



EUTM MALI

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A MODERN AVIATION CAPACITY FOR MALI

THE CREATION OF THE « ARMÉE DE L’AIR DU MALI »



The Malian Air Force, the « Armée de l’Air du Mali », was first established in 1976 - sixteen years after the young Republic had achieved its independence – with the so called Ordinance No. 76-99 CML. But the origin of this air force lies further back. When the Malian Armed Forces were first created in 1960, they did not include neither an air force nor any similar capacity. However, it should not be long before the need for such a capability became apparent. The beginnings of the Malian air force are closely linked to the beginnings of the Tuareg revolts against the Malian state. Reason enough to take a closer look at both.

In 1963 a rebellion broke out in the north of Mali. The revolt “Alfellaga” of the Tuareg proceeded from Kidal. The causes of this rebellion resulted from the concurrence of political and ethnic conflicts with personal and cultural peculiarities in the self-conception of both sides – and are still of central importance for today’s conflict.

After the independence and establishment of the national states in 1960, the Tuareg’s settlement area was spread over several countries and their free movement, which was

essential for their self-conception as a nomadic people, was intensely restricted. Moreover, they did not feel part of the new state, which was dominated by members of other ethnic groups. In addition there was a marriage law which was perceived as anti-Islamic and not compatible with local customs as well as other regulations adopted by Modibo Keita, compromising the Tuareg's way of life.

What – according to Tuareg tradition – ultimately triggered the insurrection, however, was the murder of Allaag Albachir by Moroccan Goumiers. While the murder had already occurred in 1954, Elledi ag Alla, the son of the prominent Tuareg rebel, learned about it only years later. His revenge culminated in the short lived insurgency of the Alfellaga. The response of the Malian Armed Forces, which included radical measures to say the least, has left deep resentment in much of the northern population. The narrative of the continuous revolt against foreign domination was – after the first Rebellion in 1916 against the colonial power France – linked to the Alfellaga, which in turn serves the Tuareg as a justification for their efforts to achieve independence still today.

The Malian army was, compared to the conflict in 2012, considerably better equipped than the rebels. Since comprehensive military success could not yet be achieved in the large area, they resorted to surveillance tasks and strived to tackle the rebels with isolated, targeted attacks. In this context, General Abdoulaye Soumare, CEMGA and Commander of the intervention forces, requested the participation of Light Aviation in the aforesaid operations. However, the Malian Armed Forces had none at their disposal. So it was then decided to requisition aircraft belonging to the former national airline Société Nationale Air Mali. Two Antonov An-2 and one Let L-200 Morova as well as the operating personnel were placed at the disposal of the Operational Headquarters. Thus, from a civilian company, was created the precursor of what was to become the “aviation militaire” in 1966, a small formation attached to the 1st Company of the Génie Militaire, then the Groupement Aérien Tactique in 1968, which was in turn attached to the Bataillon des Unités Spéciales, and finally the Armée de l'Air in 1976.



GENERAL ABDOULAYE SOUMARE [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

During the time of the Cold War, the Armée de l'Air received both equipment and training mainly from the Soviet Union. In the 1970s and early 1980s two AN-26 as well as 12 MIG-21MF fighters and two MIG 21UM trainers were acquired. In 1983 six Aero L-29 jet trainers were delivered to form a pilots school.

In order to bring the act of creation of the Armée de l'Air into conformity with legal provisions, a new Ordinance was drawn up and ratified in December 1999, giving the Air Force the legal framework for its existence.

NEW CRISIS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES PUT THE AIR FORCE IN PRIME POSITION AMONG MULTI-NATIONAL FORCES



In January 2016, Ibrahim Bo Keita, the former chairman of the related Commission and now Chief of Defence, announced the implementation measures for a military investment plan to the value of 1,230 billion CFA. This plan formed part of the "Military Orientation and Planning Law (Loi d'orientation et de programmation militaire, LOPM)", approved beforehand in February 2015. The law involves a modernisation of the Malian Armed Forces (MaAF) and the recruitment of 10,000 volunteers. The MaAF should number 20,000 men by 2019 as a result of this decision.

