also increase the vulnerability of societies to, and the risk of armed conflict.” Le Billon 2001, 581.

11 For instance the official position of the government of Niger is that the current rebels are bandits and drug smugglers.

12 Rollie Lal. Terrorists and Organized Crime Join Forces. *International Herald Tribune*, May 24, 2005.

views its relations with the rest of the globe. The War on Terror provides a new lens with which American policymakers can view the world, and the raised awareness of Al Qaeda's ideology provides Muslims a new lens with which to view Western policy. Al Qaeda ideology and American involvement through the War on Terror have proved influential in conflicts around the globe, most obviously including Iraq and Afghanistan, but also Somalia, the Philippines, and the Caucasus.¹³ Some American officials have insisted on viewing almost anything in the Sahara, including the Tuareg insurgencies, through the lens of the War on Terror.¹⁴ This paper will examine what effect, if any, global terrorism has had on the conflict.

Marginalization, environmental scarcity, resource conflict, smuggling, and American counterterrorism policy have all proved influential on past or current conflicts, and will certainly prove influential on future ones as well. The Tuareg insurgencies, by combining these five factors (as well as others) provides an interesting example to study these factors in depth.

History: Background and colonial legacies

The Tuareg are Berbers who speak the Tamachek language, who traditionally practice nomadic pastoralists in the western part of the Sahara desert. Although they call themselves Kel Tamashek

13 Chechnya has its own branch of Al Qaeda. The American response was to create the Georgia Train and Equip program, a counter-terrorism program funded through Operation Enduring Freedom designed to help Georgia deal with problems relating to the situation in their neighbor. Georgia 'Train and Equip' Program Begins. *Department of Defense News Release*. April 29, 2002. Online at <http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=3326>.

14 Keenan 2007, The Banana Theory of Terrorism. One former Ambassador testified to Congress that the Sahara could “be a place of refuge” as well as “potentially the site of new training sites for terrorists forced out of Afghanistan and elsewhere.” Princeton N. Lyman. Prepared testimony to the subcommittee on Africa, House International Relations Committee. April 1, 2004. Online at http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa92870.000/hfa92870_0.htm. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review refers to “emerging terrorist extremist threats” in states like Niger, countered by American aid to local internal security services. Quadrennial Defense Review. *Department of Defense*. February 6, 2006. Page 12.

(people who speak Tamachek), they are known to the Western world as Tuareg. Many Tuareg are light-skinned, in contrast to the majority of Malians and Nigeriens, while black-skinned Tuareg are usually descendants of slaves, taken by Tuareg raids on neighboring sedentary communities.¹⁵ Tuareg communities are caste-based, with the communities themselves generally organized into clans based on lineage, which are then organized in federations. Tuareg on whole probably constitute around five percent of Malians and around ten percent of Nigeriens.¹⁶

Mali and Niger were both French colonies from the end of the nineteenth century until 1960, although France did not have full control over the Tuareg in the Sahara until the end of World War One. France governed the Tuareg through relationships with Tuareg clan leaders, with the threat of military force always in the background (or foreground, as when French colonial authorities displayed the head of a recalcitrant Tuareg chief to demonstrate the value of loyalty).¹⁷ One important tool of French control was balancing rival Tuareg clans against each other, promoting, disbanding or exterminating various tribes according to political convenience.

French colonial rule left in place centralized structures of governance that usually conflicted with traditional Tuareg ways of life. Traditional Tuareg conception of space was divided between economic rights and political rights, a flexible arrangement that facilitated efficient nomadic pastoralism with minimal conflict.¹⁸ French colonialists and later post-colonial administrators gradually changed Tuareg conceptions of space away from political and economic rights associated with resources, towards territory that could be more easily delineated on a map – a “fundamental misfit

15 Slavery probably still exists in some form in many Tuareg communities, and is understandably a source of tension between Tuareg and non-Tuareg. NIGER: The government says slavery no longer exists, the slaves disagree. *IRIN*. June 24, 2005.

16 State Department background notes for Mali and Niger.

17 Poulton & ag Youssouf, 25.

18 Lecocq 2003, 60-62.

between these normative concepts and the reality of dryland ecosystems and pastoral society.”¹⁹ This degraded the resiliency of Tuareg communities, including their ability to mitigate the effects of droughts. The legacy of these political structures formed part of the basis for Tuareg perceptions of social and economic marginalization.²⁰

Independence and 1963

With independence in 1960, the major change for Tuareg communities was the change in rule from the French to the largely Bambara, Mande, Hausa and Djerma-Songhoy politicians of the new Malian and Nigerien states. As some Tuareg put it, rule had shifted from the infidel to the *iklan*, the Tamachek word for slave. Due to the history of the Tuareg which included slave trading, slave-owning, and raiding sedentary communities, the Tuareg were distrusted by their southern neighbors, and vice versa.²¹ There was little contact between Tuareg and other nomads in the Sahara, and sedentary populations in the Sahel.²² Pre-existing stereotypes played a crucial role in central government policy and a brief 1963 Tuareg rebellion in Mali.

The chief policy goals of the newly independent Mali regarding the northern regions in which the Tuareg lived were to “civilize” the nomads by converting them from nomadic herding to sedentary agriculture, and a social engineering project, to raise the status of the former slaves, who still lived in

19 De Bruijn & van Dijk, 1.

20 “...our uprising begun at the moment when Europeans decided to surround our lands. We resisted and finally they won and they put us under direct domination for the first decades and under domination of their local allies. The same resistance movement that begun with Europeans continues now with current 'independent states.’” Personal correspondence, Mohamed ag Ewangaye, March 31, 2008.

21 “West Africans tend to view the Tuaregs as lazy, prone to violence and criminality, opportunistic, ethnically chauvinistic, and unpatriotic.” Keita 1998, 9.

22 Lecocq 2002, 32. The combination of politically relevant (due to widely-known incidents of slave-holding) and socially isolated communities is a recipe for both hateful propaganda and uninformed policy, as the social isolation increases the cost for individuals to debunk propaganda. Glaeser 2005.

Tuareg communities and were economically dependent on their former owners. These policies were interpreted by some Tuareg, including the Kel Adagh clan in Kidal, Mali, as attacking their way of life.²³ Within three years, the Kel Adagh rose up against the central government.

The Kel Adagh revolted largely based on the idea that they did not want to be ruled by their former slaves, and in reaction to punishment from the central state over not paying taxes.²⁴ Although there was no Tuareg nationalist movement and the revolt did not have widespread support throughout the community, rebels knew that they did not want to be part of Mali as it was then imagined, culturally and politically dominated by Mande and Bambara, who Tuareg saw as their inferiors. Naturally local factors were also involved – individual rebels were motivated by revenge, by insulted honor, and by microcleavages important in mobilizing support.²⁵

The Malian Army crushed the Kel Adagh rebellion by using widespread violence against civilians, torture, declaring the countryside outside of a few towns a vast free-fire zone, poisoning wells necessary for any activity outside towns, killing Tuareg herds of cattle and camels to force them into the cities, executing the religious and political leaders of both rebel and neutral clans, and threatening napalm bombing from fighter-bombers. These tactics drove the local police forces over to the side of the rebels, but the counterinsurgency strategy was still effective, and northern Mali remained under military administration until into the 1990s.²⁶

23 Even schooling was seen as antagonistic. Tuareg nobles “sent the children of slaves to school in order to shield their own children.” Rasmussen 1992.

24 Lecocq 2002, 78.

25 Kalyvas emphasizes that local and supralocal motivations do not conflict, but instead local and supralocal actors create alliances to produce violence. Supralocal actors, in this case, the Malian Army and the Kel Adagh, provide locals the necessary force to win in local rivalries, while local actors provide the Malian Army and Kel Adagh access to local networks and mobilization. Kalyvas 2006, 383. For evidence of these local mobilizing factors, see Lecocq 2002, 133-141.

26 Lecocq 2002, 129-167.

The 1970s and 1980s

The 1963 rebellion and its brutal repression are widely seen in Tuareg communities as being the direct antecedent to the 1990s violence. One example are the lyrics of a song by the most widely-known Tuareg band, Tinariwen, entitled 1963: “Sixty-three has gone but will return/those days have left their traces.”²⁷ Tinariwen was a major part of Tuareg cultural movement *teshumara*, a Tuareg intellectual movement that sprung up in the 1970s in favor of rebellion and social revolution. Teshumara comes from the word *shimmir*, meaning “resistance” in Tamasheq – members of the teshumara are known as *ishumar*.²⁸ This nationalist movement saw itself as an extension of Tuareg resistance since against French colonialism up through violent and non-violent resistance to the Nigerien and Malian governments. Even Nigerien *ishumara* promote the role of the 1963 rebellion in Mali.²⁹

The Teshumara movement grew up in refugee camps in Algeria and Libya under the influence of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. Tuareg had begun emigrating during the 1963 war and had continued due to the repressive military regime in Mali, but two devastating droughts in 1974 and 1985 saw the largest waves of emigration. Droughts killed most of the livestock Tuareg herders depended on,³⁰ desertification made pasture scarce,³¹ while changes in agricultural policy further reduced grazing areas.³² Emigrants mostly moved south into refugee camps and slums in southern cities, but many

27 Tinariwen was formed in a Tuareg refugee camp in Algeria run by the Libyan army to train soldiers that were supposed to join Gaddafi's Islamic Legion. Tinariwen *Soixante Trois*. *Aman Iman: Water is Life*. World Village USA, 2007.

28 ag Ewangaye 2006, 62-64. According to ag Ewangaye, the widely repeated idea that *ishumar* was a portmanteau word from the French 'chomeur,' meaning unemployed, was to disguise the true nature of their movement.

29 Ibid.

30 Steele, 1985.

31 Tucker, Dregne and Newcomb 1991, page 300.

32 Keita 1998, n35.

young Tuareg men moved north to Algeria and Libya, finding work in the oil industries there, while Gadaffi recruited young Tuareg men in Libyan and Algerian refugee camps for his “Islamic Legion.” Thus many Tuareg men acquired combat experience in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Chad and Sri Lanka with the Tamil Tigers.³³

Tuareg political movements gained strength within Libyan and Algerian refugee camps. With Libya's encouragement, Nigerien and Malian refugees formed political groups, the precursors to the actual rebel groups.³⁴ Eventually in the late 1980s, as oil jobs became harder to come by in Libya and Algeria, many Tuareg returned to Mali and Niger, voluntarily or not. With full-fledged cultural movement, organized political groups, and the acquisition of military training, the stage was set for Tuareg political violence in the 1990s. The final necessary ingredient was weapons.³⁵

Launching the Rebellion in the 1990s

The governments of Mali and Niger monitored the Algerian and Libyan refugee camps. Through intelligence operations, many Tuareg fighters trained in these camps were arrested as they returned to their home countries.³⁶ These intelligence operations pressured rebel groups to launch their rebellion before they were fully prepared, lest they risk the entire movement being arrested one by one.

