

# German Army plans combat mission in Mali

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The German defence ministry is preparing a massive Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) combat mission in Mali, which is torn by civil war. This would be the most dangerous deployment of German troops since Afghanistan, where 56 German soldiers have been killed so far.

According to the plans of the ministry, robust combat units and reconnaissance drones will be deployed in the embattled north of the country. They will support 600 Dutch soldiers, who are stationed in the city of Gao, as part of the UN mission, Minusma.

The Dutch government, with which Germany cooperates closely in military questions, lodged a request for support. Two months ago, the German government informed the Bundestag (parliament) that it was considering stronger military involvement in the African country.

So far, the Bundeswehr has seven officers and two NCOs involved in the Minusma operation, based in the relatively safe capital, Bamako. There, some 200 Bundeswehr soldiers are training Malian government soldiers within the framework of the EU mission EUTM.

Since October 4, the German defence ministry has been in possession of a report by a reconnaissance team that travelled to the north of the country. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the intervention is being planned on the basis of this report.

An initial statement by the ministry says German units would have to be able to “largely conduct independent and robust operations”, being used “mainly in areas with a significant or high threat situation”.

Plans are already in place for an advanced party to be sent to northern Mali; it would be covered by the current parliamentary mandate, which sets a ceiling of 150 German troops as part of operation Minusma. According to the latest plans, security guards and

support forces would follow early next year, and in April and June a “mixed reinforced reconnaissance company” would be deployed. This would require a new mandate from the Bundestag.

The international military intervention in Mali dates back to 2012 after indigenous Tuareg tribes, in alliance with Islamists who had fought in Libya against Gaddafi, took power in the north. France, the country’s former colonial power, took advantage of this situation and launched a massive military operation in January 2013 in support of the corrupt regime in Bamako.

The UN mission, Minusma, has been in operation since July 2013. Officially, it is tasked with stabilizing the country. It currently consists of 9,100 soldiers and 1,200 police officers from over 30 countries and is considered the world’s most dangerous “peacekeeping” operation. Since the beginning of the operation more than 40 soldiers have been killed. The north of the country is the site of constant military operations against insurgent groups.

In fact, the war in Mali is part of a struggle for the redivision of the African continent, with its wealth of raw materials and potential markets. In addition to the old colonial powers France, Britain and Germany, the US and China are now taking part in this battle.

German foreign policy has been trying for a long time to regain a foothold in Africa. Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen had already declared on taking office two years ago that Germany would “take more responsibility” in Africa. However, the Bundeswehr has so far been limited mainly to training and transport missions.

According to *Spiegel Online*, the military mission in Mali is also about the “credibility” of von der Leyen: “in the past, the Christian Democrat politician had repeatedly expressed a willingness to become more involved in Africa”.

Questioned by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the defence

ministry stressed that Germany had “a special security policy interest in the further stabilization of Mali”. This was also emphasized by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who welcomed his Malian counterpart Abdoulaye Diop in Berlin on Thursday.

The military intervention could also help to meet the "objectives of the Africa policy guidelines of the federal government," the foreign ministry said with unusual openness.

These guidelines, adopted in 2014, are a blueprint for the imperialist plunder of the continent. They emphasize the “growing relevance of Africa for Germany and Europe”, which arises from the economic potential and the "rich natural resources" of the continent.

Berlin therefore wants to strengthen “Germany’s political, security and development policy engagement in Africa”, to intervene “early, quickly, decisively and substantially” and “comprehensively deploy the whole spectrum of its available means”.

In an interview this weekend with the newspaper *Bild am Sonntag* von der Leyen stressed again that the German army would take a “robust mandate”. She also justified the planned military aggression with reference to the current wave of refugees attempting to enter Europe. “The country is a hub for the refugee routes,” she said. It was therefore “essential that Mali be permanently pacified in order to prevent people traffickers from continuing their vile business”.



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