

STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY

Region: Somalia-Nigeria-Democratic Republic of the Congo-Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso

Date: 25 April 2026

Scope: Security | Diplomacy | Defence

Classification: Client Confidential

Executive Assessment

The past week confirms that the Sahel has entered a structurally different phase, transitioning from localized insurgencies into coordinated, multi-state challenges in which military operations, supply chain control, and state legitimacy are tightly interlinked and mutually reinforcing. This transformation is not a temporary shift, but a redefinition of how conflict operates and how it will likely persist across the entire region.

The most important structural change is the relocation of the conflict's center of gravity. Earlier phases were defined by isolated insurgent attacks and reactive government counteroffensives. The current phase is defined by opposition forces controlling critical supply corridors, capital region infrastructure, and forcing the rerouting of national logistics through alternative and economically unsustainable routes. This shift has effectively transformed the conflict into a competition over state capacity and territorial control rather than episodic tactical exchanges.

Despite ongoing diplomatic initiatives in the DRC and Turkey-Nigeria partnerships, there has been no meaningful normalization of the system that matters most: government territorial control and supply chain security. In Mali, fuel convoys are rerouted via Senegal instead of the traditional Ivory Coast corridor, military bases are under direct assault, and the capital itself is no longer secure. Commercial actors, foreign missions, and military forces continue to treat the region as operationally unstable. This disconnect between diplomatic progress and operational reality defines the current phase.

Statements from political leadership further reinforce this contradiction. While regional governments signal that security situations are "under control" and that military operations continue against opposition forces, operational data indicates that opposition forces have achieved unprecedented coordination, penetrated protected military assets, and established control over critical logistics routes. Mali's junta claims tactical victories even as military sources report "unprecedented panic in military ranks."

The result is a system best described as controlled collapse. Military losses remain contained to specific geographic regions, but state capacity is eroding across the entire Sahel. Without major international military intervention, the region will fragment into opposition-controlled zones, ungoverned spaces, and collapsed administrative structures within weeks to months.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

While Democratic Republic of the Congo President Félix Tshisekedi and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan agreed to increase bilateral trade volume to five hundred million dollars

MINTEL WORLD

Conflict and energy consultancy

in the medium term, the Congolese Defense Minister held inter-delegation talks in Ankara. Representatives of the DRC and Rwanda met in Washington with the participation of the African Union, Qatar, and the United States to evaluate the progress of the peace process. The Congolese government and M23 officials reached two technical compromises during talks on humanitarian access and legal protection near Montreux, Switzerland, but no official agreement was signed.

M23 refused to open the Goma airport, citing the non-release of prisoners, while the government rejected demands to lift banking restrictions and legal charges. United Nations Special Envoy James Swan visited Beni and Goma to discuss ceasefire monitoring processes with political leaders and M23 officials. A memorandum of understanding was signed within the framework of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to operationalize the ceasefire monitoring mechanism.

On the economic front, US-based Virtus Minerals announced it will resume copper and cobalt production under Chemaf starting in January 2027. On the ground, two hundred civilians were rescued from a camp in the east during a joint raid conducted by Ugandan and Congolese soldiers.

Despite diplomatic efforts, the army and M23 forces continue their mutual attacks. The army stated that M23 drones bombed the settlements of Kakenge, Mikenge, and Point Zero in the Minembwe Highlands, causing civilian casualties, while M23 claimed that the army targeted central Minembwe and densely populated areas in Masisi. Fierce clashes between the parties were reported in the Masisi region. It was reported that the army carried out airstrikes on M23 positions in the village of Kibati in the Walikale region. M23 reportedly set houses on fire in the village of Ndurumo near Lukweti and forcibly conscripted civilians in Goma. In the Kibirizi region, M23 launched an operation against FDLR forces that were extorting money from locals, and it was reported that FDLR militants raided the area. Meanwhile, ISCAP claimed to have killed four soldiers in a clash with a joint army patrol near the village of Kadika in the Ituri region.

NIGERIA

Defense Minister Christopher Gwabin Musa stated that they reached an agreement with Turkey on special forces training, industrial cooperation, and military production, announcing that two hundred soldiers will be sent to Turkey for training. The Ministry of Defense announced that a joint coastal military training facility will be established with Turkey to strengthen the country's security architecture. Minister Musa also emphasized the importance of regional unity in the fight against terrorism and requested support from Turkey to improve relations between Abuja and Niamey. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan expressed that this cooperation is critical for the country's stability.

Security forces neutralized numerous ISWAP members during air operations in the Lake Chad region and the Sambisa forest in Borno state. Army units repelled coordinated attacks in the

MINTEL WORLD

Conflict and energy consultancy

Kanama, Ngoshe, Banki, and Askira Uba regions without sustaining any casualties. Fifteen women and children were rescued during operations conducted around the Mandara Mountains. Twenty-four militants were killed and weapons and munitions were seized during an attack on the town of Kukareta in Yobe state. While troops conducted clearing operations in the Mobbar and Kaga regions of Borno, couriers carrying munitions were intercepted in Kogi state, and a warehouse was seized.

