Identifying Opportunities for Conflict Mediation by the GCSP in Mali and Venezuela

Final Report

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
ANC	The National Constituent Assembly
AQIM	Al Qa'eda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
CMA	Coalition des Mouvements de l'Azawad
CSDP	European Union Common Security and Defence Policy
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Reinsertion campaign
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EUCAP	European Union Capacity Building Mission
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
EUTM	European Union Training Mission in Mali
FAN	The National Armed Force
FCFA	West African franc of the African Financial Community
GCSP	Geneva Centre for Security Policy
HD	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
InCG	International Contact Group
IEDs	Improvised Explosive Devices
IFES	The International Foundation for Electoral Systems
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MUD	Democratic Unity Roundtable
MUJWA	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa

NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NOREF	Norwegian Center for Conflict Resolution
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OAS	Organization of American States
PSUV	The United Socialist Party of Venezuela
TIAR	Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance
UN	United Nations
UNASUR	The Union of Southern Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
US/USA	United States of America
USIP	United States Institute of Peace

Executive Summary

This applied research project commissioned by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) aims to discover potential avenues for future mediation projects in Mali and Venezuela. The prevalence of protracted conflicts and humanitarian crises across the world indicates the need for third-party actors to facilitate dialogue between affected communities. In light of recent geopolitical disruptions caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the research team agreed with the GCSP to focus on two such protracted conflicts whose resolution may be affected by these developments.

This report is based on findings from current academic literature, open-source information, and qualitative interviews with experts, political figures and civil society actors in Mali and Venezuela. This facilitated a broad understanding of the political context with precise insights on the current and historical mediation situations in each country. Based on these findings, the team was able to generate programme recommendations for each country to expand GCSP's work in diplomatic dialogue.

Main Findings on Mali

The conflict in Mali is a series of extremely dynamic and locally specific violent disputes. The military government is becoming increasingly hostile to international partners despite a deterioration of the security situation.

There is appetite for mediation among civil society actors and several national and international NGOs are engaged in local-level dialogue. The stalling of the 2015 Algiers Accord and an increasingly totalitarian government indicate a lack of interest in pursuing productive peace talks at the national level.

The GCSP could seek to promote interaction between political decision-makers and young people in Mali. Dialogue would seek to reduce young people's recruitment into armed groups and produce youth-centred policies. This could be done by leveraging the GCSP's alumni network and connecting with youth activists in a chosen region and bringing them together in workshops with GCSP experts.

The current government's hostility towards international actors and the increasingly violent trajectory of the conflict suggest that mediation programmes should not be launched in the short term. However, given the instability of regimes and international factors, the GCSP should continue to monitor the situation for political developments and signs that actors are ready for mediation in the medium to longer term.

Main Findings on Venezuela

Mediation by third–countries or international organizations is welcomed by most Venezuelans since there are internal difficulties that need international support to be overcome.

To further national dialogue toward a reconciliation process in Venezuela, international actors or organizations could assist and pressure the regime for reassurances that they will not be prosecuted, tortured, imprisoned or exiled.

The main factor that leads to instability is the political structure and the disputed legitimacy of the electoral process. Projects in Venezuela should therefore have a long-term focus, promoting the restoration of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights.

Education and the public universities are highly regarded in the Venezuelan society to foster knowledge and better living conditions. Despite the existing challenges to participation in political movements, the youth is committed to contribute to a democratic transition in Venezuela even though they are not naturally included in the natural process.

Comparison of the key findings from each county suggests that the timing for the development of a mediation programme is more favorable in Venezuela than in Mali, especially in light of international actors' recent use of trade to promote Venezuelan national dialogue. Nevertheless, in both contexts, appetite and entry points have been identified. The volatility of the situation in Mali suggests that the GCSP should continue monitoring this case so that mediators can move in as soon as required.

Introduction

This applied research project aims to identify potential entry points for diplomatic dialogue by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) in the Venezuelan and Malian conflicts. After a preliminary assessment of different conflict situations around the world, these two case studies were selected as they appear to be the most suitable for the development of new mediation programmes. The complexity of these situations offers an ideal environment for the research of innovative solutions in mediation. The research questions of this applied research project are the following: what is the potential for diplomatic dialogue by the GCSP in the Malian and Venezuelan contexts? The report is divided into two chapters: Mali and Venezuela.

On the Malian side, research began with the assumption that climate change may be a key entry point for diplomatic dialogue in the Malian conflict. Whilst this hypothesis has not been confirmed, research has pointed to ethnic, religious, and intercommunal tensions, in addition to weak state authority, as the drivers of the conflict. The conflict is first and foremost national but has suffered from regionally destabilising influences and has in turn destabilised neighbouring countries. What began as a secessionist rebellion was hijacked by religious extremists and has ultimately turned different faith groups, ethnic groups and land users against each other. There has been significant international intervention, mostly through military actions, from regional partners, from international organisations and from states. Such intervention has predominantly been on the side of the government, despite it being seen as a destabilising actor in the conflict. Whilst peace accords have been signed, they have excluded key groups and been poorly implemented. Other attempts at mediation have perhaps been more successful, but they suffer from challenges of legitimacy and of satisfying all of the numerous actors and ultimately the needs of the local population affected by the conflict. Significantly, any attempt at mediation will have to reckon with the fact that the conflict varies enormously from area to area - the conflict cannot be thought of homogeneously at a national level.

The Venezuelan case demonstrates the possibility of some entry points such as energy and the state building process. It is mainly an internal conflict with the interference of some actors that support the regime, such as Russia, China, Turkey, and Iran. The tensions are mainly on how the political system is built and managed in Venezuela. Part of the population and the international community regards it as deficient and corrupt, while the supporters of the government comprehend that the opposition is violent. Differently from the Chavez era, the current President Maduro's actions caught the international attention due to the second largest flux of migrants fleeing from Venezuela and the deepening of the socioeconomic crisis. Hence, the authoritarian choices from the government reached the threshold to attract attention for external assistance. However, so far, the initiatives for peace have failed. But the current geopolitical context with the conflict in Ukraine opens new possibilities for dialogue with

Venezuela since many European countries seek new alternatives for oil and gas. It is a good moment to instigate political will for the implementation of good governance measures and plans to guarantee the safety and human rights of the Venezuelan population through the relief of socioeconomic emergency in the country.

In each case study, the first section provides an overview of the conflict, including an identification of the principal actors and drivers and the main conflict resolution attempts. Then, the assessment of the main findings from the data analysis and possible niches are summarised. Finally, in the last section, predictable risks and impact of the potential mediation attempt are evaluated.

Sources and Methodology

For both case studies, a review of key literature has been conducted to identify the main characteristics of each conflict, the principal actors, the key drivers and the attempts that have been made to resolve the conflicts.

Subsequently, interviews with experts, practitioners, state officials and civil society representatives were conducted. Interviews have been used both to support preliminary findings and to reveal previously unidentified conflict dynamics or mediation entry points. Since conflict situations are complex and nuanced, a qualitative approach has been adopted to grasp the various political and social dynamics. The interviews were semi-structured in format, allowing the interviewees more freedom to express areas and ideas that are important to them. As the repression of opponents to the regime are frequent in the two contexts, most of the interviewees accepted to participate in this study if their testimony would be anonymised in the report. Aliases were given to these interviewees.

A snowball sampling method has been chosen. This approach reduces the diversity of the sample and is likely to cause a selection bias: those who agree to discuss mediation in each country are more likely to be in favour of mediation than those who do not agree. Nevertheless, we argue that, by identifying several first interviewees, we are able to create different networks of practitioners and have a broad picture of the situation. Creating such a network is also a crucial part of the diplomatic dialogue method. Moreover, it is the most promising method of reaching people in the field who would be difficult to access from Geneva. Two principal categories of interviewees have been identified:

1. Practitioners working for international organisations and academic experts carrying out development or security actions and studies in Mali and Venezuela. This data allows us to define challenges and opportunities for conflict resolution by external actors.
2. Individuals on the ground, either working for international or local organisations in Mali and Venezuela or representatives of the state or local communities. This second set of data will help better understand conflict dynamics and what local actors expect from external interventions. It will

be helpful to assess how potential GCSP involvement will be perceived and how coherent such an involvement would be.

The perspective and potential biases of interviewees have also been taken into account when analysing their opinions. Where possible, comments have been cross referenced with additional research to establish the veracity of findings and discounted where they are motivated by a clear vested interest.

Primary Data Collection for the Case of Mali

In total, 16 interviews were conducted, in French or in English, with 17 interviewees to assess the situation in Mali.[1] Nine out of the 17 interviewees were Malian nationals, and 13 of them were based in Mali when the interview was conducted. People from different backgrounds were contacted. Two of them were international researchers analysing the conflict and humanitarian situation of Mali. 10 people worked for international organisations or international NGOs, mostly for UN or European missions, but also for NGOs specialised in mediation. Two interviews were conducted with people working in civil society organisations (CSOs) or local NGOs. One Malian academic, advisor to the Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accepted to respond to our questions. Two Malian officials were also interviewed, one ambassador and one Major General.

	Malian	International
Researchers/conflict analysts	0	2
People working in IOs/international NGOs	4	6
People working in Malian CSOs/NGOs	2	0
Academics	1	0
State officials	2	0
	9	8

Figure 1: Interviewees met during the data collection in Mali

[1] See annex for detailed information on the interviewees and their profile.

The interviewees were specialised in diverse domains: humanitarian and development aid; military and security sector reforms; peacekeeping and mediation; and politics.

No significant correlation between the person's assessment of the situation and his/her affiliation have been observed, although some minor trends were noticed. In assessing the security situation, Malian state officials attest to an improvement of the security in Mali, whilst all other interviewees note a worsening of the situation. Malian nationals also tended to be more in favour of international humanitarian intervention, whilst international actors appeared to approach the topic more dispassionately.

Primary Data Collection for the Case of Venezuela

The group of 9 people interviewed are deeply connected with the political situation in Venezuela[2]. Either they protested, worked with the opposition or were part of some student movements **meaning that all of them were part or still are part of political movements**. It is important to highlight **the role of the Public Universities**, especially in Venezuela. They are a centre to share information, debate new ideas and stimulate the role of the youth to foster democracy and peace. As Diego, a master student in international relations mentioned, in many instances a politician (usually from the opposition) would clarify the advances, or not, from the current situation, especially considering the censorship and government propaganda in the means of communication.

	In Venezuela	Diaspora
International Relations Analysts	1	0
People working in Government	0	1
People working in NGOs	1	0
Academics	3	2
People working in oil company	0	1
	5	4

Figure 2: Interviewees met during the data collection on Venezuela.

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[2] See annex for detailed information on the interviewees and their profile.

It is necessary to note that despite the security concerns of those who assisted the research, many of them are in Venezuela, had issues with the internet and sometimes did not even speak English. Due to the current situation, many of them are involved in multiple jobs and/or political action leading to little time to share information. However, they seemed excited about the study and recognised the importance of it.

The study does not provide a comprehensive perspective of each sector of the Venezuelan society, especially due to the lack of response of actors in the government. However, through the available literature and interviews, there are two major political stances. One is for those that still believe in the Bolivarian revolution and consequently are in favour of Maduro's government. The other is for those from the opposition of the government. It is important to mention that the opposition is a heterogeneous group that comprehends several positions on how the national institutions and authorities should act in order to re-establish peace and democracy.

After analysing the interviews, **each of them would show discontent with the current political and economic situation in their country**. Even those that are not currently in Venezuela demonstrated that they are either seeking specialisation and expertise to contribute when they are back to their country, or they are involved in overseas initiatives to promote some improvement of their country. They seemed involved and passionate about their birthplace and have the objective to advocate for human rights, peace and democracy.

However, **it is not clear which strategy should be chosen to seek those objectives**. This seems to be the major common issue. But it is also an opportunity to collaborate with an international neutral organisation that could provide the best international practices. Thus, it is a space to work with national actors to comprehend the best strategies to adapt the initiatives and understand what would be more effective to the internal reality.

Mali
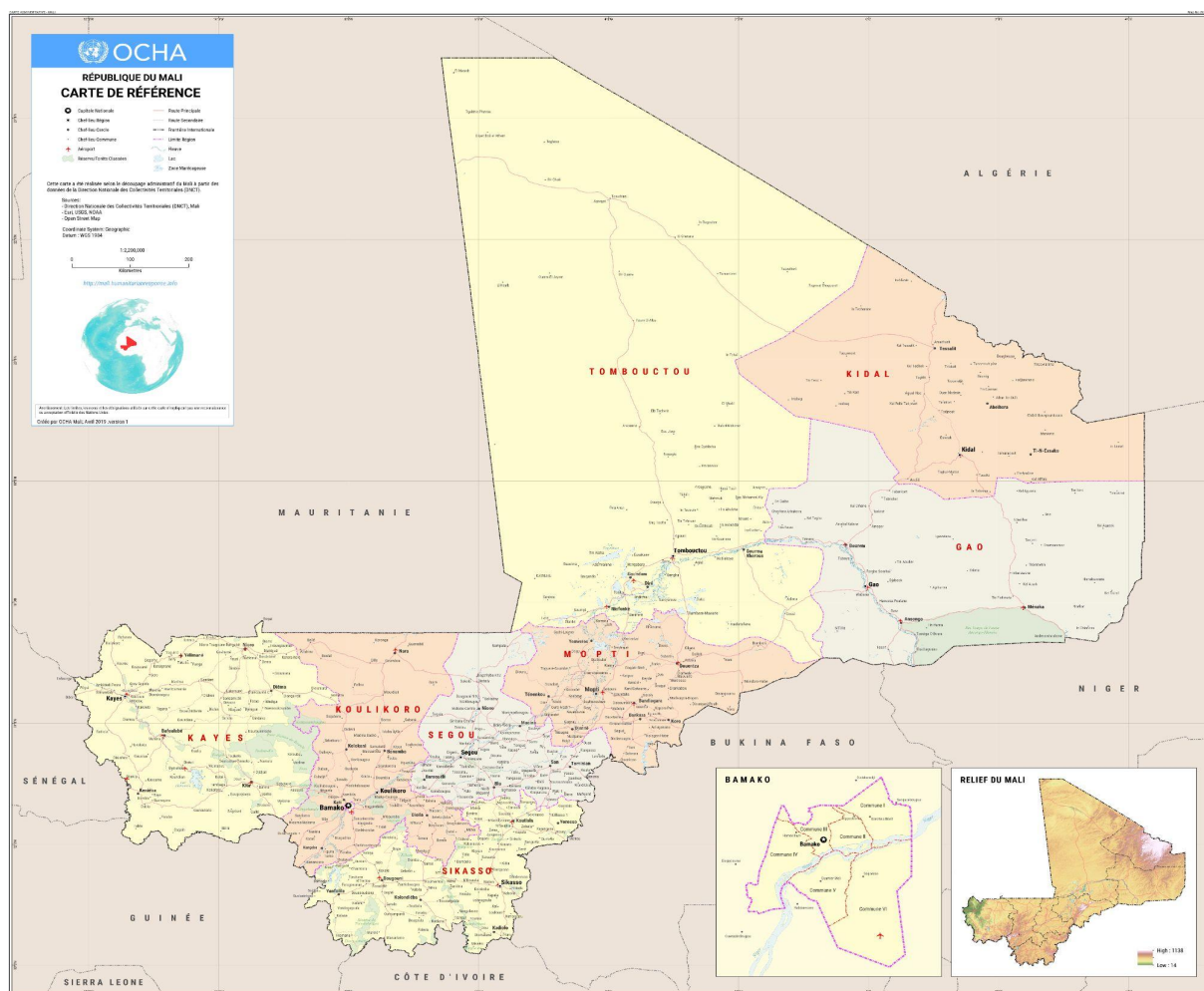
Figure 3: Map of the Republic of Mali (Humanitarian Response, 2019).

