THE AFRICA GROWTH INITIATIVE
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Africa Policy Dialogue on the Hill
"Crisis in Mali and North Africa: Past and Present"

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9:30-10:30am

Rayburn House Office Building
Room B338

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. DIAKABANA: So, good morning and welcome to the African Dialogue on the Hill. I'm Cedric Diakabana. I'm a staff member in the office of Senator Sheldon Whitehouse.

We will get an African perspective on Africa issues as well as those of outside experts.

This is a monthly co-presentation by the Confessional African Staff Association, or CASA, and the African Growth Initiative of the Brookings Institution.

For those who know CASA, we're a bipartisan, bicameral association of staff members who seek to educate our colleagues on today's substantive Africa issues, on the continent or within the great African Diaspora through panel discussions, briefings and other events with decision-makers and officials involved in African policy.

Our partner, the Africa Growth Initiative, brings together African scholars to provide policymakers with high quality research, expertise and

innovative solutions that promote Africa's economic development.

Because of AGI's access to the latest research on the continent, we thought they offered a great partnership in achieving our mutual goals to inform.

In his second inaugural address, President Obama remarked that America will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe, and we will renew those institutions that extend our capacity to manage crises abroad, for no one has a greater stake in the peaceful world than its most powerful nation.

As a Congolese-American staffer, I am humbled by this moment and I look forward to hearing from our experts. So, without further ado I'm going to do ahead and introduce the panel.

I'm going to start with Susanna Wing. She is an associate professor of political science at Haverford College. Her book, *Constructing Democracy in Transitioning Societies of Africa,* received the

2009 book award from the African Politics Conference Group. It was published in paperback in 2010, as *Constructing Democracy in Africa: Mali in Transition*.

Before moving to Haverford, Susanna taught at UCLA. She has worked as a consultant for the World Bank, USAID and the Freedom House and frequently serves as expert on women's rights for asylum cases.

Her research and teaching interests include comparative politics, Islam and politics, development, women's rights in Africa. She has conducted field work in Mali, Niger, Benin, and Nigeria.

Next I'm going to go to Nasser Weddady. I hope I got that right.

MR. WEDDADY: You got it right.

MR. DIAKABANA: He is the director of Civil Rights Outreach at the American Islamic Congress. A native of Mauritania, Nasser grew up in Libya and Syria, traveling extensively through the Middle East before coming to the U.S. seeking asylum in 2000.

A few days after the September 11 attacks, the FBI falsely detained Nasser because of his ethnic

appearance. He has organized conferences for young activists across the Middle East to offer budding activists the leadership skills to pursue their own human and civil rights campaigns.

Most recently, he has spearheaded a series of workshops to launch AIC's Tunisian Bureau.

As one of the few activists working not only in the MENA region, but in the U.S. as well, Nasser has developed a unique perspective on global struggle for human and civil rights. He has been published in the *International Herald Tribune, Wall Street Journal,* Al Jazeera, and Radio Liberty, and testified to Congress' Human Rights Caucus. Fluent in five languages, that beats me, by the way, Nasser has lectured at the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and diverse interfaith settings. He is currently chair of AIC New England Council.

And I'm now going to introduce our moderator, Mwangi Kimenyi, who is a senior fellow and director of Africa Growth Initiative in the Global

Economy and Development Program at the Brookings here in Washington.

So, with that, please start.

MR. KIMENYI: Okay. I'll start with just asking Susanna to make comments. We are very grateful of this discussion and your participation and we are looking forward to a rich dialogue. So, we'll ask the panelists to speak just for a few minutes and then we open it up to the floor.

So, Susanna, we will start with you.

MS. WING: Great. Thank you. Well, thank you so much for this invitation and it's a pleasure to be here and have an opportunity to speak on a place that's near and dear to my heart that is Mali. And as many of you know, Mali was considered a model democracy for Africa for nearly 20 years, so the question is, what happened? What triggered the conflict? And why now?

I'm going to make a few overarching comments and then sort of focus on three areas that I think are really important when we try to understand what's

going on in Mali today.

Most recently, I would point to what happened in January of 2012 in northern Mali, and that was when the Tuareg insurgency was sort of reignited and there was a conflict in Aguelhok in the north in which many Malian soldiers had been killed, were killed by the Tuareg insurgents, and the government's response to this was, in part, what triggered a lot of the frustration and the downfall of the government, I would say.

