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POLICY PAPER

COUNTERING JNIM'S DRONE PROLIFERATION IN THE SAHEL

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Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), alongside the Front de Libération de l'Azawad (FLA), has pioneered drone warfare in the Sahel–evolving from its first armed strike in September 2023 to over a dozen coordinated operations by June 2025. JNIM's drone-enabled attacks–spanning kamikaze strikes, ISR-guided assaults, and visual propaganda–now target Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo. It is the only known armed group in Africa–and one of the few globally–to conduct sustained, operational drone warfare across three countries. This cross-border reach and combat capabilities sets it apart not just in frequency, but also in geographic ambition.

The FLA's early adoption of Vertical Take Off and Landing (VTOL) and First Person View (FPV) drones, combined with possible technical diffusion through joint operations and the integration of former FLA personnel, has likely contributed to JNIM's accelerating drone capabilities. JNIM's deepening integration of drone warfare presents several risks. First, the technical barrier to entry appears to have collapsed: commercial-grade drones modified with consumer-accessible tools and offline artificial intelligence (AI) are now sufficient for increasingly lethal operations. Second, geographic expansion is accelerating. Third, JNIM's drone use appears shaped by grievance and psychological signaling, with visual propaganda often mimicking state strike footage to assert dominance and contest state airpower. Without coordinated intervention, the threat will likely evolve faster than current systems can track or counter. With the Sahel now being referred to as the 'world's terrorism hotspot', immediate action is imperative, and closing these gaps is as much about creativity and coordination as it is about hardware.

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INTRODUCTION

Drone use by non-state armed groups in Africa remained limited until mid-2024, despite earlier precedents set in the Middle East. In the Sahel, this changed with JNIM's adoption of drone technology, which has evolved quickly from isolated surveillance to structured operations involving intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance (ISR), direct strikes, and coordinated assaults. The group's first documented drone activity occurred in Bandiagara, Mali, in September 2023. Since then, confirmed incidents have climbed to over two dozen. Of these, 82% have occurred since March 2025, marking a sharp escalation in frequency and tactical complexity.

Key incidents include the kamikaze drone strike on April 9, 2025, in Togo that killed five soldiers;[1] the May 31 operation in Kabankoura involving multiple FPV drones; and the June 12 strike on the Tiby training center, which injured over 30 recruits.[2] These examples reflect increasing confidence in both drone deployment and integration with ground operations.

The pace and consistency of these attacks suggest sustained access to equipment (whether procured, modified, or captured) and continued operational learning. Burkina Faso's use of TB2 drones since late 2023 may have contributed to this trend.[3] Since that period, JNIM has released videos mimicking state drone strike footage, indicating a possible symbolic or retaliatory response. Early experimentation with drones by the Front de Libération de l'Azawad (FLA), combined with the confirmed transfer of some personnel to JNIM—including former commander Colonel Hussein Ghulam—appears to have contributed to JNIM's technical adaptation. While his name has been linked to recent operations, his current role has not been formally verified.[4]

This policy paper analyzes JNIM's tactical, technological, and symbolic advancements, assesses regional risks, and provides actionable countermeasures for military and counterterrorism (CT) stakeholders. This paper is built on open-source reporting, systematic tracking of drone use by the authors, and detailed analysis of confirmed incidents to map JNIM's evolving capabilities and propose practical countermeasures.

REGIONAL CONTEXT: JNIM'S DISTINCT ADVANTAGE

JNIM's drone activity is more frequent and geographically consistent than other armed groups in Sub-Saharan Africa (see Figure 1). While the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) used a grenade-armed quadcopter in Wajikoro and Wulgo in Borno State, Nigeria (March 24, 2025, killing 12 soldiers), and the Islamic State-Sahel (IS-Sahel) deployed an FPV drone in Tillabéri, Niger (May 2025), these instances remain isolated.[5] Al-Shabaab, the Islamic State in Central Africa Province (ISCAP), and Boko Haram continue to rely on drones primarily for surveillance or propaganda

1. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "ACLED Conflict Report: Burkina Faso," acleddata.com, April 30,2025

2. Reuters, "Sahel Militant Activity Intensifies," reuters.com, June 5, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sahel-militant-activity-intensifies-2025-06-05

