

Germany extends military deployment in Somalia

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On Thursday, the German parliament voted by a large majority to extend its military operations in Somalia. Of the 578 votes cast, 454 delegates voted for the continuation of German involvement in the mission. There were 115 “no” votes and nine abstentions.

The decision provides for a continuation of earlier commitments to the European Union Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM SOM). Up to 20 soldiers are also to be used in the training of the Somali army and as advisers to the Somali defense ministry. The German military has been active in the Somali mission since 2010, in addition to its other deployments in the Horn of Africa, including Mission Nestor and Operation Atalanta.

The extension of military commitments is part of the effort of German imperialism to establish itself in Africa and, increasingly, to ensure its economic and strategic interests militarily. Most of the 15 theaters in which the German military is currently active are in Africa. According to the military’s latest progress report, in addition to Somalia, German soldiers are active in Mali, Senegal, Central Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Western Sahara, Sudan and South Sudan. In January, Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) announced Germany would support the fight against Boko Haram.

As early as May of last year, the government adopted its “African policy guidelines,” which noted “Africa’s growing relevance for Germany and Europe.” Among other things, “Africa’s potential” derived from its growing, dynamic economy and “rich natural resources.” The German government therefore wanted to substantially strengthen “engagement with Africa’s politics, security policy and developmental policies,” to act “early, quickly, decisively and substantially” and “coordinate the use of ... the entire spectrum of available means.”

That is the purpose of the German military intervention in Somalia. Dagmar Freitag, a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) on the parliament’s foreign affairs committee, justified the extension as follows: “Somalia, as a so-called failed state, threatens the stability of the entire region in the Horn of Africa.” She added, this “remains a central problem in this region.”

The second spokesperson for the government coalition, CDU foreign policy strategist Roderich Kiesewetter, indicated that the mission in Somalia was only the prelude to a much larger intervention in Africa and worldwide. He cynically declared: “We Europeans are not there because we want direct military intervention, but because we want to help people to help themselves. ... Above all, however, the roots of terrorism must be fought. It comes not only from Somalia, but also Boko Haram, Kenya and other countries like Nigeria and Libya. It also threatens, as we have just seen in Yemen, the security of Africa, the Arabic world and Europe.”

The spokespersons for the Greens and the Left Party, who voted against extending the deployment, made clear in their remarks that they only have tactical differences with the government.

Frithjof Schmidt of the Greens proposed to temporarily suspend the deployment, owing to the insufficient dependability of Somali forces. He underscored, however, that his party supported German militarism in Africa: “We Greens stand by the buildup of security structures—especially in crisis-ridden African countries—and are open to the deployment of the military. My fraction supports the European training mission in Mali and has also supported the military mandate in the Central African Republic, in South Sudan and Darfur.”

Alexander Neu, who sits on the defense committee for the Left Party, criticized the “security policy concept of the West regarding the war on terrorism.” It would “only fight the symptoms,” he said. Above all, he complained of the close foreign policy collaboration with the US. “German state policy” would “rather participate in US war crimes—under cover, of course—than respect international law and human rights when it comes to German-American relations and German-American interests.” That is “the opposite of a responsible foreign and security policy.”

Neu’s argument makes two things clear. First, the Left Party articulates sentiments among growing sections of the ruling class, who are of the opinion that Germany must develop a foreign policy independent of the US. Second, it is providing a “human rights” cover for Germany’s return to an aggressive foreign policy.

A meeting that took place a few weeks ago in Bellevue Castle summed up the role of the Left Party. Neu and Christine Buchholz, the party’s defense policy spokesperson, were invited by the defense committee to a March 4 political discussion with President Joachim Gauck.

Buchholz reported on her web site that in the discussion with Gauck, Neu said that “the taking over of responsibility in international relationships is both conceivable and desirable on purely civil terms.” “When considering disaster relief ... Germany’s possibilities are far from exhausted. As a positive side effect, its reputation in the world would grow enormously through the use of well-intentioned and civil measures.”

Buchholz imagined “two foreign policy worlds,” but it has hardly ever been clearer that the foreign policy of the Left Party differs from Gauck’s only in nuances. What Neu proposes is exactly what Gauck does—even in Africa!

Only a few weeks before the meeting with the Left Party, President Gauck visited Tanzania and Zanzibar. In Dar es Salam, the capital of the former German East Africa colony, he spoke of “peace and freedom,” “democracy and the rule of law,” and “human dignity and brotherhood.” At the same time, he praised Tanzania as “part of a common market of 145 million people” and applauded the economic and military collaboration of both countries.

Gauck was accompanied by a high-ranking trade

delegation led by Christoph Kannengießer, the chair of the German-African Business Association. Just a few months prior, Kannengießer, reacting to the United States-Africa Leaders Summit held last August, demanded that German imperialism be more aggressive in pursuing its interests in Africa—including toward the US.

“For us, this means the Americans would be more relevant us as competitors,” he explained in an interview on Deutschlandfunk. He predicted: “Overall, the competition in these unsaturated markets on the African continent will be stronger and harder. In this respect, I believe that is an impetus for us as Germans and as Europeans to face our challenges and do what is necessary to safeguard our economic interests on the African continent.”



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