

# Threat Assessment

UNCOMPLETED

## MALI

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## FORWARD:

Intrusions of terrorist groups neighboring Algeria and the proliferation of Islamic extremism, coupled with political instability and the expulsion of ECOWAS, have left Mali destabilized with increasing Russian influence. Since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2012, Mali has seen an increase in political violence and terrorism. In the north of Mali, in the regions of GAO, Mopti, and Timbuktu, Jihadist organizations affiliated with the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (IS-GS), Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operate uncontested. Mali has expelled French influence to align with the Kremlin and the assistance they provide. The Introduction of Russian influence is solidified by the arrival of the Wagner group in 2021. The Wagner Group, a private military organization directly linked to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MOD), operates globally to disrupt Western influence and operates as a proxy force from Russia covertly. The Kremlin's objective of Skirting Western sanctions has allowed the Wagner group to align with the current political Junta, offering security services, training, and anti-terrorism operations across Mali. In exchange, the Malian FAMA has sold or given the rights to various Gold mining operations across the country.

## HISTORY

Following the overthrow of the Libyan government, Considerable numbers of combatants arrived in Mali with arms acquired during the conflict. In January of 2012, an influx of foreign fighters rapidly led to the mobilization of local Tuareg rebels who reformed elements of the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA). The MNLA is an ethnic organization that has been prevalent in the north of Mali as early as 1916 and has actively called for political separation from the south of Mali. The fighters worked to secure the north of Mali called the "azawad" and actively combat troops within this area. Following the influx of fighters from outside the country, and a coup in March of 2012 that ousted president Amadou Toumani Touré. Key infrastructure in the capital city of Bamako, including Military barracks, the Presidential palace, and state-run Media outlets, were seized and under control of the military FAMA. In March of 2012, the areas of Tombouctou, Kidal, and Gao all in the north of Mali were seized from the Residual FAMA and occupied by the MNLA in restoration of the area they called Azawad. Additionally within this region is various ideologically opposed Islamic extremist groups. Conflicts between the MNLA and AQIM in the region are fueled by harsh political secularism exhibited by AQIM, who traditionally enforce strict Sharia Law. The Tuareg rebels who are fighting for an independent autonomous region of Mali, are opposed to this secularism and carry a history of pro-democratic values. The government of Mali, which was largely inept at combating the rise in Islamic extremism and unprepared for the volume of heavy arms utilized by the rebels, lost total control of the north of the country, initiating the start of the ongoing war in Mali. The military FAMA that took power in 2012 reassured the international community that Interim elections would take place and the people of Mali would vote for their next president. On September 7, 2013, president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was elected to represent the people of Mali. IBK ran a successful pro-democracy government during his tenure, combating elements of jihadism and the MNLA. With assistance from the international community in Africa (ECOWAS), Keita's government successfully took part in joint operations to quell the stem of anti-government troops and Islamic extremism. This operation was successful in appropriating the rule of the FAMA until another coup in 2020. The 2020 Malian coup marked a staunch 180 from its original stance regarding Western support. The ousting of IBK and his pro democracy regime opened the door to positional power plays by anti-NATO interests. 9 months after the

2020 coup d'etat, another coup in 2021 established a different military FAMa. This government said it would restore democracy and host elections after a 5-year grace period. These elections never materialized, and calls to the international community fell on deaf ears as French troops were ousted from the region in favor of WAGNER's military support against the FAMa's enemies. The Wagner groups' pledged support for the FAMa came at the cost of natural resources, specifically gold mining operations. Assisting in Russia's effort to sidestep sanctions during its war in Ukraine. As of 2024, the FAMa within Mali has yet to follow through on its peaceful transition back to democratic power, which has led to additional tensions between the Malian people and the FAMa.

