

Centre for Democracy and Development
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan Monitoring
Report for January 2016

Introduction

Many were ushered into the New Year amidst disappointment, as government promises to defeat Boko Haram before the end of 2015 was not achieved. At his inauguration on May 29th 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari said, “*but we cannot claim to have defeated Boko Haram without rescuing the Chibok girls and all other innocent persons held hostage by insurgents.*”¹ Unfortunately, none of these goals were accomplished. When it became obvious to government that wanton defeat of Boko Haram was not possible in the near term, daily news headlines were brandish with Buhari’s now infamous claims of “*technical defeat.*” In reality, displacement of Nigerians, especially in Borno and Yobe, and attacks by Boko Haram in Cameroon, Niger and Chad continued throughout January 2016.

In Cameroon, Boko Haram has continued to exploit vulnerable places and soft targets. Market places and communities near the border with Nigeria have proven to be most vulnerable. Unfortunately, civilians and military alike in Cameroon have become victims of Boko Haram incessant attacks, crafty landmines and raids.

Niger’s presidential elections are due in February, but the attacks on Nigeria’s borders with Chad and Niger have increased in frequency. Raids on local communities and military posts happen both day and night. The attacks on the communities will likely not affect the elections like in Nigeria 2015 general elections, but post-election grievances regarding increases in Boko Haram violence will have to be addressed.

¹ Inaugural speech by His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari following his swearing-in as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 29th May, 2015

Beyond Boko Haram, the gradual spread of Al Qaeda affiliates in the region is worrisome. Amidst recent grief of the attack on the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, Mali last November, a similar attack was also carried out in Burkina Faso in January, heightening fears across West Africa.

Highlights

In January, Mali extended its State of Emergency (SoE) to March 31 2016, which was first put in place following the November 2015 attacks of the Radisson Blu hotel. In Mauritania, Cheikh Ould, who was sentenced to death for terrorism over an al-Qaeda plot to assassinate the president in 2011, escaped from Nouakchott central maximum security prison under unclear circumstances.² Cheikh Ould was later rearrested near the border with Guinea Bissau by Guinean soldiers and sent back to Mauritania.

In Nigeria, the January 5th attacks in Dalori claimed 86 lives in what appears to be an attack aimed at countering President Buhari's claims of a "technical defeat." Despite continued bombardment by both Air Forces and ground troops from four of the five member nations of the Multinational National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), Boko Haram splinter cells remained capable of raids, suicide bombing attacks, ambushes and landmine attacks. Although the Cameroon Army has maintained heavy military crackdown on Boko Haram bases and camps, it has equally suffered both civilian and security casualties. According to a Cameroonian journalist, Boko Haram insurgents have killed 1,098 civilians, 67 soldiers and 3 police officials in Cameroon since January 2013. In one encounter with Boko Haram, 24 insurgents were killed by Cameroon soldiers of the MNJTF in Wabache. Also in far northern Cameroon, 38 people were killed and 62 wounded in triple suicide bombings by Boko Haram in Bodo market.

While the formation of the MNJTF may have yielded some successes against Boko Haram, the lack of regional wide progress and sustained attacks by Boko Haram display that the joint strategy largely exists only on paper.

Country By Country Analysis

² <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/al-qaeda-fighter-breaks-out-prison-mauritania-2048000357#sthash.ilq4hNDL.dpuf>

Nigeria

President Buhari's claim to defeat Boko Haram by the end of 2015 proved to be an unrealistic and unachievable goal. Regardless of the controversial "technical defeat," the Nigerian Army and Air Force has shown progress in the fight with Boko Haram. Several terrorist camps were cleared and destroyed, allowing the government to recover weapons, operational tools, vehicles and motorcycles. In its brief in January, the Nigerian Air Force alleged it carried out 286 operations sorties against Boko Haram between December and January. The activities of the Air Force and Army have culminated in the liberation of several communities and the rescue of several thousand women and children from Boko Haram-held terrain.

Nigeria's government and military maintained in January 2016 that no part of Nigeria territory was under Boko Haram' control. However, accessing remote locations in Borno is only possible in armoured carrier vehicles and with military escorts. Many of the roads leading to remote communities are laden with landmines which Boko Haram militants have effectively used to degrade military movement in the region. At least five members of the Civilian Joint Task Force were killed while four others sustained critical injuries when a Toyota Hilux patrol vehicle rammed into landmines in Buma village.³ Even after the military has allegedly cleared some communities, reports of arm confrontations between the military and Boko Haram cells continue.

