

Malian president accuses Paris of secretly arming terrorist groups to provoke war

Alex Lantier**14 October 2021**

In a statement made last Friday to the Russian news service *RIA Novosti*, Malian Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga accused the French government of secretly arming Islamist terrorists to maintain the conflict in the country and justify the French military occupation.

Maiga's statement, about which the French press has maintained a deafening silence, is an indictment of the French state and its NATO allies. Two French presidents, François Hollande of the Socialist Party and Macron, and their allies have been waging war in Mali since 2013. Yet Maiga, installed in power by the Malian army that enjoys the support of Paris, accuses them of using criminal methods to justify a bloody war in his country.

Moreover, the same Islamist terror networks have committed attacks in Paris and across Europe, which Hollande and Macron used to justify a state of emergency and conduct a violent crackdown on strikes and "yellow vests" in France. Maiga's accusation compromises all the official justifications for this reactionary offensive against the working class in Europe.

Maiga blamed French forces that arrived at the beginning of the war in Kidal, in the north of the country, where several militias hostile to the central Malian power in Bamako were active. "France created an enclave in Mali, it formed and trained a terrorist organization in Kidal," he said, adding: "Having arrived in Kidal in 2013 during the offensive against the armed groups in the northern regions, France prohibited the Malian army from returning to Kidal."

He continued: "Ansar Dine, the leader of an international terrorist organization, a branch of Al Qaeda in Mali—the French took his two deputies to form another organization... The Malian government so

far does not have authority over the region of Kidal. However, it was France that created this enclave, a zone of armed groups trained by French officers. We have proof of this."

To back up his accusations against Paris, Maiga recalled that the war in Mali started from conflicts between militias that fled Libya after the war waged against that country by Paris, London and Washington in 2011 in alliance with Al Qaeda. "You know, the terrorists first came from Libya," he said. "Who destroyed the Libyan state? It was the French government with its allies."

Maiga also responded to Macron's threats to slow the withdrawal of French troops and the arrival of Russian forces requested by the Malian regime. Macron had said he wanted France to "withdraw (its) military bases as soon as possible," but then claimed that this withdrawal would require a total transformation of Malian state policy: "This implies a return of a strong state and investment projects, so that young people do not turn, as soon as the terrorist groups return, to the worst."

Calling this comment "blackmail," Maiga said, "This blackmail cannot weaken our determination to protect our territory, our country. This blackmail will not be a reason to stop cooperation with reliable partners like Russia... If we conclude an agreement with Russia, practice shows that it is a reliable partner. We are a sovereign state and that gives us the right to cooperate with any state in the interest of our people. This is our only goal!"

Maiga's accusations against Paris are not simply based on information from the Malian state, but also on the words of senior French officials. Indeed, the former French ambassador to Mali and Senegal, Nicolas Normand, had already criticized the war in

Mali—Operation Serval and then Operation Barkhane—in 2019, in terms that support Maiga’s accusations on several points.

Normand highlighted the power granted by Paris to militias and especially to the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), linked to various Al Qaeda networks including Ansar Dine. Interviewed by Radio France Internationale, Normand had said that Operation Serval sought

to prevent the various jihadist groups gathered together from surging southward ... toward Bamako. The problem is that France then thought it was distinguishing between good and bad armed groups. Some were perceived as political, and others were perceived as terrorist. And the French army went looking for this group—it was the MNLA at the time—these Tuareg separatists, from a particular tribe that was a minority among the Tuaregs themselves, the Ifoghas... It was given the town of Kidal. And then, subsequently, there were the Algiers agreements, which put these separatists on a kind of pedestal, on a par with the state, so to speak.

Normand coolly described the class strategy of French imperialism to win the loyalty of the most privileged social strata in northern Mali.

Calling the Tuareg nationalist rebellion in Azawad “a defense of the feudal privileges of a minority of Tuaregs in the Kidal region,” he pointed to the “inter-Tuareg rivalries... The Imghad group was pro-Bamako, [and sought] to resist the feudal power of the Ifoghas nobility, which was separatist in large part in order to resist democratization—the power of numbers, and the equality of status between the nobles and the third estate.”

This strategy, while it may have paid off for a time in forging links between Paris and Tuareg elites, became an obstacle to Paris’ attempts to dictate an end to the conflict. In the face of rising opposition to the French war from the Malian population, Normand argues, it left Paris allied with a small, privileged elite that also had an interest in maintaining the conflict. Referring to

the Algiers accords signed in 2015 with Paris’ support, Normand said:

The problem with the Algiers agreement is that the signatories were given a very advantageous status and all sorts of material benefits. ... In addition, the outcome of the agreement is disarmament and elections. And this minority Ifoghas nobility has no interest in elections. Because at that time, they would undoubtedly be swept away by the non-Ifoghas majority... In Kidal, the Ifoghas are in the minority, and they have all the power now.

Normand argued that Paris should strengthen its control over northern Mali by sponsoring negotiations among Tuaregs. He cited Ghana, “a successful example, where traditional chiefs have retained some local powers, land and legal [authority]... So, we can learn from that.”

In reality, the wars in Libya and Mali were and are dirty wars, conducted behind the backs of the French by a financial aristocracy seeking to oppress Africans by dividing them, in order to better rule. They have gone hand in hand with the construction of a police state in France itself, attacking social rights—labor codes, pension and unemployment entitlements—in order to exploit workers in France, and responds to popular opposition with police repression.

French troops must leave Mali and Africa, and Maiga’s accusations must be investigated to establish Paris’s responsibility for terrorist actions. The essential precondition for this is the building of an international political movement in the working class, uniting the workers of Africa and Europe in a struggle against imperialism and war and for socialism.



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