France continues Mali airstrikes; residents fraatic


As per January 18, 2013, French airstrikes has hit in and around Diabaly – a town in central Mali, about 400 kilometers north of the capital of Bamako – for four consecutive days. French warplanes pounded Islamist militant targets in Mali as international efforts to help the African nation’s government fight insurgents gained momentum.

People are desperate to get out from the town. Men, women and children flee or find cover to try to save their life. The Islamists told Diabaly’s residents that they could stay and the Islamist have prevented some of the residents from leaving the town, however people are left without any protection. People were afraid that the Islamists Rebels will turn Diabaly into a new Islamist stronghold and impose Sharia law and that the rebels will hurt them at the end.

The Islamists Radical Rebels have imposed a strict interpretation of Sharia law by banning music, smoking, drinking and watching sports on television. They also damaged Timbuktu’s historic tombs and shrines. The International Criminal Court has launched a war-crimes investigation amid reports that residents have been mutilated and killed for disobeying the Islamists. The United Nations has noted accounts of amputations, floggings and public executions such as the July stoning of a couple who had reportedly had an affair.

(Luna Puspita)
Mali is one of the poorest countries in Africa, a vast and sparsely populated land that is largely desert. But events there are being watched with growing anxiety throughout West Africa, in European capitals and in Washington. Mali had been one of the most successful democracies in Africa until last year, when a coup toppled the president and Islamists capitalized on the chaos by establishing themselves in the north.

The reason that the Islamist choose Mali are as follows:

1. Location, location and location
   Mali is hardly a regional powerhouse and is “marginal” to the world economy. It does not sit on lakes of oil; it is landlocked and desperately poor. But it is very big — nearly twice the size of France — with seven neighbors whose long, poorly guarded borders provide militants with supply (and escape) routes. So vast and inhospitable are the deserts of North Africa that groups with local knowledge (and a fleet of 4 x 4 vehicles) can make serious money from trafficking, whether in drugs, people or other contraband.

2. Ungoverned Space
   In Mali and throughout much of West Africa, the lack of state authority is nirvana to extremist and criminal groups. Across a largely Muslim area stretching from the Mediterranean to northern Nigeria, deprivation and corruption are recruiting sergeants for militant Islamist groups: al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Jihad and Unity in West Africa (MUIAO), Ansar Dine and Boko Haram.

3. Exporting Jihad
   The greatest risk of the Mali campaign is that it will actually nurture the very threat that Fabius worries about: serving as a recruiting sergeant for jihadists, to rally the faithful against a “crusader” enemy in Muslim lands. Two jihadist sites — the Sinam al-Islam Network and al-Minbar Jihadi Media Forum — have already urged support for fighters in northern Mali, saying, “Rise O servants of Allah, let us set a fire under the feet of the falling French cross.”

There is also the danger that extremists among the 5 million Muslims in France, the vast ma-
jority of them of North and West African origin, may seek revenge for French intervention. Less than a year ago, French intelligence services moved against militant cells after a young gunman who had traveled to the Pakistani tribal territories shot dead seven people in Toulouse.

4. The Soul of Islam

Twelve years ago, Mali was one of six developing nations invited to attend the G8 summit in Italy, and was seen as a beacon of civilian rule and stability in Africa. After chronic instability in the years after independence, it achieved a peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected president to the next in 2002. (The presidential election set for April 2012 never took place in the aftermath of the coup.) It had a thriving press and lively radio stations. Women had a role in public life. Indeed, in 2011 the prime minister was a woman.

Despite their country’s poverty and frequent food shortages, Malians had a reputation for moderation and tolerance, and a rich history as one of the intellectual centers of Islam. Most Malians are of the Sufi tradition—a mystical interpretation of Islam that includes a reverence for saints and is despised by puritanical Sunnis.

5. A Humanitarian Crisis

Hundreds of thousands of Malians are now either refugees in camps outside the country or internally displaced. Most are dangerously prone to malnutrition and disease. There are at least 150,000 refugees now in neighboring countries. More than 50,000 live in one camp alone in Mauritania, where Doctors Without Borders has found chronic rates of malnutrition among children. Malaria and diarrhea are killing infants.

6. A Test of International Will

Mali is now a test bed for the effectiveness of international action against militant Islam in Africa—action that brings together very different capabilities and cultures and that has an ill-defined goal.

Much depends on how groups like Ansar Dine and others respond to the offensive. If the militants scatter into the desert and Malian troops can reclaim the main towns, partial victory can be claimed. But if they hunker down and mix with civilians—much as clans in Mogadishu did in 1992—France could find itself in an ugly war of occupation and suicide bombings, with insufficient troops (2,500 spread thin over a huge area) to provide security.