Mali

Many arrests have been made by Mali following the extension of State of Emergency in early January 2016. Although several terrorist groups remain very active in Mali, peace process in Mali is increasing. Many people are returning back to Timbuktu as peace and stability improves. Aid workers project roughly 41,000 Malian refugees who have returned home as a fragile peace agreement signed in mid-2015 has taken hold. At the same time, commercial activities are said to be steadily picking up in Gao and Timbuktu but many returnees are living in hard conditions with ruined house, looted belongings, and severely degraded sources of livelihood. In some

³ 5 dead, 4 injured as CJTF vehicles step on Boko Haram's landmines in Borno
<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/01/5-dead-4-injured-as-cjtf-vehicles-step-on-suspected-boko-harams-landmines-in-borno/>

places, it is hard to find clean water and enough food. Limited resources have greatly increased the prices of basic goods, leaving those with little money few options to feed themselves.

Currently, the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR is coordinating relief efforts that focus on education, health care, hygiene and water. The UN reported that in November and December 2015, 4,307 individuals received one-off cash payments of US\$110 per adult and US\$50 per child, as part of a financial assistance programme for returning refugees. More than 800 repatriated refugees have been verified by UNHCR between August 2015 and January 2016.⁴

At the end of the 10th Algerian-Malian Bilateral Strategic Committee on Northern Mali, Algeria and Mali expressed their satisfaction with the "positive" progress in the peace process in Northern Mali in a joint statement. Even as hope of peace rises, the peace in Mali remains negative and fragile. Political analysts say confidence has steadily eroded between the government and the rebels and have slowed peace initiatives on the ground. The government and the rebel alliance - Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) - have both accused each other of stalling on implementation.⁵

There are fears that Mali may become a convergence point for various terrorist groups, including the Islamic State, which has a presence to the north in Libya, and Boko Haram. U.N. peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous stated that there are daily clashes between U.N. forces and terror groups in Mali. In one attack on a food convoy in northern Mali, four attackers and two soldiers were killed, three soldiers were wounded and three attackers arrested.

Three policemen were killed by suspected jihadists in an overnight attack near the town of Mopti while on duty in central Mali. They were ambushed about 60 kilometres (40 miles) from Mopti, once a popular tourist destination.⁶ The report that the policemen were killed for attempt to access difficult terrain suggest that terrorist gangs still control several parts of the northern Mali stretching into Central Mali. The attack alleged carried by Massina Liberation Front (FLM), one

⁴ <http://www.unhcr.org/56a8ba5d6.html>

⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-talks-idUSKCN0UW1ZI>

⁶ <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/3-policemen-killed-in-mali-attack-by-suspected-jihadists-1267844>

of the militant groups based in the area complements growing wave of attacks that risk spilling over into Mali's West African neighbours.

Similarly, four Malian soldiers were killed in two separate attacks in northern Mali on Jan 29. One of the attacks took place 37 kilometers (23 miles) from Gao, the largest Malian northern city, when a military vehicle escorting a civilian truck convoy hit an improvised explosive device on the road between the north-eastern towns of Gao and Gossi. Three of the vehicle passengers were immediately killed by the explosion and three others wounded. On the same day, an attack on a military checkpoint at the entrance to Timbuktu city claimed the life of one soldier and wounded three others.

A report by a Stockholm-based research “think tank” in September 2015 found that more peacekeepers have been killed in Mali than in any other peacekeeping mission on record. The incessant attacks have forced the mission to direct two-thirds of its infantry capacity to protecting itself, seriously hindering its ability to carry out tasks meant to bolster the peace process, according to a report by U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

According to the statement, the U.S. military has stepped in to help the U.N. mission counter IEDs, while several European countries staff an intelligence cell in Mali that analyse input from unarmed drones, sensor-equipped attack helicopters and Special Forces.⁷

Since the war in Mali broke out in 2012, Islamic militants have used northern Mali as a base to stage attacks throughout the region, including the January attacks in Burkina Faso. Kidnap-for-ransom schemes have proven lucrative, most notably Swiss missionary Beatrice Stockly and an Australian couple, Dr Ken Elliot and his wife, Jocelyn. Near the town of Tin Akoff, which sits close to the Malian border, two gendarmes were killed by suspected jihadists when 20 gunmen stormed a nearby village.⁸ Security sources say the rise in Western abductions may represent a bid by AQIM to increase funding for future attacks.

