ASSESSMENT 002 · SAHEL · MILITARY AFFAIRS, GOVERNANCE AND CIVILIAN SECURITY

The Limits of Territorial Control

Military presence, state authority and the geography of insecurity in the central Sahel

PUBLISHED	ASSESSED AS OF	RESEARCH REVIEWED	OVERALL CONFIDENCE	SCOPE
29 October 2026	28 October 2026	29 October 2026	MODERATE	Mali · Burkina Faso · Niger, 2023–26

Independent research specimen. Prepared by Vigil Consilium to demonstrate its assessment format. Not commissioned by an external client.

THE QUESTION

To what extent does military presence translate into sustained state authority, functioning administration and civilian access in the central Sahel?

JUDGMENT

Only to a limited and conditional extent. In the best-documented cases from 2023 to October 2026, military presence reliably secures a defended site: a camp, a town's built area, a convoy for the length of its journey. It has not been shown to secure the roads that sustain them, and has rarely been followed by documented administration. The state re-entered Kidal without a fight but, on current reporting, without an administration, has supplied Djibo mainly by air, and supplies its capital in escorted batches. Outlying camps overrun since mid-2025 have not been put back.

The same limit binds its opponents. The incursions by JNIM and the Islamic State Sahel Province examined here ended in withdrawal, and Vigil's reviews since August found none followed by administration; even the FLA's five-month hold on Kidal produced no documented administration. The result is emptied space between held points, not a front line between two areas of control.

FINDING 01

A recapture is a re-entry, not a restoration.

Kidal changed hands twice in 2026: in April after a two-day assault,[1] and on 6 October without resistance, when a resident said fewer than 100 civilians remained.[2] A return of administration was announced; by 15 October it was reported not to have happened.[3] Even in 2023–26, with a governor in post, no shelter or camp-management agency worked there by January 2026.[4,5]

FINDING 02

The contest is over access, not territory.

Djibo, besieged since 2022, has been supplied mainly by air on the last published measures.[6] In the far north, where aircraft cannot substitute, the alternative to holding the road has been withdrawal.[7] The fuel blockade takes no town: fuel reaches Bamako in escorted batches (957 tankers on 10 October, official).[8] Access lasts as long as a convoy.

FINDING 03

Neither side converts reach into administration.

Boulkessi (2025) and Dioura (2026) were overrun and then left empty by both sides.[3,9,10] Reviews from 9 August to 25 October found no incursion followed by administration.[11] Delegated presence extends reach without protection: at Bossieye, a militia the army had armed was attacked, and troops arrived the next day.[12]

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

- **A recapture announcement is evidence of presence only.** Treat restored authority as unverified until road resupply, returning officials, reopened schools or aid agencies are documented.
- **The unit of exposure is the road between held points** — above all the Dakar and Abidjan fuel corridors into Bamako — not an area on a map.
- **Silence is not stability.** Reporting thins where authority is weakest; plan on the gap as a standing condition.

CONFIDENCE MODERATE

Events high; the mechanism is Vigil's reading of a pattern across four well-documented cases, under severe visibility limits.

Principal uncertainty: whether lost posts stay empty through incapacity or deliberate consolidation onto defensible hubs. The orders that would settle it are not public.

02 / SITUATION AND EVIDENCE

Five things a “controlled” town can mean, and how far the evidence reaches

Reporting on the central Sahel routinely collapses five different states into one word. This assessment keeps them apart and asks, for each case, which level the evidence actually reaches.

LEVEL 1
Presence
Forces are reported at a place. Shown by deployment, an attack on them, or an official statement.