33 Humphreys & ag Mohamed 2005, 255. About two hundred Tuareg gained training and experience in the Bekaa valley and in Beirut in heavy weapons. Lecocq 2002, 217-218.

34 Nigerien Tuareg formed the Popular Front for the Liberation of Niger, or FPLN, in 1983, while Malian Tuareg formed the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, or MPLA, in 1988. See the glossary for a list of the acronyms of various rebel groups. These original names didn't reference Tuareg nationalist concepts in order to facilitate the inclusion of Arab nomads, given preferential treatment by Gadaffi. Humphreys & ag Mohamed 2005, 255, Lecocq 2002, 219-224, and Krings 1995, 60.

35 Libya provided training but not weapons. Florquin & Pezard, 53.

36 As refugees were expelled from Algerian camps and returned to Mali, international NGOs such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development detained refugees in camps to be interrogated by Malian intelligence. Humphreys and ag Mohamed 2003, page 19, n41.

In Niger, the spark that led to violence was the attempted return of eighteen thousand Tuareg refugees from Algeria. The Nigerien government had created a resettlement program for these refugees including food and tents, but upon arrival many refugees found that the goods promised them had been sold by corrupt government officials.³⁷ In May 1990, a group of rebels attacked a police post in Tchín-Tabaraden. In response, Nigerien military units arriving from the south killed a large number of innocent Tuareg civilians.³⁸ Some Tuareg rebels fled into Mali, where they were arrested and held in prison.

The MPLA, led by Iyad ag Ghali, made the decision to launch the rebellion in Mali before they were fully ready. There are competing explanations for this – some say that the goal was to free Nigerien Tuareg held in prison in Mali, while others say that the rebellion was launched early to prevent Malian intelligence operations from rolling it up before it started.³⁹ Their initial operational goals were to gain weapons and free their comrades that had been arrested.⁴⁰ Armed with traditional swords and a single Kalashnikov, they launched their first attack on June 28th 1990, capturing twelve more assault rifles, with which they launched another attack the same day, capturing almost 500 weapons and freeing prisoners in Menaka.⁴¹

Early military operations in the rebellion centered around obtaining weapons, vehicles, and fuel, and inflicting military defeats on the Malian Army. Some operations may also have targeted specific NGO projects that rebels saw as harmful to nomadic lifestyles.⁴² Military operations were successful.

37 Krings 1995, 60.

38 The official Nigerien government figure is 63, human rights organizations estimate 600, and Tuareg groups claim 1500 killed. Posthumus 2000. American-trained troops were involved in this massacre, which may contribute to general nervousness about current American programs training local militaries. Interview with Nigerien officer, March 26 2008.

39 For the first reason, see Krings 1995, for the second reason, see Humphreys & ag Mohamed 2003, 19.

40 Poulton and ag Youssouff, 55-56.

41 Lecocq 2002, 233, and Humphreys and ag Mohamed 2003, 3.

42 Krings 1995, 61.

Mali responded by trying to replicate its counterinsurgency efforts of 1963, using public executions and beatings and other similar brutal tactics.⁴³ This strategy failed both militarily and politically – during a battle at Toximine on September 4, 1990, 450 Malian soldiers were defeated by less than fifty rebels armed with grenades and knives, while the indiscriminate violence reinforced perceptions of forced many Tuaregs with no rebel ties into the desert, where the rebels welcomed them.⁴⁴ Facing increasing internal unrest in the capital and realizing a purely military solution was unlikely to succeed,⁴⁵ the Malian President Moussa Traore went to the negotiating table, while working through traditional Tuareg clan chiefs to convince their compatriots to lay down their arms.⁴⁶ With their military supplies exhausted, the MPLA agreed to negotiations.⁴⁷ At this point, Arabs within the MPLA split off to form a separate rebel group,⁴⁸ fearful that the Tuareg rebel leadership would concentrate on negotiating for the benefit of Tuareg communities and leave out Arabs.⁴⁹ After the split, the MPLA renamed itself the Popular Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FPLA). Negotiations were moderated by Algeria.

The failure of Tuareg negotiators to attain every single one of its negotiating goals left some rebels disgruntled. Many of the concessions won by the rebels benefited the Kel Adagh in the Kidal region disproportionately. Many Tuareg intellectuals, seeing the rebellion as an attempt to form an independent Tuareg state in the Sahara, kept fighting even after the Algerian-mediated Tammanrasset accords (which did not win Tuareg independence). Iyad ag Ghali, now the chief of the FPLA, split and

43 Humphreys and ag Mohamed 2005, 20.

44 Poulton & ag Youssouff, 56.

45 “Even the dictator” realized that “a purely military solution wouldn't work.” Interview, Malian officer, April 27th 2008.

46 Humphreys & ag Mohamed 2005, 20. Traditional clan chiefs have been a source of influence for the central authorities since French colonization. The Malian political and military establishment now reportedly recognizes that its strategy of clandestine payments to clan and fraction chiefs in exchange for loyalty ended up backfiring, harming the legitimacy of the chiefs while gaining the central government little in response. Interview, Malian officer, April 27th 2008.

47 Lecocq 2002, 239.

48 The FIAA – Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad, or the Arab Islamic Front of Azawad.

49 Ibid 241-242. Tuaregs and Arabs have been historical rivals in the Sahara. Interview with Malian officer, April 27 2008.

formed the Popular Movement for Azawad (MPA), while the hardliners remained in FPLA. Due to Kel Adagh domination of the MPA, more moderate Tuareg from other clans also joined the FPLA.

Over six years of conflict, the Tuareg rebellion in Mali would splinter into further factions, along ethnic (Tuareg versus Arab), tribal (rivalries between clans and federations), political (independence versus autonomy), and caste (“nobles” versus “vassals”),⁵⁰ and social lines, as the Tuareg old guard fought to protect their traditional privileges as chiefs against younger Tuareg with notions of egalitarian social revolution and giving up pastoralism for good.

The Tammanrasset accords fell apart when the government that signed them was overthrown by a coup d'etat in Bamako. Traore was replaced temporarily by Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Toure, who instituted elections and resumed his post in the army to give way to the new President, Alpha Oumar Konare (Toure did not run for election himself). However before elections could be held, Toure negotiated with the Tuareg and Arab rebels, which were by now split into four camps, FPLA, FIAA, MPA, and ARLA.⁵¹ The Algerians forced the rebel groups to unite under an umbrella group, the MFUA.⁵² The National Pact established a cease-fire, provided for the integration of the rebels into the armed services, the withdrawal of the Malian Army from the north, economic investment, a 'trust commission,' a special status for the north of Mali allowing for a wide range of autonomy, and special efforts to get more northerners into governmental positions.⁵³ While these were largely the same things agreed on in the Tammanrasset accords, the National Pact was more thorough and included timetables for implementation. However, the government was still broke and did not

50 The concepts of noble and vassal do not actually fit the Tuareg castes of imoushagh and imghad very well, but the important thing for this paper's purposes is that there were divisions between castes.

51 Revolutionary Liberation Army of Azawad

52 Unified Movements and Fronts of Azawad

53 National Pact, text provided in Poulton & ag Yossouff, 251-271.

have the resources to carry out its promises.⁵⁴

The government's failure to deliver on its promises combined with the MFUA's poor internal discipline led to renewed Tuareg raids, government blanket reprisals against Tuareg, and fighting within MFUA over the spoils won in the National Pact. Despite the signing of a cease-fire, violence levels went down only slightly. Even the promises which the government could deliver on, such as the integration of Tuareg into the Army and police, went awry as many former rebels did not adjust well to life in the Army,⁵⁵ and in 1994 several Tuareg mutinied and murdered their comrades.⁵⁶

Meanwhile the situation in Niger was equally chaotic. The Tuareg rebellion in Niger was less intense in terms of frequency of attacks, but had similar characteristics, such as the splintering of rebel groups along ethnic (Tuareg versus Toubou), caste and clan lines,⁵⁷ the hit-and-run rebel tactics, government reprisals against civilians, and negotiations broken up by the lack of either side to control its forces. After the Tchín-Tabaraden killings and the failure of a "National Conference" to soothe their fears of further killings, many Tuareg moved into the guerrilla-friendly Air mountain range and formed the Liberation Front of Air and Azawad (FLAA). In March of 1992, Niger declared a state of emergency in the north, giving the Army *carte blanche*.

Negotiations started informally in Paris in 1992, with formal negotiations taking place in Burkina Faso in 1994. As in Mali, an umbrella group developed to provide a united front for negotiations, the Coordination of the Resistance Armies (CRA), although by the time an agreement was

54 Humphreys & ag Youssouff 2003, 258.

55 Newly integrated Tuareg officers did not always receive the respect they felt should come from their military accomplishments, as many were illiterate and seen as ignorant by subordinate officers from the south. Interview, Malian officer, April 27 2008.

56 Keita 18. It is unclear whether this is the same incident as a mass desertion of newly-integrated Tuareg from a battalion in Gao – in that incident, two Tuareg were lynched, and the newly integrated Tuareg soldiers opened fire on a crowd of civilians and withdrew to old rebel camps. Poulton and ag Youssouff, 70.

57 There were at least fifteen rebel groups in Niger in the 1990s. WEST AFRICA: Tension in Central Sahara. *IRIN News*. March 18th, 1999.

finally signed, it was known as the ORA (Organization of Armed Resistance). In April 1995, the Ougadougou accords abandoned Tuareg hopes of independence while providing for the integration of one thousand Tuareg into special military units, providing emergency aid for food, health and education, and some conciliatory language on the decentralization of authority. They also gained the promise of education in Tamachek, one of the original goals.⁵⁸

The ORA did not speak for all rebel groups. After a coup d'etat in Niamey in 1996, violence flared in 1997 as UFRA (Union of Forces of the Army of the Resistance) and FARS (Revolutionary Armed Forces of the Sahara) retaliated for alleged attacks on Tuareg and Toubou, another nomadic ethnic group. Renewed negotiations and promises from the central government the following year calmed the situation again, although the ethnically Toubou FARS seems to have continued fighting.⁵⁹ Since then there have been sporadic claims that the government has ignored its promises, while hijackings have occurred regularly in a generally lawless environment.

