

Government and MNLA Negotiating in Mali: Why Failure is Not an Option

By Christos N. Kyrou, Ph.D.



A few days ago Burkina Faso's foreign affairs minister Djibril Bassole announced that talks were about to resume between the Government of National Unity of the Republic of Mali and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)[1]. Other independent credible reports from the Malian government have verified the talks as part of the commitment of the interim government to restore democracy via elections in the totality of the Republic, including those areas currently controlled by the MNLA. Given that elections are scheduled for the end of July this is one of the most ambitious enterprises in the history of peace negotiations.

A fragile balance in Kidal...

After the successful intervention of the French, working along with both the Malian Government and the MNLA - as well as Chadian and other neighboring troops - in sweeping the Islamist groups of Ansar Dine, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), the Ansar al-Sharia of Mali, and the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a fragile balance has been established in several areas in the North and especially in the district of Kidal in the North East. The city of Kidal is actually controlled and administered by the MNLA including policing, tax collection and whatever else an autonomous region requires.

The French intervention and the MNLA dilemma... When the French entered Mali they faced a very strong dilemma. On one hand they could strike simultaneously against Anzar Dine, AQIM, MOJWA MIA, and the nationalist / separatist predominately Tuareg driven MNLA. On the other hand they could capitalize on the hostility between Anzar Dine and the MNLA and bring the latter on their side for the duration of their operations in the North. They chose the second. After all the terrain did require a strong local support, and furthermore the French needed an ally in locating enemies as well as French hostages. They found that ally in the MNLA.

Separating the MNLA from the Malian government temporarily... The government of Mali protested strongly against what seemed to them an opportunistic and adventurous course set by the French. They argued that since the MNLA had been defeated by the Islamist militants anyway all the French would have to do was to force the MNLA to complete submission to the Malian army. It is possible that this might have been the initial but as the Malian army was advancing to the North, reports of extensive violence of retribution against those who had supported the MNLA, and the Tuareg in general, may have driven the French into keeping the two adversaries separate. They

then entrusted the MNLA with the territory they had some control of, including Kidal and the border zones across from Algeria, Niger, and on the other side west, with Mauritania. This tactical decision of the French might have actually saved the whole Opération Serval for the last thing the French desired was becoming entangled into a war in Mali that originates back to 1916. The French have asserted repeatedly that this is a temporary situation and that they are working on the disarmament of the MNLA in due time.[2] Today, the Malian national unity government, controls all of Mali with the exception of Kidal, enacting pressure on the French, the United States (US) and the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), to force the MNLA to put down their weapons, recognize the sovereignty of the state of Mali and surrender the areas that they control to the Malian Army and security forces.

Mali returning back to democracy after a year's break... Another factor that may have played a role in the decision of the French to separate the MNLA and protect the Tuareg from retributions was that at the time of their intervention they found themselves dealing with not only one but two belligerents. Mali itself was ruled by a military regime the result of two consecutive coups. Since then the international community applied strong pressure on the military which led among others to the formation of an interim administration - the Malian Government of National Unity - and also the scheduling of national elections including Presidential elections in July 28th[3] and then Parliamentary elections a few months later, in September. Many remain skeptical on whether these elections will take place so early considering the open question of Kidal and the lack of benchmarks that would guarantee a fair and peaceful polling[4][5]. In spite of this skepticism the government maintains that the elections will proceed as scheduled, with companies hired to organize them, and money flowing from the international community and neighboring countries to meet the costs.[6]

Elections in Mali will unlock a much needed treasure vault but only if the MNLA issue is resolved... Elections are a key step towards rebuilding post-war Mali as most governments outside Mali, including the United States have denied providing any aid to a non-elected administration. The people of Mali, including the political elite and the military are being rewarded by the international community, for their determination to end military rule and rebuild the country, with a €3.35 billion development aid[7] and smaller amounts coming from individual states and organizations. Money is already pouring into Mali spent so far mostly on training and military equipment, and much is to be directed towards preparing for the elections so that the bulk of aid will follow next. Yet between now and the promised land of development and prosperity there is a serious obstacle which Mali has to surmount, and it comes with a very tight deadline. For elections to be fair and meaningful at this crucial point in Malian history the North, as well as the 300,000 refugees[8] and internally displaced will have to be included both as candidates and in casting the ballot. For areas such as Kidal, and for security to be restored in order for the refugees and IDPs to return, the issue of the MNLA must first be addressed. In addition to security, and putting an end to the refugee and IDP ordeal, business will find it hard to return to Mali considering the risks involved even after the elections.[9]