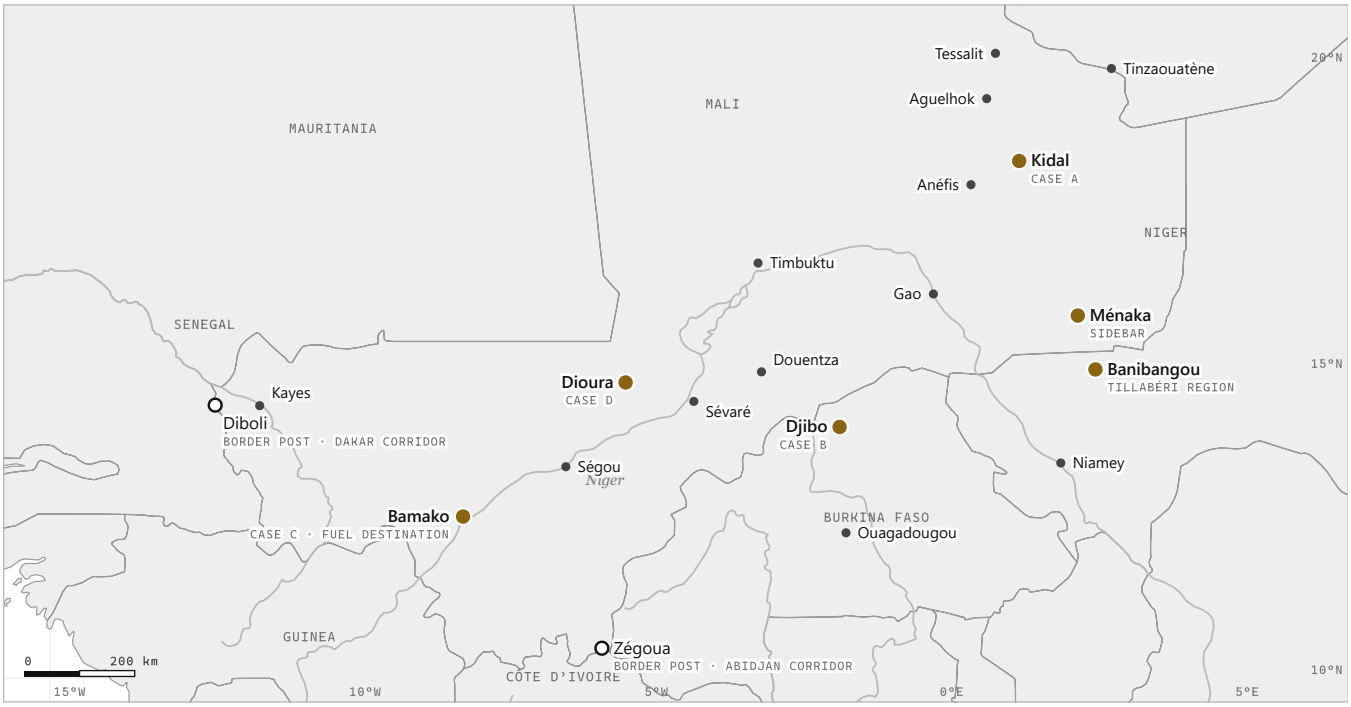
LEVEL 2
Verified control
The site is held, confirmed independently of the party claiming it. Usually a camp or a town’s built area.

LEVEL 3
Access and security
People and supplies reach it, and leave, by road, repeatedly, without escort-sized protection.

LEVEL 4
Administration
Officials present and working; schools, health care and courts open; aid agencies operating.

LEVEL 5
Claims beyond evidence
Statements of “full control” or territorial authority that no available evidence substantiates.

FIGURE 1 The case-study localities, and nothing else



SHOWS The localities examined in this assessment (amber), the towns and corridor entry points that orient them, and the Niger river. Diboli and Zégoua mark the border posts of the Dakar and Abidjan corridors, which together carry about 95% of Mali’s petroleum imports.[13]

BASIS Coordinates from Vigil location records; Diboli and Zégoua from public gazetteers. Geography: Natural Earth 1:50m (public domain); borders de facto, drawn as context.

LIMITS Not a control map. No area is shaded because no source supports a boundary, and Vigil’s own Sahel layers mark administration and activity, overlapping by design.[14] Boulkessi is not plotted: no source gives coordinates Vigil would draw. Bossieye (Tillabéri sidebar) is in Tillabéri region, which is represented by Banibangou.

