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*Defense College*

## NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

### STRATEGIC TRENDS

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#### **AFRICA**

##### **Mali: an elusive stability on a jihadist backdrop**

Only four months after the attack at the Radisson Blu, which caused 20 dead, another hotel was targeted in Bamako, the Nord-Sud, which serves as headquarter for the EUTM Mali (European Union Training Mission). Another assault to be added to the ones respectively in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) in January and in Grand-Bassam (Ivory Coast) in March this year. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for the attacks and in the Nord-Sud Hotel case the Islamist group stated that it was the first joint attack with Al-Mourabitoun.

Mali indeed is increasingly assuming the shape of a composite mosaic of different terrorist groups that, given the recent facts, are not a concern geographically restricted to the northern part of the country anymore. Ansar Eddine operates in Kidal region, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) maintains the Timbuktu foothold, whilst the Macina Liberation Front (MLF) launches attacks in the Mopti area. Despite the fact that the French-led operation in 2013 apparently scattered the jihadist militias, in particular AQIM, they have now regrouped and their threat is shoving beyond Mali's borders.

The territory of Mali is undoubtedly a pivotal area in the terrorists groups strategy. A soil abound with natural resources and a crucial hub for human, arms and drugs trafficking from southern countries such as Guinea, Algeria and Libya. This is the reason why the jihadists continue to boycott peace agreement attempts, whose real grip on the ground is still proved inconsistent, and continue to strike targets related to foreign presence.

In front of these extremist and terrorist groups increasingly active, Malian president Boubacar Keita decreed the state of emergency because of 'terrorist threat', and lately U.N. and Malian forces have called for more help. Indeed, at the current state the mission mandate does not allow a resolute counter-terror offensive and it is likely that the troops will be again a target of the Islamist strikes, MINUSMA is one of the U.N. mission that suffer the highest number of fatalities so far.

A new African counter-terrorism force to support vulnerable U.N. peacekeepers and to limit the terrorist threat, now extended to the whole region, had been evaluated by regional defense ministers and army chiefs of staff, as declared by the AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel Pierre Buyoya. It might be a desirable alternative route a harmonized action among the regional States, allegedly Mali, Chad, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso. If from here soon will not be actualized a steadfast response to the terrorist threat, combined with the establishment of a safety common device and interim authorities in the hot areas, the terrorist groups will take more and more ground by exploiting the instability.