

German government steps up military intervention in Mali

By Gregor Link
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Against a backdrop of growing conflicts between the major world powers in Africa, the German grand coalition government (Christian Democratic Union CDU, Christian Social Union, CSU, and Social Democratic Party, SPD) is preparing a massive military intervention in Mali and the entire Sahel region of North Africa.

The intervention is taking place behind the backs of the population and is part of the German government's Africa Strategy, aimed at advancing its economic and geo-strategic interests on the continent. By relying on military means German imperialism is returning to the colonial and militaristic traditions which caused immeasurable suffering on the African continent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Two weeks ago, the German parliament (Bundestag) voted by an overwhelming majority to extend the German army (Bundeswehr) missions in Mali, EUTM and MINUSMA, and the involvement of the German navy in the EU mission Atalanta off the Somali coast for another year.

The government has allocated a total of almost 400 million euros for the three operations up until May 2020. In accordance with the two mandates, the Bundeswehr can station a total of up to 1,100 German soldiers in Mali. The West African country has been effectively under joint German and French occupation since 2013.

In contrast to the previous mandate, the German army now has the task of ensuring the "restoration of state authority" in central Mali. Formerly the German intervention was restricted to the north of the country.

The aim of the new mandate is "to ensure the increased presence of armed and security forces to create the conditions for a return of state administrative structures." This explains the real purpose of the intervention: neo-colonial control and exploitation of the resource-rich country and the police-military repression of growing opposition to the imperialist occupiers and their hated puppet regime in Bamako.

The country's government is currently experiencing fierce opposition from the working class and the impoverished rural population. At the end of April, the Malian government of Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga was forced to resign following mass protests and strikes.

The trigger for the protests was a massacre in the village of

Ogossagou near Burkina Faso, involving the deaths of around 160 people, including women, the elderly and youth. Another 55 people were injured. The protests were directed against the Western occupiers, under whose eyes the massacre had taken place, and against the indifferent reaction of the Malian government. There are now indications that Malian government forces were involved in the massacre. A dozen uniformed persons are alleged to be among the attackers.

The German grand coalition is acquainted with the crimes committed by the Malian troops it has trained. Already last year, the UN Security Council issued a report listing 344 human rights violations involving 475 victims. Malian military and security forces were involved in 58 of these cases. In addition, Minusma has carried out investigations into 44 cases of extrajudicial executions by Malian soldiers. Instead of withdrawing its forces in light of this carnage the German government is expanding its murderous campaign across the entire Sahel region.

The entire parliamentary debate made clear the full extent of the war plans of the German ruling class. In his plea for deployment, the SPD deputy responsible for African affairs, Christoph Matschie, explicitly named the "stabilization" of the Malian government and the enforcement of the "state monopoly on power" as the objectives of the MINUSMA mission. Mali, according to Matschie, is "a state in the Sahel region that has enormous significance for the stability of the entire region."

The speaker of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, Andreas Nick, also pleaded in his speech for an expansion of the mission across the entire region. The country's "problems" were by no means limited to Mali but concerned "the entire Sahelian zone."

Nick continued by noting that during the course of her trip to Africa at the beginning of May, Chancellor Angela Merkel had again emphasised "the importance of the G-5 states of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger for Germany and Europe, as well as the need for action locally." Now it was important to "enable our partners in the Sahel to assume even more responsibility for providing for their own security. German and European support for the G-5 countries in financing, training and upgrading the "Force Conjointe du G5 Sahel" is an important step in that

direction.”

In the course of implementing its war plans in close cooperation with France, the German government is increasingly coming into conflict with US imperialism. Nick expressed his “great” regret that “the granting of a robust UN mandate under Chapter VII for the ‘Force Conjointe’ had so far failed due to US opposition. The declaration of purely financial reasons and the focus on the purely bilateral work of the US in this region,” Nick concluded, “was not easy to understand.”

To put it more directly: following active participation by the German ruling elite in US regime change wars during the last two decades, it is now criticising US imperialism from the right. A “robust deployment under Chapter VII” requires a brutal combat mission and involving the same murderous and illegal practices used in the US-led wars against Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The defence spokesman for the CDU/CSU, Henning Otte, made clear in his speech that the German government is considering the use of combat drones in Mali and the surrounding region: “We want the use of Heron TP (drone) equipment to continue. Training is already taking place and I say very clearly on behalf of the Union: When necessary we also want to be able to support our soldiers by arming them with the Heron.”

The “debate” over German combat missions in the Bundestag made clear the traditions the ruling class is drawing upon. Speaking on behalf of the far right AfD, Rüdiger Lucassen, a former official at the Ministry of Defense, demanded that the real nature of the operation be revealed to the public: “The entire motion is a document aimed at concealment, full of empty phrases at a time when soldiers need clarity. This is dishonest, cowardly, and deeply irresponsible given the fact that you expose our men and women to this danger.”

In fact, there is no lack of clarity regarding the aims or methods employed by the German government in the Sahel region. The plan is to use brutal force to enforce the interests of German imperialism throughout the region and, as an integral component, erect a kind of “death barrier” to block off “Fortress Europe.”

In addition to the direct deployment of German armed forces and the formation of African units such as the “Force Conjointe,” the German missions involves arming the authoritarian regimes of the Sahel.

Handelsblatt reported that Merkel promised the Burkina Faso government 17 to 20 million euros during her trip to Africa. The money is to be spent on “expanding the capacities of the police and gendarmerie” and “advice from the Bundeswehr” on how best to combat “illegal migration.” During her subsequent visit to neighbouring Niger, Merkel praised the country’s government, stating that it had “undertaken a decisive fight to deter illegal migration” and had

“done outstanding work” in recent years.

The “outstanding work” cited by Merkel consists of African regimes with the support of the European Union forcing refugees into the desert where many perish horribly through starvation and thirst. According to reports, EU-trained units have not only secured borders but also occupied waterholes in the Sahara. As a result, the UN refugee agency UNHCR reports that more people are now dying in the desert than in the Mediterranean Sea.

In order to advance their inhuman policies, the ruling class is increasingly conducting covert, illegal military operations. German army special forces are stationed in Jordan, Tunisia, Cameroon and Niger, operating in secret and without any parliamentary mandate. Around 20 naval troops have been training local government soldiers in the Tahoua region of Nigeria for a year.

The results of the votes and the contributions by the opposition parties confirm that there is no opposition to the return of German militarism within the ranks of the ruling class. The Greens and the neo-liberal FDP agreed to all of the Bundeswehr operations by a large majority. The far-right AfD voted nearly unanimously for the EU mission, Atalanta.

The Left Party—the only party to vote against all three deployments—is itself deeply integrated into the structures of German imperialism and plays a central role in Africa’s politics. The Left Party spokeswoman for defence, Christine Buchholz (Marx 21), began her speech by referring to her regular troop visits to the Malian front: “I’ve been to Mali four times in recent years—the last time in February—and the situation has worsened from year to year.”

Stefan Liebich, chairman of the Left Party in the Foreign Affairs Committee and a member of influential think tanks such as the Atlantik-Brücke and the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), criticised the new mandate from the right. “The European Union and the German army train Malian forces but we cannot decide what the Malian army does and how it does it,” he lamented. The current mandate implies “the notion that somehow one is demonstrating responsibility with purely training missions but without actually taking up any responsibility.”

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