
Rescuing Mali from Islamist militants

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The eradication of reactionary political Islam from Mali is the unavoidable necessary condition for reconstruction of the country. But it is not sufficient. And as things stand, the current war will be long, costly and painful and its outcome remains uncertain.

I am one of those who out of principle condemn all military interventions by Western powers in the countries of the South, these interventions being by nature subject to the requirements of the deployment of control of the planet by the capital of the monopolies that dominate the system.

Is the French intervention in Mali an exception to the rule? Yes and no. This is the reason why I call to support it, without nevertheless thinking the least in the world that it will provide the answer that is necessary to the continual decay of the economic, social and political conditions not only in Mali but in all the countries of the region, which is itself the product of the policies of the deployment of the capitalism of the monopolies of the imperialist triad (U.S., Europe, Japan) which are always at work, as it is at the root of the implantation of political Islam in the region.

I. REACTIONARY POLITICAL ISLAM, THE ENEMY OF THE PEOPLES CONCERNED AND THE MAJOR ALLY OF THE STRATEGIES OF THE IMPERIALIST TRIAD. (1)

Political Islam - beyond the apparent variety of its expressions - is not a “movement of renaissance of religious faith” (whether you like that or not), but an arch-reactionary political force which condemns the peoples who are the final victims of the exercise of its power to regression in every way, making them thus incapable of responding positively to the challenges with which they are confronted. This power is not a brake on the continuation of the process of decay and pauperization which has been going on for three decades. On the contrary, it accentuates its movement, on which it feeds itself.

Such is the fundamental reason for which the powers of the triad - such as they are and remain - see in it a strategic ally. The systematic support provided by these powers to reactionary political Islam has been and remains one of the major reasons for the “successes” that it has chalked up: the Taliban in Afghanistan, the FIS in Algeria, the “Islamists” in Somalia and the Sudan, those in Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere have all benefited from this support at a decisive moment for their seizure of local power. None of the components described as moderate of political Islam has ever truly dissociated itself from those who commit terrorist acts on the part of their so-called ‘Salafist’ components. They have benefited and continue to benefit from “exile” in the countries of the Persian Gulf, when necessary.

In Libya yesterday, in Syria still today they continue to be supported by these same powers of the triad. At the same time the exactions and the crimes that they commit are perfectly integrated into the talk that accompanies the strategy based on their support: they make it possible to give credence to the thesis of a “war of civilizations” which facilitates the “consensus” rallying of the peoples of the triad to the world project of the capital of the monopolies. The two lines of speech - democracy and the war on terrorism - complete themselves mutually in this strategy.

You need a good deal of naivety to believe that the political Islam of some - described on account of this as “moderate” - would be soluble in democracy. There is of course a sharing out of chores between them and the “Salafists” who they say exceed them with a false naivety by their fanatic, criminal and even terrorist excesses. But their project is the same - an archaic theocracy that by definition is the polar opposite of even minimal democracy.

II. SAHELISTAN, A PROJECT IN THE SERVICE OF WHOSE INTERESTS?

De Gaulle had cherished the project of a “Great French Sahara.” But the tenacity of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and the radicalization of the Mali of the Sudanese Union of Modibo Keita thwarted the project, definitively from 1962-1963. While there are perhaps some who are nostalgic about this project in Paris, I do not believe that they are able to convince politicians with a normal intelligence of the possibility of resuscitating it.

In fact, the Sahelistan project is not France’s - even if Sarkozy supported it. It is that of the nebula that is political Islam that is in question and benefits from the possibly favourable view of the United States and in its wake of their lieutenants in the European Union (which does not exist) - Great Britain and Germany.

