



Zero Dark Mali

by

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on

[Asia Times](#)



Gooooooooood morning, Vietnam! No, sorry, that was another quagmire.

The soundtrack then was Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, Motown and Stax. Now it's Gooooooooooooood morning, Mali! Yet the soundtrack can't be something as transcendental as Rokia Traore's Dounia, or as delightfully psychedelic as Amadou and Mariam's Dimanche a Bamako. It's way more menacing. Something like - he's inescapable - Hendrix in Machine Gun.

Timing - as in the expansion of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) - is everything. Carefully choreographed Libyan blowback in the Sahel could not be a better replacement for NATO raising



a monster white flag in Afghanistan. There's no Goooooooood morning, Kabul! anymore; there's just the sorry countdown to see the last NATO helicopter leaving Bagram - Saigon 1975-style.

The Economist - the voice of the City of London - is even promoting "Afrghanistan". There are nuances, of course. NATO had its ass kicked in Afghanistan by all sorts of Pashtun factions bundled up as "Taliban". But NATO "won" in Libya. With a certainly foreseen spin-off; the Islamist brigade which attacked the In Amenas gas field complex in the Algerian desert was using NATO-facilitated Kalashnikov AK-104s, F5 rockets, 60 mm gun-mortars and, in a nifty NATOGCC fashion touch, the "chocolate chip" camouflage Qatar handed out to the NATO rebels in Libya (yellow flak jackets with brown patches). What next, the cover of Uomo Vogue?

I'm your bogeyman, turn me on

Inevitably, that most convenient of bogeymen - al-Qaeda - is once again back in fashion, the whole nebula of Salafi-jihadi groups and sub-groups promoted by the French-Anglo-American triad as the root of all evil in Northern Africa (but not in Libya, where they were exalted as "freedom fighters") .

Mokhtar Belmokhtar, one of the founding members of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), is for all practical purposes an easily digestible Osama bin Laden remix. Belmokhtar was a classic "Arab Afghan" - part of that multinational legion trained by the ISI/CIA axis to fight the Soviets in 1980s Afghanistan. When he was back in Algeria in 1993 he joined the local jihad, as part of the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC).

AQIM since 2007 was very close to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), whose fighters were also trained in Afghanistan by ISI/CIA. And all the time LIFG was always conveniently manipulated by the CIA and MI6 against Col. Muammar Gaddafi.

After the targeted assassination of Gaddafi, AQIM was duly weaponized by LIFG, and even presented with scores of jihadis. Thus, unsurprisingly, there were plenty of LIFG fighters involved in the In Amenas raid. On top of it AQIM is also very close to the al-Nusra Front in Syria, which Washington branded as a terrorist organization (but not the eternally bickering "coalition" which wants to topple Bashar al-Assad).

The key point is that Qatar is financing all these people - AQIM, the splinter MUJAO, Belmokhtar's brigades and the Salafist Ansar Ed-Dine, a bunch of Wahhabi takfiris who have absolutely nothing to do with tolerant Mali culture.

What does stand out is the absolutely perfect pretext for NATO to get down to the groove in Northern Africa after its humiliating Afghan defeat. But wait; AFRICOM is already there! Still, Algeria - a secular Arab republic who historically has been pro-Cuban and pro-Soviet Union - better beware, and better get its US\$50 billion in reserves out of Western banks as soon as possible. Sooner or later, the AFRICOM/NATO hydra is coming to get you.

Islamogangsterism, anyone?

For now we have the spectacle of Paris involved in the "cleansing" of Mali from not only weaponized Islamists - extraneous to Mali culture - but also indigenous, weaponized Tuaregs with legitimate grievances. The master plan is to support an absolutely corrupt regime in Bamako, led by a military coup plotter, the Fort Benning-trained Captain Amadou Sanogo.

This is the meat of the matter of the new mission civilisatrice, protected by a convenient, UN-enabled smokescreen; a batch of impoverished African countries who will foot most of the bill - and come up with the 5,800 soldiers for another one of those impossibly ridiculous UN acronyms, AFISMA (African-led International Support Mission in Mali). Who pays what is still a mess; there will be a meeting next Tuesday in Ethiopia where they will all be haggling with the proverbial, reluctant "international donors".

Even in France nobody knows who is fighting who and what are these people, really. Check out



the hilarious semantic swamp here (in French). Le Monde believes it has solved the riddle; Paris is fighting "Islamogangsterism".

In this Folies de Pigalle in the desert, Washington will be "leading from behind." Wise move; shadow wars bypass quagmires. It's the French - with typical Gallic grandeur - who will remain infatuated with the illusion of soon ruling the Mali desert. In fact they won't even rule algae in the Niger river, because this will be a protracted nomad war. The prospect of a succession of sandy Dien Bien Phus looms.

And the minute most of Mali's impoverished population - for the moment in favor of getting rid of AQIM, MUJAO, Belmokhtar's gang and Ansar ed-Dine - feels the slightest whiff of neocolonial occupation, the French are on their way to meet the American fate in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

It's enlightening to regard all this under the perspective of President Obama 2.0 administration's foreign policy, as (vaguely) outlined in his inauguration. Obama promised to end US wars (shadow wars are much more cost-efficient). He promised multilateral cooperation with allies (while Washington effectively calls the shots), negotiation (as in our way or the highway) and no new war in the Middle East.

To take the president at his word, this translates into no US war against Syria (just the shadow variety); no Bomb, Bomb Iran (just murderous sanctions); and France gets the Mali prize. Or will it? Zero Dark pulp fiction starts now.