In Mali, from insurgency to civil war

In Mali the conflict deviated from the standard pattern of hijackings and negotiations in 1994 when sedentary communities in the north, mostly Songhoi, started organizing their own militias to respond militarily to Tuareg raiding. These militias, known as “*Ganda Koi*” or “masters of the land”,

58 Accord établissant une paix définitive entre le Gouvernement de la République du Niger et l'Organisation de la Résistance Armée. Text available at http://humacom.typepad.com/reseau_humacom/2007/10/touaregs-laccor.html. Last accessed April 6th, 2008.

59 The last reports of Tuareg rebels disarming are in 2000. As far as I can tell, FARS has never laid down arms – as of 2001, FARS was still fighting, and in late 2007 they announced that they were fighting alongside the Movement of Nigeriens for Justice (MNJ). Disarmament of armed groups reaches final stage. *IRIN News*. June 7th, 2000. Rebel chief reported killed. *IRIN News*. September 21, 2001. Les Combattants du FARS rejoignent le MNJ. *Mouvement des Nigeriens pour la Justice*. December 20th, 2007. Online at <http://m-n-j.blogspot.com/2007/12/les-combattants-du-fars-rejoignent-le.html>. Last accessed April 6th, 2007.

were armed by the military⁶⁰ and many soldiers deserted to join the militias in order to be in a better position to protect their family.⁶¹ Tit-for-tat violence led to a race war in Mali, between “white” Tuareg and Arabs and “black” Songhoi and others. Many Malian Army units were sympathetic to the Ganda Koi and openly aided them in fighting against the FIAA and other Tuareg rebel groups.

During this time, the MPA under Iyad ag Ghali had kept peace with the government. Over the next two years, the MPA defeated the ARLA, the FPLA ran out of money and negotiated a peace with the Ganda Koi, and the FIAA was militarily defeated by the combined efforts of the Malian army and the MPA.⁶² Due to improving civil-military relations in the capital, the government was able to replace units and senior commanders that had engaged in massacres of Tuareg.

The rebellion ended in Mali with the “Flame of Peace”, a ceremonial burning of about three-thousand weapons at Timbuktu. Although most of the weapons were broken or out of date and guns remained readily available in Mali anyway, the ceremony was important as a symbol of reconciliation and the end of ethnic and political violence.⁶³ After the ceremony, integration and efforts proceeded slowly and bandits remained a problem – a predictable result with the presence of weapons and the removal of any army presence.

Interlude

By 2000, the situation in both countries was similar – while rebel groups and the governments

60 It's probable that the political leaders in the capital of Mali were not sympathetic, however they had limited control over the army, which was being run by a “trade union” of NCOs until the military leadership was replaced in 1994-1995. Poulton & ag Youssouf 1998, pages 74-75.

61 Keita, 20.

62 Humphreys & ag Mohamed 2003, 259-260. Just as in colonial times, the central authorities used pre-existing cleavages to split the rebels, to divide and conquer.

63 Ibid., 120-122.

were at peace, many of the underlying economic grievances remained unsolved. The social problems with easy fixes, such as allowing schooling in Tamachek, were on their way to being addressed.⁶⁴ Economic aid began to flow in to Mali and Niger, although lack of funds and corruption meant that far less arrived than was promised. Former rebels were integrated into the army, gendarmerie, and civilial public sector jobs.⁶⁵ The north was still insecure, with police and tourists occasionally being taken hostage and ransomed for money.⁶⁶

Between the combination of lack of economic growth and the withdrawal of governmental presence in the Sahara, many Tuareg turned to smuggling.⁶⁷ Europe's new demand for South American cocaine created a new drug trafficking route, as drugs landed on the Atlantic coast and were smuggled east across the Sahara and up into Libya and Egypt, where they would cross the Mediterranean into eastern Europe. Counterfeit cigarettes, manufactured in factories in Nigeria, also provide profitable smuggling routes.⁶⁸

The main contraband in current trans-Saharan smuggling routes are drugs (including cocaine, hashish, and cigarettes), weapons, people (migrants from sub-Saharan Africa attempting to reach Europe), groceries and electronics. Due to a lack of infrastructure, subsidized food prices in Algeria, and fixed currency exchange rates, it's much cheaper to bring food and groceries across the border from Algeria than it is to bring it from southern Mali. Anti-smuggling operations by the militaries of Mali, Niger and Algeria have disrupting human smuggling networks, but not drugs or weapons, with

64 Bergeret 2000.

65 Boukhari 2000.

66 MALI: More banditry reported in the north. *IRIN News*. December 5, 2000. NIGER: Tourists survive attack by bandits. *IRIN News*. February 2, 2001. MALI: Kidnapped soldiers released. *IRIN News*. February 26, 2001.

67 As early as 1999, Mali's minister of culture and tourism said that without the black market, "the situation would be explosive" in northern Mali. Boukhari 1999.

68 Keenan 2000, 10.

resulting economic losses.⁶⁹

Renewed Insurgency

It's difficult to point to a single point in time when the rebellion in Niger officially restarted. Violence increased in 2004,⁷⁰ and on August 10, one prominent Tuareg declared during a radio interview that he had reconstituted the 1990s-era FLAA and was responsible for recent attacks on government security forces.⁷¹ However many point to a February 7th 2007 attack in Iferouane as the real start of the rebellion. The Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ) posted their list of demands on their website in April of 2007. These demands include wide-ranging political reform, more inclusion in the military (two Generals, 5 Colonels, 10 Commanders, 20 Captains, 40 Lieutenants, etc., eventually totaling more than a quarter of the military), increased economic development, education in Tamachek, and most controversially, forcing the uranium mines to hire 90% local workers and pay 50% of the income from uranium mining to local communities.⁷²

The rebellion in Mali had a more definitive beginning. On May 23rd 2006, Tuareg rebels, led by Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Fagaga,⁷³ raided military bases in Kidal and Menaka, both provincial capitals in northern Mali. With the help of accomplices on the inside of both camps, the rebels took

69 "With tens of thousands of would-be migrants no longer converging on Gao, Kidal, Tessalit and Tin-Zaouatene, the most dynamic component of the tri-border economy has been removed." Securing tri-border areas. *Jane's Intelligence Review*. November 1, 2006.

70 Credit for the North. *Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series*. Vol. 42, No. 10, October 2005. Pages 16401-16402.

71 NIGER: Five killed as army clashes with Tuaregs in desert north. *IRIN News*. October 7, 2004.

72 Programme des revendications du Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ). *Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice*. April 18th, 2007. Online at <http://m-n-j.blogspot.com/2007/04/programme-des-revendications-du.html>.

73 Hassan Fagaga trained in Libyan camps in the 1980s and was a rebel in the 1990s insurgencies. He then integrated into the Malian army as a Lieutenant Colonel, despite reportedly being illiterate. Touareg Attack. *Africa Research Bulletin: Social, Political and Cultural Series*. Vol. 43, No. 5, May 2006. Pages 16656-16657. Interview, Malian officer, April 27, 2008.

both military bases without a shot, although shooting then broke out as soldiers who remained loyal to the army refused to surrender.⁷⁴ Justification was given as slow progress on the promises made to end the rebellions of the 1990s.

Shortly after the attack, the Tuareg rebels, calling themselves the May 23rd Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC), held successful negotiations with the government regarding development money and amnesty for the rebels. Within six weeks, the government and ADC had signed the Algiers accord, allowing more Tuareg to enter the armed forces and accelerating Mali's ongoing democratic decentralization process.⁷⁵ As with the rebellions in 1963 and 1990, most of the rebels came from Kidal, however government negotiators insisted on reaching an agreement on the north in general, rather than limiting concessions to Kidal.⁷⁶

Although the majority of Malian Tuareg lay down their arms after the Algiers accord, men loyal to Ibrahim ag Bahanga, commanding significant combat power,⁷⁷ kept fighting under the designation "Tuareg Alliance of Niger and Mali" (ATNM). Bahanga has a long history of hostile relations with the state. He has been kidnapping army and police officers, demanding economic development and/or ransoms, and then releasing his hostages since at least 2000, possibly as cover for other criminal activity.⁷⁸ The ATNM recently concluded negotiations with Mali, held in Tripoli under Libyan auspices, that have apparently led to a truce.⁷⁹

Links between the rebels in Niger and Mali seem closer today than in the 1990s rebellion. That

74 Africa Research Bulletin, May 2006, pages 16656-16657. Two KIA were reported on each side. Keenan, Tuareg take up arms.

75 Government strikes new peace deal with Tuareg rebels. *IRIN News*. July 5th, 2006.

76 Accord D'Alger Pour La Restauration de la Paix, de la Securite et du Developpement dans la Region de Kidal. Available on the website www.kidal.info: <http://www.kidal.info/docs/Accord-Alger040706.pdf>.

77 Bahanga commands around forty "Teknicals", the name for Toyota pickups with heavy machine guns mounted in back, as well as large numbers of anti-personnel mines. Interview, Malian officer, February 18, 2008.

78 Kidnapped soldiers released. *IRIN News*. February 26th, 2001.

79 Salah Sarrar. Mali, rebels agree truce after bloody air strike. *Reuters*. April 4th 2008.

may be due to better coverage of the current conflict in the Western press, because the decreased military presence in the north facilitates closer ties between the rebel groups, or because smuggling links have drawn the groups closer together.⁸⁰ In addition to Tuareg, the MNJ has recruited disaffected (government sources say criminal and fugitive) army officers and has allied with the FARS, an ethnically Toubou rebel group based near the Nigerien/Chad border.⁸¹

The military situation in Niger seems to be at a stalemate. The Nigerien government is pursuing a purely military strategy,⁸² although there are rumors that the government is engaged in secret negotiations with the MNJ in Paris. The MNJ is holed up in the Air mountains in north-central Niger. Government attempts to penetrate the Air mountains on search and destroy missions have so far been unsuccessful, blocked by rebel ambushes and landmines. With superior knowledge of the terrain, the MNJ is able to melt away in classic guerrilla fashion whenever threatened with superior force,⁸³ leaving local civilians to bear the brunt of the army's frustration.⁸⁴

Analysis: Social and Economic Marginalization

Claims of social and economic marginalization have dominated Tuareg justifications for rebellion for the past two rebellions, and have dominated the political discourse during peaceful periods

80 Nigerien military sources indicate that the ADC acquired weapons in north-eastern Niger and brought them across Niger with the help of what would become the MNJ.