So, what happened, as many of you, I'm sure, know, is with the fall of Gadhafi, there were many Tuareg who returned to the region who were extremely well armed, and so in this conflict that started up again in January, the government was accused by military families, women in particular, of not providing the necessary resources to the army and that includes the training, the food, the clothing, everything, essentially, that the army needed for support. And so, this massacre, basically, took place in January of 2012.

In February of that same year, women protested in Kati and in Bamako and thousands of people came out to march. So, you see tensions rising in the capital city and a growing frustration towards the government.

You also have a recognition of very high levels of corruption that have really reached a point of -- that's increasing peoples' frustration where -- and that divide, essentially, between the people and the politicians, the political class, as it's often referred to, in Mali, and this is based on, frankly, the corruption that was taking place.

And linked to that corruption was what was perceived as a really inefficient and uncommitted government response to al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, so people were raising red flags about, well, what's really going on here in the north and why is the government not making real advances towards addressing al-Qaida in Islamic Maghreb in the north.

So, you've got the Tuareg insurgency and you've got al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, you've got

the Malian army struggling, and really ill prepared and poorly supported, to fight this insecurity in the north, and so in March of 2012, we see the coup in which there was the mutiny of low ranking officers who, again, were making these same claims.

So, there's three points that I want to talk about primarily and one is, what are the political realities in the south? From my perspective, nothing is going to be resolved in Mali unless these issues, these political issues, in the south in the government are addressed.

The second is: what's the basis for the Tuareg grievances? How can we understand the Tuareg concerns in the north? And third is the role of religion in politics in the country. So, those are the key three things that I'm going to talk about and, again, I'm giving you sort of a very quick broad overview and I'm happy to come back and unpack some of this more deeply as needed. It's always sort of hard to know how much information people are coming to the table with.

So, in terms of what are the political realities in the south, with the election of President Touré, ATT as he is commonly called, he came to power and operated under what's called consensus politics. So, while as the previous regime there was a very lively opposition, you had, under Konaré, you certainly had a majority party that had a great deal of control and power, but you also had a very vocal opposition.

When ATT came to power, he was an independent, and what he did was do his so-called consensus politics, which sounds all well and good, and coalition building, consensus, this is what we want.

What he effectively did was undermine the opposition and co-opt all the opposition and in sort of a typical -- I guess I would say, in many African states, the most money to be made is with an affiliation with the government and the power involved with being affiliated with the government, and so, for many people, this was the gravy train, was to get yourself into the presidential coalition and then to

be part of that powerful place in society.

And so, ATT successfully co-opted much of the opposition and then in so doing, the political class kind of had this you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, and there was corruption and nobody was calling anybody out on it because everybody was sort of -- had some interests, et cetera, so you've got skyrocketing corruption, and as the elections are approaching in April 2012, there's a lot of frustration as to how free and fair this election's going to be and a lot of concern in Bamako from people that I was speaking with when I was there in October 2011 is, is this going to be free and fair? Is there going to be some passing of the baton from ATT to a successor or not? And therefore, how democratic is this system?

So, when the coup took place, there actually were a fair number of coup supporters. I know people, educated elites in Mali, who supported the coup because they were really fed up with this corrupt regime that had been ruling for so long and they

thought, you know, just another round of elections is not going to create democracy in Mali, and so, the hope was that the coup could lead to some real changes and so after the coup, part of what was continuing to happen and is now happening is infighting between the political class -- coup supporters, those who are not coup supporters, and how to move forward.

So, again, what we have currently is a civilian government that is in place that does not have much legitimacy. They've put together a roadmap to have elections in July. The question will be, are the logistics there to have that take place? The roadmap was critical to -- I'll note that the Europeans and the U.S. are pushing for this roadmap towards elections, and once that was supported by the national assembly, voted on, bingo, I think 250 million Euros were then opened up to the Malian government and the first 20 million was just released.

So, the roadmap was essential for continued resources and funding for the government.

Okay, the next point is the basis for Tuareg

grievances. As many of you know, the Tuareg -- there's a secular Tuareg movement, the MNLA, which called for the independence of Azawad. But where does this come from? For years, the Malian government had peace agreements with the Tuareg. The Tuareg rebellions have been going on since independence; there have been several rebellions.

Inevitably, it's an issue of the development in the north, the insecurity in the north, there's not enough attention being paid to development and infrastructure for the north. Decentralization that was adopted in the 1990s was the institutional mechanism of local governance that was created, in essence, to try and bring governance to communities across the country and it was one of the ways that the resolution of the 1990s Tuareg Rebellion was addressed.

