

German government decides on long-term military deployment in Mali

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On Tuesday, February 19, the German cabinet consisting of the Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union and Free Democratic Party agreed to deploy 330 German soldiers for a long-term mission in Mali.

Prior to March 1 the German parliament (Bundestag) will be presented with two separate mandates and is expected to give parliamentary approval to German participation in France's shabby colonial war in Africa. The Bundestag debate on the cabinet proposal commenced on Wednesday.

According to the terms of the first mandate, 180 armed soldiers are to be deployed to Mali as part of a European Union "training mission". The German contingent includes 40 engineers and 40 soldiers with medical training plus military physicians. The task of the other 100 soldiers is to "protect German soldiers" and provide "support when necessary".

The second mandate involves 150 soldiers carrying out "logistical support". This involves the use of an Airbus for the refuelling in the air of French Rafale fighter jets and Mirage bombers. Without air refuelling the French planes would be unable to cover the long distances from France and other African countries to their targets in Mali.

In addition, the German army (Bundeswehr) will continue to provide three Transall planes for the transport of troops belonging to the West African Economic Community ECOWAS to Mali and within Mali. The deployment of the planes began shortly after the invasion of Mali by France on January 11 and was undertaken without a mandate from the Bundestag.

The Bundeswehr mission is initially limited to 12 months, beginning March 1, 2013, but according to the European Union military committee will be expected to remain much longer. The cost of German participation

in the war is reckoned by the government to total more than €55 million (US\$73 million) per year.

On February 18, one day before the German cabinet meeting, EU foreign ministers in Brussels agreed upon the "training mission" involving a total of 480 European soldiers to support France and the Malian army in their war against rebel groups based in the north of the country.

This EU decision, together with resolutions 2071 (2012) and 2085 (2012) of the UN Security Council, have been cited by the Berlin coalition in its motions to parliament as the "international and constitutional basis" for the German army mission in Mali. The Bundeswehr mission takes place within "the context and under the rules of a system of mutual collective security within the meaning of Article 24, paragraph 2 of the Basic Law".

The resolutions of the UN Security Council and the EU have also been used by the French government to justify its military aggression, together with the appeals for help from the interim president of Mali, Dioncounda Traoré. Both Paris and Berlin argue that only the use of troops from the UN, the EU and ECOWAS can save Mali from the terrorism of Islamic rebels in the north and enable a return to democracy.

In reality Traoré, like all his predecessors and other bourgeois leaders in West Africa, is a puppet of the former colonial power France and is only able to stay in power with the help of French troops stationed in the region. His "calls for help to defend democracy against terrorism" are just a pretext. They recall the "cries for help" by Konrad Henlein to "defend the self-determination of the Sudeten Germans", or Jozef Tiso's appeal to "protect the Slovaks", which were stage managed by Hitler in 1938 in order to "legitimise" the Nazi occupation of the Sudetenland

and in 1939 the rest of the Czech Republic.

As was the case in Afghanistan, the conflict in Mali is not a “war against terrorism”. Rather, it is the continuation of a campaign by imperialist powers to recolonise Africa, which began two years ago with the war against Libya. The main aim is to force China out of Africa. In the course of the past 15 years China has established considerable economic and political influence across the continent, and Mali has also become China’s largest trading partner.

In terms of population, Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world. But the country, together with the entire Sahel region, is rich in mineral resources, including oil, gas, uranium, gold, silver, bauxite, manganese, copper, phosphate and diamonds. For the most part these resources remain unexploited.

A current map of Mali reveals very few functioning gold and uranium mines, but is covered by rectangles marking the exploration rights or concessions for future development awarded to foreign companies such as Rockgate (Canada), Baraka (Australia) or Areva (France).

Every year the Malian government grants about 60 concessions for the exploration and extraction of mineral resources to foreign corporations. The military then move in to clear the affected regions by local residents who have lived there for centuries, working the soil or raising cattle.

Areva has designs on the major uranium deposits in the embattled north of Mali because reserves in the neighbouring country of Niger will be exhausted in the foreseeable future. For over four decades the reserves in Niger have provided Areva with 40 percent of its annual uranium requirements for nuclear power plants in France—all obtained at prices estimated at less than a third of the current level on the world market.

The German government led by Angela Merkel is no longer prepared to stay on the side lines when it comes to the exploitation of the raw materials of Africa. German companies are demanding their share of the spoils. Germany also has a direct interest in a military success in Mali because a drastic reduction in supplies or an increase in the price of uranium for France would have serious economic and political consequences for the entire euro zone.

Immediately after the cabinet decision both the Greens and the Social Democratic Party declared they

would back such a military deployment by the German army. The chairperson of the Greens in parliament, Renate Künast, stated that the motions to be put had the aim of “permitting Africans to lead the fight against terrorism at a later date” and “establishing democracy, transparency, security and economic development throughout the region”.

The Left Party plays the role of “loyal opposition”. It supports the arguments of the French and German governments, i.e., that it is necessary to intervene in the African country as part of the “war on terror”, to “resolve local conflicts” and enable a “return to constitutional order and democracy”.

The Left Party merely requests that Germany use political rather than military measures to this end while urging the United Nations to play a more active role in the Mali conflict.

In a press statement on the cabinet decision, Wolfgang Gehrke, a member of the parliamentary fraction of the Left Party, stated: “Militarily, the federal government has a presence, politically it has failed. The Left will not agree to any military action and calls for political initiatives to resolve the conflict together with the support of civil society in Mali. To this end the Left Party calls upon the federal government to agitate for a more active role to be played by the United Nations in the political settlement of the conflict in Mali.”

As has been the case in every colonial war carried out during the past 20 years, the UN seeks to give a seal of legitimacy in the case of Mali to the economic sanctions and military aggression employed by the major imperialist powers against small and weak countries. Calls for a more active role to be played by the UN only serve to confuse and neutralize the broad popular opposition to the war.



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