

UN head describes forthcoming military occupation force for Mali

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UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has sketched the outline of the UN military occupation force that will take effective control of the country of Mali in the coming weeks in a presentation to the UN Security Council on March 26. See the two news reports below. In a significant departure from the MINUSTAH mission blueprint in Haiti, Ki-moon says there should be two, not one, foreign, military forces in operation in Mali.

One will be the standard, Security Council-endorsed police and military force. As in Haiti, the white-skinned officers and troops of the dominant imperialist countries will be in the background, directing affairs. The day-to-day foot soldiers are drawn from participating countries in the region; in Mali's case, from African countries.

A second, military strike force will also operate, says Ki-Moon, and importantly, it will not be endorsed nor under the direction of the Security Council. France (surprise!) will be the lead country in this force. Such an arrangement will free up combat operations in Mali from the annoyance of direct accountability to the Security Council or other UN agencies.

In Haiti, the UN's credibility among Haitians has been blasted to zero by MINUSTAH's proven responsibility for bringing cholera to the country and its refusal to responsibility for its negligence and its failure to offer or provide restitution. It is also hated for the many assaults and sexual assault it has perpetrated against civilians. But importantly, in the years following the 2004 overthrow of elected government in Haiti, the force engaged in numerous military operations against civilian populations. Although it largely escaped international scrutiny or condemnation for such actions, it earned the deep hatred of many Haitians.

It is doubtful that the Malian people will ultimately judge the Security Council-endorsed force by different standards than the military strike force. The two missions will or will not bring meaningful social and economic improvement to the country, one of the world's poorest and most vulnerable to climate shifts. And they will or will not degrade the country's sovereignty. But the arrangement will likely buy time in this regard. Meanwhile, there are important operational considerations weighing in favour of the plan.

Roger Annis

Ban Ki-moon: Mali needs 11,000 peacekeepers

BBC News Africa, March 27, 2013

About 11,000 peacekeepers may be needed in Mali to help curb threats posed by militant Islamists, UN chief Ban Ki-moon has said. The peacekeepers may have to be backed up by a second force that will focus on combat operations, he said.

France sent troops to Mali in January to wrest control of the north from militant Islamists. It aims to start withdrawing its 4,000-strong force next month and hand over to an African force.

French troops, backed by Malian and Chadian forces, have been attacking the militants in desert and mountain hide-outs after they fled the major northern cities, including Timbuktu and Gao. The Islamists have responded to the French-led campaign by launching guerrilla-style attacks. A suicide bomber killed a Malian soldier at a checkpoint in Timbuktu last week.

Nigeria has also sent troops to Mali, but they have not been involved in combat in the north.

In a report to the 15-member UN Security Council on Tuesday, Mr Ban proposed that African troops in Mali should operate under a UN mandate. The force should be made up of some 11,200 troops, he said. It would "operate under robust rules of engagement, with a mandate to use all necessary means to address threats to the implementation of its mandate, which would include protection of civilians," Mr Ban said, Reuters news agency reports.

He said there may also be a need for a second "parallel force" that would "conduct major combat and counter-terrorism operations and provide specialist support beyond the scope of the United Nations mandate and capability".

Diplomats have said France is likely to provide troops for the smaller parallel force, which could be based in Mali or elsewhere in the West Africa region, Reuters reports.

Mr Ban also said that with Mali's government weak and no sign of reconciliation between northerners and southerners "elections could provoke further instability or even violence". The army seized power in a coup in Mali last year, but it has since put in place an interim civilian government that has promised to hold elections in July.

Islamist insurgents and Tuareg separatists took advantage of the coup to seize control of the whole of northern Mali. The alliance between the Islamists and Tuareg separatists later collapsed, with the Islamists becoming the dominant force in the north.

* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21952036>

U.N.'s Ban recommends African troops in Mali become peacekeepers

Reuters, Tuesday, March 26, 2013

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - An African force currently in Mali should be converted into a U.N.

peacekeeping operation and a separate combat force should be created to confront Islamist threats, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recommended to the Security Council on Tuesday. The U.N.-backed African force in Mali is due to take over from France when it starts withdrawing its 4,000 troops from the country in late April.

In a report to the 15-member Security Council, Ban recommended that the African force, known as AFISMA, become a U.N. peacekeeping force of some 11,200 troops and 1,440 police – once major combat ends.

To tackle Islamist extremists directly, Ban recommended that a so-called parallel force be created, which would work in close coordination with the U.N. mission. Diplomats have said France is likely to provide troops for the smaller parallel force, which could be based in Mali or elsewhere in the West Africa region.

“Given the anticipated level and nature of the residual threat, there would be a fundamental requirement for a parallel force to operate in Mali alongside the U.N. mission in order to conduct major combat and counter-terrorism operations,” Ban wrote.

The parallel force would not have a formal U.N. mandate, though it would be operating with the informal blessing of the Security Council. The report did not specify a time limit for the mission.

The Security Council was due to be briefed on Wednesday on Ban’s recommendations and diplomats hope a vote to approve the peacekeeping force can take place by mid-April.

France began a military offensive in January to drive out Islamist fighters, who had hijacked a revolt by Mali’s Tuareg rebels and seized two-thirds of the West African country. Paris said Mali’s vast desert North was in danger of becoming a springboard for extremist attacks on the region and the West.

In a nine-week operation French, Chadian and Malian troops have driven the Islamists into desert hideaways and mountains near the Algerian border. French President Francois Hollande said recently that Mali’s sovereignty had almost been restored.

However, Islamist fighters attacked northern Mali’s largest town, Gao, over the weekend. It was the third major offensive there by the rebels since the town was retaken by a French-led military operation in late January.

The African force in Mali is made up of troops mainly from West Africa, including more than 2,000 Chadians. Other than Chad’s contingent, most African elements remain in the south of Mali away from the fighting.

The United Nations would only take on security responsibilities in Mali when “the necessary security and political conditions were deemed to be in place, following an assessment by the (U.N.) Secretariat.”

Mali’s government hopes to hold elections in July, but Security Council diplomats and U.N. officials said that goal may be overly ambitious.

Ban said that once the African soldiers become a U.N. peacekeeping force, the majority of the troops and police would operate in the north of the country, while there would be a “light presence” based in the country’s capital, Bamako.

“The force would operate under robust rules of engagement, with a mandate to use all necessary

means to address threats to the implementation of its mandate, which would include protection of civilians,” Ban said. “This could include the conduct of operations on its own or in cooperation with the Malian ... forces,” he said.

Ban also suggested that the Security Council consider establishing an independent group of experts to investigate transnational and organized crime in Mali with the possibility of imposing punitive, targeted sanctions.

Mali was once viewed as an example of a working democracy in Africa, but its north has been a center of cross-desert trafficking of drugs, stolen goods and Western hostages. Border towns are used as transit hubs for trans-Sahara cocaine and hashish smuggling.

(Reporting by Louis Charbonneau and Michelle Nichols; Editing by David Brunnstrom)

* <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/26/us-mali-crisis-un-idUSBRE92P13420130326>

P.S.

* <http://www.rogerannis.com/un-head-describes-forthcoming-military-occupation-force-for-mali/>