President Alpha Oumar Konaré among the dignitaries at the Flame of Peace.

Source: Malian Press Agency

Mali's peace process:

context, analysis & evaluation

Kåre Lode

Between June 1990 and March 1996, Mali experienced a separatist war in the north. Initially mobilised through regional solidarity, the conflict slowly fragmented along inter-ethnic lines and violence tore apart inter-dependent communities. Attempts to address the conflict began in 1991, with government-sponsored initiatives to reach an acceptable negotiated solution with the armed groups. Yet one of the striking features of the Malian experience of peacemaking is that the negotiated agreements between government representatives and the armed factions were unable to bring the conflict to a conclusion. Instead, the initial negotiations actually exacerbated the conflict dynamics. Although later talks created the political terms for peace, without the involvement of local guarantors of the settlement at the community level, implementation floundered and peace remained elusive on the ground. It was only when thousands of people throughout the north engaged directly in inter-community peacemaking that the path to national reconciliation opened. The involvement of all those most affected by the conflict in open and inclusive decision-making meetings was able to achieve what official political negotiations could not: a transformation of the conflict and consolidation of peace.

Approximately 65 per cent of Mali's land area is desert or semi-desert, except the fertile Niger River basin in the south and east. Despite being rich in human creativity, it is economically one of the poorest countries in the world. The northern part of the country is deep in the Sahara desert and is inhabited principally by Tuareg nomads, Arab nomads and merchants and the Songhoy sedentarists of the Niger River basin. These communities together comprise approximately ten per cent of Mali's overall population of more than eleven million. Although a modern professional elite exists in the capital and provincial towns, the majority in the north are grounded in traditional society. However, there are important divides in the north, where the variations in ethic, social and occupational roles between the nomads and sedentarists inevitably reflect in the characteristics of civil society. Despite some tensions between these communities, their complementary economic activities have traditionally provided incentives for conflict resolution. Throughout the north there is a strong sense of inter-dependence based on mutual belonging to each

Kåre Lode worked for Norwegian Church Aid in Mali between 1987-88 and was their consultant for reconciliation in Gourma in 1995-96. He currently works as a Researcher at the Centre for Inter-Cultural Communication in Norway.

other and the land that underpins relations across ethnicity and other social divides. Awareness of this inter-dependence underpins the community approach to adopting collective decisions – a quality mobilized effectively for peacemaking.

Social exclusion and sources of conflict

Armed conflict in the north can trace its lineage to several earlier rebellions. Hard-hit by French colonial rule, Tuaregs revolted unsuccessfully in 1916. Mali gained its independence in September 1960 after a short period of union with Senegal. Prior to independence, many in the north advocated the creation of a trans-Saharan state and most felt marginal to the political processes leading to Malian independence. In 1963, a Tuareg uprising in the northeast was decisively repressed by the army, which poisoned wells and used aerial bombardment among other tactics. Many fled northwards to Algeria but a residual bitterness remained amongst Tuaregs that was reciprocated by the army's distrust of the community.

In 1968, Col. Moussa Traoré overthrew the post-independence government of Modibo Keita and installed a highly centralized and repressive military regime that appeared more interested in maintaining its control than promoting development. The north was extremely marginalized, with the nomads especially excluded. Communities in the north could not manage local affairs according to their traditions and needs. Northerners – especially nomads – held virtually no positions at any level in the government, administration and army and southern officials rarely understood or appreciated northern cultures. There were few development programmes that targeted the north and hardly any infrastructure for education, health and communication. The government did not address basic issues facing northerners, such as frustration over traditional land and water use rights.

The north was particularly hard hit by the droughts of 1972-73 and 1983-85. Insufficient relief efforts, often perceived as deliberate neglect, led many to flee to neighbouring countries. Many northern migrant men became soldiers in Libya's 'Islamic Legion' and received sophisticated military training and experience fighting in Chad and in Lebanon. A few joined POLISARIO and fought in the Western Sahara. These experiences stimulated the belief that it was acceptable and possible to solve important problems through the use of force. Some aspired to use this experience to address the problems of marginalization of northern Mali. This aspiration was compounded by the widespread feeling of hopelessness for their future among the north's younger generations. These perceptions were translated into action when most Malian Tuaregs were expelled from Algeria and Libya in the late 1980s due to deteriorating economic conditions in the host countries. The new confidence in their military capabilities combined with protracted grievance and a lack of perceived alternatives to be the crucial ingredients in sparking a well-organized armed revolt.