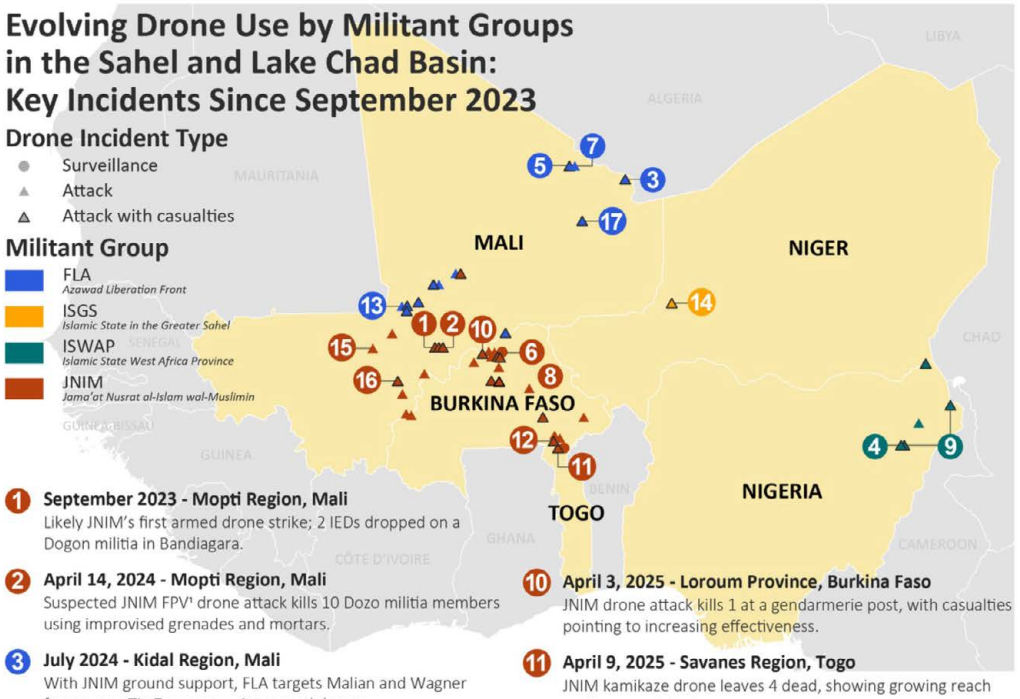
3. Human Rights Watch, "Burkina Faso: Drone Strikes on Civilians Apparent War Crimes," hrw.org, January 30, 2024; Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Africa Overview: April 2025," acleddata.com, April 4, 2025.

4. Militant Wire, "Escalation and Coordination: JNIM's Drone Warfare in the Sahel," accessed June 27, 2025 (https://www.militantwire.com/p/escalation-and-coordination-jnims)

5. Reuters, "Islamist Fighters Attack Two Nigerian Military Bases, Security Sources Say," March 26, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/islamist-fighters-attack-two-nigerian-military-bases-security-sources-say-2025-03-26/.

purposes, with no confirmed strikes in 2024–2025. In Galgaduud, Somalia (February 2025), for example, Al-Shabaab's reconnaissance drones were intercepted before impact.[6]

In contrast, JNIM has conducted repeated drone-enabled attacks across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo in 2025, often coordinating drone use with ground assaults. Examples include Djibo (February), Timbuktu (May 12), and Kabankoura (May 31), where ISR drones were used to support tactical engagements. The FLA's documented use of VTOL and FPV drones since February 2025 follows a similar pattern, reflecting a shift toward structured integration and steady adaptation.[7]



1 September 2023 - Mopti Region, Mali
Likely JNIM's first armed drone strike; 2 IEDs dropped on a Dogon militia in Bandiagara.

2 April 14, 2024 - Mopti Region, Mali
Suspected JNIM FPV[1] drone attack kills 10 Dozo militia members using improvised grenades and mortars.

3 July 2024 - Kidal Region, Mali
With JNIM ground support, FLA targets Malian and Wagner forces near Tin Zaouaten using armed drones.

4 December 24, 2024 - Borno State, Nigeria
ISWAP drone attacks on two Borno bases injure 5 soldiers, marking early armed drone use.

5 February 11, 2025 - Kidal Region, Mali
FLA deploys VTOL[2] drones against Malian army positions marks a major technological leap; use pivotal in downing of helicopter.

6 February 14, 2025 - Soum Province, Burkina Faso
First recorded instance of JNIM using drones for reconnaissance in an attack on the Burkinabe military near Djibo.

7 February 21, 2025 - Kidal Region, Mali
FLA attacks a Malian-Russian base in Tessalit with an FPV kamikaze drone possibly carrying an anti-tank RPG warhead.

