



COI QUERY

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|---|---|
| Country of Origin | MALI |
| Main subject | Armed groups, Security situation, Internal displacement situation in Mopti Region between 1 June-30 November 2020 |
| Question(s) | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>What are the main armed groups operating in Mopti Region (their structure, relations with other actors, areas of presence and operation, activities, including methods and tactics)?</u>2. <u>What are the numbers of security incidents and civilian casualties in Mopti Region (with their geographical distribution)?</u>3. <u>What is the overall number of IDPs and returnees? What were the IDP and returnee movements during the reference period?</u> |
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The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision-making authorities. The answer was finalised on 17 December 2020. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

1. Presence of actors in the conflict

1.1. Mali Defence and Security Forces (MDSF)

Mali's external and internal security apparatus includes the army, air force, *Gendarmerie nationale*, *Garde nationale*, *Police nationale*, and *Protection Civile*.¹ For detailed information on these bodies, see [EASO COI Report Mali Country Focus](#), pp. 28-31. Estimates of the size of the Mali Defence and Security Forces personnel vary: for 2017, there were estimated approximately 18 000 members of staff, while a 2019 estimate showed around 19 000 total troops.²

According to the January 2020 report of the UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali, counter-terrorism operations conducted by the MDSF have led to human rights violations, including 'summary executions, enforced disappearances, torture, ill-treatment and arbitrary arrests.'³ In June 2020, the Independent Expert, referring to incidents in Mopti region, highlighted that the killings of civilians were not 'isolated events', but a part of a 'growing and disturbing pattern' of the MDSF committing 'serious human rights violations with impunity.' In the summer of 2018, Mali's Council of Ministers approved a draft amnesty law, (the *Loi d'entente nationale* or National Accord Law), which was criticised by human rights organizations; according to Amnesty International, adopting the law would mean that 'members of the security forces responsible for human rights [...] may never be brought to justice'. The law was subsequently adopted with minor changes in July 2019 and is described as 'deeply problematic' for victim's rights.⁴

The report of the Independent Expert quoted the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) figures, which showed that in the first three months of 2020, the MDSF 'committed 119 extrajudicial executions, 32 enforced disappearances and 116 arbitrary arrests'.⁵ In a report referring to the period 1 April–30 June 2020, MINUSMA stated that the MDSF had committed human rights violations during its military and security operations in Mopti, 'mainly extrajudicial executions and enforced or involuntary disappearances of members of the Fulani and Bella communities'. According to MINUSMA, some of the MDSF's operations could be seen as 'reprisal operations against the civilian population'.⁶ In its September 2020 report, MINUSMA attributed around 25 % of all human rights violations and abuses recorded by it in Mali between 2 June-29 September 2020 to the MDSF.⁷

1.2. MINUSMA

MINUSMA was established by the UN Security Council Resolution 2100 on 25 April 2013.⁸ While after 2015 MINUSMA's primary strategic priority was 'to support the implementation' of the 2015 Agreement, in June 2019 the UN Security Council added a second strategic priority, in that MINUSMA

¹ RAND, *Mali's Next Battle: Improving Counterterrorism Capabilities*, 2017, [url](#), p. 64; MINUSMA, *Monthly Bulletin*, October 2016, [url](#), p. 2;

² CIA, *World Factbook - Mali*, 2019, [url](#); World Bank, *Armed forces personnel, total*, 2017, [url](#)

³ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali*, 15 January 2020, [url](#), para. 32

⁴ AI, *Mali: New law will reinforce the culture of impunity for human rights violations*, 12 December 2018, [url](#); JIC, *Impunity, Amnesty, and Incoherence: What justice for International Crimes committed in Mali?*, 28 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵ UN Human Rights Council, *UN expert urges Mali to step up measures to end extrajudicial executions and vicious cycle of impunity*, 12 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶ MINUSMA, *Note on Trends of Human Rights Violations and Abuses in Mali 1 April - 30 June 2020*, August 2020, [url](#), para. 7

⁷ UN Security Council, *Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General*, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 70

⁸ MINUSMA, *History*, n.d., [url](#)

became responsible for assisting national authorities to, *inter alia*, protect civilians and reduce intercommunal violence in Central Mali.⁹ MINUSMA has 13 bases in Mali, of which two are in Mopti region – one in Douentza and one in Mopti-Sévaré.¹⁰ As of September 2019, the MINUSMA counted on 12 438 military personnel, 1 712 police personnel, as well as 1 180 civilians.¹¹

During the period of 2 June-29 September 2020, there were 29 attacks against MINUSMA in Mali, of which the highest number of attacks (14) were recorded in Mopti region.¹²

1.3. French Armed Forces

France launched Operation Barkhane on 1 August 2014, with a ‘primary objective’ to support the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) partner countries in fighting armed terrorist groups across the Sahel-Saharan strip.¹³ The Operation has three permanent bases: Gao in Mali, Niamey in Niger and N’Djamena in Chad. There were around 5 100 military deployed as part of the Operation, as of September 2020.¹⁴ While the Operation has no official presence in central Mali, it has ‘made sporadic counter-terrorism raids in Mopti’.¹⁵ According to International Crisis Group, ‘Operation Barkhane intervenes strictly in response to France’s self-granted mandate to fight terrorism’, which excludes military involvement in inter-communal conflicts.¹⁶ During the reference period, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded 6 actions of the French forces in Mopti region, all against Islamist groups, of which 5 took place in Douentza *cercle*, and one in Koro *cercle*. On 12 November 2020, for instance, French forces of the Barkhane Operation killed ‘around 30 members’ of the JNIM near Niaki, Koro *cercle*.¹⁷

1.4. Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM)

The Salafi-Jihadist organization Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims - JNIM) was created on 2 March 2017 as ‘the official branch of Al-Qaida in Mali’. JNIM is an alliance between the Sahara branch of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al-Din, Al-Mourabitoun, and Katiba Macina (Macina Liberation Front).¹⁸ For detailed information on these groups, see [EASO COI Report Mali Country Focus](#), pp. 35-36.

