

I

Pathways to Development

Sitting in his executive office at Mali's Ministry of Defense, Sadio Gassama received word early in the morning of unrest at the Kati barracks. Soldiers were preparing to march the twenty kilometers from the barracks to the center of the capital, he was told, in protest against the government's mishandling of the northern rebellion. The previous month, widows of troops killed in northern Mali had attracted international media attention by setting up barricades and burning tires in the Malian capital of Bamako, but until now the soldiers themselves had stayed on the political sidelines. Gassama and other Malian leaders were acutely conscious that the participation of uniformed military personnel in a political protest would amplify the national discord to a dangerous new level. It would threaten the separation of the military from politics that had prevailed since 1991, when the military had deposed President Moussa Traoré and set up the nation's first democratic government.¹

The long-simmering Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali had boiled over three months earlier, at the start of 2012. Tuareg separatists and Islamists who had fought in Libya's civil war were at the front of the action, wielding heavy weapons they had brought back from Muammar Ghaddafi's arsenals. Their newfound firepower enabled them to overrun towns and military outposts that had withstood assaults for years. The most prominent rebel victory took place at the town of Aguelhok, where the rebels killed nearly one hundred people, including both soldiers and their families. News of the violence and mayhem spread fear across the civilian population of the northern provinces, causing two hundred thousand to flee their homes.

Malian soldiers blamed President Amadou Toumani Touré for the defeats in the north, seeing in them the same inertia, incompetence, and corruption that had characterized his government's past efforts against drug traffickers and terrorists. Reports of corruption in the supply pipeline were particularly galling to the military. Supply shortages in the north had spelled death for soldiers at

isolated outposts, including the one at Aguelhok, where the defenders had fought effectively until running out of ammunition.

Gassama, in his capacity as Mali's Minister of Defense, decided to travel to Kati himself in order to head off the protest march. His chauffeur drove him through Bamako's streets to the barracks compound, a collection of ramshackle cement buildings with tin roofs. Arriving at 1 P.M., Gassama succeeded in reaching the malcontents before they had set their plans in motion. Had he possessed a disarming personality or a keen understanding of human psychology, Gassama might have averted calamity, and hence the fate of an entire nation would have turned out very differently.

Gassama's speech was, by all accounts, a debacle. Evidencing no concern for the frustrations of the soldiers, he talked down to them like a curmudgeonly schoolmaster who has caught young boys plotting to skip class. "You want to march?" Gassama said dismissively. "You're a bunch of uneducated people. I'll educate you."

The soldiers responded with howling denunciations of the government for failing to resupply the military units in the north. One soldier flatly accused the government of betrayal. Then they started throwing stones at the minister. Gassama's nervous bodyguard fired a shot into the air in an attempt to drive the crowd back, which prompted members of the crowd to fetch weapons from the armory and fire them into the air. Outgunned, the minister and his bodyguard scrambled into their car, and the chauffeur sped away under a hail of stones.

Had the officers at Kati been intent on keeping their soldiers under control, as the officers of most highly professional military organizations would have been, they most probably could have gathered them up, settled them down with stern words, and dispersed them in a manner that would have prevented the tempers of hotheads from reinforcing one another. But they attempted no such actions, which reflected both a lack of professionalism and a degree of agreement with the complaints of the mob. In the wake of the defense minister's ignominious departure, most of the senior officers fled the scene. Their absence cleared the way for junior officers to steer the frenzied mass of enlisted soldiers.

The man who took charge was Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo. The mere fact of Sanogo's presence at Kati was testament to the deficiencies of Mali's military. During officer training, he had failed several exams, which would have prevented him from becoming an officer in a more professional military organization. He had advanced up the ranks more slowly than most of his peers; as a man of thirty-nine years, he was only a captain. Most militaries would not have selected such an individual to receive American military training, as they reserve the coveted slots for the best and the brightest, but for some reason the Malian military repeatedly sent him to the United States to attend training courses.

During the fall of 2011, Sanogo had been removed from his job at a military college as the result of a hazing scandal in which five soldiers had died. Although his superiors had been right to relieve him, their next action constituted yet

another momentous misstep. Reassigning Sanogo to the Kati barracks, they neither imposed restrictions on him nor gave him any job or other responsibilities, leaving him free to spread dissension and stir up trouble all day long. Sanogo quickly gained popularity among the enlisted soldiers by socializing with them regularly, something else that professional militaries do not permit their officers to do.

