



Speaking with the “Bad Guys”: Toward Dialogue with Central Mali’s Jihadists

Africa Report N°276 | 28 May 2019

Headquarters

International Crisis Group

Avenue Louise 149 • 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 502 90 38 • Fax: +32 2 502 50 38

brussels@crisisgroup.org

Preventing War. Shaping Peace.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
I. Introduction	1
II. The Crisis in Central Mali.....	3
A. The Katiba Macina: An Ingrained Insurgency	3
B. Intercommunal Violence	5
C. The Limits of Counter-terrorism and Development	7
D. Breaking the Taboo	10
III. Obstacles to Dialogue	12
A. Are Jihadist Demands “Exceptional”?.....	12
B. The Katiba Macina’s Outside Connections.....	14
C. Domestic and Foreign Pressures	16
IV. Engagement with Jihadists in Central Mali.....	18
A. Local Bargains.....	18
B. Humanitarian Access.....	19
C. Religious Debate	21
V. Two Governments’ Different Approaches.....	24
A. Political and Intercommunal Dialogue.....	24
B. Disarmament and Intercommunal Dialogue	26
VI. Dialogue Options for Ending the Stalemate	28
A. Renewed Efforts to Engage Katiba Macina	28
B. A More Inclusive Dialogue for Central Mali.....	29
VII. Conclusion	31
APPENDICES	
A. Evolution of Violence in Central Mali (2015-2018)	32
B. About the International Crisis Group	33
C. Crisis Group Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2016.....	34
D. Crisis Group Board of Trustees	36

Principal Findings

What's new? The war in central Mali has reached an impasse, with the state unable to defeat jihadist insurgents by force. The insurgency and military operations against it have exacerbated intercommunal violence. As a result, some Malians call for negotiations between the government and militant leaders.

Why does it matter? The calls for dialogue, while no longer marginal, are still resisted by the government, its foreign backers and parts of Malian society, who see no room for accommodation with the jihadists. Yet experiences negotiating local compromises and humanitarian access with militants suggest that at least some are pragmatic.

What should be done? The Malian state should mandate religious leaders to test the possibility of talks with militants, potentially aiming first for local cease-fires and other means of mitigating civilian suffering before broadening the scope. It should also sponsor wider dialogue among central Malians, including jihadist sympathisers, about the grievances underpinning the insurgency.

Executive Summary

Military operations aimed at defeating the Katiba Macina jihadist insurgency in central Mali have reached a stalemate, with the conflict fuelling ever deadlier inter-communal violence. In this light, some Malians call on the government to engage the militants in political dialogue. Obstacles to such talks are serious: the Katiba Macina's demands seem to leave little space for accommodation; it has ties to al-Qaeda-linked militants; and the idea of dialogue generates resistance among many Malians and foreign powers. Nonetheless, central Mali residents, aid groups and religious scholars frequently engage the group to discuss local compromises, humanitarian access and religious doctrine, revealing at least some pragmatism among militants. Given the remote prospects for defeating the Katiba Macina militarily, the Malian authorities should empower religious leaders to explore initial talks with its leaders while seeking a wider dialogue among central Malians, including those sympathetic to the insurgency.

Since 2015, the Katiba Macina has established a strong presence in central Mali, capturing vast rural areas and expelling state officials. By framing longstanding socio-economic and political grievances in religious discourse, the movement's leader Hamadoun Koufa has won support, in particular – though not exclusively – from Quranic school students and ethnic Peul herders. The group has provided basic justice, security and relief from decades of state predation in areas under its control. Both the Katiba Macina's violence and military operations against it have widened pre-existing cleavages among ethnic groups, leading self-defence militias to proliferate and intercommunal clashes that now kill more people than fighting between militants and the security forces. Central Mali's death toll is now the country's highest, with civilians bearing the brunt. As the war's costs mount, calls from activists, politicians and religious leaders for dialogue between the government and Katiba Macina leaders are growing louder.

Enormous challenges stand in the way of such dialogue. For now, both Mali's top officials and jihadist leaders reject it. At first blush, the jihadists' aspirations – in principle, the overthrow of Mali's state and democratic institutions, their replacement with a theocratic system inspired by the group's interpretation of sharia and the severing of relations between Mali and its Western partners – leave little room for conciliation. The Katiba Macina's links to the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, a jihadist coalition that pledges allegiance to al-Qaeda, likely narrow its leeway to engage officials. Malian secular elites, Sufi Muslim scholars, human rights groups and victims' associations express disquiet that talks with jihadists could lead to compromises on the role of Islam in public life. Those communities in central Mali that have suffered at its hands would likely resist negotiations. Some Western countries, in particular France and the U.S., expressly oppose the idea. No outside power explicitly backs it.

Despite these challenges, state and non-state actors have regularly engaged the Katiba Macina over the past four years. Malian officials have struck deals over hostage releases. Communal leaders, aid organisations, including Western groups, and religious scholars have discussed with the group its local rule, humanitarian access

to areas under its control and the righteousness of its discourse. One initiative that appears to have shown promise involved the Malian government itself mandating religious and traditional leaders to explore what accommodation with jihadists might entail. Such contacts have mostly been local and limited in their objectives; as yet, they have not sought to introduce ceasefires or other means of reducing violence, let alone achieve peace. But they have revealed a degree of pragmatism among Katiba Macina militants, suggesting that even if the odds are stacked against success, dialogue with the group is worth trying.

The Malian government should consider two ways of engaging central Mali’s jihadists and their supporters:

- ❑ The first would involve empowering Islamic scholars, including three religious figures that Katiba Macina leader Koufa himself has said he would be willing to meet. The scholars could seek to engage Koufa or at least people close to him, initially perhaps to explore ways of reducing civilian harm, such as through local ceasefires. They might also discuss the return of officials, especially those providing services like education and health that residents want, to areas under jihadist control. They might subsequently be able to work on proposals for political and religious reform or open a channel through which officials could talk with militant leaders.
- ❑ The second would entail a more comprehensive dialogue among central Malians aimed at establishing a shared understanding of the causes of violence and how to address them. This dialogue would not necessarily include jihadists themselves, but it should involve groups that have tended to support them, notably Quranic school students and nomadic Peul. Given the state’s chronic weakness in central Mali, the dialogue should examine what its return to the region would entail, particularly in terms of regulating access to natural resources, restoring local security and justice provision, devolving authority, ensuring political representation, and improving both Francophone and Quranic education. A first step would be for Mali’s president to empower an envoy to explore how such a dialogue might be organised in the wake of state institutions’ collapse in parts of central Mali.

Pursuing these options would not mean an end to military operations. Indeed, dialogue should be part of a comprehensive plan for central Mali involving military pressure, development aid and efforts to disarm self-defence militias and militants alike. But such an approach would entail a shift of tack, with force used alongside efforts to bring Katiba Macina leaders to the table, rather than in the likely futile hope of defeating the movement on the battlefield.

Dakar/Brussels, 28 May 2019

Speaking with the “Bad Guys”: Toward Dialogue with Central Mali’s Jihadists

I. Introduction

From 27 March to 3 April 2017, hundreds of delegates from across Mali’s ten regions attended a Conference of National Understanding (Conférence d’Entente Nationale) to promote peace and reconciliation in the war-torn country. In their final report, the delegates urged the Malian government to engage in dialogue with jihadist insurgents, including Iyad ag Ghaly, a Tuareg rebel turned jihadist leader and head of Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, or JNIM), a coalition comprising a number of militant groups formed in 2017, and Hamadoun Koufa, leader of the Katiba Macina, a JNIM member. Among the delegates’ dozens of recommendations, this one stood out. For years, at least officially, the Malian authorities had eschewed such dialogue. The delegates’ recommendation did not change their minds. A few weeks after the conference, officials including President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta reaffirmed their position: “no dialogue with terrorists”.¹

The Malian government and its foreign partners have long vowed to defeat jihadists, mostly now fighting under the banner of the JNIM or a smaller group calling itself the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, on the battlefield. For several years, the Malian army has mounted operations with this aim, alongside French troops under the auspices of Operation Barkhane, soldiers of neighbouring states in the G5 Sahel joint mission and forces of the UN’s stabilisation mission (MINUSMA). Yet for years the jihadist groups not only remained strong but also extended their reach into new territories. That expansion has slowed if not stopped: government forces and jihadists today seem locked in a mutually hurting stalemate, as both sides take heavy casualties while capturing no new ground. Clashes are, however, fuelling even deadlier intercommunal conflict. The 2017 push for dialogue came in reaction not only to the failure of military operations to achieve peace, but also to the broader escalation of violence to which the military operations have greatly contributed.

Malian officials are not alone in resisting dialogue. Their foreign partners, particularly France and the U.S., are not keen either.² Indeed, jihadists leaders themselves reject dialogue, at least rhetorically. In August 2017, Hamadoun Koufa rejected a reported invitation to peace talks. In a widely circulated audio recording, he said:

¹ See “Mali : Polémique autour d’un éventuel dialogue avec les jihadistes”, RFI, 24 May 2017. In a major interview the next year, Keïta reiterated that “there is no way to negotiate with jihadists”. “Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta: ‘Pas question de négocier avec les djihadistes’”, *Le Monde*, 23 February 2018.

² Visiting Mali in April 2017, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault answered a reporter asking about the possibility of dialogue: “How do you negotiate with terrorists? This is a fight with no ambiguity”. Reuters, 7 April 2017. When asked about the U.S. position on dialogue with jihadists in Mali, a U.S. diplomat based in Bamako reiterated that the U.S. has an official position against dialogue with terrorists. Crisis Group interview, U.S. diplomat, April 2019.

What dialogue? What are we going to bargain about in this dialogue? Is God for bargaining? God cannot be bargained [about]. ... Either we prevail and establish the will of God or we perish.³

The reluctance all around raises questions as to whether the two sides will ever agree to talk with one another or even what there is to talk about.

This report is part of a series exploring policies aimed at countering the spread of jihadism and curbing levels of violence in the central Sahelian countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Building upon Crisis Group’s recent report on the Mali-Niger border, it focuses on central Mali as an area where a number of actors, ranging from local residents, religious scholars and NGOs to state authorities, continue to gauge the possibility of dialogue.⁴ Looking at the demands and organisational structure of the Katiba Macina, the dominant jihadist movement in central Mali, as well as at the constraints faced by the Malian government, it investigates in particular whether various forms of engagement with jihadist groups could help reduce conflict, reinvigorate state authority and bring peace. It offers some ideas on how such dialogue might work, issues that it can address, goals it might achieve and actors who can influence the outcome for the better.

³ Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, 21 August 2017.

⁴ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°261, *Frontière Niger-Mali: mettre l’outil militaire au service d’une approche politique*, 12 June 2018.

II. The Crisis in Central Mali

Over the last four years, the Katiba Macina has established a strong presence throughout central Mali. Militants have expelled state authorities from a large swath of territory, shut down government schools and attempted, with mixed success, to replace the state in providing basic public goods and services. The government and its foreign partners have stepped up military operations aimed at defeating the group and restoring state authority. Thus far, while the campaign has reinforced the state’s presence in towns and stopped the jihadists’ advance, it has left rural areas under their influence. Both the insurgency and the army’s campaign against it have fuelled intercommunal violence that has claimed many lives.

A. *The Katiba Macina: An Ingrained Insurgency*

In early 2015, as the Malian government and international backers focused efforts on fighting Islamist insurgents in Mali’s north, militants opened a new front in the central region of Mopti.⁵ Hamadoun Koufa, a preacher and companion of Iyad ag Ghaly, called for jihad against the state, launching the movement that came to be known as the Katiba Macina.⁶ Within a year, the group had chased the Malian army and state authorities out of many areas in Mopti and established a stronghold in the inner Niger delta, the river’s fluvial wetlands and floodplain.⁷ Its influence spread through much of Mopti and parts of the adjacent Segou region.

The Katiba Macina has its origins in Mali’s 2012 crisis. That crisis saw jihadists and Tuareg separatists expel the army from the northern regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu, with the jihadists subsequently turning on their erstwhile Tuareg rebel allies and controlling towns in those regions for almost a year. Many people from central Mali – in particular northern areas dominated by ethnic Peul – enlisted in jihadist movements, notably the Movement of Oneness and Jihad, which had its stronghold in Gao, and ag Ghaly’s Ansar Dine movement, which occupied Kidal and Timbuktu. Recruits’ motives varied. Some were enticed by the promise of adventure or money. Others joined to obtain weapons and military training they could use to protect their communities amid the general breakdown of law and order.⁸ In 2013, after a French-led intervention routed the jihadists from northern towns, many central Malian fighters returned home, only to face harassment from the army.⁹ Starting in 2015, they regrouped and launched a new insurgency.

To mobilise support, they tapped deep-seated local grievances and exploited social fractures. The grievances included widespread resentment of state officials’

⁵ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°238, *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making*, 6 July 2016.

⁶ In the insurgency’s early stages, media coverage often called it the Front de Libération de Macina. The jihadists themselves never used that name, however. Locals refer to the militants by various names, including *yimbe ladde* and *bahee* or *pilki*, respectively “bushmen”, “bearded men” and “turbaned men” in Fulfulde. For background on Iyad ag Ghaly, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°189, *Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, 18 July 2012.

⁷ See Crisis Group Report, *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making*, op. cit.

⁸ See Boukary Sangaré, “Le centre du Mali: épice de djihadisme?”, Groupe de Recherche et d’Information sur la Paix et la Sécurité, 20 May 2016.

⁹ See Crisis Group Report, *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making*, op. cit.

predation, pastoralists’ feelings of victimisation related to the government’s resource management and the shrinkage of pastoral land due to farmers’ expansion. The social tensions were especially salient among the Peul, notably between sedentary and nomadic sub-groups, and between autochthonous and immigrant Peul over access to pastures.

