

US Special Forces deploy to Mali in wake of Bamako hotel attack

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Unidentified gunmen armed with grenades and assault rifles stormed the Blu Radisson luxury hotel in Mali's capital of Bamako on Friday, killing at least 27 and capturing as many as 170 hostages.

As French war planes patrolled above, French, American, UN, and Malian government troops surrounded and assaulted the hotel, eventually securing the upscale facility after a siege lasting into the afternoon.

US Special Forces participated in the rescue operation, evacuating as many as a dozen American nationals present inside during the attack, according to US media. US forces also provided intelligence and at least one Reaper drone in support of the rescue operation.

Scores of additional US and French Special Forces, over and above the substantial commando forces already maintained by both countries in the area, have been deployed to Bamako in response to the incident. At least 25 additional US military forces were already present in Bamako and coordinated with the government's response.

At least one American was killed in the attack, CNN reported late Friday. As many as five US Defense Department personnel were inside when the attack began, according to unnamed Pentagon officials who spoke to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Mali's government has declared a 10-day national emergency in response to the attacks, to begin at midnight on Friday.

The Islamist militia Al Mourabitoun, a split off from al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb formed by notorious international terrorist Mokhtar Bel Mokhtar, claimed responsibility for the attack in a Twitter post and an audio recording immediately following the attack. In its recorded statement, al Mourabitoun claimed that the attack was launched in retaliation for atrocities committed by French and Malian government forces against communities in the north.

Coming on the heels of politically-charged terror attacks in Paris and against a Russian jetliner over Sinai, Friday's attack against the high-profile Blu Radisson hotel, which is

frequented by an international and upper-class clientele, has ominous implications.

Washington and Paris have already seized on the Paris attacks to step up their wars in Syria and Iraq and impose authoritarian measures on their own populations. In the one week that has passed since the attacks, French warplanes have massively intensified their bombardment of Syria, and French cities have been placed under martial law.

France already maintains a substantial trans-Sahel garrison of more than 3,000 troops, who have been tasked with open-ended "counter-terror" operations across Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, as part of Operation Barkhane.

In remarks Friday, French leaders compared the events in Bamako to the Paris attacks and vowed to organize a "national and international" response.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius struck a bellicose tone, denouncing the "murderous ideology" of the alleged Islamist attackers and announcing that French diplomats are drafting a UN resolution calling for new trans-national anti-terror initiatives.

"It is not possible to negotiate with them. All they want is to kill everyone who does not accept their domination. We will have to fight them nationally and internationally," Fabius said.

"Once again, terrorists want to mark with their barbaric presence all places where they can kill or massacre," French President Francois Hollande said.

US officials have also signaled that Washington will step up its intervention in Mali. The US government will "remain a steadfast partner of the Government of Mali and others in the region fighting the terrorist groups," White House national security spokesman Ned Price said Friday.

"We are prepared to assist the Malian government in the coming days," Price said.

Military experts cited in US media have increasingly called for an enhanced military presence in the region. France's Barkhane deployment is currently "spread too thin," according to expert analysis cited by the *LA Times*.

“You have so many various groups trying to make their day in the sun. We’ll continue to have these attacks,” a European security analyst told the *Wall Street Journal*.

Armed Islamist networks have flourished across North Africa in recent years, as regional order has rapidly destabilized amid the fallout from the 2011 US-NATO war against Libya.

The breakup of the Libyan state under the US-NATO onslaught transformed Libya and neighboring countries into staging areas for Islamist groups and other ethnic militias, while flooding the entire northern half of the continent with weapons and fighters.

The numerous “rebel” militias, including Islamist forces affiliated with al Qaeda, mobilized by the Western powers as proxies against the Gaddafi regime, have continued to wage war both inside Libya and in surrounding countries. Many of these forces subsequently went on to fight in the US-fomented Syrian civil war, after being infiltrated into Syria via terrorist “ratline” networks covertly managed by US intelligence.

The US-NATO smashup of Libya also supplied forces for a new civil war in Mali, sending Tuareg, Islamist and other militias streaming across Libya’s southern border, armed to the teeth with weapons looted from government stockpiles or donated by the Western governments.

The seizure of towns in the north by a combination of Tuareg tribal fighters and Islamist militias fresh from the war in Libya rapidly provoked a civil war and precipitated a military coup in Bamako, led by a US-trained officer.

France responded by invading the country in January 2013, with US backing. Presented as an anti-terror mission, in reality the French intervention was launched as part of the broader drive by the imperialist powers to reimpose direct political and military rule over Africa, which has been massively accelerated since 2008.

Since the official formation of US Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2008, US detachments have engaged in some form of military or covert operation in literally every African country. In addition to AFRICOM’s substantial conventional forces, US Special Forces have developed extensive operations in the Central African Republic, Somalia, Mali, Uganda and elsewhere. By 2015, some 1,400 US Special Forces were conducting year-round operations in at least 23 African countries, according to US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) Africa chief General Donald Bolduc.

AFRICOM claims to be engaged in operations to “dismantle” literally dozens of different alleged terror groups, across every major subregion of Africa.

US Special Forces are targeting at least 43 terror groups and militias in the Central African subregion alone, not

counting Uganda’s Lords Resistance Army, General Bolduc said in remarks earlier in November.

The French government has lobbied hard to maintain US support for its operations in Mali and the broader Sahel, former French ambassador to the US Gerard Araud told the Huffington Post.

German imperialism is preparing its own “independent and robust” combat missions in Mali, German media reported in October. The German operations will be coordinated closely with some 600 Dutch forces already stationed in the country and will “comprehensively deploy the whole spectrum of its available means,” according to the guidelines.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier declared in response to Friday’s events that “today’s terror attack makes clear that there is a long way to go before Mali is stabilized.”

“Islamic terrorism in the region hasn’t been defeated yet,” Steinmeier said.

The German government is planning “joint ventures” and “direct investment” in central Africa, Steinmeier said Friday during remarks in Zambia.

The new Mali operations are in line with policy guidelines adopted by Berlin last year calling for aggressive German military and political interventions on the continent. The policy guidelines openly stated that these efforts are aimed at securing German control over Africa’s “rich natural resources.”

The dissolution of the Soviet Union opened up new African vistas for the US and European powers, which have responded with a ferocious scramble to redivide Africa’s vast resources and markets.

Africa’s national bourgeois elite has grown rich collaborating with this project, yet in the process it has discredited itself in the eyes of the masses. Across the continent, governments are tottering and social turmoil is reaching historic levels. The Malian government, despite extensive military assistance from the West, cannot even secure the most rarified wealthy enclaves in its capital.



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