(Luna Puspita)
Hostages missing after Algeria raid on in Amenas plant

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/scroll-africa-21069777

An Algerian army operation to free hostages at a gas facility in the desert has left a number of Islamist militants and their captives missing. It was stated that four foreign hostages has been killed in the raid and 41 person were still hold as hostages.

The militants said they had taken hostages in retaliation for French military intervention in neighboring Mali. Some hostages were freed, but the number of survivors was unconfirmed and UK officials said they were preparing for news of many British casualties. During Thursday's raid many Algerian and four foreign hostages - two from Scotland, one from France and one from Kenya - were freed, state news agency APS reported. Irish government confirmed that one of its citizens was free. Five American hostages had survived and left the country and Japan said three of its nationals had been freed in the operation, but that 14 remained unaccounted for. The militants had claimed to be holding 41 foreigners. At least four were freed but the fate of many others is unknown.

According to one of the security respondent, this was one of the most complex hostage situations seen in many years - one in which hopes for a simple, bloodless resolution always looked optimistic. The combination of a remote site in the desert, heavily armed militants, explosives at a gas facility and a kaleidoscope of nations with their citizens held hostage was always a volatile cocktail. However, there will still be questions about Algeria's decisions, particularly its reported reluctance to accept any advice or assistance.

Hostages are still being held at the Tigantourine gas treatment plant, which is surrounded by special forces. They are now looking at all possible routes to resolve this crisis. Many hostages tried to escape from the militants but failed to do so.

On Friday morning, a spokesman for al-Mulathameen (The Brigade of the Masked Ones) told ANI that it would carry out further operations. He warned Algerians to “stay away from the installations of foreign companies as we will strike where it is least expected”.

(Luna Puspita)
Burma’s ethnic conflicts see slow progress to resolution

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-18189153

The Burmese authorities are trying to reach lasting peace agreements with the country’s many ethnic groups, but it is proving a long and complex process. This process started by President Thein Sein last August, where its aim is to bring the country’s many festering conflicts to a close.

People are excited with the peace agreements with the country’s many ethnic groups, because they finally are able to go back home with a peace and safe feeling. People also rebuild the places that got destroyed during the conflicts. As for example, the New Keng Tung hotel is built on the site of what the Shan see as one of the biggest acts of cultural desecration carried out by the ethnic Burmese. In 1991 a Shan royal palace was destroyed here to make way for new buildings.

With a fighting force of about 5,000 men, the rebels control small pockets of land near the Thai border and are limited to guerrilla attacks against the Burmese military. For them, President Thein Sein’s offer of talks presented a way out. The rebels trusted the president because he announced the reconciliation and invites the armed group to join the peace agreements. People has trusted the President to end the never-ending-conflict in Burma.

So in a large room at a military guesthouse overlooking Keng Tung, 11 Shan State Army representatives wearing traditional orange tunics sat opposite 11 representatives from the Burmese authorities. In the past, ethnic groups had complained that agreements reached with the government negotiating team carried little weight with the Burmese military on the ground.

The deal they reached after a day of talks was aimed at consolidating December’s ceasefire agreement. The exact boundaries of each side’s territory was committed to paper and safe areas for displaced people established. But this was, more than anything, about building trust and paving the way for future discussions. The government’s current strategy is ambitious, some might say impossible.

The President made a three stage roadmap. The first stage is the ceasefire agreements, the sec-
ond stage political dialogue and then the third stage is a national meeting of all the ethnic groups.

That national meeting has been nicknamed “Panglong II” and is due to replace the first Panglong agreement. That treaty, signed in 1947 by among others - Aung San San Kyi’s father, established the “full autonomy in internal administration” of what was then called Burma’s “Frontier Areas”, namely the Shan, Chin and Kachin people. For all its noble intentions, it counted for little once the military had taken over.

But while some groups have accepted the offer of talks and a ceasefire, other conflicts discovered new life. In Kachin in the far north, tens of thousands of people have been displaced by clashes in the last few weeks between rebels and government troops.

Some see that as proof that parts of the Burmese army are not following a presidential order calling for restraint, and evidence of a schism between reformers and the military. The official word from the government delegation at the talks was that the Kachin fighting was due to a “breakdown of communication to remote areas’. Ceasefires being signed and subsequently breaking down have become a recurring part of Burma’s post-independence history.

In part, that is because of the fundamental incompatibility of ethnic groups wanting autonomy while the Burmese military tried to impose a strong centralised system. But with the new civilian-led government of President Thein Sein and the fast pace of reforms has come a degree of optimism.