Operational Context

The Conflict

Overview

The Republic of Mali has been embroiled in a number of "parallel non-international armed conflicts" with various non-state armed groups since 2012 (RULAC, 2022). The conflict erupted in 2012 when Tuareg secessionist movement, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), seized control of the northern Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu regions - collectively referred to as Azawad (Perret, 2014, 228). The fighting provoked a mutiny in the Malian army, leading to an "accidental coup", with President Amadou Toumani Touré being toppled and replaced by Captain

Amadou Sanogo (Theroux-Benoni, 2013, 1-3). By June 2012, the MNLA's cause had become hijacked by jihadist armed groups, (Castelli, 2014, 64-5). Despite the establishment of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in November 2012, by January 2013 the capital city, Bamako, was under threat from jihadist groups (Theroux-Benoni, 2013, 3). This led to the rapid creation of *Opération Serval*, France's largest unilateral deployment of troops since the end of the Cold War, which wrested control of Gao and Timbuktu from jihadist groups by the end of January (Chivvis, 2016, 10-1; Perret, 2014, 230). The establishment of more international missions - notably the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) - as well as a negotiated ceasefire between the government and Tuareg rebels paved the way for the signing of an agreement for peace in 2015 between Tuareg groups and the newly elected government under Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (Reeve, 2015). Underlying problems with the agreement - known as the Algiers Accord - as well as a lack of implementation, have seen violence continue and even deteriorate in the country (ICG, 2020). Moreover, despite the re-election of Keïta in 2018, successive coups of 2020 and 2021 have hindered any coherent, long-term government approach to managing the conflict and have aggravated political discord (Charbonneau, 2021, 1806). This ultimately led to the withdrawal of the French military mission, since renamed *Barkhane*, in 2022, with the political and security situation on a downward track (Wilén, Williams, 2022).

Today, the conflict is characterised by "deadly jihadist violence" in the centre and north of the country, including mass civilian killings and sexual violence (ICG, 2022). The Malian army is increasingly implicated in civilian killings, including summary executions, in the central regions of Ségou, Mopti and Koulikoro, seen as the epicentre of violence (HRW, 2022). Jihadists have increasingly resorted to indiscriminate remote weaponry, such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and begun hiding in civilian populations, recruiting children for the deployment of remote weaponry (Bencherif, 2020, 14). Moreover, *Barkhane*'s increasing resort to drone strikes in the latter period of its deployment increased the number of civilian deaths and has aggravated tensions in the conflict (Charbonneau, 2021, 1819-20). The violence often displaces people, with UNHCR identifying over 1.3 million people currently or formerly displaced in or outside the country (UNHCR, 2022). The conflict is rapidly changing as alliances, power distribution and territorial frontiers are often renegotiated (Moe, 2021, 7).
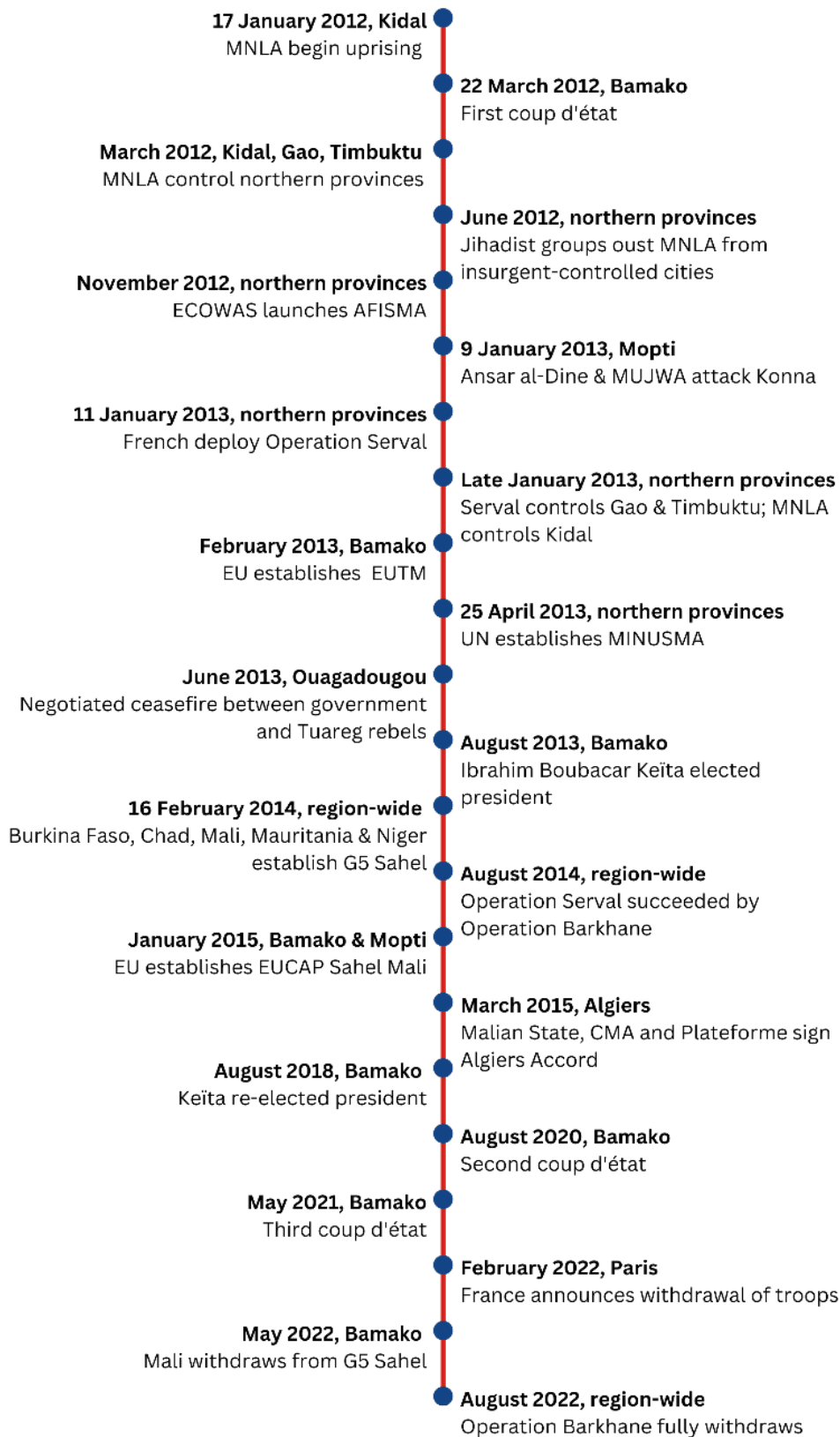
17 January 2012, Kidal
MNLA begin uprising

22 March 2012, Bamako
First coup d'état

March 2012, Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu
MNLA control northern provinces

June 2012, northern provinces
Jihadist groups oust MNLA from insurgent-controlled cities

November 2012, northern provinces
ECOWAS launches AFISMA

9 January 2013, Mopti
Ansar al-Dine & MUJWA attack Konna

11 January 2013, northern provinces
French deploy Operation Serval

Late January 2013, northern provinces
Serval controls Gao & Timbuktu; MNLA controls Kidal

February 2013, Bamako
EU establishes EUTM

25 April 2013, northern provinces
UN establishes MINUSMA

June 2013, Ouagadougou
Negotiated ceasefire between government and Tuareg rebels

August 2013, Bamako
Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta elected president

16 February 2014, region-wide
Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania & Niger establish G5 Sahel

August 2014, region-wide
Operation Serval succeeded by Operation Barkhane

January 2015, Bamako & Mopti
EU establishes EUCAP Sahel Mali

March 2015, Algiers
Malian State, CMA and Plateforme sign Algiers Accord

August 2018, Bamako
Keïta re-elected president

August 2020, Bamako
Second coup d'état

May 2021, Bamako
Third coup d'état

February 2022, Paris
France announces withdrawal of troops

May 2022, Bamako
Mali withdraws from G5 Sahel

August 2022, region-wide
Operation Barkhane fully withdraws

Figure 4: Timeline of key events in conflict in Mali from 2012.

This dynamic and volatile aspect of the conflict, with small armed groups jostling for control of strategic locations and splintering off from one another, was identified by three interviewees.[3] Armed groups often try to establish state-like systems and provide services, although they struggle to implement these systems. Despite ongoing security sector reform, Linda, a political programme officer for a UN agency in the security field, and Drissa, an advisor for a peace mediation programme, saw that the army remains weak and cannot control much of its territory, and it tends to increase tensions with the local populations where it does operate. This is significant given the inter- and intra-communitarian nature of much of the violence, with the root causes of a particular act of violence often not associated with the original, broader dispute. Five interviewees observed that the conflict thus represents many different disputes which vary from region to region and can often be difficult to distinguish from common criminality.[4] Given this, the overwhelming majority of interviewees identified an ongoing deterioration in the security situation.[5] This is especially so in the north and centre of the country, which includes: the three-borders region; Gao; Menaka; Mopti, where the conflict is more communitarian; and Kidal, where the conflict is more militarised.

Although the conflict began in the north, UN political analysts and Malian officials recognised that control of central regions is seen as strategically important as they represent key cross-border trafficking routes, a significant funding source for armed groups.[6] With border regions representing "transitional spaces", the conflict therefore has broader regional implications (Hüsken et al., 2015, 320). This indeed flows both ways. Moreover, following the recent coup in Burkina Faso, Emmanuel Tronc, a humanitarian negotiation advisor at the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, predicts that the spillover effects are likely to destabilise the Malian conflict further.

Overall, the Malian conflict has become increasingly militarised as "the Sahel region has been framed as a laboratory for contemporary interventionism" (Cold-Ravnkilde, Jacobsen, 2020, 867). Multiple stakeholders have tried to develop stabilisation strategies to prevent violence and extremism on the Malian territory, but the focus on a military solution independent of political evolutions may explain why each has thus far failed (Charbonneau, 2021).

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[3] Marie Lobjoy, a researcher and project coordinator for the UN in Geneva; Bakary, a Malian ambassador in Bamako; Ibrahim, a local political analyst for the UN in Bamako.

[4] Marie Lobjoy; Ousmane; Oumar; Ibrahim; Daouda.

[5] Marie Lobjoy; Ousmane; Souleymane; Boubacar; Oumar; Samba; Bakary; John; Ibrahim; Drissa; Emmanuel Tronc.

[6] Linda and Ibrahim, political analysts for two different UN programmes; Bakary, a Malian ambassador.

Principal Conflict Actors

Actors in the Malian conflict are either **Malian** or **international**. Malian actors can be divided into three categories: the **Malian State**; jihadist and non-jihadist **non-state armed groups**; and the **civil population**. That being said, the fluid relationships between these groups makes clear distinctions between them problematic. International actors are regional organisations, the UN and bilateral country partners to the Malian State. An overview of the main actors can be found in *Figure 5*.

Malian State

Given the frequency of military coups, which have inhibited the implementation of long-term policy and revealed a lack of unity between the government and the army, the Malian State cannot be considered a single, consistent actor in the conflict. That being said, its approach to the conflict has consistently been based on counter-terrorist measures, which, until recently, facilitated a long-term military alliance with France (Charbonneau, 2021). Critics have argued that the Malian State has sought to establish itself as a legitimate partner in the "Global War on Terror" in order to benefit from international military and economic assistance (Charbonneau, 2017a). Moreover, the State's broad categorisation of "terrorists", failing to distinguish between jihadist armed groups and Tuareg separatist fighters, reveals their broader political desire not to relinquish control of northern territories or allow for an independent Azawad (Charbonneau, 2019a, 455). This reflects the government's generally clientelist approach, interacting with those it supports and marginalising those who oppose it, which exacerbates tensions (Mbaye, 2020, 15). Unpunished human rights violations by the army, an inability to provide basic services in many regions and a lack of democratic legitimacy have all negatively affected citizens' views of the State, leaving them turning to other actors for support (Moe, 2021, 15).

Following the latest coup in 2021, the government has increasingly adopted a "populist, anti-Western stance," which ultimately led to the withdrawal of French forces earlier this year, as Russian mercenaries have moved in (ICG, 2022). The UN's independent expert on human rights in Mali described the current political climate as "poisonous" and "marked by suspicion and mistrust, with a continuous narrowing of civic space, the hardening of the Malian transitional authorities, and a malaise that does not spare international partners" (OHCHR, 2022). This speaks to three phenomena currently observed at the political level. Firstly, the state is becoming increasingly militarised (*cf.* RFI, 2022). Secondly, the government is deepening its international isolation, which is typified by the recent diplomatic fallout with Côte d'Ivoire following the Malian government's taking 49 Ivorian MINUSMA troops hostage in Bamako (Rich, 2022). Thirdly, it reveals the government's reluctance to revive the 2015 Algiers Accord (ICG, 2022).

Although the incidence of cooperation between jihadist and non-jihadist armed groups and of fighters representing different types of group depending on location makes an attempt to map all groups highly approximative (Lebovich, 2019), distinguishing between jihadist and non-jihadist non-state armed groups is likely more informative than the politically-loaded label "terrorist" (Charbonneau, 2019a, 456). That said, it is important to recognise the fluidity of the situation.

As regards jihadist groups, distinguishing between them is also inexact given evidence of both collaboration and competition between the different groups (Thompson, 2021a). Broadly speaking, however, they can be categorised as either Al Qa'eda-aligned groups, Islamic State-aligned groups, or more autonomous groups.[7] Both sets of groups seek to banish foreign armies from Mali and to defeat the Malian armed forces through a range of indiscriminate, terrorist-style tactics in order to impose strict Islamic law on the territory they control (*Ibid.*). They are both known to instrumentalise existing ethnic and socio-economic tensions to win support and recruit fighters, especially young people (Charbonneau, 2019c, 406). After a period of cooperation in 2019, more hard-line Islamic State fighters have sought to reduce the scope of their collaboration with Al Qa'eda groups moving forward (Thompson, 2021b).

Crucially, despite affiliation with international movements, "African jihadist movements are first and foremost local movements that arise from local social and political dynamics, and their struggle is primarily geared toward addressing local – not global – grievances" (Benjaminsen, Ba, 2019, 2). This explains to an extent the existence of other more autonomous groups which operate throughout these territories and spread into the south of the country (Lebovich, 2019). It also gives an indication of why Ibrahim, a UN political analyst based in Bamako, observed that the perpetrators of armed attacks often represent "unidentifiable" armed groups.

Non-jihadist armed groups, generally speaking, can be both pro- and anti-government. Most anti-government groups are signatory to the 2015 Algiers Accord as the Coalition des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA).[8] Pro-government groups are largely represented by the Plateforme.[9] The interlinkages between the groups are complex, which speaks to the common phenomenon of splintering,

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[7] The Al Qa'eda-aligned groups act under the umbrella of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen (JNIM) and include Ansar al-Din, Al Qa'eda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Katibat Macina (ECFRa, 2019). Whilst JNIM operates predominantly in the north and towards the centre of the country, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) operates more transnationally in the three-borders region of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso (Lebovich, 2019).

[8] The CMA includes the Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad (HCUA), the Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (MAA-CMA) and the MNLA. There is no unifying ideology to these groups, besides independence for Azawad. Some have also incorporated religious principles and partnered with jihadist groups (Lebovich, 2019).

[9] The Plateforme includes the Groupe d'Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (GATIA), a distinct part of the Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (MAA-Plateforme), and the Coordination des Mouvements et Fronts Patriotiques de Résistance (CMFPR-1), a distinct part of which is a member of the CMA. These groups are based variously on ethnic ties, anti-militant sentiment, or their own territorial ambitions endorsed by the government, and are not free from allegations of atrocities (Lebovich, 2019).

where groups separate from one another to gain their own slice of the pie with their own specific niche political aims.

Malian Civil Society

Although civil society has been caused tremendous suffering by the fighting, it cannot be universally ascribed a passive, peace-oriented stance vis-a-vis the conflict (Vogel, 2016, 4). Firstly, socio-economic factors play a key role in understanding civil society's stance, with a lack of economic opportunities in particular increasing young people's likelihood of joining jihadist groups (Benjaminsen, Ba, 2019, 12). Moreover, anti-government sentiment caused by human rights violations by State officials, corruption and the general impression of marginalisation encourage civilians to join jihadist groups (*Ibid*.). Equally, civilians are often ambivalent about international missions, which they may see as furthering international, neo-colonialist aims and disconnected from their reality on the ground - focussing only on counterterrorism in spite of civilians' need for basic services (Charbonneau, 2017, 409). These factors may cause civilian actors to defy or resist international actors. Ultimately, the nature of civil society's stance depends on the micro context given the array of groups - each with unique stances - that make up Malian society.