Unfortunately, it was never followed through completely. The resources were not there. These municipal governments never have the autonomy or the resources that they needed to be fully effective. So,

decentralization looked great on paper, but ultimately was yet another point of the government not following through on agreements.

Some of the previous agreements that had taken place, the National Pact in the early ‘90s, had given a special status to the north, that was never addressed. So, there have been these sort of institutional arrangements that there has not been proper follow through on.

So, that’s one issue. Another is, I would say, there’s no question to my mind that there’s some recurring players in the north who simply are seeking power and influence, who are opportunists. To my mind, this is Iyad Ag Ghaly of Ansar Dine. He was a rebel in the ‘90s who then participated in agreements with the state, peace agreements, but then he also was a negotiator in the early 2000s between al-Qaida and the Islamic Maghreb and European governments for ransom payments. Everybody knows he was the principle negotiator, he was a player that the government used, actually, to negotiate for ransom payments.

And I think many of you know that there have been some finger pointing about where have al-Qaida in Islamic Maghreb -- where have they gotten so much money? Well, part of it's organized crime and smuggling, and part of it's these massive ransom payments that have been paid to the organization.

So, people have said Iyad Ag Ghaly was not only involved, but he was also getting cuts every time that some ransom deal was made. And he's the head of Ansar Dine, which is the militant Islamism organization that was pushing for Sharia in the north.

Two things I would -- well, one key thing that I'd like to say about the Tuareg grievances, there's no doubt that the state has ignored the north for a long time and has not been efficient in addressing problems of the north. It also was not effective addressing decentralization across the entire region. You talk to a lot of Malians and they'll say, we're poor in the south too. Why is this, you know, such an issue? But I'd also like to add, in terms of thinking about an independent state

of Azawad, the Tuareg are a minority in Northern Mali. It's very important to remember it's only in the Kidal region where they're a majority, but if you're looking at Tombouctou and Gao, they're not the majority. There are many other ethnic groups involved, there are also many Tuareg who do not support a separate state.

So, it's not as clear as why don't we just have an independent north separate from, you know, Bamako, because it's a diverse population and how do you address all the diversity of interests that is going on there?

Finally, let me wrap it up with talking a little bit about religion and politics. Mali is known for having a very progressive form of Islam, practice of Islam, and so it's -- but since 1991, with democratization, what we've seen is an increasing role of Islam, Islamic leaders, religious leaders. One key place to look at this is the debate over family law, which was a major discussion in -- across the country, primarily in Bamako, however, where President Konaré, as well as ATT, seemed to push and promote sort of

more progressive marriage laws and family laws, inheritance laws, that would protect women's rights, would be more progressive in terms of women's rights.

At each corner, every time this came to a critical juncture, religious leaders in Bamako basically blocked it and this went on for 20 years, essentially. Konaré was going to sign it into law as the decree, the new family law as a decree before he left office and he was told, point blank, Bamako will burn if you do that because -- by a religious leader -- we will bring people into the streets and Bamako will burn. He backed away.

Another ten years of negotiation, a law is passed in the National Assembly and ATT is getting ready to sign it into law, and again, at this point, the High Islamic Council, which was created in 2002, managed to get tens of thousands of people to rally in the streets of Bamako, and in fact, across the cities in the country.

So, they used their influence to prevent the passage of this law and essentially were showing the

strength that they do have and the support that they do have.

What I think is important here is to show also that we have these influential Islamic leaders in the south. Chérif Haidara is one, a Sufi leader who is very -- he's a bit of a celebrity. Mahmoud Diko, who is the president of the High Islamic Council is another. He's a reformist Muslim. And these two leaders are really bringing the presence of Islam into debates in Mali much more forcefully.

But what's so interesting is, with what's going on in the north, these folks who, I'll just say from my experience with women's rights activists, et cetera, these folks who were always referred to as the Islamists, right, in sort of derogatory fashion, are now quite progressive and moderate relative to what's going on in the north. And I think that's important because I think it's going to increase the role of these moderate religious leaders in the south and I think because they will be seen as being so significantly more moderate than what's going on in

the north and perhaps people who represent the piousness of the country, and so I think we will continue to see an increasing role of these religious leaders in Bamako.

