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France will soon repent for backing al-Qaeda terrorists in Syria

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In late February, some international agencies reported that hundreds of foreign rebels were fleeing from the Idleb Province in Northwestern Syria through Turkey under the claim that they were planning to join al-Qaeda militants in Mali in order to fight against French troops deployed there.

The reason of this withdrawal is not clear. Some observers said that the real reason behind it was the Syrian army's offensive against terrorist groups in the province and the disappointment of some militants who have seen that their fight is not popular in Syria, as their recruiters had made them believe before going to Syria.

The irony is that France, which invaded Mali some weeks ago to theoretically fight against radical groups in that country, will have to end up fighting against the same groups that the French government has been openly funding. These militants have used French money and training in Syria in order to gain combat experience and they will implement this newly-acquired knowledge against French troops in Mali.

According to observers, France has become the most prominent Western backer of Syria's armed opposition and is now directly funding terrorist groups around Aleppo and other parts of the Arab country as part of a new attempt to overthrow the Syrian government. Large sums of money have been delivered by French government proxies across the Turkish border to rebel commanders, diplomatic sources have confirmed. The money has been used to buy weapons inside Syria and to fund armed operations against government forces.

On March 14, French FM Laurent Fabius announced that France and the UK would ignore a EU ban on sending weapons to Syria in order to supply terrorist groups fighting there with more arms. The goal remains the same: to overthrow Bashar al Assad's government. The French newspaper *Le Figaro* also reported in those days that French military advisers had recently met with rebel groups inside Syria, in an area between Lebanon and Damascus. It is worth pointing out that sending military personnel to a country without the permission of its government amounts to a military invasion.

Despite all this support, the political goal of France in Syria seems to be as far as ever. "Things are not moving. The solution that we had hoped for, and by that I mean the fall of Bashar and the arrival of the (opposition) coalition to power, has not happened", acknowledged Fabius on January 24. In December 2012, he had claimed that the "end is nearing" for the Syrian president. A senior Lebanese official who visited the France towards the end of last year told the daily Al Safir that "France was surprised by the fact that Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, his regime and his army could resist".

For its part, the Syrian government has condemned this French interference in its internal affairs. "France is acting like a hostile nation", said National Reconciliation Minister Ali Haidar to AFP. "It is as if it wants to go back to the time of the occupation," he added, referring to the French rule in Syria after World War I. Damascus has made it clear that France's current policies will weaken or even eliminate its political, economic and cultural influence in Syria, maybe forever.

Moreover, France is now getting nervous about the possibility of reprisals from the al-Qaeda-linked groups, similar to those it is funding in Syria, for its intervention in Mali. On March 1, three suspected militants were arrested in southern France for allegedly planning an attack in the deays ahead, the Paris prosecutor said.

Change of foreign policy

The boomerang effect of supporting terrorism in Syria is just one of the disastrous consequences

of the change of the French policy towards the Arab and Muslim world, which started when the pro-Israeli and pro-NATO Nicolas Sarkozy became President. Prior to that fact, France had gained a solid reputation due to its Gaullist foreign policy, one of whose pillars was the independence of the country with respect to the United States. In February 2003, French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, was universally applauded when he opposed Colin Powell's pathetic attempts to justify the then-forthcoming invasion of Iraq with blatant lies about the non-existent Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

The new French foreign policy, under influence of Zionist politicians such as Sarkozy himself, Bernard Kouchner or Laurent Fabius and Zionist activists as Bernard Henry-Levy, changed the equation. France began to promote pro-Israeli and neo-colonial policies in Africa and the Middle East, where France adopted an even more radical stance against Syria and Iran than any other Western country.

In Africa, Paris has increased its military presence in recent years. France's intervention in Mali, with a contingent of 750 troops, has sought to bolster the Malian army against the al-Qaeda rebels, who have controlled the north of the country for about two years. However, the war in Mali is still beginning and, even worse, it is becoming another asymmetric and far-reaching war which could involve France for years, although Paris has repeatedly announced its willingness to evacuate its army from the African country as soon as possible.

Qatar, France's ally, supported extremists in Mali

On the other hand, Qatar, which just happens to be a major ally of France in the Syrian question, has criticized Paris's intervention in Mali arguing that the force would not solve the problem. French officials have openly accused Qatar of funding the Mali rebels.

The first accusations of Qatari involvement with Tuareg separatists and al-Qaeda-linked groups came in a June 2012 article in French weekly the Canard Enchaîné. The publication quoted an unnamed source in French military intelligence saying: "The MNLA (secular Tuareg separatists), al-Qaeda-linked Ansar Dine and MUJAO [movement for unity and Jihad in West Africa] have all received cash from Doha." "The French government knows perfectly well who is supporting these terrorists. Qatar, for example, continues to send so-called aid and food every day to the airports of Gao and Timbuktu."

The speculation is that Qatar is keen to increase its influence in Mali in order to develop business ties with this nation, which is believed to have significant oil, gas and uranium resources. Moreover, its presence in Mali "greatly increase the Emirate's influence in West Africa and the Sahel region", regional geopolitical expert Mehdi Lazar, who specialises on Qatar, wrote in French weekly news magazine L'Express in December. Qatar would also be trying to destabilize Algeria, one of the Arab countries remaining free from its political influence.

France, for its part, is determined to help the pro-French military junta rule the entire nation and sees Qatari activities in Mali with dismay. The Canard Enchaîné wrote: "Earlier this year, several notes from the DGSE (the French Intelligence Service) alerted the Elysee Palace on international activities and, dare we say, the emirate of Qatar."

On 22 January, French news site France24 published an article entitled “Is Qatar fuelling the crisis in north Mali?” which claimed that Doha had taken sides with the Mali insurgents. According to author Segolene Allemandou, Qatari rulers aim to spread extremism in Africa with the help of these rebels. The subtle message was clear: the emirate’s support for terrorism will damage its long-term image in Europe.

Destroying a pluralist Syria

In this context, everyone can understand that Saudi and Qatari support extremists who fight against a multifaith and multicultural Syria and against all the religious groups supporting interfaith cooperation and coexistence, such as mainstream Sunni Muslims, Shiites, Alawites and Christians. After all, in Saudi Arabia only the Wahabi current enjoys full religious freedom. The rest of the faiths are discriminated, persecuted or banned. But some people can find it difficult to understand why the West, including France, is allied with extremist Salafist groups persecuting Christians and destroying churches.

The answer is that France and other Western governments are actually not interested in democracy or political and religious freedom but in pursuing their own political, strategic and economic interests at any cost. French aggressions in Africa have led to the death of thousands of innocent people and have ruined the lives of millions of others, not to mention its involvement in the Rwandan genocide in 1994. With its current policies towards Syria, Paris only tries to reimpose their neo-colonial yoke on that country. However, after many decades of independence and of enjoying their sovereignty, Syrian people are not willing to become slaves of European governments or of corrupt, backward, terrorist-friendly and despotic regimes as the Saudi or the Qatari.

By funding and delivering weapons to terrorist groups, the French government, alongside with its allies, is not only violating the international law but it is also destroying the possibility of a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict and leaving its resolution in the hands of the military. In this way, Syria’s friends should take good note of this fact and multiply their military aid to Syria in order to prevent their own interests from being damaged. The Syrian state is strong and its people is indomable, but there is no doubt that Syria will need all kind of support from free people in the world in order to resist this aggression.