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## **We oppose the French intervention in Mali**

Wednesday 23 January 2013, by [BESANCENOT Olivier](#), [POUPIN Christine](#), [POUTOU Philippe](#) (Date first published: 22 January 2013).

Mr Hollande, at a press conference on January 15, 2013 you said “What are we going to do to the terrorists? Destroy them!” A shocking, violent and warlike statement which recalls the tone of Vladimir Putin. A statement which is also somewhat imprudent in its peremptory aspect. Because in a game verbal escalation events unleash a process whereby, alas, hostages are frequently added to hostages. The tragic taking of hostages at the gas site in Tigantourine, in Algeria, which sickens us all, has provided a dramatic illustration of this.

What did you seek to prove in using these words? That you were commander in chief, a leader in war. And above all that you wholly assume responsibility for the war in Mali. It’s sad to note that the rare area where you do not authorise hesitation is that of war. In the highest tradition, you follow the steps of your predecessors. You also aspire to the stature of president of Françafrique (France “A fric” [a source of cash] to take up the expression of the association Survie). As it is worrying to see the usual retreat behind humanitarian motivations – which only occur to you according to circumstance – to hide from the public the real colonialist interests that France defends in this conflict.

So yes, Mr Hollande, in the north of Mali, religious fanatics seek to impose an odious regime on the Malian people. And yes, there are reasons to be moved and feel solidarity with the Malian people. The only question which matters then is whether your military intervention, carried out alone, will improve or worsen the situation.

To pose this single question is disturbing. And with good reason. The initial applause, ritualistic at the beginning of a war, which greeted your initiative, has rapidly faded and the murmur of the first doubts has already started.

Have we, on this subject also, lost the memory of our recent history? The various foreign military interventions of this type over the past 20 years in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia or Libya have led to a political situation which is unmanageable and chaotic and most often a civil war combined with a humanitarian catastrophe.

Because the lugubrious counting of thousands of deaths does not stop with the cease fire decreed by the Western powers; it inexorably claims its batch of new victims, announced for a few seconds only during our evening news broadcasts.

At the end of the day, these wars which claim to stop, even “destroy” terrorism, have very often only strengthened the position of the most determined, the most extremist, and most radical among them. As for the defence of women’s rights, who would dare to say that it has improved? And where? In Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia or Libya?

Mr Hollande, the political world now garlands you with laurels. One can be carried away by this élan of national unity which was probably sought. To the point where a sense of proportion gets a little lost. You can only note the ridiculous nature of the situation when, without laughter, you take on

your new role as the universal shining knight of democracy, proudly proclaiming your fine values – human rights, women’s rights, the implacable struggle against religious obscurantism – to justify this war, during a press conference held in the United Arab Emirates? Where legislation is applied according to Sharia and adultery, blasphemy or homosexuality are punishable by stoning.

But what does it matter. The delegation of the CAC 40 emerged satiated with juicy contracts. And we all want to believe that the summit on defence of the environment sponsored by Total and Exxon came up with some hard hitting and sensible proposals. Unhappily, one subject has however poisoned your undertakings: final agreement on a price with the presidency of the Emirates for the sale of 60 Rafale planes. The Dassault group is well aware that waging war is a business.

In the United Arab Emirates as in Mali, you inexorably follow your mission of ensuring France’s trading position. We discover then that Sahel is not only a desert but also the geostrategic confluence of numerous exchanges, both legal and illegal. It is also the key to the fragile border entry which gives access to the zones France seeks to secure, in the first place the uranium mines operated in Niger by Areva, jewel of the French nuclear industry.

You are not a disinterested hero in this war. Nor a volunteer fireman who has come to put out a fire which, remember, was maintained knowingly by successive French governments since the early 1980s. The neoliberal policies and structural adjustment plans linked to the Malian debt, whose repayment particularly interests France, have disoriented Malian society, depriving it of its public services, industries, and service enterprises. The state has been sundered, to the point of virtual disappearance in the north of Mali.

Also the recent events are directly linked to the war in Libya. The French military intervention in Libya did not consist in graciously delivering arms to the legitimate revolution of the Libyan people. France intervened militarily as an external power to remind the future regime of its dependency, and hoped for gestures in return, notably in relation to the oil market. It thus dispossessed the Libyan revolution of the possibility of politically appropriating control of the regions taken militarily. Thus, the region of the Sahel was brutally destabilised and an influx of over-armed combatants returned to their countries of origin, notably in Mali.

Finally, you are well placed to know that the French state has not looked kindly on the overthrow in March 2012 of the corrupt regime of Amadou Toumani Touré, by a military mutiny which became a coup d’état. Since then, France has deprived the Malian army of its own logistical support. The Economic Community of West African States, led by Alassane Ouattara, who owes a great deal to France for his accession to power in the Ivory Coast in 2011, thus decided last summer to impose an arms embargo on the Malian military, immobilising tanks, munitions and heavy weaponry in the ports of Dakar in Senegal, and Conakry in Guinea. Self defence necessarily became more complicated.

Mr Hollande, the fate of Malians is a matter for Malians. And if a war is to be waged, it is surely not up to France to proclaim itself the saviour of Mali. French paternalism in Africa has gone on too long.

In France, the state concerns itself with Malians above all through expelling them. Has this France suddenly been touched by sincere humanitarian feelings? This France which has not even recognised its responsibility in the Tutsi genocide which took place in Rwanda in 1994. Do not deprive the Malian people of a political solution which voices in that country are insistently demanding: the deputy Oumar Mariko from the organisation Sadi (Solidarity, Africa, democracy, independence), for example, or the former minister Aminata Traoré, who some months ago launched a manifesto against this war in the name of women’s rights. Because political, trade union and civil

society is an unavoidable reality in Mali.

In France, apart from the doubts expressed over the French mandate or the desultory parliamentary debates, national unity seems to have contaminated nearly all the parties, with rare exceptions. The best way to help the Malian people to lead its own fight against religious obscurantism, Mr Hollande, is that the French state stops speaking in the name of others.

**Olivier Besancenot, Christine Poupin, Philippe Poutou**, spokespersons and former presidential candidates of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France, January 18, 2013.

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## **P.S.**

\* Opinion published in the French daily newspaper Libération, January 22, 2013.

\* Translation International Viewpoint. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

\* Olivier Besancenot is one of the the best-known leaders of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), formed in 2009 following a call by the Revolutionary Communist League (Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR), French section of the Fourth International). As candidate for the LCR in the presidential elections in 2002 and 2007, he received 1.2 million votes (4.5%) and 1.5 million votes (4.2%) respectively. He is a postal worker in the Paris region.

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