Important as these socio-political grievances are, it was Hamadoun Koufa’s ability to lend them religious resonance that appears to have given his movement additional purchase in society. Koufa’s use of Islamic discourse recalls the Diina, a 19th-century politico-religious movement led by Sékou Amadou, a Peul cleric whose jihad led to the creation of the Macina state in 1818 – it was dissolved in 1862 – and the consolidation of Peul hegemony in the region. To this day, many Peul in central Mali consider the Diina’s era their golden age. Some of those who support Koufa view his uprising as a way to reinstate it. Koufa’s discourse has also attracted many students from Quranic schools, an important segment of central Malian society that until recently was on the margins of political struggle. The students appear to have found in the insurgency a means of empowerment.

That said, not all Katiba Macina’s members sign up willingly. Jihadist leaders often force families in the inner delta to enrol their children at pain of sanctions.¹⁰ Senior commanders or sympathisers may influence younger relatives to join, which sometimes they do only reluctantly.¹¹

Unlike many jihadist movements, the Katiba Macina has no political wing but a single leadership – centred around Koufa – that justifies every action with religious argumentation. Koufa himself wields a great deal of authority. His charisma, degree of Islamic knowledge and connection to ag Ghaly make him the movement’s uncontested leader. A second tier of leaders comprises his original disciples and Islamic scholars who joined him later. An advisory council (*majlis as shura*) discusses important social and political decisions, including the liberation or execution of hostages and prisoners.

As a fighting force, the Katiba Macina comprises a core group of combatants who have received military training, carry weapons and live in the bush. These *yimbe ladde* (“bushmen”, in Fulfulde), as locals call them, rely on sympathisers in villages for material and logistical support, as well as intelligence. Some refer to these non-combatants in villages as “dormant cells”. They often serve as intermediaries between the *yimbe ladde* and others, whether locals or humanitarian NGOs seeking to work in areas under jihadist control. While only men can be *yimbe ladde*, women play a

¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, residents of Toguéré Coumbé, Ouro Modi and Sare Seini, Mopti, January 2019.

¹¹ A Katiba Macina defector said, “I was working at my uncle’s shop in Diafarabe, *cercle* of Ténenkou. In 2016 my uncle closed the shop and started travelling while I sat at home. One day he took me with him to Ouro Modi, and then Ténenkou, where he introduced me to the *yimbe ladde*. I was assigned the task of bringing fuel from the city to the *markaz*. This is how I found myself in the group. In 2018, my uncle was arrested and imprisoned in Bamako. I fled to come to Konna, region of Mopti”. Crisis Group interview, Katiba Macina defector, Mopti, February 2019. A *cercle* is a second-level administrative division in Mali. Each region is subdivided into *cercles*.

major role in the dormant cells, helping collect intelligence, facilitate recruitment and deliver supplies to the bush.¹²

The Katiba Macina has a cohesive chain of command but is decentralised. Aside from its core in the inner delta, it comprises many units, each called a *markaz* (“centre”, in Arabic), scattered across central Mali. Each *markaz* has a leader, the “*amirou markaz*”, assisted by a military commander, a shura, or advisory, council and a *qadi* (“judge”, in Arabic).¹³ Every *amirou markaz* in principle sits on the movement’s main *majlis as shura*, which is headed by Koufa and includes other Islamic scholars.

Each *markaz* exercises authority over its own surroundings, often in collaboration with communal leaders, but the Katiba Macina’s leadership does appear to assert its command. Katiba Macina defectors and former hostages testify that each *amirou markaz* reports decisions taken at the local level to the Katiba’s central command.¹⁴ That said, it is unclear precisely how this works in practice and how much autonomy each *markaz* enjoys. It seems, for instance, that *markazes* outside the inner delta enjoy more freedom than others.¹⁵ A number of affiliated groups with varying levels of attachment to the core also operate in the areas surrounding the Delta, notably in the Haire (in the *cercle* of Douentza), Seno (in the *cercle* of Koro Bankass and Bandiagara), Kareri, Mema and Farimake.¹⁶

The Katiba’s strong and ideologically committed leadership presents a challenge to ending the insurgency but potentially an opportunity for those who would broker dialogue. On one hand, peacemaking efforts that exclude Koufa may well prove – and indeed thus far have proven – ineffective. Nor does it appear likely that trying to weaken the movement by prising away mid-level commanders or entire *markaz* will work. On the other hand, the cohesive leadership means that the state would have a credible, authoritative interlocutor were it able to engage Koufa himself.

B. *Intercommunal Violence*

The jihadist insurgency in central Mali is fuelling ever deadlier intercommunal violence. This violence originates in the historical mix of competition and collaboration among ethnic groups over access to natural resources. Peul, Bambara, Dogon, Bozo and other groups share the same land and water and pursue vocations – farming, fishing and herding – that can coexist but also come into conflict, for instance when farmers seek to plant land previously used as pasture for livestock.¹⁷ Tensions have sharpened in recent decades as both human and livestock populations have bur-

¹² Crisis Group interviews, female jihadist sympathisers from the *cercle* of Ténenkou, Mopti, February 2019.

¹³ In many cases, the *amirou markaz* is a Quranic scholar and assumes the judge’s function as well. The rank-and-file jihadists in each *markaz* are generally from nearby villages. The *markazes* vary in size and significance, but a few are considered most important, including Dialloubé and Guelédié in the *cercles* of Mopti and Ténenkou, respectively.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Katiba Macina defectors and former hostages, January-February 2019.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See the map in Appendix A.

¹⁷ According to conventional wisdom, each of these groups specialises in a particular profession: the Peul are herders, the Bambara and Dogon are farmers, and the Bozo fishermen. In reality, some Peul sub-groups practice farming, while Dogon, Bambara and Bozo own livestock as well.

geoned while natural resources have dwindled due to environmental change.¹⁸ Bandits increasingly roam the countryside as traditional livelihoods erode. More people in central Mali are learning to live by the gun.¹⁹

The jihadist insurgency stems from intra-ethnic as well as inter-ethnic rivalries. Communities are themselves divided along lines of social status: noble, common and slave lineage; sedentary and nomadic lifestyle; and autochthonous and settler heritage. These cleavages have also produced tensions over political representation and access to resources, leading intermittently to small-scale intra-communal violence.

If the jihadist insurgency is partly a product of such cleavages, it and the army’s operations against it also deepen them, thus aggravating general insecurity. While the Katiba Macina mainly attacks the military and other state institutions, militants also target civilians whom they accuse of collaboration with security forces. Peul dominance among the jihadists lends an ethnic dimension to the insurgency and has prompted members of other ethnic groups, notably the Bambara and Dogon, to establish self-defence militias called *dozo* or *donso* (“hunters”, in Bambara) in the absence of state security forces.²⁰ *Dozos*, traditionally armed with hunting rifles, now carry submachine guns. Until recently, direct confrontation between jihadists and *dozos* was rare; instead, *dozos* tended to respond to jihadist attacks on villagers with indiscriminate reprisals against Peul civilians.²¹ Direct clashes have become more common as violence has escalated and jihadists more openly claim Peul identity. *Dozo* militias have helped Malian troops with intelligence gathering, though of late their reprisals against other groups have compelled the army to scale back cooperation.²²

The death toll in Mopti has risen steadily since the insurgency began, with civilians caught in the crossfire. From 2015 to 2018, the number of conflict-related fatalities grew more than tenfold.²³ Over a thousand people have died, hundreds been injured and thousands more displaced. Mopti has become the deadliest region in Mali, accounting for nearly half of the country’s violent deaths.²⁴

¹⁸ See Marie Brossier, Cédric Jourde and Modibo Ghaly Cissé, “Le Centre du Mali: Relations de pouvoir locales, logiques de violence et participation politique en Milieu Peul (Region de Mopti)”, Centre FrancoPaix, Université du Québec à Montréal, May 2018. On livestock, see Matthew Turner, “Capital on the Move: The Changing Relation between Livestock and Labor in Mali, West Africa”, *Geoforum*, vol. 50, no. 4 (September 2009). For the effects of climate change on competition for resources, see Leif Brottem, “Hosts, Strangers and the Tenure Politics of Livestock Corridors in Mali”, *Africa*, vol. 84, no. 4 (November 2014).

¹⁹ Crisis Group has observed this phenomenon along the Mali-Niger border as well. See Crisis Group Report, *Frontière Niger-Mali: mettre l’outil militaire au service d’une approche politique*, op. cit.

²⁰ In traditional Mandé-speaking societies, *dozos* are communal guardians as well as hunters. As the conflict has evolved, however, some of them have diverged from their original mission to become something more like a militia. See Jean-Hervé Jezequel, “Centre du Mali: enrayer le nettoyage ethnique”, Crisis Group Q&A, 25 March 2019.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Crisis Group interview, military officer, Bamako, October 2018.

²³ In 2015, the number of conflict-related casualties in Mopti was 78, increasing to 114 in 2016, 292 in 2017 and 853 in 2018. ACLED data. See also the map in Appendix A.

²⁴ Recently, several human rights organisations have documented dozens of episodes of tit-for-tat violence, largely perpetrated by *dozos* against Peul civilians, and to a lesser – but not negligible –

The Katiba Macina initially distanced itself from identification with any one community but that has changed. In the past, the movement emphasised its multi-ethnic composition and focus on fighting what it called the enemies of sharia.²⁵ Yet Koufa has recently shifted his discourse to claim Fulani identity and called upon all Peul to join the jihad.²⁶ He issued this call in response to a debate raging on social media where Peul in Mali as well as in the diaspora were inveighing against the community’s victimisation at the hands of other groups, creating a sense of cross-border Peul solidarity. Koufa seized upon this sentiment not to stir up more ethnic strife but to channel the anger at France, the G5 Sahel forces and the Malian army, which he labelled the Peul’s real foes.²⁷ But by assuming a more explicit Peul identity, he risks further associating, in the eyes of other communities, all Peul with the Katiba Macina’s violence.

C. *The Limits of Counter-terrorism and Development*

The Malian government and its foreign partners, including France, have privileged a military response to address the jihadist insurgency in central – as well as northern – Mali, though they admit that stabilising the country requires more than that. As a Malian official puts it, “the government’s logic is simple: terrorism must be combated militarily, but the causes of terrorism must be addressed through good governance and development”.²⁸ In this vein, the government’s official strategy for central

extent, by jihadists who are mostly Peul against Bambara and Dogon villagers. See “Dans le centre du Mali, les population prises au piège du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme”, FIDH/AMDH, November 2018; “We Used to Be Brothers’: Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali”, Human Rights Watch, December 2018; UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, “Situation of Human Rights in Mali: Report of the Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Mali”, January 2019.

²⁵ Boukary Petal, the Katiba Macina’s second most vocal ideologue after Koufa, says in an audio recording: “Our fight is not a fight for the sake of Peul or Arabs or Touareg or Bambara. No! Our fight is a fight between faith and disbelief, democracy and the book of God, idolatry and monotheism. ... We do not fight so that Peul become superior to Bambara. ... All ethnic groups must stop their rivalries, because we have nothing to do with it and we do not want it. They must stop hating each other”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, 2015.

²⁶ In a recent message, Koufa said, “O Peul! You have seen from the outset of our jihad to this day what the unbelievers have done to Peul – massacres and extermination, as France, the UN and the Arabs looked on. The French incite others against the Peul because we raised the flag of Islam and wanted to resubmit ourselves to God’s judgment (may He be exalted)”. He adds, “My [Peul] brothers, wherever you are, remember these words, ‘Come support your religion’”. See JNIM video, “Light or Heavy, March to Battle”, 29 September 2018.

²⁷ In an audio recording, Koufa said, “The G5 is the legalisation of Peul killing in the countries that compose it. Mali has changed its law to legalise the massacre of Peul. Burkina Faso has also legalised it. ... Because of the G5 Sahel, the blood of Peul is cheaper than that of wild animals, because wild animals are, at least, protected by rangers”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, October 2018.

²⁸ Crisis Group interview, former Malian minister, January 2019. In his 7 January 2019 address to parliament, former Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga declared: “Whatever military action we take will quickly reach its limit if we do not follow it with political steps to restore consensus, cohesion and development”. Primature du Mali, “Le Premier Ministre Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga à l’Assemblée Nationale”, 7 January 2018. French Defence Minister Florence Parly also recognised the limitations of the military approach in her Twitter thread announcing the alleged killing of Kou-

Mali envisages both a military campaign and an injection of development aid. It is encapsulated in the Plan de Sécurisation Intégrée des Régions du Centre, which was announced by the government in February 2017 but not officially initiated until a year later. The Plan envisages four steps: retaking territories captured by the Katiba Macina; bringing back state officials; enabling economic development; and, lastly, communication to explain the strategy to people living in areas affected (two additional initiatives, a disarmament program and intercommunal dialogue, were subsequently added and are examined in Section V).²⁹

In reality, efforts have focused primarily on the military campaign. Since launching the plan, the government increased significantly its military presence in the centre, setting up over a dozen new posts in major towns and villages (in effect, creating “garrison towns”) in Mopti and Segou.³⁰ These operations have scored local successes. In some garrison towns, for instance, schools have reopened, the state administration is gradually returning, and economic activities, including those the jihadists banned, have slowly resumed.