⁷ <https://www.yahoo.com/news/mali-un-must-enable-peacekeepers-confront-terrorists-223800606.html?ref=gs>

⁸ <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/01/aqim-takes-australian-couple-hostage-in-northern-burkina-faso.php>

Burkina Faso

Over 32 people were killed and several others injured⁹ when AQIM fighters attacked the Cappuccino restaurant in the Splendid Hotel in the heart of Ouagadougou on the 15th of January 2016. AQIM claimed responsibility for the attack on behalf of one of its affiliates, Al-Murabitoun, a group led by Algerian extremist Mokhtar Belmokhtar. AQIM claimed the attack was in “revenge against France and the disbelieving West.”¹⁰ French forces killed four extremists and freed more than 176 people to end the seizure of the luxury hotel. The siege, which lasted 12-hours, suggested the attackers wanted something beyond merely killing people.

Prior to the ousting of former President Blaise Compaore in October 2014, Ouagadougou was a relatively safe city. The President was a pacifier who was involved in quelling many conflicts throughout West Africa during his term. Compaore was instrumental to several peace processes ranging from Liberia to Ivory Coast and Mali and had been in contact with many armed groups and rebellions. Some rebel leaders even found a home in Ouagadougou, where peace deals have often been negotiated.

At the end of the Libyan crisis and at the beginning of 2012 conflict in Mali, he forged a relationship of good understanding with some Islamist groups such as AQIM. The president's men were key for Western countries to secure the release of some of their kidnapped nationals in return for ransoms. But with the demise of the Compaore political machine, Islamist militants have lost that channel in Burkina Faso and the country is now vulnerable to their attacks in the Sahel. Observers also note that AQIM may be keen to show its strength at the time when al-Qaeda's rival, the Islamic State, is accumulating alliances in West Africa and around the world.

Other Countries

The Ivory Coast government has asked religious leaders and Muslim organisations to notify police about newcomers in their communities and any suspicious behaviour.¹¹ The situation is

⁹ <http://www.dawn.com/news/1233428>

¹⁰ <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/lcHOWeMeom55GCx6xu1AbK/Burkina-Faso-attack-At-least-20-dead-Islamist-group-claims.html>

¹¹ <http://gulfnews.com/news/africa/france-warns-senegal-ivory-coast-of-terror-plot-1.1656785>

worse off in countries that have now joined in the fight against Islamic extremism. For instance, economic activity has been paralyzed in Chad and northern Cameroon following frequent Boko Haram attacks on trucks transporting goods from Nigeria's Borno state to the two central African nations. Truck diversion despite the MNJTF manning the borders has become regular occurrence. There are reports of three trucks transporting goods to Chad through Cameroon being allegedly diverted by Boko Haram to an unknown destination.

Trends Analysis

Attacks and Operations

Hopes are high in Mali and in Nigeria about the restoration of law and order to regions devastated by extremists. Stakeholders in Mali think the peace process is progressing while in Nigeria the military destroyed several camps controlled by Boko Haram. However, the situation remains volatile. While their capabilities have been degraded, Boko Haram continues to launch deadly attacks. In Cameroon, a landmine attack killed Captain Yari Emmanuel and Lieutenant Colonel Beltus Kwene. A similar experience in Nigeria resulted in the death of at least five members of the Civilian Joint Task Force while four others sustained critical injuries when a Toyota Hilux patrol vehicle rammed into landmines in Buma village while trying to respond to a Boko Haram attack.

Many Boko Haram attacks in January appear to be raids to replenish food stores, a sign that recent military successes are having a degrading effect on the group's ability to sustain itself. The Nigeria Army, with support from the MNJTF, blocked several trade routes and markets and hindered Boko Haram's ability to trade or raid markets for food.

