

# The imperative of peace in Mali

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**Unsurprisingly, the proposals of the inter-Malian dialogue go in the direction of the junta, except that demands for peace are emerging, reflecting the will of the people to put an end to the war.**

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A few days after the end of the official transition, which was due to take place on 26 March 2024, the colonels who took power organised an inter-Malian dialogue. A way for them to fill the institutional void and above all to regain the initiative while the country sinks into a deep crisis.

## Repression at every turn

This inter-Malian dialogue, which has just delivered its 300 proposals, took place in a country that is facing repression. Several civil society organisations have been banned, including the Association des élèves et étudiants du Mali, which played a leading role in bringing down the dictatorship of Moussa Traoré in 1992. The Coordination des mouvements, associations et sympathisants de l'Imam Mahmoud Dicko has also been banned, as has the Observatoire pour les élections et la bonne gouvernance, a civil society organisation. The activities of political parties have been suspended, and some, such as Kaoural Renouveau, have been banned. Opponents are either in exile, like Oumar Mariko, or in prison, the latest being the economist Étienne Fakaba Sissoko. For writing a critical book, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, one of which was suspended.

The media are under pressure, as indicated by an Amnesty International leader who spoke of a 'culture of self-censorship that is taking hold'. But this repression is far from unanimous, including in the institutions of the State. The transitional authorities were unsuccessful in their attempt to dissolve the radical left-wing SADI party.

## The war gets bogged down

The hardening of the repression can be explained by the junta's setbacks on the security front. By denouncing the Algiers peace accords (2015) which, if not perfect, at least had the merit of pacifying relations between Tuareg armed groups and the Malian armed forces, and by retaking by force the town of Kidal controlled by Tuareg rebels, the Junta has only radicalised these groups who have now sealed a non-aggression alliance with jihadist groups linked to Al-Qaeda.

On the ground, the situation is worsening, as noted by a UN expert, with a 'rapid and continuing deterioration in security in almost all the regions of Mali', which 'appear to be beyond the control of the Malian authorities'.

## A demand for peace

So, of course, the hand-picked participants in the dialogue made proposals that were bound to please the junta. Extend the transition period from two to five years. Authorise transitional president Assimi Goïta to stand in the presidential elections, although no date has been set for this. To severely restrict the number of political parties. And the icing on the cake, the promotion of the five coup colonels to the rank of general. The inter-Malian dialogue thus fulfilled its role as a showcase for the power of the junta and its president Assimi Goïta.

Within the well-controlled framework of the inter-Malian dialogue, dissonant proposals have emerged, notably around the demand for the opening of peace talks. These demands had already emerged in 2017 during the Conference of National Accord. At the time, France, with Barkhane, refused. Today it is the junta that is opposed. It prefers to wage an all-out war with disastrous consequences. UNICEF estimates that 7.1 million people, more than half of them children, need humanitarian assistance. Every week, civilians die caught between armed groups and Malian forces and their Wagner auxiliaries. Peace remains the people's number one demand. A challenge for Mali's parties, organisations and trade unions.

**PAUL MARTIAL**

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