

## ***Mali: Extremism & Counter-Extremism***

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On August 18, 2020, Malian soldiers ambushed Bamako, the West African country's capital, and arrested President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. The mutineers call themselves the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP), and their spokesman, Colonel Ismael Wague, claims the group is "not keen on power, but we are keen on the stability of the country." CNSP seeks to organize a general election that will provide Mali with stronger institutions. The head of the African Union Commission and other West African leaders have condemned the uprising, demanding the release of the president. The country is currently embroiled in protests as disgruntled citizens are demanding new leadership to counter the growing threat of extremism and economic instability. Later that day, Keita issued a brief address from a military base in Kati where he had been detained. In the address, he announced his resignation and the dissolution of parliament. As of August 24, 2020, Keita has yet to be released by the junta. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [1], [CNN](#) [2], [Reuters](#) [3], [Washington Post](#) [4])

On June 4, 2020, French troops launched an operation in Talhandak, northern Mali. The operation targeted top al-Qaeda leader, [Abdelmalek Droukdal](#) [5], the head of al-Qaeda's affiliates in North Africa and the Sahel. Droukdal engineered al-Qaeda's expansion throughout the Sahel and Magreb through financing, planning, and carrying out terrorist attacks. (Source: [The Hill](#) [6])

In May 2020, ISIS fighters detonated a truck bomb along the desert frontier between Mali and Burkina Faso. Unlike similar previous attacks—where ISIS fighters targeted soldiers and villagers—this attack targeted al-Qaeda militants. It is suspected that several al-Qaeda fighters were killed. The explosion set off a series of al-Qaeda reprisal attacks against ISIS, and both camps disseminated statements and sermons threatening and denouncing the other jihadist entity as "apostates." The violence follows a yearlong truce between the jihadist franchises in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Chad. Although ISIS and al-Qaeda are generally rivals in other parts of the world, the regional groups—Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) more or less cooperated with one another throughout the Sahel to destroy Western-allied governments and traditional leaders. According to data from the Pentagon's Africa Center for Strategic Studies, the two groups launched over 1,000 attacks in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso in the past year. (Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [7])

Both ISGS and JNIM maintain a presence in Mali. However, on May 8, 2020, it was reported in ISIS's latest edition of its weekly *Al-Naba* newsletter, that al-Qaeda started a "war" against ISIS militants in West Africa. *Al-Naba* criticized JNIM's leadership, specifically Iyad Ag Ghaly and Amadou Kouffa, as undermining the jihad in favor of negotiating with the Malian government. JNIM sought to diffuse the tension by releasing booklets—indirectly targeted at ISIS sympathizers who are skeptical of JNIM's motives—by calling for unity among all jihadists. On May 28, ISIS spokesman [Abu Hamza al-Qurashi](#) [8] asserted that ISIS will actively retaliate against al-Qaeda in Africa due to violence allegedly instigated by the former jihadist camp. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [9], [United Nations](#) [10], [Washington Post](#) [11], [Long War Journal](#) [12], [Long War Journal](#) [13], [Twitter](#) [14], [Wall Street Journal](#) [7])

### **Overview**

The Malian government declared a nationwide state of emergency in November 2015, after two Islamists killed 20 people and took as many as 170 hostages at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Mali's capital, Bamako. Mali has continued to experience regular attacks on foreign troops, U.N. peacekeeping personnel, Malian security forces, and western tourists. On October 25, 2018, the government announced that the country would remain under a state of emergency for another year. (Sources: [Garda](#) [15], [BBC News](#) [16], [Reuters](#) [17], [Long War Journal](#) [18])

Islamist groups in Mali came to the fore after rebels of the Tuareg tribe—an ethnically Berber people concentrated in the Sahara—began an offensive against Malian government forces in January 2012. At the start of the Tuareg Rebellion, Islamic groups including [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb \(AQIM\)](#) [19], the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Ansar al-Dine (AAD), fought alongside the rebels against Malian security forces. Frustrated with the government's inability to quash the Tuareg's secession, the military staged a coup after three months of fighting. In the political chaos that ensued, the rebels, spearheaded by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), established control in the north. Shortly after, AQIM, AAD, and MUJAO joined forces to expel the rebels from northern Mali. Armed with weapons stolen from the neighboring Libyan civil war, Islamists imposed sharia (Islamic law) on the local population. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [20], [Stanford University](#) [21], [Spiegel](#) [22])

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Unable to regain control of the country's north, the Malian government appealed to France—its former colonial ruler—and the broader international community for assistance. France has provided ongoing military support to Malian troops as a part of Operation Serval, launched in January of 2013, and Operation Barkhane, which replaced Operation Serval in August 2014. Mali has also received extensive military assistance from the United Nations, as part of the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which has been extended into 2019. In addition, Mali has received training from the United States as part of the U.S. Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance Program. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [20], [Watchlist](#) [23], [National Interest](#) [24], [Ministère De La Defense](#) [25], [U.N. MINUSMA](#) [26], [U.N. MINUSMA](#) [27], [U.S. Department of State](#) [28])

In April 2017, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad formed the "G5 Sahel" to hinder the flow of terrorists and contraband across national boundaries. Mali has also worked with regional allies as a member of the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA). (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [28], [Center for Strategic & International Studies](#) [29])

In addition to the Islamist threat, Mali also contends with rising ethnic violence, which reportedly killed hundreds of people in 2018. Hunters from the Dogon ethnic group have historically clashed over land access with herdsman from the Fulani ethnic group. In March 2019, suspected members of the Dogon killed more than 150 people in an attack on Fulani villages. That January, men dressed as hunters from the Donzo ethnic group killed 37 Fulani civilians in a village attack. A January 2019 report by the U.N. secretary-general to the Security Council confirmed 395 civilian deaths in the previous six months. According to the United Nations, the "limited presence of State authority in parts of central and northern Mali continued to allow violent extremist elements to expand their influence in those areas." (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [30], [Reuters](#) [31], [Reuters](#) [32], [U.N. MINUSMA](#) [27], [United Nations](#) [33], [CNN](#) [34])

