

French troops accused of sexual violence in the Central African Republic

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8 April 2016

A new series of charges of sexual violence against minors has been brought in recent days against UN forces soldiers in the Central African Republic (CAR), and especially against soldiers of the French operation Sangaris. This intervention of the French army had been endorsed in December 2013 by the United Nations Security Council following a resolution sponsored by France.

France has mobilised up to 2,500 troops as part of this operation and still officially has 900 men in CAR. The other UN operation, Minusca, currently has about 12,600 military and police.

The latest accusations were triggered by a report comprising the testimonies of victims of sexual violence by the NGO AIDS-Free World and transmitted to the UN, which said it would launch a formal investigation into recent allegations.

According to a UN official in New York the latest charges against French soldiers involved forced sex with animals in exchange for money. AIDS-Free World reports that three girls told a UN official that they had been stripped naked and tied up in a camp by a Sangaris commander then forced to have sex with a dog.

These are just the latest of persistent reports of abuse and sexual violence that have followed the intervention of French troops and UN “peacekeeping” operations for over two years. It has now reached the scale of a full-blown scandal. Press reports last year already pointed to the “multiplication of the number of cases” and the UN had relieved its Special Representative of his duties in Bangui, the CAR capital.

Recently, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had described the sexual violence committed by the troops operating in CAR as a “cancer.”

Six months after the start of the Sangaris operation, a

UN humanitarian worker had already leaked to French authorities a United Nations report revealing that about 10 French soldiers in the Sangaris operation were accused of having sexually abused children between December 2013 and May-June 2014.

Jeune Afrique magazine quoted the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the UN, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, saying he “takes these [latest] allegations, some of which are particularly odious, extremely seriously.” And the French ambassador to the UN, François Delattre, said, “Cases of abuse and allegations of sexual exploitation are particularly shocking and heinous.”

Since the beginning of the year the cases of sexual violence against minors continue to multiply, according to the UN.

In the last several months, demonstrations of hostility to the French troops on the part of the local population are on the increase. French military convoys were booed as they passed by hostile crowds who shouted slogans alluding to theft and sexual attacks.

According to official statements, the Sangaris operation was intended to “stop communalist slaughter.” Hollande had claimed that the policy of his government was to disarm the warring groups and restore stability to avoid more bloodshed. The mission of France was “necessary if we want to avoid massacres taking place here,” he said.

“France is coming to defend human dignity with you,” contended Hollande in Bangui a few days after the start of the operation.

These scandals shockingly expose the pretext that the Socialist Party (PS) government sent its parachute regiments and the Foreign Legion to CAR for “humanitarian” reasons. The heinous acts the French troops are accused of are a true reflection in the

psychology and behaviour of individual officers and soldiers of the oppressive imperialist relations of French capitalism with the oppressed masses in Africa.

In agreement with the Obama administration, the French military intervention was intended to counteract the growing influence of China in Central Africa, which is rich in mineral and energy resources. Paris aims to control this country, strategically located at the centre of Africa, and destroy the influence of China. Under former President François Bozizé the Chinese had concluded several key agreements with CAR, including oil contracts and military cooperation.

Bozizé himself accused French imperialism of trying to overthrow him because he had made oil deals with China before being overthrown by the Seleka militia encouraged by France.

When the operation was launched, the French company Areva was in the process of preparing one of the largest investments in CAR, a proposed uranium mine in the south of the country.

The recent elections held in the context of the Sangaris operation and the UN Minusca operation produced a new government backed by France in February. The French foreign minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, and the defence minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, were present on March 30 for the inauguration of the new president, Bozizé's former prime minister, Faustin-Archange Touadéra.

Le Drian announced the same day the withdrawal in 2016 of Sangaris forces, estimating that their mission had been accomplished. One of the first statements of Touadéra was to say he was worried about the departure of French troops. "Of course, there are the UN forces but these two entities complement each other in their actions," he said. "Since the territory is large and the threats are still there, we still have concerns."

The revelation of the behaviour of the French troops with regard to the African population exposes pseudo-left organisations such as the NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party), which, after greeting the attack on Libya by NATO on the basis of fraudulent claims of its "humanitarian" nature, has sought to cover the military intervention of the PS government in the Sahel and in Central Africa, claiming it sought to ensure "security."

In September 2014, Jean Batou, a member of the Swiss SolidaritéS organisation affiliated to the NPA, expressly denied that the PS government had predatory

aims in the English organ of the NPA, *International Viewpoint*, at the same time trying to recycle the discredited "humanitarian grounds" excuse with the claim of "Defending the security of the population" along with Hollande and the PS.

He wrote that "the economic ulterior motives" of Nicolas Sarkozy in Libya and Ivory Coast seemed "less clear when considering those of François Hollande in Mali, and very questionable in CAR."

"It seems clear," he wrote, "that sending shock troops to avoid the final shipwreck of 'failed states,' such as in Central Africa, obeys first the need to maintain security in its 'backyard.'"

What "seems clear," on the contrary, is that the shock troops of French imperialism became the refuge of fascist elements and pro-Nazis who reconnect with the traditions of those used by French imperialism in its colonial wars of the 1950s and 1960s, of which the National Front's Jean-Marie Le Pen is an example.

In December 2013 a photo appeared on the Facebook page of the French army. It was then removed. The photo showed a French sergeant from a paratrooper regiment in Castres in CAR. On his uniform he wore a badge with the SS motto "Meine Ehre heisst Treue" (My honour is loyalty).

In November 2013 the French press published a photo of a legionnaire in the Serval operation in Mali wearing a scarf depicting a skull on his face, another SS symbol. In 2008, an engineering paratrooper regiment based in Montauban was rocked by a scandal exposed by the *Canard enchaîné*, which showed photos of three of its soldiers, neo-Nazis, making the Hitler salute whilst wrapped in a swastika flag.

The unbroken chain of revelations of sexual violence since the start of the French imperialist intervention in Central Africa shows that followers of these traditions, encouraged by the reactionary policies of the PS and the pseudo-left, and the rise of the National Front in France, now feel legitimised to practice all forms of oppression against the African population.



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