

MALI: EXTREMISM & COUNTER-EXTREMISM

On November 20, 2015, gunmen stormed the Radisson Blu Hotel in Mali's capital, Bamako, taking as many as 170 people hostage. The al-Qaeda-linked group [al-Mourabitoun](#) has claimed responsibility for the attack, which it allegedly carried out in conjunction with [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb](#). The attack killed at least 19 people: one U.S. citizen, Anita Ashok Datar, a former Peace Corps volunteer and an executive with an international development consulting firm; six Russians; three Chinese citizens; two Belgians; and an Israeli citizen. Malian security forces—with the help of U.N. and French forces as well as a small team of U.S. troops—ended the siege later that day, killing two gunmen and freeing the remaining hostages. (Sources: [Guardian](#), [BBC News](#), [Reuters](#))

The attack comes as Mali continues to combat insurgent elements within its borders. The Radisson Blu Hotel was hosting delegations for peace talks between the Malian government and northern separatist groups. In response to the attack, the Malian government has [announced](#) a 10-day state of emergency and three days of national mourning. (Source: [CNN](#))

Overview

Extremism within Mali's borders is tied to the country's ongoing civil war. A March 2012 military coup and impending government collapse produced a power vacuum in which U.S.-designated terrorist groups including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb ([AQIM](#)) were able to recruit, implement sharia (Islamic law), and carry out violent operations against Malian soldiers, U.N. peacekeeping forces, and Western tourists and diplomats. In the more than three years since the beginning of the country's civil war, security has only been slightly restored with the help of military operations launched by France. A peace deal was signed between the Malian government and rebel forces in June 2015, although it has not stemmed the insurgent attacks. (Source: [New York Times](#))

Prominent terrorist groups operating inside Mali include AQIM and several of its affiliates. These include Ansar al-Dine (AAD), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and al-Mulathamun Battalion ("the Masked Men Brigade," or AMB, a unit of AQIM), which merged in August 2013 to form [al-Mourabitoun](#). Analysts consider all these groups to be extensions of the core al-Qaeda brand. [Boko Haram](#), the Nigerian-based Islamist group that pledged allegiance to [ISIS](#) in March 2015, has also operated in Mali, although to a lesser extent than the al-Qaeda affiliated groups.

From 2012 onwards, Mali's military proved incapable of combatting the extremist threat on its own. The government appealed to the French, West African, and broader international community to intervene. In January 2013, French forces became the first to launch a popular military operation in Mali, followed soon after by West African forces and later, a formal U.N. intervention known as United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The work of French and international forces has enabled government services to return to much of the northern region. However, violent extremist groups continue to remain active.

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Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Mali's Civil War and Rising Radicalization

Extremism is rampant in Mali, especially in the north, where numerous U.S.-designated Islamist groups have held territory and perpetrated violent attacks.

Mali has been caught in an ongoing civil war since January 2012, when rebels of the Tuareg tribe—an ethnically Berber people concentrated in the Sahara—began an offensive against Malian government forces with the intent of creating an independent state in Mali's north. Three months into the fighting, the Malian military launched a coup in response to what it perceived as the government's inability to quash the Tuareg's secession attempt and defend Malian soldiers. The coup plunged the country further into chaos and weakened the fight against the Tuareg rebels, who were backed by various Islamist groups. In April 2012, the prominent Tuareg rebel group, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), declared the independent state of Azawad in Mali's north. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Deutsche Welle](#))

Islamist groups initially fought alongside the Tuareg. However, they ultimately sought to implement sharia in the north, wipe out the largely secular Tuareg secessionists, and assume control of the north for themselves. In the months that followed, 10 percent of Mali's population and over half of its territory, including the major cities of Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal, fell to terrorist groups. These include al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Ansar al-Dine (AAD). As the Islamists' power grew, so did the atrocities, including the oft-lamented destruction of UNESCO sites in Timbuktu between May and July of 2012. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