International Actors

At a regional level, the main actor offering development and security assistance to Mali has been the G5 Sahel created by Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad in 2014.[10] The G5 Sahel has been criticised for ignoring and bypassing existing regional arrangements and, through partnership with *Barkhane* and finance from the US, EU and Saudi Arabia, has arguably been used by EU and UN non-executive missions to realise their objectives (Moe, 2021, 12-3). The G5 Sahel's impact in Mali was ultimately curtailed in May 2022 when the Malian government withdrew from the cooperation, citing a lack of support for the current presidency (Le Temps, 2022).

At the international level, the main actor is the UN peace mission, MINUSMA.[11] MINUSMA's priorities are "to support stabilization efforts, to restore Malian State authority and, since 2015, to help in the implementation of the peace agreement" (Charbonneau, 2021, 1814). Although MINUSMA is intended as a peacekeeping mission, the distinction between peacekeeping and counter-terrorism is not

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[10] The first regional mission was in fact ECOWAS' AFISMA, which was deployed in 2013 and aimed at helping the Malian state combat terrorism. AFISMA's effectiveness was, however, limited by a lack of funding and resources (Theroux-Benoni, 2013, 3). It eventually transferred authority to MINUSMA in July 2013.

[11] The EU has also established itself as an international security actor in Mali through the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) and the EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP). The missions train Malian military and civilian security services and are principally motivated by the EU's desire to control migration flows towards Europe (Charbonneau, 2017a, 426; Cold-Ravnkilde, Nissen, 2020, 948; Frowd, 2021, 4).

always clear (Charbonneau, 2017a, 420). Due to its cooperation with *Barkhane*, the G5 Sahel and the Malian State, whose consent is necessary for its continued presence, MINUSMA can be perceived by Malian civil society as a conflict actor, undermining the mission's capacity to resolve the conflict impartially (Charbonneau, 2019a, 457). Whilst Linda and John described MINUSMA's use of quick impact projects to build trust with communities,[12] Emmanuel Tronc doubted that these gains could be sustained.

On the bilateral level, the most significant actor has been France through Operation *Barkhane*. Unlike *Serval* from which it took over in 2014, *Barkhane* had a transnational reach, allowing the mission to operate outside the confines of Mali alone, reflecting the transnational character of much of the conflict (Charbonneau, 2021, 1813). Whilst the exclusive focus on counterterrorism has led to criticism of the mission for its neglect of local developmental priorities, its pragmatic legitimacy - with military power and efficient decision-making - was broadly recognised (Sabrow, 2017, 171). *Barkhane*'s withdrawal in August 2022 amid increasing diplomatic tensions and a deteriorating security situation has made Russia, under the guise of the Wagner Group, Mali's main bilateral international security partner (Wilén, Williams, 2022, 2). Whilst there are concerns about the Wagner Group's excessive targeting of civilians (*cf.* ACLED, 2022), Drissa, a Bamako-based mediation advisor, indicated that the group's presence has not been noticeable. Emmanuel Tronc further noted that Russia is unlikely to contribute significantly to the conflict given its engagement in Ukraine.

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[12] Both political affairs officers from Europe.

Actors	Interests	Alliances	Main operations	Territorial focus	Evolution
Malian State	Keep control over its territory	Until recently: France and other international actors. Now: Wagner group	"War on Terror"	Mali	Mistrust international actors, lost international support, unable to control the country: partnership with mercenary groups
Non-state armed groups	Gain control over certain regions, banish foreign armies from Mali, implement Shariah law	Malian populations who consider the Malian government as illegitimate or incapable	Terrorism	First in the North but now also in the centre of Mali	Malian government's lack of control and legitimacy and international actors' retreat strengthen these groups
Malian civil population	Improve its socio-economic opportunities	Political or rebel groups defending their interests	Join/support political or rebel groups	Mali	Worsening of security situation affects them negatively
Operation Barkhane (France)	Fight against terrorism	Malian State, UN Security Council, UN agencies, MINUSMA, EU, G5 Sahel, US	"War on terror"	Sahel	Retreat from Mali in 2022
EUTM & EUCAP (EU)	Migration control	Barkhane mission, Malian State, G5 Sahel	Non-executive and non-cohesive mission: advisory role and training	Sahel	Expected mission contract renewal in 2023, difficulties because of the retreat of its main partners
MINUSMA (previously AFISMA)	Peacekeeping	Malian State, Barkhane mission, G5 Sahel, EU mission	Peacekeeping mission	Mali	Expected difficulties because of the French withdrawal
G5 Sahel	Security and development cooperation	Malian State, Barkhane mission, US, EU, Saudia Arabia	"War on Terror"	Sahel	Malian withdrawal from the G5 in 2022 and G5 retreat from Mali

Figure 5: Main conflict actors in Mali.

Principal Conflict Drivers

Reasons for violence often overlap and vary from one region to another - even from one instance of violence to the next. For this purpose, general drivers that may pertain to various contexts have been identified and are analysed below. They have been grouped into **political**, **social,** and **ecological** factors.

Political Factors

The roots of the Fourth Tuareg Uprising in 2012 have their origins in the foundation of the Malian state. Since independence from French colonial rule in 1960, the **government** has struggled to maintain effective control over northern territories and to provide basic services more generally (Zounmenou, 2013, 169). This has been coupled with perceived discrimination and racism from the

government towards the north, especially through policies that favoured agricultural communities which are prevalent in the south to the detriment of (northern) pastoralist communities, (Dermawan et al., 2019, 163). The government has continued to exacerbate tensions during the conflict. It has prioritised counterterrorism and neglected other fundamental state duties, including dispute resolution (Charbonneau, 2019a, 456). The government's failure to punish officials accused of human rights violations, as well as pervasive corruption have also undermined the population's trust in the authorities (Seter, Thiesen, Schilling, 2018, 185). To an extent, the conflict is therefore a crisis of legitimacy of the Malian state (Charbonneau, 2019c, 405; Seter et al., 2018, 185).

Regional instability also drives the conflict in Mali. The collapse of the regime in Libya was a critical enabling factor in the 2012 uprising, facilitating secessionists' access to arms (Mbaye, 2020, 15). Prior to the conflict, the permeability of Malian borders had also driven jihadist fighters into Mali from neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger, where governments exerted more pressure on the groups (Castelli, 2014, 63-4). As such, increasing regional instability, typified by the recent coup in Burkina Faso, will continue to exacerbate the Malian conflict.

The presence of **terrorist groups** is often framed by external security actors as the main driver in the Malian conflict. However, terrorism is often related to livelihood and social issues on the ground. In young people especially, religious ideology is more often a legitimation discourse than a motivating factor in itself (Interpeace et al, 2016). Jihadist groups exploit disputes between the State and the civilians to recruit combatants (Benjaminsen, Ba, 2019. 12). Whilst jihadist groups may provide basic services to the population in areas where the Malian State is unable to provide, this often comes at the price of the imposition of strict religious law through violent means, which prookes resistance from civilians and other armed groups (Charbonneau, 2019c, 406).

Social Factors

Ethnic tensions in Mali manifest themselves mostly in land-use conflicts as different ethnic groups use land for different and competing purposes: "the Fulani and the Tuareg tend to be pastoralists, while the Songhai and Bambara tend to be agriculturalists" (Mbaye, 2020, 16). Pastoralist communities are marginalised and do not benefit from the same rights as the farmers (Läderach et al., 2021, 1006). Some may join jihadist groups in order to defend their interests and resist domination by government elites and in order to protect themselves in inter-ethnic conflicts (Benjaminsen, Ba, 2019, 15).

Jihadist groups also take advantage from the **lack of economic opportunities** to recruit new members. New recruits joining jihadist groups receive around 150,000 FCFA (approximately 230 Euros), which can be decisive for Malians from low-income households (*Ibid*, 12). Socio-economic marginalisation is thus central to explain young people's participation in jihadist violence (Läderach et al., 2021, 1003).

With a sizable migrant population - those either fleeing persecution in neighbouring countries, transiting Mali to reach Europe, or internally displaced persons (IDPs) - **migration** can provoke conflict in Mali. This is often because it is seen to increase competition for land, jobs and public services, and it can also lead to ethnic conflicts (Läderach et al., 2021, 1004). Nevertheless, studies have shown that conflicts between the migrant and host populations are often caused more by lack of experience in dispute settlement than by the competition for resources (Seter, Thiesen, Schilling, 2018, 183-184). Social, political and economic factors are also key to determine if migration will lead to a conflict or not (Freeman, 2017, 352-3).

Ecological Factors

Semi-arid regions like the Sahel are particularly vulnerable to **climate change** (D'Errico, Bori, De La O Campos, 2021, 2). Rural communities who live off the land are directly dependent on climate conditions and have little savings to live off during hard times (Turner, 2010, 5). Whilst this is often seen as a new development, the Sahelian and Saharan climates have always been hostile and local populations are often resilient to climate hazards (D'Errico, Bori, De La O Campos, 2021, 2-3).

Climate change does have a negative impact on **food security** which is often thought to be a reason for conflict in the Sahel, although several studies have found no correlation between food availability and conflict emergence (Buhaug et al., 2015, 8; D'Errico, Bori, De La O Campos, 2021, 15). Food insecurity may thus amplify existing conflict risks without being a decisive driver in the Malian conflict in itself.

Elsewhere, desertification caused by an increasingly harsh climate reduces farmland and confines populations to a smaller area and certain communities, like pastoralist groups, have to adapt their lifestyle. In these circumstances **competition for land** is likely to occur. Despite the aggravating effect of desertification, land-use conflicts in Mali may in fact happen because of "the dominance of agricultural reform bringing restricted mobility for pastoralists, political negligence and rent seeking, and corruption among officials" (Läderach et al., 2021, 1006). The Malian State has been accused of being responsible for land-use conflict because of its clientelist approach, the abuse of power by the paramilitary Forest Service, and its agricultural policies that restrict pastoralists' movement (Benjaminsen, Ba, 2019, 5, 15).

Thus, climate change, food insecurity and competition for land exacerbate tensions and increase the risks of conflict. However, political, social and economic drivers are more fundamental factors that better explain the emergence of conflict in an area affected by climate change (Freeman, 2017, 360-1; Läderach et al., 2021, 1004; Mbaye, 2020, 12).

The Dialogue

2015 Algiers Accord

The most significant attempt at agreeing peace was made in 2015 in the Algeria-mediated Algiers Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.[13] The deal was agreed between the government, the pro-government Platform and the anti-government CMA. Jihadist groups and civil society were not included in negotiations or agreements. Despite regular meetings of the Comité de Suivi de l'Accord (CSA), almost no progress has been made in the implementation of any of the five key pillars of the agreement (ICG, 2020). Security commitments have been weak, institutional reform has been stiflingly limited and development and reconciliation have been overlooked (*Ibid*.). Principal among reasons for the lack of implementation is a lack of will among signatories, who are both happy with the status quo and see the agreement as having been imposed upon them by international actors (*Ibid*.). This is despite various interviewees recognising the status quo as the source of grievances and problems.[14] The fact that the Accord was only ever an agreement *for* peace, with much of the detail not having been decided, also gave parties cover to diverge from their commitments (Boutellis et al., 2017, 1).[15] Beyond this, as attested to by interviewees, there is a fundamental lack of trust at various levels. Oumar noted mistrust between the southern, Bamako elite and the northern elite - a feature of the country since independence.[16] Major General Abdoulay Coulibaly recognised mistrust between northern populations and the army.[17] Boubacar observed a lack of trust between Bamako and international actors.[18] The lack of implementation serves to undermine trust even further. On top of this, the constantly shifting array of incompatible demands from different groups who were regularly splintering meant the agreement could never satisfy all parties (Boutellis, 2017, 1).

In the face of these challenges, the Ara Pacis Initiative has been undertaking to revive the Algiers Accord and support the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP).[19] The NGO touted the signing of an "historic peace agreement" when it brought leaders of the CMA and the Plateforme together in Rome in 2021 to reaffirm their commitment to the Algiers Accord and to promoting social cohesion

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[13] Significant agreements included: keeping Mali as a unified, secular state; devolving power and finances to an elected Azawad assembly with greater investment in the region; greater involvement of northern Malians in national governance; a disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and reinsertion (DDRR) campaign in northern territories; and a national reconciliation process with a commitment to investigate war crimes and human rights abuses from all parties (Reeve, 2015, 1-2).

[14] Oumar, a UN political affairs officer based in Menaka; Salif and Robert, European agency representatives based in Bamako.

[15] This qualification was also highlighted by John.

[16] Oumar is a political affairs officer based in Menaka.

[17] Major General Coulibaly is responsible for security sector reform in Mali.

[18] Boubacar is a technical coordinator for a local NGO.

[19] Ara Pacis Initiative is an Italian NGO supported by the Italian government.

(Ara Pacis, 2021). Notably absent from the meeting was a representative of the Malian government, who pulled out late in the day (Agence Anadolu, 2022). The weight of this declaration, the extent to which it constitutes a peace agreement, the genuine interest of signatories, and ultimately the effect it will have on the conflict remain unclear.

Other Mediation Attempts

Beyond high-level dialogue, there are numerous non-governmental actors involved in mediation in Mali, both local and international.

On the local front, traditional communicators, known as griots represented under RECOTRADE, have been used on numerous occasions by the government to mediate, notably during the 2013 mutiny, and by MINUSMA to allow for elections (Hoffman, 2017, 114-6). Whilst some interviewees with a Bamako perspective called for increased involvement of griots and for the need to take the practice more seriously,[20] Oumar pointed out that, on the evidence, such traditional mediation has failed and only serves to reinforce the status quo - the source of the problem in the first place.[21] When considered alongside the State's clientelism, the practice cannot be considered impartial.

On the international side, several international NGOs are active in mediation in Mali (see Figure 6). On the basis of interviews with advisors in the mediation field and desk research, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) appears to be a key actor, having focussed on community reconciliation.[22] This has included bringing together different ethnic and refugee communities, different faith groups, and groups who use land and other resources for different purposes (HD, 2021). Mediation typically takes the form of conferences followed by the signing of an agreement by the actors.

Another main international actor is the Geneva-based International Organization for Peacebuilding (Interpeace). Interpeace's mediation in Mali is notable for its partnership with the Institut Malien de Recherche Action pour la Paix (IMRAP) on various projects. Projects have included field research, the promotion of an inclusive dialogue, and support in the implementation of the Algiers Accord (Interpeace, 2022). Interpeace has also been active in facilitating cross-border dialogue and offering ex-combattants training in communication (*Ibid.*).

Whilst both organisations and many international mediation organisations alike often report success, they are often seen to favour local faction leaders as opposed to experts on the ground, which has allowed such leaders to profit from the attention to the detriment of the people they claim to represent (Chebli, 2020, 22-3).

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[20] Moussa, a former field assistant for an international NGO; and Bakary, a Malian ambassador.
[21] Oumar is a political affairs officer based in Menaka.
[22] Samba, professor and researcher in a Malian university, advisor to the Malian State; Drissa, a mediation advisor for a European peace mediation organisation.

Actors	Mediation in Mali	Description of the project
Ara Pacis Initiative	YES	The Rome Declaration is an attempt to revive 2015 Accords and support thepermanent strategic framework.
Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)	YES	HD has launched mediation projects focussing on community reconciliation (inter-religious dialogue, agro-pastoral mediation, inter-communautarian dialogue).
Crisis Management Initiative (CMI)	Unknown	The CMI has peace and mediation programmes in Sub-saharan Africa but does not appear to be working in Mali.
DCAF	NO	DCAF is working on projects in Mali to assist the Malian government in the security system reforms but nothing related to mediation.
Interpeace	YES	In collaboration with the Institut Malien de Recherche Action pour la Paix (IMRAP), Interpeace provides conflict analyses and support to international actors who want to develop more participatory and inclusive peace programmes. They also have their own mediation programmes to promote inclusive dialogue.
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	YES	NRC is mostly working on humanitarian projects. However, it also offers programmes to prevent and resolve conflicts through a neutral restoration of communication between belligerents, training sessions for local actors involved in conflict resolution and ensure regular monitoring of the implementation peace agreements.
Promediation	NO	Promediation used to work on the implementation of the implementation of the Algiers Agreement and the dialogue between Fulani communities and the Malian government. However, due to disagreements with the Malian government, Promediation had to leave the country.
Search for Common Ground	YES	Search for Common Ground engages with youth to contribute to the implementation of peace agreements. For instance, they have created radio programmes in which young people can talk about local conflicts and areas of common ground.
Swisspeace	NO	Swisspeace has not launched any mediation programme in Mali. However, until 2018, it supported the Commission for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation of Mali (CVJR) with documentation work.
Think Peace Sahel	YES	Think Peace has launched a mediation programme in the the community of Niono to promote communication between IDPs and the host community.

