



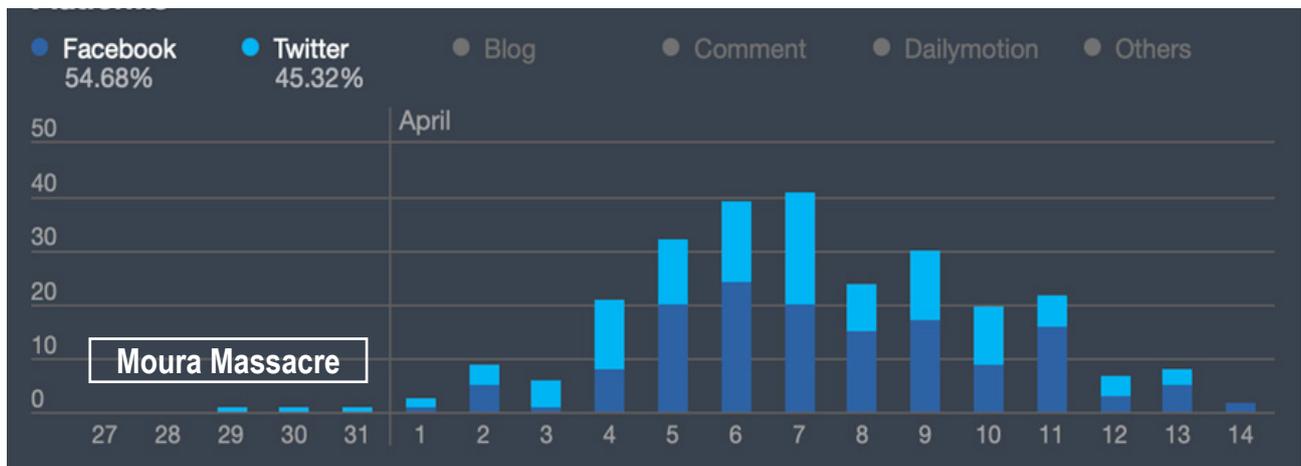
Mali: The Moura Massacre

Social Media Monitoring

09 May 2022

Between 27 and 31 March 2022, the Malian armed forces and Wagner Group soldiers allegedly committed a massacre of civilians in the village of Moura located in Djenné Circle in Mopti region during a military operation against Islamist rebels in the area. According to reports, hundreds of civilians were executed and a number of women were victims of sexual violence. Most [victims](#) were from the pastoralists Peuhl and Fulani ethnic groups who had lived in fear following a quasi-control of Islamist fighters linked to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). This report analyses how the event is being commented about by social media users with an IP address in Mali.

Number of social media posts originating in Mali on Twitter and Facebook containing the word 'Moura' between 27 March and 14 April 2022.



Background to social media posts

Discussions on social media regarding a military operation in Moura against Islamist rebels picked up following a press release by the Malian military on 01 April. The following day, on 2 April, a few local newspaper social media accounts reported on the press release, mostly framing it as a successful military operation against Islamist rebels. At the same time, a social media account with a wide following shared a [Le Monde](#) article published on 2 April consisting of witness accounts of the massacre. Public attention increased further after 5 April when Human Rights Watch published an [article](#) that detailed the violence and the Malian military issued a press release that denied the 'unfounded' allegations.

Social media users with IP addresses in Mali did not use facebook or twitter to share evidence about the massacre. There were only a few voices on social media with direct connections to the victims. No posts mentioned incidents of sexual violence during the massacre, as had been reported elsewhere.

Many social media posts were written in relative eloquent language using full sentences and a varied choice of vocabulary. On social media, the massacre in Moura was mainly discussed in relation to its 'strategic significance'. Few posts expressed shock or sadness. Opinions were not generally shared through single words or the use of emojis.