So, just to wrap it up I will say that there are two non-negotiables from the side of the Malian state, and that Mali is secular state and the territorial integrity must remain intact. So, in terms of thinking about negotiations in the north and with anybody who's been involved here, that's tricky. If they're saying, we're standing by secular state and territorial integrity, that puts some of the claims from those in the north, obviously, it challenges those, but I would say in terms of thinking about the north, I do think it's about time that the government does think about various institutional responses that are possible, whether it's reinforcing decentralization and really making it work or at some kind of loose federalism. There is, in fact -- there can be institutional responses, but I want to emphasize the north is not simply Tuareg territory, it

really is much more diverse.

So, I'll wrap it up there.

MR. KIMENYI: Well, thank you very much, Susanna, for that very comprehensive overview of -- from the historical -- with historical timelines and what has happened to the coup and after. So, we will follow up with some questions after Nasser makes a few comments.

MR. WEDDADY: Well, first of all, good morning and thank you for inviting me to this event. Even though that you heard my biography, some of the things that I'm about to say might surprise you because generally I'm thought of as the human rights guy, which is generally very ambivalent and has mixed feelings about questions of counter-terrorism and radicalization.

The fact is, no, it's not the case, and I'll explain why.

First of all, the events in Mali represent the biggest security failure since 9/11 globally, because this was a situation that could have been

prevented. It has been only exacerbated through incompetence, a combination of incompetence, lack of proactive action, and arguably one could make a point about something about post-colonial discourses. But the third point is obviously not for our panel today.

And let me explain to you the case. Northern Mali, which I will refer to in this conversation as Azawad, because that's the real historical name of the region -- Mali is a construct, like most African nations -- a result of a colonial line drawing that has, in the words of a great Middle Eastern scholar, Elig Katouri, that those lines are violently divorced from the realities of history, geography, and ethnography, have nothing to do with it. As a matter of fact, a lot of the problems that we're looking at today can be traced back directly to that era, chiefly the issue of an independent Azawad.

Yes, the conflict, in many -- sort of in the first rush of media discussions and production about the issue, has been dominated by the blind narrative of the Tuareg return to Mali heavily -- you know,

heavily armed and tilted the balance.

The reality is, is the people of Northern Mali, Azawad, have been seeking a divorce from Mali since its inception. The first rebellion started in 1962 and it was violently crushed, and as a matter of fact, when we talk about Libya and the use of the Azawadis, which are not only the Tuaregs, these are Arabs, these are Songhai, and some Peul. It's just like -- it's very important for us to realize that before a Darfur, there was an Azawad.

The ferocity through which the 1962 rebellion was crushed not only deprived the people of the region of their traditional elites and their chieftain for a generation, but ultimately created a situation where by the time of the 1968/1969 droughts created the situation basically of mass exoduses that happened -- that started to happen out of the region and drove people as far as Coturno down to the south, as far as Libya, because people were basically deprived of their natural means of subsistence, that's cattle, and many of you might like -- see that those

of us who come from the Sahel region, we smile when people start talking to us about global warming because our response is, we've been feeling it for the last four years.

And nowhere is that truer than in Northern Mali, Mauritania, and the Sahel region.

And the second element that is very important to acknowledge here is that the -- whatever the Malian state has been engaging in the last four years, in terms of negotiations, in terms of agreements, et cetera, there's a fundamental inherent problem there and most of these agreements were predicated on the concept that we will -- you drop arms in exchange of favors. We'll give you positions, we'll give you money, we'll give you certain things, just quiet down and we'll pay you off, basically buying off loyalties. And that has -- that obviously has it limits and as Susanna pointed out, one of its manifestations of the limits of that is the emergence of people like Iyad Ag Ghaly, who is a total opportunist who has surfed on every possible

ideological wave since the 1970s. At one time he was fighting in Lebanon under Gadhafi's Arab Nationalist Agency. At one point he found God and became sort of a Marabout, even though he's not from a Maraboutic tribe.

At one point he became basically the chief -- the representative of the Malian state that he spent some time fighting and became their counsel in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and there he found Salafism, which is obviously an important ideology -- a violent important ideology that is a very sure source of funding if you're in the business of looking for money via God.

And ultimately, he became basically a pivotal player in the whole ransom money business, and that's actually the central point that I wanted to contribute to this conversation about the Mali thing and that's why I believe the Mali crisis has been -- has been the biggest security failure globally since 9/11. Because the European Union state members have never hesitated to negotiate with terrorists and pay ransom money to release kidnapped citizens, and that

policy is so egregious that it went on a decade unchallenged publically -- very few writings, very pronouncement, and certainly zero public statements about the problem came from any governmental bodies until 2009 when the Algerians started raising hell about it, and they went as far as proposing a U.N. ban on ransom money payments, which became later the basis of a Security Council Resolution, which, in effect, remained just ink on paper.

