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Tuareg Crises in Niger and Mali

Seminar on the 27th November, 2007

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Sub-Saharan Africa Program



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TUAREG CRISES IN NIGER AND MALI

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I. The MNJ and the identity crisis in Tuareg societies

by *Yvan Guichaoua and Ferdaous Bouhlel-Hardy.*

In February 2007, with the attack against Iferouane garrison in Niger, the Nigerian Movement for Justice (*Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice* [MNJ]) emerged in Northern Niger.

MNJ's sociology

According to Yvan Guichaoua, the MNJ was initially formed by two ex rebels; Amoumane Kalakoua and Aboubacar Alambo. Both men were suspected of committing crimes after a rebellion in the 1990's. In a few weeks, the movement gained numerous members from a more credible stake of the Tuareg community such as Aghaly Alambo, and some local representatives.

The movement is composed of people frustrated by their social, material or political situations. Deserters from rebel forces integrated within Niger's Armed Forces after the 1995 peace agreements; a group of former soldiers who rallied around Kindo Zada (who claimed elucidation for the president Bare's assassination); former rebels of the *Aïr et de Azawak Liberation front* (F.L.A.A.) ejected from the *Peace Consolidation Program in Aïr and Azawak* (PCPAA); and Youths from Agadez infuriated by the Army's acts of violence.

Mr Guichaoua argues that the MNJ get financial and material support from Algerian and Libyan Tuaregs. However, the movement has its roots in the communities of Northern Niger and their resentment towards Niger's central State.

Political claims and Tuareg's identity crisis

Ferdaous Bouhlel-Hardy describes how and why the issue of decentralization is an important part of MNJ's demands. Decentralization first appeared in the 1995 peace agreement and created hope for collective management and autonomy. However the slowness in electoral preparation, the delay in providing technical and financial support as

well as the weakness of the financial grants made decentralized governance difficult. This increased the feeling of abandonment amidst local representatives, and postponed the peace itself. The rallying of two mayors and three local representatives with MNJ proved this dissatisfaction.

Mrs Bouhleb-Hardy also points out how this aggravated the frustrations within the pastoral populations of Northern Niger. The way in which the 2005 food crisis was handled highlighted deficiencies with the State's approach towards pastoral populations. While agricultural populations benefited from warning alerts and programs to surmount the crisis, no such large-scale action was organised to warn and help the pastoral populations. Pastoral communities in the North lost fifty to ninety per cent of their livestock.

There is also a particularly sensitive land ownership issue for all nomad societies in Northern Niger. It is increasingly difficult for shepherds to graze their herds and to reach the wells in large parts of the country because Southern farmers are settling on land that was once available to Nomads. Consequently there are less pastoral zones, while farmers from the South are gaining more areas. Simultaneously impoverishment is causing nomads to settle on the periphery of Agadez or Arlit. This changes their way of life.

According to both speakers, the integration of the above social issues and cultural dimensions such as teaching the tamasheq language, are taken into account in MNJ's political platform. Mr Guichaoua underlines the following central and recurring demands made by the MNJ: effective implementation of the decentralization process, economic development, respect for the cultural diversity; more representation of Northern populations within state authorities, the administration and the army. Other demands are dressed in a discourse intended for the Western public (governance, ecology, autochthonous peoples, visible minorities). The movement wants to avoid appearing too ethnic in its claims. It uses themes (uranium-bearing pension, increased subsidies for Northern regions) in which all the populations of the northern regions can meet themselves.

The movement respects institutions that resulted from the peace agreements of 1995. It focuses its grievances on the delays in implementing decentralization law, such as the lack of granting a suitable budget and the provision of technical assistance. The MNJ wants institutions to be funded by a larger stake of the uranium-bearing pension (at the regional level).

The uranium-bearing question

In the debate on how institutions are financed, Mrs Bouhleb-Hardy presents the importance of the uranium-bearing issue. The concomitance between the rebellion, recent negotiations between the State and the traditional mining operator (Areva), and new actors getting prospecting concessions in the North are certainly not fortuitous.