## **Membership/Leadership**

### **Islamic jihadists**

AQIM: Al-Qaeda in the ISLAMIC MAGHREB is an Al-qa'ida offshoot located primarily with Algeria, Mali and Niger. Originally founded in 1998 as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), this was largest active Terrorist organization within Algeria, with a record high of over 30,000 active members. In 2006, the GSPC officially formed ties with Al-qa'ida and renamed it to AQIM. In 2012, amid political chaos within Mali, AQIM formed allies with the local Tuareg population to seize key northern cities in Mali. This operation was a success, and by the latter part of 2013, Major northern cities such as Gao, MOPTi, and Timbuktu were all under Terrorist control.

AAD: Ansar Dine is an additional terrorist organization operating exclusively within central and northern Mali that took influence from AQIM. Much like AQIM, Ansar Dine is an Islamic extremist group that advocates for fundamentalist views of Islam and the practice of Sharia law. After the coup in 2012 toppled the Malian government, AAD took residence in various cities within the north and central Mali until French intervention within the region pushed AAD out in 2013.

IS-GS: Islamic state in the greater Shael is a further offshoot of AQIM. In 2015, the group and its leader, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, split from AQIM and pledged allegiance to ISIS. In 2016 the group was officially recognized by ISIS and has carried out attacks since 2017 against various military installations in Niger, and Mali. The group has also clashed with French peacekeeping forces within the Mali region. The group panders to the largest audience it can attain with its teachings and beliefs of radical Islam.

JNIM- JNIM is a merger between 4 Different organizations. These two organizations are known to be at war with each other, as senior JNIM leadership has called IS-GS "deviant".

## **TACTICS/CAPABILITIES:**

### **key takeaways-**

#### **FAMa**

The FAMA is broken into 3 different military branches (FAMA), the first being the Armed Forces of Mali, the second being the Malian air force, the third the Malian national guard, and fourth the national police. The Malian army is composed primarily of conscripts. The FAMA numbers in strength reported by Global fire power as 48,500 personnel across all branches. According to the table, the FAMA has a limited number of land and air military assets to use during operations. Most of the armored vehicles that Mali has in their possession have their roots in early soviet and Chinese designs such as the t-54 and t-62 tanks. The age of the fleet renders the question of operational effectiveness as the influx of man portable anti armor capabilities renders any tactical advantage assumed by the deployment of armor obsolete. In their possession are a handful of 85mm Soviet D-44 and 76mm ZIS-3 Artillery guns. The FAMA is hindered in capabilities by the warring insurgents in the north, the government isn't equipped to fight an insurgency and deal with the terrorist organizations operating within the country.

Land Vehicles	647
Aircraft total	42
MLRS	
Tanks	20
Towed artillery	10
Helicopter	10
Fighters	9
Attack helicopter	7
Air Transports	6
Air Trainers	2

**Azaward Rebels**

The Azaward rebels' primary capabilities lie in its ongoing insurgency within its occupied territory. The estimated size of the force is rumored to be around 10,000 members. These members are separate from the radical Islamic extremists, although once alighted. The Tuareg rebel groups have limited arms capabilities past what have accrued previously. Arms from the civil war in Niger, the fall of the Libyan government and Islamic Extremist involvement have seen a variety of patterns of weapons being used. In Libya, Rebels were supplied by the CIA with Anti-aircraft manpads as well as western small arms in the effort to overthrow the Gaddafi regime. These arms returned to Mali as evidenced by a successful MANPAD launch against the FAMA airforce by Tuareg rebels. Soviet era arms such as (Fully listed in the table below) SPG-9 recoilless rifle, DSHK heavy machine gun, ZPU anti-aircraft cannon, and RPG-7s are also commonplace within the group.

**Islamic Jihadists-**

Much like the rebels, radical extremist Islamic groups operate within the area, utilizing a variety of small arms platforms and technical vehicles. Many of the same weapons patterns are synonymous with either side. The IED and VBIED threat posed by Islamic terror groups operating within the area (AQIM, JNIM, AAD) are typical of any jihadist movement. Oftentimes, military convoys are targeted for ambush after an initial contact using IEDs. Improvised explosives are also documented as being used on the civilian population across Mali.