Mali

Acronyms

ARLA	Revolutionary Army for the Liberation of Azaouad
FIAA	Islamic Front of Azaouad
FPLA	Popular Front for the Liberation of Azaouad
POLISARIO	Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia El-Hamra y Rio de Oro
MPA	People's Movement of Azaouad
MFUA	United Movements and Fronts of Azaouad
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

In June 1990, a small group of Tuaregs attacked a military post, effectively announcing the start of the rebellion. They then hit hard at government and military targets. The army responded with brutal violence against both Tuareg and Arab civilians. The number of casualties is unknown but it is clear that the brutality of the army's retaliation resulted in popular support for the insurgency. Soon thousands of young men had joined the rebels. Despite their hopes of support from Libya, the armed movements were mainly financed with local resources and with money sent from individuals living abroad.

Tuaregs in the People's Movement of Azaouad (MPA) initiated the revolt. Azaouad is a name that traditionally designates a huge zone north of Timbuktu. The insurgency movements used it to designate the three northern regions, Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu, which cover some two-thirds of the national territory of Mali – though the region is called simply 'the North of Mali' in later peace agreements. After the army's reprisal attacks, they were soon joined by Arabs who organised their own Arabic Islamic Front of Azaouad (FIAA). The rebels had the support of all ethnic groups in the north for at least the first year. In this period, the main divide was between the north and the central government. Northern solidarity transcended any local inter-ethnic tensions over resources or social differences.

Early negotiation efforts

The Traoré regime was under mounting international and domestic pressure for democratization when the insurgency emerged. President Traoré realised that a swift military victory was impossible, making the possibility of a negotiated settlement more attractive. The Algerian government was concerned with internal security and feared an uncontrollable situation on its southern border that might draw in the disaffected Tuareg population in Algeria. It became very active in supporting peace initiatives to address the conflict in Mali. Within Mali, President Traoré began to pursue strategies to influence the northerners. First he turned to a traditional chief who was comparatively close to his government, Intallah Ag Attaher, for mediation. However, the northern 'youth' viewed the traditional leadership as part of the repressive regime and ignored Attaher. In 1994, they kidnapped him and it became evident that the revolt was not only against the military regime but also against the traditional domination of the Tuareg aristocracy.

The army continued to suffer a series of humiliating defeats and the insurgents recognised that they could negotiate from a position of military advantage. Traoré devoted more time in late 1990 to the Tuareg insurgency than to containing the pro-democracy movement that was gathering momentum in the south. Aware that he needed to stabilize the situation quickly and return troops to the capital, he entered into direct negotiations

with the MPA (and later the FIAA) with Algeria's assistance. On 6 January 1991, they signed a peace agreement in Tamanrasset, Algeria. The agreement satisfied the core demands of the movements, including a very high percentage of development funds allocated to the north; integration of nomads into the army, other 'uniformed services' and in all levels of the administration; and greater regional autonomy for managing local affairs according to cultural customs.

But Moussa Traoré had gone too far and did not dare to publish the exact terms of the *Tamanrasset Agreement*. The opposition was furious at the perceived capitulation of the army and the rumour that the concept of 'autonomy' had been agreed. Although many of the new political parties, students, trade unions and other civil society groups had supported the northern rebellion initially because it threatened the authoritarian regime, many thought Traoré had jeopardised the country's integrity with the agreement. Furthermore, Songhoy communities had not been represented at the Tamanrasset negotiations and many worried that the agreement would install Tuareg dominance in the north, thus fuelling suspicion and tensions within the region.

In March 1991, amidst frequent demonstrations that were violently suppressed, Gen. Adamou Toumani Touré overthrew the regime in a military *coup d'etat*. He formed a transitional government to guide the country on its way to democracy. Yet the new regime did not consider *Tamanrasset Agreement* legitimate and made few moves towards implementing it. Under pressure from civil society, in August 1991, the new government hosted a National Conference in Bamako to discuss the future and draft a new constitution.