In August 2007, the government of Niger and Areva announced the renegotiation of the price of uranium. The kilo of uranium ore increased from 27 300 to 40 000 FCFA¹. The French company came under intense pressure during the negotiation process. In July, under a pretext that Areva had links with the MNJ, Niamey expelled two executive expatriates

¹ With retroactive effect from January 1st 2007. At the same time, Areva agreed to overturn (in the state of Niger), as a deposit on royalties, a sum of 15 billion FCFA. This agreement had to be a prelude to a general contracts renegotiation between these two parties from December 31st 2007.

working for the group: the retired colonel Gilles Denamur, a company security consultant and the general manager of Areva in Niger, Dominique Pin. On August 6th 2007, Aïchatou Mindaoudou, the Foreign affairs and Co-operation Secretary, proclaimed the Niger government was to launch a 'partner's diversification policy' with the aim of breaking the Areva monopoly. Thereafter it appeared that tensions between AREVA and the authorities came to an end.

In 2006 and 2007, the government of Niger granted a series of concessions for mining, gas and petrol exploration, divided between almost all of the mining companies present on the international market (Chinese, Americans, Australians, Canadians, Indians, etc). These areas are all located on the liveable zones of the pastoral populations of the North (Tim Mersoï's region: Aïr valley). However, the nature of contracts, the amount of taxes paid, the cost of the deals, the employment distribution and the impact on the environment have not been made public. Above all, it is not known if clauses regarding rights of the local populations to reach pastures or wells were included in these contracts. Only the percentage of redistribution to the areas of North (15%) was fixed by the law.

It is through the environmental issue that the MNJ integrated the uranium-bearing question into its demands. It resumes the Sherpa association² and the CRIIRAD's³ report on radioactive pollution and workers' sanitary conditions in Arlit. Areva ordered expertise at two medical and epidemiological specialist laboratories such as Quanta Medical⁴ or IRSN⁵.

The MNJ explicitly asks for "a 50% share of the development companies' taxes for the benefit of local authorities". As one request is put forward, other demands linked with mining concessions are added. The MNJ utilizes a favorable international context to support its cause; for example it has adopted the UN's September 14th 2007 declaration which stipulates that autochthonous people cannot be expelled from their territories without their free and informed consent.

President Tandja's attitude

According to Ferdaous Bouhlel-Hardy, basic mediation attempts between the government and MNJ were launched through Mohamed Anacko, one of the former leaders of the nineties rebellion, and High commissioner to the Restoration of the Peace. Many felt that he had little room to manoeuvre and expressed doubts about his ability to succeed. His role is now limited to secondary mediation operations, notably humanitarian (securing the release of hostages held by the MNJ).

Mrs Bouhlel-Hardy also suggests that Libya was probably approached as a mediator. The Libyan influence in Northern Niger could clearly be observed in April 2007 when Libyan guide Muammar Gaddafi attended the "Mouloud" feast celebration.

On the ground, the State of Niger carried out acts of repression against the MNJ's supposed supporters by sending in military reinforcements. This action came during a pre-

² http://www.asso-sherpa.org/CP_areva07/RAPPORT%20SHERPA%20NIGER%20ARLIT.pdf

³ <http://www.criirad.org/actualites/dossiers2005/niger/somniger.html>

⁴ http://www.areva.com/servlet/news/groupnews/vdg_rapport_quanta-c-AroundUs-cid-1175762970286-p-1028798801494-fr.html

⁵ http://www.areva.com/servlet/news/groupnews/operationsgroupnews/vdg_irs_n_20_04_2005-c-AroundUs-cid-1113202835363-p-1028798801485-fr.html

election year. It was to show the Southern population that President Tandja was standing firm against Tuareg 'criminals'.

Henceforth, President Tandja's actions seem to add to the destabilization of Northern Niger with the aim of compromising the MNJ. It was also noted that President Tandja's acquaintances facilitated patriotic movements such as the Ivory Coast "Young patriots", in order to stigmatize the supposed collusion between Areva and the rebels.

Armed action assessment and latest developments

In a few months MNJ's ambushes against the country's (FAN) military convoys are likely to have caused the death of more than a hundred servicemen. These attacks provoked FAN reprisals against civilians. It is thought that about fifty civilians were killed or kidnapped by armed forces. In recent weeks, there's been a decay of the situation with the multiplication of robberies and attacks against civilians.

This situation has to be put in perspective with the Tuareg crisis in the North of Mali. Even though the Malian crisis preceded the situation in Niger (May 2006), it has neither the same foundations nor the same scale and, most importantly the Malian authorities managed it in a totally different manner.

