

Will the Rebellion Return to Fill the State Power Vacuum in Mali?

(Translated)

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In a geography seemingly far removed from the center of international decision-making, one of the most dangerous silent transformations is taking shape today in western Mali, where the name Azawad is resurfacing, not as a memory of a past rebellion, but as a project renewed from the heart of chaos. The emergence of the Azawad Liberation Front in its new form is not an isolated event, but instead a direct reflection of the collapse of the balances that governed the Sahel region for years, following the decline of international influence and the erosion of the central state's authority.

In this turbulent context, demands for national identity are intertwined with power calculations, and politics is entangled with the economy of chaos, producing a landscape far more complex than a mere traditional separatist conflict. What is happening today is not just a struggle over territory, but a severe test of the very idea of the state in one of the world's most fragile regions.

From traditional rebellion to political reposturing: The Azawad rebellion in Mali is a structural conflict that has persisted since its supposed independence in 1960, centered on the demands of the Tuareg inhabitants of the north for autonomy or secession in the Azawad region. This rebellion is seen as a vicious cycle of insurgency, repression, negotiations, and ceasefires that have repeated themselves over the decades.

Since the brief declaration of independence of the Azawad region in 2012 by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), the Tuareg cause seemed to have entered a new phase. However, this rise was quickly contained by foreign military interventions, most notably Operation Serval led by France.

Today, the same idea has resurfaced, but in a different guise: a discourse less driven by outright secession and more focused on autonomy and political rights. This shift is not so much moderation as it is a tactic dictated by the balance of power. While previous Tuareg rebellions were classical, this front is distinctly hybrid, characterized by several key factors:

- **A dual-headed tactic in partnership with al-Qaeda:** For the first time, a separatist front is cooperating in this way with the al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), with a clear division of roles. The Tuareg focus on expanding their control in the north, while the jihadists strike at the strategic heart of the state, creating a complex equation. This was reported in an Al Jazeera article on April 28, 2026, titled: "The Alliance of JNIM and the Azawad Liberation Front: A Marriage of Convenience or a Strategic Shift?"

- **The Timing of Exploiting the Geopolitical Vacuum:** The withdrawal of the UN mission (MINUSMA) at the end of 2023 and the expiration of the Wagner Group's contract in Mali, where it was reported "the Russian group officially announced the end of its contract on June 6, 2025, after stating that it had completed its official mission with the Malian government, according to Sahara 24 Radio Live," created a vacuum in the landscape and opened the door for a realignment of influence. This places the Malian authorities before two paths: either to continue with the military option, which has proven limited in the face of evolving guerrilla warfare, or to accept difficult negotiations with armed groups and separatist forces to salvage what remains of the state. The country is thus heading towards a period of political instability that could end with a change in the power structure or the declaration of a prolonged state of emergency.

- **A Moral Victory by Rewriting History (The Recapture of Kidal):** According to reports, on April 25, 2016, the country was subjected to attacks targeting military sites and bases, resulting in the death of Defense Minister Sadio Camara and his wife, along with other casualties. Sporadic explosions were also reported in the vicinity of Modibo Keita International Airport in the capital, Bamako, and the city of Kidal in the far north fell. The city's

recapture, less than three years after its initial recapture, was seen as an admission of the failure of Bamako's military approach, which relied heavily on the support of Russian mercenary battalions, who were forced to withdraw according to a field agreement (according to the African Security Studies Center, April 29, 2016).

The most important question remains: Why now?

The decision to form the Front is the culmination of accumulated anger rooted in Mali's structural deficiencies. At its political root, this stems from the repeated failure to implement agreements, most notably the Algiers Agreement (January 2014). The abrogation of the 2015 Algiers Agreement marked a pivotal turning point, reigniting fighting with armed groups, including Tuareg factions. This escalation highlighted the need for some Azawad movements to restructure themselves within a more effective, unified framework. The formation of the Front was a direct response to the military escalation inherited by the ruling military junta.

Strategically, the factions under the Front's umbrella sought to preempt any future threats through a unified entity capable of collective deterrence.

Unfortunately, the situation resembles a deadly tango between two main players:

The Azawad National Liberation Front (Tuareg separatists), whose formation in November 2014 was a direct result of accumulated security and political developments in northern Mali. These developments reshaped the landscape of armed actors in the region. The Front seeks self-determination for Azawad and a form of autonomy backed by moderate legitimacy to attract external support, but it is hampered by the weakness of its coalition and the potential for future fragmentation.

And the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (jihadists). In 2017, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims emerged as a dominant force after the merger of several al-Qaeda-linked groups. This led to an escalation of attacks and an expansion of its control in northern Mali. The group is employing a pragmatic approach to become a key player in the equation, benefiting from the leadership of a mediating figure like Iyad Ag Ghali to bridge the gaps between opposing viewpoints (Al Jazeera Net, April 28, 2016).

The Front's formation was a direct result of security and political development in northern Mali. In light of this acute fragility, the financial situation could slide into a full-blown civil war, with the capital continuing to be targeted and the front expanding towards major cities like Gao and Timbuktu, threatening to plunge the country into a protracted regional conflict. Alternatively, we could witness a scenario of state fragmentation and the formation of ethnic cantons, similar to Somalia, which would allow for regional interventions, such as those by Algeria and Mauritania, as well as international interventions, especially given the competition for influence and the desire to penetrate the entire region.

Therefore, what we are witnessing is not merely a new rebellion, but a resounding failure of the centralized state model in Mali. The Azawad Front is no longer simply a rebel group demanding autonomy; it has become a structural crisis that the military junta in Bamako may have to address, either through negotiations or by continuing its repeatedly failed approach of repression.

Unfortunately, Muslim lands are vulnerable to exploitation by all and sundry under various pretexts, as long as there is no Khaleefah (Caliph) to protect them. Therefore, the peoples of Africa in particular, and Muslims in general, must return to a dignified life whose values are derived from the application of the Shariah Law of Allah (swt) and strive to fulfill the glad tidings of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) who said, «نَمُ تَكُونُ خِلَافَةً عَلَىٰ مِنْهَاجِ النَّبُوَّةِ» **“Then there will be a Khilafah on the Method of the Prophethood.”** Thus, we will break free from the shackles of ethnicity and sectarianism, and unify within the crucible of Islam as we once were, under the banner of a Khaleefah who cares for the affairs of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and spreads justice and enlightenment throughout the world. O Allah (swt), hasten for us the establishment of the Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly Guided Caliphate) on the Method of the Prophethood.