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**Mali**

# **Mali: the dead end of all-out war**

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### **An alliance is emerging between jihadist forces and pro-independence forces in northern Mali, which would improve their balance of power in the ongoing conflict.**

In February, the convoy of the Minister for Higher Education was attacked in the Sikasso region, followed a week later by a second attack on the Kati-Soribougou road. This time it was the Minister of Sanitation who was targeted. These two raids were claimed by the Islamists, who continue to gain ground to the point where the state now controls only half the territory.

## **A desire for peace**

In this difficult situation for the military junta, the announcement of talks between the al-Qaida-affiliated *Groupe de soutien à l'islam et aux musulmans* (GSIM) and the *Front de libération de l'Azawad* (FLA), which brings together all the pro-independence and autonomy organisations in northern Mali, is a new source of concern.

An initial non-aggression pact was signed in the spring of 2024 between the two organisations, which have very different agendas. The Islamists want to establish a state based on Sharia law, while the FLA is campaigning, at least for its most radical members, for secession from the country.

These talks are a response to the people's desire for peace. This desire has been expressed for years and was reiterated during the national dialogue organised by the putschists. The FLA has said it is sensitive to this, especially as the idea is also widely shared by members of the communities where it is established. There is also the idea that the GSIM could abandon part of its programme and its most radical methods, in the image of the evolution of the al-Nusra Front, which participated in the creation of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which has taken over the reins of government in Syria.

## **Negotiations under way**

It would appear that the GSIM has accepted the FLA's proposal on how Sharia law should be applied, in a less brutal manner and under the responsibility of religious notables recognised by the communities, regardless of whether or not they are affiliated to the GSIM. For the GSIM, disaffiliation from al-Qaeda could even be envisaged if there were major upheavals within the country, such as the fall of the government or the independence of Azawad. Although the GSIM believes that the international community would find it easier to accept a state based on Sharia law than the partition of Mali. Finally, should the situation arise, the GSIM does not rule out the possibility of joint administration of towns or territories with the FLA.

This rapprochement between the two organisations is also the consequence of the attitude of the junta, supported by the Russian mercenaries of Wagner/Africa Corps, which refuses to consider a political solution to this crisis, which is rooted in economic, social and community problems.

The people are paying a high price for the ongoing conflict. In 2024, the Malian armed forces and their Russian auxiliaries killed three times as many civilians as the Islamists - even if the latter, through their policy of encircling

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towns, are deepening the impoverishment of the population and carrying out violent reprisals.

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