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Mali, Niger, Françafrique: we are all the hostages of the AREVA corporation!

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Three serious events occurred in one week, in late October and early November 2013. One was happy, the others were tragic. Two of the three were lead stories in the French media.

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The links between the three are clarified by the third event, reported by Agence France-Presse and many papers but eclipsed in the media by the freeing of the Arlit hostages. We will explore this presently. It sheds light on the sorry role played in Africa, as in France, by the French-owned "world leader in the nuclear industry": AREVA.

Not all lives are equal

On Tuesday 29 October the liberation was reported, after three years of captivity and anguish, of the last four French hostages who had been seized in Niger on 16 September 2010, at the Arlit uranium site operated by AREVA. They had been held by AQMI (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb). Brought back to Niamey, the capital of Niger, from detention in northern Mali, they soon rejoined their families in France. At last! Safe and sound! We share the joy of Thierry Dol, Marc Féret, Daniel Larribe, Pierre Legrand and their friends and families.

On Sunday 3 November news came that the previous day in Kidal, north Mali, two journalists of RFI (Radio France Internationale) Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon, had been seized and almost immediately murdered. A brutal reminder. Horror and incomprehension grabbed the national community. Why this barbaric action?

In fact the happy outcome for "Thierry, Marc, Daniel et Pierre", as AREVA put it on its website, must not cause us to forget other much less joyful realities.

Firstly, the probable murders of the other hostages held by AQMI : Edwin Dyers, Michel Germaneau, and Philippe Verdon, executed by the kidnappers of the "Arlit Seven" after the death of their chief Abou Zeid, who had been killed during OperationServal.

Secondly, the continuing detention of other hostages, French and foreign, in Africa, Syria, Asia, Latin America and elsewhere. That list, frequently renewed, is not limited to French citizens or employees of AREVA or Vinci. Let us not forget them.

And now the murders of two highly-regarded French journalists, aged 55 and 57, who were doing a remarkable job, by all accounts, as enlightened observers and honest communicators in Africa.

We must start asking questions. How good are France's policies, linked to those of AREVA, in Françafrique [the former French empire in Western and Center Africa]?

We must say that the Arlit Seven, in their misfortune, had the conspicuous luck of working, directly or indirectly, for AREVA. They were seized because they were its employees, or employees of a subcontractor of the Vinci group, but they were kept alive and finally freed for the same reason. Yes, despite official denials, the press (led by Le Monde) agrees that their empoyer paid out 12.5-13 million euros to obtain the liberation in February 2011 of the first three Arlit hostages, including Françoise Larribe, and 20- 25 million for the last four. At least 4.5 million euros, that

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was the market value of each one, negotiated and agreed to by AREVA.

Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon were doubtless no worth so much, since RFI has neither the financial means of AREVA nor the autonomy of decision-making. But the two journalists also represented France in the eyes of their kidnappers, and that cost them their lives. We will probably learn more about the identity and motivations of the murderers and their possible links with AQMI; but already one thing is certain, one lesson is sure: from now on no French citizen is totally safe from kidnap and murder.

In this matter AREVA bears an immense responsibility. Obviously, judging by the ransoms paid to AQMI, our multinational uranium exploiter puts a high price on human life. Or does it? Let's try to judge.

The cost of a ransom

Like the insurance premium for "K & R" (Kidnapping and Rescue) and the 35 million extra euros paid out by AREVA in Niger in March 2013 to bolster the security of its sites, the 33 million (or more) paid to AQMI will be factored into the cost of nuclear kilowatt-hours paid by the customers of EDF (Electricité de France), alongside new taxes likely to be paid to President Mahamadou Issoufou (good news for Niger...) during or after the negotiations conducted by his trusted agent, Mohamed Akotey, to ensure the freeing of the last Arlit hostages.
In this way the French people, as consumers of nuclear-generated energy, have been placed financially in solidarity with the AREVA hostages. We shan't complain about that. But there is worse.

Feeding the coffers of AQMI, those 33 million euros (or more) will strengthen its armoury and its logistical means of kidnapping more French citizens. The uranium wars are just starting, and we are all potentially exposed to becoming the hostages of AREVA's enemies, whether we are workers with AREVA, Vinci, the EDF, or journalists, or mere tourists in Africa or elsewhere.

A more serious point is that, at least collectively, we have all become the political hostages of AREVA itself..
For AREVA decides on matters in Niger, as it does in France. Mohamed Akotey chairs the administration council of Imouraren SA, the AREVA subsidiary in Niger which is preparing to exploit the biggest uranium mine in the world. As for Mahamadou Issoufou, he is a mining engineer trained in France. He was National Director of Mines in Niger's Ministry of Mines and Energy from 1980 to 1985, then he directed the Arlit mine (belonging to AREVA), then was secretary-general of the Société des Mines de l'Aïr (SOMAIR, a subsidiary of AREVA) until 1991. He then interrupted his mining activities to enter politics, founding the "parti socialiste nigérien"... Who had suggested this idea to him? He became President of Niger on 12 March 2011 -cela mérite bien un avion présidentiel- (that deserves a presidential plane). So Mahamadou Issoufou is "AREVA's Man".