(Luna Puspita)

Greece police break up Athens underground workers’ strike

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-21192096

Greek police have stormed a metro train depot in the capital Athens, breaking up a sit-in by striking workers. The workers had been on the ninth successive day of strike action that has crippled the underground system. The conservative-led government used an emergency law to threaten the strikers with arrest
unless they went back to work. It was not clear if the move would lead to transport resuming. Strikers are opposed to proposals which might see their salaries slashed. Workers on the underground had been striking over a public sector unified wage scheme that would see their salaries reduced by up to 25%.

The government is using civil mobilization legislation, which has only been invoked nine times since the collapse of Greece's military dictatorship in 1974.

This is now becoming a significant stand-off and a test of the government's resolve over austerity measures opposed by trade unions, the BBC's Mark Lowen reports from Athens.

Public opinion is split over the issue, but with commuters facing long taxi queues as temperatures fall, the government feels it may just get the support it needs to hold firm. The next step of government predicted will lead to turmoil if it's failed to accommodate the need of the worker.

(Meike Rachmana)

Nations agree on legally binding mercury rules


More than 140 countries have agreed on a set of legally binding measures to curb mercury pollution, at UN talks. The rules, known as the Minamata Convention and named after the Japanese town that experienced one of the world's worst cases of mercury poisoning, will open for nations to sign at a diplomatic conference later this year.

The convention will regulate a range of areas, including: the supply of and trade in mercury; the use of mercury in products and industrial processes; the measures to be taken to reduce emissions from artisanal and small-scale gold mining; the measures to be taken to reduce emissions from power plants and metals production facilities.

The UN recently published data that showed mercury emissions were rising in a number of developing nations. Ahead of the
five-day meeting, UNEP published a report warning that developing nations were facing growing health and environmental risks from increased exposure to mercury.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says: "Mercury is highly toxic to human health, posing a particular threat to the development of the (unborn) child and early in life. Campaign group Zero Mercury Working Group co-coordinator Michael Bender called the global deal a "major accomplishment", but added: "Yet the instrument is hampered by weak controls on mercury emissions from major sources like coal-fired power plants." He said new facilities would not be required to have mercury pollution controls for five years after the treaty came into force, with existing facilities given a decade before they had to begin their control efforts.

(Meike Rachmana)

North Korea warn South over UN sanctions

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21191264

North Korea has issued another warning, a day after announcing plans for a third nuclear test. In a statement, Pyongyang pledged "physical counter-measures" against South Korea if it participated in the UN sanctions regime. The threat came 24 hours after North Korea said it would proceed with a "high-level" nuclear test in a move aimed at "arch-enemy" the US.

North Korea has conducted two nuclear tests in the past, in 2006 and 2009. It gave no time-frame for its third test. Its announcement followed the adoption by the UN Security Council of a resolution condemning North Korea's recent rocket launch and extending sanctions. North Korea says its rocket launch was for the sole purpose of putting a satellite into orbit; the US and North Korea's neighbors say it was a test of long-range missile technology banned under UN resolutions. Both North Korea's previous nuclear tests followed long-range rocket launches.

Beijing has called for dialogue, urging all parties to act with restraint and "look at the long-term interest". But an editorial in China's state-run Global Times appeared to hint at exasperation.

(Meike Rachmana)
ICC Prosecutor opens investigation into war crimes in Mali

International Criminal Court (ICC) opened an investigation of crimes, including murder, torture, and rape, committed in Mali since January 2012. The focus put on the north part of the country.

The renewed clash on the north involving Government forces and Tuareg rebels, not to mention the proliferation of armed groups in the region, caused the political instability in the wake of a military coup d'état in March have involved hundreds of thousand of civilians over the course of 2012.

Fatou Bensouda gave a comment that people of Northern Mali have been living in trouble caused by the armed conflict, which sparked in January 2012. In the time of conflict, she added, different armed group have brought despair and human suffering toward the people through acts of extreme violence. Some of the deeds may constitute war crimes as defined by the Rome Statute.

In the news release issued by the court she ensured that ICC will do thorough and impartial investigation and will bring justice the Malian victims by investigating who are the most responsible for this alleged crimes. (Sámanuel Yefúa)

Iran: UN welcomes temporary release of imprisoned human rights defender

In January 18 2013, Nasrin Sotoudeh, lawyer and human rights activist, was welcomed by the United Nation human rights office after been granted a temporary release. Ms. Sotoudeh is serving six-year sentence in Iran. She was arrested in September 2010 on charges linked to her work as a human rights defender. United
Nation human right office voiced the hope of permanent release of Ms. Sotoudeh.

