

In the Wake of The Mali Terrorist Attacks: Escalation of U.S. and French Military Interventions in Africa?

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Over two dozen killed at hotel in Bamako

Despite the presence of French and United States Special Forces inside Mali, the siege of the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako on November 20 has resulted in the deaths of over two dozen people.

U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) leader Army General David Rodriguez continues to maintain that the purpose of Washington's military policy on the continent is to assist nation-states in their efforts to enhance the security capacity of various governments. AFRICOM identifies its purpose as working with African states in the so-called "war on terrorism."

Nonetheless, the "war on terrorism" is a by-product of successive failed imperialist interventions from Afghanistan to Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. The so-called "Islamist extremist" organizations were nurtured, funded and coordinated since the early 1980s when the administration of President Jimmy Carter worked vigorously to overthrow the socialist government in Afghanistan which was supported by the former Soviet Union.

With the overthrow of the government of President Saddam Hussein in Iraq, these same strains of Islamic organizations were strengthened spreading their influence into the Syrian situation which began during the early months of 2011. The outbreak of the Syrian war coincided with the destruction of Libya that subsequently brought unrest and instability throughout North and West Africa, right across the Mediterranean into Southern, Central and Eastern Europe.

Rodriguez was quoted as saying by the Department of Defense news agency that "The major thing they need and want is training and understanding how to operate in the environments they are working in. They usually need help in the same type of areas — command and control and communications, [and] intelligence — we do a tremendous amount of intelligence training throughout the African continent. They need help in logistics and mobility. They need help in specialty skills anti-mine or IEDs." (November 20)

Another key aspect of this policy is the molding of African military officials into the image of the Pentagon. Rodriguez stresses "For their militaries and institutions, the most important thing for them is to grow leaders and select the right people and build the systems that sustain their efforts for the long run."

This purported selection of correct leaders resulted in a military coup over three years ago. The elected head of state in Mali, Amadou Toumani Toure, was overthrown on March 23, 2012 by military officer Capt. Amadou Sanogo. After regional pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), Sanogo turned over the ostensible reigns of power to an interim government headed by parliamentary leader Dioncounda Traore.

Sanogo was a student of the Pentagon as a participant in the International Military Education and Training program where he received instruction in Georgia and at the Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia, which specializes in counter-terrorism education. The former officer also studied English at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas.

With specific reference to the recent attacks in Bamako, at least two gunmen walked into the hotel, which is a mainstay for diplomatic personnel and business interests from the international community, opening fire on staff and guests taking approximately 130 people hostage.

It was reported that Malian, French and U.S. soldiers stormed the building ending the siege. At present it is not clear whether the hostages were killed by the gunmen or by the security and military forces allied with the Malian government during the retaking of the hotel.

Two Organizations Claim Responsibility

Two Islamist groups operating in Mali and Algeria have claimed responsibility for the attacks through the Al Akhbar website based in neighboring Mauritania. Both Algeria and Mali have waged wars against such organizations with the latter being the latest to face the seizure of its territory in the north during 2012-2013.

The Al Akhbar site hosted a recording saying "We, in the group of the Mourabitoun, in cooperation with our brothers in Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the great desert area, claim responsibility for the hostage-taking operation in the Radisson hotel in Bamako." This statement apparently issued during the siege suggested that an end to hostilities was "predicated on the release of the all the imprisoned mujahedeen in the prisons of Mali and the cessation of the aggression against our people in the north and center of Mali." (November 20)

In 2012, a secessionist movement based among the Tuaregs, the MNLA, declared an independent state in the north of the country. However, other groups entered the fray prompting greater French and U.S. military intervention.

The main identifiable organizations involved in the struggle for control of Mali include Ansar Dine - which is Arabic for Defenders of Faith - and two other groups, AQIM and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), whom were originally allied to the MNLA, but have appeared to have been operating independently since the French invasion of January 2013.

The French government deployed its air force and 3,000 troops in 2013 in the north of the country at the request of the newly installed president, Dioncounda Traoré. Labelled as "Operation Serval," the occupation continued through July 2014 when the French military forces were reassigned as the major elements within a broader offensive expanding across large swaths of the Sahel region. The United Nations mandated force, MINUMSA, has been

operational since April 2013 now numbering approximately 10,000 troops.

Pentagon air support was critical in this occupation of Mali. With the U.S. already well established within the military inside the country, it was poised to carry out logistical flights transporting personnel and equipment to the French forces and their allies.

Pentagon and NATO Occupation Has Not Brought Stability

French forces occupied Mali nearly three years ago with Pentagon assistance after the collapse of the security situation in the north and central regions of the country due in part to the unresolved regional issues stemming from colonial rule by Paris. It is important to note that the seizure of substantial portions of Malian territory took place in the aftermath of the March 2012 military coup led by the Pentagon-trained Capt. Amadou Sanogo.

Many analysts have cited the war of regime-change engineered and waged by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Pentagon and NATO against the former Jamahiriya system under the leadership of Col. Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, as being a major contributing factor to the destabilization of northern Mali. Members of the Tuarag nationality in Mali were living in Libya during the Gaddafi era where some participated in the defense of the country during the counter-revolution in 2011.

The fleeing of many Tuaregs from Libya and the conclusion of the bombing campaign by western imperialist states and their allies, found them inside northern Mali where unresolved inter-ethnic conflicts have reappeared since national independence in 1960.

AFRICOM and other allied forces are already planning further deployments in the so-called “war on terrorism.” Nearly two years ago the Obama administration announced the deployment of 3,500 troops to nearly three dozen African states.

The largest AFRICOM base in the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti contains thousands of U.S. and French troops at Camp Lemonnier. This base has also been utilized in the Pentagon-supported bombing campaign by the Saudi Arabia and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) coalition that has ravaged Yemen since March.

There appears to be no change in U.S. relations towards Africa and the Middle East with both Democratic and Republican candidates for president during 2016 saying nothing about the failure of these policies as it relates to instability spreading throughout the region. It will be up to a future regenerated anti-war movement in the U.S. and Western Europe to take up these issues within the broader struggles for social justice and peace.

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