

# Mali's Genocide (2023-2024)



A Report by Professor Jeremy Keenan

Jeremy Keenan is a social anthropologist and Visiting Professor in the Law School of Queen Mary University London

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<sup>1</sup> Keenan, Jeremy 2020. Armies out of Control. Special Report on COVID-19 and State Crime in the Sahel. International State Crime Initiative (ISCI), School of Law, Queen Mary University of London. <http://statecrime.org/covid19andthesahel/>

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# Summary

This report (eight chapters) presents detailed evidence that Mali's military junta with its Russian Africa Corps ally, previously called and still known as the Wagner group, has been perpetrating a genocide against the Tuareg population of northern Mali since November 2023.

Since 2012 Mali's army, the Forces Armées Maliennes (FAMa), assisted by French military forces and a substantial UN peacekeeping force, had been fighting an incursion of Islamic terrorists. However, France's failure to secure the country against the 'terrorists' resulted in Mali's army seizing power in 2020. Following a second coup in 2021, the Moscow-aligned junta consolidated its power and invited the Russian mercenary Wagner group to replace the French. The 15,000 UN peacekeeping force was also told to leave the country.

Even before the Wagner group's arrival, the FAMa had been committing atrocities against its civilian population for much of the previous decade. With the arrival of the Wagner group, these crimes against humanity proliferated, reaching international attention with the massacre of over 500 civilians in the village of Moura in March 2022.

Despite the West's portrayal of Mali as a successful, ethnically diverse democracy, there has been tension between successive Mali governments and the minority Tuareg population of northern Mali, known by the Tuareg as 'Azawad', since independence in 1960 (Chapter 1). Tuareg protests against their perceived political marginalisation and ethnic discrimination resulted in the most recent of several rebellions in 2012. A declaration of Azawad independence was cut short by Islamic terrorists taking over the rebellion, supported by Algeria's secret services. This left the Tuareg separatists confined to their traditional stronghold of northern Mali's Kidal region.

Three years later (2015), an Algerian negotiated Peace Agreement brought a degree of autonomy to northern Mali's regions, especially that of Kidal, where the French and UN forces kept an uneasy peace through an effective buffer zone around Kidal.

The junta's eviction of the French and UN forces on the grounds that they had failed to protect Mali from the Islamic terrorists provided the junta with the pretext of attacking Kidal on the grounds of reclaiming Malian national territory. To legitimise the attack, the junta falsely portrayed the Tuareg as 'terrorists'.

On 2 October 2023, a FAMa-Wagner convoy set out from Gao to reclaim Kidal (Chapter 3), a 300 km journey that would normally take two days, but which took six weeks. The delay appears to have been deliberate, with the convoy spending days massacring civilians and their livestock along the way in the most barbaric manner: decapitation and impalement of the heads on poles or leaving them on the bodies, booby-trapped with explosives; disembowelments; incineration; torture, rape and all manner of bestiality. By the time the convoy reached Kidal, photographs of its atrocities had proceeded it on social media. The Wagner tactic of terrorising the civilian population had worked: by the time the convoy reached Kidal, faced with only light resistance, much of the population had fled to neighbouring countries.

The military convoy took Kidal in mid-November, raising the Wagner flag over the town and with the junta installing its own selected regional governor. In January, the junta formally announced its unilateral cancellation of the Algiers Peace Agreement.

With Kidal reclaimed, the convoy's objective had been achieved. From then on, the FAMa-Wagner duo, in accordance with the definition of the United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Chapter 2), to which Mali is a signatory, turned to the perpetration of a genocide against those Tuareg – now branded as 'terrorists' – who had not fled the region and who the FAMa-Wagner soldiers began hunting down in the surrounding semi-nomadic camps, settlements and villages.

The UN's Genocide Convention defines genocide as any of five acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. At least three of these five acts, namely: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction, have been committed by the FAMa-Wagner duo in the most brutal and barbaric ways since late 2023.

A detailed timeline of the genocidal acts committed by the FAMa-Wagner duo between late November 2023 and September-October 2024 is given in Chapter 4. (Note that October does not mark the end of the genocide). Along with Chapter 5, the Report, based on eye-witness accounts provided by local Tuareg civil society organisations, such as Kal Akal, and their representatives, describes, documents and dates the massacres, destruction of settlements and infrastructures (e.g. schools, water towers, wells, etc.),

beheadings, impalements, looting, theft, torture, rapes, acts of cannibalism, incineration and booby-trapping of bodies and disappearances that have constituted this genocide.

For the perpetrators of these acts to be guilty of genocide, there must be “proof of intent.” Chapter 6 provides detailed documentary evidence to show that Mali governments over the last two decades have adopted what they and the US State Department called a “Tuareg First” policy. This meant that the Mali government would deal first with the Tuareg before Al Qaeda terrorists. Further proof of intent is demonstrated by Tuareg belonging to militia and political organisations that support and fight alongside the FAMa also being killed, simply because they were Tuareg.

By the end of September 2024, Kal Akal reckoned that about 800 civilians had been killed by the FAMa-Wagner duo but is certain that this number will rise. This number of deaths is not many in comparison to those killed in the Gaza genocide, Ukraine and Sudan, but in such a small, semi-nomadic and close-knit desert community, where survival sometimes appears as miraculous, even a handful of deaths is catastrophic.

Further evidence of Mali’s intended genocide comes from reports - compiled by Akli Sh’kka after his investigations into the 1 December drone attacks on Tin Zaouatene -that captured Russian soldiers being held as prisoners by FLA fighters in northeast Mali have confessed that they, along with the FAMa, were ordered by Mali’s coup leader and interim President, Colonel (now Général d’Armée) Assimi Goïta, to kill all ‘white-skinned’ inhabitants of the Kidal region.

This Report provides the evidence that obligates the international community to investigate and take action to stop this genocide and bring its perpetrators to justice.

October 2024

## **Génocide au Mali – Résumé**

Ce rapport (huit chapitres) présente des preuves détaillées montrant que la junte militaire malienne et son allié russe Africa Corps, autrefois connu sous le nom de groupe Wagner, commettent depuis novembre 2023 un génocide contre la population touarègue du nord du Mali.

Depuis 2012, l’armée malienne, les Forces armées malientes (FAMa), assistée des forces militaires françaises et d’une importante force de maintien de la paix de l’ONU, combat une incursion de terroristes islamistes. Cependant, l’échec de la France à sécuriser le pays contre les « terroristes » a conduit l’armée malienne à prendre le pouvoir en 2020. Après un deuxième

coup d'état en 2021, la junte alliée à Moscou a consolidé son pouvoir et a invité le groupe de mercenaires russes Wagner à remplacer les Français. La force de maintien de la paix de l'ONU, forte de 15 000 hommes, a également été sommée de quitter le pays.

Avant même l'arrivée du groupe Wagner, les FAMa commettaient des atrocités contre leur population civile depuis une bonne partie de la décennie précédente. Avec l'arrivée du groupe Wagner, ces crimes contre l'humanité se sont multipliés, attirant l'attention internationale avec le massacre de plus de 500 civils dans le village de Moura en mars 2022.

Malgré le portrait occidental du Mali comme une démocratie réussie et ethniquement diversifiée, des tensions existent depuis l'indépendance en 1960 entre les gouvernements maliens successifs et la population touarègue minoritaire du nord du Mali, connue par les Touaregs sous le nom d'« Azawad » (Chapitre 1). Les protestations des Touaregs contre leur marginalisation politique perçue et leur discrimination ethnique ont donné lieu à la plus récente de plusieurs rébellions en 2012. Une déclaration d'indépendance de l'Azawad a été interrompue par la prise de contrôle de la rébellion par des terroristes islamiques soutenus par les services secrets algériens. Les séparatistes touaregs se sont alors retrouvés confinés dans leur bastion traditionnel de la région de Kidal, au nord du Mali.

Trois ans plus tard (2015), un accord de paix négocié par l'Algérie a apporté une certaine autonomie aux régions du nord du Mali, en particulier à Kidal, où les forces françaises et onusiennes maintenaient une paix précaire grâce à une zone tampon efficace autour de Kidal.

L'éviction par la junte des forces françaises et onusiennes au motif qu'elles n'avaient pas réussi à protéger le Mali des terroristes islamiques a fourni à la junte le prétexte d'attaquer Kidal au motif de reconquérir le territoire national malien. Pour légitimer l'attaque, la junte a faussement présenté les Touaregs comme des « terroristes ».

Le 2 Octobre 2023, un convoi FAMa-Wagner est parti de Gao pour reprendre Kidal (Chapitre 3), un voyage de 300 km qui prendrait normalement deux jours, mais qui a pris six semaines. Le retard semble avoir été délibéré, le convoi ayant passé des jours à massacrer des civils et leur bétail le long de la route de la manière la plus barbare: décapitation et empallement des têtes sur des poteaux ou les laissant sur les corps, piégées avec des explosifs ; éventrations; incinération; torture, viol et toutes sortes de bestialité. Au moment où le convoi a atteint Kidal, des photos de ses atrocités l'avaient précédé sur les réseaux sociaux. La tactique de Wagner consistant à terroriser la population civile avait fonctionné: au moment où le convoi a atteint Kidal, confronté à une faible résistance, une grande partie de la population avait fui vers les pays voisins.

Le convoi militaire a pris Kidal à la mi-Novembre, hissant le drapeau Wagner

sur la ville et la junte y installant son propre gouverneur régional. En Janvier, la junte a officiellement annoncé son annulation unilatérale de l'accord de paix d'Alger.

Avec la reprise de Kidal, l'objectif du convoi avait été atteint. Dès lors, le duo FAMa-Wagner, conformément à la définition de la Convention des Nations Unies pour la prévention et la répression du crime de génocide (Chapitre 2), dont le Mali est signataire, s'est tourné vers la perpétration d'un génocide contre les Touaregs – désormais qualifiés de « terroristes » – qui n'avaient pas fui la région et que les soldats FAMa-Wagner ont commencé à traquer dans les camps, implantations et villages semi-nomades environnants.

La Convention des Nations Unies sur le génocide définit le génocide comme l'un des cinq actes commis dans l'intention de détruire, en tout ou en partie, un groupe national, ethnique, racial ou religieux. Au moins trois de ces cinq actes, à savoir : tuer des membres du groupe ; Des actes de génocide, notamment des atteintes graves à l'intégrité physique ou mentale de membres du groupe et des conditions de vie délibérées devant entraîner sa destruction physique, ont été commis par le duo FAMa-Wagner de la manière la plus brutale et la plus barbare depuis fin 2023.

Une chronologie détaillée des actes génocidaires commis par le duo FAMa-Wagner entre fin Novembre 2023 et Septembre-Octobre 2024 est présentée au Chapitre 4. (À noter qu'Octobre ne marque pas la fin du génocide). Parallèlement au Chapitre 5, le rapport, basé sur des témoignages oculaires fournis par des organisations de la société civile touarègue locale, telles que Kal Akal, et leurs représentants, décrit, documente et date les massacres, la destruction d'établissements et d'infrastructures (par exemple, écoles, châteaux d'eau, puits, etc.), les décapitations, les empalements, les pillages, les vols, la torture, les viols, les actes de cannibalisme, l'incinération et le piégeage des corps et les disparitions qui ont constitué ce génocide.

Pour que les auteurs de ces actes soient coupables de génocide, il faut qu'il y ait une « preuve d'intention ». Le Chapitre 6 fournit des preuves documentaires détaillées montrant que les gouvernements maliens ont adopté au cours des deux dernières décennies ce qu'ils et le Département d'État américain ont appelé une politique « Touareg First ». Cela signifie que le gouvernement malien s'occupera d'abord des Touaregs avant les terroristes d'Al-Qaïda. Une preuve supplémentaire de cette intention est démontrée par le fait que des Touaregs appartenant à des milices et à des organisations politiques qui soutiennent et combattent aux côtés des FAMa ont également été tués, simplement parce qu'ils étaient Touaregs.

À la fin du mois de Septembre 2024, Kal Akal estimait qu'environ 800 civils avaient été tués par le duo FAMa-Wagner, mais il est certain que ce nombre va augmenter. Ce nombre de morts n'est pas élevé par rapport à ceux tués lors du génocide de Gaza, en Ukraine et au Soudan, mais dans une communauté

du désert aussi petite, semi-nomade et soudée, où la survie apparaît parfois comme miraculeuse, même une poignée de morts est catastrophique.

D'autres preuves du génocide intentionnel du Mali proviennent de rapports - compilés par Akli Sh'kka après ses enquêtes sur les attaques de drones du 1er décembre sur Tin Zaouatene - selon lesquels des soldats russes capturés et détenus comme prisonniers par des combattants de la FLA dans le nord-est du Mali ont avoué qu'ils avaient reçu, avec les FAMa, l'ordre du chef du coup d'État du Mali et président par intérim, le colonel (aujourd'hui général d'armée) Assimi Goïta, de tuer tous les habitants à la peau blanche de la région de Kidal.

Ce rapport fournit les preuves qui obligent la communauté internationale à enquêter et à prendre des mesures pour mettre fin à ce génocide et traduire ses auteurs en justice.

Octobre 2024

# Introduction

**A detailed analysis of the actions and intentions of the Forces Armées Maliennes (FAMa) and its Russian allies during this period suggests very strongly that they have been doing more than 'ethnic cleansing': they have been perpetrating a genocide.**

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During the more than ten months from November 2023 to late September 2024 (and likely to continue for the foreseeable future), the Tuareg peoples of the Kidal region of northern Mali have been accusing Mali's military junta, along with its army (the Forces Armées Maliennes - FAMa) and its Russian allies, the mercenary soldiers belonging to Russia's Wagner group (now renamed as the 'Africa Corps'), of 'ethnic cleansing'. A detailed analysis of the actions and intentions of the FAMa and its Russian allies during this period suggests very strongly that they have been doing more than 'ethnic cleansing': they have been perpetrating a genocide.



# 01

# Background to Mali's genocide

**This chapter provides a summary background to this Report. It gives a brief explanation of the complex events prior to August 2023 that help explain the circumstances and the motives for the Mali government's perpetration of a genocide against the Tuareg of the Kidal region of northern Mali between November 2023 and September 2024, and possibly continuing.**

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The events covered by this report, from roughly August 2023 until the end of September 2024 (and likely to continue after this date), cannot be fully appreciated without a summary understanding of the series of 'crises' which have characterised relations between northern Mali and Bamako, the country's capital, since the attainment of Mali's independence from France in 1960.

Northern Mali, called 'Azawad' by Tuareg separatists, covers the present-day regions of Timbuktu, Gao, Ménaka, Kidal and Taoudéni. According to Tuareg separatists, the population of Azawad is at least three million. Mali's Tuareg population, which has not been subject to an exact census, is estimated at around three quarters of a million. They live mostly in the Kidal region and the northern parts of the Timbuktu, Gao and Ménaka regions. The scant population of Taoudéni is predominantly Tuareg and Arab.

## **A long history of antagonism between Mali's north and south**

There is a long history of antagonism and conflict between Mali's Tuareg population and the Malian government in Bamako, beginning with the first Tuareg rebellion in 1962. A summary of the several other subsequent Tuareg rebellions is given in Chapter 6 in the section entitled Mali's "Tuareg first" policy.

Part of the antagonism between Bamako and the north is of racial origin, in that northern Mali is inhabited predominantly by Arabs and Tuareg who are regarded as being 'white skinned', compared to the vast majority of the peoples of central and southern Mali who belong to 'black-skinned' or 'negroid' ethnic groups. This division between 'white' and 'black' still permeates much of the political, social and economic life and culture of the country. Traditionally, and through much of the colonial period, the 'white-skinned' Tuareg and Arab peoples of the north regarded the predominantly 'negroid' peoples of the south as potential slaves. Indeed, the remnant of 'slavery' still rears its head in some socio-political relations and situations in Mali, as it does across almost the entirety of Africa's Sahel region.

### **The Tuareg of northern Mali feel they have been marginalised politically and economically by the Bamako government.**

In addition to these traditional racist and ethno-linguistic divisions, the Tuareg of northern Mali feel they have been marginalised politically and economically by the Bamako government. The evidence for this, which goes beyond the scope of this report, is by no means as clear-cut as many Tuareg claim.

While these deep-seated issues lie behind the Tuareg rebellions of the 20th century, those of this century, in both Mali and neighbouring Niger, have very different causations. Mali's and Niger's Tuareg rebellions of this century, starting in 2004 in Niger and 2006 in Mali, are, as explained in Chapter 6, a product of America's global war on terrorism (GWOT). The GWOT in the Sahara-Sahel, as it evolved from around 2002-2003, was based on a series of 'terrorism' incidents that were planned in 2002 and first implemented in Algeria in 2003 by the Americans working in collusion with Algeria's secret intelligence service, the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS), before being 'transplanted' into Mali later in 2003. Perhaps ironically, the key agent in facilitating the DRS's 'relocation' of this terrorism from Algeria into Mali in 2003 was Iyad ag Ghali, the leader of Mali's main jihadist group, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), who became a prominent figure in the events described in this Report more than 20 years later.

## The Tuareg in both Mali and Niger were portrayed as 'terrorists' by their governments so that the regimes of both countries could continue to benefit from American military assistance and largesse.

From 2004 onwards, first in Niger, then Tamanrasset (Algeria) and then Mali,<sup>2</sup> the two governments of Niger and especially Mali tried – successfully – to provoke the Tuareg into taking up arms against them. The reason for this, as explained in Chapter 6 (Mali's "Tuareg first" policy) and Appendix 9 (The Bamako Cables), was so that the governments of both Mali and Niger could show to the Americans that there was 'terrorism' in their countries in the form of their rebellious Tuareg populations. The Tuareg in both Mali and Niger were cast as 'terrorists' by their governments so that the regimes of both countries could continue to benefit from American military assistance and largesse. Ironically, in Mali especially, the only people ready to fight the 'terrorists' in the form of the Algerian-based Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), were the Tuareg.<sup>3</sup>

The situation of the Tuareg in both Mali and Niger changed dramatically following the overthrow and killing of Libya's Colonel Mouamar Gadhafi in October 2011. Over the preceding years, many Tuareg from the Sahel had gone to Libya, often with their families, to escape the drought conditions in the Sahel and find employment, often in Gadhafi's foreign legions. Following NATO's military intervention in Libya,<sup>4</sup> many more Tuareg travelled north from the Sahel to help Gadhafi's resistance.

During late 2011, Tuareg returned from Libya to the Sahel in their thousands. They were angry at the events in Libya, well-armed and seasoned fighters.

One of the first Tuareg fighters to return to Mali from Libya was Mohamed ag Najim (a.k.a. Najem), who at that time was a colonel in the Libyan army. Najim was a Kel Iforas Tuareg, whose father was killed by the Malian army in the 1963 Tuareg rebellion when he was a young child. When aged about 20, he was recruited as a volunteer and served in Gadhafi's army in both Libya and Chad, before returning to Mali to take part in the 1990 rebellion led by Iyad ag Ghali. He rejected the 1992 peace deal between the Mali government and the rebels and returned to Libya where he became a colonel and was placed in charge of an elite unit in the city of Sebha. It was here that he met up with Ibrahim ag Bahanga, leader of the Mouvement Touareg

2 Keenan, Jeremy H. (2013). *The Dying Sahara*. Pluto Books, London

3 See Keenan (2013) op. cit. and Appendix 9.

4 NATO's invasion was both illegal and ultimately unsuccessful, resulting in Libya becoming the 'failed state' of today. The intervening countries gave absolutely no thought to the possible consequences of their intervention.

du Nord du Mali (MTNM), with whom the Mali government had still not made peace. Bahanga had gone to Libya before his death<sup>5</sup> in August 2011 to persuade Najim to return with his men to Mali and join the struggle against the Bamako government.

While Niger was aware of the problems posed by the return of these battle-hardened fighters and did its best to integrate them into the security services, Mali virtually ignored the problem, making the Malian Tuareg even angrier. Most of the Malian returnees, including Najim and his men, stopped short of Kidal in the mountainous region around Ti-n-Asselak in the Abeibeira district, some 130 kms east of Kidal, where they joined forces with the few hundred remaining rebels of Ibrahim ag Bahanga's Mouvement Touareg du Nord du Mali (MTNM). On 16 October (2011), the two groups – the Libya returnees and Bahanga's MTNM – announced their merger to form the Mouvement National pour la libération de l'Azawad (MNLA), a secessionist force bent on creating an independent state of Azawad.<sup>6</sup> Mohamed ag Najim was the commander of the MNLA's incipient army.<sup>6</sup>

## **The Tuareg threat to Mali and Algeria (2011)**

The MNLA posed a major threat to Algeria, which realised that the MNLA would easily defeat Mali's ill-led and ill-equipped armed forces and potentially ignite simmering Tuareg unrest in Algeria's extreme south. A victory for Tuareg irredentism in Mali would have been a major threat to Algeria's own political instability.

The DRS's strategy to overcome, or at least reduce this threat was to encourage an Islamist rebellion in Mali that would support the MNLA rebellion but quickly subsume the MNLA both politically and militarily, thus reducing the MNLA's credibility and political potency as a bona fide Tuareg nationalist movement.

The DRS set about implementing this strategy by mobilising the AQIM, now under the leadership of Abdelhamid Abou Zaïd, and creating two further Islamist jihadist groups, the Jamat Tawhid Wal Jihad Fi Garbi Afriqqiya or, translated into French as the Mouvement pour l'Unification et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) – the Unity Movement for Jihad in West Africa, and Ansar al Dine (The Supporters of the Faith).<sup>7</sup> The latter was under the leadership of Iyad ag Ghali, who had long been closely associated

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<sup>5</sup> Bahanga officially died in a car accident, but it is widely believed that his death was arranged by Algeria's DRS.

<sup>6</sup> In its first press statement, the MNLA said: "This new organisation aims to free the people of Azawad from the illegal occupation of its territory by Mali."

<sup>7</sup> MUJAO first came to public attention on 10 December 2011 when it sent a message to the AFP correspondent in Bamako claiming responsibility for the kidnappings, during the night of October 22-23, of three European aid workers from the Hassi Rabuni Sahrawi refugee camp, near Tindouf in the extreme west of Algeria. The other new jihadi group, calling itself Ansar al-Dine ('The Supporters of the Faith'), announced its existence on the Mauritanian Tawassoul website on December 15 ([http://www.thememriblog.org/blog\\_personal/en/41395.htm](http://www.thememriblog.org/blog_personal/en/41395.htm)).

with the DRS and was often referred to as the DRS's man in Mali.<sup>8</sup>

All three movements - Ansar al Dine, AQIM and MUJAO - were encouraged to recruit in Mali, or, in as much as most of AQIM and some of MUJAO were in Algeria, to move their operations into northern Mali and ally with the MNLA, where they would be supplied and supported by the DRS with arms, fuel and other essential supplies.

## The beginning of a new Tuareg rebellion

**In less than three months, the FAMa had been effectively driven out of northern Mali, thereby enabling the MNLA [...] to declare unilaterally on 6 April 2012 that Azawad (northern Mali) was independent from the Republic of Mali**

The first shots, marking the beginning of this new Tuareg rebellion, were fired on 17 January 2012 when a group of Tuareg rebels attacked the town of Ménaka. On the 19 January, MNLA forces attacked the villages of both Aguelhok and Tessalit on the western side of the Adrar-n-Iforas massif. In less than three months, the FAMa had been effectively driven out of northern Mali, thereby enabling the MNLA, who had been assisted by the above-mentioned Islamist groups, which at that time had been under the overall direction of Algeria's DRS, to declare unilaterally on 6 April (2012) that Azawad (northern Mali) was independent from the Republic of Mali.<sup>9</sup>

A Malian military source was quoted as saying that to the best of the Malian Army's intelligence "the MNLA is in charge of nothing at the moment... it is Iyad ag Ghali who is the strongest and he is with AQIM." The international reaction to the announcement was one of complete negation, with not a single state recognising the declaration.<sup>10</sup>

By 28 May 2012, seven weeks after Azawad's declaration of independence, northern Mali was in a state of chaos, with the idea of an independent Tuareg state of Azawad fading rapidly as the Islamists, or jihadists as they

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<sup>8</sup> The DRS's awareness of Iyad's activities stretches back over some 35 years, to 1988 when he founded the Mouvement Populaire pour la Libération de l'Azawad (MPLA), which led the initial uprising that began at Ménaka in June 1990. Iyad was the most prominent of Mali's Tuareg leaders in that rebellion. When the MPLA split into three groups in 1991, Iyad led the Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad (MPA), which was drawn predominantly from the politically dominant Ifoghas (Iforas) tribe. By the time that the MPA was dissolved at the Flame of Peace ceremony at Timbuktu in 1996, Algeria's DRS had already identified Iyad as a key player in the region's future and possibly one that they could use to their own advantage.

<sup>9</sup> The declaration was signed by the Secretary-General of the MNLA, Bilal ag Acherif, in Gao, and announced on France24 by the MNLA's spokesman Moussa ag Attahir.

<sup>10</sup> France's Defence Minister Gérard Longue said: "A unilateral declaration of independence which is not recognised by African states would not have any meaning for us." France's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said the declaration was "null and void" and affirmed France's commitment to Mali's territorial integrity. France indicated it would offer military assistance to the ECOWAS force aimed at stabilising Mali and containing the rebels. Patrick Ventrell, a spokesman for the US State Department said: "We reject the MNLA's statement of independence and reiterate our call for the territorial integrity of Mali."

are now usually known, effectively took over control of Azawad from the MNLA, as Algeria's DRS had planned. How the duplicitous dealings and intentions of the Islamists and Algeria's DRS cut the ground from under the feet of the predominantly Tuareg MNLA is covered in Appendix 4, which explains the treachery that lay behind the gruesome massacre of FAMa soldiers in the village of Aguelhok shortly after the rebellion had started.

What happened at Aguelhok and then in the seven weeks between the Azawad declaration of independence and a meeting the Islamist leaders and the DRS at Timbuktu on 28 May effectively set the groundwork for the Sahel-wide conflagration that began in 2013 and has continued to the present (2024).

The clue to understanding what happened during this period lay in the abovementioned statement from the Malian army's intelligence service that Iyad ag Ghali was the strongest character in the field at that time, and that he was with AQIM. Indeed, there were growing rumours and hearsay during those weeks that Iyad was not only supported by and working with Algerians, meaning the DRS, but that he was deliberately undermining the MNLA, its aims and its ultimate negotiating position. While the MNLA was demanding the independence of Azawad, Iyad had been making it widely known that his group, Ansar al-Dine, which was later to become JNIM, did not want independence or any sort of breakaway from Mali, but merely shar'ia in Azawad (and Mali), something that was strongly opposed by the vast majority of Tuareg.

The pattern of the MNLA's advance across the Azawad region during these few weeks had been for the MNLA to drive out the Malian military and occupy their bases,<sup>11</sup> while Iyad and his band of 'Islamists' took over the town centres, notably Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. For example, in Kidal, Iyad quickly moved to the centre of town, issuing unwelcome orders to shopkeepers and other residents about observing shar'ia law. A similar pattern occurred in Gao, while the move into Timbuktu was so fast that Gao almost got left behind. In Timbuktu, Iyad's men drove through the town in fifty vehicles, replacing the MNLA flag with the black flag of Ansar al-Dine. He also set up alliances with members of Arab militia who had been responsible, only a few days before, for killing Tuareg civilians.

By 3 April, three days before the MNLA's declaration of Independence, French media sources<sup>12</sup> confirmed that the three emirs of AQIM, Abdelhamid Abou Zaid, Mokhtar ben Mokhtar and Yahia Djouadi (Yahya Abou Al-Hammam), all of whom were Algerians associated with the DRS, had arrived in Timbuktu to meet up with Iyad ag Ghali.<sup>13</sup> In other words, even before the MNLA's declaration of Independence, this AQIM-DRS-

<sup>11</sup> The MNLA encountered little resistance as the Malian army for the most part complied with Bamako's call for a 'strategic retreat'.

<sup>12</sup> "Islamists gain ground in Mali as pressure mounts on junta." France24, 03.04.2012. Accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20120403-mali-junta-threatens-prosecute-ousted-president-amadou-toumani-toure-coup>; Jeune Afrique <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/depeches/56982/politique/mali-le-sort-des-otages-francais-passe-au-second-plan/>; "Mali: le sort des otages français passe au second plan », AFP 05.04.2012.

<sup>13</sup> The town's imams were also reported to be present at the meeting. The three AQIM/DRS agents are reported to have made the vacated army camp their base. Iyad was said to be in complete control of the town, backed up by AQIM.

Ansar al-Dine alliance had taken control of Timbuktu.<sup>14</sup>

Timbuktu's citizens and MNLA supporters described how the MNLA had been led into a trap in Timbuktu. One member of the MNLA described it as "a Trojan Horse".<sup>15</sup> He said that the Berabiche militia, into whom Mokhtar ben Mokhtar had married, had called in the Ansar al-Dine, along with the three AQIM/DRS emirs, and that they were accompanied by Algerian Special Forces.

There were also widespread reports of looting in both Gao and Timbuktu, with these actions being allegedly directed by Iyad ag Ghali and his Ansar al-Dine, with further claims that they were accompanied by Algerian Special Forces disguised as AQIM members. Such reports, although hard to verify, tended to confirm the close relationship between AQIM and Algeria's DRS, and that the aim of the DRS was to undermine the MNLA and turn Azawad into an 'Arabo-salafist' 'narco-state' effectively under its control.

A report from Paris<sup>16</sup> said that France's Foreign Minister Alain Juppé had confirmed that Ansar al-Dine was closely linked to AQIM, and that Paris was encouraging the UN to mobilise against this danger to the whole of Mali. Juppé said that while certain rebels, notably the MNLA, were content with control over the northern region of Azawad, others, notably Iyad ag Ghali, along with AQIM, were aiming to turn the whole of Mali into an Islamist republic.

The seemingly inevitable showdown between the MNLA and Ansar al-Dine came on 28 June. Since the beginning of the rebellion in January, Islamists had invidiously been taking control of Azawad. Their full control of the region was declared on Thursday 28 June, the day after they had pushed their Tuareg MNLA allies out of Gao in a gun battle that killed, according to medical sources, at least 35 people, possibly many more. Most of those killed were MNLA, including two of their colonels. The MNLA leader Bilal Ag Acherif was wounded and evacuated to neighbouring Burkina Faso

## **France's military intervention and the start of the 'Sahel War'**

From late June 2012 until the end of the year, there was widespread speculation and discussion in regional and international quarters as to whether the chaotic spread of Islamisation in northern Mali and the Islamist's encroachment south-westwards towards the capital, Bamako, would lead to some sort of international military intervention.

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<sup>14</sup> Reports indicated that the MNLA who had taken control of Timbuktu on or before 1 April were quickly driven out by the Ansar al-Dine/AQIM alliance.

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication to the author. Reported in Sahara Focus, 2012.1. Menas Associates, London.

<sup>16</sup> Reuters (John Irish and Catherine Bremer), "France urges talks with Mali rebels, unity against al Qaeda." 05 April 2012. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-france-tuareg-idUKBRE8340EV20120405>

On 10 January 2013, the Islamist's forces, estimated by local sources as numbering around 800 men in about 200 vehicles, and believed to have been led by Iyad ag Ghali, overran the small town of Konna, which was on the Mali side of the 'de facto' frontline between Malian and Islamist forces. Konna was strategically important, being only 56 kms from Mopti and the nearby, crucially important strategic airbase of Sévaré. Whether the Islamists could have taken either or both Mopti and Sévaré is debatable. If they had entered Mopti, it would have been extremely difficult to dislodge them. It would also have created panic in Bamako, just over 600 kms away.

With the fall of Konna, the Mali government, fearing an Islamist advance on Bamako,<sup>17</sup> finally requested military assistance from France. The French military intervention, initially under the name of Operation Serval, began on 11 January 2013. France's immediate task was to halt the Islamist advance. However, although air assaults on Konna soon put the Islamists to flight on the roads back to Timbuktu and Gao, the French operation to rid Mali of the Islamists soon became bogged down as hardcore Islamist fighters entrenched themselves in the rugged Tigharghar mountains in northern Kidal,<sup>18</sup> while documents found in Timbuktu and elsewhere revealed that the Islamist groups had used their 10-month occupation of northern Mali to stretch their tentacles across much of West Africa and beyond. Indeed, the evidence of widespread Al Qaeda recruitment across the region, doubtless galvanised by the French military presence, suggested that the French-led war against al Qaeda and its allies could drag on for much longer than originally anticipated.

Indeed, the war against the Islamist, Al Qaeda 'terrorists', now generally called 'jihadists', did not just 'drag on' but expanded across much of the Sahel, notably in Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso, and gradually also into the northern parts of the Western African Gulf States. On 1 August 2014, just over 18 months after France had driven the Islamists out of Konna, Operation Serval was transformed into Operation Barkhane. This saw France's military presence expanded from around 3,000 to 5,000 troops and deployed beyond Mali into Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso.

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<sup>17</sup> There are many theories about why Iyad might have launched an advance on Bamako. One is that his Islamist forces had grown to the point where the main groups were on the brink of further fragmentation. He possibly thought that an advance on Bamako would hold them together. Another was that Iyad had done a deal with one of the FAMA's commanders whereby they would divide the country between them.

<sup>18</sup> It took several months to clear Tigharghar of Islamist fighters. Most of the fighting was undertaken by Chadian troops seconded to the French forces. Overall, the death toll in Tigharghar was estimated at around 200. These were mostly Islamists, although several Chadians and a few French were also killed.

## **The 'Sahel War' (President Obama's 'Long War')**

**From January 2013 to the present (September 2024), the fight by the governments of the regions against the Islamist extremists or 'jihadists', first under the umbrella force of France's Operation Serval, and then under France's Operation Barkhane, [...] escalated.**

From January 2013 to the present (September 2024), the fight by the governments of the Sahel against the Islamist extremists or 'jihadists', first under the umbrella force of France's Operation Serval, and then from August 2014 under the umbrella force of France's Operation Barkhan<sup>19</sup>, along with several smaller European contingents, and the UN Peacekeeping mission of MINUSMA (Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation au Mali), escalated.<sup>20</sup> The jihadists were comprised mainly of the JNIM and the more extreme État Islamique du Grand Sahara (EIGS), which claimed allegiance to the Islamic State. In addition, Chad and southeast Niger suffered from incursions of Boko Haram extremists from northeastern Nigeria. Throughout these years, especially from about 2017 onwards, the presence of the 'jihadists' increased in terms of their numbers, geographical spheres of activity, attacks on both civilians and military, deaths and population displacements.

Over this 11-year period (2013-2024), this conflict has been given various names, such as the 'Sahel' War', the 'War in the Sahel' the 'GWOT in the Sahel', the 'war against the jihadists in the Sahel', and variations of these, as well as President Barrack Obama's aptly named 'Long War'. Over the last three-four years, coinciding with the overthrow of democratically elected governments in these countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger), the expulsion of the French military and MINUSMA peacekeepers, and the arrival of Russia's Wagner group mercenaries, the key statistics of this conflict in terms of such indices as the number of Islamist fighters, civilian deaths, population displacements, and the suchlike, have increased almost exponentially. Current (September 2024) estimates of JNIM and EIGS fighters are around 6,000 and 3,000 respectively.

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<sup>19</sup> Operation Barkhane was formally ended on 9 November 2022.

<sup>20</sup> The G5 Sahel Joint Force (la Force conjointe du G5 Sahel "FC-G5S") was established in 2017 to respond to the expansion of armed and violent extremist groups and to the deteriorating security situation in the region.

# A military junta and its Russian allies take over Mali

A key turning point in Mali's post-2012 crisis was the military coup of 18 August 2020 by Colonel Assimi Goïta that overthrew President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK). Six months before the coup, a Wagner-linked network began waging a disinformation campaign pushing for the disengagement of French and UN troops in Mali. A few weeks after the coup, the junta agreed to an ECOWAS-negotiated plan for an 18-month transition and elections to be held in February 2022.<sup>21</sup>

On 24 May 2021, nine months after the first coup d'état, Assimi Goïta led a second coup in which he strengthened his grip on the country by ousting the transitional president and prime minister and appointing himself as transitional president.<sup>22</sup> Within a few weeks of the second coup, France announced the beginning of the drawdown of Operation Barkhane, with the idea that it would be partially replaced by a European Union Taskforce named Takuba. The Takuba taskforce scarcely materialised, while both Takuba and Barkhane left Mali in February 2022.<sup>23</sup>

However, by this time, Russian Wagner group mercenaries were already established in the country. First reports of a deal having been struck between the Wagner mercenaries and the junta emerged during September 2021, with the first Wagner troops arriving in Bamako in December 2021. Although denied by Algeria and Mali, the transport of these Russian forces to Bamako was facilitated by Algeria, whose Army Chief of Staff, General Saïd Chengriha, an ardent Russophile, allowed the Russian troops to transit across Algeria via Tamanrasset.<sup>24 25</sup>

With the withdrawal of French, EU and G5S troops from Mali, along with the withdrawal of many European and African contingents from the MINUSMA peacekeeping force prior to the expiration of the UN mandate in June 2023,<sup>26</sup> Mali's security situation, now effectively in the hands of the FAMa and its Russian allies, deteriorated rapidly. Measuring violence by categories is not only difficult but often misleading as it is unclear whether the violence was perpetrated by Islamist groups, other armed groups, or the FAMa and its Russian allies. Much published data therefore tends to be cases of comparing apples with pears.

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<sup>21</sup> Many, including the author, believed the junta had no intention of honouring this agreement.

<sup>22</sup> The coup was greeted by the junta's stage-managed false-flag demonstration in which many Russian flags were displayed, with the demonstration's cheerleaders calling for Russian intervention in Mali.

<sup>23</sup> On 17 January (2022) the junta expelled Danish special forces sent to join the Takuba force, while four days later it refused flight clearance for German military transport aircraft.

<sup>24</sup> In their stop-over at Tamanrasset, the Algerian authorities said that the Wagner contingent were tourists. Local people noted that they came accompanied by women (wives, girlfriends, and/or prostitutes), but no children.

<sup>25</sup> Protected by their new Russian allies, the junta announced that elections would be postponed until 2026.

<sup>26</sup> Sweden announced the withdrawal of its MINUSMA troops on 3 March 2022. Benin announced its withdrawal from Minusma on 19 May 2022. Egypt suspended the activities of its MINUSMA force on 15 July 2022. Côte d'Ivoire announced its withdrawal on 11 November 2022. On 22 November, Germany announced its MINUSMA troops would be withdrawn by 2024, while Britain also announced in November that it would be withdrawing its troops six months ahead of their planned schedule. Earlier, in February 2022, the Mali junta began refusing flight clearances to ECOWAS governments that enforced sanctions thereby preventing peacekeepers from Senegal, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ghana from rotating in or out of the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali. On 14 July 2022, the junta suspended all MINUSMA troop rotations.

However, in Mali, three trends have been very clear.<sup>27</sup> One is that insecurity, whether measured by the number of ‘terrorist’ attacks on civilian or military targets, the number of ‘violent events’, population displacements, etc., has increased since military juntas overthrew civilian rule. A second, which tends to mirror the first, is that insecurity has increased in direct relation to the withdrawal of French and other foreign troops, including the MINUSMA. The third trend is that insecurity, as measured in civilian deaths, has accelerated since the arrival of the Wagner group.

For example:

- The Global Terrorism Index report for 2024 revealed that the Sahel had become the most impacted region in the world, representing 43% of global terrorism deaths, 7% more than the year prior.<sup>28 29</sup>
- The Global Terrorism Index for 2024 (index 10-0) ranked Burkina Faso first (8.571), Mali third (7.998) and Niger tenth (7.274). In terms of the percentage of world terrorism deaths in 2023, the percentages for Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger were 23%, 9% and 6% respectively.<sup>30</sup>
- Extremist violence has surged across the Sahel. The first seven months of 2023 saw at least 7,800 civilian deaths, a significant increase from 2022, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). This data contradicts claims by the military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger that they are tackling insecurity effectively.<sup>31</sup>
- The most relevant of these data for the purposes of this report is the report by Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), published of 21 September 2023, less than two weeks before the FAMa/Wagner convoy left their military bases in Gao and Bourem on 2 October 2023 to attack Kidal (see Chapter 3). According to ACLED, violence targeting civilians had increased by 38% in Mali so far in 2023. The main perpetrators of these attacks were JNIM (over 180 events, 33%), Malian state forces and/or the Wagner Group (nearly 160 events, 29%), and the EIGS (nearly 90 events, 15%).<sup>32</sup>
- Additional ACLED data shows that “in the wake of successive military coups promising to improve security across the region, political violence levels in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have together increased by 5% [for January 2023 up to September 2023] relative to the same period in 2022, and by 46% compared to 2021.

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27 The same trends are common to Burkina Faso and Niger, although the Russians have not been as established as in Mali.

28 <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/>

29 Burkina Faso suffered the worst impact from terrorism, with deaths increasing by 68% despite attacks decreasing by 17%, (ibid.)

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 “Attacks on Civilians Spike in Mali as Security Deteriorates Across the Sahel”. ACLED, 21 September 2023. Accessed at: <https://acleddata.com/2023/09/21/fact-sheet-attacks-on-civilians-spike-in-mali-as-security-deteriorates-across-the-sahel/>

## If the data documented in this report is included, we are probably faced with the realisation that around 50%, possibly more, of the attacks on Mali's civilians over the last year have been perpetrated by the FAMa-Wagner duo

In short, ACLED's data shows that 29% of attacks on Mali's civilians in the period January-September 2023 were perpetrated by the FAMa and its Russian Wagner allies. If the data documented in this report is included, we are probably faced with the realisation that around 50%, possibly more, of the attacks on Mali's civilians over the last year have been perpetrated by the FAMa-Wagner duo.

