

Germany expands its military intervention in the Mediterranean Sea

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Germany is to expand its military intervention in the Mediterranean Sea. The cabinet made the decision at a meeting on Wednesday. It signifies a massive escalation of the military operation and is in pursuit of several goals: the blocking of the influx of refugees, the strengthening of fortress Europe and the preparation for military interventions in North Africa.

According to the defence ministry, 950 German soldiers will locate and confiscate ships belonging to smuggling groups. The deployment is part of the second stage of the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (Eunavfor Med), which was finalised at a May meeting of European defence and foreign ministers.

The first phase of the mission, in which Germany participated with the frigate Schleswig-Holstein, the supply ship Verra, and 320 soldiers, was limited to the collection of information about the smuggling networks.

On Monday, the EU Council gave the go-ahead for Eunavfor Med's second phase. At first, military operations are only to be conducted in international waters between Italy and Libya. However, the EU is pressing for a UN Security Council mandate and agreement by Libya so it can intervene in Libyan sovereign waters.

According to press reports, military rules of deployment for a comprehensive mission will be worked out at the EU level by September 24. According to diplomats, it has already been agreed that those identified as smugglers will be handed over to Italian authorities.

The transition to phase two could begin in October with the agreement of the EU Council and upper house of Germany's parliament, the Bundesrat, according to the German defence ministry. The German military

could then stop, search and confiscate suspect boats on the high seas, and have the authority to collect personal data of alleged smugglers and pass it on to prosecuting authorities.

According to current military plans, the EU intends to deploy seven warships, an aircraft carrier to serve as a headquarters, submarines, drones, helicopters and planes.

Thereafter the third stage of the operation will begin, in which the EU plans to target boats before they take to sea. The official web site of the German army states blandly that then "all necessary measures will have been taken so as to overcome and destroy the boats and infrastructure."

The official propaganda from politicians and the media has long attempted to sell the operation as a humanitarian intervention to save refugees taking the dangerous routes across the Mediterranean.

Now, even the right-wing German daily *Die Welt* has to admit that "the rescue of shipwrecked people ... [was] not explicitly mentioned in the Eunavfor mission."

Green Party member of the European parliament Barbara Lochbihler described the intervention as "crazy border politics," which has "absolutely nothing to do with dealing with refugees in a manner conforming with human rights."

Eunavfor is in fact an intensification of the war policy that initially provoked the stream of refugees leaving the Middle East and North Africa. The military interventions by the United States and European powers in Iraq (2003), in Libya (2011) and other countries, as well as the ongoing arming of Islamist militias to overthrow the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, have destroyed an entire region and forced millions to flee.

Instead of calling a halt and reconsidering their

murderous politics, the imperialist powers are exploiting the catastrophe they have created to expand their militarist policies.

In this, the three stages of EUNAVFOR are only the beginning. Behind closed doors, a possible “fourth stage” has been discussed for some time in Berlin and other European capitals, involving another military intervention in Libya and other African countries.

Already last month, the *Times* revealed that “hundreds of British soldiers” were preparing “to be deployed to Libya within the framework of a new, comprehensive international mission.” They were conducting “an operation jointly with soldiers from Italy, France, Spain, Germany and the US which could seemingly begin as soon as the rival factions in Libya agree to form an all-party government,” the *Times* wrote.

Over the past week, leading German politicians and commentators have also spoken out in favour of military interventions in Africa and Syria, raising the prospect of German ground troops being deployed.

The deployment of 950 German army soldiers to the Mediterranean underscores that unlike in the past, Germany is preparing to play a leading role in future wars. While it officially did not participate in the Iraq and Libyan wars, the German government is now exploiting the catastrophic consequences of these wars to position itself at the forefront in the next round of the struggle for control over the geopolitically significant region, which is rich in raw materials.

A hint of the interests behind the German military intervention can be gained from a glimpse at the “outlines of Africa policy” presented by the German government in early 2014.

In the first section it states under the title “Starting point: The growing relevance of Africa for Germany and Europe”: “Africa’s potential arises from a demographic development with future markets and high economic growth, rich natural resources, potential for agricultural production and food security from its own capacities ... African markets are developing dynamically, and will—beyond the raw materials sector—for the German economy ... [become] increasingly interesting.”

The second part, “Our engagement in Africa”, then appeals for a “targeted” strengthening of Germany’s engagement in Africa, “politically, in security policy

and development policy.” The German government was pursuing “the right to act, based on values and human rights, orientated by interests, early, rapidly, decisively and substantially.” It wanted to “*deploy all the means at its disposal* across, political, security policy, development policy, regional policy, economic, scientific, cultural departments” (emphasis in original).

German ruling circles have now apparently concluded that the time has come to implement this program. Hardly anything is left of the talk of “values” and “human rights”. The true face of German imperialism is visible once again. The “spectrum” of German foreign policy is being reduced ever more to war and military policy, and the “means at its disposal” are above all soldiers and warships.



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