WHO IS PRESENT

In Mali, the armed forces (FAMa) operate with Russia’s Africa Corps, which replaced the Wagner Group from June 2025. Vigil’s reading is that the change altered ownership and supply, not battlefield outcomes.[15] The state also works with integrated Tuareg groups (MSA, Gatia) in the north. Burkina Faso relies heavily on the VDP auxiliaries, and Niger has armed village militias. Their opponents are JNIM, the al-Qaeda affiliate operating across all three states, the Islamic State Sahel Province, and in northern Mali the Tuareg-led FLA. A joint force of the Alliance of Sahel States was inaugurated in December 2025, but no operation by it is documented.[16]

WHAT CAN BE SEEN

All three governments have suspended international broadcasters; most recently, Niger suspended nine French outlets on 8 May 2026.[17,18] Burkina Faso publishes only attacks it repelled, and its displacement count has not been updated since March 2023.[19] Vigil’s weekly reviews have carried Burkina Faso as “a limit of visibility, not calm”.[18] Every figure here therefore carries its own date. UNRESOLVED Where a place is unmeasured, this assessment records it as unmeasured, not as stable.

03 / CORE MECHANISM

Presence holds points. It does not hold the roads between them.

In four bounded cases, the evidence for levels 1 and 2 is strong; for levels 3 and 4 it is thin or absent. The chronology follows one town through three changes of hands.

FIGURE 2 Four cases against the five levels

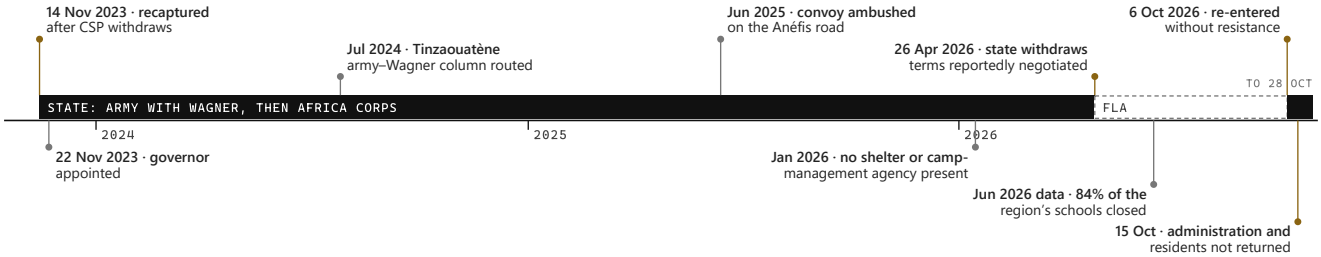
CASE	1 · PRESENCE	2 · VERIFIED CONTROL	3 · ACCESS AND SECURITY	4 · ADMINISTRATION AND SERVICES	5 · CLAIMS BEYOND THE EVIDENCE
A · Kidal Mali · 2023–2026	● DOCUMENTED Army with Wagner from Nov 2023, then Africa Corps from June 2025, to Apr 2026; again from 6 Oct 2026.[2,20]	◐ PARTIAL The town's built area, re-entered without resistance; the FLA calls its withdrawal "controlled".[2]	○ NOT DOCUMENTED Road supply not reported; the Gao–Kidal axis carried the 2025–26 convoy ambushes.[7,21]	○ NOT DOCUMENTED Return of administration announced 6 Oct; reported not to have happened by 15 Oct.[3]	✕ EXCEEDS EVIDENCE "Fully under the control of republican forces" (military account); the FLA's description of its exit as temporary.[2,22]
B · Djibo Burkina Faso · 2022–2026	● DOCUMENTED Garrison and VDP auxiliaries; never held by JNIM beyond a raid.[6]	◐ PARTIAL The town core, interrupted: JNIM held it for about nine hours on 11 May 2025.[23,24]	○ NOT DOCUMENTED Supplied mainly by air (last measured 2023); road convoys rare: one in March 2023 after four months.[6,25]	◐ PARTIAL Made a regional capital in July 2025; services degraded, no dated measure after 2023.[24,25]	✕ EXCEEDS EVIDENCE Describing the town as either government-held or JNIM-controlled.
C · Fuel corridors Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire to Bamako · 2025–2026	● DOCUMENTED Army escorts on convoys; an Africa Corps escort role is asserted in commentary, unconfirmed.[8,26]	– NOT APPLICABLE No locality changes hands — the point of the case.	◐ PARTIAL Fuel arrives in escorted batches: 643 tankers on 3 Oct, 957 on 10 Oct (official).[8]	◐ PARTIAL Capital supplied but degraded: diesel short in May 2026, water and power sabotaged in July.[27,28]	✕ EXCEEDS EVIDENCE Describing the blockade as broken, or Bamako as besieged.
D · Boulkessi and Dioura Central Mali · 2025–2026	◐ PARTIAL At the hubs only; the outlying camps were overrun.[9,29]	○ NOT DOCUMENTED Neither side holds the ground: Boulkessi left 6 Jun 2025, Dioura empty by 21 Sep 2026.[3,9]	○ NOT DOCUMENTED No relief column to Dioura; neither camp re-garrisoned.[10]	○ NOT DOCUMENTED None documented, for either side.[11]	✕ EXCEEDS EVIDENCE JNIM's claims of "total control"; any state claim of consolidation.[10]