The head (emir) of the JNIM is Tuareg militant leader Iyad ag Ghali, who also formed Ansar al-Din in late 2011, while Amadou Koufa, the Fulani head of Katiba Macina, has also been described as a ‘leader’

⁹ UN Security Council, Security Council Renews Mandate of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2480 (2019), 28 June 2019, [url](#); Just Security, As UN Renews Peacekeeping in Mali, Civilian Protection Requires Ongoing Push for Air Assets, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰ MINUSMA, Fast Facts-Uniformed Personnel, March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹ MINUSMA, Personnel, June 2020, [url](#)

¹² UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 53

¹³ Ministère des Armées, Dossier de Presse – Opération Barkhane, Septembre 2020, [url](#); Ministère des Armées, Press Pack Operation Barkhane, February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴ Ministère des Armées, Dossier de Presse – Opération Barkhane, Septembre 2020, [url](#); Ministère des Armées, Press Pack Operation Barkhane, February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵ International Crisis Group, Speaking with the “Bad Guys”: Toward Dialogue with Central Mali’s Jihadists, 28 May 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁷ France 24, French army says 30 jihadists killed in Mali, 11 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸ CSIS, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) TNT Terrorism Backgrounder, 2018, [url](#); UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 20 March 2020, [url](#), para. 6; CISAC, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, 2018, [url](#); UN Security Council, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), 4 October 2018, [url](#)

of JNIM, together with ag Ghali.¹⁹ Other members of the group include Djamel Okacha, the former emir of AQIM's Sahara branch (killed by French forces in February 2019) and Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the former emir of al-Mourabitoun.²⁰

The goals of JNIM are to 'unite all terrorist groups in the Sahel, eliminate Western influence in the region, especially French military forces, and establish an Islamic state centred on Mali'.²¹ According to the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), the JNIM 'formalizes the collaboration the constituent groups by establishing a hierarchical relationship in which AQIM oversees the allied militant groups and provides strategic guidance, directions, and resources'. Yet, while 'all members conform to JNIM's strategy', each of the groups 'have their own shifting interests, territorial influence, and motivations'.²²

Recruitment

According to the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), the JNIM has successfully integrated into local communities in Mopti, due to its 'ability to understand local contexts and grievances'.²³ A Human Rights Watch report highlighted that armed Islamist groups with links to Al-Qaida had 'concentrated their recruitment efforts' on the Fulani community, and managed to gain new recruits by exploiting the Fulani community's 'frustrations over poverty, banditry, abusive security services, government corruption, and competition for land and water'.²⁴ Moreover, recruitment was also enabled by the 'charismatic' leader Amadou Koufa, who comes from Mopti region.²⁵ With regards to the size of the JNIM, it is estimated that the group has between 1 000-2 000 members.²⁶

Targets and Tactics

According to the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), one of JNIM's aims is 'to drive foreign (especially French and UN) forces out of Mali'.²⁷ Since its formation, JNIM has 'clashed continually' with French counter-terrorism forces, with MINUSMA, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force.²⁸ The JNIM has carried out 'complex attacks', assassination, suicide bombings, kidnappings, and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks.²⁹

As many JNIM fighters are Fulanis, including Katiba Macina leader Amadou Koufa, JNIM has also been involved in communal clashes among local ethnic groups, fighting alongside Fulani militias. According to an August 2020 report by ACLED, 'JNIM militants and Fulani militias have conducted incessant

¹⁹ RFI (Radio France International), Mali open to dialogue with jihadists, 11 February 2020, [url](#); BBC, Africa's Sahel becomes latest al-Qaeda-IS battleground, 11 May 2020, [url](#); ACSS, The Puzzle of JNIM and Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel, December 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UN Security Council, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), 4 October 2018, [url](#);

²⁰ UN Security Council, Amadou Koufa, 4 February 2020, [url](#); ECFR, Ansar al-Din, n.d., [url](#); BBC, Explainer: Who are the militant groups behind Sahel jihadist violence? 14 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹ CIA World Factbook, Terrorist Organizations, n.d., [url](#)

²² ACSS, The Puzzle of JNIM and Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel, December 2020, [url](#), p. 2; CISAC, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, 2018, [url](#)

²³ ICCT, The Shifting Sands of the Sahel's Terrorism Landscape, 12 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴ HRW, "We Used to Be Brothers" Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali, 7 December 2018, [url](#); CISAC, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, 2018, [url](#)

²⁵ HRW, "We Used to Be Brothers" Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali, 7 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁶ EER, Jihadist Competition and Cooperation in West Africa, 3 April 2020, [url](#); CSIS, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) TNT Terrorism Backgrounder, 2018, [url](#);

