

“Operation Mali”: United Nations Complicit in Recolonization of Africa

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It's the third month since the French troops entered Mali. The action entailed the involvement of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) organized military mission, sent to support the government of ECOWAS member nation Mali against Islamist rebels in the north of the country. Its strength has reached around six and a half thousand troops by the end of March. (1) Still the French and AFISMA forces have failed to crush the resistance of the terrorists as yet.

The fighting continues in the Adrar des Ifoghas and the areas around the towns of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. The armed formations are mobile enough, according to reports off and on they get into towns and cities, including Bamako. The humanitarian situation remains hard to manage. Around half a million people (2) have become refugees, about 300 thousand have been displaced. Approximately 200 thousand Malians have been received by Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso. Hunger is a threat: 750 thousand urgently need food aid, 660 thousand children suffer from lack of food, including 210 thousand who face most extreme form of malnutrition. (3)

Dioncounda Traore, interim President of the Republic of Mali, sent a letter to the United Nations Security Council dated 25 February 2013 asking to support the rapid deployment of AFISMA in Mali. But he wants to do it in a special way – by transforming AFISMA into a «United Nations stabilization and peacekeeping operation» in accordance with the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 2085 (2012) in order to restore the authority and sovereignty of the Malian State throughout its territory». (4) Looks like the request happened to be exactly what the Secretary General was waiting for.

On April 3 the United Nations Security Council held a session devoted to the situation in Mali to discuss the report of the Secretary General on new proposals related to the crisis management. He responded favorably to the request of the Malian President and worked out a plan to transform AFISMA into a UN peacekeeping mission. Ban Ki-moon offered two options of the plan.

According to the *first option*, the UN could set up an «expanded political office» and let AFISMA do security and peacekeeping duties outside UN control. If a peacekeeping force was mandated, the report said the present UN mission would be «subsumed» into it. The UN, then, would support the Malian political process, carry out stabilization tasks, protect human rights and support AFISMA. The first option envisages AFISMA's responsibility for security and support of Malian armed forces. It will be mandated to conduct offensive actions against armed extremists. The United Nations would increase the AFISMA's

operational capabilities using the UN Trust Fund and, possibly, the logistics support package approved by the Security Council. At that, The European Union would continue efforts to train the Mali's armed forces. The support could also be rendered to Malian defense and security structures through the UN's Trust Fund for the African support mission AFISMA and the Malian armed forces. The option of the plan envisages the transformation of AFISMA into a UN peacekeeping force, in case the UN Security Council finds the measure expedient and endorses it. The *second option* of the plan presupposes the formation of a stabilization mission according to article VII of the UN Charter along with a parallel force. Aside from the political mandate, the mission would be responsible for security and stabilization, protection of civilians and humanitarian aid. The activities would be conducted in strict accordance with the rules of engagement. As the second option envisions, the major part of AFISMA staffers would join the United Nations stabilization mission. Military, police and civil components of the mission would be mainly deployed in the north, leaving just a token presence in Bamako. The parallel force would act alongside the UN mission taking the responsibility for large-scale military operations and providing experts support outside the UN mandate.

The both options could be construed as the gradual transformation of the present situation to the phase of UN stabilization efforts including the establishment of the parallel force. The UN Secretary General's proposals are substantiated by the fact that, *«the options presented in the present report are based on a frank appraisal of the current political and security environment, as well as a thorough analysis of the comparative advantage of the United Nations vis a vis other international actors in the ongoing effort to bring peace and stability to Mali. They take into account the fact that the United Nations is operating in a new geopolitical context and faces threats that have not been encountered before in a peacekeeping context. The situation on the ground remains fluid. Although the extremists and criminal elements have been dealt a heavy blow, they continue to pose a significant threat to the safety and security of the civilian population and any United Nations personnel deployed in Mali. The recent suicide bombing in Timbuktu and the fighting in Gao are a stark reminder that the risk of a major deterioration of the security situation remains ever present»*. (5)

