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Tuareg rebellions

Tuareg rebellions have influenced profoundly the history of the contemporary Sahara, especially the countries of Mali and Niger. The Tuareg (Kel Tamasheq) are a historically nomadic ethnic group found primarily in the Saharan parts of Mali, Algeria, Libya, Niger, and Burkina Faso. A minority in all of these countries, they have nevertheless proven to be crucial antagonists of, and sometimes allies for, central governments. Tuareg rebellions long centred on demands for autonomy and even independence, but the 2012 Tuareg-led rebellion in northern Mali came to include a substantial jihadist element.

1. COLONIAL PERIOD

Leaving aside the initial Tuareg resistance to (primarily French) colonial conquests in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the history of Tuareg rebellions dates to 1916–20, when colonial Mali and Niger (then known as Haut Sénégal et Niger) saw important uprisings. In 1916, Fihrun, a leader of the Iwellemedan Tuareg confederation,

initiated a brief but impactful rebellion that culminated in his death in battle within a few months. Later that year, Kaocen, a leader of the Ikazkazen confederation, launched a rebellion in the Air Mountains that ended with his execution in 1919 and that of his brother in 1920. Later in the colonial period, the bandit-rebel Alla ag Albachir, of the Kel Adagh Tuareg in what is now Mali, led a group of outlaws until his capture and execution by French forces in 1954.

2. TWENTIETH CENTURY

These colonial precedents helped inspire post-colonial rebellions against the central governments of Mali and Niger. The earliest such rebellion began in northern Mali in 1963, as ag Albachir's son Elladi ag Alla (d. 2018) and other Kel Adagh Tuareg rose against Mali's first president, Modibo Keita (in office 1960–8, d. 1977). The uprising had multiple causes, from broad dissatisfaction with the outcomes of decolonisation and the subordination of Saharan territories to Bamako's control, to more personal motives of revenge. The uprising also exposed rifts within the Kel Adagh Tuareg, as the paramount chief

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