²⁷ ECFR, The Group for the Support of Islam And Muslims (Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam Wa Al-Muslimeen, JNIM), n.d., [url](#)

²⁸ CISAC, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, 2018, [url](#)

²⁹ ECFR, The Group for the Support of Islam And Muslims (Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam Wa Al-Muslimeen, JNIM), n.d., [url](#); CISAC, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, 2018, [url](#)

attacks against Dogon villages to isolate and subjugate Dogon communities'.³⁰

1.5. Katiba Macina (Macina Liberation Front)

Now officially a member of the JNIM, Katiba Macina was created in early 2015 in Mopti by Fulani imam and former member of Ansar al-Din Amadou Koufa. In a 'relatively short time', the group drove away the Malian army from 'many areas in Mopti' while establishing a 'stronghold in the inner Niger delta' and 'a strong presence throughout central Mali'.³¹ According to ECFR, the group has 'built a significant part of its outreach efforts around the discontent of local Fulani populations, a lack of justice in the area, and [existing] social tensions'.³² While it isn't 'an exclusively Fulani group', the perception of Katiba Macina as such has 'fuelled stigmatization and ethnically based reprisals, which [Amadou] Koufa has exploited for recruitment'.³³

Katiba Macina comprises a 'core group of combatants' who 'have received military training, carry weapons and live in the bush'. They depend on 'sympathisers in villages for material and logistical support, as well as intelligence'.³⁴ Since 2017, Katiba Macina has 'become increasingly implicated' in inter-communal conflicts, has launched attacks on UN and Malian forces in central Mali, and has 'occupied' different areas of Mopti.³⁵ Katiba Macina has sought 'targets associated with the government', and attacked 'state representatives, especially water and forestry, defence and security forces, and magistrates [...] municipal councillors, village chiefs, imams and "collaborators"'.³⁶

According to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), the tactics of Katiba Macina have become 'increasingly violent'. The same source highlights that since 2018, a large majority of 'attacks against civilians attributed to JNIM' have been in fact carried out by Katiba Macina.³⁷

1.6. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)

The group Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) is based in Mali and Niger, operating mostly along the border area between the two countries, but also in Burkina Faso.³⁸ The ISGS was created in May 2015 by Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, when he and his followers split from the Al-Mourabitoun group.³⁹ Al-Sahraoui, a member of Al-Mourabitoun since its creation in August 2013, announced in 2015 his allegiance to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and proclaimed himself emir of the Al-Mourabitoun group in Mali. This provoked a negative response from Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the founder of Al-Mourabitoun, who reaffirmed the group's loyalty to Al-Qaida.⁴⁰ In October 2016, ISIL's

³⁰ ACLED, Mid-Year Update: 10 Conflicts to Worry About in 2020, 18 August 2020, [url](#); Counter Extremism Project, Mali: Extremism & Counter-Extremism, 2020, [url](#); CISAC, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, 2018, [url](#);

³¹ ECFR, Katibat Macina, n. d., [url](#); UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 20 March 2020, [url](#), para. 6; International Crisis Group, Speaking with the "Bad Guys": Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists, 28 May 2019, [url](#), p. 3

³² ECFR, Katibat Macina, n. d., [url](#)

³³ ACSS, The Puzzle of JNIM and Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel, December 2020, [url](#), p. 4

³⁴ International Crisis Group, Speaking with the "Bad Guys": Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists, 28 May 2019, [url](#), p. 4

³⁵ ECFR, Katibat Macina, n. d., [url](#)

³⁶ Boukhars, A., The Logic of Violence in Africa's Extremist Insurgencies, October 2020, [url](#), p. 120

³⁷ ACSS, The Puzzle of JNIM and Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel, December 2020, [url](#), p. 6

³⁸ CIA World Factbook, Terrorist Organizations, n.d., [url](#); UN Security Council, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 23 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁹ UN Security Council, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 23 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰ CISAC, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 2018, [url](#)

Amaq News Agency officially recognized al-Sahraoui's pledge of allegiance, and ISGS became an ISIL affiliate in West Africa.⁴¹ The ISGS is now the second ISIL affiliate in West Africa, along with the group Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP).⁴² While it has been described as lacking 'a cohesive, ideologically driven narrative', its goal is to 'replace regional governments with an Islamic state'.⁴³

Recruitment

Since 2017, the ISGS 'grew as it managed to mobilize a large number of fighters against the backdrop of intercommunal violence in the Mali-Niger borderlands'.⁴⁴ Many ISGS fighters are 'native to the areas in which it operates'.⁴⁵ Similar to the JNIM, some of the main recruitment methods of the ISGS are to 'exploits local issues to garner popular support', and capitalizing on 'the sense of discrimination' of marginalized ethnic groups and their 'desire for self-defence' and protection.⁴⁶ Fighters in the ISGS come from a varied range of ethnic groups, including Fulanis from Niger and Mali, Dawsahak from Ménaka and Gao, as well as Tuaregs, Sahraouis, Bambaras, and Mossi.⁴⁷ It is estimated that the ISGS comprises around 200-300 ISGS core fighters, while drawing on a 'network of informants and logistics among sympathetic villagers'.⁴⁸ The ISGS frequently uses 'ad-hoc fighters', which are 'hired' from local areas for a particular operation. These fighters can reach up to 70 % of fighters involved in an attack.⁴⁹