If there were any doubts about Wagner's role in Mali, whose presence was continually denied by the junta, it was made very clear on 27-31 March 2022, when the FAMa, accompanied by Wagner troops, allegedly on an anti-jihadist mission, butchered more than 500 civilians in the village of Moura in the Mopti region of central Mali. Details of the massacre are given in Appendix 2.<sup>33</sup> Prior to the Moura massacre there were several unverified reports of attacks on other civilian settlements by the FAMa accompanied by Wagner troops. Further confirmation of Wagner atrocities came some three weeks later, on 20 April, when Wagner mercenaries were filmed staging a mass grave outside the Gossi military base, which had recently been occupied by French troops.<sup>34</sup>

In January 2023, UN experts, pointing to the Moura massacre in March 2022, advocated for an independent investigation into potential war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by government forces and the Wagner Group in Mali. The experts claimed a "climate of terror and complete impunity characterised the Wagner Group's activities in the country," pointing to the Moura massacre in March 2022.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Mali: Massacre by Army, Foreign Soldiers", Human Rights Watch, 05. April 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/05/mali-massacre-army-foreign-soldiers> "Malian troops, foreign military personnel killed over 500 people during military operation in Moura in March 2022 – UN human rights report." Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 12 May 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/malian-troops-foreign-military-personnel-killed-over-500-people-during>

<sup>34</sup> "France says mercenaries from Russia's Wagner Group staged 'French atrocity' in Mali." France 24. 22.April 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220422-france-says-mercenaries-from-russia-s-wagner-group-staged-french-atrocity-in-mali>

<sup>35</sup> Edward Mcallister and Nellie Peyton, "UN experts seek probe into possible war crimes by Mali, Russia's Wagner." Reuters. 31 January 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-experts-call-probe-into-possible-war-crimes-committed-mali-2023-01-31> See also: "Violent Extremism in the Sahel", Center for Preventive Action. 14. February 2024. Accessed at: [https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel#:~:text=Meanwhile%2C%20extremist%20violence%20has%20surged,Event%20Data%20Project%20\(ACLED\)](https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel#:~:text=Meanwhile%2C%20extremist%20violence%20has%20surged,Event%20Data%20Project%20(ACLED))

## Bamako's failed attempt to retake Kidal in 2014

Throughout more than 11 years, from the first months of the Tuareg rebellion in 2012 until its recapture by Bamako's forces in November 2023 (as described in Chapter 3), Kidal was in the effective hands of the Tuareg MNLA rebels. In October 2014, the MNLA became the dominant group in an alliance with two other groups, the predominantly Tuareg Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad (HCUA) and the Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (MAA). Their alliance was called the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA). The first two groups were dominant in the Kidal region, the MAA was more active in and around Timbuktu. In May 2021, the CMA formed an alliance with the Platform, which comprised several Tuareg Imrad tribes, mostly from the Ménaka region, who had previously been broadly aligned with the Bamako government. This short-lived alliance called itself the Cadre stratégique pour la défense du peuple de l'Azawad (CSP-DPA). The Platform left this alliance in September 2023, more or less at the start or resumption of fighting between the government forces and the Cadre stratégique permanent pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement (CSP-PSD), as the other members of the CSP-DPA renamed themselves. Throughout this 11-year period, and despite the several name changes (i.e. from CMA to CSP-DPA to CSP-PSD) the MNLA remained the dominant force in the Kidal region.

However, in May 2014, Bamako attempted to retake Kidal. At the time, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's (IBK's) government had never had any intention of trying to achieve a peaceful resolution to the conflict with the MNLA rebels, but saw it as a predominantly military matter, that the Bamako authorities dressed up in dangerously racist terms, and which would only be addressed when the Mali army had finally established itself in the Kidal region. In language horribly similar to that prevalent in Bamako today, most of the Bamako political elite, especially those around the President, had been wanting revenge against the Tuareg and other "white-skinned" rebels, now called "terrorists", and were not serious about peace talks.

The crisis began on Saturday 17 May when Prime Minister Moussa Mara decided, against advice, to make the first visit by either the President or Prime Minister, to Kidal. Fighting between Tuareg rebels and Mali's army began when the relatively few Malian soldiers stationed in Kidal<sup>36</sup> fired on civilians protesting the arrival of Moussa Mara at Kidal airport. Some 36 people were killed as Tuareg rebels drove the soldiers from the town and took over all government buildings, leaving Kidal wholly in MNLA hands.

Back in Bamako, Prime Minister Moussa Mara said: "The 'terrorists' have declared war on Mali, so Mali is at war against these 'terrorists'."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> French and UN peacekeeping forces garrisoned at Kidal ensured a tenuous peace between the small contingent of Malian soldiers and the MNLA rebels.

<sup>37</sup> This vicious and dangerous racist rhetoric from government spokespersons, referring to "white-skinned" Tuareg and Arab "terrorists", resulted in at least one major atrocity in which an innocent "white" trader was burnt alive in front of a howling mob in Gao.

Four days later, on 21 May, the government mobilised 1,500 troops to retake Kidal. The Malian army began by shelling civilian districts, but within hours, the ill-trained Malian forces were in flight. By nightfall, the MNLA had once again taken control of almost all towns in Northern Mali other than Gao and Timbuktu. These included Ménaka, where the Mali army garrison surrendered on sight, Tessalit, Aguelhok and Anéfis, with unverified reports that Bourem, Goundam and even Léré were in MNLA hands. From all accounts, the Mali army was put to flight even more quickly than in 2012. The number of casualties was never verified. The Mali government publicly admitted to 55 of its soldiers being killed, while Tuareg sources suggested that Tuareg losses could have been as few as three. At least 3,000 people were reported to have fled Kidal for the safety of Gao and other places.

With Mali's government and its rag-tag army humiliated, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon ordered a cease-fire while France announced a postponement of its eastwards deployment of troops across the Sahel and raised its troop level in Mali by another 100 to 1,700.

After such a humiliating defeat, the only possibility for reconciliation lay in diplomatic negotiation with the aid of France, the UN and international bodies. In the end, Algeria, not for the first time, stepped in and brokered the Algiers Accords, officially referred to as the Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, in an agreement to end the Mali War. The agreement was signed on 15 May and 20 June in Bamako, following negotiations in Algiers between the Republic of Mali and the CMA. The Accords sought to restore peace to Mali through a process of decentralisation or regionalisation, which gave the rebels a degree of autonomy, and the reconstitution of the national army. As this Report explains, the CMA and later the CSP-PSD always felt that the Bamako government was never sincere in wanting to fully implement the Algiers Accords. Following the FAMa-Wagner duo's recapture of Kidal in November 2023, the Algiers Accords were in tatters: Mali's junta announced their termination on 25 January 2024.

This Report picks up the situation in northern Mali around August 2023 when, with all foreign troops having left Mali and with the MINUSMA force withdrawing from its bases in northern Mali, the FAMa-Wagner duo tried to occupy these bases which were disputed with local Tuareg fighters who had occupied most of them since the rebellion in 2012, prior to the arrival of the MINUSMA peacekeeping force in 2013.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> MINUSMA was established by Security Council resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013.

## 02

# Definition of Genocide

**The definition contained in Article II of the United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide describes genocide as a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part.**

The United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) is an instrument of international law that codified for the first time the crime of genocide. Its preamble recognises that “at all periods of history genocide has inflicted great losses on humanity” and that international cooperation is required to “liberate humankind from such an odious scourge”. According to the Convention, genocide is a crime that can take place both in time of war as well as in time of peace. The definition contained in Article II of the Convention describes genocide as a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part. It does not include political groups or so-called “cultural genocide”.

The Convention was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948 and entered into force on 12 January 1951. It signified the international community's commitment to 'never again' after the atrocities committed during the Second World War.

The countries which this report accuses of genocide, namely Mali (1974) and the Russian Federation (1949, as the USSR) have both acceded to the Genocide Convention, as have the three other countries which this report deems as complicit in this genocide, namely: Algeria (1963), Turkey (1950) and the UAE (2005).

## To constitute genocide, there must be a proven intent on the part of the perpetrators to physically destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.

To constitute genocide, there must be a proven intent on the part of the perpetrators to physically destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Cultural destruction does not suffice, nor does an intention to simply disperse a group.

According to the UN's 'Genocide Convention', genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:<sup>39</sup>

- Killing members of the group - Article II(a)
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group - Article II(b)
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction - Article II(c)
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group - Article II(d)
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group - Article II(e)

FAMa/Wagner, as described below, have committed II(a)(b) and (c) in Kidal. So far, there is no evidence, nor is there likely to be, of their committing II(d) and (e).

## Genocide and/or ethnic cleansing:

Ethnic cleansing is similar to forced deportation or population transfer. While ethnic cleansing and genocide may share the same goal and methods (e.g. forced displacement), ethnic cleansing is intended to displace a persecuted population from a given territory, while genocide is intended to destroy a group. In northern Mali, most of the population of the Kidal region – at least 67,000 – has already fled the region into neighbouring countries (Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and further afield to Libya and beyond) to avoid the massacres being perpetrated by the FAMa/Wagner forces.

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<sup>39</sup> chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1\_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

This dispersal of the peoples of Kidal (and surrounding regions of Timbuktu, Gao, Ménaka and much of central Mali) may be deemed as ‘ethnic cleansing’, but does not fall, despite over 100,000 people having fled Mali, within the definition of genocide. However, the ongoing actions by the FAMa/Wagner forces after their capture of Kidal town on 14 November 2023 to exterminate all forms of life that could still be found in the Kidal region, including all livestock, is strong evidence to support the accusation of genocide.

## **The actions of the FAMa/Wagner forces against the civilian population of the Kidal region [...] fall unequivocally within the legal definition of genocide**

Although many of the atrocities committed by the FAMa/Wagner forces in Mali, such as the massacre of some 500 civilians in the village of Moura (see Appendix 2) in the Mopti region of central Mali on 27-31 March 2022, have been designated by international human rights agencies as ‘crimes against humanity’, they do not, in themselves, constitute a genocide. As detailed below, the actions of the FAMa/Wagner forces against the civilian population of the Kidal region after 14 November 2023 go beyond fighting a war against Islamist ‘terrorists’ (see below) or Tuareg separatist fighters, as Mali’s new rulers have tried to claim, and fall unequivocally within the legal definition of genocide, in this case perpetrated against the Tuareg people of the Kidal region specifically and northern Mali more generally.

## **Is Mali killing political or ethnic groups?**

The killing of political groups or so-called ‘cultural genocide’ is excluded from the Convention’s definition of genocide. Mali’s junta might claim in its defence that the FAMa and Wagner forces are killing a ‘political group’ in Kidal, or even fighting ‘terrorism’. The evidence of this report shows that such a claim is false: The killings are directed at an ethnic group: the Tuareg, along with other persons found living with them, such as members of local Arab groups. In the process of these civilian massacres, the FAMa/Wagner forces would not be able to distinguish readily between members of local Tuareg or Arab groups. As explained below, the Mali junta, perhaps in an attempt to legitimise its crimes, at least to its supporters in Bamako and elsewhere, has designated falsely all the peoples it has been killing in Kidal as ‘terrorists’.



## 03

# When Mali's state crimes became a genocide

**If any one day is to be singled out as marking the start of this genocide, it is 14 November 2023, when the town of Kidal, the capital of the Kidal region, was captured and reoccupied by the FAMa/Wagner forces.**

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The date on which the attacks by the FAMa and their Russian allies on Mali's civilian population turned from being simply 'state crimes', 'war crimes' or 'crimes against humanity' to a specific genocide against the Tuareg of the Kidal region is open to debate, depending very much on the evidence of FAMa/Wagner intentions and their commensurate actions.

If any one day is to be singled out as marking the start of this genocide, it is 14 November 2023, when the town of Kidal, the capital of the Kidal region, was captured and reoccupied by the FAMa/Wagner forces. Some might argue that it began some six weeks earlier when a FAMa/Wagner convoy of 119 military vehicles set out from Gao with the stated intention of recapturing Kidal, which had effectively been in the hands of Tuareg rebels, as explained in Chapter 1, since 2012.

Others might argue that it began a couple of months earlier in August (2023) when both the FAMa and Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA), comprising the former Tuareg rebels of the Mouvement national pour la Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA), the predominantly Tuareg Haut

Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad (HCUA) and part of the Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (MAA-CMA), each described themselves as being in a 'state of war' with the other.

This 'state of war' was triggered by the departure of the UN peacekeeping force, MINUSMA, which had been ordered by Mali's military junta to leave the country by 31 December 2023.<sup>40</sup> MINUSMA had 13 bases<sup>41</sup> in Mali and nearly 15,000 peacekeeping troops. Fighting between the FAMa and the CMA had begun around the MINUSMA-vacated base at Ber, some 60 kms east of Timbuktu, in early August.

Other groups involved sporadically in this fighting were:

- The Islamist extremist group of the Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), generally referred to as 'jihadists' and/or 'terrorists', led by Iyad ag Ghali, a Tuareg of the noble Iforas lineage, many of whom comprised the HCUA), and
- a number of Tuareg 'tribes/lineages' of the tributary Imrad<sup>42</sup> class who had grouped together as the Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (GATIA), a predominantly Tuareg grouping previously at odds with the CMA, but which recently declared its alliance with the CMA against the FAMa.
- Another group that should be mentioned at this stage is the extremist État Islamique du Grand Sahara (EIGS), known locally as Daesh. It operates mostly in Mali's Ménaka region (to the immediate south of Kidal) and what has become known, especially in security parlance, as the 'three borders region' of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. JNIM and EIGS, which claim allegiance to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State respectively, are both designated as armed 'terrorist' (jihadist) groups.

## FAMa/Wagner massacres on the way to Kidal

The FAMa/Wagner convoy that headed north from the Gao and Bourem military bases on 2 October was reported to comprise 119 military vehicles. This was never verified beyond eye-witness accounts, nor has the FAMa released any information about the size or composition of the force that eventually regained Kidal on 14 November. Only later did Mali's ruling junta admit that the aim of the convoy was to recapture Kidal, which had been in the CMA's hands since 2012.

<sup>40</sup> In July 2023, the United States accused Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin of orchestrating Mali's decision to expel MINUSMA to advance Wagner's interests. See: "Violent Extremism in the Sahel", Center for Preventive Action. 14. Op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> This includes the base at Bamako.

<sup>42</sup> Imrad was translated by French colonialists as 'vassals'.

One of the first and few corroborated reports on the convoy's progress came from Radio France International's (RFI's) David Baché on 10 October.<sup>43</sup> RFI reported that on 5 October, three days into their macabre journey north, FAMa and Wagner soldiers executed 17 civilians in the village of Ersane,<sup>44</sup> between Tarkint and Anéfis. The CMA, now calling itself since 2021 the Cadre Stratégique Permanent pour la Paix, la Sécurité et le Développement (CSP-PSD) claimed that before Ersane, more than 70 civilians were killed in the village of Tonka (between Niafounké and Timbuktu). However, this was not verified by RFI and it may have involved other FAMa/Wagner soldiers than those heading north to Kidal.

Before reaching Ersane, the convoy executed at least two Tuareg (Assanete ag Oumar and Ismaghil ag Ahmed – Appendix I), and possibly others in the village of Tarkint.

Images broadcast on social media by the CSP-PSD showed the 17 bodies lying on the ground, with their severed heads placed on their abdomens; 15 of the 17 beheaded victims have been identified. They are from the Tuareg Idnane 'tribe'/faction. Their names and details are in APPENDIX 1.

The bodies of the victims were decapitated and booby-trapped using grenades or homemade mines. An Idnane Tuareg from the nearby town of Tarkint who participated in the burial of the bodies confirmed that all the victims were civilians and included several old men who had not been involved in recent hostilities. According to him, 15 of the 17 bodies were booby-trapped with explosives. Their burial was delayed until the following evening while members of the CSP-PSD attempted to deal with the explosives. One witness described how they dragged the bodies to the burial ground using string but had to blow them up before burying them.<sup>45</sup>

Speaking on Mali TV on 3 October, Colonel Souleymane Dembélé, head of the army information services, said: "The process of irreversible occupation of Malian lands [...] continues and will continue despite the vain opposition of some of its misguided sons. [...] Our valiant army will fight to the last breath to defend the integrity of our beloved homeland, which is one and indivisible."

On 7 October, the FAMa took control of the village of Anéfis, which it claimed to be a "major strategic location", 234 kms north of Gao, 108 kms south of Kidal and just north of the border between the regions of Gao and Kidal. Anéfis is often referred to as the 'gateway to Kidal'.

Both sides were giving the impression of the army convoy coming under intermittent fire for most of its journey north from Gao. However, how much fighting – if any – took place around Anéfis is not at all clear, with the

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<sup>43</sup> David Baché, "Des civils décapités à Ersane par l'armée malienne et ses supplétifs de Wagner". RFI 10.10.2023. Accessed: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20231010-des-civils-d%C3%A9capit%C3%A9s-%C3%A0-ersane-par-l-arm%C3%A9e-malienne-et-ses-suppl%C3%A9tifs-de-wagner>

<sup>44</sup> Ersane is approximately 120 kms north of Bourem and 60 kms south of Anéfis.

<sup>45</sup> Asked by RFI about this massacre in Ersane, the Malian army did not wish to comment.

few statements from both sides being unverified and probably being of little more than propaganda value. The predominantly Tuareg CSP-PSD claimed that Anéfis was not a major strategic location<sup>46</sup> and appears to have made a tactical withdrawal, while still claiming to be harassing the FAMa/Wagner forces in and around Anéfis.

What is not in doubt is that the FAMa/Wagner column perpetrated the same sort of atrocities on the civilian population in and around Anéfis as it had at Ersane a few days earlier. Details of these killings are still coming to light. Local Tuareg sources claim that at least seven civilians were beheaded in Takoukete, near Anéfis, on 8 October. The number killed in Anéfis has not yet been ascertained.

Details of the FAMa/Wagner advance on Kidal from Anéfis and the actual capture of Kidal are still unclear. Apart from an airstrike on Kidal on 7 November, of which there are several slightly differing versions, there are still many gaps in our knowledge of what happened during the 38 days that elapsed between the arrival of the FAMa/Wagner forces in Anéfis on 7 October and their entry into Kidal on 14 November. In short, why did it take 38 days for the FAMa/Wagner forces to advance the 108 kms from Anéfis to Kidal?

There are at least six possible reasons, singly or jointly, none of which have been admitted by the FAMa or confirmed by verifiable evidence on the ground, which might have accounted for this delay.

One possible reason is that the FAMa/Wagner force was held up by attacks from the CSP-PSD. However, there is little evidence of this. The CSP-PSD withdrew from Anéfis, fearing a bloodbath. While they claim to have harassed the FAMa/Wagner troops, there is no evidence of the FAMa/Wagner force encountering serious resistance during their advance on Kidal.

The FAMa/Wagner force may have been hesitant in advancing on Kidal for fear of encountering a much stronger combined force of CSP-PSD and JNIM fighters. In the earlier fighting in the Timbuktu and Gao regions in August, there was evidence of the CSP-PSD and JNIM combining, or assisting each other, in their attacks on the FAMa. Given that JNIM's 'home base' was the Kidal region, it was widely assumed – almost certainly by both the FAMa and the CSP-PSD – that JNIM would ally itself to the CSP-PSD in the defence of Kidal.

JNIM does not appear to have come to the assistance of CSP-PSD in the Kidal region. The main reason for this is because JNIM believed its forces would be too vulnerable to the FAMa's air superiority, especially its Turkish drones and helicopters, in the open desert terrain. It therefore chose strategically to take its fight against the Malian regime further south, out of the desert region and into the more vegetated regions of central and southern

<sup>46</sup> Almou Ag Mohamed, a CSP-PSD spokesperson told Agence France Press (AFP): "Anéfis is not a major issue for us. We are at war, a war that will be long and will not be fought [on] one position. Anéfis is only one position, and the front is mobile." AFP 07.10.2023. Accessed: <https://www.voafrique.com/a/mali-l-arm%C3%A9e-affirme-contr%C3%B4ler-une-ville-dans-sa-progression-vers-kidal/7300968.html>

Mali. While doing so, it invited CSP-PSD fighters to join it.

A third but less likely reason is that the FAMa/Wagner forces may have been distracted by JNIM's siege of Timbuktu and its attacks on military bases in the Timbuktu and Gao regions. Since August, JNIM had been trying to cut off the historic city of Timbuktu by preventing supplies reaching it. By early October, the UN estimated that 33,000 people had fled the city. Gao, the largest city in northern Mali, 320 kms east of Timbuktu, was also under siege from JNIM, with electricity being restricted to barely an hour a day and food prices rising. JNIM's aim was to demonstrate to the people of northern Mali that the Bamako regime and its Russian allies could not take care of them.

Another possible reason is that the FAMa were awaiting the arrival of a new shipment of Turkish drones before attacking Kidal. However, this is unlikely as the new drones arrived on 4 January, almost two months after the strike on Kidal.<sup>47</sup> What is significant about the arrival of the new drones is that they provided the FAMa/Wagner forces with the means to conduct more effectively their current genocide in the Kidal region.

The most likely reason for FAMa delaying the advance on Kidal was because by 7 October, when the FAMa/Wagner convoy reached Anéfis, MINUSMA was still occupying three bases in Kidal: at Aguelhok and Tessalit in the Tilemsi valley on the west side of the Adrar Iforas, and at Kidal. Convoys of the UN Chadian contingent left Tessalit and Aguelhok on October 21 and 23 respectively and arrived in Gao on October 29. Peacekeepers at Tessalit came under fire on several occasions, presumably from either CSP-PSD or JNIM fighters who sought access to the base in preference to the FAMa, including on 19 October, when a MINUSMA C130 was hit in the wing as it landed in Tessalit, fortunately without any injuries or major damage to the aircraft.<sup>48</sup>

The last convoy of peacekeepers left Kidal by road for Gao on 31 October, with the last UN flight from Kidal reaching Gao the previous afternoon. Stephane Dujarric, a spokesperson for the UN, said there had been six incidents since the peacekeepers left their bases in northern Kidal to make the estimated 350km journey to Gao, injuring a total of at least 39 peacekeepers.<sup>49</sup>

As a last resort, and in accordance with UN rules and procedures,

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<sup>47</sup> Mali received 6 more Bayraktar TB2 armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) on 4 January 2024, bringing its fleet of TB2s to at least 17. A previous shipment of Turkish TB2s had been made in January and March 2023. The drones have a wingspan of 12 meters, a maximum take-off weight of 650 kilograms, and a payload capacity of 150 kilograms. They can fly up to 24 hours at an altitude of 27,000 feet, and can carry various types of munitions, such as MAM-L laser-guided bombs and Roketsan Cirit laser-guided rockets. Mali's TB2s are equipped with ASELSAN's CATS electro-optical system, which provides high-resolution imagery and target acquisition in day and night conditions. In August 2023, Russia enhanced Mali's aerial strike force with the delivery of several Su-25 Frogfoot and L-39C Albatross fighter jets, Mi-17 helicopters, and two Mi-35M attack helicopters. "Mali boosts its drone fleet with new Bayraktar TB2s from Turkey", Military Africa, 9 January 2024. Accessed: <https://www.military.africa/2024/01/mali-boosts-its-drone-fleet-with-new-bayraktar-tb2s-from-turkey/#:~:text=Mali%20one%20of%20the%20African,in%20January%20and%20March%202023>.

<sup>48</sup> Some of the soldiers from the Chadian contingent were repatriated directly to Ndjamena on aircrafts chartered by Chad. Meanwhile, the other contingents present in Tessalit, such as the Nepalese Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team, the Cambodian engineers and the Bangladeshi airfield services and management unit, all left on UN aircraft. The remaining personnel departed for Gao in a final ground convoy.

<sup>49</sup> 22 of these were injured when the convoy leaving Kidal was hit by two improved explosive devices (IEDs).

MINUSMA was forced to destroy and decommission sensitive equipment, valued at several millions of dollars, belonging to troop- and police-contributing countries, as the 200 trucks on standby in Gao since September 24 had been denied access to Tessalit, Aguelhok and Kidal to collect the UN equipment for shipment out of Mali.<sup>50</sup>

What happened at Aguelhok is still unclear. According to the UN, the base was vacated and left empty on 23 October because of the rapidly deteriorating security situation. However, according to Mali's Direction de l'Information et des Relations Publiques (DIRPA), the junta's propaganda unit, the UN's departure from Aguelhok was one of "non-compliance", which threatened the security and stability of the locality. DIRPA alleged that "terrorists", a euphemism for the CSP-PSD, "took advantage of this disorder, entered the area and destroyed several installations". It then claimed that the "terrorists" were "neutralised" by FAMa air attacks.<sup>51</sup> The reality may have been rather different. Although unverified, local sources claim that the FAMa/Wagner troops also killed an as yet unknown number of civilians. Local sources claimed that both Aguelhok and Tessalit, whose populations were approximately 10,000 and 7,000,<sup>52</sup> were now both empty, with the civilian population having fled the FAMa/Wagner advance.<sup>53</sup>

A sixth and very likely reason for delaying the advance on Kidal was to 'terrorise' the Kidal population by allowing time for the macabre photographs of the massacres conducted by the convoy at Ersane, Tarkint, Takoukete, Anéfis and possibly elsewhere to be circulated around the Kidal region so that they knew what was heading their way and could flee the region. Grotesque photographs of the FAMa/Wagner massacres showed decapitated and disembowelled corpses, and the decapitated heads impaled on poles.

**Since their arrival in Mali in late 2021, the Wagner group had quickly established a reputation for killing citizens. [...] The OHCHR concluded that at least 500 people were unlawfully executed by the Malian armed forces and their foreign allies during the siege of Moura. [...] As the FAMa/Wagner force advanced on Kidal, the alarm call that rang out through Kidal was: "Beware, the Russians are coming".**

<sup>50</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/minusma-closes-its-camp-kidal-marking-end-of-its-presence-region#:~:text=Bamako%2C%20October%2031%2C%202023%20%2D,by%20air%20and%20land%20convoy>.

<sup>51</sup> "Les FAMa neutralisent des terroristes dans le camp de la MINUSMA à Aguelhok (Kidal)." Malijet, 24 octobre 2023.

<sup>52</sup> In 2009 the populations of Aguelhok and Tessalit were recorded as 8,080 and 5,739 respectively.

<sup>53</sup> The people of both Aguelhok and Tessalit are believed to have fled mostly to Algeria.

Since their arrival in Mali in late 2021,<sup>54</sup> the Wagner group had quickly established a reputation for killing citizens. Their barbaric actions were brought to world attention following their massacre of more than 500 civilians in the village of Moura (in the Djenné Cercle in Mopti region) between 27-31 March 2022. On 12 May 2023, almost a year later, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was able to publish the results of its investigation into the Moura massacre (See Appendix 2 for details). Its report concluded that at least 500 people were unlawfully executed by the Malian armed forces and their foreign allies during the siege of Moura. It also documented the cases of 58 women and girls who suffered sexual violence at the hands of Malian military personnel.<sup>55</sup>

On 13 May 2022, Mali's military authorities condemned the report, stating that “no civilians from Moura lost their lives during the airborne operation”.<sup>56</sup> They also announced that an investigation was to be opened into the OHCHR's factfinding mission for espionage, breach of national security and foreign conspiracy.

Moura established the reputation of the Wagner mercenaries as nothing more than criminals and ‘terrorists’ – terrorising the local people. As the FAMa/Wagner force advanced on Kidal, the alarm call that rang out through Kidal was: “Beware, the Russians are coming”.

## Propaganda and disinformation from all sides

During the month between the FAMa's arrival in Anéfis on 7 October and the ‘softening up’ of Kidal by FAMa airstrikes on 7 November, the information from both sides was little more than propaganda, with the most informative coming from the CSP-PSD in the form of an interview with Bilal ag Acherif, the leader of the MNLA, conducted by Jeune Afrique and published in the French newspaper L'Opinion on 23 October (see Appendix 3), and the most absurd from the FAMa.

Bilal Ag Acherif used his interview to explain and justify the actions of the CSP-PSD, while seeking understanding – and hopefully support – from the international community. FAMa, on the other hand, publishing in Mali's

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<sup>54</sup> The first reports of a deal between the Wagner group and the Malian government began to emerge in September 2021. The first Wagner troops were reported to have arrived in Bamako in December 2021. Open-source flight tracking data recorded a Russian Air Force Tupolev TU-154 aircraft arriving in Bamako on December 19, 2021, after traveling from Moscow via Syria and Libya. (Accessed: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/tracking-arrival-russias-wagner-group-mali>) Local sources in Tamanrasset (Algeria) report Russian Wagner troops arriving at Tamanrasset airport and being hosted by the Algerian army before being flown on to Mali.

<sup>55</sup> The report was based on 157 individual interviews conducted over a period of seven months from 1 April to 30 October 2022 with survivors of the attack, including victims of sexual violence, as well as people tasked by the military with burying the bodies in mass graves.

<sup>56</sup> “Mali: The perpetrators of the Moura massacre must be prosecuted and tried by a competent court.” Amnesty International. 17 May 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/mali-les-auteurs-des-tueries-a-moura-doivent-etre-poursuivis-et-juges-devant-un-tribunal-competent/>

controlled media also on 23 October, concocted the most incredible story, which really did defy credulity, to claim that the CSP-PSD was being assisted by American mercenaries in what was presumably an attempt to justify its own alliance with Russian mercenaries.

The main points and quotations from Bilal's interview are contained in Appendix 3. The interview was clearly intended for an international audience. Notwithstanding slight exaggerations and bias, it is fundamentally correct. However, as far as the question of genocide is concerned, Bilal's interview, as well as Bamako's statements, make it clear that both sides considered themselves to be in a state of war. This supports the main argument of this Report that in the period prior to the fall of Kidal on 14 November, notwithstanding the multiple atrocities committed by the FAMa/Wagner forces against civilians, we are looking at the perpetration of war crimes and/or crimes against humanity, but that after 14 November, when the CSP-PSD appears to have 'fled' the region and the Wagner flag been raised over Kidal, the situation changed to the perpetration of a genocide.

Almost immediately following the arrival of the FAMa/Wagner convoy in Anéfis on 7 October and the capture of its military base, the FAMa announced the discovery of objects that it claimed as proof of the presence of US mercenaries affiliated with the Los Angeles-based Unity Resources Group. The objects included mobile phones, files containing information on the deployment of the Malian army and the Wagner group, references on the region and a careful description of the territory, as well as the cap badge of chief officer named Stephen Russell, his identity card and documents, and the notebook of an officer allegedly containing telephone numbers, encryption codes, liaison contacts, meeting places, registration plates and diagrams.

These items are certainly not proof that US mercenaries were or had been present at Anéfis or anywhere else in Mali. The 'discovery' of the objects is very much in keeping with Russia's playbook, with the ID of Stephen Russell and other documents being forgeries, which the Wagner group could easily have manufactured. If the documents, which have not been independently verified were genuine, it is possible that they had been left at the base if and when it was visited by Unity Resources Group when MINUSMA or French forces had been stationed there. Either way, it is very difficult to conceive American soldiers leaving so much sensitive equipment lying around. The result of the FAMa discovery was that dozens of predominantly African and pro-Russian media outlets reported quite uncritically and without independent verification on the presence of US mercenaries helping the rebel and/or 'terrorist' forces in Mali.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> "Mercenaires en Terre Malienne: L'Intrusion Silencieuse de Unity Resources Group et les Ombres du Conflit Moderne." Mali Actu, 23 Octobre 2023. Accessed at: <https://infowakat.net/mercenaires-en-terre-malienne-lintrusion-silencieuse-de-unity-resources-group-et-les-ombres-du-conflit-moderne/>; "Des mercenaires américains pour déstabiliser le Sahel." Jeune Indépendant, 26 Octobre 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.jeune-independant.net/des-mercenaires-americains-pour-destabiliser-le-sahel/>

## The softening-up of Kidal

The first direct moves by the FAMa/Wagner force against Kidal came on 7 November when the Mali's ruling junta, perhaps fearing that its ground forces were not up to engaging with Tuareg fighters, or, more likely with the intent of 'softening up' the town's possible resistance before the FAMa advanced on it, decided to bomb the town.

Details of the bombing operation are still cloaked in a mixture of uncertainty and disinformation. Reports from the town say that at least three Turkish-made drones bombed seemingly arbitrary targets killing at least 12 and probably 14 people, and wounding many more. According to Kidal sources, all the dead, which included at least five children, were civilians. They included the town's deputy mayor and a local councillor. A CSP-PSD spokesperson said 20 people, including eight children were killed.<sup>58</sup>

The FAMa, although it is unclear on whether it used drones, manned aircraft or both, confirmed that it had carried out 'airstrikes' on what it called "terrorist targets in the rebel stronghold of Kidal". By this time, the junta was using the word 'terrorist' to designate all jihadists, irrespective of whether they belonged to JNIM or the EIGS, as well as all Tuareg separatists, the CSP-PSD and any other armed group opposing the military regime.<sup>59</sup> The FAMa appealed to people "not to give in to the terrorists" propaganda intended to tarnish the reputation of the Malian armed forces." Another FAMa statement said that it had "neutralised" a certain number of targets but gave no details of the targets or casualties.

It is not clear whether there were further air strikes on Kidal or whether the attack was limited to these three drone strikes. The FAMa's statements implied there may have been further airstrikes, although no details have been given, and no further airstrikes were verified by independent sources. Some Kidal sources also suggested that the bombing may have been more extensive, but, like the FAMa, did not give details.

## The capture of Kidal

One of the few facts that is not in dispute is that the FAMa/Wagner force captured Kidal on 14 November. However, the manner of the seizure is still very unclear. The few reports in the international media, notably Reuters and RFI, who had contacts within both the government and rebel forces, agreed that the advance on Kidal from Anéfis and the battle for Kidal town lasted for at least three days.

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<sup>58</sup> "Mali drone strikes kill civilians in town of Kidal, officials and rebels say." Reuters, 7 November 2023. Accessed: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mali-drone-strikes-kill-civilians-town-kidal-officials-rebels-say-2023-11-07/>

<sup>59</sup> The FAMa said that the strikes "neutralized several terrorist pickup trucks" at the former MINUSMA military camp in Kidal that had been evacuated by the UN peace-keeping force a week earlier.

On 11 November, RFI referred to “three days of bombings between 7 and 10 November”, with the rebels reportedly cutting down all phone connections in Kidal in preparation for the FAMa’s attack on the town.<sup>60</sup>

A statement from the FAMa on 13 November, the day before its forces entered Kidal, said that its advance to Kidal had only been opposed by “a series of low intensity skirmishes” with what it described as “the alliance of terrorist armed groups”. By “terrorist armed groups”, the FAMa meant both JNIM and the CSP-PSD and anyone else who opposed it, all of whom were lumped together and designated by the FAMa as ‘terrorists’. In fact, it is doubtful, as explained later, whether JNIM was involved in the defence of Kidal.

Reality may have been rather different in that the FAMa may have been trying to under-report the strength of the rebel resistance and perhaps also its own losses. RFI had already reported that the FAMa, with significant support from Russia’s paramilitary outfit Wagner, engaged in a battle with militants of the CSP-PSD coalition for control of Kidal on Saturday 11 November. RFI added that “despite the strong advantage provided by its aerial capacity, the army were unable to quell the militants who disrupted official communications in Kidal.”<sup>61</sup>

The CSP-PSD claimed to have engaged in “vigorous combat” against an army convoy that was aided by mercenaries from Russia’s Wagner paramilitary force. On a social media post, the CSP-PSD claimed that the convoy had withdrawn having suffered “considerable losses”. While the FAMa/Wagner convoy may have suffered losses, there is no evidence that it withdrew. For its part, the army claimed on social media to have “broken the defensive line” that the rebels had established near Kidal. It made no mention of losses.

From these sporadic and unverifiable reports, in which neither side made any mention of their own losses, both sides had actually suffered casualties. The FAMa’s reports tried to give the impression that it had faced only minimal resistance and suffered no casualties in regaining control of Kidal, while the CSP-PSD gave no details of any losses.

On reviewing these and other reports, it seems that the major battle for Kidal, in terms of serious fighting, probably took place on 11 November a few miles south of Kidal. However, details of the fighting and the number of casualties on both sides are sketchy and unverified.

On capturing Kidal, the FAMa issued a statement saying it had “inflicted heavy losses on the armed insurgents”. A CSP-PSD spokesperson made no reference to the FAMa claim but told both Reuters and RFI, neither of whom were able to verify the situation on the ground, that they had made a

60 RFI reports on 10.11.24 and 11.11.24.

61 “Mali: l’armée se rapproche de Kidal, des combats éclatent à quelques kilomètres de la ville.” RFI 11.11.24. Accessed: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20231111-mali-l-arm%C3%A9e-se-rapproche-de-kidal-des-combats-%C3%A9clatent-%C3%A0-quelques-kilom%C3%A8tres-de-la-ville>

strategic decision to leave the city, allowing the army to take it back. These reports also suggested that citizens had begun fleeing Kidal several days before its eventual capture on 14 November.

On entering the town, the FAMa immediately imposed a nightly curfew (20.00 to 06.00 hrs) that would last initially until 14 December. The curfew was extended across the entire Kidal region, except for the movement of the security forces and their equipment. It was also reported that the security forces were setting up checkpoints across the region, although it is still not clear how many or how effective these were, as they would have been exposed to counter-attacks by the rebels.

In the immediate aftermath of Kidal's capture the situation in both Kidal town and the wider Kidal region was shrouded in uncertainty and disinformation. Neither side issued any figures regarding their causalities, while government propaganda from Bamako hailed the capture of Kidal as a great victory for the FAMa, the ruling junta and especially Colonel Assimi Goïta. At least one state-owned news outlet advocated that Goïta should change his military uniform for that of a president.

Some unverified social media posts claimed that the FAMa and its Russian allies had bulldozed civilian houses – “Israeli-style”. At the time, it was impossible to verify these reports, although more reliable information that became available later suggested that several houses were destroyed indiscriminately. It was – and still is – very unclear how many citizens had fled Kidal before its capture and how many stayed.

## **The number of civilians who fled Kidal**

The number of people who fled Kidal can only be estimated. Attempts to establish reliable demographic data on how many have fled the region runs into two problems:

First, there is no reliable data on the number of people living in Kidal town or the wider Kidal region. A 2009 census put the population of Kidal town at around 25,000 and the Kidal region at around 67,000. However, the populations of both the town and region are known to have increased substantially since 2009. According to Malian government data, a 2023 census, based on highly suspect and largely unexplained methodology, put the total population of the five regions of Azawad (Timbuktu, Gao, Taoudéni, Ménaka and Kidal) at 2,204,221, with the Kidal region numbering 83,192. However, these figures are strongly contested by the people of Azawad, who reckon they are far too low. The author would estimate the population of the Kidal region as at least 100,000.

Second, Algeria does not consider these displaced people as refugees and does not afford them internationally recognised refugee status and rights, with the result that they remain undocumented with their numbers unknown.

In the weeks following the capture of Kidal town, the UNHCR estimated that the number of refugees who had fled into Algeria was around 50,000. Some six months later, in June 2024, the Kel Akal association estimated that around 90,000 had sought refuge in Algeria.<sup>62</sup> The difference between these two numbers might be that the higher figure comprises people who have fled from Kidal, Ménaka and Gao regions, while the lower number is an estimate of those who have fled from Kidal. Alternatively, the difference in the estimate might be that the lower estimate was made shortly after the capture of Kidal, while the higher estimate, made six months later, may include the number who have fled into Algeria in the subsequent 6-7 months.

The attacks by the FAMa and Wagner forces were not only on the populations of Kidal, Gao and Ménaka, but the whole of Azawad, which also includes the regions of Timbuktu and Taoudéni. Most of the civilians who fled Timbuktu and Taoudéni chose to seek refuge in Mauritania rather than Algeria, partly because of proximity but also because they are better cared for in Mauritania than Algeria. Mauritania works with the UNHCR, in trying to care for the refugees and alleviate their difficulties and ensures, as far as possible, that the refugees are regularly recorded. That does not happen in Algeria.

In May 2024, the UNHCR wrote: “Following the intensification of the armed conflict in Mali, there has been a massive influx of Malian refugees, mainly women, children and the elderly, along the border with Mauritania.”<sup>63</sup> According to a report in Libération, tens of thousands of Malian refugees – possibly as many as 80,000 – reached Mauritania in “recent months”, referring to the months prior to the article’s publication in mid-May.<sup>64</sup> As at 29 February 2024, the UN database recorded the number of souls in Mauritania’s M’bera refugee camp as 99,117, with another estimated 20,000 at the nearby Agor camp.<sup>65</sup> According to the UNHCR, between January 2023 and April 2024, more than 95,000 new Malian refugees arrived in the country, in addition to the 105,000 previously registered refugees. Most of these had fled from the Malian regions of Timbuktu and Kidal. By late May, local people had compiled records of 67,000 mostly Tuareg civilians who had fled the Kidal region. Some had travelled to Libya but most had crossed into neighbouring Mauritania, Niger and Algeria. Local reports said that the two villages of Tessalit and Aguelhok, as well as the Abeibeira region, were now deserted with their inhabitants having fled north into Algeria. In late April, the UNHCR estimated the number of Malian refugees in the Tamanrasset region — mostly huddled around the border towns of Bordj Badi Mokhtar, Timiaouine and Tin Zaouatene — as 40,000-50,000.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Rapport de l’association kal Akal du mois du juin relative aux violations des droits humains en Azawad. 01.07.2024. Accessed at: <https://kal-akal.com/?p=141>

<sup>63</sup> UNHCR Mauritania Refugee Emergency Response Update (As of 31 May 2024) published 02.07.24. Access at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/109625>

<sup>64</sup> “Des dizaines de milliers de réfugiés maliens ont rejoint la Mauritanie ces derniers mois.” Libération, 13. Mai 2024. Access at: [https://www.facebook.com/100064986330109/posts/830696699106534/?paipv=0&eav=AfbwO5TLzgJWayXAQH6io-8a4efOzsbGjHMuDEVKqQ8DCG47Cy4HV3I9g3AQCvfwSzlI\\_&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/100064986330109/posts/830696699106534/?paipv=0&eav=AfbwO5TLzgJWayXAQH6io-8a4efOzsbGjHMuDEVKqQ8DCG47Cy4HV3I9g3AQCvfwSzlI_&_rdr)

<sup>65</sup> Kel Akal Report No. 5. See Chapter 4.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

## Kidal situation obscured by government disinformation

The situation in Kidal town immediately following its capture by the FAMa/Wagner forces was unclear, being obscured by a deluge of government disinformation.<sup>67</sup>

**...a large portion of the Kidal's citizens, reportedly a substantial majority, fled the town to avoid the bombings and in fear of the exactions for which the FAMa and its Wagner auxiliaries had already acquired a gruesome reputation.**

In the days between the first FAMa bombings of Kidal on 7 November and the arrival of the Malian army in Kidal one week later, a large portion of the town's citizens, reportedly a substantial majority, fled the town to avoid the bombings and in fear of the exactions for which the FAMa and its Wagner auxiliaries had already acquired a gruesome reputation.

