

“Le Monde” articles warn of humanitarian disaster in Mali

Tuesday 22 January 2013, by [ANNIS Roger](#) (Date first published: 22 January 2013).

Surprise! The Canadian government has decided to extend its modest engagement (to date) in the French-led war in Mali. A news report tells of Canada’s decision to continue its air transport assistance to the French invaders beyond the “one week” it initially announced [\[1\]](#).

CBC News has published an article [\[2\]](#) based on documents it obtained detailing the discussions at the highest levels of the Canadian military beginning last March of plans for a deepening military intervention in Mali. Mali’s military officers overthrew the civilian government in March, 2012, a feat they repeated in December 2012, though by then there was probably little left of anything resembling civilian rule to be overthrown.

Le Monde has published two very troubling articles, dated Jan. 15 [\[3\]](#) and 22 [\[4\]](#), about the humanitarian catastrophe that is following in the wake of the French invasion, including reports of retributive massacres by France’s erstwhile ally, the Mali military. In the Jan. 15 article, the reporter writes, “In Mopti, it was a manhunt [following the entry of the Mali army]. The military ascertained that Islamists had representatives in the city. The army had a unit conducting investigations [sic]. Some people were arrested and shot,” reported by phone an inhabitant of this city of more than 100,000, located on the Niger River in the center of Mali.

The article also reports that the French and Mali armies are preventing reporters and aid workers from entering zones where French bombings or French-led combat has taken place.

English-language press, including *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, is publishing next to nothing on the subject. Those two newspapers have reporters on the ground. The closest that *The Guardian* has come is the brief quotation here:

The Guardian saw a column of about a dozen heavily armoured French tanks advancing on Diabaly on Sunday evening, moving east in the direction of Markala, where the French and Malian military control a key bridge across the river Niger.

Malian army officers warned, however, that some of the population remained loyal to the Islamist fighters, some of whom were said to have taken refuge in forests around the town to wait for reinforcements.—*The Guardian*, Jan 22, 2013.

Ditto for *L’Humanité*, the daily newspaper of the French Communist Party. The newspaper is publishing perfunctory reports of the progress of the French invasion and its Mali allies. It features a photo in its edition of Jan. 22 of a French Legionnaire in Mali wearing a death mask while on duty. It’s not clear if the newspaper disapproves or finds anything alarming about the photo, though it does mention that the mask is ‘non-reglementary’ [\[5\]](#)

L’Humanité publishes many reports of “massacres” by the “Islamists” whom the French military is targeting.

CBC Radio’s *The Current* broadcast a very informative interview with Robert Fisk on Jan. 21 [\[6\]](#). In

it, Fisk comments briefly on Mali. He says near the outset of the interview:

First of all, you have to disconnect the 'war on terror' (which I don't believe in as an institution) from what's going on in Mali. The problems in Mali have been going on for thirty years, have never involved the West before, except peripherally, and are basically that the people of the North of Mali—Berbers Arabophones, Tuaregs—have never accepted a Black government in Bamako in the south. That is the basis (of the conflict), it is partly a civil war in Mali in which we (sic) the West are partly becoming involved.

Over that has been spread over the past few months this Islamist veil, if you like, that suddenly has become a war on terror, that the people of the north are supporting or not supporting the various franchises of Al-Qaueda. An organization, I should add, that the Arab Awakening (as I intend to call the Arab Spring) basically saw the end of ...

What's happening in Mali, which is partly an African rather than Arab conflict, is very much a civil war within Mali, not just an Al Qaeda war. The French have got themselves deeply involved in a real mess and they don't know yet, I think, how much worse it's going to become.

The invasion last year of Libya and subsequent overthrow of its government is widely reported as a contributing factor, if not precursor, to the conflict in Mali. It seems evident that the Touareg national rights fighters obtained military and other material benefits from their presence in Libya, though it's much less clear whether this was any kind of formal support coming from the government of Moammar Gadaffi. I have not seen any accurate reports of the extent or consequences. Nor have I seen reports of what support, if any, that the Islamist fundamentalists that pushed aside the Tuareg national liberation movement last year in Mali had received from Libya, and what role, if any, that Libya had played in the conflict between those opposing forces. Regardless, as Robert Fisk accurately states, the conflict in northern Mali stems from a decades-long conflict over the national aspirations of the peoples of the South Sahel. A similar, even more intense conflict (prior to the French invasion), has been raging in neighbouring Niger for decades.

An interesting interview (in French) on aspects of all this was published on Europe solidaire sans frontières on Jan. 18 [7]

Roger Annis, January 22, 2013

Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 27649), [Despite fears of 'mission creep,' Ottawa responds to French request for help moving West African force.](#)

[2] <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2013/01/21/mali-canada-spring-preparations.html>

[3] See on ESSF (article 27646), [Les ONG s'alarment de la situation humanitaire au Mali.](#)

[4] See on ESSF (article 27633), [Les allégations sur des exactions de l'armée malienne se multiplient.](#)

[5] [http://www.humanite.fr/monde/mali-les-militaires-maliens-et-francais-entrent-da-513446.](http://www.humanite.fr/monde/mali-les-militaires-maliens-et-francais-entrent-da-513446)

[6] <http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/episode/2013/01/21/robert-fisk-on-al-qaeda-in-north-africa-the-legacy-of-the-arab-spring/>

[7] See on ESSF (article 7600), [The question of faith: UPA's capitulation to the Sangh Parivar on Ram Sethu](#).