

Summary

In a series of events during the last two months, fighting has significantly increased in Northern and Central Mali. Rebel forces and the government clashed for the first time since the 2015 peace agreement, while insurgents carried out terrorist acts and exerted control over strategic locations. In the hopes of countering and fighting terrorism, Mali signed the new tri-state agreement. Given the multitude of fronts the Malian authorities are facing, and despite assistance from the new alliance and Wagner, limiting violence and its spread proves to be tricky.

Recent events and developments

On September 17, the CMA (Coordination of Azawad Movements) claimed responsibility for an attack on two military camps in the town of Lere, Timbuktu region, where 5 Malian soldiers were killed, 11 went missing, and a military aircraft was downed. The Malian army announced that 30 “terrorists” were neutralized. Five days earlier, in an attempt to capture the village of Bourem, Gao region, members of the Northern armed coalition CSP (Permanent Strategic Framework) targeted military and non-military positions, killing at least 10 people and injuring 13. The attack involved car bombs and was answered by a counterattack supported by air raids, killing more than 46 militants. Furthermore, on September 11, Sky Mali suspended all commercial flights from and to Timbuktu and Goa airports after three shells fell near Timbuktu airport, with two hitting the UN-mission camp. Also, on September 8, the Al-Qaeda affiliated JNIM’s (Jama’at Nasr-al-Islam wal Muslimin) attacked a military base near Gao Airport using suicide bombers and mortar shelling. The previous day, JNIM carried out two attacks along the Niger River between Timbuktu and Gao. The first one targeted a boat near Abakoira, leaving more than 49 civilian casualties, while the second aimed at a military base adjacent to the river in Bamba, killing at least 15 soldiers.

Impact assessment

In light of the UN-mission withdrawal, the 2015 Algiers peace agreement between the northern armed coalition and the government has been voided. As previously declared, northern armed factions are violently reacting to the government’s take-over of previous peacekeeping camps in coalition-controlled areas. Moreover, JNIM imposed a blockade on the city of Timbuktu on August 8, and flying, the last mode of transport, became inaccessible after the shelling near the airport area. The city has thus become completely cut-off from the rest of the country, and the isolation could eventually grant insurgents further entrenchment in such a strategic location. In fact, the Malian government has not faced such levels of threat since 2017. Despite becoming part of the new Alliance of Sahel States alongside Burkina Faso and Niger, technically replacing the French-supported G5 Sahel, withholding pressure from many adversaries could still pose a challenge to the Malian government, and violence could potentially reach the capital. For instance, during high levels of insecurity in June 2017, 5 people were killed by Al-Qaeda linked jihadists in a resort near Bamako. Furthermore, in November 2015, terrorists claimed responsibility for an attack that killed 20 people in the Raddison Blu hotel in Bamako.

Advice from Forth Global

- Make sure contingency and security plans are updated and adequately distributed to employees on the ground. This includes the decision-making process on relocation, evacuation, and hibernation.
- Monitor local news and liaise with local contacts to be informed of relevant developments. Inform staff to not discuss plans and routes publicly.

Customized advice

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