81 *Les Combattants du FARS rejoignent le MNJ*. Communiqué on the MNJ website, posted December 20, 2007. Online at <http://m-n-j.blogspot.com/2007/12/les-combattants-du-fars-rejoignent-le.html>.

82 *Response varies to Tuareg troubles*. *Oxford Analytica*. November 29, 2007.

83 As many of the MNJ fighters are not actually from the Air mountains, they rely on local guides, to the extent of mounting operations specifically designed to break people out of jail that they know have knowledge of the area. Amoumoune Kalakoua was freed for this purpose in an operation in 2006. Interview, Nigerien officer, March 26, 2008.

84 Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented numerous alleged human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings of civilians. These typically occur after Nigerien soldiers have been killed by landmines and the survivors look for the perpetrators. See, Amnesty International 2007, Human Rights Watch 2007, Amnesty International 2008.

as well. The discourse of marginalization provides the context in which all other factors are interpreted, and provides motivation and justification for Tuareg to join rebel groups.⁸⁵

Claims of economic marginalization are easy to measure, and Tuareg can point to economic statistics to prove their point. UN data shows that in the Kidal region of Mali between 1999-2001, less than one in five children attended school, malnutrition rates were over forty percent and over eighty percent of the population were “vulnerable to extreme food insecurity.”⁸⁶ Many areas in the north do not have basic infrastructure like banks or paved roads, making the payment of government salaries to Tuareg fighters integrated into government service difficult, and discouraging government employees from the south from working in the north where they might not get paid. However while the North is obviously worse off than other areas of Mali and Niger, its probably unknowable how much is attributable to purposeful marginalization and how much is due general difficulties resulting from the harsh terrain. Government officials in both countries claim that since the end of the rebellions in the 1990s, investment in the North of both countries has, proportional to population, been higher than other areas of their countries.⁸⁷

Social marginalization is more difficult to measure. Some degree of social discrimination appears inevitable as Mali and Niger attempt to modernize their states and societies, and some Tuareg resist modernization, although generally the Tuareg that resist modernization are not the Tuareg that rebel. Nomadic communities worldwide frequently complain of discrimination, as the instruments of

85 Mohamed Serge Maurice, a Nigerien university student, explained his joining the MNJ: “There are injustices and hatred that Tuareg endure, but there is no way we can talk about it openly. No one will listen to us, so there is nothing else we can do but to take up arms... At university, we debated different theories of social justice and reform. We have always wanted the chance to put into practice those ideas. Now is the time.” Quoted in Phuong Tran. Nigerien Students Clandestinely Join Mountain Rebellion. *Voice of America*. April 9, 2008.

86 This is much higher than other areas of Mali. Humphreys & ag Mohamed 2005, 273.

87 Interviews, government officials of both Niger and Mali.

Western states (borders,⁸⁸ taxes,⁸⁹ education⁹⁰) are difficult to adapt to nomadic life. The process of decolonization and independence itself proved discriminatory to nomads, as artificial lines in the sand suddenly separated herds from their pastures and water, destroying Tuareg grazing patterns.⁹¹

The 1963 rebellion in Mali started with perceived difference and antagonisms as much as any legitimate grievances, which would have been impossible for the Tuareg to verify anyway, due to the lack of contact between north and south. Tuareg perceptions of discrimination were based on ethnic and racial stereotypes as much as actual anti-nomad or anti-Tuareg discrimination. This initial rebellion entrenched hostile perceptions between Tuareg and other Malians, creating the context in which Tuareg view political events. The failure of the Malian and Nigerien states failed to help nomadic populations during the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, government crackdowns on illicit economic activity, resource extraction that doesn't benefit local communities, and increased state security presence justified by terrorists, are all interpreted within the framework of decades of perceived anti-Tuareg discrimination and marginalization.⁹²

The Environment

The droughts of the 1970s and 1980s set in motion a series of events vital to the organization and training of rebel groups. Without the droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, Tuareg rebels would not have acquired military training and experience in Gaddafi's Islamic Legion in Lebanon, Chad and

88 Krings 1995.

89 "Iforas pay no tax." Lecocq 2002, 76-78.

90 Saverio Krati. The bias behind nomadic education. *UNESCO Courier*. October 2000.

91 Krings 1995.

92 The character of past interactions between actors influences behavior at a number of variables: "History matters." Wendt 1995, page 77.

elsewhere. Tuareg refugee camps might not have created the teshumara culture or the young ishumar modernizing intellectuals, leading the drives for social revolution.⁹³ In short, environmental factors were absolutely crucial in the history of the 1990s insurgency.

As important as the droughts themselves are the context in which they occurred (concurrent with political repression) and the resulting state responses. Even in the 1960s, the central state had been attempting to sedentarize nomads, under the belief that nomads would never become true citizens of the new nation-states.⁹⁴ The droughts then pushed Tuareg communities into even deeper poverty, and the poor reaction to the drought by the central governments further contributed to Tuareg perceptions of marginalization. When corrupt government officials sold aid for private profit, many Tuareg did not see the problem as corruption in general, but as further evidence that the central government ignores or even actively contributes to their problems.⁹⁵

In addition to bad governance, international NGOs that arrived on the scene to help may have actually exacerbated the situation. NGOs largely ignored local leaders in designing and implementing projects.⁹⁶ New wells disrupted migration routes by clustering large herds to the sites, leading to overgrazing.⁹⁷ Anti-desertification projects led by NGOs reclaimed former nomadic pasture lands from the desert, but then assisted Hausa and other non-Tuareg sedentary farmers to grow crops, rather than allowing Tuareg herds to graze.⁹⁸ Even food aid was biased against pastoralists. Taking the form of mass cereal distribution, international food aid caused wholesale diet changes and nutritional

93 One of the main logics of environmental conflict in Homer-Dixon 1994 is environmental scarcity disrupting social institutions, which played out as Tuareg migrations to southern cities and northern refugee camps disrupted clan and fraction authority and led to the attempted social revolution.

94 Giuffrida 2005, 533.

95 "It is sometimes said that the sons and brothers of those who starved to death in Kidal and Boureissa in 1974, returned in 1990 to take their revenge on Moussa Traore." Poulton & ag Youssouf 1998, page 26.

96 Childs & Chelada 1994.

97 Ibid.

98 Krings 1995, 58 and 63. Land reserved for pasture was oftentimes seen by NGO workers and sedentary farmers as abandoned.

deficiencies in Tuareg refugee populations.⁹⁹ One nutritionist involved in NGO assistance noted:

“Continued distribution of cereals to the camps is not the best way to help the Tamasheqs [Tuareg]. It would be better from the nutritional, as well as the ecological point of view, to help them to build up their herds again.”¹⁰⁰ Nomads lost trust for NGOs, which gradually became reluctant to support further projects in the north and withdrew.¹⁰¹ Added to this was the role one NGO played in the arrest and torture of returning exiled Tuareg.¹⁰²

Droughts have also further hardened ethnic boundaries between Tuareg and southern ethnic groups. As a response to the droughts that killed off nomadic herds in large numbers, nomadic pastoralists had started to turn to agriculture by the 1980s to supplement or temporarily replace livestock production.¹⁰³ Sedentary farmers also began to keep their own livestock to improve their land's fertility and as a way of “banking' or keeping savings on the hoof.”¹⁰⁴ As both nomads and farmers became agro-pastoral, the traditional interdependence between the two livelihoods decreased, and inter-ethnic relations became more violent as competition for scarce resources grew.¹⁰⁵ This competition also made it more difficult for pastoralists to rebound after droughts, the way they have after previous droughts in the twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ The social distancing of Tuareg and other nomads from the sedentary ethnic groups (Bamana, Djerma, Hausa, etc.) that dominate Malian and Nigerien politics probably reinforced the perception of Tuareg social marginalization.

Competition also grows as sedentary farmers expand northwards into traditionally pastoral land,

99 Jacks 1994, 444.

100Ibid., 444.

101Childs & Chelada 1994.

102See note 35.

103Jacks 1994, 442.

104Trench et al 2007, 11.

105Kivimaki 2001, 16.

106Jacks 1994, 442.

presumably due to population expansion.¹⁰⁷ These farms are more vulnerable to droughts than southern farms because the further north one travels, the more arid the climate becomes. The land available to pastoralists shrinks from the north due to desertification,¹⁰⁸ and from the south due to the expansion of sedentary agriculture. Furthermore the expansion of farming can block off migration routes for nomads and their herds, and farms are sometimes planted to surround wells, denying nomadic herds access to water altogether. Some farmers purposefully plant their fields to deny as much land as possible to nomads.¹⁰⁹ Many Tuareg see the government as aiding farmers in pushing nomads off their land.¹¹⁰

It's important to note that adversarial competition between farmers and nomads is not pre-ordained. In some areas, Hausa farmers and Tuareg herders work together to build water traps in order to combat drought and desertification.¹¹¹ The factors that determine whether farmers and herders cooperate or compete during times of environmental scarcity is an interesting area for further research.

It's less clear what role environmental factors have played in the more recent violence. The 2005 drought and famine in Niger, compounded by locusts, devastated many Tuareg herds.¹¹² As in the droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, aid did not reach those in need because of corruption. International food aid destined to the north of Niger was instead sent south to Nigeria where it was sold for significant profit.¹¹³ However this drought couldn't have been the spark that led to the recent violence,

107Another logic put forth in Homer-Dixon 1994 is that "population movements caused by environmental stress would induce 'group-identity' conflicts, especially ethnic clashes." Environmental stress can occur either to environmental changes or to increased population. Ethnic violence remains a serious possibility in parts of Mali and Niger. There are even rumors of the Ganda Koi attempting to reorganize in Mali, although with promises to avoid the atrocities of the 1990s. Interview, Malian officer, April 27, 2008.

108Nico Colombant. Desertification Pushes South Across West African Borders. *Voice of America*. April 22, 2008.

109Ibid., 12.

110Personal correspondence, Mohamed ag Ewangaye, March 31, 2008.

111Tristan McConnell. How Tuaregs, Hausas Are Avoiding Another Darfur. *Christian Science Monitor*. October 3, 2007.

112Nomadic herders watch helplessly as animals die taking income with them. *IRIN News*. August 5, 2005.

