

Pro-French Central African Republic coup leaders scrap Chinese oil deals

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Over 500 French troops are deployed in Bangui, Central African Republic, supporting the new regime headed by Michel Djotodia, heading the Seleka rebel coalition that recently ousted CAR President François Bozizé.

Djotodia has announced that he is dissolving parliament and suspending the 2004 constitution. “To this effect, we have decided to guide the destiny of the people of the Central African Republic during this transitional period of three years... During this transition period which will lead us to free, credible and transparent elections, I will legislate by decree,” he said.

Djotodia has already announced that he will review the CAR’s mining and oil contracts with China, signed by the Bozizé government, “to see whether things were badly done, to try and sort them out.” Further, Djotodia declared that he would invite the former colonial power in CAR, France, along with the United States, to retrain the official military, which was defeated by Seleka last weekend.

“We will rely on the European Union to help us develop this country,” Mr. Djotodia said, adding that about 80 per cent of the country’s foreign aid has come from the bloc. “When we have been sick, the European Union was at our bedside. It will not abandon us now.”

Effectively, Djotodia is preparing to hand over the key resources of the CAR’s economy to European imperialism.

The situation facing the CAR population remains disastrous. Most of Bangui lacks running water and electricity, and the single functioning hospital is still taking in 30 wounded per day. The United Nations reports that food shortages affecting tens of thousands are gripping the country, and prices of staple goods such as cassava and rice have tripled.

Already, life expectancy in CAR is barely over 40 years, with only 40 percent literacy and skyrocketing HIV rates.

The takeover of Bangui by the Seleka rebels with French and US support represents the most recent stage in the unfolding recolonization of Africa by the imperialist powers that came to the fore with the 2011 NATO war in Libya. It testifies to the reactionary character of the ethnic-based politics of various bourgeois and petty-bourgeois factions in Africa, which are constantly manipulated by the imperialist powers amid the growing impoverishment of the workers and rural masses.

Seleka (meaning “union”) is a coalition of dissident factions that formed initially in September of 2012. Their decision to seize Bangui came in violation of the Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which they had signed with the government in 2008.

The coup by Seleka forces has placed the CAR at the center of a struggle for influence between the United States, France, South Africa and China.

As they advanced on Bangui, then held by forces loyal to Bozizé, Seleka fighters encountered a South African National Defense Force (SANDF) detachment and attacked the outnumbered South Africans, killing 13 and wounding 28.

The future course of South African military policy in CAR remains unclear. An anonymous senior Ugandan officer said, “The intention of the South Africans is to reorganize themselves and then redeploy massively in CAR and topple these rebels. They were humiliated and they want to avenge.”

South African media are reporting that SANDF troops are staging in Uganda for a “new mission” in CAR. A South African representative, Col. Selby Moto, cautioned against such a view, however, claiming that

South African troops are merely waiting in Uganda “until the decision to reinforce or withdraw” is made by the South African government in Pretoria.

“This is complete disaster for South Africa,” Thierry Vircoulon, Central African specialist at the International Crisis Group, told Reuters. “They did not at all understand they were backing the wrong horse.”

The defeat of the South African forces and the theft of Chinese oil purchases were particularly provocative and humiliating, coming in the midst of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) conference in Durban. Chinese president Xi Jinping said China would “intensify, not weaken” its commitment to Africa, including the extension of \$20 billion in credit over the next two years.

The imperialist backing for Seleka is merely one component of a grand strategy aiming to contain China’s growing influence throughout the African continent. By 2011, the volume of Sino-African trade reached \$166 billion, with African exports to China topping \$90 billion. At the time of the Seleka takeover, Xi was touring the African continent, where he signed agreements with many resource-rich African countries.

The United States has reacted by issuing mild criticisms of the Seleka takeover. On Saturday, Washington released a statement asserting that the national unity government led by Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye is the “only legitimate government” of CAR. It did not, however, call for Bozizé’s reinstatement or criticize the theft of oil resources purchased by Chinese firms.

Tiangaye is a lawyer and a member of the Human Rights League (HRL), a global network of human rights operatives headquartered in Paris and run with financial support from European governments and Washington. Political operatives from the HRL have played a crucial role in helping organize and promote the imperialist agenda in Libya, Syria and elsewhere.

Tiangaye is apparently a trusted instrument of French imperialism, having participated in sensitive trials of African officials who enjoyed French backing but whom Paris subsequently discarded. Selected by CAR dictator Emperor Jean-Bedél Bokassa to defend him at Bokassa’s trial in 1986, he also defended Rwandan officials accused of perpetrating the 1994 Rwanda genocide.



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