The initial reports coming from Tuareg sources in the region indicated that most of the civilian refugees from Kidal had fled towards Tin Zaouatene, on the Algeria border, and also into the mountainous Timetrine region to the west of Boughessa, also close to the Algerian border town of Timiaouine. The CSP-PSD are thought to have withdrawn mostly towards Tin-Essako, due east of Kidal in the direction of the Niger border. Others are suspected of retreating into the impenetrable and more easily defendable boulder-strewn Tigharghar mountains some 100 kms due north of Kidal.<sup>68</sup>

## Uncertainty over the role of JNIM in the defence of Kidal

Despite Mali's military junta referring to all Islamic jihadists, notably the EIGS and JNIM, as well as the predominantly Tuareg CSP-PSD, as "terrorists", it is very unclear just how far the JNIM and the CSP-PSD are in an alliance.

Although JNIM and the CSP-PSD had been broadly supportive of each

<sup>67</sup> The result of such disinformation over many years is that local journalists in Bamako were able to write many passages along the lines of the following: "For many Malians, Kidal is the epicenter of insecurity, the true sanctuary of terrorists, the rear base of the forces of evil that must be dismantled. For many Malians, peace in Mali requires the recovery of Kidal, currently under the control of former rebels." Published on 6 November 2023 by: <http://news.abamako.com/h/288368.html>

<sup>68</sup> In 2013, French soldiers and their Chadian auxiliary fighters had great difficulty in dislodging the hardcore of Islamist fighters from the Tigharghar mountains.

other in their military actions against the FAMa in August and September 2023, there was no formal alliance between them, as was the case in the alliance between Iyad's Ansar al Dine fighters and the Mouvement National Pour la Libération de L'Azawad (MNLA), a central component of the CSP-PSD, in the Azawad uprising of 2012.

With both JNIM and the CSP-PSD wanting the removal of the junta and its Russian allies, there was speculation that the two armed groups might form an alliance in defence of Kidal and the wider region. Indeed, it was quite conceivable that the CSP-PSD combined with JNIM could wage a successful guerrilla-style campaign against the FAMa-Wagner force by targeting its excessively long supply lines and thereby isolating and weakening it in the Kidal region. However, there is no evidence that whatever sort of alliance may have existed between JNIM and the CSP-PSD during August and September had continued during and after the FAMa-Wagner convoy set off from Gao on 2 October to capture Kidal. Indeed, once the FAMa-Wagner force had set out to capture Kidal, it seems that the CSP-PSD were on their own. Whatever the CSP-PSD may have supposed or hoped for, there is no clear evidence that JNIM supported them militarily during the FAMa-Wagner advance on Kidal or during and after the town's capture.

The FAMa-Wagner advance on Kidal and its capture on 14 November not only marked a possible change in the relationship between JNIM and the CSP-PSD, but perhaps even more significantly, a change in the nature of warfare in the region.

The FAMa's use of Turkish drones in the capture of Kidal on 14 November and the increased provision of the FAMa-Wagner forces with a further batch of 20 Bayraktar TB2 drones on 4-5 January 2024<sup>69</sup> enabled the FAMa and its Russian allies to wage a new type of military operation in the Kidal region. The more desertic regions of northern Mali lacked vegetation cover, compared to central and southern Mali. People on the ground were therefore more exposed to aerial surveillance and bombardment from drones. With the FAMa-Wagner force better provisioned with Turkish drones, the CSP-PSD, as well as whatever JNIM fighters may have also been in the region, were particularly vulnerable to air attack. Local sources suggested that JNIM's reluctance to assist the CSP-PSD against the FAMa-Wagner convoy's advance north from the Gao into the Kidal region during November was because of their increased vulnerability to aerial attack.

In early 2024, there was increasing evidence that JNIM was taking its fight against the Bamako regime much deeper into central and southern Mali and effectively abandoning the northern, more desertic region, where they were more vulnerable to air attack.

This change in the nature of warfare, especially since the start of 2024, has left the more exposed desert regions of northern Mali, notably the Kidal

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69 "How cooperation with Turkish company SADAT could have negative impact on Mali." Vanguard News, May 7, 2024. Access at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/05/how-cooperation-with-turkish-company-sadat-could-have-negative-impact-on-mali/>

region, relatively devoid of either jihadist or Tuareg separatist fighters. Many of the latter appeared to have left the region altogether, either joining Iyad ag Ghali's fighters further south in Mali's more vegetated and less exposed central, southern and western regions, even as far south as Burkina Faso, or sought shelter across the Mauritanian and Algerian borders.

## **Evidence of JNIM's opposition to Tuareg rebels**

Although Mali's junta has lumped together JNIM and the CSP-PSD as one and the same thing, they are very different organisations and not always in harmony with each other. Indeed, clear evidence of JNIM's opposition to the CSP-PSD came to light on 6 April 2024, when jihadist fighters from Amadou Koufa's Macina Katibat (Macina Liberation Movement), an affiliate of Iyad ag Ghali's JNIM, attacked a CSP-PSD convoy in the Ouagadou forest, not far from Nara, in western Mali.<sup>70</sup> The attack took place as the CSP-PSD column was preparing a military action to celebrate the anniversary of 6 April, 2012, the date on which the MNLA had proclaimed the independence of Azawad. The CSP-PSD were attacked by a large number of jihadists belonging to the Macina Katibat, with heavy losses on both sides,<sup>71</sup> as the CSP-PSD headed south from close to Mauritania's extreme south-east corner in the region of the border villages of Fassala-Néré and Madd Allah.<sup>72</sup>

Iyad ag Ghali, leader of JNIM, had officially written, following previous messages from his lieutenant Amadou Koufa, to prohibit the CSP-PSD launching military operations in central and southern Mali, regions over which JNIM claimed authority.<sup>73</sup>

## **Divisions amongst the Tuareg**

**An important feature in the evidence of the junta's perpetration of genocide against the Tuareg was its evident lack of understanding of the many social and political divisions amongst the Tuareg.**

An important feature in the evidence of the junta's perpetration of genocide

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<sup>70</sup> "La coalition touareg du nord du Mali menacée d'éclatement". MondAfrique, 8 Avril 2024. Access at: <https://mondafrique.com/a-la-une/mali-la-coalition-touareg-du-nord-menacee-declatement/>

<sup>71</sup> MondAfrique reported 18 fatalities on the CSP-PSD side and around 30 on the jihadists' side, not to mention the wounded and missing. Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Some of the CSP-PSD member groups did not participate in the battle. This was particularly the case of the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA), led by Mohamed Ag Intallah, and the Arab groups belonging to the Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (MAA), who are historically and socially closest to Iyad Ag Ghali. On 17 May, Alghabass Ag Intalla, one of the prominent leaders of the CSP-PSD and the younger brother of Mohamed ag Intallah, confirmed in a social media message that he was seeking to obtain a non-aggression pact with JNIM to "allow free movement of fighters, sharing of information, and protection of populations." (RFI 17.05.24).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

against the Tuareg was its evident lack of understanding of the many social and political divisions amongst the Tuareg. One such division, the relevance of which will be explained further on, emerged in September 2023 around the time that fighting broke out between the CSP-PSD and the FAMa following the withdrawal of the MINUSMA from their bases in the Timbuktu and Gao regions, some two-to-three months before the FAMa's capture of Kidal.

Moussa ag Acharatoumane, leader of the Daoussahak Tuareg, an Imrad tribe that inhabited much of the Ménaka region, and the leader of the Mouvement pour Le Salut de l'Azawad (MSA), an armed Tuareg group which had signed the 2015 Algiers Agreement,<sup>74</sup> gave an interview to RFI's David Baché in which he explained that the MSA had left the CSP-PSD when fighting broke out between the FAMa and the CSP-PSD around August-September 2023.<sup>75</sup>

In his interview, Moussa explained that the threat posed by the jihadists of the EIGS in the Ménaka region was far greater than that posed by the FAMa and the Wagner group, and that it was unfortunate that his brothers in the CSP-PSD thought otherwise. Rather, he said, they should ally their forces with those of the government's defence and security forces in combatting the jihadist threat.

Having denounced the junta and its FAMa for more than a year for their inaction against the EIGS, Moussa was now asserting that the MSA's collaboration with the FAMa was working well, and that the CSP-PSD should follow suite. He went on to say that he welcomed the collaboration of the Malian, Nigerien and Burkinabè armies<sup>76</sup> in the Three Borders region<sup>77</sup>, which included much of the Ménaka region,

In early November 2023, at about the same time as RFI published its interview with Moussa ag Acharatoumane, Zeidan ag Sidalamine, the chief of the prominent Chamanamas tribe, another Tuareg Imrad tribe, which also lives mostly in the Ménaka region and was aligned with the Daoussahak Tuareg in the MSA, said that he had been warned by the Algerian authorities that any attempt to reignite the Azawad independence issue was a 'non-starter'.<sup>78</sup> The implication of Algeria's message was very clear: it would step in to put a stop to any Tuareg independence moves, as it had done in 2012.

Zeidan ag Sidalamine's intervention was extremely significant. It meant that the Chamanamas Tuareg, who, like the Daoussahak, were also members of

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<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 1 on signing of the Algiers Accords, and Appendix 3 for Tuareg comments on them.

<sup>75</sup> David Baché, "Les plus grandes exactions au Mali sont celles des jihadistes, selon Moussa Ag Acharatoumane (MSA)". RFI, 4 Novembre 2023. Access at: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20231104-mali-plus-grandes-exactions-au-mali-sont-celles-des-jihadistes-selon-moussa-ag-acharatoumane-msa>

<sup>76</sup> Earlier in 2023, the three military junta's that had seized power in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, agreed that their armies would fight together against the jihadists, especially in the Three Borders region of their countries.

<sup>77</sup> The Three Borders region refers to the Liptako-Gourma region of the Sahel, which extends across south-east Mali, southwest Niger and northern Burkina Faso. It is a focal point for the jihadist extremist groups that are operating in these three countries.

<sup>78</sup> "Révélation du Chef Touareg Zeidan Ag Sidalamine: 'Pas D'azawad entre L'Algérie et le Mali, les Frontières Resteront In-changées'." Bamada.net, 06/11/2023. Access at: <https://bamada.net/revelation-du-chef-touareg-zeidan-ag-sidalamine-pas-dazawad-entre-algerie-et-le-mali-les-frontieres-resteront-inchangees>

the MSA, inhabited much of Mali's Ménaka region and had also suffered greatly at the hands of the EIGS, were no longer so enthused at the idea of fighting for an independent Azawad and were aligning themselves more to Bamako's ruling junta.

The realignment of these two prominent Tuareg tribes from the CSP-PSD towards the FAMa, prior to the capture of Kidal, was not secret or esoteric knowledge. On the contrary, it had been widely published in the local Bamako media and was therefore known to the leaders of both the junta and its FAMa.

## **The Malian junta's propaganda**

The capture of Kidal town by the FAMa-Wagner forces has been shrouded in propaganda by the Malian junta. Aside from a veil being drawn over the number of casualties, three specific items of disinformation stood out: the use of skin colour and the classification of 'terrorist' to designate the junta's enemies; the junta's denial of the role of the Wagner group; and the alleged discovery in Kidal of a mass grave.

With the capture of Kidal, the DIRPA intensified its perpetration of the regime's worst racial prejudices. Elements of the foreign media, mostly African, referred to the 'white inhabitants' of Kidal as having fled the town and then, sometime later, reporting that the FAMa had executed those with 'white skins'. This reference to 'white inhabitants' and 'white skins' is how Mali's racist elements in the south, and especially in government circles, designate and categorise the Arab and Tuareg populations of the north.<sup>79</sup> It stems from the prevalence in pre-colonial times of the northern populations of Tuareg and Araba to enslave the 'negroid - i.e. 'black' - populations of the south. French colonial rule did little to end the practice. Today, the people of the south and Bamako especially refer derogatorily to the Arabs and Tuareg of the north as 'whites' and 'white-skinned', irrespective of the actual colour of their skin. This fabricated racial division is further emphasised and demonised by Mali's junta which designates the CSP-PSD and all other 'whites', irrespective of their degree of irredentist separatism, as 'terrorists'.

The DIRPA tried to portray the convoy that set out to capture Kidal as an exclusively FAMa operation, continuing to deny the presence and assistance of Russian Wagner group mercenaries, at least until 21 November, when the Wagner soldiers, much to the irritation of the authorities in Bamako, raised the Wagner flag over Kidal's fort.<sup>80</sup>

On 18 November, the DIRPA claimed that the FAMa, after capturing Kidal on 14 November, had discovered a mass grave on 16 November. The DIRPA

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<sup>79</sup> See the comments on skin colour in Chapter 1 in the context of Bamako's attempt to recapture Kidal in May 2014.

<sup>80</sup> The Malian authorities initially explained the flag as "false information", but it appeared on the Wagner Group's Telegram channel on 21 November with the Russian caption: "The flag of Wagner PMC flies proudly in the centre of Kidal". The picture also found its way into much of the international media.

provided no details but said that the army was carrying out investigations to bring those responsible to justice. In a clear prejudgement of the issue, the DIRPA added: “This mass grave recalls the atrocities committed by these terrorists [i.e. the citizens of Kidal] who have neither faith nor law.” Three days later, on 21 November, the DIRPA further dramatised the find by issuing a statement saying: “Due to the seriousness of the facts, which may constitute alleged offenses or acts of terrorism and violations of human rights, in particular war crimes and crimes against humanity, Amadou Bocar Touré, the Prosecutor of the Judicial Pole Specialised in the Fight against Terrorism and Transnational Crime, has decided to open an investigation to shed light on it, identify and arrest the perpetrators, co-perpetrators and accomplices.” So far, some eight months further on, there has still not been an investigation, nor have any further details of the alleged grave been given.

The immediate reaction of Kidal’s citizens was to deny the existence of any such grave. Attaye ag Mohamed, head of the CMA’s monitoring committee of the 2015 Algiers peace agreement, described the alleged mass grave as a “farce”. The CSP-PSD issued a statement saying that the “allegations (were) wholly fabricated and obviously intended to hide the horrible massacres committed by the Wagner-FAMa terrorist duo.” The statement added that the claim was “a clumsy manoeuvre to counter all the massacres perpetrated by the army and their Russian paramilitary allies.” This would appear to be a direct reference to the Wagner group’s burial of corpses close to the former French military camp at Gossi in April 2022 in an attempt by the Russians to falsely accuse the departing French troops of leaving behind mass graves.<sup>81</sup>

## Since the FAMa/Wagner advance on Kidal, and especially during 2024, local people have discovered many mass graves of multiple burials of civilians executed by the FAMa and Wagner

Since the FAMa/Wagner advance on Kidal, and especially during 2024, local people, as detailed below, have discovered many mass graves of multiple burials of civilians executed by the FAMa and Wagner in their

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<sup>81</sup> The French military produced drone video evidence of Russian mercenaries burying bodies near the Gossi army base in northern Mali — handed over by the French to the Malian army on 19 April 2022 — in an attempt to falsely accuse the departing troops of leaving behind mass graves. Unfortunately for the Wagner Group mercenaries, the French had positioned a military drone overlooking the Gossi camp. The video taken on 21 April 2022 shows ten Caucasian soldiers covering approximately a dozen bodies with sand about four kilometres east of the military base. One of the soldiers appears to be filming the scene. A French military officer said that several tweets with pictures of the bodies had been posted on accounts that support Russia or on fake accounts created by Wagner. Their tweets blame the French for the killings and the burials. One from a Wagner created account called Dia Diarra said: ‘This is what the French left behind when they left the base at #Gossi. These are excerpts from a video that was taken after they left! We cannot keep silent about this! The French handed over the Gossi base in a safe, orderly and transparent manner. A confidential report sent by the French military to Associated Press (AP) said on 19 April that a “French sensor observed a dozen Caucasian individuals, most likely belonging to the Wagner Group, and a detachment from the Malian army arrive at the Gossi site and unload equipment.” It claimed that the move to discredit the French in northern Mali was part of a coordinated campaign of multiple information attacks on [the French] that had been going on for months. By comparing the photos published by the Russians on Twitter and those taken by the drone has allowed the French to demonstrate how the Wagner Group constructed this false information. See: “France says mercenaries from Russia’s Wagner Group staged ‘French atrocity’ in Mali.” France 24, 22.04.2022. Access at: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220422-france-says-mercenaries-from-russia-s-wagner-group-staged-french-atrocity-in-mali>

campaign against the civilian populations of Azawad (northern Mali).

Prior to the Wagner group's above-mentioned fabrication of a mass grave at Gossi, the politically most resonant mass grave in the minds of the Mali populace, especially the FAMa, was the massacre and mass burial of some 80 (possibly more) Malian soldiers at Aguelhok on 24 January 2012.

## The Aguelhok massacre

As detailed in Appendix 4, on 24 January 2012, some 80 (possibly more) FAMa soldiers who had been captured at Aguelhok were massacred and buried in a mass grave. This appalling action took place less than two and half months before the MNLA unilaterally declared Azawad (northern Mali) independent from the Republic of Mali.

Almost immediately after the massacre, the Mali government authorities in Bamako accused the Tuareg MNLA rebels of committing what was clearly a 'war crime'.

However, over the following months and years, evidence collected by the author and submitted to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague, indicated that the circumstances behind the Aguelhok massacre were rather different.

At the time of the massacre, it was widely known that the MNLA was being assisted by an assortment of Islamist extremist groups, notably Ansar al-Dine, led by Iyad ag Ghali, and Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique (AQMI),<sup>82</sup> led at that time by Abdelhamid Abou Zaïd. However, what was not so well known was that both Ansar al-Dine and AQMI were supported by Algeria's secret services, the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS), under the overall command of General Mohamed 'Toufik' Mediène.

Algeria was extremely worried that the re-emergence of Tuareg irredentism in the Sahel, especially Mali, would spread to the Algerian Tuareg and lead to a Tuareg rebellion in Algeria. The aim of the DRS was to cast the blame for the Aguelhok massacre onto the Tuareg MNLA separatists and thereby demonise them internationally. There is little doubt that the MNLA attacked Aguelhok on 18 January. However, the group that returned of 24 January appears not to have been the same MNLA fighters who had attacked Aguelhok on 19 January but Ansar al-Dine and AQMI fighters, trained in such gruesome killing techniques as were used on the captured soldiers, and under the command of Iyad ag Ghali (and possibly also Abou Zaïd). The MNLA returned some three days later and raised their flag over Aguelhok.

The effect of the Aguelhok massacre, as intended, was to paint Mali's Tuareg rebels as Islamist - cutthroat - Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

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<sup>82</sup> English: Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

(AQIM) terrorists. It was a strategy that worked well, in that whatever international sympathy the Tuareg rebels and their call for an independent state of Azawad may have acquired was immediately tarnished, with the whole Tuareg rebellion being discredited in the eyes of most of the international community.

In the intervening eight months since the FAMa/Wagner troops claimed to have found a mass grave in Kidal, but without providing any evidence, it has become increasingly apparent to the local people that the FAMa/Wagner claim to the discovery of the grave was an attempt to convince Malians, and especially the population of Bamako, that the Tuareg, as at Aguelhok in 2012, are ‘cutthroat terrorists’, whose crimes are on a par, or even worse than those committed against Malian civilians by the ‘FAMa-Wagner duo.’

## **ICC issues arrest warrant against Iyad ag Ghali over Aguelhok massacre**

**The importance of the ICC arrest warrant is that it not only confirms the evidence in Appendix 4, but it also exonerates the Tuareg of responsibility for the Aguelhok massacre.**

On 21 June (2024), the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC), at the request of the Prosecutor, made public an arrest warrant against Iyad Ag Ghali, also known as “Abou Fadl”, for war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed in northern Mali between January 2012 and January 2013. The arrest warrant was initially issued under seal on 18 July 2017.

In the words of the ICC,<sup>83</sup> “Mr Ghali is suspected of being responsible for the following crimes:

- “war crimes: murder of soldiers placed hors de combat in Aguelhok; rape, sexual slavery and any other form of sexual violence; violence to person (mutilation, cruel treatment and torture) and outrages upon personal dignity (humiliating and degrading treatment); intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion and historic monuments; and
- “crimes against humanity: imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty; rape, sexual slavery and any other form of sexual

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<sup>83</sup> “Situation in Mali: ICC unseals arrest warrant against Iyad Ag Ghaly”. ICC Press Release: 21 June 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-mali-icc-unseals-arrest-warrant-against-iyad-ag-ghaly>

violence; torture; other inhumane acts causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health; persecution on religious grounds; and persecution of women and girls on gender grounds.

“These crimes were allegedly committed in Mali, in Timbuktu between January 2012 and January 2013, and for the crime of murder of soldiers, in Aguelhok on 24 January 2012<sup>84</sup>. Mr Ghali is suspected of having committed these crimes jointly with others and/or through others; ordering, soliciting or inducing their commission or aiding, abetting or otherwise assisting in the commission of these crimes; or in any other way contributing to the commission of these crimes; and/or as a military commander.

“The Chamber ordered the Registrar of the Court to prepare a request for cooperation in the arrest and surrender of the suspect, and to address it to the competent authorities of any relevant State and/or any other relevant authority.”

The importance of the ICC arrest warrant is that it not only confirms the evidence in Appendix 4, but it also exonerates the Tuareg of responsibility for the Aguelhok massacre.

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<sup>84</sup> The Aguelhok massacre was committed on 19 not the 24 January,



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# **Mali's Genocide Timeline: November 2023 – September 2024 (and continuing)**

**This Chapter records the details of events as witnessed and recorded by local civil society groups and individuals and then verified and compiled by the Imouagh International Organisation and the Kal Akal Association into monthly reports (NB. There is no Report No. 2). Their reports are incomplete, in that almost every day more information comes to light as to the fate of 'missing persons', the identities of disfigured bodies, and massacres that were known about or not recorded at the time. At the end of September 2024, Kal Akal reckoned that about**

**800 civilians had been killed by the FAMa-Wagner duo, but is certain that this number will rise. 800 deaths are not many in comparison to those killed in the Gaza genocide, Ukraine and Sudan, but in such a small, semi-nomadic and close-knit desert community in which survival sometimes appears as miraculous, even a handful of deaths is catastrophic.**

The data in this section, which covers the period from the capture of Kidal town on 14 November 2023 to the battle at Tin Zaouatene on 25-27 July 2024, has been taken from the reports compiled by the “Imouhagh (Imoughagh) International Organisation for the sake of Justice and Transparency”, generally known as the “Imouhagh International Organisation” and the “Observatoire de Veille Citoyenne pour la Défense des droits Humains du Peuple de L’Azawad”, generally known as the “Kal Akal Association”. The latter’s head office is at Tin Zaouatene in the Kidal region.

These two dates - 14 November 2023 and 25-27 July 2024, are a little arbitrary. 14 November is based on the consideration that all atrocities committed by the FAMa-Wagner duo prior to their capture of Kidal were ‘war crimes’, as both sides considered themselves to be in a ‘state of war’. In as much as the capture of Kidal marked the goal of the Bamako junta, and therefore an end to that particular war, the atrocities committed against the civilian populations of the Kidal and neighbouring regions by the FAMa-Wagner duo after the capture of Kidal are considered to be acts of genocide, as distinct from ‘war crimes’, although at some point in the future, they are likely to be prosecuted as both ‘war crimes’ or ‘crimes against humanity’. The date of 25-27 July coincides with the massive defeat inflicted on the FAMa-Wagner duo in the region of Tin Zaouatene by ‘Azawadi’ fighters. It also marks the termination of this report, except for two Epilogues, at least for the moment. The battle of Tin Zaouatene was a potentially transformative event in that it may mark: the beginning of a new phase in the war; an intensification of genocidal practices as the FAMa-Wagner duo wreak revenge on the civilian population; or possibly something else, such as external intervention and moves to establish some sort of peace.

The monthly reports compiled by these two organisations, covering the nine-month period from November-December 2023 to September 2024, are not complete. Many incidents have possibly not been recorded, while the actual

number of dead, disappeared and tortured is almost certainly higher than those so far accounted for and identified in these locally compiled Tuareg reports. Many more atrocities are likely to come to light in the coming months.

Data and text taken from the Imouhagh and Kal Akal reports are in normal font. The author's comments and explanations are in italics. The original reports were written in French. They have been translated into English with as few changes as possible, in order to keep to the sentiments of the original reports.

Spellings of place names and ethnic/tribal groups (e.g. Imouhagh) may vary slightly.

## About Kel Akal and its Reports<sup>85</sup>

In accordance with its founding texts, the Kal Akal Association intervenes in the fields of education, social cohesion, the promotion of Tuareg culture, development and above all human rights.

Since the outbreak of the conflict in August 2023, the Kal Akal Association has focused its work on the question of HUMAN RIGHTS, especially collecting and collating information. Through its focal points, Kal Akal reports and documents daily all allegations relating to human rights violations committed by the Russian mercenaries of the Wagner group in the service of the junta and the Malian Army against the civilian populations of Azawad, mainly the Kel Tamachek (Tuaregs), the Arabs and the Peulhs (Peuls).

The Association covers human rights violations in the territory of Azawad, corresponding to the five administrative regions located in Northern Mali (Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, Ménaka and Taoudenit). It also attempts to report crimes targeting Peulh communities in Central Mali.

The perpetrators of human rights violations in Azawad and central Mali are the:

- Wagner group Russian mercenaries, blacklisted by the United Nations, but recruited as sub-contractors by Mali's military junta;
- FAMa (Forces Armées Maliennes), the Malian army;
- EIGS/ISGS: État islamique dans le Grand Sahara (Eng. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara);
- JNIM: Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Eng. Support Group for Islam and Muslims).

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<sup>85</sup> The following texts are translated as nearly as possible ad verbatim from the Kal Akal reports.

All of these actors have the common denominator of violence and serious violations of human rights against unarmed civilian populations.

Unlike the terrorist groups of EIGS and JNIM, which act by targeting on an ad hoc basis, Wagner and FAMa are distinguished by indescribable cruelty manifested by massacres, attempted massacres, individual and collective summary executions, destruction of habitats, infrastructure (water towers, schools, health centres, livestock parks, etc.), theft of property, arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances on the basis of the social/cultural affiliation of the victims.

The majority of civilian victims killed since the start of the conflict in 2023 by Wagner-FAMa died following strikes by Turkish-made drones. (While this may have been true at the start of the conflict, it may no longer be correct)

Others are arrested and executed in cold blood, often decapitated with their heads left resting grotesquely on their bodies, but booby-trapped with wiring to explosives.

All these practices, worse than those of EIGS and JNIM terrorists, aim to terrorise the civilian inhabitants into abandoning their homeland territory.

The Kal Akal Association has issued reports on a more or less monthly basis since shortly after the capture of Kidal on 14 November 2023. Kal Akal's first newsletter covered the Wagner-FAMa human rights violations during December 2023. Thereafter, the newsletters were published as monthly reports, with the first being for January 2024.

## **December 2023 Newsletter by Kal Akal Association**

This monthly newsletter briefly summarises all the human rights violations committed by the Wagner group and the Malian army throughout the territory of Azawad during the month of December 2023. Also included are violations perpetrated in November. These violations range from summary executions to the theft of property, including forced disappearances, looting of homes and businesses, depopulation, destruction of social infrastructure (schools, health centres, mosques, water holes, etc.), burning of grazing lands, etc. The main ethnic targets of violations are the Tuaregs, Arabs and Peuls. The means of action used to commit the crimes are of 4 types:

- Drone strikes;
- Direct execution;
- Bombardment (shooting) using armoured vehicles and handguns;
- Bombardment (aerial bombing) using aircraft.

During the months of November and December, the Association was able to record the following:

- Summary execution: a non-exhaustive count by the Association recorded around 198 civilians killed.
- Disappearance: Several dozen civilians went missing after being arrested.
- Theft: Thefts of vehicles, money and women's jewellery were recorded wherever Wagner and FAMa went.
- Looting: Several cases of looting were recorded in Kidal, Tadoumoumt, Larnab, Tarkint, Anafif (Anéfis), Ber, Aguelhok, Ghati Loumo, Lougui, etc.
- Destruction of infrastructure: These include Ain Rahma, Erintedjeft, Tarkint, Tehardjé, Aglal, Tessalit, Larnab, etc., and include health centres, water towers, mosques and homes.
- Rape: Several cases of rape reported in Léré, Kidal, Ber, Anafif (Anéfis), etc.
- Bush fires: 2 bush fires in the Kidal region.
- Mass graves: The existence of at least two mass graves, including one in the Timbuktu region with 73 bodies, and the other in the Kidal region also containing several dozen bodies;
- Arbitrary arrests: The Association has been able to count at least 40 cases of arrest, including two ICRC workers. Their parents still have no news of them;
- Depopulation: Almost all of the indigenous white populations (i.e. Tuareg and Arab) have been driven from their homes, and the vacuum is being deliberately filled by the State (i.e. the ruling junta in Bamako) with non-native populations or immigrants who have come in search of work.

This is just a tiny fraction of the crimes committed in just two months (mid-November to end-December).

Despite all the difficulties encountered in the field and despite limited resources, Imoghag International Organisation and the Kel Akal Association have made it their duty to identify, document and archive all of the human rights violations committed by Wagner and FAMa.

## **Report No.1 for January 2024**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the beginning of the current conflict, Kel Akal and Imouagh International Organisation have been using the means at their disposal to identify the various human rights violations committed by the Wagner group of

mercenaries and the Malian Army in the territory of Azawad. The Association has established as part of its activities the production of a monthly report of the violations reported by its local sources. Its activities cover the whole territory of Azawad, and to a certain extent the centre of Mali, where the Peul communities constitute the prime target of Wagner and the Malian Army.

This report is not intended to be an exhaustive compilation, yet it is fairly indicative of the violations perpetrated during the month of January 2024 in the territory of Azawad and in certain parts of central Mali. The violations identified range from serious crimes, in particular summary executions and mass killings, to thefts and looting, etc.

### The principal ethnic targets:

- The Tuaregs;
- The Arabs;
- The Peuls.

The perpetrators of the crimes: mercenaries of the Wagner group, supported by the Malian Army and their local informers.

The means used to commit violations:

- Drones made in Turkey and kamikaze drones;
- Fighter aircraft and helicopters;
- Explosive barrels;
- Mines and explosive grenades;
- Artillery;
- Small arms;
- Bladed weapons (knives).

During the month of January, Kal Akal and Imoughagh International Organisation recorded:

- Summary executions and massacres: 93 cases of executions, including an 80-year-old man and 4 foreign gold prospectors. Among these victims were 24 civilian Peul shepherds (herdsman) executed in cold blood in the region of Nara, in the village of Welingara/Wuro Ferro, on 26 January, by the Malian Army. The Kal Akal Association was able to acquire a video of the execution thanks to the parents of the victims.
- Enforced disappearances: Several dozen civilians arrested near Timbuktu, then taken to the airport, where they disappeared. To date, their families

still have no news of them.

- Injured: Several dozen injured.
- Looting and/or theft: Local sources have reported to Kal Akal cases of theft and/or looting of sleeping mats, of shops, or of provisions at the Sangh site near Léré.
- Businesses and shops looted at Kidal. This situation was reported to the governor, who was not able to do anything. Two cars were stolen in Enekar/Anchawadj.
- Arrests: 24
- Ransacking/fires: Several houses belonging to the famous Sheikh Abak at the Sangh site near Léré were set on fire; his Koranic library with an estimated value of over 10 million CFA was burned down; and 2 cars and some provisions were set on fire. His son Ismaguil has been reported missing.
- We also note the fire at the displaced persons camp at Tabagart/Ber in the Timbuktu region. A total of 4 villages/sites set on fire have been reported in the month of January.
- Killing of livestock: Several dozen cattle, camels, sheep, etc., were killed in indiscriminate shelling by Wagner-FAMa.
- Cases of depopulation/eviction: Several sites around Ménaka were forced to flee towards the town centre of Ménaka under the threat of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). In the regions of Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao, Wagner and the Malian Army were behind the forced depopulation of sites of their indigenous populations, who fled to Mauritania and Algeria, which were already inundated by the influx of refugees. As a reminder, the latest quantified data from December 2023 estimates at 150,000 the number of refugees in Mauritania, not counting refugees outside the camps, who are not recorded by the UNHCR.

*It should be noted that the FAMa and their Russian allies have made little or no attempt to attack the ISGS and thereby protect the predominantly Tuareg civilian population of the Ménaka region. As later reports (May) reveal, the FAMa-Wagner duo massacred Tuareg civilian populations in the Ménaka region (Tassik and Amassine) as part of the junta's genocide policy. Officially, the role of the Wagner group in Mali has been to help rid the country of the ISGS and JNIM terrorist groups. As these and many other reports reveal, the Wagner mercenaries, rather than fighting the Islamic terrorists, have been pre-occupied in protecting Mali's military junta and committing atrocities against the Malian civilian populations.*

- Among the recorded savage killings of civilians, Kal Akal was able to identify a case involving the bombing of two civilian cars near Ménaka, which killed their occupants.

- We also note cases of Russian-made improvised bombs being dropped on a residential area at Tabankorte/Ménaka.
- These violations involve: Timbuktu, Aguelhok, Leré, Goundam, Kidal, Ménaka, Tessalit, Tabankorte, Tadoumoumt, Ber, Tinza (Tin Zaouatene), Diré, Tindirma, Tonka, Fatakara, and other locations.

The Kal Akal Association and Imouhagh International, in accordance with their role (of recording and) monitoring the Defense of the Human Rights of the People of Azawad and the indigenous people of the Sahel region (Tuareg), denounce and condemn these grave violations of human rights committed deliberately by foreign mercenaries (the Wagner group), who have been blacklisted by the United Nations, and who have been recruited by the Malian junta to get rid of certain targeted ethnic groups, or to chase them out of their traditional homelands.

The Association calls upon the whole of the international and sub-regional community to act quickly to put an end to this [...] targeting the Tuareg, Arab and Peul populations. Both organisations have launched an urgent appeal to international human rights organisations, in particular: Human Rights Watch; Amnesty International, Ligue Européenne des Droits de l'Homme; Ligue des Droits de l'Homme (LDH) ["Human Rights League"], etc., to engage in this documentation in collaboration with Kal Akal and Imoughagh International [...]

Kal Akal Association and the Imouhagh International Organisation were able to acquire audio recordings calling for ethnic cleansing. It also has [possession of a copy] of Decree No.4794 from the Malian Minister of Defence dated 29 December 2023, which establishes the prohibition of civilian populations from certain areas in the central regions. This decision, which seems to give the green light to the army to treat any person they come across as a military target, applies (implicitly) to the regions of Azawad.

The Kal Akal Association and Imouhagh International have also noted the Nigerien junta's Decision No. 000769/MAE/C/NE/SGA of 18 January 2024, which is aimed at expelling refugee Tuareg populations from Nigerien territory to insecure areas in Mali.

Some images of human rights violations (included in this report):

- Bombing carried out by Turkish Bayraktar drones near Amasrakad/Gao, killing several civilians killed on 5-6 January 2024.
- Russian Wagner mercenaries and FAMa dropped Russian-made F-1 defensive fragmentation grenades by drone on civilian homes in Tabankort, Gao, on 19 January 2024.

*It should be noted that drone strikes by the FAMa-Wagner duo against civilian populations appear to have intensified during and subsequent to January. This was almost certainly made possible by the arrival of a further shipment to Mali of 20 Turkish Bayrakter TB2 drones on 4-5 January.*

## Report No.3 for February 2024

February was marked by an intense wave of serious human rights violations in the Azawad territory and in central Mali. Neither women, nor children, nor livestock, nor even basic social infrastructure has been spared. The repressive, unquestioning machine has indiscriminately targeted anything that moves within its incursion zones. Night and day, patrols of Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group and the Malian Army (FAMa) travel back and forth non-stop through the Azawad territory, primarily targeting its nomadic villages and hamlets during their hunting operations. Mass and individual summary executions, rapes, livestock theft, fires, looting, enforced disappearances, the destruction of watering points and more are reported on a daily basis to the Kal Akal Association and Imouhagh International Organisation by their local sources.

The majority of the Tuareg, Arab and Peul populations have fled towards Mauritania as refugees or to Algeria, where they are denied formal refugee status. Those without the means to travel and unable to move have been left behind to live in fear and anguish, awaiting their “sentence” at the hands of Wagner-FAMa the next time they pass through. Few schools remain open, while health centres and water points in nomadic communities have been destroyed. Dwellings, abandoned by their owners, are either destroyed or booby-trapped with mines, with the aim of terrorising and forcing populations to abandon their lands. Weekly markets providing grocery supplies have become ambush sites for killing or arresting civilians, as have animal grazing areas. No human rights or humanitarian organisations dare venture to find out exactly what is going on, or attempt to provide aid. The asphyxiation is total and very focused on physically killing the populations with weapons or killing them by starving them, with the objective of erasing their presence in the region, or at least reducing it significantly. This is how one might describe the human rights violations currently happening in Azawad.

During February 2024, Imouhagh International Organisation and the Kal Akal Association were able to record the violations committed by Wagner and FAMa by category. They were primarily perpetrated against populations in the territory of Azawad. However, according to information we have received, they also affected part of the centre of the country, targeting the Peul community.

The violations were as follows:

- Executions and massacres: 117 civilians, including 2 young Talibé children [students at non-formal traditional Koranic schools] killed in front of the Al Irchad centre in Kidal; and 14 civilians killed following an attack by Wagner-FAMa against a Peul village named Konokassi in Niono Circle, with several were killed during a wedding. The following day, while the villagers were burying their dead, other strikes targeted them, leaving more dead and injured. A youth was also killed after being

injected with a lethal substance in the Tanaynayte area of Kidal.

- Arrests and enforced disappearances: 72 cases, verified and confirmed by local sources, including the victims' parents, have been recorded. These include the case of Ahmad ag Baye, a nurse bound for Tin Zaouatene, who disappeared without trace after being arrested. Dozens of other cases of arrests and disappearances have been reported to us, but we are unable to verify (all) the allegations.
- Theft: 5 cases of theft in the Ménaka and Kidal regions have been reported, relating to the theft of fuel stolen to be resold on the market; of animals in Gao, and of money in Tin-ghardian. The theft of women's jewellery and of the tyres of parked vehicles, mobile phones and a tricycle, have also been recorded in the Gao region.
- Rape: 3 rape cases involving many women have been reported to Kal Akal, including one in Dianké in the Niafunké Cercle, and another in the Gourma Rharous area, where several women and girls are believed to have been raped by the Wagner Group and FAMa, led by a Wagner boss named MIRONE. Lastly, a girl is thought to have been raped in the village of Traoré, in the Gabero district, by unidentified armed men.
- Fires and looting: At least 9 cases were reported anonymously, including a fire at the Tahabanat Mosque, the looting of the medical clinic in Tanaynayte, shops in Echel Horo, Ingodiri, Tangara, Indelimane, Ibdakan, Djounhan, Dari, Tindirma, etc. In addition to fires, looting and theft, serious material damage has been caused by Wagner and FAMa. On the night of February 13, drone strikes targeted a petrol storage yard in Talhandak belonging to local shopkeeper, Mr Assabit ag Bakrene. Everything went up in flames, with material damage totalling several hundred million CFA francs, not to mention the horrifying human cost.
- Injuries: During their missions, Wagner and FAMa have been known to shoot indiscriminately at inhabited camps, at traders or at herdsmen with their animals. These criminal acts have resulted in several injured people, including some who now suffer lifelong disabilities. They have also killed significant numbers of livestock by opening fire indiscriminately on herds of animals, sometimes killing them to take with them. The latest case to date is that of Aman Idarnen in Niafunké, on February 24, where they killed the equivalent of a truckful of cattle before taking them away.

## CONCLUSION

[...] The two organisations send an urgent appeal to the international community to end its silence in the face of the planned and targeted ethnic cleansing characterised by mass killings, the destruction of vital infrastructure, the depopulation of lands traditionally belonging to the Tuareg, Arab and Peul communities, before their repopulation by selected communities and actors.

Imouhagh International Organisation and Kal Akal Association invite human rights organisations to promptly and decisively fulfil their role so that the

perpetrators of human rights violations answer for their criminal acts before independent and credible legal bodies. Despite having very limited resources for exhaustively monitoring and covering the human rights violations carried out against civilians in Azawad and [Central Mali], the Kal Akal Association and Imouhagh International Organisation remain open to and available for collaborating readily with all organisations, actors and countries wishing to help them bring to light the human rights violations committed by Wagner and FAMa.

## **Report No.4 for March 2024**

As in previous months, March was characterised by quite serious and inhumane human rights violations against the civilian population, their property and their basic social infrastructure.

The Russian mercenaries of the Wagner Group, employed by the Malian junta and accompanied by their “auxiliaries” from the Malian Army, are the main perpetrators of these violations. In addition, these terrorist groups participate in human rights violations through targeted assassinations, kidnappings and cattle theft. The targets of the violations consist mainly of the Kel Tamachakt [Tamachek] (Tuareg), Arabs and Peuls. Infrastructure and assets are not left behind.

The violations range from individual and/or collective summary executions, to the theft of cattle and other property, to beheadings and the public display of severed heads on the corpse, in order to create a regime of horror and terror that can forever affect people’s minds.

These violations are committed in the following ways:

- Turkish-made Bayraktar drones (TB2) constitute the largest portion in terms of civilian massacres and destruction of infrastructure through indiscriminate and criminal strikes;
- Arrests followed by executions—and often beheadings;
- Bombings of villages and human gatherings around water sources or health centres, travellers, market traders, shepherds, etc.;
- Enforced disappearances;
- Thefts;
- Attempts to damage the Kal Tamachek (Tuareg) culture and identity, manifested by a campaign to suppress Tifinagh (Indigenous Tuareg script) and the rock drawings on the rocks of the Adagh [Adrar-n-Iforas] of Kidal;
- Abductions;
- Torture;
- The State policy of targeted depopulation and planned repopulation.

