

Pentagon prepares military operation in Mali

By [RT](#)

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It's only December, but it looks like the Pentagon has all planned out how they'll spend a good part of 2013. US officials now claim that the Defense Department is busy preparing a military operation in the nation of Mali.

United States officials with knowledge of the matter tell the Washington Post that the Department of Defense and the US State Department will assist next year in a mission to overthrow Islamic extremists with ties to al-Qaeda who took under control a significant part of Mali, a small West African country that is still picking itself up after a coup this past March.

Earlier this year, military officers displaced the administration of then-President Amandou Toumani Toure, claiming that he was reluctant in addressing the extremist issue himself. However since then the military junta failed to improve security in the country and retake control of the northern part of Mali captured by the Islamists. Now the US is claiming that it's ready to help the military rulers, even though it may be a clear violation of American laws: the Pentagon cannot assist first-hand with people responsible for ousting a democratically elected leader. That doesn't mean, however, that Washington won't find a way to send support overseas.

According to testimonies from officials speaking to the Post, both the Pentagon and State Department will assist opposition to the terrorists by training, equipping and transporting troops to tackle what Sen. Christopher A. Coons (D-Delaware) has called "*the largest territory controlled by Islamic extremists in the world.*" Speaking on the record, though, the Pentagon's deputy assistant secretary for Africa tells the paper that US influence might not end there.



AFP Photo / Robert Nickelsberg

"There's plenty of other forms of information and intelligence that are circulating that give us enough insight for planning purposes," the Defense Department's Amanda J. Dory tells the Post this week. According to the paper, Dory also floated the possibility of US warplanes being deployed to North Africa to provide troops there with aerial protection. "We definitely don't know how that would work out," Dory says. In advance of next year's expected war, the State Department and the Treasury announced this week that they have blacklisted two Mali extremist groups, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, as terrorists officially in the eyes of Uncle Sam. The Associated Press reports that doing such will make any of those groups' members ineligible to receive assistance from the US or conduct business, the start of crippling sanctions expected to continue until eventual military intervention.

Meanwhile, though, the wheels are indeed in motion in terms of starting to send US support towards Mali. On Wednesday, Johnnie Carson, assistant secretary for African Affairs under US President Barack Obama, said *"We have sent military planners to [the Economic Community of West African States] to assist with the continued development and refinement of the plans for international intervention."* Carson acknowledged that US assistance will be needed in order to overthrow al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, but added, *"it must be African-led; it must be Malian-led."*

Testifying to Congress, Rep. Dory adds that AQIM and its affiliates *"took over administration of northern cities and began imposing a harsh version of Sharia law"* in Mali. *"This expanded safe haven and control of territory allows al-Qaeda and affiliates to recruit supporters more easily and to export extremism."*

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