AQIM, AAD, and MUJAO—armed with weapons stolen from Muammar Gaddafi's former regime in Libya—imposed a strict version of sharia over the local Malians. Under the Islamists' rule, hands of thieves have been chopped off and adulterers stoned to death. Islamist police reportedly set up checkpoints throughout northern Mali, with Kalashnikov-wielding teenagers repeating, "No cigarettes, no CDs, no radios, no cameras, no jewelry" over megaphones. The promise of a burgeoning caliphate (Islamic empire) in Mali drew jihadists from across Africa. A U.S. official said in 2013: "Northern Mali has become a jihad front. People think of northern Mali like they thought of Chechnya in the late '90s—as someplace where you can go and do your part to restore the caliphate." (Sources: [Spiegel](#), [Atlantic](#))

Islamist groups have been strengthened by local Tuaregs, as well as Malians throughout the country. Grievances such as poverty and lack of opportunity may have played a role in drawing civilians to the Islamists' ranks. Two-thirds of Mali's adults are illiterate, and [UNICEF](#) reported that between 2008 and 2012, just over half of Mali's youth attended primary school. Islamists have been able to recruit Malians (94.4 percent of whom are Muslim according to a [Pew poll](#) released in 2015) by presenting themselves as righteous defenders of the faith. However, many

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local Malian communities rejected the Islamists' implementation of sharia. Most of Mali's Muslims follow Sufism, a mystical form of Islam that is considered idolatrous by Salafists. Nonetheless, these communities have largely been unable or unwilling to drive the militants from power. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#), [Foreign Policy](#), [RAND Corporation](#))

France's January 2013 military intervention, Operation Serval, brought northern Mali under the control of its fragile interim government within weeks. In August of that year, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was elected president and nearly a year later in July 2014, the government and the Tuareg rebels began peace negotiations. During this time, the French refocused and expanded their military operation, launching Operation Barkhane to target Islamists in the larger Sahel region. As of mid-2015, Mali has yet to reach a peace agreement with the Tuareg rebels. (Source: [Deutsche Welle](#))

Extremism inside Mali existed prior to Mali's civil war of 2012. AQIM maintained a small-scale threat in Mali beginning with the group's inception in 2006, using isolated parts of the country's north as a safe haven. However, there was little or no confrontation between AQIM and Malian forces until 2009, when AQIM began to slowly pick up its insurgency. It was not until 2012 that AQIM took full advantage of the lawlessness caused by the country's political chaos and launched full scale attacks against Malian government and international targets. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb ([AQIM](#)) is al-Qaeda's African wing. It is a U.S.-designated Sunni Muslim jihadist group based in Algeria. AQIM operates throughout the Sahel, a stretch of Africa that includes parts of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Chad, and Libya. While AQIM is just one of multiple jihadist groups operating in Mali, analysts consider all other groups to be extensions of the larger al-Qaeda brand. (Source: [Associated Press](#))

The group is led by [Abdelmalek Droukdel](#), an Algerian national suspected to currently reside in Algeria. A former leader and co-founder of AQIM, [Mokhtar Belmokhtar](#), split with AQIM in late 2012 and formed the al-Mulathamun Battalion (AMB), which later merged with MUJAO to form al-Mourabitoun. Belmokhtar, one of the Sahel's most notorious jihadists, was designated as a terrorist by the U.S. in 2003. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Though AQIM was officially created in 2006, jihadists that would form its base entered Mali in 2003 after kidnapping 23 European tourists in the Algerian desert. In the years that followed, AQIM used northern Mali to hide foreign hostages and smuggle drugs, raking in millions in ransom payments. Today, the group still seeks to implement sharia and liberate Malians from what the militants perceive as French colonial legacy. Most of its fighters hail from Algeria and Mauritania. (Sources: [Washington Post](#), [BBC News](#), [Associated Press](#), [New York Times](#))

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The group's funding is intricately tied to the work of human traffickers, who smuggle migrants through Mali on their way to Libya and then Europe. The human trafficking network has reportedly enabled AQIM and its affiliated groups to purchase weaponry and pay fighters' salaries. (Source: [International Business Times](#))

