France claims killing of Al Qaeda leaders in Northern Mali

Kumaran Ira
27 May 2015

The French defense ministry announced on May 20 that four Al Qaeda members, including two leaders allegedly involved in the deaths of several French citizens, were killed during a French Special Forces raid on the night of May 17-18 in northern Mali.

While it provided no details about the Special Forces raid, the defense ministry hailed the extrajudicial murder, declaring, “Four terrorists were killed in combat. They included Amada Ag Hama, alias ‘Abdelkim the Tuareg,’ and Ibrahim Ag Inawalen, alias ‘Bana,’ two of the main leaders of AQIM [Al Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb] and of Ansar Dine.”

These two groups, the ministry said, had carried out “numerous terrorist attacks on international forces, as well as repeated atrocities against Malian populations.”

Amada Ag Hama, also known as Al-Targui, claimed responsibility for killing two journalists of Radio France Internationale (RFI), Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon, in Kidal in northern Mali in November 2013. The journalists were covering the Malian legislative election campaign.

Hama was allegedly involved in the killing of French aid worker Michel Germaneau in 2010 and Philippe Verdon in 2013, as well as in the kidnapping of four French citizens working for nuclear energy firm Areva in the uranium mining town of Arlit, Niger. (See: France seizes on murder of RFI journalists to intensify Mali war)

Bana was a former Malian colonel who deserted the army to join the Islamist group Ansar Dine. He reportedly executed 80 unarmed men in the rural village of Aguelhok in the Kidal region of northern Mali in January 2012.

The killing of the two men by French Special Forces occurred without any judicial proceeding—the inquiry into the assassination of two RFI journalists is still taking place. Moreover, the circumstances of the murder of the journalists remain unclear. They were killed in an area with a heavy presence of French and UN forces.

Previously, French and Malian authorities said the killing of the journalists would lead to an investigation and a trial. Last October, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told deputies, “The investigation is entering an absolutely decisive phase. Investigators should be able to rapidly obtain all the elements allowing for the arrest of the guilty parties.”

On May 20, the parent company of RFI, France Médias Monde, said in a statement that it “expects that the ongoing judicial inquiry into the assassination of its two reporters will explain the circumstances of the tragedy and lead to the arrest of the assassins.”

The extrajudicial killing of the two Islamist leaders will allow French authorities to shut down the investigation into the murder of the two journalists.

After the raid, Fabius praised the killing of top Al-Qaeda members, boasting, “One should keep in mind that France has a long memory.”

The killing of the two men came after French forces killed Ahmed al Tilemsi, a senior commander of the al Mourabitoun Islamist group in northern Mali last December. He was a founding member of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), which merged with fighters loyal to Islamist leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar to form al Mourabitoun in 2013.

Even as French officials persist in claiming that they are fighting a “war on terror” in Mali, Paris and its allies continue to depend on Islamist fighters elsewhere. Al Qaeda-linked Islamists targeted for assassination by French forces also serve as its proxy forces in wars for regime change in Libya and Syria.

© World Socialist Web Site

During the 2011 Libyan war, Paris and Washington used such Islamist militias as its ground troops to oust the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

The ongoing war in Mali is the direct product of these NATO-led proxy wars. Mali has been rocked by conflict since Gaddafi's overthrow, after Tuareg rebels who fought in support of Gaddafi returned with heavy weapons to Mali. They took control of vast areas of Northern Mali in early 2012, seeking greater autonomy in an area they refer to as "Azawad."

France invaded Northern Mali in January 2013 to regain control of the region. Islamist control of the area would serve to discredit pro-French regimes in the region and undermine France's highly profitable uranium mining operations, particularly in neighboring Niger.

Currently, France has 3,000 troops deployed across the strategic Sahel region as part of a military operation codenamed Barkhane. French troops are carrying out military operations in the former French colonies of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad.

Since the French war in Africa began, the Malian crisis has escalated. The killing of the two Al Qaeda leaders came as the Malian government struck a preliminary peace deal, led by Algeria, with several armed groups on May 15. The main Tuareg rebel coalition, the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), boycotted the deal however, demanding more concessions from the Malian regime in Bamako.

Bamako is seeking a deal with the CMA in an effort, in part, to isolate the Islamists. Speaking in Accra, Ghana's capital, on May 19, Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop claimed that Islamist groups remain a "big concern," calling for a special military force to block them. At the same time, he called on the CMA to strike an agreement.

"The situation on the ground is very unstable, it's critical, it's time for them to take a decision so that we can go ahead and implement the May 15 peace deal," he said.

Over the past days, Northern Mali has seen surging violence and atrocities. Thousands have fled fighting between French-backed Malian forces and rebels in the area. On May 21, the CMA said the Malian army executed nine civilians in Tin Hama, including a Malian aid worker.

A spokesman for the UN's humanitarian office, Jens Laerke, said "Our partners and local authorities on the ground estimate that over the past two weeks, nearly 27,000 people have fled their homes and villages. In the past week alone, 20,000 people have been uprooted by this violence. The displaced people are currently staying in temporary shelters or with host families in the larger population hubs in the region or on the south bank of the Niger River. They are in urgent need of water, food, non-food items and emergency shelter."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site