Although northerners participated in the National Conference, it was not intended as a forum to address the conflict and the insurgency was not on the agenda. Yet on the second day, the 192 northern delegates – men and a few women with positions of status in their communities – met to discuss the situation. They decided to form a commission to follow up on the issues addressed in the *Tamanrasset Agreement*, where the grassroots had not been represented. The general complaint was of insufficient information and a perception that neither the government nor the movements encouraged popular involvement. Many Songhoy were also negative, believing that the *Tamanrasset Agreement* failed to pay serious attention to their particular needs. At this stage, however, it was difficult for local civil society to act. Continued violence was exacerbated by the transitional government's inability to control army troops stationed in the north, who wanted to show that they could command the situation. As the army's atrocities against civilians mounted, two new and more aggressive movements

Sequence of mechanisms

1990 June	Rebellion begins People's Movement of Azaouad (MPA) and Islamic Arabic Front of Azaouad (FIAA) attack military targets in north.
1991 Jan	*Tamanrasset Agreement* The widely condemned agreement between Traoré and the MPA and FIAA is signed; the People's Liberation Front of Azaouad (FPLA) and the Revolutionary Liberation Army of Azaouad (ARLA) are formed shortly after.
1991 March	Transitional Government Traoré overthrown by military coup; a new pro-democracy transitional government that rejects *Tamanrasset Agreement* is installed.
1991 29 July - 12 Aug	National Conference The transitional government hosts a gathering of delegates from all over Mali to develop a new constitution, providing an opportunity for northern participants to discuss peacemaking.
1991	Preparatory meetings for *National Pact*
25-27 Nov	**Segou:** government officials, leaders from the armed movements and civil society meet to draft the basic document to guide negotiations.
10-13 Dec	El Golea, Algeria representatives of the armed movements meet to develop a common platform United Movements and Fronts of Azaouad (MFUA).
15-17 Dec	Mopti: civil society participants are involved in MFUA - government negotiations; the parties agree on the principle that the solution should be sought within the framework of a single state.
1991 - 1992 Dec - March	*National Pact* A series of meetings in Algiers concludes in the *National Pact* but key stakeholders are left out and implementation proves difficult.
1994 Aug	Regional concertations Government-sponsored meetings are held throughout the country to engage the wider public in discussion of political priorities; they help to consolidate democracy and consensus on need for a peaceful resolution to conflict in the north.
1994 Nov	Inter-community meetings 37 meetings are self-organized throughout the North with support from Norwegian Church Aid, resulting in localized ceasefire and peace agreements.
1996 22 March	Consolidation meeting Unsuccessful attempt to follow up on the community meetings.
1996 27 March	'Flame of Peace' A national reconciliation ceremony is held, marking a final conclusion to the war with decommissioned weapons destroyed symbolically in a giant fire.
1997 Oct	Follow-up meetings A series of inter-community meetings is held to follow up on earlier developments, resolve outstanding disputes and address ongoing decommissioning issues. They feed into the national process of decentralizing government.

emerged: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Azaouad (FPLA) and the Revolutionary Army for the Liberation of Azaouad (ARLA).

Negotiating the *National Pact*

In late-1991, President Touré's transitional government opted for a new negotiating strategy with the northern insurgency movements. Algeria was asked to play an active role in the peace process and Edgar Pisani of France and Ahmed Baba Miské of Mauritania, known for their personal skills and impartiality, were invited to assist in bringing the movements into negotiations. Previous government-led peace initiatives had provided few opportunities for significant civil society participation. In advance of entering into negotiations in late 1991, there were a series of preparatory meetings to formulate positions, consolidate the northern forces and develop a negotiating framework.

In November 1991, an initial meeting was held in Segou involving representatives from the government, the armed movements and a few civil society leaders selected by the government, who jointly agreed the basic negotiation process and agenda. This was followed by a meeting of representatives of all the armed movements in El Golea, Algeria in December where they created a common platform and formed the United Movements and Fronts of Azaouad (MFUA). The government and the MFUA met in Mopti a few days later and they soon agreed to a ceasefire. The talks involved representatives of neighbouring governments as well as prominent civil society figures, who were influential both with the government and the MFUA negotiators – although it was not an event where civil society participated in its own right and on its own initiative. A significant substantive outcome was the MFUA's agreement that a solution should be sought within the framework of the existing Malian state. Independence for the north was no longer seen as a viable option.