Suicide bomb attacks were also very prominent in Boko Haram's operational zones. In Cameroon, Boko Haram carried several suicide bomb attacks in markets, churches, mosque, crowded places and other soft targets. On January 27, two suspected female suicide bombers detonated their explosive devices at the main market and a military check point in Chibok, Nigeria. Fifteen people were killed and another forty-nine were injured during the attack.

In other parts, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso, terrorist attacked soft targets such as hotels, cafeterias and resorts. Boko Haram yet to use utilize hostage-taking but it is quickly becoming a common trend and modus operandi for groups in Mali and Burkina Faso.

Tactics and Response

The attacks in Mali and Ouagadougou have resulted in increased armed military presence in major hotels and leisure centres across West Africa, and in particular in areas where AQIM operate. Government offices, foreign missions, popular hotels and other major public places are often barricaded with thick concrete slabs, making movement by vehicle much harder in major parts of these cities.

Amidst increasing fuel scarcity and the blockage of fuel tankers from supplying fuel to hinterland communities in Nigeria, Boko Haram logistics now use jerry cans to transport fuel. The military and other security agencies have intensified effort that have resulted in large fuel shortages. As a result, many of Boko Haram attacks in January were conducted without the use of vehicles. Many bicycles were recovered and destroyed by the Nigeria army while many motor cycles found in Boko haram camps were without fuel. The army has also intercepted several drug and stimulant sellers. Intelligence report says the drugs are used to boost sexual performance of the group and to keep them awake.

Government Response

In the aftermath of the attacks in Mali and Burkina Faso in November and January respectively, leaders from both countries agreed to work more closely to fight jihadists by sharing intelligence and conducting joint security patrols. There are several multinational groups that have emerged in West Africa and the Sahel over time to tackle extremist groups but they have largely been ineffective. In December 2014, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger formed the G5 Sahel grouping, an institutional framework created to coordinate development and security policies of the region. Also, there is the Multinational Joint Task Force, France's counter-terrorism mission in the Sahel region known as Operation Barkhane and others. These groups are often marred by internal bickering, conflicting interests, confused on strategy and tactics and

laden with selfish interest of different leaders. The emergence of these groups has put a question mark on the efficacy of the ECOWAS and the AU.

Government response to terrorism has largely been hinged on military might rather than on tackling the root causes of terrorism. Since the attack on Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso's government has responded by significantly increasing military presence in civil space. This has also occurred in population centres in Senegal and Ghana. However, leaders have failed to realise that military might is not sustainable, especially when the extremist themselves are not afraid of death. Increased military presence in public spaces has created conditions for human rights violations. Using solely military in many cases has incited extremist's force against government forces. While military force is critical, it should however not be treated as sole solution.

Although Mali attempted a peace agreement in June 2015, the inability and incapacity of the government to fulfil the peace conditions continues to undermine the peace process. There are indications that confidence has steadily eroded between the government and the rebels, slowing peace initiatives to a halt. The government and the rebel alliance - Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) - have both accused each other of stalling on implementation. In Nigeria, the government has continued to express its willingness to dialogue with Boko Haram. One thing is clear in both instances: these are just temporary measures. If the real issues are not addressed, peace will likely never be achieved.

Thousands of Malian children have been sold to armed groups by family members or school officials in exchange for money. In other cases, the children themselves may have been lured in by money and the appeal of "fighting for God," especially after indoctrination in religious schools. Girls are often bought or abducted and forced into marriages with combatants or used in sexual slavery. In 2013, the United Nations added Mali to its child soldiers list of shame. Malnutrition affects one in three children in Mali; latest figures show a Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate of 12.4 percent among children under five across the country. In the region of Timbuktu, this rate rises to 17.5 percent, exceeding the World Health Organization's critical emergency threshold.

In Nigeria, several children are lost to malnutrition each day. Feeding condition in IDP camps in Nigeria is very poor and alleged cases of women in IDP camps forced to trade sex for food is rampant. The cost of living in remote areas of Borno State where people have managed to return into has skyrocketed and deemed many areas unaffordable for the many of them. Government food supplies remain critically low. Nigeria needs 1.5 billion dollars as immediate relief fund for the states of the north east affected by Boko Haram activities.

