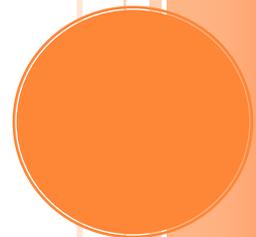




Institute for Islamic Strategic Affairs

IISA SPECIAL REPORT

Hotel attacks in Mali: Dynamics, aftermath & impact



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The attacks on a five star hotel in the heart of Malian capital Bamako, bring some questions to the forefront. Particularly, how safe is the country and to what extent do Jihadist or militant groups have a strong hold in the country. Mali has slipped from the scope of mainstream international media since early 2013, after French forces moved into Northern Mali with the aim of destroying and displacing Jihadists who had created a state in the North of Mali.

Here at IISA, we have been carefully monitoring the Malian conflict since 2012, and sent a delegation to Mali before and after the French intervention. We have long argued that the central issue in Mali is not that of security but de-centralisation and demographic division. These issues have been central to Malian internal politics since its independence in 1960, which have continued to dominate the political scene. There have been numerous peace accords brokered by regional powers, such as Algeria, and internally brokered ones. This

particular factor has had multiple ramifications for Malian domestic politics, including seismic social shifts. Gone are the days when you could describe Malian society as being African Muslim, Animist or Secular (on the French secular model) or a combination of all the above. As our field report and analysis on [‘conservatism in Mali’](#) suggests, there has been a significant social change that has only deepened after the coup and ‘takeover’ of Northern Mali. The role of Islam has seen a comeback in Malian society and therefore Malian politics. Historically respected religious leaders have seen their significance and influence rise dramatically. This has not been limited to their decrees of or on Jihad but also on issues such as law making and even the endorsement of Presidential candidates, as demonstrated in the previous elections.

Aside from de-centralisation and a change in Malian society, the third important factor is Mali's strategic location. Although it is a landlocked country, it share borders with key Sahel and North African countries,

including Libya, Algeria, and Chad. Its geographic position also means that it is inherently vulnerable to changes in regional order. As such, Mali has been significantly impacted by the US-led Global War on Terror (GWOT), which aimed to hunt down Al Qaeda in Maghreb (AQIM), a group hiding and operating in Northern Malian vast deserts since first decade of the 21st century. Similarly, the deteriorating situation in Libya and removal of Qaddafi by a western coalition had direct repercussions for Mali. Libyan weapons were infused into Malian internal demographic conflict, this heavy weaponry out-gunned and out powered Turareg rebels and provided space for a Jihadist resurgence: allowing Jihadists groups to initially align with nationalist Tuaregs and seize control of Northern Mali before later over running them from key infrastructures and consolidating their group on whole of northern Mali.

Malian culture and customs are particularly important factors to take into consideration when discussing the conflict. Itinerant nomadic communities, such as the Tuaregs, are diffused throughout the region. Yet, when the Malian state has tried to impose border controls it affected the

free movement of these communities. On the other hand, smugglers have capitalized on the nomadic culture and used the routes for their own purposes.

Last but not least is the issue of governance or rather 'the lack of it'. Mali's central government has been consistently unable to provide governance, particularly in the Northern region, which has only increased sympathy for nationalist movements.

It is in this complex internal and regional setting that Malian conflict emerged in 2013.

To understand Malian conflict and the current security situation, it is therefore necessary to understand all of these factors. Jihadism in Mali is directly connected to regional issues (the Algeria civil war, Libyan conflict etc); internal strife including the lack of governance and lack of stable peace processes; and organised crime, which continues to operate within a vacuum created by the state. In particular, a shadow economy that was fed by smuggling and the drug trade due to a lack of economic opportunity, aided the emergence of Jihadism.

In short, a holistic understanding is required to truly grasp the context in

which the recent attacks have taken place.

Security cannot be isolated from society, culture and economics and all three spheres are directly inter-dependent.

The Radisson Blu attack comes at a time when Mali's general security situation remains unstable and there have been a number of other attacks both preceding and succeeding it.

Several weeks ago, there was a declaration by a Iyad Ag Ghaly, a Tuareg Jihadist leader, which denounced the Algiers Accord and urged young people to go out and put on suicide belts.

Furthermore, there has been speculation that some ex-Massina Liberation Front (MLF) personnel were staying at the hotel.

The use of diplomatic plates by the perpetrators illustrate a high level of strategic premeditation when carrying out the attack. Moreover, the fact that the attackers remain at large suggests that they may have access to a network of safe houses. To date, there remains confusion over who was actually behind the attacks. Although an AQIM linked group Al Mourabiton (led by

Mokhtar bil Mokhtar) has taken responsibility of the attacks, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita has suggested that ethnic Fulani Jihadist militants MLF were to blame.

If this is the case, MLF represents a new trend in the Malian conflict and represents the evolution of both militancy and Jihad. Centrally, it suggests that a thorough understanding of Jihadism in Sahel is necessary. Yet, this feat is becoming increasingly difficult as nationalists or ethnic militants infuse with Islamist Jihadists.