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Opinions posted on social media in relation to the massacre at Moura

A victory for Malian armed forces over djihadists

The event was widely celebrated on Malian social media accounts as representing a victory of the Malian armed forces over so-called terrorists. Part of a post which was extensively posted on a number of social media accounts is the following: *We recall the recent victory of the army especially in the jihadist sanctuary of Moura [...]. The army has affirmed having killed 203 terrorist combatants and captured 51 others.*

Another post falsely reported the following: *The Malian army has gained a great victory at Moura [...] reducing the destructive capacity of the intransigent terrorists with the destruction and seizure of their impressive war arsenal.*

Another linked the Malian victory over the rebels to the French military withdrawal: *It was sufficient for the government to have the courage to bring about the immediate departure of occupying French troops for us to witness a reversal in roles, specifically at Moura.*



Posts

On se rappelle, les récentes victoires de l'armée notamment dans le sanctuaire djihadiste de Moura, dans le cercle de Djenné. L'armée affirme y avoir tué 203 combattants terroristes et en avoir capturé 51 autres.

L'armée malienne a remporté une éclatante victoire à Moura non loin de Djenné en mettant hors d'état de nuire d'irréductibles terroristes avec à la clé, la destruction et la saisie de leur impressionnant arsenal de guerre.

Image accompanying a post celebrating the liberation of the population of Moura which had been under the threat of terrorists.

The post was shared 56 times.



Posts

Selon un habitant joins par nos soins << la population de Moura félicite l'armée Malienne pour la libération de la population de Moura qui était sous menace des terroristes depuis des mois, Toujours Selon la même source chaque famille était obligée de donner un élément de la famille pour participer au Djihad selon les terroristes. Les terroristes avaient imposé un système de contribution obligatoire aux frais de guerre soit par nature où en espèce .

Il a suffi que le gouvernement ait eu le courage d'acter le départ sans délai des troupes d'occupation françaises pour qu'on ait assisté à un inversement des rôles, précisément à Moura.

Allegations of a massacre is a misinformation campaign by France

References to a massacre were mostly dismissed as disinformation by France and its allies. A post for example argued that the resounding success by the Malian armed forces on the military operation theatre has only increased the anger and the hatred of France and its opaque allies who are resolutely engaged in a smear and disinformation campaign with the sole purpose of continuing to marginalise the Malian people to whom they have given false impressions for more than a decade.

Another commented: we can affirm that the war waged by the French press and its allies against the armed Malian forces has taken a more cynical turn since the Malian forces took full responsibility of their destiny in their hands by succeeding in eliminating an important number of terrorists in Moura.



Posts

Ce succès retentissant des FAMAS sur le théâtre des opérations n'a fait qu'attiser la colère et la haine de la France et de ses alliés opaques, résolument engagés dans une campagne de dénigrement et de désinformation dans le seul but de continuer à marginaliser un peuple qu'ils ont roulé dans la farine pendant plus d'une décennie....

On peut même affirmer que la guerre de la presse française et compagnie contre les FAMAS a pris une tournure des plus cyniques depuis que ces dernières ont pris en toute responsabilité leur destinée en mains en réussissant à éliminer un nombre important de terroristes à Moura.

French military forces are behind the massacre

Some social media discussions on the massacre in Moura tended to argue that the French army was behind the atrocities with links to the alleged massacre in Gossi. A post, for example, noted that buried bodies were apparently discovered close to the camps in Gossi after the departure of the French army BARKHANE OP. Probably acts of violence committed by BARKHANE OP.



Operation Barkhane is a French-led five country operation against Islamist groups in Africa's Sahel region. Named after the crescent-shaped dunes in the Sahara desert, Operation Barkhane, headquartered in Chad, brings together Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger since 2014 with an attempt to help governments to maintain control of national territory and to prevent that the region becomes a safe heaven for Islamist terrorist groups. The initiative was launched following a successful French intervention against rebel forces in Northern Mali in 2013. In reaction to the coup d'état in Mali in May 2021, France announced an end to the operation. On 18 March 2022 the Malian government asked France to withdraw troops.