Figures and Casualties

Rescue	adoption	State	CJTF death	injuries	civilian death	injuries	soldier death	injuries	terrorist death	losses	Surrender	arrest	Weapons	weapons	Country
696	1	0	0	0	302	273	2	2	151	0	0	345	0	0	

18 incidences 3 kidnapped (one Swiss missionary woman, an Australian couple, husband and wife)/ 11 military deaths/ 3 Military injuries/ 1 civilian death/ 3 terrorist death, 4 police death/ several arrest

Nigeria									
Rescue	adoption	vigilante	civilian death	injuries	soldier death	injuries	terrorist death	arrest	Surrender
696	1	4	307	329	2	2	134	345	3
			Cameroon						
		2	93		2		several	several	

At least 40 villagers in Gwadale border community in Gwoza local government area of Borno state were allegedly killed by Cameroonians soldiers.

A Cameroonian Battalion Captain, Yari Emmanuel and Lieutenant Colonel Beltus Kwene in separate incidences died in landmine explosions

Three people were killed in two suicide attacks in neighboring Chad

Regional

The AU is showing an appetite for a co-ordinated military response. In her statement on the Burkina Faso attack, AU Commission chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma reaffirmed the “vital importance of establishing, quickly, an Intervention Force to be deployed in northern Mali, to fight against the criminal and terrorist groups operating from that region towards other countries of the Sahel”. The ECOWAS has also responded in a similar manner. Between October

and November 2015, AU trained its first 5000 African Standby Force (ASF) troops, which has now replaced the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) created in 2013.

International Support

The countries ravaged by extreme violence have benefited from a series of external support in the last few months. Support pledges came from, among others, the European Union, the United States, Russia and China. The United States has already established a drone base in Cameroon to assist with intelligence gathering and has a small detachment of its troops in Nigeria and neighboring countries who are not meant to be actively involved in the war.

In January, as part of their Excess Defense Articles Program, the United States donated over 24 mine-resistant armor-protected vehicles to the Nigerian Army. According to reports, more than half of the vehicles are not functional. Similarly, Germany's President is expected in Nigeria in February as part of her African tour. Her visit is also expected to attract some support for the fight against Boko Haram.

Germany shows commitment towards counter violent extremist in Africa, particularly in West Africa. The German cabinet approved the deployment of 550 Bundeswehr troops to Mali in early January. This was further to the campaign by President Francois Hollande in Europe for support following the Paris and Bamako attacks. German deployment of troops to Africa to counter terrorism has so far been minimal. In 2012 when France began its deployment over the crisis in northern Mali, only 10 German soldiers were involved.

The German troops are better trained and equipped than most of the peacekeepers already on ground in Mali and can provide emergency combat support that is currently provided by French troops. The German government's proposal will extend the deployment until 31 January 2017. The German soldiers will be stationed in Gao, northeastern Mali, where soldiers from the Netherlands are operating a base camp.

With increasing casualties from landmines, the U.S. military is helping the U.N. mission counter IEDs, while several European countries staffed an intelligence cell in Mali that analyzes input from unarmed drones, sensor-equipped attack helicopters and Special Forces.

The Strategy

In view of these challenges, the ECOWAS CTSIP fills the gap for the need of robust and proactive policy recommendations address the security issues of terrorism within the region. The ECOWAS CTSSIP calls on states to develop de-radicalisation programs that seek to counter radical ideologies and terrorist propaganda and social awareness programs for youth groups. Counterterrorism programs should also be incorporated into school curriculums.

The CTSIP is built on the primacy of terrorism prevention and respect for human rights. Our strategy emphasizes good governance and a democratic culture as prerequisites for effective counter-terrorism. Counter-terrorism requires both military and non-military strategies and tools, however CTSIP observes that the largest percentage of efforts usually lean toward military means. Cooperation among states and technical assistance in all fields constitute a cornerstone for the successful implementation of this strategy.

Conclusion

Violent extremist groups pose a serious threat to international peace, security and stability and constitutes a criminal act that undermines efforts aimed at achieving democracy, good governance and development. In West Africa, particularly within the ECOWAS bloc, the challenges posed by violent extreme groups have further impoverished many people and created dire humanitarian crisis. The reversal of democratic and development gains of previous decades¹² is a result of the chaos caused by these elements.

Terrorism is a major global problem. States in the Sahel and ECOWAS have proven to be weak against political corruption, poverty, social injustice and governance in remote areas. Large areas left ungoverned by states are now controlled by terrorist elements, insurgent groups and criminal gangs. While some groups like Boko Haram have evolved locally, other groups use West Africa as a base of operations and spread their terror to other parts of Africa.