Rupert Colville, spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), gave a statement to the reporter that Ms. Sotoudeh was granted a three-day temporary leave from Tehran’s Evin Prison. In addition to that, the spokesperson stated that the travel restrictions imposed on her family were lifted in December, therefore, the temporary release indicates second improvement on her case.

Last month Navi Pillay, High Commissioner urged Iran to release Ms. Sotoudeh and all the activists who have been detained because of promoting observance of human rights in the country, noting that the rights to freedom of expression and opinion, and peaceful assembly are fundamental human rights which must be protected and respected

(Samuel Yesta)

Security Council condemns terrorist attack in Algeria


In 19 January 2013, Members of Security Council altogether condemned this week’s terrorist attack at the gas facility in Amenas, Algeria, caused numerous death toll and injuries.

Ambassador Masood Khan of Pakistan stated to the press that all the members expressed their sympathy and condolences to the victims and their families and to the people and government of Algeria.

The siege at the facility began on January 16 when the militants stormed the gas plant and took the foreign and Algerian workers as hostage. Because of that, several hostages and militants killed. Report stated the crisis situation has ended.

The members of Security Council underlined the need to bring whomever that realized such reprehensible acts of terrorism. Moreover, they urge all States, in accordance with their obligation under international law, to give hand to Algerian authorities in this regard.

Further Council members reaffirmed that all forms of terrorism
are serious threats of international peace security, and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed.

(Samuel Yehia)

World Can No Longer Procrastinate on Disarmament Issues


Took place at the Monterey Institute of International studies in California, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon raised a passionate call to all states and countries to advance disarmament and non-proliferation nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, as well as illegal arms.

Mr. Ban stated, in such opportunity, that the greater risk of such weapons to be used or acquired by terrorists will follow if the world does not come together and start to take steps and actions to prevent the misuse of such destructive weapons.

"Delay comes with a high price tag. The longer we procrastinate, the greater the risk that these weapons will be used, will proliferate or be acquired by terrorists," Mr. Ban said in his lecture at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California.

Increasing accountability, law enforcement, partnerships establishment, strengthening the role of Security Council, and boosting efforts to educate young people on the danger of weapons proliferation; those are 5 things that States need to work on the disarmament and weapon non-proliferation agenda.

"My advice, my appeal to all, is this: Be a first mover. Don’t look to others or to your neighbours to start disarmament and arms control measures. If you take the lead, others will follow," he said, regarding to the point of accountability.

In the same opportunity, Mr. Ban had stressed that states and countries need to look back at the Conference on Disarmament, which was established in 1979,
that focuses on cessation of the nuclear arms race and disarmament, nuclear war prevention, and prevention of an arms race in outer space. This conference has produced some disarmament instruments, such as: Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). However, the members seem to have failed to put aside all the differences, rather than start to walk hand by hand toward those goals.

The issue of the Arms Trade Treaty agreement was also 1 of the issues Mr. Ban had pointed out in his lecture at the Monterey Institute. The Arms Trade Treaty will be an instrument to regulate the transfer of conventional weapons, including small arms, and to ensure that there will be no gap that can be used to transfer such weapons because The Arms Trade Treaty will cover all types of transfers.

"Every day, we at the United Nations see the human toll of an absence of regulations or lax controls on the arms trade. We see it in the massive displacement of people within and across borders. We see it through grave violations of international law. An agreed set of standards for arms exports along with strong national legislation can help begin to change all of that."

Mr. Ban acknowledged that Non-Governmental Organizations and civil society are putting out remarkable efforts and works on the disarmament and non-proliferations, but Mr. Ban also noted that the ultimate responsibility of this issue lies with the State Members, who decide whether or not they will spend their budgets on arms or on other equally important issue, such as climate change and development.

Member states also have the power to strengthen the implementation of treaties through the Security Council, Mr. Ban said, referring to the case of the democratic People’s Republic of North Korea (DPRK), which recently violated a Council resolution when it launched long-range rocket.

Mr. Ban also strongly encouraged to increase the funding on disarmament education, to raise awareness of the importance of this issue and to clarify the myth that nuclear disarmament is unattainable.

"It is easier for students to learn the logic of nuclear deterrence than to learn to discard the myths that keep nuclear weapons in place. Education can fix this. It
can clarify that our aim is not simply to keep the deadliest of weapons from ‘falling into the wrong hands’. It can teach that there are no right hands for wrong weapons.”

(Dhea Gita Pramesh)

North Korea Threatens War with South Over UN Sanctions

North Korea threatened to declare a war against South Korea if Seoul decided to join the UN Sanctions, as Washington revealed its own economic restrictions due to Pyongyang’s rocket launch last month.

