

MALI: The situation in Mali and the Sahara region, brought to public attention by French military intervention in early 2013, was analysed by JEREMY KEENAN, Professorial Research Associate at SOAS (School of Oriental & African Studies, London University). A consultant to the European Commission, UN and other international organisations, he is author of *The Dark Sahara* and *The Dying Sahara*, both about US imperialism in the region. He dated the general instability of the region from 2002-3, when US launched a new 'Saharan front' in its 'War on Terror'. Both a major US energy crisis making its oil involvement with Niger critical, and US hegemonism (shown in setting up AFRICOM, its African military command) were behind this development. Donald Rumsfeld colluded with Algeria's secret service to create 'false flag terrorism' to justify its intervention and support for the region's increasingly repressive regimes. "There had been little terrorism in Africa before this." Thousands of innocent people suffered loss of life and livelihood; also, multinationals expropriated Tuareg lands for uranium. The corrupt Mali government did not address these grievances: by 2004 all this had provoked Tuareg rebellions in Niger and Mali. There was also 'the Libya effect' after the overthrow of Gaddafi: Tuaregs who had fought in Libya for Gaddafi returned to Mali with their weapons, and formed the MNLA, fighting for independence of the Azawad region from Mali. Keenan argued that to counter this, Algeria supported or even created Islamist jihadist groups, e.g. MUJAO (Mouvement pour l'Unité du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest); also active was al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb. By 2012 these groups were sweeping across Mali, even threatening the capital, Bamako. Alarmed by these developments, in December 2012 UN Security Council authorised military action to oust the Islamists from northern Mali - thus leading to the French military action [January 2013 onwards], which has stabilised the situation. However, in view of the complexity of the situation, the proliferation of jihadist groups, the corruption of the Mali government and intervention by regional powers eg. Algeria, the prospects for lasting peace, in Keenan's view, are "extremely bleak". The US' role particularly, "far from bringing security, peace and development, (has) created a self-fulfilling prophecy of terror and instability in a region the size of western Europe."

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