And I repeat myself again because this is as egregious for those of us who have been around since 9/11, who spent a decade hearing about counterterrorism and engaging in full scale wars across the globe, breaking and disrupting networks, waging scale -- like war against terrorist networks on a scale never seen before, and yet our very earnest allies, our closest allies, while deploying troops to fight with us a war against terrorism, or so we were told, in places like Afghanistan, at the same time were pouring dollars into terrorist coffers. It’s offensive, and it’s absolutely unacceptable, and it

has to be addressed and stopped at one point.

And here the issue here is not pointing fingers at the Europeans, but it's simply coming to terms with the reality that you cannot count on the Europeans when you're fighting these kind of insurgencies and you're engaging on resolving a problem of this scale.

And I point it back to scale because let's not forget that Northern Mali, Azawad, is potentially -- I mean, it's not potentially, it's a matter of a fact, almost twice the size of France. It's a huge land mass. That's twice the size of Iraq. And we know how that went when the United States was engaged in a counterinsurgency that covered only a portion of Iraq. We're talking about a massive landmass here that is completely porous borders and has demonstrably become a security threat to the surrounding countries.

I am a native of Mauritania and the reason I'm so passionate about the issue have been tracking it very closely since the beginning is because, let's face the reality, at least 30 to 40 percent of the

folks who have been recruited to fight in MOJWA and AQIM are Mauritania citizens. We have a radicalization problem that needs to be addressed.

And none of this, ultimately, and that's the point that I was pointing to, none of this would have happened because the AQIM networks, and later on the MUJAO, which is an offshoot of it, were an easily disrupted and easily removable infection, had somebody decided to take proactive steps as early as 2007, 2008. Time and again, the Europeans chose to negotiate, keep pouring money to release kidnaps, in the process turned their own citizens into the most valuable commodity in the region, basically putting a bull's eye on them, and in the shuffle, the United States was basically a latecomer to the conversation through AFRICOM, through whole sets of initiatives regarding Mali, but never with any kinetic solutions.

And the reason I'm talking about kinetic solutions is that a very valuable time was lost in the run up to the collapse of Mali to the point that basically we're dealing with a problem that could be

easily preventable. And I'm deliberately making my remarks very -- driving in to that point to make the audience realize how much of a self-made problem this has been in the last decade.

And going forward, I think it is very important for us to address the dysfunctionalities of Malian state in order to contain this threat that could potentially infect other places. And I have the next possible spot for the contagion is none other than Mauritania, and the reason I want to warn about all of this is that any sort of short-sighted policies that do not take into consideration the nature of the ethnic makeup of the region, the shared networks, the political economy of the region, will simply create a situation where African troops will be left on their own fighting something that, frankly, they do not have the muscle to deal with, and will be left, basically, slugging it out in a war that instead of ending up with one failed state, we could potentially end up with two failed states.

I'll stop at this point because the -- not

only the time in the sense of this conversation, but I wanted to deliberately shed light on that massive failure that happened during that decade and that we cannot have an intelligent and productive conversation about the outcome of this crisis without addressing that structural weakness and the fact that neither the United States nor the Europeans have, today, any credible plans and strategies to deal with this.

MR. KIMENYI: Ah, wow. I think we probably would like to have like two hours to discuss that, but we have very few minutes. Thank you very much, both. I think we have gotten very good highlights and we shall open this for comment.

But I wanted to ask both of you one question just for brief answers. Now, Susanna, you said that one of the non-negotiables, one, is that territorial integrity, and your forecast was strengthening the institutions like decentralization. Nasser says that, the way I read it, is that almost a territorial sort of autonomy for North.

So, we almost two completely opposed

positions. What does that mean for the future as we move forward, ahead? So, we have two hard positions, which we got from you two, where do we move from there? What do you see as the options?

MS. WING: So, that's why I sort of ended what I was saying about the territorial integrity being non-negotiable, because obviously from the side of the MNLA, that's an essential element, is addressing Azawad.

I guess, you know, I believe that -- I agree, of course, all African borders are completely artificial. We know this. The question is, what do we do now? I disagree about the Peul and the Songhai and some of these other people identifying with Azawad. I disagree pretty strongly about that.

