

German government steps up military operations

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The German government is fiercely promoting an aggressive imperialist foreign policy. At the beginning of the year, it declared an end to the previous policy of military restraint. Shortly thereafter, it announced plans to develop a new strategy for Africa.

This was followed last Wednesday by the announcement that the German Navy was to be sent to the Mediterranean to fulfill a “robust mandate”. Official statements revealed that the frigate Augsburg is to aid in securing the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons on a US vessel, Cape Ray. The use of combat forces is not ruled out in the operation.

This decision is in line with US President Barack Obama’s announcement that he reserves the right to militarily intervene in Syria. At a joint press conference with French President François Hollande in Washington on February 11, Obama stressed that a military option in Syria was not off the table.

At the same time, Berlin is toughening its foreign policy offensive in Ukraine. In his first official visit to Moscow last week, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) warned the Russian government against escalating the Ukrainian power struggle. “Nobody should seek to ignite the fuse to that powder keg”, said Steinmeier.

In fact, Berlin itself is fanning the flames of conflict in Ukraine. It supports the opposition and cooperates closely with Vitali Klitschko and his UDAR party, which is strongly supported by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)-affiliated Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Via the Adenauer Foundation, the German foreign ministry also has links to Oleh Tyahnibok, head of the far-right anti-Semitic Svoboda party.

The foreign policy offensive for more robust *Bundeswehr* (German army) operations abroad is high on the agenda of the first meeting of the CDU-SPD coalition committee early next week. Defence Minister Ursula von

der Leyen (CDU), Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) and Development Minister Gerd Müller (Christian Social Union, CSU) will meet afterwards to discuss details and coordinate procedures.

Foreign office spokesman Martin Schäfer emphasised that a future focal point of the new foreign policy will be Africa. He added that a new Africa strategy was overdue, but its deliberation and development had been underway in the Interior Ministry for a long time. “Africa is much more than a continent of crises. There are also a lot of opportunities there”, said Schäfer, adding: “Several African countries show growth rates that are significantly higher than those in the European Union.”

Schäfer went on to say that Germany wanted to significantly expand economic cooperation with a number of African countries. He revealed that the German economy is looking to profit from both the market opportunities and natural resources available in Africa. However, the foreign office prefers to keep its own interests in the background, claiming that it is mainly motivated by humanitarian and security concerns. Schäfer said the goals of German “economic support” were to stabilise African countries and avoid further conflicts.

Immediately after the Munich Security Conference two weeks ago, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen travelled to Senegal and Mali to announce the expansion of the *Bundeswehr*’s training contingent in Mali from 180 to 250 soldiers.

During her visit to barracks on the Niger River, where a vanguard battalion of approximately 100 German soldiers is already stationed, she rejected criticism of the expansion of *Bundeswehr* missions abroad. “There have been times when 11,000 male and female soldiers were serving abroad. Currently, there are 5,000 because operations in Afghanistan are drawing to a close”, she said. She declared that the *Bundeswehr* had the capacity to undertake additional operations.

On Monday of last week, Berlin also confirmed that there is discussion of renewed Bundeswehr participation in the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) in the crisis-torn East African state of Somalia. Until the end of last year, Germany had been involved in training Somali military units in Uganda, deploying about 20 soldiers there. When the mission moved into Somalia early this year, the *Bundeswehr* initially terminated its engagement, because the security situation was considered to be too unstable. This assessment has apparently now been revised.

At the end of January, the n-tv news channel reported on what lies behind the humanitarian arguments currently used to propagate the new Africa strategy.

Titled “Uranium, gold, diamonds, minerals: Germany discovers Africa”, its report examined German business interests in the continent. It began with a quotation from Wolfgang Ischinger, who heads the Munich Security Conference. Ischinger said Germany had a lot of catching up to do and “Africa should not be left to the Chinese.”

The programme warned that, compared to China, Germany was lagging behind. Since the early 1990s, China had been engaging in a “veritable spending spree”, acquiring strategic resources and increasingly winning favour in many African countries. The secret of Chinese policy towards Africa was seen to lie in the fact that, in exchange for raw material supplies, Beijing was building “schools, hospitals and stadiums for the common people.”

The n-tv report cautioned that a new German strategy with respect to Africa should not be perceived as a neo-colonial venture. However, it also suggested that, “if Germany engaged with France, for example in central Africa, one would be able to speak of a European instead of a German raw materials policy.”

The television report went on to propose that the Central African Republic (CAR) could develop into a testing ground for this kind of cooperation. Although the landlocked African country north of the Congo is almost twice the size of Germany, it has virtually no infrastructure. Some 60 percent of the population is illiterate and very poor. However, the former French colony possesses great economic advantages: it is rich in gold, diamonds, uranium, timber, coffee and numerous other commodities.

It was also speculated that other mineral resources would likely be available in the country; these included copper, graphite, iron ore, kaolin, lignite, limestone, manganese, quartz, salt and tin. “And by no means can it be said that the Central African Republic has yet been

fully explored”, the n-tv report enthused.

The “new Africa strategy” has nothing to do with safeguarding humanitarian aid, as Steinmeier and von der Leyen claim. Rather, it recalls the “scramble for Africa” that occurred at the height of imperialism on the eve of World War I—when Germany colonised what is now Namibia, Tanzania, Cameroon, and Togo. The current deployment of combat troops in Mali also serves the imperialist interests of the German economy. Geostrategic interests, like those pursued by the German Africa Corps (DAK) during the Second World War, are also part of the strategy.

All the German parliamentary parties are backing this belligerent policy. The SPD has taken the lead in the government regarding issues of war and enjoys the support of the Greens and the Left Party.

Last autumn, Left Party parliamentary deputy Stefan Liebich jointly drafted and endorsed a strategy paper, authorised by the Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) and entitled “New Power - New Responsibility”. In mid-January, he produced a strategy paper together with Green Party politician Agnieszka Brugger that supported Bundeswehr missions abroad if they are covered by a United Nations mandate and allegedly serve “the advancement of human rights.”

As Left Party representative in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bundestag (German parliament), he explained last week that there were many compelling arguments for deploying German armed forces in the Mediterranean. He added: “Mind you, we’re glad to see that the Syrian chemical weapons are being destroyed.”

Christine Buchholz, defence policy spokeswoman for the Left Party parliamentary faction, likewise stated: “We welcome the fact that the Syrian poison gas is being destroyed.”

The Left Party is involved at the highest level in the turn in German foreign policy and the revival of German imperialism and militarism, and is playing a key role in driving war propaganda by disguising it in humanitarian phrases.



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