In addition to the Malian army’s efforts, the French Operation Barkhane has also made sporadic counter-terrorism raids in Mopti. Barkhane has no official presence in central Mali, as it concentrates resources further north, particularly on the Malian border with Burkina Faso and Niger. Nonetheless, between March 2017 and February 2019, it has conducted at least six operations in Mopti, often combining airstrikes with ground action, sometimes in collaboration with the Malian army.³¹ Some of these operations targeted Katiba Macina commanders in an attempt to “cut the head off the snake”.³² In November 2018, the French mission claimed to have killed Hamadoun Koufa himself in Youwarou *cercle*. Four months later, however, Koufa appeared in a video, apparently safe and sound.³³

fa. She said, “the weakening of terrorist groups is essential for allowing the return of public services, access to education and the gradual normalisation of daily life. Military action is effective only if it is followed by a development policy”. Tweet by Florence Parly, @Florence_Parly, French defence minister, 10:46 am, 23 November 2018.

²⁹ République du Mali, Ministère de la Sécurité et de la Protection Civile, “Plan de Sécurisation Intégrée des Régions du Centre (PSIRC Mopti et Ségou)”, February 2017.

³⁰ In his address to the Malian National Assembly, Prime Minister Maïga enumerated the new military posts in the towns and villages of Mopti: Djenné, Diankabou, Sindégué, Kouakourou, Sokoura, Mondoro, Dialloubé, Toguere Koumbé, Diougouni and Konna. These new posts came in addition to others in cercles capitals, including Ténenkou and Youwarou. The goal of increasing the number of military posts is to achieve better military coverage of central Malian territory. See Primature du Mali, “Le Premier Ministre Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga à l’Assemblée Nationale”, 7 January 2018.

³¹ The Barkhane sorties include Operation Panga in March-April 2017, Bayard in April 2017, Dague in May-June 2017 and Youwarou, Dialloubé 1, Serma and Dialloubé 2 between November 2018 and February 2019. For more information, see Barkhane’s official website.

³² The figures targeted were Yahia Aboul Hammam, the top al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb commander in Timbuktu; Mouhamed Ould Nouni, leader of al-Murabitun; Malick ag Wanasnat, Iyad ag Ghaly’s right-hand man; and Mohamed ag Almouner and Mansour ag AlKassim, commanders of JNIM and ISGS, respectively. Parly claimed the death of Koufa before the French National Assembly. “We are targeting [jihadists] at the top of the pyramid because it is the best way to weaken [their] base”. Assemblée Nationale Française, “Questionnement au gouvernement 28/11/2018”, La Chaîne Parlementaire, 11 November 2018.

³³ “They Are Liars: Interview with Sheikh Muhammad Kufa”, JNIM, video.

Other foreign forces also play a role. The G5 Sahel joint force, composed of units from five Sahelian countries – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – had its headquarters in Sevaré, Mopti until June 2018. But in that month a jihadist attack destroyed the building, forcing the G5 Sahel command to relocate to Bamako. MINUSMA also has two bases in Mopti, at Sevaré and Douentza.³⁴ Recently, in reaction to the upsurge in intercommunal violence, UN peacekeepers have stepped up operations, notably in the Koro, Bankass and Bandiagara districts. While the G5 Sahel focuses on counter-terrorism, MINUSMA is primarily concerned with protecting civilians and restoring the state’s presence. Thus far, neither has succeeded in halting violence in central Mali.

While military operations have helped return the state’s authority to garrison towns, they thus appear unlikely to defeat the Katiba Macina. Indeed, insurgents have shown considerable agility in the face of pressure, moving into the bush, where they can better hide out, and adopting guerrilla tactics like ambushes, roadside bombs and landmines. While the Malian army controls towns and their immediate vicinity, the jihadists rule the countryside, erecting checkpoints on rural roads and patrolling rivers. In this manner, they have effectively placed garrison towns under siege.³⁵ They impose embargoes on villages they accuse of collaborating with security forces, forbidding the movement of people and goods in or out.³⁶ They have also developed networks that allow them to rule villages without having to maintain a physical presence, limiting their exposure to military crackdowns. They rely on a sophisticated system of intelligence gathering, comprised of sympathisers in the “dormant cells”, to reward villagers who comply with their rules and sanction dissenters.

The development component of the government’s and its international partners’ approach has arguably made even less of a difference than military operations. The Plan de Sécurisation Intégré envisages delivering services as a means to improve communities’ lives, strengthen the state’s legitimacy and thus gradually sap support for the insurgents, as army operations weaken them militarily.³⁷ In reality, development projects are rare in areas under the Kabita Macina’s control. Militants tend to allow in humanitarian groups but refuse access to development agencies. In the infrequent instances where agencies can deliver services, little suggests that the services boost the Malian state’s legitimacy, even when they benefit the local populations.³⁸ Overall, prospects appear gloomy for strengthening the weak local governance and

³⁴ The new MINUSMA mandate adopted on 28 June 2018 (UN Resolution 2423) directed the mission to “reprioritize its resources and efforts to focus on political tasks and its support for the restoration of State authority to the Centre of Mali, which is in the midst of a growing cycle of violence”. UN Security Council, “Resolution 2423 (2018)”, 28 June 2018.

³⁵ On 20 March 2019 the jihadists stormed Dioura, a garrison town in the *cercle* of Ténenkou. They killed dozens, mostly military personnel, looted military equipment and set what remained of the garrison on fire.

³⁶ The notable cases of villages under embargo include Toguéré Coumbé in the *cercle* of Ténenkou, Dialloubé in the *cercle* of Mopti and Kouakourou in the *cercle* of Djenné. See also fn 83.

³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Malian and foreign officials involved with the Plan de Sécurisation Intégré, Bamako, December 2018 and April 2019.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian aid workers operating in Mopti, Dakar, Bamako and Mopti, December 2018 and January 2019.

the state’s poor relations with society that underpin the insurgency while at the same time mounting military offensives against militants.

D. *Breaking the Taboo*

As the Katiba Macina’s military defeat has come to appear less likely, the idea of engaging it through dialogue has gained traction. An increasing number of outside experts, including Crisis Group, have recommended at least testing the waters to see whether negotiations might complement military action.³⁹ In Mali itself, several civil society activists, politicians and Islamic scholars, began already in 2012 calling on the authorities to start a dialogue with the jihadists.⁴⁰ The April 2017 report of the Conference of National Understanding echoed these pleas.⁴¹

At the conference, dialogue advocates gave various reasons for their stance.⁴² For some, dialogue was the “pragmatic choice” given that military action had yet to end the insurgency. Others cited it as a means for the government to assert its sovereignty in the face of foreign pressure against such initiatives. Still others promoted dialogue with jihadists as a matter of consistency, since Malian governments have talked with leaders of past rebellions.⁴³

Indeed, Bamako has attempted to end successive insurgencies through negotiations. Over the last thirty years, Mali has endured three periods of uprising, in 1990-1996, 2006-2009 and 2012-present, resulting in repeated peace agreements. The last such deal, the 2015 Bamako Agreement, which followed French-led operations that ousted jihadists from northern towns in early 2013, formally excluded ag Ghaly and other jihadist leaders. That said, some of the armed groups that signed the Bamako deal enjoyed close ties to ag Ghaly or other militants; indeed, many fighters formerly with jihadist groups rehatted themselves as members of the signatory armed groups. Those who favour dialogue with jihadists argue that if the government is willing to talk to separatists – particularly separatists who themselves have close links to jihadists – why not talk to jihadists themselves?⁴⁴

³⁹ Jean-Hervé Jezequel et al, “La France doit rompre avec la rhétorique martiale qui prévaut au Sahel”, *Le Monde Afrique*, 21 February 2018. See also Crisis Group Report, *Frontière Niger-Mali: mettre l’outil militaire au service d’une approche politique*, op. cit.

⁴⁰ A community-based organisation called Amical Jawambe launched a mediation initiative Jam-e-Dina lobbying politicians and jihadists to come to the negotiating table (See Section V.) Peul leaders also began pushing for dialogue. Aly Nouhoum Diallo, former president of the National Assembly and leader of a coalition of Peul associations named Coordination Pulaaku, has called on Koufa to come to dialogue. Tiébilé Dramé, leader of the opposition Parena party, and the current foreign minister, has also publicly called the government to engage in dialogue. “Négociation avec les djihadistes: IBK pris entre la France et les Maliens”, *Afribone.com*, 26 April 2017.

⁴¹ Advocates for dialogue at the Conference included religious leaders such as Mahmoud Dicko, civil society organisations such as the Association Adema, opposition leaders and delegates from the armed group Coordination des Mouvements de l’Azawad. Crisis Group interviews, Conference for National Understanding participants, October 2018 and January 2019.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, member of civil society organisation who attended the 2017 Conference of National Understanding, January 2019.

Yet both the Malian authorities and jihadist leaders themselves have resisted talking. Many Malian officials view jihadists as nothing but “nihilistic” criminals without an identifiable political agenda.⁴⁵ Some insist on “no negotiation with terrorists” as a principle. On the other side, the hardest-line among the jihadists view the Malian government as not only illegitimate but infidel. Many militants, in principle including Hamadoun Koufa himself, demand nothing less than its overthrow and replacement with an “Islamic state”.⁴⁶ Between these two extremes lies a spectrum of officials and insurgents who, to one degree or another, are more amenable to dialogue. But thus far the less compromising attitudes have prevailed.

⁴⁵ A former minister and member of the current ruling coalition says: “Contrary to separatist groups, which have territorial claims, jihadists are nihilists. They just want to kill us. Would you say to someone who plants a bomb, ‘Please remove your bomb?’ We have known jihadists long enough to realise that only force works with them. ... Speaking with Iyad would be a capitulation”. Crisis Group interview, January 2019.

⁴⁶ Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, August 2017. See also fn 3.

III. Obstacles to Dialogue

Three factors complicate prospects for dialogue with the Katiba Macina: its ideological program and the ambiguous support it enjoys locally; its transnational ties; and strong domestic and foreign opposition to such talks.

A. *Are Jihadist Demands “Exceptional”?*

Unlike Mali’s northern separatist movements, the Katiba Macina has no list of political demands. Yet its discourse, disseminated via audio and video recordings, as well as its governance practices in areas it has conquered, reveal that it does want something: namely profound change in Mali’s state institutions and foreign relations.

The movement’s rhetoric revolves around three ideas, akin to those propagated by jihadists elsewhere.⁴⁷ The first is that Malian state institutions and the whole democratic system of government are un-Islamic and illegitimate. It is incumbent upon all Muslims to overthrow the system by force and replace it with theocratic governance based on sharia – as the Katiba Macina interprets it.⁴⁸ Secondly, the West and “Westernised” Malian elites, particularly France and Francophone state officials, are enemies of Islam. They are thus legitimate targets, though state officials can spare themselves if they break ties with their Western allies.⁴⁹ Thirdly, militants believe that they represent the purest form of Islam and that they must teach local Muslims to adopt their stricter approach. They consider Muslims who collaborate with the Malian government to be apostates (*murtaddin*), and they apply the same label to some of their local theological rivals and critics.⁵⁰

At first glance, this discourse appears to set aspirations well outside the realm of what the Malian state can offer. The Malian state is ostensibly committed to secularism (understood as the separation of religion and politics), representative democracy based on elections and strong relations with Western countries, particularly France.⁵¹ The gap between the Katiba Macina’s and the state’s respective positions is so wide that many on both sides see little point in talking. True, the movement has shown pragmatism. Its discourse and practices have evolved over time as local conditions

⁴⁷ Crisis Group Special Report N°1, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, 14 March 2016.

⁴⁸ In several audio recordings, the jihadists have emphasised the non-Islamic character of the Malian state. They have often referred to Malian officials as *taghout* (“idol” or “false god”, in Arabic). Koufa explained the Katiba Macina’s views in one recording: “God has given us the power to fight the protectors of laws that are not God’s law on this territory and at this moment. We have given up our families, parents and homes. We did all this so that God’s law can be implemented”. He added: “You cannot consider those who protect laws that run contrary to God’s law to be Muslims”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, 2016.

⁴⁹ Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, August 2017.

⁵⁰ Koufa has blasted Islamic scholars who disagree with him as cowards and undercover French agents. Of some he has said, “The Wahhabites and the Da’awa have advocated for jihad, but why do they not engage in it now? What should we conclude? Either they are scared or they are hypocrites”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, 2016. He considers Muslims who accept secular laws to be apostates. But he has not called for indiscriminate attacks on these Muslims.

⁵¹ In 2013, during peace discussions with armed groups in the north, including jihadists, President Keïta defined his government’s three red lines: 1) Mali’s national unity and territorial integrity; 2) the secular nature of the state; 3) the stability of the Sahel and the African continent.

have changed. As discussed in Section IV, the jihadists often have to juggle both being true to their ideology and making compromises in order to avoid alienating those whom they seek to rule. Yet if the grievances that motivate many to join Katiba Macina – shrinking pastoral land, abusive government officials and socio-economic neglect – are not religious, Koufa frames them within a religious discourse that would make reaching a negotiated settlement more difficult.⁵²

While Koufa himself self-identifies as jihadist and claims to be fighting for the establishment of sharia in Mali, his success in mobilising local support owes more to his ability to exploit ingrained socio-economic and political discontent in central Mali and fill the gap left by a largely absent state.⁵³ During its early years, 2015 and 2016, the Katiba Macina focused on delivering public goods and services where it held sway. In reality, it struggled to provide much more than rough dispute resolution, attempts at regulating access to land, water and pasture, and a reduction in cattle theft.⁵⁴ But given decades of government mismanagement and abuse, and the corruption and inaccessibility of the Malian court system for people in rural areas, even that won the jihadists some local support.⁵⁵

Over the course of 2017, as the movement consolidated control over larger areas, militants began to collect *zakat*, the alms regarded by Muslims as a religious obligation, and impose a draconian moral code that banned several local customs and severely restricted freedoms, in particular for women and youth. They outlawed playing music or football, consuming alcohol and social mixing between the sexes. They imposed a dress code requiring women to cover their bodies head to toe; though most women in central Mali have traditionally worn headscarves, covering the full body was uncommon. Not all women reject such a code; indeed, some approve of it.⁵⁶ But many others chafe at a requirement that complicates daily practices like washing clothes in the river and farming.⁵⁷ Jihadists also stopped women from travelling unless accompanied by their husband or a male relative, constraining women traders’ circulation around rural markets. They often enforced this code violently, including by whipping, abduction and even killing offenders.⁵⁸

The brutal enforcement of ultra-conservative mores has meant that some of – though by no means all – the sympathy the jihadists initially won has dissipated.⁵⁹ Some locals approve of strict Islamic law as a concept. Many still appreciate the rea-

⁵² In jihadist discourse, the boundary between ideology and interest is blurred. When proselytising, jihadists say their ideas emanate from God but also strive to tie these ideas to human well-being. The sharia is not only God’s law, they say, but it is also best for humanity.