So, I do think, time and again, the state has acknowledged and said, we'll give special status to the North, we'll give some kind of autonomy to the north. I think something can happen that keeps the Malian state intact, but that perhaps the region of Kidal has a very special mechanism of, you know,

regional assemblies and being in control of that area in a different way. In other words, some kind of federal structure but that privileges the Kidal region in a particular way, that -- it has to happen within the institution -- within the integrity of Mali, keeping Mali intact, but addressing this through institutional structures, and I think you can do it by providing real governance within the Kidal region that can be in the hand of local elected officials, that, complimented by real decentralization. I throw that out there and it's been discussed.

MR. KIMENYI: Thank you. And let me ask you a question, I'm sure you'll get more of these questions, Nasser. Thank you very much, Susanna, for that.

We have known Mali, at least for the last several years, as a model democracy, and Susanna mentioned this, it's been known as one of the top democracies in Africa. It was ranked very high in the indicators of freedom and it was ranked in terms of, you know, within the media -- a lot of indices, in

fact, qualified for America's MCC, which requires very high standards.

And the United States are very intelligent people, very good FBI. What, really, were they missing? Why did we get this type of situation?

MR. WEDDADY: That's what I alluded to in my point about post-colonial discourses. I mean, you know how policy -- I mean, I'm not going to tell people who are on the Hill how policy works, but somebody decides that it's time somebody needs to give a big speech, they need to show that they did something and that they threw money at some problem. And that's how we end up with some of these kind of assessment.

The truth is, is that Mali, the transition from a military regime to a democratic regime, it's true, it was remarkable, and it was very inspiring at one point for those of us who are in the region who are pointing out to … by saying, look, they did it, they got the military out of power, and they're doing their bit, and basically elections are deciding the

outcome of what's going on.

I think that the story of Mali is basically about the unfortunate realities, our African realities that at times the aspirational promises of democracies are not necessarily always in sync with the economical realities and the political realities on the ground, and you end up basically with a situation. My own native country, Mauritania, is an example of that. Very few people remember that in 2005, the Kafia movement in Egypt, which was the main opposition group at the time, was drawing inspiration from our democratic transition. We had the first Arab ever -- Arab presidential debate before an election, we had the first transition in the Arab world in basically -- in a very long time.

But ultimately that, too, collapsed because of the economical and political realities of the region. And I think that the thing to retain about Mali, and I think it's very important here, is that the Malian people, the Malian intelligentsia, and the Malian elites, are not anti-democratic by supporting

the coup. It's a vote of protest. It's a disenchantment. And we had the same thing in Mauritania when the civilian-elected government was overthrown by a military coup. To the outside world it was like, wait, these guys are crazy. How can they support a coup? They were all democratic all the sudden.

The fact is, is that we have to acknowledge and take stake of the complexities of these places. There are no simple answers. We cannot just like have an answer at all Peul that would (inaudible); it's all democracy. It's a process and I think that at times outsiders are too eager to intervene and sometimes our -- or rather, most of the times, are too eager not to do anything proactively.

MR. KIMENYI: Thank you very much. And we have about 12 minutes. What I would like to do is ask you to make a very brief questions. I'll take a couple and I'll ask our colleagues to respond. So, if you could raise your hand. Yes, please.

SPEAKER: Alexis --

MR. KIMENYI: Would you please speak louder? We are trying to be able to capture to record?

SPEAKER: Alexis Aria for the Congressional Research Service. Nasser, I'm really glad that you mentioned Mauritania. I feel it's a country that doesn't get a whole lot of attention in D.C. You discussed how Mauritania might be vulnerable to spillover from Mali, but I wonder if you might sort of dig a bit deeper on that. Specifically, Mauritania has not elected to send troops to the African Intervention Force in Mali. There's a very complex internal political system. The U.S., at the same time, has increased some types of security assistance to Mauritania over the past year.

I wonder if you could sort of pull those threads together for us.

MR. KIMENYI: We're going to take a couple of questions. Yes, sir.

SPEAKER: Just a quick question to – Nasser, by the way. I was just wondering, is there any specific, like, special quality about the people that

they are paying these ransoms for or is it just random people or like any citizen? Or is it business people? Is it -- because it seems like they are paying a lot of money.

MR. KIMENYI: Thank you very much. Yes, sir.