Ansar al-Dine

Ansar al-Dine ("Movement of Defenders of the Faith," or AAD) was founded in November 2011 by the Malian Tuareg fighter Iyad Ag Ghali, cousin of AQIM senior leader Hamada Ag Hama. A largely homegrown movement comprised of Tuareg and northern Malian Berber Arabs, AAD works closely with AQIM in their joint goal of implementing sharia. Many of its members are Tuaregs who previously fought alongside deceased Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi and returned to Mali after his overthrow. (Source: [BBC News](#), [Agence France-Presse](#))

Following the fall of northern Mali in March-April 2012 to the Tuaregs, AAD gained control over major cities including Kidal and Timbuktu, and sought to implement sharia in those areas. However, AAD's control was reportedly merely nominal, with AQIM's presence in AAD-controlled areas an "everyday reality." In July 2015, reports emerged that AAD had begun to ramp up attacks in Mali's south, especially near the capital, Bamako. (Sources: [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#), [International Business Times](#))

The U.S. Department of State designated AAD a foreign terrorist organization in March 2012, with the United Nations soon following suit. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [United Nations](#))

Al-Mourabitoun

[Al-Mourabitoun](#) ("The Sentinels") is a [U.S.-designated](#) violent jihadist group operating in Mali, Algeria, southwestern Libya, and Niger, that seeks to implement sharia. It is the outcome of an August 2013 merger between two AQIM splinter groups: Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and al-Mulathamun Battalion (AMB). On November 20, 2015, the group claimed responsibility for a deadly gun and hostage attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali, allegedly as part of a joint attack with AQIM. According U.N. spokesman Olivier Salgado, 21 people were killed in the attack. Earlier this year, al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility for a hotel siege in Sere, central Mali that claimed the lives of nine civilians and four Malian soldiers. (Source: [Guardian](#), [Reuters](#))

Al-Mourabitoun believes it has a "Shari'a-based duty" to unite Africa's Muslims and Islamic movements against secularism, in particular France and French influences in the region. It also finances itself through drug smuggling and kidnapping for ransom. (Source: [Australian National Security](#))

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In August 2015, al-Mourabitoun published an online statement announcing [Mokhtar Belmokhar](#) as the group's leader. The memo was signed, "Al-Mourabitoun – Al Qaeda in West Africa," leading analysts to believe that the group now fully considers itself under al-Qaeda's umbrella and loyal to al-Qaeda Emir [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#). (Source: [Long War Journal](#))

The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa

The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) first appeared in southern Algeria and northern Mali in December 2011. At that time, its purported leader, Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou, announced the group as an AQIM splinter and claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of Italian and Spanish aid workers in Tindoug, Algeria. MUJAO merged with al-Mulathamun Battalion (AMB) in August 2013 to form al-Mourabitoun. (Source: [News24](#))

MUJAO disdained AQIM's lack of jihad and preference for criminal activity. Following the capture of northern Mali by Tuareg rebels in March-April 2012, MUJAO controlled the city of Gao and surrounding areas. During this time, AAD purportedly brokered a truce between MUJAO and AQIM. (Source: [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#))

MUJAO was composed of Mauritians and Arabs from Gao and its environs, but is believed to have had little public support in Mali. Nonetheless, the group drew recruits from the region and internationally, from countries including Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and others. In its height, MUJAO attacked Algerian targets in both Algeria and Mali. (Source: [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#))

Analysts disagree on MUJAO's level of activity, ranging from defunct to still active. It is also disputed whether it is a distinct entity from al-Mourabitoun. The U.S. Department of State has used "MUJAO" and "AMB" as aliases when referring to al-Mourabitoun. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Boko Haram

The Nigerian-based terror group [Boko Haram](#) has operated training camps in Gao, Mali, according to sources from Niger. AQIM has also reportedly given training to Boko Haram members in northern Mali. In June 2012, Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou publically alleged that Boko Haram held close ties with AQIM. However, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS, al-Qaeda's foe, in March 2015. (Sources: [Atlantic](#), [BBC News](#), [Perspectives on Terrorism](#))

Foreign Fighters

There is little information to suggest that Malians are leaving the country to fight alongside Islamic extremists in other parts of the world. However, militants from across Africa have come to fight alongside extremists in Mali's north, including from Algeria, Mauritania, Sudan, Niger,