Thus, for the month of March, the breakdown of human rights violations is as follows:

- Massacres/executions: During the month of March, the Kel Akal Association and Imouagh International Organisation were able to count at least 65 civilians killed, most of them as a result of Turkish drone strikes. Among these innocent victims, the following are the most serious cases:
  - > 16 March 2024: a drone strike on the village of Amasrakad, Gao resulted in the death of at least 13 civilians, including 9 women, one of whom was over 70 years old, the director of the health centre, children and adults, with 11 injured, some of them seriously, and a vehicle belonging to the CSCOM (Community Health Center) burned.
  - > On the night of 22 to 23 March 2024: a drone strike targeted a group of Talibé children (Quranic students) between the ages of 9 and 14 around a fire in Douna Pen, Koro region, resulting in at least 14 killed and several injured.
  - > 25 March 2024: sources close to the victim confirmed to the Kal Akal Association the death by torture at the Timbuktu military camp of a young teenager named Sidi Arby, who had been arrested with his brother (whose fate is still unknown).
- Arrests/kidnapping: 66 cases have been reported, including that of the mayor of Tidermene, Youssouf ag Dandane, who was kidnapped from his home in Ménaka by Wagner-FAMa on the night of 20-21 March 2024. There was also the case of 3 civilians in Kidal, including a physically handicapped man named Bikka Ag Assiltane, by Wagner-FAMa on 26 March 2024.
- Wounded: 18 wounded have been formally reported for the month of March. However, there have been many more that have been reported to Kal Akal, but it has not been possible to verify them.
- Looting/Destruction/Fire: The following cases are the main ones recorded:
  - 10 March 2024: several nomadic settlements were set on fire in Egharghar, Kidal;
  - 15 March 2024: an incident involving oil tankers resulted in the death of 5 people, through the fire/damage of 6 vehicles with all their cargo; that is, several hundred million CFA francs went up in smoke in the Tabankorte sector;
  - 16 March 2024: a campaign of destruction and looting of houses using heavy machinery occurred in Tessalit, along with the theft of several vehicles and motorbikes;
  - 18-19 March 2024: drone strikes in Zouera, Goundam with 1 dead, 3 injured and several businesses snuffed out. The damage is estimated at

several hundred million CFA francs;

- 21 March 2024: In Gabero, 52 kms from Gao, ISGS terrorists looted shops and houses. They stole many animals before executing an elderly man named Aïdrissa Almadjissa.
- 29 March 2024: a drone strike occurred against a fuel depot belonging to traders in Combo, Rharous circle, resulting in 1 dead, 2 injured and significant material damage;
- Theft: In this area, the Kal Akal Association was able to document the most egregious and irrefutable cases recounted by the victims themselves, along with witnesses on the scene:

15 March 2024: a Wagner-FAMa patrol roamed across some localities within the circle of Tidermene in the Ménaka region. It stole/ confiscated money from 6 people for a total sum of one million, four hundred and thirty-five thousand (1,435,000F), with a breakdown as follows:

- Theft of 400,000F belonging to a butcher
- Theft of 100,000F belonging to a shepherd
- Theft of 285,000F from a farmer's market vendor
- Theft of 400,000F from a merchant
- Theft of 150,000F from a farmer's market vendor
- Theft of 100,000F from a farmer's market vendor
- 16 March 2024: on the sidelines of their campaign of destruction and looting of houses with heavy machinery in Tessalit, Wagner and its FAMa auxiliaries proceeded to steal several vehicles and motorbikes;

## **APRIL REPORT MISSING**

### **Report No.5 for Mid-May to 30 June 2024**

In August 2023, the Malian junta, boosted by the recruitment of Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group and the purchase of sophisticated weapons, such as Turkish-made drones, launched hostilities against the signatory movements of the Agreement resulting from the Algiers process [otherwise known as the Algiers Agreement of 2015], of which Kidal was the rear base.

The Malian junta's deployment of the FAMa and Russian Wagner group mercenaries into the regions of Azawad, was accompanied by a vast campaign of indiscriminate repression against the Arab, Tuareg and Peulh civilian populations, involving summary executions, torture, disappearances and the

destruction of property and basic social infrastructure.

Summary executions, mutilations, burning of homes, burning of pastures, intense and indiscriminate bombardments of camps and other civilian targets, arrests and forced disappearances... constitute the daily ordeal of the nomads.

Regular counts of massacres by the Kal Akal Association have established a toll of civilian deaths numbering several hundred, the majority of whom died following Turkish drone strikes.

[The Wagner-FAMa policy of driving people from their homelands - ethnic cleansing – invariably involves extrajudicial executions of entire communities, often by decapitation and with the severed heads being placed on the bodies, which in turn are booby-trapped (with explosives) so that those trying to identify and bury the bodies are mutilated or killed by the explosion.]

The nomads' means of subsistence such as livestock (dromedaries and cattle) are regularly slaughtered or loaded into military trucks and taken to feed the troops or sell at the markets, thereby enriching themselves.

At the same time, infrastructure (schools, health centres, mosques, water towers, etc.) are deliberately demolished to prevent any possibility of people living in [or returning to] their homes.

The region of Kidal and its inhabitants constitute the primary target of the Wagner-FAMa troops, which are under the firm instructions of the junta and operate in total disregard of human rights.

The criminal and genocidal actions committed by the Wagner-FAMa troops affect all regions of Azawad (Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, Ménaka and Taoudéni). However, they have been more cruel and more intense in the Kidal region, which has challenged successive Malian regimes.

*(NB. The author believes this is the first time that Kal Akal has referred to the Wagner-FAMa atrocities as part of a **genocide**, as distinct from 'ethnic cleansing')*

The only alternative available to civilian populations to escape these massacres is to flee to either Algeria or Mauritania. Those who fled to Algeria received some Red Cross assistance in February-March, but since then - nothing.

In Algeria, [which does not grant refugee status], the displaced people come mainly from the Kidal, Ménaka and Gao region. Their numbers remain unknown due to the fact that they are not recorded by the Algerian or UN authorities. An estimated figure of around 90,000 souls has been put forward.

According to Mali's official 2023 census, the total population of the Azawad regions is 2,204,221, with Kidal comprising 83,192. However, the figure for Azawad is wholly unreliable and strongly contested, especially in Kidal whose population is considered by the inhabitants to be well in excess of 83,192.

Although Mauritania faces difficulties linked to:

- the lack of state resources;
- the gradual winding down of refugee care since the huge influx of refugees in 2012; and
- the current massive influx of refugees escaping the massacres in Timbuktu and Taoudéni,

the situation is comparatively better than that of Algeria.

The Mauritanian State and the UNHCR are working with the means at their disposal to alleviate the refugees' difficulties. In the M'bera camps, unlike in Algeria, their details are recorded and they benefit from being afforded official refugee status. According to the UNHCR database, the refugee population in M'bera at end-February 2024 numbered 99,117, with a further 20,000 in the nearby Agor camp.

Between 16 May and 30 June, a period of just over 6 weeks, The Kel Akal Association recorded a series of massacres committed by Wagner and FAMa forces as they passed through localities such as Tassik, Tadimamst, Touzek and Amassine in the Kidal and northern Ménaka regions.

The Kel Akal Association and Imouhagh International Organisation counted 87 civilians killed in atrocious and inhuman conditions in the Kidal region alone. Property was stolen and livelihoods destroyed.

In this macabre campaign, the sectors of Tassik, Amassine and Abeibeira were the worst affected. Due to the difficulties in accessing these localities, it is difficult to identify all the victims. So far, 57 (See Appendix 5) deceased have been formally identified. Investigations are continuing to identify the remainder. Most of these victims were older men and children, as most of the executions took place while the able-bodied were watering their animals around the watering points. However, women and children found in villages or with their animals, were also executed in cold blood.

*According to sources from The Associated Press (AP) and RFI, Malian soldiers and Wagner Group fighters attacked the town of Abeibeira in the Kidal region between 20 and 29 June. Kal Akal, said at least 60 civilians, mainly of the Tuareg ethnic group, were killed and buried in mass graves. The Malian army said it had no knowledge of the killings but that military operations were underway across the country. The son of Abeibeira's village chief, Hamadine Driss ag Mohamed, told the Associated Press that Malian soldiers and fighters from the Russian mercenary group Wagner had killed 46 civilians and then stolen everything they found in the camps ranging from money to jewellery. Images of the dead have been circulating on social media since the attack.<sup>86</sup>*

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<sup>86</sup> "Malian army and Russian mercenaries accused of killing dozens of civilians in Kidal region." Arab News. 06 July 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2544381/world>

*NB. For the purposes of establishing proof of genocide, as distinct from 'war crimes' or 'crimes against humanity', the massacres committed at Tassik and Amassine, for reasons explained in Chapter 6, are particularly important.*

## **Report No.6 for June 2024**

*(NB. This report, slightly duplicates events, notably at Abeibeira, in the previous report)*

### **MASSACRES AND EXECUTIONS**

For the month of June, the Kal Akal Association recorded 117 cases reported by the parents and/or relatives of the victims.

This is a real ethnic cleansing campaign, knowingly orchestrated by the ruling junta in Bamako. In addition to the deliberate massacres of civilians in their camps, around water points or in the bush where their animals are grazing, civilians are also executed so that the Wagner-FAMa can take their property and enrich themselves.

Although the ethnic cleansing campaign affects all regions of Azawad, in June it has been particularly targeted on the Kidal region, notably the areas falling within the rural commune of Abeibeira, Ahjir (Akomas), Tassissat, Aghli, Hadjouss, Tadinamast, Tazik ...

### **Entire families were decimated, some victims were being burned, others executed and thrown into the wild at the mercy of scavengers and other carnivores.**

In these areas, civilian populations experienced appalling horrors. Humiliation followed by executions were reported. Entire families were decimated, some victims were being burned, others executed and thrown into the wild at the mercy of scavengers and other carnivores. Given the fact that many of the victims still cannot be found, this figure (of 117) may rise.

The Kal Akal Association was able to identify some other fairly extensive violations committed during June, such as the following cases:

- On 17 June, Wagner-FAMa abducted Mossa ag Samoghine, a sick old man who had already lapsed into coma, from his home in Tanaynayte, near Kidal, along with four other civilians, Mossa was found burned to death near Ahader.
- Between 16 and 20 June, several dead bodies of Fulani (Peuhl) shepherds were found in Gassi Djirma, in the Léré area, following the passage of a Wagner-FAMa unit.

- On the eve of the Tabaski festival, 20 civilians, including the aged Higuiss ag Almahdi, were executed by the Wagner-FAMa duo on their way back from Bamako to Timbuktu for the festival. Several others were reported as missing.
- Mohamed ag Hamata, known as Ouumboba, was arrested by the Wagner-FAMa duo at his home on 9 June. He was declared dead by his family at the Timbuktu regional hospital.
- 22 civilians were killed in Tadinamst, Abeibeira June 20 (as reported in the previous report);
- Arrested by the Wagner-FAMa duo on 13 May in their village of Chinam near Diré, the imam of the village, Douly Djadajé, and the village chief Issa Maiga, were later declared dead at the Timbuktu regional hospital after suffering physical torture.

### **ARRESTS, DISAPPEARANCES AND ABDUCTIONS**

47 proven cases were reported to the Kal Akal Association by its local members. The main cases were:

- On 17 June, 12 civilians were taken by the Wagner-FAMa duo from Touzek, Takalote, following a morning assault on the location. Others were sequestered in a house for several hours while the operation was carried out.
- 20 civilians were arrested in Ersane, 3 of whom were executed, 9 released and the remaining 8 ‘disappeared’.
- On 9 June, a mentally ill civilian, Ag Tanou, was kidnapped by the Wagner-FAMa duo from Takoudoust (Daouna).

### **TORTURE AND INJURIES**

10 confirmed cases of torture resulting in injuries have been reported from Tadjalalt-Tinaghay, approximately 30 kms from Amasrakad (Gao), Léré, Touzek, Takalote, Ersane, Djaloubé, Diré and elsewhere.

### **DESTRUCTIONS, LOOTING, THEFT AND OTHER PROPERTY DAMAGE**

Six cases, involving the demolition of people’s homes, the looting of the contents of houses and shops, the theft of money and animals, and the destruction of basic social infrastructure were formally identified.

They took place mainly in the areas of Abeibara, Tin-Essako, Takalote and Ahel Kawri, with money, sleeping mats, blankets, cushions being stolen in Tadjalalt-Tinaghay.

## Report No.7 for July 2024

### INTRODUCTION

The month of July was particularly deadly and devastating, with a vast campaign of human rights violations, targeting civilian populations, infrastructure and the local economy being recorded throughout the territory of Azawad, although with more sustained pressure in the Kidal region.

Units of the FAMa and the Wagner group made incursions into pastoral camps and watering holes to commit summary executions, often by beheading, and rapes. Animals are blindly machine-gunned in open pastures, or sometimes taken away for food or to be resold. Even women's veils, kitchen utensils and other household objects are collected and taken away.

### **documents attributed to the Wagner group ... state that the junta gave Wagner free rein to cleanse Azawad of its white populations [that is Tuareg and Arabs] in exchange for access to natural resources**

The Kal Akal association was able to consult documents attributed to the Wagner group, the authenticity of which is currently being verified, which state that the junta gave Wagner free rein to cleanse Azawad of its white populations [that is Tuareg and Arabs] in exchange for access to natural resources.

In addition, vocal and written incitement to hatred are regularly relayed on social networks.

### MASSACRES AND EXECUTIONS

During July, the Kal Akal Association recorded 116 killings. They were all unarmed civilians arrested in their camps or encountered by Wagner and FAMa while travelling, invariably around watering points with their animals. They were executed collectively or individually. Kal Akal is documenting the cases of beheadings, charred bodies and mass graves. The Association has been able to identify some victims through the fragments of objects used in the booby-trapping of the bodies of some victims and the carcasses of slaughtered animals.

The most atrocious massacres committed by the Wagner/FAMa due are listed below:

- July 4: six bodies were found executed and burnt along with two vehicles during the operations at the end of June in Aghli in the Kidal region;

- July 11/12: five civilians were executed in Tin-Essako, their bodies were booby-trapped before being thrown into a mass grave;
- July 17: a civilian was killed followed by beheading in Soumphi commune Eghachar-Alkhandak;
- July 24: two elderly civilians were executed on the Achibrich road;
- July 30: several drone strikes targeted an artisanal gold mining site at In-Attayara and a shelter for displaced people at Ikharaaban in the Tin Zaouatene sector. At least 50 killed – of Sudanese, Chadian and Nigerian origin – were counted at the In-Attayara gold mining site, with several others injured and considerable damage done.

## **RAPES**

3 cases of rape were recorded:

- July 15: the Kal Akal Association was informed by parents of the victims that 16 girls would be kidnapped and raped for a whole night in Doghay, N'Tillit/Gao by suspected terrorists and brought back the next day;
- July 16: a girl was allegedly raped by about 20 terrorists in Doghay. She was hospitalised in Gao after the act;
- July 24: a source close to the victim claims the rape of a woman on the road to Achibrich. She succumbed after a whole night of rape and physical violence. Her elderly husband, had his throat cut, while another woman was also reportedly raped.
- June 27: a FAMa soldier allegedly raped a married lady in the displaced persons camp at Lellehoye near Ansongo.
- Kel Akal has not disclosed the identities of these women and their husbands, which are being safeguarded in its database while awaiting the opening of a possible investigation.

## **ARRESTS / DISAPPEARANCES / KIDNAPPINGS**

15 cases were recorded, of which

- July 4: a lady was arrested in Kidal by Wagner-FAMa for having denounced the difficult conditions and the police rackets against the civilian populations of Kidal;
- July 6: three civilians (traders) were arrested by Wagner-FAMa in Ménaka;
- July 12: two humanitarians were kidnapped in Taboye, Bourem by unknown persons.

## **TORTURE AND WOUNDINGS**

5 cases were confirmed, among which:

- July 19: elements suspected of belonging to the EIGS attempted an incursion into the northern outskirts of Ménaka, with the response by the FAMa resulting in a 33-year-old woman and a 14-year old minor being wounded.
- July 28-29: two young teenagers were shot by the Wagner-FAMa duo in Timbuktu, but they escaped with injuries.

## **DESTRUCTIONS / PILLAGES / THEFT AND MATERIAL DAMAGE**

Kal Akal records and monitors as well as it can the damage caused to people's property, whether in terms of theft, destruction or looting. Those listed below are the tip of the iceberg:

- July 2: unknown armed men broke into a displaced persons site 12 kms from Gao. They extorted the sum of 3,850,000 FCFA and also stole women's possessions (jewellery);
- July 7: in the village of Alghariyat in Timbuktu region, the Wagner-FAMa duo set fire to all the villagers' homes, along with their means of subsistence, after they had already watched their livestock die as a result of the late rains.
- July 8: more than 50 sheep were slaughtered by the Wagner-FAMa duo in the In Afarak, Aguelhok-Kidal sector;
- July 11/12: the same Wagner-FAMa unit operating in the In Afarak sector slaughtered six cows whose carcasses were booby-trapped. They also destroyed a mosque, looted houses and emptied the village of all its possessions. They also poisoned the village water supply, causing the death of the goats that drank there and causing illness among the people.
- July 13: the EIGS stole livestock from the village of Batalo, near Indaki in the Gossi region;
- July 21, 22 and 23: Wagner-FAMa ransacked many homes in the Abeibeira hamlets of Edjerer, Intawaké, Tihadjiwen, Eleoudj and others, as well as in the Aguelhok-In Afarak sector. They stole vehicles, destroyed a water tower and took three trucks filled with looted equipment. In addition, they destroyed motor-pumps used to irrigate the villages' vegetable gardens;
- July 24: hundreds of livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, camels ...) were stolen by the EIGS from the Achibago commune in the Ménaka region.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Kal Akal Association reminds neighbouring countries of their moral

responsibility linked to the deafening silence in the face of a creeping genocide.

Kel Akal also informs the Turkish government and Turkey's Muslim people that their drones deliberately kill only civilian populations and, consequently, to reconsider the provision of Turkish-made drones, along with any loan or training contracts with the Malian junta, or any purchase/sale.

*NOTE: it is significant that by the time of its July 2024 report the Kel Akal Association is talking increasingly about a genocide, as distinct from 'ethnic cleansing'.*

## **Report No.8 for August 2024**

August has been distinguished by a series of intense and deadly FAMa drone strikes on civilian targets and infrastructure throughout the Kidal region, particularly in Tin Zaouatene.

Several dozen civilians, including children, who were among the displaced persons who fled the exactions of Wagner and the junta army in Ménaka, Gao, Kidal, as well as gold miners of various nationalities died in these strikes just a stone's throw from the Algerian border.

In parallel with this murderous campaign targeting unarmed civilians, thefts and/or slaughter of animals and other property continue. Arrests and forced disappearances are carried out without interruption. This is the macabre lot of human rights violations targeting the civilian populations of Azawad, their property and their basic infrastructure on a daily basis.

This document reports all the human rights violations recorded and reported by our local relays in Azawad and to a certain extent, in the center of the country during this month of August.

### **ATTEMPTED MASSACRES, MASSACRES/EXECUTIONS**

Kal Akal recorded 64 confirmed cases in August, including the most emblematic:

- On August 2: 3 lifeless bodies were found in the Inbater valley. These people were arrested by Wagner-FAMa in December 2023 in Ibdakan, 50km west of Kidal, along with others, of whom there is still no news.
- On August 9: a Wagner-FAMa patrol executed 4 civilians including Boka Ag Hamata in Intarcha southwest of Nampala.
- On August 15: a civilian named Boucary was killed by Wagner-FAMa in Moribougou Torobé, Dilly commune in the Nara region.
- 17-18 August: assassination of two teachers in Arabébé, Niafunké circle by unidentified armed men. They are: BokaryKisso Bokoum, school principal in Arabébé and Ousmane A Daou, school principal in Goundam, Teskel. They had been kidnapped on 5 August.

- On 18 August: a mass grave was discovered in Eghaf-in Elewidj in the Eghachar Sadidane valley, 25 kms northeast of Kidal after a heavy flood of rainwater. These victims had been arrested by Wagner-FAMa. Everything suggests that they were murdered a long time ago and buried in a hurry.
- August 25: two young people from the Songhoy community were executed by Wagner-FAMa towards Arhabou.
- August 25: several drone strikes in Tin Zaouatene, initially targeting a pharmacy, then a gathering of people around the damage caused by the first strike. These strikes resulted in: damage to the pharmacy, death of its manager and the death of 30 civilians, including 11 children. These were mostly displaced people who had taken shelter in Tin Zaouatene following Wagner-FAMa massacres. There was considerable material damage and several other people injured.
- August 26: the assassination of a notable in Gawinané in the Nioro region by the JNIM for refusal to pay zakat.
- August 27: the assassination, in his home, of the village chief of Hamakoira, Souboundou in the Niafunké circle by JNIM.
- August 27: a helicopter operation by Wagner-FAMa killed two civilians in Marate, near Aguelhok.

*(Note. Of these 10 recorded incidents, two were committed by JNIM; the remainder by Wagner-FAMa.)*

## **RAPES**

The association has not heard of any confirmed cases of rape. However, on August 8, Kal Akal was able to obtain a video from a mobile phone of a Wagner mercenary captured during the fighting in Tin Zaouatene. The video shows the interrogation of a woman, frightened and ordered to undress for denying being in possession of any information concerning armed men. Kal Akal has the video in its database.

## **ARRESTS/DISAPPEARANCES/KIDNAPPINGS**

During August, the Kal Akal association recorded at least 30 cases of arrests, disappearances and kidnappings. Amongst these were the following:

- August 2: arrest by Wagner-FAMa of a community notable at his home in Ménaka.
- August 20: 3 civilians from Tassik in Kidal are reported missing.
- August 26: 5 civilians were kidnapped between Tessalit and Aguelhok by Wagner-FAMa.

## **TORTURE/INJURIES**

Several cases have been reported following the multiple drone strikes on Tin Zaouatene and elsewhere.

## **DESTRUCTION/LOOTING/THEFT AND OTHER MATERIAL DAMAGE**

The month of August is particularly marked by fairly considerable destruction and theft. In addition to the massacres and arrests of civilians, the rush people's goods and property is one of the motivating factors of the Wagner mercenaries and the FAMa who accompany them on patrols.

Thus, during this month, there are many cases of theft and destruction at the expense of civilians by Wagner and the Malian junta's army. Some examples, typical of many others, are:

- On August 2: a Wagner-FAMa mission from Kidal passed through Touzek, Aguelhok. It ransacked homes, robbed shops and took away ten goats.
- On August 8: several cattle were atrociously slaughtered and dismembered in Tawouloste, Aguelhok by Wagner-FAMa.
- On August 9: Wagner-FAMa arrived at Tassik, 50 kms from Kidal, and committed the following damage: - 1 vehicle and 4 motorcycles belonging to civilians set on fire; 1 vehicle and 2 motorcycles taken away; Shops looted and/or vandalized.
- On several occasions, notably on 10-11, 16 and 17 August, families in Timbuktu were besieged, threatened with weapons and searched by Wagner and the junta's army. These night operations, carried out on the basis of racial profiling, resulted in the disappearance of 3 people.
- On 11 August: Wagner-FAMa raided Abawin, 35 kms from Bourem. After searching the village, they tied up and took a civilian with them and stole phones charging in the village's mosque.
- August 14: Wagner-FAMa raided Emnaguil, Anchawadj 45 kms northeast of Gao. Several shops were robbed with the goods loaded into trucks chartered for this purpose from Gao. 6 people were arrested and released two days later.
- August 15: armed men burst in to the village of Namaniguila in the Mourdiah circle. They searched houses and took away various goods such as motorcycles, money, clothes, etc.
- August 20: A herd of cows and small livestock village were kidnapped from the village of Baji Haoussa near Ansongo by unidentified armed men.
- August 23: two unidentified armed individuals kidnapped a herd of animals near the village of Bintagoungou, Goundam.

- August 30: In Kidal, the properties of indigenous populations who fled were looted by Wagner-FAMa thieves who were known to the onlookers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Kal Akal association strongly condemns the human rights violations perpetrated daily by the Russian mercenaries of the Wagner group in the company of elements of the Malian junta's army (the FAMa). It also strongly denounces the silence of the international community and human rights organizations, in what amounts to a trivialization of human life. [...] The Kal Akal Association reminds the Turkish Muslim state of its responsibility in the massacres of Azawadian and central [Mali] civilians through the drones it makes available to a junta which mainly target civilians.





# 05

# Armies out of control<sup>87</sup>

**The FAMa – Mali's army - like those of Niger and Burkina Faso, were 'out of control' and a threat to the safety of the civilian population long before Colonel Assimi Goïta and his military colleagues seized power in August 2020.**

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Before turning to the essential matter of establishing proof of genocide, there is the important question of whether the atrocities committed by the FAMa during the period broadly covered by this report (August 2023 – late 2024) can be attributed to a military culture that came into being with the military coup d'état that seized power in August 2020 and the junta's second coup, or 'coup within a coup', of May 2021 whereby the junta reinforced its control over the Malian state, or whether these practices can be attributed to the Russian mercenaries of the Wagner group mercenaries, who arrived in Mali in the latter part of 2021 and whom the junta insists on calling 'military trainers'.

The answer to this question is that the FAMa – Mali's army - like those of Niger and Burkina Faso, were 'out of control' and a threat to the safety of the civilian population long before Colonel Assimi Goïta and his military colleagues seized power in August 2020.

For several years before Mali's military coup d'état of August 2020, there had been allegations – and some evidence – that the security forces of the

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<sup>87</sup> Keenan, Jeremy 2020. Armies out of Control. Special Report on COVID-19 and State Crime in the Sahel. International State Crime Initiative (ISCI), School of Law, Queen Mary University of London. <http://statecrime.org/covid19andthesahel/>

Sahel were committing atrocities in their own countries.<sup>88</sup> For example, in the 13 months from January 2019 to January 2020 inclusive, ACLED<sup>89</sup> recorded 86 attacks by the armed forces of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger on their civilian populations, with 584 fatalities: an average of 45 per month.<sup>90</sup> During February-April 2020, ACLED recorded 69 such attacks with 450 fatalities: an average of 150 per month and a more than threefold increase.

Writing on this subject shortly before Mali's coup of August 2020,<sup>91</sup> the author said that such accusations were not made lightly, but were based partly on his extensive experience and knowledge of the region, but particularly the recent work by a number of investigative journalists, notably Nathalie Prevost<sup>92</sup> and a number of NGOs.<sup>93</sup>

However, at that time (2020), the data on the number of army killings was not clear. That was because several media reports referred to only two sets of data: the 99 deaths in Mali documented in the UN Minusma report and the 102 deaths recorded in Niger between 27 March and 2 April in the so-called 'blue list'. In fact, both Niger's Human Rights Commission and Nathalie Prevost's enquiry recorded at least a further 67 such deaths in Niger alone, while the number of people executed by the armed forces of the three countries (Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali) during the three months of February-April, as recorded by ACLED, was some 450. If the 26 fatalities recorded by ACLED in January were included, as well as several dozen during May and early June, the total number of recorded army executions since the beginning of 2020 was around 500.

## Army killings of civilians in Mali (prior to August 2020)

In the two or three years prior to Mali's coup d'état of August 2020, there were an increasing number of reports of the FAMa's involvement in the massacre and summary execution of civilians.<sup>94</sup> In both 2018 and 2019, the FAMa were responsible for several killings in the centre of the country, mainly directed

<sup>88</sup> See, for example, the Le Monde article based on the work of HRW's Corrine Dufka: Sahel: "Atrocities committed by the military encourage recruitment by armed groups", Le Monde 29.06.20. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/06/29/sahel-les-atrocites-commises-par-des-militaires-favorisent-le-recrutement-par-les-groupes-armes\\_6044601\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/06/29/sahel-les-atrocites-commises-par-des-militaires-favorisent-le-recrutement-par-les-groupes-armes_6044601_3212.html)

<sup>89</sup> The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is a disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping project. ACLED collects the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and modalities of all reported political violence and protest events across most of the world. <https://acleddata.com/about-acledd/>

<sup>90</sup> "State Atrocities in the Sahel: the Impetus for counterinsurgency results is fuelling government attacks on Civilians." ACLED 2020, (Note. This data is read visually from a graph and may therefore contain an estimated error of about 1-2%). <https://acleddata.com/2020/05/20/state-atrocities-in-the-sahel-the-impetus-for-counter-insurgency-results-is-fueling-government-attacks-on-civilians/>

<sup>91</sup> Keenan, Jeremy 2020. Armies out of Control. Special Report on COVID-19 and State Crime in the Sahel. International State Crime Initiative (ISCI), School of Law, Queen Mary University of London. <http://statecrime.org/covid19andthesahel/>

<sup>92</sup> "Niger, cent-deux civils massacrés puis ensevelis dans des fosses communes" Une enquête de Nathalie Prevost). Mondafrigue 23 Avril 2020. <https://mondafrigue.com/niger-cent-deux-hommes-massacres-puis-ensevelis-dans-des-fosses/#:~:text=Niger%20cent%20deux%20civils%20massacr%C3%A9s%20puis%20ensevelis%20dans%20des%20fosses%20communes.,By&text=Cent%20deux%20noms%20soigneusement%20%C3%A9crits,agent%20d%C3%A9tat%C2%80d%C3%A9s%20Bellas%20comme%20on%20les,Quatorze%20%C3%A9taient%20Peuls.>

<sup>93</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW); Amnesty International (AI); La Commission nationale des droits de l'Homme et des Libertés Fondamentales (CNDHLF); the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (Minusma).

<sup>94</sup> See Corrine Dufka (HRW), Le Monde 29.06.20. Op. cit.

against the Peul. During the first months of 2020, the FAMa once again resorted to the strategy of terrorising the local populations, especially since JNIM's attack on the gendarmerie in Sokolo on 26 January 2020, in which 20 gendarmes were killed.

MINUSMA documented during January-March 2020: 101 extrajudicial killings, 32 cases of enforced disappearances, 32 cases of torture and inhuman treatment by the Malian security and defence forces.<sup>95</sup> On 10 June 2020, Amnesty International published a report on many of those extrajudicial executions or unlawful killings and enforced disappearances that it investigated and documented between February 2020 and April 2020.<sup>96</sup>

On 30 January, four days after the Sokolo attack, the Malian authorities launched a new military operation called 'Maliko'. Malian soldiers began their push through Niono on 3 February, starting at the village of Kogoni-Peulh in the commune of Sokolo. One of the witnesses reported: "When the soldiers arrived, they started shooting. Many villagers fled, those close to the mosque sounded the alarm and many others fled to the bush, outside of the village. The herder [who was shot and killed by the soldiers] was among the second group, but he was not able to reach the bush. I was also among those who fled, was able to escape but not him". Another informant corroborating this testimony said that the herder was killed while he was driving his cattle, in an attempt to flee from the soldiers.<sup>97</sup>

During the following days, the soldiers continued their push through the local villages, launching large-scale operations in the communes of Diabaly and Dogofry, in the Ségou region. Amnesty International was able to confirm at least 23 cases of extrajudicial executions or other unlawful killings and 27 arbitrary arrests followed by enforced disappearances at the hands of the Malian army in the communes of Diabali and Dogofry, between 3 February and 11 March 2020.

The bloodiest intervention was probably in the village of Belidanedji on 16 February 2020. One resident, Moussa, described how the Malian soldiers arrived around 11:30 am in 15 vehicles. He said: "They surrounded the village and started shooting everything that was moving. We immediately fled to hide in the bush. Then they went to the place of a baptism, they took four men and killed them on the spot. Then they looted the store where the farmers store their grain. They left around 5 pm." Moussa said that 19 were killed, all men of the village, all Peul except one Bambara.<sup>98</sup>

In the following weeks, images posted on Facebook raised many questions about the FAMa's methods. They show armed and bloody men on the ground,

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<sup>95</sup> MINUSMA, 'Note sur les tendances des violations et abus de droits de l'homme (1er janvier-31 mars 2020)', Division des droits de l'homme et de la protection, Avril 2020, para 21, page 6.

<sup>96</sup> Amnesty International. "They Executed some and brought the rest with them: Civilian Lives at Risk in the Sahel". 10 June 2020. All the incidents documented occurred in the communes of Diabaly and Dogofry, in the cercle of Niono, in the region of Ségou [https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2020/06/20200528\\_Briefing-Sahel.pdf?x28174](https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2020/06/20200528_Briefing-Sahel.pdf?x28174)

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. pp.6-7

<sup>98</sup> Rémy Carayol, "Au Sahel, les massacres s'amplifient malgré le COVID-19." Orient XXI. 28 Avril 2020. <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/au-sahel-les-massacres-s-amplifient-malgre-le-COVID-19,3830>

presented as some of the seven jihadist fighters who were allegedly killed by the National Guard on 12 April in Sambéré, in the Mopti region of central Mali. But several details suggest that it was in fact an execution of simple herdsman. The men were slaughtered with their hands tied. The weapon, a Kalashnikov presented as proof of their guilt, was the same on each of the bodies photographed individually (it was easily recognizable by its red stock). A human rights organisation in Bamako said that everything about the killings suggested that they were staged.<sup>99</sup>

On 5 June (2020), the village of Binedama in the Mopti region was attacked by men dressed in army uniforms. Between 26 and 29 civilians, including the village chief and women and children were shot dead and the village burned down. According to the Tabital Pulaaku, the civil society organisation that represented Peuls in Mali, the village was surrounded by armed men who came in about 40 vehicles. Although the individuals had not been identified, local officials confirmed that the attackers were dressed in Malian army uniforms. Contacted by Agence France Press (AFP), the Minister of Defense, General Ibrahima Dahirou Dembélé, said he could not confirm or deny anything at this stage, but that a fact-finding mission was being sent to the area.

## FAMa's abuse of civilians worsens after the arrival of Wagner?

A key question is whether the FAMa's abuse of Mali's civilians, notably the sort of extrajudicial killings outlined above, got better or worse after the arrival of the Wagner group in Mali in late 2021. This question presents Mali's military junta with an awkward dilemma. This is because the junta has continued to insist, over the course of almost three years, that the Russian mercenaries are simply 'military trainers'. Their job, according to the junta, has been to 'train the FAMa'.

In fact, as most Africanists know, the Wagner group had already established a reputation for extreme brutality in those parts of Africa, notably the Central African Republic (CAR), where it had been operating.

Greg Mills and Ray Hartley, the authors of a recent article on the Sahel, quote the Cambridge Scholar Christopher Clapham, a professor of politics and international relations at Cambridge and the recently retired editor of *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. Mills & Hartley wrote:

*Ultimately, Moscow will find itself in the same mess that the French (and everyone else) routinely does. It is plunging into a part of the world of which it knows nothing, in which its main advantage, if such you can call it, notes the Cambridge scholar Christopher Clapham, "is that they can be as brutal*

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

*as they like".<sup>100</sup>*

In Mali, the Russian Wagner group soldiers have not only been “as brutal as they like,” (to quote Christopher Clapham) but appear to have ‘trained’ the already ‘out of control’ FAMa to behave in the same way. In addition to the evidence provided in the above-cited Kal Akal reports, there are two other lines of evidence which attest to the increased brutality of the FAMa since they were ‘trained’ by the Russians. The first is in inflicting rape and other forms of sexual violence on the local populations, notably by raping women and young girls as a form of ‘due’ for allowing them to flee the country. The second is in cannibalising their victims.

## **Rape as an act of genocide and as an ‘exit visa’**

### **Under certain circumstances, sexual violence can be categorized as a crime of torture or an act of genocide**

The Rome Statute<sup>101</sup> classifies rape and other forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity and war crimes, depending on the context in which the crimes are committed. Under certain circumstances, sexual violence can be categorized as a crime of torture or an act of genocide.<sup>102</sup>

### **Since the arrival of the Wagner group in 2021, reports suggest strongly that the prevalence of rape or other forms of sexual violence have increased.**

There is no detailed record of rapes committed in Mali, largely because most go unreported. Prior to the emergence of the extremist Islamist armed groups of JNIM and EIGS in Mali from around 2012 onwards, rapes in Mali, especially as a ‘weapon of war’ or ‘aggression’ appear to have been rare. Since 2012, the

<sup>100</sup> Greg Mills & Ray Hartley, “Outside world can help turn the Sahel away from its disastrous path”. Daily Maverick. 18 August 2024. Accessed at: [https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-08-18-outside-world-can-help-turn-the-sahel-away-from-its-disastrous-path/?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=first\\_things&mle=MEdjczVNYUpZefBuZmN-2SkdvQUJXSUNDNTM0Z3IxaHhvauVsTGozaGdzWG5EalhNWDDGRnllR1h5ekZDMHprWmt2Z1BKeThxOERLVE1nSIB-SOU1wTjQ4NVTemJzaDNqVUN0VVFwNTJWc24rMkM0a0ZjakRzSTRLbUNMVWxBRWpQMWNKaEEvbmhOanpwczF-6NlpSRUx3PT0%3D](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-08-18-outside-world-can-help-turn-the-sahel-away-from-its-disastrous-path/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=first_things&mle=MEdjczVNYUpZefBuZmN-2SkdvQUJXSUNDNTM0Z3IxaHhvauVsTGozaGdzWG5EalhNWDDGRnllR1h5ekZDMHprWmt2Z1BKeThxOERLVE1nSIB-SOU1wTjQ4NVTemJzaDNqVUN0VVFwNTJWc24rMkM0a0ZjakRzSTRLbUNMVWxBRWpQMWNKaEEvbmhOanpwczF-6NlpSRUx3PT0%3D)

<sup>101</sup> The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is the treaty that established the International Criminal Court. It was adopted on 17 July 1998, and it entered into force on 1 July 2002. As of February 2024, 124 states were party to the statute. They include Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, but exclude Russia, Algeria and the USA. Crimes with the Jurisdiction of the Court include: genocide (Art. 5); Crimes against Humanity (Art. 7); War crimes (Art 8); and Crimes of aggression (Art. B bis). Accessed at: [www.rome-statute.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf](http://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/)

<sup>102</sup> Caroline Kapp. “The Devastating Use of Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War”, Think Global Health. 1 November 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/devastating-use-sexual-violence-weapon-war>

number of rapes, according to reports by various human rights organisations,<sup>103</sup> appears to have increased, more or less annually. Most of these rapes appear to have been committed by the Islamist armed groups, with the EIGS probably exceeding JNIM in the number of violations. However, as the violence in Mali increased, almost progressively from 2012 to the present, the limited number of reports on the region give a strong impression of the increasing involvement of FAMa personnel in the perpetration of rapes against civilians. Since the arrival of the Wagner group in 2021, reports suggest strongly that the prevalence of rape or other forms of sexual violence have increased.

For example, In January 2023, UN experts (Appendix 6) said that since 2021 they had received persistent and alarming accounts of human rights abuses that include rape and sexual violence perpetrated by Malian armed forces and Russian paramilitaries, adding that “victims of the so-called Wagner Group face many challenges in accessing justice and remedy for the human rights abuses, including sexual violence, and related crimes committed against them, particularly in light of the secrecy and opacity surrounding Wagner’s activities in Mali”.<sup>104</sup>

The first documented evidence of the systematic use of rape as a ‘weapon of terror’ and perhaps other motives (punishment, pleasure – for the soldiers, etc) against Mali’s civilian population by the Malian army and its Russian ‘trainers’ (the Wagner group), was at the village of Moura in March 2022 (Appendix 2), when FAMa-Wagner forces, under the direction of the Russian mercenaries, massacred over 500 civilians. A key passage of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (OHCHR’s) report on the Mauro massacre (see Appendix 2) read:

*At least 58 women and girls were raped or subjected to other forms of sexual violence. In one shocking instance, soldiers reportedly brought bedding from a house, placed it under trees in the garden, and took turns raping women they had forced there.*

The Moura massacre and rapes were not unconnected to events in Russia’s Ukraine war. The rapes in Moura were conducted under the direction of the Wagner mercenaries not merely for the ‘pleasures’ of the soldiers concerned, but as a systematic ‘weapon of war’ and especially to terrorise civilian populations, which is clearly part of Russia’s military playbook, whether in Ukraine under the Kremlin’s direction, or in Africa, where Russia, at least prior to Prigozhin’s ‘death’ on 23 August 2023, used the Wagner group as a means of trying to deny accountability.

The rapes in Mauro began on 27 March 2022. Those by Russian troops in Ukraine, according to the UN’s investigation, began on 27 February 2022,

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103 Note 45.

104 “Mali: UN experts call for independent investigation into possible international crimes committed by Government forces and ‘Wagner group’.” United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 31. January 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/01/mali-un-experts-call-independent-investigation-possible-international-crimes>

precisely one-month earlier.<sup>105</sup> This suggests strongly that the Russian mercenaries in Mali were taking their cue from the violations being committed by the Russian troops in Ukraine.

**“When women are held for days and raped, when you start to rape little boys and men, when you see a series of genital mutilations, when you hear women testify about Russian soldiers equipped with Viagra, it’s clearly a military strategy. [...] When the victims report what was said during the rapes, it is clearly a deliberate tactic to dehumanise the victims.”**

Pramila Patten,<sup>106</sup> the UN special representative on sexual violence, was reported as saying: “Rape and sexual assault attributed to Moscow’s forces in Ukraine are part of a Russian military strategy” and a “deliberate tactic to dehumanise the victims.” When asked if Russia was using rape as a weapon of war in Ukraine, Patten replied: “All the indications are there [...] When women are held for days and raped, when you start to rape little boys and men, when you see a series of genital mutilations, when you hear women testify about Russian soldiers equipped with Viagra, it’s clearly a military strategy. [...] When the victims report what was said during the rapes, it is clearly a deliberate tactic to dehumanise the victims.”<sup>107</sup>

Since the beginning of the Ukraine war (during the period February to late March 2022) the UN verified more than a hundred cases of rape or sexual assault. The first cases were reported just three days after the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February (2022). The cases reported by the UN were only the tip of the iceberg. Pramila Patten added: “It’s very difficult to have reliable statistics during an active conflict, and the numbers will never reflect reality, because sexual violence is a silent crime that is largely underreported.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> UN General Assembly, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. Doc. Ref. A/77/533. Published 18 October 2022. Accessed at: <http://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/><https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/637/72/pdf/n2263772.pdf>

<sup>106</sup> Primila Patten’s statements were made in an interview she gave to Agence France Press (AFP). See: “Rape used in Ukraine as a Russian ‘military strategy’: UN.” AFP, Paris, 14.10.2022. Accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20221014-rape-used-in-ukraine-as-a-russian-military-strategy-un>

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

## Since the departure of the last French troops from Mali in August 2022 and the departure of the MINUSMA about a year later, the perpetration of rapes by both the EIGS and the Wagner-FAMa duo appear to have increased at an almost exponential rate.

