

## West Africa Mining Security Conference *Summary of Key Conclusions*

The West Africa Mining Security (WAMS) conference was held under Chatham House rules. The summary of proceedings is provided as aggregated information for participants' personal and internal institutional use only.

### **Context**

The impacts of the Libyan uprising in 2011 continue to be felt in West Africa. Breaches of Gadhafi's weapons caches led to an unprecedented flow of black market weapons into the region. The resulting instability led to a coup d'état in Bamako in 2012, which allowed Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and later IS-affiliated factions to expand south into Mali and Burkina Faso.

The recent disruption of Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria has partially displaced the problem to other theatres. Although there is little evidence of a widespread influx of IS fighters into West Africa, AQIM and IS-affiliated groups have increased their presence in the region. In Niger, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) has recently renewed its pledge of support for the central leadership of IS and increased attacks against government targets north of Niamey.

The fall of the Compaoré regime in 2014 eroded the capacity of Burkina Faso's security and intelligence apparatus to respond to terrorist threats. At the same time, community discontent with the government and high rates of poverty allowed the expansion of influence of terrorist groups in some regions. While Burkina Faso's small, poorly equipped and poorly trained military and police lack the capacity to respond effectively to the threat, there is little appetite within the international community to provide major military assistance. Overall, the security outlook in Burkina Faso is poor.

In Mali and Burkina Faso, multilateral security operations engage in active targeting, training and containment, but are unlikely to have a strategic affect. MINUSMA, which is the UN's deadliest peacekeeping mission, faces major challenges, including the strength of its mandate; poor intelligence sharing among contributing states; inconsistencies in troop capabilities; and limitations on logistics and mobility. The capacity of the Malian military is extremely constrained, including weapons with no ammunition, trucks with no fuel, insufficient rations and absent leadership. There are no plans to expand the current peacekeeping operations in Mali to directly address the terrorist threat.

### **Threat**

In this context, security in parts of West Africa, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger has deteriorated further in the past 12 months. Terrorist groups (Ansaroul Islam, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin [JNIM], and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara), often acting in concert with local bandits, have occupied large areas of east and south eastern Burkina Faso since mid-2018. New violent extremist groups and coalitions have formed and expanded beyond the Sahel and increased the tempo of complex attacks on symbolic targets.

To date, there has been an over emphasis on religion as a driver of recruitment and radicalisation. Rather, multiple and overlapping factors, such as income and protection, particularly in locations where the state

is absent or contested, are more significant drivers of recruitment. Terrorist groups increasingly focus on addressing the concerns of local communities and exploit community divisions and regional vulnerabilities. Groups often respond to local needs faster and more effectively than the state, and use a combination of intimidation, exploitation of ethnic tensions and financial control to gain influence. Violent extremist groups are segmented, which provide opportunities to engage differently with potential foot soldiers or leaders. To address the threat effectively, military intervention is sometimes necessary, but always insufficient without broader community focussed, political and economic strategies.

Terrorist groups effectively use kidnap for ransom (KFR) attacks to raise funds. Large ransoms paid by some countries have helped sustain terrorist groups and fund their operations. Other sources of terrorist financing include trans-Saharan smuggling, taxation, extortion, theft and external financing. The illegal artisanal gold trade has been flagged as a potential source of funding in Mali and Niger and Burkina Faso.

The potential 'spill over' of insecurity from Burkina Faso represents a challenge to the coastal West African states, which lack the operational coordination and capacity to respond effectively. Kidnap for ransom and other 'hit and run' terrorist operations, conducted from relative safe havens in Mali and Burkina Faso, are likely to increase in coastal states in the short to medium term. Ghana's vulnerabilities include 181 known unapproved border crossing points; high levels of youth unemployment; existing religious, ethnic, and political tensions.

### ***Industry and government response***

It is possible that extremist groups will shift focus to commercial targeting in the future, which will require a more securitised approach to mining operations. The industry in the region faces threats from KFR, direct action raids and denial of access attacks. The risk of attacks from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are likely to increase. Companies are encouraged to identify the level of risk from IEDs; engage in risk management and mitigation; and complete route assessments and a risk registry.

The Australian Government's ability to respond in the event of a major security incident, or kidnap for ransom case, is limited in West Africa. As a result, companies are urged to take appropriate security measures to address the threat and mitigate the risk.

The security response should be proportionate to the risk and insurance should include appropriate cover for potential threats. While large mining operations often have sophisticated security architecture, smaller exploration companies, which lack financial resources, face greater challenges operating in high threat environments.

Companies are encouraged to:

- **Fund** security operations appropriately;
- **Conduct** risk assessments;
- **Maintain** effective plans, policies and practices supported by training and drills;
- **Review** the adequacy of insurance;
- **Observe** effective security protocols;
- **Promote** a culture of security awareness;
- **Maintain** a high level of situational awareness;
- **Develop** a network of contacts to facilitate information sharing;
- **Ensure** physical protection of assets including journey management;
- **Engage** local communities and authorities;
- **Collect** appropriate information at the local level; and

- **Enact** targeted community based corporate social responsibility programs to address local concerns and grievances.

Greater industry collaboration, information sharing, and collective action may assist companies respond to the threat and mitigate the risk. For example, the Australian Mining Network WhatsApp group is a popular, cost effective and timely platform for the distribution of open source security information. The Australian High Commission, in consultation with other key stakeholders, will explore opportunities for further mining industry-wide initiatives to improve safety and security for personnel and assets in the region.

Feedback from participants on the conference was overwhelmingly positive (see analysis attached). Almost 80 per cent of respondents to the participants' survey said the event improved their ability to make informed investment decisions in the region. Over 90 per cent of respondents indicated they wanted WAMS to be held annually. The Australian High Commission will consider an appropriate follow-up event in 2020.