

In bipartisan vote French parliament continues war in Libya

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On Tuesday the French National Assembly and Senate voted by 482 to 27 and 311 to 24, respectively, to continue the French military intervention against Libya initiated by President Nicolas Sarkozy on March 19, in alliance with the US and British armed forces.

The lopsided vote demonstrated the commitment of the entire French political establishment to a continued policy of militarism and war—even as the French military increasingly acknowledges that the war is going badly. The miniscule votes against the war from sections of the bourgeois “left” were of an entirely hypocritical character, designed to retain credibility with the 51 percent of the French population that now opposes the war.

The Greens voted for the motion, and some 45 PS (Socialist Party) deputies abstained on the basis that the action was not in accordance with UNSC resolution 1973, which itself violates Libya’s sovereignty.

While the PCF’s (Communist Party) parliamentarians voted against the war, their candidate for the 2012 presidential elections, Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the Left Party (PG), openly supports it. He told the daily *Libération* on March 21 that he voted in the European Parliament for the resolution supporting the war “together with the leadership of the PCF ... together with my colleague, the European deputy Patrick Le Hyaric.” Le Hyaric is a leading member of the PCF.

After 4 months of bombardments, the continued resistance of the Libyan government has thrown France’s military adventure into crisis. At the beginning of the war in March, Foreign Minister Alain Juppé asserted that the intervention “could last a few days, or a few weeks, but not months.” This went along with official assurances that the Benghazi revolt against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and the so-called

Transitional National Council (TNC) had a mass popular base.

It is worth noting that now, as the French government is negotiating with the Libyan regime, it is presenting a different version of events—advancing the claim that the French government controls the TNC and it is therefore a credible negotiating partner. According to the Algerian newspaper *El Khabar*, Sarkozy told Gaddafi’s son Saif al-Islam: “We created the [Transitional National] Council, and without our support and money, and our weapons, the council would have never existed”. He reportedly added, “When we reach an agreement with you, we will force the council to cease fire.”

There is growing dismay in the French armed forces at their humiliating failure to defeat Gaddafi’s forces and sweep him from power. In a July 7 investigation of the opinions of military brass and diplomats, *Le Nouvel Observateur* wrote: “Four months and thousands of strikes on, Gaddafi is still there. Of course, Benghazi, the rebel capital, is still being protected but Sarkozy’s war has bogged down. ... France appears impotent against the dictator of a poorly armed nation with a tenth of its population.”

Interviewed on Radio Montecarlo on Tuesday Jean-Yves Moissoner, a researcher at the Institute for Research and Development who edits the *Maghreb-Machrek* journal, said: “Not only are the positions stabilised, but we are approaching Ramadan, a period that is unfavourable for military operations. ... The tribes in the east will not die for Tripoli, and the tribes in the west will not fight for Benghazi, quite simply because it’s not home for them.”

Top officers are openly criticizing the intervention. TF1 reported on Tuesday: “Some, such as the chief of the general staff of the armed forces Admiral Edouard

Guillaud, advocate continued military operations—a vision criticized by General Vincent Desportes, former head of the Military School, who said in the *Journal de Dimanche* that it is ‘high time to find a compromise with the Libyan authorities’. Despite having been admonished for his criticisms of the conduct of the war in Afghanistan, he added: ‘we can’t wait indefinitely for the Gaddafi regime to fall’.”

Le Nouvel Observateur’s investigation found opinions that “the war started with an unplanned show of force by the French air force” but that, despite superior weaponry, “we underestimated Gaddafi. ...We could not imagine that he would adapt so quickly”. It concluded that no one had foreseen the military weakness of the “rebels”.

There was considerable friction within the NATO alliance over who should be in charge, with France losing out to the UK and the US. The investigation reports: “For several days French diplomacy has been trying to save face, pushing for the maritime embargo of Libya to be carried out by the EU and not by NATO. ... Sarkozy insisted that Turkish and German officers in the NATO command structure be sidelined, fearing they could sabotage the war to which Berlin and Ankara were hostile.”

At current exchange rates, France has the third largest military budget in the world (after the US and China) at \$65.74 billion a year—just in front of the UK—over 2.5 percent of its GDP. Nonetheless, the French military is complaining that it is running short on funding and equipment.

A *Le Monde* article published on Tuesday detailed the overstretched resources of the armed forces fighting in Afghanistan, the Sahel and Ivory Coast: “the armed forces no longer have the resources to both fight and restore combat capacity.” The cost of the Libya war is “€1.2 million per day, the minister of defense pointed out—€100 million over 3 months. The excess costs for foreign operations will certainly be over a billion by the end of 2011, when €640 million were budgeted.”

Le Monde reports Admiral Edouard Guillaud’s concerns: “The armed forces are weak, have been weakened. ... Financial constraints diminish our operational endurance.” Referring to the fiscal pressure for cuts demanded by the bourgeoisie throughout Europe, Guillaud added: “far more than the weakening

of the bond between the armed forces and the nation, the crisis is endangering national cohesion, and financial demands are dominating the strategic debate.”

Defense Minister Gérard Longuet declared on Sunday: “We have stopped Gaddafi’s violence against his people. We are asking them [the TNC and the Gaddafi regime] to speak to each other and get round a table.”

This unusual intervention of leading military officers and officials in the press and public debate is a warning to the working class. Faced with a humiliating setback in their attempt to bomb a Third World country into submission, the military and the political establishment will press for greater military spending—funding and resources that can only come at the expense of social spending and the working class at home.

The author also recommends:

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