8 March 2025 - Multiple regions, Burkina Faso
JNIM drones drop explosives on military positions in Centre-Est, Centre-Nord, Est, and Sahel regions. Limited casualties reported.

9 March 24, 2025 - Borno State, Nigeria
ISWAP drone attacks at army bases kill 15, signaling increased precision and training advances.

10 April 3, 2025 - Loroum Province, Burkina Faso
JNIM drone attack kills 1 at a gendarmerie post, with casualties pointing to increasing effectiveness.

11 April 9, 2025 - Savanes Region, Togo
JNIM kamikaze drone leaves 4 dead, showing growing reach and improved designs.

12 April 24, 2025 - Koulpélogo Province, Burkina Faso
In a sign of tactical advancement, JNIM uses drones for real-time surveillance during ground attack.

13 May 9, 2025 - Tombouctou Region, Mali
Drone strike hits Wagner base and TB2[3] relay station, marking FLA's first use of drones to attack drone infrastructure.

14 May 25, 2025 - Tahoua Region, Niger
ISGS uses kamikaze drones in 3-hour assault, killing 41 in Eknewane—among the deadliest militant drone attacks to date.

15 May 31, 2025 - Ségou Region, Mali
Suspected JNIM militants launch 2 armed FPV drones simultaneously in Kabankoura, signaling drone coordination.

16 June 12, 2025 - Ségou Region, Mali
Likely JNIM drone attack on Tiby training camp injures ~30; defensive measures suggest growing counter-drone capability.

17 June 12, 2025 - Kidal Region, Mali
FLA drone strike on Africa Corps convoy leaves many dead and injured, reflects tighter coordination and advancing technology.

[1]FPV - first-person view; [2]VTOL - vertical take-off and landing; [3]Turkish-made tractical drone

Sources: Africa Center for Strategic Studies, ACLED, Critical Threats, Aldebaran Consulting, GNET, Military Africa, ISS Africa, Reuters, X posts from @SahelAnalyst, @BurkinaSec, @NigeriaDefence, @TogoSecurity, and other open-source intelligence accounts (Sept 2023–Jun 2025).

6. Institute for Security Studies, "Lake Chad Basin: Insurgents Raise the Stakes with Weaponised Drones," issafrica.org, accessed June 05, 2025, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/lake-chad-basin-insurgents-raise-the-stakes-with-weaponised-drones.

7. Military Africa, "Africa's Insurgents and Terrorists Are Adopting Drones," militaryafrica.com, February 23, 2025 (https://www.military.africa/2025/02/the-rise-of-drone-warfare-insurgents-and-terrorists-in-africa/)

The timing and nature of these developments suggest that both groups are refining drone use through regular deployment. Personnel movement– particularly the transfer of former FLA members to JNIM–may be facilitating technical knowledge transfer. JNIM remains the only known armed group in Africa conducting sustained drone operations across three national borders. Its current pattern of pairing drones with ground units indicates that drone use is no longer experimental, but increasingly incorporated into routine planning and execution.

TACTICAL LEARNING AND THE FLA–JNIM NEXUS

The low-cost, field-adapted model of drone warfare seen in Ukraine appears to have influenced how armed groups in the Sahel are approaching drone integration. The FLA was the first group in the region to adopt a more structured approach. According to statements by FLA spokesperson Mohamed el Maouloud Ramadane following the July 2024 joint FLA–JNIM attack on Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) and Wagner positions in Tinzaouaten, the group had acquired its own drones and trained a dedicated team over a ten-month period.[8] While he denied receiving drones directly from Ukraine or JNIM, some reporting suggests Ukrainian military intelligence may have contributed to shaping FLA's tactical model in advance of the attack.[9]

In mid-2024, Colonel Hussein Ghulam (previously with FLA) joined JNIM. His name has since been linked to the group's drone operations, including during the Dioura strike in May 2025. Throughout early 2025, both FLA and JNIM demonstrated rapid improvements in drone tactics, with similar patterns of deployment and increasing technical capability. While it is not possible to confirm direct coordination between the two groups, the timing and geographic overlap suggest potential for knowledge transfer or mutual observation.[10] This dynamic may be contributing to the pace and direction of drone adaptation across northern Mali.

TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESSION AND AI ENABLEMENT

FLA's use of modified VTOL drones in early 2025 marked a shift toward structured integration of drone technology. This timeline coincided with, and in some cases preceded, JNIM's adoption of similar tools. Early indicators of JNIM's drone evolution, from improvised release systems in Tessalit (April 2024) to FPV-modified drones dropping improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Djibo (February 2025), suggest sustained experimentation and technical refinement.[11] By mid-2025, JNIM operations included ISR-guided targeting, dual drone-ground coordination, and standardized payloads, pointing to increasingly deliberate use of drones within its tactical planning.

Open-source AI tools may be supporting this shift. In other conflict contexts, offline models have been used to assist with firmware modifications, flight path planning, and hardware troubleshooting.

8. RFI, "Mali: Les Rebelles du CSP Combattent Désormais avec des Drones," September 12, 2024, https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240912-mali-les-rebelles-du-csp-combattent-désormais-avec-des-drones.

9. Kyiv Independent, "Kyiv Denies Media Reports about Supplying Drones to Mali Rebels," accessed June 27, 2025, https://kyivindependent.com/kyiv-denies-media-reports-about-supplying-drones-to-mali-rebels/.

10. Militant Wire, "Escalation and Coordination: JNIM's Drone Warfare in the Sahel," accessed June 27, 2025, https://www.militantwire.com/p/escalation-and-coordination-jnims.

11. Military Africa, "Africa's Insurgents and Terrorists Are Adopting Drones," militaryafrica.com, February 23, 2025 (https://www.military.africa/2025/02/the-rise-of-drone-warfare-insurgents-and-terrorists-in-africa/)

JNIM's ability to bypass geofencing, integrate mortar payloads, and produce edited strike footage indicates a growing internal capacity to modify and deploy commercial systems.[12] These capabilities likely reflect repeated trial-and-error, as well as access to technical guides or models that do not require online connectivity. If these trends continue, further adaptations, such as greater onboard autonomy or expanded coordination, could emerge over time.

SYMBOLIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

Burkina Faso acquired Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones in late 2022. The TB2 gained global attention for its effectiveness in asymmetric warfare, particularly in Ukraine, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Burkina Faso remains the only African state to consistently release footage of drone strikes. These videos are often graphic and framed to demonstrate state control over contested spaces. JNIM appears to have taken note of this approach. Since early 2025, the group has consistently recorded and disseminated footage from its own drone-enabled operations, including those in Djibo (February), Dioura (May 23), and Tiby (June 12), where the footage shows soldiers responding under fire.

The visual style and structure of these videos resemble those released by state actors, particularly in how they emphasize surveillance, targeting, and aftermath. JNIM's adoption of this format may be intended to signal capability, assert presence, and challenge state narratives of superiority. The use of drone footage in this way appears to serve both operational and psychological objectives, reinforcing the group's messaging and shaping how its actions are perceived by supporters, rivals, and the public.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND STRATEGIC RISKS

JNIM's sustained integration of drone warfare has introduced a set of risks that are both immediate and structural. The technical barrier to entry has lowered significantly. Commercial drones, paired with consumer-accessible tools and offline AI, are now sufficient for operations that can produce tactical effects. Geographic spread is increasing, with confirmed attacks across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo, and signs of possible extension into other Sahelian and coastal states. Targeting patterns suggest that operations are shaped not only by tactical opportunity but also by symbolic and emotional triggers. The use of drones following state airstrikes points to a feedback loop, with retaliation serving both strategic and psychological functions.

Existing countermeasures have not kept pace. JNIM's ability to hit secured military sites raises questions about infrastructure vulnerabilities, as well as the group's apparent use of firmware overrides enabled by offline AI. These tools (many of them open-source) allow for flight path customization, 3D-printed component integration, and geofence bypassing without emitting signals that would typically aid attribution. The posture of the group also appears to have shifted. Rather than testing drone capabilities, JNIM is incorporating them systematically. The use of drones alongside ground operations - particularly for ISR and real-time targeting - suggests a transition to doctrine.

12. Allen, Nate. "Military Drone Proliferation Marks Destabilizing Shift in Africa's Armed Conflicts." Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Spotlight, April 21, 2025.

Urban areas, especially those linked to state infrastructure or symbolic power, may be increasingly attractive targets. Their density and visibility offer leverage, even with limited payloads. Patterns from other theaters suggest that once battlefield effectiveness is established, groups may repurpose drones for soft-target, high-impact operations - particularly against private sector assets such as fuel depots, transport corridors, and mining sites.[13]

While states and partners are monitoring these developments, gaps remain in coordination, adaptation, and local capacity. There are opportunities to incorporate battlefield insights, such as how obstructed environments or smoke influence survival rates into unit-level protocols. But doing so requires a structure that can test, adapt, and communicate tactics quickly. Innovation may not come solely from hardware, but from how regional actors approach coordination, scenario planning, and the use of locally available tools.

