FRENCH COLONIALISM TO NEO-COLONIALISM IN MALI: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

The history of colonialism is very interesting and has had a noteworthy impact on the contemporary world. Between 1870 to the mid twentieth century, the continent of Africa encountered the full force of European colonialism. European powers fought each other to establish their footprint on the continent. Around 17th century, France began to establish its historical, economic and political footprint in Africa. Amongst other European countries, France expanded the most and by the 19th century it had conquered vast territories in West Africa. Nevertheless, a process of decolonization began in the latter half of the 20th century against the backdrop of the Second World War. Although France ceased to govern these territories directly, it still retained substantial politico-economic clout in the region. Paris also cultivated strategic security partnerships with its former colonies in Africa. Between 1963 and 2013, France undertook several interventions. Mali, located in West Africa, officially got independence from France in 1960. Still, it carries vestiges of its colonial past. This paper studies the continuing French influence in Mali, and how this former French colony in West Africa became victim of a resource war.

Colonialism

Colonialism is a practice of domination. It refers to an area of the world acquired by conquering the territory and imposing physical control over the region and its population. The colonial country uses the natural and human resources of the colony for the benefit of its own state. In the 19th century, colonialism emerged as a general description of the state of subjection in all sectors, including political, economic, cultural and social. Europeans in the foreign territory managed their administrative and education systems, infrastructure, mining sector and trading departments. Practically

decolonization started between 1945 and 1975 when nearly all colonies became independent.[1]

Neo-Colonialism
The colonial period ended after the end of Second World War but colonialism never ended. It transformed into new form called Neo-Colonialism. It represents imperialism in its final stage. Neo-colonialism can be defined as the continuation of colonialism after a colonized territory achieves formal independence. Thus, major powers of the world control the economic and political policies of the weaker countries. The term Neo-Colonialism was popularized soon after the process of decolonization, particularly in reference to Africa, which underwent many nationalist independence movements after the end of Second World War. After gaining independence, some national leaders and opposition groups argued that their countries were being subjected to a new form of colonialism, waged by their former colonial masters and other developed countries.

The meetings of the All-African Peoples' Conference (AAPC) conducted in the late 1950s and early 1960s spread this particular critique of neocolonialism. The conference opened a new chapter in the relationship between Africa and Europe when it called upon the colonial powers to apply the principle of self-determination to their African colonies. This Conference was attended by different social groups, including ethnic communities, anti-colonial political parties and African organizations such as Labor Unions. From December 5th-13th, 1958, around 300 political parties and trade union leaders from 28 African countries met at Accra at the invitation of Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of Ghana. There were also observers from China, India, the Soviet Union, Denmark, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.[2]

The committee selected Tom Mboya, general secretary of the Kenya Federation of Labor as chairman of the conference. Mboya in his address compared the conference with Berlin Conference (1884-1885) and told that Africans were tired of being governed by foreigners. In his view, Africans

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[1] D .K. Fieldhouse, Colonialism 1870-1945: An Introduction (London: The Macmillan Press, 1983), 6-7.

[2] "All-African People's Conference", *International Organization - Africa and International Organization* 16, No. 2 (1962), available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/2705395.

should control their region, and he also appealed to the United States and the Soviet Union to avoid involving Africa in the Cold War. Mboya urged the colonized states to acquire political power as quickly as possible and avoid Balkanization.[3]

The All-African Peoples' Conference (AAPC) was organized to create a mechanism through which the independent countries of Africa could assist the dependent territories to gain their independence. The Conference considered unity and solidarity to be the key strategies in the fight against colonialism and economic domination after attaining complete independence.[4] Five committees were formed during the working session of the conference to discuss following issues;

