Conflict Factsheet

Tuareg Rebellions in Mali and Niger in the 1990s

Type of conflict	Intensity
Main	1.5

Conflict Locality	Time
Western Africa	1990– 1997

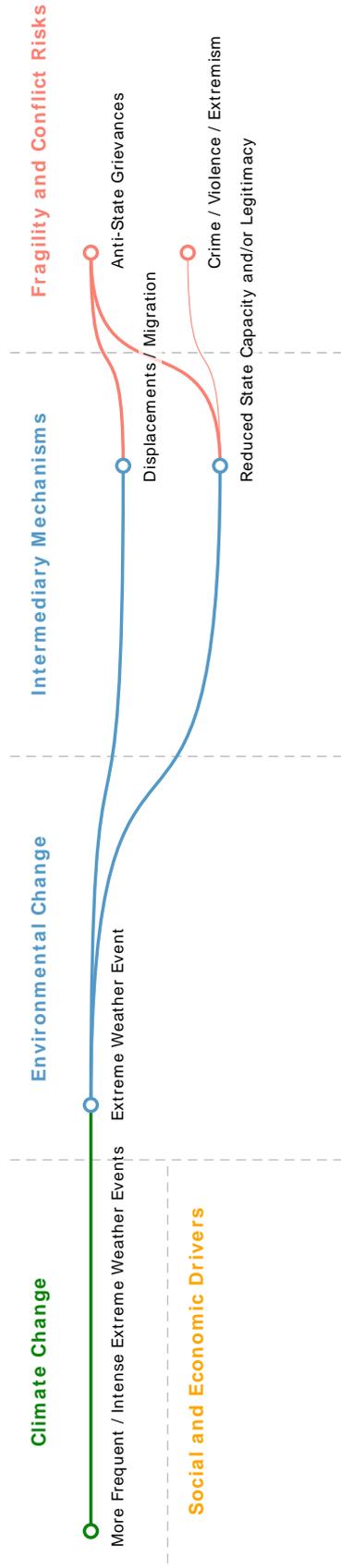| Countries	Resources
Mali, Niger	Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water
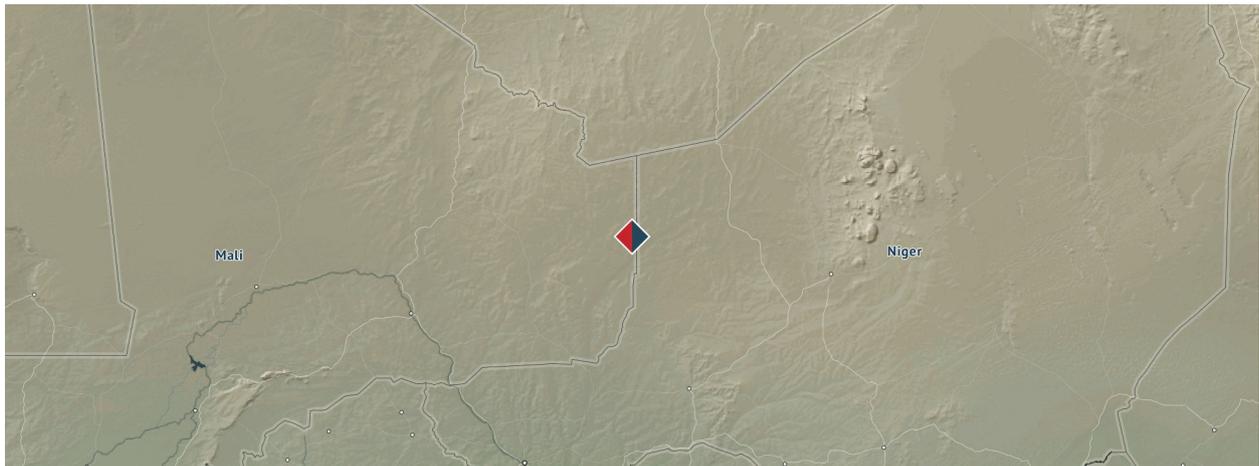
Local resource competition

Livelihood insecurity and migration

Conflict Summary

Sahel droughts in the 1970s and 1980 contributed to the outbreak of Tuareg insurgencies in both Mali and Niger in the early 1990s. After a period of peace, violence erupted again in 2007.