So is François Hollande, who has become President of France.

AREVA, a State within a State

In November 2011 when the Socialist Party signed an agreement with the EELV party (Europe-Ecologie-Les-Verts) which included the closure of the re-treatment lines (aiming to separate plutonium from the other by-products of our power-plants) and the end of MOX fabrication, AREVA informed François Hollande, by a simple phone-call, that that point was unacceptable. Immediately Hollande abrogated it unilaterally, then reestablished it for a weekend - long enough to gain the assent of EELV's council (l'aval du Conseil fédéral d'EELV à l'accord) - and then abrogated it again, declaring that if he was elected he would be sole judge of how the agreement is applied.
François Hollande is a resolute supporter of AREVA, a determined champion of all nuclear technology (partisan acharné du nucléaire sous toutes ses formes), so it is unsurprising that he welcomed Issoufou with open arms at the

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Elysee Palace on 11 June 2012, 13 November 2012 and 10 May 2013. President Issoufou is also vice-president of the socialist Internationale, and a "friend" whom he knew long before either became president. Unsurprising too is that he paid him strong homage after the freeing of "Thierry, Marc, Daniel et Pierre". That's what families do.

On 10 May 2013, François Hollande declared : "This is the third time I've received M. Mahamadou ISSOUFOU, the President of Niger. This testifies for the quality of relations between our two countries and the confidence we have in each other. We found the same confidence at the time when France intervened in Mali... We have bilateral relations that are also in good "tenue" [condition] - I almost said 'teneur'[high-grade] because with have the relationship with AREVA! We discuss this regularly with the President... There is also very strong economic cooperation... and then there is military cooperation which had begun before Operation Serval and continues on a solid basis" (Source). In short, he gave a rosy overview of Françafrique.

And here are some further proofs that all of us, citizens of Niger or France, are the hostages of AREVA.

AREVA's Lies

According to its website, AREVA watches over "the health and security of the workers and the surrounding populations", "the preservation of the environment", "the limitation of impacts", and practises "a strong engagement with society."

"Security of the Workers"?

The hostages seized at Arlit in June 2008, in October 2009, and in the night of 15-16 September 2010 could appreciate this. So could the fifteen injured men mentioned by AREVA among their local workers during the suicide-attack of 23 May 2013, again at the Arlit site. And a simultaneous attack at Agadez caused more than 20 deaths of young soldiers in training for Niger's army (so the first consequence of the 35 million euros given by AREVA to Niger in March was the murder of new recruits).

"Health of the Workers"?

"At Arlit and Akokan, the uranium concentrations in some pits exceed the WHO norms by a factor of 10". This was demonstrated by the independent CRIIRAD and also by official labs (Algade and IRSN) commissioned by AREVA to do monitoring.

"Preservation of the environment"?

In June 2009, just when AREVA, under pressure from NGOs, announced the creation of "Health Observatories" at its exploitation sites, CRIIRAD wrote : "Uranium exploitation at Arlit and Akokan (Niger) has led to the withdrawal of over 270 million cubic metres of water from a fossil water-layer. The exploitation of the Imouraren field will lead to a withdrawal of 12-13 million cubic metres per year. AREVA knows that the groundwater will be dried out when the exploitation ends in around forty years. Further, the exploitation will require excavating nearly 4 billion tonnes of rocks and will produce mountains of tailings: sterile piles 40 metres high covering 20 square km, with 245 million tonnes of wastes which will remain radioactive for a very long period and which nobody knows how to confine reliably."

Note also that these mining tailings, if used in roading, cause a considerable elevation in the radioactivity of the soil: in the streets of Akokan, for example, or in front of the COMINAK hospital, radioactivity levels were found up to 100 times above normal, (Letter from CRIIRAD to Anne Lauvergeon, president of AREVA, 15 May 2007).

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"Limitation of impacts"?

Besides the direct, chemical, radiological and groundwater impacts, CRIIRAD in 2009 denounced the "indirect impacts linked to the use of coal to provide energy to the uranium extraction complexes. In 2006 in Niger, 85% of the electricity commercialized by SONICHAR was bought by SOMAÏR and COMINAK. The future exploitation of the new uranium layers will push up the coal consumption from 160000 tonnes to 400000 tonnes in 2011. The population of Tchirozérine, the district with the coal mine and the electricity plant, is complaining of the impact of both atmospheric and water pollution."

