

EU and the US prepare military intervention in Mali

By Ernst Wolff
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One week ago, the European press was singing the praises of the European Union (EU) as this year's recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. At the same time, top European diplomats were preparing for another imperialist military intervention in Africa. Chief EU diplomat Catherine Ashton was given responsibility for presenting a concept for a "Mali mission" within 30 days.

According to statements by EU diplomats, such a mission involves the deployment of 150 European military experts to train Malian and African troops over a period of four to six months. The role model for such an operation is the EUTM (European Training Mission), which has been training Somali soldiers in Uganda since May 2010. A final decision on the type of military engagement is to be made on November 19.

On October 12, the United Nations Security Council approved an international military mission in Mali and commissioned UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon to draw up detailed plans for a military intervention, involving information on personnel, costs and type of operations, with the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). The plan is to be completed by the end of November.

The actual leadership for an intervention is neither the UN nor the EU, but rather the former colonial power, France. The Paris government drafted the UN Security Council resolution giving the green light for military action and has undertaken hectic diplomatic activity to persuade African governments to supply troops for such an operation. French generals also worked out the plans for military deployment. They are applying pressure for an operation to commence before the Mali monsoon season starts in late March 2013.

France has the full backing of the United States, which according to reports is prepared to supply drones

for such an intervention. The German government has also agreed to participate. German chancellor Angela Merkel told German soldiers on Monday that Berlin was prepared to participate in principle in a "training and support mission in Mali."

Senior US and French military officers and diplomats met in Paris this week to discuss "security issues in the Sahel zone". After the talks, a spokesman for the French Defence Ministry announced that France was seeking active EU involvement in the logistical planning and design of a military intervention along the lines of the EU-led Operation Atlanta, aimed at combating piracy off the Somali coast.

Although France, the US and the EU are mapping out the aims and purposes of the military operation, their plans entail the use of troops from African countries. According to the current plans, the ECOWAS will provide about 3,000 troops for such a deployment. The EU and the United States will be responsible for training, finance, delivery of weapons and military planning. In the words of EU diplomats last week, this solution will lend the operation "an African face". For the European powers, there is the advantage that loss of life and injury will be restricted to African soldiers.

The official pretext for the war preparations is the seizure of power by Islamists in northern Mali. After meeting with his French counterpart Laurent Fabius, the German foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, declared: "Should northern Mali collapse completely, if there is another Somalia, a lawless, stateless region, then terrorists will have a safe haven".

The fact that Islamist forces in recent months could take control in the north of Mali—an area the size of France—is a direct consequence of the Libya war. Under the rule of Gaddafi, Libya was one of the most important investors in impoverished Mali. Gaddafi also

mediated in the conflict between the central government and the Tuaregs, who fought for their independence in the arid north of the country. Many were able to obtain work in Libya.

After the overthrow of the Libyan regime, Tuaregs streamed back into the country. Many of them were heavily armed. They were accompanied by Islamists, who had supported the NATO campaign against Gaddafi in Libya. The long-time Malian president, Amadou Toumani Touré, then lost control and was deposed in a military coup in late March. The leader of the coup was the US-trained Captain Amadou Sanogo, who maintains close ties to US intelligence agencies.

The background to the coup was a series of social problems and discontent. Government soldiers had been sent to fight against the Tuaregs without being supplied with proper weapons. At the same time, the land has been plagued for years by mismanagement and corruption on the part of the local bourgeoisie, who sold off large stretches of arable land and cotton companies to foreign capitalists. This provoked considerable opposition among peasants and young students.

In the political chaos following the coup, Tuareg rebels returning from Libya joined up with local Islamists to bring large parts of the north under their control. Then, the Islamists from Ansar Dine, Mujajo and smaller groups, with links to the North African branch of the Al Qaeda network (Aqmi) and financial backing from Kuwait, drove the Tuareg rebels out of most major cities and assumed unchallenged rule over the region.

According to media reports, hundreds of jihadists met up in the cities of Timbuktu and Gao in northern Mali following the decision by the UN Security Council to go to war. The radical Islamist warriors stem from the Sudan and also from the territory claimed by Morocco, Western Sahara, and intend to defend northern Mali against a planned offensive by Malian and international forces. Islamist forces from Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan and Yemen are also converging on northern Mali, and demonstrations against a foreign intervention in the conflict recently took place in the Malian capital of Bamako.

Some military experts are already warning that an intervention in Mali could develop into a long-term war such as the one waged by imperialist powers for more

than a decade in Afghanistan. The former inspector general of the German army, Harald Kujat, told the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* it was illusory to believe one could train unarmed soldiers in Mali. “There is a considerable risk of the development into an armed conflict.”

Blind to the enormous suffering of the civilian population—300,000 people have fled their homes, the lives of a half-million people are threatened by drought and hunger, and more than half-a-million children are undernourished—the imperialist powers are preparing a military intervention in Mali that will have repercussions far beyond the borders of the country.

The stance of the UN and the EU is determined by a hodgepodge of different interests. All of the Western states are fearful that the takeover by radical Islamists in northern Mali could send a signal for uprisings in other regions. To prevent this, the imperialist powers are striving to install a Western-oriented puppet regime.

Following its military intervention in the Ivory Coast, France is intent on expanding its influence in West Africa. The US, which is presumed to be the string puller behind the recent coup, seeks to establish West Africa as its own geo-strategic base, thereby repelling Chinese influence in the region. For its part, Germany is striving to exert its power as a major player in military affairs and is not prepared to allow France and the United States to dictate the agenda in the region.

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