On February 10, 2020, Human Rights Watch released a new report detailing the rising number of jihadist-backed armed attacks in Mali. According to the report, 2019 was the deadliest year for civilians since Mali's political and military crisis in 2012. With most of the attacks occurring in central Mali, more than 456 civilians have been killed and hundreds more have been wounded. Jihadists from both al-Qaeda and ISIS have been encouraging inter-ethnic attacks in hopes of asserting their power throughout both the state and the West African region. In the past two years, militants have further demonstrated their influence by forming a new alliance called the Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and the establishment of a new cell called the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. JNIM's leader, [Amadou Kouffa](#) [35], an ethnic Fulani, has used his radio sermons to exploit the historical rivalry between the Fulani and Dogon Groups. In the face of increasing violence between the two ethnic groups, Mali's government has allowed the Dogon to form their own self-defense militias which has led to indiscriminate and rampant violence throughout the country. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#) [36], [Telegraph](#) [37], [National](#) [38])

### **Radicalization and Foreign Fighters**

In January 2012, the Tuareg separatist National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) began carrying out attacks in northern Mali with the intent of establishing an independent state. With the backing of armed Tuareg militants who had returned to Mali after training and fighting alongside former Libyan dictator Moammar Gaddafi's forces in that country's civil war, MNLA posed a serious threat to the Malian government. 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. The coup plunged the country further into chaos and in April 2012, MNLA declared that Azawad, a region in Mali's north, was an independent state. (Sources: [International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research](#) [39], [Cato Institute](#) [40], [Stanford University](#) [21], [Deutsche Welle](#) [41])

Beginning in October 2011, top al-Qaeda leader and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) emir, Abdelmalek Droukdel, provided military, financial, and logistical support to Ansar al-Dine (AAD)—a Malian Islamic militant group—to increase AQIM's territorial influence in northern Mali. Under Droukdel's leadership, AQIM formed an alliance with AAD and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in November 2015 to fight against the French and Malian militaries. On June 4, 2020, French troops launched an operation in Talhandak, northern Mali, targeting and killing Droukdel. (Sources: [The Hill](#) [6], [United Nations](#) [42], [Mapping Militant Organizations](#) [43])

Islamist groups in the region, including AQIM, MUJAO, and AAD, initially fought alongside the Tuareg rebels against

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Malian security forces. However, shortly after MNLA declared Azawad as an independent state, AQIM, MUJAO, and AAD, expelled MNLA from the region, assuming control over 10 percent of Mali's population and over half of its territory, including the major cities of Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal. As Islamists gained control in these and other areas, they carried out a series of atrocities, including attacks on UNESCO sites in Timbuktu between May and July of 2012. (Sources: [Stanford University](#) [21], [BBC News](#) [44], [U.S. Department of State](#) [45])

Armed with weapons stolen from Muammar Gaddafi's former regime in Libya, AQIM, AAD, and MUJAO imposed a strict version of sharia over local Malians, including stoning punishments for adulterers, and cutting the hands off of thieves. Islamist police in terrorist-held areas 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, including from Algeria, Mauritania, Sudan, Niger, Nigeria, Morocco, Senegal, and Western Sahara. As one 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](#) [22], [Atlantic](#) [46])

Although Islamist groups in Mali share a common goal of establishing an Islamic state, power politics and ideological differences have created a complex dynamic among the groups. MUJAO initially emerged as an AQIM splinter group that was established by members who believed that AQIM's focus on criminal activities had caused it to lose sight of the jihadist cause. However, after Islamists had ousted MNLA from the north, AAD purportedly brokered a truce between MUJAO and AQIM. In late 2012, a former leader and co-founder of AQIM, [Mokhtar Belmokhtar](#) [47] split from AQIM to form al-Mulathamun Battalion (AMB). AMB merged with MUJAO to form [Al-Mourabitoun](#) [48] ("The Sentinels") in August 2013. On November 20, 2015, the group claimed responsibility for a deadly attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali, which was reportedly carried out with AQIM. In December 2015, it was announced that al-Mourabitoun had formally joined AQIM. (Sources: [Stanford University](#) [21], [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#) [49], [U.S. Department of State](#) [50], [Long War Journal](#) [18])

In March 2017, AQIM, AAD, and al-Mourabitoun merged to form Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). Since its formation, JNIM has carried out a number of violent attacks and was designated as a "Foreign Terrorist Organization" by the U.S. government on September 5, 2018. According to the Center for Strategic & International Studies, JNIM absorbed the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), an AAD-affiliated Islamist group that seeks to establish an Islamic state in central and southern Mali. As of September 2018, JNIM reportedly has between 1,000 and 2,000 fighters. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [51], [The Jamestown Foundation](#) [52], [Center for Strategic & International Studies](#) [53])

Over the next two years, jihadists across the Sahel united under a common banner to expel Western forces from the region. According to military leaders from the United States, France, and West Africa, the militants have carried out increasingly forceful attacks across villages and army bases. Although the jihadists have established a united front, they have yet to declare "caliphates" in favor of focusing on training and plotting attacks. Furthermore, it is reported that fighters affiliated with al-Qaeda and ISIS have been coordinating attacks and have even agreed upon divvying areas of control throughout the Sahel. However, on May 8, 2020, it was reported in ISIS's latest edition of its weekly *al-Naba* newspaper, that al-Qaeda started a "war" against ISIS militants in West Africa. *Al-Naba* criticized JNIM's leadership, specifically Iyad Ag Ghaly and Amadou Kouffa, as undermining the jihad in favor of negotiating with the Malian government. JNIM sought to diffuse the tension by releasing booklets—indirectly targeted at ISIS sympathizers who are skeptical of JNIM's motives—by calling for unity among all jihadists. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [11], [Long War Journal](#) [12], [Long War Journal](#) [13])