Targets and Tactics

According to the Georgetown Security Studies Review (GSSR), while the ISGS 'does not appear to exert full control over the territories it occupies and has not established organized governance structures', it is however highly mobile, and able to attack across large regions.⁵⁰ Due to its 'mobile and increasingly sophisticated tactics', the ISGS has been 'able to cause massive casualties, despite having a limited number of fighters'. The group carries out fast attacks using fighters on motorbikes, who are then able to retreat 'before army re-enforcements have time to respond'.⁵¹ According to CISAC, the ISGS 'uses mortar, heavy machine guns (AK-47s), and rocket-propelled grenades in its attacks, in addition to bomb-loaded trucks and suicide bombings'.⁵² More recent attacks since end of 2019 in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have also been described as 'sophisticated and hugely lethal', and the tactic of ISGS of using drones for reconnaissance before its attacks has been noted.⁵³

The ISGS targets local and foreign armed forces, ethnic groups, and local government officials. Regarding civilian targets, in 2017 and 2018, ISGS launched several attacks 'against Malian civilian nomad camps, markets, and villages'. Since 2018, the ISGS has 'repeatedly targeted schools, with

⁴¹ UN Security Council, Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui, 9 August 2018, [url](#); UN Security Council, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 23 February 2020, [url](#); CISAC, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 2018, [url](#)

⁴² CISAC, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 2018, [url](#)

⁴³ CIA World Factbook, Terrorist Organizations, n.d., [url](#);

⁴⁴ CTC, Outlasting the Caliphate: The Evolution of the Islamic State Threat in Africa, November/December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵ ECFR, The Islamic State in The Greater Sahara (ISGS), n. d., [url](#)

⁴⁶ CISAC, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 2018, [url](#); GSSR, As Attacks Rise, is the Islamic State Tightening its Grip on the Sahel? 28 September 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷ UN Security Council, Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui, 9 August 2018, [url](#); ECFR, The Islamic State in The Greater Sahara (ISGS), n. d., [url](#); CISAC, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸ ACSS, Exploiting Borders in the Sahel: The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 10 June 2019, [url](#); EER, Jihadist Competition and Cooperation in West Africa, 3 April 2020, [url](#); France 24, Islamic State replaces al-Qaeda as Enemy No. 1 in Sahel, 15 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Guardian (The), Sahel faces surge in violence from terror attacks, 22 January 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰ GSSR, As Attacks Rise, is the Islamic State Tightening its Grip on the Sahel? 28 September 2020, [url](#)

⁵¹ ICCT, The Shifting Sands of the Sahel's Terrorism Landscape, 12 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵² CISAC, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 2018, [url](#)

⁵³ EER, Jihadist Competition and Cooperation in West Africa, 3 April 2020, [url](#);

devastating effect.⁵⁴ In 2020, several civilians were killed during clashes between ISGS and JNIM in Gao, Mopti and Menaka regions.⁵⁵

The relationship with JNIM

According to the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), the relationship between the two groups was initially described as the ‘Sahelian exception’, in that they ‘existed within an uneasy alliance in the region’, in contrast to other areas of the world, where Al-Qaida and ISIL fight over territory and control.⁵⁶ However, the relationship between the ISGS and JNIM began to deteriorate as the ISGS expanded its influence.⁵⁷ In July 2019, fighting broke out, and has ‘since intensified’. In September 2019, Al-Qaida reportedly claimed that JNIM had ‘successfully expelled ISGS from a number of towns in central Mali’.⁵⁸ However, a March 2020 UN report stated that the ISGS had ‘expanded its areas of activity into parts of Gao and Timbuktu regions’ that were the area of operation of the JNIM, and the same source quoted reports of ‘clashes’ between the two groups in central Mali and Timbuktu region.⁵⁹ Moreover, several sources report that the shift in the balance of power in favour of the ISGS resulted in a split within the Katiba Macina group, where several of its fighters have ‘defected’ and joined an ‘increasingly emboldened’ ISGS.⁶⁰

1.7. Community-based armed groups

Central Mali is the home of several ethnic groups, including the Fulani, the Bambara, the Bozo, the Dogon, and the Tellem.⁶¹ One of the main drivers of conflict in the region, including in Mopti, is the competition over land and other natural resources, as different groups ‘pursue vocations – farming, fishing and herding – that can coexist but also come into conflict.’⁶² The divisions between communities have been exacerbated by jihadist groups, particularly the JNIM, who has ‘aligned itself to Fulani causes’ and exploited their ‘grievances with the state and other ethnic groups’. The recruitment of Fulanis into extremist groups has caused members of other ethnic communities to create their own self-defence groups, ‘in the absence of state security forces’, resulting in a ‘proliferation of self-defence militias with an “ethnic” base.’⁶³ Among the more established groups are the Donsos (mainly Bambaras) and the Dan Na Ambassagou group (mainly Dogons), who are ‘traditional hunting societies [armed with] military weapons’, and the Sékou Bolly group (Fulani),

⁵⁴ CIA World Factbook, Terrorist Organizations, n.d., [url](#); CISAC, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵ MINUSMA, Note on Trends of Human Rights Violations and Abuses in Mali 1 April - 30 June 2020, August 2020, [url](#), para. 5