Since the departure of the last French troops from Mali in August 2022 and the departure of the UN Peacekeeping force (MINUSMA) about a year later, the perpetration of rapes by both the EIGS and the Wagner-FAMa duo appear to have increased at an almost exponential rate.

With the departure of the French and UN forces and the junta's effective closure of Mali to the outside world, human rights organisations and journalists have been increasingly denied access to Mali. The result is that the responsibility for recording rapes and the many other 'war crimes' and 'crimes against humanity' being perpetrated by the Wagner-FAMa forces has fallen largely to local civil society organisations such as Kel Akal, whose reports have inevitably been restricted and are therefore incomplete. Kel Akal's reports are possibly the tip of a very large iceberg.

With Azawad having become increasingly inaccessible to the outside world after the departure of the UN peacekeepers, the report by Philip Obaji Jr, published by Al Jazeera in August 2024, is therefore of inestimable value and importance.<sup>109</sup>

Obaji's report was filed from Ayourou, a town in Niger, on the Niger River, some 50 kms south of the border with Mali, where he was able to interview, in a shelter where the women had sought sanctuary, a number of teenage girls and older women who had fled the violence of Mali. They gave Obaji detailed accounts of their experiences of the violence being committed not just by the Islamist armed groups (notably the EIGS) but the "white soldiers", by whom they meant Russians, and the Malian army who "attacked homes, killing people and torturing and sexually abusing villagers."

Obaji documented the testimonies of girls and women who had succeeded in fleeing Mali (see Appendix 7). To reach the safety of Niger, women had to suffer the torture of being forced into a small tent where the soldiers manning the border post took turns in raping them. If they were travelling in the company of males, such as brothers, fathers or perhaps just friends and neighbours, the men were held on the ground at gunpoint, after being robbed of their money, with the threat of being shot if they tried to resist and intervene.

<sup>109</sup> Philip Obaji Jr. "They rape us before we can cross": Women, girls fleeing violence in Mali." Al Jazeera, 10 August 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/8/10/they-rape-us-before-we-can-cross-women-girls-fleeing-violence-in-mali> See also, Philip Obaji Jr. "Why Putin's Private Army Ordered Soldiers to Torture Me." The Daily Beast, 05 July 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-putins-private-army-ordered-soldiers-to-torture-me?ref=author>

## Cannibalism in Mali

On 16 July 2024, a very distressing video of cannibalism in Mali began circulating on the international media. The video shows a soldier, wearing FAMa military clothing clearly displaying the insignia of the FAMa, disembowelling a human corpse with a machete and announcing in the Bambara language (spoken in Mali) that he is going to eat its liver. The other uniformed men surrounding him, apparently his unit, respond by laughing and expressing a desire to “share his breakfast”. One even asks for the victim’s heart. The victim in the video has not been identified with certainty. Radio France International (RFI) said it believed the video may have been recorded in Sokolo in south-central Mali in June 2022, or the village of Moudiah near Mauritania in May 2023.<sup>110</sup> Azawadi sources believe the victim was a Peul who had been killed by the FAMa-Wagner forces in the Léré region in 2023.

The FAMa high command, which claims to be investigating the incident, said that it was a “one-off” incident. However, that is clearly not the case, as in the following week at least three other recent videos of cannibalism being perpetrated by the FAMa-Wagner forces emerged. These are still being investigated by local Azawadi sources. Provisional information, which still awaits verification, are that one victim is a Fulani (Peul), another is a Tuareg executed in Léré on 4 July (2024), while the third victim is still not identified although the perpetrators are identified as Dozo (Bambara) militia affiliated to the FAMa. Unverified reports suggest there may have been several more such incidents.

The key questions surrounding these distressing videos are whether they reflect some sort of occult practice rooted in Malian culture, or whether they are a product of the violence that has enveloped Mali increasingly since 2012 and especially since the military junta seized power.

Given the lack of any reliable statistical or other data on the practice of cannibalism in Mali, neither of these questions can be answered with any certainty. However, two lines of inquiry await investigation: one relates to possible occult links to the Dozo; the other relates to the influence of the Wagner group.

Several, journalists have commented on how the video that came to light on 16 July (2024) is reminiscent of a previous scandal in 2019 involving traditional Dozo hunters,<sup>111</sup> who have often faced allegations of macabre ritual practices. The 2019 scandal, which shocked Mali, involved a video showing traditional Dozo hunters cutting out the liver of a corpse to offer it to their leader.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Army News. 23 July 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.overtdefense.com/2024/07/23/more-videos-of-malian-pro-government-forces-engaging-in-cannibalism-appear/>

<sup>111</sup> The Dozo are not an ethnic group, but a co-fraternity of traditional hunters in northern Côte d’Ivoire, southeast Mali and Burkina Faso, drawn mostly from Mandé-speaking groups such as the Bambara, the dominant group in Mali, but also Dyula-speaking communities, such as the Dogon people of Mali, around Bandiagara and northern Burkina Faso.

<sup>112</sup> Fatshimetre, “Alleged cannibalism in the Malian army: Light on a shocking practice”. The Citizens Blog. 17.07.24. Accessed at: [https://eng.fatshimetre.org/2024/07/17/alleged-cannibalism-in-the-malian-army-light-on-a-shocking-practice/#google\\_vignette](https://eng.fatshimetre.org/2024/07/17/alleged-cannibalism-in-the-malian-army-light-on-a-shocking-practice/#google_vignette); “Horrible Video sparks outrage – Malian Soldiers Accused of Cannibalism.” Gambia Journal (Bamako), 17.07.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.gambiah.com/horrible-video-sparks-outrage-malian-soldiers-accused-of-cannibalism/>; Bianca Bridger, “Video Surfaces of ‘Cannibal’ Malian Army Member”. Atlas News, 17 July 2024. Accessed at: <https://theatlansnews.co/latest/2024/07/17/video-surfaces-of-cannibal-malian-army-member/>

The suggestion made by some journalists is that the FAMa soldiers' practice and participation in genocide may have been influenced by the FAMa's proximity to Mali's traditional Dozo hunters, who, especially in the last decade, have frequently acted as proxies of the army in the fight against JNIM and other armed groups.

The second line of inquiry is whether this apparent increase in cannibalism is linked, like the apparent increase of rape as a systematic 'weapon of war', especially to terrorise civilian populations, to the arrival of the Wagner group in Mali in late 2021, and especially in Azawad since the French and MINUSMA forces withdrew.

At the moment, this line of enquiry is tenuous and based on purely circumstantial evidence, namely that there is well-documented evidence of the Wagner group having recruited convicted cannibals from Russian prisons (See Appendix 8). While it is known that some of these cannibals, and we may not be talking about more than a handful, have been sent to the Ukraine front, no evidence has yet emerged of Russian Wagner group soldiers practicing cannibalism in Ukraine. Nor has any evidence yet emerged of convicted cannibals being sent to join the Wagner forces in Mali. However, what is worrying is that those cannibals recruited by Wagner might well request to be sent to Africa rather than Ukraine in the knowledge that in Africa, especially Mali, they can act with complete impunity.

NOTE. The recent cases of cannibalism in Mali, that is those that came to light in July 2024, although possibly perpetrated earlier, appear to have been committed after the death (suspected assassination) of Yevgeny Prigozhin in August 2023. This means that Russia's President Vladimir Putin is directly accountable for any acts of cannibalism and/or associated crimes committed by Russian 'Wagner group' (or 'Africa Corps' as it now calls itself) in Mali. (See Appendix 8).

# 06

# Genocide: Proof of Intent

**A crucial component for an act to be classified as genocide is ‘intent’. It is essential to show that the perpetrator(s) of a genocide, in this case Mali’s military junta and its Russian Wagner allies, had a deliberate and specific aim (dolus specialis) to physically destroy a group, in this case the Tuareg of northern Mali – Azawad, based on the group’s real or perceived nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion. This Chapter presents such proof of intent.**

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In the case of the events in the Kidal and wider Azawad regions in 2023-24, there are at least two bodies of evidence that prove ‘intent’. One of these is Mali’s “Tuareg First” policy; the second is the FAMa/Wagner duo’s killing of Tuareg, even though the Tuareg killed were not separatists but supporters of the ruling military junta and the FAMa.

## Mali's "Tuareg first" policy

There is a long history of antagonism and conflict between Mali's Tuareg population and the Malian government in Bamako, with tension going back to the time of the Malian Tuareg's first rebellion just after independence in 1962.

France's short-lived OCRS<sup>113</sup> policy of 1957-1963 led many in the sparsely populated and ethnically distinct north of Mali, along with some in southern Algeria and northern Niger, to expect an independent Tuareg-Berber-Arab nation to be formed in this part of the Sahara when French colonialism ended. This, combined with dissatisfaction over the new government in Bamako, led some Tuareg in northern Mali to rebel in 1962.

The first Tuareg attacks began in northern Mali in early 1962 with small, hit-and-run raids against government targets. The attacks escalated in size and destructiveness through 1963. The rebellion, which probably numbered no more than 1,500 combatants equipped mainly with unsophisticated and rather old small arms, did not reflect a united leadership and was brutally crushed in 1964 by Mali's Soviet-equipped army. Dozens, possibly hundreds, of Tuareg nomads were killed as Malian warplanes bombed and strafed Tuareg nomadic camps. Bamako then placed the Tuareg-populated northern regions under a repressive military administration. Many of Mali's Tuareg fled as refugees to neighbouring countries. While the government had succeeded in ending the rebellion, its coercive measures alienated many Tuaregs who had not supported the insurgents. Atrocities and human rights abuses on both sides contributed to a climate of fear and distrust in the north. While the government subsequently announced several programmes to improve local infrastructure and economic opportunity, it lacked the resources to follow through on most of them. As a result, Tuareg grievances remained largely unaddressed, and a seething resentment continued in many Tuareg communities.

A further Tuareg uprising began in 1990 when Tuareg separatists attacked government buildings around Gao. Malian army reprisals led to a full-blown rebellion, which continued intermittently until 1995, invariably with heavy and brutal Malian army reprisals. A ceremonial burning of weapons in Timbuktu in 1996 brought a symbolic end to the conflict.

The Tuareg rebellions of this millennium have followed very different patterns in that they have been a product of America's global war on terror (officially 'terrorism') (GWOT). For reasons explained in detail in Keenan (2013)<sup>114</sup>, the US, with the complicity of Algeria's secret intelligence services – the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS) – launched a 'second front' in the GWOT in the Sahara-Sahel for highly duplicitous reasons, in which most of the supposed terrorist incidents were 'false-flag' operations

<sup>113</sup> The Organisation Commune des Régions sahariennes (OCRS) was a territorial community created by France in the Sahara in 1957 and which existed until 1963. It was established by the law of January 10, 1957, and its goal was "the development, economic expansion and social promotion of the Saharan zones of the French Republic." On October 30, 1957, a petition signed by 300 local chiefs and submitted to the French authorities by the cadi of Timbuktu, Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Cheikh, requested that the Tuaregs and Moors of Azawad, northern Mali, not be part of the West African independence process.

<sup>114</sup> Keenan, Jeremy (2013). *The Dying Sahara: US Imperialism and Terror in Africa*. London, Pluto. p. 326.

carried out by the DRS. With the exception of a few cases of ‘terrorism’ that lingered on in northern Algeria after Algeria’s civil war (the ‘Dirty War’) of the 1990s, almost every case of reported ‘terrorism’ in the Sahara-Sahel from 2003 until the start of the ‘Sahel War’ in 2012-2013 either did not happen or was a fabricated ‘false-flag’ operation undertaken by the DRS on behalf of the US, and increasingly, from about 2010 onwards, without the US’s knowledge.

The problem for the US was how to justify taking the GWOT into the Sahel when there was no terrorism there. The answer was to fabricate it. As Keenan documented in detail,<sup>115</sup> the broad strategy in Algeria, Mali and Niger was for the regimes to provoke unrest, which could then be explained as ‘terrorism’.

In Mali and Niger, this involved the two regimes provoking the Tuareg into taking up arms, which could then be explained to the Americans as ‘terrorism’. The first such attempt to provoke Tuareg militancy in Niger in 2004, did not last long, thanks to the intervention of Libya’s Colonel Mouamar Gadhafi.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, a ‘fabricated’ Tuareg rebellion in Kidal in May 2006 lasted little more than a day, although with profound consequences.<sup>117</sup>

As explained in Chapter 1, more long-lasting rebellions in Mali and Niger, both provoked by the actions of their respective governments, began in 2007. In Niger, the rebellion continued until 2010; in Mali it continued through various phases until culminating in the Malian crisis of 2012 and the start of France’s military intervention in January 2013.<sup>118</sup>

Both the Niger and Mali governments, especially Mali’s, presented these Tuareg rebellions, which they had deliberately provoked, as ‘terrorism’, with the Malian government especially presenting the Tuareg to the Americans as ‘terrorists’.

The obvious question is: if the Americans were waging a GWOT, especially in the Sahara-Sahel, why did they ignore the alleged ‘terrorism’ of Mali’s Tuareg population? The answer to this highly pertinent question is found in what the author has called the ‘Bamako cables’ that were leaked by Wikileaks in 2010.

The ‘Bamako cables’, which are detailed in Appendix 9, provide overwhelming evidence that the Mali government had prioritised what it called the ‘Tuareg problem’ and with wanting to rid Mali of this ‘problem’ before assisting the Americans in ridding the region of Al Qaeda terrorism, whether real or fabricated.

Our awareness of the ‘Bamako cables’ owes much to the work of Pablo de Orellana (2016)<sup>119</sup> who was able to access nearly 1,000 communications

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Keenan, op. cit. p. 38-41.

<sup>117</sup> Keenan, op. cit. p. 64-73.

<sup>118</sup> Keenan, op. cit. p. 74 et passim.

<sup>119</sup> de Orellana, Pablo. 2016. “When diplomacy identifies terrorists: Subjects, identity and agency in the War On Terror in Mali”. In The Palgrave Handbook of Counterterrorism Policy, edited by Romaniuk, S. N., Grice, F., Irrera, D., and Webb, S., 1021-56, London: Palgrave Macmillan; de Orellana, Pablo. 2017. “‘You Can Count On Us’: When Malian Diplomacy Stratcommed Uncle Sam.” Defence Strategic Communications. 3: 103-37.

between the US embassy in Bamako and the U.S. State Department between 2006 and 2010, which were leaked via Wikileaks in 2010.

The essence of the 'Bamako Cables' is that they contained highly detailed and accurate assessments of the local situation pertaining to the Tuareg in northern Mali, as well as key recommendations by the diplomatic staff in America's Embassy in Bamako regarding Mali's treatment of the Tuareg, all of which were ultimately ignored or deemed irrelevant to the GWOT by higher powers in Washington.

**The 'Bamako cables' provide strong evidence that the Mali government, having provoked the Tuareg into taking up arms, thereby legitimising military action against them, prioritised the objective of ridding the country of the 'Tuareg problem', by which was meant the presence of the Tuareg in northern Mali, before dealing with AQIM. For the Americans, the Mali government's policy was known as the "Tuareg first, then AQIM".**

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The same is true today, in that although the Wagner group was contracted initially by Mali's junta to replace the French forces in fighting and ridding the country of terrorists, namely JNIM and the EIGS, the FAMa/Wagner duo has prioritised its attacks on ridding the country of its so-called 'Tuareg problem' while almost ignoring the real terrorist threats posed by JNIM and EIGS, which have increased since the arrival of the Wagner group. The net result of this policy is that Mali is in the process of being ethnically cleansed of its indigenous Tuaregs, either by forcing them to flee the country or by subjecting them to the genocidal practices of the FAMa/Wagner murderers.

Finally, it should be noted that successive Bamako governments, headed by President Amadou Toumani Touré (2002-2012), President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (2013-2020), and the military junta led by Col. Assimi Goïta (2020 - ), all showed 'bad faith' towards the Tuareg peoples by never attempting seriously to adopt the recommendations of the 2006 Algiers Accords for the Restoration of Peace, Security, and Development in the Kidal Region or the 2015 Algiers Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

*(For details of the Bamako cables, see Appendix 9).*

## Prioritising the killing of Tuareg

It is clear from the Kel Akal reports, witness statements and other evidence that the FAMa-Wagner campaign in northern Mali - Azawad - has not been targeted exclusively against the Tuareg. Other 'Azawadis' - residents of Azawad - of other ethnic groups, notably Peuls and Arabs, have also been targeted. However, persons of other ethnic groups appear to have been massacred or executed either:

- because they lived in the same communities as Tuareg, or
- were deemed to be associated with Tuareg in one way or another, or, more likely
- because they were mistaken for Tuareg.

At the same time, one gets a strong impression from Kal Akal and witness statements that the Wagner-FAMa duo is regarding all Azawadis as 'fair game' in their committing of abuses – executions, decapitations, torture, rape, looting, etc. – in what appears to be a 'pleasurable' pursuit.

However, in the perpetration of these atrocities, there is a pattern that suggests that 'Tuareg', simply because they are Tuareg, or appear to look like Tuareg (often because of headdress), or are associated with Tuareg through work or occupation, are being prioritised.

This suggests that the genocide being perpetrated by the FAMa-Wagner duo, because of the latter's ignorance and lack of knowledge of the complex ethno-socio-linguistic-political composition of Azawad, is as much against the entire civilian population as against the Tuareg as a distinct ethnic group. In other words, nomadic camps, communities and settlements are being attacked and massacred, simply because they are predominantly 'Tuareg settlements', such as Aguelhok, Tessalit, Abeibeira, Tassik, Anéfis, Amassine, Takalote and many others, irrespective of the fact that they may contain members of other ethnic groups such as Arabs and Peuls.

Proof of the fact that the perpetration of the genocide is being prioritised against the Tuareg, qua 'Tuaregness' / Tuareg culture, has been clearly demonstrated in several massacres, notably at the settlements of Tassik and Amassine on 16 and 19 May 2024 respectively, at Takalote<sup>120</sup> on 9 July 2024, and no doubt at other places which have not yet come to light.

The massacres at Tassik, and Amassine Takalote, and no doubt several others that have not yet been reported, are particularly important in that they provide firm evidence that the FAMa-Wagner duo were intent on killing Tuareg, even

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<sup>120</sup> David Baché, "Mali: Abuses by the Army and Wagner in Takalote, in the Kidal Region". 11 July 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240711-mali-exactions-de-l-arm%C3%A9e-et-de-wagner-%C3%A0-takalote-dans-la-r%C3%A9gion-de-kidal>

if, as in these three cases (and almost certainly others), the Tuareg concerned belonged to the Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (GATIA),<sup>121</sup> which was supportive of the government and whose men effectively constituted an auxiliary force of the FAMa.

The number of people killed in the Tassik and Amassine massacres was initially put at 11 and 19 respectively. (See Appendix 5). However, these have subsequently been updated by Kal Akal to 12 at Tassik, with at least two missing, and 30 at Amassine. At Takalote, at least eight were massacred, although a higher final toll is expected as the count of victims and missing persons was not finished.

However, the significance of these three massacres, as well as several others, is that although the victims were Tuareg, many are believed to have belonged to the Daoussahak and Chamanamas Tuareg tribes who live mostly in the Ménaka region but who also have settlements in southeastern Kidal region and parts of Gao region.

The Daoussahak and Chamanamas, as members of the GATIA, have vacillated over recent years in their support between the FAMa and the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA), or the CSP-PSD, as it has called itself latterly. The GATIA has long been a supporter of the Mali government and its army, to the extent that Mali's military junta had immediately appointed the GATIA's leader, General El Hajj (Hadj) ag Gamou, as governor of Kidal after its recapture by the FAMa-Wagner forces in November 2023.

On 4 November 2023, Moussa ag Acharatoumane, leader of the Daoussahak Tuareg and the leader of the Mouvement pour Le Salut de l'Azawad (MSA), which was aligned with the CSP-PSD, left the CSP-PSD when fighting broke out between the FAMa and the CSP-PSD around August-September 2023.<sup>122</sup>

Moussa explained that the threat posed by the jihadists of the EIGS in the Ménaka region was far greater than that posed by the FAMa and the Wagner group, and that it was unfortunate that his brothers in the CSP-PSD thought otherwise. Rather, he said, they should ally their forces with those of the government's defence and security forces in combating the jihadist threat. Having denounced the junta and its FAMa for more than a year for their inaction against the EIGS, Moussa was now asserting that the MSA's collaboration with the FAMa was working well, and that the CSP-PSD should follow suite.

Also in early November (2023), Zeidan ag Sidalamine, the chief of the prominent Chamanamas tribe, which also lives mostly in the Ménaka region and was aligned with the Daoussahak Tuareg in the MSA, said that he had been warned by the Algerian authorities that any attempt to reignite

121 The GATIA's leader was the Imrad Tuareg, El Hajj Gamou, who, after the re-capture of Kidal in November 2023 was appointed by Mali's ruling junta as the governor of the Kidal region.

122 David Baché, "Les plus grandes exactions au Mali sont celles des jihadistes, selon Moussa Ag Acharatoumane (MSA)". RFI, 4 Novembre 2023. Access at: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20231104-mali-plus-grandes-exactions-au-mali-sont-celles-des-jihadistes-selon-moussa-ag-acharatoumane-msa>

the Azawad independence issue was a ‘non-starter’.<sup>123</sup> The implication of Algeria’s message was very clear: it would step in to put a stop to any Tuareg independence moves, as it had done in 2012.

This meant that the Chamanamas Tuareg, like the Daoussahak, were no longer so enthused at the idea of fighting for an independent Azawad and were aligning themselves more to Bamako’s ruling junta. This had been widely published in the local Bamako media and was therefore known to the leaders of both the junta and its FAMa.

The number of Tuareg killed at Takalote or in the surrounding area - Eferer and nearby valleys – on 9 July 2024 by soldiers of the FAMa and their Russian allies was at least eight. However, the victims at Takalote were neither jihadists from JNIM or EIGS, nor rebels from the CSP- PSD, but members of the GATIA armed group created by General Gamou, which was now fighting alongside or incorporated into the FAMa. According to local sources, the men killed at Takalote were on leave with their families.

## **Tuareg were being killed on the basis of their ethnicity, irrespective of their political and/or military affiliations.**

The killing of Chamanamas and Daoussahak Tuareg at Tassik, Amassine and Takalote is proof that the Wagner-FAMa duo were intent on killing all Tuareg, irrespective of whether they were supportive of the FAMa or the separatists, or, as in these three massacres, and perhaps several more, were members of the GATIA. In other words, Tuareg were being killed on the basis of their ethnicity, irrespective of their political and/or military affiliations.

## **A repeat of Bamako’s “Tuareg first” policy**

The Kal Akal reports show that the people of Azawad are also suffering from attacks by the Islamist armed groups of JNIM and the EIGS, the ‘real terrorists’. However, the policy of Mali’s rulers in Bamako, as during the GWOT, has once again been to adopt a “Tuareg first” policy. Mali’s ruling junta and its Russian allies are prioritising ridding Azawad of Tuareg rather than ridding the country of JNIM and the EIGS. The Kal Akal reports give countless examples of Azawadi communities suffering at the hands of JNIM and EIGS armed groups and not being protected by FAMa-Wagner troops.

However, it is difficult to quantify this assessment because of the increased muzzling of both the foreign and domestic media. However, the trickle of information (as distinct from disinformation through government propaganda) from Mali, especially from northern Mali, strongly suggests that the security

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<sup>123</sup> “Révélation du Chef Touareg Zeidan Ag Sidalamine:’ Pas D’azawad entre L’Algérie et le Mali, les Frontières Resteront In-changées’.” Bamada.net, 06/11/2023. Access at: <https://bamada.net/revelation-du-chef-touareg-zeidan-ag-sidalamine-pas-dazawad-entre-algerie-et-le-mali-les-frontieres-vesteront-inchangees>

and humanitarian situations have deteriorated rapidly since the departure of the French military forces and MINUSMA and are continuing to get worse. For example, a UN report in August 2023 on the threat posed by the EIGS warned that the armed group had doubled the territory under its control in Mali in less than a year since the withdrawal of French troops from the country in November 2022.<sup>124</sup>

For example, Timbuktu, with an estimated population in excess of 136,000)<sup>125</sup> was under siege by JNIM since around August 2023 for several months, while by August 2024, Ménaka (with a population in excess of 140,000 including some 80,000 children) had been under siege from the EIGS for at least four months.<sup>126</sup> The aid group Save the Children described the situation in Ménaka as “catastrophic, with displaced people going from house to house asking for food for their families. Children are threatened with starvation. [...] Children ... are trapped in a living nightmare. Let us be clear: unless the blockade is lifted, starvation and disease will lead to deaths.”<sup>127</sup>

## By designating the Tuareg population of Azawad as “terrorists”, Mali’s ruling junta believes it can legitimise its policies of ethnic cleaning and genocide in northern Mali in preference to defending these populations, especially in Ménaka, Gao and Timbuktu from the jihadist – “terrorist” – armed groups.

The key question is why the FAMa-Wagner duo has prioritised the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Azawad rather than concentrating their efforts on relieving the suffering of local residents at the hands of the Islamist armed groups, as was the junta’s promise when it seized power and then proceeded to throw out the French and UN forces. The answer is that it has repeated Bamako’s “Tuareg first” policy, this time even more vehemently than during the GWOT. By designating the Tuareg population of Azawad as “terrorists”, Mali’s ruling junta believes it can legitimise its policies of ethnic cleaning and genocide in northern Mali in preference to defending these populations, especially in Ménaka, Gao and Timbuktu from the jihadist – “terrorist” – armed groups. Indeed, by failing to prioritise the relief of the sieges of Timbuktu and Ménaka, the junta can be accused of colluding with the Islamist armed groups by allowing the latter to terrorise the local populations, thereby encouraging them to flee northern Mali for the refuge of Mauritania, Algeria and Niger.

124 “Islamic State group nearly doubled its Mali territory in under a year, UN says.” France 24, 26.08.2023. Accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230826-islamic-state-group-doubled-controlled-territory-in-mali-in-under-a-year-un-experts-say>

125 VOA. “Residents of northeastern Mali town trapped, blocked from humanitarian aid”. VOA 23.05.24. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/residents-of-northeastern-mali-town-trapped-blocked-from-humanitarian-aid/7596354.html>

126 “Humanitarian crisis escalates in Northeastern Mali as armed groups besiege major towns.” Africa News with AP. 13. August 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.africanews.com/2024/05/02/humanitarian-crisis-escalates-in-northeastern-mali-as-armed-groups-besiege-major-towns/>

127 Ibid.

## The Junta's bans on the media and political activity

As with all military dictatorships, which Mali has become, the regime relies on maintaining control over information, or more usually 'disinformation', and the repression of dissent and freedom of association.

Since the junta took power in 2020, it has cracked down increasingly on both foreign and domestic media, political activity and expressions of dissent. Since the initial coup in August 2020, foreign and local reporters have denounced a progressive worsening of the climate for media professionals in the country. Through 2021 and into 2022, journalist associations denounced an increase in attacks and smear campaigns against reporters, especially against representatives of French media outlets. Then, on 17 March 2022, the junta, through its 'High Authority for Communication' (HAC), announced the permanent suspension of broadcasts by France's RFI and France 24, accusing the news outlets of reporting "false allegations" that the army had killed dozens of civilians. The two channels had reported that Michelle Bachelet, head of the United Nations human rights commission, and Human Rights Watch (HRW) had said that Malian soldiers had been responsible for killing at least 71 civilians since early December.<sup>128</sup> Ironically, the ban on the two French channels came just 10 days before the FAMa and their Russian Wagner group allies massacred over 500 civilians in the village of Moura (See Appendix 2).

Since the Moura massacre (March 2022), the muzzling of foreign and local media has intensified, as the junta has been determined that neither Malians nor the outside world should know the truth of what the ruling junta and its army are doing. Almost all foreign reporters have been expelled or denied press accreditation and access to the country, while local journalists have no choice but to apply self-censorship or risk prison, or worse.

The junta's muzzling of the media is for two broad reasons:

One is so that neither local people nor the outside world can easily find out about the atrocities being committed by the FAMa and its Russian allies. In the local media, FAMa's actions in Azawad are always described as being actions against "terrorists": all inhabitants of the north, whether separatist fighters, armed Islamists or ordinary civilians are designated as "terrorists". Thus, when massacres of civilians are reported in the Bamako press, they are described as army actions against "terrorists".

For example, the FAMa and its Russian allies suffered a severe defeat in late July (2024) at the hands of Tuareg fighters near the village of Tin Zaouatene, close to the Algerian border (see Chapter 7). The FAMa had to admit that it had lost several soldiers but has never declared how many. It is generally accepted that at least 47 FAMa soldiers were killed along with 84 Russian soldiers. To

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<sup>128</sup> "UN condemns Mali's ban on French media." Al Jazeera, 29 April 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/29/un-condemns-malis-ban-on-french-media>

revenge this humiliation, the FAMa launched a series of drone-based missile attacks on the village of Tin Zaouatene. Some 50 foreign artisanal gold miners were killed at a nearby gold mine, while a series of strikes that targeted the pharmacy in Tin Zaouatene killed 30 civilians including 11 civilians. In an attempt to regain some dignity for its “out of control” army, the Direction de l’Information et des Relations Publiques (DIRPA), reported that the army had launched drone strikes on Tin Zaouatene and killed dozens of the “terrorists” associated with the earlier battle of Tin Zaouatene.<sup>129</sup>

The result of this muzzling of the media is that few people within Mali and probably fewer without are aware of the actions described in this report by the FAMa and its Russian allies, least of all the genocide being perpetrated in the wider Kidal region.

The second reason for muzzling the media is to silence expressions of dissent and democratic political freedoms. On initially seizing power, the junta promised to return Mali to civilian democratic rule within three years. However, as it has become increasingly apparent that the junta has no intention of relinquishing power, so public opposition to its rule has increased.

On 25 September 2023, the military junta announced a second postponement of the presidential elections scheduled to take place in February 2024, adding that new dates would be communicated later. This second postponement was said to be for “technical reasons”. The junta also announced legislative elections would not take place at the end of 2023, as originally planned, as legislative elections could not be held ahead of presidential elections.

The military junta had originally committed to hold elections in 2022. However, that led to the imposition of ECOWAS sanctions, which were lifted when the junta published a new electoral timetable that would see the end of the transition period of military rule on 26 March 2024.

On 25 March, the day before the originally scheduled end of the transition period, the junta banned the activities of a new political coalition, the “Synergie d’action pour le Mali”, which consisted of 30 opposition groups, including the supporters of the populist religious leader Imam Mahmoud Dicko, who was believed to be in exile in Algeria. The coalition was calling for the establishment of a civil transition. The junta accused it of “threats of disturbance to public order.” The coalition criticised the ban as a “violation of the freedom of association and expression guaranteed by the constitution.”

Six days later, on 31 March, more than 80 Malian civil society organisations and political parties came together to call for elections and the return to constitutional order and civilian rule.

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129 See Chapter 4, Kal Akal Report No.8 for August 2024.

## **On 10 April 2024, the junta suspended all political activities until further notice, allegedly for reasons of security and maintaining public order. On the following day, the junta prohibited the media from reporting on the activities of political parties and associations.**

On 10 April 2024, the junta issued a decree suspending all political activities until further notice, allegedly for reasons of security and maintaining public order.<sup>130</sup> On the following day, the junta extended its control further by prohibiting the media from reporting on the activities of political parties and associations.<sup>131 132</sup>

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130 “Mali’s junta suspends political party activities until further notice.” Reuters, 11 April 2024. Accessed at: [om/world/africa/malis-junta-suspends-political-party-activities-until-further-notice-2024-04-10/](http://om/world/africa/malis-junta-suspends-political-party-activities-until-further-notice-2024-04-10/)

131 With all political activity effectively banned, the junta held a so-called “National Dialogue”. The “Dialogue,” which coup leader Colonel Assimi Goïta insisted had been inclusive, recommended extending the transition period by two to five years and allowing Assimi Goïta, the current transitional president and head of the military junta, to run for the presidency when elections are finally held. Most of the opposition boycotted the talks, claiming the “Dialogue” was the military’s strategy to retain power.

132 On 20 June (2024) 11 of the leaders of the alliance of Mali’s political parties and civil society groups opposed to the ruling junta were arrested during a private meeting at the house of a former minister. One, a lawyer and former minister was released the following day. The other ten were charged with “conspiracy against the government” and “undermining public order.” They were expected to remain in custody until trial.



07

# The Tuareg hit back: the FAMa and Wagner humiliated

## The Battle of Tin Zaouatene

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The last two weeks of July (2024) saw the unfolding of dramatic events in the Kidal region, the consequences of which are still only beginning to unfold.

The fortnight began, as described in Chapter 4, with the circulation on local social and international media of a video showing a FAMa soldier cutting up and preparing to eat the heart, liver and other parts of a human body. This was not a 'one-off' incident as the FAMa claimed, as several other videos of cannibalism by the FAMa-Wagner forces emerged on local social networks with the Kal Akal able to identify the victims and the location of the incidents. Whether the exposure of these repugnant practices by the FAMa deepened the anger of Tuareg Azawadi fighters and emboldened them to act against these marauding forces will only become clear when it is possible to undertake a full investigation of Mali's genocide.

At the same time as these gruesome videos were circulating, a large column of Wagner-FAMa troops, presumed to have been despatched from Kidal town rampaged through the Aguelhok, In Afarak and Abeibeira sectors ransacking and looting everything they could get their hands on.<sup>133</sup>

The details of what happened in the next few days will probably not become

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133 See Kal Akal report No. 7 for July 2024 in Chapter 4.

wholly clear until it is possible to undertake a complete investigation of all that happened in northern Mali during this period. What is known is that on 22 July, this heavily armed FAMa-Wagner force overran and captured the remote settlement of In-Afarak 122 kms northwest of Tessalit and some 10 kms or less from the Algeria border. The FAMa claimed that In-Afarak was in the hands of armed rebel groups and traffickers. This may have been true but sounds more like an exaggerated claim to justify the FAMa's capture and ransacking of the settlement, which was a key point, like In Khalil a little further south, in both legal and illegal trafficking from Algeria to Mauritania. It was also a little-known but key 'informal' border-crossing point for Algerian supplies transported, usually by discrete trafficking networks, to the cities of Gao and Timbuktu further south.

After ransacking In-Afarak, the FAMa-Wagner column moved south-eastwards, keeping roughly parallel to the Algerian border before arriving in the Abeibeira region, where it ransacked several settlements, being moving into the Tin Zaouatene sector, at which point it was ambushed and virtually destroyed by Tuareg fighters.

The battle of Tin Zaouatene, as it has become known, began on 25 July and lasted for a couple of days. As the column tried to retreat towards Kidal, it ran into a second ambush, this time by JNIM fighters. In addition, a military helicopter, sent from Kidal, presumably to transport the wounded to Kidal, was reportedly shot down.

The number of killed and wounded has not been disclosed by either side. Although the FAMa has refused to admit how many of its soldiers were killed, most reports – widely circulated on global media – gave the figure as at least 47. Russian sources have been less reticent in admitting some 84 dead, including the Russian Commander (sometimes designated as 'General') Sergey Shevchenko. The Tuareg admit to having lost about seven fighters. Pictures of the battle scene reveal substantial amounts of FAMa-Wagner heavy military equipment destroyed or captured.

The Russians, possibly to explain their heavy defeat, claimed that they were overcome by a sandstorm which allowed some 1,000 Tuareg fighters to regroup. Whether there was a sandstorm has not been verified and may well be part of Russian's explanation for their heavy defeat.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the Russian claim that they were ambushed by 1,000 Tuareg fighters is almost certainly an exaggeration.

So far, despite many claims by Ukrainian and 'anti-Russian' interests that Ukraine provided assistance to the Azawadis, there is no verified evidence that Ukraine,<sup>135</sup> or any other country, including Algeria, played any part in the Battle of Tin Zaouatene.

<sup>134</sup> Sandstorms (more often 'dust-storms') are commonplace in the Sahara. Sometimes, high atmospheric dust can mask the sun for weeks on end. While high atmospheric dust content may have impeded the Russians' use of drones, both for surveillance and attack, it rarely impedes ground visibility.

<sup>135</sup> The belief that Ukraine played a part in the Battle of Tin Zaouatene has its roots in a photo published by the Kyiv Post on 29 July which appears to show Malian rebels holding a Ukrainian flag alongside their own after the battle of Tin Zaouatene. BBC Verify established that this image – widely republished around the world - dates back to a video posted on X in June, in which only the Azawad flag can be seen. The addition of the Ukrainian flag appears to have been a clever piece of digital engineering submitted to or undertaken by the Kyiv Post.

Although further details of the Battle of Tin Zaouatene will inevitably emerge over time, one thing is certain. This is that Tin Zaouatene is the largest, and only major, military setback that Russia's Wagner Group has experienced in Africa. Thus, while Russian mercenary troops such as Wagner (renamed as the Africa Corps), will always retain their reputation for barbarity, their reputation for invincibility is now shattered.<sup>136</sup>

## JNIM attacks Bamako

On Tuesday 17 September (2024), some seven weeks after the Battle of Tin Zaouatene, the JNIM, which claims to have killed about 50 soldiers (Russians and Malians) in the second ambush at Tin Zaouatene, launched a pre-dawn attack on the capital, Bamako. One group of JNIM fighters ('terrorists') attacked the Modibo Keita International Airport, another attacked the Faladié gendarmerie training college – an elite police training academy. The two sites are symbolic of the city's security.

By early afternoon, the Malian army claimed to have the situation under control. Army chief General Oumar Diarra visited the gendarmerie training college in the aftermath and told journalists the "complex attack" was now under control and fighters who infiltrated had been "neutralised".

The JNIM claimed responsibility for the attack almost immediately on the Al-Zallaqa news outlet. Later in the day, as gunfire rang out, JNIM posted several videos on social media. In one of them, a jihadist is seen setting fire to the engine of one of the Malian government planes, a Boeing 737, parked on the airport tarmac. In another, several fighters wander around the presidential pavilion, appearing to taunt the authorities. The FAMa finally regained control of the airport area early in the afternoon, and air traffic was gradually restored the next day.<sup>137</sup>

The army, as is the case with all its losses, never releases details of the death toll. The junta merely said on television on the Tuesday evening that there had been "some" deaths. The JNIM said in a statement on Wednesday that "hundreds of enemy soldiers were killed and wounded" in the attack. However, the JNIM offered no evidence to verify this claim. According to security sources in Bamako, more than 75 people were killed and over 250 injured. Some diplomatic sources put the number killed at between 50 and 75. The United Nations said in a note to staff in its Bamako office on the

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<sup>136</sup> The implications of the Tin Zaouatene defeat of Russian Wagner group forces go beyond the bounds of this report. However, initial indications, in conjunction with developments in Ukraine, suggest that Russia may redeploy some of its forces in Africa to the Ukrainian front, as seen by the withdrawal of 100 Russian troops from Burkina Faso in September. Also, as news of the humiliating Tin Zaouatene defeat and the implications of the Russian presence in African countries spreads across Africa, so many African countries may now be more inclined to look towards Beijing than Moscow. Even Mali might now begin to look beyond Moscow. For example, under an agreement signed in Beijing in early September on the sidelines of the China-Africa cooperation forum, China will provide Mali with drones, armoured vehicles, military training, and defence technologies.

<sup>137</sup> Jean-Hervé Jézéquel, "Attaque jihadiste du 17 septembre à Bamako : l'échec du tout-sécuritaire au Mali?" International Crisis Group, Dakar, Sénégal. 24.09.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/sahel/mali/attaque-jihadiste-du-17-septembre-bamako-lechec-du-tout-securitaire-au-mali>

following day that the incident demonstrated a “strong show of force”<sup>138</sup> by JNIM.

The JNIM claims that 13 of its fighters carried out the operation, but local security sources interviewed by the International Crisis Group (ICG) suggest a slightly higher number, up to twenty. In any case, as the ICG noted, a small number of individuals seem to have been enough to launch these deadly attacks. The Malian general staff did not provide details on the number of attackers, perhaps to avoid admitting that it was small, but said it had neutralised them. At midday, national television broadcast images of around 15 suspects arrested near the gendarmerie school. Unlike the jihadists who appeared in the airport videos, none of these individuals were wearing military uniform, leaving doubts about their identities and involvement.<sup>139</sup>

The material toll is also uncertain. The JNIM claims to have destroyed six military aircraft including a drone, while four others were partially disabled. The authorities deny such damage but concede that “a few installations” and equipment were damaged in both places. The images that circulated on social networks showed damage to civilian equipment, including a plane from the Malian government and another from the World Food Programme (WFP).<sup>140</sup>

Several journalists reckoned the attack was planned in advance and that its timing was symbolic, coming as it did on the 64th anniversary of the founding of Mali’s gendarmerie. It also came a few days after junta leader Assimi Goïta gave a speech marking the anniversary of Mali’s decision, together with junta-led neighbours Burkina Faso and Niger, to form a security and political alliance, in which he said his army had “considerably weakened armed terrorist groups.”

Jean-Hervé Jézéquel, the ICG’s Sahel Project Director, was quoted by Reuters as saying: “This attack is way more ambitious than the previous attacks back in the second half of the 2010s. It directly targets military objectives in Bamako. ... It seems the jihadists demonstrated capacity to hold the airport for some time, possibly multiple hours, which is a huge blow. ... Wagner’s base is located at the airport, as well as some Malian drones and war planes. ... Even if it does not ruin all the Malian army’s efforts to redeploy these last few years, it is a serious blow that stresses the absolute need for serious adjustments in the Malian counter insurgency strategy.”<sup>141</sup>

A few days later, in a more detailed report, Jean-Hervé Jézéquel said the attack lasted about nine hours and that “the assault highlighted the failures and vulnerabilities of the Malian intelligence and defence system. As a sign of the unease provoked at the highest levels, he noted that no Malian political

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138 “Mali says attack repelled in capital; Qaeda affiliate claims responsibility.” Reuters News. 17 September 2024.