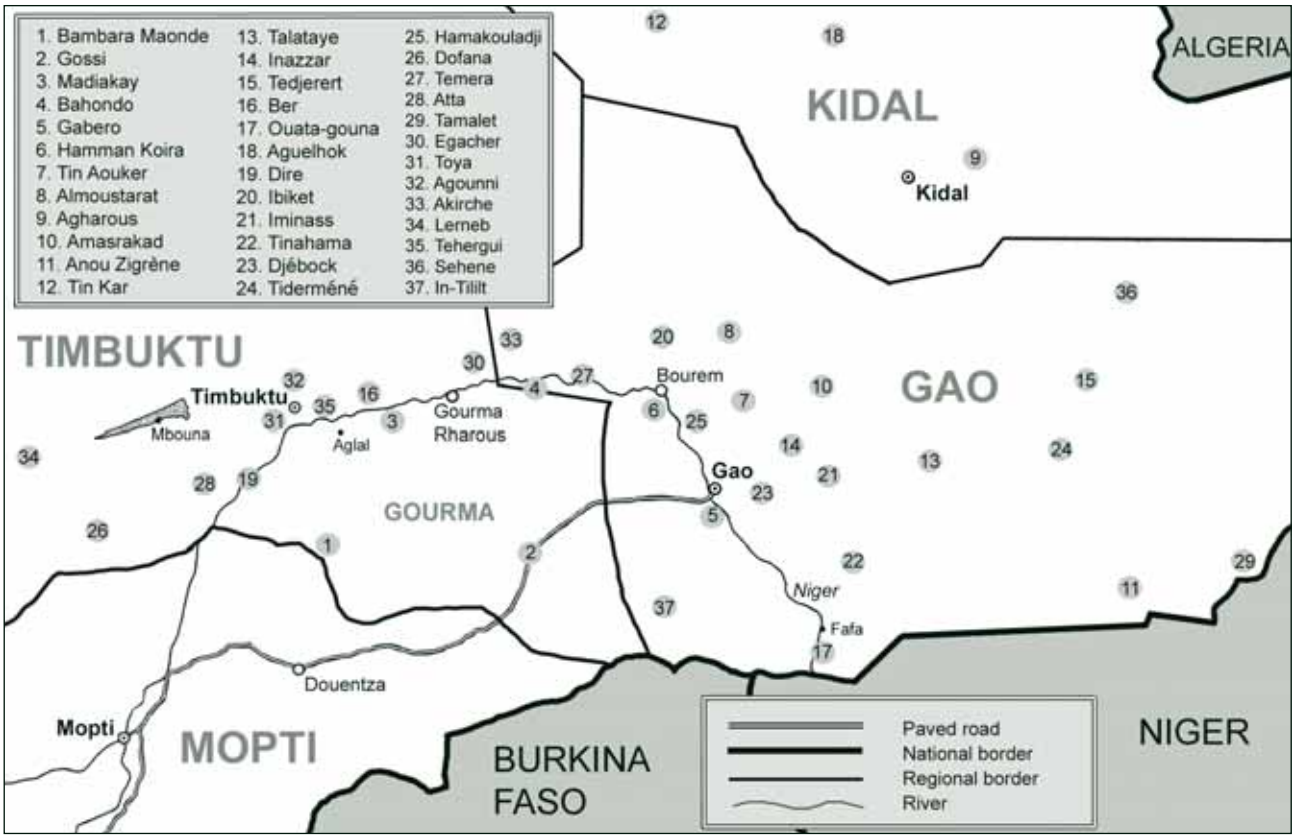
This series of preparatory meetings was followed by a series of four negotiation meetings in Algiers from late December 1991 until March 1992. The Algerian government, accompanied by Pisani and Miskié, played a key role in facilitating the talks and mediating agreements. The delegates at each meeting agreed new elements that culminated in the preparation of what became known as the *National Pact*, which was signed in Bamako between the MFUA and the transitional government in April 1992. The agreement was based on four key points: peace and security in the north; national reconciliation; special initiatives to promote socio-economic development in the north; and according the north a special status within the framework of the unitary state of Mali. It also envisioned a new 'Commissioner for the North' to oversee implementation, who would be appointed for a five-year renewable term and operate directly under the president's authority.

