

# Germany takes over military training operations in Mali

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The Bundeswehr (German army) officially assumed command of the European Training Mission (EUTM) in Mali last week in the presence of Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU). Subsequently in speech given in Tunisia Von der Leyen announced that Germany's "long tradition of cooperation" with the Tunisian military was to be strengthened.

The EUTM is officially a training mission through which European soldiers train the Malian armed forces and also act as advisors to the army's high command and Malian defense ministry. Some 24 European countries are involved in the mission now led by Germany, with the Bundeswehr providing about 160 soldiers or approximately one-third of the total quota.

The advance of German imperialism into Africa is part of the country's return to the world stage, as proclaimed by German President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and von der Leyen at the Munich security conference in early 2014. Shortly thereafter, the government concluded its so-called "Africa policy guidelines," the blueprint for the plundering of Africa with the military at the fore.

The guidelines mention, among other things, a "growing relevance of Africa for Germany and Europe," accruing from the economic potential and "rich natural resources" of the continent. They also reveal that the German government thus wants to intensify "specifically (its) political, security and development policy engagement with Africa," intervene "early, quickly, decisively and substantially" and "deploy the full range of its available resources."

The German elites consider the adoption of the training mission in Mali as another important step towards accomplishing these objectives.

*Bundeswehr* editorial *aktuell*, the the army's weekly newspaper, states that, although German soldiers have been deployed in Mali for more than two years, "our nation's military operation in West Africa" is now taking on "a new dimension." It points out that, as a result of the commissioning of Brigadier General Francis Xavier Pfrengle, Germany will be providing the commander of a multinational force in Africa for the first time.

"Following on from Kosovo, Bosnia, the Congo and the Horn of Africa, this is another operation in which the international community is demanding more responsibility from our country," claims the editor, adding, "After more than 20 years of being an army in action ... assuming the role of a lead nation (has) become routine for the Bundeswehr."

The shameless ease with which—70 years after the end of World War II and 25 years after German reunification—the German elite again speaks about "leadership" and sending German soldiers to participate in military missions around the world is staggering.

As a result of NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011 and despite a number of ceasefires between the government in Bamako and the nomadic Tuareg people in the north, Mali has been in a *de facto* state of war since 2012. The stated aim of the EU mission is to prepare the Malian army to recapture the whole of the resource-rich north of the country and bring it under the control of Bamako.

The Malian army must be "built up into a hard-hitting military force" to combat those who were opposing the "peace agreement," von der Leyen said. As far as the defence minister is concerned, German troops will be deployed in the West African country for a long time to come: "Mali needs sustained commitment. And we

need a lot of patience and we'll have to remain involved for a longer period of time!"

Bellicose reports in the Bundeswehr's official publications reveal the character of the operation. "Shots are heard, smoke shells blanket the movement of German and Malian soldiers. Commands are shouted—in German, French and Bambara, a Malian dialect. One house after another is taken." The training of Malian soldiers "by the Germans" is said to be "demanding and true to life."

A blond-headed German sergeant, named Sven S., who heads the training in urban warfare, tells in a video film about the Malian soldiers under his instruction: "I'm mostly satisfied with them, because it was the first training exercise we've conducted with them. Every beginning is difficult, but the lads are doing quite well."

During talks last week with Tunisian president Beji Caid Essebsi and defense minister Farhat Horchani, von der Leyen offered the country a "partnership" in the military sphere and aid with respect to border security. She also announced in a press statement that the Tunisian army would initially receive military equipment worth €1.2 million, including a floating dock for the repair of sea vessels, a naval launch and five trucks, as well as 3,000 helmets and 700 binoculars.

The defense department officially justified the increased German engagement in Tunisia by citing the "fight against terrorism" and defense of the "only democracy in the Arab-speaking world." This is simply propaganda. Under the pretext of combating terrorism, the Essebsi regime intends to restore the old police and repressive apparatus that existed in early 2011, prior to the fall of longtime dictator Zine Abedine Ben Ali. The now 88-year-old Essebsi is himself a former supporter of Ben Ali and his predecessor, Habib Bourguiba.

The terrorist attacks in Tunisia in recent months are being exploited by Berlin as an excuse to sharpen its long planned offensive in Africa. Since the former CDU-Free Democratic Party (FDP) government's abstention from participation in the NATO war against Libya in 2011, which German elites such as Humboldt University Professor Herfried Münkler regard in retrospect as "a foreign policy disaster," Germany has been escalating its military intervention in Africa in pursuit of its geostrategic and economic interests.

The aggressiveness and arrogance of the German government officials and military arise from the same predatory interests that drove German imperialism to Africa before the First World War and during the Second World War under the Nazis.

At the beginning of the French intervention in Mali in early 2013, an article appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, describing the country as "the legendary kingdom of gold and natural resources." Although its riches lie "deeply hidden in the ground," they "are more abundant than in most other countries," according to FAZ.

Mali was said to be "in the middle of a 'gold belt', stretching from Senegal over Guinea, Ghana (the former British Gold Coast colony), Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon and through the whole of West Africa." In addition, there were "oil, gas, phosphate, copper, bauxite, diamonds and other precious stones," and even pure hydrogen had been "discovered deep below the country's surface."

Although hardly anyone in government circles admits to it openly, the renewed outbreak of the "scramble for Africa" will once again exacerbate tensions among the imperialist powers. Tunisia and Mali are two former French colonies which Paris continues to regard as its historical sphere of influence. Significantly, US President Barack Obama appeared in Africa at the same time as von der Leyen. For its part, US imperialism is intent on securing its geo-strategic and economic interests primarily in opposition to China's growing influence on the continent.



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