“Islamic” Sahelistan would make possible the creation of a big country covering a good part of the Algerian, Nigerian, Mauritanian, and Malian Sahara rich in important mineral resources: uranium, petroleum and gas. These resources would not mainly be open to France, but in the first place to the dominant powers of the triad. This “kingdom”, like what Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates are, could easily “buy” the support of its sparse population, and its emirs could transform into fabulous personal fortunes the fraction of the rent that would be left to them. The Persian Gulf remains, for the powers of the triad, the model of the best useful ally/servant, despite the ferociously slave-owning and archaic character of its social management - I would say thanks to this character. The powers in place in Sahelistan would abstain from pursuing terrorist actions on their soil, without for all that refusing to possibly back them elsewhere.

France, which managed to safeguard from the project of the “Great Sahara” control of Niger and its uranium, would only occupy a secondary place in Sahelistan. (2)

It was up to François Hollande - and it is to his honour - to have understood and refused. We should not be amazed to see that the intervention which he decided on was immediately backed by Algiers and a few other countries which, however, are not classed by Paris as “friends.” The Algerian government demonstrated its perfect lucidity: it knows that the objective of Sahelistan also targets southern Algeria and not just northern Mali. (3) Nor should we be astonished that the “allies of France” - the United States, Great Britain, Germany, not to mention Saudi Arabia and Qatar - are in reality hostile to this intervention, which they only barely accepted because they were confronted with a *fait accompli* - F. Hollande’s decision. But they would not be unhappy to see the operation bog down and fail. That would give new vigour to the taking up of the Sahelistan project.

III. WINNING THE SAHARA WAR

I am hence one of those who wishes and hopes that the Sahara war will be won, that these Islamists will be eradicated from the region (Mali and Algeria in particular), Mali restored to its borders. This victory is the unavoidable necessary condition, but it is far from being a sufficient condition, for a later reconstruction of Malian society and government.

This war will be long, costly and painful and its outcome remains uncertain. Victory demands that certain conditions be met. Indeed it will not only be necessary for the French armed forces not to abandon the ground before victory, but in addition for a Malian army worthy of the name to be rebuilt rapidly. Because you must know that military intervention by the other African countries cannot constitute a decisive element in the victory.

The reconstruction of the Malian army is something that is entirely feasible. The Mali of Modibo was able to build an armed force that was competent and devoted to the nation, enough to dissuade aggressors like today’s AQMI Islamists. This armed force was systematically destroyed by Moussa

Traorés dictatorship and has not been rebuilt by his successors. But because the Malian people have full consciousness that their country had the duty to be armed, the reconstruction of its army benefits from a favorable terrain. The obstacle is financial: recruiting thousands of soldiers and equipping them is not within the possibilities of the present-day means of the country, and neither the African countries, nor the United Nations will consent to make up for this poverty. France must understand that the only means that will permit victory obliges France to do it. Becoming bogged down and defeat would not only be a catastrophe for the African peoples, it would also be one for France. Victory constitutes an important means for the restoration of France's place in the concert of nations, even beyond Europe.

Not much is to be expected from the countries of the CEDEAO. The praetorian guards of the majority of these countries are an army in name alone. Of course Nigeria disposes of equipped and numerous forces, unfortunately little disciplined is the least one can say; and many of its higher officers pursue no other objective than looting the regions where they intervene. Senegal also disposes of a competent and in addition disciplined military force, but a small one, on the size of the country. Farther away in Africa, Angola and South Africa could contribute effective support, but their geographical distance, and perhaps other considerations, make it likely that they will not see the interest.

A firm commitment from France, determine and for the whole necessary duration implies that Paris's diplomacy understand that it has to distance itself with regard to its teammates in NATO and Europe. This is far from being a sure thing and nothing indicates for the moment that F. Hollande's government is capable of daring to do it.

IV. WINNING THE DIPLOMATIC BATTLE

The visible conflict between the honorable objectives of the French intervention in Mali and the pursuit of the present diplomatic line of Paris will rapidly become intolerable. France cannot fight the "Islamists" of Timbuktu and support them in Aleppo!

