

# The Islamic State is Expanding its Areas of Influence in Mali

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# Islamic State is Expanding its Areas of Influence in Mali

**Dr. David Doukhan**

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## Abstract

The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) is expanding its territorial influence in northeastern Mali, endangering the city of Ménaka. The Malian government's armed forces and al-Qaeda-affiliated fighters are absent in the region. ISGS engages in combat with government forces, killing civilians and displacing settlers from their homes. Non-jihadist armed groups are heavily involved in the war, coexisting with people who are not of their own race by engaging in illicit activities.

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## **The Islamic State (ISIS) is expanding its areas of influence in Mali**

The important city of Ménaka is in danger due to the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara's (ISGS) expansion in northeastern Mali. Around Manaka, ISGS surrounded the city by capturing the towns of Tidermène and Inkadewane, which are both around 75 kilometers apart.<sup>1</sup> The Islamic State group has authority over a region of 80,000 square kilometers and can cut off the city's supply routes whenever it pleases.<sup>2</sup> There are neither government armed forces nor al-Qaeda-affiliated fighters present in the territory that the organization has taken over<sup>3</sup>.

The occupation of Tidermène, a village of a few thousand people a few tens of kilometers north of Manaka, confirms estimates and observations that the organization continues its occupation campaigns in the desert while engaging in fierce combat with government forces, killing innocent civilians and displacing hundreds of thousands of settlers from

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1 <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20230413-mali-le-groupe-%C3%A9tat-islamique-au-grand-sahara-aux-portes-de-m%C3%A9naka>; <https://www.voanews.com/a/islamic-state-group-affiliated-militants-take-key-mali-village-/7047719.html>

2 <https://www.dw.com/fr/mali-menaka-etat-islamique-au-grand-sahara/a-65283334>

3 <https://www.fncv.com/2023/mali-retrait-barkhane-daesh-encercle-menaka-eigs-islamique/>

their homes as they move towards the state of Niger, which established tent camps for them. In the towns captured by the organization, its fighters distribute the Koran to the residents as well as levy taxes on them as part of the 'zakat' mitzvah.

I'll point out that a significant ISGS onslaught took place in the western regions of Menka and Gao starting in the first half of 2022.

In actuality, the organization has been more liberated to act after the departure of the French joint force, or "Barkhane". Anderamboukane, Tamalat Inekar, and Talataye were taken prisoner from the JNIM organization (Group to Support Islam and Muslims), which is Al-Qaeda's ideological opponent. The group is still at war with local Tuareg organizations (local nomadic tribes), including the CMA (Coordination of Azawad Movements), which entered accords with the government in 2015.<sup>4</sup> The Tuareg Dawsahak tribal massacre during the conflict stood out, with the organization's fighters executing scores of its members.<sup>5</sup> The organization also fights against the GATIA (Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies), a union of local tribes that are not part of the CMA.

It turns out that the military junta in charge of Mali wanted to drive out the French and restrict the work of MINUSMA (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali). This gave the Islamic State group the opportunity to expand both its operational reach and its influence.

### **The Silence of the Government**

According to field reports, Western articles, and evaluations, the Malian army's inadequacy is clearly obvious. The Malian army has conducted many airstrikes and patrols in towns, engaging in some fighting with militants in response to the increase of the conflict and the extremist organization's spreading. Despite being outfitted with cutting-edge weapons of war, the Malian army only operates in the country's major cities. Numerous organizations have control over the towns, villages, and highways, which are all promiscuous.<sup>6</sup>

On the face of it, it seems that the military junta is busy with itself and is indifferent to what is happening in the northeast of the country.

Instead of the military, non-jihadist armed groups are heavily involved in the war. The Movement to Save Azawad (MSA) Dawsahak faction and the GATIA are the two groups. The key point is that they only operate in a limited portion of the area that ISIS controls, and they coexist with people who are not of their own race by robbing, raping, and killing them as well as engaging in drug trafficking and illicit smuggling.

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4 Malian rebels sign landmark peace deal with government; <https://www.france24.com/en/20150620-rebels-mali-tuareg-peace-deal-algiers-accord>

5 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/27/mali-coordinated-massacres-islamist-armed-groups>

6 <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/02/06/Mali-Islamic-State-attacks>