⁵⁶ CTC, The End of the Sahelian Anomaly: How the Global Conflict between the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida Finally Came to West Africa, July 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷ CTC, The End of the Sahelian Anomaly: How the Global Conflict between the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida Finally Came to West Africa, July 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸ CTC, Outlasting the Caliphate: The Evolution of the Islamic State Threat in Africa, November/December 2020, [url](#); GSSR, As Attacks Rise, is the Islamic State Tightening its Grip on the Sahel? 28 September 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 20 March 2020, [url](#), para. 36

⁶⁰ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 20 March 2020, [url](#), para. 36; CTC, Outlasting the Caliphate: The Evolution of the Islamic State Threat in Africa, November/December 2020, [url](#); Boukhars, A., The Logic of Violence in Africa’s Extremist Insurgencies, October 2020, [url](#), p. 123

⁶¹ HRW, “How Much More Blood Must Be Spilled?”, Atrocities Against Civilians in Central Mali 2019, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

⁶² International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), pp. 5,6; ICG, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), pp. 5,6

⁶³ ACSS, How Violent Extremist Groups Exploit Intercommunal Conflicts in the Sahel, 26 February 2020, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Speaking with the “Bad Guys”: Toward Dialogue with Central Mali’s Jihadists, 28 May 2019, [url](#), p. 6; International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), p. 6; HRW, “How Much More Blood Must Be Spilled?”, Atrocities Against Civilians in Central Mali 2019, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

which ‘mainly consists of former MUJAO members.’⁶⁴

The volatile security situation has had a severe impact on civilians. While Dogon armed groups such as Dan Na Ambassagou, have ‘attacked Fulani civilians whom they accuse of supporting and protecting the jihadists’, Fulani armed groups have targeted Dogon and Bambara civilians, accusing them of collaborating with security forces, as ethnic militias from the Bambara and Dogon communities ‘are relatively well represented in the government and in Malian military structures’ and accompany Malian soldiers sometimes during their military operations.⁶⁵

In its report covering the period 2 June-29 September 2020, the UN reported that ‘self-defence militias and extremist groups’ continued to exploit inter-communal tensions, resulting in violence against civilians and security incidents; the same source stated that the most affected were the *cercles* of Bankass, Bandiagara, Douentza and Koro.⁶⁶ According to International Crisis Group, most ethnic violence takes place ‘in the north and centre of Koro, in Mondoro commune in the south of Douentza, in the centre and south of Bankass, and in certain areas around Bandiagara’.⁶⁷

1.8. Dan Na Ambassagou

The Dan Na Ambassagou group is a ‘loose coalition of largely Dogon self-defence militias’, with an active presence ‘around Bankass, Bandiagara, Koro, and Mondoro’.⁶⁸ According to Human Rights Watch, Dan Na Ambassagou ‘has hundreds of members, [and] is organized into a quasi-military-like hierarchy, headed by Youssouf Toloba’, who hails from Mopti region. The same source quotes Toloba, who stated, in December 2018, that the group’s size had increased to ‘more than 5 000 men operating out of at least 30 training camps, and had incorporated a political arm with offices in Koro, Bandiagara, Bankass, Douentza, and Bamako.’⁶⁹

Dan Na Ambassagou fighters frequently target Fulani ‘villages and encampments’ and fight with Fulani self-defence groups, as they accuse them of being part of, or cooperating with, Katiba Macina.⁷⁰ In March 2019, Dan Na Ambassagou was accused of attacking the Fulani villages of Ogossagou and Welingara in Mopti region, which ‘left 134 victims dead and 55 injured’.⁷¹ Following the incident, the Malian Prime Minister reportedly ‘dissolved’ the group, ordering its fighters to hand over their weapons.⁷² However, Toloba denied the involvement of Dan Na Ambassagou in the attack, stating that the group ‘would not disarm until the government demonstrated their ability to secure Dogon villages and property.’⁷³ In August 2020, the report of the Panel of Experts on Mali described the group

⁶⁴ SIPRI, The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali, October 2019, [url](#); CBS News, UN warns of increase in abuses against civilians in Mali, 7 August 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), p. 3; International Crisis Group, Speaking with the Bad Guys: Toward Dialogue with Central Mali’s Jihadists, 28 May 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁶ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 33

⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), p. 10

⁶⁸ ECFR, Dan Na Ambassagou, n. d., [url](#); International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁹ HRW, “How Much More Blood Must Be Spilled?”, Atrocities Against Civilians in Central Mali 2019, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁰ ECFR, Dan Na Ambassagou, n. d., [url](#); UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 20 March 2020, [url](#), para. 26

⁷¹ DW, Mali president sacks generals after deadly raids on ethnic villages, 24 March 2019, [url](#)

⁷² DW, Mali president sacks generals after deadly raids on ethnic villages, 24 March 2019, [url](#)

⁷³ HRW, “How Much More Blood Must Be Spilled?”, Atrocities Against Civilians in Central Mali 2019, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

as still ‘officially associated with the operations of government forces’.⁷⁴ Furthermore, according to the report, Dan Na Ambassagou was in control of ‘dozens of checkpoints on the main road between Sévaré, Bandiagara, Bankass and Koro’.⁷⁵

During the reference period, Dan Na Ambassagou has been accused of ‘obstructing’ MINUSMA patrols during their civilian protection operations’, and of depriving Fulanis of ‘access to markets, schools and health centres’ in majority Dogon villages.⁷⁶ In its reports covering the period 20 March-29 September 2020, the UN stated that Dan Na Ambassagou had ‘forcibly recruited Dogon villagers into its ranks and violently retaliated against those who refused’; furthermore, the group had reportedly recruited ‘children between 11-17 years old’.⁷⁷