Neo-Jihadism in Mali:

IISA has created a new approach of understanding evolution of Jihadism which we refer to as neo-Jihadism:

“Neo-Jihadism is a diverse, syncretic form of global organisation and interaction that emerged from within Islamic Jihadism, is unique to early-twenty-first-centuries, is increasingly sectarian and through its advocacy of violent form of war and selectively literal interpretations of sacred texts, radically differentiates itself from the traditional Jihadist forces, the faith's

mainstream and constitutes a new body of thought and actions. – Neo-Jihadism: A new form of Jihadism, leading and emerging actors”.

According to the above description, IS (Islamic state) and Boko Haram fit the profile in contrast to groups in the Sahel, such as AQIM, which do not. AQIM, also known as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, believes in defensive Jihad, which aims to defend Muslim lands from ‘crusaders’ / We have yet to see a change in AQIM in that regard. Contrastingly, Neo-Jihadists are regional and territorial. These groups seek to control a territory, yet are neither nationalist (i.e. groups like Hamas) or global (i.e. Al-Qaeda) but regionally focused. While AQIM does operate regionally in Sahel it does not seek to control a territory, nor does it believe in an offensive form of Jihad, which is the hallmark of neo-Jihadist organisations.

However, the evolution of Jihad is taking place and groups like Al Mourabiton and MLF represent that trend. There is also an issue of other regional groups such as Ansar al Sharia in Libya and Tunisia who may be affiliated to IS. Particularly in Libya,

IS has not only been able to capture and control parts of the country, but have established two affiliate groups called Cyrenaica Province (“Wilayat Barqa”) and Tripoli Province (“Wailayat Tarablus”). Boko Haram has also subsequently pledged their allegiance to IS. Given the fact that Ansar Dine, MUJAO and other Malian groups have interconnections with Boko Haram and Libyan groups, it cannot be ruled out that there may be some influence of neo-Jihadists on Malian Jihadism.

Thus, the central question remains whether the attack on Malian hotel is an attempt of Neo-Jihadist groups to declare their foothold in the country or whether it is just a result of localised militants or Jihadist action.

First, the style of the attack is very different to a localised mainstream Jihadist attack. It was well coordinated and premeditated. It was offensive and purposely seemed to illustrate that the attackers were able to deliver an attack in the heart of Mali, breaking all normal security precautions and, most importantly, getting away alive. To this date there has been no confirmation that any attackers were killed nor has

any information been released regarding their whereabouts.

We also need to analyse this in the greater context of a battle for legitimacy for Jihad currently taking place between neo- Jihadists groups, such as IS, and mainstream Jihadist, such as Al-Qaeda.

The timing of the attack, only a few hours following the Paris attacks, cannot be ignored.

There is no such thing as mere coincidence. It is clear that both by the targets and the style of the attack that premeditation and military sophistication were key components to carrying it out. Al Mourabiton has previously demonstrated over a year ago, by launching a successful attack against an Algerian gas plant. But what could be the aims behind this attack?

To us, it is clear that the attack is intertwined with neo-Jihadism in one of two ways. First, either groups who have just pledged allegiance to, or transformed, into neo-Jihadist groups are behind the attack, as it is clearly an offensive strategy. In contrast, the attacks were aimed at asserting

legitimacy against neo-Jihadism by mainstream Jihadists, trying to demonstrate that they are still capable of inflicting sizeable security breaches and damage. In both cases, it is critical to further understand and analyse the evolution of Jihad in Mali and the region, as future attacks are likely.

French intervention and the role of international community?

One of the core issues in Mali is a lack of governance. When the UN was given an extended mandate in Mali it was hoped that global governance could fill in the gaps and strengthen local governance models. However, despite MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) being a very large organisation with a multi-billion dollar budget and thousands of personnel, it has been unable to achieve any of its goals.

In fact the situation in Mali can be best described as global 'non' governance. MINUSMA is a large dinosaur that everyone can see but which fails to

deliver. Not only has it been unable to keep the peace in the North, it has also failed to protect civilians. Moreover, it has been blamed for inflation, corruption and even inflaming immorality in Mali. MINUSMA could have worked on serious issues such as DDR and SSR but instead it has been unable to bring any meaningful change in Mali.

The French intervention, aimed solely at routing out the Jihadist has been unable to achieve that single objective. Instead it has ended up turning the public against French role in the country and questions are being asked why France intervened and what its real motive in Mali are? France, it can be argued has lost much more soft power than it may have gained a hard power (i.e. boots on ground etc.).

Yet, as stated earlier, global governance (or lack thereof) or western/French intervention is not only to blame. In this context the Malian government has failed on multiple levels. After remarkable elections in 2013 and a semblance of democracy, the Malian people's trust in the government has dissipated due to the government's inability to form a solid peace agreement with the North. Economic situation has also

deteriorated further.

If the government fails to deliver governance, and global governance is in fact undermining the situation further, then somebody will have to fill in the vacuum. This is where you see Jihadist, neo-Jihadist and criminal groups thriving. Similarly a pervasive drugs economy has developed in the North, with border control offices becoming implicated and local traffickers becoming politically potent, as discussed above.