- **Imperialism and colonialism:** This committee declared its support for freedom fighters in Africa. It called for the end of economic exploitation in Africa and independence for territories still under colonial rule, like Union of South Africa, Algeria, Rhodesia, Angola, Kenya and Mozambique.
- **Frontiers, boundaries and federations:** This committee was interested in the ending of white settlement in Africa and condemned the hostility of region by colonial masters and underlined the theme of a United States of Africa.
- **Racialism and discriminatory laws and practices:** This committee voted to abolish diplomatic and economic relationship with territories like South Africa, the Portuguese territories and Rhodesia because they practiced racism. It further urged dismantling of the UN mandate that placed South West Africa under the Union of South Africa.
- **Tribalism, religious separatism and traditional institutions:** This committee viewed tribalism, religious separatism and traditional institutions as obstacles to the rapid liberation of Africa and urged the political organizations and trade unions to come forward and educate the masses.
- **Establishment of a permanent organization:** The committee on the establishment of the permanent organization wanted the All-

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3   See   http://www.worldhistory.biz/sundries/43489-all-african-people-s-conference-1958.html

4   Visit at https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R001300320009-3.pdf

African People's Conference to be held on permanent basis with a professional secretariat at Accra. The organization was to promote understanding among Africans, accelerate liberties for Africans, mobilize world opinion against the denial of fundamental rights of Africans, and develop feeling of community among fellow Africans.[5]

Colonialism in Africa

Between 1870s and 1900s, Africa faced European imperialism, military interventions, diplomatic pressures and eventual conquest and colonization. The European imperialist push into Africa for three main factors; economic, political, and social. The rise of capitalist industrialization, including the demand for raw materials, guaranteed markets and profitable investment outlets encouraged the European countries to converge on Africa. Thus, the primary motivate of the European intrusion was economic in nature.

The drive to establish colonies and obtain raw materials led to the "scramble for Africa". The European countries including Belgium, Britain, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain struggled to claim territories and establish their colonies on the African continent. By the beginning of the 16th century to the middle of the 19th century, the trans-Atlantic trade in slaves expanded enormously in West Africa. The European powers began to enhance their links with African slave traders and by the eighteenth century slaves were an important factor in the trade led by European countries in West Africa.

Although the French had established a trade port on the West African coast as early as 1659 at St. Louis (present day Senegal), their participation in West Africa did not increase substantially until later in the 19th century. Their participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade was always less significant than other European countries, especially Portugal and Britain.[6] The French invaded south of the Sahara along the Senegalese coast in 1843 under the leadership of Governor General Bouet Willaumez.[7] Since 1843, there had been a French stronghold on the river mouth of the

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[5] Available at https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1958-aapc-res1.html
[6] "French in West Africa" by University of Pennsylvania- African Studies Centre, https://www.africa.upenn.edu/K-12/French_16178.html
[7] Jim Jones, "The French in West Africa".See http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/fren-occ.htm

Gabon. A settlement for free slaves was held and recognized as Libreville in 1849. In the mid 1880s, France had spread its influence from the Gabon to the Congo. In 1880, Brazza acquired French footing on the north bank of the Congo, which became Brazzaville.

The French invasions in West Africa were continuing, and France by that time had established its trading station on the Senegal River, whereas Britain had been trading far up the Niger from the coast. There was a strong competition between the European imperialist powers for the control of the upper water of the Niger, close to Senegal.

During the 1880s, the French traders and missionaries held their influence in the north of Ivory Coast, and by 1893 the area became a French colony. The French Sudan, present day Mali, was located in the west of Lake Chad. The French viewed Sudan as the link between their holdings in Algeria and Senegal, as well as the gateway to Congo via Lake Chad. By the end of the 19th century, the French were able to place Sudan under their direct administration. Mali, known at the time as French Sudan, linked up with French Algeria to the north. Between 1895 and 1897, southern Mali, located under the great curve of the Niger River, had also become a French colony.[8]

By the early years of the twentieth century, France had invaded most of the territories in West Africa including present day Senegal, Benin, Guinea, Mali, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Niger. To rule the region directly, France subjected its colonies to a highly centralized administration. The French rule was harsh and insensitive. In addition, they made attempts to increase their economic grip in the region in order to maintain and expand their interests in West Africa.