2. Security situation

2.1. National

After legislative elections on 29 March and 19 April 2020 took place ‘in a peaceful context’, post-election protests escalated since June 2020 and culminated in a military *coup d’état* on 18 August 2020, when the President, Prime Minister and other officials were detained. On 19 August 2020, the President resigned and announced the ‘dissolution of the government and the National Assembly.’⁷⁸ During the same day, a group of military officers announced the formation of the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (Comité national pour le salut du peuple - CNSP), and that they ‘had taken power in Mali’. Colonel Assimi Goïta, the ‘commander of a battalion of special forces based in central Mali, was presented as the President of CNSP’.⁷⁹ On 10 and 12 September 2020, the CNSP consulted ‘key political and civil society actors’ and subsequently adopted a “Charter for the transition”, that includes a ‘framework for the holding of elections over a period of 18 months.’ The CNSP announced on 21 September 2020 the designation of former Minister of Defence Bah N’Daw as President of the 18-month transitional government, while Goïta was assigned as Vice-President.⁸⁰ On 5 October 2020, a new government was formed.⁸¹

With regards to security incidents, between 1 June-30 November 2020, ACLED recorded at national level 529 violent events, of which 237 were recorded as battles, 235 as incidents of violence against civilians, and 57 as explosions/remote violence. Meanwhile, for the reporting period 2 June-29 September 2020, MINUSMA documented 720 human rights violations and abuses at national level,

⁷⁴ UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), 13 August 2020, [url](#), para. 11

⁷⁵ UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), 13 August 2020, [url](#), para. 12

⁷⁶ International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), p. 4; UN SC, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 2 June 2020, [url](#), para. 11

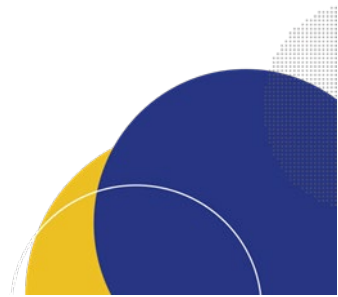
⁷⁷ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 2 June 2020, [url](#), para. 77; UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), paras. 33, 73

⁷⁸ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 2 June 2020, [url](#), para. 2; AA, Mali’s president resigns after military coup, 19 August 2020, [url](#); UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), paras. 2,4; BBC, Thousands of protesters call for resignation of Mali president, 19 June 2020, [url](#); France 24, Malian protesters regroup to demand the resignation of President Keita, 11 August 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁹ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 10

⁸⁰ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), paras. 19, 21

⁸¹ UN Security Council, Weeks after Coup d’État in Mali, Strong Regional Leadership, New Transition Plan Show Promise for Country’s Future, Special Representative Tells Security Council, 8 October 2019, [url](#)



some 185 more than during the previous reporting period of 20 March-2 June 2020.⁸²

2.2. Mopti

According to International Crisis Group, the areas that can be distinguished in Mopti are: the *zone inondée* – the ‘flooded part of the inner Niger river delta’, also described as the historic ‘Macina heartland’; and the *zone exondée* – which includes the Dogon plateau.⁸³ In the *zone inondée*, incidents of violence against civilians have been rare due to the fact that the control of Islamist groups over the area – predominantly Katiba Macina – has not been contested. In the *zone exondée* – and particularly in the four *cercles* of Koro, Bankass, Bandiagara and Douentza - competition over territory control has led to an increase in the number of incidents of violence against civilians. Territory is reportedly disputed between: groups ‘affiliated with jihadist movements’, such as Katiba Macina and JNIM, Bambara and Dogon self-defence groups, particularly Dan Na Ambassagou, and Fulani self-defence groups.⁸⁴

A UN report referring to the period 2 June-29 September 2020, stated that the security situation in central Mali was ‘concerning’, with ‘self-defence militias and extremist groups’ exploiting inter-communal conflicts and affecting civilians mostly in Bankass, Bandiagara, Douentza and Koro *cercles*.⁸⁵ The report also highlighted the increase in abductions by ‘terrorist elements’ and attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Douentza *cercle*, ‘impeding the movements of civilians and security forces.’⁸⁶

With regards to inter-communal violence, Mopti region is considered ‘the epicentre of violence among Fulani and Dogon people’.⁸⁷ According to the UN, between 2 June-29 September 2020, ‘Dogon armed groups and militias were responsible for 6 attacks, in which 9 persons were killed, and armed groups from the Fulani community were involved in 61 attacks, resulting in 180 killings’.⁸⁸ The same source also highlighted the deterioration of the human rights situation, ‘with violations and abuses linked to the spread of violent extremism, counter-terrorism operations and community-based violence’. For the reporting period 2 June-29 September 2020, MINUSMA documented 359 violations and abuses (around 49% of all human rights violations and abuses recorded at national level).⁸⁹

In Mopti region, between 1 June-30 November 2020, ACLED recorded 250 violent events (some 47 % of all violent events in the country), of which 124 were incidents of violence against civilians, 111 were battles, and 15 were explosions/remote violence.⁹⁰

With regards to actors, the violent events during the reference period were attributed to:

