

**Mali Islamists Willing to Cut al-Qaeda Ties**  
**Ansar Dine Would Back International Dialogue, Elections**  
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In an attempt to forestall the US-backed invasion of northern Mali, the Islamist faction Ansar Dine has reportedly told Algerian officials that they are willing to sever all ties with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and hold elections.

Ansar Dine has deployed two factions, one to Algiers and another to Burkina Faso in an attempt to kickstart international negotiations on the status of Azawad, the northern two-thirds of Mali which are in a de facto state of independence since early this year, when Tuareg secessionists ousted the Malian military before being themselves ousted by Ansar Dine.

France and the United States have been pushing for a plan to invade Azawad, with the goal of imposing on the region the rule of the “interim” government of southern Mali, installed by the military junta after the loss of Azawad led to a coup.

Ansar Dine has sought to install a Taliban-style theocracy in Azawad, but now says they are willing to “play the democracy game” and have promised a statement in the next few days aimed at placating Western concerns that the region could become a breeding ground for terrorists.

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