After the signing, interim President Touré admitted the systematic neglect of the development of the north as the primary source of the conflict, thus taking a courageous step towards peace. Many thought this would bring the conflict in the north to a decisive conclusion in advance of the elections for choosing a new democratic government. But it soon became clear that – like the *Tamanrasset Agreement* before it, although for different reasons – the *National Pact* would be difficult to implement.

Implementation problems

Two months after the signing of the *National Pact*, Alpha Oumar Konaré was elected as President. Until late-1994, the threat of a military coup remained an active possibility, making it a priority for the new democratic government to gain control over the army. There were a number of problems. Discipline and leadership within the national army and its relations with the government were problematic. Although some soldiers and officers supported democracy, most soldiers had no experience of civilian rule. Many in the army believed that the government had capitulated to the demands of the northern insurgency – forced in part because the army had been denied the necessary weapons to defeat the movements on the battlefield. These issues of legitimacy were compounded by internal discipline problems. Soldiers stationed in the north had organized a type of union; they rejected the army's command structure and refused to take orders from senior officers. Local units continued to fight their own war, effectively blocking the implementation of the demilitarization and integration provisions of the *National Pact*. The weak government found it difficult to address this serious problem within the army.

The northern armed movements were also affected by indiscipline and fragmentation. Although they had a common federative structure in the MUFA, they continued to be composed of four groupings, each loyal to their own leaders and drawing on their own social support base. The combatants were largely self-reliant; their movement provided neither their weapons nor a salary. In the beginning, most were idealistic. But as the years passed, they became increasingly autonomous and unconstrained by orders, including those concerning their commitments in the *National Pact*. In addition to the four main groupings, there were a number of smaller armed groups that never had substantial influence in the peace talks. Some of these were essentially armed bandits acting independently and uninterested in peace.



Map designating inter-community meetings that took place in northern Mali, October 1995 - March 1996

Source: Sigrid Lode

Furthermore, many sedentarist communities felt uneasy about the *National Pact*. They were not represented at the various negotiating tables and suffered increasingly at the hands of the insurgency movements.

In addition to these obstacles, there were few resources to implement the substantive provisions in the agreement regarding socio-economic development. International donors showed little interest in Mali and the peace settlement. Of those that did make pledges to support the *National Pact* with investments, few fulfilled their commitments. Local communities needed to adapt the agreement to their situation but insecurity made it difficult for local civil society to act. Thus there was little in the way of a 'peace dividend' and it was difficult to make any substantial changes in living conditions.

The *National Pact* process in 1991 and 1992 did, however, succeed in reaching important political agreements of lasting importance. Yet they were ultimately insufficient to transform the dynamics of the conflict and generate peace. First, it became clear that the neighbouring countries wanted stability in Mali and were willing to provide support for initiatives towards peace. This helped to de-escalate mistrust and diminish the idea that the conflict could be sustained with external support. Second, all actors realised that their enemies wanted a peaceful settlement of the rebellion, provided that their main objectives were met. Third, through the various negotiations, the actors agreed on the basic parameters and conditions to build a political settlement that could foster durable peace, as expressed in the *National Pact*. Fourth, although the government expected to be in charge of the process, top-level civil society actors used their strength and creativity to become involved. From this time, the pattern began to shift so that civil society assumed an instigating role that was increasingly owned by local-level actors and eventually government officials and top civil society leaders became observers of a process led by others. These were all extremely important steps towards peace. The *National Pact* was not the end of the conflict, nor even the beginning of the end; but perhaps it was the end of the beginning.

Civil society takes the lead

Although 1993 was a relatively quiet year, the intra-northern conflict dynamics had been changing and by 1994 there was considerable inter-factional fighting between the movements that in turn fuelled inter-ethnic

tension. It seemed clear that the government could not bring the violence to an end unilaterally. In June 1994, under severe domestic pressure and facing a potential coup d'état, President Konaré announced a series of regional 'concertations' (consultations) to engage the public in debate on the country's future. Although the concertations were not peace initiatives, they engaged the public and helped to consolidate democratic rule by breaking the control of well-organized political voices in the capital and generated a broader public consensus on the need to bring a peaceful conclusion to the conflict in the north.