- JNIM (80 violent events); Fulani ethnic militias (55); Unidentified armed groups (50); Dan Na Ambassagou (23); ISGS (9); MDSF (8); Dozo communal militias (7); Military Forces of France

⁸² UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 66-68

⁸³ Region de Mopti, Le Territoire, n.d., [url](#); International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁴ International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 10; Conversation (The), Central Mali gripped by a dangerous brew of jihad, revolt and self-defence, 13 November 2016, [url](#)

⁸⁵ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 33

⁸⁶ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 34

⁸⁷ International Crisis Group, Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence, 9 November 2020, [url](#); ACSS, Mitigating Farmer-Herder Violence in Mali, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 72

⁸⁹ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 66-68

⁹⁰ ACLED, Data Export Tool - Mali, n.d., [url](#)

(6); Katiba Macina (6); Dogon Ethnic Militia (5); and G5S: G5 Sahel Force (1).⁹¹

The distribution of violent events by location, as recorded by ACLED, by *cercles* in Mopti is as follows:

- In Bandiagara: 73 violent events (40 battles, 29 incidents of violence against civilians, 4 incidents of explosions/remote violence);
- In Koro: 68 violent events (29 battles, 35 incidents of violence against civilians, 4 incidents of explosions/remote violence);
- In Douentza: 46 violent events (22 battles, 19 incidents of violence against civilians, 5 incidents of explosions/remote violence);
- In Bankass: 29 violent events (11 battles, 17 incidents of violence against civilians, 1 incident of explosions/remote violence);
- In Mopti: 23 violent events (8 battles, 14 incidents of violence against civilians, 1 incidents of explosions/remote violence)
- In Djenne: 7 violent events (1 battle, 6 incidents of violence against civilians);
- In Youwarou: 2 violent events, both incidents of violence against civilians;
- In Tenenkou: 2 violent events, both incidents of violence against civilians.⁹²

Some of the indicative security incidents in Mopti region in the reference period include:

- On 3 June 2020, a MDSF convoy ‘stormed’ Yangassadiou village in Mopti region, and ‘summarily executed’ more than 15 civilians.⁹³
- On 5 June 2020, MDSF soldiers accompanied by ‘a group of armed Dogon traditional hunters’ reportedly killed at least 37 civilians in the Fulani village of Binedama, Mopti region.⁹⁴
- On 1 July 2020, armed men reportedly from the Fulani community attacked the four ethnic Dogon farming villages of Panga Dougou, Djimdo, Gouari and Dialakanda in the communes of Tori and Diallassagou, Bankass *cercle*. Between 30-33 civilians were killed, and ‘many others’ were injured.⁹⁵
- On 14 July 2020, attacks by ‘unidentified gunmen’ on villages ‘inhabited by Dogon farmers’ resulted in at least 12 people killed.⁹⁶ More information related to the attackers was not found in sources consulted.
- On 13 October 2020, armed men attacked ‘a commercial truck, killing 12 traders and one soldier’, near Bandiagara town.⁹⁷ Additional information with regards to the perpetrators could not be found among sources consulted.
- On 22 October 2020, the MDSF reportedly carried out a ‘revenge attack’ in the village of Libé in Bankass *cercle*, allegedly as retaliation against ‘Islamist militants in the region’, to whom attacks on MDSF bases were attributed. At least 15 civilians were killed, and the village was

⁹¹ ACLED, Data Export Tool - Mali, n.d., [url](#)

⁹² ACLED, Data Export Tool - Mali, n.d., [url](#)

⁹³ UN Human Rights Council, UN expert urges Mali to step up measures to end extrajudicial executions and vicious cycle of impunity, 12 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, UN expert urges Mali to step up measures to end extrajudicial executions and vicious cycle of impunity, 12 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 72; AJ, Dozens of civilians killed in central Mali village attacks, 3 July 2020, [url](#); AI, Mali: Recent killings in central region could fuel humanitarian disaster, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Garda, Mali: Multiple people killed as gunmen attack villages in Mopti region on July 14, 16 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷ Garda, Mali: Multiple people killed in several militant attacks in Mopti region October 13, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

burnt down.⁹⁸

- On 3 November 2020, unknown gunmen attacked a minibus ‘between the settlements of Parou and Songhobia as it was travelling between the towns of Bandiagara and Bankass’. At least eight civilians were killed, and eight others were injured.⁹⁹ More information related to the attackers was not found in sources consulted.

Civilian Casualties

ACLED data shows 235 incidents of violence against civilians recorded in Mali between 1 June-28 November 2020, of which 124 were recorded in Mopti region (approx. 52 %). With regards to civilian deaths, ACLED figures show that between 1 June-30 November 2020, there were 317 civilian deaths recorded in Mali. Of those, 209 were recorded in Mopti region (approx. 65% of all civilian deaths). Disaggregated data detailing the distribution of civilian deaths by *cercles* in Mopti region was also available from ACLED, and is as follows: Koro (57), Bandiagara (51), Bankass (50), Douentza (38), Mopti (8), Djenne (5), Youwarou (0), and Tenenkou (0).¹⁰⁰

UN data shows that at the national level, between 2 June-31 August 2020 there were recorded around 343 ‘targeted attacks on civilians’ (an increase compared to the previous reporting period of 20 March 2020-2 June 2020, when 293 such attacks were recorded). Of the 343 attacks, 165 were registered in Mopti region (48 % of all incidents involving civilians in Mali.)¹⁰¹ Regarding civilian casualties, the UN recorded between 2 June-31 August 2020 some 375 civilian deaths (as well as 450 people injured and 93 abducted), at national level. Meanwhile in Mopti region, ‘248 civilians were killed, 100 were injured and 49 were abducted’ during the same period.¹⁰²