Accusations of a massacre near Gossi: On 19 April, the French army left the military base at Gossi. Since then, several tweets with pictures of bodies have been posted on pro-Russian or fake accounts created by the Wagner Group.

It comes after a Twitter account, using the name Dia Diarra, posted images of pixelated corpses buried in sand and then accused France of atrocities. 'This is what the French left behind them when they left the base in #Gossi... We cannot keep silent!', the account [wrote](#) in a tweet. France then shared a drone [video](#) that it said showed Russian mercenaries burying bodies near a base at Gossi. Mali reacted furiously, accusing the French army of "spying" and "subversion".

Another, refusing suggestions in a post arguing that the massacre was committed by the jihadists, argued: It's an act by a well-equipped and well-trained army ! Do you really think that Barkhane would have left without mounting such attacks? Removing herdsmen is just a miniscule part of what the French army will do!



Posts

Des corps enterré aurait été découvert près du camps de #Gossi après le départ de L'armé française @ BARKHANE_OP. Probablement des exactions commis par @BARKHANE_OP.

C'est le fait d'une armée très bien équipée et très bien entraînée! Pensiez vous vraiment que Barkhane allait partir sans monter des tels coups? Enlever des bergers n'est qu'une infime partie de ce qu'elle fera!

Wagner are not present in Mali

While analysts have no doubt that Wagner is present in Mali, social media users are still discussing whether this is the case. Rumours that Wagner soldiers were behind the accusations of a massacre in Gossi, which would mean that Russian mercenaries are indeed operating in Mali, were mostly dismissed. For example, responding to claims that a drone filmed a 'white' soldier on the site, a post said: Aren't there other whites in this part of the world if these are not Wagner Russians? Another commented: It's a French dressed up as Wagner. We are not stupid.

Nevertheless, opinions on social media suggest that there is support for the Wagner group's official declared objectives. For example, one wrote: Well, even if Wagner is here in Mali to help us get rid of these armed bandits, criminals and terrorists supported by those who were supposed to be our combat partners who betrayed us, where is the problem?

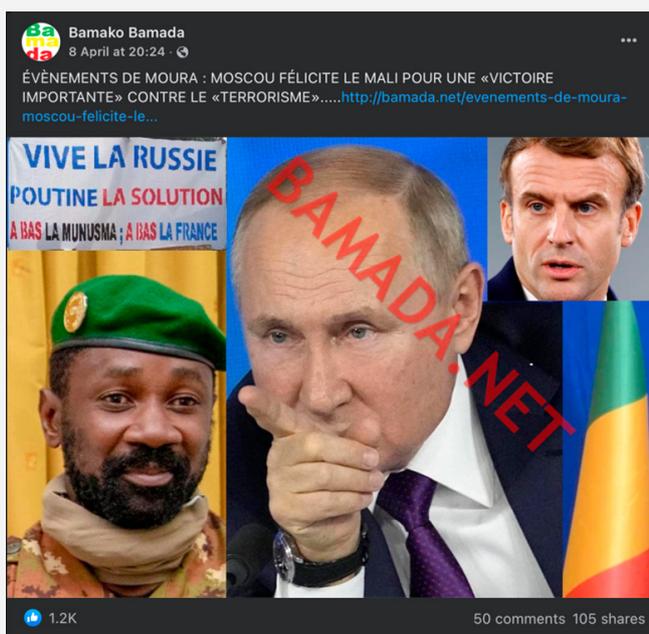
A widely shared post by a local newspaper Facebook page alleging that Russia has congratulated Mali for its 'important victory' in Moura.



Posts

Pourquoi filmer par des drones-espions (parce que le Mali n'a jamais donné son autorisation) un camp après l'avoir cédé aux FAMa ? Qu'à cela ne tienne, qu'est-ce que nous prouve la véracité des images diffusées ? N'y a-t-il pas d'autres blancs dans cette partie du monde si ce ne sont des Russes de Wagner ? C'est un français habillé en wagner. On est pas dupe

Enfin, même si Wagner est ici au Mali avec nous pour aider à se débarrasser de ces phénomènes, ces bandits armés, criminels et terroristes, soutenus par ceux-la qui étaient supposés être nos partenaires aux combats qui nous ont trahis, où est le problème ?