Figure 6: An overview of the main international actors involved in mediation in Mali.

Opportunity for Peace Mediation by the GCSP

For the majority of interviewees, there does seem to be space for the GCSP to engage in mediation in Mali and appetite among Malians, provided certain conditions.[23] Interviewees working for the UN, European agencies or international NGOs as well as for local NGOs stressed that mediation projects can only be successful by working with **local partners**.[24] Moreover, local staff of UN agencies, European missions and international peace mediation organisations emphasised the need for **transparency**.[25] Significantly, whilst mediation is seen as an important tool, interviewees suggested a need for it to be done in **non-traditional ways.**[26] Traditional methods where community leaders are gathered and sometimes paid for a conference are seen to have proven insufficient in solving disputes and creating meaningful changes in conflicting communities.[27]

John and Emmanuel Tronc, both Europeans no longer based in Mali, however, expressed scepticism about the realistic appetite for mediation in Mali. Certain actors may be more interested in being funded and sustaining their lives than in being genuine partners in mediation. On top of this, Emmanuel Tronc noted that the general lack of education among conflict actors makes informed mediation difficult. More fundamentally, he saw that the downward trajectory of the conflict, especially with the increasing withdrawal of international actors further destabilising the security situation, means the window for mediation may be closing.

On balance, Mali presents a complicated picture for mediators. There appears to be an appetite for mediation, although such an appetite is perhaps not shared by principal conflict actors - the State and non-state armed groups - who continue to fight. Appetite for mediation is therefore likely to be keener in civil society actors. Given the significant overlap between these conflict actors and civil society, engaging with the latter could have an effect on the former and may ultimately prevent actors from entering into the conflict.

Assessment of the Findings and Possible Niche

Niches and Entry Points

Arriving on the field with a clear entry point or mediation programme is unlikely to be successful for two reasons. First of all, IOs' mandates are contingent on approval from the Malian government. Major General Coulibaly explained that the Malian government is more likely to deliver

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[23] Marie Lobjoy; Ousmane; Boubacar; Moussa; Samba; Bakary; Ibrahim; Daouda; Drissa; Salif.
[24] Marie Lobjoy; Ousmane; Boubacar; Moussa; John.
[25] Ousmane; Souleymane; Drissa; Salif.
[26] Ibrahim.
[27] Oumar.

a mandate to international stakeholders who come with a broad agenda, willing to adapt their mission in relation to needs identified by the Malian State. Robert, a project coordinator for a European agency, explained that international actors who arrive in Mali with a precise and inflexible mandate might arouse the suspicion of the Malian government, who would fear a hidden political agenda that runs counter its interests. Second, to gain the trust of the local communities and increase the chances of success, the mediation process should be locally owned and driven. Representatives of local NGOs, IOs and the Malian State agree on the fact that future mediation actors should listen to the population's concerns and demands in order to understand the local conflict and what issues they want to be mediated.[28] Several interviewees, who have experience working directly with local communities, mentioned that many conflict situations arise from different communities being forced to live together; everyday issues that negatively impact people's lives should be at the centre of mediation programmes.[29] As each region has its unique conflict dynamics, communities expect to have a unique solution adapted to their needs.

Nevertheless, two populations that should be the target of future mediation programmes have been identified: **internally displaced persons** (IDPs) and **young people**. Despite the important role of these two groups in the conflict, current mediation attempts have failed or insufficiently oriented their programmes towards them. Moreover, Malian and non-Malian interviewees have emphasised the need for special attention to gender equality in mediation programmes in Mali.[30]

Internally Displaced Persons

The Malian conflict has resulted in significant population displacements. Drissa, a local advisor for a mediation organisation, noted that IDPs settle around urban centres in the Centre and South of the country. Whilst they are not the root cause of the conflict in Mali, they play an important role in fuelling it. Tensions with host communities often arise because of the State's failure to support their integration and cohabitation with local communities (Freeman, 2017, 352-3). Thus, Drissa and Marie Lobjoy both noted that their arrival is perceived by the locals as additional pressure on natural resources and economic opportunities, which increases grievances. A conflict analyst and two local partners working in IOs identified the mediation of conflicts between local populations and IDPs as a niche in the current Malian context.[31] Peace mediation programmes with IDPs would take place in urban centres in the

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[28] Soulaymane, a programme officer of a local NGO; Oumar, a UN political affairs officer; Bakary, a Malian ambassador; Ibrahim, a UN political analyst.
[29] Boubacar, a technical coordinator for a local NGO; Moussa, a former field assistant for an international NGO; Salif, a project coordinator for a European agency and former project coordinator for a European peace mediation organisation.
[30] John and Emmanuel Tronc from Europe; Daouda and Drissa from Mali.
[31] Marie Lobjoy; Ousmane; Drissa.

centre and south of the country.[32] Such programmes support the Malian State in dealing with these problems in an area out of its control. Youth and women are also disproportionately present in the growing IDP population, meaning IDP programmes would also tackle gender issues in the country (CARE International, 2021).

The GCSP would not be the first organisation to launch a mediation programme focussing on the integration of IDPs (*c.f.* Thinkpeace Sahel, 2022), but very few international mediators work on IDP issues in relation to the scale of the problem. Despite this, dealing with IDP issues requires specific expertise and experience, that means such a project is not suited to the GCSP's strengths.[33] That being said, if the Centre were willing to bring in and rely extensively on external experts from different fields, a programme could feasibly address the above issues.

Young People

Approximately 97% of the population of Mali is under 65 years old and 47% is less than 15 years old but most existing mediation projects have sought to engage with community leaders and elders who are perceived as local authority (World Bank, 2021). This is despite Ibrahim, a UN political affairs officer, asserting that between 60-70% of combatants in Mali are young people. It also neglects the potential disconnect between group leaders involved in mediation or negotiations, often in urban centres, and the combatants who experience and perpetrate the violence on the ground: leaders and fighters may no longer be in contact with one another.[34] Two reasons have been given for the high proportion of youth involvement in hostilities. Firstly, Linda identified that a lack of job prospects, especially in areas where there is no state presence, pushes young people towards armed groups.[35] Secondly, two interviewees from the development and humanitarian fields suggested that lack of education can contribute to young people joining armed groups.[36] Indeed, it is estimated that over 500,000 children are out of school across the country due to closures; in parts of the region of Mopti, over 60% of schools are closed (Humanitarian Response, 2022). As a result, engaging young people in mediation is an issue that should be addressed and a potential niche that was explicitly recognised by Ibrahim, a UN political analyst, and Drissa, a local advisor for a peace mediation organisation.

The mediation organisation Search for Common Ground is currently undertaking projects promoting youth engagement. Projects consist of involving young people in conflict analysis to

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[32] These locations decrease security risks and unpredictability linked to the expansion of armed groups' control, confrontations between jihadists and the army and the use of communication channels.
[33] This point has been raised during discussions with the GCSP.
[34] This fact was illuminated by John, a UN political affairs officer, and Emmanuel Tronc, a humanitarian negotiation expert.
[35] Linda, a UN political officer in the security field.
[36] Ibrahim and Emmanuel Tronc.

contribute to the implementation of peace agreements (Search For Common Ground, 2017) and creating radio programmes in which young people talk about how they have been affected by local conflicts and about areas of common ground (Search For Common Ground, 2022). Similarly, Interpeace and IMRAP have worked on promoting youth perspectives in conflict analysis. Interpeace found that the Malian population's perception of the importance of young people's perspective in politics increased dramatically after this project (Interpeace et al., 2016). That being said, youth participation in political decision-making, however, has been decidedly absent.

Given this, the GCSP could develop a project that increases youth participation in the political process. Encouraging youth political participation was identified as a potential niche by Ibrahim. By facilitating dialogue between a variety of youth groups or leaders in a particular region and national political actors, the GCSP could empower disenfranchised young people and ensure that their concerns are being met. Creating youth pathways into political discussions would also bring the reality of different conflict dynamics and conflict drivers into political decision-making. This would help produce more nuanced and empathic policies that grapple with root causes of conflict, instability and violence at a regional level, rather than seeing counter-terrorism as an end in itself.

A youth-centred programme could also be designed to take advantage of the GCSP's strengths and expertise. A potential avenue to explore is organising workshops between Malian political figures and Malian youth leaders to discuss recruitment into non-state armed groups and what young people need to discourage them from joining. The GCSP already has access to several significant figures in the Malian government through its Global Fellowship Initiative. Youth actors can be identified and contacted through the network created through this project. With the epicentre of the conflict in the centre and north of the country and with Mali's history of discrimination by southern elites against those away from the capital, it would be important to cooperate with young people from the more conflict-affected areas. Such workshops would not only see policies that promote peace being generated by affected persons, they would also serve as an important opportunity to build trust between Bamako-based politicians and potential conflict actors.

Challenges for Future Mediation Attempts

Interviewees mentioned several challenges that could be encountered by international actors launching mediation activities in Mali. These possible obstacles can be classified into three categories: security, legitimacy and organisation.

The **security** situation appears to be a major challenge for internationals and Malians working in development and peacebuilding. Interviewees from multiple backgrounds said that the situation on

the ground is dangerous, very volatile and unpredictable.[37] Certain regions are not accessible because of the conflict, or the access has to be negotiated with armed groups who control the area.[38] It is necessary to have contacts on the ground and, even in that case, access is often temporary and has to be renegotiated. Thus, interviewees acknowledged that it is difficult to have a well-defined mission because of the changing context.

Being considered as a **legitimate** mediator also appears to be challenging. On the one hand, international actors willing to work in Mali have to be considered legitimate by the Malian government. The Malian state is very reluctant to welcome actors with a political agenda and reform programmes or to allow international actors to work with armed groups. Boubacar, a technical coordinator for a Malian NGO working closely with international actors, attributed the withdrawal of international actors such as Barkhane to recent tensions between the Malian State and the international community and the erosion of trust. On the other hand, to obtain results, mediation actors also have to be seen as legitimate by local communities. Various interviewees noted that the need to go through the Malian State and the State's preselection of actors involved in mediations programmes have a negative impact on communities' perception of the mediators' impartiality and transparency, both key to being considered legitimate.[39] To that end, communication with local communities about the goal, approach and results is a key aspect of any mediation programme, although Boubacar mentioned that the variety of languages in Mali might hamper cooperation and communication with local people. Communities' trust in a new mediation actor depends on the results of its programmes, but also on what has been done before by other international actors. For instance, an interviewee, who comes from a Tuareg community, mentioned that Swiss organisations are perceived to unduly favour Tuareg movements and defend minorities after several Swiss organisations decided to work on the protection of the rights of these communities in 2014. This might have a negative impact on the perceived impartiality of the GCSP.

Challenges at an **organisational** level also constrain the development of peace mediation programmes in Mali. A range of interviewees deplore the lack of coordination among the actors working in mediation.[40] Besides the mandatory validation of IOs' mandates by the Malian government limits mediators' engagement and cooperation with diverse actors. Malian staff of international projects acknowledged that the unstable political context and frequent military coups might also negatively

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[37] Marie Lobjoy, a researcher and UN project coordinator based in Geneva; Ousmane, a UN project officer based in Bamako; Souleymane, a programme director in a local NGO based in Timbuktu; Moussa, a former field assistant for an international NGO; Ibrahim, a UN political analyst based in Bamako; Salif and Robert, two project coordinators for a European agency based in Bamako.

[38] Marie Lobjoy; Moussa; John; Ibrahim; Salif and Robert.

[39] Marie Lobjoy; Linda; Boubacar; Oumar; Samba; Bakary; John; Ibrahim; Daouda; Drissa; Salif and Robert; Emmanuel Tronc.

[40] Samba, a Malian professor; Bakary, a Malian ambassador; Emmanuel Tronc, a research analyst for the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative.

affect IOs' mandate.[41] At a community level, several interviewees recognised that the application of Sharia law and, more generally, significant gender inequality limit mediators' potential range of activity.[42] Recruitment of local staff can also be difficult. Various interviewees from Europe and from Mali emphasised that understanding traditional hierarchy structures and identifying community leaders who are considered legitimate by the locals can be difficult.[43] People without authentic interests, who seek financial gain and are not genuinely interested in peace-making, have to be identified and kept out of the process.[44]

Assumptions

Before launching a mediation programme, the following steps should be taken:

1. The Ministère de la Réconciliation Nationale should be contacted to discuss and obtain a mandate from the Malian authorities. Salif and Robert explained that administrative cooperation in this way increases the chances of a long-term, sustainable mandate and reduces the potential impact caused by changes of government and other political shocks. The Malian government is likely to provide contact with local authorities that could be involved in the mediation programme and help coordination with other stakeholders working in the peace mediation field.[45]

2. Once the local scope of the mission has been determined with the Malian Government, credible local partners should be identified. Almost all interviewees mentioned that local partners' knowledge of the context, recent evolutions of the conflict and understanding of traditional, local mediation techniques should be the starting point of the programme. Working with local NGOs or CSOs could facilitate the identification of reliable local partners.

3. The mediation programme should be designed to address the common needs of conflicting parties and aimed at providing them with a public good, as three project coordinators emphasised.[46] It increases the chances of success because local actors are more likely to be committed to the project if it meets their needs. Besides, implementing a mediation programme which aims to respond to the needs of the communities shows that the meditation actor is not only the Malian government's puppet. All conflict parties are more likely to perceive the facilitator as being neutral and impartial.

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[41] Ousmane; Drissa.
[42] Boubacar; John; Daouda; Drissa; Emmanuel Tronc.
[43] Boubacar; Samba; John; Daouda.
[44] John; Daouda; Emmanuel Tronc.
[45] Bakary, a Malian ambassador; John, a former political affairs officer for the UN and a European agency; Abdoulaye Coulibaly, a major general; Daouda, a UN field assistant.
[46] Boubacar; Moussa; Daouda.

The mediation programme should then ensure the following characteristics:

Inclusive	Mediation programmes should make extra efforts to include as many actors as possible, with interviewees identifying the importance of including women and young people.[47]
Long-term	Only long-term programmes can create sustained change in the conflict.[48]
Innovative	One interviewee who has worked in peace mediation programmes targeting inter-communitarian conflicts explained that audio-visual means, such as small videos, were used to recreate dialogue between conflict parties.[49] According to him, the lack of communication is one of the main issues in inter-communitarian conflicts and this kind of tool is very useful to de-escalate tensions and restart the dialogue.
Monitored	It is necessary to monitor the implementation of the project or the peace agreement, in cooperation with local actors. Mechanisms to enforce compliance with the agreement should be agreed upon during the negotiations. Five interviewees emphasised that the lack of monitoring mechanisms from most inter-communitarian peace agreements is a reason for their failure.[50]
Frequently reassessed	It is necessary to be ready to interrupt the mediation programme if local actors do not show any genuine interest in mediation - as well as to restart it when actors are truly ready.[51]

Potential Mediation Attempt Assessment

How other players would view GCSP engagement

GCSP mediation programmes would not compete with the UN or European missions but rather complement them. The willingness of some interviewees working for the UN and EU programmes to share their conflict analysis with the GCSP demonstrates that they do not feel threatened by the possible arrival of a new actor in peace mediation.[52]

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[47] Ibrahim, UN political analyst; Drissa, mediation advisor.
[48] Samba, professor and advisor to the Malian State; Bakary, Malian ambassador; John, UN political affairs officer.
[49] Salif.
[50] Souleymane; Boubacar; Daouda; Salif; Robert.
[51] John raised this point in relation to his experience negotiating with Malian authorities.
[52] Salif and Robert, working for a European agency.

Interviewees working for local NGOs and CSOs said that they are often interested in cooperating with IOs in order to obtain funding and expertise, and, in exchange, share their understanding of the context and local network.[53]

According to the Malian officials interviewed, the Malian government welcomes peace mediation initiatives, as long as they do not question its agenda or aim to reform its structure.[54] They mentioned that projects launched by international stakeholders should not compete with what the Malian State does but support it when it is not able to fulfil its duties.

Several Malian interviewees describe the Malian people as "hospitable" and generally open to participate in mediation programmes, as long as the programmes are transparent and they feel that they have agency in the process.[55] The Malian population generally recognises that violence will not solve the conflict and that the Malian government is not able to respond to the needs of its population, requiring the assistance of international actors.

