

Merkel promotes the return of German militarism to Africa

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The German government is massively expanding its political, economic and military involvement in Africa. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is currently touring Mali, Niger and Ethiopia with a high-level delegation.

On Sunday, Merkel met President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in Mali's capital Bamako. "We want to make a contribution to stabilising Mali so that it can make a good development," she said. "It is important to us that we establish coherence in connection with our development cooperation and military support."

In reality, there is no "development aid" taking place in Mali, but a military operation in which 650 German soldiers are participating. In Bamako, Merkel thanked the German troops there, saying, "Firstly, I want to thank you for your service, since this is quite a challenge given the unaccustomed temperatures and given the climatic conditions."

An official report by the German government openly admits that what is involved in Mali is a military combat operation: "MINUSMA and French soldiers are attempting to bring the north of Mali back under the control of the government in Bamako, and in this are *fighting* against Islamic groups [emphasis added]." As well as MINUSMA, Germany is involved in two further missions in Mali: the EU training mission EUTM and a mission to train the Malian police to guard the country's borders.

On Monday, Merkel met with President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger in the country's capital, Niamey. The chancellor announced financial support of 17 million euros, which above all is for the "fight against smugglers." Berlin will also provide 10 million euros to equip the country's armed forces, supposedly for the fight against terrorism.

A few days before Merkel's visit, the German ambassador to Niger, Bernd von Münchow-Pohl, announced that following the US and France, Germany too now planned to establish a military base in Niger. "With the establishment of a German military base for aviation in Niamey, the MINUSMA mission should be supported," Pohl was quoted saying. Germany was "ready to do more in the Sahel" and

"take on more responsibility".

The official reason for Merkel's Africa trip is the opening of the so-called "Julius Nyerere Peace and Security Building" in Addis Ababa, which Germany had financed to the tune of 30 million euros. It contains the headquarters of the Africa Union, as well as a meeting chamber and facilities for directing military operations. Today, the chancellor is scheduled to deliver "a speech on the architecture of African peace and security," according to a government spokesman.

The official propaganda cannot disguise the fact that Germany is increasingly pursuing a military course in Africa, collaborating with authoritarian governments to keep refugees in Africa, far from Europe, and above all in order to assert Berlin's economic and geostrategic interests in this populous continent, rich in raw materials.

Before her departure, in an interview with news weekly *Die Zeit*, Merkel said, in the manner of a colonial master, "Now, of course, we can't make the world better in one fell swoop. But if we want to pursue German interests, we must say realistically that Africa's wellbeing is also in Germany's interest."

Whose "wellbeing" and which "German interests" are involved in Africa is especially apparent when one studies the current foreign policy strategy papers of the federal government and takes a look at history.

Merkel's first extended trip to Africa since 2011 has been long prepared politically and is part of Germany's return to an aggressive foreign policy. Just weeks after President Gauck and the government announced the end of German military restraint at the Munich Security in January 2014, Merkel's cabinet agreed on "Africa Policy Guidelines." This is a strategy paper of German imperialism to exploit the population and resource-rich continent in the 21st century.

In the first part of the guidelines, under the heading, "Background: growing relevance of Africa for Germany and Europe", one reads, "The potential of Africa arises from demographic change with a future market with high economic growth, rich natural resources, potential for agricultural production and self-sufficient food security ...

African markets are developing dynamically and—beyond the extractive industries—will be of growing interest to German business.”

The second section, “Our engagement in Africa”, demands “Germany’s engagement in Africa in the spheres of politics, security and development policy has to be strengthened in a targeted fashion.” The government “aims to act early and swiftly, in a decisive and substantive manner, based on values and human rights.” This also includes military interventions. The government wants “to use *the whole spectrum of means available* to it in the fields of politics, security, development and regional policy, business, academia and culture [emphasis in original].”

Since the adoption of the paper, Berlin is increasingly seeking to impose its economic and geopolitical interests under the guise of the fight against terrorism and the fight against the “causes of flight” in Africa. Already in early 2013, the Bundestag (parliament) decided to support the French military intervention in Mali and deploy the Bundeswehr in the country. Since then, the mission has been repeatedly extended. Other German missions are currently under way in Senegal, Central Africa, the Horn of Africa, Western Sahara, Sudan, Southern Sudan and Somalia, and all have been extended or expanded.

The crowing of the Bundeswehr in Africa, like the return of German militarism to Eastern Europe and the military interventions in the Middle East, stands in the tradition of German colonial and great-power politics. In his notorious speech to the Reichstag (parliament) on December 6, 1897, when the future Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow called for Germany, as a “nation that had come too late,” for the first time to have a “place in the sun,” he meant primarily the acquisition of colonies in Africa.

As a result, the German Empire, although never able to catch up with the leading colonial powers France and England, was able to establish the so-called “German protectorates” formed at the beginning of World War I, creating the fourth largest colonial empire on earth. This included German Southwest Africa (today’s Namibia), German West Africa (today’s Togo, the eastern part of Ghana, Cameroon, the eastern part of Nigeria, parts of Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo and Gabon), German East Africa (today’s Tanzania and Rwanda) and German Witu (today southern Kenya).

Germany had to give up its colonies following defeat in World War I. But under Hitler, sections of the German elite were again enthusiastic for a German colonial empire in Africa, which could serve as a “tropical extension” to a Europe dominated by Germany. In a memorandum dated July 1940, the director of the Deutsche Bank and head of the Economic Colonial Political Office of the NSDAP (Nazi

party), Kurt Weigelt, summarised the interests of the Third Reich as follows:

“Seen economically, the countries on the Guinea coast are of the highest worth. Based on our old local possessions (Togo and Cameroon), the Gold Coast-Togo-Dahomey-Nigeria-Cameroon form the ideal central element of Germany’s possessions in Africa. With well over 30 million inhabitants, this area is not only the optimum of the tropical extension but with a few exceptions, (copper), provides all the nationally important economic needs of the homeland.”

He continues: “It is completed from a forestry products perspective with the inclusion of French Congo, whereby it also extends to the Belgian Congo, which would also meet the needs for copper. On the way to this area, lie the iron ore reserves of Conakry and the phosphates of French Morocco (special arrangements), as well as air and marine bases at Bathurst, or Dakar.”

Seventy-five years after the fall of Nazi Germany, the time has come again when the German elites aggressively enter the new “scramble for Africa.” As in the past, this will not only worsen the plight of the local population, but also fuel the conflict between the imperialist powers themselves.

The German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), a Hamburg research institute that advises, among others, the foreign ministry, noted in a 2014 paper on the new German Strategy for Africa: “Increasingly, the African continent is the scene of new geostrategic rivalries between the European Union, China, the US and other leading powers such as India, Brazil and Turkey. German foreign policy is bound to reflect the new constellations and challenges and new conceptions towards Africa.”

Another factor behind the German offensive in Africa is Berlin’s fear of a revolutionary uprising of the African masses. The GIGA paper warns: “From Mauritania to Sudan, for decades a deep-seated distrust of governments and governors has existed. In the eyes of the population, these have done little or nothing [...] In the villages of the Sahel, there is hardly any electricity, few streets and the population is—apart from a few circles of the elite—completely impoverished and has no prospect of ever getting a job. The Sahel is one of the poorest regions of the world. For many years, experts have warned of social unrest.”



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