⁵³ In many of his audio recordings, Koufa identifies himself and the Katiba Macina recruits as “jihadists”. In his August 2017 audio recording, he says: “We jihadists attack only our known adversaries, the allies of France”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, August 2017.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interviews, residents of Toguéré Coumbé, Ouro Modi and Sare Seini, Mopti, January 2019.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See Nomade Sahel, “La Situation des femmes dans le Delta central du fleuve Niger (Mali) de 2015 à nos jours”, 14 December 2018.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews, residents of Toguéré Coumbé, Ouro Modi and Sare Seini, Mopti, January 2019.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

sonably predictable dispute resolution, the degree of security (especially the tough measures against cattle theft), and the absence of corrupt and predatory state officials. Moreover, since 2018, when Malian army operations started reversing some of the jihadists’ gains, local Katiba Macina leaders appear to have been readier to enter deals with villagers that see them temper enforcement of some rules. Still, many central Malians consider the Katiba Macina’s rule as too extreme and out of tune with customs that are also widely accepted locally as Islamic. The jihadists’ use of violence is a particular source of anger.

The Katiba Macina’s aspirations and the questionable level of support its rule enjoys among many central Malians pose a challenge for dialogue. Many people in central Mali would likely oppose any notion that jihadists speak in their name. While many peace talks involve compromise with unpopular and violent groups, the Katiba’s recent experiences show that at least some of the social mores it might hope to negotiate in talks enjoy at best limited local support. Even were the state inclined to make such concessions – and nothing suggests that it is – it would risk running up against local resistance.

B. *The Katiba Macina’s Outside Connections*

The Katiba Macina’s transnational ties pose another challenge. Contrary to other jihadist movements in Mali such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in Greater Sahara – respectively led by Algerians and Sahrawis – the Katiba Macina is primarily indigenous. All the movement’s key figures are from central Mali, and they exploit local grievances to recruit. Yet Hamadoun Koufa answers formally to Iyad ag Ghaly, who has pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda.

In March 2017, Koufa appeared in a video alongside ag Ghaly and three other jihadist leaders to announce the merger of their movements, including ag Ghaly’s Ansar Dine (of which Katiba Macina is considered part), AQIM’s Sahelian branch and the Katiba al-Murabitun, into the JNIM coalition.⁶⁰ In the video, ag Ghaly, who assumed the coalition’s leadership, announced his allegiance to the Algerian Abdelmalik Droukdel, head of AQIM, as well as to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and by extension Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada (Zawahiri himself has pledged allegiance to successive Taliban leaders).⁶¹ The transnational connection poses problems. For some Malian officials, political talks with members of a movement, al-Qaeda, that at least rhetorically recognises no borders and claims to be fighting for establishment of a global caliphate make little sense.⁶²

⁶⁰ Al Murabitun is a jihadist group created in 2013 out of the merger of elements from former Movement of Oneness and Jihad in West Africa and al-Mulathamine, another movement then led by the Algerian jihadist figure Mokhtar Belmokhtar. Al-Murabitun split in 2015, into a pro-ISIS faction, which later became the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, and a pro-al-Qaeda faction, which merged with JNIM.

⁶¹ See the JNIM’s founding statement, “And Hold On Firmly to the Rope of God Together and Do Not Become Divided”, 2 March 2017. Al-Qaeda global leaders – first Osama bin Laden and now Ayman al-Zawahiri – have always pledged allegiance to the Taliban, dating from al-Qaeda’s founding in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

⁶² Crisis Group interviews, Malian officials, Dakar and Bamako, November and December 2018.

The tone of the Katiba Macina’s discourse shifted around the time of its affiliation with JNIM and al-Qaeda. In 2015, when Koufa listed the Katiba Macina’s enemies, he pointed to oppressive Malian state officials, whether military or civilian, and those who collaborate with them.⁶³ But starting in 2017, anti-French rhetoric and references to Crusaders started to predominate.⁶⁴ The shift appears to partly reflect the Katiba Macina’s ties to JNIM, several of whose components are fighting French Barkhane forces. It has created concerns that Koufa may now be less interested in negotiating over local grievances and that, in any case, he could not enter dialogue unless authorised by more transnationally motivated jihadist leaders. Indeed, Koufa has rejected offers to engage in talks with Peul Francophone elites, arguing that they were part of a French conspiracy to pinpoint the jihadists’ bases and gauge firepower and manpower, and he has declared that all peace talks must go through ag Ghaly.⁶⁵

That said, the extent of ag Ghaly’s authority over Koufa and the latter’s commitment to transnational goals are hard to evaluate. Since 2017, Koufa has appeared twice beside ag Ghaly and Yahya Abul Hammam, the former top al-Qaeda commander in Mali.⁶⁶ The quality of the Katiba Macina’s recent video footage and its attacks’ complexity, including the use of roadside bombs, suggests the transfer of expertise from JNIM. Yet, even if important, ag Ghaly’s authority appears loose.⁶⁷ The JNIM itself espouses transnational goals, including establishing a caliphate, and the Katiba Macina’s membership in that coalition does appear to be slowly moving it away from its solely local roots. That said, the fervour of Koufa’s rhetoric against France may also stem from the Katiba Macina’s own battles with French troops. Most of his discourse remains locally focused, despite the al-Qaeda ties he nominally enjoys via ag Ghaly. His participation in the JNIM may well have been motivated by his long association with ag Ghaly and the desire to garner training, funds and expertise, rather than a commitment to its transnational aspirations.

The Katiba Macina has shown some flexibility toward dialogue. In August 2017 Koufa mentioned that he would be ready to speak with religious leaders, in particular three well-known Salafi scholars, including Mahmoud Dicko. He said:

⁶³ Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, “How to interact with civilians”, June 2015.

⁶⁴ In an audio recording likely made in 2018, Koufa declares: “It is France, not Mali, that is our enemy”. He redefines even local enemies as French allies, who refuse to adhere to sharia at France’s behest. He considers the Malian president himself to have been chosen by France. “France has become God”, he says. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession. 2018.

⁶⁵ In a 2018 audio recording, Koufa says, “We hear a lot about Peul holding meetings with France, MINUSMA and the Malian state to facilitate the return of peace between us and the Malian state. ... We want you to understand: we can talk to each other and you can negotiate with us. ... [But] we know that you come to gather information on our positions, our manpower, our weapons and our mode of command. This is the mission that France has entrusted you with”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession. 2018. In 2017, when a number of prominent Peul including Aly Nouhoum Diallo called on Koufa to attend peace talks, he replied: “If you want dialogue, go discuss it with our amir, Iyad ag Ghaly. ... He is our guide. ... He is Malian. It is undeniable. If you want peace, go talk with him; otherwise, you won’t have peace, not on this earth or in the hereafter”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, August 2017.

⁶⁶ See the JNIM’s founding statement, “And Hold On Firmly to the Rope of God Together and Do Not Become Divided”, op. cit.; and JNIM video, “Light or Heavy, March to Battle”, op. cit.

⁶⁷ While the Katiba Macina appears dependent on Ansar Dine and JNIM for financial and logistical support, its increasing effort to collect *zakat* (alms) suggests a desire for financial autonomy.

Our wish is that you send us the scholars, they are more able to understand what we are looking for. If you send us the ulama [a body of Muslim scholars], they are welcome to come discuss with us. These are Mahmoud Dicko, Mahi Banikane, Cheick Oumar Dia and others so that they can see how we live here, and we will appreciate it together.⁶⁸

In addition, as recently as early 2019, the Katiba Macina has shown willingness to engage in transactional negotiations with the government, such as to exchange hostages for militants held prisoner.⁶⁹ That the militants whom the Katiba Macina wanted released included men from outside central Mali, notably a high-profile fighter and former jihadist police chief from Gao, suggests that the JNIM may have condoned the transactional negotiations.⁷⁰

C. Domestic and Foreign Pressures

Pressure from both domestic and foreign actors who oppose the idea of dialogue or fear its possible outcomes also militates against talks.

Malian actors including secular elites, Sufi scholars, human rights organisations and victims’ associations voice concerns about dialogue. Secular elites view it as part of a larger threat to the separation of religion and politics in Mali. They point to increasingly assertive attempts by Islamist activists to carve out a place for themselves in the political arena.⁷¹ This concern is all the more resonant given that Mahmoud Dicko, whom many secular leaders regard with suspicion, is a key figure both in promoting the role of Islam in politics and in pushing for dialogue with jihadists.

Many clerics also reject the Katiba Macina and its intolerant tenets – perhaps not surprisingly given that the insurgents oppose the Islamic establishment as much as the state.⁷² Sufis from Mopti are particularly hostile to dialogue with jihadists, believing that any compromise struck with them would likely privilege Salafi strands of Islam to the detriment of others.⁷³ In 2012, when the jihadists conquered northern Mali, the Malian Association for Unity and Progress of Islam in Mopti considered sending a delegation to debate the jihadists on religious matters. But most association members rejected the idea. Even today, several members of such associations continue to oppose the idea of dialogue.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Audio recording in response to Peul leader Aly Nouhoum Diallo, op. cit.

⁶⁹ In February 2019, after long negotiations, the jihadists freed two hostages, including the former prefect of Ténenkou and a journalist, in exchange for nineteen militants.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, counter-terrorist specialist from the Sahel, Dakar, April 2019.

⁷¹ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°249, *The Politics of Islam in Mali: Separating Myth from Reality*, 18 July 2017.

⁷² Koufa first came to prominence due to his preaching that criticised the clerical class in Mopti, which is largely Sufi. See Crisis Group Report, *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making*, op. cit.

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Muslim scholars, Mopti, Bamako, October 2018 and January 2019.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, a religious scholar member of Association Malienne pour l'Unité et la Progrès de l'Islam, Mopti, January 2019. He justified his position against dialogue as follows: “Now that they have the upper hand, how can we negotiate with them? It’s either they dictate what they want or we have to fight until everyone gets tired of fighting. Then we can talk about negotiation. That’s how all states have dealt with the issues of terrorism”.

Among central Malians, views toward dialogue are mixed, though predicting how they would respond to talks is hard. Thus far, debate about dialogue with jihadists occurs mostly among Bamako elites. In central Mali, such notions remain quite marginal. Given the deteriorating security context and the fear that violence could escalate further, some in the inner delta, including within communities that have borne the brunt of jihadist violence, admit that they would welcome dialogue that reduced levels of bloodshed even if it entailed concessions to jihadists.⁷⁵ Outside the delta, the idea of dialogue with the Katiba Macina is likely to provoke anger, in particular among the Dogon and Bambara.

Opposition is not only domestic. Western countries, in particular France and the U.S., clearly reject dialogue, citing several reasons. Militant groups with which Koufa has ties are designated by the UN and others as terrorists. This classification does not prohibit talking to them but it can complicate doing so.⁷⁶ It is difficult for French politicians to support dialogue with groups that have killed French soldiers.⁷⁷ Relatedly, some countries view the jihadist insurgency in Mali as an extension of their own struggle with jihadists around the world. Many Western policymakers worry that engaging in dialogue with jihadists would bestow legitimacy upon these groups and their ideas. True, the U.S. has over the past year renewed efforts to reach a settlement with the Islamist Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, with senior U.S. officials holding repeated meetings with Taliban leaders. But whether those talks will create a precedent, making talking to militants in Africa or elsewhere easier to accept, as of yet is unclear.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, delta inhabitants, including from the districts of Ténenkou and Mopti, Mopti, January 2019.

⁷⁶ The UN Security Council and the U.S. both list the JNIM, Ansar Dine and Iyad ag Ghaly as terrorists, but neither explicitly lists Koufa or the Katiba Macina. If the UN or U.S. were to designate Koufa and the Katiba Macina as part of Ansar Dine, that determination could complicate dialogue. U.S. law bans the provision of material support or advice to those designated, which can pose challenges to mediators.

⁷⁷ In April 2017, on an official visit to Mali, French Foreign Minister Ayrault justified France’s anti-dialogue position by evoking a dead countryman: “How do you negotiate with terrorists? ... Iyad ag Ghaly rejoiced at the death of French soldier Julien Barbé”. See Moussa Bolly, “Mali: Paix et réconciliation nationale: Paris interdit à Bamako de négocier avec Iyad”, *Le Reflet*, 14 Avril 2017.

⁷⁸ U.S. talks with the Taliban leadership are motivated by U.S. leaders’ desire to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. In addition, the Taliban is a considerably larger and more powerful insurgent movement than the Katiba Macina and enjoys relations with a number of foreign powers. Despite its longstanding ties to transnational militants, its leaders do not pledge allegiance to them and it has no aspirations beyond Afghanistan.

IV. Engagement with Jihadists in Central Mali

The prevailing view of jihadists as beyond the pale has not prevented local leaders, humanitarian organisations and Islamic scholars from engaging them. These contacts have allowed jihadists and their interlocutors to address issues such as the management of daily affairs in places under jihadist control, humanitarian access to vulnerable populations and even jihadists’ practice of Islam.