French diplomacy, hooked onto NATO and the European Union, shares the responsibility of its allies in the successes of reactionary political Islam. It has furnished the shining proof in the Libyan adventure whose only result has been (and this was foreseeable and certainly desired, at least by Washington) not to liberate the Libyan people from Kaddafi (a clown more than a dictator) but to destroy Libya, which has become a terrain for operations by warlords, directly behind the reinforcement of AQMI in Mali.

Because the hydra of reactionary political Islam recruits as much in the sphere of organized crime as among the madmen of God. Beyond the "jihad", their emirs -who proclaim themselves intransigent defenders of the faith - get rich from trafficking drugs (the Talibans, AQMI), arms (the Libyan warlords) and prostitution (the Kosovars).

Now up to today French diplomacy supports these same groups, in Syria for example. The French media give credit to the communiqués of the supposed Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, a known front for the Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Ryad El Maleh, backed by the CIA and the British intelligence services. You might as well give credence to the communiqués of Ansar Eddine! France tolerates that the so-called "National Coalition of the forces of opposition and revolution" is presided over by Sheikh Ahmad El Khatib, chosen by Washington, Muslim Brother and the man behind the burning of the Douma neighbourhood in Damascus.

I would be surprised (but it would be an agreeable surprise) if F. Hollande dared to upset the table, as De Gaulle had done (leaving NATO, practicing in Europe the policy of the empty chair). We don't demand that he do so much, but only to turn his diplomatic relations in the direction demanded by

the pursuit of the action in Mali, to understand that France counts more adversaries in the camp of its “allies” than in that of its “enemies”! It would not be the first time that it would be thus when two sides clash on diplomatic terrain.

V. RECONSTRUCT MALI

The reconstruction of Mali cannot be the work of the Malians. Still it would be desirable that we help them rather than to put up barriers that make this reconstruction impossible.

French “colonial” ambitions - to make Mali a client state like a few others in the region - are perhaps not absent among some of those in charge of Mali policy in Paris. French neocolonialism still has its spokespeople. But they do not constitute a real danger, still less a major one. A reconstructed Mali will also be able to affirm - or to reaffirm - quickly its independence. On the other hand a Mali wrecked by reactionary political Islam would be incapable, for a long time, of conquering an honourable place on the world and regional chessboard. Like Somalia it would risk being wiped off the list of sovereign countries worthy of the name.

In the days of Modibo, Mali had made progress in the direction of social and economic progress like its independent affirmation and the unity of its ethnic components.

The Sudanese Union managed to unite in one nation the Bambara of the south, the Bozo fishermen, the Songhai peasants and the Bella of the Niger Valley from Mopti to Ansongo (today one forgets that the majority of the inhabitants of northern Mali is not made up of Tuaregs), and even got the Tuaregs to accept the liberation of their Bella serfs. It remains that the lack of means - and of will following the fall of Modibo - the governments in Bamako afterwards sacrificed the projects to develop the north. Some of the Tuareg demands are perfectly legitimate. Algiers which recommends distinguishing between the rebellion of the Tuaregs (who henceforth are on the sidelines) with whom one must talk, from the jihadists come from elsewhere - who are often perfectly racist with regard to “Blacks” - is proving its lucidity on this point.

The limits of the realizations of Mali under Modibo, but also the hostility of the Western powers (and of France in particular) are at the root of the directionlessness of the project and finally the success of the odious coup d'état of Moussa Traoré (backed to the end by Paris) whose dictatorship is responsible for the decomposition of Malian society, for its pauperization and its impotence. The powerful movement of revolt of the Malian people succeeded, at the price of tens of thousands of victims, in overthrowing the dictatorship, and fed big hopes for the renaissance of the country. These hopes have been disappointed. Why?