139 International Crisis Group, Dakar, Sénégal. 24.09.2024. Op. cit.

140 Ibid.

141 Tiemoko Diallo, Portia Crowe and David Lewis, “Questions remain over security in Mali a day after ‘ambitious’ attack”. Reuters 18.09.24. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/questions-remain-over-security-mali-day-after-ambitious-attack-2024-09-18/>

leader made a public statement either during the evening or the day after the attack.”<sup>142</sup>

Jézéquel also reported that “security,” in anticipation of the two above-mentioned anniversary dates “had been stepped up in Bamako in recent weeks. The rumour of a possible attack in the city, as in other capitals of the Alliance des États du Sahel (AES)(Alliance of Sahel States), had indeed circulated in Sahelian security circles. The assault took place despite this state of alert, adding to the failure of the Malian security apparatus.”<sup>143</sup>

The attack was described by most journalists as a major blow to the junta and a shock to Bamako, which has been largely protected from the violence that has engulfed much of the rest of Mali over the last decade and where the population has been cocooned since the junta took power in 2020 in an unreal world of controlled news. Indeed, it is rare for insurgents to strike inside the capital. The last time a major attack took place in Bamako was in 2015, when armed men launched a dawn raid on the Radisson Blu hotel that killed 20 people. In 2022, JNIM targeted the garrison town of Kati, 15 kms north of the capital. The 17 September attack is the first time that jihadists have succeeded in hitting military targets of such importance in the capital.

The attack has clearly damaged the credibility of the junta and especially the Wagner group soldiers who, perhaps not surprisingly after their defeat at Tin Zaouatene, appear to have played no part in defending the airport.

At the time of writing, the JNIM has not given any statement explaining its motive for this attack, although it had issued a communiqué a few weeks earlier declaring that it intended to “strike throughout Mali”. Moreover, in numerous statements over the last year or two, the JNIM has made it very clear that it opposes both the junta and its Russian allies and wants them both removed. Also, in many of its attacks against both military and civilian targets in northern and central Mali, as with its recent siege of Timbuktu, its message to the civilian population has been to show that the junta and its FAMa cannot give Mali’s citizens the protection they deserve.

Although JNIM has not yet said so, several Azawadi sources believe that JNIM may have been additionally motivated to undertake this attack on Bamako by a desire to revenge the many genocidal atrocities committed by the FAMa-Wagner duo in northern Mali and the Kidal region since the FAMa-Wagner duo set out from their military bases in Gao and Bourem on 2 October 2023 to retake Kidal.

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142 Jean-Hervé Jézéquel, Op. cit.

143 Ibid.

## The junta's response to its Tin Zaouatene defeat

Bamako's immediate response to the humiliating defeat at Tin Zaouatene was to take revenge by launching drone strikes at the civilian population in the Tin Zaouatene sector. On 30 July, it launched drone strikes<sup>144</sup> which targeted an artisanal gold mining site at In-Attayara and a shelter for displaced people at Ikhharaban in the Tin Zaouatene sector. Kal Akal reported at least 50 — of Sudanese, Chadian and Nigerian origin — killed, with several others injured.

On 25 August, the FAMa launched further missile strikes into the centre of Tin Zaouatene. One missile landed and exploded outside the pharmacy precisely 162 metres from the Algerian border. A second missile hit the crowd that had gathered around the damaged pharmacy. Initial reports from Kel Akal said that 21 people, mostly children, were killed. This was later increased to 30-31, at least 11 of whom were children.

On 14 September the FAMa launched blind drone strikes against the village of Zarho in the commune of Ber (Timbuktu region), killing ten civilians, including one woman who was ill and returned from hospital and at least one child under the age of seven. In addition, 4WD vehicles were destroyed, with property and infrastructure damaged.<sup>145</sup>

## The junta's response to the attack on Bamako

The main reason why military juntas were able to take power in Mali, then Burkina Faso and Niger, was because the French military presence, supported in Mali by the MINUSMA, had failed to restore security. In fact, the security situation had been getting progressively worse in all three countries since the arrival of the French military in 2013. However, the fact that jihadist attacks have escalated, and the security situation deteriorated in all three countries since the French were ordered to leave is denied by all three juntas and their anti-western media. So too is the fact that Wagner troops have not only failed to halt this deterioration but - in Mali especially - have contributed to it.

The JNIM's attack on Bamako was intended to shatter the junta's' narrative that security had improved under its rule. To that extent, the attack was a 'success' in that it has seriously impacted the credibility of the junta on the security front.

However, how the junta will respond is still in the realm of speculation.

<sup>144</sup> Some sources thought these drones might have been fired from Burkina Faso. This is possible, but unverified and unlikely. The belief probably comes from media reports saying that the Malí junta was going to call on assistance from the juntas in Niger and Burkina Faso to help it fight 'terrorists'.

<sup>145</sup> Kal Akal 14.09.24. Accessed at: <https://kal-akal.com/?p=286>

Among the better-informed commentators and recognised ‘experts’ on the Sahel, there seems to be a majority view that the junta will survive this attack, in that the population of Bamako, heavily influenced by the junta’s propaganda and its control of the media, will continue to support the regime against the jihadists, at least until the ‘next time’.

However, several of these commentators and analysts believe that the junta will have to act quickly to restore the increasingly tarnished reputation of the FAMa. There is no guarantee that the FAMa, on its own or with its Russian allies, will be able to achieve a telling military victory against the jihadists. A more likely option is for the junta to launch another and perhaps even more devastating military campaign into the Kidal region.

As Paul Melly noted, the 2023 campaign against the Tuareg separatists and the army’s reoccupation of Kidal proved highly popular among southern public opinion on the streets of Bamako. He therefore sees “a risk that, in the short term at least, the Malian regime will oversee a reassertion of nationalistic feelings - and with that, the risk of a deepening of inter-ethnic distrust, with the fingers of populist accusation all too often pointing at those groups regularly accused of jihadist sympathy or activism.”<sup>146</sup> The two most suspect groups are the Tuareg and the Peul. The Peul communities of central and northern Mali are soft targets, while further genocidal attacks on Tuareg settlements, especially in the Tin Zaouatene sector, would feed the FAMa’s need for revenge and be claimed by the junta as great military victories against “terrorists”.

The ICC’s Jean-Hervé Jézéquel also sees the likely reaction of the FAMa, at least in the short term, “as trying to restore their image by organising spectacular strikes using their fleet of drones.” He also believes that the authorities may want to accelerate the launch of an operation to recapture Tin Zaouatene. However, in the current context, Jézéquel sees the junta’s strategy of banking on new military successes as risky. A further setback, as experienced at Tin Zaouatene on 25-27 July could further weaken the regime and severely test the coherence and solidarity within its leadership team. It would also leave the regime, if it were still in power by then, with little option but to open dialogue with “those with guns”. In the case of Azawad and the Kidal region, this would be seen as victory for the separatists and almost certainly lead to the overthrow of the junta.

However, there are other equally damaging risks in trying to recapture Tin Zaouatene. If the junta sends ground troops into the Tin Zaouatene sector, with or without Russians, who may be unwilling to venture again into a sector where they were decimated, there is no guarantee that they will not suffer the same fate as on 25-27 July. That would be so damaging that it could spell the overthrow, or at least the fragmentation, of the junta. The junta is therefore more likely to rely on its fleet of drones to launch what could be a potentially massive punitive attack on the inhabitants of the region on a scale much larger than those on 30 July and 25 August. The attack would be described by the

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<sup>146</sup> Paul Melly, “Jihadist airport assault leaves Mali’s junta rattled”. BBC, 21 September 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cz04ryym45eo>

Bamako media as a major victory by the FAMa against “terrorists”. However, as the victims would once again be civilians, the charges of war crimes and genocide against the junta would be compounded.

As this Report was being prepared for on-line publication at the end of September, the author received information from sources in both Kidal and Timbuktu that the FAMa, in conjunction with its Russian allies, were preparing to launch a major strike into the Tin Zaouatene region. The information pointed to the strike being launched from both Timbuktu and Kidal by air and ground forces. If this information is correct, the Tin Zaouatene-Abeibeira sector, which contains numerous settlements, could be the subject of a horrific civilian bloodbath.

NB. Details of this strike are given in an EPILOGUE (dated 16.10.2024)

## **The possibility of Algerian intervention in northern Mali**

A FAMa-Russian attack on the Tin Zaouatene sector faces the risk of how Algeria might react. On 7 September, Algeria held a farcical presidential election in which barely 10% of the electorate bothered to vote and the regime had to rig the results twice to give President Abdelmadjid Tebboune the appearance of being more popular than he is. The result of this operation was for the Algerian regime to be humiliated and ridiculed both at home and internationally with the result that the presidency has been seriously weakened, while tension between the presidency and the army high command is once again at a dangerous and unpredictable level.<sup>147</sup>

Against this backdrop of political fragility and tension in the relationship between Algeria's President Tebboune and the Army Chief of Staff, Army General Said Chengriha, it is impossible to predict how Algeria might react to an attack on Tin Zaouatene (Mali) by the FAMa. Two factors need to be borne in mind.

One is that Algeria's High Security Council (HSC) met on 1 September amidst fears of how FAMa's operations against Mali's Tuareg might impact on Algeria. The result was that the HSC, under the chairmanship of President Tebboune, ordered Algeria's armed forces to “neutralise, destroy and shoot down any military equipment that comes within a few kilometres of the borders.” The term “military equipment” refers specifically to the Turkish and Russian military drones that Mali's junta has been deploying near Algerian territory.

However, the HSC's order is not limited to drones. The green light has been

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<sup>147</sup> The most incisive analysis of the election and its implications was published by London's Menas Associates (<https://menas.co.uk/>). Menas' two publications, *Algeria Politics & Security* and *Algeria Focus*, reveal how the election was first manipulated by the Autorité nationale indépendante des élections (ANIE) and then re-calibrated by the Constitutional Court to further boost the appearance of the President's popularity.

given to Algeria's armed forces to attack all military targets that approach the borders, including those identified as "armed independence groups." This opens up an extremely ambiguous and potentially dangerous situation. It implies that if armed Tuareg groups try to seek protection in Algeria, they will be neutralised by the Algerian army. It also raises the question of what the Algerian army will do if faced with armed Tuareg fighters accompanied by civilian Tuareg seeking refuge in Algeria.

Despite the dangerous ambiguities in the HSC's orders, one senses that the HSC has prepared the ground for Algerian forces to enter northern Mali should the situation there deteriorate much further.

This possibility relates to the second factor, namely the referendum held on 1 November 2020 to approve some seemingly small amendments to the Constitution, one of which was to allow the Algerian army to be deployed abroad, especially if it was to meet international requests for assistance in humanitarian or counter-terrorism operations.<sup>148</sup> This amendment to the Constitution was the result of political pressure on the Algerian regime by both France and the US who were hoping to use Algerian forces in the Sahel in so-called 'counterterrorism' operations. Although Algeria did not commit troops to the Sahel at that time, this little-noticed change in the constitution would now allow Algeria to deploy its forces into Mali. Such an eventuality, with Algeria supported by France and the US<sup>149</sup>, could lead to Algeria becoming a key player in a proxy war in the Sahel in the New Cold War.

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<sup>148</sup> The changes to the constitution, especially that affecting the army, were subject to no public debate and were kept virtually secret, as most Algerians would almost certainly have disapproved. The referendum itself was the subject of a massive boycott.

<sup>149</sup> A secret deal was reached between the US, France and Algeria in August (2024) whereby Lebanon, which was experiencing electricity cuts, would receive three 30,000 tonne cargoes of Algerian fuel oil, valued at over US\$90 million, to operate its power plants. The first cargo was shipped from Skikda (Algeria) and arrived in Tripoli (Lebanon) on 27 August. For Algeria, part of the deal was that France and the US would support Algeria's 7 September presidential election, which Tebboune could not fail to win. France and the US sent congratulations to Tebboune before the Constitutional Court, which rigged the ballot for a second time, had even declared the results. Both France and the US have an interest in driving the Russians out of Mali and in replacing the junta and might therefore welcome Algerian military intervention in Mali. (See *Algeria Politics and Security*, Menas Associates London (<https://menas.co.uk/>), 3 September 2024.



# 08

# international imperatives and Implications for the West

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With the exception of the Battle of Tin Zaouatene (25-27 July), very few of the events documented in this Report have received attention in the global media. This is not surprising for two reasons. One is the international media's prioritisation of the situations in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan and the American elections. The second is the remoteness and relative inaccessibility of this part of the Sahel, along with the tight media control exercised by the regimes of both Mali and its partnering 'AES' states.

However, it is the responsibility of the UN and other international bodies to ensure that these reasons do not facilitate the impunity of the perpetrators of the genocide in northern Mali.

The West will inevitably ask why it should give attention to Mali's genocide when the number killed in northern Mali is far less than those in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan. Beyond the moral, humanitarian and legal imperatives of treating all genocides equally, irrespective of the numbers killed, the events documented in this Report have other implications which the West and European countries especially should not ignore. Three, in particular, are of concern to the West.

## Russia's presence and influence in the Sahel

The first is the rapid escalation of Russia's presence and influence in the Sahel. The Battle of Tin Zaouatene has highlighted the likelihood of Mali and the wider region becoming the focus of a proxy war in the New Cold War. Given that crises are not confined to borders, this will have implications for Africa and Western interests beyond the Sahel.

## Migration to Europe

A second is that the wider conflict in the Sahel, of which the events documented in this Report are merely one area of conflict among many others,<sup>150</sup> "is contributing to a sharp rise in migration from the region towards Europe at a time when anti-immigrant far-right parties are on the rise and some EU states are tightening their borders."<sup>151</sup> According to the UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the route to Europe with the steepest rise in numbers this year (2024) is via West African coastal nations to Spain's Canary Islands. IOM data shows the number of migrants arriving in Europe from Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal) rose 62% to 17,300 in the first six months of 2024 from 10,700 a year earlier, a rise the U.N. and the IOM have blamed on conflict and climate change.<sup>152</sup>

**One reason why the Wagner group in Mali has played such a minimalistic role in fighting the jihadists in Mali is because Russian policy is to encourage the escalation of violence in the Sahel in order to increase the flow of migrants to Europe and thereby fuel the growth of far right extremism there.**

Since the arrival of the Wagner Group in Mali in 2021, Reuters' analysis of ACLED's data has found that the number of violent events involving jihadi groups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger has almost doubled. Since the start of 2024, there have been 224 attacks a month on average, up from 128 in 2021. This increase in conflict is the major driver of migration and displacement

<sup>150</sup> Notably Burkina Faso, central and southern Mali, southeast and southwest Niger, the Lake Chad region and the northern parts of several West African coast states.

<sup>151</sup> Reuters, "West Africa becomes global terrorism hotspot as Western forces leave"; Reuters 24.09.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/west-africa-becomes-global-terrorism-hotspot-western-forces-leave-2024-09-24/>

<sup>152</sup> Cited Reuters *ibid.*

from the region.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, one reason why the Wagner group in Mali has played such a minimalistic role in fighting the jihadists is because Russian policy is to encourage the escalation of violence in the Sahel in order to increase the flow of migrants to Europe and thereby fuel the growth of far right extremism there.

## A terrorism hotspot

A third is that the Sahel has become the world's "Terrorism Hotspot". Reuters News reports written following the 24 September JNIM attack on Bamako, described the region (Sahel) as a "Global Terrorism Hotspot".<sup>154</sup> Burkina Faso is the Sahel country most hard hit by jihadism, with Mali's security declining rapidly since the departure of the French and the arrival of Russia's Wagner Group.<sup>155</sup> In Niger, now also increasingly under Russian influence, security is also deteriorating. This year, Burkina Faso topped the Global Terrorism Index for the first time, with fatalities rising 68% to 1,907 - a quarter of all terrorism-linked deaths worldwide.<sup>156</sup> Somewhere between 40% and 60% of Burkina Faso is now estimated to be beyond government control.

With both JNIM and the EIGS claiming their goal is to establish Islamic rule in the Sahel and with neither declaring an interest in carrying out attacks in Europe or the United States, the West may feel secure in believing that it has contained jihadism to this seemingly remote corner of Africa. However, the potential for this part of Africa to become a base for global jihadism, like Afghanistan or Libya in the past, with Western interests in its crosshairs, should not be discounted.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this Report is not to try and predict what might happen in Mali, or even the wider Sahel, in the coming months. There are many possible scenarios: some are positive, many more are pessimistic. Rather, this report focuses on the events that took place in northern Mali between 2 October 2023 and late September 2024, a period of almost exactly 12 months. Prior to 2 October 2023, the FAMa and its Russian allies, had committed multiple atrocities – war crimes and crimes against humanity – against the country's civilian population. However, even before the Wagner group was brought

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<sup>153</sup> Insa Moussa Ba Sane, regional migration and displacement coordinator for the International Federation of the Red Cross, said conflict was a major factor behind the increase in migration from the West African coast, with rising numbers of women and families seen along the route. "Conflicts are at the root of the problem, combined with the effects of climate change," he said, describing how floods and droughts are both contributing to the violence and driving an exodus from rural to urban areas. Cited by Reuters, 24.09.2024.

<sup>154</sup> Reuters Ibid., and "Why West Africa is now the world's terrorism hotspot". Reuters 25.09.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/west-africa-becomes-global-terrorism-hotspot-western-forces-leave-2024-09-24/>

<sup>155</sup> A U.N. panel of experts that monitors the activities of JNIM and EIGS estimates that JNIM has 5,000-6,000 fighters while militants linked to the EIGS number 2,000-3,000. Cited by Reuters 24.09.2024. Op. cit.

<sup>156</sup> The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), Sydney, Australia. Cited by Reuters 24.09.2024. Op. cit.

into the country in 2021, ostensibly to take over from the French in fighting ‘terrorism’, although in reality to protect the Russian-oriented junta, the FAMa had committed many such crimes against the country’s civilian population. Most of those crimes have been recorded, and many documented in some detail, by International Human Rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI), ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data), Save the Children, and many others, including a host of local civil society organisations, whose testimonies will be heard and become increasingly valuable if and when a full investigation into the nightmare of the many hundreds, if not thousands, of crimes against humanity that have been perpetrated in Mali by both state and non-state actors increasingly over the last decade (at least from the start of 2012) is undertaken. That investigation, when it takes place, may adjudge that some of the crimes committed by the FAMa before 2 October 2023 may also have constituted a genocide, or, at the least, the pre-conditions for what this Report has shown to have become a genocide.

The genocide which is the subject of this report, began in October 2023, or, to be more precise and for reasons explained in the Report, after the capture of Kidal in November 2023. A legally constituted investigation, preferably authorised under the auspices of the United Nations, through its agency the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), may conclude that the atrocities committed by the FAMa-Wagner duo prior to the capture of Kidal also constitute part of that genocide.

The arguments and supporting evidence put forward in this Report, which could not have been accomplished without the courageous work undertaken by Kal Akal and the Imouhagh International Organisation, along with their many local collaborators and witnesses, is an attempt to ‘bear witness’ – draw attention – to what has taken place in northern Mali over the last 12 months and thereby to provide a ‘base map’ and ‘guideline’ for the international investigators who must now step in and takeover. It is the duty of the UN and its appropriate agencies to fully investigate the accusations of genocide levelled against the ruling military junta in Bamako and its Russian allies in the form of the Wagner group (renamed the Africa Corps), for which Russia’s President Vladimir Putin must be held accountable.

## **EPILOGUE 01**

### **(16 October 2024)**

**Driven by the thirst for revenge, a massive FAMa-Wagner convoy set out from Kidal on 1 October 2024 in an attempt to reach Tin Zaouatene and inflict revenge on its inhabitants. It returned to Kidal on 9 October, having been forced to abandon many of its vehicles in the desert sands and without reaching Tin Zaouatene or engaging with “the enemy”, after an even greater demonstration of FAMa-Wagner military incompetence.**

In Chapter 7 (The Tuareg hit back: the FAMa and Wagner humiliated), it was warned that information was being received during the last week of September

that the FAMa, in conjunction with its Russian allies, were preparing to launch a major revenge attack on Tin Zaouatene. It was feared that such a strike would result in an horrific civilian bloodbath. This epilogue, drawing on multiple sources,<sup>157</sup> most notably Tuareg participants in the region, gives an account of what happened during the first two weeks of October 2024 as a FAMa-Wagner convoy attempted to reach and inflict revenge on the inhabitants of Tin Zaouatene.

## The fate of the FAMa-Wagner revenge attack on Tin Zaouatene

After its catastrophic and humiliating defeat at Tin Zaouatene on 27 July, the Russian Wagner group and the FAMa decided to inflict revenge on the Tuareg fighters and civilian population in the Tin Zaouatene sector. This time, they planned to attack with twice as many men as before and a more studied plan of attack.

After their 27 July defeat at Tin Zaouatene, the Wagner soldiers regrouped in Gao and trained with the FAMa through August and September, before heading back in late September to Kidal, from where they planned to launch their punitive expedition on Tin Zaouatene. In Kidal, they joined up with ‘pro-government’ Tuareg from the MSA and GATIA.<sup>158</sup>

The Russian plan to attack Tin Zaouatene was to avoid the more direct but more dangerous route through Abeibeira, where the mountainous terrain provided Tuareg fighters with good ambushing territory. Instead, they planned to head eastwards to Ti-n-Essako, 115 kms east of Kidal, and then head north to Tin Zaouatene, thereby keeping in the more open terrain to the east of the Adrar-n-Iforas mountains.

According to Menadefense.net,<sup>159</sup> the Wagner-FAMa plan was to launch a convoy of 50 vehicles to Tin Zaouatene, via Ti-n-Essako. A second convoy would then leave Kidal to protect the flank of the first, while a third group would be deployed to secure the logistics between Kidal and Tin Zaouatene. According to the same source, between 300 and 500 men, 100 vehicles, two helicopters and two drones were said to be taking part in this operation.

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<sup>157</sup> “Sur fond d’innondations et de malaria, Wagner prépare sa vengeance contre Tinzaawaten”. Menadefense.net 02.10.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.menadefense.net/sur-fond-dinnondations-et-de-malaria-wagner-prepare-sa-vengeance-contre-tinzaawaten/>; “Mali Troops Return From Volatile North With No Combat”. Barron’s Newsletters – from AFP News. 09.10.2024. Accessed at: <https://www.barrons.com/news/mali-troops-return-from-volatile-north-with-no-combat-ae32416e>; Bianca Bridger, “Russia-Malian Convoy Faces Difficulties en Route to Tinzaouaten.” Atlas News, 03.10.2024. Accessed at: <https://theatlasnews.co/africa/2024/10/03/russia-malian-convoy-faces-difficulties-en-route-to-tinzaouaten>; Bianca Bridger, “JNIM Launches Simultaneous Attacks on Malian Military Installations.” Atlas News, 08.10.2024. Accessed at: <https://theatlasnews.co/africa/2024/10/08/jnim-launches-simultaneous-attacks-on-malian-military-installations>; Bianca Bridger, “Mali: Rebels Dispute Claim Wagner Retrieved Russian Bodies from Tinzaouaten.” Atlas News, 12.10.2024. Accessed at: <https://theatlasnews.co/africa/2024/10/12/mali-csp-dpa-disputes-claim-wagner-retrieved-russian-bodies-from-tinzaouaten>; “UAV event in Mali on Tuesday 1st October 2024.” Accessed at: <https://fenixinsight.com/event/377016>; Christiaan Triebert, post. Accessed at: <https://x.com/trbrtc/status/1841544526495969787>

<sup>158</sup> The Mouvement pour Le Salut de l’Azawad (MSA), as explained in Chapter 3 (divisions amongst the Tuareg), had left the CSP-PSD around August-September 2023 and joined up with the pro-government GATIA (see Chaps. 3 and 6). After the recapture of Kidal in November 2023, the junta had appointed the GATIA’s leader, El Hajj Gamou, as the governor of the Kidal region.

<sup>159</sup> Menadefense.net. Op.cit.

The timing chosen for the FAMa-Wagner attack was not insignificant. The heavy rains of recent weeks had washed away many of the vehicle tracks in the region, which the Russians presumed would make it difficult for the defenders of Tin Zaouatene to move around. Furthermore, the Russians also considered that it would be a good time to attack as the rains had caused serious outbreaks of malaria, diphtheria, cholera and yellow fever in the Tin Zaouatene region.

On 1 October, the convoy, numbering, according to one witness, between 50 and 66 MRAP<sup>160</sup> vehicles left Kidal. The FAMa and Wagner troops, clearly unfamiliar with desert terrain, especially after heavy rains, and having deliberately chosen the less mountainous route, soon ran into problems with the sand. Many vehicles got bogged down in soft sand, others, we suspect, got bogged down in waterlogged sand in the valley bottoms. Several vehicles which could not be dug out had to be abandoned.

By the end of the first day, the convoy, had reached the small settlement of Inakarot, 45 kms north of Ti-n-Essako and about 100 kms SSW of Tin Zaouatene. Members of the CSP-PSD, who had been keeping a close watch on the convoy's arduous progress, said they were waiting for it and did not intend to evacuate the area.

An interesting aspect of the FAMa-Wagner advance is that the Russians planted a life-size model of the Pantsir air defense system, mounted on a Chinese truck chassis, just north of Ti-n-Essako, suggesting that the Russians were wary of a possible Algerian strike against them.<sup>161</sup>

At Inakarot, the troops destroyed the small village school, although it is not clear whether they destroyed the building themselves or called in a drone strike.

How long the convoy stayed at Inakarot, 100 kms short of its objective, and what it did there is not entirely clear. With both FAMa and Russian troops chattering on their WhatsApp channels as if neither had any understanding of 'security', the CSP-PSD listened in on their many communications.

It is evident from these communications that both Malian and Russian soldiers were 'spooked' by their desert surroundings, the Tuareg fighters watching them and their fears of falling into an ambush as they did at Tin Zaouatene. Indeed, the fear of again falling into an ambush kept the convoy away from the oueds (dry river valleys), resulting in their having to abandon several vehicles trapped in deep sand.

Tuareg separatist sources, keeping tight surveillance of the convoy and listening in on its communications, claimed that FAMa soldiers began shooting randomly into the gloom as darkness fell. The Russians were perturbed by the unease of the FAMa soldiers and their awareness of being under surveillance. "They [Tuaregs] follow us step by step. They are in front of us and behind

<sup>160</sup> Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP).

<sup>161</sup> It is conceivable that Russia sold 'duds' to the Mali military.

us,” said one Russian mercenary.

CSP-PSD sources reported a heightening of tension between the FAMa and the Wagner mercenaries, with Russian channels denouncing the FAMa soldiers for their lack of operational security measures. “The idiots from FAMa continue to post their location on Twitter, even during stops. Unteachable,” said one channel.

Whether the convoy managed to progress any further north from Inakarot is unclear. One source implies that they may have managed to progress about 45 kms further north, but that is ambiguous as it could be interpreted as saying that they had progressed 45 kms north of Ti-n-Essako, which would have taken them to Inakarot.

The convoy seems to have spent some time criss-crossing Tuareg territory, but without making much progress towards Tin Zaouatene. During that time, CSP-PSD surveillance and communications intercepts revealed that the convoy lost several vehicles in deep sand and was forced to spend three days at Inakarot waiting to receive additional water supplies and more tyres.

Surrounded by Tuareg fighters, the convoy was obliged to retreat back to Ti-n-Essako and Kidal, where it arrived on 9 October, some eight days after venturing forth on its ‘revenge’ mission. According to both FAMa and Wagner sources, as well as the CSP-PSD, there was no direct engagement between the convoy and the Azawadis. However, according to the Azawadis, they had the convoy surrounded and effectively ushered it back along its path of retreat to Kidal.

Possibly aware that the mission might fail, the local media, including Agence France Press,<sup>162</sup> were told that the convoy’s mission was to recover the bodies of their comrades who had been killed at Tin Zaouatene some 70 days earlier.

On 7 October, the FAMa issued a statement, which was clearly untrue, that the convoy had “recovered the remains of their brothers in arms who had been killed in the Tin Zaouatene area around 27 July.” Similar information was given by Russia’s Tass news agency and a Telegram post from the Community of Officers for International Security (COSI), which has close links to the Wagner Group. COSI’s head, Alexander Ivanov, was quoted as saying: “The Malian armed forces and their Russian allies mobilised to recover the bodies of their fallen comrades and today they have done their duty.”<sup>163</sup>

On the Russian side, a Telegram message from the pro-Wagner channel ‘Unloading Wagner’, dated 9 October, was shared into the ‘Departmente’ Telegram channel - a group closely linked to Russian mercenaries in Mali – which said: “Yesterday, the operation to return the bodies of our brothers, who heroically fought against Islamists who outnumbered them many times over in July 2024, was successfully completed. [...] “The Wagner PMC convoy passed through the most difficult sections of desert terrain teeming with

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<sup>162</sup> Barron’s Newsletters – from AFP News. Op. cit.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

Azawad militants. Despite the terrorists' constant attempts to counterattack, the mission was accomplished.”<sup>164</sup>

Both statements are untrue for multiple reasons. Firstly, after some 70 days, there would have been few body parts remaining: jackals, hyenas and carrion birds would have moved in quickly. Secondly, if the soldiers had returned there, local people in the Tin Zaouatene region would have seen them and reported their presence. Thirdly, the CSP-PSD, which disputed the FAMa statement, had previously issued a statement saying that it had already taken all appropriate provisions regarding the remains of the Russian Wagner mercenaries,<sup>165</sup> while all FAMa bodies, having been identified, were burnt and buried on site.

The CSP-PSD's statement also reported the Wagner-FAMa's alleged war crimes – which this report would categorise as part of Bamako's genocide policy – as it attempted to reach Tin Zaouatene. According to the CSP-PSD, the convoy's passage was marked by the Wagner-FAMa's usual serious crimes, ranging from the poisoning of wells, summary executions of civilians including an old woman, the booby-trapping of possessions with explosives and the slaughter of livestock, to the bombing of the school at Inakarot.

To compound the humiliation of the FAMa-Wagner duo's forced retreat, which the Tuareg are regarding as a great victory, JNIM took advantage of their absence from their bases in the Gao and Timbuktu regions to attack the bases. According to local sources, JNIM launched several rockets, mortars, and artillery shells at the military camp at Ber and the military airports at Timbuktu and Gao.

The latest news following the humiliations suffered by the FAMa-Wagner duo in Kidal is that major tensions are now evident within the alliance, to the extent that the Russian presence in Mali could be more short-lived than anticipated a year ago. There are also indications that Mali's junta is facing political challenges from within its own ranks and the wider civilian population.

On 16 October, one week after the ill-fated convoy reached the safety of Kidal, Mali's military junta announced transitional President Colonel Assimi Goïta had appointed himself general of the armies (a five-star general), the highest military distinction. Five other members of the junta were promoted to the rank of four-star generals.

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164 Ibid.

165 Two Russians remain as prisoners in the hands of the CSP-PSD. The bodies of those killed have been buried in a secret grave site, so that they can be exhumed and returned to Russia for proper burial when the “time is right”.

## EPILOGUE 02

### (December 2024)

#### **Tuareg leadership assassinated in targeted drone strike**

Following the three humiliations suffered by Mali's junta and its Russian allies, namely: their defeat at Tin Zaouatene on 27 July; JNIM's attacks on army facilities in Bamako on 17 September and the FAMa-Wagner duo's abortive attempt to attack Tin Zaouatene in the first week of October, the obvious question was how Bamako would respond. There was also a secondary question, which, since a devastating drone attack on Tin Zaouatene on 1 December, has now become of major importance. This is: what sort of relationship has developed between Algeria and the Russian forces in Mali; and what role did Algeria play in the events of 1 December?

After the withdrawal of the FAMa-Wagner convoy of early October, there was speculation that Mali's junta and its Russian allies might end their attacks on northern Mali and in the case of the Russians even withdraw from Mali.

Neither has been the case. Information received from reliable sources in November was that the FAMa and its Russian allies were adopting a new military strategy by switching from ground to air strikes, at least in the far north of Mali which had proven both dangerous and difficult for their armed columns to reach. The humiliating outcomes of their two attempts to attack Tin Zaouatene had taught the Russians and the FAMa that they could not work together in such testing ground operations. They therefore decided to switch to air attacks, the success of which had been proven in several earlier drone attacks on Tuareg settlements. The revenge attack on Tin Zaouatene on 25 August (Chapter 4) was particularly successful: the first missile targeted the village's pharmacy, the second decimated the crowds that had come to rescue the wounded. Some 30 civilians were killed, and dozens wounded.

This switch in military strategy was corroborated by a report in *Le Monde* that the three Russian-backed juntas of the Sahel – Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger – had strengthened their air resources considerably through the help of their partners in Moscow and Ankara.<sup>166</sup> Mali, in particular, has enabled this switch in military tactics through the purchase of more Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones, supported by Russian helicopters and fixed-wing L-39 Albatros planes.

Mali's junta claimed that this increased air power would be used to fight the 'jihadist terrorists' of JNIM and the EIGS. While that may be true, Tuareg were under no illusions that the junta's primary target was a revenge operation against the Tuareg peoples of the Kidal region. That belief was confirmed on 1 December.

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<sup>166</sup> Benjamin Roger, Thomas Eydoux et Cellule Enquête. "Drones turcs, avions russes... Au Sahel, la guerre des airs est déclarée." *Le Monde* 22.11.2024. Accès: [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/11/20/drones-turcs-avions-russes-au-sahel-la-guerre-des-airs-est-declara-ree\\_6405083\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/11/20/drones-turcs-avions-russes-au-sahel-la-guerre-des-airs-est-declara-ree_6405083_3212.html)

Before turning to the 1 December drone-launched missile attack on Tin Zaouatene, it is necessary to explain the recent vacillations in Algeria's relationship with Moscow, which is believed to have played a key role in the 1 December tragedy.

## Algeria's Russian connection

Algeria and Moscow have long had a close relationship, especially at the military level, with some 80-90% of Algeria's military equipment and weaponry being supplied by Russia.

Since independence in 1962, Algeria has been a military state, with the president being chosen (through rigged elections) to provide a veneer of democracy.

The current head of the army is Army General Saïd Chengriha, a renowned Russophile. It was Chengriha who facilitated the Wagner group's transit through Algeria, ostensibly as tourists, to Mali in late 2021. Since Chengriha was appointed in 2020, a few months after Abdelmadjid Tebboune accession to the presidency, there has been almost constant infighting between their two entourages.<sup>167</sup> Since the start of the Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the President's sporadic lurches towards France and the USA, along with the publication on social media of Chengriha's criminal activities as a drugs and arms trafficker, weakened Chengriha's position and led to a marked deterioration in Russo-Algerian relations. However, since Tebboune's 're-election'<sup>168</sup> to a second mandate in September 2024, thanks largely to Chengriha's support, the balance between these two poles of Algerian power has shifted more towards Chengriha and the army, with the result that Tebboune announced in a November ministerial reshuffle the appointment of Chengriha as Minister Delegate of Defence while retaining his position of Army Chief of Staff.

On 1 September 2024, with relations between Algeria and Russia at possibly their lowest point in many years, President Tebboune chaired a meeting of the High Security Council (HSC) at which all the most important leaders of the Algerian Army and the country's most strategic security forces were present. The HSC, worried by Russia's military activities in northern Mali, ordered Algeria's armed forces "to neutralise, destroy and shoot down any military equipment that comes within a few kilometres of the Algerian borders." By "military equipment", it seems clear that the HSC was referring specifically to the drones that were being deployed by the FAMa and its Russian allies in the border localities very close to Algerian territory. At least one of the drones that targeted Tin Zaouatene's pharmacy on 25 August was reported by Malians to have landed 162 metres from the Algerian border.

Then, in October, shortly after the humiliating withdrawal of the FAMa-

<sup>167</sup> Usually referred to misleadingly as 'clans' in Algeria.

<sup>168</sup> The election was massively rigged in chaotic circumstances, making Tebboune's presidency even more unpopular and 'illegitimate'.

Wagner convoy from its failed advance on Tin Zaouatene, possibly with Chengriha knowing that he was shortly to be appointed as Minister Delegate for Defence, information from a reliable Algerian source<sup>169</sup> said that Algeria and Russia had reached an agreement that FAMa-Russian forces would not again attempt to approach Algeria's border.

On the basis of this seemingly 'secret' agreement, the Algerian authorities assumed, quite incorrectly, that refugees from Mali were now safe and able to return. A reliable US source<sup>170</sup> reported that the Algerian authorities had begun on 20 October to expel "tens of thousands" of Malian refugees, who had fled from Mali's Ménaka region to the outskirts of Algeria's Tin Zaouatene. Kal Akal sources in Tin Zaouatene confirmed that this figure was correct and that the Algerian army had been "knocking down" their tents and forcing them to cross the border into Mali. Given that the area was suffering at that time from an epidemic of malaria, diphtheria, yellow fever and cholera, it is hardly surprising that several reportedly died in this move. The Malians being ejected are reported as being nearly all Daoussahak Tuareg who fled the Ménaka region because of the attacks on them by the EIGS (Islamic State in the Greater Sahara). That ongoing disaster has been the result of the FAMa-Wagner troops being preoccupied with hunting down and killing the Tuareg people of the Kidal region (and the wider Azawad) rather than protecting its own citizens.

Kal Akal sources on the Malian side of the border indicated that many if not most of these Tuareg, fearful or unable to return to Ménaka, have moved a little further westward along the Algerian-Mali border zone to the highly insecure region of Inaghawass, between the Malian communes of Tin Zaouatene and Boughessa. Many more are likely to die in this region from hunger, lack of water, and sickness.<sup>171</sup>

## Drone assassinations in Tin Zaouatene

Initial press reports of what happened on 1 December were not only few in number but also full of inaccuracies.<sup>172</sup> The essence of the incident was that The Tuareg had been holding major meetings close to Tin Zaouatene, the purpose of which was to merge some of the more disparate Tuareg groups, especially those which had previously been aligned to the 'pro-government' GATIA, with the CSP-PSD and thereby unite all the Tuareg under the single banner of a newly named grouping – the Front for the Liberation of Azawad (le Front de Libération de l'Azawad – FLA). According to the FLA's

<sup>169</sup> Personal communication from a diplomatic source whose anonymity is retained.

<sup>170</sup> Biance Bridger, "Algeria Expels Tens of Thousands of Malian refugees". Atlas News, 28 October 2024. Access at: <https://theatlansnews.co/africa/2024/10/28/algeria-expels-tens-of-thousands-of-malian-refugees>

<sup>171</sup> Algeria's failure to register these and other refugees and its subsequent inhuman ejection of them from Algerian territory is contrary to international law and should be investigated along with its complicity in Mali's genocide and its alleged role in the 1 December assassinations in Tin Zaouatene.

<sup>172</sup> For example, a report in Le Monde said the first meeting(s) was held 60 kms from the site of the drone strike. See: "Touareg tué par un drone à Tin Zaouatine 1er décembre." Le Monde. 2 décembre 2024. Access at: [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/12/02/au-mali-les-chefs-rebelles-de-l-azawad-s-unissent-et-subissent-un-bombardement-mortel\\_6425937\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/12/02/au-mali-les-chefs-rebelles-de-l-azawad-s-unissent-et-subissent-un-bombardement-mortel_6425937_3212.html)

founding statement, the movement's aim was to "defend the interests of the Tuareg people of Azawad in the face of security challenges and to work for the political recognition of the region." Unlike the situation in 2012, when the Tuareg called for an independent state of Azawad, the FLA sees its task as working for the political recognition of the Azawad region and its greater autonomy.

On 1 December, in what was a clear attempt by the FAMa and its Russian allies to assassinate the leadership of the FLA, a drone-launched missile attack killed eight of the FLA's newly chosen leaders.

An official statement signed by the FLA's spokesperson Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadane, confirmed the loss of its leaders, describing the victims as "martyrs of the Azawadian cause". The eight named FLA leaders killed were:

- Fahad ag Almahmoud, political leader and former GATIA secretary general;
- Choghib (Shoib) ag Attaher, chief of the Idnane tribe and former MP for Kidal;
- Albaraka ag Alfaki, influential notable of the Idnane community;
- Sidi ag Baye, FLA's political cadre (chairman of Kal Akal);
- Mohamed ag Acherif, FLA's political cadre;
- Mossa ag Baye, notable of the Idnane tribe;
- Bachar ag Ahmad, FLA's administrative cadre;
- Ousmane ag Mohamedine, FLA cadre.

The number of Idnane Tuareg in the FLA leadership is significant in that the Idnane and GATIA had, until recently, been fighting each other. Their presence in the FLA leadership under Fahad Ag Almahmoud reflects the extent to which the Mali government's assault on the Tuareg population of Azawad has united disparate Tuareg groups together under the same flag. The Idnane Tuareg live mostly in the Timbuktu area. The Tuareg executed by the FAMa-Wagner convoy at Ersane in October 2023 (Chapter 3 and Appendix 1) were members of the Idnane tribe.

Sidi ag Baye, who was killed in this attack, was the chairman of Kal Akal, one of the main investigators and recorders of the genocide being perpetrated against the Tuareg and a key contributor to this report.

Akli Sh'kka, the founder of the Imouagh International Organisation for Justice and Transparency, the author of *Man of the Sahara* and a key contributor to this report, survived the attack. When the missile strikes began, he was seated about 20–30 meters away filming the gathering. He witnessed the entire assassination and afterwards helped recover the bodies of the

victims. After the strikes, Akli remained in the vicinity for many more days collecting and recording evidence of the strikes. It is his first-hand evidence that is cited below.

According to Akli, the meetings had been ongoing since 25 November at the same location at which the strikes took place. On 30 November, the meeting finalised the agreement to unify all Tuareg movements. A public statement was issued accordingly.

The site where people had gathered to hold their meetings and which was targeted by the missile strikes of 1 December was approximately 10 kilometres from the centre of Tin Zaouatene and some 200-350 metres from the Algerian border, which runs down the centre of the oued (valley). The reason why this site was chosen for the meetings was because of the natural shelter and camouflage provided by the tree and bush cover along the margins of the oued, which made it difficult for the FAMa/Wagner drones to see the meetings. Indeed, the meetings were occasionally paused when drones appeared overhead and resumed once they had left. The site was also chosen because of its proximity to the Algerian border, which was seen as a safeguard. Historically, the area has always been considered a neutral zone, a sort of no-man's-land, where people could move freely without interference.

At the time of the strike on the morning of 1 December, no meeting was taking place. Rather, the people were gathered at the site as they prepared to leave for their homes. The three missile strikes were fired singly and clearly targeted individuals as they dispersed. According to Akli, only one drone was visible at the time of the strikes. Akli recognised it as a Turkish Akinci drone,<sup>173</sup> capable of traveling over 7,000 kms, and believed to be one of those that had recently been acquired by both Mali's and Burkina Faso's military rulers.