In the aftermath of Minister of Defense Gassama's inglorious departure, Sanogo decided to lead the throng of soldiers to the presidential palace. According to those close to him, he did not intend to overthrow the president, but merely planned to "dress him down." How he expected the president's bodyguards to react to a junior officer attempting to dress the president down is unclear.

Meanwhile, officers loyal to President Touré alerted him that soldiers had staged a mutiny at Kati. Touré used his personal Twitter account to notify the Malian citizenry that the country faced a mutiny, not a coup, a message that presumably was intended to shore up confidence in the government. To protect the palace, the presidential security staff summoned the elite paratroopers of the 33rd Parachute Regiment, who were known as the "Red Berets" because of their resplendent headgear.

When Sanogo and his followers arrived at the palace, they fired their automatic weapons in the air and shouted threats. The Red Berets responded in kind. This posturing went on for some time, neither side being so bold as to fire their weapons horizontally. The standoff allowed time for security personnel to whisk the president to safety. Once he had been evacuated, the Red Berets abandoned the defense of the palace, leaving Sanogo's troops to enter unopposed.

Unruly soldiers availed themselves of the opportunity to steal chandeliers, vases, and other valuables. As Sanogo surveyed the scene, he mulled things over. President Touré's decision to flee and the absence of presidential authority in the palace reportedly made a strong impression on him, triggering a reconsideration of his objectives. Within a couple of hours, Captain Sanogo decided that if the president could be driven out of the palace, then he might as well be driven out of office.

The mutineers next headed for the studios of the state TV and radio stations. Firing their weapons in the air in their customary style, they chased the guards away. Once inside, they compelled the studio technicians to replace the regularly scheduled TV programming with videos of traditional dancing and music, which ran in a loop for several hours while Sanogo and his coconspirators worked out what they would announce.

Late in the evening, the dancing videos went off the air, and viewers found themselves looking at twenty men in military uniforms and green berets. Beneath them was superimposed a caption that read "Committee for the Re-establishment of Democracy and the Restoration of the State." Sanogo and others explained that they had ousted the government for its failure to provide

the army with the resources to defeat the northern rebellion. Lieutenant Amadou Konare, said to be the group's spokesman, averred, "We promise to hand power back to a democratically elected president as soon as the country is reunified and its integrity is no longer threatened."

The coup of March 21 proved highly popular with Mali's citizenry and armed forces. The country's two decades of democracy had been marred by widespread corruption and incompetence, robbing Malians of whatever affection they might once have had for democratic principles like the subordination of the military to civilian authority. "Our democracy needed this coup so that it could right itself," fifty-four-year-old Soumara Kalapo told Associated Press correspondent Rukmini Callimachi. "It was a democracy run by, and benefiting, a mafia."²

Reactions were far less favorable in the international community, dominated as it was by officials who viewed military coups as unmitigated disasters. The United States, the World Bank, and other national and international donors issued statements of condemnation and suspended their aid to Mali, except for certain types of humanitarian aid. Their pressure ensured that Sanogo would act quickly on his promise to restore civilian rule; just a few weeks after the coup, Sanogo transferred power to a transitional government led by Dioncounda Traoré, a seasoned civilian politician.

The formation of the interim government appeased some international donors, but not the United States. Democratic elections had to be held, American spokesmen said, before aid could be restored. The continued suspension of American military aid undermined the already weak capabilities of the Malian army in the north. Lack of external assistance to the army, together with bureaucratic turmoil resulting from the coup, enabled rebel groups to gobble up huge chunks of territory in April.

At this juncture, the Tuareg separatists who had dominated the rebellion in 2011 and early 2012 gave way to fanatical Islamists. Several Islamist groups, including Al Qaeda's North African branch, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), established dominion over northern Mali in the middle of the year. Bent on imposing sharia law with draconian purity, the Islamists whipped, beat, dismembered, stoned, and shot individuals for alleged violations of the code. They destroyed UNESCO-listed ancient shrines of local saints in the fabled trading town of Timbuktu, and they ransacked Christian churches, provoking a mass exodus of Christians.³

Extremists in neighboring countries who were under pressure from counter-terrorist forces flocked to northern Mali and used it as a sanctuary and staging ground for cross-border attacks. The governments of Mali's neighbors sent despondent pleas for help to foreign nations and multilateral organizations. During the summer, the Economic Community of West African States laid plans to deploy three thousand African soldiers into northern Mali to drive out the rebels, and the organization's member nations asked France and the United States to provide support. The French were agreeable, but the Americans

balked, arguing that the problem should be solved politically rather than militarily. Political stability had to be restored in the south through elections, they said, and then the parties could negotiate a political solution in the north.⁴ Johnnie Carson, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, explained to American congressmen on June 29 that the United States would enhance the prospects for negotiation by providing assistance that would “increase economic development and provide economic opportunities to disaffected youth populations in northern Mali.”⁵ In September, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton rebuffed mounting international pressure for military action with the assertion that “only a democratically elected government will have the legitimacy to achieve a negotiated political settlement in northern Mali, end the rebellion, and restore the rule of law.”⁶