SHOWS For each case, the highest standard the evidence meets at each level, with the line that decides the cell. ● documented · ◐ partial · ○ not documented · – not applicable · ✕ claim exceeds the evidence.

BASIS Vigil campaign, Watch and logistics records to 28 October 2026, and the sources cited in each cell.

LIMITS "Not documented" is not proof of absence (see page 2). Convoy counts are official and unaudited.

FIGURE 3 Kidal, 2023–2026: three changes of hands, one administration that did not return



SHOWS Above the axis, documented changes in who held the town's built area, plus the security events on its supply axis. Below it, the dated evidence on administration and services.

BASIS Vigil records; AFP; France 24; Wakat Séra; ACAPS citing OCHA; Education Cluster data via RFI.[1,2,4,5,20,30]

LIMITS The band describes the built area only, not the surrounding region. The terms of the April 2026 withdrawal are unknown. The 15 October entry rests on Vigil's paraphrase of Journal du Mali.

SUSTAINMENT IS THE BINDING VARIABLE

Where aircraft can substitute for roads, presence persists without access: Djibo got one road convoy in four months to March 2023,[25] and Amnesty counted 46 besieged localities by July 2023.[31] Where they cannot, presence ends: the northern axis has "no air substitute at scale", and in April 2026 the state left Kidal, Tessalit and Tessit.[7,20,32] VIGIL ASSESSMENT

THE BLOCKADE TARGETS LOGISTICS, NOT LAND

No locality changes hands. Bellingcat counted more than 130 burnt-out tankers on four routes in late 2025, and drivers were executed at Ambidédi in January 2026.[33,34] Escorted batches keep fuel moving but tie forces to escort: degraded, not severed.[28] VIGIL ASSESSMENT

04 / IMPLICATIONS AND OBSERVABLES

What follows, under which conditions, and what would change the judgment

MUTUAL DENIAL, AND WHO PAYS FOR IT

The opponents show the same limit. JNIM held Djibo for about nine hours in May 2025, razed the base and withdrew.[23,24] IS Sahel entered Ménaka in April 2026 and withdrew after clashes.[35] JNIM's claims of "total control" at Boulkessi and Dioura were followed by vacant ground.[10] The FLA's five-month hold on Kidal is the exception in kind: it held the town, but the only humanitarian reporting found, from the first week, describes rules for movement, markets and services as "unclear"; no working administration is documented.[5] The space between held points is emptied, not governed.

