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## Mali, Unintended Consequences, and Endless War

By John Glaser

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Kevin Gosztola over at FireDogLake <sup>[1]</sup> has a helpful round-up of news stories describing US involvement in the French-led military intervention in Mali:

CBS News reported <sup>[2]</sup> the "United States is providing communications and transport help for an international military intervention aimed at wresting Mali's north out of the hands of Islamist extremists." Though the mission is taking place in a "lawless desert in weakly governed country," French foreign minister Laurent Fabius said the operation was "gaining international backing. The US was providing communications and transportation support.

On January 12, "US officials" told CBS "they had offered to send drones to Mali." Drones excel in weakly governed and lawless deserts and lawless parts of countries it seems such parts are where the US likes to use drones the most.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported, "France asked Washington late last week to deploy unmanned aerial drones and aircraft that could be used to refuel French fighter planes in the air. Paris also asked the US to provide satellite imagery and share intercepts of militants' communications."

According to *WSJ*, unnamed US officials told the newspaper the role of America "would be non-lethal in nature, focused on intelligence collection and providing other support to French and any allied African forces." But drones were used to carry out strikes in Libya in 2011 and mission

creep could easily lead to a situation where military drones were not just providing non-lethal tactical support to enable French military operations.”

Also, Tom Vanden Brook of *USA TODAY* reported <sup>[3]</sup>, “US military warplanes assisted French forces battling Islamic extremists in two African countries over the weekend, according to the Pentagon, highlighting the growing threat of al Qaeda-linked terrorists in the region.”

It is important to remember, as I wrote almost a year ago <sup>[4]</sup>, that the unrest in Mali that is now the excuse for Western military intervention is a direct consequence of the US-NATO war in Libya in 2011. Former Gadhafi militias, including lots of Tuaregs from northern Mali, returned after an influx of arms flooded Libya. The resulting unrest led to a military coup - led by by Captain Amadou Sanogo, trained by the US military - against President Amadou Toumani Toure. So not only did the rise of Islamist rebels in Mali result directly from a separate US war in Muslim lands, but the subsequent collapse of the Malian government was instigated by militias that were trained and armed by the US.

“Over and over, western intervention ends up – whether by ineptitude or design – sowing the seeds of further intervention,” writes <sup>[5]</sup> Glenn Greenwald, with regard to the intervention in Mali. “Nobody is better at creating its own enemies, and thus ensuring a posture of endless war, than the US and its allies,” Greenwald adds. “Where the US cannot find enemies to fight against it, it simply empowers them.”

Walter Russell Mead writes <sup>[6]</sup> at *The American Interest* that Obama’s “counter-terrorism” policies in North Africa have failed catastrophically:

Since Obama took office the US spent almost \$600 million to combat Islamic militancy across North Africa. In countries like Mali and Niger US forces trained local soldiers in counterterrorism skills. Arms and equipment were bought so local governments could protect their territories. This strategy, in theory, would protect North Africa from falling into the hands of Islamist militants—who would impose strict Sharia rule on unwilling locals and use lawless territory to launch attacks on Western targets—without involving a heavy deployment of American troops like in Iraq and Afghanistan.

That was the theory. But as heavily armed Islamist militants battle French forces in the Battle for Mali, it’s clear Obama’s strategy to help weak North African states protect themselves from terrorists has failed catastrophically.

“This has been brewing for five years,” one US special ops officer told the *NYT*. “The analysts got complacent in their assumptions and did not see the big changes and the impacts of them, like the big weaponry coming out of Libya and the different, more Islamic” fighters who came in from Libya.

The *New York Times* reports <sup>[7]</sup> that some US officials believe a Western assault on Mali “could rally jihadists around the world and prompt terrorist attacks as far away as Europe.”

Indeed what has been happening in the news is revealing: the French-led air assaults seem to have emboldened <sup>[8]</sup> the Islamist fighters. Either Mali becomes a long lasting military quagmire, or a misleadingly quick mission leads to even worse blowback somewhere else in Africa's Sahel region, prompting yet another Western intervention.