SPEAKER: Daair Omar from the British embassy. I want to ask, in terms of the negotiations with the North, with the Taureg rather, who should be leading that now? We have seen some activity from Burkina Faso and you now have the AU appointing President Buyoya as a leader. Who can you imagine leading this? Should it be the U.N. or some other group?

MR. KIMENYI: Yeah, the gentleman at the back -- those two, please?

SPEAKER: Moshe Simpson, Office of Congressman Charles Rangel. I was just wondering, Algiers wasn’t really mentioned and what happened with the attack and I just wanted to hear maybe you guys talk about if there are any further implications.

SPEAKER: Adebayo Adediji from CBO. Many people in the U.S. are wondering whether or not there is an external player in this Malian situation, i.e., maybe possibly world terrorism organizations like al-Qaida and so on and so forth. I haven't heard any of you mention such. Anything to address that issue?

MR. KIMENYI: Let's get some answers. Susanna --

(Laughter.)

MS. WING: I haven't got all the answers.

MR. KIMENYI: If we are very efficient responding to these ones, we could probably take a few more, so just be brief.

MS. WING: All right, so I think the ones appropriate for me to respond to, who should lead negotiations with the North, I'm a little bit suspicious about Burkina Faso and how successful that has been. I think the U.N. is a good option. The AU, the U.N. would be a good option.

I think the real question is, who gets to sit at the table, and that's what Mali still has to

figure out. You know, who -- part of what has been happening is the MNLA has been trying to position itself as, you know, being one of those who can help fight against the terrorists and the real bad guys and the real bad guys are al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and MOJWA and even with Ansar Dine, Iyad Ag Ghaly has been trying to do the same, and so, you know, it's -- the whole question of negotiations and who gets to sit at the table and are Malians from the south going to be willing to sit down at a table with Ansar Dine and MNLA representatives, is a whole can of worms. So, I don't really have the answer for that.

In Amenas, the Algerian attack, there's no question, I mean, that was directly linked to the intervention of the French and it was simply saying, you know, we are going -- this is what France has coming with this attack -- with this intervention in Mali, and I think we're going to be seeing more of that. In some ways, I think the recent kidnappings in Cameroon of French citizens, which is being linked to Nigerian -- right, Boko Haram or Ansaru, the other

group, to my mind, there's two things probably going on there. One, we're going to get ransom payments and that's the way to go, and two, we don't want these French in our neighborhood intervening militarily, so we're going to go after French citizens.

And so, this is the kind of blow back of this intervention. There's no question.

MR. KIMENYI: Thank you very much.

MR. WEDDADY: So, addressing very quickly, so, what's so special about these people? Nothing. They just happen to be European citizens. They are from nation states that are willing to pay money to release them, and that's what the terrorists have learned and it became a Pavlovian thing.

Regarding Algeria, Algeria is actually the most important regional country in the conversation. They're the only country that has a really -- not only the military muscle, but also the intelligence networks to deal with this problem. The problem is that the Algerians are difficult, to put it mildly. They have a very sort of specific worldview. They

don’t like the notion of interventions to begin with, even if it’s in their best interest, and the third point that can be said about the Algerians is that the Algerians actually, in the very last period, got burned out a little bit because they -- one of their gambles was like they thought that they could control this guy, Iyad Ag Ghaly, who’s sort of becoming, throughout this conversation, probably as the arch villain in the talk, but frankly, there’s nothing of substance that couldn’t be achieved without the Algerians sitting on the table, cannot do anything constructive without them, because for all intents and purposes, like the area that Susanna mentioned, Kidal up north, they’re in a sphere of influence. They have a lot of investment and influence there and they can do stuff.

The question is, I think that here for Congressional folks is, the more relevant questions I like, how to learn to talk to the Algerians in a language they understand, which is an entire other conversation.

Regarding the presence of the national terrorist networks, AQIM, GSPC, in reality don't have much to do with the others. They decided to rebrand themselves as part of the movement and payed allegiance to Osama bin Laden before he was eliminated. However, there have been reports showing more of a -- direct contacts between the guys and Northern Mali and Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Shabaab of Somalia, but that's, again -- the main thing to look at is that this is a Sahelian problem that started, actually, if you want another factor to throw in who to blame for the ignition of this, another distant second after Mali's own dysfunctional stuff and ransom money would be the Algerian Civil War, because that's how these guys came to the desert to begin with.

Regarding Mauritania, the thing about Mauritania is that -- the biggest misconception about Mauritania is that this is a strong regime that possesses a strong military that could fight the problem. The second part, yes, the Mauritanian

military is a natural candidate to fight in the Sahara Desert because that's their natural area of theater of operation and they have experience dealing with it.