Civilians carry the cost of presence without protection. At Bossieye in January 2026, HRW documented the execution of 31 men and boys by IS Sahel in a village whose militia the army had trained and armed; troops arrived the next day.[12,36] Near Ménaka on 18 October, dozens of civilians were killed in attacks attributed to IS Sahel and unclaimed; provisional tolls differ by source. Reuters' sources described them as retaliation for abuses against suspected informants in an earlier MSA and Africa Corps operation.[37,38] ATTRIBUTED Rights organisations also document abuses by state forces and Africa Corps.[39]

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE QUESTION

For anyone assessing exposure in the region, the reliable unit is the held point and the road to it. Hubs such as Sévaré, Gao and the capital have been reinforced and held; outlying camps and the roads between hubs have not.[10] An operation's footprint is a corridor, and a corridor is open only while a convoy is on it. VIGIL ASSESSMENT

For reading official claims, a statement about presence or a recaptured town is level 1–2 evidence. It says nothing about levels 3–4 until a road convoy, an official's return, a reopened school or an aid agency is reported by someone other than the claimant.

CONDITIONAL PATHWAYS

A · CONSOLIDATION HOLDS CONDITIONAL

Hubs and escorted corridors persist; outlying posts stay empty.

WOULD BE SHOWN BY

continued batch arrivals in Bamako and no re-garrisoning of Dioura, Boulkessi or Tessalit.

B · PRESENCE CONVERTS CONDITIONAL

The state turns a re-entry into authority.

WOULD BE SHOWN BY

road resupply of Kidal and documented return of officials and services there, sustained over months.

C · OPPONENTS CONVERT CONDITIONAL

JNIM moves from denial to governing a town it enters, or imposes a new Djibo-style encirclement.

WOULD BE SHOWN BY

appointed officials, courts or taxation after an incursion.

Pathways are conditions, not forecasts. No likelihood is assigned: the evidence supports none.

OBSERVABLES THAT WOULD CHANGE THIS ASSESSMENT

01 **Kidal administration documented**: officials, a school or health centre, or an aid agency operating, reported independently.
MOVES KIDAL TO LEVEL 4 · WEAKENS FINDING 01

02 **A road convoy reaches Kidal from Gao** without loss, and does so more than once.
MOVES KIDAL TO LEVEL 3 · WEAKENS FINDING 02

03 **A lost post is re-established and held** (Dioura, Boulkessi, Tessalit or Tessit) for a sustained period.[3]
CONTRADICTS NON-REGENERATION · WEAKENS PATHWAY A

04 **Administration follows an incursion**: JNIM courts, taxation or appointees in a town it entered.[11]
CONTRADICTS FINDING 03 · PATHWAY C

05 **A dated attack on an escorted fuel convoy**, or escorted arrivals stopping. Conversely, unescorted commercial deliveries resuming.[40]
CHANGES THE BLOCKADE READING IN EITHER DIRECTION

06 **A dated measurement from inside Djibo** (population, health, food), or a resumed road convoy.
CLOSES THE LARGEST VISIBILITY GAP

WHAT THIS ASSESSMENT CANNOT CONCLUDE

It cannot draw boundaries of control, because no source supports one. It adopts no casualty toll; those reported disagree. It cannot state the terms of the April 2026 withdrawals, or whether non-regeneration is incapacity or design. Its Burkina Faso evidence is a floor, not a count.

05 / EVIDENCE REGISTER

Every source cited, in citation order

40 SOURCES · 18 VIGIL RECORD · 5 OFFICIAL / PRIMARY · 4 RESEARCH / DATA · 13 REPORTING

1 REPORTING **France 24** (2026-04-27). Street battles and withdrawal of Russian mercenaries: inside the 48-hour fall of Mali's Kidal.
www.france24.com/en/africa/20260427-street-battles-withdrawal-russian-mercenaries-inside-48-hour-fall-mali-kidal
Much of the account of the withdrawal's terms rests on FLA-aligned sources.

2 REPORTING **AFP via Justice Info** (2026-10-06). Malian army and Russian paramilitaries enter Kidal (resident: fewer than 100 civilians remained).
www.justiceinfo.net/en?p=166633

3 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10-25). Watch: Does the state put back a position it has lost? Review ledger incl. 18 Oct 2026 entry citing Journal du Mali (15 Oct).
vigilconsilium.com/watch/sahel/position-regeneration/
Journal du Mali held as Vigil's paraphrase; URL not located.