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Nigeria, Morocco, Senegal, and Western Sahara. The number of foreign fighters in Mali is difficult to assess, and the amount has most likely decreased since the height of the country's civil war in 2012-2013. (Sources: [Washington Post](#), [Stratfor](#), [BBC News](#))

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

Extremist and terrorist incidents in Mali have included improvised explosive device (IED) attacks as well as rocket and mortar fire attacks, suicide bombings, kidnappings, hostage-taking, and landmines. These attacks regularly target Malian, French, and U.N. peacekeeping forces. The U.S. Department of State reported in its 2014 Country Report on Terrorism that in a five-month window between May and September 2015, a total of 27 separate attacks targeted U.N. peacekeepers inside Mali. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Timeline of Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

- **November 20, 2015:** Gunmen attack the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, the capital of Mali. The assailants kill 19—including foreign nationals—and hold more than 100 hostages. (Source: [New York Times](#))
- **August 7, 2015:** Al-Mourabitoun gunmen attack the Hotel Byblos in the central Malian town of Sevare, resulting in the death of nine civilians and four Malian soldiers. (Source: [France24](#))
- **June 30, 2015:** AAD militants attack military positions near the borders with Mauritania and Côte d'Ivoire, killing three soldiers. In a telephone call with Agence France-Presse, AAD preacher Ismail Khalil warns “[AAD will] multiply the attacks in Ivory Coast, Mali and Mauritania, countries that work with the enemies of Islam.” (Source: [Agence France-Presse](#))
- **March 7, 2015:** Al-Mourabitoun insurgents attack La Terrasse—a restaurant frequented by expatriates—in the capital of Bamako, killing one Belgian security officer, three Malians, and wounding nine others. (Source: [Reuters](#))
- **January 9, 2015:** AQIM is the suspected perpetrator of an attack on a U.N. vehicle in Kidal, Mali that wounds 7 Senegalese U.N. peacekeepers. (Source: [UN News Centre](#))
- **January 5, 2015:** AQIM claims responsibility for an attack in Mali's capital, Bamako. According to an anonymous security official, six soldiers are killed and others injured. (Source: [Associated Press](#))
- **November 25, 2014:** The Malian Minister of Rural Development is left unscathed when insurgents attack his convoy with a roadside bomb, killing two soldiers and wounding four others. (Source: [Associated Press](#))

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- **October 3, 2014:** In the deadliest attack on the U.N. mission in Mali to date, Islamist insurgents ambush a U.N. convoy and kill nine peacekeepers in north-east Mali. (Source: [BBC News](#))
- **September 18, 2014:** A roadside bomb kills five U.N. peacekeepers and wounds several others in the Kidal region in northern Mali. (Source: [Associated Press](#))
- **August 30, 2014:** Two of the seven Algerian diplomats kidnapped by MUJAO in April 2012 are released. (Source: [Agence France-Presse](#))
- **June 11, 2014:** A suicide bomber kills four Malian and Chadian soldiers at a U.N. peacekeeping camp in Aguelhok, Mali. (Source: [Agence France-Presse](#))
- **November 14, 2013:** Al-Mourabitoun claims responsibility for a vehicle-laden IED that detonates at the Malian Solidarity Bank in Kidal. The explosion kills two U.N. peacekeepers and injures seven Malian soldiers. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))
- **November 2, 2013:** AQIM claims the murder of two French journalists in northern Mali, calling it a response to “crimes perpetrated by France and its U.N., Malian and African allies.” (Source: [Reuters](#))
- **October 28, 2013:** AQIM releases four French hostages that were kidnapped in Niger and held in northern Mali since 2010. (Source: [Guardian](#))
- **October 23, 2013:** Al-Mourabitoun suicide bombers target a U.N. peacekeeping base with IEDs, killing two Chadian soldiers and one Malian civilian. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))
- **October 7, 2013 – October 8, 2013:** Insurgents belonging to Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)—which was recently absorbed into AMB—launch mortar shells on bridges in the northern region of Gao. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))
- **September 28, 2013:** Suicide bombers belonging to AQIM attack a Malian military camp in Timbuktu, killing civilians and injuring six soldiers. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))
- **January 16, 2013 – January 19, 2013:** Islamists belonging to al-Mulathamun Battalion (AMB)—under the order of Mokhtar Belmokhtar—cross into Algeria from Mali and Libya and launch an attack on the Tigantourine gas facility at In Amenas, Algeria. The militants take over 100 hostages, most of whom are foreign expatriates. The four day siege ends with the death of 39 hostages and one Algerian security guard, as well as 29

