

Canada to expand support for French imperialism's war on Mali

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Unbeknownst to the vast majority of the Canadian people, the Canadian government and armed forces are deeply implicated in the French invasion of Mali and in the growing imperialist intervention in West Africa of which it is part.

Knowing that there is no enthusiasm in the Canadian populace for the country's participation in yet another imperialist war, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper has been at pains to present the role of Canada's military in the war in Mali as limited and unexpected.

This is a subterfuge. Discussion in government circles of a Canadian role in an imperialist-orchestrated military intervention in Mali has been underway since at least last spring. Furthermore, Canadian special forces were providing training to Mali's army for at least a year prior to a February 2012 military coup that was triggered by the loss of much of the country's north to an ethnic Tuareg rebel army. A December 3, 2011 Postmedia report cites Brigadier-General Denis Thompson of Canadian Special Operations Forces Command as saying the "deployment of Canadian special ops to Mali is expected to be an ongoing mission, with small teams moving in and out of the country whenever it is determined that Malian forces need such training."

Canada's military has also developed an increasing presence in other states in the region, with the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) assisting in the training of African forces that are now being readied for combat in Mali.

Canada has dispatched two dozen troops to Niger to provide military training. Niger, which borders Mali on the east, is expected to provide 500 troops to a 3,300 strong force that is being put together by ECOWAS—an alliance of west African states, all of them former French colonies—to wage war in Mali.

The CAF is also participating in Exercise Flintlock, a military exercise to be staged next month with US, European and African troops in Mauritania, which shares a 2,237-kilometer border with Mali.

To date, Canada's government has publicly acknowledged the deployment of one C-17 Globemaster III transport plane to the Malian war theater and that for just one week. But

Canadian news sources report that later this week the Conservative government will announce a lengthening of that deployment and likely other steps in direct support of the French invasion.

The Canadian Press news agency reported yesterday that it has learned from CAF sources that the C-17 that has been ferrying French troops and military equipment to Bamako, the Malian capital, since last week has been cleared by air force planners for deployment to Mali for up to three months.

France has reportedly asked for Canada to provide further transport planes and additional CAF trainers for ECOWAS states. In a telephone call to Harper, French President Francois Hollande is also said to have requested financial support for the French invasion.

Speaking earlier this week, France's ambassador to Canada, Philippe Zeller, said, "All options are still open from the Canadian side ... except the one expressed by the Prime Minister, that there would be no involvement of [Canadian] troops in combat."

On Wednesday Prime Minister Harper said his government was consulting with the opposition parties so as to develop a "parliamentary consensus" for increased CAF involvement in the French invasion of Mali. "The government," said Harper, "is looking at whether and how to extend... commitments of technical support" to the French. He then added, "I do think it is important to help this mission."

Both the Official Opposition, the trade union-supported New Democratic Party (NDP), and the Liberals have indicated they support Canada playing a greater role in the war in Mali.

Last week NDP leader Thomas Mulcair said his party supported Harper's decision to lend support to the French invasion of Mali. On Monday, NDP Foreign Affairs critic Paul Dewar said the NDP wants the CAF to do more to assist in the transport of French equipment, supplies, and personnel. "Clearly," Dewar told the *iPolitics* website, "Canada has a responsibility and a role to demonstrate that

it's going to be helping in any way we can and we want to see more engagement. As we saw at the beginning, there was more confusion than there was engagement.”

Liberal Defence critic John McKay also criticized the government on Monday for not doing more to support and promote the imperialist intervention in Mali. “I’m quite content,” said McKay, “with using our military to resolve conflicts. And I base that on a doctrine of responsibility to protect and the ... responsibility to intervene. My objection is that I actually haven’t heard the Prime Minister articulate that with respect to Mali.”

Former Liberal leader Stephane Dion, meanwhile, has criticized the Harper government for its “timidity” in Mali, which he contrasted with its readiness to send the CAF into combat in Afghanistan and Libya.

The government, opposition parties and corporate media are attempting to bamboozle the Canadian people into supporting the CAF’s growing involvement in Mali and West Africa as a whole by invoking the “war on terror” and the threat represented by Islamist forces.

These are threadbare pretexts for an intervention that on the part of Canada—no less than France, the region’s old colonial overlord—is driven by mercenary economic and geopolitical interests.

Canada is a major economic player in Mali, which in addition to being Africa’s third largest gold producer is believed to have substantial oil reserves. According to the *Toronto Star*, there are 15 Canadian mining and exploration firms active in Mali and they have Malian assets worth almost half a billion dollars.

Moreover, like their French rivals, Canadian resource extraction companies are increasingly active throughout region. Ottawa has attempted to buttress their efforts by using the *Francophonie* to boost Canada’s influence in West Africa.

In pursuit of its global interests, the Canadian ruling class, under Liberal and Conservative governments alike, has over the course of the past two decades put paid to the myth of Canada as a “peacekeeper” and played a prominent role in a series of imperialist wars and interventions. These include the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia, the ongoing US-NATO war in Afghanistan, the 2004 ouster of Haiti’s elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and the US-French and British-led “regime change” war in Libya.

As a result of this revival of militarism, by 2011 Canada was spending more on its military in real, i.e., inflation-adjusted, terms than at any time since the end of World War II.

Working people should reject with contempt the propaganda campaign of the political establishment and media that justifies the French invasion of Mali by pointing

to the overrunning of parts of northern Mali by Al Qaeda-aligned Islamist forces. Over the past four decades, dating back to the US proxy war against the Soviet-supported government in Afghanistan, the imperialist powers have repeatedly made use of Islamic fundamentalists in seeking to overturn governments that they viewed as obstacles to their unbridled domination, while at other times justifying imperialist intervention in the name of fighting “Islamist terrorism.”

In Libya in 2011, the western powers, Canada included, mobilized and helped arm Islamist militias as part of their campaign to replace the Gaddafi regime with one more pliant to their interests. And, with the support of Saudi Arabia’s medieval regime and other Gulf State sheikdoms, they are doing the same today in Syria.

Indeed, the presence of heavily-armed Islamist forces in northern Mali is a direct, albeit unintended, consequence of the NATO war on Libya. Many of the Islamist forces now active in northern Mali moved into the region from Libya and/or gained access to heavy weapons when they were captured by allied Islamist forces fighting in Libya with NATO logistical support and air cover.

Already, in the first days of the French invasion of Mali, the character of the war that Canada’s ruling elite is participating in, is being exposed. French warplanes have killed civilians in air strikes, while their Malian Army allies have carried out “summary executions” of people simply because they did not have identity documents and are targeting ethnic Tuareg and Arab civilians for abuse, including murder.

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