On the other hand, twenty people lost their lives in a raid on two villages in the northeast by militants on motorcycles. Terrorists killed seven soldiers and abducted local residents in attacks on a military base and the village of Kemanji in the Kaiama region of Kwara state. ISWAP claimed to have killed twenty-one civilians and militiamen in attacks in Adamawa state, and twelve militiamen near Gwoza. The group claimed to have damaged an armored vehicle with an explosive between Gajiram and Mairari, and executed a captured army member in Nguma.

SOMALIA

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud stated that the army is a fundamental prerequisite for the existence and development of a democratic state. Defense Minister Ahmed Moallim Fiqi emphasized that counter-terrorism operations will continue uninterrupted. Commander of the National Armed Forces, Brigadier General Ibrahim Mohamed Mohamud, visited Bardale and Awdiinle to inspect troops in the Bay region.

The National Intelligence and Security Agency, with the support of international partners, killed more than thirty-three militants, including senior leaders, and destroyed a key facility belonging to the group in operations conducted in the Guulane area of the Middle Shabelle region. AFRICOM carried out airstrikes targeting the Islamic State's Somalia Branch around the Golis Mountains and the Jaceel River. Puntland forces neutralized more than ten militants in a ground operation around the Kal-Riyaad well. The group attacked a water well in Dhaadaar, Bari region, but security forces repelled the attack, sustaining three injuries. The same group targeted Puntland forces conducting medical evacuations in the Daray-Madoobe region, killing one soldier and causing a doctor to go missing.

MALI

A fuel tanker convoy escorted by soldiers reached Kayes via Senegal instead of Ivory Coast after the army secured the route. The Russian Defense Ministry announced that two geologists kidnapped in Niger were rescued in an operation conducted by the Africa Corps. The Malian army and allied forces repelled an ISSP attack in the Tessit region, seizing various military equipment. Army units carried out airstrikes in the Lakamane, Kidal, Sévaré, Kolokani, Koulikoro, and Mopti regions. It was announced that over one hundred and thirty militants were neutralized in the Faya Forest and Dioura regions during these operations. JNIM claimed to have assassinated a captain and his driver in the Goundam region of Timbuktu. The group also asserted that it killed a soldier in Konna and targeted an army vehicle with an IED between Markala and Ke Macina.

However, on the same date (25 April 2026), Mali experienced coordinated attacks of unprecedented scale. Gunmen attacked Mali's capital, Bamako, and several locations across the country in what the army described as a coordinated assault involving multiple armed groups. Two loud explosions and sustained gunfire were heard shortly before 06:00 GMT near Mali's main military base at Kati outside Bamako. The FLA (Azawad Liberation Front) spokesperson Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadane declared on Facebook that FLA forces "control the entire city" of Kidal and are continuing operations. In Gao, FLA forces penetrated the city center after neutralizing outpost positions, with Ramadane stating: "In Gao, our forces are now present inside the city, after having neutralised several positions located on the outskirts." Video evidence verified by Al Jazeera showed armed FLA fighters entering the National Youth Camp of Kidal, and visual confirmation emerged of FLA controlling the Edjerer Petroleum Kidal station, inaugurated barely two months prior by the regional governor.

The simultaneity of these attacks across Kidal, Gao, Sévaré, Kati, and Bamako within hours indicates pre-planned, coordinated operations between FLA and JNIM. Military sources told Al Jazeera that "fighters involved in this coordinated attack are targeting military armed compounds." What is notable is that armed groups previously fighting each other are now coordinating attacks against a common enemy—the Malian state and Russian forces. JNIM attacked the capital and surrounding areas, with gunfire reported near a military camp adjacent to Bamako's airport, where Russian mercenary forces are based. In Sévaré, JNIM captured Balobo Army Camp on the town's edge, with militants advancing toward the hospital and city center, moving with apparent freedom through the urban area.

The FLA spokesperson also called on "authorities of Burkina Faso and Niger to stay out of the ongoing events in Mali," signaling confidence in their capacity to warn neighboring states away from intervention. Kati residents reported being "holed up" in their homes as heavy gunfire erupted at the military base where General Assimi Goita, Mali's military ruler, maintains his residence. According to eyewitnesses, drones hovered over military headquarters in Kati, and coordinated efforts from Malian forces were visible in attempts to repel the assault. The scale and coordination suggest FLA-JNIM have achieved operational maturity in synchronized attacks across the country's north (Kidal-Gao), center (Sévaré), and capital region (Bamako-Kati).

The US Embassy issued a "Shelter in Place" directive for American citizens after reports of explosions and gunfire near Kati and Modibo Keita International Airport, signaling international assessment that Bamako is no longer secure. The Malian army's General Staff issued a statement claiming the situation is "under control" after "armed terrorist groups" launched simultaneous attacks on military posts, stating attackers "were immediately met with strong resistance" and "several terrorists were neutralized." However, military sources reported unprecedented panic in military ranks, suggesting rank-and-file soldiers understand the severity of the threat.