Since the fall of Moussa Traoré the Malian people have benefited from unparalleled democratic freedoms. Nevertheless this does not seem to have served any purpose: hundreds of phantom parties without a program, impotent elected parliamentarians, generalized corruption. Analysts whose minds are not always freed of racist prejudices hurry to conclude that this people (like Africans in general) is not ripe for democracy! One pretends not to know that the victory of the struggles of the Malian people coincided with the “neoliberal” offensive which imposed on this extremely fragile country a model of lumpen-development recommended by the World Bank and backed by Europe and France, a motor for social and economic regression and limitless pauperization.

It is these policies that bear the main responsibility for the failure of democracy, which is discredited. This involution has created here as elsewhere a favorable terrain for the increase in the influence of reactionary political Islam (financed by the Persian Gulf) not only in the north captured afterwards by AQMI but also in Bamako.

The decrepitude of the Malian government which resulted is the source of the crisis which led to the destitution of President Amani Toumani Touré (since a refugee in Senegal), to the unconsidered coup d'état of Sanogho and then the putting of Mali under guardianship with the "nomination" of a "provisory" president - said to be transitional - by the CEDEAO, whose presidency is exercised by the Ivory Coast president A. Ouattara who has never been anything except a civil servant of the IMF and the French ministry of cooperation.

It is this president, whose legitimacy in the eyes of the Malians is close to zero, who called for the French intervention. This fact considerably weakens the strength of Paris's argument, although it is diplomatically impeccable: that Paris responded to the call of the "legitimate" head of state of a friendly country. But then in what is the appeal of the Syrian head of state - incontestably just as legitimate - for the support of Iran and Russia "unacceptable"? It is up to Paris to correct its aim and to look again to its language.

But it is above all the reconstruction of Mali which henceforth depends on the pure and simple rejection of the free trade "solutions" which are at the root of all its problems. Now on this fundamental point the concepts of Paris remain those that are current in Washington, London and Berlin. Paris's "aid to development" concepts do not go beyond the dominant free trade litanies (4). Nothing more. Even if France wins the battle of the Sahara - which I hope for - France will remain poorly placed to contribute to the reconstruction of Mali. The certain failure would then allow the false friends of France to take their revenge.

[1] Ce rappel bref de ce qu'est réellement l'Islam politique réactionnaire s'impose en introduction. L'utilisation stratégique des mouvements en question par les forces du capitalisme/impérialisme dominant n'exclut pas les couacs. La mobilisation d'aventuriers « djihadistes » (« terroristes ») est le moyen incontournable par lequel l'Islam politique réactionnaire peut imposer son pouvoir. Ces aventuriers sont évidemment enclins à la criminalité (le pillage, la prise d'otages, etc.). De surcroît les « fous de Dieu » parmi lesquels ils recrutent leurs « armées » sont toujours, par nature, capables d'initiatives imprévisibles. Le leadership du mouvement (le Golfe wahabite) et celui de l'establishment des États-Unis (et par ricochet les gouvernements des alliés subalternes européens) sont conscients des limites de leur capacité de « contrôler » les instruments de la mise en œuvre de leur projet commun. Mais ils acceptent ce chaos.)

[2] La France a maintenu son contrôle sur le Niger et son uranium par le moyen d'une politique « d'aide » à bon marché qui maintient le pays dans la pauvreté et l'impuissance. Voir note

(4). Le projet du Sahélistan balaye les chances de la France de pouvoir maintenir son contrôle sur le Niger.

[3] Faisant contraste avec la lucidité d'Alger, on constatera le silence du Maroc, dont la monarchie avait toujours exprimé ses revendications sur Tombouctou et Gao (villes « marocaines » !) dans des discours tonitruants répétés. Une explication de ce repli de Rabat reste à être donnée.[4] Yash Tandon (En finir avec la dépendance de l'aide, CETIM, 2009) a démontré que « l'aide » associée à la conditionnalité commandée par le déploiement de la mondialisation libérale n'était pas un « remède » mais un poison. Dans l'introduction de cet ouvrage j'en ai moi-même fourni un exemple, précisément celui du Niger.

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