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UN Security Council approves military intervention in Mali

By Ernst Wolff and Alex Lantier

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On Thursday the United Nations Security Council authorized an intervention into the sub-Saharan country of Mali by foreign troops, under the pretext of freeing northern Mali from occupation by Al Qaeda-linked Islamists. The resolution was adopted unanimously.

The vote came only ten days after the forced resignation of Malian Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra and his replacement by Django Cissoko. Diarra was an outspoken defender of a foreign military intervention, whereas Cissoko, who was installed by the military junta under Captain Amadou Sanogo, has so far abstained from any commentary on foreign intervention.

The United Nations' decision, which does not contain a specific time-table for military action, comes as a clear warning—firstly to the military junta, but above all to the workers and oppressed masses of Mali—that the imperialist powers intend to control the fate of Mali.

Malian Foreign Minister Tieman Hubert Coulibaly called the resolution a “historic step,” adding that his government “commits itself fully” to fulfilling its obligations under the resolution.

To give itself a democratic touch, the resolution calls for “political reconciliation”, elections “as soon as technically possible,” and the restoration of constitutional order. It also asks UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to “confirm in advance the council’s satisfaction with the planned military offensive operation”. In reality, it is paving the way for another bloody war on African soil, setting the fuse for an explosion of the entire surrounding Sahel region.

Mali, one the world’s poorest countries, was shaken by a military coup in March. This was provoked largely by the occupation of northern Mali by heavily-armed Tuareg forces returning from the NATO war in Libya, where they had fought on Gaddafi’s side against NATO. Only months later, the Tuareg militias were forced out by Islamist fighters, who have ties to Al Qaeda and established rule by sharia law. They were joined by several thousand Islamists from North Africa and Asia, reportedly financed from Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The UN resolution backs a decision by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to deploy 3,300 troops in Mali to fight the Islamists. The mission is to be led by Nigeria and has drawn criticism from Algeria, which historically has objected to foreign military deployments in the Sahel.

The imperialist powers are trying to hide their agenda behind their regional proxies. The resolution officially authorizes an African-led International Support Mission, known as AFISMA, for an initial period of one year without making any mention of its size. It “welcomes” ECOWAS troop contributions and calls on member states, including those in the Sahel, to contribute troops to the mission.

It also mentions providing “a voluntary and a United Nations-funded logistics support packages to AFISMA, including equipment and services for an initial period of one year”.

The resolution asks the secretary-general to provide support in critical areas to help the Malian government to “extend its authority during or following a military operation, including in the rule of law, removing land mines, and promoting national dialogue and regional cooperation”.

Although the UN Security Council resolution was unanimously adopted, it appears that the detailed planning of an intervention is still ongoing. This is due above all to considerable frictions between the United States and France, the former colonial power in Mali, over the tactics of an invasion.

French imperialism is heavily dependent on the Sahel for uranium for its nuclear industry. It is demanding immediate military action—with ECOWAS countries providing ground troops as cannon fodder for the war, while Washington and its European allies provide logistical, air, and intelligence support.

Sections of the American ruling class opposed such plans, objecting that ECOWAS troops would not be militarily able to defeat the Islamists, and that other regional powers, such as Algeria, should be involved. US Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice recently dismissed France's plan based on ECOWAS as "crap."

An imperialist-led intervention in Mali as outlined by the UN and discussed by the United States and the European powers would be yet another reactionary war launched on the basis of lies. The claim that the NATO powers must intervene in Mali because they need to halt the spread of Al Qaeda's influence is absurd.

NATO wars are in fact one of the main bases on which Al Qaeda's influence develops. The fighting in Mali grew largely out of the Libyan war, in which NATO relied to a large extent on far-right Islamists, including forces of the Al Qaeda-linked Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. Today, the US-backed opposition in Syria includes the Al Nusra Front, which the US government itself acknowledges is a terrorist group tied to Al Qaeda.

While using Al Qaeda as a tool of its imperialist policies elsewhere, in Mali the NATO powers are citing the threat of Al Qaeda as a lever to organize intervention in Mali and deepen imperialist control over all of western Africa. Negotiations are continuing with the ECOWAS states as well as with Algeria on how to proceed with the intervention. (See also: French president promotes corporate interests, Mali war in Algeria visit)

There are widespread expectations that an invasion of northern Mali will rapidly spread fighting throughout the Sahel, as northern Mali shares long borders with Algeria, Niger, and Mauritania. Comparisons are now openly being made between the war in Mali and the NATO war in Afghanistan, which has since spilled over into Pakistan and other neighboring countries.

Thus Algiers University Professor Ahmed Adhimi wrote, "Now we face the Afghanization of the Sahel region. Military intervention means that all adventurers, terrorists, and all those who want to fight the Crusaders will come to northern Mali. Then Algeria would become the Pakistan of Africa, and it would be easy to drag the region's countries into war... [This would] drag Algeria into a war with which it has nothing to do, its objective is to drain the country's wealth."