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Reports of war atrocities grow as France/Mali invaders settle into a long war

Sunday 27 January 2013, by [ANNIS Roger](#) (Date first published: 25 January 2013).

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A state of emergency prevails in Mali, declared by the governing regime. France is intensifying its bombing, reports of atrocities by the Mali army are being confirmed, and Canada has decided to extend its support role of France.

The French daily *Le Monde* publishes a report on Jan. 25 (print edition and online) by one of its correspondents in Mali, Jean-Phillipe Rémy. He managed to enter the town of Sévaré, one of the first to be taken by French forces and their Mali army subordinates [1]. It is located in the region of the city of Mopti, near the frontier separating southern Mali from the beginning of the vast expanse of northern Mali.

Rémy reports that soldiers of the Mali army, following in the wake of the French air strikes and ground force invasion six days earlier, seized people in the town and executed them summarily. Their bodies were thrown into numerous pits, pictured in accompanying photos. He writes that when a photographer of the newspaper later questioned an officer of the Mali army about the photos of body parts he had taken, the officer declared, "So what do you think we did with people we grabbed? We snuffed them out."

Another report on summary executions is published in *Le Monde* online on Jan. 25. [2]

French invaders readying for a long war

Le Monde also reports on the continued transport of massive quantities of weaponry to Mali by France. The number of French soldiers is quickly expected to exceed 3,000, says the newspaper.

In an interview online in *Le Monde* dated Jan. 24 [3], French General Vincent Desportes says he does not expect African forces (expected to eventually number 4,000) will be ready for fighting until September 2013. He says the seizure of the entire north of Mali will probably not begin in earnest until the autumn and that if there is serious fighting, it will take many more troops than the 4,000 African soldiers and 3,000 French soldiers presently said to be in the country or on their way.

The general said that a full military occupation of the north would require many more soldiers than those numbers. He also said that France does not have a lot of recent experience in fighting a desert war and will need time and resources to be in full operational mode.

The interview is headlined with a quotation of General Desportes: “For now, we are a ways away from a quagmire.”

One of the myths peddled by the invasion force and their hangers-on is that the imperialist armies will be replaced in short order by armies from neighbouring African countries. They even have a name for this force-to-be—‘MISMA,’ International Mission of Support to Mali (yes, shades of the ‘MINUSTAH’ acronym from Haiti, though in the case of ‘MISMA’ there is no rubber stamp by the UN Security Council accompanying it and therefore no ‘UN’ (‘NU’) in the name).

L’Humanité, the daily newspaper of the French Communist Party which has backed the invasion in the name of a necessary war against “jihadists” reports in a complaining tone on Jan. 23 that measures to bring soldiers from the armies of the neighbouring neo-colonial regimes are not being taken quickly enough by France [4].

Three leaders and former presidential candidates of the left-wing NPA party (New Anti-Capitalist Party) issued a statement on Jan. 18 condemning the war in Mali. They are Olivier Besancenot, Christine Poupin and , Philippe Poutou. You can read the statement on the informative, bilingual website ‘*Europe solidaire sans frontières*’ (A Europe of Solidarity Without Borders). [5]. Protests against the war are taking place in France, including one to take place tomorrow, Saturday, January 26, in Avignon.

The International Trade Union Confederation has strongly backed the French war in Mali [6]. In its statement, the ICTU sharply condemns a Jan. 15 statement by the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in opposition to the war. It accuses the rival union federation of “siding with the terrorists” in Mali. Among the affiliates of the ITUC [7] are many of the world’s leading trade union organizations, including the Canadian Labour Congress and the Quebec union federations FTQ, CSN and CSD.

The World Peace Council issued a statement on Jan. 16 opposed to the war on Mali [8]. The WPC and WFTU were for decades closely allied with the foreign policy of the former Soviet Union.

Roger Annis

Related reading

Mali: Canada extends C-17 transport mission to mid-February

By Bruce Champion-Smith, *Toronto Star*, Jan. 25, 2013

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1319629--mali-canada-extends-c-17-transport-mission-to-mid-february>

Canada’s NDP says ‘yes’ to Mali bombing mission

January 23, 2013—Yesterday, New Democratic Party and Member of Parliament and war (“defense”) critic Jack Harris appeared on a panel on Evan Salomon’s ‘Power and Politics’ program on CBC News Network [9]. He explained that the NDP has been closely consulted by the government and

supports the mission without hesitation.—RA

What Canada is doing in Mali

West African nation has been a 'country of focus' for CIDA since 2009, but aid links to Canada go back decades. CBC News, Jan 24, 2013

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2013/01/23/f-mali-canada-links.html>

Mali's army may be behind abuses, France says

FRANCE 24, Wed. 23/01/2013

<http://www.france24.com/en/20130123-mali-army-committing-human-right-abuses-france-drian>

Mali executions alleged

By Richard Valdmanis, Reuters, Jan. 24, 2013, published in the *Toronto Star*

Full text enclosed. This same story is also reported in the Globe and Mail on Jan. 24 by its Africa writer, Geoffrey York. Both stories are prompted by the statement of the FIDH human rights agency, of which the latest update is now Jan. 24. [10]

SEGOU, MALI— Mali's army sealed off the central town of Sévaré to journalists on Wednesday following allegations by residents and human rights groups that government soldiers had executed Tuaregs and Arabs accused of collaborating with Islamist rebels.

