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From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Tuesday, January 17, 2012 09:03 PM
To: NEWS-Mahogany
Subject: Mali says several killed in Tuareg attack (Reuters)

KIDAL, Mali, Jan 17 (Reuters)- At least one Malian soldier and several assailants were killed on Tuesday when Tuareg rebels and former soldiers from Libya attacked a town in northern Mali and were pushed back by the army, the government said.

Tuareg nomads, who have fought several rebellions for a sovereign homeland in the Sahara desert, are believed by Malian authorities and other regional leaders to have received an influx of weapons and men in the aftermath of Libya's war. Their last rebellion ended in 2009.

The Defence Ministry said in a statement read on national television that the former Libyan soldiers and Tuareg rebels under the name the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) attacked Menaka in the Gao region of the West African nation.

"The army, backed by a squadron of the combat helicopters were able to push them back," said the statement signed by Colonel Idrissa Traore, the ministry spokesman.

"Six of the assailants vehicles were destroyed, several of them were killed; some were wounded while many were arrested. One Malian soldier was killed," it said.

A statement on a website purporting to be that of the separatist MNLA said the group launched the attacks and blamed their action on what they said was the Malian government's refusal to engage in dialogue. The statement said the government had instead chosen to built up troops in the region.

"To protect and progressively re-occupy Azawad territory and also respond to Bamako's provocation, the men of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad have chosen to act," the statement said.

"It is in this context that military action started in Menaka this morning," it said.

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