

At least 95 killed in massacre at Sobane Kou village in Mali

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A horrific massacre took place overnight Sunday and early Monday morning in the central Malian town of Sobane Kou. At least 95 of the town's inhabitants were slaughtered, including women and children, but many more remain unaccounted for. This is the latest in a series of mounting sectarian massacres produced by the predatory policies of imperialism throughout the region, above all France and Germany, and their neo-colonial occupation of Mali and the Sahel.

No one has claimed responsibility for the mass killing on Sunday night, which targeted a village inhabited by the ethnic Dogon community. There is suspicion, however, that it was a retaliatory action for an equally brutal massacre on March 23, when heavily-armed Dogon fighters with ties to government security forces attacked the predominantly Muslim Fulani village of Ogossagou, near the border with Burkina Faso. They killed approximately 160 people, including men, women and children, and injured more than 50.

The official death count of 95 civilians in Sobane Kou is based only on the bodies that have already been found, most of them badly burned. It will likely rise further. The official population of the village is 300, but an *Al Jazeera* reporter stated that when a roll call was conducted on Monday, "they had only a few dozen people coming forward."

A survivor of the Sobane Kou attack, who gave his name as Armadou Togo, told AFP that "about 50 heavily-armed men arrived on motorbikes and pickups. They first surrounded the village and then attacked—anyone who tried to escape was killed. ... Some people had their throats cut or were disemboweled, grain stores and cattle were torched. No one was spared—women, children, elderly people."

A spokesman for Dan Na Ambassagou, the Dogon militia suspected of having attacked Ogossagou, said:

"We are in consternation. ... After the authorities inspect the site, we will proceed with the burials."

An escalating conflict between the Fulani and Dogon ethnic communities is underway. Six months ago, a massacre at the Fulani village of Koulongon killed 39 people.

The Malian government in Bamako, despised by the population as a corrupt puppet of the Western imperialist powers occupying the country, reacted to the Sobane Kou massacre by pledging to prevent further bloodshed. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita cut short an official visit to Switzerland, telling the local public broadcaster that the "country cannot be led by a cycle of revenge and vendetta."

But the reality is that the bloodshed is the catastrophic outcome of the aggressive, militarist policies of the imperialist powers, above all the United States, Germany and France, and their client government in Bamako.

The origins of the conflict must be sought most immediately in the 2011 NATO war in Libya, which, with the support of right-wing fundamentalist Islamist proxy forces, destroyed the government of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The outcome of this war was the complete destruction of Libyan society. The country is now run by rival militia groups tied to the imperialist powers, who have kept the country in a state of civil war for nearly a decade since the NATO intervention.

Following the destruction of the Gaddafi regime, thousands of fighters poured out of Libya and across the Sahara, traveling to the Sahel region, including Mali. Various rival militias declared an independent or Islamic state in northern Mali.

Paris reacted in 2013 by launching a new war to occupy its former colony, one of the poorest countries in the world, to save the Bamako regime and destroy

the northern Mali militias. For six years now, Paris has sunk deeper into a quagmire in Mali. President Emmanuel Macron has continued the war, codenamed Operation Barkhane, initiated by Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande, involving an occupation force of 4,500 French troops and troops from five former French colonies in the Sahel: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

As it rapidly moves to re-militarize its foreign policy, Berlin also approved military operations in support of the French only two months after the initial French invasion. Last month, the German parliament voted overwhelmingly to extend the military occupation of the country with 1,100 soldiers until 2020, at a yearly cost of 400 million euros.

These operations have nothing to do with protecting the local population from Islamist militias, which were armed and funded by US and European intelligence agencies in Libya. They are aimed at propping up the puppet government in Bamako, suppressing the resistance of the impoverished rural population and workers to the government, and maintaining their control over the resource-rich region.

The imperialist intervention in Mali led directly to the growth of ethnic tensions between the predominantly Muslim Fulani community and the Dogons. There are widespread suspicions of state involvement in the ethnic conflicts that are now erupting. The Malian government has utilized the Dogon militia in the French-led war against Islamist militias, which have recruited disproportionately among the Fulani.

There were reports that a dozen uniformed security members were among those who carried out the March 23 massacre in Ogossagou. At the same time, while the government announced that it would dissolve the militia after that massacre, this was never carried out. Nor are there reports of criminal prosecutions related to those killings.

There is, however, deep and growing opposition in the Malian population to the imperialist powers and the Bamako regime. Following the massacre on March 23, protests and strikes of tens of thousands of workers and impoverished rural people broke out, directed against the central government and the occupying forces, which the population considered responsible for allowing the attacks to take place. After a protest of tens of thousands on April 5 in the capital, the government of

Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga was forced to resign.

Radio France Internationale-Afrique reported an outpouring of opposition on social media to the Franco-German war and the related UN military mission in the country. “What shame for the UN mission in Mali,” wrote one user on Twitter, while another wrote: “The breakthrough in Mali will be the departure of the UN force and the Barkhane force.”



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