There too, we see the value placed on "the health of the workers and the surrounding populations"... along with the "environmental" argument in support of nuclear fuel that is claimed to avoid the use of coal, and the accompanying atmospheric pollution and CO2 production!

"Strong engagement with Society"?

According to Areva, "since the mining companies SOMAÏR and COMINAK were created some forty years ago, AREVA has had ambitious societal policies... In Niger the group supports development aid programmes and even does solidarity actions in the fields of health, education, training and access to water and energy for local populatons... When confronted with emergencies, famines, floods... AREVA helps the stricken populations of Niger. AREVA takes an active part in Niger's economic development and is Niger's chief industrial partner."

AREVA declared for 2012 a gross raw profit of just over one billion euros, including 425 million in the mining sector. It boasts on its website that it devotes 3 million euros per year to its "societal contributions" in Niger - less that a tenth of its "contribution" to AQMI - and "over 37 million euros of various taxes paid to Niger in 2009" - barely more than the "tax" paid to AQMI. Not enough to change the face of the country.

To Die in Niger

The 113 clandestine migrants who left Arlit in October 2013 in family groups did not benefit from the "economic development" model promised in Niger, one of the world's poorest countries, by its "chief industrial partner". Those people did not eat the manna that fell from AREVA.
For here is the third event of late October, the least-known and the most tragic: on the 28th, just before the Arlit hostages were freed, we learnt that 87 decomposed bodies, partly dismembered by jackals, had been found in the desert between Arlit and the Algerian border, along with broken-down trucks which ought to have taken them to Algeria and the mirage of a better life. These are added to the remains of 5 women and girls found earlier. They were all clandestine migrants who had left Arlit some weeks before. They died of thirst. Essentially women and children. In all, 21 got through and 92 fell victim: 7 men, 35 women and 50 children.

"Sadafiou, an escapee aged about 30 who lost three family members during the trip, explained a few days ago on the private radio Sahara FM that the group he belonged to originated in South Niger and was fleeing from future bad harvests " (*Le Parisien,* 31.10.13).

It is true that AREVA is not in Arlit to bring happiness to Niger. Or to us. The aim is to provide uranium to French power-plants and profits to shareholders (83% of it is state-owned). The uranium ore extracted at Arlit pollutes the environment there and all along the line of transfer, treatment and re-treatment which turns it into fuel and then into plutonium (usable in MOX fuel and as military explosive)... and into nuclear waste. For eternity.
Citizens of Niger or France "we are all hostages of AREVA".

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The Octopus

AREVA extends its tentacles from France to Niger and Gabon, but also from the USA to China and Japan, via Kazakhstan, Finland, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates. The company boasts of this on its site and even emphasizes it: "AREVA enables its customers to benefit from a commercial presence in over 100 countries and an industrial presence in 43. The group has worked out a super-long-term development strategy, resting on balanced implantation between Europe, Asia and the Americas."

This "balanced implantation", may be likened to the "strict sufficiency" boasted by France's strategists and leaders, our "thinking heads" in the matter of the 300 "nuclear warheads" - as conceived by the Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique (CEA), which is a 61.52% shareholder in AREVA, and commanded by the French State, which is a 21.68% shareholder in AREVA. France's brave "nuclear heads" are modestly capable (if so decided by a single thinking head currently named François Hollande) of causing a paltry billion deaths. And of course of deterring terrorists from ever taking French hostages.

This economic strategy is as "super-long-term" as our military strategy, because there is no plan to renounce nuclear weapons any more than nuclear power-plants. The reactors originally planned to last 25 to 30 years are now expected to last 40 and will soon be lasting 50 or even (given EDF's most recent request) 60 years. Relief is meant to come from a series of EPR reactors which are having difficulty germinating but will soon be destined to live for at least 60 years. As for the weapons that France undertook to eliminate, which she ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty over 20 years ago, France is spending nearly 4 billion euros every year to modernize them. AREVA, CEA, it's the same struggle against the same enemy.

All Hostages

The hostages of AREVA include all French citizens, but also all human beings now permanently subject to the threat of new events like Fukushima, Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, Cheliabinsk, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki... and the humans of tomorrow condemned to have to manage for thousands of years the uranium-based wastes from Arlit and elsewhere.

Frenchmen, rebel! Let's demand the end to AREVA's dictatorship!

And you, men and women of the Media, don't be content to weep your murdered colleagues. The best way to honour their memory is to let the dissenters speak, to report those fighting against the octopus and claiming the right of French citizens to escape from its grip, and to make lucid enlightened choices in energy policies and strategic policies.

A livable world (Un monde vivable pour tous), a peaceable world, is a world with no nuclear arms and no nuclear power-plants.

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