The first missile struck near a tent housing several elders, including Shoib Ag Attaher who was killed. This was close to Fahad ag Almahmoud's tent, who, like others, sought to escape to a safer location by crossing the oued into Algeria. Fahad was struck by the second missile while he was crossing the oued into Algeria. According to Akli, Fahad was about 20 metres into Algerian territory when he was hit and killed by the missile.<sup>174</sup> According to Akli's subsequent investigations, there are strong suspicions that Fahad's movements were being tracked, possibly by a chip or through his phone.

## Algeria's complicity

This incident raises extremely serious questions about Algeria's complicity in both this attack and Mali's genocide. Since the start of the Tuareg uprising in January 2012, Algeria has done everything possible to prevent Tuareg

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<sup>173</sup> According to Le Monde, Bayraktar Akinci drones, of Turkish manufacture and received by the junta of General Assimi Goita a few days earlier in Bamako, were used for these strikes in Tin Zaouatene. (Le Monde, *ibid.*)

<sup>174</sup> One of Fahad's colleagues was wounded by the missile strike but succumbed to his wounds.

irredentism in Mali and will certainly not be mourning the deaths of the FLA leadership, which it would have seen as a dangerous threat to its own attempts to prevent Tuareg unrest within its own territory.

It is also inconceivable that the FAMa and its Russian allies would have dared launch such a strike, let alone into Algerian territory, after Algeria's High Security Council (HSC), as explained earlier in the Epilogue, had ordered Algeria's armed forces only three months earlier to "neutralise, destroy and shoot down any military equipment (by which it meant specifically drones) that comes within a few kilometres of the borders." The fact that the FAMa/Wagner drone pilot(s) ignored this warning completely suggests there had been a subsequent agreement between Algeria's military and the FAMa/Wagner alliance that gave the FAMa/Wagner duo permission to launch missile strikes not only to within metres of Algeria's border but even into Algeria itself in hot pursuit operations. Indeed, targeting Fahad ag Almahmoud as he sought safety in Algeria would have been seen as a 'hot pursuit' strike.

Further evidence of such an agreement is that the Algerian regime has not only remained completely silent about this incident but has also made no mention or taken action about another missile strike from a FAMa/Wagner drone that struck a vehicle in the Oued Telkak close to Timiaouine, killing its occupant, on 29 December 2024.

According to Akli's investigations in the Tin Zaouatene region, there is a general consensus that the FAMa and its Russian allies would not have conducted such an operation without Algeria's knowledge and approval. There are also strong suspicions that Algeria may also have assisted the FAMa/Wagner duo through intelligence-sharing and target identification.

Several international media reports suggested that the 1 December missile strike was a revenge attack by the FAMa and its Russian allies for the heavy defeat they suffered at the hands of Tuareg fighters near Tin Zaouatene on 27 July. That may be the case, although the evidence suggests that it was not simply an attack on Tin Zaouatene, but a very precise targeted assassination of Tuareg leaders in which Algeria must be held complicit.

## ADDENDUM

### **FAMa and Wagner ordered to kill 'white skinned' inhabitants of Kidal region**

Further evidence of Mali's intended genocide comes from reports - compiled by Akli Sh'kka after his investigations into the 1 December drone attacks on Tin Zaouatene - that captured Russian soldiers being held as prisoners by FLA fighters in northeast Mali have confessed that they, along with the FAMa, were ordered by Mali's coup leader and interim President, Colonel (now Général d'Armée) Assimi Goïta, to kill all 'white-skinned' inhabitants of the Kidal region.

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## APPENDIX 1

**Identities of those killed by FAMa/Wagner soldiers at Ersane October 2023**

Identities of those executed at Ersane on 5 October 2023, and others believed to have been executed by the Wagner/FAMa column on its way to the capture of Kidal on 14 November 2023, or shortly after.

These lists are not complete. Many more victims of the Wagner/FAMa massacres and executions have been identified subsequent to this initial recording of identities.

### **Ersane. 5 October 2023**

- 01 - Bagha ag Ahmed 79 years old
- 02 - Bouna ag Dakhmane 75 years old
- 03 - Ifadahit ag Abanet 38 years old
- 04 - Mossa ag Abdullah 28 years old
- 05 - Amidi ag Abdullah 62 years old
- 06 - Hassoune ag Arwaibakh 33 years old
- 06 - Acherif ag Rhissa 37 years old
- 07 - Alkassime ag Rhissa 35 years old
- 08 - Mohamed ag Kabba 30 years old
- 09 - Alghabide ould Khamdane 56 years old
- 10 - Mostafa ag Alhadu 48 years old
- 11 - Almahmoud Maïga
- 12 - Siliya Maiga 34 years old
- 13 - Abdullah ag Akilinallah 47 years old
- 14 - Akilinyallah ag Abdullah 32 years old
- 15 - Attaher ag Warinedh 42 years old

### **Tarkint (date not given)**

- 16 - Assanete ag Oumar
- 17 - Ismaghil ag Ahmed

**Tekankante (date not given)**

- 18 - Ogeunat Ag Ahmadou
- 19 - Awinan Ag Achkounin
- 20 - Aysha ult Baye

**Kidal (date not given)**

- 21 - Atakara ag Atlagh
- 22 - Titta ag Bacrene
- 23 - Nassi ag Doula
- 24 - Amghar ag Baye
- 25 - Talga ag Badi
- 26 - Askiw ag Wanine
- 27 - Badine ag Sidi
- 28 - Tana ag Ibrahim
- 29 - Mamou

**Tadayite: 30.12.23**

- 30 - Bakla ag Otane
- 31 - old Naka and his son
- 32 - Baguya ag Oumar
- 33 - Hamadi Aa Amoumen
- 34 - Ibrahim ag Alkassim
- 35 - Sina ag Baysa
- 36 - Mossa ag Bangui

**Anefif (date not given) (Ed. Anéfis)**

- 37 - Barka known as Kanté ould M'bayarak
- 38 - Nayji Ould Mereré

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **The Moura massacre**

This text is extracted from Menas Associates' Sahara Focus for May 2023. It was written by this author and summarises and contextualises the report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which was released on 12 May 2023.<sup>175</sup>

#### **From Sahara Focus, May 2023: Mali's Junta fears intervention of International Criminal Court (icc) over Mauro Massacre**

A much-awaited report from the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was released on 12 May (2023). The OHCHR's fact-finding report concluded there are strong indications that more than 500 people were killed – the vast majority summarily executed – by Malian troops and foreign military personnel, almost certainly belonging to the Russian Wagner group, during a five-day military operation in the village

<sup>175</sup> See: "Malian troops, foreign military personnel killed over 500 people during military operation in Moura in March 2022 – UN human rights report". OHCHR Geneva 12 May 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/malian-troops-foreign-military-personnel-killed-over-500-people-during>  
See also: "Mali: The perpetrators of the Moura massacre must be prosecuted and tried by a competent court." Amnesty International. Accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-perpetrators-moura-massacre-must-be-prosecuted-and-tried-competent-court#:~:text=The%20report%20concludes%20that%20at,hands%20of%20Malian%20military%20personnel>.

of Moura in the Mopti region of central Mali in March 2022.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, said: ‘These are extremely disturbing findings. Summary executions, rape and torture during armed conflict amount to war crimes and could, depending on the circumstances, amount to crimes against humanity.’

The report is the result of an extensive human rights fact-finding mission conducted over several months by UN staff in Mali. Malian authorities denied requests by the team to access the village of Moura itself. The report is based on interviews with victims and witnesses, as well as forensic and other information sources, such as satellite imagery.

The report details how events unfolded day-by-day in Moura. The operation - described by the authorities as an anti-terrorist military operation against an al-Qaeda-affiliated group known as Katiba Macina – began on 27 March 2022, a busy weekly market day in Moura.

According to witnesses, a military helicopter flew over the village, opening fire on people, while four other helicopters landed and troops disembarked. The soldiers corralled people into the centre of the village, shooting randomly at those trying to escape. Some Katiba Macina militants in the crowd fired back at the troops. At least 20 civilians and a dozen alleged members of Katiba Macina were killed.

Then, over the next four days, at least 500 people are believed to have been summarily executed, the report says. The fact-finding team has obtained extensive personal identification details, including the names of at least 238 of these victims.

Witnesses reported seeing ‘armed white men’ who spoke an unknown language, believed to be Russian, operating alongside the Malian forces and at times appearing to supervise operations. According to witnesses, Malian troops were rotated in and out of Moura daily, but the foreign personnel, almost certainly members of the Wagner group, remained for the duration of the operation.

A day after the assault, soldiers began going house to house searching for ‘presumed terrorists’, apparently selecting and summarily executing people with long beards, people wearing ankle-length trousers, or who had marks on their shoulders - interpreted as a sign that they habitually carried weapons, and even those who merely showed signs of fear.

Witnesses told the fact-finding team that a group of men who had been rounded up in the south-east of the village were led away by soldiers and shot in the head, back or chest, and their bodies thrown into a ditch. They reported that those who resisted or tried to flee were also executed by the Malian armed forces and the ‘armed white men’ and dumped into the ditch.

At least 58 women and girls were raped or subjected to other forms of sexual violence. In one shocking instance, soldiers reportedly brought bedding from a house, placed it under trees in the garden, and took turns raping women they had forced there.

Dozens of other people were detained. Some of the detainees were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during questioning and while in detention in Moura, Sévaré, as well as at the National Agency for State Security (ANSE) in the capital Bamako.

One victim said he and other detainees were punched, slapped, and kicked in the head, as soldiers called them jihadists, accusing them of killing their own brothers and destroying their country. Another victim detailed how soldiers took him to State security premises where he was tortured and electrocuted for hours as he was questioned.

The Malian authorities announced the opening of an investigation shortly after the attack took place, but more than a year later and pending the final outcome of the investigation, continue to deny wrongdoing by their armed forces. Türk stressed that investigations into such serious reports of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law must be conducted in an independent, impartial, and transparent manner, with a view to holding those responsible to account. He said: 'It is vital that the Malian authorities take all necessary steps to ensure that Malian forces engaged in any military and law enforcement operations, including foreign military personnel under their command or control, fully respect the rules of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.'

The report is based on a seven-month investigation between March and October 2022 and on 157 individual interviews and 11 group interviews. The junta persistently denied access to Moura for the investigators, apart from one initial flyover.

On the day after the report's release, Malian authorities denounced the United Nations and criticised the report as 'fictitious and biased.' Additionally, they announced the opening of an investigation for espionage based on the U.N.'s use of satellites as data collection tools.

## **Amnesty International calls for intervention of ICC**

Amnesty International (AI), which has been at the forefront of collecting information on human rights abuses in Mali, welcomed the UN report. It said that the more than 500 people executed by the Malian army and 'foreign' fighters amounts to the worst atrocity Mali has experienced since a jihadist insurgency flared in 2012. It is also the most damning document yet against Mali's armed forces and their foreign allies.

Ousmane Diallo, AI's senior Human Rights Researcher on the Sahel, described

the seriousness of the report: ‘We draw the attention of the prosecutor and the International Criminal Court to the Moura incident as documented by the office of the OHCHR because the Moura incident potentially involves war crimes and crimes against humanity. [...] And right now, we are in the eleventh year of conflict in Mali and the Moura incident is the most violent case against civilians since the beginning of this conflict.’ He went on to say: ‘the OHCHR said it had reasonable grounds to believe at least 500 people were killed in violation of norms, standards, rules and/or principles of international law. [...] The victims were executed by the FAMa (Malian Armed Forces) and foreign military personnel who had complete control over the area.’,

Diallo said one of the key concerns was the evidence of Russian military involvement via the Wagner mercenary group. He explained: “That may be the highlight of the report. That is to say, it talks about white men speaking a language that is neither French nor English and foreign military personnel. But we all know that these people are members of the Wagner private military company. And what happened in Moura is symbolic of the joint military operations that took place in central Mali in 2022.”

Moura, was known as a stronghold of the Katiba Macina, a group affiliated with Al-Qaeda. On 27 March 2022, the Malian army took control of the area and rounded up around 3,000 people. On 1 April (2022), the junta described the events in Moura as a successful anti-jihadist operation that had put 203 “terrorists” out of action. But five days later, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said 300 civilian men, some of them suspected jihadists, were summarily killed. White foreigners, identified by several sources as Russian, took part, it said.

## **Mali junta fears ICC referral**

According to reliable sources, Abdoulaye Diop, Mali’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, has for several weeks feared that the publication of the Moura report would lead to the involvement of the ICC and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Aware of the judicial and diplomatic consequences of the report, Assimi Goïta, Mali’s interim president and head of its military junta, did everything he could to prevent its publication. Mali’s government had until 9 May to provide feedback to the OHCHR, but ignored all reminders to do so.

We understand that witnesses and families of Moura’s victims are considering turning to ECOWAS for justice. Behind the scenes, the human rights office of MINUSMA and the OHCHR in Geneva are hoping that the ICC, despite its poor reputation on the continent, will take up the case.

## APPENDIX 3

**Jeune Afrique interview with Bilal ag Acherif, leader of the MNLA, somewhere in Kidal, on or just before its publication in L'Opinion on 23 October 2023.**

Bilal (B): “Since coming to power, the junta led by Assimi Goïta wants to destroy us”

Jeune Afrique (JA): A few days earlier, the predominantly Tuareg movements retreated to Anéfis, on the road to Kidal, after intense fighting. They withdrew in order to “avoid a bloodbath”.

JA: Bilal wants the location of the meeting to be kept secret.

B: “From August, the Bamako government, supported by Wagner, attacked our positions, in Foïta then in Ber. Despite all our calls, the attacks continued.”

JA: Do you hold the authorities responsible for the failure of the peace process? (JK Note. This is a reference to the 2015 Algiers Peace Accord).

B: “Responsibility for the situation we are facing lies very clearly with the Bamako and Wagner government. The government never intended to apply the Algiers agreements. But the difference between Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta [IBK]<sup>176</sup> and those who lead the country today is that IBK at least tried to create the conditions for a minimum of trust between the parties. Since coming to power, the Assimi Goïta junta has had the sole objective of resuming the fighting and destroying us. This war in northern Mali can determine the very existence of the people of Azawad. I also think that international mediation, which lacked commitment [...] also bears part of the responsibility.”

JA: What about your own responsibility? Bamako also accused you of having violated the agreement on several occasions...

B: The government was the only one with the power to implement the Algiers agreement. Our role was to facilitate its application by establishing, for example, the lists of our combatants [to be integrated into the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration – DDR – and into the reconstituted army], or by working on the establishment of a new system of governance in the north. And we did it.

JA: The authorities have criticised you for “the installation of headquarters in the Gourma region” or even “the conduct of patrols by unrecognized entities, without consultation or agreement from the government...”

B: “When we signed the Algiers agreement, things were clear: we control and administer a large part of Azawad. We have our own military personnel, defence and security zones that we manage, and we have cooperated on site with Malian and international forces, as with MINUSMA and with [the French operation] Barkhane when they were here.

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<sup>176</sup> The President of Mali who was deposed by military coup d'état in August 2020.

“We deployed to ensure the safety of our populations who have never been protected by the government. That was in no way a violation of the agreement....”

JA: Some leaders in Bamako claim that large sums intended for the development of the north were diverted by armed movements, and that this would have slowed down the implementation of the agreement. What do you answer?

B: “The government must first tell us clearly what funds have been allocated to the movements as part of the agreement.

JA: Where did the money intended for the north go?

B: “It was partly used for the south, for Bamako. Another part was used by the government to create problems in the north, to fund fights between certain communities or against movements. In no way has this money supported development in the north.

(Ed. Note. Since the independence of Mali (and Niger), international aid and development funds intended for the predominantly Tuareg northern regions have been embezzled by the political and military elites in Bamako (and Niamey).

JA: Now that the war has resumed, what are your objectives? Are you fighting again for the independence of Azawad?

B: “We are fighting to protect our people and to protect our very existence. Because we are facing a new kind of war: the FAMa have new capabilities and are using an international mercenary company, Wagner. We also fight to defend our culture and our political aspirations. We will continue to fight until we obtain a new agreement with the government which will guarantee us an administration capable of offering new governance to our regions.

JA: But the Malian army now has greater resources than in 2012. It has increased its numbers and acquired new air resources...

B: Historically, we have never had the same capabilities as the Malian state. Whether it is the number of soldiers, weaponry, financial and logistical means, because Mali has always had external support.

JA: What would it take to stop the fighting?

B: Let the government understand that it cannot stay in Azawad without the consent of the people of Azawad. It doesn’t matter what means it deploys, it doesn’t matter how many people it kills, it doesn’t matter the support it receives. If the junta understands this and agrees to seriously discuss a new relationship between south and north, then the war will end. It is also imperative that the government removes Wagner’s mercenaries from our regions.

JA: Do you fear these men and their methods?

B: Wagner supports the army, but also the military system in power in Bamako ... On the ground, its methods against civilians are terrible. Wagner kills people, steals their property, their money, everything they have. The mercenaries carry out mass executions among civilians wherever they are. Two weeks ago, they beheaded civilians and planted mines in their bodies in Ersane. These are inhumane terrorist actions. It is a message of terror sent to the populations. We call on the International Criminal Court to open an investigation.

JA: The authorities call you “terrorists”. How do you react to the use of this term?

B: In 1960, we were called armed bandits. Today, we are called terrorists, this is nothing new. It's a way of absolving themselves of all responsibility and not looking for a solution. When the Bamako army of putschists and Wagner's men execute old people, women and children, who are the terrorists? The CSP-PSD is not responsible for the death of any civilian.

JA: Is there mediation to bring all parties back to the negotiating table?

B: Any possibility of mediation was destroyed by the government which asked Minusma, guarantor of the [Algiers 2015] agreement, to leave Mali.

JA: Bamako also accuses you of collusion with JNIM. Are their fighters on your side? Is an alliance of circumstance possible?

B: With its attacks initiated last august, the army forced us to defend our populations and our bases. If they want to accuse us of being allied with JNIM because we are defending ourselves, they are free to say whatever they want. We fight alone, with our people, no matter what the government says.

JA: The MSA of Moussa ag Acharatoumane turned its back on the CSP-PSD, refusing to allow its men to fight against the army. This departure is a blow to the unity of your coalition...

B: We are fighting for dignity and call on all freedom fighters who defend human rights to support the people of Azawad and the CSP-PSD. Those who [do so] are welcome, others do what they want.

## APPENDIX 4

### **The Aguelhok massacre. January 2012**

In January 2012 a new Tuareg rebellion, led by the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) began in Mali. On 6 April, the MNLA unilaterally declared Azawad (northern Mali) independent from the Republic of Mali. The MNLA were assisted by an assortment of Islamist extremist groups, notably Ansar al-Dine, led by Iyad ag Ghali, and Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique (AQMI) (Eng. Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb – AQIM) led at

that time by Abdelhamid Abou Zaïd. Both Ansar al-Dine and AQMI were supported by Algeria's secret services, the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS), under the overall command of General Mohamed 'Toufik' Mediène.

The first shots, which marked the beginning of this new Tuareg rebellion, were fired on 17 January 2012 when a group of Tuareg rebels attacked the town of Ménaka. On the 19 January, MNLA forces attacked the villages (small towns) of both Aguelhok and Tessalit. The details of these three engagements are still not entirely clear as the reports from the Mali government and the MNLA were totally contradictory. Within the next three weeks, the MNLA undertook further attacks on the towns of Anderamboukane and Léré (January 26), Niafounké (February 4) and Tin Zaouatene (February 8). At Tin Zaouatene, a substantial contingent of Mali forces was driven out of the town and forced to take refuge in Algeria.

By mid-March, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) had reported that 195,000 people had fled their homes in Mali since mid-January, with about half of them fleeing to neighbouring countries.

The key to understanding the nature of the rebellion and the forces at play in Mali at that time, requires an understanding of what happened at Aguelhok on 24 January (2012).

The outcome of the MNLA's first assault on the army bases at Tessalit and Aguelhok that began at dawn on 19 January are still unclear. The Forces Armées Maliennes (FAMa) claimed to have lost two soldiers and killed 45 rebels. The MNLA denied such losses and claimed to have killed many more government soldiers.

On Tuesday 24 January, rebel forces launched a second assault on Aguelhok. What happened at Aguelhok on that day may yet become the subject of an investigation by the International Criminal Court at The Hague (see below).

Reports from both civilian and military sources stated that the Malian army's soldiers stationed at Aguelhok ran out of ammunition and were overwhelmed. A Mali security source in Bamako told Reuters that dozens of Malian troops were killed. "It was real carnage," he said. "Dozens of dead and several vehicles were burnt. [...] This is a turning point in the conflict." The source added that after being pushed back the previous week, the rebels returned with reinforcements, with the army, which ran out of ammunition, being forced to abandon its positions in Aguelhok. An MNLA spokesman confirmed that at least 50 soldiers were killed in the fighting.<sup>177</sup>

News of the Aguelhok slaughter sent angry demonstrators into the streets of Bamako, demanding to know why their menfolk had been sent into battle so unprepared. Their anger was directed at the government and army.

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<sup>177</sup> Tiemoko Diallo and Adama Diarra, "Mali rebels push south to open third front" Reuters 26 January 2012. Accessed at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/26/mali-fighting-idUSL5E8CQ3JY20120126>

No sooner had news of the army's débâcle at Aguelhok spread around Bamako than it was overtaken almost immediately by rumours that dozens of the soldiers, perhaps as many as a hundred, had been taken captive by the Tuareg rebels and then executed in cold blood, either with a bullet to the head or by having their throats slit. Demonstrators filled the streets of Bamako protesting their anger at the Tuareg. The government, for its part, sought to exploit this anger by directing a black propaganda campaign against the MNLA. The core of the campaign was the posting of explicit photographs of dead soldiers, the authenticity of which could not be established, on Facebook and the Internet. Hostility towards the Tuareg was whipped up further when an announcement from the defence ministry on 26 January stated that the Aguelhok assault had been carried out by "AQIM jihadis, MNLA forces and others." The next day, the government publicly reiterated the statement, accusing the Tuareg rebels of joining forces with AQIM and attacking Aguelhok.<sup>178</sup>

Following a week of government propaganda, mob violence directed at Tuareg and anyone who appeared 'light-skinned' or was suspected of being from the north, took hold of Bamako on 2 February. The violence started in the small military town of Kati, just north of Bamako. People spilled out of the barracks and began attacking and looting Tuareg homes. Within a matter of hours, almost all Tuareg, Arabs and other northerners had left the capital, its environs, and other main towns in the south and were fleeing from Mali.

Whether the Mali government's motive in linking the alleged executions at Aguelhok to AQIM and the MNLA was to divert attention from its own military incompetence or to get more support from the US, France and other Western countries, or both, is still a matter of conjecture. By mid-February, the Mali government had succeeded in revamping its inept military defence against MNLA rebels into a campaign against what it called 'Al Qaeda-linked Tuareg terrorists', for which Western countries, and not least the US, were prepared to provide logistical military support.

On 13 February, the Malian army confirmed that Tuareg rebels had carried out the summary execution of soldiers and civilians in Aguelhok on 24 January. In the same statement, Colonel Idrissa Traoré, head of the Mali army's information service, re-confirmed that both soldiers and civilians had been executed at Aguelhok on 24 January, some with their throats cut, and that these acts could only have been undertaken by AQIM.<sup>179</sup> Speaking earlier the same day, French Development Minister Henri de Raincourt, who had visited Bamako on 9 February, told RFI radio that "there was absolutely atrocious and unacceptable violence in Aguelhok. There were summary executions of soldiers and civilians. ... There's talk of around 100 who were captured and killed in cold blood," he added, saying the tactic "resembled that used by Al Qaeda."<sup>180</sup>

178 Bakari Guèye, "Touareg refugees pour into Mauritania." Magharebia in Nouakchott February 3, 2012. Accessed at: [http://magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2012/02/03/feature-03](http://magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2012/02/03/feature-03)

179 AFP 13.02.12. See also: "Tuareg rebels behind January killings, confirms Mali army". RFI. 13.02.12. Accessed at: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20120213-tuareg-rebels-behind-january-killings-confirms-mali-army>; Mali: "exécutions sommaires" de militaires dans le Nord, selon Paris et Bamako". AFP 13.02.2012. Accessed at: [https://www.challenges.fr/afp/mali-executions-sommaires-de-militaires-dans-le-nord-selon-paris-et-bamako\\_309449](https://www.challenges.fr/afp/mali-executions-sommaires-de-militaires-dans-le-nord-selon-paris-et-bamako_309449)

180 Ibid.

Whereas Traoré said he did not know the exact number of soldiers killed, putting the number of dead at “about 60”, a source close to the matter and citing Malian official sources told AFP that: “In total there were exactly 82 deaths, no civilians.” An officer involved in burying those killed told AFP that he had counted 97 dead soldiers and seen a military camp “completely destroyed.”<sup>181</sup>

In spite of the assertions by the Mali government, its military and its allies, the proffered evidence for such executions consisted of little more than statements from Malian government and army officials and photographs of questionable authenticity. Photographs placed on Facebook and the Internet by Mali government ‘supporters’ in the last week of January were quickly removed. However, five of them remained accessible. One was soon identified by the MNLA as being of a massacre undertaken by Boko Haram in Nigeria on 2 March, 2010. This photograph was included in a widely circulated pro-Mali government video posted on YouTube on 16 February under the title: “Les Meurtres du Mouvement national de libération de l’azawad MNLA: les meurtres et assassinats commisent par le MNLA le 24 janvier 2012 à Aguel’hoc, avec des Salafistes de Iyad Ag Ghali.”<sup>182</sup> The authenticity of the other four photographs was not established. The MNLA’s communications officer confirmed that the four photographs were not of Aguelhok,<sup>183</sup> while international news agencies, for their part, remained suspicious of their authenticity.

While there is now no doubt that a war crime was perpetrated at Aguelhok, the question is: who was responsible for it?

The MNLA’s emphatic denial that it conducted any such executions is supported by statements acquired from villagers themselves.<sup>184</sup> According to these Aguelhok residents, the MNLA attacked Aguelhok on 24 January and killed only soldiers in the fighting. The next day, people whom the villagers identified as AQMI came and carried out the massacre. The MNLA returned three days later and raised their flag over Aguelhok.

These statements, raise the question of whether the massacre took place on 24 or 25 January. They also raised the question of whether the force that returned and attacked Aguelhok on 24 January was the same group of MNLA that had attacked the village on 19 January or whether another group, comprised mostly of Ansar al Dine and AQMI fighters who were supposedly allied to the MNLA at that time, also came to the village. The MNLA may have returned on 24 January to launch a second attack on the army post, only to find that the Malian soldiers had run out of ammunition. The MNLA therefore took them captive, only for Iyad and Ghali’s and AQMI’s Islamic extremists to descend

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> The suspicious photograph was originally published in an online news article on Tuesday March 2, 2010, according to the date in the original photograph at <http://hespress.com/international/19160.html>. The photo was taken in a different country (Nigeria) and concerns a Boko Haram massacre in northern Nigeria. Right-click on the image in this website to see the title: \_img\_bukuharam1500.jpg. Right-click on the image to check the “Associated Text” (in Arabic), which says: “Nigeria arrests involved in the massacre of Boko Haram.” The URL of the original photo is: [http://t1.hespress.com/cache/thumbnail/article\\_medium/\\_img\\_bukuharam1500.jpg](http://t1.hespress.com/cache/thumbnail/article_medium/_img_bukuharam1500.jpg)

<sup>183</sup> Personal communications.

<sup>184</sup> Personal communications.

on Aguelhok later in the day or early on 25 January and massacre the captured soldiers. The villagers' statements suggest very strongly that the massacre was not committed by the MNLA but by Iyad and Ghali's and Abou Zaïd's Islamic extremists.

Despite these statements, which are known to the Mali authorities, the Mali government, as well as Mauritania's then President Abdel Aziz<sup>185</sup>, continued to accuse the MNLA of being in an alliance with AQIM and insisted that the executions were proof of this alliance. This accusation gained support amongst French, US and other Western agencies, on the basis of 'proof by reiteration'. However, as Tuareg are not known to slit throats as a form of killing humans or to kill their captives in cold blood, the accusation was directed more at the AQIM part of the supposed MNLA-AQIM alliance, with Iyad ag Ghali's name increasingly being mentioned.

If Iyad and his newly created jihadist group, the Ansar al-Dine, were involved in the alleged executions, then a number of other questions arose. The first, of course, was whether Iyad was operating on his own initiative or whether he was tied up in some way with either or both Algeria's DRS and Abdelhamid abou Zaïd's AQMI, which was known to be based at that time in the Tigharghar Mountains close to Aguelhok.

If Abou Zaïd and AQIM, either independently or in association with Iyad, were responsible for the alleged executions, as the villagers' statements suggested, then Algeria's DRS was immediately implicated. That is because Abou Zaïd was not only AQIM's top emir in the Sahel, but he was closely associated with the DRS and had been in charge of the DRS-managed 'terrorist' training camp at Tamouret (a pseudonym)<sup>186</sup> in southern Algeria, until the camp was closed and its members relocated, first to the Ahaggar-n-Tassili, close to Algeria's border with Niger, and then to the Tigharghar mountains in the Kidal region of northern Mali. The Tamouret camp, was under the direct control of the Algerian army and the DRS. It was there that AQIM's foot-soldiers were trained in throat-slitting, or, as they call it in Arabic, *al-mawt al batii'* (the slow death).

These connections posed a problem for Iyad. No matter how hard he and his followers might insist that he was not involved with the DRS, he had, in fact, been associated with them for a long time. He had played a pivotal role in a number of major DRS 'false-flag' terrorist incidents. He had also been close to Abou Zaïd since the latter's return to Northern Mali around 2008-2009. Iyad still has a home in Algeria and is protected by the Algerian regime.

The linkage of the alleged Aguelhok executions to AQMI and the DRS raised two further questions. The first was: what was the Algerian army doing in Aguelhok? Algerian armed forces crossed into Mali on 20 December 2011,

<sup>185</sup> President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, Interview with Le Monde, February 10, 2012, cited by Raby Ould Idoumou, Magharebia, Nouakchott February 17, 2012. Former President Abdel Aziz was found guilty on multiple charges of fraud in a Nouakchott court in December 2023. At the time of his Le Monde interview, Abdel Aziz was merely repeating the disinformation disseminated by the Mali authorities. Magharebia, now defunct, was a US-funded propaganda site.

<sup>186</sup> Details of Tamouret can be found in Keenan, Jeremy (2016), Report on In Amenas: inquest cover-up and Western involvement in Algerian state crimes. International State Crime Initiative (ISCI), School of Law, Queen Mary University of London, p. 283, October 2016. Accessed at: <http://statecrime.org/data/2016/11/KEENAN-IN-AMENAS-REPORT-FINAL-November-2016.pdf>

just over one month before the executions. While the Algerian government eventually admitted that 15 military instructors had been sent to Mali, local observers reported an Algerian army convoy of five army trucks with trailers and 24 heavily armed 4x4s heading south on the road from Bordj Mokhtar, on the Algerian side of the border, through Tessalit, on the Malian side of the border, to Aguelhok.<sup>187</sup> The number of troops was not given but was estimated at around 200. The same sources confirmed that Algerian troops were garrisoned, albeit perhaps temporarily, at the army bases in both Tessalit and Aguelhok. In addition, an army transporter was seen flying into Kidal. It contained an unspecified number of Algerian army officers and was reportedly ‘heavily armed’.

What were these Algerian troops doing in Aguelhok and had they returned to Algeria by the time of the alleged executions on 24 January? At the time local observers saw the Algerian convoy, a high-ranking Algerian military officer said: “Algerian troops are currently stationed in northern Mali to assist the Malian army in the fight against terrorism.”<sup>188</sup> However, that statement was misleading, in that by December 2011 no attacks had been launched against AQMI in Mali by either Mali or Algerian forces. All the signs were that the Algerian army’s presence at Tessalit, Aguelhok and Kidal was not to help Mali fight AQMI, but to protect AQMI from any assault on it by the MNLA, which had threatened on numerous occasions to rid Mali of AQMI.

While Mali’s government had been prepared to contract Russian and/or Ukrainian pilots to fly its helicopter gunships to strafe and bomb both the MNLA and Tuareg civilians, to sacrifice its own soldiers and to use the logistical support of the USA, France and Algeria to fight its own Tuareg peoples, it had been noticeably reluctant to undertake any meaningful attacks on the AQIM bases that were a metaphorical stone’s throw from Tessalit and Aguelhok. The explanation for this, according to the MNLA, was simple: AQIM was protected by both Algeria and Mali, and their Western allies, because AQIM was a cover for the massive, billion-dollar, cocaine trafficking business which was controlled by elements of the political-military elites and their security services in both Mali and Algeria.<sup>189</sup>

The MNLA threat to AQMI was evidenced on the night of 4 February when an MNLA patrol came across one of Abou Zaïd’s AQIM camps in the Tigharghar Mountains and opened fire on it. Under the cover of darkness and the chaos of a three-hour skirmish, two French Areva employees, who had been taken hostage in September 2010 and were being held in the camp, escaped. However, they were re-captured the next day. Local sources in Aguelhok<sup>190</sup> said that AQMI came to the village at first light and offered large sums of

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<sup>187</sup> Local observers were uncertain where the convoy went after passing through Aguelhok.

<sup>188</sup> “Algerian troops in Mali to fight Al-Qaeda.” Sapa-AFP, 20 December, 2011. Accessed at: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/afrika/2011/12/20/algerian-troops-in-mali-to-fight-al-qaeda>

<sup>189</sup> If Mali had not been such a close client state of Washington at that time, it is likely that it would already have been labelled a ‘narco-state’.

<sup>190</sup> Personal communication to the author.

money for their recapture.<sup>191</sup> News of this story broke in the media on 1 March (2012).<sup>192</sup> A week later, a brief news item in the Algerian state-controlled daily newspaper Echorouk stated that AQMI had moved its base camp from Mali to 90 kms north of Timiaouine in southern Algeria.<sup>193</sup> If this report was true, and it would not have been published without the green light from the DRS, it is evidence of the protection afforded AQMI by Algeria's DRS.<sup>194</sup>

The second question raised by the linkage of the alleged Aguelhok executions to AQIM concerns the matter of complicity. The line of reasoning is as follows. If Abou Zaïd and AQIM were involved in the executions at Aguelhok, then the DRS was also implicated. That raises the question of whether the DRS's allies and backers, namely the US and UK, may also be deemed to have been complicit. Although that may seem far-fetched, especially to those not aware of the closeness of the relationship between the DRS and both the US and UK authorities, the reality of the situation is not very hard to grasp. It is that the US had colluded with the DRS in false flag and fabricated terrorism in the Sahara-Sahel region since 2002, while the UK became an active party in that relationship in 2009, if not earlier, following Abou Zaïd's execution of the British hostage Edwin Dyer.<sup>195</sup> Not only were US and British intelligence services aware of the DRS's AQIM training camp at Tamouret, but the UK provided training to the DRS.

Thus, if AQMI did execute Malian soldiers at Aguelhok, as the Mali government claims, and as the evidence suggests, then it is likely that the persons who undertook the executions were under or closely associated with Abou Zaïd's command and almost certainly trained in such black arts at the DRS-managed Tamouret training camp.

If an international inquiry (see below) into the alleged Aguelhok executions were to establish such a chain, then the question becomes one of how far the DRS's Western allies, notably Britain and the US, might also be held accountable for the massacre at Aguelhok.

The effect of the Aguelhok massacre, as intended, was to paint Mali's Tuareg rebels as Islamist - cutthroat - AQIM terrorists. It was a strategy that worked well, in that whatever international sympathy the Tuareg rebels and their call for an independent state of Azawad may have acquired was immediately tarnished, with the whole Tuareg rebellion being discredited in the eyes of most of the international community.

<sup>191</sup> Boris Thiolay, "AQMI: 2 otages s'enfuient et sont repris." L'Express, Jeudi 1er Mars 2012. Accessed at: [http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/aqmi-2-otages-s-enfuient-et-sont-repris\\_1088231.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/aqmi-2-otages-s-enfuient-et-sont-repris_1088231.html). Confirmed through personal communications with Areva's insurance company.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Echorouk 7 March 2012. See report accessed at: [http://www.Sahara Focus adnkronos.com/IGN/Aki/English/Security/Algeria-AQIM-moves-base-from-northern-Mali\\_313059440363.html](http://www.Sahara Focus adnkronos.com/IGN/Aki/English/Security/Algeria-AQIM-moves-base-from-northern-Mali_313059440363.html)

<sup>194</sup> At that time, the area immediately surrounding Timiaouine was effectively a 'military zone', as it still is.

<sup>195</sup> Keenan, Jeremy. (2009): "Al Qaeda terrorism in the Sahara? Edwin Dyer's murder and the role of intelligence agencies." Anthropology Today. August 2009, vol. 25, no 4, pp. 14-18

# **ICC issues arrest warrant against Iyad ag Ghali**

The details in this appendix were given by the author to a prosecutor from the International Criminal Court in the Hague in 2017. Shortly thereafter, the ICC issued an arrest warrant under seal in July 2017 against Iyad ag Ghali for war crimes – the murder of soldiers – in Aguelhok on 24 January 2012. On 21 June, 2024, a pretrial chamber of the ICC ordered the unsealing of the arrest warrant against Iyad Ag Ghali. The warrant states that Ag Ghali is wanted on charges of war crimes, including sexual violence, and crimes against humanity committed in northern Mali between January 2012 and January 2013.

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **Identities of victims executed at Tassik, Amassine and Abeibeira (Abeibara)**

This Appendix contains the names of victims that have been identified by the Kel Akal Association and Imouhagh International Organisation as having been executed in the massacres committed by Wagner and FAMa troops at Tassik (16 May 2024), Amassine (19 May 2024) and Abeibeira (20 June 2024 and the following days). These lists are not complete. At end-June 2024, 20 people were still reported as missing after these massacres.

#### **Identified victims executed at Tassik, 16 May, 2024:**

- 01 - Erzag ag Ibrahim
- 02 - Tanani ag in Asawal
- 03 - Tihmouda ag Moussa
- 04 - Oulamine ag Ahmed
- 05 - Tanani ag Hachim
- 06 - Tanani ag Abdi
- 07 - Mohamed ag Bilal
- 08 - Mohamed ag Saghid
- 09 - Talli ag Mohamed
- 10 - Baye ag Attouyoub
- 11 - Mohama ag Abdalah
- 12 - Tamdout ag Mouna.

#### **Identified victims executed at Amassine, May 19, 2024**

- 01 – Lamine ag Bissada
- 02 - Ahbal ag Badi
- 03 - Antakane ag Mdeya
- 04 - Inataba ag Mdeya
- 05 - Sidi Med ag Sarid
- 06 - Illias ag Med
- 07 - Mossa ag Agaly
- 08 - Baye ag Inawelane
- 09 - Badi ag Rhissa
- 10 - Ahmed ag Hamzatta
- 11 - Fakni ag Oubeyba

- 12 - Mossa ag Alady
- 13 - Mohamed ag Sidi Mohamed
- 14 - Ayad ag Sidi Mohamed
- 15 - Khaki ag Takanda
- 16 - Mohamed ag Bousneyna
- 17 - Adahossi
- 18 - a worker
- 19 - a breeder.

**Identified victims executed at Abeibara, 20 June and following days.**

- 01 - Attouyoub ag Hamadine
- 02 - Oumayata ag Ibrahim
- 03 - Ayadin ag...
- 04 - Albaka ag Almouner Ag Alhassane
- 05 - Ibn Adm ag Almouner (chagatmane)
- 06 - Assafah ag Mayghis
- 07 - Sali ag Alhousseini
- 08 - Rhissa ag Amda
- 09 - Sali ag Alhousseini
- 10 - Alhousseini ag Ibrahim
- 11 - Abdalla ag Tamiket
- 12 - Sidi Elmoctar ag Magdi
- 13 - Akka ag Tanat
- 14 - Alhassane ag Mossa;
- 15 - Mohamed ag Mohamed Alhassane
- 16 - Intilouten ag Rhissa
- 17 - Alhassane ag Hamad Alamine
- 18 - Salah ag Hamad Iknane
- 19 - Ahmed ag Baba
- 20 - Ahmed assaleh
- 21 - Sidi Ham ag...
- 22 - Lalla ag Iyamine Mohammad ag Qot, (visually impaired)
- 23 – Mohamed (?), originally from Ménaka;
- 24 - Cherif ag Mohamed
- 25 - Ismaguil ag Oyanitt
- 26 - Hatkata ag Hadah Ag Amad

## **APPENDIX 6**

### **UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. Press Release**

Mali: UN experts call for independent investigation into possible international crimes committed by Government forces and “Wagner group”  
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UN experts\* (names of experts accessed on above website) today called for an immediate independent investigation into gross human rights abuses and possible war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Mali by

Government forces and the private military contractor known as the “Wagner Group” since 2021.

Since 2021, the experts have received persistent and alarming accounts of horrific executions, mass graves, acts of torture, rape and sexual violence, pillaging, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances perpetrated by Malian armed forces and their allies in the Mopti area and other places, in the context of ongoing hostilities.

We are particularly worried by credible reports that over the course of several days in late March 2022, Malian armed forces accompanied by military personnel believed to belong to the Wagner Group, executed several hundred people, who had been rounded up in Moura, a village in central Mali,” the UN experts said.

Most of the victims belonged to the Peuhl minority, they said.

“We are disturbed by the apparent increased outsourcing of traditional military functions to the so-called Wagner Group in various military operations, also encompassing operations defined as counter-terrorism, including in Nia Ouro, Gouni, and Fakala”, the experts added.

“Mali must exert the utmost vigilance in prohibiting the direct participation in hostilities of all private individuals operating on its territory. The use of mercenaries, mercenary-like actors and private security and military companies only exacerbates the cycle of violence and impunity prevailing in the country,” the experts said.

Victims of the so-called Wagner Group face many challenges in accessing justice and remedy for the human rights abuses, including sexual violence, and related crimes committed against them, particularly in light of the secrecy and opacity surrounding Wagner’s activities in Mali.

“The lack of transparency and ambiguity over the legal status of the Wagner Group, combined with reprisals against those daring to speak out, create an overall climate of terror and complete impunity for victims of the Wagner Group’s abuses”.

The experts have conveyed their concerns about the allegations to the Government of Mali directly.

