

German government hosts major conference on Africa

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The German government is working systematically to expand its global political and economic relations ahead of the G20 summit in Hamburg in July. Following the visits earlier this month by Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Chancellor Angela Merkel's visit to South and Central America last week, the focus has now shifted to Africa.

The German government organised a high-level conference in Berlin on June 12 and 13 attended by dozens of African heads of government within the framework of the "G20 Africa Partnership – Investing in a Joint Future." Organisers included the federal Finance Ministry, Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Bundesbank.

In her opening address, Merkel raised the question of whether industrial states had "adopted the correct approach with the classical development aid model." From the German government's point of view, it was necessary in the future to focus more on "each state's own economic development," i.e. private investment. As a result, "the idea emerged—particularly from our Finance Minister and Development Minister—to say: We need an initiative where we are not speaking about Africa, but with Africa."

The official propaganda about a new form of cooperation, from which both sides will allegedly profit equally, cannot conceal the fact that Germany is pursuing definite imperialist interests on the heavily populated and resource-rich continent.

Aid projects are to be replaced by capital exports, the exploitation of raw materials and cheap labour, the securing of new sales markets and other forms of profit maximisation—methods which characterised the scramble for Africa between the 1880s and the beginning of the First World War. To this end, the domestic ruling elites are being bribed, blackmailed, supported militarily and if necessary made to see sense by violent measures. For this

reason, the German government is propagating the need to increase "development aid" in conjunction with its military budget.

Tuesday's edition of *Die Welt* enthused, "Merkel wants to make Africa the new China." On the sidelines of the conference, German companies Bosch, Kärcher, Siemens and Volkswagen announced new investments in Africa. *Die Welt* reported that the discount textile retailer Kik is opening new locations in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kenya and Egypt, and the German government is initiating "reform partnerships" with Ghana, Tunisia and the Ivory Coast.

In the lead article of the same edition, entitled "Continent with potential," the newspaper could not resist having a dig at the United States. While "in this country" the "0.7 percent of GDP on development aid proposed by the UN" was spent, "the US, which under President Donald Trump is vehemently demanding the fulfillment of military spending [achieves] ... just 0.2 percent."

The German government's declared goal is to develop new initiatives at the expense of the United States. "We must now use the spaces being vacated by America," declared Social Democrat Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel shortly after Trump came to office.

Nonetheless, the Africa conference is not merely a reaction to growing transatlantic tensions, but has been politically prepared over a long period of time. "The time for strategy papers is over, now the concrete projects must come," stated Stefan Liebing, head of the German Business Association for Africa.

An examination of the strategy papers authored in Berlin over recent years makes clear what "concrete projects" he means. The Association for Africa's position paper entitled "Energy and Raw Materials" states, for example, "Germany requires a long-term and reliable supply of raw materials. Africa, as a resource-rich continent, offers this. Along with the securing of supplies with long-term contracts, for example within the

framework of resource partnerships, German business must engage much more strongly in the processes of exploration, extraction and processing of raw materials.”

It continues, “To bring this vision to life, close cooperation—between business and politicians in Germany on the one hand and with African partner countries on the other—is required. In the highly-competitive international energy and resource market, German business requires political backing to create favourable conditions for German corporations to operate.”

As German business implements this “vision,” the Chancellor has increased her focus on Africa. Prior to her Africa trip last autumn, Merkel declared in typical German colonial style in an interview with *Die Zeit*, “Now we certainly cannot improve the whole world from one day to the next. But if we want to pursue German interests, we have to also realistically say that Africa’s welfare is in Germany’s interest.”

Merkel’s speech on Monday in Berlin made clear what other “interests” apart from economic ambitions she is talking about. She demanded the curbing of illegal immigration, because “if there is too much hopelessness in Africa, young people will say: We have to look for a new life somewhere else in the world.” According to the German government’s plans, ruthless African rulers like Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who once again enjoyed the red carpet treatment in Berlin, will receive billions in European Union funds to strengthen their security forces and detain refugees in Africa before they reach Europe.

Nothing is more terrifying to the imperialists than an uprising of the rapidly growing and young African population, as occurred in Egypt and Tunisia six years ago. Merkel cautioned, “Substantially more than half of the population is younger than 25. I always say this in Germany: Our average age in Germany is 43. The average age in Niger, Mali and in other countries is little more than 15. [...] If we don’t give the youth a perspective, if we don’t invest in education and qualifications, if we don’t strengthen the role of girls and young women in particular, the development agenda won’t be successful.”

Merkel’s “development agenda” includes the brutal suppression of the population in the name of “security” and the “fight against terrorism.” Development aid policymakers had “for many years [...] failed to pay enough attention to questions of security,” the Chancellor complained. “For many years, we felt good if we avoided thinking about military armaments.”

But this would now change: “We have to be honest and

say: only where security is guaranteed can development actually take place. I think it is very courageous that some countries are ready to assume responsibility in the struggle against terrorism in Mali and throughout the neighbourhood. In this context, France is seeking a mandate in the UN Security Council. I would only add: We will support you from the German side in this.”

The German government is clearly planning to extend its military engagement in Africa. German imperialism has resorted increasingly to military means over recent years to pursue its economic and geopolitical interests under the cover of combatting terrorism or dealing with “causes of flight.”

Parliament decided in early 2013 to support France’s military intervention in Mali by stationing German soldiers in the country. The deployment has since been expanded on several occasions. It is now the German army’s largest foreign deployment. Further German operations are currently under way in Senegal, the Central African Republic, the Horn of Africa, Western Sahara, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia, all of which have either been extended or expanded.

The grim traditions upon which the army’s interventions rest are becoming ever more obvious in Africa. *Der Spiegel* reported recently that on a wooden wall in the watchtower of Camp Castor in Mali, the slogan “God with us” had been written in runes. This was last used as a battlecry by the Wehrmacht, and appeared on the soldier’s belt buckles directly above the swastika, according to the magazine. The use of the slogan remains popular in right-wing circles.



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