Negotiating peace while preparing for war... Options for the government of Mali at this point include a military assault for removing the MNLA from Kidal or negotiations with the rebels over restoring Mali's full sovereignty without the use of force before elections time. These two options are currently being developed in parallel. The Malian military has engaged the last few weeks in an extensive combination of maneuvers meant to isolate and encircle Kidal, set now for a direct assault.[10] Even though reports suggest that it is the French who stopped the Malian army "at the gates of Kidal,"[11] nevertheless the fact that they have stopped against their self-imposed deadline shows prudence and a commitment to a peaceful resolution. At the same time the government has declared its readiness and determination to negotiating with the MNLA for a mutually accepted

solution. This strategy as wise as it may be involves risks and obstacles in both tracks - military and negotiations that are worth a closer look.

Preparing for a Pyrrhic victory...? Without a substantial and fully committed and determined support by the French, the AU, the US, and other allies, even a victorious campaign against the MNLA in Kidal might bring disaster in the long term. To begin with, a Malian battalion is currently receiving 10, instead of the minimum 27, weeks' training before deploying.^[12] Beefing up the ranks without backing it with soldering experience makes a dangerous recipe for cultivating a potentially disastrous overconfidence of the Bamako government over the capabilities of its own army. The plan to an assault against the MNLA in Kidal will bring the newly trained Malian army face to face with a well-seasoned, well equipped rebel force absolutely familiarized with the peculiarities of the Kidal terrain. Such an assault will very likely attract the attention and hostile action by whatever elements of the Ansar Dine, MIA, MOJWA, and AQIM are still hiding in the area, refueling the war and generating another massive wave of refugees and IDPs for post-war Mali to have to deal with.

The paradox of overwhelming force in counterinsurgency... Even if the assault is successful it will come short from bringing an end to the MNLA question, even if every MNLA rebel is killed or captured. At this point the situation in Kidal in regards to loyalties and alliances is to say the least, murky. Most likely at their breaking point the rebels will retreat leaving behind the Tuareg population of Kidal to fall prey and offer an easy scapegoat for the Malian military's wrath. As any insurgency might, in fact the MNLA is counting on it. With another half million refugees and IDPs added to the existent pool of the desolate, the MNLA will have no problem in identifying new recruits for the next rebellion. Even worse... this one million people will be an ideal ground for recruitment not only by the MNLA but more so by the AQIM which will most likely, at that point, surpass the MNLA in availability of logistical and military resources. The recent attacks in Niger by Mali based MOJWA^[13] demonstrates a sample flavor of what is to come if Kidal is to fall via the military option.

The fragile coexistence of anti-Malian government forces in Kidal echoes the Wild West, and might go either way... Strong evidence from the ground suggests that currently the MNLA may be in control of Kidal but had been unsuccessful in asserting their full authority.^[14] Many other elements are present in the region including MIA and the AQIM. Attacks against MNLA checkpoints by the MOJWA back in April^[15] and the latest full scale engagement that allegedly prompted a brief French air force intervention^[16] indicate that the MNLA provides a very fragile stability in the areas under their control which over time will come to resolve itself. The French involvement seems to provide a marginal advantage for the MNLA but not enough to allow them to reassert their earlier ambitions of cutting off from Bamako. Yet if pushed too hard the MNLA might join forces or even partially melt into the Islamist militant ranks with all the adverse regional implications mentioned earlier.

Should the parties negotiate now? A better solution might be to invest in the negotiations option heavily. But are the MNLA and the Malian government ready to negotiate? The current state of affairs suggests a string compliance with the principles of "ripeness and mutually hurting stalemate" form negotiations theory. According to Zartman, "the concept is based on the notion that when the parties find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them (although not necessarily in equal degree or for the same reasons), they seek an alternative policy or Way Out." ^[17] The concept is "optimally associated with an impending, past or recently avoided catastrophe" which Zartman sees as providing "a deadline or a lesson indicating that pain can be sharply increased if something is not done about it now."^[18] In terms of the timing for negotiations between the MNLA and the Malian government, nothing could describe the situation better than this axiomatic principle.