The allegations, denied by the Malian army, threatened to cast a shadow over a French-led operation to drive Islamist fighters allied with Al Qaeda from northern Mali. They also pointed to a risk that the internationally backed military campaign could trigger further racially motivated killings in Mali's desert north, home to a complex mix of ethnic groups.

A Reuters reporter saw at least six bodies in two areas of the Walirdi district of Sévaré. [See a report from Sévaré further below in this posting.—RA] Three of them were lying, partly covered in sand, near a bus station and showed signs of having been burned. Three more had been thrown into a nearby well.

Oumar, a jewelry salesman who has long worked closely with Sévaré's Tuareg community, said his friend Hamid Ag Mohamed had been arrested by soldiers shortly after President Diounkounda Traore declared a state of emergency on Jan. 11, handing the military sweeping powers. "I tried to call him but the phone rang and he never answered. The next day, his body was behind the station in Sévaré," said Oumar, who declined to give his family name for fear of reprisals. "There were many other bodies there and in wells. It was only Tuaregs and Arabs, some with beards."

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), a global network of rights groups based in Paris, said it had evidence Mali's army had executed at least 11 people in Sévaré from Jan. 10 onwards. It called for an independent inquiry. It also reported that two Tuaregs were killed in the Niono region, farther to the west, and it cited other unconfirmed reports of summary executions in western and central Mali.

FIDH said victims were people accused of collaborating with the jihadists or of possessing weapons, those without proper identification documents or people who resembled members of lighter-skinned Arab and Tuareg ethnic groups associated with the rebels.

The army is dominated by black Africans from southern Mali.

“These reprisals, linked with the extreme tension which already exists between communities, is an explosive cocktail which makes one fear for the worst, especially in the context of the reconquest of the north,” said Souhayr Belhassen, president of FIDH.

Many in Mali’s powerful [sic] military, which toppled the government in March last year, are furious at the Tuaregs for precipitating a crisis which has displaced some 400,000 Malians and threatened to split the landlocked state in two.

The MNLA Tuareg separatist group seized control of northern Mali in April last year in a power vacuum left by a military coup. The MNLA, however, were quickly pushed aside by an Islamist alliance grouping Al Qaeda’s North African wing AQIM and Malian militant groups Ansar Dine and MUJWA.

Ethnic tensions have been fuelled by abuses on both sides. Dozens of Malian soldiers were slaughtered by rebels in the remote northern town of Aguelhoc in January 2012 when they ran out of supplies and ammunition.* The International Criminal Court said on Jan. 16 it was opening an inquiry into war crimes in Mali.

While some Tuaregs support the Islamists, many of them resent their fundamentalist form of Islam at odds with the region’s traditional moderate Sufi beliefs. David Gressly, UN regional humanitarian co-ordinator for the Sahel region, said he had no firm evidence of ethnic reprisals. “We have heard of rumours of abuses which we cannot confirm and we are asking for more access to see what is happening on the ground,” Gressly said. The United Nations is sending a team to Sévaré to investigate the claims and has requested Malian authorities to strongly denounce such activities.

P.S.

* Published on Rabble.ca on January 25, 2013. What follows is a slightly expanded version:
<http://www.rogerannis.com/reports-of-war-atrocities-grow-as-francemali-invaders-settle-into-a-long-war/>

The story of the “massacre” at Aguelhoc was a propaganda rumour that was hotly denied and disproven by the MNLA at the time. As to the forthcoming International Criminal Court investigation in Mali, this will likely serve to bolster the reasons provided by France for its invasion. Other ICC inquiries accompanying other imperialist invasions have routinely be used for such purposes.-RA

Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 27647), [A Sévaré, l’armée malienne « zigouille » des suspects](#).

[2] See on ESSF (article 27696), [Nouveau témoignage sur des exécutions sommaires au Mali](#).

- [3] http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2013/01/24/mali-on-est-tres-loin-de-l-enlissement-pour-l-instant_1820881_3212.html
- [4] <http://www.humanite.fr/monde/la-force-africaine-se-fait-attendre-au-mali-513538>
- [5] See on ESSF (article 27656), [We oppose the French intervention in Mali](#).
- [6] <http://www.ituc-csi.org/ituc-statement-on-mali?lang=en>
- [7] http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/no_08_-_list_affiliates_09gc_-_201211-2.pdf
- [8] See on ESSF (article 27672), [The World Peace Council denounces the brutal military intervention of France in Mali](#).
- [9] <http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Politics/ID/2328521129/>
- [10] See on ESSF (article 27658), [Exactions by Malian military: urgent need for an independent investigation commission](#).