**Islamic Jihadists/Rebel Small Arms**

**Islamic Jihadists/Rebel Heavy Weapons**

<u>Kalashnikov- 7.62 x 39 mm Assault rifles</u>	<u>FN MAG-pattern 7.62 x 51 mm general-purpose machine gun</u>
<u>FN FAL- 7.62 x 51 mm rifle</u>	<u>Barrels for 7.62 x 54R mm RP-46 general-purpose machine guns</u>
<u>G3- 7.62 x 51 mm rifle</u>	<u>Dragunov SVD-pattern 7.62 x 54R mm sniper</u>
<u>MAT-49 9 * 19 mm sub-machine gun</u>	<u>PSL-pattern 7.62 x 54R mm sniper rifle</u>
<u>RPD- 7.62 x 39 mm light machine gun</u>	<u>SKS-pattern 7.62 x 39 mm rifle</u>
<u>PK- 7.62 x 54R mm general-purpose machine gun</u>	

<u>DShKM- 12.7 x 108 mm heavy machine gun</u>	<u>RPG-7- rocket launcher</u>
<u>Type 85 12.7 x 108 mm heavy machine gun (box only)</u>	<u>SPG-9- 73 mm recoilless gun</u>
<u>KP/KPVT- 14.5 x 114 mm heavy machine gun</u>	<u>2A14- single-barrel 23 x 152B mm cannon</u>
<u>81/82 mm mortar</u>	<u>ZU-23-2-pattern twin-barrel 23 x 152B mm cannon</u>
<u>Type 63- 12-tube 107 mm rocket launcher</u>	<u>UB-32 57 mm multiple rocket launcher</u>
<u>D-30A 122 mm towed howitzer</u>	<u>BM-21122 mm multiple-launch rocket system</u>

## **Wagner**

The Arrival of Wagner within the region indicated an alignment of the current FAMA with the Russian federation, enshrining the organization's hold on power. Wagner initially arrived in Bamako and began constructing military facilities near the international airport. Quickly fighting vehicles and wagnerites were imported to the country. The Russians brought along with them modernized versions of rifles, artillery, and vehicles to assist in the counter terrorist/insurgency threat.

