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## Boots on the Ground: First US Troops Arrive for Mali War

By Jason Ditz

May 1, 2013

From the moment France invaded Mali in January, the US has expressed “support,” but in a limited, troop transporting sort of way, while insisting that “boots on the ground” were never even being considered.



Today marked the arrival of those first “boots,” in the form of US ground troops assigned to “liaison support” for French and African troops. Officials say so far there are only “about 10” troops involved, but the number could grow as the war drags on.

Now instead of insisting the US won't send ground troops, the Pentagon is simply claiming that those troops aren't going to engage in direct combat, though exactly what they're doing remains something of a mystery, with Socom commander Admiral McRaven refusing to provide specifics.

These sort of support missions, of course, have historically been a shoe-horn to much larger, open-ended military commitments, with the deployment of small numbers of military advisers setting the stage for decades of US involvement in Vietnam involving enormous military commitment. Though the US is still envisioning the Mali mission as small, France has already made it clear their forces are never leaving, and that this is an open-ended sort of war.