Hurting stalemate for the government... If the Malian government engages into a long military adventure by removing the MNLA forcefully from Kidal, it will risk prolonging – or even losing – the war. That will mean missing the historic opportunity to properly use the enormous funds currently available for post war development pledged by the international community. It may most likely secure condemnation instead, for whatever crimes of retribution will be committed by the troops and militias against the Tuareg in the north. On top of all this it will have to chronically deal with a million refugees and IDPs being used as fertile ground for recruitment by nationalist separatists, and Islamic militants, destabilizing Mali and the region for decades to follow.

Hurting stalemate for the MNLA... On the other hand as, time goes by, the MNLA itself may be strengthening their hold on the limited region of Kidal but they are risking losing gradually every support from tribal leaders who are already nervous about the Tuareg being associated with an ineffective and political damaging armed rebellion. Some are abandoning the movement already.^[19] Aside from their internal challenges the MNLA has to deal with the AQIM and the openly hostile MOJWA on a daily basis, with potentially explosive face offs at the best, and deadly full-scale engagements at the worst. In time, and as the French will gradually withdraw the carrot of their support, the MNLA will be defeated once more in the hands of the Islamist militants or even worse, it may melt-in with them. Furthermore these Tuareg nationalists are risking being excluded by the aid bonanza secured by the government of Mali for development including the North. If this money fails to reach Azawad due to MNLA's unwillingness to negotiate, and considering that they cannot at the present time alone maintain an independent state, hundreds of thousands if not millions of Tuareg will blame them for poverty, underdevelopment, hunger, and other similar calamities for generations to come.

There is no doubt that the two parties should. and have to negotiate now, and also that failure is simply not an option.

The greatest challenges for the MNLA...

Disarmament: Given the current icy coexistence of the MNLA with AQIM and other militant groups in Kidal, and their close dependence on French air support to maintain dominance against them, **disarming** over night in order to accommodate the government's demands for a peaceful resolution is simply against the rules of survival and common sense. The most likely scenario in such an unstable balance is that the weakest party falls prey to the strongest. In a paradoxical manner it is even against the government's own interest that the MNLA disarms immediately, considering that most MNLA fighters will choose to join the Islamist militants simply so that they save their lives.

Malians or Foreigners? Government officials never miss an opportunity to remind the media that the MNLA is a "foreign force," and to some degree this is true. Back in 2011 Kaddafi of Libya was recruiting hundreds of Tuareg youth through a well-established network including offices in Kidal.^[20] Most of the MNLA fighters who started the war by invading Mali in 2012, after the collapse of Kaddafi's regime, were previously from those lining up to join Libya. Many had started families there and their **status in Mali** is not very clear to determine. Even though the Malian government has reached to them as "returning children of Mali" there are still many holes to fill in regarding the legality of their transition into Malian citizens or that of their foreign family members. If the negotiations fail, and the war is lost, these Tuareg will have nowhere to go, literally. They will either fight it out to death or will join whoever offers a shelter for them.

How much of reconciliation and how much of justice? Another serious bump on the road to a peaceful settlement is that of impunity. Even though the government established a Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission^[21] they have also made clear that justice will be served by the Malian state, to the fullest, on crimes committed during the war.^[22] War crimes such as rape and the killing of innocent civilians in the context of war as much as in peace are deplorable, however, a certain

degree of impunity has applied in almost every previous case of truth and reconciliation process especially as a reward to the truth aspect of the process, and in helping move easier away from contentious matters and enter into the actual healing process. Studies are still inconclusive over the degree of impunity for crimes against civilians in making reconciliation processes more effective than less but to shut down the path of impunity altogether is a recipe for some very serious trouble in the near future; an open fire ready to reignite the conflict at any moment. Given the mistrust of the MNLA towards the Malian government it is unlikely that they will regards it as an impartial process and more guarantees and third parties might be needed to help with the investigations. The United Nations may provide processes previously applied elsewhere effectively, and which will not question Malian sovereignty in assisting an impartial investigation. It is a long shot nevertheless.

Easy ones for the MNLA...