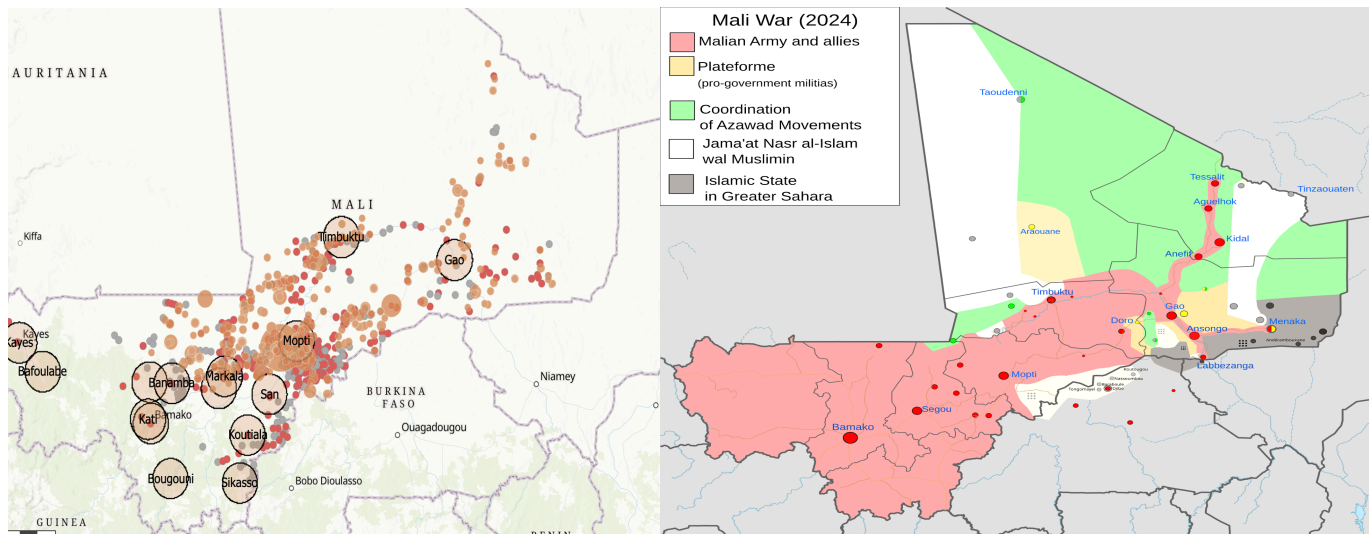
## **LOCATION/SCOPE/MAGNITUDE**

### **Azaward Rebels**

The Azaward rebels are a formation of Tuareg ethnic muslims whose goal is the separation of the North of Mali and its traditional historical capital, songhai, from the south of Mali and the French Malian capital of Bamako. The official leader of the rebels is *Bilal Ag Acherif*. The Azawards' main motivation is the security of the north from the government and terrorist threat alike. Since the start of the Mali civil war in 2011, the MNLA was able to hold key cities in the north such as Kidal, Anefif, and Tessalit and the surrounding localities. Only recently has the Malian army and its allies been able to recapture cities that have been occupied since 2011.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Map 1: Heatmap of Wagner and JNIM operations (Wagner Orange) (JNIM Red/Grey)

Map 2: War In mali conflict map 2024



**Islamic Jihadists-**

Various groups of Islamic radicalists in the form of terrorist cells inhibit the environment north of the capital of Bamako. Some of the most prevalent still in operation today are IS-GS and JNIM. These fundamentalist Sunni interpretations of Islam led to conflict with the traditionally democratic status quo of the north. This, in turn, leads to elevated levels of terrorist activity against local population and counter insurgency/insurgency forces. Large areas to the northeast of Mali are claimed to be under the control of JNIM, and a small pocket of resistance in the northwest is claimed under IS-GS.

**FAMa**

The junta in Mali, following multiple coups spanning the 10s. The junta has announced that elections will take place afterward. The FAMa has control of all the south of Mali, this includes the capital, Bamako, and the provinces adjacent to it. Since the start of the Russian intervention within Mali in 2021, the FAMa has reclaimed large territories in the north with the help of the Russians. The recapturing of key northern cities has expelled the MNLA and Islamic extremist from the more populated urban city centers.

**Wagner Group**

Wagner group operations are headed in the area by the region commander Ivan Maslov, who has connections to Yevgeny Prigozhin. Maslov was part of the 2014 invasion of Crimea in the battle for Luhansk Airport. Wagner assumed security services for the interim government in exchange for various stakes in state-run gold and diamond mining operations; these Western Sahara shell companies include DIAMVILLE, M-Finans, and Meroe gold. The main motivation of the Wagner forces in Mali is regional security for the interim government. The military FAMa aligning with the Russians allows for a halt to the electoral process emphasized by the Malian Constitution and ensures the proliferation of the current FAMa as a whole.

**ORGANIZATION**

## **key takeaways-**

### **Islamic Jihadists-**

*JNIM*- Formed in 2017 after the joint merger of AAD and AQIM in the area. JNIM operates primarily in Western Africa, among these countries Mali being one of the most prevalent and along with Niger and Burkafaso. The leader of JNIM, Iyad ag Ghali, has allegiances pledged to the amir of al-Qa'ida, making this terrorist organization an offshoot of AQIM.

### **Azaward rebels-**

The Azaward rebels primarily consist of ethnic Tuaregs within the northern Mali region.