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militants who are killed by Algerian security forces. An AMB spokesperson announces that the attack seeks to punish Algeria for allowing French fighter planes to use its airspace while attacking Islamists in northern Mali. (Sources: [Euronews](#), [Combating Terrorism Center](#), [Al Jazeera](#))

- **November 20, 2012:** MUJAO claims responsibility for the kidnapping of an elderly French tourist in Diema in the Kayes region. (Source: [Agence France-Presse](#))
- **May-July 2012:** Islamists destroy the UNESCO world heritage sites, including Sufi shrines, in Timbuktu, Mali. (Source: [Atlantic](#))
- **April 2012:** MUJAO insurgents kidnap seven Algerian diplomats in Gao. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))
- **March 2012:** AAD insurgents attack Malian soldiers in Aguelhok, killing 82 and kidnapping 30 more. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))
- **January 24, 2012:** AQIM militants and Tuareg secessionists massacre more than 100 Malian soldiers in Aguelhok, Mali. The soldiers allegedly run out of ammunition, and are then executed, some with their throats slit and others shot in the head. (Source: [Al Jazeera](#))
- **November 24, 2011:** Islamists abduct two French citizens from a hotel in Hombori in central Mali. (Source: [BBC News](#))
- **January 4, 2011:** An individual who had trained in an AQIM camp in northern Mali attacks the French Embassy. The attack causes only minor injuries. (Source: [OSAC](#))
- **July 24, 2010:** AQIM executes the French citizen NGO worker abducted in December 2009. (Source: [OSAC](#))
- **December 2009:** AQIM militants in Mali kidnap an Italian citizen, his wife, and a French NGO worker. (Source: [OSAC](#))
- **November 25, 2009:** AQIM militants kidnap French citizen Pierre Camatte near Mali's border with Niger. He is released in February 2010 in exchange for four AQIM militants. (Source: [France24](#))
- **May 31, 2009:** AQIM insurgents execute British hostage Edwin Dyer, who they had held since January when they kidnapped him in Niger. (Source: [Guardian](#))
- **June 10, 2009:** AQIM militants assassinate Malian State Security officer Colonel Lamana Ould Bou at his house in Tumbuku. (Source: [BBC News](#))

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- **June 2009:** AQIM insurgents execute a French tourist they had held since his January 2009 abduction near Mali's border with Niger. (Source: [Guardian](#))
- **October 31, 2008:** AQIM militants turn over two Austrian tourists—who the group kidnapped in southern Tunisia in February 2008—to the Malian government after a ransom is paid. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Since January 2012, Mali has had to grapple with a secessionist Tuareg movement and Islamist rebellion in the country's north. In that time, Mali's government has relied on military operations—domestic and international—to quash extremist elements within its borders. As of 2015, the government conspicuously lacks what the U.S. Department of State called “an official strategy to counter violent extremism.” Despite a shaky peace deal signed with rebel forces in June 2015, Mali continues to rely on French and U.N. military forces to stabilize its northern region and suppress violent Islamist activity. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#), [New York Times](#))

Military Endeavors

From January to March 2012, Mali relied on its military to suppress the northern Tuareg rebellion. After months of failed strategy and continued Tuareg attacks on Malian forces, the military launched a coup on March 22. In the weeks that followed, Mali lost large swaths of territory to the rebels who, on April 6, declared the independent state of Azawad in the north of the country. With its own military failing, the government of Mali appealed to the international community—and its former colonial master France in particular—for emergency military intervention.

