

German government extends combat mission in Mali and Sahel

Johannes Stern
15 May 2022

Berlin is playing an increasingly aggressive role in NATO's proxy war against Russia. Almost daily, the federal government announces new sanctions against Moscow and the delivery of more heavy weapons to Kiev. Now it is also pushing ahead with German imperialism's offensive in Africa. On Wednesday, the cabinet approved a massive expansion of the German war mission in Mali and throughout the entire Sahel region.

The government's proposal, which will be voted on in the Bundestag (parliament) next week, increases German participation in the UN mission MINUSMA by 300 soldiers. The additional personnel are to be used primarily to take over tasks from French combat troops, who are expected to be withdrawn from Mali in the next few months and redeployed to neighbouring countries.

The WSWS described this drawdown, announced by French President Emmanuel Macron on February 17, as driven by "explosive popular opposition to French imperialism, notably in the aftermath of NATO's humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan last year and after repeated massacres committed by French troops or local militias set up with tacit French backing in the Sahel region of Northern Africa."

Germany is now responding to the end of the infamous French-led "anti-terrorism" missions "Barkhane" and "Tabuka" in Mali by increasing its own presence in the geostrategically important and resource-rich country.

"The personnel ceiling will increase from 1,100 to 1,400 soldiers in order to do justice to the envisaged German contribution to compensate for capabilities previously taken on by France..." the German government's motion states. This concerns medical services, support forces for the continued operation of

the airfield in Gao, as well as "an additional security company for property protection" and efforts "to support the operations of our ground-based reconnaissance forces."

It is becoming increasingly clear that Berlin is preparing, behind the backs of the population, a massive combat operation in Mali—and increasingly throughout the Sahel—for which more and more soldiers are being mobilised. "For redeployment phases as well as in the context of troop rotations and in emergency situations," the mandate text states, "the personnel ceiling may be temporarily exceeded."

In this context, MINUSMA is "authorised to take all necessary measures, including the use of military force, in order to fulfil the mandate..." Although "German participation" in Mali is for air transport, air refuelling and "logistical and other support," the Niamey military base in Niger is also "part of the area of operations."

European police missions are also being extended to the whole region. "Another pillar of Germany's engagement" would be "support for the further development" of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger. Germany would participate in these with a total of 30 soldiers and "thus complement the police participation in MINUSMA."

In addition, the EU mission EUTM will focus on Niger and other Sahel states. According to the corresponding government proposal, up to 300 Bundeswehr soldiers are to help improve the "operational capabilities of the security forces of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger and of the Joint Task Force of the G5 Sahel states." This involves "military advice and training, including pre-deployment training" and "escort duties."

Massacres carried out by the Malian regime, which

came to power in a coup in June 2021 in alliance with Russian forces, are cited as official justification for the relocation of EUTM. “The reports of human rights violations by Malian and Russian troops, which we read in the newspapers here and have of course also heard about on the ground, are terrible,” complained Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock in the Bundestag. It was now a matter of “standing with the people on the ground against these forces that care nothing for human rights, nothing for democracy and nothing for a rule-based order.”

This is nothing but absurd propaganda. Berlin is in a pact with the Malian coup regime against the “people on the ground” who oppose the occupation of their country by the imperialist powers. The German government’s mandate states that it wants to “exert pressure on the Malian transition government on the one hand, but at the same time keep channels of dialogue open and offer support in a spirit of partnership.”

The massacres are being committed by the very forces that the Bundeswehr has trained over many years. Parliamentarian Katja Leikert, who sits on the Bundestag’s Foreign Affairs Committee for the Christian Democrat (CDU/CSU) parliamentary group, had to admit that the perpetrators were “Malian troops—it has to be said here—who were trained by German officers with good intentions and who are now murdering alongside Russian troops.”

And even that is not the whole truth. In fact, the imperialist powers and their troops on the ground have no “good intentions” but are the main perpetrators of terror and massacres of civilians.

Mali, in particular, is a tragic example of this. The country was plunged into the abyss by the NATO war against Libya in 2011. After an influx of weapons and militias into Mali in the wake of Libya’s destruction, Tuareg fighters and Islamist forces began an uprising in the north of the country against the central government in Bamako in early 2012.

When the official Malian army was on the verge of collapse, after fierce fighting and a military coup in March 2012, the former colonial power France intervened in early 2013 to secure the north of the country, which is particularly rich in raw materials. The mission was presented as a “fight against terror”. In reality, it was part of a renewed scramble for Africa by

the imperialist powers.

Germany was involved from the beginning and supported the French intervention—initially with logistics and personnel. At the end of April 2013, the Bundeswehr began training the first soldiers on the ground. Since then, mandates have been repeatedly extended and expanded—and with them the brutalisation of the war.

The anger in the population escalated after imperialist crimes—such as the French airstrike on a wedding party in Bounty in early 2021, in which 22 people were killed—and numerous massacres that occurred under the eyes of the occupying forces. In May 2021, the military carried out another putsch, significantly, after the Malian trade unions had called off a planned general strike in the capital Bamako.

A declared war aim of the imperialist powers is to suppress the impoverished masses in the region and prevent them from fleeing to Europe. The Sahel is characterised by “a high level of instability..., combined with a massive increase in flight and migration, which may also affect Europe”, the German government warns in its mandate text.

At the same time, the aim is to pursue economic and geopolitical interests and to push back the influence of other powers—first and foremost Russia. “If MINUSMA were to withdraw from Mali, the vacuum would be filled even more by other forces,” Baerbock warned in the Bundestag. This would apply “to Islamist fighters”, but “also to Russian forces”.

As in the NATO war against Russia, the Bundeswehr’s overt display in Africa is part of German imperialism’s return to the world stage. On behalf of the entire ruling class, Baerbock proclaimed that they were not only “concentrating on what is happening on our own doorstep” but were “continuing to assume our responsibility in the world”. This was also “the message we are sending by supporting this MINUSMA mandate”. Germany was “the largest Western troop contributor in Mali” and was “not withdrawing from the world”.



To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wws.org/contact