A. Local Bargains

The jihadists have chased state authorities out of many rural villages, but they have not exactly taken their place. Rather, they reside in the bush and visit villages only periodically, often in small groups, to preach, settle disputes and police moral conduct. This shadow governance leaves local leaders in charge of managing local affairs, albeit under the Katiba Macina’s watch and according to its rules.

The collaboration is not always smooth. The Katiba Macina’s rule can impose a heavy burden. For instance, the jihadists frequently abduct those they accuse of disobedience and seize the herds and other property of suspected government informants. They have resorted to collective punishment to enforce rules, for example shutting down weekly rural markets because women have failed to respect their dress code or because people have smoked cigarettes. They have imposed blockades on several villages that they accuse of working with the military.⁷⁹

In some instances, village notables have won concessions from militants. For example, in Tenenkou *cercle*, as elsewhere, the ban on women travelling without a male relative has restricted women’s mobility, in particular that of women traders accustomed to shuttling between weekly rural markets to buy and sell goods. After discussions between notables and local Katiba Macina leaders, the jihadists allowed women to travel as long as the mode of transport, whether donkey cart, boat or car, was segregated by gender.⁸⁰ In some areas, villagers have negotiated the reopening of schools, notwithstanding jihadists’ opposition to what they portray as the Western-influenced Malian curriculum. In others, villagers have voted in elections, despite militants’ antipathy to representative democracy. The implicit bargain is that those elected exercise their authority without challenging that of the Katiba Macina.⁸¹

⁷⁹ In mid-2018, following the Malian army’s deployment in Toguéré Coumbé, Dialloubé and Kouakourou, respectively in the *cercles* of Ténenkou, Mopti and Djenné, the Katiba Macina imposed a blockade, banning all movement in and out. They accused the villagers of collaboration with the military. Due to the blockade, villagers could not reach their farms or weekly rural markets. The jihadists also abducted people and impounded thousands of livestock belonging to village notables. Recently, the jihadists have significantly eased the embargo on Dialloubé following negotiation with local notables.

⁸⁰ These negotiations, with jihadist brigades operating in the Kadiol forest between Ténenkou and Mopti, occurred around June 2017. Crisis Group interviews, Ténenkou residents, February 2019.

⁸¹ In the *cercle* of Youwarou, only two schools operate, including one in Gatchi Loumo, which is open due to talks between village notables and jihadists. The other, in Youwarou village, is open after the military’s deployment there. Mayoral elections have occurred in several districts, including Nampala and Dogo, respectively in the *cercles* of Niono in Ségou and Youwarou in Mopti.

Since 2018, as the Malian army stepped up operations and increased pressure on the group, such local accommodation appears to have become more common.

Local negotiations still often fail. In Toguéré Coumbé, a village in Tenenkou *cercle* under blockade since March 2018, the residents have appealed several times for the Katiba Macina to lift the blockade – to no avail.⁸²

Local negotiations take various forms. In most cases, village notables send emissaries to petition the jihadists, usually in forums where delegates from different villages gather. Villages also organise assemblies, knowing that “dormant cell” members are present and will convey discussions to militant leaders. On the jihadists’ side, the *amirou markaz* usually take charge and report the outcome to the Katiba Macina’s top leadership. The *amirou markaz*’s personality plays a significant role in determining how much militants compromise.⁸³ Overall, the movement’s relationships with influential families in areas where it operates are complicated: at first, it often undercut those families’ authority but more recently it appears to have been more willing to compromise with them than with others.⁸⁴

B. Humanitarian Access

Though the Katiba Macina speaks in strident anti-Western terms, it has nonetheless allowed humanitarian organisations, including predominantly Western NGOs, to operate in areas it controls. This stance is in keeping with a fatwa (legal ruling) issued in 2018 by a jihadist judicial committee in Timbuktu urging member groups not to attack but rather to facilitate access for humanitarians.⁸⁵ Koufa himself has mentioned that his group is not opposed to humanitarian aid, provided that agencies respect certain conditions, among which he cited a prohibition on foreign staff.⁸⁶ While not all NGOs that operate in jihadist areas are aware of this announcement, it appears to have made negotiating humanitarian access easier on the ground.⁸⁷

Humanitarian organisations use varying tactics to negotiate. Some rely on local beneficiaries while others hire intermediaries. Some health care agencies started

⁸² Crisis Group interviews, residents of Toguéré Coumbé, Bamako, December 2018; Mopti, January 2019.

⁸³ In *markazes* where jihadist leaders are local, talks tend to be more cordial than in those where jihadists are from villages far away. Crisis Group interview, former *yimbe ladde* fighter, February 2019.

⁸⁴ For example, at first, the jihadists attempted to cancel royalties collected by landowners called Jowrow from foreign herders who were seeking access to a particular pasture in the inner delta called the Bourgou. Militants argued that the Bourgou belongs to God, who wants it to be open to all. But the Jowrow pushed back, and the jihadists reinstated the royalties in a reduced amount. Crisis Group interviews, members of Jowrow families from Mopti *cercle*, Mopti, January 2019.

⁸⁵ Houka ag Alhousseini, head of a judicial committee reputed to be close to jihadists in Timbuktu, issued a two-page letter on 14 March 2018, in which he authorised humanitarian organisations to operate in areas under jihadist control. He justified this fatwa by citing the benefits that those organisations could bring to the local population. Fatwa signed by the Timbuktu Judicial Committee in Crisis Group’s possession, March 2018.

⁸⁶ Koufa said, “We are not opposed to your humanitarian action, provided that it is not foreigners who will lead it. If a mayor wants to dig a well, he can go get funding from to the United States and dig his well [but only] with natives. ... We do not want to see a single stranger”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, op. cit.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, heads of humanitarian NGOs working in jihadist-controlled areas of Mopti, Dakar and Bamako, December 2018; Mopti, January 2019.

sending doctors to local clinics without obtaining the jihadists’ permission; they then sought approval only after the medics had established a good reputation.⁸⁸ In general, negotiating access appears to be easier for health care providers than for agencies working in sectors like education or development.⁸⁹

Three factors in particular explain why such negotiations are possible. First, humanitarian organisations offer services that locals badly need. In jihadist-occupied zones, welfare services have been lacking for years, in many cases at least since 2015, when the state administration deserted these areas. Secondly, the Katiba Macina benefits from granting access. The movement can show residents that it cares about their well-being and foster an image as a service provider, all the more important given its struggles to offer those services itself. Humanitarian organisations also boost the jihadists’ claim to legitimacy by implicitly recognising them as *de facto* authorities. Thirdly, the agencies stress their respect for humanitarian principles: their neutrality in the conflict, their independence of foreign influence and their impartiality in treating the conflict’s victims, whether or not they are combatants.⁹⁰

Jihadists impose conditions on humanitarian agencies but also make compromises. They require organisations to forbid aid workers from listening to music, consuming alcohol and smoking, and to instruct female staff members to cover their heads. Particularly contentious is their attempt to force NGOs to use separate vehicles for transporting female and male workers. But while humanitarian organisations abide by some conditions, they often resist others. An international NGO that operates in Tenenkou has refused to segregate female and male staffers in vehicles and employs foreign Christians.⁹¹ Yet it is still able to operate in jihadist-held areas. Aid organisations can flex their own muscles, using services they provide and local support they enjoy as leverage.

Still, such negotiations are not without problems. The jihadists have refused humanitarian access to many organisations. Even aid agencies that have secured access can face harassment at checkpoints. The Katiba Macina has held NGO workers as hostages for weeks. In 2018, militants abducted two NGO workers in the *cercle* of Douentza and held them hostage for several days.⁹² They have repeatedly confiscated cell phones and other equipment. The militants often cite suspicions that human-

⁸⁸ According to an international NGO worker in Ténenkou’s health sector: “We began sending medical agents to Ténenkou before engaging in contact with the jihadists. It was afterward, when we had our legitimacy, and proved that we are independent and neutral, that contacts with jihadist sympathisers began to take shape. We do not speak directly with the jihadists but with their sympathisers in the village. Sometimes these are local notables. Every time that we have a mission in the villages, we inform those sympathisers and they convey the information. When we arrive at the jihadist checkpoints, they check our ID cards, cars or boats and then let us pass”. Crisis Group interview, Bamako, December 2018.

⁸⁹ Koufa said, “Any mayor or deputy who comes to build a school, a road, bring humanitarian aid, dig a well on behalf of the Republic of Mali, France or any other country, he will be our enemy, except dispensaries or hospitals”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, 2018.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, heads of humanitarian NGOs working in jihadist-controlled areas of Mopti, Dakar, Bamako and Mopti, December 2018 and January 2019.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, head of a humanitarian NGO that operates in Mopti, Bamako, December 2018.

⁹² International NGO Safety Organisation, “INSO Rapport – Mali Central – Mopti: Détention irrégulière d’Agents ONG”, 15 January 2019.

itarian organisations conduct espionage on behalf of Western countries or collaborate with security forces to justify this harassment.⁹³

C. *Religious Debate*

Over the last three years Katiba Macina ideologues and Islamic scholars have engaged in debates over the righteousness of jihadist discourse. The Katiba Macina emerged in Mopti, a historical centre of Islamic learning, where numerous Quranic schools host students from all over the Sahel. Sufi orders, in particular the Qadriyya (also called Malikiyya) have dominated the area, though recently Salafism and the Da’awa movement (the local branch of the Tabligh Jama’at) have made inroads.⁹⁴ Sufi as well as Salafi scholars have spoken out to discredit the religious foundations of jihadist tenets in several venues, including mosques, radio and television broadcasts, and social media, particularly WhatsApp.

In their argumentation, these scholars emphasise that jihadist violence is unjustified in an almost entirely Muslim society, and that it is suicidal – and therefore un-Islamic – for Muslims to declare jihad against the Malian government and powerful Western countries.⁹⁵ They argue that jihad today should be a peaceful struggle preaching piety and intercommunal harmony.⁹⁶ Islamic scholars also criticise the Katiba Macina’s forcible imposition of sharia and argue against specific fatwas the jihadists have issued.⁹⁷

⁹³ Crisis Group interview, elected official abducted together with NGO agents by jihadists, Bamako, September 2018.

⁹⁴ The jihadist insurgency’s outbreak exacerbated existing tensions among these religious currents. While all of them have unequivocally distanced themselves from the Katiba Macina, the jihadists are often associated with Salafists and sometimes also with the Da’awa. Koufa was an adherent of the Da’awa before he turned jihadist. In Mali, the terms Salafism and Wahhabism are used interchangeably to refer to a Sunni current originating in the Arabian Peninsula that advocates a practice of Islam inspired by the first generation of Muslims (*al-salaf al-salih*) and a literal reading of Islamic scriptures. The Tabligh Jama’at is also a Sunni movement but has its roots in South Asia. It is locally known as the Da’awa, is supposedly apolitical, rejects violence and emphasises that Muslims should engage in missionary work. Salafi scholars often criticise the Tabligh as deviant because its missionary practices go against the ways recommended by *al-salaf al-salih* and because they emphasise missionary work over Islamic learning. For more on Islamic movements in Mali, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°249, *The Politics of Islam in Mali: Separating Myth from Reality*, 18 July 2017.

⁹⁵ Responding to Koufa’s audio recording released in August 2017, Alpha Ibrahim Sow, a religious scholar from central Mali now living in Egypt argued that “wanting to take up arms today to go to war against France or the West is a monumental mistake comparable to suicide that cannot be justified in Islam”. “Replique en Fulfulde d’Alpha Ibrahim Sow a Hamadoun Koufa”, 12 September 2017.

⁹⁶ Alpha Ibrahim Sow identifies five types of jihad: preaching to spread the word of God; emigration to escape persecution in emulation of Prophet Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina; promotion of peaceful coexistence with Muslims and non-Muslims alike; armed self-defence, but only if Muslims are in a position of strength; and finally offensive jihad, in response to aggression and when Muslims have the requisite military might. He argues that “in our countries today, the rightful jihad is that of peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding and mutual respect between religions”. Ibid.

⁹⁷ For example, in 2017, in Kouboulou, a village in the *cercle* of Ténenkou, a female *maccudo* (slave descendant) refused to cover herself according to the jihadists’ rules. She argued that female slaves in Islam are entitled not to cover themselves. The jihadists whipped her anyway. A prominent Islamic scholar in Mopti who follows the Maliki school of jurisprudence endorsed the woman’s argu-

Though they draw little attention, these challenges to jihadist discourse resonate. Katiba Macina leaders take them seriously, particularly as Koufa rationalises the movement’s every action with religious argumentation. His persona as a religious leader has made enforcement of sharia the uprising’s core element.

At the beginning, the exchange took a harsh, accusatory tone. Several establishment Islamic scholars cast the *yimbe ladde* as *khawarij* – a derogatory term referring to a nihilistic and violent movement that appeared in the Arabian Peninsula in the 8th century. For their part, jihadist ideologues denigrated the religious scholars as French allies and sellouts to the government.⁹⁸ They even declared some critics to be unbelievers and threatened to kill them.⁹⁹

Starting in 2018, a more reasoned debate took shape between a handful of Peul Islamic scholars and Katiba Macina ideologues, though it did not last long. Citing Quranic verses that enjoin Muslim combatants to choose *sulh* (reconciliation) over war, the Peul scholars invited the jihadists to an open discussion. At first, the Katiba Macina accepted, mandating Imrana Cissé, one of their ideologues, to conduct the discussion, which took place via WhatsApp, on their behalf.¹⁰⁰ As the debate gained momentum, many saw it as a sign that jihadists might be willing to engage in other forms of dialogue. Some weeks later, however, Koufa put an end to it, citing security concerns.¹⁰¹

Though the debate ended prematurely, scholars who participated stressed the exchange was valuable. First, their interactions with Imrana Cissé allowed them to make public the inconsistencies in jihadist arguments. One scholar insisted that the debates had a positive impact on youth at risk of being seduced by jihadist discourse. He said the debates made them aware of the discourse’s fallacies and persuaded them not to join the jihad.¹⁰² But the scholars also recommended that the government take measures to meet some of the insurgents’ demands, particularly as they relate to the role of Islam in public life. They and others who followed the debate on WhatsApp viewed this attempt at religious dialogue as a window of opportunity for more ambitious initiatives.¹⁰³

ment, using the example to contend that the jihadists are ignorant of sharia. Crisis Group interview, imam, Mopti, January 2019.