In December 2012, the United Nations sanctioned an African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) intervention for late 2013. However, as secessionist and jihadist attacks escalated in late 2012 and early 2013, France—and later West African and U.N. forces—expedited their plans for January 2013. France's Operation Serval, which [sought](#) to put “an abrupt end to the advance of jihadist groups to the south of Mali and to ensure the safety of the 5,000 French nationals in the country,” launched on January 11, 2013. On January 17, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) launched its U.N.-authorized AFISMA mission eight months ahead of schedule. The AFISMA mission [aimed](#) to “contribute to the rebuilding of the capacity of the Malian Defence and Security Forces...; support the Malian authorities in recovering the areas in the north of its territory under the control of terrorist, extremist and armed groups; transition to stabilization activities to support the Malian authorities in maintaining security and consolidate State authority through appropriate capacities; support the Malian authorities in their primary responsibility to protect the population; and support the Malian authorities to create a secure environment for the civilian-led delivery of humanitarian

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assistance and the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees.” On January 17, Nigeria became [the first](#) ECOWAS member state to contribute military support to Mali. It was joined soon after by military contingents from Togo, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and other ECOWAS member states.

In July 2013, the United Nations formally took over authority from the AFISMA mission and established the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Not unlike the AFISMA mission, MINUSMA [sought](#) to “support the political process and carry out a number of security-related stabilization tasks, with a focus on major population centres and lines of communication, protecting civilians, human rights monitoring, the creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the return of displaced persons, the extension of State authority and the preparation of free, inclusive and peaceful elections.” In the months following the international interventions in Mali, violent rebellion subsided significantly in the north, although attacks have continued to erupt in the months and years since.

Although Mali has been entrusted with some military and governance responsibilities for its northern region, the country is still heavily dependent on French and U.N. forces to maintain security in areas under its control. Launched on August 1, 2014, France’s Operation Barkhane has continued to conduct anti-terrorism operations in the country’s north. The United Nations has also extended its MINUSMA operation into 2016. As the U.S. Department of State noted in its 2014 Country Report on Terrorism, Mali continues to lack a comprehensive national strategy to confront violent extremism. To date, the Malian government has not been able to secure a peace settlement with the rebels through diplomacy. (Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#), [Le Figaro](#), [Ministère De La Defense](#), [United Nations](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Security Agencies

Mali’s domestic counterterrorism entities are primarily its Armed Forces and Air Force. Under the country’s Ministry of Security, the General Directorate of State Security has the authority to detain and investigate individuals for terrorism-related offenses. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

National Programs to Counter Extremism

As noted by the U.S. Department of State in 2014, Mali lacks an official program to counter violent extremism in the country. Nonetheless, elements of counter-extremism can be found in some of the government’s reconciliation and development policies. According to the U.S. Department of State, Mali’s 2014 National Reconciliation Policy, as well as its Program for Accelerated Development in the Northern Regions, both contain elements of counter-extremism policy. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Combatting Terrorist Financing

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Mali has made efforts to combat terrorist financing, both within its own borders and throughout the region. In November 2010, Malian representatives voted unanimously to implement legislation countering terrorist financing in the country. To combat the threat of terrorism financing in the region, Mali also belongs to the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA). Established by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), GIABA works to “strengthen... the capacity of member states towards the prevention and control of money laundering and terrorist financing in the region.” (Sources: [Primature](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [GIABA](#))

International Counter-Extremism

International Effort in Mali

In January 2013, Mali became host to an international effort to quash the country’s Tuareg and Islamist uprising. On January 11, 2013, France became the first country to contribute to the effort, conducting air strikes in northern Mali and dispatching troops there soon after. Member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) joined the French days later, as part of the U.N.-approved African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). In July 2013, the United Nations took over responsibility from AFISMA under a mandated mission in Mali known as United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). MINUSMA was charged with stabilizing the country’s north in the aftermath of the international military interventions. As of July 2015, MINUSMA has been authorized to use up to 12,680 uniformed personnel and over \$628 million. (Sources: [Primature](#), [United Nations](#))

Alongside MINUSMA, French forces have continued military operations in Mali through successive Operations Serval (launched January 2013) and Barkhane (launched August 1, 2014). While France—alongside AFISMA and the U.N.-led MINUSMA—has produced major successes in reclaiming northern territory from the rebels and Islamists, violent extremist activity continues to remain a threat. As of June 2015, the U.N. and French missions in Mali are ongoing, with MINUSMA’s strength marked at 10,207 personnel. (Sources: [Le Monde](#), [Le Figaro](#), [Ministère De La Defense](#), [Primature](#), [United Nations](#))