MINTEL WORLD

Conflict and energy consultancy

The rerouting of fuel tankers via Senegal rather than the traditional Ivory Coast corridor now takes on different meaning within this context of active combat operations. The government's inability to secure the southern logistics route indicates that opposition forces have effectively severed government resupply lines. JNIM demonstrated similar capability in 2025 when it imposed an economic and fuel blockade by sealing off major highways, bringing Bamako to a standstill from September to October 2025. For weeks, residents could not purchase fuel for vehicles or motorcycles. Although calm returned in late 2025, diesel shortages persisted into March 2026. The current rerouting suggests the junta cannot risk the Ivory Coast route and faces fuel depletion within 2-4 weeks if ground corridors are not reopened.

The timing of these 25 April coordinated attacks coincides with reported withdrawal of Russian mercenaries (formerly Wagner Group) to the Ukraine front. Witnesses confirmed that Russian mercenaries are fighting in Bamako around the airport where they maintain headquarters, but significant numbers are being pulled from Mali due to pressure on the Russia-Ukraine front. This withdrawal creates a capability gap exactly when FLA-JNIM coordination has matured to launch maximum-effort coordinated assaults. The Russian Africa Corps, which the junta relied upon to maintain military superiority, no longer has full strength deployed in Mali.

Mali's strategic situation has fundamentally shifted. What began as reports of government airstrikes across six regions has evolved into evidence of a comprehensive opposition offensive that has penetrated government's most protected assets: the military base where the junta leader resides, the capital airport, and all northern strongholds simultaneously. The permeability between opposition-held and government-held areas has become so acute that even the capital is no longer secure. Without major international military intervention, Mali's state collapse is now a matter of weeks rather than months.

BURKINA FASO

In the Bam region, soldiers and the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) state that they have secured control of Manegtaba. On the other hand, JNIM claims to have targeted a patrol in Ouahigouya with an improvised explosive device (IED) and seized control of an outpost there. JNIM also claims that in an attack on an outpost in Bango, two VDP members were killed, military equipment was seized, and they secured control of the area. Furthermore, JNIM asserts that in its attack in Bagamoussa, twenty-five soldiers were killed, various munitions were confiscated, and complete control of the area was taken.

NIGER

ISSP claimed that four soldiers were killed in an attack on a National Guard camp in Ayorou, Tillabéri region. JNIM, on the other hand, claimed to have seized control of a military outpost in Kokorou, located in the same region.

Forward Outlook (Next 14 Days)

Mali will dominate the next 14 days as the critical flashpoint. The immediate variable is whether FLA-JNIM consolidate territorial gains or face a coordinated government counteroffensive.

MINTEL WORLD

Conflict and energy consultancy

The most important indicator remains fuel supply to Bamako—if ground corridors are not reopened within 2-4 weeks, government military operations will cease due to fuel depletion. The Kati military base and Bamako airport security will remain the primary escalation variable. If opposition forces expand control from current positions toward the capital's administrative center, state collapse will accelerate beyond current 2-8 week timeline.

Russian mercenary withdrawal will continue as Africa Corps redeploys personnel to Ukraine. This creates a cascading vulnerability: as Russian air support diminishes, government ground forces become increasingly exposed to opposition advances. The junta's historical reliance on Russian military superiority is collapsing at the exact moment that alliance is being hollowed out. Watch for announcements of additional Africa Corps withdrawals or shifting deployment priorities.

DRC will remain diplomatically active but operationally stalled. Ceasefire monitoring discussions may produce technical agreements on humanitarian access or legal protections, but M23 will continue refusing to open Gao airport and government will continue refusing to lift banking restrictions. Ground clashes will persist in Masisi, Minembwe, and Walikale. US Virtus Minerals' January 2027 production resumption signals that some international actors believe stabilization is achievable, but this optimism is not yet reflected in military dynamics. Expect continued civilian casualties and limited strategic movement.

Nigeria will show incremental tactical gains against ISWAP but persistent insurgent resilience. Turkey-Nigeria partnership will deepen with special forces training exercises and coastal facility activation. Lake Chad region will remain contested despite government improvements. ISWAP will continue demonstrating capacity for synchronized assaults in Adamawa and Gwoza. No de-escalation is expected; instead, expect a prolonged tactical stalemate with slow government advantage.

Somalia will maintain localized security gains with limited strategic momentum. AFRICOM airstrikes will continue targeting ISIS-Somalia around Golis and Jaceel. National Intelligence and Security Agency operations will produce tactical kills but insufficient operational pressure to suppress the broader ISIS-Somalia threat. Expect continued attacks on civilian infrastructure and military operations.

Burkina Faso and Niger will face expanding JNIM pressure with AES (Mali-Burkina-Niger) unified command continuing to fragment. JNIM will exploit the vacuum created by Mali's internal collapse, expanding operations into neighboring territories. Expect IED strikes, outpost seizures, and coordinated attacks across eastern Burkina Faso and central Niger. Regional command capacity will continue dissolving.

The Sahel is expected to remain in a state of advanced instability, characterized by progressive loss of government authority and opposition force consolidation of control. Mali represents the critical inflection point with imminent collapse risk within 2-8 weeks. Regional fragmentation, refugee displacement, and Sahel-wide jihadist expansion are probable outcomes absent immediate major international intervention.

MINTEL WORLD

Conflict and energy consultancy