This ambitious plan also includes a structural reorganisation of the Malian Air Force and the purchase of new aircraft. The requirement for modernised military air capacity in support of the Malian ground forces is therefore crucial. The geographical distance between the northern

regiments is very wide. Without an airlift for their logistical supplies and medical evacuations, these units could quickly become isolated in the event of a terror threat or worse. Besides its seven light Tetra aeroplanes, the Malian Air Force also owns one operational Bastler BT-67 transport aircraft. Since 2016, however, as part of the investment plan, the country has been able to extend its airlift capacity with a cargo CASA C-295W aircraft, stationed at the 101th air base (AB101) of Sénou. Subsequently, the two Chinese Harbin Y-12 transport aircraft was delivered the 20 September this year at AB101. The investment plan also contains a focus on developing a rotary wing capacity.



Two French Super Puma helicopters have been purchased at a total value of 18 million dollars. A contract signed with Russia is set to further strengthen the Malian Air Force with four Mi-35M helicopters delivered 21 September 2017. Two others will follow at AB 101.

Even more than these air transport facilities, the country has need of a mobile observation and control centre active across central and northern Malian airspace. This is a priority that Mali also shares with its G5 Sahel Joint Force partner nations. The investment plan



provides for the purchase of six Super Tucanos, of Brazilian origin, two of which are equipped with optics. They will serve to provide air support to the ground forces.

The Achilles heel of this multi-year restructuring plan for the Malian Air Force, however, has turned out to be the lack of infrastructure adaptations, and maintenance of the new aircraft. The *Advisory Task Force* from EUTM Mali is working with the Malian military authorities to find a solution. The Mission's *Education and Training Force* is already providing the *Tactical Air Control Party* (TACP) course for the Malian Air Force. In the near future, an infantry and

surveillance course, known as FUSCO, will also be offered at MaAF's request. These soldiers will ensure the protection and defence of Malian air bases. EUTM Mali hopes that this new contribution will support the Malian authorities in their intention to have a modern aviation capacity as soon as possible.

AERIAL SURVEILLANCE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF PARSEC IN CENTRAL MALI



The Niger River flows into the delta at Mopti in Central Mali. Thanks to development work, Central Mali is well-cultivated. Unfortunately, during the rainy season this area is prone to high levels of flooding. As a result, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) must deliver food aid every year. From August until early October, the National Directorate for Water Resources, which closely monitors any upheavals on the river, if the river rises an alarm will sound. More than 60,000 people are directly affected by the rising waters. The ground forces and security forces find it difficult to control the situation in Central Mali because of the loss of land, flooded rural roads and river bank shifting.

The river runs through the Gao Region, the western part of Mopti and the eastern part of Niger. There are four forests that are listed as protected in the delta, covering a surface area of 4,020



hectares. The Ansongo-Menaka animal reserve is also situated in the region. Together they offer an amazing array of wildlife and nature. Over time, following migratory movements in the Gao Region have transformed into a multi-ethnic region.

At the Valetta Summit in November 2015, the European Union launched a "Programme of Support for enhanced security in Mopti and Gao Regions" (PARSEC), as part of its general approach to the Sahel. PARSEC was the outcome of negotiations between the EU Delegation to Mali and the Government of Mali, with the support of the EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Mali missions. It was implemented by Expertise France over a period of 42 months, in consultation with all of Mali's technical and financial partners. The EU contributed 29 million euros to the project.



PARSEC's objective is to continue the stabilisation effort in Central Mali, by strengthening security for the population in these regions, increasing territorial control and improving the management of the border areas by the security forces. Aerial surveillance of the borders and the land along the River Niger as well as strengthening homeland security are also objectives of this project. A Cessna aircraft will soon operate

over these areas. EUTM Mali will coordinate any infrastructure and maintenance problems arising from the aircraft's operation.