

Imperialist Powers Escalate War in Mali

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Amid continuing offensives by French troops in Mali, the imperialist powers are making clear that the assault on Mali is part of a lasting, neo-colonial escalation of military intervention throughout Western Africa and beyond.

"This is a global threat and it will require a global response... that is about years, even decades, rather than months," British Prime Minister David Cameron said over the weekend.

French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian defined his aim in Mali as "the total re-conquest of the country," using troops provided by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). France, which is currently spearheading the war in Mali, plans to expel Tuareg and Islamist fighters from Mali to pursue its agenda. Its goal is to stabilize the corrupt regime in Bamako, currently led by the military junta of Captain Amadou Sanogo, as its stooge regime in Mali, where France has significant corporate interests.

Similarly, British Foreign Secretary William Hague held up the current war in Somalia as an example for Mali on how to create space for a "legitimate government" to function. He said, "This has led to a lot of progress in Somalia. What we don't want in countries like Mali is the twenty years of being a failed state that preceded all of that in Somalia."

Such a comment could not be more chilling. In fact, Somalia continues to be a deeply impoverished country, torn by civil war, and which Washington regularly targets with drone strikes. Hague's comment signifies that the NATO powers view such an outcome as perfectly acceptable, even desirable, for Mali.

The broader implications of the escalating war in Mali were laid out in an article yesterday in the *New York Times*. The *Times* quotes Rudolph Attala, a former Pentagon counterterrorism official: "To dismantle their [Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's] network, the United States and its allies will need a well-thought-out regional strategy."

The point being made is clear: the war in Mali is not only about Mali, but involves intensive diplomacy and military operations by the imperialists to shape all of Western Africa—including Algeria, Nigeria, and the Libyan regime installed by the 2011 NATO war. The *Times* notes that Washington and Paris have been "courting Algeria for months," to get Algiers' help in Mali.

The *Times* added: "Forging that strategy will be far from easy, given those involved. The Algerians have an able, if heavy-handed military, but have not been eager to co-operate extensively with their neighbours. Libya's new government appears willing to cooperate but has little ability. Mali has little military ability, and any enduring solution needs to be crafted with an eye to internal politics."

Bruce Hoffman, an expert on terrorism at Georgetown University, told the *Times* that the US should escalate military assistance and drone warfare to help France: "The United States should consider stepping up its support for the French intervention, by providing additional logistical support and perhaps making use of drones, so that the French military can better carry out its operations and hand over the mission as soon as possible to African troops."

The press is stepping up its criticisms of an alleged "lack of support" for French imperialism's war in Mali, demanding that their governments rush to help. The former US ambassador to Mali, Vicki Huddleston, criticized the Obama administration for its "inaction" in a recent radio interview.

While US think tanks and intelligence forces are busy deliberating methods of escalating the war, the fighting in Mali has intensified. Over the weekend French Rafale fighter planes and Gazelle helicopter gun ships carried out a dozen operations.

On Monday about 200 French soldiers from the 21st Marine Infantry Regiment, supported by six combat helicopters and reconnaissance planes, seized the towns of Diabaly and Douentza. The infantrymen had set out at dawn from the nearby government-controlled town of Niono, thirty miles south of Diabaly.

Few details about the fighting are known, as reporters have been banned from the combat zone. However, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said that they had received reports of serious abuses, including ethnic killings, committed by French-backed Malian security forces against civilians in Niono.

According to HRW, Tuaregs and Arabs, the ethnic groups most associated with the rebels in northern Mali, are especially targeted. This recalls similar communal attacks by NATO-backed forces on immigrant workers from ethnic groups considered supportive of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, during the NATO war on Libya.

On Saturday French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, attending an ECOWAS emergency summit in the Ivorian capital of Abidjan, told African leaders that it was time for their nations to take over military operations in Mali "as soon as possible".

The member states pledged to send 5,800 troops into Mali. They endorsed Major General Shehu Usman Abdulkadir of Nigeria and Brigadier General Yaye Garba of Niger as Force Commander and Deputy Force Commander of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA).

AFISMA is expected to cost the impoverished former French and British colonies in West Africa over \$500 million. International donors will meet January 29 in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, to discuss funding.

Some 150 troops from Nigeria, Togo, Benin and Chad arrived in Bamako on Sunday.

Nigerian troops were attacked on their way by gunmen in Kogi State, central Nigeria, leaving two officers dead and eight soldiers wounded. An online newspaper said the attack was part of a mission to stop Nigerian troops joining Western powers in their "aim to demolish the Islamic empire of Mali." A group named Ansaru close to the Islamists of Boko Haram was reportedly behind the attack.

France can firmly count on the support of European imperialism. The European Union (EU)

appointed French Brigadier General Francois Lecointre as commander of a mission to send 250 military trainers to Mali in February. It will not only give 50 million euros (\$66 million) of funding to Ecomog forces, but has announced it will unblock € 250 million in aid for Mali that was frozen after the military coup in March 2012.

It also offered to host a ministerial meeting of the international support and follow-up group on the situation in Mali on February 5. Following Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Belgium and Denmark, Italy has now also offered logistical support.

According to US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland, about 100 American trainers have been deployed to Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Togo, Senegal and Ghana to help prepare troops in these countries for combat in Mali.

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