Conceptual Model

Climate Change

More Frequent / Intense Extreme Weather Events

Social and Economic Drivers

Environmental Change

Extreme Weather Event

Intermediary Mechanisms

Displacements / Migration

Reduced State Capacity and/or Legitimacy

Fragility and Conflict Risks

Anti-State Grievances

Crime / Violence / Extremism

Eroded Social Contract
High Unemployment
History of Conflict
Low Level of Economic Development
Political Marginalization
Unresponsive Government

Water-stressed Area

Context Factors

Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

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Conflict History

In Mali Tuareg insurgencies and communal conflicts lasted from 1990 to 1995 (see Tuareg rebellion in Mali) and also fuelled inter-ethnic violence (see Conflict between Tuareg and farming communities). In Niger the Tuareg rebellion lasted from 1991 to 1997 (see Tuareg rebellion in Niger). Eventually both conflicts could be settled temporarily by promises of political decentralisation and development funds directed to rebel areas. However, as the provisions of the peace agreements were implemented very slowly, violence erupted again in both countries in 2007. These conflicts are also at the origin of the presently very fragile security situation in the Malian Sahel zone (UCDP, 2014).

Prior to the insurgencies, Tuareg communities in Niger and Mali held little political influence. The Sahel region encompassing northern Mali and north western Niger - often referred to as "Azawad" and mostly inhabited by Tuareg pastoralists – thus remained mostly excluded from national development policies and was characterised by a persistent lack of essential infrastructures and economic opportunities. This marginalisation forced many Tuareg to seek a better life in Algeria or Libya from the mid-1970s onwards. This dynamic was dramatically accelerated when Tuareg areas in Mali and Niger were hit by severe droughts in the 1970s and 1980s. However, economic conditions deteriorated in the host countries by the end of the 1980s, prompting the return of Tuareg migrants. Many of those who spent time in Libya acquired considerable military experience serving in Gadaffi's army and created nationalist Tuareg movements, which facilitated the organisation of the insurgencies against the governments of Mali and Niger upon their return (Hershkowitz, 2005; Benjaminsen, 2008). From 1990 to 1997, several Tuareg groups engaged in rebellions against the governments in Mali and Niger, resulting in several hundred deaths. In Mali, this also fuelled communal conflict between Tuaregs and other communities, such as the Songhoy or Fulani (see Humphreys & Mohamed, 2003).

Eventually both conflicts could be settled temporarily by promises of political decentralisation and development funds directed to rebel areas. However, as the provisions of the peace agreements were not fully implemented, violence erupted again in both countries in 2007. Both insurgencies are also considered as important factors behind the rise of Jihadist groups in the Sahel and the presently very unstable situation in northern Mali (UCDP, 2014; MAR Project, 2004).
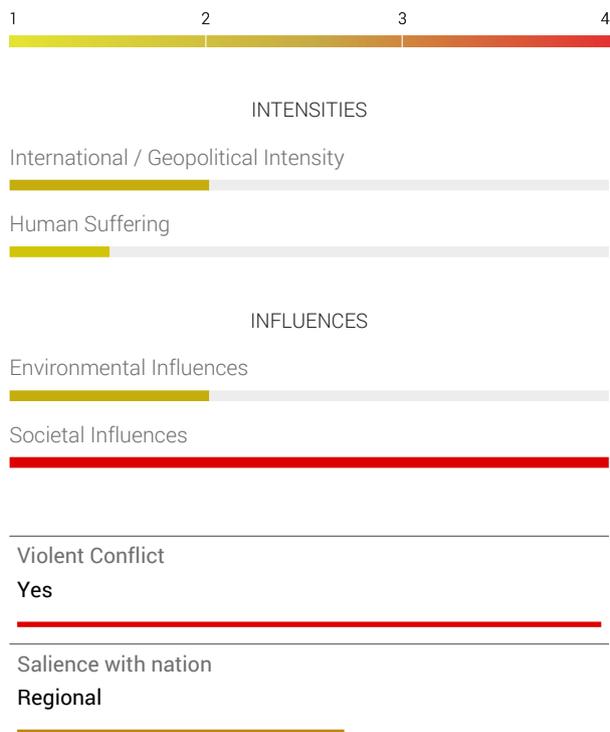
Resolution Efforts