113Keenan 2005, Famine in Niger is not all that it appears.

as the rebellion declared by the FLAA in April of 2004 was over a year old at the time of the drought.¹¹⁴ However it is possible that the environmental difficulties, combined with the government's corruption, led to the broadening of the rebellion from the FLAA to the formation of the MNJ in 2007.

The linkage between drought and war in the Sahara goes back further than the the two most recent conflicts – the 1916 Tuareg rebellion against the French had its roots in droughts in 1914.¹¹⁵ Since 1990, environmental factors have largely played two roles in the Tuareg insurgencies. First, the droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, combined with the inept government response, both reinforced Tuareg perceptions of marginalization and pushed many migrants into refugee camps in Algeria and Libya, where they would radicalize and gain the military skills necessary for rebellion. Without these droughts, the Tuareg insurgencies in the 1990s might never have happened, and at the least would have looked very different.

Second, current environmental trends seem to be exerting a gradual squeeze on the rural economies in the Sahara. As nomads and farmers become less economically interdependent on each other and start competing for the same resources, the risk of violence rises. However the greater danger is that the deteriorating legal economy will increase competition in illicit economies. Without the droughts and the destruction of the pastoral economies, smuggling would not have become such an attractive option for many Tuareg, and there might be better economic alternatives to smuggling and rebellion.¹¹⁶ Many Tuareg join Bahanga's rebels in Mali simply to learn the smuggling routes so they

114The FLAA declared itself reconstituted on April 26, 2004, via a communique published in the Niger weekly *L'Evenement*. [UN responds to growing insecurity in the north](#). *IRIN News*. June 10, 2004.

115“Drought appears to be cyclical. The 1914 drought was also a catastrophe for the North, directly contributing to Firhoun's revolt of 1916 against the French colonial system.” Poulton & ag Youssouf 1998, 40.

116“Life in the desert has been very difficult, especially since the 1973/74 drought. People have been obliged to live from other revenue sources such as tourism, state subsidies, and banditry.” Stephen Ellis, former Africa director for ICG, quoted in [Famine not fanaticism poses greatest terror threat in Sahel](#). *IRIN News*. October 14, 2004.

can earn money as guides for drug smugglers coming from the Atlantic coast and heading east.¹¹⁷

Already the majority of businesses in Agadez (the main city of northern Niger) are considered “illegal.”¹¹⁸ As the environmental situation deteriorates without anything to replace it in the economy, illicit economies will rise in importance.

Resource Extraction

The presence of vast quantities of uranium has altered the insurgencies in Niger in several ways. The most important reason is that the unmet expectations of increased employment and income from uranium mining has amplified Tuareg feelings of economic discrimination and marginalization. Areva, the French state-owned uranium mining company that has operated for forty years in Niger, brings in workers from southern Niger for mining operations, claiming that local Tuareg do not have necessary education to work at the mine. Areva does give jobs such as driving buses to local Tuareg, yet publicly recognizes that it needs to do more.¹¹⁹

Niger is the main supplier of weapons-grade uranium to France, and so France has taken an active role in Niger's internal affairs since independence. French involvement on the side altered the course of the two most recent conflicts. Alleged French involvement on the side of the rebels in the 1990s¹²⁰ possibly prolonged the war by rendering an eventual Nigerien military victory more difficult

¹¹⁷Interview, Malian army officer, April 27, 2008.

¹¹⁸When asked how many businesses in Agadez operated in the illicit economy, two Nigerien officers laughed and immediately said “all of them.” Upon reconsideration, one officer noted there were a few businesses that were legal. Interview, Nigerien army officers, April 18, 2008.

¹¹⁹“...despite the aforementioned cultural problems, AREVA has managed to attract a large number of Tuareg employees, far in excess of the national average but still insufficient. [AREVA] is perfectly aware that increasing these numbers will be a strong societal challenge. It does not exclude the possibility of setting up accelerated training courses for these populations at some point in the future.” *AREVA in Niger*. *AREVA Press release*, Paris. August 7, 2007.

¹²⁰French Colonel Gilles Denamur, the French Defense Attache to Niger in the 1990s, allegedly provided Tuareg rebels with supplies. Interviews, Nigerien army officers, March 26, 2008, and April 18, 2008.

and may have given the rebels disincentives to negotiate, anticipating a more favorable negotiating position in the future due to more French aid. The French role in the current conflict is more complicated.

In 2007 there were multiple allegations of Areva giving aid to the current rebellion. Areva hired as their “security adviser” retired French Colonel Gilles Denamur, who was French Defense Attache to Niger in the 1990s rebellion when France aided the Tuareg.¹²¹ Areva was supposedly acting with the motive of preserving its monopoly on Niger's uranium, by proving to other uranium mining companies that Niger was not safe enough for new companies to begin mining operations. The MNJ kidnapping of a Chinese uranium worker fits this conspiracy theory.¹²² After the abduction (and subsequent safe release) of the Chinese uranium executive, Colonel Denamur was expelled from Niger along with Dominique Pin, the director of Areva's operations in Niger.¹²³ This led to a phone call between Nigerien President Tandja and French President Sarkozy.¹²⁴ Two Nigerien officers say that after the expulsion of Colonel Denamur, Areva no longer aids MNJ.¹²⁵

France is now involved on the side of the government by providing signals intelligence.¹²⁶ This may also prolong the conflict – a purely military strategy seems unlikely to succeed, but President Tandja is unwilling to compromise and negotiate with “bandits” and may feel that, with French intelligence support, a purely military solution is possible. Because of the nature of French alleged assistance, this reasoning is simple speculation; nonetheless it provides an interesting direction for

121Abdoulaye Massalatchi. Niger says Areva paid army deserters turned rebels. *Reuters*. August 2, 2007.

122Abdoulaye Massalatchi. Niger rebels kidnap Chinese uranium executive. *Reuters*. July 7, 2007.

123France sees no reason for Niger to bar Areva boss. *Reuters*. July 27, 2007.

124Jean-Michel Bezat. Areva perd son monopole sur l'uranium du Niger. *Le Monde*. August 5, 2007.

125Interviews, Nigerien army officers, March 26, 2008, and April 18, 2008.

126Interview, Nigerien army officer, March 26, 2008. The MNJ claim that in addition to providing intelligence, French special forces conduct military operations with Nigerien troops, however the field commander of Niger's elite unit says he has no knowledge of this.

future research.

The Tuareg insurgency in Niger did not begin with Tuareg rebels having hopes of hijacking uranium exports, as some general models of insurgency predict.¹²⁷ However the government's reliance on uranium for revenues has driven the MNJ to attack uranium mining projects and the infrastructure that supports them, such as electrical plants¹²⁸ and roads,¹²⁹ thus giving the rebels leverage over the government. The MNJ is not attacking uranium mines to control them, and is not attacking mining convoys in order to hijack the uranium to sell for profit – instead they are using the attacks to harm the central government in an effort to force President Tandja to the bargaining table.

That uranium accounts for over half of Niger's exports also gives the central government much more incentive to fight any calls for decentralization, as opposed to Mali which has actively pursued a program of political decentralization ever since the fall of the last dictator in 1991.¹³⁰ This plays into many Nigerien Tuaregs' belief that they will never be permitted to access political power. Yet the importance of uranium has not stopped the Nigerien Parliament from calling for Tandja to find a “peaceful settlement.”¹³¹ It is more likely that Tandja's refusal to negotiate openly with the MNJ stems not from the importance of uranium to Niger's treasury, but from Tandja's personality and pressure from street protests¹³² and senior military leaders to pursue a military solution.¹³³

Finally, many nomads feel that uranium mining is harmful to their lands and water supply.

127Collier 2000.

128Abdoulaye Massalatchi. *Niger desert rebels launch twin attacks, 2 dead*. *Reuters*. August 10, 2007.

129Indignation dominates reaction as attacks in north escalate. *IRIN News*. August 31, 2007.

130“Decentralization is correctly regarded as the heart of Mali’s democracy; it is the institution that best reflects popular ownership of the new order and thereby improves its prospects for sustainability.” Pringle 2006, 43.

131Le parlement nigerien appelle le gouvernement a un “reglement pacifique” de la crise au nord. *Agence de Presse Africaine*. April 12, 2008.

132Response varies to Tuareg troubles. *Oxford Analytica*. November 29, 2007.

133One Nigerien officer explained that army leaders are pressuring Tandja not to negotiate because the army feels “enough is enough” – negotiations in the past have failed to conclusively 'solve' the problem of the north, and that the military can do a better job of it. Interview, Nigerien officer, March 26, 2008.

Allegations of pollution from the uranium mining contribute to the discourse of marginalization.¹³⁴

Concerns exist over open pit uranium mining, the storage of radioactive waste, and the pollution of aquifers, as well as the depletion of aquifers in water-intensive open-pit mining.¹³⁵ Many Tuareg allege that uranium mining has killed off wildlife, polluted water, and given people radiation poisoning.¹³⁶ The chief of the MNJ states that mining “is destroying the land needed for crops, animals and water.”¹³⁷

Two recent NGO reports have backed Tuareg claims, with one documenting unsafe working conditions at the mines due to radiation,¹³⁸ and another amplifying Tuareg allegations of environmental pollution and calling for investigations.¹³⁹ Tuareg have actively lobbied NGOs such as the Paris-based anti-nuclear CRIIRAD (Commission for Research and Independent Information on Radioactivity) in order to put pressure on Areva and the governments of Niger and France.¹⁴⁰

The most important impact of resource extraction is the way in which the political issues uranium raises has reinforced the existing perception of marginalization. However uranium mining has also played a role through French involvement, and providing the MNJ leverage over the state via a vulnerable yet important resource.¹⁴¹

134La Cogema Au Niger: Rapport d'enquete sur la situation des travailleurs de la SOMAIR et COMINAK, filiales nigériennes du groupe AREVA-COGEMA. *Sherpa*. April 25, 2005. Online at http://www.asso-sherpa.org/CP_areva07/RAPPORT%20SHERPA%20NIGER%20ARLIT.pdf.

135One map shows that while current uranium mining areas do not overlap with important aquifers, areas slated for exploitation in the near future do. *Le peuple touareg menace par l'exploitation de l'uranium*. Online at <http://www.targuinca.org/documents/carte-nappe-concessions-uranium.pdf>. Last accessed May 1st, 2008.

136Personal interviews.

