

**Le Campement Kangaba Attack**

**Mali**

**18 June 2017**

# Le Campement Kangaba Attack<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

On 18 June 2017 at least five Jihadist insurgents attacked the “Le Campement Kangaba,” holiday resort 14 kilometres east of the Malian capital, Bamako, owned and run by a French national. The resort is popular with western expatriates working in Mali, as well as wealthy Malians. The resort is also reported to have been on an “approved” list issued by the UN and EU offices in Mali.

According to a spokesman from the Malian Security Ministry four insurgents were killed, although only two bodies have been recovered.<sup>2</sup> Four other insurgents have been captured.

At first, the death toll, other than the insurgents, was reported to be two, but this was later increased to five; a Chinese national, a Portuguese soldier and a Malian woman who worked for the EU, a Franco-Gabonese citizen, and a Malian soldier.

At least 60 people had been held hostage, including 13 French nationals, as well as two Spaniards, two Dutch, two Egyptian, and a Chinese citizen.

All hostages have been rescued by Malian Special Forces, aided by French forces based in Mali, and assisted by UN forces from MINUSMA. Operations to recover the bodies of the other two insurgents, as well as to find any accomplices are underway.

According to witnesses, the first jihadi on the scene arrived by motorcycle shouting "Allah Akbar" (God is Great in Arabic). Three others subsequently arrived in a vehicle and began firing their weapons. One of the attackers was subdued by a French soldier who happened to be at Campement Kangaba on a weekend break, according to a witness at the scene. The attacker was wounded and later died. A Kangaba employee also described ushering clients into hiding places.

It was also reported that during the Jihadist's assault, they were fired on by two plainclothes policemen. Whilst the full details remain unclear, it is possible that these actions disrupted the attack, and its probable intent of staging a long-duration hostage crisis. This also provides a possible explanation for the relatively low death toll compared with the lives lost in previous assaults on tourist targets in West Africa.



<sup>1</sup> This report has been compiled for numerous reports in the open media, from other “open source” organisation, and from official announcements. The reported details from these sources can vary, but every care has been taken to ensure accuracy.

<sup>2</sup> Reports from Reuters indicate that five Jihadist have been killed.

According to Malian officials, one of the escaping terrorists left behind a machine gun and bottles filled with "explosive substances." This would support the assessment that this was a martyrdom operation with the explosives intended to be used in a suicide vest.

According to SITE, a terrorism monitoring group, on 19 June Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack, declaring that it bears a message to the "Crusaders" that they will never be safe in the country.

The group also claimed that the attackers were from the Fula (Fulani) ethnic group, and that they had battled for "many hours" at the popular eco-lodge near Bamako, which it termed a site of "debauchery".<sup>3</sup>

The involvement of members of the Fulani from central Mali suggests that the attack was carried out by JNIM's "Southern Command". As Fulani, their ethnicity would not have stood out as much as the Berber/Tuareg members of JNIN. In addition, this group has been attributed for being responsible for recent attacks along the Malian borders with Niger and Burkina Faso, as well as an attack in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso's capital, in January 2016, and at the Grand Bassam resort in Ivory Coast in March 2016.

## Analysis

There had been several recent warnings of a possible attack in the Bamako area, including one from the US State Department issued the previous week. In addition, since an amalgamation of several Islamist groups at the beginning of this year to form the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), some form of "spectacular" attack against westerners or western interests has been expected.

This attack matches the "spectacular" profile, by being close to the capital, with the intent of taking foreign nationals hostage, and a location known to be popular with westerners. The "un-Islamic" activities at the camp, as well as its connections to France, the former colonial power, as well as having forces in Mali fighting the Islamists, will have also helped to single it out as an attractive target. The

### JNIM

In March 2017, the terrorism monitoring group SITE reported that Ansar Dine, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's Sahara branch, Al Murabitoon, and Katibat Macina (also known as the Macina Liberation Front) had merged to form Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (the "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims" (JNIM)).

According to SITE, Iyad Ag Ghaly, a veteran Tuareg jihadist, heads the new entity, which is openly loyal to Ayman al Zawahiri and Abdelmalek Droukdel, the leader of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

It is also noted that the new group includes Al Murabitoon, led by the veteran Islamist terrorist Mokhtar Belmokhtar. Belmokhtar was credited with the January 2013 In Amenas siege in Algeria.

