

Islamist offensive tacitly backed by Paris shakes Mali

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On April 25, an alliance of Tuareg nationalist militias and Islamists launched a coordinated offensive across Mali. This offensive shook the ruling military junta, which responded in 2013 to mass demonstrations against the French-led war in Mali by imposing the withdrawal of French troops and allying itself with the Kremlin.

While the junta retained power and control of the country's more populous southern cities, the Tuareg-Islamist offensive shook it badly. Mopti in the north fell under control of Islamist and Tuareg forces, backed by the Algerian military regime and above all by Paris. In the global context of the imperialist war against Iran and Russia, the conflict between the anti-imperialist aspirations of the Malian working masses and the bourgeois politics of the junta is emerging ever more clearly.

The offensive began with surprise attacks across the country, targeting Kidal and Gao in the north, Sévaré and Mopti in the center, and Kati and the capital, Bamako, in the south. According to the X account of the Russian Africa Corps stationed in Mali, the offensive mobilized between 10,000 and 12,000 fighters. In Kati, it assassinated the junta's second-in-command, Defense Minister Sadio Camara, a key architect of the alliance with Moscow, with a car bomb.

The day of the initial assault "was truly terrifying, we were afraid," a Bamako resident told *Radio France Internationale* (RFI). "We were woken up by heavy weapons fire and then, after an hour of exchanges, we realized it was a terrorist attack. It all started around 6 in the morning and went on until the afternoon."

RFI also quoted a resident of Mopti, who said: "The population is panicked, there was no market, almost all families are sheltering at home and houses are shut... The gendarmerie and the police station were stormed

by the attackers, who now control practically everything."

The Africa Corps was forced to suddenly abandon Mopti, negotiating the departure of its troops but leaving hundreds of Malian soldiers behind as prisoners of the Islamists. Islamist and Tuareg militias are now trying to blockade energy supplies to Malian cities.

It is difficult to provide casualty figures for the losses in the initial assault. According to the Africa Corps, the government and Russian counter-offensive killed 1,000 fighters and destroyed more than 100 vehicles. On the evening of the 25th, the junta issued a communiqué reporting 16 civilian casualties. The true death toll on both sides likely runs into the thousands.

The offensive mobilized fighters from the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), linked to Al-Qaeda, as well as the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA), a Tuareg nationalist movement with ties to Paris, the former colonial power in Mali. Attaye Ag Mohamed, a Tuareg nationalist figure, told RFI that there exists "a partnership" and "a coordination of actions" between the FLA and JNIM.

The Coalition of Forces for the Republic (CFR), Mali's bourgeois opposition led by imam Dicko—who is exiled in Algiers, with other CFR leader based in France—responded with a communiqué demanding that the junta cede more power to it. Offering its "most sorrowful condolences to bereaved families" and denouncing "the security failure of the military regime," the CFR insisted: "Mali is in danger: the junta must acknowledge its failure, and a national dialogue must open."

Numerous reports, notably concerning the use by Islamist militias of fiber-optic guided drones deployed on the Russo-Ukrainian front, point to the role of the pro-NATO Ukrainian regime. Since 2024, Kiev has

repeatedly pledged to assist forces in Africa fighting the Russian Africa Corps. On March 26, 2026, less than a month before the offensive in Mali, it convened a governmental meeting on its African policy.

Afterwards, Kyrylo Budanov, the former head of Ukrainian military intelligence who was then serving as head of the Ukrainian presidential office, announced: “For the first time, Ukraine has set itself the objective of comprehensively influencing the situation on the African continent.”

In reality, the Ukrainian regime cannot intervene in the Sahel independently of French imperialism. It is entirely funded by the European Union, whose member states transfer tens of billions of euros to it annually. It acts on behalf of NATO, waging war against Russia but also in the Sahel, where Paris seeks to topple the juntas that demanded the withdrawal of its troops.

Through a series of proxies, Paris is attempting to reinstall a neocolonial regime that would better protect French imperialism’s economic and strategic interests in Mali. Its strategy remains essentially that of its 2011 war in Libya, which paved the way for its war in Mali.

In 2011, Paris, Washington and London responded to the workers’ uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia by arming Islamist and tribal militias to overthrow the Libyan regime. After the fall of the Libyan regime, the flood of arms and fighters leaving Libya destabilized the region. Paris then intervened in Mali, ostensibly to fight the Islamists and protect Bamako. But Paris subsequently negotiated with the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad—the FLA’s precursor—to carve out a neocolonial base in northern Mali.

The demonstrations in Mali in 2021–2022 brought to power, within the Malian regime, officers hostile to the French military presence. To shield themselves from Paris’s anger, they built a pragmatic alliance with the Russian capitalist regime. They naturally did not pursue a revolutionary policy, refusing to appeal to working class opposition in France to the widely hated Macron regime, or to mobilize workers and oppressed masses across Africa against imperialism.

The current offensive reveals the limits of such bourgeois politics which, precisely because it rejects a socialist struggle against capitalism, cannot fight imperialism. Rejecting a more egalitarian policy toward rural farmers and herders, which would cut the ground from under the Islamists and Tuareg nationalists, the

junta allowed Paris to maneuver with Kyiv, Algiers, the Tuareg nationalists and JNIM. It even negotiated in March with a “Sahel envoy” sent by the Trump administration, Nick Checker, while Trump was bombing Iran.

The Malian army served for decades as a neocolonial instrument of France. Paris is now mobilizing its closest supporters among the Tuareg nationalists and accommodating the role of elements linked to Al-Qaeda, in order to carry out a regime change—but its principal target is not the army. It is the anti-imperialist aspirations of workers and oppressed masses across the Sahel and the whole of Africa.

Ulf Laessing, a senior official at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, told German public radio *Deutsche Welle* that the Islamists “do not have the capacity to manage a large city. They want to provoke an uprising, hoping to force the government to negotiate with them, or to install a new government. But there is no indication that this is happening. Most people are unhappy with the situation in Mali, but they support the regime.”

The current crisis in Mali points to the urgent necessity of overcoming the obstacle the junta poses to a revolutionary struggle against imperialism. The decisive question is the unification of workers in Mali and across the Sahel with workers in France and all NATO countries, in a socialist movement to halt the ongoing imperialist wars, break the power of the imperialist governments and transfer power to workers and the oppressed masses.



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