The Events in Mali. Part 1

The media understand current events in Mali in the following terms. First of all, the political situation in Africa is extremely complicated, state systems are weak, and the borders between countries were arbitrarily determined by the former colonial powers. They did not emerge from a natural historical process and do not reflect the true ethnic situation. The African populace is split along tribal lines, education and living standards are low, and pronounced brutality is characteristic of their moral system. All of these factors contribute to constant political upheaval and bloody ethnic clashes, and they make the African peoples easy pickings for the developed countries.

Second, the deployment of French troops to Mali was rationalized as a need to protect the uranium and gold mines operating there. The latter are currently being threatened by Tuaregs and the ubiquitous al-Qaeda.

After the collapse of Colonel Gadhafi’s dictatorship and the establishment of a long-awaited “democracy” in Libya, some of Libya’s ethnic groups acquired a considerable quantity and variety of weapons along with freedom. The combination of freedom and arms gave Tuareg leaders the idea of forming their own country. Since most Tuaregs live in northeastern Mali, that is where their leaders decided to establish their country. That decision was led to the ongoing conflict.

During a Senate hearing, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, “Unfortunately, it suffered a military coup by low-ranking military officers, which threw it into a state of instability who, as you know, some groups of, as well as other groups, had been in the employ of Gadhafi for years. He used them as mercenaries. With his fall, they came out of Libya, bringing huge amounts of weapons... At the same time, there was a move by al-Qaeda in the Maghreb to establish a base in Northern Mali.”

It should be pointed out that only authoritarian military regimes can keep a native population from wholesale slaughter and mutual extermination (remember the conflict between the Tutsis and the Hutus). Incidentally, that is how the leaders of Western countries saw the Gadhafi regime in recent years. That is, the West initially was very angry at the Colonel, but they subsequently made friends with him. The Colonel invested heavily in Europe’s economy and stopped being concerned with acquiring modern arms.

In short, the establishment of democracy in Africa can only bring civil war, genocide, famine, epidemics and other charming features of social chaos. Democracy as the United States understands it is impossible in Africa. In fact, no one even tried to establish it during the Arab Spring. The Obama administration has officially said that the freezing of Gadhafi’s assets was the largest asset freezing operation in US history.

The current “democratic” government of Libya, like the government of Mali, has proven unable to control an ethnic group as large and well-armed as the Tuaregs. The situation is also dangerous because a Tuareg success could serve as a bad example for many African tribal leaders and could ignite efforts to redraw borders. That would threaten the existence of large commodity companies of the West, China and other African countries because Africa remains a major supplier of raw materials to industrialized countries.

What is currently happening in Africa and the Middle East? These regions appear to be falling into social chaos. To protect their supplies of raw materials, therefore, the United States and the EU have no choice but to deploy
expeditionary forces to countries where they have an interest. The introduction of French troops into Mali may only be the beginning of a very interesting new conquest process. What it might lead to is anyone’s guess.

On the whole, the situation in Mali is simple and clear, and it gives rise to no unusual questions. However, there are a few nuances.

Al-Qaeda’s involvement is particularly interesting. In addition to being an extremist terrorist group, it is also a radical Islamist party. By nature, this type of organization is literally saturated with intelligence agents. During the 1930s, for example, the famous George Orwell was an ardent Trotskyist. He later wrote the novel “1984,” which exposed totalitarianism, and he was just recently revealed to have been an agent of British intelligence.

The idea of a secular state is foreign to Islamic fundamentalist organizations. Therefore, they can be used to undermine state institutions in Islamic countries. We saw that happening during the Arab Spring.

To put it bluntly, the spatial scope and scale of al-Qaeda’s operations is so great that we have to wonder about its funding. It is no secret that al-Qaeda units were created with the active involvement of US intelligence agencies for military and terrorist activities against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and that Osama bin Laden openly cooperated with US intelligence at the time. Tens of thousands of people from 43 countries passed through Mr. Osama’s military training camps between 1982 and 1992.

The press often asserts that after Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan bin Laden took aim against his former patron, i.e., against the United States, and that al-Qaeda today is funded by the drug trade. These allegations obviously have some basis in fact, and some terrorists actually fight American imperialism or tend to think in those terms. The problem is that al-Qaeda units exist in many countries, and their weapons are not always directed against the United States. Moreover, I sometimes get the impression that the actions of some of its fighters are very helpful to the White House.

Konstantin Alexandrovich Penzev is an author and historian and a columnist for New Eastern Outlook.