French interests in West Africa
The continent of Africa is rich with abundant natural resources. Africa is significantly important for France. Former French president Jacques Chirac recognized that "without Africa, France will slide down into the rank of a third world power".[9] Chirac's predecessor François Mitterrand also

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[8] Ruth Ginio and Jennifer Sessions, "French Colonial Rule", *African Studies*(Oxford University Press, 2016) available online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199846733-0029

[9] See http://www.modernghana.com/news/731947/why-should-us-taxpayers-fund-french-neo-colonialism.html

predicted in 1957 that "Without Africa, France will have no history in the 21st century."[10]

The classic example used to define modern neo-colonialism is Françafrique; it refers to the continuing close relationship between France and some leaders of its former African colonies. It was first used by the president of the Ivory Coast, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who appeared to use it in a positive sense, when he referred to the good relationship between France and Africa. However, it was subsequently borrowed by critics to describe an unbalanced relationship. The French Community and the later Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie are defined by critics as agents of French neo-colonial influence, especially in Africa. While the crux of this claim is that the Francophonie organisation is a front for French dominance on its former colonies.

France was historically one of the most interventionist countries in the world. It launched more than 35 military interventions in Africa. It sought to maintain its influence and power. It has economic as well as geo-political interests in the West African region. Though, Paris has diversified its sources of raw materials, Africa still remains an important supplier of oil and metals. The French officials also encourage the importance of regional stability and development, the support for democratic governments, and the protection of French nationals living in their ex-colonies in Africa.[11]

Historical Background of Mali
Mali is a large country situated in the heart of what used to be the French West African Empire. It is rich in natural resources - including gold, phosphate, salt, uranium, granite, limestone and gypsum. The major industries of Mali are food processing, construction, phosphate and gold mining. Cotton, rice, vegetables, millet, peanuts and corn are the major agricultural products of the country. Besides, it is one of the world's poorest countries that formally gained independence from France in 1960, but has continued to be dependent and at the mercy of its former colonial master.

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[10] Visit at www.globaltimes.cn/content/739771.shtml
[11] Andrew Hansen, "Backgrounder: The French Military in Africa", *The New York Times*, February 9, 2007.

Mali was formerly a part of three prominent empires: the Ghana Empire, Mali Empire, and Songhay Empire. The history of Mali begins with the empire of Ghana, which is said to date from the 4th century AD. The Ghana Empire was the earliest known in the region, and was dominated by the Mande people. From the 8th century till the end of the 11th century they expanded throughout West Africa, and controlled the trans-Saharan gold and salt trade centers. At its height in the 10th century, they occupied eastern Senegal, southwest Mali, and southern Mauritania and carried on a steady trade (with the Arab states) across the Sahara. The Ghana Empire disintegrated by the 13th century and was succeeded by the Mali Empire, from which the independent republic takes its name.

In 1230, Sundiata Keita founded the Mali Empire on the upper Niger River. The Mali Empire reached its peak in the 14th century under Mansa Musa (1312–1337), who captured Tombouctou (now called Timbuktu) and made Mali a center of Muslim learning. Meanwhile, from the thirteenth century to the late fifteenth century the Songhai Empire was expanded on both banks of the middle Niger. Later, its center shifted to Gao. After the capture of Tombouctou (Timbuktu) in 1468, the empire was at its zenith. The strongest rulers in this period were Sonni 'Ali Ber (1464–92) and Askia Muhammad I (1492–1528).

