

Germany steps up military intervention in Mali

Johannes Stern
28 January 2017

Germany's parliament (Bundestag) voted overwhelmingly on Thursday to extend and massively expand the German army's intervention in the West African country of Mali.

According to the motion, which was approved by parliament in its third reading, the upper limit for the number of soldiers deployed as part the UN mission in Mali, known as MINUSMA, is to be increased by 350 to more than 1,000. The limit was increased just last year from 150 to 650. The deployment is also to be extended by a year.

An additional 300 German soldiers are deployed in Mali as part of the European Union's (EU) training mission EUTM. This means that more German soldiers will soon be stationed in the West African country than in any other country outside Germany. The largest intervention to date was limited to 960 soldiers in Afghanistan. In Kosovo, where the German army has been operating for 18 years, 517 soldiers are currently deployed.

The army began on Friday with the shifting of NH90 combat and Tiger transport helicopters from Leipzig-Halle airport to Mali. According to the German army, they will be used to transport and rescue injured people. In addition, operations to escort convoys and conduct surveillance are also planned.

Next Tuesday, Colonel Oliver Walter, commander of the Friesland air force regiment, will send the first new contingent into action with a military order at the former Upjever airfield. The first soldiers will be deployed on February 15. The entire contingent is then to arrive in Gao, in the dangerous and restive northern region of the country, on March 1.

The German government is seeking to sell the mission as a humanitarian peacekeeping operation. In the government's justification of the new mandate for

the army, it states, "The stabilisation of Mali is a key focus of German engagement in the Sahel region and an important part of the German government's Africa policy. The issue at stake is to help Mali towards a peaceful future and overcome the causes of flight and persecution."

In reality, the German army is not leading Mali toward a peaceful future but increasingly towards terrorism and chaos. A few days ago, a fatal suicide bomb attack near a military base in Gao killed 70 people and many more were injured. "The hospital is overcrowded. There are decomposing bodies everywhere," Arboncana Maiga, a resident of the city by telephone, told Deutsche Welle. "We have not experienced this before in Gao."

The deterioration of the security situation in the area is so dramatic that the German army has increased its so-called risk payment to €110 per day. This corresponds to level six, the highest danger level. This only previously applied to the military intervention in Afghanistan.

All of this sheds light on the true character of the German military intervention in Mali and its background.

Germany is waging war and collaborating with an authoritarian and corrupt government to keep refugees away from Europe by detaining them in Africa. Above all it is using the unrest and refugee crisis as an excuse for enforcing its economic and geo-strategic interests on the continent, which has a large population and is rich in natural resources.

Africa was at the heart of Germany's foreign policy shift from the outset. Just weeks after President Joachim Gauck and other leading politicians announced the end of military restraint at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, the cabinet adopted the guidelines

for an Africa policy. These guidelines read like a blueprint for the exploitation of Africa by German imperialism in the 21st century.

The guidelines speak of a “growing relevance of Africa for Germany and Europe,” and this means, “The potential of Africa arises out of a demographic development with a future market with high growth rates, rich natural resources, potential for agricultural production and food security under its own control ... African markets are developing dynamically and will—in the raw materials market and beyond—be for the German economy ... increasingly interesting.”

The goal of the German government is therefore to increase “the political, security policy and development policy engagement of Germany.” The aim being pursued was “to act based on interests, early quickly, decisively and substantially,” which includes military interventions. The German government intended “to deploy the full spectrum of its available methods ... cross-departmentally, political, security policy, development policy, regional policy, economic, academic and cultural.”

Since the publication of the guidelines, German imperialism has stepped up its efforts to impose its interests in Africa under the guise of the war on terror or combatting the “causes of flight.”

Already at the beginning of 2013, the German parliament agreed to support the French intervention in Mali and to station German soldiers in the country. Additional German interventions are currently under way in Senegal, Western Sahara, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia.

The latest expansion of the Mali operation introduces a new stage in the return of German militarism to Africa. It is directly connected with the geopolitical shifts and mounting conflicts between the imperialist powers following the election of US President Donald Trump.

In an interview with *Handelsblatt*, German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen demanded the “clear political will” to reach the NATO-mandated figure of 2 percent of GDP for defence spending and not lose any time with military rearmament. “Ships, helicopters, armoured vehicles, personnel—even when the money is there, they still need to be built or recruited and trained.”

At the same time, Von der Leyen explained that

European governments had to readjust their foreign policy and “ensure security in our region as Europeans.” With reference to Africa that meant “supporting African states to bring the growing population in correspondence with the expanding economy and stabilise them against terrorism.” The “cooperation with Africa” was thus “a task for NATO. I see us Europeans assuming much more responsibility.”

The Left Party, which was the only parliamentary group to vote against the expansion of the mission, supports the offensive of German imperialism like all the other parliamentary parties and has fulfilled its “duty” in Africa for some time.

In December, the defence policy spokeswoman of the Left Party, Christine Buchholz, made her second trip to Mali to visit the troops, she went there for the first time in 2014.

In her speech in parliament, Buchholz did not oppose the deployment in principle, but merely warned of the growing danger for German soldiers. “With the capability of carrying out rescue missions, the action radius of the German army will be expanded and thus also the risk of becoming the targets of attacks,” she said.

Buchholz and the Left Party fear above all sparking an uprising of the Malian masses against the foreign occupiers. “The German soldiers are operating in Gao as foreigners, cut-off from the population. The more insecure the situation, the more isolated will be the German troops,” Buchholz told the deputies.

Loyal, the magazine of the German military reserves association, recently reported “how a German patrol in Gao not only had to struggle with the extreme heat, but also a cool response from the population. A stone was thrown at the armoured and armed vehicle of the German army.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact