Macron demands Malian junta endorse French occupation of Mali

Kumaran Ira
3 June 2021

Speaking last Sunday to *Le Journal du Dimanche* (JDD), French President Emmanuel Macron arrogantly demanded that the Malian military junta state its support for the French occupation of Mali.

France's eight-year war in Mali, launched shortly after a coup d'état in 2012, has relied on a series of neocolonial military dictatorships in Mali and across the Sahel. Macron spoke less than a week after Colonel Assimi Goïta, the strongman of the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP) junta, arrested interim President Bah Ndaw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane. Goïta forced them to resign, after having first ousted President Ibrahim Boubakar Keïta in a coup last August.

Yet Macron unblushingly told the JDD that France will not remain "at the side of a country where there is no more democratic legitimacy." He shamelessly demanded that the Malian government and people should state its gratitude to its French military occupiers.

Macron complained, "It is precisely those who are asking us to intervene militarily who refuse to publicly state their need for France. They are used to saying that their problems today are due to the old colonial powers of yesterday. Of course, colonization has left a deep mark. But I also told youth in Ouagadougou that their problems today are not due to colonialism, they are caused more by bad governance by some and the corruption of others."

He spoke to the JDD amid mounting anger and disillusionment with the war across the Sahel, as well as in France, and shortly after the National Workers' Union of Mali (UNTM) bureaucracy called off a nationwide strike to oppose falling living standards in the impoverished country. It was an empty exercise in political damage control, yet after another coup in Mali exposed Macron's fraudulent claims that France is intervening in Mali to protect democracy from Islamism.

Last week, Washington and the European powers went through the motions of condemning the recent coup and threatening economic sanctions. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union both suspended Mali's membership. "Like ECOWAS, France believes that organizing presidential elections in Mali on February 27, 2022 is an absolute priority," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Monday.

Such posturing about democratic values is a disgusting political fraud. France and all the NATO powers have close ties with the bloody Egyptian military junta of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, which drowned mass working class protests in blood, and have backed Islamist militias in wars in both Libya and Syria. As for Le Drian, he is infamous not only for his close ties to al-Sisi and other bloody African dictators, but for helping French presidents select targets for France's extrajudicial assassination program.

Goïta clearly calculated, as he launched his latest coup last month, that Paris will support his junta if he creates conditions for the French war in Mali to continue. Indeed, Macron backed Goïta's coup last year as the only way to continue the war amid mounting protests and popular opposition to the French military presence in its former colony.

While making clear he would work with the Malian junta, Macron issued a bizarre denunciation of political Islamism in Mali to the JDD. He said, "Radical Islamism with our soldiers on the ground? Over my dead body. I know this temptation exists in Mali. But if things evolve this way, I will withdraw" the troops, Macron said.

© World Socialist Web Site

Macron's comments were astonishingly incoherent, as the pretext Paris gave for invading Mali in 2013 was to crush Islamist militias arriving in Mali from Libya. After the 2011 NATO war in Libya, ethnic Tuareg and other militias returned to northern Mali with heavy weapons, provoking a crisis in the country's capital, Bamako. A coup toppling President Amadou Toumani Touré in March 2012 and a French military intervention in the nearby Ivory Coast militarily prepared the French intervention in Mali in 2013 and troop deployments to Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger.

It appears that Macron's comment was not intended to seriously suggest that French troops would leave if any Islamist presence was detected in Mali, but as a signal to the Malian junta and also as an attempt at political damage control addressed to a French and European domestic audience. While French imperialism's back channel ties to Islamist terrorist networks are an open secret in the ruling elite, Paris intends to keep control over the Malian regime's relations to Islamist groups in order to maintain the political lie that it is present in Mali to wage a "war on terror."

The junta has not ruled out negotiations with armed jihadist groups, and also it has ties with Islamic preachers in Mali. Goïta made clear that he would work with parties, including the June 5, 2020 Movement-Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP), to form a government. He demanded that "the prime minister's post go to the M5-RFP." Several M5-RFP members signaled their acceptance, with Choguel Kokalli Maiga, a M5-RFP member and former minister, declaring, "This went straight to our heart."

The M5-RFP was the main political organization backing the CNSP's coup last August, pushing protests by youth in Bamako into the dead end of supporting the CNSP. Paris backed both the M5-RFP and the CNSP in order to block a broader movement of the Malian oppressed masses and youth demanding the withdrawal of French troops. Significantly, France's petty-bourgeois New Anti-capitalist Party also endorsed the M5-RFF during the military coup last year.

Within the M5-RFP, Imam Mahmoud Dicko, the former president of the Islamic High Commission of Mali (HCIM), has played an important role. He served as a mediator between the Malian government and jihadist groups in northern Mali. After supporting Keïta in the 2013 election, Dicko backed protests against Keïta in 2019 and 2020. In 2019, he launched the CMAS (Coordination of Movements, Associations and Sympathizers). In June 2020, the CMAS joined the M5-RFP.

Dicko, despite holding protests serving as a safety valve for anger at the French occupation, functions as a tool of French imperialism. In 2013, he stated that French intervention in Mali against jihadist groups was not an aggression against Islam, and that France had come to the aid of a people in distress.

At home, Macron is waging an anti-Muslim campaign. He is imposing a charter of principles on French Islam and promoting an "anti-separatist law" aimed against "Islamist separatism," that is, at preventing any Muslim criticism of French imperialism's predatory wars—measures designed to consolidate fascistic police-state rule against the working class. There is also mounting dissatisfaction among French troops in Mali following the rise of attacks against them by jihadist forces. So far, France has lost about 50 troops in Mali.

In this context, Macron fears the consequences if Goïta makes Bamako's ties to Islamist forces too obvious, exposing Macron to criticism on his right from anti-Islamic neofascist forces as Macron attempts to run for reelection in 2022 despite his massive unpopularity.

The corrupt and reactionary dealings underscore the necessity of building a movement in the working class, across the Sahel and Africa as well as in France, against war and for the withdrawal of French troops from Africa.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site