

France steps up military intervention into Central African Republic

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Yesterday evening, French President François Hollande announced an “immediate” military intervention in the Central African Republic (CAR), a former French colony, after holding a Defense Council meeting with government ministers and the army chief of staff.

Hollande declared that French troop levels in CAR will be doubled “in a few days, if not a few hours.” The announcement came after yesterday’s adoption by the the UN Security Council of a French-sponsored resolution authorizing the deployment of more French and African troops in CAR.

The UN resolution authorises the deployment of an African Union-led force, the International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA). The resolution also authorises French forces “to take all necessary measures” to support the MISCA.

Some 2,500 African forces are currently deployed in CAR, a figure that is set to increase to 3,500. France has some 410 troops in CAR and it deployed an additional 250 troops yesterday in the capital city, Bangui. A total of 1,200 French troops are expected to be sent to CAR.

To justify this further intervention in its former colony, France is seizing upon violence between the country’s majority Christians and minority Muslims that exploded since French-backed Muslim Seleka rebels seized power in March. Seleka leader Michel Djotodia, a Muslim, declared himself president, ousting President François Bozizé.

According to media reports, at least 100 people have been killed and at least 90 wounded by machete attacks and gunfire. Voice of America reported that at least eight people were killed and 70 people wounded on Thursday.

In a short speech justifying the intervention, Hollande

claimed to be acting on France’s “duty to bring aid and solidarity to a small, friendly country, the world’s poorest country, which is calling us for help. ... France must act to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe; it will act. I have full confidence in our troops for this operation.”

The invasion of CAR will take place without any parliamentary vote, Hollande indicated: “The government will give explanations to parliament as soon as next week.”

In a statement that amounts to an insult to the intelligence of the working class, he insisted, “France’s only objective is to save human lives.”

Hollande’s statement is a cover-up of the imperialist motivations driving French policy in its former colony. Paris is intervening in CAR in order to protect French imperialist interests as the CAR is home to untapped natural resources including diamonds, gold, uranium, timber, and oil. Bozizé himself accused French imperialism of seeking his ouster because he made oil deals with China. (See: “US, France deploy troops to Central African Republic”)

It is more broadly part of an explosion of French imperialist interventions, concentrated in Africa, in the last two years—during which France has attacked Libya, Ivory Coast, and Mali and threatened war with Syria before the US turned away from attacking Syria.

Despite Hollande’s ludicrous attempts to deny the imperialist motivations underlying his latest war, his administration itself has made clear that its strategy is to escalate French intervention in Africa to destroy the influence of rival powers, particularly China.

Earlier this week, Hollande participated in an economic conference organised by the French Ministry of Economy and the Medef employers’ organisation, focused on boosting French economic positions in

Africa and reversing its loss of market share in Africa to China. He announced plans to increase French yearly investment in Africa to be around €20 billion, as compared to €10 billion between 2008 and 2013.

French Finance Minister Pierre Moscovici declared, “France has not seen or perceived clearly enough that there was new competition, that our positions were no longer exclusive or guaranteed.”

From 2000 to 2011, France’s market share in sub-Saharan Africa fell from 10.1 to 4.7 percent, while Chinese market share went from less than 2 percent in 1990 to 16 percent in 2011.

The military intervention is supported by the bourgeois media and the political parties like the conservative UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) of former President Nicolas Sarkozy and the neo-fascist Front National (FN).

Former UMP Minister for European Affairs Pierre Lellouche said that the military intervention aims “first of all to end a humanitarian disaster, there are people killing each other, the state has lost its authority, there is nothing left in this country.” He absurdly claimed, “There are no economic interests underlying this policy, no neo-imperialist designs of any kind. This is why the UMP is supporting the government in this affair.”

For its part, the FN explicitly backed the intervention as necessary to protect French imperialism’s geo-strategic interests in the region. According to the FN, “This intervention which is necessary from a humanitarian standpoint is also in conformity with French interests in the region. France must defend and retake its positions in what is for it an indispensable zone of influence.”

Paris is hosting a two-day Africa-France summit beginning today with 40 African leaders aimed at boosting French economic ties with Africa. It is widely expected that the summit will be dominated by French military intervention in CAR.



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