In the 14th century, the great Mali Empire stretched across a large area of West Africa. It spanned from the coast (today's Senegal) to beyond Timbuktu (in northern Mali). In the fifteenth century, Timbuktu and Djenné were major trading centers, as well as renowned seats of Islamic learning.[12] By the mid of the nineteenth century, the French entered and conquered the area, which came to form part of 'French West Africa'. After a decade, the French made a concerted effort to occupy the interior. The resident French military governors regulated the timings and methods of their advances. A French civilian governor of Sudan was appointed in 1893, but resistance to French control did not end until 1898. In this year, the Malinké warrior, Samory Touré was defeated after seven years of war against the imperialists. The French attempted to rule indirectly, but in many areas they disregarded traditional authorities and governed through

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[12] See http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Mali-HISTORY.html

appointed chiefs. The land became a colony in 1904, and was named French Sudan in 1920. In 1946, it became a part of the French Union.[13]

As the colony of French Sudan, Mali was administered with other French colonial territories as the Federation of French West Africa. In 1956, France's Fundamental Law (*Loi Cadre*) was passed and the Territorial Assembly obtained extensive powers over local affairs. It was permitted to form a cabinet with executive authority on matters within the Assembly's competence. After the 1958 French constitutional referendum, the *Republique Soudanaise* gained a membership of the French Community and enjoyed complete autonomy.

In January 1959, the representatives of the Sudanese Republic, Senegal, Dahomey (now Benin), and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) met in Dakar and formed a constitution of the Federation of Mali (named after the medieval African empire), but only the assemblies of the Sudanese Republic and Senegal ratified it and became members of the federation. Later that year, the new Mali Federation asked the French Community to grant it complete sovereignty even though it was willing to remain a member of the French Community. The Mali Federation became a sovereign state in June 1960. Conflicts arose over external and internal policy, and on 20 August 1960, the federation was dissolved. On 22 September 1960, the Sudanese republic declared its independence as the Republic of Mali.[14]

The constitution of the Fourth Republic, promulgated on 13 October 1946, defined the country's post-war relationship with it colonies. It was an era of great economic growth in France, and the rebuilding of the nation's social institutions and industry after the Second World War, and played an important part in the development of the process of European integration which changed the continent permanently. Moreover, the government made effective decisions regarding decolonization of the numerous remaining French colonies.

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[13]   "Mali", *Bureau of African Affairs*, October 2008.   available at https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2828.htm

[14]Cyril K. Daddieh, *Historical Dictionary of Cote d'Ivoire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman& Littlefield, 206), 354.

The West African countries agreed to a Colonial Pact with France in the 1960s that allowed the latter to dominate and control their political, military and economic policies. For France, the West African region is important for its economic development and political standing in the world. De Gaulle, the then French President, admitted that French prosperity derived from the raw materials and mineral resources of Africa.

Soon after independence from colonial rule, the pro-Soviet Modibo Keita came to power in Mali. He had good relations with Ghana's nationalist leader, Kwame Nkrumah and Guinea's Sekou Touré. He also sympathized with the Algerian and other liberation movements in Africa. Modibo Keita was overthrown in 1968 and replaced by General Moussa Traoré, who was an obedient partner of the West. Several military coups happened over the past 45 years, reflecting the weakness and instability of the Malian state.[15] A multi-party constitution was approved in 1992, after demonstrations led by students against the government, and a Tuareg revolt had been brutally suppressed in 1991 by Touré's predecessor. On 8 June, 1992, Alpha Oumar Konare, member of the Alliance pour la Democratie en Mali (ADEMA, Alliance for Democracy in Mali) became the President of Mali's Third Republic.[16]

In the early 1990s, the government fought a rebellion by the Tuaregs. The Tuaregs are a nomadic tribe of Berber and Arab descent who inhabit the northern desert regions of Mali. The Tuaregs accused the government of marginalizing them politically and culturally. A peace agreement was signed in 1995, and thousands of Tuareg refugees were allowed to return to Mali. The presidential election was held on 11 May 1997, and President Konaré triumphed without any opposition. In the new presidential election in 2002, retired General Amadou Toumani Touré, former head of state during Mali's transition government (1991-1992), became the country's second democratically elected President. He was reelected to a second 5-year term in 2007.