It is more difficult to assess the stance of other mediation actors. On the one hand, Drissa, who works in mediation for a western organisation, said that despite several international NGOs conducting similar mediation programmes, the large number of inter-communitarian conflicts and the vastness of the Malian territory mean that they do not compete with each other. On the other hand, Emmanuel Tronc explained that cooperation among mediation organisations in Mali is almost non-existent because they see each other as competitors, despite their claims to the contrary.

Risks - What could go wrong and how it would impact the GCSP

The most striking risk for any international organisation involved in Mali is the dangerous security situation, as many IO staff noted.[56] IEDs, armed attacks and abduction are all possibilities.

On a project-specific front, mediation projects risk banishment from the country if they are seen to act outside of the mandate granted to them by the government. This is known to have happened to Promediation.[57] Beyond the failure of the project, it is likely to cause stigmatisation for the organisation.

Assuming the project complies with government stipulations, the GCSP could become instrumentalised by actors for their own political gain, as two interviewees with experience in project coordination in Mali warned.[58] This problem would be particularly acute were the GCSP to promote the provision of public services in areas under armed-group control - although access to such areas is likely to be restricted by the government.

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[53] Souleymane; Boubacar.
[54] Bakary, an ambassador; Major General Abdoulaye Coulibaly.
[55] Ousmane; Samba; Drissa.
[56] Marie Lobjoy; Ousmane; Souleymane; Moussa; Ibrahim; Salif and Robert.
[57] Salif and Robert offered details of this development.
[58] John; Emmanuel Tronc.

The GCSP may also lose credibility in the eyes of some local actors if it is not seen to obtain results, according to Salif and Robert. Results, however, may be hard to establish, especially given that conflict may re-erupt if peace agreements are not matched by development. They may also be jeopardised if the GCSP is too visible an actor on the ground, which will give local actors the impression that peace is being imposed by an external actor, as Emmanuel Tronc alerted.

On an external front, John put forward that publicising details of peace agreements and even the mere signing of peace agreements could put signatories at risk. Being seen to cooperate with mediators and international actors may make local actors targets for armed groups.

Impact - What realistic impact for the GCSP mediation activities

The assessment of the impact that the mediation programme could have depends on how success is understood. As with many other aspects of the project, it should be defined in cooperation with the local communities. Emmanuel Tronc suggested that success should be defined as "permitting people to find their own resolutions" and should be measured by looking at what has improved. That said, John stressed the need to establish humble and achievable goals. On a similar level, Salif and Robert saw that community-level agreements can have an important impact on reducing violence in a region and on improving communities' access to natural resources.

Given these three factors and the GCSP's limited capacity for involvement in Mali, a proposed mediation project should be small-scale, focussing on sub-regions and communities rather than a wider national dialogue. The proposed programme - workshops bringing young people and government decision-makers together to create youth-centred solutions - cannot be considered a "one-size-fits-all" approach that can be replicated across the country. The specificity of challenges faced in each region means that workshops would have to focus on different issues in different locations. Government involvement therefore does not mean that the programme should be nationwide. Rather, it should be seen as a way to promote regional youth perspectives amongst decision-makers with the ability to implement policies in those regions. Workshops would have to be organised in various communities across a targeted region to reflect the localised character of needs. Having a narrower focus thus improves the chances of local actors' developing and agreeing on their own solutions to their own problems. Ultimately, incorporating local youth voices and the national government could build trust between these actors, reduce the influence of non-state armed groups and improve human security in the selected region.

Venezuela

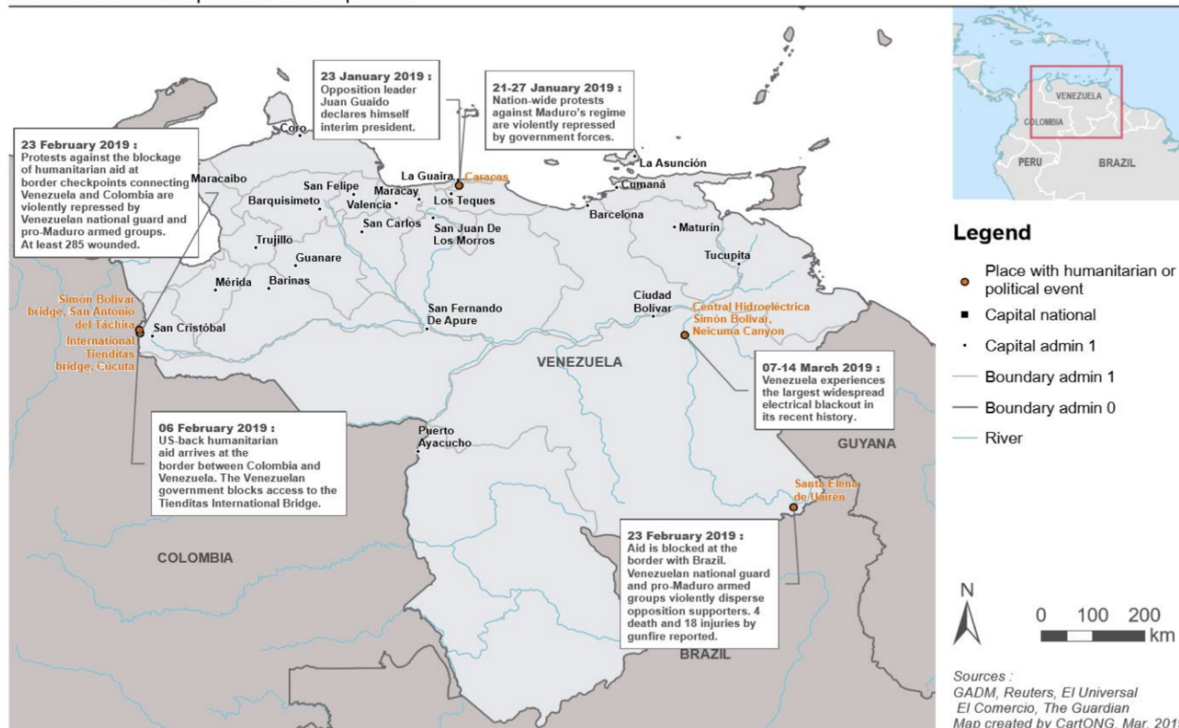*Figure 7: Venezuela: Humanitarian and Political Developments (Acaps, 2019).*

Operational Context

The Conflict

Overview

Venezuela is currently facing tense **political instability and a socio-economic meltdown**, which includes hyperinflation, violent crime, political repression, widespread corruption, and food shortages, resulting in **massive emigration** from the country to its neighbours and triggering a humanitarian crisis in them. The socioeconomic and political turmoil began during the presidency of Hugo Chávez and worsened during Nicolás Maduro's. The latter has grabbed power and dismantled democratic checks and balances from 2013 until today.

Despite the current shared perception that the economy is better than in 2017, as mentioned by Manuel an international relation specialist, social inequality is getting higher. Hence, there is a lack of economic opportunities due to the lack of juridic security. The process with the government to open a business is long, and bureaucratic and needs to present several documents, as the political science and business undergraduate named Lucas mentioned. Despite this, there is **high insecurity** that someone in

the government will take possession of the company/restaurant or business. As an example, Hugo Chavez expropriated the commercial centre el Sabil de la Candelaria 14 years ago promising it would become a hospital or a school (Adn Cuba, 2022). As a compromise to peace in 2022, Maduro gave it back to the rightful owners.
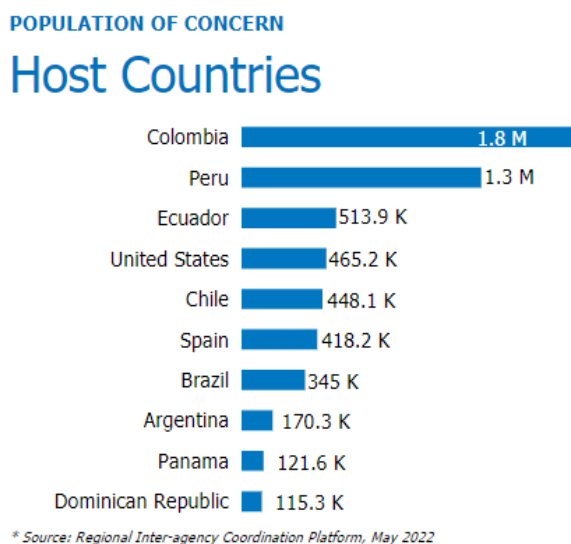
POPULATION OF CONCERN

Host Countries

Country	Value
Colombia	1.8 M
Peru	1.3 M
Ecuador	513.9 K
United States	465.2 K
Chile	448.1 K
Spain	418.2 K
Brazil	345 K
Argentina	170.3 K
Panama	121.6 K
Dominican Republic	115.3 K

* Source: Regional Inter-agency Coordination Platform, May 2022

Figure 8: Host countries of Venezuelan migrants (UNHCR, 2022).

Despite some progress as mentioned above, the political situation continues to be very critical. For instance, the Elections of the National Assembly in December 2021 were a significant concern for the European Union and the United States of America due to the lack of credibility, transparency, and compatibility with international standards (Venezuelan Analysis, 2021). Although there is great discontentment in the society, the opposition through the Democratic Alliance has little space in the national structure and many times don't have their political parties recognised by the government, as Camilo, an international relations undergraduate explained. **That means that even if they win elections, they are overruled**. The restoration of legitimate and representative state institutions as well as urgent economic reform is vital for the peaceful resolution of the political crisis and the reduction of mass emigration.

As a result, **more than six million people fled Venezuela**, more than 950,000 requested asylum worldwide and over 186,000 were recognised as refugees (UNHCR, 2022). Currently, it is the second largest migration flow internationally seeking assistance from countries such as Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the socioeconomic crisis and the lack of essential services, food and medicine, and has contributed to greater levels of violence and insecurity for the Venezuelan people (UNHCR, 2022).

Migration levels reduced in 2022, a probable effect of the perceived economic enhancement. However, the number of people that search for new opportunities in other countries is still high due to the poverty and precarity in Venezuelan society, as explained by Manuel and Camilo. However, it leaves groups and individuals vulnerable to human trafficking. In many routes, Venezuelans are stopped by national authorities and are prohibited from leaving the country. Named "*coyotes*", the human

traffickers require payment to take people fleeing the country on unusual routes or to obtain the clearance of the national authorities for them to leave (Portal Holofote, 2017). During fieldwork in Pacaraima, Brazil, on the Venezuelan border, one of the authors of this report saw municipal guards and military "accompanying" people until they reached Brazilian soil.
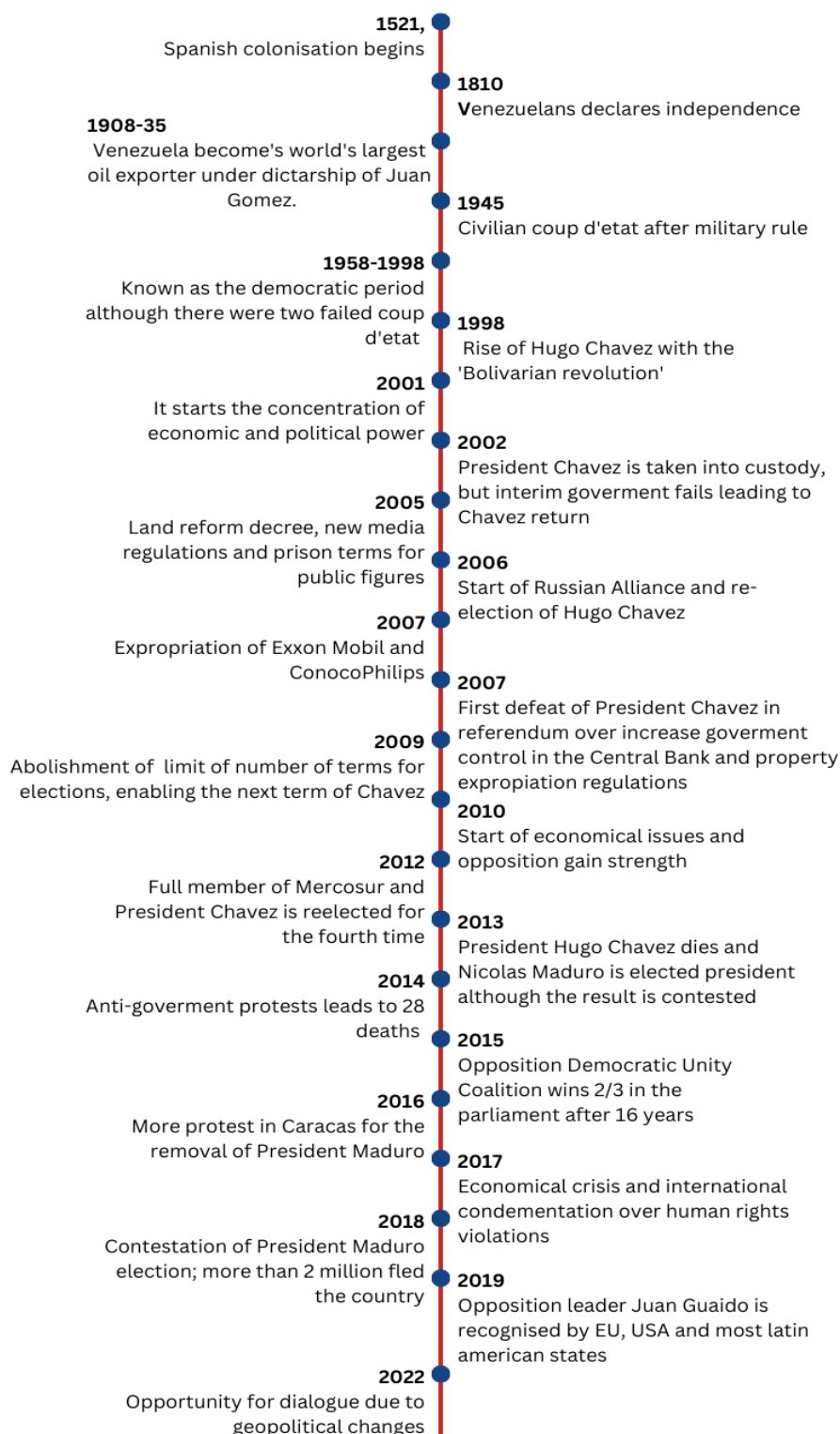
1521,
Spanish colonisation begins

1810
Venezuelans declares independence

1908-35
Venezuela become's world's largest oil exporter under dictarship of Juan Gomez.

1945
Civilian coup d'etat after military rule

1958-1998
Known as the democratic period although there were two failed coup d'etat

1998
Rise of Hugo Chavez with the 'Bolivarian revolution'

2001
It starts the concentration of economic and political power

2002
President Chavez is taken into custody, but interim goverment fails leading to Chavez return

2005
Land reform decree, new media regulations and prison terms for public figures

2006
Start of Russian Alliance and re-election of Hugo Chavez

2007
Expropriation of Exxon Mobil and ConocoPhilips

2007
First defeat of President Chavez in referendum over increase goverment control in the Central Bank and property expropiation regulations

2009
Abolishment of limit of number of terms for elections, enabling the next term of Chavez

2010
Start of economical issues and opposition gain strength

2012
Full member of Mercosur and President Chavez is reelected for the fourth time

2013
President Hugo Chavez dies and Nicolas Maduro is elected president although the result is contested

2014
Anti-goverment protests leads to 28 deaths

2015
Opposition Democratic Unity Coalition wins 2/3 in the parliament after 16 years

2016
More protest in Caracas for the removal of President Maduro

2017
Economical crisis and international condemnation over human rights violations

2018
Contestation of President Maduro election; more than 2 million fled the country

2019
Opposition leader Juan Guaido is recognised by EU, USA and most latin american states

2022
Opportunity for dialogue due to geopolitical changes

Figure 9: Timeline of key events in Venezuela from 1521.

36

Principal Conflict Actors

Venezuela is one of the countries in South America that is part of the Amazon basin, and it possesses **several natural resources** such as the largest oil reserves and precious metals in its territory. The geopolitical aspect of the state is not only due to its resources but also its close localization to the United States and its "area of influence". After the rupture of the relationship between Venezuela and the US, the Venezuelan government sought help from Russia and China and maintained its support for Cuba. With the mismanagement of the economy and democratic governance from the Chavez and Maduro regimes, the wide assistance from Beijing and Moscow had a sum of 90 billion dollars in 2019, varying from economic loans to military contracts (Clavijo, 2019).

While Beijing and Moscow aim to diversify their economic relationships (Mijares & Creutzfeldt, 2020), Russia strives also to expand its military ties and assert itself as a main player in the energy field. Not only was it able to get oil and gas at discounted prices, but its companies also got projects and licences to extract the resources in Venezuela (Clavijo, 2019). However, both countries have a military presence in

Figure 10: Countries supporting Maduro VS Guaido (Bloomberg Research, 2019).

Venezuela being a Chinese satellite tracking facility and a Russian cyber presence. Hence, for the past 15 years, Russia demonstrated assertively its influence by sending its ships, such as the Peter the Great (nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser) and others for joint exercises with Venezuelan forces (The Economist, 2022).

Despite the good relationship between Caracas with Moscow, Beijing, and Havana, the attention to the Ukrainian crisis, especially from Russia, is creating an opportunity for the engagement of different actors with Venezuela. The Biden presidency adopted a more multilateral and less pressured posture, giving space for more interaction with Venezuela to counter the Chinese and Russian presence in its area of influence. For instance, the US is visiting Caracas for bilateral talks. Thus, Venezuelan oil is being regarded by European countries as an alternative to Russian oil and gas since the US eased some sanctions allowing gas sales to Spanish and Italian companies (Bloomerang, 2022). However, further assistance will depend on the negotiations in Mexico.

On the national level, the main division in society is those in favour of the Maduro government and the opposition. It is important to notice that many parts of Venezuela are controlled by **militias** and **armed groups**, many linked to the government and the **narcotraffic,** as explained by Manuel and Andrea, the opposition ambassador's secretary. The opposition is not a homogeneous group composed of many political parties and independent politicians that have many initiatives and proposals. One recurrent point of the interviewees was that the main problem to change the current regime is the lack of cohesion in the opposition and what would be the best strategy and actions to (re)build the national institutions to return to democracy.

Actors	Interests	Alliances	Territorial Focus	Evolution
The Maduro Administration (Regime)	Keep Power and Control in the country. Remain united	Russia, China, Turkey, Cuba, Argentina, Guyana, Iran, Afghanistan, Finland, Haiti, Iceland, Japan, and South Korea, Mexico, India	Venezuela	It needs to resist the pressure that Venezuelan society and international community are exerting. Without it collapse is inevitable. Also, balance within the bloc depends on economic interests. Whoever presides over the ANC, will stand to gain and dispense significant advantage.
The Opposition	The MUD (Democratic Unity Roundtable): Political Alternative to the Regime in Power. Maintaining its legitimacy with Venezuelans who are against Maduro's Regime	EU, Bolivia, Brazil, U.S., Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Paraguay	Venezuela	The MUD survived critical moments in which its prestige suffered. The ANC could test its legitimacy, if Venezuelans interpret it as a failure of leadership. Without recognized leaders, the protest movement would lose its ability to impact politics
The Military	FAN (The National Armed Force). Guardians of the status quo	Military involved in the fighting. It defends the Regime	Venezuela	The FAN's course will weight heavily on Venezuela's future. No one wants a military government, but their support, if they keep their institutional role, could be the determining factor in the country's turn toward democracy.
Venezuelan Society - The People	Powerful actors on the national stage. Main source of pressure on the government, through	The MUD, UN, NGOs, and civil society organizations	Venezuela	They are manifesting their revolt over public protests. If the people's anger reaches to a boiling point, there would be an escalation of the conflict, which would become decisive under solid MUD leadership, or could turn violent and ineffective if they fail to maintain the legitimacy needed to channel it.
The National Constituent Assembly - ANC	This Assembly could reform the state, eliminating the obstacles the government currently faces in maintaining power.	ANC established by President Maduro, to write a new Carta Magna, has set off alarms within and outside the country. it supports the government bloc	Venezuela	Uncertainty. On one hand, stopping the ANC would be an important victory that MUD could exploit to shift the country toward a democratic system. On the other hand, if it is inaugurated, it needs to become a disruptive element in the administration and is vital NOT to be seen as a body aiding the government bloc.
The International Community (Russia, China, Iran, Cuba, Turkey, US, EU, UN)	External Actors with different interest, all pushing for stability in the region. The interaction of the variables in the complex situation from a turn towards a democratic system to the consolidation of the authoritarian system that rules the country today.	Legitimate Recognition and Diplomatic Relations with the Maduro Regime or Supporters of the Opposition.	Venezuela	Expected difficulties due to different geopolitical, and financial motivations

Figure 11: Main conflict actors in Venezuela

Principal Conflict Drivers

Some topics were mentioned by many of the interviewees regarding the social, political, economic, and energetic sectors that are a threat to national and regional stability. The current **society** in Venezuela seems to be very **polarised** between those against Maduro and his repressive regime and those in favour since they view the protesters as violent and destabilising (Morselli et al, 2020). For instance, Alma mentioned that many divorces, for instance, happened due to the difference in opinion regarding the political situation. Important to notice that the Venezuelan population, from the interviews, seemed very attached to politics from an early age as Bruno, Lucas, Andrea, Diego, and Antonio have memories of seeing institutional announcements on the television when they were children and how their parents saw the situation and shared their perspectives.

The precarity of the political and economic reality led to over 6,000 street demonstrations in 2017 alone (Morselli et al, 2020). Regarding the political context, many pointed out how **national institutions are corrupted** and manipulated to work in favour of Maduro's decisions. One example is the difficulty to get legal documents. As Alma explained, to get the passport, the current process is through connecting to one person in the government through WhatsApp without any reassurances of actually getting the document and when. In sum, it is an illegal way to get legal documents Thus, the exodus of the country tends to highlight the overall dissatisfaction with the government. The persecution, threats, and violent response to protests produce more violence in society and permit an overall sense of impunity for crimes. Some of the pressing issues are the shortage of basic services (education, health, access to jobs), basic products like water, medicine, and food, a high rate of inflation (over 60% per year in 2015), and a high rate of crimes (Ellner, 2015).

Antonio, a political leader, and refugee mentioned how a close loved one died due to the lack of common medications such as for high pressure. Hence, the government changed the suppliers from US companies to those allied to the political stance such as Iran and India. However, Antonio also mentioned that the quality and efficiency weren't the same leading to deaths that could have been preventable.

The Venezuelan economy relies mainly on oil revenues. That posed many challenges due to the US sanctions, as the IR graduate Camilo explains. However, during the study, it was found that the sanctions weren't a driver for more conflict inside Venezuela, but rather the governmental decisions that led to further violence and lack of development. Currently, there is a **serious energetic problem** leading to a disruption in the electrical supply for the population. Venezuela is one of the main world producers of hydropower, with exceptional geographical and hydrological conditions for the development of new projects. However, these potential facts are underutilised. In 2015, several reports concluded that the share of renewable energy decreased in the total primary energy supply between 2000 and 2012 due to the decrease in the hydropower supply. Also, the country is exploiting only 66%

of its important hydropower capability (Pietrosemoli, Monroy, 2019). Nevertheless, due to external influence along with the failed policies of the current presidency in the country, the vast amount of its energy market is exploited, without having the chance to use it for its own benefit (Pietrosemoli, Monroy, 2019).

The Dialogue
International Efforts to resolve the Interconnected Crisis

Between 2014-2019, several international efforts have taken place, as a way of addressing the question of whether peace-making efforts and negotiations have any impact on the political and humanitarian crisis in the county. From 2002, during Chavez' Presidency, with the involvement of Former US President Carter, to the Union of Southern Nations (UNASUR), which remains active although paralyzed and the Holy See's Involvement, followed by Mexico Talks later on (Ramsey, Smidle, 2020).

The first attempt at diplomatic dialogue during the Maduro period came after an extended wave of protests from February to April of 2014, that responded to the frustration and the consolidation of Maduro's government. After a recorded number of deaths, **UNASUR**[59] sponsored an effort dialogue[60], still active at that time along with the Holy See's representative in Venezuela (Ramsey, Smidle, 2020).

The dialogue broke down after a month with no concrete results. The Secretary General of the Democratic Unity Table (MUD) - the opposition coalition – stated that the dialogue was in crisis and the government did not show the willingness to make progress. This was a reaction to the government's repression of protest movements, which aimed at pushing foreign governments to act against a repressive dictatorship, as many opposition radicals suspected. The possibility that the MUD might have negotiated behind the scenes to prevent U.S. sanctions, reinforced the radical's distrust of the opposition leadership (Ramsey, Smidle, 2020). During the whole dialogue effort, UNASUR and Holy See representatives encouraged the whole process without any substantial intervention.

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[59] UNASUR is an intergovernmental organisation with an international legal personality made up of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela, with the main objective of building in a participatory manner and consensual, a space for integration and union in the socioeconomic, political and cultural areas among its peoples, giving priority to political dialogue, education, social policies, infrastructure, energy, financing, and the environment, with a view to eliminating socioeconomic inequalities achieving citizen participation and social inclusion and boosting democracy by strengthening the sovereignty and independence of States (gov.co). UNASUR was established in Brazil in 2008 upon the signature of the Union of South American Nations Constitutive Treaty and it entered into force in March 201 with the ratification by nine of the signatory states (Closa, Palestini, 2015).

[60] The initiative commenced after a visit to Venezuela by the foreign ministers of UNASUR countries, which noted a willingness to dialogue from all sectors. During the process, each side was represented by eleven leaders, Maduro on one side and the opposition on the other (Gill, 2014).

In 2016, the Venezuelan opposition pressured the government to organise a presidential recall referendum and the National Electoral Council, which was also controlled by Maduro too, to impede it. Several suggestions of dialogues and calls have been made for the **Holy See's** involvement in this matter. After the suspension of the procedure by the National Electoral Council, Capriles, the former presidential candidate that led the opposition, called for massive demonstrations to protest this delay. Due to the pressure against Maduro's Government and following a meeting between Pope Francis and Maduro, the Vatican joined a multistate initiative that sought to find a negotiated solution to the political crisis (Cruz, 2020).

The Holy See's Secretary of State Pietro Parolin has sent a letter to both sides, as well as to the rest of the mediators, requesting the parties to include four demands in the previous agreements, including recognition of the National Assembly and agreement on an electoral calendar. Only, in that case, the Holy See would proceed to any mediation effort[61]. However, the talks not only failed to achieve significant progress but also solidified Maduro's grip on power and caused divisions within the opposition (Cruz, 2020).

It is noteworthy to mention the vigorous engagement of the Holy See. While they manifested that they played the role of facilitators and not mediators, they practically made suggestions, pushed for agreements, and brokered a deal. When the stipulation of the deal was not fulfilled, they refused to participate further and signalled a symbolic end to the Holy See's involvement (Ramsey, Smidle, 2020).

At the end of 2017, after the Venezuelan government announced elections for the first half of 2018 and the opposition would not participate, another effort was made at brokering an agreement. Several international actors proposed an initial agreement that would serve as a guide to the discussions. **Talks** were hosted **in the Dominican Republic** and Spain's ex-President Rodríguez Zapatero worked as a facilitator[62].

The government from her side released several political prisoners as a good gesture that would facilitate the dialogues but the decision of the National Constituent Assembly to limit the ability of opposition parties that have previously participated in boycotts, to participate in future elections, deteriorated the progress of the talks. In February 2018, the government presented the document "Accord of Democratic Coexistence for Venezuela", and Jorge Rodriguez claimed that the opposition had agreed to sign the proposal. From its side, the opposition presented its counterproposal to the public

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[61] A month later, mediators, including Spain's Former President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Monsignor Aldo Giordani, met Maduro at Miraflores and presented him with a document, in an attempt to restart the dialogue (Ramsey, Smidle, 2020)

[62] After several months of talks, the Dominican Republic's Foreign Minister, Miguel Vargas, announced that the sides have reached a pre-agreement of 6 points that would guide them as an agenda for the dialogue sessions. By the end of the second round, mediators declared that there had been advances and they mentioned the signing of a possible agreement document (Pineda,2018).

in the next few days. Significant differences were observed between the two proposals, especially in electoral conditions and institutions (Ramsey, Smidle, 2020). The government refused to sign the opposition's version and did not attend the next sessions. The abovementioned effort was notable for its well-developed proposal, provided by the efforts of mediators and the concrete discussion of the issues. Both sides of the issues needed to be tackled, but they remained far apart on how to address them.

During the period 2019-2020, the **UN Security Council** undertook several discussions with its member-states and observers, regarding the political and humanitarian crisis in the country. Nevertheless, divisions among the UN members blocked several resolutions in response to the crisis, such as the S/2010/186, proposed by the US regarding the humanitarian situation in Venezuela, and was vetoed by China and Russia (S/2019/186, 2019). On one side, Russia and to a lesser extent China supported the presidency of Maduro. In contrast, the United States supported Guaidó, a former National Assembly president once regarded as interim president by more than 60 countries.

Despite the polarisation, **UN Agencies** increased humanitarian assistance after the approval from Maduro and Guaidó in April 2019. From their side, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), coordinated a great number of more than 5 million Venezuelans who had left the country and their host communities as of May 2021 (Seelke, 2020). In addition, an independent Fact-Finding Mission of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented thousands of human rights violations and abuses against civilians, describing them as crimes against humanity (UNHRC, 2019).

From its side, the **European Union** responded to the crisis by adopting an arms embargo against Venezuela in 2017, while in 2018 it began to impose targeted sanctions on Maduro's officials. Simultaneously, it has opposed broad economic sanctions, military intervention, and "any form of violence" in the country ((EU) 2017/2063, 2017). Instead, it has supported the efforts of the International Contact Group (ICG) and Norwegian diplomats to promote a diplomatic solution to the crisis. During the period of 2020, the EU backed former presidential candidate Henrique Caprioles' efforts to seek better conditions and a postponement of the December legislative elections compared to the organised boycott that Guaidó and the US government had declared. By 2021, the EU Parliament and most member states began referring to Guaidó as a "privileged interlocutor" rather than an "interim president." (Seelke, 2020).

The **Lima Group** was formed in 2017 from a common dissatisfaction of the Organisation of American States with Venezuela due to Venezuelan oil diplomacy; the institution couldn't take more robust actions in the international conflict (Morselli et al, 2020). The aim was to restore democracy in Venezuela in a peaceful manner with the concern of the socioeconomic impact of the refugee crisis would have in the American states. The President of the United States, Donald Trump, imposed several

economic sanctions in 2017 and didn't recognize the result of the elections in late 2018, or early 2019, claiming Guaidó was the president and not Maduro.

The Venezuelan government had the support of Russia, China, Cuba, Turkey, and Iran, having their assistance to avoid the sanctions. Even though these actors have different interests in Venezuela, they managed to avoid the isolation of the country and resist the internal pressure from public discontentment (Rendon, 2020). However, the influence of this group in Venezuela failed its objective, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic deepened the political polarisation and instability in Venezuela. Hence, many countries had to draw attention to their internal situation to restrict the contamination of the coronavirus (Morselli et al, 2020).

Since 2016, **OAS's**[63] Secretary-General, Luis Almagro, has released several reports regarding Venezuela's situation and convened special sessions of the Permanent Council to discuss regional responses to the crisis, and condemned Maduro's presidency (OAS, 2019). In 2017, Maduro, from his side, denounced the OAS for interfering in his country's domestic affairs and began a 2-year process to withdraw from the organisation. In January 2019, the OAS's Permanent Council approved a resolution, refusing to recognize the legitimacy of Maduro's second-term presidency, urging all member-states to adopt measures in order to facilitate the restoration of democratic order in the country (Freden, 2020). Some observers comment on OAS's Secretary-General's activism in the Venezuelan political crisis, while others seem more sceptical of his approach to working closely with the opposition, which would lead to the uncertainty of a possible diplomatic solution to the crisis (Seelke, 2020).

In February 2019, after a call for dialogue in the Venezuelan conflict by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Uruguay and Mexico announced a meeting in the Uruguayan capital of Montevideo, the so-called International Conference on the Situation in Venezuela[64]. The same day, the Uruguayan and Mexican Foreign Ministers, alongside countries of the Caribbean Community, held their own meeting and drafted a proposal for what they called the "Montevideo Mechanism,"—a four-phase plan for dialogue with no preconditions.

