

Why communists oppose the French military intervention in Central African Republic

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The French government has sent 1,600 troops to the Central African Republic to disarm rebel militias under a United Nations plan to 'restore order' to a country destabilised by decades of exploitation at the hands of French imperialism.

More than 450 people, mainly Christian civilians, have been killed in clashes between the predominantly-Muslim Séléka militias and the Christian anti-balaka self-defence forces.

The Séléka ('union' in the Sango language), a loose coalition of independent rebel forces, overthrew President Francois Bozizé in March this year. Their leader, Michel Djotidia, declared himself President but, despite the formal disbanding of the Séléka coalition, many of its component militias have refused to disarm. Instead, they have turned to looting and attacking the Christian population, sections of which have responded with reprisals against Muslim quarters and villages.

It is clear that the majority of the killing has been carried out by opportunist elements among the rebel forces, taking advantage of the collapse of the state apparatus to plunder, rape and revenge themselves on parts of the population they see as having been privileged by successive governments.

While the conflict has thus taken on an inter-communal character, we should reject the narrative of an impending 'genocide' by Muslims against Christians, which simply does not reflect the reality on the ground. The Muslim population of the CAR is around 15 per cent, as against the 50 per cent of Christians and 35 per cent who adhere to various indigenous African beliefs.

The supposed threat of genocide, which plays on the racist idea that black Africans are somehow prone to massacring each other because of their religious beliefs, is designed to equate the conflict with the Rwandan genocide and promote support for intervention.

The various Muslim rebel groups which collectively made up the Séléka coalition have been engaged in a sporadic conflict with the central government since 2006. The underlying causes for the conflict are economic rather than religious; a policy of systematic underdevelopment and deprivation of the Muslim-dominated north of the country, partly a result of the need for the central government to pay for a bloated and inefficient civil service in the Christian-dominated towns, was exacerbated by communal conflict over access to land between the cattle-herding Muslim people and sedentary farmers of the Christian areas.

Hypocrisy

Although French troops have been deployed under the pretext of disarming the Séléka militias, this intervention has to be seen in historical context. France has been directly or indirectly involved in the

assassination or overthrow of every single leader of the CAR since it first gained autonomy in 1958. There has never been a constitutional transfer of power.

The hypocrisy of governments in Paris, leftwing and rightwing, is exposed by the recent history of their relations with the CAR regime. In 2006, France sent Mirage jets to bomb the Séléka coalition in response to an appeal from its then-ally François Bozizé, who had himself taken power in a French-backed coup. When Bozizé started to engage in infrastructure-for-resources deals with China, France decided to back the Séléka coalition, led by Michel Djotodia.

That France now claims it is 'disarming' the militias (with UK and USA logistical support) is a brazen lie, particularly when European arms companies continue to flood the CAR and its neighbours with millions of pounds worth of weapons.

Imperialism

France is only intervening now because Djotodia cannot control the militias, and their rampaging threatens to further destabilise the region. This desire for a compliant but stable regime is what lies behind President Hollande's comments that Djotodia may have to 'be replaced' because he is 'responsible' for the collapse of law and order.

Coming hard on the heels of France's recent adventures in the Ivory Coast, Libya and Mali, it is clear that Paris is determined to reassert an imperial role in central Africa, lost to an important degree after its influence was supplanted by the United States following the Rwandan genocide.

China's strategy in sub-Saharan Africa has caused alarm in Paris (and in London and Washington, too). In return for mineral prospecting and extraction rights, Beijing offers major infrastructure development to overcome the under-development that is the true legacy of a century of French and British colonial and semi-colonial dominance. Such deals have attracted interest from local elites across the continent.

France's historic role as a colonial ruler, and the economic investments of French multinationals like Total and Bolloré, mean that it is best positioned to play the role of gendarme, sending a message to China that western imperialism is not prepared to surrender its sphere of influence.

Finally, the stated objectives of the French mission are impossible. France is unlikely to be able to militarily defeat and disarm the guerrilla forces, many of which are based in neighbouring countries like South Sudan, Congo and Chad, which do not have the ability to suppress them and prefer to maintain these militias as proxies to further their regional interests. Moreover, there is no 'exit plan'; the only 'political solution' acceptable to French imperialism is one which sees the installation of a government favourable to French economic penetration.

France has no intention of developing the economy of the CAR to the extent that would allow it to exercise some degree of sovereignty. Rather, it intends to install a government dependent on French military protection in return for the right to develop and monopolise the extraction of CAR's reserves of diamonds, uranium and other raw materials.

We therefore unequivocally condemn the military intervention as having no purpose other than to ensure that France, rather than any other power, retains the keys to the shackles subjugating the peoples of the Central African Republic. Understandably, those peoples welcome any force which can protect them, but the only force that can enable them to determine their own future is the self-organised poor farmers and urban classes themselves. That is for them to organise.

Elsewhere, but especially in the imperialist countries themselves, the first priority for revolutionaries is to

oppose all military intervention and all economic subordination by any of the foreign powers. We have to expose the lie that France or the UN has any intention of allowing self-determination for the enslaved nations of Africa.

We should fight for massive economic aid to develop infrastructure, housing and education, which alone can enable CAR to escape the cycle of subordination and exploitation.

Against the white saviours in blue helmets, we counterpose the right of the CAR peoples to be given the weapons to defend themselves where they do not have them. We support the organisation of collective self-defence bodies that transcend ethnic and religious divides and enable the people to defeat those militias which would rather pillage than play a role in the establishment and defence of a government of the workers and peasants.

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