⁹⁸ Audio recordings in Crisis Group’s possession, August 2017 and October 2018.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Muslim scholars who have received threats from the Katiba Macina, Bamako, December 2018 and April 2019; Mopti, January 2019.

¹⁰⁰ In an audio recording, Imrana Cissé, who represented the jihadists in the religious debate defined their criteria for engagement. He said, “To all those who want to debate jihad and its conditions as written in the Quran. ... We are ready to discuss all topics. ... We have only one condition: if you win this debate with evidence from [Islamic] books, we will lay down our weapons. If you do not, you will abandon the government and follow us”. Audio recording in Crisis Group’s possession, September 2018.

¹⁰¹ Koufa said, “There was a debate between us and the ulama. ... They asked one of us about why we engage in jihad. ... When the debate dragged on, we discovered that the real intention of the ulama was not to debate. It was something else”. He reportedly feared that those scholars would reveal his location to the security forces.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interviews, Muslim scholars who debated the Katiba Macina via WhatsApp, Mopti and Bamako, January and April 2019.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interviews, pro-dialogue Muslim scholars and civil society activists, Bamako, October and December 2018; Mopti, January 2019.

The various engagements between the Katiba Macina and non-state actors from civil leaders to humanitarians and religious scholars have been narrow in scope but have shown promise. They have aimed to solve specific problems, such as easing jihadist sanctions or allowing humanitarian access, or at settling arguments over religious interpretation, rather than serving the broader goal of peacemaking. Nor have they challenged the jihadists’ authority, though those mediating have been far from obsequious. The engagements suggest that within the Katiba Macina there are pragmatic negotiators. True, Koufa curtailed the discussion between Imrana Cissé and religious scholars, but his ideological commitment has not stopped dialogue altogether, including with self-identified critics and foreign organisations staffed and funded by those the jihadists consider infidels.

V. Two Governments’ Different Approaches

Over the last two years, the government has taken two markedly different approaches to central Mali’s crisis. Between March and mid-December 2017, then Prime Minister Abdoulaye Idrissa Maïga rolled out his signature program, the *missions de bons offices*, aimed at advancing peace through dialogue, including with figures close to the Katiba Macina. In December 2017, however, a new prime minister, Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, came in with an approach relying first and foremost on military action, envisaged intercommunal dialogue in a supplemental role and explicitly excluded jihadists.

A. Political and Intercommunal Dialogue

The Malian authorities have been more willing to engage Katiba Macina than official rhetoric suggests. In the past, they have opened channels of communication with the jihadists with an eye to initiating peace talks. But these measures have been both ad hoc and inconsistent.

In March 2017, a community-based organisation called Amicale Jawambe du Mali claimed that high-level Malian officials, including the defence minister and the governor of Mopti had instructed it to mediate between the government and the “dormant cells” – people in villages with close ties to the Katiba Macina.¹⁰⁴ The Amicale Jawambe created a commission called Jam e-Dina, composed of ten members, including traditional chiefs, religious leaders and other local notables. This commission claims to have engaged jihadist sympathisers and supporters in villages regularly. It even reportedly set up a meeting between Mahmoud Dicko, former head of the High Islamic Council of Mali, and the Katiba Macina’s emissaries, though the meeting did not come off, apparently for logistical reasons.¹⁰⁵ Though unsuccessful, the Jam e-Dina’s outreach may have helped lay the groundwork for larger-scale initiative.

This initiative, the *missions de bons offices*, was the most ambitious the government has launched since the crisis in central Mali began. It aimed to advance peace through dialogue between a team of religious leaders and traditional notables, on one side, and armed groups in the north and centre, including the Katiba Macina, on the

¹⁰⁴ The Jawambe (sing. Jawando) is a sub-group of Peul, who as per the traditional socio-professional division of labour work as merchants and advisers to the chief. The Amical Jawambe claims that it can mobilise religious scholars and use local traditions, in particular the historical relations between pastoralist Peul and the Jawambe, to mediate contacts with the jihadists. One member of this association summarised this mediation approach, saying, “When a Peul is in conflict, a Jawando can bring him back to reason, just as when a *talibe* (Quranic student) is in trouble his master can bring him back to his senses. It is on this traditional basis that the current mediation will take place in order to speak with the young people who took up arms on behalf of Islam”. Crisis Group interviews, members of Amical Jawambe du Mali, Bamako, October 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Mahmoud Dicko says he could not travel because the meeting was scheduled at a time when the inner delta, where the meeting was set to take place, is completely flooded. Before the dry season arrived, he was sacked from the *missions de bons offices*. Crisis Group interviews, religious leaders closely involved in the mission, March and April 2019.

other.¹⁰⁶ The government appointed Mahmoud Dicko to lead the team, which also comprised traditional chiefs from Kayes, Sikasso, Koulikoro and Ségou, as well as representatives from other associations.¹⁰⁷ Through the *missions de bons offices*, Dicko and his team attempted to establish contact via intermediaries with both Iyad ag Ghaly and Hamadoun Koufa.¹⁰⁸ Their goal was to identify influential families and Quranic school teachers who educated many of the jihadists and who together could convince the jihadists to enter peace talks.

As regards the Katiba Macina, Dicko attempted to make contact with Koufa’s inner circle by organising large meetings in Bamako, Segou and Mopti where he convened religious leaders, in particular teachers at Quranic schools, to discuss how to bring about peace. At these meetings, he called upon religious scholars to convince the jihadists to lay down their weapons and come to the negotiating table. He suggested various ways in which the jihadists and the government could compromise, including the appointment of a *qadi* by local district authorities, reform of Quranic schools, and bans on bars, brothels and gambling where necessary.¹⁰⁹

Despite showing some initial promise, the *missions de bons offices* were short-lived. The efforts mobilised many people and revealed some support, in particular but not only among Quranic school teachers, for such dialogue.¹¹⁰ It made clear who was responsible, in this case Mahmoud Dicko, for establishing contacts – important in an environment where potential mediators between the state and militants often compete for opportunities that can entail access to resources.¹¹¹ More broadly, the mission illustrated that the Malian authorities can at least envisage an approach to tackling the jihadist insurgency that involves dialogue. In December 2017, however, Prime Minister Maiga resigned, effectively ending the program.¹¹² The choice of Dicko, a religious personage many Malians view as controversial, appears also to have generated opposition from Western countries.¹¹³ That Dicko’s relations with President Keïta

¹⁰⁶ According to a top official closely involved in the *missions de bons offices*, those efforts involved “choosing the right people to solve the issue of security”. He assumes that, where state institutions are weak, traditional leaders can play a significant role in advancing peace. Crisis Group interview, former senior official, Bamako, October 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Prime Minister, Lettre N° 0362 PM-CAB, “Organisation d’une mission de bons offices à Kidal, dans le Delta intérieur et la Boucle du Niger”, 24 May 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interviews, religious leader closely involved in the mission, March and April 2019. Dicko claims that Iyad ag Ghaly agreed to negotiate. He says his intermediary Cheikh ag Aoussa told him as much. On the same day that ag Aoussa informed him of ag Ghaly’s answer, however, ag Aoussa was assassinated with a car bomb.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ For more on tensions and competition among elites from Central Mali, see Crisis Group Report, *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making*, op. cit. For another example of this competition for mediation positions in the central Sahel, see Crisis Group Report, *Frontière Niger-Mali: mettre l’outil militaire au service d’une approche politique*, op. cit.

¹¹² President Keïta distanced himself from the *missions de bons offices*. “Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta: ‘Pas question de négocier avec les djihadistes’”, *Le Monde*, 22 February 2018.

¹¹³ Dicko has taken strong conservative positions on family code reform, called for the Islamisation of Malian public life, and been an outspoken critic of homosexuality and Western influence. Senior Western officials apparently protested directly to the prime minister about his role. Crisis Group interviews, Bamako, October 2018.

had also become increasingly strained also likely contributed to bringing the mission to an end.¹¹⁴

B. *Disarmament and Intercommunal Dialogue*

Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga’s government adopted an approach to the conflict that centred more on military operations aimed at opening space for the state apparatus to return to central Mali than on efforts to negotiate a settlement. As described in Section II, this approach primarily entails the redeployment of security forces, state officials and development projects, outlined in the February 2017 Plan de Sécurisation Intégré des Régions du Centre du Mali, backed up by aggressive military operations. But after publishing the plan, Maïga’s government complemented it with two further other elements: first, a DDR program for combatants – including jihadists – who surrender weapons; and secondly, intercommunal dialogue sponsored by NGOs that aims to promote national cohesion but explicitly excludes the Katiba Macina. Officials presented these efforts as an integrated strategy.¹¹⁵ In reality, however, the DDR and dialogue initiatives are largely disconnected from the military campaign, limiting the effectiveness of the whole approach.

On 24 December 2018, Prime Minister Maïga launched a new DDR process in Mopti. It came as foreign countries stepped up pressure on Malian authorities to take steps to calm escalating intercommunal violence. The government fixed a deadline of one month for all armed groups and individuals to enrol.¹¹⁶ The program aims to disarm non-jihadist self-defence militias, many of whom were involved in intercommunal violence, but also jihadists. It thus appears to attempt to pull the rug out from under jihadist leaders and ideologues by peeling off less committed members and isolating those more militant.¹¹⁷

The success of the disarmament program thus far is hard to evaluate. In February 2019, the government announced that an impressive number – over 5,000 – combatants had signed up.¹¹⁸ A few jihadist fighters may also have joined. Yet without a blessing from their leaders and suspecting that the government would use the program to arrest them, the vast majority of Katiba Macina militants have thus far boycotted.¹¹⁹ As militants refused to disarm, it has become harder to persuade the com-

¹¹⁴ Dicko supported President Keïta until 2016, but since then relations between the two had been increasingly strained.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, advisers to the prime minister and government officials in Mopti, January and March 2018.

¹¹⁶ The DDR commission’s president distributed registries to several armed groups in Mopti and invited them to register their combatants. Other registries were provided to each of Mopti’s eight *cercles* to allow non-affiliated armed individuals or even jihadists to enrol in the DDR process.

¹¹⁷ Former Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga announced that the DDR program’s goal was to “provide an exit to those who enrolled [in jihadist groups] for lack of better perspectives”. See *Primature du Mali*, “Le Premier Ministre Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga à l’Assemblée Nationale”, 7 January 2019.

¹¹⁸ UN Security Council, “Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary General, March 2019”, S/2019/262, 26 March 2019.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, member of DDR commission in Mopti, Mopti, January 2019. A video portraying a group of armed individuals presented as jihadist defectors enrolled in the DDR program has circulated in social media.

munal militias often involved in fighting the jihadists to do so. Continuing intercommunal violence also acts as a strong disincentive. Of the 5,000 combatants that the authorities cite as having joined the program, it is unclear how many have actually disarmed.

Meanwhile, the government has tasked NGOs with mediating intercommunal dialogue in central Mali, though explicitly excluding the jihadists from their mandate.¹²⁰ On 28 August 2018, following a Center for Humanitarian Dialogue mediation, 34 village chiefs from Mopti met in Sevaré to sign an agreement that aimed to end intercommunal violence. Some militias initially laid down their weapons as a result. But as jihadist attacks continued, the truce fell apart. In some areas, the incidence of assassinations, raids and livestock thefts in the area has since risen.¹²¹ Much as with the disarmament program, such ceasefires appear unlikely to hold if they do not include all those fighting on the ground, including jihadists.

¹²⁰ At least two international NGOs, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue and Promediation, have received mandates from the Malian government to mediate in central Mali for the purpose of mitigating conflict. Crisis Group interviews, mediation NGOs, October and January 2019.

¹²¹ In January and March 2019, central Mali registered the two deadliest attacks since the conflict began in 2015. On 1 January 2019, suspected Dogon militias stormed the village of Koulogon Peul, killing 36 civilians, injuring nine, and burning down over a hundred houses and dozens of granaries. On 23 March, in similar circumstances, suspected Dozo militias attacked the village of Ogassagou Peul killing 157, injuring 65 and setting fire to over 200 houses. An attack on Ogassagou’s scale is unprecedented in Mali’s history. See MINUSMA, “Communiqué de presse: Conclusions préliminaires de la mission d’enquête spéciale sur les graves atteintes aux droits de l’homme commis à Ogossagou le 23 mars 2019”, 2 May 2019.

VI. Dialogue Options for Ending the Stalemate

Given the limits of the Malian government and its Western partners’ current approach, it could add to the mix dialogue involving – though not limited to – Katiba Macina militants. The government could pursue two channels for such engagement. The first would involve seeking to reinitiate talks with Katiba Macina leaders, by reviving the idea of debate between religious scholars and Hamadoun Koufa, though taking steps to minimise backlash. The second would aim to foster a more inclusive political dialogue involving all central Malian communities, including those who support and sympathise with the jihadists, that aims to reach at a shared understanding of the conflict’s causes, how to tackle them and the state’s role in doing so.