The next day, the attendees of the meeting created a very different mechanism, the so-called **International Contact Group** (InCG). InCG brought together countries from Latin America such as Costa Rica, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Panama, as well as representatives of the European Union. InCG's objective was not a mediation approach, but rather building trust and creating necessary conditions for

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[63] The Organization of American States (OAS) is a regional multilateral organisation that includes all 35 independent countries of the Western Hemisphere, except for Cuba and it has focused its attention on Venezuela's Political Crisis (OAS, 2019).
[64] This Conference came after Venezuela's National Assembly President Juan Guaidó had assumed the interim presidency of Venezuela and has been recognized by the US and the members of the Lima Group. From her side, the EU had not recognized the presidency of Juan Guaidó but stated that it would if the government of Nicolás Maduro did not concede to elections (Ramsey, Smile, 2020).

a credible process to emerge in line with the relevant provisions of the Venezuelan Constitution (Ramsey, Smile, 2020). InCG has met and cooperated several times with Lima Group representatives, supported the Norway-led dialogue process, and sent political missions to the capital of Venezuela, Caracas (Seelke, 2020).

In May 2019, the **Norwegian government** confirmed it had been facilitating talks between negotiating teams for Maduro and Guaidó. The negotiations' purpose was to establish conditions for free and fair elections. Several sceptics asserted that, as in the past, Maduro was using negotiations as a delaying tactic. In August 2019, Maduro ended participation in the negotiations after the new U.S. sanctions were imposed on his government. Norwegian officials have maintained communication with Maduro and opposition leaders, even during the COVID-19 pandemic (VOA, 2019). On May 11, 2021, Guaidó issued a call for the opposition to unite behind a "national salvation agreement"[65], possibly arranged by Norway.

Latest Progress in Peace Talks

After the COVID-19 Crisis and the engagement of Norway in assisting the parties in Venezuela, during summer period in 2019 in Barbados, new explanatory talks between the two sides from March 2021 resulted in the launching of a new negotiation process in August in Mexico City. The parties there signed a *Memorandum of Understanding*[66], setting out the visions and the agenda for comprehensive negotiations (Venezuela Blog, 2022). Mexico hosted the negotiations, Norway was the facilitator, while parties have designated two accompanying countries, the Netherlands and Russia. Their aim was to negotiate effectively to achieve inclusive and lasting results for the benefit of the Venezuelan people. In addition, during the 4 rounds of processes[67], they conducted consultations with political and civilian actors and ensured a conducive environment during the process (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). After the fourth round of talks was scheduled, it was immediately suspended in October when the government delegation decided not to participate in the next round of talks, in response to the

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[65] The agreement aimed for (a) an electoral accord, (b) an agreement on political participation and the release of political prisoners, (c) international support for lifting sanctions to stimulate the Maduro government, and finally (d) a plan to distribute COVID-19 vaccines and foreign aid (Seelke, 2020).

[66] According to the Memorandum they outlined the priorities of the dialogue process, which included above all, the political rights, the electoral guarantees for all and an electoral schedule for elections with observation, lifting sanctions and restoring assets, as well as protection of the national economy and social protection measures for the Venezuelan people (Venezuela Blog, 2022).

[67] In the first 2 rounds of negotiations, the parties reached 2 agreements and 2 joint statements, concerning the humanitarian emergency in the country, the restoration of rule of law, and the establishment of an impartial justice system. The signed joint statement on the third round of negotiations reiterated a commitment to include political and social actors in the process and emphasised the need for a gender focus in the dialogue (Venezuela Blog, 2022).

U.S. extradition of close government ally and accused money launderer Alex Saab (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

A return to the Mexico City dialogue remained open and possible. After the country started recovering from its 2013-2021 economic meltdown, based on partial dollarization and relaxation of price and exchange controls, the government was forced to soften its austerity program due to increasing labour unrest in mid-2022. Unless living standards improve for the population between now and the polls, Maduro's chances of re-election will be sharply reduced (Crisis Group, 2022).

On March 5, 2022, a high-level delegation of U.S. officials, including presidential advisor Juan Gonzalez, U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela Jimmy Story, and Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Roger Carstens, travelled to Caracas to speak with Maduro as well as chief opposition negotiator Gerardo Blyde and opposition leader Juan Guaidó. A few developments followed after the visit of U.S. officials to the country, as the Maduro government released two U.S. citizens who have been detained in the country. In a quickly changing geopolitical context, and amid ongoing diplomatic efforts by the Biden administration to encourage the resumption of negotiations over Venezuela's crisis, Maduro's government and the opposition stated that they are ready to restart talks in Mexico aimed at resolving the long-running political and humanitarian crisis, which has seen more than six million people fleeing the country (Venezuela Blog, 2022). At the same time, Chevron, the last major American oil company with significant operations in the country, will also be permitted to engage in discussions about future activities with Maduro's government (BBC, 2022).

On the 11th of November, a "closed-door" meeting in Paris occurred, which served to finalise the details and consolidate the conditions for the return of the parties to Mexico City, where negotiation processes would aim at resolving the political and social crisis in Venezuela. France, and specifically French President Emmanuel Macron, played an indispensable role in the bilateral work that needs to be done for the country and the region. The Meeting on the Agenda in Paris was attended by the president of the Venezuelan parliament, the chief government negotiator, Jorge Rodriguez, as well as the presidents of Argentina and Colombia. The main objective of the new round of negotiations in the Mexican capital intends to prepare the ground for the presidential elections scheduled for 2024 (Nova News, 2022).

At the end of November, the Venezuelan government, and the opposition coalition, known as the Unitary Platform[68], restarted the political talks in Mexico City, ending a yearlong standoff and opening a new chapter that would help pave the way for easing U.S. oil sanctions, as well as unlocking

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[68] The Unitary Platform is a Venezuelan Opposition political alliance of civil society, trade unions, retired military personnel, political parties, and deputies of the 2016-2021 National Assembly, presented and led by the opposition leader, Juan Guaidó. This alliance was born with 4 objectives: to address the humanitarian crisis, to restore constitutional order and human rights, to restore sovereignty through free elections, and to promote national reconciliation (Morales, 2021).

$2.7 billion of government funds, currently frozen by sanctions (Itriago, Vasquez, 2022). The UN accepted the request of the parties, to assist and support in implementing the agreement, in accordance with relevant UN mandates and authorities (OCHA, 2022). In addition, the Colombian President, Gustavo Petro, is involved in the process, while Norway holds once again the role of the mediator between the Venezuelan delegations (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Several sources mentioned that US President Biden would revaluate his sanctions policy if the meetings between the Venezuelan government and the opposition resumed. A first step would be the preparation of an extended license for oil company Chevron's operations, based in Venezuela. Chevron Corporation[69] could rapidly win US's approval, which would help rebuild sagging oil production in the Latin American nation (Armas, Sequera, 2022).

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[69] Chevron is one of the leading private oil companies in Venezuela. It works in partnership with affiliates of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), Venezuela's national oil company, in four joint-venture operations in the western and the eastern part of the country. Several of them are related to heavy or extra-heavy crude oil projects (Chevron).

Actors	Mediation in Venezuela	Description of the project
The Carter Center	YES	It observed Venezuelan elections in 1998 and 2000. It also joined the OAS and UN Development Program to help mediate the 2002 political crisis between the government and the opposition groups. The mediation led to a recall referendum, which the Center also observed. For more than a decade it has continued to study the nation's electoral processes, to train media in nonpartisan reporting practices and to foster dialogue between the country and its Andean neighbors.
Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)	YES	HD has focused on initiatives to help alleviate the impact of humanitarian crisis, magnified by poverty and COVID-19. Within HD's COVID-19 Global Response Initiative launched in 2020, it pursued a project of joint action, through the development of technical experts group, convened under the auspices of the Inter-Religious Social Forum of the country.
DCAF	NO	DCAF has published several policy and research papers as well as podcasts related to Venezuelan Crisis but nothing related to mediation.
The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)	NO	Since 1987, IFES has worked in over 145 countries to advance good governance and democratic rights. Although it is not currently engaged in programming in this country, research work has been published regarding democracy and electoral processes in Venezuela
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	YES	NRC has been active in Venezuela since 2005. In 2009, it launched its independent country office, due to the deteriorating humanitarian crisis. It's one of the largest NGOs in Venezuela and its work includes water, sanitation, hygiene, education, livelihoods, food security, information, counselling and legal assistance. In addition to the direct implementation and capacity building measures for local communities, it also plays a critical role in coordination at multiple levels.
Norwegian Center for Conflict Resolution (NOREF)	YES	Since 2017, it has been engaged in Venezuela, exploring possibilities form improving political dialogue and participation in the country. It has supported the Norwegian facilitation of the formal Venezuelan negotiation process. It has also participated on the explanatory talks between Venezuela and the opposition in 2021, in Mexico City.
United States Agency for International Development USAID	YES	Inside Venezuela, the Governemental Agency strengthens local human rights defenders, civil society, independent media, electoral oversight, and the coalition of democratic actors in Venezuela.
Swisspeace	NO	Swisspeace has developed expertise through various consultancy and support mandates as well as through organizing learning processes on Central America and Colombia. However it has not launched any mediation programme in Venezuela.
United States Institute of Peace (USIP)	YES	Since 2018, USIP has worked to generate the conditions for a peaceful negotiated political settlement in the country, by enhancing engagement and supporting more than 500 moderate civil society actors across the country. The Institute's expanded alliances with civil society include youth, religious, ecumenical and private-sector leaders, as well as women peacebuilders, in order to advance dialogue, social cohesion, and promote tolerance for building a fertile ground for a peaceful solution to the cirisis.

Figure 12: An overview of the main international actors involved in mediation in Venezuela

Opportunity for Peace Mediation by the GCSP

The protests in Venezuela usually happen in "waves", as Camilo, a master's student in IR explained. It means that at some point there is an event that mobilises society to demand better political, social, and economic conditions. One of the events mentioned was the lack of payment of professors' salaries in the public universities in 2018 that already gathered in the last 4 years more than 1.000 protests (Venezuelan Politics and Human Rights, 2018 & El Nacional, 2022). The universities, especially in Caracas, are the centre of Venezuelan society. However, the government doesn't provide physical conditions, materials, and salaries for the staff that can provide the basic monthly necessities.

However, the severity of the insecurity felt by the population inhibits more protests. The interviewees mentioned that their close ones had to flee, as in the case of Juan, were arrested, got hurt during protests, or got kidnapped during the night as Bruno stated. The fear is constant and tiresome, leading many just to try to survive the situation. As an example, in 2017 the Venezuelan National Guard used tanks to hit the population, besides using tear gas and real ammo (Global News, 2017). Moreover, there is a sense of surveillance of those who disagree with the government, especially with the existence of armed groups promoted by Nicolas Maduro (International Amnesty, 2019).

All of the interviewees seemed open to international collaboration in the national mediation process for peace. Moreover, they understood it as a necessity due to the lack of internal space for dialogue, insecurity, and disagreement even inside the opposition on what are the steps needed in the political and economic process. To have an effective process, the actors involved should understand the local reality to suggest adequate solutions and actions to enhance the national institutions and foster democracy. Hence, some security measures need to be provided to have the participation of the opposition. For instance, they would like to be recognised in their political parties, not be persecuted, tortured, or exiled from their country.

The aggression of Russia in Ukraine encourages an approximation of western countries to Venezuela due to the interests of its natural resources such as gas and oil. The USA and European countries are more willing to foster dialogue in Venezuela not only to promote national peace and democracy in Venezuela but their economic and security objectives. One example is the current initiative for negotiations in Mexico on this matter.

Assessment of the Findings and Possible Niche

Most of the interviewers have expressed their **disappointment and frustration** concerning the mediation attempts that have already taken place, as well as the possibility of a new attempt, was also characterised as extremely difficult, having to tackle several barriers from a political and institutional perception. Several of them perceived the mediation efforts as unsolved, as most of them have been banned, instantly paused, or never finished.

Despite the frustration of the unsolved or problematic negotiation efforts, a small number of interviewers, such as Juan, Diego, Antonio, and Camilo recognized the efforts that have been made by international actors in order to stand beside the Venezuelan people, to fight for the unprecedented refugee crisis, the catastrophic economic policies and the political repression and to promote peace and security in the region. In Andrea's analysis, the international community lost the timing of imposing more severe actions against Venezuela instead of economic sanctions that didn't lead to great outcomes.

Hence, Andrea and Diego recognized the aid that had been given by externals in order to fight for a democratic change, but the social pressure was not enough. A number of people turned their back on Maduro's government and the efforts have been unsuccessful. Antonio and Camilo expressed positive feelings towards Norway and the negotiations that have been made from its side during the period 2019 – 2021. They particularly expressed his full support and trust in Norway's integrity in any potential future initiative through other countries and NGOs. In addition, Juan, a civil engineer involved in political movements during the university, mentioned the need to continue the peace dialogues in Mexico, after the switch of U.S.'s strategy, in order to tackle the phenomenon of economic freedom in the country.

The majority of the interviewees agreed that the problem behind any mediation attempt is the need for close diplomatic and geopolitical ties with the regime. Any attempt does not stand any chance if the initiative, organisation of a third-party country is not trusted by the government. The discussion around the space of civil society organisations in any possible mediation attempt remains the same problematic. The fact that these organisations are not politically accepted and directly engaged with the government, is the reason why it is impossible for them to engage in any negotiation effort. In addition, the hard-diplomatic approach of Maduro's government, as is strongly condemned by a **lack of transparency** when it comes to releasing and sharing data.

Concluding, it is unlikely for an international institution to initiate any negotiation project if it's not directly allied with the government. These kinds of projects should be focused on different aspects such as poverty, food insecurity, and democracy through civil society organisations. Working with grassroots collectives that are not directly related to the diplomatic members of the government is what is missing according to the interviewers.

Niche and Entry Points

After taking into consideration the interviews that we have conducted, we believe that the GCSP could use **social and energy factors** when arriving on the field to launch any mediation program, by engaging with local actors and initiatives. In addition, data analysis allowed us to also identify a target group that would facilitate any future mediation program, and that would be the **youth**.

The majority of the young interviewees highly expressed the need for the **inclusion and engagement of young people** in the process. Alma, Juan, Diego, Antonio and Lucas have worked in a

civil society organisation, a collective, or an NGO either in a local or an international one. All of them were deeply influenced by the political challenges and socio-economic crisis that their country has been suffering from, while they were growing and developing as young adults in Venezuela, which increased their willingness to make a change in their own country, even from abroad. Juan, Diego,, Bruno, Camilo and Manuel have leaved their childhood under Chavez's and Maduro's governments, they experienced several difficulties, from poverty, lack of a proper educational system, challenges connected to freedom of expression and freedom of the press, political violence, persecution, lack of legitimacy and democratic values and institutions.

The repression by the previous and the current government that they have witnessed created the need to get involved from a young age with several collectives across the world, fighting for a better future in Venezuela. As a result, young people are considered an indispensable source of information for GSCP, if it decides to engage in any way to the mediation efforts. Youth could aid the GSCP in understanding the current needs of the population as well the public opinion concerning their stance towards Maduro's government. In addition, young people would share with GSCP the actual needs of Venezuelans and practical information regarding the political and institutional governance of the country. This information could work as the basis of any project that GCSP could initiate in Venezuela. Given this, young participation would be an asset for the GCSP.

Social cohesion and society are considered a priority for the interviewees in total. For that reason, possible entry points for the GCSP to use in a future mediation attempt would be anything regarding humanitarian crisis root causes. Several interviewees suggested poverty, food insecurity and refugee crisis as effective niches to the GCSP efforts. For instance, Antonio, Andrea and Diego mentioned, several food programs have been launched in Venezuela due to hunger and lack of access to basic needs for an outstanding percentage of the population. The point is to coordinate better between the organisations in order to prevent duplication of efforts and use GCSP expertise to work on the root causes of the conflict.

Another entry point suggested by a number of interviewees such as Bruno, Antonio, Camilo, Andrea, and Alma, would be the state of democracy and the importance of **legitimate institutions and an election system** in the country so that everyone gains access to this political process. Each one of the people that we interviewed, stressed the importance of the engagement of everyone in the society in order to build a safe country, based on democratic values and people's needs.

