

Boko Haram and the Return of German Imperialism to Africa

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The government plans to expand Germany's military engagement in Africa. Earlier this week, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced Germany would be supporting the fight against Boko Haram.

Germany is prepared to offer financial aid in the struggle against the terrorist militia, Merkel declared following a meeting with the Ghanaian president John Dramani Mahama on Monday in Berlin. The West African country wants to fight Boko Haram with a regional military force. "Ghana can provide troops for this", explained Mahama. The plans for the operation will be discussed at the next summit of the African Union.

Merkel promised financial support for the planned troop deployment, and spoke of "terrible, brutal crimes that are being conducted against the civilian population in Nigeria, but also in Cameroon." However, there were no current plans for a direct military intervention by the European Union, Merkel said.

Since the beginning of the year, Boko Haram has brought large areas of northern Nigeria under its control and has penetrated into neighbouring Cameroon. On January 4, militia fighters took over a military base of the Multinational Task Force in Baga, in the Nigerian state of Borno.

According to media reports, the city was completely destroyed and up to 2,000 people killed. Baga was the last district in the northeast of the country still controlled by the central government and has repeatedly been the scene of bitter fighting. The Nigerian army was responsible for a massacre of the civilian population in Baga in 2013, which left more than 200 dead.

In addition to Baga, many other towns in the region are no longer under the control of the Nigerian government of President Goodluck Jonathan, including Damasak, Gubio, Kukawa, Mafa, Bama and Konduga. The area at least partially under the control of Boko Haram reportedly covers more than 50,000 square kilometres and extends from Machena on the border with Niger to Damaturu and up to Yola on the Cameroonian border.

Merkel's support for the fight against Boko Haram sends a signal. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris, Berlin is preparing to pursue Germany's imperialist interests in Africa with increasingly military means. The Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) is already working closely with the Ghana Armed Forces and is supporting them in building a Pioneer Regiment as part of a task force of the African Union.

The German offensive in Africa has been planned long beforehand and is part of the return

of Germany to an aggressive foreign policy. In mid-May last year, the cabinet approved the “government’s African policy guidelines”, which read like a strategy paper regarding the exploitation of the resource-rich continent by German imperialism in the twenty-first century.

When presenting the paper, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier declared, in the best German great power manner, that Germany must raise its gaze to Africa and “adapt its political instruments to the diversity of Africa”.

In the first section of the guidelines, under the heading “Current situation: Africa’s growing relevance to Germany and Europe”, it states:

“Africa’s potential stems from its demographic development and the fact that it is a huge market of the future with strong economic growth, rich natural resources, a great potential for increasing agricultural production and food security by its own efforts.... African markets are developing dynamically and—beyond the extractive industries—will be of growing interest to German business.”

The second section, “Our engagement in Africa”, demands “Germany’s engagement in Africa in the spheres of politics, security and development policy has to be strengthened in a targeted fashion”. The federal government “aims to act early and swiftly, in a decisive and substantive manner which is based on values and human rights.” This also includes military interventions. The government wants “to use the *whole spectrum* of means available to it in the fields of politics, security, development and regional policy, business, academia and culture” (emphasis in original).

The German government officially rejected the NATO bombing of Libya in 2011, but since then, under the guise of fighting terrorism, is increasingly returning to the traditional areas of influence of German imperialism in Africa. In early 2013, the German parliament agreed to support the French military intervention in Mali and to send soldiers to the country. In 2014, the mission was expanded. More German contingents are currently in Senegal, in Central Africa, in the Horn of Africa, the Western Sahara, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia.

The return of the Bundeswehr to Africa, like the confrontation with Russia last year and the intervention of Bundeswehr in the Middle East, is in keeping with the traditions of German great power politics.

When the Kaiser’s German Empire, in pursuit of a new world policy as a nation that had apparently “come too late”, for the first time sought its own “place in the sun” (according to the later Reich Chancellor von Bülow on December 6, 1897, before the German parliament), it was above all a matter of possessing colonies in Africa.

Although Germany was never able to match the leading colonial powers of France and England, the so-called German protectorates at the beginning of the First World War formed the fourth largest colonial empire on earth. This included German Southwest Africa (today’s Namibia), German West Africa (today’s Togo, the eastern part of Ghana, Cameroon, the eastern part of Nigeria, parts of Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo and Gabon), German East Africa (today’s Tanzania and Rwanda) and German Witu (today’s southern Kenya).

After Germany lost its colonies following defeat in the First World War, the German elite under Hitler dreamed anew of a German colonial empire in Africa. It would serve as a “tropical extension” to a Europe dominated by Germany.

In a memorandum dated July 1940, the then director of the Deutsche Bank and director of the Nazis’ Colonial Policy Office, Kurt Weigelt, summarised the war aims of the Third Reich as follows:

“Seen economically, the countries on the Guinea coast are of the highest worth. Based on our old local possession (Togo and Cameroon), the Gold Coast-Togo-Dahomey-Nigeria-Cameroon form the ideal central element of Germany’s African possessions. With well over 30 million inhabitants, this area is not only the optimum of the tropical extension but with a few exceptions (copper), provides all the nationally important economic needs of the homeland.”

He continued:

“With the inclusion of French Congo, it is completed from a forestry products perspective, whereby it also extends to the Belgian Congo, which would also meet the need for copper. On the way to this area lie the iron ore reserves of Conakry and phosphates of French Marocco (special arrangements), as well as air and marine bases at Bathurst and Dakar.”

As in the past, the new “scramble for Africa” threatens not only to bring terrible suffering to the African masses but also to intensify conflicts between the imperialist powers.

Early last week, an article in the political weekly *Die Zeit* left no doubt that the German elites are increasingly prepared to engage in confrontation with their nominal allies in order to pursue their own geo-strategic and economic interests. Under the headline “We need more Germany in Africa”, the paper asked: “Is it really enough to just contribute enough so that Paris is not annoyed? Certainly not, and there are good reasons for a stronger engagement in Africa on our own part.”

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