Pursuing these options would entail not an end to military operations, development work and DDR but a shift in tack. If thus far the goal has been to exhaust jihadists to the point where they have no option but to surrender or leave the region, the military instead could maintain a level of pressure but accept temporary and local ceasefires when those leading mediation efforts believe it is time to give more space to dialogue. Meanwhile, the government’s DDR program should at a minimum continue to leave the door open for jihadists who either joined the insurgency unwillingly or joined by choice but now regret doing so and wish to lay down their guns. Bamako should, however, recognise that few are likely to do so while their leaders are sworn to continue fighting. It should avoid aggressive efforts to prise away militants that are unlikely to work and could undercut efforts to open lines of communication to their leaders.

A. *Renewed Efforts to Engage Katiba Macina*

The Malian government should also consider renewing its efforts to engage people close to the Katiba Macina, with an eye to communicating with the movement’s leaders. Such efforts would be both controversial and challenging, with success far from guaranteed. But given the paucity of good options, they are worth pursuing.

The Malian government could seek to initiate local dialogue with confidants of Katiba Macina leader Hamadoun Koufa. Koufa rejected in August 2017 the invitation for talks from Peul elites, saying that any such talks should take place with Iyad ag Ghaly as his leader. Whether he would be prepared to engage now without a green light from ag Ghaly and, indeed, whether dialogue with ag Ghaly himself might be an option are unclear (a forthcoming Crisis Group briefing will explore prospects for the latter). But Koufa’s past expression of willingness to at least enter into religious dialogue with three Islamic scholars, one of whom was Mahmoud Dicko, might offer an entry point.¹²² The government could encourage such a dialogue, by explicitly mandating and empowering religious leaders, including the three scholars, to engage in discussions with Koufa or his representatives.

Such talks could probably initially yield at most small dividends, but could build in ambition over time. The Islamic scholars might, for example, start by seeking to simply establish contacts and explore options for steps that might reduce violence,

¹²² See also fn 68.

such as local ceasefires and the negotiated return of some officials, potentially those providing services that communities want, notably veterinary and health services, to areas under jihadist control. They might eventually be able to explore with Katiba Macina representatives areas of potential compromise and produce concrete proposals for political and religious reforms. These might involve, for example, the creation of an official position of *qadi* appointed by local authorities in certain central Malian districts – as is the case in Mauritania and Nigeria – or the integration of Quranic schools in the national education system to improve their graduates’ job prospects. The initial dialogue might also open a channel through which officials could discuss transactional deals, like ceasefires or aid access, or political steps or even hold direct talks with Koufa over such issues.

The government would have to take steps to defuse the resistance such efforts are likely to generate. As described, some Bamako elites and many central Malians would likely view engagement as a step toward a deal with jihadists and sharia rule, while foreign powers might see it as legitimising a terrorist outfit with blood on its hands. Officials could make clear that those talks do not signal acceptance of the jihadists’ vision for the country as legitimate. To counter potential resistance from Western governments, they could guarantee that militants pledging to renounce transnational connections would be a requirement for any agreement. Malian leaders could also signal to Western counterparts that they share a heavy financial and military burden for a war that appears to be dragging on with no foreseeable end and have an interest in at least permitting the Malian government to explore all options for resolving it.

Challenges notwithstanding, there may be some scope for accommodation. In reality, Islam already regulates much of life in rural Mali, particularly in matters of family, marriage, inheritance and divorce. Most Malians, particularly in rural areas, look first to traditional or religious authorities to settle family and land disputes, for example, and only after exhausting these traditional avenues they resort to the state’s inefficient courts.¹²³ Were, for example, the government to formalise sharia courts, the impact on people’s behaviour or the state’s authority is unlikely to be dramatic. Indeed, doing so might shore up the state’s legitimacy if people in areas affected see the step as part of a reduction in violence and responding to local needs.

B. *A More Inclusive Dialogue for Central Mali*

Given that jihadism is but one dimension of central Mali’s crisis, the Malian government should also pursue a wider dialogue with the region’s many constituencies, including those based on ethnicity. This would aim to arrive at a shared understanding of the grievances and cleavages underpinning violence, how to address them and, given the state’s chronic weakness in central Mali, what its return to the region would entail. Issues on the table could include, for example, how to regulate access to natural resources and restore forms of local security and justice provision, what forms of decentralised authority and political representation make sense and the nature of education, both Francophone and Quranic, in the region. Such a dialogue could help assuage fears of those constituencies worried about engagement with militants

¹²³ See “Résumés des Résultats: 6ème Tour de l’Afrobarometer Enquête en/au Mali 2014”, Afrobarometer, 2015.

that their voices will count for less. It would not necessarily have to include the *yimbe ladde* directly; indeed, doing so would likely be impossible unless efforts to engage Hamadoun Koufa bear fruit. But it should include parts of society most sympathetic to them, including Peul nomads and Quranic school students.

The *missions de bons offices* offer lessons as to how such a dialogue might be framed and conducted. It should go beyond the periodic forums the government has tended to organise in the past.¹²⁴ It should be as inclusive as possible and led by a range of people, including state officials, traditional authorities and religious and civic leaders. It should aim to generate grassroots mobilisation, nurturing or empowering strong leadership within communities. Contrary to the *mission de bons offices*, which ended prematurely due to the change of government, it should be catalysed and then publicly and consistently supported by the Malian presidency.

Obstacles to such a dialogue are serious. The three years of negotiations in Algiers that resulted in the 2015 Bamako accord, which aimed to give different constituencies from Mali’s north a say, and subsequent struggles to implement that deal, show how hard it is to hold inclusive talks, reach agreement and follow through.¹²⁵ Much as in the north, the challenge is all the graver given the collapse of central Mali’s political system after years of insurgency. Most elected officials have fled their constituencies and retain little influence. The legitimacy of traditional authorities who remain is often contested. Nor is it clear that jihadists who control rural areas would allow people to participate, though this might potentially be an area on which the religious scholars seeking to engage Katiba Macina leaders could seek compromise.

One first step the government could take would be to appoint a presidential envoy with a full mandate to explore how such a dialogue might work and then lead it. The envoy should work with local elites and influential figures, such as Quranic school teachers and traditional notables, to reduce the chances that jihadists will stop the process even if they oppose it.

¹²⁴ Since 2016, several forums have been organised in Mopti, including the Forum de paix et de réconciliation de Mopti in January 2016 and the Forum des victimes et associations des victimes de la région de Mopti in April 2017.

¹²⁵ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°226, *Mali: An Imposed Peace?*, 22 May 2015; Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°104, *Mali: Last Chance in Algiers*, 18 November 2014; and Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°115, *Mali: Peace from Below?*, 14 December 2015.

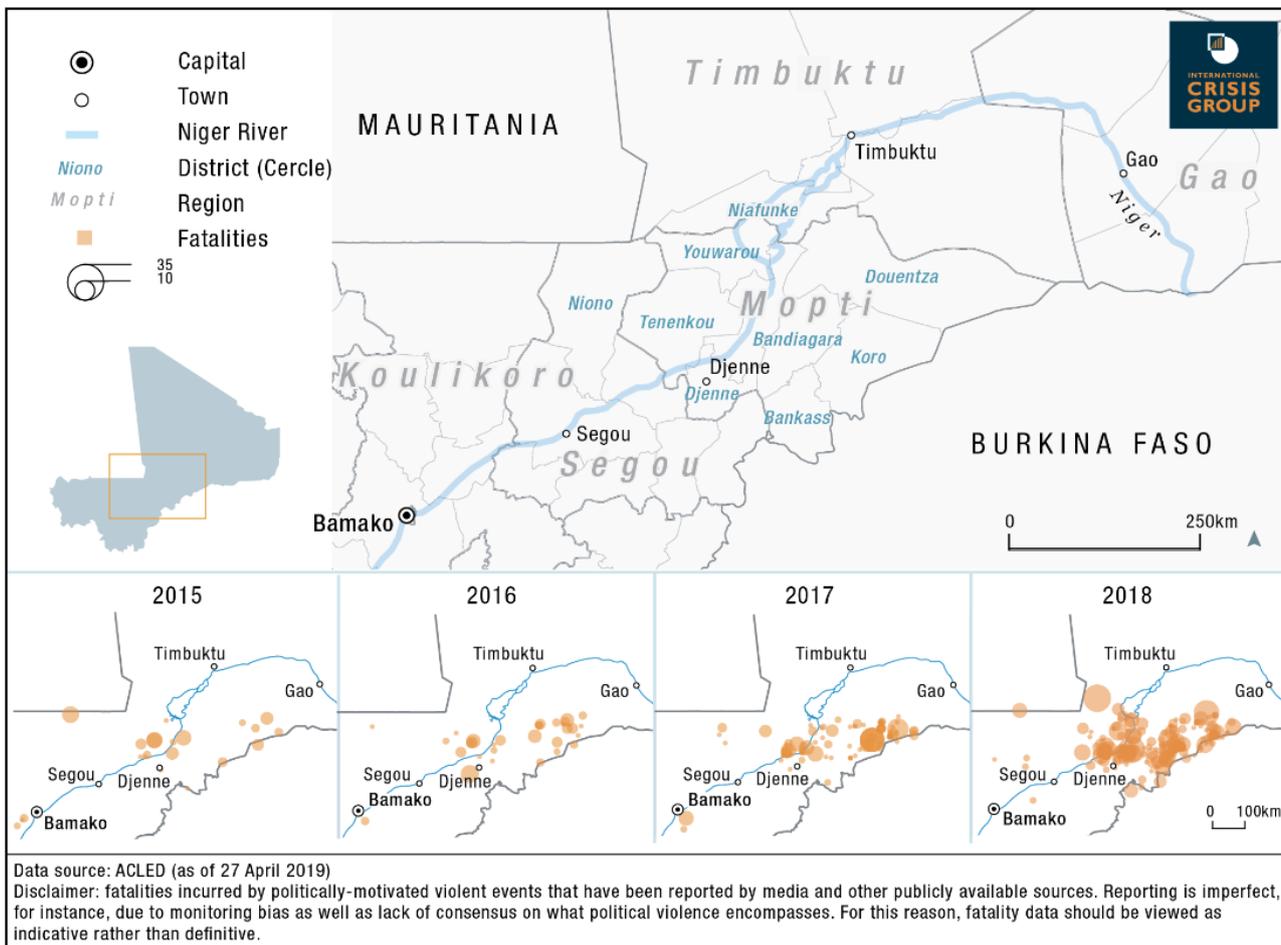
VII. Conclusion

Central Mali now suffers worse violence than anywhere else in the country, with thousands killed over the past four years. The state’s response, involving mostly military force complemented with some development aid, has thus far done little to reduce levels of bloodshed. If military operations have enhanced the state’s presence in towns, Katiba Macina insurgents control much of the countryside and continue to recruit by tapping deep-rooted local grievances. Little suggests the movement will be defeated any time soon. Meanwhile, both jihadist attacks and the counter-insurgency campaign have fuelled intercommunal bloodshed, which now exacts a higher toll than fighting between the security forces and militants. While development aid is critical for central Mali, the track record there and elsewhere in the Sahel suggests that it is an ineffective counter-insurgency tool, unable to sap popular support for militants and unlikely to much improve people’s lives absent at least a modicum of security.

As existing policies flounder and few good options remain, the Malian government should consider options for engaging militants and their supporters, whether by establishing lines of communication to Katiba Macina leaders or engaging in a wide dialogue including the social strata most sympathetic to them. Such efforts are fraught with difficulties: notably the resistance they would likely generate among communities that have borne the brunt of jihadist violence in Bamako and in foreign capitals; and the fact that Hamadou Koufa himself so far has rejected dialogue. They will almost certainly not lead to an immediate cessation of hostilities and may not even over time yield major dividends. Nor are they an alternative to force: the Malian government and its international partners should maintain military operations that since early 2018 have at least checked the militants’ advance. But an approach that pairs those operations with efforts to engage in dialogue might help bypass the current gridlock and open new opportunities for reducing violence and advancing peace.

Dakar/Brussels, 28 May 2019

Appendix A: Evolution of Violence in Central Mali (2015-2018)



Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group’s approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group’s reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group’s President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group’s Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton’s Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group’s international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Germany Federal Foreign Office, Irish Aid, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the UK Department for International Development, and the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Crisis Group also holds relationships with the following foundations: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Charles Koch Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Korea Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Ploughshares Fund, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, UniKorea Foundation, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

In addition to its indispensable core donors, Crisis Group acknowledges with gratitude that this report was funded by the European Union.

May 2019

Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2016

Special Reports and Briefings

Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy, Special Briefing N°1, 30 April 2019.

Central Africa

Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility, Africa Report N°233, 30 March 2016 (also available in French).

Burundi: anatomie du troisième mandat, Africa Report N°235, 20 May 2016 (only available in French).

Katanga: Tensions in DRC’s Mineral Heartland, Africa Report N°239, 3 August 2016.

The African Union and the Burundi Crisis: Ambition versus Reality, Africa Briefing N°122, 28 September 2016 (also available in French).

Boulevard of Broken Dreams: The “Street” and Politics in DR Congo, Africa Briefing N°123, 13 October 2016.

Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram, Africa Report N°241, 16 November 2016 (also available in French).

Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures, Africa Report N°246, 8 March 2017 (also available in French).

Burundi: The Army in Crisis, Africa Report N°247, 5 April 2017 (also available in French).

Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads, Africa Report N°250, 2 August 2017 (also available in French).

Avoiding the Worst in Central African Republic, Africa Report N°253, 28 September 2017 (also available in French).

Time to Reset African Union-European Union Relations, Africa Report N°255, 17 October 2017 (also available in French).