137Phoung Tran. *Nigerien Conflict Draws Attention to Desert Wealth, Poverty*. *Voice of America*. February 25, 2008.

138La Cogema Au Niger: Rapport d'enquete sur la situation des travailleurs de la SOMAIR et COMINAK, filiales nigériennes du groupe AREVA-COGEMA. *Sherpa*. April 25, 2005. Online at http://www.asso-sherpa.org/CP_areva07/RAPPORT%20SHERPA%20NIGER%20ARLIT.pdf.

139La CRIIRAD apporte son soutien au president de l'ONG Nigerienne AGHIRIN'MAN qui fait l'objet de pressions de son employeur la SOMAIR. *CRIIRAD (Commission de Recherche et d'Information Independantes sur la Radioactivite)*. June 26, 2006. Online at <http://www.criirad.org/actualites/dossiers2005/niger/somniger.html>.

140Rhissa ag Boula, a rebel leader in the 1990s, has given talks at CRIIRAD in Paris. CRIIRAD devotes significant attention to Niger, as Niger supplies France with much of its uranium for nuclear power and weapons.

141This leverage is a clear example of how “the control of local resources influence[s] the agendas and strategies of belligerents.” Yet there is no direct evidence of “the level of dependence, conflictuality, and lootability” of Niger's uranium leading to conflict, although perhaps if uranium was more 'lootable', the insurgency would have taken a

Smuggling

Many Tuareg say that smuggling is a way of life for them. Tuareg have been engaged in trans-Saharan commerce for centuries, while state borders have only existed for a few generations.¹⁴² The notion of “smuggling” itself is contested in the Sahara. One Tuareg businessman objected to the use of the word “smuggling” with its negative connotations, and explained that it is impossible for Tuareg to smuggle anything, since international borders do not apply to them.¹⁴³

There are some indications that the 2007 escalation of the violence in Niger was in response to government anti-smuggling operations that killed several Tuareg and damaged the illicit economy.¹⁴⁴ Smuggling networks also provide easy access to weapons, gasoline, and other necessary supplies,¹⁴⁵ and decrease the government's capacity to govern as many of its officials are corrupted by the large amounts of money to be made. Both these factors make the decision to engage in political violence a less costly and more profitable one.¹⁴⁶

Smuggling and its attendant lawless environment may be to blame for much of the residual violence between the insurgencies in the 1990s and 2000s. Smuggling routes have grown up in West Africa over recent years largely due to Europe's developing taste for cocaine.¹⁴⁷ West Africa suffers

different course. Le Billon 2001, 580-581.

142Lecocq & Schrijver, 158.

143Interview, Tuareg businessman in United States, March 2, 2008.

144Interview, Nigerien officer, March 26, 2008. According to a Western reporter, this explanation is one of several competing explanations, all of which might be true. Interview, Voice of America reporter, March 18, 2008.

145The MNJ buys its gasoline from smugglers who bring it across from Algeria. Phoung Tran. African Desert Gas Smuggler Weighs Risks, Profits. *Voice of America*. April 10, 2008.

146“...to take the decision to go to war needs some means, that could be get with smugglers. Smuggling need freedom and for them they are not smuggling but they are doing cross-borders business, as their ancestors where doing by camel thousands of years ago.” Personal correspondence, Cheick ag Baye, March 18 2008.

147de Andres 2008, 215.

from the misfortune of convenient placement between drug producing South America and the market of Europe, and is also vulnerable to traffickers due to corruption and weak, single-commodity economies.¹⁴⁸ Weak states and porous borders have further handicapped drug interdiction efforts, and South American traffickers are making long-term investments in West Africa, indicating that drug smuggling may become a permanent fixture in West African economies.¹⁴⁹

Ibrahim Bahanga is known to be heavily involved in drug smuggling, and the MNJ is thought to be involved as well.¹⁵⁰ Antonio Mazzitelli, West Africa director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime says: “The fact that the territory where the rebellions are operating is also coincidentally the territory where a number of important drug seizures have occurred, where notably a lot of contraband and smuggling take place make us think that certainly there are big economic interests related to the control of those areas.”¹⁵¹ Thus rebellion and insurgency can provide political cover to drug trafficking, and the political goals of decreased government security presence in the north, while playing off of Tuareg distrust of the southern-dominated governments, also would allow greater operational freedom to smugglers and traffickers. In addition to fighting between rebels and the government, some fighting may be the result of competition between rival smuggling networks,¹⁵² and between Tuareg and the GSPC/AQIM network over control of smuggling routes.¹⁵³

148“‘The very structure of many West and Central African economies, based on exploitation of natural resources (mining or single-crop, export-oriented agriculture), coupled with a patrimonial conception of the state within which national natural and financial resources belong to the individual(s) in power, also contribute to the creation of an environment where a disregard for existing laws and the use of institutional prerogatives for private goals is considered not only justified, but an indicator of power.’” Mazzitelli 2007, 1072-1073.

149Ibid., 215. Also see Drug cartels begin cracking West Africa. *Janes Foreign Report*. August 23, 2007.

150Also, Indignation dominates reaction as attacks in north escalate. *IRIN News*. August 31st, 2007, and Interview, Nigerien officer (including photographic evidence of dead cocaine smugglers with alleged MNJ ties), March 26 2008.

151Antonio Mazzitelli, quoted in Phuong Tran, Nigerien Conflict Draws Attention to Desert Wealth, Poverty.

152One aspect of the split between Bahanga and the more mainstream ADC may be a personality clash that developed during competition over smuggling routes between Bahanga and Iyad ag Ghali. Interview, American official, April 9, 2008.

153Nick Tattersall. Mali desert nomads pledge to battle al Qaeda group. *Reuters*. November 2, 2006.

Cooperation between rebel groups in Mali and Niger can also be linked with smuggling.

According to a source in the Nigerien military, after the May 23rd attack in Menaka and Kidal, the ADC sold the weapons they had captured to the GSPC (referring to Belmokhtar's gang) and then used the money to travel to a weapons bazaar in northeastern Niger near the Chadian and Libyan borders to buy more weapons.¹⁵⁴ In this they were aided by the men that would later form the leadership of the MNJ. Intelligence gathered from anti-smuggling operations even provided warning for the May 23rd attack.¹⁵⁵

However smuggling networks also provide employment opportunities to Tuareg, and the huge amounts of money made on smuggling trips presumably trickle down into the local economies.¹⁵⁶ Smuggling networks become even more important during tough economic times, such as drought.¹⁵⁷ Many nomads and academics warn that shutting down smuggling networks with the goal of denying terrorist networks support and sanctuary would backfire and “threaten to turn people towards more extreme politics.”¹⁵⁸

This risk might be overstated by some in terms of the economic effect. One expert on the Tuareg situation compares shutting down trafficking routes without providing economic alternatives to eradicating poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, which has been a noteworthy failure.¹⁵⁹ However poppy cultivation is labor intensive, yielding to political benefits for rebels who protect a large portion of the population's economic activities whether licit or illicit. In contrast, smuggling routes employ only a few hundred people at most, and there have been no reports of Tuareg smugglers redistributing

154Weapons are freely available in Chad due to the ongoing conflict between the government of Idris Deby and multiple rebel groups. The MNJ also receives weapons shipments from Libya.

155Interview, Malian officer. Apparently the Kidal garrison received warning that an attack was coming on May 22nd.

156One smuggling trip from Algeria to Sudan can make about \$10,000 per smuggler. Niger's GDP per capita is \$700, and less in the north. Phuong Tran. In Niger, Cargo Changes But Sahara Desert Trafficking Remains. *Voice of America*. February 27, 2008.

157Rasmussen 2002.

158Dr. Mike McGovern, quoted from Secrets in the Sand Part 2. *BBC World Service*. August 10th, 2005.

159Dr. Mike McGovern, quoted in *Ibid*.

illegally-obtained wealth (either directly or in the form of social services) to gain political support.¹⁶⁰

Migrant-smuggling, the most “dynamic” of the smuggling operations, has already severely been hampered by the local governments.¹⁶¹ Rather than creating blowback through economic effects, the danger of cracking down on drug, weapons, and miscellaneous smuggling comes from its likely interpretation as more anti-Tuareg government actions, feeding the marginalization discourse.

Beyond potential blowback, it's also unclear what benefit suppressing drug trafficking would have to the Malian and Nigerien governments' counterinsurgency efforts. Disrupting drug trafficking networks will not spill over to weapons smuggling networks – West African criminal networks are loose, fragmented, flexible and resilient organizations that coalesce quickly around individual business transactions and disband immediately afterwards.¹⁶² In contrast to the fairly static drug trafficking routes, weapons are easily obtainable anywhere in the Sahara, where a Kalashnikov assault rifle reportedly costs only six dollars.¹⁶³ Cracking down on drug trafficking will not decrease the weapons supply for rebels. It also may not even harm rebels financially – assuming European demand stays high, a squeeze on supply will cause prices to rise, yielding higher profits per each successful smuggling trip.¹⁶⁴ Thus while disputes over drug trafficking may have provided a spark to the conflict in 2007, fighting drug trafficking would probably be ineffective in denying insurgents access to money or weapons, the typical rationale for linking anti-smuggling efforts to counterinsurgency.¹⁶⁵

The protection of smuggling rackets may provide some explanation for the timing of rebellions,

¹⁶⁰I'm indebted to Georgetown professor Vanda Felbab-Brown for drawing the distinction between labor intensive illicit economies and illicit economies based around smuggling and trafficking.

¹⁶¹Securing tri-border areas, 2006.

¹⁶²de Andres 2008, 218-219. See also Results of a Pilot Survey of Forty Selected Organized Criminal Groups in Sixteen Countries. *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*. September 2002. Pages 41-43. West African criminal networks are presented as the prototypical ad hoc and resilient criminal network.

¹⁶³Phone interview, Jeremy Keenan (noted academic expert on Tuareg), April 18, 2008. “Africa is so saturated with weapons that prices are that low that one can buy an AK 47 for less than ten dollars.” Van Der Graaf 1997, page 134.

¹⁶⁴This same dynamic has occurred in the US 'war on drugs.'

