

The French Intervention in Mali

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Upon the UN resolution No. 2085 on Mali, the ECWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, including 15 countries, had joined the Malian army, under an intense cover from France. Then, the French Prime minister said that the intervention in Mali aims at realizing three goals: halting the advancement of terrorist groups towards the south, preserving the existence and the territorial integrity of the Malian state, and preparing for the deployment of the African Intervention Force which was established by virtue of a Security Council resolution. Despite the fact that such political targets are geographically limited inside the Malian soil, yet this is not the truth, especially that terrorism is a trans-border phenomenon. The strategic aim for the intervention in Mali is the protection of the French interests (security and economically).

Fighting in Mali is a protection for Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritius. In this respect, France has understood the domino effect of the terrorist groups in Mali; if they took control over Mali, other countries will fall in their hands sooner or later. Thereupon, its intervention aims at imposing a reverse domino effect that would totally face the terrorist groups in the region and prevent any similar aggression on the fragile neighboring countries (lie under French influence). Undoubtedly, the stability of the terrorist groups along the shore for a long period of time (Mali, Niger, Mauritania) constitutes a security obsession for France.

The French military intervention in Mali has raised various questions and dimensions, the matter that made it appear as if Paris had hastily taken the decision of war, especially with the creeping of the fighters of the Qaeda-linked Tawhid and Jihad Movement in West Africa and *Harakat Ansar el-Din* (Movement of Religious Supporters) in the South towards the Capital Bamako, and their repercussions on various pivots, salient of which are the French and Western interest in Mali; the oil and mineral-rich country, and in Mali's neighboring countries such as Niger, Mauritius, Algeria and Cote d'ivoire.

The main target behind the French intervention in Mali is the protection of the financial, political and security interests. In this vein, various francophone countries in West Africa began orienting towards the US as regards the educational system and towards China and Iran as regards the trade relations. Furthermore, France, as a previous colonial power, did not accept to lose its previous spheres of influence in favor of other powers such as China and Iran, thus, France regarded it a ripe time for an intervention that would save its interests.

The expedient French decision came as a result of the new givings which the Islamist movements tried to impose through crippling to the South towards Bamako; the matter which means a full domination over Mali; or rather on all the west African states as was mentioned in *Ansar el-Din* statements as follows; “we neither need independence nor do we need secession, we rather want to apply Islamic *Shariaa* (law) over the whole Malian state, or rather on all the west African states” the matter which threatens the French interests in the region.

The French Interests in Mali and West Africa

1. Economic Interests

In Mali, French investments in the

mining sector is huge, not to mention the French companies that work in various fields either inside Mali or in its neighboring countries, especially as regards the huge investments in Algeria in the field of oil and the French investments in Niger and Mauritania. Thus the domination of the extremist Islamic movements which fight the Western states by all means in North Mali will lead to a state of instability in the region; thus hampering the French interests in Mali and in the whole region.

Mali is the third biggest gold producer in Africa after South Africa and China. It is noteworthy to mention that an Italian company had discovered petroleum, uranium and phosphate in north Mali in 2010, the matter behind France’s attempts to find a place for herself in the African coast especially upon the discovery of huge oil reserves in that place. Such attempts aim at compensating any deficiency that might happen upon Iran’s closure to the strategic Strait of Hormuz which the Gulf petroleum is exported to the rest of the world.

Undoubtedly, France has huge strategic and economic interests in Mali. According to the French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on January 14, 2013 “the main interests of France, Europe and Africa are at stake, thus we had to take a quick action.” On top of such French inter-

ests is finding Uranium in the African desert, as around 75% of France's needs of electricity comes from nuclear energy. In this respect, international energy estimations indicate that the north Mali desert and east of Niger occupy the third rank as of possessing the uranium reserves worldwide, not to mention the huge reserves of crude oil there.

In Niger, the French "AREVA" company provides more than third of the nuclear energy stations for (ODF) company for electricity in France. Thus, the French economic interest in Mali was one of the main targets behind the intervention; highlighting France's fear from the influence of the Islamic groups over the North which has huge mineral wealth, especially petroleum, phosphate, Iron and uranium.

2. Political Interests

Not only does France has economic interests in Mali, but it also has traditional and historic influence in the region, thus it is trying to re-draw its influence against the increasing US and Chinese dominations. In this respect, the US tried to build a huge military base so as to monitor the whole region extending from Somalia to Mauritania; an area double that of the whole European continent and had chosen north Mali as a headquarters for its military base (AFRICOM).

China's pragmatic policy towards

Africa is one of the two key actors in the African policy during the last decade. In this vein, many calls have emerged inside various African countries asking for fostering relations with the new emerging powers in Asia such as China, India and Malaysia that do not have any colonial history in Africa.

3- Security and Strategic Interests

France has huge economic interests in Mali and its neighboring countries that should be protected. At the same time, France wants to protect itself and its citizens abroad. Thus, the French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian said that the threats are related with "establishing a terrorist state at the gates of Europe and France" adding that his country will not leave any Islamic resistance remains, will eradicate terrorism along the coast and will restore Mali's territorial integrity. As for the prime minister, he concentrated upon the European and international dimensions for the threat saying that France has interfered in Mali "in order to stop the terrorist threat" which not only targets the African countries, but also all the European states.

Another psychological matter that should be taken into consideration is the terrorist groups who horrify France through kidnapping its citizens, thus giving France a good reason for targeting the kidnapers

themselves and for delivering a message saying that despite the threats on the lives of the French hostages, yet France will never hesitate in any military intervention.

The French military intervention in Mali has recorded some primitive successes such as seizure of cities and saving the weak transitional government in Bamako from the attack of the Islamic rebels. However, it is not yet clear whether the “war in Mali” will end soon or will extend to long periods. The French forces – especially the Air Force – can achieve successes in the operation in Mali as it can confine the French losses and intensify those of the armed groups on land.

In order for the peace and security to stabilize in Mali, such recommendations should be achieved:

- The international society, through the (ECOWAS) contact groups, should support the government and the political elite in Mali in applying wide-range political reforms in order to create a real democratic rule in Mali.
- The transitional government in Mali should be backed to adopt a comprehensive strategy for reform and rebuilding the army and the rest of the security bodies.
- The Sahel and Sahara countries should unite under a strong regional system that can address the

security challenges in the region, while concentrating on issues including the exchange of intelligence information, the security of the borders, fighting the smuggling and the organized crime which include drugs, human trafficking, weapons, explosives and fighters.

- The African and Malian forces should invest in building strong and amicable relations with the local citizens in north Mali so as to deprive the rebel groups from any kind of support from those citizens. Moreover, while fighting the Islamists, the French and African forces should avoid any kind of human rights violations.
- The French and African forces should develop a wide-range informative plan or a psychological strategy to face the Jihadi campaigns who accuse the Malian and foreign forces of declaring war in order to “destroy the Islamic emperor in Mali.”
- The (ECOWAS) should support Mali in developing and implementing an overall strategy for national conciliation while concentrating on addressing the Malian issues including the negotiations for finding solutions for the corruption, injustice and marginalization problems which the Malian minorities suffer from.