On May 7, 2020, ISIS revealed in *al-Naba* that the insurgent group has engaged in tense clashes with al-Qaeda militants in Mali and Burkina Faso. ISIS accused JNIM for instigating the violence as the jihadist camp allegedly mobilized large forces to attack and prevent supplies from getting to ISIS strongholds in Mali and Burkina Faso. According to ISIS, JNIM has amped up attacks since April 17. Unverified claims from JNIM sources also claim that ISIS proposed a ceasefire on May 5, but JNIM allegedly rejected the request. Furthermore, on May 28, ISIS released a statement on Telegram claiming that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic served as punishment for the forces that have fought against ISIS. Additionally, ISIS spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurashi, claimed that ISIS will now retaliate against al-Qaeda in Africa due to attacks initiated by the latter insurgent camp. Although specific countries are not listed, Mali and Burkina Faso have seen increasingly hostile clashes between ISIS and JNIM forces. On June 4, 2020, French soldiers killed AQIM leader [Abdelmalek Droukdel](#) [5] in northern Mali near the Algerian border. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [54], [Twitter](#) [14], [Agence France-Presse](#) [55])

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### *Recruitment*

Islamist activity in northern Mali can be traced back to 2003, when militants from AQIM's predecessor, the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), kidnapped 32 European tourists and held them captive in northern Mali's remote desert for up to six months. Since then, AQIM, AAD, and other Islamist groups in the region have carried out a wave of similar kidnapping operations, using northern Mali to hide dozens of foreign hostages and raking in millions in ransom payments. Islamist groups in Mali have also generated significant funding through establishing and operating drug and human trafficking networks that extend across West Africa. (Sources: [IRIN](#) [56], [New York Times](#) [57], [Stanford University](#) [58], [USA Today](#) [59], [U.S. Department of State](#) [60], [GSDRC](#) [61], [AMDH-FIDH](#) [62])

AQIM, AAD, al-Mourabitoun, and other Islamist groups in Mali have used revenue generated from criminal operations for recruitment purposes. Among other efforts, Islamist groups have attempted to attract new recruits by offering financial incentives to Malians, many of whom live in extreme poverty. According to a CBS News report, Islamists have reportedly "bought" children from their parents, promising families between \$1,000 and \$1,200 a month per child. By October 2012, up to 1,000 child soldiers were included among the ranks of Islamist groups in Mali. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [63], [New York Times](#) [64], [Australian National Security](#) [65], [CBS News](#) [66])

In addition, Islamist groups have attempted to attract new recruits through capitalizing on ethnic and regional divisions within the country. AAD was largely comprised of Tuaregs from the same tribe as its founder and leader, Iyad Ag Ghali. MLF, led by extremist preacher Amadou Koufa, is understood to be a predominantly Fulani movement. To that end, the group has reportedly attracted 4,000 members, primarily of Fulani ethnic origin. Koufa was reportedly killed in a November 2018 French attack but resurfaced in a February 2019 propaganda video. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [67], [Newsweek](#) [68], [Reuters](#) [69])

Islamists have also reportedly attempted to attract new recruits by presenting themselves as righteous defenders of Islam. However, though approximately 95 percent of Mali's population is Muslim, many local communities reject the violent Salafist interpretation of Islam embraced by AQIM and other Islamist groups. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [70], [U.S. Department of State](#) [71], [RAND](#) [72])

### *Foreign Fighters*

There is little evidence to suggest that Malians are leaving the country to fight alongside Islamic extremists in other parts of the world. Rather, militants from across Africa, including members of the Nigerian-based terror group Boko Haram, have reportedly traveled to Mali to attend AQIM training camps and to fight alongside Islamists in Mali's north. (Sources: [Atlantic](#) [46], [BBC News](#) [73], [Perspectives on Terrorism](#) [74])

## **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. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [75])

- **August 11, 2020:** Unidentified jihadists ambush Kimparana, central Mali. The assailants set fire to a jail, resulting in the release of five inmates. The attack kills a police officer and a soldier. Source: [Defense Post](#) [76]
- **July 23, 2020:** The Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM) claims to ambush a French military camp in Gossi, northern Mali. The al-Qaeda linked group raided the camp with two explosive-packed vehicles. The attack kills one soldier. Source: [Defense Post](#) [77]
- **July 3, 2020:** Unidentified armed men ambush several villages in central Mali. The attack kills over 31 villagers and nine soldiers. Source: [France 24](#) [78]
- **June 15, 2020:** JNIM militants ambush a dozen military vehicles in Bouka Were. The ambush kills more than 24 soldiers. Source: [SOFREP](#) [79]
- **June 13, 2020:** Unidentified gunmen ambush a convoy in central Mali. The attack kills at least 24 soldiers. No group claims responsibility for the attack, but the area is known for Islamist militant violence. Source: [BBC News](#) [80]

