

UN prepares French-backed intervention in Mali

Ernst Wolff**25 September 2012**

The West African Economic Community (ECOWAS) and the government of Mali have agreed on the conditions of a military operation in northern Mali. On Sunday, the defense ministers of Mali and the Ivory Coast announced that an ECOWAS delegation would formalize the agreement within days in the Malian capital, Bamako.

Ivorian Defence Minister Paul Koffi said that a force of 3,000 ECOWAS soldiers "including no foreigners" would be deployed. However, Mali's former colonial power, France, had already announced that it will support an intervention in Mali "not through personnel, but logically."

In Washington, Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson said the international community was working with Mali's neighbors inside and outside the regional ECOWAS alliance to combat terrorist groups. This leaves no doubt as to the conflict's international implications.

A green light on the deployment of ECOWAS troops is expected at a meeting chaired by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly on Wednesday. It has been prepared by U.N. Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay. In widely publicized comments, she said Islamists in northern Mali were committing serious human rights violations and possibly war crimes—including amputations, summary executions, and the stoning to death of an unmarried couple.

Since the beginning of the year, Mali has rapidly sunk into civil war. On 22 March, longtime President Amadou Toumani Touré was overthrown by a group of soldiers led by US-trained Captain Amadou Sanogo. This combined with fallout from the imperialist intervention by NATO in Libya to topple the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and install a puppet regime in the oil-rich North African country.

Tuareg rebels of the Azawad National Liberation

Movement (MNLA), many of whom had returned from Libya heavily armed after serving Gaddafi, joined forces with Islamist groups. They succeeded in bringing the north of the country under their control, declaring it the independent state of Azawad.

The Islamist forces ultimately drove the Tuareg out of the cities of Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal, however. They introduced Sharia law and destroyed a number of Islamic shrines.

On April 6th the former labor minister, French-trained Diouncounda Traore, was appointed interim president by the military, under strong pressure from ECOWAS. On 21 May, demonstrators stormed the presidential palace and severely injured Traore. After two months of medical treatment in Paris, he returned in late June and set up a government of national unity with the support of the trade unions.

However, this government controls only Bamako and southern Mali. Northern Mali, which covers an area the size of Texas, is controlled by three different radical Islamic groups: Ansar Dine, the "Movement for unity and Jihad in West Africa" (MUJAO) and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). AQIM funds itself by taking Western hostages and is suspected of receiving financial support from Kuwait.

The leaders of Mali's military also seem to have lost control over their armed forces. The shooting of sixteen clergymen 15 kilometers north of Diaboly by insurgent soldiers against orders suggests that the command structures are disintegrating.

The Malian government had already turned to ECOWAS for military aid in early September, asking for "five battalions, on the front line, to be gradually engaged in the control of the reconquered cities." However, the Malian army—fearful that outside troops could weaken their position in Mali—rejected any outside involvement until the talks on Sunday.

The stance of the trade unions over matters was made clear at a meeting last Wednesday, when the National Union of Workers (UNTM), the Independent Union of Magistrates (SAM) and the Independent Union of Civil Administrators (SYNAC) came together in Bamako.

Backed by his colleagues, UNTM leader Siaka Diakité proclaimed that “the unions are not trying to play a particular part in politics in this chaotic situation.” He went on to explain that it was “necessary to rebuild our country, to consolidate the unity of our nation and to safeguard its territorial integrity.”

Under conditions where the central government in Bamako does not and cannot control much of Mali’s territory, such comments amount to a barely veiled endorsement of an imperialist intervention, that will be presented to the public as an operation by regional powers to reunite Mali. However, the key equipment, intelligence, and logistical support will be provided by the imperialist powers. The Ivorian government, installed through a French-UN intervention last year to oust President Laurent Gbagbo, is closely tied to the Western imperialist powers.

Present living conditions in Mali include a per capita income of less of than \$1 a day and a life expectancy of 48 years. The country runs an illiteracy rate of 81 percent and one-third of the population has no access to drinking water.

The poverty of the population’s overwhelming majority stands in stark contradiction to its wealth of natural resources, including gold and cotton. Others include phosphate, lime, rock salt, iron, manganese, bauxite, uranium and suspected large oil reserves.

The resources of the region play a major role in the global economy—prominently including the dependence of France’s nuclear industry on West African uranium. The region has become the center of a scramble for economic and geopolitical influence between the United States, France, other European states, and China. It is these interests that stand behind plans for yet another planned intervention by the United States and France in West Africa.



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