

Mali Grabs World Attention

Jan 20, 2013 By Anita Ramachandran



Talk about unintended consequences! When the regime of Col. Muammar Gadhafi fell in Libya, the world heaved a sigh of relief. Another dictatorship had toppled and democracy had found its voice in yet another country. Well, the good feeling has not had much chance to sink in.

The impact of these actions are now being felt in far-away Mali, a land-locked democratic nation, that does not even share a border with Libya. Now the world is being forced to take notice and get involved in Mali's internal conflicts.

The recent hostage crisis in an Algerian gas refinery was in response to French assault on Islamist rebels in Mali. The crisis ended on Saturday with 23 international workers dead by the time the hostage-takers were overpowered by the Algerian army.

The Libyan Connection

Wondering how Libya is involved with the internal conflicts in the West African nation? Well, the Tuaregs - a nomadic tribe of Mali, had been recruited by Gadhafi to make up his army. When Gadhafi's dictatorship fell, these well trained guerillas, armed with sophisticated weapons returned to their own country as rebels demanding their own territory.



We had written about the civil war that has been ongoing in Mali previously. For over several months now, these rebel groups who have ties with the Al-Qaeda, have taken over the northern half of the country. The Islamist attack (with ties to Al-Qaeda) has the African Governments and other western nations, especially France and the US, on high alert.

Things changed dramatically earlier this month when the well-equipped rebels - with the arms left over from the Libyan warehouses, began making a push for Bamako, the capital of Mali.

The French Connection

Mali was a former French Colony from 1906 through 1960. After attaining independence from France, Mali had a brief period of dictatorship. In 1991, after a peaceful transition to democracy, the country has served as a model for democracy for all of Africa. However, the returning Tuareg rebels pushed the Malian army to a corner, by capturing several cities in the north. In a coup last year, the army overthrew the democratically elected President Amadou Torre for lack of support from his government.

Now with rebels advancing on the capital, and fearing the lives of its citizens in the country, France has decided to step in to help its former colony. They hope their action to send in the French army will help to push the rebels back. Other African nations are also stepping in with reinforcements.

There has been initial success. However, Mali is very vast and the rebels are ably equipped. The issue of displaced Malian refugees and Islamist invasions spilling into neighboring Algeria is concerning the world. What began as an internal conflict is beginning to spread into a full scale regional conflict.

Write a written response (1-2 paragraphs):

- What are your thoughts on this?
- Should other countries step in to help? Why or why not?
- What should be done about the displaced refugees?