CONCLUSION

JNIM's drone campaign has moved quickly from experimentation to operational doctrine. In less than two years, the group has built the capacity to deploy drones across three countries, integrating them into battlefield tactics, reconnaissance, and visual propaganda. The pace of adoption, the shift in targeting, and the growing symbolic use of drone footage all point to a deliberate and evolving strategy.

Several dynamics appear to be reinforcing this shift. The absorption of FLA personnel with drone expertise, the use of offline AI tools to overcome geofencing and optimize payload delivery, and the replication of state-style propaganda footage suggest that JNIM is drawing from multiple sources of adaptation. Its attacks are increasingly shaped by psychological and retaliatory drivers, not just tactical ones.

While other groups in the region have experimented with drones, JNIM is the only one conducting coordinated, cross-border drone operations at this scale. Its ability to iterate quickly, pair drones with ground assaults, and exploit symbolic targets indicates that drone warfare is now central to how the group signals power, contests state control, and responds to perceived grievances. Recognizing this shift, and the technical, emotional, and narrative layers driving it, will be critical for understanding where this threat is heading.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Coordination and Information Sharing

Create a Standing Multi-Stakeholder Task Force
Establish a permanent coordination mechanism bringing together CT officials, drone warfare experts, AI researchers, and regional military planners. This task force could serve as the operational backbone for several of the recommendations listed, including overseeing red team exercises tailored to Sahel-specific threats; integrating AI and drone innovations into tactical planning; convening and sharing findings from open-source intelligence (OSINT) monitoring cells;

13. Daniel M. Gerstein and Erin N. Leidy, Emerging Technology and Risk Analysis: Unmanned Aerial Systems Intelligent Swarm Technology, Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center, RR-A2380-1, RAND Corporation, February 15, 2024, accessed May 18, 2025, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2380-1.html.

and coordinating the timely release of defensive footage as part of a broader narrative defense strategy. It should also act as a central node for threat intelligence sharing and dissemination across regional militaries and civilian sectors. While the structure can remain light-touch, regular engagement is essential to ensure rapid adaptation, prevent siloing, and maximize the impact of emerging innovations across domains.

Strengthen Regional Coordination Against JNIM's Expanding Drone Threat
JNIM is the only armed group in the Sahel conducting drone-enabled attacks across three countries—Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo. Its tactics are spreading, with drone strikes often paired with ground assaults and adapted to local terrain. This growing cross-border campaign requires a coordinated response. Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Togo, and Benin should establish a dedicated channel for frontline coordination. This should include intelligence sharing, aligned response protocols, and joint planning for counter-drone operations. Coordination at this level is critical to stay ahead of JNIM's evolving capabilities and contain its geographic reach.

Tactical Adaptation

Conduct Red Team Exercises for Sahel-Specific Context
Run red team exercises tailored to the Sahel's terrain and threat environment, simulating JNIM's ISR-guided and multi-drone tactics observed since March 2025. These exercises could bring together Sahelian military planners, counterterrorism experts familiar with JNIM behavior, and AI/drone warfare specialists to identify gaps, test assumptions, and develop practical response strategies. They could also serve as a core activity coordinated by the proposed multi-stakeholder task force and directly inform complementary efforts - such as regional OSINT monitoring, AI-supported wargaming simulations, and the development of indigenous counter-drone technologies.

Integrate Open-Source AI Threats into Initial Red Team Exercises
Initial red team exercises should incorporate scenarios involving less-monitored, open-source AI models like Mistral and LLaMA, which JNIM may already be using to support drone modifications. These tools can enable firmware overrides, autonomous flight path optimization, and comms-free execution. Testing against potential AI-enabled tactics from the outset will help identify detection blind spots, inform disruption strategies, and anticipate how emerging tools could lower replication barriers for other groups. Findings could feed directly into the proposed multi-stakeholder task force and guide collaboration with local AI developers and drone engineers.