The North has declared a boycott of all dialogue and discussions focusing at shutting its nuclear programme, and instead, vowed to continue its rocket and nuclear tests after the UN Security Council strongly criticized it for the last month long-range missile launch.

“If the puppet group of traitors takes a direct part in the UN ‘sanctions’, the DPRK will take a strong physical counter-measures against it,” the North’s Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea said, referring to the South.

Took place in Beijing, US Special representative for North Korea Policy, Glyn Davies said that he and his Chinese fellows had agreed that a new nuclear test would be very much harmful, and that North Korea is not contributing to peace and the stability on the peninsula with its missile launch.

On Thursday, the United States has decided on economic sanctions on 2 North Korean bank officials and a Hong Kong trading company, for giving support for Pyongyang’s weapon proliferation of mass destruction, while The Company, Leader (Hong Kong) International Trading Ltd, was separately blacklisted by the United Nations the day before, on Wednesday.

Seoul said that its main focus, other than any further sanctions to implement alongside with the United States, it to follow the Security Council resolutions which
banned Pyongyang from conducting further ballistic missile and nuclear tests, and also from importing materials and technology used for those programmes. It does not release any new sanction for Pyongyang, despite of the strong encouragement from US and the Security Council to impose entirely new sanctions against Pyongyang.

On Thursday, North Korea's rhetoric was addressed to some of the angriest outburst against the world. The North said that it would launch further rocket launches and a nuclear test directing its ire at the United States, a country it called its "sworn enemy". This comment has raised high concern of the US Defense Secretary, Leon Panetta.

"We are fully prepared to deal with any kind of provocation from the North Koreans. But I hope in the end that they determine that it is better to make a choice to become part of the international family," he said.

It seems to be unreliable that North Korea has the technology to deliver a nuclear warhead that is capable to hit the United States, although its December launch proved that the North does have the technology that is able to send rocket that could travel 10,000 km (6,200 miles), and potentially put San Fransisco in range. This information is obtained from the intelligence assessment by South Korea. The South also believes that North Korea is technically ready with its third atomic test and is awaiting for the political decision of its leader.

Burning with rage and ire, North Korea declared on Friday that a landmark agreement it signed with the South in 1992 on eliminating nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula is no longer in force, since the South is now considered plotting with Washington against North Korea.

(Dhea Gita Pramesti)
Flood Emergency Reignites Debate on Relocating Capital from Jakarta


A state of emergency was subsequently declared on Friday, after flooding hit most of Jakarta on Thursday, just a day before Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe arrived in the capital for bilateral talks with the President on Friday. This declaration then has reignited a long debate whether or not to relocate the nation’s capital.

People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR) Speaker, Taufiq Kiemas, stated that the damage should be a wake up call for the government that it is crucial to immediately relocate the capital from Jakarta.

“It’s time to seriously think about moving the capital. Jakarta has been paralyzed by the ongoing floods. Administrative and business activities can’t proceed properly. This has obviously worsened the many unresolved problems faced by the city, which I think cannot be solved by conventional measures,” said Taufiq at interview.

Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan is named as a potential site for the relocated national capital, with the population of 170,000 inhabitants, Palangkaraya has bigger chance for flood-free.

The flood has caused some serious and severe damage in some areas and aspects in the capital; traffic, serious injuries until death, economic paralysis, loss of goods, etc. Among the chaos caused by the flood was the 2-hour delay of the bilateral meeting between President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Argentine President, Christina Fernandez de Kirchner after the Presidential Palace was inundated to a depth of 20 centimeters.

Another site came up as an option for relocating the national capital. It is Jayapura, Papua, as mentioned by MPR Deputy Speaker, Hajriyanto Thohari, although he personally thinks that Palangkaraya is the best option.

The relocation of the national capital have been a debatable issue. Government officials, however, have not been to enthuse about the idea of leaving Jakarta.
Coordinating Economic Minister, Hatta Rajasa, for example, stated that solving is better than moving to another province, since moving the capital would be neither easy nor cheap. Hatta Rajasa believes that resolving Jakarta is a priority instead of moving it to another province. Similar with Hatta Rajasa, former vice President, Jusuf Kalla stated that the solution is not moving the capital, but improving its infrastructure.

"Moving offices is easy, but what about the people occupying the offices? It is not as easy as people might think. It will also be useless to move the capital if Jakarta remains prone to flooding, and if poverty and slums are still all over the city," said Kalla.

Presidential expert staff member, Velix Member, described plans to relocate the capital as 'unrealistic'. While other government officials have said that Jakarta should remain the nation's capital, claiming that hosting the government would aid local officials in spatial planning and transportation management.

(Dhea Gita Pramesi)