4 REPORTING **Wakat Séra** (2023-11-23). Mali: General El Hadj Ag Gamou appointed governor of Kidal.
www.wakatsera.com/?p=95081

5 RESEARCH / DATA **ACAPS** (2026-04-30). Mali: Escalation of conflict in northern and central regions (briefing note; relays OCHA, FEWS NET and REACH data).
www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20260430_ACAPS_Mali_-_Escalation_of_conflict_in_northern_and_central_regions___.pdf
Text and tables used; its map is built on ACLED data and is not reproduced.

6 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10-29). Campaign record: the siege of Djibo.
vigilconsilium.com/conflicts/sahel/campaigns/djibo-siege/

7 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-09-26). Logistics record: northern military sustainment (one axis; "no air substitute at scale").
vigilconsilium.com/conflicts/sahel/logistics/northern-military-sustainment/
Its Kidal node predates the October re-entry; flagged for review.

8 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (2026-10-18). Sahel weekly review, 11–17 October 2026 (Kidal "held but nearly empty"; DGCC escorted arrivals).
vigilconsilium.com/briefs/2026-10-18/sahel/

9 REPORTING **France 24 / AFP** (2025-06-06). Mali: army withdraws from camp after two deadly jihadist attacks (Boulkessi).
www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20250606-mali-arm%C3%A9e-se-retire-camp-apr%C3%A8s-deux-attaques-jihadistes-meurtri%C3%A8res

10 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (2026-09-19). Analytical Note: Mali's regeneration problem.
vigilconsilium.com/notes/sahel-regeneration-problem-2026-09/

11 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10-25). Watch: Is JNIM moving from raids to sustained territorial administration? Review ledger, 9 Aug–25 Oct 2026.
vigilconsilium.com/watch/sahel/territorial-administration/

12 OFFICIAL / PRIMARY **Human Rights Watch** (2026-02-12). Niger: Islamist armed group massacres villagers in west.
www.hrw.org/news/2026/02/12/niger-islamist-armed-group-massacres-villagers-in-west

13 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10-18). Logistics record: Mali fuel import corridors (Dakar and Abidjan corridors, ~95% of petroleum imports).
vigilconsilium.com/conflicts/sahel/logistics/mali-fuel-import-corridors/

14 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (series reviewed 2026-10-28). Sahel map: administration and activity layers ("not a control map"); attacks-on-positions Tempo series.
vigilconsilium.com/map/sahel/

15 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (2026-09-09). Analytical Note: Africa Corps in Mali, what changed.
vigilconsilium.com/notes/sahel-africa-corps-what-changed-2026-09/

16 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-08-30). Force record: AES unified force (inaugurated December 2025; no operation documented).
vigilconsilium.com/conflicts/sahel/units/aes-unified-force/

17 REPORTING **Euronews / Africanews** (2026-05-09). Niger suspends nine French media outlets over alleged threats to public order.
www.euronews.com/2026/05/09/niger-suspends-nine-french-media-outlets-over-alleged-threats-to-public-order

18 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (2026-10-25). Sahel weekly review, 18–24 October 2026 (Ménaka killings; Burkina Faso "a limit of visibility, not calm").
vigilconsilium.com/briefs/2026-10-25/sahel/

19 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10-28). Sahel module: humanitarian picture and map design note (each figure carries its own date and grade).
vigilconsilium.com/conflicts/sahel/humanitarian/

20 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10). Campaign record: northern offensive 2026 (April withdrawals; October return).
vigilconsilium.com/conflicts/sahel/campaigns/northern-offensive-2026/

21 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10-25). Watch: state reach and supply. Kidal road supply "still not reported".
vigilconsilium.com/watch/sahel/state-reach-supply/

22 REPORTING **Alwihda Info** (2026-10-08). Déploiement des FAMa à Kidal (single military account; flag raised on administrative buildings).
www.alwihdainfo.com/deploiement-des-fama-a-kidal-un-tournant-majeur-pour-la-souverainete/

23 REPORTING **France 24 / AFP** (2025-05-12). Jihadist attack kills several dozen in Burkina Faso (Djibo).
www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250512-jihadist-attack-kills-several-dozen-in-burkina-faso

24 RESEARCH / DATA **ACCORD / ecoi.net** (2026-04-23). Burkina Faso: situation in Djibo (query response compiling ICG, The New Humanitarian, HRW and CTP).
www.ecoi.net/en/document/2140610.html
Used only for the attributed ICG, TNH and HRW material it relays; its ACLED incident counts are not used.