Strengthen Tactical Protocols for Drone-Assisted Ground Assaults
While some response planning may already be underway, many units remain under-equipped for the specific dynamics of drone-assisted assaults - particularly those involving real-time surveillance, ISR-guided targeting, or coordinated air-ground strikes. Militaries across the Sahel could prioritize scenario-based protocols that explicitly address these threats, including fallback maneuvers under drone observation, detection drills in urban environments, and defensive coordination when jamming or concealment fails. These protocols would help identify operational blind spots and enable faster adaptation. Insights from red team exercises and OSINT monitoring could feed into regular updates, with the proposed multi-stakeholder task force serving as a coordination and dissemination hub.

Use AI to Jumpstart Scenario Planning for Drone-Assisted Assaults
Sahelian militaries and CT actors could immediately begin using open-source AI tools to simulate drone-assisted ground assaults, including ISR-guided targeting and coordinated strike patterns. These AI-supported wargames can serve as a low-cost, low-barrier way to jumpstart scenario planning and tactical adaptation - especially in contexts where full-scale red team exercises may not yet be feasible. This process could help identify practical response strategies, inform the development of unit-level protocols, and help identify vulnerabilities across urban and rural terrains. The proposed multi-stakeholder task force could help facilitate this effort by bringing together drone warfare experts, Sahel insurgent group specialists, and local AI developers to refine scenarios and guide implementation.

Compile and Disseminate Tactical Adaptations That Can Be Implemented Now
While larger counter-drone systems are being developed, Sahelian militaries can adopt immediate, low-cost tactics that improve survivability. Lessons from other theaters offer concrete, evidence-based adjustments that can be integrated into training now. For example, an analysis of 5,000 drone strike videos by Defense Specialist Louis Saillans found a 67% survival rate in obstructed environments, and a 32% increase in survival rate when smoke was present (confuses visual tracking systems). Guidance like this could be compiled, adapted to local terrain, and disseminated across frontline units. The proposed task force could support this by coordinating with OSINT researchers, drone warfare experts, and tactical trainers to synthesize and distribute actionable insights without delay.

Monitoring & Intelligence

Establish a Regional Drone Incident and OSINT Intelligence Platform
Create a shared, real-time database to log drone incidents across the Sahel and coastal West Africa, including location, type, target, and outcome. This platform should also incorporate open-source monitoring of Telegram and other channels to track claims, footage, and tactical shifts, giving early warning of evolving threats. The goal is to centralize analysis and ensure countries learn from incidents beyond their borders. The multi-stakeholder task force could manage the platform, ensuring updates are verified, actionable, and accessible across military, intelligence, and civilian sectors.

Ensure Basic Forensic Analysis of All Recovered Armed Group Drones
Require that every drone recovered from JNIM, FLA, or other armed groups–whether captured after being shot down, crashed, or retrieved post-strike–undergo basic forensic analysis. This includes serial numbers, technical modifications, and signs of repurposing. JNIM routinely displays looted military equipment, including drones, after ambushes and convoy attacks, underscoring the need to track how these assets are acquired and redeployed. A coordinated process, overseen by the task force, could standardize documentation and ensure that findings feed into tactical adaptation and future threat assessments.

Innovation and Capability Building

Fund Partnerships with Local Tech Actors to Accelerate Tactical Counter-Drone Innovation
Defense ministries and donors should invest in partnerships between Sahelian militaries and local drone, AI, and software specialists to rapidly develop terrain-adapted tools for both countering and deploying drones. These collaborations could produce lightweight, low-cost countermeasures

like signal decoys or thermal alerts for use in mobile or remote settings, while also supporting the development of offensive capabilities such as ISR payloads or loitering munitions to disrupt VEO operations and protect convoys. By reducing reliance on foreign imports and leveraging local talent attuned to the region's operational realities, these partnerships would build faster, more relevant innovation loops between developers and frontline units. The proposed task force could play a key role in coordinating these efforts.

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ANNEX I : TIMELINE OF DRONE INCIDENTS BY JNIM, ISGS, BOKO HARAM, ISWAP, AND AL-SHABAAB (SEPTEMBER 2023 – JUNE 22, 2025)