¹² Banfield J. Tell (2015) Like It Is the role of civil society in responding to serious and organised crime in west Africa, International Alert, September 2015

There is a desperate need to increase state response that addresses these threats using a holistic approach. The unfortunate inability of the region to form a common alliance against crime and terrorism has made the region a common ground for breeding criminals and terrorist organizations.

Recommendations

- African countries must think beyond their individual country's security and think holistically about areas of influence outside their borders. African leaders must meet and address these grey areas and develop joint counterterrorism strategies.
- Porous borders and state-within-state spaces not governed by a legitimate central government must be collectively addressed through a continent-wide strategy.
- Transparency of the state and its institutions is essential. There is need to operate an open policy with consistent interface with civil society and the media as a measure of galvanizing national support.
- ECOWAS states need to share actionable intelligence and information. Cooperation in investigation, prosecution and counterterrorism operations is essential to defeating violent extremist groups in the region.
- Those who have been displaced need to be provided with psychological, mental, physical and emotional support before they are returned to their communities. Governments need to guarantee their safety, ensure rebuilding of their community, houses, markets, roads/bridges before they are returned to their respective communities.

Appendixes

January 2016 security Incidents in Mali

07 January 2016: Gunmen abducted a Swiss woman identified as Beatrice Stockly in Timbuktu. Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility in a video the group released on January 26th, 2016.

09 January 2016: AQIM released a video of the Swedish and South African hostages. Both hostages were kidnapped in Timbuktu, Mali November 26th, 2011. AQIM demanded that France no be involved in the negotiations of their release.

09 January 2016: Yahya Abu al-Hammam, head of *katibat* Grand Sahara of AQIM in Mali, conducted first interview since the French intervention in Mali in January 2013.

Key points:

- Abu al-Hammam confirmed collaboration between AQIM and Macina Liberation Front (MLF), jihadist group that rose to prominence since January 2015 in Central Mali.
- Abu al-Hammam said AQIM was in contact with Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, and hoping will return to the right direction. Claiming al-Sahraoui had gone astray in giving allegiance to the so-called Islamic State.

09 January 2016: Malian investigators reported a proof to confirm al-Murabitun to be behind November 20th, 2015 Radison Blu hotel attack in Bamako, Mali. Mali's chief prosecutor said that a scrap of paper with an Arabic inscription was found on the bodies of the two men that conducted the attack. The note sought the release of two prisoners who are members of al-Murabitun. *Katibat* Grand Sahara of AQIM, in collaboration with al-Murabitun, already claimed responsibility.

12 January 2016: Unknown gunmen attacked Malian forces checkpoint near Gao. Reportedly, gunmen seized weapons after Malian officers abandoned the post.

13 January 2016: Two men have been indicted on charges of complicity in terrorism for the attack on Radison Blu hotel in Bamako, Mali. The two suspects were arrested November 26th, 2015.

15 January 2016: Gunmen attacked a market in Dioura, Mopti region, killing a guard from the Water and Forests Agency. Members of the MLF suspected to be behind the attack.

15 January 2016: Suspected AQIM gunmen attacked Malian security forces while escorting humanitarian convoy near Goundam, Timbuktu. Two soldiers and two attackers reportedly killed. Three Malian soldiers wounded and three attackers arrested.

15 January 2016 (see statement image below): Ansar al-Din claimed to have targeted and destroyed a French military vehicle north of Kidal killing unknown number of French soldiers. France did not confirm the incident.

19 January 2016: Unconfirmed reporting stated that a MINUSMA vehicle struck an improvised explosive device (IED) near Kidal injuring unknown number of peacekeepers. MINUSMA did not confirm the incident.

19 January 2016: Gunmen killed three Malian gendarmes in ambush in Mopti region. Ansar al-Din Macina branch claimed responsibility.

21 January 2016 (see statement image below): Ansar al-Din Macina branch claimed to have attacked Malian forces checkpoint in Konna and seized weapons.

21 January 2016: Unidentified gunmen targeted weekly market at Bonna commune in Macina Circle. One civilian killed and one gendarme injured.