¹⁶⁵Of course eliminating drug smuggling is still a desirable goal in order to promote the rule of law, etc.

and for their funding and operation, and explains why there are closer links between the situations in Mali and Niger in the current conflict than there were in the 1960s and 1990s rebellions, when smuggling networks were not as prolific. Crackdowns on smuggling also reinforce the Tuareg perception of economic and social marginalization.¹⁶⁶ Legitimate economic activity is seen as “off-limits to Tuareg”, and so Tuareg are forced to enter smuggling in order to earn a living.¹⁶⁷ As mentioned earlier, some Tuareg apparently join Bahanga's rebels in order to gain the knowledge to guide smugglers across the desert, a well-paying job. While smuggling creates an environment facilitating insurgency, cracking down on smuggling will not necessarily benefit counterinsurgency efforts. Instead it runs the risk of being interpreted, in light of past discrimination, as a form of economic warfare against the Tuareg, playing into themes of marginalization.

Terror Networks and America's Global War on Terror

The increase in smuggling and decrease in government presence brought a new actor to Mali and Niger in the presence of the terrorist group Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), currently known as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Khalid Abu al-Abbas, known as Mokhtar Belmokhtar, is or was the leader of a smuggling ring in northern Mali. This smuggling ring is the southern branch of GSPC/AQIM. There are questions on the relationship between the southern branch and the new AQIM leadership however – Belmokhtar may have quit AQIM after AQIM's leader Abdelwadoud Droukdel announced that GSPC had changed its name to AQIM and was

¹⁶⁶“...the US is increasingly characterised as working with corrupt government lackeys against the interests of everyday people in the Saharan fringe, the vast majority of whom rely on informal economies to get by every day.” Gutelius 2007, page 69.

¹⁶⁷“Tuareg who are dealing with this issue are smugglers because they have no other way to live... all the ways to enter in regular business are 'forbidden to Tuareg'.” Personal correspondence, Mohamed ag Ewangaye, March 18, 2008.

officially part of the broader Al Qaeda movement.¹⁶⁸ Also it is unclear whether Belmokhtar is still alive – he was reported killed in September 2006 in clashes with Tuareg rebels,¹⁶⁹ and again this past February.¹⁷⁰ Recently, the Algerian press is reporting that the Belmokhtar wing of AQIM has been taken over by Yahia Abu Amar Tiarti after Belmokhtar negotiated a surrender to the authorities to take advantage of an amnesty offered by Algeria.¹⁷¹

Most terrorist activity in Mali and Niger is related to Belmokhtar's smuggling operations that allegedly benefits AQIM operatives in northern Algeria, the main focus of AQIM operations. American officials also fear that AQIM could take advantage of the 'undergovernment' of northern Mali to set up logistics bases from which they could launch terrorist attacks into Europe.¹⁷² It is extremely unlikely that radical Islam will gain a foothold in the Sahara or Sahel, at least in Tuareg areas.¹⁷³ There is little prospect of bin Ladin's Al Qaeda successfully recruiting in Tuareg, Toubou and Arab communities in Mali and Niger, especially given the openly patronizing views missionaries from the Middle East and South Asia express to the locals.¹⁷⁴ In the prism of the Global War on Terror, logistics bases for locally-oriented¹⁷⁵ terrorist groups like the GSPC are conflated or aggregated with a “monolithic enemy” of global terrorism.¹⁷⁶

Ironically, the presence of the GSPC in northern Mali was one of the grievances of the ADC

168 Oliver Guitta. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb's dilemma. *Middle East Times*. January 28, 2008. AQIM had announced support for Al Qaeda operations and goals before 2007 – the most significant aspect of the name change may be the importation of operational capabilities such as simultaneous suicide bombings.

169 Hunt 2007, n8. Also see Malian Tuareg rebels' military commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Fagaga: 'We will eliminate any of Al-Qaeda elements on our controlled areas.' *El Khabar*, March 6th, 2008.

170 *El Khabar*, February 19th 2008, quoted by MEMRI. Online at http://www.thememriblog.org/blog_personal/en/5565.htm. Last accessed April 6th 2008.

171 Belmokhtar fears physical elimination. *El Khabar*. April 12, 2008. Security services detain Belmokhtar. *El Khabar*. April 26, 2008.

172 Jonathan Karl. ABC Nightline report, March 22, 2006.

173 International Crisis Group 2005.

174 Gutelius 2007, page 64.

175 While there's a debate over whether AQIM is currently oriented toward goals within Algeria or the larger global jihad, up until 2006 the GSPC was focused locally on Algeria.

176 Berschinski 2007, page 12.

against the government, listed as justification for the 2006 attack.¹⁷⁷ Tuareg in Algeria were also on the opposite side from the Islamists during the Algerian civil war – Tuareg held the Islamists responsible for starting the war that devastated their tourism industry.¹⁷⁸ Part of the American TSCTP has even provided counterterrorism training to the same Tuareg fighters that are now conflated with terrorists.¹⁷⁹ However there has been cooperation at the tactical level between GSPC/AQIM and some Tuareg regarding smuggling operations and fighting the common enemy of government security forces.¹⁸⁰

Advocates of greater American involvement have been able to point to one significant terrorist event in the Sahara – the El Para kidnapping in February 2003, when a previously-unknown GSPC terrorist “El Para”¹⁸¹ kidnapped about thirty German tourists traveling in the Sahara.¹⁸² The captives were held by the GSPC in two separate groups, one of which was liberated by an assault by the Algerian army. El Para negotiated the release of the second group of hostages for about five million dollars paid by Germany, and was then chased about two thousand miles through Mali, Niger and into Chad where he was captured by Chadian rebels¹⁸³ and given over to the Libyan government who eventually transferred him to Algeria.

177ADC military commander Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Fagaga “not only ruled out the possibility of any link between the rebellion that he is leading and the terrorist organisation, but went so far as to turn the charge against the government by criticising it for its complacency in the face of the presence of armed groups affiliated with Osama bin Laden.” Touareg Attack. *Africa Research Bulletin: Social, Political and Cultural Series*. Vol. 43, No. 5, May 2006. Page 16657.

178“...most Tuareg were not only well-informed about the 'civil war' but supportive of *Le Grand Caid Bouteflikka*, as they referred to the country's president, in the government's struggle against the Islamic fundamentalists, whom they saw as being directly responsible for the cessation of tourism and the damage this was doing to their own local economy.” Keenan 2000, page 9.

179Trans-Sahara Partnership. *Africa Research Bulletin: Social, Political and Cultural Series*. Vol. 44, No. 7, July 2007, pages 17170-17171. Keenan 2005, page 634.

180Interview, Nigerien officer, March 26, 2008. See also Le Sage 2007, page 20.

181Also known as Abderrezak Lamari and Amari Saifi, the name “El Para” comes from his stint as a parachutist in an Algerian special forces unit.

182Khatchadourian 2006.

183The United States apparently provided intelligence to Chadian rebels in order to aid them in capturing El Para. A Stars & Stripes article shortly after El Para was captured references providing intelligence to “soldiers from Chad” who then ambushed the GSPC, killing 43 and losing 3 of their own. The El Para incident is the only known incidence of GSPC penetration of Chad, so it makes sense to connect these two incidents. Drew Brown. U.S. stepping up anti-terrorism efforts in Africa. *Stars and Stripes*. April 5, 2004.

Many, including Tuareg in Algeria, Niger and Mali, suspect collusion and conspiracy between El Para and Algerian security forces due to a variety of missed opportunities to capture El Para, as well as a lack of evidence that El Para was involved in the first place.¹⁸⁴ Algeria's motivation to create a “terrorism event” was to make sure American arms sales wouldn't be jeopardized by Algeria's human rights record.¹⁸⁵ Given the history of the Algerian security services, their involvement in the El Para kidnapping is a definite possibility, although the truth will likely not be known for years (if ever).¹⁸⁶ An additional possibility is that Algerian commanders in the south of the Sahara are operating outside the oversight of their headquarters, and thus are liable to be bribed by organizations such as smugglers and the GSPC/AQIM.¹⁸⁷

Some also suspect the United States is having a role in the events in order to justify a large military presence to control Saharan oil.¹⁸⁸ As one Kidal politician put it, “The USA try to reach the region through the government and Al Qaeda through the population.”¹⁸⁹ There is a widespread perception among many in the Sahara that the United States is attempting to guarantee access to oil in the Sahara, and that fighting terrorism is just an excuse. This perception, with attendant rumours,¹⁹⁰ spread rapidly across the Sahara on new radio stations, many of which are ironically funded by USAID through the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership.¹⁹¹

184Barth 2003, page 682-683.

185Mellah & Rivoire 2005.

186Jebnoun 2007, page 5.

187This is how smuggling operations are able to go through Algerian ports to Eastern Europe, by bribing individual Algerian officials rather than subverting entire the entire security service to work on their behalf. It is also known to be the situation with other militaries in the region.

188Jeremy Keenan. The Banana Theory of Terrorism: Alternative Truths and the 'Second' (Saharan) Front in the War on Terror. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, January 2007, 31-58. See also, Jeremy Keenan, Terror in the Sahara: the Implications of US Imperialism for North & West Africa. *Review of African Political Economy*, September 2004, 475-496.

189Cheick ag Baye, personal correspondence, March 18 2008.

190Keenan 2007, US Silence as Sahara Military Base Gathers Dust.

191Gutelius 2007, page 68, and Interview with American official, April 9, 2008.

The sudden influx of resources from the United States is indeed perplexing, given the previous disinterest in Washington.¹⁹² The Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership, providing military assistance to north African countries for counter-terrorism operations, is funded for \$500 million over six years starting in 2005, as compared its predecessor, the Pan-Sahel Initiative, which received roughly \$7 million in two years.¹⁹³ Given a sober look at the terrorism threat in the Sahara, it's difficult to see the justification for hundreds of millions of U.S. taxpayer dollars. U.S. rhetoric on the possibility of the Sahara somehow transforming into a “swamp”¹⁹⁴ of terror can be destructive, as it confirms widely-held views that the United States views the Sahara as a land to be tamed and Americanized.¹⁹⁵

Rather than a sudden increase in terrorism or plans to control Saharan resources, the sudden American interest is likely the result of bureaucratic politics. The International Crisis Group quotes a US analyst as saying “After 9/11, Rummy told all his commanders to go out and find terrorists. So Wald went out and found some in the Sahara.”¹⁹⁶ As Toby Archer and Tihomir Popovic argue:

“It has become a cliché that 9/11 changed everything, but in the case of the US government it is true. All diplomatic, intelligence and military efforts have been reoriented because of the terrorist attacks. It was therefore important for all parts of the military and government to be playing their part, and to be seen to be playing their part,

192The Bush administration is asking for \$500 million in military equipment and training delivered through the State Department, and \$400 million delivered through DoD, \$400 million to establish AFRICOM headquarters, plus an additional \$100 million in authorized arms sales, totaling roughly \$1.4 billion dollars in military aid to Africa. Daniel Volman. *Africa: U.S. Security Assistance Programs – The FY 2009 DoS and DoD Budget Request*. *African Security Research Project*. March 13th, 2008. Online at <http://allafrica.com/stories/200803131262.html>. Previous programs were on the scale of providing occasional medical training to host nation military doctors, or logistical assistance to Malian peacekeeping deployments in Liberia. Abramovici 2004, *The Mali Connection*.

