

# German Chancellor Scholz visits East Africa and sends the Bundeswehr to Niger

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German imperialism is not only playing a leading role in NATO's escalation of the war against Russia in Ukraine, Africa, too, is increasingly coming into its focus. The coalition government is aggressively pursuing the goal of increasing Berlin's political, economic, and military influence on the resource-rich continent.

At the end of last week, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrat, SPD) visited Ethiopia and Kenya, together with high-ranking business representatives. It was the chancellor's second trip to Africa. Last May, he had visited Senegal, Niger, and South Africa. In parallel, Germany is developing its military presence. A few days before Scholz's departure, the Bundestag (federal parliament) initiated a new Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) deployment in Niger.

The offensive is not, as official propaganda declares, about the "fight against terrorism" or even "human rights" and "democracy." It is, as in the past, about geostrategic and economic interests. At the end of the 19th century, German imperialism under Kaiser Wilhelm II claimed a "place in the sun," meaning above all the acquisition of colonies in Africa. For German great power aspirations in the 21st century, the continent is once again playing a prominent role.

At a press conference in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, Scholz declared, "We must prepare ourselves for a world that will be multipolar and in which many countries of the global South will assume great importance.... Africa is of central importance for us in Germany, is of central importance for us in Europe." He said it was part of "a long-term political decision, therefore, that I am now once again speaking to heads of state and government here in Africa."

Scholz's entire trip made clear what is at stake. Berlin is trying to secure access to African energy and raw materials and lucrative sales markets and cheap labour in a race with the other major powers—first and foremost Russia and China, but also its imperialist allies.

Media commentaries speak about this openly. Under the headline "Catching up in Africa," *tagesschau.de*, for

example, praised Germany's increasing presence in Africa. The continent was needed "politically." In the Ukraine conflict, for example, "many African countries have a problem taking a clear stand against Russia."

Above all, however, "the topic of business is driving up visitor frequency." In many countries, small and medium-sized businesses were growing, and with them the sales markets. In addition, for the "sustained, 'green' transformation of Western industries... important raw materials such as cobalt or lithium are found on the continent." This was also "important if the industries' dependence on China or Russia is to be reduced."

Scholz and his entourage were working on this agenda on the spot. Germany wanted to "increasingly create regular, legal immigration opportunities for those who want to work in Germany, and at the same time we want to push back irregular migration," the chancellor explained at a press conference with Kenyan President William Ruto in Nairobi. He said he saw "great potential in Kenya for skilled migration in many areas of our economy."

Kenya is also seen as an important partner in energy matters. For more than two decades, Berlin has been investing in energy projects through institutions such as the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) and the Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). Among other things, it was involved in the construction of the world's largest geothermal plant, Olkaria, which Scholz visited together with Ruto. Now, the German government plans to invest in the development of a hydrogen economy in Kenya.

For his part, Ruto sought further German investment. He said Kenya had already "made progress in terms of the economy, so German investors can be made more attractive." He said the investment potential was "huge" and that he also wanted to "point out the geostrategic advantage" Kenya represented "as an energy hub for investment on the continent." He promised the German business delegation he would provide further "incentives" so that "you can successfully invest in [the] great potentials in our country."

What this means is clear. To attract foreign investment,

Kenya's ruling capitalist class will further intensify its attacks on the country's impoverished and starving masses. In March, Ruto banned the first mass opposition protests against his government. He mobilized 5,000 heavily armed police and the notorious paramilitary General Service Unit (GSU), which used tear gas against protesters and arrested dozens, including numerous members of parliament.

When Scholz speaks of the governments in Kenya and Ethiopia as guarantors of "stability" and "peace" in the region, it is pure mockery. In fact, it is about suppressing the growing social and political opposition among workers and youth and "pacifying" conflicts by force if necessary.

Ruto, who began his career under Kenya's long-term dictator Daniel arap Moi, was indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2011. The Hague accused him of inciting murder, forced displacements and persecution in the wake of Kenya's 2007-08 political unrest. According to the ICC indictment, more than 1,100 people were killed and more than half a million forcibly displaced in the process.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, whom Scholz courted in Nairobi, even dwarfs Ruto in his crimes. Between 2020 and 2022, under his leadership, the Ethiopian army drowned the Tigray region in blood. It is estimated that some 500,000 people were killed and at least two million people forced to flee. Ahmed's units are accused of massive human rights crimes—including the rape of 22,500 Tigrayan women at the very beginning of the conflict.

The permanent presence of the Bundeswehr on the continent illustrates that German imperialism does not only seek to enforce its predatory interests in Africa by force through its proxies. On April 28, the coalition government of the SPD, Liberal Democrats (FPD) and Greens, supported by the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), decided on a new military mission in Niger. At the end of May, the Bundeswehr mission in neighbouring Mali, which began around ten years ago, is to be extended for a proclaimed final time by one year.

The German government cites Russia's growing influence in Mali and crimes committed by the Malian armed forces as reasons for shifting the focus to Niger. The fact is that the Western occupation forces are hated by the population. Last year, the former colonial power France was forced to withdraw its combat troops from Mali and partially relocated them to Niger.

German politicians' references to Malian and Russian war crimes are also intended to conceal the real nature of their own intervention. In fact, the crimes against the civilian population are committed by the same Malian army that the Bundeswehr has been training for about ten years. The imperialist occupation forces are directly or indirectly involved in the crimes and bring nothing but war and terror

to the entire region.

In this context, the deployment in Niger, which initially provides for the stationing of about 60 Bundeswehr soldiers, is only the prelude to an ever more aggressive and comprehensive military presence by Germany.

"The geostrategic and security environment has also become harsher in the Sahel, in Africa as a whole," Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) stated during the Bundestag debate on the Niger deployment. The Sahel was and would remain "strategically relevant, especially in view of the Russian presence in the region," he said. It was becoming "increasingly important that we are represented in the region, that we remain committed and demonstrate we are there." That included "showing presence, including militarily."

Officially, the Niger mission serves to "build the capacity of the Niger armed forces" as part of a European Union-led "military partnership mission" (EU Military Partnership Mission in Niger—EUMPM Niger). But behind this, German imperialism is seeking to transform the Niger army into a powerful proxy force that will impose the interests of German and European imperialism in a region which boasts significant reserves of uranium, gold, coal, iron, limestone and phosphates.

Pistorius praised the fact Niger wanted "among other things, to double its armed forces by 2025, from 25,000 to 50,000 troops." For the country to be able to do that he said, it "needs the support of the international community." The Social Democratic defence minister sees the Bundeswehr playing a leadership role in this regard. "The German contribution" to EUMPM Niger included "above all participation—this should also be emphasized—in the mission's command structures on the ground."

The text of the mandate adopted explicitly provides for the future expansion of the mission. Among other things, it states that "further strengthening projects to support the civilian and military security forces in the Republic of Niger are planned for the coming years."



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