21 January 2016: Two rockets reportedly fired at MINUSMA camp in Aguelhoc. No casualties reported.

21 January 2016: MINUSMA vehicle struck an IED on Ménaka – Ansongo transit route. No casualties reported.

23 January 2016: Unknown gunmen attacked the residence of the Public Prosecutor in Gao. A guard reportedly returned fire, killing one attacker.

28 January 2016: Malian military vehicle escorting humanitarian convoy struck an IED between Gao and Gossi. Three Malian soldiers killed.

28 January 2016: Malian Army vehicle came under attack by unknown gunmen at a checkpoint east of Timbuktu. One Malian soldier killed.

Additional Security Reporting and Analysis Related to Mali:

- The three AQIM/al-Murabitun members that carried the attack on Splendid hotel and Cappuccino restaurant in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso are believed to be Malian citizens.
- On 15 January 2016, same day as Ouagadougou attack, Australian couple was kidnapped in Baraboulé, northern Burkina Faso on the borders with Mali. AQIM claimed responsibility.
- On 25 January 2016 Malian forces claimed to have arrested four individuals in Kayes while traveling through Mali then through Niger to allegedly join Boko Haram. The suspects were a Gambian, a Guinean, and two from Guinea Bissau.
- On 27 January 2016, reportedly the MLF distributed leaflets at local mosques in village Kewa, Mopti region. The message was to encourage local parents to send their children to Medrassas. In Mali Medrassa is often used to refer to traditional schools run by local chiefs or religious leaders, and there is no confirmation these schools are encouraging or being a source of radicalization.

- AQIM and Ansar al-Din have stepped up their media presence by releasing high quality videos. Videos included images and recordings of held hostages and attacks against opposed armed groups in the region, like the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA), and alleged images of destroyed French military vehicles. While many believes this is in competition with the rise of Islamic State, AQIM and allies are doing this mainly for recruitment purposes.
- AQIM and allies while likely to continue to carry small scale attacks on foreign, peacekeeping, and Malian troops, suicide missions similar to Radison Blu and Splendid hotels attacks should be expected. The group demonstrated its willingness to wait as long as it takes to conduct spectacular attacks¹³.

Burkina Faso

Friday 15 January 2016 More than 30 people, largely foreigners were reported killed, 186 rescued and more 63 injured at Cappuccino Café and Splendide Hotel in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso by alleged Islamists affiliated to ALQIM.

Over 30 death, 176 rescue, 63 injuries

Boko Haram incidents in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad

2 January 2016: Boko Haram killed two in Mozogo, Cameroon.

3 January 2016: Boko Haram killed twelve in Nasarawa, Nasarawa.

5 January 2016: Boko Haram killed twenty-five in Gwoza, Borno.

10 January 2016: Boko Haram killed seven in Madagali, Adamawa.

13 January 2016: A suicide bomber killed himself and twelve others in Kouyape, Cameroon. Boko Haram is suspected.

15 January 2016: Nigerian troops killed seventeen Boko Haram fighters in Gujba, Yobe

18 January 2016: A suicide bomber killed himself and four others at a mosque in Nguetchewe, Cameroon. Boko Haram is suspected.

18 January 2016: Nigerian troops killed ten Boko Haram insurgents in Marte, Borno.

20 January 2016: Nigerian troops killed three Boko Haram insurgents in Damboa, Borno.

¹³ Sourced and lifted from Rida Lyammouri via <https://maghrebandsahel.wordpress.com/2016/02/05/january-2016-violent-extremist-organizations-veos-and-security-related-incidents-in-mali/>

20 January 2016: Nigerian troops killed twenty Boko Haram insurgents in Marte, Borno.

20 January 2016: Nigerian troops repelled a Boko Haram attack, killing three insurgents in Biu, Borno.

21 January 2016: Nigerian troops killed eight Boko Haram insurgents in Gwoza, Borno.

21 January 2016: Nigerian troops killed twenty Boko Haram insurgents in Dikwa, Borno.

January 21 2016: Nigerian troops killed four Boko Haram insurgents in Askira/Uba, Borno.