But then, out of nowhere, Mali became a matter of national security for the United States. On September 11, the eleventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, militants assailed U.S. government facilities in Benghazi, Libya, killing American Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. For a week, the U.S. administration attributed the killings to a spontaneous mass demonstration, but soon it became clear that the operation had been a premeditated terrorist operation, carried out by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other extremist organizations. At a press conference on September 26, Secretary of State Clinton acknowledged that Al Qaeda might have been behind the attack, and she mentioned that the organization was using Mali as a springboard for operations into Libya.⁷

Just four days later, Carson announced a reversal of the American position on military intervention. He explained that the world was facing terrorists in Mali, “and the response to that must be a security, military response.”⁸ The evaporation of formal U.S. opposition to a military solution opened the door to a United Nations resolution for the use of force in Mali. The United States, however, continued to insist on democratic elections as a precondition for an African military expedition, which prevented the dispatch of any foreign troops in the near term. The Islamists strengthened their grip on northern Mali in the ensuing months.

Extremist forces advanced toward Bamako in January 2013, intent on establishing an Islamist government with control over all of Mali. The Malian government issued desperate pleas for military intervention, concentrating on the most likely saviors, the United States and France. The U.S. government, which had little appetite for military intervention at this time, avoided making military commitments and instead continued talking about the need for elections and negotiations. The French government, on the other hand, rapidly deployed its ground and air forces. French troops saved the Malian capital and then drove the extremists from northern Mali. Afterward, the French sought to hand over security to forces from Mali and its West African neighbors, but the French military would end up remaining for years afterward, owing to the ineffectiveness of the African forces.

The most obvious lesson of the Mali crisis of 2012 is that security problems in seemingly remote countries can endanger the security of other nations, near and far. That lesson will be explored in Chapter 5. This chapter is concerned with a subtler aspect of events in Mali, the internal dynamics of impoverished countries and their relevance to foreign assistance programs. While personality and chance dominated many of the coup's events, the susceptibility of Mali to this sort of cataclysm was a product of those dynamics. The same is true across the third world.

In the years leading up to the coup, the United States had concentrated its considerable assistance to Mali in select sectors of government and society. With Mali, as with every other country in the world, policymakers and congressmen in Washington allocated funds to the primary sectors of assistance – governance, development, and security – and their various subsectors, based on their personal views about the relative importance of each. In the foreign assistance world, governance is generally understood as the exercise of political authority, and its leading subsectors of assistance are administration, justice, human rights, political competition, and civil society. Development is most commonly defined as the advancement of social and economic conditions, and its subsectors include health, education, infrastructure, agriculture, economic growth, and women's rights. Security is the protection of state and society from physical harm and intimidation, with the military, police, courts, and corrections the primary subsectors.⁹

Reasonable and knowledgeable people often have very different views on how much each of these sectors and subsectors contributes to national betterment and how much each can be improved by foreign aid. In 2011, the U.S. government concentrated its aid to Mali on development, based on a particular interpretation of foreign assistance that has both strong supporters and strong detractors. Out of the \$221 million allocated to development, \$79.8 million went to roads and irrigation infrastructure, \$46.5 million to the improvement of Bamako's airport, \$24.5 million to malaria prevention and treatment, and \$16.0 million to basic education.¹⁰

That same year, the U.S. government spent less than \$4 million on what it characterized as security, which also reflected a view of foreign assistance that is controversial. Most of that total, some \$3.2 million, went toward the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership, a program that funded not only security forces but also development programs intended to curb the popular appeal of AQIM and other terrorist groups long known to be active in Mali.¹¹ A USAID document explained, "The Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership aims to provide Malians with the means to overcome the acute poverty and weak institutional capacity exploited by extremist groups," with primary emphasis on "enhancing civic engagement and economic opportunities among Malian youth."¹²

The security budget included only \$350,000 for International Military Education and Training, which was the principal funding line for the education of

military officers, and \$200,000 for Foreign Military Financing, which paid for the acquisition of U.S. military equipment and training. “We provided training and equip support for many years, but in relatively modest quantities,” Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa Amanda Dory acknowledged to a Senate subcommittee in December 2012. She added, “I don’t think that level of resourcing was commensurate with the threat.”¹³