25 OFFICIAL / PRIMARY **Médecins Sans Frontières** (2023-05-08). Burkina Faso: Djibo, life under blockade.
www.msf.org.za/news-and-resources/latest-news/burkina-faso-djibo-life-under-blockade

26 REPORTING **African Arguments** (2026-10-07). 900 tankers under escort: what Africa Corps actually does in Mali.
africanarguments.org/2026/10/900-tankers-under-escort-what-africa-corps-actually-does-in-mali/
Used for the government's 14 September figure, and for the Africa Corps escort role as unconfirmed commentary; a fuel-price claim it relays is unsourced and not used.

27 REPORTING **Le360 Afrique** (2026-05-16). Mali: Bamako resupplied with fuel (more than 800 escorted tankers; diesel still short).
afrique.le360.ma/societe/mali-la-situation-sameliore-progressivement-bamako-reapprovisionne-en-carburants_VXRJPUBPKRGRBJU42S6DY6SBVQ/

28 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10-29). Campaign record: JNIM fuel blockade.
vigilconsilium.com/conflicts/sahel/campaigns/jnim-fuel-blockade/

29 REPORTING **AFP via Arab News** (2026-09-18). Death toll passes 100 soldiers in Mali attack last week, sources say (Dioura).
www.arabnews.com/world/death-toll-passes-100-soldiers-in-mali-attack-last-week-sources-3002283

30 REPORTING **RFI via allAfrica** (2026-10-01). Mali: 2,444 schools non-functional at the start of the school year (Education Cluster data, June 2026).
fr.allafrica.com/stories/202610010261.html

31 OFFICIAL / PRIMARY **Amnesty International** (2023-11-02). Burkina Faso: armed groups committing war crimes in besieged localities.
www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2023/11/burkina-faso-armed-groups-committing-war-crimes-in-besieged-localities/

32 RESEARCH / DATA **ICCT (W. Nasr)** (2026-05-28). Mali: what were the reasons and consequences of the 25 April attacks?.
icct.nl/publication/mali-what-were-reasons-and-consequences-25-april-attacks

33 RESEARCH / DATA **Bellingcat** (2025-12-03). Mali under siege: tracking the fuel blockade crippling Bamako.
www.bellingcat.com/news/2025/12/03/mali-under-siege-tracking-the-fuel-blockade-crippling-bamako/

34 OFFICIAL / PRIMARY **Human Rights Watch** (2026-03-10). Mali: Armed Islamist group executes truck drivers.
www.hrw.org/news/2026/03/10/mali-armed-islamist-group-executes-truck-drivers

35 REPORTING **Reuters via The Jerusalem Post** (2026-04-29). Islamic State fighters enter Mali's Ménaka before withdrawing.
jpost.com/international/islamic-terrorism/article-894614

36 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10). Campaign record: Tillabéri pressure ("Vigil publishes no territorial assessment for this region").
vigilconsilium.com/conflicts/sahel/campaigns/tillaberi-pressure/

37 REPORTING **Reuters via bdnews24** (2026-10-20). Dozens of civilians killed in attacks near Ménaka, Mali.
bdnews24.com/world/africa/j7itlogspf

38 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (2026-10). Event record: Ménaka-area killings, 18 Oct 2026 ("establishes no casualty figure").
vigilconsilium.com/conflicts/sahel/events/menaka-tagadayat-killings-2026/

39 OFFICIAL / PRIMARY **Human Rights Watch** (2026-10-22). Mali: Army, Russia's Africa Corps commit new abuses.
www.hrw.org/news/2026/10/22/mali-army-russias-africa-corps-commit-new-abuses

40 VIGIL RECORD **Vigil Consilium** (reviewed 2026-10-25). Watch: blockade pressure. No tanker attack or escorted arrival reported after 10 Oct 2026.
vigilconsilium.com/watch/sahel/blockade-pressure/

06 / METHOD AND LIMITATIONS

How the judgment was reached, and where it is weakest

The assessment began from Vigil's Sahel records: campaigns, Watch ledgers, logistics records, Tempo series and Notes. Load-bearing figures were re-checked against the document they rest on wherever it could be opened; those carried from Vigil records are marked as such in the research log. Where a record cites only a source registry id, the underlying document was located or the figure was not used.

