

The Mali situation as I understand it- Week 2: March 28-April 5, 2012

Janet Goldner, April 5, 2012, New York City
art@janetgoldner.com

My background and summary of Week 1: March 21- 28 is available:
<http://www.janetgoldner.com/site/mali-coup/week1/>

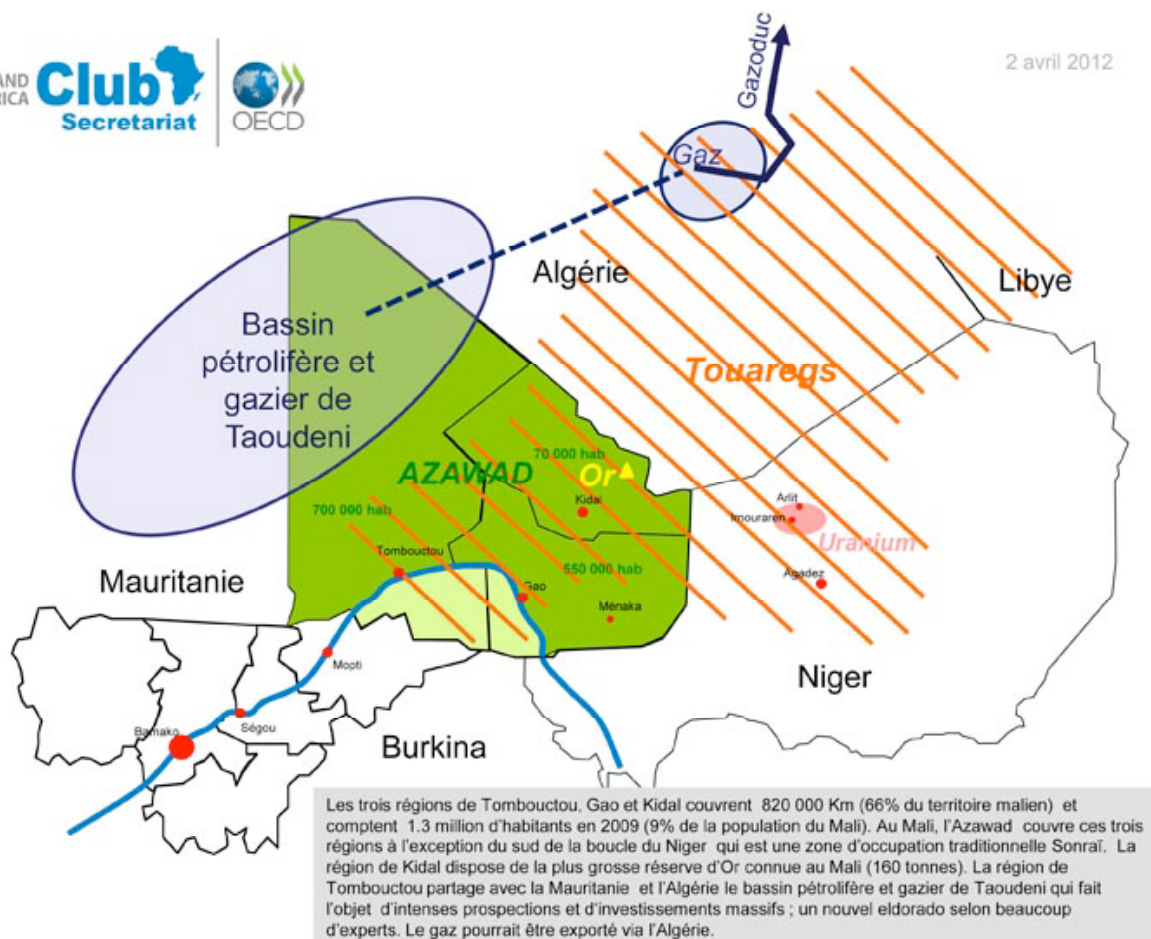
**This has been a terrifying, unimaginable week in Mali.
Things have moved with heart attack speed and ferocity especially last weekend.**



ECOWAS (non)visit to Bamako

Last Thursday, March 29th, the ECOWAS presidents were scheduled to come to Bamako. Other high level representatives of these governments were already in Bamako. There was a large pro-coup demo downtown and a small pro coup demo at the airport. The demonstrators were on the runway at some point in the demo. The ECOWAS presidents turned around in midair and flew back to Abidjan.