In terms of the MNLA accommodating Malian sovereignty, a future disarmament when security is guaranteed, and their transformation into main-stream Malian politics, these are all textbook negotiations issues and they should not cause concern. Independent statehood is not the only way towards asserting a people's national identity. There are many variations of co-existence with a nation state from within, either this is by strategic necessity or as a matter of survival. Those include the Basque example in France, the devolved state of Wales, and other forms and grades of self-governance and autonomy. Disarmament has been dealt with in many ways, from full integration into armed forces, as in South Africa, to fully disarmament and dismantling through a well-established process guided by committees including interest parties and independent observers such as in Northern Ireland. The transformation of the Azawad nationalists into a political force added to the Malian parliament depends on the degree to which the party or parties are willing to collaborate with the state from within. It is a very common theme for ethnic minorities to represent themselves in national assemblies as political parties, and even though it might be considered distasteful by many, that parties are drawn along sectarian lines, the system seems to be working at least in providing vital breathing space for the end of violence and in preparing the ground for post war development.^[23] A successful integration into politics however, will require capacities which the Tuareg tribes and clans supporting the MNLA might or might not possess and it is imperative that they begin working with existing parties and the international community in securing a substantial representation in the political arena instead of being swiftly liquidated into the party labyrinth of Bamako. Return from politics back to violence, when the process has failed a group, has also its historic precedence, such as in the Patriotic Union during the 1980s in Colombia. Thousands of party members were assassinated and the FARC ran back in the mountains to resume their guerrilla operations against the Colombian governments. Every attempt that followed since, to negotiate a transformation of the FARC back again into politics has been haunted by that lost opportunity.

The greatest challenges for the government...

Repairing a tarnished image... Even under the spell of decades of corruption, and two military coups following a war almost lost, and given its current status as interim unity administration, the government of Mali has invested heavily in repairing its image and credibility in the international arena with extraordinary efficiency. Capitalizing on the previous benefits and fruits of its long tradition of democracy the current representatives of the state, both domestically but especially so internationally, have managed to restore confidence on Mali in the international community. They have led them to pledge extraordinary resources for restoring the integrity of Mali, sometimes as if the Asawad affair was only a bad dream, or as if the issue of democracy is simply a matter of time. To reach this point Mali has led itself through strong and brave reforms in pursuing the return of democracy: they have declared elections, while checking the military back to its traditional role of protecting the nation from internal and external enemies; they have taken the initiative in establishing a dialogue for reconciliation committee, opened up to non-governmental and international governmental organizations, and are feverishly collaborating openly with their allies, to demonstrate accountability and commitment to contemporary democratic principles. Mali has undertaken the

impossible role of fighting two or even up to four different types of insurgencies and waves of terrorism from domestic to international. It has become the playground of geopolitical confrontations far and beyond its traditional size and scope and yet it has come out, instead of a victim, a potential winner in reasserting itself in the international stage, this time as a critical strategic player.

Sticking on one last critical issue... The Malian government questioned quite effectively the credibility of the MNLA's claim for an independent North, and managed to come out almost unscathed from a war which raised, and still raises many questions over the human rights situation in the country and in regarding and strength of influence of the retreating military regime. To this effect Mali worked hard in utilizing every potential source and diplomacy, from hiring lobbyist companies in the United States,^[24] to using disarming honesty in press conferences and public exchange opportunities. Through diplomatic missions such as the one in Washington DC Mali has extended their hand for assistance and collaboration to non-governmental organizations and associations, to the academia, to religious global entities such as The Organization of Islamic Cooperation and others.^[25] Mali has done everything practically possible to develop its "Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA)"^[26] And yet it still has to pass the test of negotiating with the MNLA successfully. It is not the last test left for Mali but it is certainly absolutely critical.

The issue of sovereignty... Treated as black and white the issue of sovereignty is not a brainer for any modern state. The answer is simply "no" to any attempt to question this most vital source of legitimacy of the authority on a nation state's owned physical and legal space. Yet the issue of sovereignty does come along with legitimacy, and effective governance is the supreme judge in deciding who is entitled to which. Due to chronic corruption and mismanagement the seemingly stable democracy of Mali was in fact a broiling cauldron ready to explode especially in the North. And even though the war begun with the return of Kaddafi's Tuareg soldiers from Libya, that alone does not explain the limited resistance of the Northern Malian population - or even the army in some cases - against the MNLA. Nor does it explain the persistence and resilience of the MNLA, fighting since October 2011 in a "foreign land" without an outside available life line. Nationalist separatist insurgencies such as this are heavily dependent on local resources to remain active.