Crises in Mali
In August 2007, suspected Tuareg rebels kidnapped government soldiers near the Niger and Algerian borders. In February 2009, the government announced that the army had taken control of all the bases of the most

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[15] Visit at https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2828.htm
[16] See https://www.thoughtco.com/brief-history-of-Mali-44272

active Tuareg rebel group. Rebellions broke out because the northern region of Mali was neglected and discriminated against by the ruling government. The Tuaregs were spread across contiguous area including Algeria, Niger, Libya and Mali.

The former Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi had also incorporated Tuaregs into the Libyan army. Thus, after the French invaded Libya in March 2011 and the collapse of Gaddafi's government, this group clutched modern Libyan weapons and headed for northern Mali.[17] Some members also joined the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (NMLA) with the declared objective of establishing an independent Tuareg state called Azawad in the northern Mali.

In 2012, crisis erupted in Mali when militant groups took over the major cities in the north of the country. By February 2012, many northern areas of Mali, including Menaka had been seized by the rebel forces.[18] In March 2012, before the national elections could be held in Mali, some junior army officers staged a military coup and overthrew Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré. Many government officials were arrested by the army. The coup was extensively condemned by the regional countries and international community.[19]

In April 2012, Dioncounda Traore, the leader of National Assembly, was appointed as a temporary President. After his appointment, talks were conducted between officials from the National Committee for the Return of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDR) and international mediators from ECOWAS. During the talks it was decided CNRDR would install transitional government for forty days, as an initial attempt towards the restoration of civilian government.[20]

Soon after, on 26 May 2012, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and Ansar Dine strengthened as the "National Army of Azawad", announced that the "Independent State of Azawad" had been created in northern Mali.[21]

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[17] Visit http://kasamaproject.org/imperialism-war/4403-imperialism-crisis-france-in-mali
[18] Available at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13881978
[19] Darren Sagar(ed.),"Mali", *Keesing's Record of World Events* 58,No. 3 (March 2012), 50968.
[20] Ibid, No.4 (April 2012), 51028.
[21] Visit http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17635437

In view of the humanitarian crisis in the troubled areas of Mali, on 12 Oct 2012, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 2071, demanding in the interest of human rights that, "all armed groups cease human right abuses and violation of humanitarian law, including targeted attacks against civilians, civil violence, the recruitment of child soldiers and forced displacements". In December 2012, another resolution was adopted by the UNSC, permitting the deployment of an African military force to support Malian army against the insurgency in northern Mali.[22]

French Intervention in Mali
On 11 January 2013, 'Operation Serval' was launched by the French military to repel militant groups in Northern Mali. This step had been taken, after an appeal from Mali's interim president to France for help. The basic objective of the operation was to stop the advance of a coalition of Tuareg rebel and Islamist militants who had already taken control over half of Mali's territory. France's intervention in the West African nation stopped the advance of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb-linked fighters, who had taken advantage of a Tuareg separatist uprising and military coup to control the northern two-thirds of Mali in 2012. The French were satisfied with their success on the battlefield and low casualty rate that demonstrated the proficiency of their military, but they took large risks.[23]
The withdrawal of French military forces from Mali had started in early April 2013 and continued throughout May, but the country remained in conflict and crises situation. An important progress was that the Tuareg leaders announced that they had created a new group called the High Council for the Azawad (HCA). The purpose of this group is to pursue negotiations with the government officials who rejected the idea of independence from Mali.[24]

On 8 June 2013, the government officials of Mali and leaders of the MNLA agreed to restore the power in northern part of the country, and that presidential elections would be scheduled next month. Bert Koenders, the UN representative to Mali, defined the agreement as the most important step towards stability in Mali, while Laurent Fabius, the France's foreign

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[22] Darren Sagar(ed.),"Mali", No. 11(November 2012), 52369.
[23] Michael Shurkin, "France's War in Mali: Lessons for an Expeditionary Army", available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR770.html
[24] Darren Sagar(ed.), 59,No. 5 (May 2013), 52649.

