

The role of Germany in the war in Mali

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A month ago, French soldiers, tanks and fighter jets invaded the West African country of Mali. Since then, Germany has been expanding its involvement in the colonial war from week to week.

The government in Berlin immediately declared its unconditional support for the French invasion, providing two Transall transport aircraft to carry troops, arms and ammunition of the West African Economic Union (ECOWAS) to the war zone. In the meantime, Berlin has provided an additional transporter; and the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) has rapidly built up a support base in Dakar (Senegal). It is from here that the Transall craft operate, with a support force of 75 soldiers.

At the United Nations' "donor conference" to finance the war, Berlin promised immediate payments of US\$20 million towards a fund totalling US\$456 million. This will serve to strengthen the Mali army and to finance the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA).

As Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) told the Munich Security Conference last weekend, the Bundeswehr will contribute 40 engineers to the European Training Mission (EUTM Mali). These will train troops from Mali and ECOWAS to be able to conduct combat missions.

At a "troop providers' conference for Mali" in Brussels on Tuesday last week, Berlin also announced the deployment of 40 army doctors and paramedics, as well as the delivery and operation of a field hospital.

The French government's request for support by Bundeswehr tanker aircraft is already being prepared technically. Without air-to-air refuelling, French bombers and fighter jets would not be able to travel the extremely long distances from their bases in France or Africa to their missions in Mali.

Since the belligerent nature of these operations and the training of Malian soldiers cannot be denied, they must be approved by the Bundestag (federal parliament), which should happen retrospectively in early March.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière and Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle never tire of protesting that they are acting out of "solidarity with France" and for the "defence of the security of Europe against terrorists." This is the same mendacious war propaganda with which the United States justified the war against Iraq.

Paris and Berlin say the aims of the war are the elimination of groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). These same organisations were funded and armed in Libya by the US, France, Britain and their allies in Qatar and Saudi Arabia to fight against Muammar Gaddafi.

In Syria, organisations like al-Nusra, which is close to Al Qaeda or works with it, are part of the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (NCSROF), which is recognised by the NATO powers and the Gulf countries as "the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people", and is armed and financed by them to foment the overthrow of the Assad regime.

The war in Mali is a dirty colonial war. It is not a matter of a "war on terror", but the military control of the Sahel in order to plunder its largely untapped natural resources in the long term.

The national bourgeois regimes that rule there are corrupt and hated. They have only been able to cling to power with the help of the French military in putting down uprisings. To this end, France maintains bases in its former colonies with naval units, tanks and fighter jets. In return, France, as well as other foreign mining companies and investors, are given access to cheap land, exploration rights and mining concessions.

France also used its military bases in neighbouring countries for the invasion of Mali. It is supported in the war over the Sahel by other imperialist powers. As with the war in Libya, Britain has immediately declared its support. As well as money and weapons, Prime Minister Cameron last week also promised the deployment of several hundred soldiers.

The US has announced the establishment of a permanent military base in Niger. As well as a 300-man elite squad, drones are being stationed there capable of carrying out surveillance and combat missions over the Sahel. A US drone base is also planned in Burkina Faso near southern Mali.

In just a few weeks, Mali and its neighbours have been transformed into a veritable military staging area for the imperialist powers and their local African allies. In addition to the 4,000 French soldiers deployed, the German Transall planes will transport around ECOWAS 7,000 soldiers. They will also be joined by hundreds of American, British and German troops.

Two years ago, France, Britain and the US initiated a new round of wars to subjugate the African continent to direct colonial rule with their aggression against Libya. At that time, the Berlin government had decided against open German participation. That was not out of a love of peace, but with regard to China and Russia, which were heavily involved in Libya with investments and trade agreements and which are significant trading partners for German business.

In addition, the Bundeswehr was ill prepared for such an extensive and prolonged military campaign. With troops in Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa and other war zones, its capacity for foreign missions was exhausted.

The Bundeswehr, reorganised and rearmed 10 years ago by the

previous Social Democratic (SPD)-Green Party government into an effective fighting force for international operations, was in a crisis. The then-defence minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (Christian Social Union, CSU), had made more of a name for himself through high-profile media appearances than for actually reforming the structure of the Bundeswehr.