During the April 3 session the representative of Mali opted for the second option. (6) According to him, the Mali's government is confident that the option would let it reach its goals: to restore the sovereignty over the national territory, to stabilize the situation in the country and to apply efforts for national reconciliation. The African Union has changed its stance too. In mid-March a revised concept of African Union mission was submitted to the United Nations. It envisions being expanded by the mission of the United Nations. At the same time, it does not say the AFISMA mission should be subjugated by the presence of the UN. The revised document puts it straight – AFISMA is not to limit its activities by Mali and it can spread it to the neighboring states (with their consent). (7)

It's important to point out the stance of ECOWAS. By the end of March the session of the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staffs (CCDS) came to conclusion AFISMA was to be urgently provided with necessary means to enable it to take over the functions carried out by French forces (an ECOWAS representative said it was planned to pull them out in the near future). The re-hating of AFISMA tentatively planned to take off by July 2013, envisages a troops' strength of 11,200 and 1,440 police officers for the robust assignment under the aegis of the UN to rid Mali of terrorism and criminal insurgency and also to restore the country's territorial integrity with support for the national armed forces. Burkina-Fasp, Niger,

Togo, Nigeria, Chad, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Guinea, Cote D'Ivoire and Gambia have already agreed to join and deploy their ground forces contingents.

ECOWAS has sent a letter to the United Nations Secretary General strongly recommending to transform AFISMA into a UN stabilization mission with a robust mandate. (8)

Besides, ECOWAS stands for the establishment of the parallel force acting alongside the UN mission capable to counter terrorists and rebels. ECOWAS Authority urged UN Security Council to authorize the deployment of the international military force in Mali in conformity with Article 7 of the UN Charter.

Demands for «robust mandate» and evoking article 7 (the article allows the use of force) can mean Mali and ECOWAS want to expand the Congolese experience. A few days ago the United Nations Security Council adopted an intriguing resolution, which was largely unnoticed while being of enormous importance. For the first time since 1960 the UN Mission in Congo was mandated to engage in combat. On March 28, 2013 the United Nations Security Council extended the mission for a year and authorized an intervention brigade will carry out targeted offensive operations, alone or with the Congolese national army, against armed groups that threaten peace in the eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo. The authorized strength of the force is twenty thousand (!) (9) The composition will include three battalions, an artillery battery, a company of special operations forces and a reconnaissance company. The mission is «to neutralize and disarm militant groups». The wording of the resolution and the composition of the unit leave no doubt the 'neutralization» means waging combat actions.

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The concept of [crisis management in Mali](#) has gone through an about-face. The Africans are made to refuse the idea of tackling the conflict themselves. The African Mission – AFISMA has failed. One of the reasons – it never got the funds it needed. The United Nations and the donor-states have refused to finance an African mission. But they agree to reverse their stand in case the UN would be a decision maker. At that, the very same AFISMA forces would do the job, but under the command of «international community»... It all seems to be in conformity with logic against the background of toppling Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan leader in 2011, who promoted the idea of creating inter-African peacekeeping forces and the overthrow of Amadou Toumani Touré, former President of Mali, who was to become the commander-in-chief of new contingent.

Notes

(1) According to the information of the United Nations Secretary General dated March 26, 2013. At that, it's only around 80% of the planned strength (9500).

(2) According to the estimated by Jeffrey D. Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the number exceeds 470 thousand (US document S/PV.6944. C.3)

(3) Same, p.4

(4) Letter of Mr. Dioncounda Traoré, interim President of the Republic of Mali addressed to the President of the Security Council dated 26 February 2013// UN Document: S/2013/113 .

(5) Rapport du Secrétaire général sur la situation au Mali, 26 mars 2013, // UN Documents: S/2013/189.

(6) Ref. Verbatim report on UNSC session, March 3, 2013// UN Document: S/PV.6944. p.4.

(7) Letter dated 15 March 2013 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, operations of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali, adopted by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union at its 358th meeting, held on 7 March 2013 //paragraph 14//UN Document S/2013/163. p.9.

(8) См. выступление представителя ЭКОВАС на заседании СБ ООН 3 апреля 2013 года, // ECOWAS representative speech, UNSC session, April 3, 2013//UN Document S/PV.6944.

(9) UNSC resolution № 2098 (2013), March 28, 2013 // UN Document S/RES/2098 (2013) – <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/273/83/PDF/N1327383.pdf?OpenElement>

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