It should be noted that Mali was not among those nations that pour large amounts of their national income into defense and hence have little need for foreign military aid. In 2011, at which time the country already faced serious security problems in the vast north, Mali spent a modest 1.9 percent of its small GDP on defense. Foreign observers were struck by the dearth of resources available to the Malian army. “In Mali, they barely have AKs that have butt stocks,” an American officer remarked in 2011. “They have old Chinese ammo where one of every three rounds work.” The forty-two vehicles that the Americans had provided sat idle in motor pools because of a lack of fuel to run them.¹⁴

While low internal and external funding ensured that Mali’s military would have too few resources to vanquish the rebels, the resource shortages were exacerbated by corruption. Considered less corrupt than many of its neighbors, Mali was nonetheless rife with corruption, ranking 118 out of 182 countries on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index.¹⁵ The impact of corruption and the ability of foreign donors to influence corruption levels are also the subject of much dispute, which helps explain why the U.S. government spent so little in 2011 on programs aimed at improving Malian governance. Expenditures on governance programs targeted directly at the Malian government amounted to just \$114,000 for the year, with another \$724,100 spent on other governance subsectors such as civil society and political competition.

In Mali’s case, low U.S. spending on security and governance facilitated the further deterioration of security and governance. High spending on development did not improve security or governance, in part because the risks posed by armed Islamists and separatists in the north caused many aid donors to concentrate aid projects near the capital and other areas in the south.¹⁶ Once security and governance crumbled in the north, the development projects that had been implemented there crumbled, too, unable to withstand rebel bullets and knives.¹⁷ Subsequent efforts to regain the north with development and governance measures came to naught, necessitating recourse to a military solution.

In hindsight, it is safe to say that the U.S. government did not accurately perceive which types of human activity were most important to Mali’s national betterment. Consequently, it did not concentrate assistance in the sectors where it could have been most effective. As we shall see, Mali was far from unique in this regard.

What accounts for these misperceptions? The answer is to be found in the theories on national prosperity that guided American decision makers. Since the days of Thucydides, bright minds have tried to figure out why some nations are

rich and others are poor, in order, among other things, to help the poor countries become rich, or at least less poor. As with most controversies on the fundamental nature of politics, no consensus opinion has ever emerged, compelling those engaged in the business of prioritizing foreign assistance to select from a range of opinions. In the recent history of the United States, a few schools of thought have dominated the policy choices of foreign assistance organizations and third world governments.

FOREIGN EXPLOITATION

During the Cold War, large numbers of intellectuals subscribed to the view that wealthy nations acquired their riches by exploiting poor nations. European colonial powers, followed by the neocolonial United States and its multinational corporations, pilfered natural resources from the world's poor countries, employed their people at low wages, and compelled them to buy manufactured goods at inflated prices. This interpretation was to be found not only in the Marxism–Leninism of the Communist bloc but also in a number of left-wing offshoot theories that enjoyed currency in the intelligentsia of the free world, of which the most prominent were dependency theory and world systems theory.

Political leaders in a variety of newly independent countries embraced the view that foreign exploitation accounted for the inequality of nations, and they enacted measures to stop the alleged exploitation, such as the expulsion of foreign businesses, the banning of foreign investment, and the imposition of high tariffs. But they achieved only economic stagnation and continuing poverty, while some of the third world leaders who adopted free-market capitalism saw their countries soar to prosperity. By the end of the Cold War, all but the most ideologically rigid national leaders had abandoned economic isolationism in favor of open international commerce. Consequently, the theory that foreign exploitation is the principal cause of national inequality has fallen out of favor with most serious theorists and development practitioners.

General agreement now exists that the wealth of nations is largely dependent on economic growth, and that economic growth is a function of a nation's own economic productivity, not of how much wealth it takes away from other nations. The settling of that dispute has been a huge step forward for international development, but it has not settled the larger question of national prosperity, only shifted the debate to a new battleground. The debate has moved from the question of whether economic weakness is the result of external or internal factors to the question of why some nations have been less capable than others of achieving economic growth.