-
Date: September 2023 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM conducted first armed drone strike, dropping two IEDs on Dan Na Ambassagou positions in Bandiagara, Mali, using a quadcopter drone.
Casualties: 0 killed
-
Date: April 14, 2024 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM suspected of using FPV quadcopter drones with modified grenades and mortar rounds to kill 10 Dozo militia members in Mali.
Casualties: 10 killed
-
Date: May 20, 2024 (Surveillance, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM used drone to monitor attack in Boni, Niger.
Casualties: Not reported
-
Date: July 2024 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: Azawad forces (CSP/FLA) deployed armed drones in Tinzaouatene, Mali, targeting Russian mercenaries and downing a Malian helicopter in Kidal.
Casualties: Several dozen killed
-
Date: July 20, 2024 (Surveillance, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM used drone to monitor attack in Kpekankandi, Togo.
Casualties: Not reported
-
Date: September 11, 2024 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: 08:50
Details: CSP/FLA drone dropped bombs on FAMa and Wagner at Goundam camp, Mali, damaging a wall. Up to 5 suicide drones allegedly used.
Casualties: Not reported
-
Date: September 22, 2024 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: 11:00
Details: Suspected Azawad fighters' drones bombed FAMa camp in Timbuktu, Mali, causing panic, disrupting celebrations, and damaging vehicles.
Casualties: Not reported

Date: September 25, 2024 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: 15:00
Details: Azawad National Army (CSP-DPA) drone dropped 2 bombs on FAMa/Wagner camp in Lere, Mali, targeting Wagner command post.
Casualties: Not specified, casualties reported
-
Date: October 1, 2024 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: 06:00
Details: CSP-DPA drone attacked FAMa camp in Lere, Mali, allegedly killing and injuring soldiers.
Casualties: Not specified, casualties reported
-
Date: October 4, 2024 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: 10:00
Details: CSP-DPA drone struck FAMa camp in Goundam, Mali, with multiple strikes claimed by CSP-DPA spokesman.
Casualties: Not reported
-
Date: December 24, 2024 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: ~02:00
Details: ISWAP used grenade-strapped drones to attack Nigerian army bases in Wajiroko, Damboa LGA, Nigeria, injuring 5 soldiers.
Casualties: 0 killed, 5 injured
-
Date: January 24, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Afternoon/Evening
Details: JNIM drone dropped 5+ shells on FAMa convoy between Diallo and Mandali, Mali, alongside IED attack and ambush.
Casualties: Not specified
-
Date: February 11, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: FLA used VTOL drones (FDG 410) to attack Malian army positions in northern Mali, downing a helicopter in Tessalit.
Casualties: 16 killed
-
Date: February 14, 2025 (Attack + Surveillance, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM used FPV drone to drop IEDs (plastic bottles) on military positions in Djibo, Burkina Faso, killing 3 soldiers.
Casualties: 3 killed
-
Date: February 18, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM attacked Djibo, Burkina Faso, with FPV drone debris suggesting explosive drops; 6 soldiers killed.
Casualties: 6 killed

Date: February 19, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Morning
Details: JNIM booby-trapped drone attacked FAMa camp in Kemparana, Mali, with no casualties or damage.
Casualties: 0 killed

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Date: February 19, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: Suspected JNIM drone attempted to drop explosive on Malian position near Koury, Mali.
Casualties: Not reported

-

Date: February 21, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Afternoon
Details: FLA used FPV kamikaze drone (possible PG-7V warhead) to strike Malian-Russian base in Kidal; intercepted drone in Tessalit.
Casualties: Not specified, casualties reported

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Date: March 20, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM used two FPV drones to attack military position in Zongo, Burkina Faso.
Casualties: Not reported

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Date: March 22, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM used drones around Djibo, Burkina Faso, over 48 hours.
Casualties: Not reported

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Date: March 24, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: ~06:00
Details: ISWAP and Boko Haram used drones to initiate assault on Nigerian army bases in Wajiroko and Wulgo, Nigeria, followed by ground attack.
Casualties: 12 killed

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Date: March 31, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM used drones in attacks in Lanfiala, Segou, Mali, alongside ground clashes with Dozo militia.
Casualties: Not reported

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Date: March 31, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: Explosive-laden drone downed by security forces in Sollé, Burkina Faso.
Casualties: Not reported

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Date: April 3, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM drone with Yugoslavian 60mm M57 mortar bomb struck gendarmerie post in Loroum, Burkina Faso.
Casualties: 1 killed