Minister, received this agreement as a good sign to bring all groups in Mali closer to their country.[25]

As promised by the government, presidential elections were held on 28 July 2013, but no candidate got more than 50% of the vote. As a result the second round of election was held next month and Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, a former Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and law maker known for his pro-French sympathies, secured majority of votes and became President.[26] French President Hollande reacted to this election as a "success for peace and democracy".[27] The new President of Mali said in his speech that his first priority was to bring lasting peace in the region.

According to analysts, the election was marked as an important step towards the restoration of democracy in the country and also aimed to get relief from various political and social problems prevailing in Mali. In spite of this, violence and tension increased in the country, although emergency was lifted, that had been imposed by France in Jan 2013 during their military operation. International military operation against militant groups in northern Mali continued. On Oct 2013, Bert Koenders, the UN Representative to Mali, requested more troops and helicopters to bring peace and stability in the region and to support the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) against militant groups.[28]

Legislative elections were held on 24 Nov 2013 and only sixteen seats were won. As no one got majority votes a second round of voting was required. Rally for Mali (RPM) led by President Ibrahim Keita got eight seats, while Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD), led by Soumaila Cisse, who was defeated in Presidential elections, won six seats and the Alliance for Democracy in Mali-Pan-African Party for Liberty, Solidarity and Justice (Adema- PAST) secured only two seats. A second round of voting in legislative elections was held in December. Rally of Mali (RPM), headed by

[25] Darren Sagar(ed.), No. 7/8 (July 2013), 52779.
[26] Adam Nossiter, "In Mali: Race between a Former Finance Minister and a Pro-French Favorite", *The New York Times*, August 2, 2013.
[27] Darren Sagar(ed.), 59,No. 7/8 (August 2013), 52827-52828.
[28] Ibid, 59, No.11(November 2013), 52997.

President Keita won majority votes.[29] President Ibrahim Keita appointed Moussa Mara as new prime minister.[30]

In the beginning of June 2014, a senior government official had confirmed that an army officer Lt. Mohammed Ouattara had been arrested with other military officers, who had intended to overthrow the government of Ibrahim Keita.[31]

On 10 June 2014, three main northern Tuareg groups signed a deal in Algiers, capital of Algeria, to work for peace and reconciliation through negotiation with the Malian government. On 25th of June, the UNSC unanimously adopted resolution 2164, extending the mandate of the MINUSMA till 30 June 2015. This resolution focused on providing security, stabilization and protection of civilians, supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; supporting the re-establishment of state authority, the rebuilding of the security sector, and the promotion of human rights in Mali.[32]

On 16 July 2014, Government officials and six rebel groups of northern Mali held peace talks in Algiers. The talks led to the signing of 'road map' agreement on security, reconciliation and humanitarian issues. Perhaps, it is not a coincidence that on the same day, Mali and France had also signed a five-year bilateral defense co-operation agreement in Bamako, capital of Mali. The agreement was signed by Defense Minister Ba N' Dao and his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian. This agreement aimed to strengthen military cooperation in the fields of intelligence, training and information-sharing to ensure security in the Malian territory, and it replaced the previous defense co-operation agreement signed by France and Mali in 1985.[33]

On 27 September 2014, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon organized a meeting in New York to discuss the security situation in Mali. The meeting was attended by President Ibrahim Keita and many others from the

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[29] Ibid, No.12(December 2013), 53061.
[30] http://www.african-bulletin.com/7301-oumar-tatam-ly-appointed-malis-prime-minister. html
[31] Darren Sagar(ed.), 60,No 4(April 2014), 53276.
[32] Ibid, 60,No.6 (June 2014), 53397.
[33] Darren Sagar(ed.), Vol.60,No 7/8(July 2014), 53460.