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- **June 13, 2020:** Unidentified gunmen ambush a U.N. convoy traveling between Tessalit and Gao in northwest Mali. The attack kills two U.N. peacekeepers. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [81]
- **June 4, 2020:** French troops launch an operation in northern Mali. The operation targets top al-Qaeda leader, Abdelmalek Droukdal, the head of al-Qaeda's affiliates in North Africa and the Sahel. Droukdal engineered al-Qaeda's expansion throughout the Sahel and Magreb through financing, planning, and carrying out terrorist attacks. Source: [The Hill](#) [6]
- **May 11, 2020:** A convoy of United Nations soldiers from Chad strikes a roadside bomb in Aguelhok, northern Mali. Three soldiers are killed in the attack and four more are wounded. No group claims responsibility for the attack. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, however, states that attacks targeting U.N. peacekeepers could constitute war crimes under international law. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [9]
- **May 2020:** ISIS fighters detonate a truck bomb along the desert frontier between Mali and Burkina Faso. Unlike similar previous attacks—where ISIS fighters targeted soldiers and villagers—this attack targets al-Qaeda militants. It is suspected that several al-Qaeda fighters are killed. The explosion set off a series of al-Qaeda reprisal attacks against ISIS, and both camps disseminated statements and sermons threatening and denouncing the other jihadist entity as “apostates.” The violence follows a yearlong truce between the jihadist franchises in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Chad. Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [7]
- **April 23, 2020:** During a Malian operation targeting “armed terrorist groups” in the Liptako region of southeast Mali, a military tanker belonging to the French-led Operation Barkhane is hit by an IED. One French soldier was killed and another was wounded. Source: [Associated Press](#) [82]
- **April 6, 2020:** Militants ambush a military base in Bamba. The attack kills over 25 soldiers. No group claims responsibility for the attack, however it is suspected that jihadist Group to Suppress Islam and Muslims (JNIM) was behind the ambush. The same day, suspected jihadists kill a custom officer in Sebekoro town, the details of the attack are unreported. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [83], [International Crisis Group](#) [84]
- **March 31, 2020:** According to reports, the days leading up to and the day of Mali's parliamentary elections have been subject to kidnappings, ransacked polling stations, and roadside bomb attacks. An unreported number of village chiefs, election officials, and one electoral observer are kidnapped. It is uncertain if the perpetrators are jihadist militants or political dissidents. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [85]
- **March 29, 2020:** An unidentified local official claims that a vehicle hit a landmine in N'gorkou, central Mali. At least nine people are killed. Sources: [International Crisis Group](#) [84], [Al Jazeera](#) [85]
- **March 25, 2020 - March 27, 2020:** Malian opposition leader Soumalia Cisse is kidnapped by suspected Katiba Macina militants while campaigning in the Niafounke district in Timbuktu. Five others were kidnapped with Cisse but were released on March 27. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [86], [Al Jazeera](#) [87], [International Crisis Group](#) [84]
- **March 24, 2020:** A Malian Armed Forces vehicle strikes an IED in the Mopti region of central Mali. The attack kills two soldiers, and injures three others. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [88]
- **March 19, 2020:** Armed men ambush a Malian army camp in Gao, northern Mali. At least 29 soldiers are killed and at least five others are wounded. No group claims responsibility for the attack, however, the ambush is similar to those carried out by al-Qaeda linked groups in the region. Source: [Associated Press](#) [89]
- **March 14, 2020:** A Canadian woman and an Italian man who were kidnapped in December 2018 in Burkina Faso are released in Mali. It is unreported who kidnapped the two or who arranged for the release of the hostages. Source: [Associated Press](#) [90]
- **February 26, 2020:** A roadside bomb strikes a German vehicle being driven by Irish troops near Gao, northern Mali. The attack injures three Irish soldiers. It is unreported who is responsible for the attack. Source: [Associated Press](#) [91]
- **February 14, 2020:** Suspected jihadists launch an attack in Ogossagou, a village that is home to mostly Fulani herders. At least 31 people are killed in the attack. No group claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [New York Times](#) [92]
- **January 26, 2020:** Militants ambush an army camp in Sokolo, central Mali. The attack kills at least 20 soldiers. No group claims responsibility for the attack, although it is suspected that the attackers were linked to al-Qaeda. Sources: [North Africa Post](#) [93], [Reuters](#) [94]
- **January 16, 2020:** A U.S. federal court charges a Malian man in absentia for his role in two 2016 terror attacks in Burkina Faso. The attacks killed 30 people, including Michael J. Riddering, an American missionary. The attacker, Mimi Ould Baba, reportedly scouted attack locations for AQIM and arranged the transport of weaponry to be used in the attacks on a hotel and a café in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Several weeks after the Burkina Faso shooting, Baba helped plan a similar attack on Westerners in Ivory Coast. In that attack, three men armed with hand grenades and AK-47s walked along a beach in Grand Bassam and opened fire. Nineteen people were killed. Baba was eventually captured in 2017 in Mali, where he remains in custody. Sources: [Fox News](#) [95], [U.S. Department of Justice](#) [96]
- **November 26, 2019 - November 28, 2019:** French troops launch an air operation to support ground forces engaged in combat with militants. Two helicopters collide, killing 13 French soldiers. On November 28, ISIS claims its West African branch caused the collision. The Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) said the helicopters collided after one of them retreated

