

US backs new French offensive in Mali

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On August 9, French forces bombed an Islamist militant position in north Mali. It was reported that four or five bombs were dropped in the Essakane region west of the city of Timbuktu. The following day, US president Barack Obama announced that the US government would be sending \$10 million to France to help finance these operations.

The bombing marked the opening of a new French military operation in West African, code-named Operation Barkhane, ostensibly aimed at halting the spread of Islamist militant groups in the Sahel region.

France's intervention in Mali began in January 2013, and though Paris had announced it planned to withdraw its troops several months ago, it subsequently argued that renewed fighting in the region forced them to retain around 3,000 soldiers. The killing of two French journalists in November 2013 was used as a pretext to slow the scheduled reduction of French troops.

The US and British governments both provided vital support in France's war effort. Obama had previously sent a small contingent of non-combat US troops to support the French war last year. These troops were officially deployed as advisers on intelligence or transportation issues.

France's new military operation in northern Mali will be launched and waged with US support. On August 10, Obama issued an order to redirect \$10 million, supposedly to help France fight terrorism in Mali. According to National Security Council spokesman Ned Price, the new funds "will be used for airlift and aerial refueling services requested by France to support their counter-terrorism operations".

Last week, Obama announced his decision to assist the French operation in a memorandum to Congress, writing: "I hereby determine that an unforeseen emergency exists that requires immediate military assistance to France in its efforts to secure Mali, Niger and Chad from terrorists and violent extremists."

Washington Times article from August 11 noted that the aid given to France for its military efforts in Mali "is awkward for the administration, in part, because human rights groups have accused the Mali government's troops of abuses ranging from extrajudicial killings to torture in the fight against the militants."

The support offered by France's imperialist allies to the war in Mali involves them in yet another brutal crime against the African working class and oppressed masses. Hypocritically marketed to the public as a war for democracy and against terrorism, it is a bloody war to re-divide the spoils from the pillage of Africa, with Washington, London, and Berlin all seeking their share (see also: "German government extends its military mission in Africa").

The French war in Mali emerged directly from the bloody NATO war in Libya, in which Washington, London, and Paris armed Al Qaeda-linked groups and tribal militias to topple Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and install a pliant proxy regime in the oil-rich country. As Islamist groups then spread from Libya into the neighboring Sahel region, Paris seized upon this to intervene in Mali, deepen its military influence, and post troops near Sahel's strategic uranium mines, which are exploited by French corporations.

French imperialism was warning that it fully intended to return to North and West Africa, a region that it brutally conquered in the late nineteenth century at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. Mali, a French colony from 1892 to 1960, is located at the centre of the resource-rich region and is considered as its hub for exercising political and economic influence there.

The French intervention is in direct violation of international law. While it presented UN Security Council Resolution 2085 as the legal basis for this war, the resolution, passed under pressure from the imperialist powers, only authorises "the deployment of

an African-led International Support Mission in Mali.” In the event, French president François Hollande seized upon it to bomb Mali and dispatch thousands of troops to fight in Mali, a former French colony, in January 2013, six months after coming to power.

French troops are already deployed in other former French colonies in the region, such as Senegal, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast. The increasing use of drones and Special Forces across the region underscores the reactionary character of the corporate and strategic interests driving the war.

French imperialism’s intervention in Mali is also related to France’s own explosive domestic situation. Amid the first air strikes in Mali, the Hollande government launched a political attack against the French working class. The government announced far-reaching “labour market reform”, including the imposition of more-”flexible” working conditions.

Anonymous members of Hollande’s Socialist Party (PS) told the press that a key motivation in the decision to launch the war was the hope that it would boost Hollande’s poll ratings and help him to push through unpopular cuts to social programmes (see: “France seizes on murder of RFI journalists to intensify Mali war”).

In the event, this politically criminal calculation utterly failed, and France is sinking deeper into a political and economic crisis amid broad popular disaffection with imperialist wars. Last Thursday, the INSEE national statistics institute officially declared that last year the country’s economy stagnated, and this week the government collapsed amid mounting divisions over Hollande’s unpopular austerity policies.



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