Finally, **energy and oil** could also be considered as a possible entry point for diplomatic dialogue in Venezuela. As we have already mentioned, Venezuela is considered one of the countries with the largest oil reserves worldwide. Due to external influence along with the failed policies of the current presidency in the country, the vast amount of its energy market is exploited, without having the chance to use it for its own benefit (Pietrosemoli, Monroy, 2019). Nevertheless, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the energy crises that Europe and the US are currently dealing with, the

situation shifted, and now they are in need of Venezuela's production of oil to balance the tremendously high prices in the market. On the occasion of the G7 held in Germany, on June 2022, the French presidency mentioned the need for the international community to explore all options to loosen the Russian squeeze on energy supplies, including by initiating talks and collaboration with producing countries such as Venezuela and Iran (Nova News, 2022). For that reason, energy and oil could stand as an effective niche for the GCSP.

Challenges for Future Mediation Attempts

The interviewees, such as Juan, Diego, Bruno, Camilo, Manuel and Lucas mentioned several obstacles that would unease any possible future mediation attempt. These challenges refer to **lack of legitimacy and transparency** as well as the concentration of power from Maduro's government. At the same time, the tension between the government, the opposition, and civil society organisations creates organisational challenges, and simultaneously political violence and the aggressiveness of the government, flare up security issues.

To begin with, every single one of the interviewees has witnessed at least once in their lives a **violation of human rights**, from **political prosecution** to the **use of violence** by paramilitary groups across the country, who are still controlling specific regions. At the same time, poverty and the deteriorated economic crisis in the country have facilitated the flourishing of several crimes, such as **narco-trafficking, drugs, and illegal exportation of gold and uranium**. The fear of insecurity across the country was expressed by several interviewees. It is therefore challenging for international collectives and organisations to easily engage in the area.

Furthermore, there is the question of the legitimacy and transparency of the government. In any case, if an international actor would choose to engage with the government, it would face several challenges. Firstly, if in any case the actor is not politically affiliated with the government there is no possibility that the regime would accept to work with it. The government's aim would be to address Maduro's political agenda and needs. At the same time, the interviewees in total expressed their concerns regarding the regime and characterised it as corrupted and highly criminal. High figures of the government are involved in several crimes, such as drugs trafficking, and money laundering. Juan, Diego, Camilo and Bruno insisted on the lack of legitimacy and transparency by the government, which would hamper the access to any of their data.

On the other hand, an attempt to collaborate with the opposition would still be considered ineffective. **The interviewees in total deplore the lack of communication and coordination not only with the government but also within the opposition**. They have specifically mentioned the fact that the opposition is not unified enough, which creates a weak profile to the society. Citizens do not trust the opposition, as they feel it could not represent them, while individual political figures have made their appearance in the country. The interviewees in total do not believe in the influence of the

opposition and have expressed their disappointment regarding its power in changing the political system if they ever had a chance of being elected. For that reason, this lack of organisation and coordination would challenge any attempt of GCSP to launch a mediation programme with the aid of the opposition.

Finally, the fact that there is no rule of law, neither respect for the institutions, and a lack of juridical security, directly guarantees the unsafety of engaging even with a civil society organisation in the country. Interviewees criticised the concentration of power in Maduro's government, as well as the perpetual bureaucracy conducted by the regime. This unprecedented situation increased the lack of motivation for Venezuelans to fight for their freedom, to fight for democracy. Society and the local community need to be more engaged and inspired to proceed to any future mediation attempt.

Assumptions

Before launching a mediation programme:

1. When choosing legitimate actors to participate in the national talks, it is important to include even those that are unrecognised by the government. Otherwise, it would not be a representative and inclusive process to diplomatic dialogue. Thus, it would exclude important perspectives from several parts of the society that have significant contributions to these processes.

2. Despite the national public opinion of the government, it is hard to proceed with any initiative without the commitment of the national authorities since it has the primary responsibility for the creation and implementation of policies[70].

3. It would probably be beneficial to foster a connection with local organisations to potentialise GCSP's ideas and adaptation plans[71]. However, it should be a diverse process to avoid being perceived as biased. Hence, language could be a natural barrier since many actors of the population don't speak English or have limited knowledge.

4. Any proposition that would promote parallel National Assemblies or the president only showed negative results. First, it led to great disinformation. Additionally, the lack of understanding of who was legitimate or had the actual authority only promoted more violence and instability (political and economic).

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[70] Alma; Diego; Juan; Lucas; Andrea;
[71] Bruno; Manuel; Juan.

The mediation programme:

Inclusive and diverse	The programme should convey the perspective of people in different sectors of Venezuelan society, especially the groups that seemed to be marginalised such as the youth and women.[72]
Long-term strategy	Due to the structural nature of the economic and political instability, the programme should consider long-term goals since it takes time to promote significant change.
Flexible	It is very likely that geopolitics can influence the disposition of actors, as well as national conditions, to a mediation programme. In this sense the programme should be able to adapt to these conditions being as the availability of actors or budget for instance.
Expertise	GCSP can contribute with either training, capacity building, and/or expertise with local actors that already have established programs.
Partnerships	Local actors are the best source to gather information either on what is the current situation or on cultural knowledge to adapt new projects.[73] The partnerships could be with states such as Norway since it is already a mediator on the current negotiations or Turkey which emerged as a facilitator on illegal gold trade showing potential for other topics.[74] When it comes to international organisations, the suggestions are the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and/or the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) due to their presence and expertise. The NRC is already working on the ground.
Thematic	Themes of engagement could serve as good entry points due to the national difficulties in some areas such as the energy and oil sector, and the electoral process[75]. Hence, it could take advantage of programs in Venezuela from the possible partners such as the USIP to support women peacebuilders in the negotiation efforts.
Transparency and legitimacy	The programme, objective, partners, and actions should be available, clear, and transparent to the local population. Hence, if it follows the recommendations, it will help to have a legitimate project with a positive impact locally[76].

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[72] Juan; Diego; Antonio; Manuel.

[73] Juan; Bruno; Manuel.

[74] Turkey is a relatively new partner of the regime. This partnership though remains controversial as it maintains constructive diplomatic relations with the United States. For Venezuela, Turkey is an economic and political lifeline amid increasingly suffocating sanctions targeting the country's gold industry. The Maduro Regime announced that it would move its gold refinery operations from Switzerland to Turkey. In 2020, Turkey emerged as a major importer of Venezuelan non-monetary gold, importing around $900 million worth of the metal between January and November. In addition, Turkey's current President, Erdogan, has staunchly defended Maduro diplomatically on several occasions (Rendon, 2020).

[75] Bruno; Camilo; Manuel; Lucas.

[76] Juan; Diego; Bruno; Camilo; Manuel; Lucas.

Potential Mediation Attempt Assessment

How other players would view GCSP engagement

All interviewees showed great interest in the action of a neutral third party to assess and assist in the promotion of national dialogue. Juan even explained that part of the society in 2017, the worst year of the crisis, expected and hoped for US intervention to support the population. However, there is not a current appetite or cohesion for such action.

It seems that the Venezuelan government is more likely to dialogue with third parties to negotiate some concessions to obtain flexibilization on the sanctions implemented by the European Union and the United States. It is difficult to predict how GCSP specifically would be seen but neutral and impartial institutions tend to be better accepted. When it comes to local actors, there is an openness to foster more initiatives in the Venezuelan case to pressure the government to implement measures that could better the living conditions for the population, especially when the inequality is growing.

Risks - What could go wrong and how it would impact the GCSP

The current government doesn't inspire trust in those that try to have initiatives with them. It is well known that many members of the were tortured, persecuted, and exiled from the country. Hence, it lacks juridical security leading to unpredictable actions made by the government, for instance, changing political position regarding one actor or then expropriating properties. One point that was recurrently mentioned was that to have any dialogue or joint initiative with the government, the national authorities should have security provisions such as not to persecute, torture, exile or not recognise the actions as legitim to peace talks.

The same provisions and assurance should be made for international actors in case they are deployed in Venezuela. Another possibility is to promote neutral spaces for diplomatic dialogue in other countries. However, it should notice the financial constraints for political actors, especially for the opposition and independent ones, to be able to reach and participate in events out of the country.

Impact - What realistic impact of the GCSP mediation activities

One diplomatic dialogue won't promote peace or resolution for the political and economic complexities in Venezuela. This doesn't diminish the importance to promote advancements to confidence and trust-building between the national actors. A possible GCSP mediation activity would be important to guide the negotiations and expertise in possible strategies to implement since it is one of the main difficulties felt between the members of the opposition. Hence, in order to provide any guidance in this process, the members of the GCSP should understand the local reality and reach out to key actors to potentialize any suggestion of activity.

Conclusion

Mali is facing a complex array of simultaneous crises at various levels: governmental, ecological, terrorist, secessionist, and social, to name a few. The situation is volatile but seems to be trending away from possible mediation, highlighted by the government's recent expulsion of all French organisations. Despite this, the volatility means that the situation may evolve very quickly. The frequency of military coups is a testament to the State's fragility. Moreover, its inability to control its territory, its increasing isolation in the fight against terrorism (which may be deepened by Russia's preoccupation in Ukraine) and the threats caused by regional instability could lead to political change. Appetite and entry points for mediation have indeed been identified in Mali, focussing particularly on engagement with young people. Whilst the scope of such projects may be small, the broader situation in Mali should continue to be monitored so that mediators can move in as soon as required.

The political and socio-economic situation in Venezuela is facing several challenges such as hyperinflation, violent crime, political repression, widespread corruption, and food shortages. Consequently, there is a considerable flow of migrants from the country to its neighbours triggering a humanitarian crisis in them. However, this study found precise entry points, notably in the energy sector, in youth engagement, and in the creation of partnerships with CSOs and international NGOs which would allow the GCSP to share expertise. These approaches could build trust and create space for national dialogue, especially between the current regime and the opposition leaders, as well as contribute to the restoration of the democratic process and of the rule of law.

Whilst entry points and niches for peace mediation have been identified in both the Malian and the Venezuelan contexts, recent evolutions of the conflict and geopolitical situations suggest that, in the near future, the GCSP is more likely to launch successful mediation programmes in Venezuela than in Mali. The analysis of the Venezuelan context should be deepened, focussing on how the GCSP can harness the current momentum to promote youth political engagement and the furthering of national dialogue using GCSP expertise. Whilst the volatility of the Malian conflict and political context is currently an important obstacle to the implementation of any mediation programme, the situation might rapidly change and offer favourable conditions for the development of a mediation programme in the next months or years.

Recommendations

Mali

Monitor the conflict: GCSP should continue to watch the situation in Mali over the coming months and years. Whilst the current scope of mediation is limited, the volatility of the conflict and of Malian politics means mediation may be required at any moment.

Evaluate each region: A comprehensive evaluation of the exact region where the GCSP will engage, the unique problems the GCSP could address and the specific risks engagement in the region would entail is necessary for micro-level engagement in Mali..

Select local partners: GCSP can leverage its alumni network to engage with political officials and can identify local youth activists by collaborating with local CSOs and by engaging with Malian social media pages. People without authentic interests, who seek financial gain with no real interest in peacebuilding, have to be identified and kept out of the process.

Listen to local needs: Programming will have to start by going through the government and securing a mandate to work on mediation that they endorse. Subsequently, mediators should dialogue with local partners to understand the political issues that are of importance in the particular region and to allow local ownership of any solution.

Organize workshops: GCSP can harness its depth of expertise to create dialogue on the identified political issue and incubate locally-driven policy solutions that respond to young people's needs and reduce recruitment into armed groups. Experts should have knowledge on policy solutions relevant to the issue and region.

Establish enforcement: Mechanisms must be decided on to discourage cheating from either side of the agreement. Monitoring and follow-ups should be conducted to ensure compliance before reneging occurs.

Venezuela

Engaging the youth: GCSP should collaborate with NRC, NOREF and USIP already present in the country to engage young people in social and political life. Another possible collaborator would be Plan Pais, a US based NGO which connects and educates the Venezuelan youth abroad through a platform for the exchange of knowledge, talent and ideas. It would be a complementary action to enhance engagement, capacity building and support to civil society.

Using the safe haven: GCSP should harness its action to the public universities. They are a hub of debates and innovation. Thus it serves as a safe space for the youth to develop and express themselves as well as to share their experiences in GCSP programmes through panel discussions, workshops and training sessions on peacebuilding skills and community-based dialogues.

Fostering collaborations: USIP and USAID should be GCSP partners to assist in the support of the political process, use their expanded alliances in the country with the civil society and private-sector leaders. Such collaborations strive for strengthening the unity and legitimacy of the political figures.

Sharing expertise: GCSP can provide expertise to the agencies for the organization of several activities and events such as team building exercises, to encourage trust and honesty between members of the different sectors in society. Hence, it could develop the group in leadership and communication skills to foster more diplomatic dialogue.

Energy and oil sector: GCSP should strengthen diplomatic dialogue between the government and the opposition providing expertise to facilitators, in this case Norway. Its engagement in the latest explanatory talks between the two sides in Mexico City in 2021, indicates Norway's importance as a facilitator on future negotiation processes. Due to the oil and gas interest of institutions such as the European Union, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the exchange of natural resources for expertise and investment of Venezuelan infrastructure in the energy sector is a possibility to further the dialogue between national and international actors with Venezuela.

Annexes

Interviewees for the Mali Case Study

Int. no.	Name	Gender	Origin	Current location	Position and affiliation
M1	Marie Lobjoy	F	International, Europe	Geneva	Researcher and project coordinator for two UN agencies working on humanitarian projects in Mali
M2	Ousmane (*alias*)	M	Malian	Bamako	Programme officer for a UN agency in humanitarian aid
M3	Linda (*alias*)	F	International, Europe	Bamako	Political affairs officer for a UN agency in the security field
M4	Souleymane (*alias*)	M	Malian	Timbuktu	Programme director of a local NGO working in humanitarian aid
M5	Boubacar (*alias*)	M	Malian	Bamako	Technical coordinator for a local NGO working in development assistance
M6	Moussa (*alias*)	M	International, Sahel	Ouagadougou	Former field assistant for an international NGO
M7	Oumar (*alias*)	M	International, Southern Africa	Menaka	Political affairs officer for a UN agency in the security field
M8	Samba (*alias*)	M	Malian	Bamako	Professor and researcher in a Malian university, advisor to the Malian State
M9	Bakary (*alias*)	M	Malian	Bamako	Malian ambassador, former politician
M10	John (*alias*)	M	International, Europe	Baghdad	Former political affairs officer for UN and European agencies in the security field
M11	Ibrahim (*alias*)	M	Malian	Bamako	Political analyst for a UN agency working in development aid
M12	Abdoulay Coulibaly	M	Malian	Bamako	Major General in charge of the security sector reforms
M13	Daouda (*alias*)	M	Malian	Mopti	Field Assistant for a UN agency working in the security field
M14	Drissa (*alias*)	M	Malian	Bamako	Mediation advisor for a European organisation specialised in peace mediation
M15	Salif (*alias*)	M	Malian	Bamako	Project coordinator for a European agency, former project coordinator a European organisation specialised in peace mediation
M15	Robert (*alias*)	M	International, Europe	Bamako	Project coordinator for a European agency
M16	Emmanuel Tronc	M	International, Europe	Massechussetts	Humanitarian negotiation advisor for the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, former MSF humanitarian coordinator

Interviewees for the Venezuela Case Study

Int. no.	Name	Gender	Age	Origin	Current location	Position and affiliation	Refugee Status
V1	Alma (alias)	F	20s	Venezuela	Switzerland	Behavioural and social psychologist, women rights activist	N
V2	Juan (*alias*)	M	20s	Venezuela	Venezuela	Civil engineer	N
V3	Diego (*alias*)	M	20s	Venezuela	Switzerland	Master student in IR	N
V4	Bruno (*alias*)	M	20s	Venezuela	Switzerland	Master student in IR	N
V5	Antonio (*alias*)	M	30s	Venezuela	USA	Petroleum engineer and political leader	Y
V6	Camilo (*alias*)	M	20s	Venezuela	Venezuela	International relations undergraduate	N
V7	Manuel (*alias*)	M	20s	Venezuela	Venezuela	International relations specialist at NGO (political in Venezuela)	N
V8	Lucas (*alias*)	M	20s	Venezuela	Venezuela	Political science and business undergraduate	N
V9	Andrea (*alias*)	F	50s	Venezuela	Brazil	Ambassador's secretary for the opposition	N

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