Just after the presidents' return to Abidjan, ECOWAS issued a declaration threatening harsh economic sanctions if the military didn't go back to their barracks in 72 hours, on Monday. They threatened to close the borders and cut off the money supply. Since Mali is landlocked, they receive goods overland so petrol, medicine, etc would be cut off. And Mali and the rest of the former French colonies use a single monetary unit, the CFA so ECOWAS would be able to do this.



This map shows the area claimed as Azawad which is currently under MNLA and Ansar Dine control. It also shows the minerals wealth in the area as well as Touareg areas. The blue line is the Niger River. It also delineates the 9 regions (states) in Mali.

The Capture of 2/3 of Mali by the rebels in 72 hours

At the same time, the rebellion in the North continued at with terrible speed. Over the same period of 72 hours, 2/3 of the country was captured by Tuareg, Islamist and Al Qaeda groups- MNLA and Ansar Dine. They took the capitals of the 3 regions (like states) in the north- First Kidal, then Gao then Timbuktu. They took these towns without a real fight. The Malian army simply withdrew. It seems like they might march south right into Bamako.

Last weekend felt like those days here in 2008 when the stock market was in freefall and it seemed like our economy might disappear. It seemed the Mali might cease to exist. Though rumors persist, the advance south seems to have stopped. The residual fear persists.

The young military officers had staged the coup over the mishandling of the war in the north. Areas had already been captured and occupied by the rebels. So how/why did these same people allow this to happen?

This is the subject for much debate and future inquiry as well as legal proceedings. Why didn't the Malian army defend the cities in the north?

As you can imagine rumors and theories abound.
Were they just cowards?

Were the arms stolen from the Malian army warehouses? Maybe. Colonel Alhaji Ag Gamou, a Tuareg officer who had been in the Malian army defected to the MNLA.

Another rumor says that when the coup leaders looked in the warehouses, they were empty. That the Malian Army was ill fed and ill equipped because corruption had reach such a level that money authorized for the purchase of material had simply been used to line pockets.

But in any case, the Malian army didn't fight. And the rebels rode into the towns and took them without a fight.

Ansar Dine, one of the groups that has taken over in the north and is reportedly in control of Timbuktu and perhaps Gao is said to be instigating Islamic law- veiled women, etc. There have been reports of other atrocities including rapes. Clearly help is needed in the north. Quickly.

The MNLA seem to be fighting amongst themselves for control or their new territory. I don't having the stomach to keep up with the blogs and websites from this part of the story.



Woman in Banemba, Mali carding cotton.

ECOWAS Sanctions

During the same 72 hours that the country seemed to be evaporating, in response to the threat of ECOWAS sanctions and the dawning isolation of the coup, Sanogo, the coup leader announced that he was restoring the 1992 constitution. He agreed that he would leave power.

The ECOWAS Presidents met again on Monday in Dakar at the inauguration of the new Senegalese president, Macky Sall. Much to Malian surprise and dismay, and even after the disaster that had taken place over the weekend, ECOWAS announced that they were going to go ahead with the sanctions until the military went back to their barracks.

The international community will not intervene until the junta leaves. But how can the coup leaders just leave? Don't they need to hand power over to some person, body, committee that will see the country through a transition to new elections? Such a meeting was called for today in Bamako but has been postponed.

The French and the British have told their citizens in Mali to leave. The Peace Corps is pulling out of Mali for the first time in 41 years but other Americans have not been ordered to leave. NGOs have pulled out of the north at this time of crisis, 200,000 refugees and internally displaced people as of a couple of weeks ago! There is also an impending food crisis in the north and elsewhere because the rains were not good this year.

There have been reports of meetings between representatives of the coup leaders and the governments of ECOWAS countries in Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

Today, April 5, reports starting to circulate that the sanctions will be lifted soon

* The Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional group of fifteen countries, founded in 1975. Its mission is to promote economic integration in "all fields of economic activity, particularly industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions, social and cultural matters"

Communauté Economique des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, (CEDEAO) is the French name for this group.