The political reality, however, is that the Mauritanian military is a military that is made to -- commanded by people who do not fight wars. They are more interested in sitting back in their AC – air-conditioned offices and living on the largesse of the state and the international funding than fighting wars, and the guy in command, General Aziz understands that very well that he could lose his position if the sons of important tribes start dying, there's going to be a coup d'état.

MR. KIMENYI: You know, I like when I moderate to be looking at people so that I can signal. I wonder, we have about four minutes, right? I wanted to take maybe two more questions so that we finish right on time so that we don't abuse the privileges. I would like to take it from someone who has not asked. Drew?

SPEAKER: Yeah, my question is, if there was

such dissatisfaction with the Malian government before the coup, why did people support the coup? Why didn't they go back to the polls? Why didn't they wait until the next election?

MR. KIMENYI: Any other comments? Okay, yeah, go ahead.

MS. WING: That's a great question and I think it's because the Malian people believed the system was so corrupted. They didn't trust the polls. They didn't trust that these elections were going to be free and fair, and, you know, I know somebody who said to me in an October meeting, he said, you know, mark my words, if things are looking bad, there's going to be real -- you know, whatever, to pay here -- and it was basically, to me, signaling that there's going to be a coup if things aren't handled correctly.

And so, I think you have to understand how undermined that system had become and I would like to point out -- the point I made about the roadmap being hashed by the National Assembly and elections being held in July of this year is really critical because

if there's too much emphasis on these elections as being the answer, Mali is going to end right back in the same situation where we're saying they're holding elections, this is functioning.

Obviously, elections are critical, but it is just one first step on a long process and that's what I worry about is that we're going to get into this electoralism mode again.

MR. KIMENYI: Could you finish your question, since you started?

SPEAKER: Just real quickly, what would be the difference between -- like, why is there no, like, solution like they did in Southern Sudan? Are they just distinct differences between what Southern Sudan achieved –-

(Laughter)

MR. WEDDADY: First of all, the continental reality is that Southern Sudan is a special case and everybody -- that was made possible only through the United States. And the AU players are not going to allow that to happen.

So, this talk about, you know, an independent Azawad, as much inspiration it can get, in practice has zero chance of going through because the continent will not allow it, the continental forces.

The second point to retain is that as much as one could be sympathetic to a state of Azawad is that it does lack the resources to survive. Like, fine, you go get independence, then how are you going to live? And the third thing to be made there is that the larger thing is that unfortunately, my assessment of the entire situation is very bleak. As far as I'm concerned, until I see a credible strategy that involves the United States, the European Union, and the African Union, that involves a big budget and involves a U.N. force, and involves a robust economic aid package, we're looking at potentially five to eight years of insurgency.

MS. WING: Can I just very quickly say about the reason these borders are so sacrosanct is that when the OAU, at the time, in 1960, they explicitly said, borders in Africa cannot change, and these were

all heads of states who came together and they did that because they knew it would be complete chaos once you start messing with these borders because every country has so many different ethnic groups. So, it's one of the core things about the African Union.

And so I think we have to understand that that's where that's coming from. You've got Eritrea and South Sudan as being very particular cases, but if we start playing with these borders, they're all going to disappear.

MR. KIMENYI: Yeah, every place, it was called the nonviability of colonial boundaries, and I think -- I remember writing a small book saying that it's a stupid rule. And it has to -- well, it has changed in some cases and I think you have it in the areas of Djibouti and Eritrea, I mean, those things have to change. And so I think democracy means it's impossible sometimes to hold people together, these forced marriages, when they're so weak. So, you can have people who are married who are fighting all the time. I think it's true, people realize that some

divorces are welfare enhancing So, sometimes I think Africans have to look at these issues of border clarity.)

Now, unfortunately, our time is over, but you agree with me that this has been very enriching. It's almost -- if we had another (inaudible) I would like to go to discussions of real policy issues, who should intervene, this issue about the U.S., the European, the African Union, because I think that's the question now that we should be focusing on. I think for Cedric, probably this is something that we may want to hold another discussion focusing not on the sources of the problems, but focusing on how do we move forward.

So, would you like to say a final word, Cedric? It's your home.

MR. DIAKABANA: Well, I just want to thank the experts for the information and I think we have a few staffers here who will be grateful for the information. I think we can close it.

MR. KIMENYI: Okay. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

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