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- under fire from ISWAP fighters, but it did not provide evidence for its claim. Sources: [Guardian](#) [97], [Reuters](#) [98]
- **November 1, 2019:** ISIS militants attack an army post in Indelimane, northern Mali.  
The attack kills at least 54 people and injures another 10. French forces claim that included among the casualties was one of its soldiers who died after his vehicle hit an improvised explosive device. Source: [Reuters](#) [99]
  - **October 9, 2019:** French forces carry out an operation successfully killing Ali Maychou, the second in command of JNIM.  
Maychou was a former radical Imam who was added to international sanctions list by the United Nations for his links to ISIS and al-Qaeda. Source: [Deutsche Welle](#) [100]
  - **October 6, 2019:** A vehicle hits an improvised explosive device in Aguelhok, northern Mali.  
The vehicle carried a U.N. peacekeeper and four others. All five sustain injuries. No group claims responsibility for the explosive. Source: [Reuters](#) [101]
  - **October 3, 2019:** Insurgent forces simultaneously attack the G5 Sahel force camp in Boulikessi and the Malian army base in Mondoro.  
The insurgents kill at least 25 Malian soldiers. At least 60 soldiers are missing. No group claims the raids, but Malian authorities blame the al Qaeda-linked Burkinabe jihadist group Ansaroul Islam for the assaults. Source: [Long War Journal](#) [102]
  - **September 30, 2019:** JNIM militants attack military bases in Boulikessi and Mondoro, both in central Mali.  
The attacks kill at least 38 with dozens of other soldiers missing. Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#) [103], [Reuters](#) [104]
  - **September 3, 2019:** A vehicle hits a makeshift bomb in Mopti, central Mali.  
The attack kills at least 14 people and wounds another 24. JNIM claims responsibility for the attack, claiming they intended to target French troops and not civilians. Source: [Reuters](#) [105]
  - **August 21, 2019:** Suspected jihadists ambush Malian soldiers in Bamako.  
The attack kills five. Source: [Reuters](#) [106]
  - **June 18, 2019:** Unidentified gunmen attack the villages of Yoro and Gangafani 2.  
The attacks kill at least 41. The victims of the raids were mostly ethnic Dogons, where 24 people were killed. Another 17 died in Gangafani 2. Source: [Reuters](#) [107]
  - **June 17, 2019:** Insurgents attack Gaganfani and Yono, two ethnic Dogon villages in the Mopti region of central Mali.  
The attack kills 38 and leaves many others wounded. No group claims responsibility for the attacks. Source: [The Defense Post](#) [108]
  - **June 16, 2019:** Allied French and Malian forces kills 20 ISIS militants in an operation in Akabar, northern Mali.  
Despite the deployment of 4,500 French troops meant to contain the violence in the Sahel, it has steadily worsened, and the Islamists have succeeded in triggering an ethnic conflict. Source: [Reuters](#) [109]
  - **June 9, 2019 - June 10, 2019:** A Malian militia believed to belong to the Fulani ethnic group raids the Dogon village of Sobane Da.  
Over two days of violence, the attack kills at least 95 people and wounds another 38, with reports of over 20 people missing. No group claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Defense Post](#) [110]
  - **April 21, 2019:** Gunmen attack and burn down a Malian army base in Guire district, Central Mali.  
The ambush kills 11 soldiers. No group claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Reuters](#) [111]
  - **March 23, 2019:** A group of armed men dressed as traditional hunters attack the Ogossagou village in the Mopti region, killing at least 157 people and wounding at least 73.  
The village is home to members of the Fulani ethnic group. The attackers are suspected of belonging to the Dogon ethnic group. The two groups have historically clashed over land access. On March 24, the Mali government dissolves a Dogon militia, which had previously helped in counterterrorism operations. The United Nations sends human rights experts to investigate the attack. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [30], [Reuters](#) [32], [CNN](#) [34]
  - **March 17, 2019:** Gunmen launch an overnight raid on a military base in the village of Dioura in the Mopti region, killing at least 23 soldiers.  
The gunmen briefly seize the military base. Malian officials suspect jihadist militants linked to a Tuareg militia and al-Qaeda. JNIM claims responsibility. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [112], [Reuters](#) [113], [Voice of America](#) [114], [Long War Journal](#) [115]
  - **February 22, 2019:** French troops carry out an operation involving air and ground assets in Timbuktu.  
French troops kill several militants including Yahia Abou Hamman, the number two in command of JNIM. Source: [Reuters](#) [116]
  - **January 20, 2019:** Militants attack MINUSMA forces at a U.N.-run camp in the village of Aguelhok in the Kidal region, killing at least 10 Chadian U.N. peacekeepers and wounding 25 others.  
AQIM claims responsibility, claiming the attack is in response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Chad. Sources: [CNN](#) [117], [Al Jazeera](#) [118]
  - **January 15, 2019:** Gunmen on motorbikes kill at least 34 Tuareg civilians in two villages in northern Mali.  
Source: [Reuters](#) [119]
  - **January 1, 2019:** Armed men dressed as traditional Donzo hunters kill at least 37 Fulani civilians in the village of Koulogon Peul in the Mopti region.  
U.N. human rights experts announce intentions to investigate. Sources: [Reuters](#) [31], [United Nations](#) [33]
  - **December 11, 2018 - December 12, 2018:** A series of attacks on Tuareg camps in the Ménaka region of eastern Mali

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claims the lives of at least 42 people, including children as young as eight.

The attacks are reportedly carried out by men on motorcycles, who are suspected to be jihadists. Source: [CBC News](#) [120]

- **November 12, 2018:**Three Malians are killed and 30 others are wounded when two suicide bombers detonate vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices near U.N.-owned villas in the city of Gao. JNIM claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [News 24](#) [121], [News24](#) [122], [GardaWorld](#) [123], [GardaWorld](#) [124], [U.S. Department of State](#) [51]
- **July 1, 2018:**In an attack on French troops in Gao, JNIM militants kill four French soldiers and four civilians. JNIM claims that the attack is intended to send a message to French President Emmanuel Macron, who is scheduled to arrive in Mauritania the following day. Source: [Reuters](#) [125]
- **June 29, 2018:**Islamists exchange gunfire with security officials after a suicide bomber is prevented from entering the headquarters of an anti-terror taskforce located Sévaré. Six people are killed and others are wounded. Source: [Guardian](#) [126]
- **July 29, 2017:**Al-Qaeda releases South African hostage Stephen McGown, who had been kidnapped nearly six years earlier at a hotel in Timbuktu. Source: [BBC News](#) [127]
- **June 18, 2017:**Gunmen storm Le Campement, a luxury hotel outside of Bamako, killing five people. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [BBC News](#) [128], [Independent](#) [129], [Reuters](#) [130]
- **June 8, 2017:**A U.N. base in Kidal, northern Mali, is attacked with heavy mortar fire. Three U.N. peacekeepers from Guinea are killed and five others are wounded. Three Guinea soldiers are killed just outside the base. An al-Qaeda affiliate group claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [131], [Associated Press](#) [132]
- **June 1, 2017:**Several French soldiers are wounded in a mortar attack on a U.N. peacekeeping camp in Timbuktu. JNIM claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Associated Press](#) [133]
- **May 23, 2017:**An attack on a U.N. patrol in the Kidal region kills two Chadian peacekeepers. Source: [United Nations](#) [134]
- **May 15, 2017:**Four U.N. peacekeepers and three Malian soldiers are hurt when a U.N. camp near Timbuktu is hit by mortar fire. The same camp was attacked with rockets on May 3. Source: [Sahelien](#) [135]
- **May 3, 2017:**At least one U.N. peacekeeper is killed and nine others hurt when a U.N. base in the northern city of Timbuktu is hit by rocket fire. The U.N. reports that JNIM claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [136], [Liberian Observer](#) [137], [Voice of America](#) [138], [United Nations](#) [139]
- **May 2, 2017:**Nine Malian soldiers are killed and five others are injured when a supply convoy is ambushed between Dogofri and Nampala. The convoy hit a mine before being attacked by gunfire. A Malian security official attributes the attack to “jihadists.” Source: [Agence France Presse](#) [140]
- **March 5, 2017:**Assailants target a Malian army post near the border with Burkina Faso, killing 11 soldiers. The attack is attributed to Ansar-ul-Islam lil-Ichad wal Jihad (IRSAD), an al-Qaeda-linked group led by extremist Burkinabe preacher Malam Ibrahim Dicko. Sources: [International Business Times](#) [141], [International Business Times](#) [142]
- **January 18, 2017:**A suicide car bomber targets a military camp in Gao, killing 47 people and wounding more than 100 others. Al-Mourabitoun claims responsibility. Sources: [CNN](#) [143], [Associated Press](#) [144]
- **November 30, 2016:**Militants target two airports in Gao, leaving no casualties. Al-Mourabitoun claims responsibility. Source: [Reuters](#) [145]
- **October 3, 2016:**Unidentified assailants target a camp hosting a U.N. peacekeeping mission in Aguelhok, in Mali’s northern Kidal region. The attack leaves one U.N. peacekeeper dead and eight wounded. Source: [News24](#) [146]
- **August 5, 2016 - August 7, 2016:**Unidentified assailants launch a series of bombs targeting U.N. peacekeeping targets in northeast Mali. The attacks leave one peacekeeper dead and eight wounded. Sources: [News24](#) [147], [United Nations](#) [148]
- **July 19, 2016:**A joint attack—allegedly carried out by AQIM, the Macina Liberation Front, and an ethnic Peul group—targets an army base in central Mali, killing 17 Malian soldiers. Source: [Reuters](#) [149]
- **May 29, 2016:**Five U.N. peacekeepers are killed when a roadside bomb detonates near a convoy near Severe in central Mali. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [150]
- **April 12, 2016:**Three French soldiers are killed by an improvised explosive device in Tessalit. AAD takes credit for the attack. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [150]
- **March 21, 2016:**Gunmen attempt to attack the Bamako’s Hotel Nord Sud, where the headquarters of the European