In both Mali and Niger, the government quickly engaged negotiations with the rebels, leading to several peace agreements in 1991, 1992, 1994 and 1997, in which the two governments promised greater political autonomy and a higher amount of financial resources for mainly Tuareg regions. These political measures were backed by disarmament campaigns and efforts to integrate Tuareg fighters into the regular armed forces, as well as grassroots initiatives fostering dialogue and reconciliation between Tuaregs and other groups. The success of these peace initiatives, however, was only temporary, as fights resumed in 2007 (Lode, 2002; Hershkowitz, 2005).

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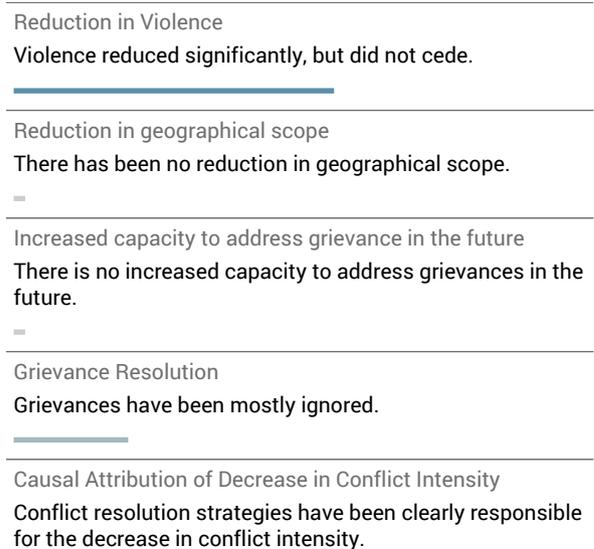supported by

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Yet peace processes in both countries also show slight differences: As opposed to the Tuaregs in Mali who live concentrated in the north, those in Niger live more spread out across the country, which has helped curbing irredentism. In fact, the objectives of Tuareg rebels in Niger have varied from regional autonomy to installing a federal system in Niger at different stages of the conflict, creating divisions among the Tuareg rebels. It also seems as if the Nigerian government has done more to build trust with the Tuareg. For example, Brigi Rafini, himself a Tuareg, was appointed prime minister in 2011. In contrast, the Malian government has focused on military actions at the expense of development initiatives, which has stirred anger and distrust in the government amongst Tuareg communities in the north. As a result, Tuareg leaders in Niger are more inclined to cooperate with the government, whereas in Mali, there has been a proliferation of armed groups, arms trafficking and other illicit activities, often involving young Tuaregs (IRIN, 2013).

An important challenge lies ahead, as the governments in Niger and Mali have yet not succeeded in tackling the structural causes of Tuareg grievances, which include: political marginalisation, general distrust in the central government and state security forces and considerable economic disparities between peripheral regions inhabited by Tuaregs and the rest of the country. These grievances are expected to increase in the future due to a fast growing population, stagnant development and persistent societal and political tensions, compounded by an increasing risk of drought and gradual desertification (Fleury, 2010).

Intensities & Influences

1   2   3   4

INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

Human Suffering

INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences

Societal Influences

Violent Conflict

Yes

Salience with nation

Regional

Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

Violence reduced significantly, but did not cede.

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.

Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been mostly ignored.

Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.

Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Disarmament, demobilisation & reintegration
The two governments led disarmament campaigns and efforts to integrate Tuareg fighters into the regular armed forces.

2

Dialogue
Mali and Niger engaged in negotiations with the rebels, leading to several peace agreements in 1991, 1992, 1994 and 1997. Furthermore, grassroots initiatives fostered dialogue and reconciliation between Tuaregs and other groups.

2

Compensation
Mali and Niger promised a higher amount of financial resources for mainly Tuareg regions.

2

Changes in constitutional balance of power
Both Mali and Niger promised greater political autonomy to Tuareg communities.

3

Resources and Materials

Conflict References
Tuareg Rebellion in Mali 1990-1995
Tuareg Rebellion in Niger 1991-1997
Conflict Between Tuareg and Farming Communities in Mali

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