Cameroon: A Worsening Anglophone Crisis Calls for Strong Measures, Africa Briefing N°130, 19 October 2017 (also available in French).

Cameroon’s Far North: Reconstruction amid Ongoing Conflict, Africa Briefing N°133, 25 October 2017 (also available in French).

Time for Concerted Action in DR Congo, Africa Report N°257, 4 December 2017 (also available in French).

Seven Priorities for the African Union in 2018, Africa Briefing N°135, 17 January 2018 (also available in French).

Electoral Poker in DR Congo, Africa Report N°259, 4 April 2018 (also available in French).

Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis: How the Catholic Church Can Promote Dialogue, Africa Briefing N°138, 26 April 2018 (also available in French).

Increasing the Stakes in DR Congo’s Electoral Poker, Africa Briefing N°139, 8 June 2018 (also available in French).

DR Congo: The Bemba Earthquake, Africa Briefing N°140, 15 June 2018 (also available in French).

Cameroon’s Far North: A New Chapter in the Fight Against Boko Haram, Africa Report N°263, 14 August 2018 (also available in French).

Helping the Burundian People Cope with the Economic Crisis, Africa Report N°264, 31 August 2018 (also available in French).

Cameroon: Divisions Widen Ahead of Presidential Vote, Africa Briefing N°142, 3 October 2018 (also available in French).

Chad: Defusing Tensions in the Sahel, Africa Report N°266, 5 December 2018 (also available in French).

Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?, Africa Report N°272, 2 May 2019 (also available in French).

Tchad : sortir de la confrontation à Miski, Africa Report N°274, 17 May 2019.

Horn of Africa

Ethiopia: Governing the Faithful, Africa Briefing N°117, 22 February 2016.

Sudan’s Islamists: From Salvation to Survival, Africa Briefing N°119, 21 March 2016.

South Sudan’s South: Conflict in the Equatorias, Africa Report N°236, 25 May 2016.

Kenya’s Coast: Devolution Disappointed, Africa Briefing N°121, 13 July 2016.

South Sudan: Rearranging the Chessboard, Africa Report N°243, 20 December 2016.

Instruments of Pain (II): Conflict and Famine in South Sudan, Africa Briefing N°124, 26 April 2017.

Instruments of Pain (III): Conflict and Famine in Somalia, Africa Briefing N°125, 9 May 2017.

Instruments of Pain (IV): The Food Crisis in North East Nigeria, Africa Briefing N°126, 18 May 2017.

Kenya’s Rift Valley: Old Wounds, Devolution’s New Anxieties, Africa Report N°248, 30 May 2017.

Time to Repeal U.S. Sanctions on Sudan?, Africa Briefing N°127, 22 June 2017.

A New Roadmap to Make U.S. Sudan Sanctions Relief Work, Africa Briefing N°128, 29 September 2017.

How to Ensure a Credible, Peaceful Presidential Vote in Kenya, Africa Briefing N°129, 2 October 2017.

Managing the Disruptive Aftermath of Somalia’s Worst Terror Attack, Africa Briefing N°131, 20 October 2017.

An Election Delay Can Help Avert Kenya’s Crisis, Africa Briefing N°132, 23 October 2017.

Uganda’s Slow Slide into Crisis, Africa Report N°256, 21 November 2017.

After Kenya’s Leaders Reconcile, a Tough Path Ahead, Africa Briefing N°136, 13 March 2018.

Somalia and the Gulf Crisis, Africa Report N°260, 5 June 2018.

Averting War in Northern Somalia, Africa Briefing N°141, 27 June 2018.

Al-Shabaab Five Years after Westgate: Still a Menace in East Africa, Africa Report N°265, 21 September 2018.

Improving Prospects for a Peaceful Transition in Sudan, Africa Briefing N°143, 14 January 2019.

Managing Ethiopia’s Unsettled Transition, Africa Report N°269, 21 February 2019.

Salvaging South Sudan’s Fragile Peace Deal, Africa Report N°270, 13 March 2019.

Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute, Africa Report N°271, 20 March 2019.

Southern Africa

Zimbabwe: Stranded in Stasis, Africa Briefing N°118, 29 February 2016.

Zimbabwe’s “Military-assisted Transition” and Prospects for Recovery, Africa Briefing N°134, 20 December 2017.

West Africa

Burkina Faso: Transition, Act II, Africa Briefing N°116, 7 January 2016 (only available in French).

Implementing Peace and Security Architecture (III): West Africa, Africa Report N°234, 14 April 2016 (also available in French).

Boko Haram on the Back Foot?, Africa Briefing N°120, 4 May 2016 (also available in French).

Nigeria: The Challenge of Military Reform, Africa Report N°237, 6 June 2016.

Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?, Africa Report N°238, 6 July 2016 (also available in French).

Burkina Faso: Preserving the Religious Balance, Africa Report N°240, 6 September 2016 (also available in French).

Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency, Africa Report N°242, 5 December 2016 (also available in French).

Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram, Africa Report N°244, 23 February 2017.

Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-insurgency, Africa Report N°245, 27 February 2017 (also available in French).

The Politics of Islam in Mali: Separating Myth from Reality, Africa Report N°249, 18 July 2017 (only available in French).

Double-edged Sword: Vigilantes in African Counter-insurgencies, Africa Report N°251, 7 September 2017 (also available in French).

Herders against Farmers: Nigeria’s Expanding Deadly Conflict, Africa Report N°252, 19 September 2017.

The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso’s North, Africa Report N°254, 12 October 2017 (also available in French).

Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, Africa Report N°258, 12 December 2017 (also available in French).

Preventing Boko Haram Abductions of Schoolchildren in Nigeria, Africa Briefing N°137, 12 April 2017.

Frontière Niger-Mali : mettre l’outil militaire au service d’une approche politique, Africa Report N°261, 12 June 2018 (only available in French).

Stopping Nigeria’s Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence, Africa Report N°262, 26 July 2018.

Drug Trafficking, Violence and Politics in Northern Mali, Africa Report N°267, 13 December 2018 (also available in French).

Nigeria’s 2019 Elections: Six States to Watch, Africa Report N°268, 21 December 2018.

Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province, Africa Report N°273, 16 May 2019.

Returning from the Land of Jihad: The Fate of Women Associated with Boko Haram, Africa Report N°275, 21 May 2019.

Appendix D: International Crisis Group Board of Trustees

CHAIR

Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown
Former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

PRESIDENT & CEO

Robert Malley
Former White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region

OTHER TRUSTEES

Fola Adeola
Founder and Chairman, FATE Foundation

Hushang Ansary
Chairman, Parman Capital Group LLC; Former Iranian Ambassador to the U.S. and Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs

G rard Araud
Former Ambassador of France to the U.S.

Carl Bildt
Former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Sweden

Emma Bonino
Former Foreign Minister of Italy and European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid

Cheryl Carolus
Former South African High Commissioner to the UK and Secretary General of the African National Congress (ANC)

Maria Livanos Cattau
Former Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce

Ahmed Charai
Chairman and CEO of Global Media Holding and publisher of the Moroccan weekly *L’Observateur*

Nathalie Delapalme
Executive Director and Board Member at the Mo Ibrahim Foundation

Alexander Downer
Former Australian Foreign Minister and High Commissioner to the United Kingdom

Sigmar Gabriel
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice Chancellor of Germany

Robert Fadel
Former Member of Parliament in Lebanon; Owner and Board Member of the ABC Group

Frank Giustra
President & CEO, Fiore Group; Founder, Radcliffe Foundation

Hu Shuli
Editor-in-Chief of Caixin Media; Professor at Sun Yat-sen University

Mo Ibrahim
Founder and Chair, Mo Ibrahim Foundation; Founder, Celtel International

Yoriko Kawaguchi
Former Foreign Minister of Japan; former Environment Minister

Wadah Khanfar
Co-Founder, Al Sharq Forum; former Director General, Al Jazeera Network

Nasser al-Kidwa
Chairman of the Yasser Arafat Foundation; Former UN Deputy Mediator on Syria

Bert Koenders
Former Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations

Andrey Kortunov
Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council

Ivan Krastev
Chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies (Sofia); Founding Board Member of European Council on Foreign Relations

Tzipi Livni
Former Foreign Minister and Vice Prime Minister of Israel

Helge Lund
Former Chief Executive BG Group (UK) and Statoil (Norway)

Susana Malcorra
Former Foreign Minister of Argentina

William H. McRaven
Retired U.S. Navy Admiral who served as 9th Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command

Shivshankar Menon
Former Foreign Secretary of India; former National Security Adviser

Naz Modirzadeh
Director of the Harvard Law School Program on International Law and Armed Conflict

Saad Mohseni
Chairman and CEO of MOBY Group

Marty Natalegawa
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, Permanent Representative to the UN, and Ambassador to the UK

Ayo Obe
Chair of the Board of the Gor e Institute (Senegal); Legal Practitioner (Nigeria)

Meghan O’Sullivan
Former U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser on Iraq and Afghanistan

Thomas R. Pickering
Former U.S. Under-Secretary of State and Ambassador to the UN, Russia, India, Israel, Jordan, El Salvador and Nigeria

Ahmed Rashid
Author and Foreign Policy Journalist, Pakistan

Juan Manuel Santos Calder n
Former President of Colombia; Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2016

Wendy Sherman
Former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and Lead Negotiator for the Iran Nuclear Deal

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
Former President of Liberia

Alexander Soros
Deputy Chair of the Global Board, Open Society Foundations

George Soros
Founder, Open Society Foundations and Chair, Soros Fund Management

Jonas Gahr St re
Leader of the Labour Party and Labour Party Parliamentary Group; former Foreign Minister of Norway

Jake Sullivan
Former Director of Policy Planning at the U.S. Department of State, Deputy Assistant to President Obama, and National Security Advisor to Vice President Biden

Lawrence H. Summers
Former Director of the U.S. National Economic Council and Secretary of the U.S. Treasury; President Emeritus of Harvard University

Helle Thorning-Schmidt
CEO of Save the Children International; former Prime Minister of Denmark

Wang Jisi
Member, Foreign Policy Advisory Committee of the Chinese Foreign Ministry; President, Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Peking University

PRESIDENT’S COUNCIL

A distinguished group of individual and corporate donors providing essential support and expertise to Crisis Group.

CORPORATE	INDIVIDUAL	
BP	(5) Anonymous	Stephen Robert
Shearman & Sterling LLP	Scott Bessent	Ludék Sekyra
Statoil (U.K.) Ltd.	David Brown & Erika Franke	Alexander Soros
White & Case LLP	Herman De Bode	Ian R. Taylor

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Individual and corporate supporters who play a key role in Crisis Group’s efforts to prevent deadly conflict.

CORPORATE	INDIVIDUAL	
Anonymous	(3) Anonymous	Faisal Khan
APCO Worldwide Inc.	Mark Bergman	Cleopatra Kitti
Atlas Copco AB	Stanley Bergman & Edward Bergman	Michael & Jackie Lambert
Chevron	David & Katherine Bradley	Samantha Lasry
Edelman UK	Eric Christiansen	Leslie Lishon
Eni	Sam Englehardt	Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Foundation
HSBC Holdings Plc	The Edelman Family Foundation	The New York Community Trust – Lise Strickler & Mark Gallogly Charitable Fund
MetLife	Seth & Jane Ginns	The Nommontu Foundation
Noble Energy	Ronald Glickman	Brian Paes-Braga
RBC Capital Markets	David Harding	Kerry Propper
Shell	Geoffrey R. Hogue & Ana Luisa Ponti	Duco Sickinghe
	Geoffrey Hsu	Nina K. Solarz
	David Jannetti	Clayton E. Swisher
		Enzo Viscusi

AMBASSADOR COUNCIL

Rising stars from diverse fields who contribute their talents and expertise to support Crisis Group’s mission.

Amy Benziger	Lindsay Iversen	Nidhi Sinha
Tripp Callan	Azim Jamal	Chloe Squires
Kivanc Cubukcu	Arohi Jain	Leeanne Su
Matthew Devlin	Christopher Louney	Bobbi Thomason
Victoria Ergolavou	Matthew Magenheimer	AJ Twombly
Noa Gafni	Madison Malloch-Brown	Dillon Twombly
Christina Bache	Megan McGill	Annie Verderosa
Lynda Hammes	Hamesh Mehta	Zachary Watling
Jason Hesse	Tara Opalinski	Grant Webster
Dali ten Hove	Perfecto Sanchez	

SENIOR ADVISERS

Former Board Members who maintain an association with Crisis Group, and whose advice and support are called on (to the extent consistent with any other office they may be holding at the time).

Martti Ahtisaari Chairman Emeritus	Christoph Bertram Lakhdar Brahimi	Aleksander Kwasniewski Ricardo Lagos
George Mitchell Chairman Emeritus	Kim Campbell Jorge Castañeda	Joanne Leedom-Ackerman Todung Mulya Lubis
Gareth Evans President Emeritus	Joaquim Alberto Chissano Victor Chu	Graça Machel Jessica T. Mathews
Kenneth Adelman Adnan Abu-Odeh HRH Prince Turki al-Faisal	Mong Joon Chung Sheila Coronel Pat Cox Gianfranco Dell’Alba	Miklós Németh Christine Ockrent Timothy Ong Roza Otunbayeva
Celso Amorim Oscar Arias Richard Armitage	Jacques Delors Alain Destexhe Mou-Shih Ding Uffe Ellemann-Jensen	Olara Otunnu Lord (Christopher) Patten Surin Pitsuwan Fidel V. Ramos
Diego Arria Zainab Bangura Nahum Barnea Kim Beazley Shlomo Ben-Ami	Stanley Fischer Carla Hills Swanee Hunt Wolfgang Ischinger	Olympia Snowe Javier Solana