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Union training mission is based.

One attacker is killed while trying to penetrate the perimeter as another is arrested. Authorities suspect AQIM and AMB are involved. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [150]

- **March 13, 2016:** Gunmen with links to AQIM attack a beach resort in Côte d'Ivoire, killing 19 people. Shortly after, Malian forces arrest three people connected to the attack. Source: [France24](#) [151]
- **February 12, 2016:** A mortar attack—claimed by Ansar al-Dine—kills five U.N. peacekeepers in Kidal. Source: [BBC News](#) [152]
- **November 20, 2015:** Two gunmen storm the Radisson Blu Hotel in Mali's capital, Bamako, killing 20 people and taking as many as 170 hostages. Al-Mourabitoun claims that it carried out the attack in conjunction with AQIM. Sources: [BBC News](#) [16], [Reuters](#) [17]
- **August 7, 2015:** Al-Mourabitoun gunmen attack the Hotel Byblos in the central Malian town of Sevare, killing nine civilians and four Malian soldiers. Source: [France24](#) [153]
- **June 30, 2015:** AAD militants attack a military camp 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](#) [154]
- **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](#) [155]
- **January 9, 2015:** AQIM is the suspected perpetrator of an attack on a U.N. vehicle in Kidal, Mali that wounds seven Senegalese U.N. peacekeepers. Source: [U.N. News Centre](#) [156]
- **January 5, 2015:** Islamists open fire on Malian soldiers in Nampala, a town located near Mali's border with Mauritania. According to a source at the United Nations, five soldiers are killed. Source: [BBC News](#) [157]
- **November 25, 2014:** Insurgents target the convoy of the Malian Minister of Rural Development with a roadside bomb. Two soldiers are killed in the explosion and four others are wounded. The Minister is left unscathed. Source: [Associated Press](#) [158]
- **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](#) [159]
- **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](#) [160]
- **August 30, 2014:** Two of the seven Algerian diplomats kidnapped by MUJAO in April 2012 are released. Source: [Agence France-Presse](#) [161]
- **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](#) [162]
- **November 14, 2013:** Al-Mourabitoun claims responsibility for a vehicle-borne 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](#) [163]
- **November 2, 2013:** AQIM claims responsibility for 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](#) [164]
- **October 29, 2013:** Four of the seven French hostages that were abducted by AQIM in September 2010 are released in northern Mali. The hostages are believed to have been held in the Sahel desert. Source: [Guardian](#) [165]
- **October 23, 2013:** Al-Mourabitoun suicide bombers kill two Chadian soldiers and one Malian civilian at a U.N. peacekeeping base. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [163]
- **October 7, 2013 - October 8, 2013:** Insurgents belonging to MUJAO destroy two bridges during a mortar attack in the northern region of Gao. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [163]
- **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](#) [163]
- **January 16, 2013 - January 19, 2013:** Islamists belonging to AMB cross into Algeria and launch an attack on the Tigantourine gas facility in the town of In Amenas. The militants take over 100 hostages, most of whom are foreign expatriates. During the siege, which lasts four days, 39 hostages, one Algerian security guard, and 29 militants are killed. 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.