Date: April 9, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: ~10:00
Details: JNIM suspected kamikaze drone attack on Togolese military position in Djignandjoaga, Togo.
Casualties: 5 killed
-
Date: April 24, 2025 (Attack + Surveillance, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM used drone to monitor ground attack in Soudougui, Burkina Faso, bypassing defensive trench.
Casualties: Not reported
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Date: May 9, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: FLA drone attacked Wagner base and TB2 drone relay in Mali, both targets hit.
Casualties: Not reported
-
Date: May 9, 2025 (Surveillance, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM militants trained with DJI quadcopter armed with 60mm T-63 HE mortar bombs for surveillance in Sahel.
Casualties: 0 killed
-
Date: May 9, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: FLA drones dropped explosives near vehicles and buildings in Lere, Mali.
Casualties: Not reported
-
Date: May 23, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Early hours (~3 hours)
Details: JNIM, led by former FLA Commander Hussein Ghulam, used 3 suicide drones in attack on Dioura military base, Mali, temporarily controlling the city.
Casualties: At least 1 killed
-
Date: May 25, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Early hours (~3 hours)
Details: ISGS used kamikaze drones in a 3-hour assault on Nigerien outpost in Eknewane, Niger, killing 41 soldiers.
Casualties: 41 killed
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Date: May 26, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: 08:30
Details: FLA launched 3 FPV drones against FAMa camp in Soumpi, Mali, killing 2 soldiers and wounding 13.
Casualties: 2 killed, 13 wounded
-

Date: June 1, 2025 (Attack + Surveillance, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM used drone to expose defenses during Koumbri attack, Burkina Faso, aiding ground assault.
Casualties: Not reported

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Date: June 3, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Early hours (~3 hours)
Details: JNIM attack on Boulkessi, Mali, monitored by drone, with 100+ soldiers killed.
Casualties: 100+ killed

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Date: June 4, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Morning (~4 hours)
Details: ISWAP and Boko Haram used armed drones and grenade launchers in attack on IDP camp in Mallam Fatori, Nigeria, killing 12, including 3 commanders.
Casualties: 12 killed

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Date: June 5, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM used drone in attack on Mahou barracks, Sikasso, Mali, capturing the site.
Casualties: Not reported

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Date: June 8, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM shot down Burkina Faso military DJI drone near Bourzanga, Bam Province, using small arms or counter-drone system.
Casualties: 0 killed

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Date: June 12, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: JNIM kamikaze drone attack on Tiby Training Center, San, Mali, led by former FLA Colonel Hussein Ghulam.
Casualties: 30 injured, unverified 67 killed

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Date: June 12, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: FLA used FPV kamikaze drones in Aguelhoc and Kidal, Mali, targeting Russian Africa Corps.
Casualties: Unknown

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Date: June 15, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: ~19:30
Details: Burkina Faso forces thwarted drone attack in Diabo, Gourma province.
Casualties: Not reported

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Date: June 15, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: FLA drone strike targeted Russian Africa Corps convoy near Lere, Mali.
Casualties: Not reported

Date: June 18, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Not specified
Details: Suspected JNIM used explosive-laden drones in attack on security post in Dioura, Mali.
Casualties: Not reported
-
Date: June 22, 2025 (Attack, Confirmed)
Time: Morning
Details: FLA drones targeted FAMa/Africa Corps convoy on Niafunke-Lere axis, Mali, causing casualties and damage.
Casualties: Not specified, casualties reported
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

NICCOLA MILNES

Niccola Milnes is a senior advisor and researcher with over 14 years of experience navigating complex geopolitical challenges across Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and South Asia. With expertise in conflict, security, and counterterrorism, she blends strategic advisory, risk assessment, and research-driven evaluation to support evidence-based decision-making in volatile environments. Niccola has led evaluations, context analyses, and monitoring systems for USAID, the EU, the UK, and the Netherlands, helping shape programming on stabilization, migration, counter-trafficking, and violent extremism. Her work bridges policy and implementation-translating field research into actionable insights for governments and partners. She is known for delivering practical, politically informed analysis that strengthens program relevance and impact in rapidly evolving contexts.

RIDA LYAMMOURI

Rida Lyammouri is a senior fellow at the Policy Center for the New South (PCNS). He is also a senior West Africa and Lake Chad Basin researcher and advisor, with expertise in regional conflicts, violent extremism, climate change, migration, and trafficking. His research activities focus on geopolitics and international relations in the West African Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, regions he has worked on for about 14 years, including in the field. He has extensive experience supporting both governmental and non-governmental organizations in the areas of international development, security, countering violent extremism and terrorism, preventing conflicts, ensuring humanitarian access, and migration. Mr. Lyammouri has contributed to in-depth research and analysis reports aiming at building deeper understanding of regional and domestic challenges. He is often solicited by various stakeholders to provide policy recommendations on how to address various security, economic, and political challenges related to West African Sahel and Lake Chad Basin.

ABOUT THE POLICY CENTER FOR THE NEW SOUTH

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of Africa as integral parts of the global South.

The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

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