The issue of a vacuum of state legitimacy... As in many other cases including in Colombia, Kosovo, Northern Ireland, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Mexico, and others when the state neglects a territory under its jurisdiction, for one reason or another, citizens grow marginalized and eventually revolt or become vulnerable to joining outside forces in challenging the state's authority on the basis of legitimacy. When that tendency is combined with historically existent identity issues, such as ethnic strife, religious competition, ideology, and other ingredients, then follows the incipient formation of insurgencies which now openly and by force challenge the state's legitimacy.^[27] In the case of Mali the chronic situation of deprivation in the North mounted by an extensive and disastrous drought prepared the gates for an insurgency to arrive in the shape of returning Tuaregs from Libya as MNLA. The great challenge for Mali is not dealing with the MNLA's aspirations for independence. This issue can be addressed effectively as mentioned earlier with constitutional and political arrangements. The greatest challenge for Mali will be to establish its presence and administrative credibility in the North in order to regain its legitimacy. Given the resources made available for after elections, this task might become easier now than it was before the war started. The return of the refugees in a stable and growing North will resolve the MNLA problem in the long run just as it did in Niger.

Disentangling disarmament from national sovereignty... In dealing with issues such as disarmament, there is plenty of space to address the concerns of MNLA fighters' over their own safety. Framing the armed MNLA as "two armies in one Mali" and contrasting Malian sovereignty with them being armed is a treacherous path to follow. The French or the oncoming UN - AU ECOWAS peacekeeping force may provide mechanisms which will increase security, including for

MNLA fighters, allowing for a much more orderly and conclusive disarmament. However, this might be too much to expect to happen before the elections. Seeking the cooperation if not collaboration of the MNLA with a thoroughly chosen Malian, as well as French, and a UN contingent in providing together security in Kidal for fair elections might provide a better option; all this of course in exchange of the promise of the MNLA to disarm after elections, given an agreed sequence of steps, similar to the IRA disarmament process in Northern Ireland.

The temptation to spend more on another war... Given the abundance of resources provided to the Malian army, and in spite of their short training and rushed mobilization towards Kidal, the temptation of many in the government and the military to take the city with an assault is enormous and maybe justified. Yet besides the risk of winning a Pyrrhic victory, taking the path of war once again may determine where the priorities of Mali will be over spending most of the money pledged by its friends in Brussels and elsewhere. If the country finds itself trapped in a chronic counterinsurgency quagmire whatever was to be spent towards building infrastructure, schools, providing incentives to youth to distant themselves from militants or those involved to disarm, assisting the refugees for a successful return, most instead will go towards supporting the counterinsurgency effort. Especially if Tuareg nationalism overlap as narrative with international Jihadism, then the pattern will be replicated along sub-Saharan Africa in a much larger scale. To put things in perspective the total amount of money pledged recently by the international community to rebuild Mali was more or less the same with the amount spent by the US for the war in Afghanistan **for a month** in 2009.^[28] Furthermore in counterinsurgency over-investing on the military option while neglecting the other, socioeconomic parameters usually fuels the given insurgency even further. The consequences will be lasting. Mali's profile for the next fifty years may depend on the effort invested in avoiding the war with the MNLA today.

Easy ones for the government...

A commitment to constitutional amendments and/or a Malian Bill of Rights... It is in accordance to the democratic traditions of Mali and the spirit of tolerance for the other - part of a combined heritage as a Muslim and a multi-ethnic society - to maintain and improve institutions that will consolidate such traditions. Considering the long history of rebellion in Mali, it may be time to contemplate no on new political and constitutional instruments which will address those challenges once and for all. There are examples of successes and failures in that domain and I will recite Spain as a failure in addressing the Basque issue via constitutional amendments vs. the far more successful French constitutional reforms in addressing the exact same Basque minority within its own borders. A Bill of Rights may provide more confidence to state institutions in avoiding a clientele culture of party favoritism and potential retribution rising from the grievances caused by the war in the new Mali. Many Tuareg including returning refugees will fall victims of retribution unless there is a strong solid framework of protection in place.