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- Sources: [Euronews](#) [166], [Combatting Terrorism Center](#) [167], [Al Jazeera](#) [168]
- **November 20, 2012:**MUJAO claims responsibility for the kidnapping of an elderly French tourist in Diema in the Kayes region.  
Source: [Agence France-Presse](#) [169]
  - **May 2012 - July 2012:**Islamists destroy UNESCO world heritage sites, including Sufi shrines, in Timbuktu, Mali.  
Source: [Atlantic](#) [170]
  - **April 2012:**MUJAO insurgents kidnap seven Algerian diplomats in Gao.  
Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [45]
  - **March 2012:**AAD insurgents attack Malian soldiers in Aguelhok, killing 82 and kidnapping 30 others.  
Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [171]
  - **January 24, 2012:**Assailants shoot and slit the throats of soldiers and civilians in Aguelhok, a town located in eastern Mali.  
The attack, which claims the lives of up to 100 people, is believed to have been carried out by AQIM and MNLA.  
Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [172]
  - **November 24, 2011:**Islamists abduct two French citizens from a hotel in Hombori in central Mali.  
Source: [BBC News](#) [173]
  - **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](#) [174]
  - **July 24, 2010:**AQIM executes the French citizen NGO worker abducted in December 2009.  
Source: [OSAC](#) [174]
  - **December 2009:**AQIM militants in Mali kidnap an Italian citizen, his wife, and a French NGO worker.  
Source: [OSAC](#) [174]
  - **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](#) [175]
  - **May 31, 2009:**AQIM insurgents execute British hostage Edwin Dyer, who they had held since January when they kidnapped him in Niger.  
Source: [Guardian](#) [176]
  - **June 10, 2009:**AQIM militants assassinate Malian State Security officer Colonel Lamana Ould Bou at his house in Tumbuktu.  
Source: [BBC News](#) [177]
  - **June 2009:**AQIM insurgents execute a French tourist they had held since his January 2009 abduction near Mali's border with Niger.  
Source: [Guardian](#) [178]
  - **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](#) [179]

## **Domestic Counter-Extremism**

### *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 an independent state in the country's north. With its own military failing, the government of Mali appealed to France—its former colonial ruler—and to the broader international community for emergency military intervention. (Sources: [International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research](#) [39], [Guardian](#) [180], [BBC News](#) [181], [New York Times](#) [182], [Reuters](#) [183])

On January 11, 2013, France launched 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.” Later that month, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) began deploying troops to Mali as part of the U.N.-approved African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). Although the deployment of AFISMA forces was not expected to take place before September 2013, as secessionist and jihadist attacks escalated in late 2012 and early 2013, the involved parties agreed to accelerate their plans. On January 17, Nigeria became [the first](#) [184] 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. 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

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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 assistance and the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees.” (Sources: [Ministère de la Défense](#) [185], [U.N. Security Council](#) [186], [Fox News](#) [184], [U.N. MINUSMA](#) [26])

In July 2013, the United Nations formally took over authority from the AFISMA mission and established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Not unlike the AFISMA mission, MINUSMA [sought](#) [187] 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.” (Source: [U.N. MINUSMA](#) [26])

Despite ongoing foreign military interventions, Islamist groups continue to control territory in northern Mali and to carry out attacks across the country. Mali has been entrusted with some military and governance responsibilities for its northern region but is still heavily dependent on France and the United Nations. France’s Operation Barkhane, which was launched on August 1, 2014, has continued to assist Mali in its counter-terrorism efforts in the country’s north. The United Nations has also extended its MINUSMA operation into 2019. On February 2, 2020, France stated that it would boost its military presence in the Sahel by adding 600 troops to its counterterrorism effort, Operation Barkhane, in Mali and the four other countries in the region. As of early 2020, there are 4,500 French troops deployed across the Sahel. The bulk of the reinforcements will be stationed in the border zone linking Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The French Armed Forces have launched counterterrorism missions particularly in Mopti which is rife with conflict exacerbated by Katiba Macina—a group associated with Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), which is a jihadist group that has pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. Despite the increase of extremist attacks in the Sahel, on January 26, 2020, the Pentagon announced it was considering reducing the number of U.S. troops in Mali. The United States, which currently deploys over 7,000 forces in Africa, has provided critical support to France’s Operation Barkhane in terms of intelligence and surveillance via drones. (Sources: [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [188], [National Interest](#) [24], [Ministère De La Defense](#) [25], [U.N. MINUSMA](#) [189], [U.N. MINUSMA](#) [27], [U.S. Department of State](#) [28], [Deutsche Welle](#) [190], [Defense Post](#) [191], [Al Jazeera](#) [192], [Telegraph](#) [37], [National](#) [38])

In October 2018, members of the Groupement Spéciale d’Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (GSIGN), a French embassy-trained National Gendarmerie advanced intervention unit, began its first deployment to the Segou region in support of the government’s Integrated Central Region Security Plan and Operation Dambé, a military counterterrorism operation. The unit had immediate impact, supporting current gendarme posts, intervening in an armed robbery, and arresting suspected terrorists. In Bamako, the next phase of training began with the creation of an additional 32-man team with the GSIGN at the new Department of State-funded training academy. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [193])

In January 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted a meeting with the leaders of Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, and Chad to address increased jihadist activity in Africa’s Sahel region. The leaders pledged to increase their military campaigns against jihadists. On February 27, 2020, the African Union (AU)—a pan-African organization which can deploy military forces via approval from its Peace and Security Council—confirmed that it would temporarily deploy 3,000 troops throughout the Sahel region to contain the violence propagated by armed Islamists. The troops will be deployed for a period of six months, however, the finer details of the deployment have yet be worked out. (Sources: [France 24](#) [194], [Voice of America](#) [195], [BBC News](#) [196])

On March 28, 2020, France and several of its European allies—including Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom—launched a new task force called Takuba. The task force, made up of Special Forces that fight armed groups throughout the Sahel, is planned to “have an initial operational capability (IOC) by the summer of 2020 and is expected to become operational (FOC) by early 2021.” The task force will operate in the Liptako region between Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, and forces will also provide assistance to France’s Operation Barkhane and the regional G5 Sahel Joint Force. Using intelligence provided by the United States, French troops in Mali killed al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb leader Abdelmalek Droukdel near the border with Algeria. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [197], [Agence France-Presse](#) [55])

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### *Security Agencies*

Mali's national counterterrorism infrastructure consists of its Armed Forces, the primary entity responsible for carrying out domestic counterterrorism operations, and its General Directorate of State Security, which is authorized to detain and investigate terror suspects. However, as noted by the U.S. State Department in its 2017 Country Reports on Terrorism, lack of coordination between security forces and law enforcement as well as inadequate resources and training, among other factors, have made it difficult for the country to effectively secure its borders and to combat domestic terrorism without the assistance of foreign powers. Mali's security forces continue to receive military support from the United Nations and France as well as training from the U.S. government as part of the U.S. Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance Program. Among other efforts to enhance Mali's capacity to counter terrorism, the U.S. government has provided training programs on crime scene investigations of terror attacks, surveillance detection, incident response, and securing vital infrastructure. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [28], [U.S. Department of State](#) [150])