Wagner in Mali: The Wagner Group, a Russian private military company with links to the Kremlin and the Ministry of Defence and security services in Russia arrived in Mali in December 2021 with support from the Malian armed forces. Wagner's intervention in Mali displaces the traditional French partnership.

According to observers, Mali's military leaders turned to Russia and the Wagner Group for support to strengthen its hold on power rather than to address the growing insecurity in the country. Wagner will train Malian forces and provide security advice to Malian officials. Observers believe that Wagner will aim to spread Russian influence and to secure financial gains. Wagner-linked Russian actors have used [disinformation](#) to support its activities, while the Malian military leadership taps into anti-French sentiment for support.

Concluding discussion

No certain conclusions can be drawn as to the extent to which the opinions expressed on social media in relation to the Moura massacre reflect public opinion in Mali or the attempt to influence public opinion through an orchestrated social media campaign. The type of language used by some local newspapers and influential commentators, and the timing of their interventions, suggest that there seemed to have been a somewhat coordinated effort to discredit rumours of acts of violence. This coordination could have proceeded informally, possibly nudged or guided by the military press release on the subject. Some of the posts accusing France of being behind the massacre in Moura may be part of a Russian-led disinformation campaign.

However, the overwhelming majority of social media users supported the army's claim that the military operation targeted rebels and not civilians. At times, when lone voices suggested that the victims could have been innocent civilians, reactions from other social media users tended to respond with supportive comments in relation to the army's efforts.

Several posts do not distinguish between civilians and 'terrorists' but consider the population of Moura as terrorists. This suggests that social media use reflects and probably reinforces social and ethnic divisions within Mali. The strong anti-French sentiments expressed in many of these posts carries implications for aid agencies. On social media, negative sentiments can turn fast into expressions of hatred.

Recommendations for aid agencies

- Stay informed and vigilant in relation to public discourse. In particular aid agencies with connection to France are well advised to be aware of discussions and dominant sentiments.
- Communicate independence, neutrality and impartiality in relation to any national interests.
- Consider strengthening acceptance-base strategies by seeking advice from Malian staff and partners. Engage with Malian security staff with a view to strengthening a positive and collaborative working environment.
- Ensure that your aid agency's objectives are understood in Mali. Consider both social media users and populations who do not communicate via social media.
- For health care providers delivering services to survivors of the massacre, including survivors of sexual violence, ensure high levels of confidentiality both for the survivors and the health workers providing care.
- The protection of civilians during any military operations remains a humanitarian imperative both to protect aid workers (who are civilians) and the populations they serve. Support civil society organisations with mandates to advocate for respect of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

In case you missed them

DRC: Downing of a UN Helicopter: 06 May 2022

On 29 March 2022, a PUMA helicopter operated by the United Nations' MONUSCO peace-keeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) crashed during a reconnaissance operation in Tshanzu area, located in the northeastern province of North Kivu. Bordering with Uganda and Rwanda, the Tshanzu area had in recent days been the site of clashes between resurgent M23 rebels and the Congolese armed forces (FARDC).

This report discusses sentiments towards the UN peace-keeping operation as expressed in social media posts with IP addresses in the DRC. [Read more](#)

DRC: Ebola in Équateur Province" 29 April 2022

On the 23rd of April 2022, the health ministry of the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared an outbreak of Ebola after a case was confirmed in Mbandaka city in Équateur province. The epidemic is the fourteenth Ebola outbreak in the sub-Saharan African country since 1976, and the third in Équateur province since 2018. The announcement by the health authorities generated a significant spike in online discussions about the event in the DRC, including on social media platforms Twitter and Facebook.

In this brief report we summarise the main takeaways from our long-term monitoring of these social media discussions. [Read more](#)

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