END

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **Testimonies of being raped by FAMa soldiers at Mali's border**

The following extracts are taken from an article written by Philip Obaji Jr., entitled “‘They rape us before we can cross’: Women, girls fleeing violence in Mali”, published by Al Jazeera on 10 August 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/8/10/they-rape-us-before-we-can-cross-women-girls-fleeing-violence-in-mali>

**(Note. The author's edits and comments are in italics)**

It was just a few minutes before 7 o'clock on a Friday evening in early June when Kani\* and 10 others fleeing violence in northeastern Mali arrived at a checkpoint in Labbezanga, close to the border with Niger.

Six armed men, three of them wearing military fatigues, at the checkpoint stopped the men and women who had begun their journey from their village on foot the previous day.

“They [the gunmen] separated the men from the women,” Kani, 17, said. “Then three of them ordered all the four girls who made the journey to move into a small tent [the armed men had erected near the checkpoint].

“They took turns to rape us at gunpoint,” said Kani, who spoke to Al Jazeera from the home of a local legume farmer in the Nigerien border town of Ayourou, a town on the border with Mali, where many Malian refugees have settled in recent years and where she has been living for the past several weeks since crossing into Niger.

“Policemen and soldiers scare me because they remind me of the people who raped me.”

The rape victims were all young girls who said they begged their attackers not to harm them because they were exhausted and hungry following the long journey they had made without food and enough water.

“Everything we said fell on deaf ears,” Coumba\*, another 17-year-old girl who was also raped, told Al Jazeera. “At some point, they started to beat us up with their guns and whips just to make sure we stopped talking.”

The pair had fled together from Ouattagouna in eastern Mali following a series of attacks on the town by armed groups from the so-called Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (*Fr. L'État islamique dans le Grand Sahara – EIGS*).

... more than 10,000 Malians have taken refuge in Ayourou...,

“We didn’t know we were going to face another hell trying to leave Mali,” said Coumba. “If we knew anyone would attempt to rape us, we would have left Ouattagouna for another community in Mali.”

While the armed men, some of whom Kani and Coumba suspect were Malian soldiers because of the military camouflage shirts they were wearing, sexually abused the girls, the men they were travelling with were ordered to lie on their stomachs with their foreheads touching the ground.

“We could hear the women screaming and begging the [armed men] to let them go,” said 40-year-old Seydou Camara, one of the men who made the journey from Ouattagouna and now lives in the refugee settlement in Ayourou. “We couldn’t do anything because the men were armed and were going to shoot us

if we dared try to rescue the women.”

The victims estimate that the abuse lasted for about an hour. Each of the three armed men that escorted the girls to the tent, they said, raped all four of them.

“They told us that the only way we could cross into Niger was if we had sex with them and that we could not say no to them,” said Coumba. “They only let everyone go after they had raped the girls and seized money from the men who had cash in their pockets.”

Al Jazeera contacted the Malian government about the allegations against Malian soldiers on July 17, and then again on July 22, but received no response.

In March 2023, around the time that Human Rights Watch reported armed groups based in the north of Mali were carrying out widespread killings, rapes and lootings in villages in the northeast of the country, fighters stormed the street where the girls lived, burned down some houses, seized a number of men and sexually abused women, including the two teenagers.

“They [the fighters] came into our compound very late at night and raped almost every woman there,” Kani, whose father and only brother were abducted by the fighters that night and hasn’t heard from them since, said. “About 10 of us were raped at gunpoint by five men.”

Growing acrimony between Western powers, who voiced disapproval of the coup (in Mali), and the military leaders pushed France out of the country. The Malian military government, in a bid to defeat separatist rebels and fighters (*these are the predominantly Tuareg CSP-PSD*) in the north developed ties with Russia’s military and its Wagner Group of mercenaries, but the alliance has struggled to put an end to rebel activities which appear to have escalated, especially since the country ordered the UN peacekeeping mission known as the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and its 15,000 international soldiers to depart last year (*They left around August 2023*).

“Since UN peacekeepers left last year, Islamist militants have been attacking communities in the northeast on a regular basis,” Adama Traore, a 45-year-old farmer who fled from Ouattagouna to Ayourou last August, told Al Jazeera. (*This is because the Russian mercenaries have focussed more on attacking the Tuareg CSP-PSD and Mali’s civilian populations, rather than attack and rid the country of the Islamist militants, notably EIGS and JNIM, which was the reason Mali’s military junta contracted them to come into Mali in the first place.*)

The teenage girls aren’t the only ones from Ouattagouna who have reported being raped by armed men, suspected to be soldiers, while trying to cross into Niger from Mali. A week after Kani and Coumba arrived in Ayourou, Heita\*, a 45-year-old woman, who previously sold foodstuffs in a market in Ouattagouna, said she and two other women were raped at gunpoint by men in military uniform at the same checkpoint near the border with Niger while

they were trying to flee Mali.

Heita had left Ouattagouna to escape the frequent attacks by armed groups in the town. In one of these attacks more than two years ago, her husband and two sons were killed by fighters who raped her in the process.

“It was already dark when we arrived at the checkpoint and the four men in military uniform we met there forced us into a small tent where they took turns to rape us,” Heita told Al Jazeera. “We initially refused to let them have their way but when they started hitting us with their weapons, we had no choice but to submit.”

As was the case with Kani and Coumba, Heita and the other travelling women were only allowed to continue their journey to Niger after their rapists were done abusing them.

Reports of rape by rebels and other fighters in Mali have been mounting in number since the conflict began in 2012. But government-backed forces, including the Russian mercenaries drafted in to assist them, have greatly added to incidents of sexual violence especially in the last three years.

“If it isn’t militants attacking homes and killing people, it is white soldiers and the army torturing and sexually abusing villagers,” said Heita, who – like many locals in Mali – refers to Russian paramilitaries as “white soldiers”. “Living in Mali has become so dangerous.”

Last year UN experts (*See Appendix 6*) said that, since 2021, they have received persistent and alarming accounts of human rights abuses that include rape and sexual violence perpetrated by Malian armed forces and Russian paramilitaries, adding that “victims of the so-called Wagner Group face many challenges in accessing justice and remedy for the human rights abuses, including sexual violence, and related crimes committed against them, particularly in light of the secrecy and opacity surrounding Wagner’s activities in Mali”.

\*Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA

## APPENDIX 8

### References to Wagner group cannibalism

The following are extracts taken from various media sources which refer to recent / contemporary cannibalism in Russia, especially with links to the Wagner group. Although there are no references relating to Wagner group ‘cannibals’ being sent to Mali, there is evidence they were sent to Ukraine. The question is whether these or other convicted or known cannibals recruited by the Wagner group were sent to Mali.

## EXTRACT 1

**TITLE:** “Wagner Group recruiting murderers, rapists from African prisons to fight in Ukraine”

**AUTHOR:** Kanat Altynbayev

**DATE:** 08.12.2022

**PUBLICATION:** <https://pakistan.asia-news.com>

**ACCESS AT:** [https://pakistan.asia-news.com/en\\_GB/articles/cnmi\\_pf/features/2022/12/08/feature-01](https://pakistan.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_pf/features/2022/12/08/feature-01)

Colossal losses of manpower in Ukraine are pushing Russia’s Wagner Group mercenaries to look for new cannon fodder -- this time from prisons in the Central African Republic (CAR).

BISHKEK – The Wagner Group is desperately seeking new cannon fodder to fight in Ukraine, and has started raiding the prisons of the Central African Republic (CAR) for recruits, according to local sources.

The Russian private military company (PMC) is releasing prisoners in the CAR and sending them to Donbas, Ukraine, The Daily Beast reported in late November, citing local military officials.

Men incarcerated for crimes including rape and murder are being released en masse to join Wagner’s forces, they said.

The PMC’s Central African “wing” has hundreds of fighters, known insultingly as “Black Russians”, according to the officials.

Many of these recruits [...] were convicted of carrying out violent acts against civilians and the armed forces in order to achieve their political goals.

“Since October, they [Wagner paramilitaries] have been walking into military and police cells and releasing rebels, including those held for attacking Bokolobo village [in southern CAR] in May and for raping women and girls,” an officer serving at the military headquarters in the CAR capital Bangui told The Daily Beast.

“Nobody can stop them because the government has given them so much power to act the way they want.”

Rebels convicted of killing CAR soldiers -- Wagner’s supposed allies -- during an April attack on a military camp in the southeastern city of Bakuma were also released, said another officer.

“They [Wagner] said they needed urgent manpower in Mali and Ukraine,” the officer, who works with CAR’s army, told The Daily Beast. “I think more than 20 people we’ve been holding [for very serious crimes] have been released.”

Wagner recruiters promised the new fighters from the CAR not only freedom but also earnings that are fabulous by local standards -- about \$1,000 a month.

However, salaries are being paid irregularly or not at all, according to ex-prisoners from the CAR who joined the Russian PMC and have since left.

Dozens of their colleagues, particularly those recruited from prison, began to disappear in recent months purportedly to fight for Russia in Ukraine, they said.

‘All sorts of rabble’

Led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wagner Group is notorious for furthering Russian President Vladimir Putin’s objectives under the guise of plausible deniability. The Wagner Group is accused of war crimes, abuses and meddling in conflicts across Africa – including in Mali, Libya, Chad, the CAR, Sudan and Mozambique -- as well as in Syria, Venezuela and Ukraine.

Prigozhin in September disclosed for the first time that he founded the Wagner Group in 2014 to fight in Ukraine and acknowledged its presence in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. This admission came after he and the Kremlin had long denied the group existed.

Serving as a mercenary remains illegal for Russians.

Since the start of the invasion in February, the Kremlin-controlled paramilitary organisation has suffered huge losses and must recruit whom and where it can.

The BBC’s Russian service reported that the Wagnerites began widespread recruitment of mercenaries for fighting in Ukraine back in the spring.

A source who at the time was a Wagner Group mercenary told the BBC in March that there were no hiring criteria, so recruiters hired the “dregs” and “all sorts of rabble”.

Wagner’s dragnet recruiting has picked up recruits from around the world.

On November 14, Zambian Foreign Minister Stanley Kakubo said a Zambian student who had been jailed in Russia died “at the battlefield” in Ukraine on September 22.

“We call on African Union and all African states to demand that Russia stop press-ganging their nationals,” Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko wrote on social media. “Africans shouldn’t die for Putin’s sick imperial ambitions,” he said.

Independent media outlets previously have also reported on the recruitment of Afghan and Syrian mercenaries by the Wagner Group.

‘Serial killers, robbers and at least one cannibal’

In June, the Wagner Group started actively recruiting inmates at Russian prisons, preferring hardened criminals who are prone to violence.

Berlin-based Olga Romanova, director of Russia Behind Bars, a human rights organisation, told The Daily Beast in September that the Kremlin's recent recruitment tactic in the war against Ukraine is part of her "worst nightmares".

"Putin's plan is to recruit at least 50,000 convicts, and Prigozhin, who is an ex-convict himself, already has sent more than 3,000" inmates to Ukraine, including "serial killers, robbers and at least one cannibal" who was serving a prison sentence in Saratov, Russia, Romanova said.

[...] In September, leaked video verified by the BBC showed Prigozhin meeting with convicts and assuring them that they could do "whatever they want [with Ukrainians], and they won't get anything for it".

[Cont. ....]

## EXTRACT 2

**TITLE:** Putin sends cannibals to fight in Ukraine

**AUTHOR:** Veronika Melkozerova

**DATE:** 24 November 2023

**PUBLICATION:** Politico

Access at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-war-cannibal-soldiers-vladimir-putin/>

Russian media report that the president pardoned two convicted cannibals because they fought in his war.

Russia needs fresh meat for its meat grinder of a war in Ukraine. So it's using cannibals.

In the best traditions of the late Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Kremlin uses convicted criminals of all sorts as soldiers and pardons those who fight in its war against Ukraine as "Heroes of the Special Military Operation."

Two convicted killers, who ate the flesh of their victims, have recently joined the heroes' cohort and were reportedly pardoned by Russian authorities and released, several Russian media outlets reported.

Sibir.Realii, a Russian branch of Radio Liberty, reported that Denis Gorin, a cannibal from Sakhalin, who killed four people and was sentenced to 22 years in prison, is now a free man and receiving treatment in a hospital in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk.

Gorin — who has posted photos online in military uniform with a Z, a symbol of Russian aggression against Ukraine — was convicted of murder and mutilation of a body in 2003, and was released in 2010 on parole. He later killed at least three more people and was arrested again in 2012 and sentenced to 22 years in prison. Prosecutors said he ate the meat of one of his victims.

Another pardoned criminal, Nikolay Ogolobiak, a former member of a Satanist group, killed two young women and then, with friends, cooked and

ate some of their organs in 2008. He was sent to fight for Russia and returned from the war in Ukraine on November 2.

Ogolobiak was supposed to be in prison until 2030, but was pardoned because he fought in Ukraine. His father told Russian website 76.Ru that his son now lives with his mother in Yaroslavl.

Like many other Russian convicted criminals, Ogolobiak served in Storm Z — a Russian battalion made up of criminals. Recently Ukrainian soldiers reported fighting against Storm Z near Avdiivka, one of the hottest spots of the war.

“I like the news when serial killers, maniacs, and now also cannibals return home in a hurry from the war. I hope that they will eat some more of their compatriots,” Maksym Zhorin, a deputy commander in the Ukrainian army, said in a Telegram post.

## EXTRACT 3

**TITLE:** Wagner chief says he's turning Russian convict fighters destined for Ukraine into 'cannibals'

**AUTHOR:** Caitlin McFall

**DATE:** 31.01.2023

**PUBLICATION:** Fox News

**ACCESS AT:** <https://www.foxnews.com/world/wagner-chief-says-hes-turning-russian-convict-fighters-destined-ukraine-cannibals>

Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin championed the training efforts of his newest recruits swept from Russia's penal system and slotted for deployment on Ukraine's front lines and said they will "will make real cannibals."

Rebekah Koffler, former Defense Intelligence Agency intelligence officer for Russian Doctrine & Strategy, said the term is not meant as a literal interpretation. The expression is intended to mean that Prigozhin is turning his convicts into fighting machines as they prepare for the Ukraine war front.

## EXTRACT 4

**TITLE:** “Putin's top army boss boasts thousands of convict conscripts have turned into 'cannibals'”

**AUTHOR:** Liam Doyle

**DATE:** 31.01.2023

**PUBLICATION:** Daily Express

Access at: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1728922/Vladimir-Putin-army-chief-Wagner-Yevgeny-Prigozhin>

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the infamous Wagner Group, recently appeared in a video boasting the capabilities of his men. He said that, ahead of their deployment to Ukraine, his intense training is turning enlisted convicts into "real cannibals".

## EXTRACT 5

**TITLE:** “Cannibal jailed after headless body fell out of his car ‘joins Putin’s bloodthirsty mercenaries to fight in Ukraine war’”

**AUTHOR:** Tariq Tahir

**DATE:** 22.09.2022

**PUBLICATION:** The Sun

Access at <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/19892442/cannibal-joins-putin-mercenaries-fight-ukraine/>

A Cannibal killer has joined bloodthirsty Russian mercenaries recruited from jails to fight in Ukraine, it’s claimed.

Yegor Lomarov was arrested after a headless body with multiple stab wounds fell out of a car and he later admitted he “nibbled to just take a taste”. He is now among those who have joined the notorious Wagner Group.

According to Olga Romanova, from the Russia Behind Bars organisation, their ranks include at least one “killer” with “cannibalism in his portfolio”. According to the anti-Putin ASLAN twitter account, that man is Komarov.

In a leaked video of his court [trial] the footage showed Komarov also admitting he had previously killed an unnamed 38-year-old male victim “without any reason” to see what they tasted like. He confessed to cutting off a part of the man’s body, cooking and eating it at home and that he scoured parks at night looking for victims.

## APPENDIX 9

### THE BAMAKO CABLES: MALI’S “TUAREG FIRST” POLICY

As a PhD researcher at King’s College London, de Orellana (2016)<sup>196</sup> was able to access nearly 1,000 communications, known as the ‘Bamako cables’, between the US embassy in Bamako and the U.S. State Department between 2006 and 2010, which were leaked via Wikileaks in 2010. Of these, Orellana analysed 413 of the diplomatic cables.

The essence of the ‘Bamako Cables’ and de Orellana’s analysis of them is that they contained highly detailed and accurate assessments of the local situation pertaining to the Tuareg and northern Mali, as well as key recommendations, all of which were ultimately ignored or deemed irrelevant by higher powers in Washington.

This raises a number of questions, namely:

- What sort of information and recommendations did the diplomats’ cables contain?
- Why was this information ignored or deemed irrelevant by Washington?
- What have been the implications of Washington’s actions?

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<sup>196</sup> De Orellana, Pablo 2016, op. cit.

## The US diplomats' information and recommendations

The 'Bamako Cables' show that US diplomats in Bamako developed an impressive network of contacts and expertise on crucial issues, notably the conflict between the Malian state and the Tuareg and Arabs of northern Mali, (known by Tuareg as Azawad), and an extremely insightful understanding of the overall political situation in Mali.

As a result of this knowledge and insight, the diplomats were well-positioned to advise on key subjects, notably the issues and grievances that underpinned the conflict between the central government in Bamako and the Tuareg and Arab tribal and ethnic groups in the north of the country (Azawad).

There has been intermittent conflict between the Malian Tuareg and the government since the first rebellion by the Tuareg just after independence in 1962. A further rebellion saw a major conflict in the 1990s, while tension had been building up again since the start of the GWOT, with a further rebellion in 2007-08 escalating into a major conflict in early 2012 and the ensuing Malian crisis. The 2012 rebellion resulted in the Tuareg taking over the entirety of the three northern regions of Mali – Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao, or Azawad as the rebels called northern Mali. This led to the collapse of the Mali government in a military coup d'état in March 2012, as well as the so-called 'Mali crisis', which is effectively still ongoing more than 12 years later. The 'Mali crisis' saw France intervene military in Mali in January 2013 and the beginning of what became known increasingly in the West as the 'Sahel war'. This was effectively an extension of the GWOT, but with France rather than the US now playing the dominant role in the Sahel. With the 'Sahel war' worsening incrementally on an almost year by year basis, the Mali military overthrew the government of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta on 18 August 2020. The military junta, led by Col. Assimi Goïta, took even further power in a second coup, or 'coup within a coup', on 24 May 2021, shortly after which they invited the Wagner Group to come into the country and replace the French and UN forces which were told to leave.

From early in 2012 until 14 November 2024, Kidal town and most of the Kidal region remained in the hands of the Tuareg separatists.

The Bamako Cables also revealed that the diplomats had an impressive knowledge and understanding of the country's religious groups and their political affiliations, criminal enterprises, notably kidnapping and drugs trafficking, and the relationship of these to Islamic terrorism and AQIM.

While the diplomats had a particularly good understanding of the developing conflict situation in the north of the country, it is significant that they had no knowledge of the covert role played by the DRS and US Special Forces in initiating the rebellion of 23 May 2006.<sup>197</sup> Nor is there any evidence from the Bamako Cables that the US diplomats had any realisation of the nature of the relationships between Washington and Algeria's DRS, or that almost the

<sup>197</sup> This was made evident to the author when he was briefing the US State Department in Washington shortly after the rebellion (Keenan 2013: 67-68).

entirety of the GWOT in the Sahara-Sahel had been fabricated.<sup>198</sup>

Although it appears that the diplomats were unaware of the duplicitous nature of the secret relationship between Algeria's DRS and the US in the GWOT in the Sahara-Sahel, their professionalism enabled them to gain a particularly good understanding of the nature of the grievances that led to and underpinned the Algerian Peace Accords of 2006, which were negotiated by the Algerian DRS<sup>199</sup> on behalf of the Malian Tuareg after the short-lived revolt in Kidal on 23 May 2006. The American diplomats were also keenly aware of the implication of these grievances for counter-terrorism efforts in Mali, as was made clear in numerous warnings they sent to Washington.

As for the alleged link that both the Mali and US governments were claiming between Mali's Tuareg and AQIM, ten US diplomats concluded that "while certain Tuareg are clearly providing logistical services to AQIM, there is little evidence that this support is motivated by anything beyond economic gain. There is no indication, for instance, that Tuareg smugglers or bandits have any religious or ideological links with AQIM. What they share is an interest in trafficking weapons, drugs and anything else passing through the Sahara. Malian Tuaregs generally regard AQIM as a foreign extremist group trespassing on Tuareg land. The Algerians who form the backbone of AQIM do not speak the Tuareg language of Tamachek and share no cultural ties with Malian Tuaregs." (08BAMAKO371 as quoted in de Orellana 2016)<sup>200</sup>

Two qualifications should be added to this conclusion. The first is that it was more a matter of economic 'need' rather than 'economic gain' that Tuareg provided some degree of logistical support to AQIM. The economies of all the Tuareg groups in the Sahara-Sahel, being based predominantly on pastoralism, have always been marginal. However, during the latter part of the last century, tourism made an increasingly important contribution to their economies, to the extent that it was probably the major source of cash income by the time the GWOT was launched in 2003. However, one of the main impacts of the GWOT was the almost instantaneous and complete decimation of the tourism industry, which reduced many Tuareg to desperate lengths to survive.

The second qualification is that trans-Saharan trade, as recognised by the diplomatic cables, has been a key source of Tuareg income for centuries. However, the Tuareg's revenue was derived not so much from participation in the trade, but from charging protection tariffs for right of passage across their territories. In other words, as far as the Tuareg were concerned, the actual content of the trade was almost irrelevant, irrespective of whether it was gold, ivory, slaves, arms, cigarettes, drugs or whatever else. The Tuareg saw the trans-Saharan trade conducted by AQIM, which was much less than generally assumed by most media reports, as more of a source of revenue

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198 See Keenan 2013, op. cit. for the details.

199 Algerian diplomats in the Sahel are all members of the DRS or vetted and appointed by the DRS.

200 Cables are cited by their original State Department reference, where the first two numbers indicate the year, the letters provence and the last number its location in the cables register. All the cables cited in this Appendix are cited by Pablo de Orellana (2016) in his analysis of the cables.

from protection tariffs than any enthusiasm for crime, ideology or terrorism.<sup>201</sup> Indeed, throughout this period, most Tuareg were strongly opposed to the presence of AQIM in their regions and almost had to be restrained from attacking them. Indeed, as the cables noted, many Tuareg wanted to fight AQIM and drive it out of the region. Numerous cables pointed out the degree of goodwill by Tuareg leaders to the US.<sup>202</sup> Evidence of this was: their help in rescuing kidnapped Westerners; their desire to take on AQIM militarily; their willingness to participate with the US and other partners in anti-AQIM offensives, along with multiple offers of counterterrorism assistance (09BAMAKO0186, 09BAMAKO0257, 07BAMAKO1006, 08BAMAKO0888, 07BAMAKO0394, 06BAMAKO1243, 07BAMAKO0587, 08BAMAKO0462 2016).<sup>203</sup>

US diplomats in Bamako also examined religious extremism in Mali and the structures and people facilitating it, concluding that 'Wahabbists' or 'al-Sunna' in Mali were not comparable to similarly named extremists in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. They emphasised that they were less extreme in their views, integrated into Malian society and neither inherently anti-American nor extremist. Indeed, in many cases, "they were indistinguishable from their Sufi counterparts" (07BAMAKO1223 as quoted in de Orellana 2016). It was particularly significant that the US diplomats found no evidence during this period (2006-10) of the large-scale religious extremism on the order of the perceived Al Qaeda threat in Mali that was being propagated by US propaganda. That, quite simply, was because there was no such existential threat to Mali at that time. The main threat at that time came in the form of kidnapping. As Keenan documented,<sup>204</sup> all cases in that period involved the kidnapping of Westerners, with every case - without exception – being linked to Algeria's DRS.

Having found no direct link between Tuareg militancy, religious affiliation and AQIM, the diplomats focused their attention on documenting Tuareg grievances. These included human rights abuses, political and economic marginalisation, mistrust of the Bamako government, poor governance, corruption of government officials, lack of faith in Malian justice and security and lack of infrastructure (09BAMAKO0105, 08BAMAKO0239).

The diplomats warned of the political consequences of these human rights and other abuses, even naming individuals and government-backed militias whom they regarded as serial abusers. The US Cables even named Colonel Abderahmane Ould Meydou who frequently killed and tortured Tuareg prisoners (09BAMAKO0211, 08BAMAKO0366, 08BAMAKO0239).

The diplomats also warned Washington that the Algiers Accords of 2006,

<sup>201</sup> Most media reports and writers on this period, relying heavily on US propaganda, have assumed that AQIM was heavily involved in the trans-Saharan drug trafficking business. In fact, AQIM's involvement in this was marginal. It was conducted by major drug barons in the region, mostly Arabs, who were protected by the highest levels of the state. Tuareg were paid a tariff for the right to traverse their lands, while some took the opportunity to work for the traffickers as guides and drivers on the trans-Saharan routes (Keenan 2018 and forthcoming).

<sup>202</sup> Tuareg leaders such as Ibrahim Mohamed Asselah, Ahmada ag Bibi and Deity ag Sidamou met frequently with US Embassy staff in Bamako (2016).

<sup>203</sup> De Orellana, 2016, op. cit.

<sup>204</sup> Keenan 2013, op. cit.

whose implementation was crucial for reducing Tuareg grievances and reducing the likelihood of another rebellion, were effectively being ignored by the Malian government (08BAMAKO0239).

As far as achieving anti-terrorism goals, the diplomats were clearly very sceptical of a military solution to Mali's northern problem, not only because of their lack of confidence in Mali's security forces, but also because they considered that the solution lay not with the military but in the urgent application of the Algiers Accords (08BAMAKO0239).

The diplomats even warned that the claims being made by the Malian government in its communications to the US that the Tuareg were "enablers of terror" was a "Tuareg diversion": a pretext by the Mali government to get the US to direct its attention to ridding the country of the "Tuareg problem" rather than fighting terrorists. Indeed, cables quoted Tuareg sources who claimed that Mali, which received tens of thousands of dollars in counter-terrorism assistance from the U.S. and other donors, was using this money to fight Tuaregs instead of terrorists. Indeed, Tuareg even went so far as to warn the diplomats that AQIM was being used as a pretext to harass local Tuareg populations (08BAMAKO0462, 09BAMAKO0211). These claims were absolutely true. As documented by Keenan,<sup>205</sup> all governments in the region, notably Algeria in 2005, Niger in 2004 and again in 2007, and Mali in 2008, not only harassed Tuareg but deliberately provoked them into taking up arms in order to portray them to the Americans as terrorists.

One cable sent in 2008 pointed out that even though AQIM may have been based in northern Mali, no terrorist attack had occurred in Mali in that year. Another cable warned Washington that "typecasting Tuaregs as terrorists was a mistake" and that other groups were more likely customers for terrorism (08BAMAKO0937, 08BAMAKO0371).

The diplomats even went so far as to warn Washington that: "Should tensions and clashes between the Malian military and Tuareg rebels increase, Tuaregs in opposition to the Malian government are likely to perceive counter-terrorism assistance provided by the U. S. and other international donors to the Malian military as counter to Tuareg interests." (08BAMAKO0462). The message from the US diplomats in Bamako to Washington was very clear: "the Tuareg could come to see counterterrorism as a threat to themselves, their grievances and claims for autonomy." (08BAMAKO0462).

The overall message of the cables to Washington was that the US should be applying constant pressure on Mali to hammer out a realistic timeline for the implementation of the Algiers Accords, which was essential to avoiding a Tuareg crisis as well as Tuareg suspicion of the US' counterterrorism programme (08BAMAKO0339 as quoted in de Orellana 2016).

Additionally, the cables advised that the US could, and should, pressure the Malian government to engage meaningfully with Tuareg grievances, namely the human rights abuses, the lack of economic opportunity, food security, education, and some political autonomy (08BAMAKO0366,

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

08BAMAKO0375).

The US did none of these things. The question is why.

## Why the diplomats' information was ignored or deemed irrelevant

There were five reasons why the diplomats' information, advice and warnings were ignored.

The first was because at the highest level, which may not have involved more than a few top military and intelligence officials around Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, the US government knew that the GWOT in the Sahara-Sahel was a fabrication. While there was a small number of AQIM, possibly no more than two hundred, based in northern Mali from about 2008 until a possible increase in number from 2012 onwards, their leaders were DRS agents, such as Abdelhamid abou Zaïd, or associates and accomplices of the Algerian army and DRS, such as Mokhtar ben Mokhtar. Indeed, this is why the diplomats were able to report in 2008 that there had been no AQIM attack in Mali in 2008.

A particularly good example of this was the Tuareg rebellion of 23 May 2006 and the two arranged attacks on 'traffickers' or 'terrorists' a few months later in September and October.<sup>206</sup> If these attacks had been genuine attacks by Tuareg against AQIM, and not attacks that the DRS had arranged on possible traffickers for propaganda purposes, this would have been a significant development. However, because the diplomats in Bamako were unaware of the collusion between the US, Algeria's DRS and Iyad ag Ghali,<sup>207</sup> the diplomats regarded the Tuareg attacks as a very significant development in the GWOT and accordingly notified Washington as such. However, as de Orellana discovered, the diplomats' reports on these attacks "were not reported further up the chain for analysis in Washington." (08BAMAKO371, 08BAMAKO239).<sup>208</sup> The reason for ignoring the diplomats' reports on these attacks was because Washington, at least at the highest level, unlike the diplomats in Bamako, knew that these two attacks had been arranged by the DRS, the US and Iyad ag Ghali. The diplomats' reports could therefore be ignored.

The second reason was because those in the US administration directing the GWOT in the Sahara-Sahel had no interest in Mali's abuse of human rights and other Tuareg grievances. Their interest was solely in keeping the Mali government humoured and 'on board' in the GWOT, without getting involved in social and political issues, which they saw as irrelevant. If that meant supporting the Mali government's demonisation of the Tuareg, so be it.

<sup>206</sup> Keenan 2013, p. 69-73.

<sup>207</sup> Iyad ag Ghali was widely known by the Tuareg and many others as "Algeria's man in Mali", as he had close relations with Algeria's DRS.

<sup>208</sup> De Orellana (2017), op. cit. p. 124.

The third reason was because most US government senior officials and military commanders, as well as diplomats, except those few in the top echelons of the U.S. government, were almost certainly unaware of the true nature of the U.S.-Algerian alliance in the GWOT and the operations of the P2OG<sup>209</sup>. They believed and acted on Washington’s disinformation and propaganda war and its overarching counter-terrorism discourse. In short, they acted upon their government’s own lies.

The fourth reason was the priorities of Washington’s counter-terrorism policy, which were almost wholly military, which, in Mali’s case involved military control over northern Mali.

Washington’s counter-terrorism discourse had its own hyperbolic language. Mali’s north, for example, was portrayed in the most exaggerated geographical language, being described as a vast, sparsely populated, ungoverned space, surrounded by porous borders and a frontier of more than 7,000 kms that provided a “haven for smugglers, bandits and terrorist elements” (08BAMAKO0491, 09BAMAKO4350). The nature of the exaggeration is contained in the concept of “ungoverned space” and Mali’s 7,000 kms of frontier. There are many parts of the world that are governed badly or only minimally, but there is nowhere in the world, least of all in the Sahara, that is “ungoverned”. It is an image that Washington liked to give of those parts of the world in which it was conducting the GWOT, as the notion of an “ungoverned space” provided legitimacy for America’s military intercession in it. As for Mali’s 7,000 kms of frontiers, this figure is an exaggeration. It is technically correct in that all Mali’s borders, including those with its southern neighbours, come to about 7,000 kms. However, those borders involved in the GWOT, the ones with Mauritania, Algeria and Niger, are only some 5,000 kms.

Washington saw the chief means of countering terrorism in the Sahel as being through controlling the porous borders and the vast ungoverned spaces. The problem with this territorial control approach to counterterrorism, which the diplomats regarded as questionable, meant that as northern Mali’s border areas were part of the Tuareg domain, the first priority was to quell the Tuareg rebellion. Only after that could Mali’s army turn its attention to AQIM.

This became known to the Americans as the “Tuareg first, then AQIM” policy, and was exactly what the Mali government wanted. The Mali government was more concerned with quelling Tuareg rebelliousness than getting rid of AQIM.

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<sup>209</sup> P2OG was the acronym which stood for Proactive Preemptive Operations Group. For detail, see: Keenan 2013: 5-13. In 1962, following the Bay of Pigs disaster, the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, drew up plans, code named Operation Northwoods, to justify a US military invasion of Cuba. The plans proposed launching a secret war of terrorism against their own country in order to trick the American public into supporting a war against Cuba. It called on the CIA and other operatives to undertake a range of atrocities: Innocent civilians were to be shot on American streets; boats carrying refugees fleeing Cuba were to be sunk on the high seas; a wave of violent terrorism was to be launched in Washington, D.C., Miami, and elsewhere. People would be framed for bombings they did not commit; planes would be hijacked. Using phony evidence, all of it would be blamed on Castro, thus giving the US Chiefs the excuse, as well as the public and international backing, they needed to launch their war against Fidel Castro’s Cuba. President Kennedy rejected the plan which remained classified until 2001. In 2002, a similar plan was presented to US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld by his Defense Science Board (DSB), which recommended the creation of a P2OG, a covert organisation which would carry out secret missions to provoke terrorist groups into undertaking violent acts that would expose them to “counterattack” by U.S. forces, along with other operations which, through the US military penetration of terrorist groups and the recruitment of local peoples, would dupe them into conducting “combat operations, or even terrorist activities.” Rumsfeld agreed, in collusion with Algeria’s DRS, for the P2OG to be put into operation in Algeria in 2002-2003.

Counterterrorism in Mali thus became overtaken by territoriality and the Tuareg issue. Bamako was willing to assist the US in counterterrorism on the condition that the US helped it resolve the so-called ‘Tuareg problem’, which, as the diplomats’ cables confirmed, was largely one of the Mali government’s own making. Indeed, America’s diplomats persisted in arguing that the Tuareg issue could only be resolved through the implementation of the Algiers Accords and a concerted Malian effort to address Tuareg human rights and economic grievances. However, because of Washington’s awareness of the true situation in the Sahara-Sahel and its preoccupation with its own counterterrorism discourse, the social and political aspects of US counterterrorism policy in Mali became progressively diluted and ignored.

Within this very limited discourse, subjects that were identified by Washington as obstacles to US counterterrorism’s central tenet of territorial control, such as traffickers and Tuareg, in spite of the insistence by diplomats in Bamako that such an analysis was incorrect, were identified as “terrorist-enabling subjects” or “putative terrorists” and a threat to the implementation of US counterterrorism policy.

The obvious question was how, despite the diplomats’ detailed and nuanced recommendations, the focus shifted from the social and political to purely military concerns.

The answer to this lay in the fifth reason as to why the diplomats’ cables were ignored. In his analysis of the cables, de Orellana noted Washington’s use of what was effectively a filtering process. He identified the clear implementation of such a filtering system from at least 2008 onwards. This more or less coincides with cables in April 2009 from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Director of National Intelligence, which shifted the priorities in diplomatic reporting towards the needs and demands of the prevailing counter-terrorism discourse (09STATE37566), with the result that much of the diplomats’ informative analysis of the Tuaregs’ political and economic situations and the Mali government’s abuse of their human rights became filtered out and lost.

Most importantly, these new instructions from the US State Department set the scene for any non-state actor in northern Mali, such as the Tuareg, to be potentially identified as an “enabler of terrorism”. As de Orellana<sup>210</sup> noted: “The gradual narrowing in range, scope and relevance of diplomatic reporting allowed for the initial social and political US policy answer to northern Mali instability to sink.”<sup>211</sup>

The effect of Washington’s instructions and the filtering process were catastrophic for the Tuareg in that they were even further demonised.<sup>212</sup> As de Orellana states: “Reports on ‘insurgents’ and ‘separatists’ were led into the same reporting category. The new instructions did not request reporting on

<sup>210</sup> De Orellana. 2016, *op. cit.*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> Keenan, J. 2018. “Why the Tuareg have been demonised”. In *Extremisms in Africa*, edited by Alain Tschudin, Stephen Burchanan-Clarke, Lloyd Coutts, Susan Russell, Mandla Tyala, 140-61. Johannesburg: Jacana.

the goals of such groups, but focused instead on their capability to ‘destabilise host country government’, ‘links to international terrorist groups’, and ‘criminal activity’, stripping the context from these reports and placing all ‘criminal activity’ in the context of terrorism. This is a self-sabotaging lack of nuance that, in our case, strips the politics out of Tuareg activity due to centrally mandated lack of context (09STATE37566)”<sup>213</sup>

De Orellana noted: “Writing [the cables] was heavily conditioned by a set of instructions on reporting and collection needs.”<sup>214</sup> When questioned on this statement by the author on 9 August 2018,<sup>215</sup> de Orellana said: “It was worse than keeping the State Department in the dark. Drawing on the evidence originating in the Principal’s Committee, that is higher up than the CIA, NSA, navy intelligence, and other agencies, the State Department was basically being told to ‘integrate’ its reporting into theirs and to respond to their priorities. It was a case of ‘tell me what I want to hear’.”<sup>216</sup>

De Orellana’s statement corroborates the author’s own assessment of the State Department. At two briefings he gave to State Department officials in Washington D.C. in August 2006 and August 2008,<sup>217</sup> it was clear that neither State Department staff nor diplomats had any awareness of the fabricated nature of the GWOT in the region or the nature of the relationship between higher elements in the US administration and Algeria’s DRS.

Further confirmation of the State Department’s lack of awareness of the US’ collusion with Algeria’s DRS in fabricating acts of terrorism in the Sahara was revealed in some of Hilary Clinton’s 32,000 leaked emails during her time as Secretary of State.<sup>218</sup>

The most important of Clinton’s leaked emails relates to the largest – at least in terms of lives lost – false-flag terrorist attack in the region: the January 2013 terrorist attack on the Tiguentourine gas plant near In Amenas in the Algerian Sahara in which some 80 people, including at least 39 foreign oil workers, died. Clinton’s emails confirm that there was a “secret agreement” between the Algerian government and its DRS and Mokhtar ben Mokhtar, the AQIM terrorist leader allegedly responsible for the organisation of the In Amenas attack.<sup>219</sup>

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213 De Orellana 2017: 126.

214 Ibid. p. 125.

215 Personal communication.

216 De Orellana 2017: 125.

217 Keenan, J. 2013: 67-9.

218 Keenan, J. (2016). Report on In Amenas: Inquest Cover-up and Western involvement in Algerian State Crimes. London: International State Crime Initiative (ISCI), School of Law, Queen Mary University of London. Accessed at: <http://statecrime.org/data/2016/11/KEENAN-IN-AMENAS-REPORT-FINAL-November-2016.pdf>

219 Wikileaks 2016. “Hillary Clinton email controversy”. Accessed at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillary\\_Clinton\\_email\\_controversy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillary_Clinton_email_controversy)

See also: Clinton, Hillary. 2013a. Wikileaks Doc ID 12093. Dated 17.01.2013, 22:00. Subject: Latest French Intelligence Reports on Algerian Hostage Crisis. From Sidney Blumenthal to Hillary Clinton; and Clinton, Hillary. 2013b. Wikileaks Doc ID 12082. Dated 19.01.2013, 07:44. Subject: Algeria Latest French Intel. Sidney Blumenthal to Hillary Clinton. Both as quoted in Keenan 2016a. “Thank you Hillary! Secretary Clinton’s ‘emailgate’ revelations about Algerian state crimes.” International State Crime Initiative (ISCI), 21 April 2016. Accessed at <http://statecrime.org/state-crime-research/thank-you-hillary-secretary-clintons-emailgate-revelations-about-algerian-state-crimes/>; and Keenan 2016 op. cit. p.197-202.

## The implications of Washington's and Bamako's actions for Mali's Tuareg

The main implication of the US' and Bamako's approach to counterterrorism in Mali in the decade preceding the Mali crisis of 2012, is that it enabled both governments to ignore the social and political issues identified by America's diplomats in Bamako, and for the Mali government to identify falsely the Tuareg as 'terrorists'. This enabled the Mali government to intensify its demonisation of the Tuareg to a point where this indigenous ethnic minority has now become the subject of a genocide.

The US and Mali governments were equal drivers of this approach. Whereas the US was preoccupied with its own promotion of the GWOT and had little or no interests in either the development or social and political problems of the region, the Mali government, like former President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya in Mauritania (until ousted in 2005) and former President Mamadou Tandja in Niger (until ousted in 2010), saw the opportunity of America's GWOT to designate its own political enemies as 'terrorists' and the subjects of the US' counterterrorism strategies.

The US support for the Mali state's "Tuareg first, then AQIM" approach to counterterrorism, combined with the US' focus on a border and territorial security solution in preference to resolving northern Mali's social, economic and ethnic grievances, directly enabled the disaster of 2012: the Tuareg uprising and takeover of northern Mali and the coup d'état that ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), followed by the Islamist insurgency in northern Mali that led to the French military intervention in January 2013 and what became known as the Sahel War, or, in US President Barack Obama's view, the aptly named 'Long War', culminating, at least for the moment (2024), in the ethnic cleansing and genocidal practices described in this report.

None of this has been a surprise. As Gutelius (2006, 2007)<sup>220</sup> and others<sup>221</sup> had predicted soon after the launch of the GWOT in the Sahel, US support for the Mali state would enable the latter to avoid having to resolve the longstanding grievances of the Tuareg and Arab minorities in the north, which, if left unresolved, would lead to long-term instability. This is precisely what the "Tuareg first, then AQIM" policy has achieved. Furthermore, as both Gutelius (2006, 2007) and Keenan (2013 and forthcoming) predicted, this policy has not only led to an increasing radicalisation of elements within Mali society, which have come to the fore since the start of 2012 with disastrous consequences, but the military coups of 2020 and 2021 and the even more disastrous policies and practices of Bamako's ruling junta and its Russian allies.

<sup>220</sup> Gutelius, D. 2006. "War on terror and social networks in Mali." *ISIM Review*, 17, 2; Gutelius, D. 2007. "Islam in northern Mali and the war on terror." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 25(1): 59–76.

<sup>221</sup> Keenan predicted in numerous articles in the early years of the GWOT in the Sahara-Sahel, that the US' launch of its GWOT in the Sahara-Sahel by such duplicitous means would lead to a regional or even Sahara-wide conflagration.





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