International Counterterrorism and Counter-Extremism

Mali is part of a number of international initiatives working to counter terrorism and extremism in West Africa. In February 2014, Mali and four other West African countries—Mauritania, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso—agreed to form an organization called the G5 Sahel. The group aims to strengthen regional cooperation on development and security. In announcing the group’s formation, the Heads of State formally reiterated their “strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms.” (Source: [Primature](#))

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Since its formation, the G5 Sahel has worked to coordinate with foreign forces undertaking counterterrorism and counter-extremism efforts in the region. Among other entities, the G5 Sahel has met with the European Union, whose EU Sahel Regional Action Plan works to prevent and combat extremism and radicalization in the West African region. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [European Union](#))

Mali is also part of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and has benefitted from ECOWAS membership, particularly via ECOWAS's 2013 military intervention. According to ECOWAS's General Officer, religious extremism is a contributing factor to terrorism and the threat of terrorism in West Africa. Other factors the Officer links with terrorism are "poverty, poor governance, conflicts, political instability, corruption, weak government institutions, easy access to small arms, [and] violence." According to the Global Center on Cooperative Security, ECOWAS's Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan in particular, holds principles that mirror those aimed to counter violent extremism. (Sources: [Diplomatie](#), [Global Center](#))

To combat the threat of terrorism financing, Mali holds membership in the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa. Mali is also a member of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, and has participated in the Global Counterterrorism Forum. As the U.S. Department of State has noted, Mali has volunteered to act as a pilot country for the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, an effort designed to support local communities and help them resist violent extremism. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Public Opinion

The Northern Rebellion and Military Activity

According to a [poll](#) by ORB International conducted in late 2012, 78 percent of Malians supported an international intervention in northern Mali to quash the rebellion. In the region closest to the northern conflict, that number was higher, with 89 percent supporting an international intervention and only 8 percent opposing it. At the time, Malians polled lacked confidence in their own military, with 61 percent believing that the nation's military should not attempt to retake the north until it was stronger. Immediately following France's intervention, a poll conducted by Al Jazeera showed that 96 percent of Malian respondents polled were supportive of the intervention. (Sources: [ORB International](#), [Gallup](#), [Al Jazeera](#))

According to an August/September 2014 poll, 39.9 percent of Malians believed that the fight against armed militias in the north should be a priority of the government. By that time, however, surveys showed that other issues—including youth unemployment and government corruption—ranked higher on citizens' priorities. Malians in 2014 were also significantly more confident in their country's military capabilities, with 58 percent believing that the military was capable of securing the country, including the northern region. After France's intervention, 56 percent of Malians appreciated France's efforts in the country through Operations Serval and Barkhane. A

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total of 71.9 percent of Malians believed in 2014 that armed forces and MINUSMA were sufficient to ensure the security of Mali going forward. Although, the country had a mixed response to the ongoing presence of MINUSMA forces on Malian territory. (Source: [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#))

By 2015, pollsters could reach the northern Malian regions of Gao, Kidal, and Menaka. Polls published January/February 2015 revealed that 25.32 percent of Malians in those areas believed that the fight against armed militias should be one of the government's main priorities. This came in contrast with 52.60 percent of those polled, who believed that negotiating with the armed militias should be one of the government's main priorities. (Source: [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#))

Islamic Extremism

Polls show that Malians have mixed attitudes regarding Islamic extremism, and whether or not it constitutes a national priority to address. According to a Gallup [poll](#) from 2012, a slight majority (51 percent) of Malians reject the implementation of sharia. A Pew [poll](#) released in 2013, however, showed that 63 percent of Malians favored the implementation of sharia. (Sources: [Gallup](#), [Pew](#))

According to a 2014 [poll](#) by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, a minority of Malians—27.6 percent—believe that religious and political extremism constituted one of the greatest challenges in Mali. In the northern regions of Mali, that number was higher by early 2015, with 34.6 percent of Malians polled in Gao, Kidal, and Menaka considering religious and political extremism a major challenge for the country. (Sources: [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#), [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#))