

## France Strengthens Homeland Security Against African Al Qaeda

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*(To be read in continuation of my article of July 11,2012, titled "Spectre of A Neo Al Qaeda Haunts Africa" at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?281615> [1])*

French President Francois Hollande has ordered the strengthening of homeland security in France following threats of retaliation by Ansar Dine, an African affiliate of Al Qaeda, which has established control over Northern Mali.

2. It issued the threat of retaliation against French citizens anywhere after French troops and Air Force units went into action on January 11,2013, in Mali, to help the troops of interim Mali President Dioncounda Traore retake the strategically important town of Konna which had been reportedly captured by the Islamists.
3. Reports from Mali indicate that this town has since been freed by the Mali troops with French air support. One French helicopter pilot was reported to have been killed in the air action.
4. The short-term objectives of the French intervention seem to be to prevent the jihadi terrorists from expanding the area under their control, to strengthen the morale and capability of the Malian troops and to protect the local French residents numbering about 6000, mostly in the capital Bamako. The long-term objective is to roll back the jihadi terrorists and free the area presently under their control.

5. While the French action in Mali has gone on without any major mishap except the death of the pilot, a simultaneous but unconnected commando raid undertaken by French commandos in Somalia to free a French hostage held in captivity since 2009 by al-Shabab, the Somali affiliate of Al Qaeda, seems to have failed with both the commandos and possibly the hostage too being killed. However, Al Shabab has not confirmed the death of the hostage.
6. The failure of the raid in Somalia seems to have been due to inadequate intelligence and poor planning.
7. The French will be operating in Mali side by side with a pan-African force whose intervention has been authorized by the UN. The French intervention had been expected for some time since the French were increasingly concerned over the implications of the activities of the jihadi terrorists for the protection of their strategic and economic interests in Africa and for their homeland security.
8. The French face two kinds of threats. The first threat is more in the nature of a Taliban-style insurgency in Mali. The second is more in the style of Al Qaeda style terrorism in the French Homeland. They, therefore, have to use both their counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency capabilities.
9. The jihadi terrorists' threat of a retaliation against French nationals has to be taken seriously since the large number of persons of African origin in France will provide the terrorists a reservoir for recruitment of jihadi volunteers. They do have the capability for retaliation, but the question is how soon can they retaliate.
10. The French will be worried about the safety of eight hostages still in the custody of the Islamists in different countries. After the failure of the rescue operation in Somalia, the chances of success in other countries will be doubtful.
11. Osama bin Laden's main targets were the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan as a sanctuary, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Somalia. He did not give priority to French targets and interests, His successor Ayman al-Zawahiri has been talking for many months of the need for an African front and was showing interest in the French Homeland as a target.
12. Even though France has drawn down its presence in Afghanistan, Zawahiri would still be interested in France as a target to strengthen the North African front of the international jihad.

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