Strengthening the mandate of the Dialogue for Reconciliation Commission... Even though the commitment to the absolute application of the law and the punishment of those who committed crimes during the war is totally understandable, when it comes to peacebuilding and reconciliation dialogues in particular things get more complicated. The Reconciliation Committee must acquire a mandate to include the powers of impunity (especially when it serves progress on the truth front), executive powers in regards to victims, including surviving victims and families of victims, returning refugees and resettled IDPs, mechanisms to absorb and adopt orphan children of rape victims or parentless youth, and in dealing with other specific and circumstantial cases of victimhood. It will be impossible for the state to provide such services and creative solutions to moving forward the reconciliation process from within its staggering, red tape infested monolithic apparatus - as any state would. By extending the mandate of the dialogue for reconciliation committee to include executive powers, given the right structures of measuring progress, and grinding accountability, things will move much faster and much more efficiently on the ground.

Guaranteeing by law the equal distribution of development aid to all Malians, south and north...

It is already a common understanding between most members of the interim administration and those who have pledged money for Mali's reconstruction that the benefits will be distributed equally to all regions and people in the country. The attitude of treating Mali as one big family expressed by many Malian public officials is a noble one but even in families there are favorites and those considered outcasts, and in the case of a state dealing with minorities the law makes all the difference. The distribution of development assistance has to be accompanied by legislative and constitutional reforms. Laws regarding policing, taxes, citizenship, land ownership and their aspects of Malian life will have to come to life by the newly elected government as a guarantee for a successful post-war transformation.

What others can do... The French are looking for a way out of Mali even though their limited presence in dealing with counter terrorism is now considered a given. But for the immediate situation, so far they have invested into keeping the MNLA separate from the Malian government forces while at the same time balancing the scale enough against the MNLA to push them specifically into negotiating their future within a Malian sovereign state. It is a tedious work and so far they have excelled even though they are gradually staying out of time. If the MNLA gets desperate enough to join the Jihadists all of their efforts in resolving the Tuareg nationalist issue separate from the AIQM will go to shambles. Maintaining access into Kidal and other Tuareg controlled territories gives the French an advantage in playing a leading role in the MNLA's pre-election or post-election disarmament.

The US has so far invested in helping the French and the intervention coalition with logistical support and especially refueling, while at the same time prudently emphasizing both the need for the return of democracy in Mali and a peaceful resolution on the MNLA question. It is now providing aid for elections preparation, as well as for strictly humanitarian purposes. The US is fully aware of the geostrategic significance of Mali and will invest heavily in assisting on reconstruction, security and stabilization in the region. The British, French, Irish, German, and other European countries are currently training the Malian army and will do so until there is a standing force able to repel any further threats.

In spite of intentions, the **UN, AU, and ECOWAS peacekeeping** force may become a major threat to progress in restoring peace in Mali, unless they are well prepared, ready and trained to dealing with a variety of eventualities, and disciplined enough to stay away from causing trouble similar to those in Bosnia, Somalia, and DR Congo ("Mon-useless"), such as in promoting sex slavery, human trafficking and committing other crimes and or by abusing their power. The Malian people are far too vulnerable right now to resist the potential misdeeds of a force as overwhelming as 12,000 troops from more than a dozen different nationalities. In regards to the MNLA it might be even preferable that the current negotiations are concluded before the UN peacekeepers arrive en masse, adding one more variable to the already highly complex conflict system. They should however be considered as part of any other solution in providing security to returning refugees, delivering humanitarian aid, assisting in decommissioning processes, and actively repelling Jihadist attacks if necessary.

Ending a war... Theoretically, for as long as the MNLA controls alone Malian territory, the war in Mali is still ongoing. Overcoming issues such as disarmament, and impunity, and restoring peace and stability in the country sustainably, will take much more than the current negotiations between the MNLA and the government. Yet by closing this painful chapter in time, the interim government may give the oncoming elected government a chance to to a clean start. Ending the war in Mali will be a strategic victory for all Malians as well as their neighbors and beyond. A traditionally moderate Muslim state, post-war Mali while healing, may provide an even better example of itself as a nation which can successfully combine democracy and freedom of expression, along with ancient

traditions, living heritage, in an ultra-diverse ethnic setup. To that end, building peace with the MNLA via negotiations will be a decisive step for the future of Mali.

Dr. Christos Kyrou is currently Research Director at the Center for International Relations and an Adjunct Associate Professor at American University.

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