### **Wagner Group-**

The Wagner Group in Mali is under the direct supervision of the Russian MOD after the expiry of Yevgeny Prigoshin in October of 2022. The Wagner Group is broken up into different Divisions that fight across the world on the Kremlin's behalf. High-level individuals in the area previously stated are contracted directly on behalf of the Russian government, and equipment is procured from official Reserves.

### **FAMa**

Mali's government FAMa, installed during the coup d'etat of 2021, was a formation of high-ranking military generals with their finger on the pulse of Mali's political divide. The decision to align with the Wagner group in exchange for state-run resources put a soft guarantee that the ruling FAMa would continue to retain power into the future with little risk of another military takeover. As a result, in March of 2024, the current military FAMa suspended all political party activities across the country, effectively making it a de facto dictatorship under the current Colonel Assimi Goïta. With no signal of whether interim elections will be held, the situation is destabilizing politically.

## **FUNDING/CONNECTIONS**

## **key takeaways-**

### **FAMa**

With the arrival of the Wagner group, its clear mail has aligned itself with the Russians in exchange for untapped Military support and expertise. The FAMa's number one export is precious metals. Gold makes up around 90% of the revenue harvested from the natural resources in Mali and is extremely important in maintaining its GDP.

### **JNIM**

Terrorist organizations like JNIM are often funded from a variety of black market operations, some of these most notable being the sub shara drug trade, human trafficking, forced kidnappings, and looting and property destruction.

### **Azaward rebels**

Considering their waning influence post-2021 coup, the MNLA, which has traditionally denounced the surge of Islamic extremism, has found itself disjointed and unorganized since the

reclamation of the northernmost cities. This organization has seen an exodus of active membership in exchange for linking up with different larger extremist groups to combat the traditional enemy, the Malian government.

### **Wagner**

The Wagner Group receives its funding from the Russian Ministry of defense. Since its formation in 2014 during the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Wagner Group has been directly paid and contracted by the Russian MOD for asymmetric operations that require levels of plausible deniability. Although known by intelligence communities as being a branch of the Russian war machine, the international community has little to no effect on the actions of a “Private military corporation” other than standard international sanctions.

### **Goals**

**Islamic jihadists- Destabilize junta, install African caliphate, rule locally using fundamentalist interpretations of Islamic law**

#### **Azaward rebels-**

Retain control of the north from the FAMA and separate themselves from Islamic extremists. Azaward rebels have continuously called on the international stage for a 2 state solution to the conflict in Mali. These calls have gone unanswered, and the violence within the region against the FAMA and rebels continued by instilling influence within the north using displays of strength and public unity to maintain region holds on their claimed areas.

#### **Wagner group**

The current goal of the Wagner Group is to ensure that the ruling military FAMA remains in power. After the 2021 coup and expulsion of ECOWAS and French influence, the FAMA needed allies to help retain its hold on power. The FAMA contracted Wagner PMC to provide security for military and political personnel as well as the subsequent facilities that both operate out of. The Wagner PMC group was formed around 2014, during the start of the invasion of Ukraine. It was rumored that the PMC was under the direct supervision of the Russian Ministry of Defense, but rumors were unclear until the death of Yevgeny Prigoshin under suspicious circumstances after the Wagner Rebellion. After the leader's death, the PMC was formally integrated into the Russian armed forces after rumored disbandment and exile.

#### ***FAMA***

The goal of the FAMA has changed since the start of the war in Mali. Mali's government traditionally held democratic elections in high regard, according to its constitution. After 3 coups within 10 years, a regional power struggle between northern separatists and Islamic jihadism has forced the government to consolidate into a de facto dictatorship by banning rival political parties from gathering in 2024. The goals of the government are still clear: Unification of the northern state and expulsion of jihadism from the borders of Mali. They can achieve this by aligning themselves with the Russians in exchange for state-run resource control, and their hold on power is solidified by the alliance with the Russian-backed mercenary group.



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