WHY THESE CASES

The four cases were chosen for evidence, not balance. Kidal is the best-documented locality that the state recaptured, lost and re-entered, with dated evidence on administration at each stage. Djibo is the longest-documented siege of a held town. The fuel blockade is the clearest case of pressure on logistics with no territorial change. Boulkessi and Dioura are the best-reported pair of camps overrun and not re-garrisoned. Ménaka and Tillabéri appear as supporting evidence only.

Tinzaouatène (July 2024) is folded into the Kidal chronology: its evidence concerns the cost of the supply road, not authority. Burkina Faso and Niger are covered less than Mali because less can be verified there, not because less is happening.

WHAT WAS EXCLUDED, AND WHY

Conflict-event dataset counts (ACLED), including counts relayed by third parties, because their use in commercial products is unresolved under the provider's licence. Analysis rests on the underlying reporting instead. **Party casualty claims** are reported as positions, never adopted. **A widely relayed fuel-price claim** was dropped: it has no traceable source. **A September 2026 newsletter item** was rejected: it re-reported September 2025 convoy attacks as current. **An "18 months" interval** in one humanitarian briefing was not used: the arithmetic is 29 months.

TABLE 1 Source quality of the claims the judgment leans on most

CLAIM	BASIS	GRADE	QUALIFICATION
Army and Africa Corps re-entered Kidal, 6 Oct 2026	AFP; RFI; Vigil event record	HIGH	The event only. Durability is not part of the claim.
Fewer than 100 civilians remained in Kidal	One departing resident, quoted by AFP	LOW	Single witness; used only as an indication, never as a count.
Administration not returned to Kidal by 15 Oct	Journal du Mali, via Vigil's Watch ledger	MODERATE	Paraphrase; article URL not located in this pass. Needs editorial check.
84% of Kidal region's schools closed	Education Cluster data, June 2026, via RFI	MODERATE	Regional aggregate; earlier series has a different scope and is not compared.
Escorted tanker arrivals (643; 957; 900+; 800+)	Malian authorities, via Vigil reviews and press	MODERATE	Official, unaudited. Shows supply arrives, not what share of demand.
Djibo supplied mainly by air	Vigil campaign; MSF (2023); ICG via ACCORD	MODERATE	High through 2023. No dated measure since; siege start date itself disputed.
Bossieye militia armed by the army; troops arrived the next day	HRW, 13 remote interviews	HIGH	Findings well documented; no government response to HRW.
Dozens of civilians killed near Ménaka, 18 Oct	Reuters and AFP sources; local officials	MODERATE	Tolls differ by source and none is adopted; unclaimed; the motive is attributed.

DATES AND REVIEW BASIS

Published 29 October 2026. **Assessed as of** 28 October 2026, the date of Vigil's last Sahel review. **Research reviewed** 29 October 2026, when the supplementary sources were opened. Each figure carries its own date; figures of different scope are never combined or treated as a range.

Records flagged during research: several Vigil records still describe Kidal as FLA-held. They predate the 6 October re-entry and are listed for review in the research log. Nothing here depends on their Kidal lines.

CONVENTIONS

Evidence status:
ESTABLISHED · ATTRIBUTED · VIGIL ASSESSMENT · UNRESOLVED · CONDITIONAL

Confidence: High: independent credible sources agree. Moderate: credible sourcing with known gaps. Low: contested or single-sourced.

Independent research specimen. Prepared by Vigil Consilium to demonstrate its assessment format. Not commissioned by an external client. No classified, proprietary or client information was used.