Conclusion, Aftermath and impacts of Hotel attack:

To conclude, Mali's problems are spread among multiple fault lines. Internally, each angle of the problem feeds the other. Regionally, Mali is and will continue to be highly vulnerable to any changes in the social or political order in the regions it is linked with (Sahel and Maghreb).

The attacks on Radisson Blu are not a secluded and isolated incident but part of a broader problem. There is some form of neo-Jihadism or evolution of Jihad taking place in Mali which needs

to be better understood. Furthermore, we need to understand the seismic social changes that are taking place along multiple fault lines whether religious, ethnic, demographic, cultural, and so on.

From a governance or global governance point of view: the attacks on foreigners will inhibit international input and development, acting to further solidify and fund organised crime, such as the drug trade.

In terms of Jihadism, the attacks will either help in recruiting for neo-Jihadist groups or will create a further tussle between neo-Jihadists and mainstream Jihadists, which is not a good sign for Mali's already unstable security climate.

From a conflict resolution point of view: The attacks represent a clear message that Malian conflict is very much alive and thriving, despite after French and international intervention. However, amid all of this negativity, there are some positive and hopeful signs. Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA) a grass root Tuareg representative group is pushing

forward for internal discussion and reconciliation. Bottom up formulas are always a good sign in transforming or resolving conflict.

However, as this paper has suggested, positive developments in a generally negative situation need a lot of room to breathe and man oeuvre and, from practical point of view if such peace reconciliation efforts are to succeed and be sustained, they need to be met half way by top-down development. The Malian government or global governance agencies cannot simply sit and wait while such important socio-political and socio-religious developments take place. And this is where the problem lies. Thus far, international intervention has done nothing but exacerbate the already unstable environment.

Also, for local formulas to succeed, there needs to be a secure enough environment, with the support of government and global governance agencies. Without this, and as neo-Jihadism finds its feet in the region, the Malian conflict will only become protracted and more unmanageable.

ABOUT RESOURCES, MILITANCY AND ORGANISED CRIME IN WEST AND HORN OF AFRICA PROGRAMME

BRIEF BACKGROUND AND SCOPE:

Africa's GDP is the most rapidly growing of any continent but corruption, crime, and militancy are rife. Much of this centres on the continent's wealth of natural resources, including petroleum etc. Foreign investment in Africa has grown exponentially over the last decade and will continue to rise. Consequently, foreign & African governments and criminal/militant groups' interests and sphere of influences will clash with increasing intensity over the coming years. This will have direct implications on energy, regional and global security agendas. Furthermore, areas such as West and Horn of Africa regions are strategically located which enhances their role in the international trade system through shipping routes and trans-national linkages etc. The creation of AFRICOM reflects the rising global importance of the region, with the export of oil from the continent expected to increase drastically by 2025. Yet, with the region still lacking institutions of effective governance and reliable security structures, the levels of violent insurgency have jeopardised economic development in countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Mali and Nigeria. Different militant groups finance their operations through employment of traditional criminal enterprises, such as smuggling and drug sales. Resources are also exploited for revenue by both criminal organisation and militant groups. Militant organisations such as Al-Shabab and other Jihadists and nationalist movement operating primarily in Somalia & Sahel – have exploited the security vacuum that exists in the regions. In addition, issues such as piracy continue to effect maritime security whilst increasing costs for counter-piracy measures.

The implications of this are severe on all three fronts - energy security, regional security and global security. While to address these problems and develop solutions, we must confront all three now and holistically, with due appreciation and regard to their interrelated attributes.

PROGRAMME'S DELIVERABLES:

1. Mapping the interplay between resources, militant groups and the dynamics of organised crime in West/Horn of Africa.
2. Conflict forecasting and risk analysis of the current and future dynamics of militancy, resources, organised crimes and their repercussions on energy security, regional and global security.
3. Situation analyses on above issues, regional positioning and global powers interests etc.
4. Alternative policy analyses that may serve in policy making on regional and global governance levels
5. Creating a useful guide and knowledge base for stakeholders and public for future oil, gas and aid endeavours in West/Horn of Africa.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC STRATEGIC AFFAIRS (IISA)

IISA is a think-tank and an intellectual forum for addressing the current and future dynamics of the Islamic-world and its interaction with Western civilisation. Based in London, IISA will create trans-Islamic and global reach. IISA seeks to establish a platform where Islamic-world's dynamics, trends, issue, problems or crises are analysed within the Islamic-world and by working on local models and realities and not against any external standards or perceptions. We will be one of the leading think-tank on the Islamic-world and its role in the contemporary global system. In a short span of time we have attracted great academic support and a reputation for both open and track-II dialogues. IISA is the only think tank initiative that goes beyond national and regional inclinations and addresses strategic and socio-political issues/crises of the Islamic world in its totality. For more information i.e. our mission statement, current programmes and our academic and regional expertise please visit the following links:

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