II. The Tuareg crisis in North Mali

by *Abdoulaye Tamboura*

Since May 2006, Mali has been confronted with the fourth Tuareg rebellion in its history (after those of 1962-1964, October / December 1990, 1994-1995). This time, it began on May 23rd 2006 with Kidal and Menaka garrison attacks by the *May 23rd Democratic Alliance for the Change (Alliance Démocratique pour le Changement du 23 mai [ADC])*.

A more limited crisis

At first, Abdoulaye Tamboura focused his presentation on the social hierarchy (noble persons / subjects / slaves), tribal, and geographical fragmentation of Tuareg societies in Northern Mali. The crisis in May 2006 was led by elements from the Kel Adagh tribe living in the Kidal region. The rebellion did not extend to other tribes or other regions.

The movement of May 23rd 2006 was set up by former rebels integrated into the Malian armed forces following on from the National Pact signed in 1992. They felt discriminated against because to the slowness of their promotions and the mediocrity of their attributed tasks. Thus, as in Niger, a feeling of economic banishment within the Northern Mali populations fuelled the demands.

So, the ADC's main demand is motivated by the feeling of obsolescence of the National Pact signed in 1992. Besides, this feeling would have been strengthened by the fact that the Malian army, contrary to what was planned in the peace agreements, was not withdrawing from Tuareg zones. But also one of the central stakes is the ability of the people of Kidal to control the movement luxury products being trafficked through their zone (cigarettes, drugs, weapons, etc).

Swiftly, ADC's members grouped together into the massif of Tigharghar where the Malian army had no means to dislodge them. Attacks against the garrisons of Kidal and Menaka had allowed them to accumulate a substantial military arsenal. Several months later it was discovered that some of these weapons, particularly mines, were used by MNJ in attacks in Niger.

Regional Geopolitical Context

Mr Tamboura emphasizes that the Algerian and Libyan rivalry for the control of the Northern Mali is certainly one of the factors which explains the resurgence of the Tuareg rebellion. This rivalry increased during the passage to Timbuktu by the Libyan guide Gaddafi during "Mouloud" in 2006 (in April 10th, 2006). The Guide had promised to invest in numerous projects in Northern Mali and had immediately ordered the opening of a consulate to Kidal even if there were no Libyan citizens in the region. Algerians, very active in this part of Mali fighting against ex-GSPC (since renamed *Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb*) closed their consulate to Gao and then their border with Mali. This reaction led a short time later to the attacks of May 23rd, 2006. This Algerian-Libyan tension faded with the transfer of the Libyan consulate in Bamako.

Trying to protect the good image of the country and not wanting to get entangled in a conflict during a pre-electoral context, the President Toure sought mediation through the Algerian authorities. This mediation became a reality from Summer, 2006 with the Algiers Agreements (in July 4th, 2006). Even though these agreements were criticized by the Malian political class, they briefly prevented an expansion of the movement. ADC's executives were allowed to return into the national political picture, by means of the forum of Kidal (in March 2007). Then the July 2007 general election saw an Alliance member being elected as deputy⁶.

Appeasement and resurgence

Mr Tamboura explains how, since the Algiers agreements, the movement's armed branch continued to justify its existence with the start of a fight, supported financially and technically by Algiers, against their former GSPC's business partners (*Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb*). This struggle allowed them to gather important material support on Algeria's behalf while trying to take control of the various traffic roads.

In August 2007, a group formed around Ibrahim Ag Bahanga resumed the fight against the Malian state, attacking the village of Tinzaouatene and kidnapping 23 Malian servicemen. The Malian army, with the support of ADC's elected representatives, launched operations to dislodge the rebel group and repel it outside the country. Bahanga and his men would henceforth move on the Algerian-Libyan border from where they have been negotiating for several months the payment of a ransom.

⁶ Hamada Ag Bibi to Kidal.

Conclusion

This seminar emphasizes the crises' characteristics in Mali and in Niger through their sociological, political and geopolitical implications. If the links between both movements do not seem organic, we can still note the weakness of border controls, especially facing the movement weapons. Algeria and Libya Tuareg communities have also supported the rebellions. Also, both crises are not of the same scale, and are managed differently by Mamadou Tandja and Amadou Toumani Toure. In Niger, the president remained inflexible and chose to impose repression while the rebellion gains support from large sections of Northern Niger. In Mali, the conciliatory attitude of the State, the highest authority has confined the movement to a reduced fringe of the Kidal region.

To go further:

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Maps

Niger: http://www.izf.net/affiche_oscar.php?num_page=3496

Mali: http://www.izf.net/affiche_oscar.php?num_page=3495