

France threatens military intervention in the Central African Republic

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Seizing on the rising humanitarian crisis and ongoing sectarian violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) following after the French-backed coup in March, French president François Hollande is preparing to launch a military intervention into its former colony.

After his three-day visit to Israel, where he took a bellicose stance against Iran over its alleged nuclear weapon programmes, Hollande called the international community to “act” in CAR, criticising “excesses.” At a Council of Ministers meeting on November 20, he said: “France is planning to live up to its responsibilities.”

French intervention in the CAR would reportedly consist of military operation to seize Bangui and its suburbs, as well as towns in the northwest of the country, in order to secure access to strategic routes connecting the CAR to Cameroon and Chad.

France currently has some 410 troops in the CAR guarding the airport in the CAR’s capital, Bangui. Yesterday, French defense minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said that “on the order of 1,000 troops” would be sent to the CAR beyond the 410 French troops already present, with plans to stay at least six months.

France has pushed for military intervention in the CAR, seeking a UN mandate. It is planning a vote at the UN Security Council in early December on a motion allowing neighbouring countries, the African Union (AU) and France to intervene in the CAR. On December 6-7, Paris is to host a summit with some 40 African state officials, in order to beef up the AU force in CAR.

French military intervention may take place before the Paris summit, however. *Le Nouvel Observateur* cited a French official who declared: “We are preparing to intervene in CAR, probably immediately after the Elysée summit on African security scheduled for

December 6-7, even before if necessary.”

In run-up to launching its intervention, Paris has intensified talks with the heads of regional states, which function as proxies for French imperialism. A 2,500-strong regional peacekeeping force, known as Misma, is currently deployed in the country. On November 18, UN leader Ban Ki-Moon called for up to 6,000 more international troops.

While preparing to intervene militarily in the CAR, Paris is downplaying the scale of the operation, claiming it would be carried out in a short period and then the troops will be withdrawn.

The CAR has plunged into deepening sectarian violence and humanitarian crisis since the French-backed Seleka (“alliance” in the Sango national language) Muslim militia ousted President François Bozizé in March. Seleka leader Michel Djotodia, a Muslim, declared himself president after the coup.

Since the coup, there have been increasing sectarian clashes between Seleka rebel forces and militias set up by Christian communities, which make up about 80 percent of the population.

The ongoing sectarian bloodshed triggered by the Seleka coup underscores the reactionary character of Paris’s initial support for the coup and its threat to step up its intervention in the CAR. Paris is now seizing on the violence that has emerged from the coup it supported to justify stepping up its intervention in the CAR, in an intervention aimed against the people of the CAR and the working class at home.

France aims to subjugate its former colony, one of the poorest countries in the world, home to untapped natural resources including diamonds, gold, uranium, timber, and oil. It also aims to distract attention from Hollande’s deeply unpopular austerity policies at home, which have led to growing anger in the

population against the government, and government attempts to present Hollande as a decisive war leader (see “France seizes on murder of RFI journalists to intensify Mali war”).

A French intervention in the CAR will only serve to intensify the downward spiral of conflict and ethno-sectarian bloodshed that has repeatedly devastated countries in the region.

News agency IRIN reported that “Humanitarian and development indicators were dire before the coup, but now, amid increasing violence by armed groups and between communities and religious faiths, they are even worse.”

According to IRIN, “almost the entire population of 4.5 million has been affected; 1.1 million people outside the capital, Bangui, are estimated to be severely or moderately food-insecure; and there are almost 400,000 internally displaced people (IDPs), double the figure of just a few months ago.” The agency estimates that around 65,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries, notably Cameroon.

The head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the CAR, Amy Martin, said, “CAR was a failed state before. Now, it’s just worse.... We’re estimating over 1.5 million people who need assistance of various kinds, whether it’s health, nutrition, shelter, protection.”

Sectarian clashes erupted in early September in Bossangoa, a northwestern town in CAR. It has since spread throughout the province. Villages across the province have been emptied of people, and several have been razed to the ground by armed groups.

IRIN quoted Prophete Ngay-bola, a father of eight: “We’re here because of the Seleka, who came to our village, looted, ransacked and killed.”

He added, “We’ve lost our houses, our fields, our goods. Houses were razed with all our things in. We are.... I don’t even know what to call us. We have nothing now. I can’t even go to my house or fields. If they see me there, they’ll kill me.”

The conflict has pushed some 70 percent of the country’s children out of education. It is reported that some 3,500 have been recruited into rebel forces, and an unknown number recruited into the anti-balaka—a new, predominantly Christian rebel group created by Bozizé’s sympathisers.



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