

German government votes to expand military interventions in Mali and Iraq

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11 January 2016

The German government voted last Tuesday to expand the German army's intervention in Mali within the framework of the United Nations Minusma mission. The number of troops deployed is to be increased by 550 to 650. Thus far, 235 soldiers were involved in a so-called European Union training mission (EUTM) in the relatively quiet south, in the capital of Bamako. By contrast, the new soldiers are to be deployed in the northern city of Gao, and tasked with reconnaissance, protecting a military camp and logistics. The dispatch of the soldiers is to be completed by May 2016.

At the same time, the German government decided to increase the number of troops in Irbil, in northern Iraq, by 50 percent, to 150. They are training Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, in part in the use of German supplied weapons. In Syria, the German Luftwaffe's Tornado fighter jets began their intervention this weekend to support the war against ISIS.

The German government's proposal will extend the deployment until 31 January 2017. Both proposals require the assent of parliament, but with the large government majority, this is a foregone conclusion.

Defence minister Ursula Von der Leyen justified the expansion of troops in Mali last November by pointing to the need to support France after the Paris terrorist attacks. It was necessary to relieve the French army, which had been fighting in Mali since 2013 with thousands of soldiers, she said.

At a meeting of European Union (EU) defence ministers in Brussels, the French government asked all member states for support for the first time in the EU's history. It based the demand on article 42 section 7 of the EU treaty. This states, "in the case of an armed attack on the sovereign territory of a member state ... the other member states [owe] it all of their available assistance and support." According to the French government, the Paris terrorist attacks fell into this category.

The German government's attempt to justify the army's fourth combat mission, after Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Syria, as a response to the horrific terrorist attacks in Paris is a deliberate effort to cover up the intervention's real agenda. The war is part of the new imperialist campaign to subordinate Africa, which began with the NATO war on Libya in 2011. Like Libya and the rest of the Sahel zone, Mali is rich in natural resources, which the imperialists intend to win control of in competition with China, a country with close economic ties to Mali and other countries in the region.

In contrast to the official propaganda that Western intervention would bring "stability to the country", Mali was plunged into chaos by the bombardment of Libya. After a flood of weapons to Mali due to the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in Libya, Tuareg rebels and Islamist militias began a rebellion against the Malian government at the beginning of 2012.

After the position of the Malian army was severely worsened due to heavy fighting and a military coup, France launched operation Serval in January 2013, with the support of the United States, to win back the resource-rich north of the country. The intervention was sold as an anti-terrorist mission. However, it was in fact part of the broader drive by the imperialist powers for their economic and geostrategic interests in Africa.

Unlike the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the attack on Libya in 2011, Germany was an active party in this war from the outset. Immediately after the beginning of the French operation, the then-Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union-Free Democratic Party coalition government supported the intervention and made available Transall aircraft for the transportation of troops, weapons and equipment into the war zone. Ever since, the German contribution has been increased step by step.

The current expansion of the mission had been long planned and is part of Germany's return to an aggressive

foreign policy. Speaking on behalf of the government, finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble said in a recent interview with *Bild am Sonntag* that in 2016 “Germany will be challenged in foreign and security policy perhaps more strongly than we would like.” Schäuble identified the main avenue of Germany’s intervention as Africa, along with the Middle East.

A glance at the official foreign ministry web site leaves no doubt about the interests being pursued by German imperialism in Mali. In the section on “country information” for Mali, it states that the West African country is “increasingly oriented to a market economy” and “the privatisation of state companies is—if with difficulty—progressing.” “The volume of foreign direct investment in Mali”, however, amounted to “as in the past, still less than Mali’s economic potential.”

Also the “raw material deposits in the country, particularly limestone, phosphate, diamonds and marble,” are “currently hardly being exploited.” It states further, “Income improvements through the exploration of deposits of oil and phosphates in the north seem, given the open questions of investment and transport infrastructure and the current security situation, only conceivable in the medium term.”

This is now apparently to change with the intervention of the German army in the north.

Leading defence politicians are already openly talking about how German soldiers need to kill and be killed in Mali to secure raw materials and markets for export-hungry German capitalism. The armed forces spokesman in parliament, Hans-Peter Bartels, described the intervention in northern Mali as just as dangerous as that in Afghanistan, where 55 soldiers have lost their lives. “It is currently the most dangerous UN mission,” stated Bartels, before adding cynically, “the German army is not going there to fight against terrorists, but it could confront terrorists there. That is the risk.” He therefore recommended “a strong presence there.”



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