### *National Programs to Counter Extremism*

In June 2017, Mali implemented its first national strategy to prevent radicalization, terrorism, and violent extremism. The strategy involves Mali's Ministry of Religious Affairs working with Islamic organizations to promote moderate Islam. In February 2019, the Ministry of Religious Affairs launched a new Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) strategy that focuses not only on working with religious associations to maintain a secular state, but also improving governance, reinforcing security, promoting development, and increasing communication with local citizens in central Mali to provide greater transparency regarding the government's actions. However, the Ministry of Religious Affairs lacks the necessary resources and effective interagency communication to fully implement these stabilizing measures. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [28], [U.S. Department of State](#) [150], [U.S. Department of State](#) [198])

As of June 2020, Mali continues to rely heavily on the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and French forces to help marginally stabilize and secure the country's northern regions. Terrorist groups, particularly ISIS, increased their attacks on all 2015 Algiers Accord signatories, including the rebel/separatist Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA), the pro-government Plateforme coalition, and the jihadist groups with which were once briefly allied with groups such as al-Qaeda, al-Murabitun, and Ansar al-Din. Terrorism, insecurity, and lack of accountability or effective governance resulted in a significant increase in intercommunal violence, particularly in central Mali. The conflict area has moved farther south than at any time since the 2012 triple crisis of the political insurgency, military coup, and terrorist assault on the country. Security in the center of the country rapidly deteriorated in 2018 as terrorists took advantage of long-standing intercommunal and ethnic tensions to significantly increase violence against civilians. MINUSMA maintained its northern presence in 2018, and continued its work with the Malian government and various militia groups to facilitate redeployment of government administrators and security forces to the north. Human Rights Watch documented numerous allegations of human rights violations by Malian security forces in counterterrorism operations, particularly in the center of the country. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [193], [UNHCR](#) [199])

In 2018, Mali was a pilot country of the International Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism Capacity-Building Clearinghouse Mechanism, an online database under the GCTF to identify and de-conflict gaps in counterterrorism and CVE programming. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [193])

On February 10, 2020, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita confirmed that the Malian government has opened communication with the armed groups. The government has previously been hesitant to initiate dialogue with armed groups. Given the on-going violence in the country, however, Keita asserted that it is an option that has to be explored. (Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [200])

Despite Keita's efforts to mitigate ongoing insurgent violence, on August 18, 2020, Malian soldiers ambushed Bamako, the West African country's capital, and arrested the president. The opposition, which calls themselves the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP), and their spokesman, Colonel Ismael Wague, claimed the group is "not keen on power, but we are keen on the stability of the country." CNSP seeks to organize a general election that will provide Mali with stronger institutions. Later that day, Keita delivered a brief address from the military base in Kati. Keita announced that he would not only resign, but that he would also dissolve Parliament. As of August 24, 2020, Keita has yet to be released by the junta. Since May 2020, Malian citizens have protested Keita and his party as a constitutional court overturned results from a contentious parliamentary election that allowed for Keita's party to occupy the majority of seats.

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Since the contested ruling, Malian streets have been embroiled in protests as disgruntled citizens demanded new leadership to counter the growing threat of extremism and economic instability. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [1], [CNN](#) [2], [Reuters](#) [3], [Washington Post](#) [4])

### **International Counter-Extremism**

#### *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.” The countries formally agreed to set up a joint counterterrorism force in February 2017. (Sources: [Primature](#) [201], [BBC](#) [202], [Africanews](#) [203])

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](#) [204], [European Union](#) [205])

Mali is also part of ECOWAS, and has benefitted from ECOWAS membership, particularly via its 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.” (Sources: [Diplomatie](#) [206], [Global Center](#) [207])

#### *Combating Terrorist Financing*

To combat the threat of terrorism financing, Mali holds membership in 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.” 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. (Sources: [Primature](#) [208], [U.S. Department of State](#) [75], [GIABA](#) [209])

### **Public Opinion**

#### *Islamic Extremism and Armed Insurgencies*

According to a 2018 poll by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 88 percent of Malians interviewed claim to fear terrorist attacks. Additionally, 59 percent of interviewees claim that MINUSMA does not adequately protect the population from armed groups and terrorists and over 57 percent of interviewees believe that soldiers involved in Operation Barkhane are “in cahoots with armed groups.” Furthermore, given the increasing number of insurgent attacks, more than 65 percent of interviewees claim to favor government negotiations with jihadist leaders to prevent future turmoil. (Source: [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#) [210])

#### *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,

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with 89 percent supporting an international intervention. At the time, the 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 the Malian respondents polled were supportive of the intervention. (Sources: [ORB International](#) [211], [Gallup](#) [212], [Al Jazeera](#) [213])

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 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. A poll of Malians conducted in October 2015 showed that 67 percent of the population was dissatisfied with MINUSMA's work, compared to 29 percent who were satisfied. (Sources: [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#) [214], [GISSE](#) [215])

By 2015, pollsters could reach the northern Malian regions of Gao, Kidal, and Menaka. Polls published in 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](#) [216])

By October 2015, a slight majority of Malians polled—54.3 percent compared to 44.6 percent—believed that Malian president Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta had done a good job managing the northern conflict. A larger majority—67.3 percent—was satisfied with France's efforts in Mali, compared to 32 percent who were dissatisfied. While this figure appears to indicate broad support for France's activity in Mali, it is worth noting that the figure is significantly lower than it was at the start of the conflict, when over 90 percent of the Malian public supported France's intervention in the country. (Source: [GISSE](#) [215])

After the November 2015 Bamako attack, roughly 35 percent of those polled in an online survey believed that Malian security forces were failing, and 31.29 percent indicated that the West treated the attack as trivial. Twenty one percent believed that the hotel attack was a response to a June 2015 peace deal signed between the Malian government and insurgents. (Source: [aBamako.com](#) [217])