THE ANNALES SCHOOL

This shift has induced a large-scale migration from the dependency theory and world systems theory of the Cold War to *Annaliste* theory, which explains the

inequality of nations as the consequence of geographic and environmental variations. The theory began with Fernand Braudel, a French historian born at the start of the twentieth century. Braudel was blossoming into a promising young scholar when World War II erupted and he was called up for active service in the French army. Captured by the Germans in 1940, Braudel spent the remainder of the war in captivity, where he took advantage of the solitude to write his seminal work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. After returning to France at war's end, Braudel became the leading figure of the *Annales* school of historians, named after its journal *Annales d'Histoire Économique et Sociale*.

Braudel and the other *Annalistes*, as the school's disciples were called, asserted that the truly important factors in history were geography and environment. The *Annalistes* found the greatest profundity in the access to commercial activity and foreign ideas afforded by the Mediterranean and in the prevention of interaction by the desert sands of the Sahara. In comparison with lasting facts like soil fertility or the steam engine, they said, the wars, artists, and kings of mankind were fleeting trifles. Individuals and peoples were creatures of their environment, not altogether different from other species, their choices meaningless except when the same choice was made a million times over during a period of centuries or millennia, in response to geographic or environmental conditions. Such behavioral patterns produced economic and technological trends that accounted for the disparities in economic output from one region to another.

The *Annales* school quickly accumulated adherents in the United States and other Western countries, becoming the most influential historical school in the world during the 1950s. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, its influence waned in academic history departments as postmodernism and other abstractions took hold. Then suddenly, near the end of the century, it vaulted back to prominence, with the help of a few authors whose eloquence captured the minds of politicians and publics.

Foremost among these authors was Jared Diamond, a career physiologist who became a professor of geography later in life. In his bestselling *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, Diamond looked through the *Annaliste* lenses of geography and environment to explain why certain peoples had achieved higher levels of prosperity than others. A few years later, the economist Jeffrey Sachs employed *Annaliste* principles to formulate global poverty solutions in his blockbuster *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*.¹⁸ Sachs, who had already been established as a towering figure in academia, became a worldwide celebrity, making *Time* magazine's list of the one hundred most influential people on the planet.

Diamond and Sachs repackaged Braudel's ponderously expressed ideas into terms more accessible to the average reader. Inequalities among nations, they wrote, resulted from the presence or absence of various natural "curses" and "traps" that were consequences of humankind's surroundings rather than of humans themselves. One was the curse of being landlocked, a feature of many

impoverished sub-Saharan African countries, which deprived societies of access to maritime commerce and the technological knowledge that boosts economic productivity. Another was the “disease curse,” whereby climates conducive to debilitating diseases like malaria depleted the work force. Countries afflicted by the so-called resource curse, such as Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, failed to develop politically and economically because their elites could enjoy lives of luxury merely by selling abundant natural resources to foreigners. Poverty itself made the list of curses, because the poorest nations lacked the levels of income required for the personal saving that led to economic investment.¹⁹

According to Diamond and Sachs, rich countries could eliminate severe poverty in poor countries through large expenditures on social and economic measures that exorcised the curses of geography and environment. Building roads to landlocked states would mitigate commercial disadvantages. Administering vaccines would remove the scourge of disease. Large infusions of external funding would facilitate personal saving. Once these measures were taken, poverty would recede, education would increase, and the population would make use of the technologies that had enabled other countries to thrive. Because spending on social and economic development held such promise, foreign donors needed to concentrate their aid resources on the development sector.

Another group of writers, emerging a few years after the publication of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, focused more narrowly on the *Annaliste* theme of geographic and environmental influences on the flow of information. Among the leading lights of this group was Thomas P. Barnett, author of *The Pentagon's New Map*. Barnett depicted a world divided into two camps, which were differentiated by their degree of “connectedness” to information. The “disconnected” countries, which together comprised the “Non-Integrating Gap,” were the countries in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, and Latin America that were generally considered to be the members of the third world. The other countries, which were called the “Functioning Core,” had to “connect” the “Non-Integrating Gap” countries through information technology and commerce. Once they had been connected to the rest of the world, the “Non-Integrating Gap” countries would prosper, and the problems of international terrorism and political instability would wither away.²⁰

The impact of Barnett's work would be felt for years to come, particularly within the U.S. defense establishment. In Iraq and Afghanistan, commanders made life-and-death decisions on the basis of the theories presented in *The Pentagon's New Map*. During a visit to an insurgency-plagued Afghan district in 2008, I was told by an American military officer that the United States was helping the Afghan government build a new road from the district's largest town to “disconnected” villages in order to “connect” them to the outside world. The villagers would stop supporting the Taliban once they could visit the town, the officer explained, because the town had the internet, television, and other information portals that would expose them to new political ideas and new information.