<sup>3</sup> The Fula (Fulani) make up approximately 15% of the population of Mali, and are the second largest group after the Bambara (34%). Fula are also found in neighbouring Niger, Burkina Faso and in northern Nigeria.

attack will also have had the aim of undermining the authority of the Malian government and its control of the security situation, although in this case, the situation was quickly resolved, albeit with the deaths of five innocent people.

The timing of the attack was also notable for several reasons:

- It occurred in the final week of Ramadan, a time of fasting when the abilities of the security forces manning roadblocks etc. would be at low ebb, aiding infiltration. In addition, attacks during Ramadan would have an especial religious resonance in the minds of the Islamists.
- It occurred at the end of the French Parliamentary elections, and a few weeks after the new President of France, Emmanuel Macron visited Mali and stated the continuing support of France in the fight against Islamist groups in Mali and the Sahel. The attack being a clear signal to Paris by those responsible, that they intend to continue the conflict.
- The location had a strong French identity, being owned and managed by a French national, as well as being popular amongst French national living in Mali.

Attacks this far into the “African” south-west of Mali are uncommon, but when they do happen, are typically high-profile, targeting so-called soft-targets. Moreover, when attacks do occur they are well planned and will involve some form of infiltration. In this case, finding the ways and means to infiltrate fighters and weapons past the police road-blocks, which are found outside the major towns and villages on the route from their mounting base in the north-east.

This attack also appears to be an attempt to repeat the “success” of two attacks in 2015:

- On 7 March 2015 (a Saturday), five people were killed, including a French and Belgian national in a gun and grenade attack at the “La Terrasse” nightclub and café in Bamako. The attackers fled the area in a vehicle and a motorcycle.
- On 8 August 2015, a Saturday, at least 13 people were killed, including five UN workers, in a hostage siege at the Byblos hotel in the central Malian town of Sevare (600 km east of Bamako). A further four UN workers survived by hiding in cupboards for almost 24 hours. The situation was resolved after Malian Special-Forces stormed the hotel killing four Jihadist gunmen, and arresting a further seven. The Malian forces were aided by French Special Forces and Gendarmes based in the country. The attack was claimed by Al-Murabitoun.
- 20 November 2015 (a Friday), two Jihadi gunmen took 170 hostages and killed 20 of them in a mass shooting at the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako. The siege was ended when Malian commandos assaulted the hotel and freed the surviving hostages. Al-Murabitoun claimed that it carried out the attack "in cooperation with" Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

- JNIM linked groups have also claimed major attacks in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso's capital, in January 2016 (at least 29 dead in an attack on a hotel), and at the Grand Bassam resort in Ivory Coast in March 2016 (19 dead).

When JNIM was formed in early 2017, it included members of al- Murabitoun , led by the Algerian extremist Mokhtar Belmokhtar. In addition to the Raddison Blu and Byblos hotel attacks, Belmokhtar was responsible for planning the January 2013 In Amenas siege in Algeria in which at least 37 expatriate workers were killed. Once again, this attack displayed an ability to infiltrate insurgents, in this case from northern Mali, through south-west Libya and into Algeria.

## **Assessment**

Whilst attacks of this nature are uncommon, especially when compared with the daily insurgent attacks in the north-east of Mali, they do occur. Moreover, in the south-west, attacks have been typified by hostage taking. This has been for political/propaganda purposes, and have been so-called “martyrdom” operations in which the insurgents expect to be killed.

As with previous attacks against “western” soft targets in Mali, this one occurred at a weekend. Given the nature of the targets as places of relaxation and leisure, this would of course coincide with a time when more westerners would be present.

As can be seen by the attacks in 2015, al Murabitoun (and by extension, its successor JNIN) has displayed an ability to mount major attacks in the relatively more secure south-west within a few months of each other. In addition, their use of Fula members of the group gives them further capacity to mount attacks in the west, using this ethnic group as cover.

In addition, the attack had a strong anti-French element, being owned by a French national, and popular with French nationals in Mali. It is also assessed to be a clear challenge to Paris, and the new President, Emmanuel Macron.

Notwithstanding this “French” connection, any western target in Mali, especially those used for leisure activities, would be attractive to the Islamists due to the high propaganda value, and as a means to undermine the authority of the Malian Government. Moreover, an attack on “soft” leisure locations have the added attraction of targeting “un-Islamic” activities such as drinking alcohol, or displaying flesh.

Due to this further attacks of this nature can be expected.