By October 1994, the government was on an information offensive with unprecedented levels of openness about events in the north. Furthermore, the army was under civilian control – in part because its influence had diminished when it proved unable to defeat the northern movements militarily. Although the movements were also growing weaker and appeared to want peace, they did not know how to achieve it. They understood that there was no military solution and they were under heavy pressure from local civilians who wanted peace.

The foundations were eventually laid by Konaré's encouragement of civil society peacemaking initiatives. In November 1994, the first inter-community meetings began in the north, involving traditional and movement leaders in the negotiation of local ceasefires. At the time, there was no functioning government administration and the army did not control the area. The President wisely realized that the grassroots had taken the lead in seeking to end the fighting and decided to support them. On 2 November, the President visited the northern districts of Gao and Kidal, where he insisted that attacks by insurgents could not be used by the army to justify reprisals against civilians.

In late 1994, Konaré announced that there would be no new government initiatives "until we have given time for civil society to work out a solution." To this end, he organized the withdrawal from the north of the military units who had committed atrocities and confined many other units to barracks. He insisted that regional authorities should support – but not interfere with – the work of civil society. These were very clear signals to northerners to assume their responsibility and lay the foundations for their own future by taking the initiative. Civil society did not let the opportunity pass. What followed was a series of self-managed inter-community meetings throughout the north creating localized peace agreements among inter-dependent communities, leading to the voluntary disbanding of the movements, the resolution of local disputes, and social reconciliation.

Reintegration and national reconciliation

While the inter-community meetings were bringing a decisive end to the armed confrontation, the government was working on a programme for decommissioning weapons and demobilizing and reintegrating the combatants from the movements. The

The signing of the National Pact.

Source:Malian Press Agency

government assumed the primary political, organizational and financial responsibility for the initiative and was assisted by the leadership of the movements and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Throughout the conflict, inter-governmental organisations and NGOs had played a number of roles, though to a lesser degree than in many other contemporary wars. The UNDP, in particular, played an important enabling role. In 1994, Tore Rose became the UNDP's Resident Representative and developed strong relations with the new Commissioner for the North, Mohamadou Diagouraga. Both were open-minded, creative and cooperative – and were extremely positive towards civil society initiatives. Their close working relations enabled them to coordinate the international community's efforts to support the peace process, lay the foundations for comprehensive development in the north and support post-conflict peacebuilding through ongoing inter-community meetings. They were also central actors in two international conferences where donors discussed conditions for their contributions to demilitarization programmes and heavy investment schemes for the north. These conferences were viewed by the movement leaders as a kind of guarantee of the process, encouraging them to dissolve their movements.

The president was alert to the need to consolidate the transition politically through a powerful symbolic event to mark national reconciliation. The UN-supervised disarmament programme had collected close to 3,000 arms from demobilized combatants. It was decided to hold a ceremony on 27 March 1996 in Timbuktu, organised jointly by the Commissariat of the North and the UNDP. Close to 10,000 spectators gathered to watch these weapons burn in a giant 'Flame of Peace' bonfire, where the president received the announcement of the dissolution of the five movements in a statement read by Zeïdan Ag Sidalamine, leader of the Popular Front of Liberation of Azaouad. This event marked the decisive end to the war. Although the challenges of building a just and lasting peace continued, it was a powerful moment in shaping the historic memory of modern Mali.

Conclusions

After the secretive January 1991 *Tamanrasset Agreement*, the public felt excluded and suspicious. After the 1992 *National Pact*, certain sections of the population – notably the Songhoy sedentarists – continued to feel excluded. Many were uncertain whether the movements were sincere and unconvinced that the government was strong enough to provide security and ensure a peaceful transition. Community leaders – particularly at the grassroots level – felt they had no role in creating the peace agreement and were unprepared to take action in support of it. This only began to change in 1994. The regional concertations helped to consolidate the democratic transition and to build public support for peace in the north. But it was not until local northern civil society leaders, with the government's encouragement and support from a group of facilitators, took a primary role in peacemaking at the community level that the peace process began to consolidate. The inter-community meetings involved all concerned in developing shared strategies to address conflict-generating problems and in creating a united front against those who used violence. They reached localized agreements that finally enabled implementation of the official demobilization programmes and the political agreements in the *National Pact*. The experience paved the way for post-conflict peacebuilding and laid the foundations for self-managed development programmes and local self-governance that have begun to address the problems that were initially at the root of the conflict.