international community, who were part of the mediation team for the Malian crises. The participants concluded the meeting by influencing the government and rebel forces to fully respect the UNSC resolutions as well as ceasefire agreements and roadmap agreement. They also endorsed their commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of Mali. They also strongly condemned the act of violence and terrorism in northern Mali. Attacks were continued throughout September, whereas government officials and militant leaders had arranged the peace talks in Algiers.[34]

On 21 October 2014, the government representatives of Mali and six dominant Tuareg groups met in Algiers for the peace talks. Both parties accepted the peace agreement that was offered by international mediators. Despite the prevailing positivity among officials, violent clashes between militants and MINUSMA troops continued throughout the month.[35]

In November, 2014, another round of peace talks between the government and six Tuareg rebel groups was held in Algiers that concluded with an agreement for a final peace deal. Meanwhile, attacks were carried out by rebel forces, and in response the French military also killed and captured rebels. These cross border attacks from northern Mali were an important factor in a decision made by leaders of MINUSMA and also other West African nations, including Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, Senegal, Chad and Togo, to create a Rapid Intervention Force (RIF) operating in Mali and its bordering territories to fight against terrorism.[36]

In the start of January 2015, Prime Minister Moussa Mara resigned along with his cabinet and Modita Keita became new prime minister. Since northern Mali did not get full autonomy, the alliance of Tuaregs and Arab rebel groups, called "Co-ordination of Azawad Movements" (CMA), staged

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[34]   Visit   https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2014-09-27/note-correspondents-high-level-meeting-malian-political

[35] Darren Sagar(ed.), 60, No 10(October 2014), 53608.

[36]   Katarina Hoije, "Mali's Government, Tuaregs Engage in More Peace Talks", https://www.voanews.com/a/mali-government-tuaregs-engage-in-more-peace-talks/2434553.html

a series of protests and demanded autonomy for the northern region of the country.[37]

On 19 June 2015, the rebels formed a new militant group, called "The Platform", and handed over control of the northern town of Menaka to the Malian Army and MINUSMA, which had been a key demand of CMA. Next day, the government officials and CMA signed the "Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali". They both agreed on three main points:

- A ceasefire in Menaka.
- The withdrawal of armed groups from Menaka.
- A political agreement that reportedly addressed autonomy demands of CMA.[38]

The challenges faced by the international mediators, the Malian authorities and the MINUSMA in enforcing the peace agreements were compounded by persistent attacks in the region from multiple armed groups that were not signatories to the peace deals. The government forces responded to attacks by militant groups with counterterrorism operations that often resulted in arbitrary arrests, executions, torture, and other ill-treatment. French forces and the United Nations peacekeepers attempted to fill the security vacuum. The failure of the Malian government and armed groups to implement the 2015 peace accord and the spread of militant attacks to Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire generated impatience and growing diplomatic engagement by the international community.

Throughout 2016, the armed groups linked to Al-Qaeda, Tuareg groups and Arab rebels, and government-supported militia attacked each other, Malian soldiers and neutral peacekeepers, and to a lesser extent, aid workers and other civilians were killed. The increasing presence of militant groups in central Mali generated fear and engulfed more civilians in the conflict.

In the Malian crisis, France and the United States took the lead on military matters, the European Union led on training and security sector reform, and the United Nations led on rule of law and political stability. The UN and several members of the international mediation team, that had negotiated

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[37] Darren Sagar(ed.), 61,No 2(February 2015), 53842.
[38]   https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/The-implementation-of-the-peace-process-in-Mali.pdf

the peace accord, threatened targeted sanctions against those threatening Mali's security. The MINUSMA, the UN Development Programme, the EU, the Netherlands, and Canada took the lead in programs to support the justice sector and address corruption. The United States supported reform of military justice.[39]