Guttenberg was finally forced to resign following a plagiarism scandal, and was replaced by Thomas de Maizière (CDU) in March 2011, just two weeks before the bombing of Libya by the US, Britain and France.

De Maizière is considered a quiet but effective organiser. He was also familiar with the Bundeswehr since childhood. His father, Ulrich de Maizière, a staff officer in Hitler's army, had built up the modern Bundeswehr in the 1950s and 1960s as the army inspector and general inspector.

Thomas de Maizière drove forward the "reorientation of the Bundeswehr" with professional efficiency. This was implemented during 2012 at the level of the ministry and the supreme military command. In January of this year, work began on the third, operational level, in a variety of so-called command capabilities.

For example, on January 15, in time for the first mission in Mali, the new, high-tech Bundeswehr Central Logistics Command opened in Erfurt. Under its command, 15,000 Bundeswehr personnel organise the logistics of all worldwide operations—i.e., supplying military task forces, weapons, transportation, clothing and food.

Thus, two years after the war in Libya, Germany is from the start an "equal partner" with the other great powers in the colonial war in Mali.

In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, at the opening of the Munich Security Conference, de Maizière stressed the importance of this change. With more than 6,000 soldiers deployed abroad, Germany was making a significant contribution by European standards, he said. France has only 2,700 soldiers, and Britain 11,000, participating in multilateral missions, he said. "Our involvement began in 1992 with medical missions in Cambodia, but now it is clear that the Bundeswehr can fight too."

In the same interview, de Maizière made clear that the Bundeswehr is not thinking of withdrawing from Afghanistan in 2014, and will stay there at least another 10 to 15 years. The mission will only be completed in its current form at the end of 2014. "We will then be present in a different way in Afghanistan", he said, "so that the previous efforts were not in vain. That is, if they want sustainability."

When asked whether such a policy can be implemented with domestic political support, he replied: "Yes, of course. But we will have to change the justification.... International missions must be...explained realistically and the reasons should not be too pathetic."

In plain language, where the German government had argued in the 1990s and at the beginning of the Afghanistan mission that they were concerned with the "defence of human rights" and the "construction of wells, schools and hospitals", in future, wars would have to be justified with reference to German interests and by openly declaring that they required great sacrifice and costs.

At present, combat missions in Mali are still being carried out

and "legitimised" within existing alliances such as NATO, the UN or the EU. But German imperialism is already pursuing its own interests.

The chancellor made this clear when five days after the start of the French aggression in Mali, she received Alassane Ouattara, the president of the neighbouring state of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) and agreed to a substantial increase in investment by German energy and agricultural companies in this country.

At the concluding press conference, she said, "It is often thought of in Germany that this is actually a French sphere of influence, and so we don't need to get involved there. The president will use his visit to make clear in Germany that this is by no means the case, and that other countries also have good relations to Ivory Coast."

One-hundred-ten years after the barbaric genocide of the Herero and Nama in German South West Africa by the Kaiser's military, and 70 years after Rommel's murderous African campaign in World War II, Germany is once again acting openly as a colonial power in the new "scramble for Africa".

According to a survey by the Emnid polling institute on January 17, 60 percent of the German population clearly reject this policy. But it is supported all the more vehemently by all the parties in the Bundestag.

The SPD and Greens attack the ruling coalition from the right: Germany must be an even more comprehensive and active participant in the war in Mali! The Left Party contributes to the official war propaganda by claiming the issue is one of "stopping terrorism" and settling "internal conflicts in Mali". It merely criticises the choice of means, saying the "use of force" in the African country is wrong.

The German Trade Union Federation (DGB) is also marching in lockstep with the Bundeswehr. In the midst of the Mali war, de Maizière invited the DGB to meet him. It was the first such meeting in 30 years. DGB president Michael Sommer stressed the good atmosphere at the meeting. The DGB and the Bundeswehr agreed to cooperate further and to issue a joint statement.

De Maizière noted the earlier peace demonstrations of the DGB and claimed, without contradiction, that the Bundeswehr was also an "organisation of peace".



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