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Preliminary Report

LEADER OF MLF AMADOU KOUFFA RECURFACES AFTER MONTHS OF REPORTED KILLING IN MALI

28TH February 2019

Incident:

On Thursday, 28th February, 2019, the *Andalous* and *Az-Zallaqua* media foundations, jointly broadcasted a 19 minute exclusive interview it purportedly conducted with *Amadou Kouffa*, leader of the *Macina Liberation Front* (MLF) or *Katibat Macina*, a jihadi group operating in Central Mali, who until this video, was reportedly killed together with 34 others in a joint operation by the French Operation *Barkhane* and the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) on 23rd November 2018, in *Mopti*.



Later on in December, a senior member of *Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal-Muslimeen* (JNIM) and leader of AQIM, *Abdelmalek Droukdel*, denied that Kouffa was killed. Droukdel claimed the announcement on the disappearance of the jihadist was a "manoeuvre" by Paris to divert the attention of the French people from what was happening in the street, an allusion to the "yellow vest" protests.

In the broadcasted video, Kouffa berates the French Government and its puppet Government in Mali for continuously lying to the people and the international Community about their achievements in Northern and Central Mali. He noted that while the local and international media bore responsibility for reporting his purported killing without verification, the major blame lay with the French and Malian governments that could not double check their information in an era where obtaining information is less cumbersome.



(After the re-emergence)

The MLF Emir revealed that he stayed silent for over three months following his reported killing to enable the jihadist observe the political reactions of the French and the Malian governments as well as enable the MLF to test its own media and political strategies. He added that the incident also allowed the leadership to monitor the reactions of the rank and file of its fighters and to assure the younger generation that the leader does not die with the message and the mission.

Kouffa also claimed that the '*traitor*' who provided the information that led to the operation has been apprehended and is being interrogated by his fighters. He said the information provided to the French and their Malian counterparts was completely wrong as he was nowhere near the sight of the operations in November, 2018.

Amadou Kouffa opined that the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program initiated by the Government of Mali in Central and Northern Mali will not see the light of day because the crisis in the regions were much more complex than what the authorities imagined as they are rooted in history and deep mistrust.

Analysis:

It is anticipated that the re-emergence of Amadou Kouffa will have huge negative repercussions for the security situation in Mali, as it will boost the moral of the terrorist fighters within the MLF and JNIM and motivate them to escalate their activities.

It is to recall that his MLF is the link in Central Mali with the Al-Qaeda affiliated groups in the North. He had exploited ethnic tensions in Central Mali to recruit fighters mainly from his Fulani (*Pheul*) ethnic group to the MLF, a situation that exacerbated the communal violence among the populace. With his reported elimination, it was thought that the government had an opportunity to take the initiative and control of the situation in Central Mali by negotiating with the various ethnic and rival groups to lay down their arms and give peace a chance.

His reported killing was also expected to put pressure on the coalition JNIM in the North who had expanded their operations beyond Mali into Burkina Faso and Niger. With his re-emergence, the reverse will likely occur. The JNIM, rather than being demoralized, will be emboldened while the Malian Armed Forces, including the French led Operation Berkhan, who had issued a statement announcing the death of Kouffa will be dispirited.

The new development will also undermine government authority in Mali particularly in the Central and North parts where it is already struggling to maintain control. The state's inability to know that Amadou Kouffa was not dead demonstrates the

challenge it has in obtaining reliable intelligence in the conflict zones. The resurfacing will also cast doubt on the reported killing of *Yahya Abu al Hammam (Djamel Okasha)*, Deputy leader of JNIM as well as Tunisian founder of *Ansar al-Sharia, Abu Iyadh al-Tunisi* in another French operation on Thursday, 21st February, 2019, in north of *Timbuktu*.

With this development, there is the need for the Malian government and her international partners to retake control of the initiative and to adopt a whole of society approach where all segments of the country particularly those in the North and Central to feel part of the system. This will enable the government to win the hearts and minds of local communities who will serve as the eyes and ears of the relevant authorities.