Long-delayed local elections were held on 20 November 2016, but violence and threats from armed groups prohibited voters in dozens of local administrative areas from taking part. The populations of northern Mali are exhausted by two consecutive food crisis and four years of conflict between the army, separatists groups and radical militias. Despite the signature of a peace agreement in June 2015, the deal has not yet provided peace dividends. The security situation remains volatile and humanitarian needs are far from having decreased. Insecurity and the targeting of national and international defence forces prevent state authority and basic services from being restored in Northern Mali.[40]

Humanitarian space is fragile, and the situation is volatile. To preserve access to people in need, it is crucial that the lines between humanitarian assistance and the political stabilization agenda are not blurred. The conditions are not favourable for a safe and durable return of refugees, and internally displaced people, to large parts of the north. Access to basic social services such as health care, nutrition, water and education remain a major concern. Acute malnutrition levels exceed emergency thresholds in certain areas of the country, while food insecurity looms for the poorest and most vulnerable families, especially in the north.

Conclusion
This is the new age of colonialism which is known as Neo-Colonialism or Economic Colonialism. France has a very strong presence in its former colonies in West Africa. The reactions to France's deepening engagement in West Africa are mixed. Some people think rather than preventing the region and its people from terrorists, it is about the natural resources including gold, uranium and oil. On the contrary, for some people the French intervention in Mali at the request of the Malian government has

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[39] https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/mali
[40]   https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-elections/malis-local-elections-marred-by-boycotts-kidnapping-idUSKBN13F0R8?il=0

been very effective in stopping the militants' from taking over northern Mali.

France's continuing interest in the region may be due to the tapped and untapped uranium deposits in Mali as well as uranium mines in neighboring Niger. It was realized that France's nuclear programme would require significant quantities of uranium, and France was quick to exploit foreign sources of uranium. Niger quickly became a prominent source of natural uranium for France. Most of the uranium produced in Niger is exported to France in order to sustain France's electricity production. Niger provides up to forty percent of France's uranium consumption. Discoveries for uranium started in early 1950s. After the independence of Niger in 1960, France had secured preferential access to the uranium of Niger through a bilateral defence agreement in 1961.[41]

In the light of the facts mentioned above the French military intervention in Mali ensured that the conflict does not spread to Niger where French has significant economic interest, particularly in the mining sector.

The Western African countries have come to accept the fact that they cannot bear the military or financial burden alone. Also, big powers should make it clear that the revolution they supported in Libya put the Malian state into this situation in the first place. Without the fighters and weapons from Libya, neither the Tuareg nor the Islamists would have been in a position to seize the North.

Mali, however, needs more than soldiers and military equipment. France along with the United States and developed European countries must help African countries in the restoration of peace in the region as soon as possible. Otherwise this may lead towards serious war like situation and also affect the neighboring countries. Mali's immediate neighbors are also in urgent need of long-term strategies to fight poverty, chaos and violence. Many French leaders have promised to reform France's policy on Africa and to move from a position of dominance to that of a partner. In practice, however, such promises have changed very little. The West African countries should ensure their own security, instead of depending on

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[41] Bruno Tertrais, "Uranium from Niger: A key resource of diminishing importance for France", February 2014. www.files.ethz.ch/isn/180947/PB2014_Niger-France-uranium-CVE_Bruno-Tertrais_web.pdf

others. African politicians have been urging for a long time that their respective countries need to be less dependent on France, their former colonial master.

France is expanding its interventionist policies throughout Africa to secure its mineral resources. It costs France a lot of money to maintain its role as a major player in Africa. Military interventions are not cheap. France has its own domestic economic problems and is therefore, finding it increasingly difficult to finance its African operations. However, the French are facing growing competition. China has established close ties with many African countries and the United States has also been displaying greater commitment to Africa in recent years. The West has been intervening in Africa for more than four centuries, and it has only resulted in more war, destruction, chaos and extreme poverty for the African people.