193Craig Smith. *U.S. Training African Forces to Uproot Terrorists*. *New York Times*. May 11 2004.

194A recent piece in Air Force Magazine labels the Sahara a “swamp of terror” and includes a map titled “The New Front in the War on Terrorism,” highlighting the entirety of northern Africa, with green shading in countries that are “More than 50% Islamic.” Powell 2004, page 53.

195Gutelius 2006.

196ICG, 31.

in the war on terrorism.”¹⁹⁷

EUCOM feared a loss of funding and status relative to CENTCOM due to operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and even the Horn of Africa all falling under CENTCOM authority. Thus EUCOM, and Deputy Commander Charles Wald in particular, had an incentive to play up a hypothetical terrorist threat to Africa. The philosophy of phase-zero operations, developed at EUCOM under Wald,¹⁹⁸ in which American resources are invested *before* a threat materializes, creates a non-falsifiable terrorist threat: 'there may be no terrorism there now, but unless we act, there may be in the future.' Due to its non-falsifiability, this argument would be difficult to defeat in bureaucratic competitions over resources – it leverages the focus on counterterrorism while offering proactive preventative engagement as a cheaper alternative to invading countries after terrorist attacks have already occurred. Seen through the prism of phase-zero operations, undergoverned spaces in Africa such as Mali and Niger's Sahara regions acquire new relevance.

In the new AFRICOM, the structural incentives to play up the terrorist threat in the Sahara will be unclear. American defense officials typically justify attention on Africa in four ways: humanitarian situations, oil, counterterrorism, or using Africa as an excuse to launch multilateral exercises to strengthen alliances.¹⁹⁹ AFRICOM is being spun off of EUCOM's Africa subcommand, however the increase in resources may be balanced by the increase in geographic scope, especially with the addition of Somalia, currently under CENTCOM. Thus the end result could be no greater or lesser resources towards the TSCTP.²⁰⁰

197Archer & Popovic, 51.

198“Phase Zero encompasses all activities prior to the beginning of Phase I—that is, everything that can be done to prevent conflicts from developing in the first place. Executed properly, Phase Zero consists of shaping operations that are continuous and adaptive.”Wald 2006, 72-73.

199Stevenson 2003.

200Interview, American official, April 9, 2008.

American involvement in northern Mali and Niger carries significant risk of blowback. The risk comes when, once the government has built capacity thanks to American efforts, it begins cracking down on smuggling operations, stirring up more Tuareg discontent. Knowing of American military aid to Mali and Niger, local populations may blame the United States if their economies are hurt by anti-smuggling operations. When Major General Crsnko, responsible for U.S. special operations in EUCOM's area of responsibility in 2005, was asked about the wicked problem of anti-smuggling operations driving Tuareg to "more extreme politics" in Mali, he punted the question, saying "I think that's an activity and a decision that's going to have to be resolved by the national leadership."²⁰¹ Another American official agreed that it was a problem for the Government of Mali rather than the United States, but proposed making the distinction between smuggling drugs and weapons, versus "tomatoes and cigarettes."²⁰²

Foreign involvement in the form of terrorist networks and the American military do not seem to have had an impact on the most recent Tuareg insurgency, beyond improved tactical performance by American-trained units and occasional tactical cooperation between rebels and elements of AQIM. However any visible American presence, even well-intentioned operations such as having military doctors provide medical aid in the hopes of "winning hearts and minds", may backfire as it is seen as foreign intrusion in support of the host governments. American involvement runs the risk of reinforcing the Tuareg perception of marginalization.

Other important factors

²⁰¹Quoted in BBC, [Secrets of the Sand Part 2](#).
²⁰²Interview, American official, April 9, 2008.

Many in the region point to Libya as a troublemaker. Libya provided bases and training to the rebels before the 1990s conflicts and assisted in the political organization of rebel groups in the 1980s. The Libyan government supplied the rebels during the 1990s and may be doing so again.²⁰³ Libya opened a consulate in Kidal in January of 2006, a curious development given the lack of Libyan citizens in the area. When Malian officials asked to inspect the first aircraft to supply the consulate, Libyan officials refused, and many Malians believe that the aircraft was filled with weapons for the rebels.²⁰⁴ Before the rebellion Gaddafi also visited Timbuktu to launch his “Great Sahara” project, seen as inciting Tuareg to rebellion, and may have met secretly with Tuareg leaders.²⁰⁵ Shortly after the negotiations closed in July, Libya closed its consulate in Kidal.²⁰⁶ One American official summed up the role of Libya with an understatement: “not terribly helpful.”²⁰⁷

Geography also has played a major role in the Tuareg insurgencies. Tuareg guerrillas have been able to create nigh-impregnable bases in all three major periods of conflict – in Mali in the mountains north of Kidal, and in Niger in the Tamgak mountains northeast of Agadez. The government's lack of significant air power and the rebels' use of landmines has allowed the rebels to create safe havens, vital to the success of any insurgency. The porous international borders created by the vast desert and weak states also allow for safe havens for rebels, bandits, and traffickers.

Neither Libyan involvement nor geographical factors provided the driving motivation behind the insurgencies. Rather, along with smuggling and criminal networks, they helped create the environment in which insurgency became a viable option.

203One Nigerien officer referred to trucks of supplies coming from Libya. Interview, Nigerien officer, March 26, 2008.

204Interview, Malian officer, February 14, 2008.

205The “Great Sahara” project is the idea of a Libyan-backed Tuareg confederation incorporating territory from Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Algeria. Keenan 2006, Tuareg take up arms. Interview, Malian officer, April 27, 2008.

206In Brief. *Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series*. Vol. 43, No 8., August 2006. Page 16744.

207Interview, American official, April 9, 2008.

Conclusion

If one looks at the five factors individually, marginalization, the environment, and smuggling have impacted the Tuareg insurgencies the most between 1990 and today, while the Global War on Terror and resource extraction have had a lesser impact. However the Tuareg rebellions shouldn't be analyzed by looking at the factors individually, but rather in how they interacted to build upon each other and reinforce each other.

The processes of decolonization, combined with preexisting ethnic and racial tensions and the 1963 Tuareg rebellion in Mali, created the original frame of social, political and economic marginalization. This original frame then shaped how Tuareg interpreted significant political events. Droughts became evidence that central governments let Tuareg starve while international food aid is sold for profit. Resource extraction became evidence of economic discrimination and central government theft because Tuareg did not see enough economic benefits from uranium mining. Anti-smuggling policies became evidence of marginalization as governments classified traditional Tuareg trading routes as "illegal." U.S., Malian and Nigerien rhetoric on terrorism are seen by many Tuareg simply as justification for further discriminatory policies. These interpretations in turn altered but largely reinforced the discourse of marginalization.

Beyond providing motivation and framing the discourse of the rebellion, several of the individual factors have influenced the execution of the insurgencies themselves. Smuggling routes have provided rebels with cash and weapons, the importance of uranium mining has provided Nigerien rebels with the ability to blackmail the central government, and terrorist networks may have provided

extra manpower at crucial engagements. Environmental scarcity and government efforts against smuggling or terrorism may also influence the future of the insurgencies in Mali and Niger. However social and economic marginalization remains the most important variable, as it provides the context in which all other events are evaluated.

An alternative evaluation of the interaction between marginalization and the other four variables studied in this paper would be to change the locus of agency, and look at the dynamics of alliances between core and periphery. As Stathis Kalyvas observes, "...ambiguity is fundamental rather than incidental to civil wars, a matter of structure rather than noise."²⁰⁸ Rather (or in addition to) factors such as smuggling reinforcing perceptions of marginalization, smuggling and marginalization might provide simultaneous private and political motivations for violence.²⁰⁹ This alternative analysis substitutes the interactions between political and private violence in place of the interactions between marginalization and environmental scarcity, smuggling, uranium, and terrorism.

To apply this alternative explanation to one facet of the Tuareg insurgencies, we can look at Ibrahim Bahanga and his ATNM political group. Under the alternative explanation, this would not exist purely to provide political cover for drug trafficking, but might be a legitimate attempt to enter the political process, while Bahanga's drug trafficking operations remain separate. Alternatively, core/periphery alliance dynamics may be at work – the ATNM might be a way of Bahanga calling in external support by framing his private struggle as political, while external actors attempt to use Bahanga's private criminal network for political mobilization.²¹⁰ There are significant policy

²⁰⁸Kalyvas 2003, 475.

²⁰⁹"Posing a strict dichotomy between the political and the private (or the center and the periphery) is misleading.

Demonstrating the omnipresence of local and private conflicts cannot be used to reject the importance of political and strategic dimensions in civil wars, very much like the emphasis on these dimensions cannot possibly hide the significance of local and private conflicts." Kalyvas 2006, 381.

²¹⁰"Alliance entails a process of convergence of interests via a transaction between supralocal and local actors, whereby the former supply the latter with external muscle, thus allowing them to win decisive advantage over local rivals; in

implications to this alternative analysis – the Malian government's strategy of using local allies against Bahanga could drive Bahanga to more actively seek outside help, either from the MNJ or AQIM.²¹¹

These two competing explanations, those of marginalization being driven by smuggling, environmental scarcity, uranium mining and terrorism versus the alternative of alliances between political and private actors and motives, is a fruitful opportunity for further research.

The question this paper asked was, *How have marginalization, environmental degradation, resource extraction, smuggling, and the Global War on Terror impacted the Tuareg insurgencies since 1990?* This paper found that *while marginalization, environmental factors and smuggling have had a greater impact than resource extraction and the Global War on Terror, the greatest impact comes from the interaction of variables, as they reinforce Tuareg perceptions of marginalization.*

exchange, supralocal actors are able to tap into local networks and generate mobilization.” Ibid., 383.

211“...a recurring pattern is that losers in local conflicts are more likely to move first and, hence, be the first ones to ally with outside forces.” Ibid., 383.

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