22 January 2016: Nigerian troops killed ten Boko Haram insurgents in Gwoza, Borno.

22 January 2016: Two suicide bombers killed themselves and a third was shot in Maiduguri, Borno.

24 January 2016: Boko Haram killed one in Tarmuwa, Yobe.

24 January 2016: Sectarian violence led to the deaths of thirty in Grie, Adamawa.

25 January 2016: Four Boko Haram suicide bombers killed themselves and thirty-one others in Bodo, Cameroon.

25 January 2016: Cameroonian troops hunting Boko Haram insurgents killed forty civilians in Gwoza, Borno.

26 January 2016: 3 Boko Haram kamikaze and 2 members of vigilante group dead, 2 others wounded in attack on Bargaram in Logone and Chari division

27 January 2016: Two suicide bombers killed themselves and fourteen others in Chibok, Borno. Boko Haram is suspected.

28 January 2016: Two suicide bombers killed themselves and four others in Kerawa, Cameroon. Boko Haram is suspected.

29 January 2016: One suicide bomber killed themselves and seventeen others in Gombi, Adamawa.

30 January 2016: Boko Haram killed eighty-six in Maiduguri, Borno.

30 January 2016: Boko Haram landmines killed five members of the CJTF in Kaga, Borno.

The existing Islamic Extremist Groups

Although there are many violent Islamic extremist groups within the ECOWAS and the Sahel, this report will examine a select few of the prominent groups that were active in January 2016.

AQIM: Created from the jihadi insurgents who fought during the 1990s Algerian civil war, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has existed as an al-Qaeda franchise based in desert borderlands since 2007. Since November 2015, AQIM fighters have conducted two attacks on hotels in the Malian and Burkina Faso capitals, killing dozens of Westerners with continuously increasing sophistication. Assaultants in Ouagadougou planted explosives to slow first responders and sent an apparently live audio message from the scene entitled "Message Signed with Blood and Body Parts"

Mokhtar Belmokhtar: A veteran of the war in Afghanistan, the elusive one-eyed Algerian terrorist made a name for himself as a leader of desert bandits aiming to kidnap and kill Westerners. A few years ago, he broke with AQIM after its leaders criticized him for not being violent enough. Groups he has founded since then have gone on to kill scores of people, mostly foreigners, in Algeria, Mali and Burkina Faso. The jihadist Mokhtar Belmokhtar and his al-Mourabitoun movement are proving to be a growing menace. The group is widely believed to be the perpetrators of attacks on two hotels and a café in Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou, in which over 30 people are killed.

Ansar Dine: Ansar Dine, led by Tuareg commander Iyad Ag Ghali, briefly seized the desert north of al AQIM in 2012 and the two groups are involved in an intensifying insurgency that has spilled over Mali's borders. They are largely Tuareg who refused to signed government offered peace in June 2015 and have continued Islamic terrorist operations with profits from drug smuggling. The continued smuggling explains Ansar Dine involvement with the new Islamic terror group Macina Liberation Front (FLM). This group also claimed involvement in the November 2015 hotel attack in the capital. FLM openly identifies with the Fulani (Macina are the local branch of the Fulani) tribe¹⁴. The Sahara Emirate is led by Abu Yahya al Hammam and has a long history of taking hostages in the Sahara and Sahel. For example, the group is holding Swede Johan Gustofsson and South African Stephen McGowan in northern Mali. The two were held with Dutch citizen Sjaak Rijke, who was freed last year in a French Special Forces raid.

Macina Liberation Front: FLM is composed mostly of young Fulani men and is associated with Ansar Dine and AQIM. Although most Malians are Moslem, few want anything to do with Islamic terrorism. FLM started out with calls for Fulani people to live according to strict Islamic rules. That in turn led to violence against tribal and village leaders who opposed this.

Boko Haram/ ISWAP: This northern Nigerian militant group first made a name for itself by opposing Western education and for abducting hundreds of schoolgirls in the notorious 2014 Chibok raid. Recently, the group has been responsible for increasingly bloody attacks in Nigeria and neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and Niger. In the spring of 2015, some Boko Haram leaders declared loyalty to the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL) and rebranded themselves the Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP). In January, the group conducted a horrific attack in Dalori in which 86 people were reportedly killed, including many women and children. Boko Haram has mastered the act of

¹⁴ Mali: The North Smolders <http://www.strategypage.com/qnd/mali/20160115.aspx>

using young, often kidnapped girls to carry out suicide bomb attacks, targeting vulnerable areas such as markets and refugee camps.