3. Displacement

A February 2020 report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre’s (IDMC) stated that internal displacement in Mali is ‘mostly associated with inter-communal conflicts’.¹⁰³ According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as of 31 October 2020, there were approx. 311 193 IDPs registered in Mali (an increase from the 287 496 IDPs registered in July 2020). Of those, some 131 150 IDPs were registered in Mopti region (compared to 113 043 registered in July 2020). According to the IOM research, while there was no data referring specifically to Mopti region, at national level the reasons given for displacement were inter-communal tensions (71 % of respondents), armed conflict (28 %) and presence of weapons or UXOs in the place of origin (1 %). In contrast, during the previous assessment of July 2020, some 51 % of respondents mentioned inter-communal tensions as reasons for their displacement, while 46 % mentioned that they had been displaced by armed conflict (and 2 % due to other causes).¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Garda, Mali: Malian Armed Forces accused of abuses in Mopti region October 22, 24 October 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Garda, Mali: Militants kill eight in attack on minibus in Mopti region November 3, 4 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ ACLED, Data Export Tool - Mali, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰¹ UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 62

¹⁰² UN Security Council, Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General, 29 September 2020, [url](#), para. 62

¹⁰³ IDMC, Assessing the Severity of Displacement, February 2020, [url](#), p. 40

¹⁰⁴ IOM DTM Mali, Rapport DTM Octobre 2020, [url](#) pp. 2,7; IOM DTM Mali, Rapport DTM Juillet 2020, [url](#), pp. 7,8



| Date/Cercle | Mopti | Bandiagara | Bankass | Youwarou | Djenne | Douentza | Koro | Tenenkou | Total |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|
| January 2020 | 20 437 | 14 967 | 18 264 | 102 | 5 866 | 6 697 | 14 890 | 3 193 | 84 416 |
| February 2020 | 20 637 | 14 967 | 18 264 | 207 | 5 866 | 6 697 | 16 212 | 3 463 | 86 313 |
| March 2020 | 21 765 | 16 190 | 21 289 | 1 470 | 5 866 | 6 697 | 22 787 | 3 463 | 99 598 |
| April 2020 | 24 648 | 16 190 | 21 289 | 1 470 | 5 866 | 6 697 | 22 787 | 3 463 | 102 481 |
| May 2020 | 24 299 | 16 190 | 21 289 | 1 470 | 5 866 | 6 697 | 22 787 | 3 463 | 102 132 |
| June 2020 | 24 597 | 16 190 | 21 289 | 1 470 | 5 866 | 6 697 | 22 787 | 3 463 | 102 430 |
| July 2020 | 25 378 | 21 446 | 25 646 | 1 470 | 5 866 | 6 697 | 22 787 | 3 463 | 113 043 |
| October 2020 | 25 916 | 24 903 | 29 682 | 2 841 | 7 319 | 12 564 | 24 462 | 3 463 | 131 150 |

Table 1: IDPs in Mopti region. Source: IOM DTM Mali, 31 October 2020, [url](#)

With regards to IDP returnees, IOM reported 581 550 individuals in Mali (an increase from the 567 266 returnees reported in July 2020). In Mopti, there were 45 394 IDP returnees registered, as of 31 October 2020, the same figure as previously recorded in July 2020.¹⁰⁵

| Date/Cercle | Mopti | Bandiagara | Bankass | Youwarou | Djenne | Douentza | Koro | Tenenkou | Total |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| January 2020 | 4 524 | 3 374 | - | 3 337 | 18 | 25 896 | 3 228 | 3 977 | 44 354 |
| February 2020 | 4 524 | 3 374 | - | 3 337 | 18 | 25 896 | 3 228 | 3 977 | 44 354 |
| March 2020 | 4 524 | 3 374 | - | 3 337 | 18 | 25 896 | 3 228 | 3 977 | 44 354 |
| April 2020 | 4 524 | 3 374 | - | 3 337 | 18 | 26 587 | 3 228 | 3 977 | 45 045 |
| May 2020 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| June 2020 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| July 2020 | 4 524 | 3 374 | - | 3 337 | 367 | 26 587 | 3 228 | 3 977 | 45 394 |
| October 2020 | 4 524 | 3 374 | - | 3 337 | 367 | 26 587 | 3 228 | 3 977 | 45 394 |

Table 2: IDP returnees in Mopti region. Source: IOM DTM Mali, 31 October 2020, [url](#)

With regards to Malians returning from abroad, as of 31 October 2020, there were 84 474 returnees registered in Mali, compared to 84 383 individuals registered as of July 2020, according to data presented by IOM. In Mopti, the number of returnees from abroad as of 31 October 2020 was 4 503, a slight increase compared to the 4 495 individuals recorded in July 2020.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ IOM DTM Mali, Rapport DTM Octobre 2020, [url](#) p. 18; IOM DTM Mali, Rapport DTM Juillet 2020, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁰⁶ IOM DTM Mali, Rapport DTM Octobre 2020, [url](#) p. 20; IOM DTM Mali, Rapport DTM Juillet 2020, [url](#), p. 19

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