



The African Centre of the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT/CAERT)

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Preliminary Report

Malian Military Camp Attack

27 January 2018

INCIDENT

On Saturday 27 January 2018, a group of about 30 heavily suspected al-Qaeda fighters attacked the Malian military camp in *Soumpi*, Timbuktu region, at around 04:00 hours.

During the attack 14 Malian soldiers were killed, 18 others were wounded and also 17 attackers have been killed. The attackers briefly took control of the military camp in the morning but the army retook the camp in the afternoon. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

ANALYSIS

Terrorists groups are becoming more active in West Africa particularly in the Sahel and Sahara regions. Mali being located in the region is not spared from these terrorist acts. The political and security situation in Mali since 2011 has become fragile. There are various armed groups operating in the country including terrorists groups, some controlling vast swathes of the countryside.



Al-Qaeda fighters and other violent extremists in coalition with the *Mouvement National de Liberation de l'Azawad* (MNLA), seized control of northern Mali in 2012 before being driven back by a French-led intervention in 2013.

Recently Mali marked the five-year anniversary of ousting the extremists from power in the major towns of the north. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated

Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was also established in April 2013 to support political processes in the country and carry out a number of security-related tasks. Despite the presence of a MINUSMA and troops operating under a regional French anti-militant mission, violence is on the rise and spreading further south toward Bamako.

The Soumpi incident came two days after 26 civilians including women and children were killed when civilian passenger vehicle, traveling from neighboring Burkina Faso, ran over a landmine in Boni, central Mali, on Thursday 25 January 2018. It is also reported that just a day after the Soumpi incident, on Sunday 28 January 2018, in Menaka town, eastern Mali, a suicide bomber attempted to blow himself up on the approach of an army and national guard post, during this operation, 4 armed forces personnel were killed, during an attempt of terrorists on motorcycles and vehicles to make an assault on the military camp in Menaka, 700 km east of Timbuktu.

It is anticipated that such attacks would continue to be perpetrated by either the coalition of the terrorist groups known as *Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin* (JNIM) or the *Islamic State in the Greater Sahara* (ISGS) operating along Malian border with Niger and Burkina Faso. It could be possible that the two groups are cooperating as demonstrated by the geographic location and the timeframe between these attacks. The attacks not only contribute to displacement of civilians but also weaken the national security architecture; it often aggravates dissatisfaction of national defense and security forces claiming inadequate resources to confront armed groups.

Malian government signed a peace agreement with coalitions of rebels that were not affiliated to al-Qaida in 2015. The agreement however has not been able to be fully implemented due to the fragile and volatile security situation in northern Mali. Recently, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a French-drafted statement giving parties to the 2015 peace agreement until the end of March 2018 to show progress or face sanctions. Could this make any significant effect in the Malian security situation– the probability is very low - terrorists groups in Mali are fiercely determined in causing havoc particularly to the military and international peacekeepers, they seem to be well organized, cooperating and well coordinating. However, it is uncommon for terrorist groups not to claim responsibility of attacks on such symbolic targets; this could also mean lack of coordination amongst themselves, internal rivalries or inadequate communication strategy. It can also be an attempt by terrorist groups to create confusion as to who is carrying out these attacks.

CONCLUSIONS

Terrorists activities in Mali is on rise and is spreading geographically – it was concentrated around Kidal area in the north but now violence is spreading more to south, terrorists groups operating in the country have increased in number – in 2010 only one group was active in Mali, al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), but 8 years later there are multiple groups operating in the country including amongst others MUJWAO, Ansar Dine, Macina Liberation Front (FLM), and al-Mourabitoun.

When terrorist groups started to be active in Mali, the groups were predominately of Arab origins, followed by Tuaregs and currently more Fulanies have been drawn into terror activities. At the onset also their doctrine was purely jihadist; and had since taken a ride on socio-economic and political grievances. The crust of terror activities is shifting from Algerian-Mali border to Mali-Burkina Faso border. The complexity of the threat and availability of vast operational area contribute to the deteriorating security situation in Mali and to a greater concern, undermines efforts made through Barkhane Operation and G5 Sahel military intervention.