

German Parliament Backs New Military Intervention in Mali

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Global Research, February 01, 2016

[World Socialist Web Site](#)

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The return of German militarism is assuming ever greater dimensions. Last Wednesday, German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen declared that Germany would spend an additional €130 billion on the military by 2030. Just one day later, parliament voted by an overwhelming majority to send an additional 650 troops to Mali and increase the number of German troops in northern Iraq to 150.

According to an official German army (Bundeswehr) report, the first soldiers will arrive in their areas of deployment over the coming days. Under the heading “Quickly, effectively and securely deployed,” an official Bundeswehr web site stated that the first soldiers will be deployed to Mali at the beginning of February. From April, “the comrades from the Netherlands will be gradually withdrawn, until by June the entire unit will fulfil its role.”

By the summer, close to 1,000 German soldiers will be stationed in the geopolitically important, resource-rich country in West Africa. For two years, Germany has contributed 350 soldiers to a European Union “training mission” in the relatively quiet south, based in the capital Bamako. The troops now being sent will be part of the UN’s Minusma mission and will be deployed to the city of Gao in the more dangerous north.

A report in *Die Welt* under the revealing headline “Bundeswehr begins its ‘Afghanistan 2.0’ mission,” provides some detail on the German army’s fourth and most dangerous mission, following Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq/Syria.

Unlike the deployment of aircraft in Syria, the Bundeswehr is not intervening “from a safe distance” in Mali, *Die Welt* wrote, “but with ground troops.” What this signifies was recently indicated in a report by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, the article went on. According to this report, attacks using explosives against international troops are on the order of the day, clashes are frequent, and UN bases are often fired upon with rockets. In the estimation of the conservative newspaper, “Operation Minusma is the most dangerous UN mission worldwide; no other has registered as many attacks and casualties.”

The Bundeswehr and its European counterparts will emerge as military occupation forces. According to the text of the mandate, the Bundeswehr is explicitly allowed to employ military force to protect Bundeswehr soldiers and Minusma forces, and to use force in response to emergency situations. The units involved in the deployment are heavily armed.

Even as the debate in parliament was proceeding, soldiers of Reconnaissance Battalion 6, the Air Force’s object protection regiment, and Tank Grenadiers 41 showed off their equipment at a so-called “media day” in Eutin, Schleswig-Holstein. The show included various models of unmanned reconnaissance drones, handheld weapons of varying calibres,

and the Fennik armoured reconnaissance tank.

Prior to the vote in parliament, Von der Leyen made clear that the German troops had to prepare for a long and dangerous mission. "The north of Mali is very unstable, and the mission for our soldiers is correspondingly dangerous," she stated. "We are participating there in one of the most dangerous United Nations missions. We shouldn't underestimate that," she added.

She went on to say the government anticipated a long mission and cautioned about the need for patience. Saying the goal was to put Mali in a position where it could resist terrorism and the breakdown of the state and stand alone, she warned, "That will take time."

The claim that Western military interventions are aimed at combating terrorism and the collapse of states turns reality on its head. It was precisely the NATO-led war against Libya in 2011 that destabilised Mali. Tuareg rebels and Islamist militias that were previously engaged in Libya launched a rebellion against the government in Bamako in early 2012.

After the Malian army lost control of the north of the country following heavy fighting and a military coup in March 2012, France initiated Operation Serval with the support of the United States in early 2013 to reconquer the lost territory. The mission was described as an anti-terror mission. In reality, it was a component of the imperialist powers' efforts to re-colonise Africa.

Unlike with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the attack on Libya in 2011, Germany was a warring party from the outset. Immediately after the French intervention, the then-Christian Democratic-Free Democratic Party coalition government declared its support and made available transport aircraft for moving troops, equipment and munitions to Mali.

The latest expansion of the mission had long been prepared behind the backs of the population and is a part of the foreign policy conspiracy carried out by President Joachim Gauck and the German government. Almost exactly two years ago, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) declared at the Munich Security Conference that Germany had to be ready "to intervene earlier, more decisively and substantially in foreign and security policy." In the list of countries that German imperialism views as part of its sphere of influence, Steinmeier at the time named Syria, Ukraine, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Afghanistan and Mali.

Significantly, Von der Leyen last week linked her rearmament plans with the assertion of German great power interests in Africa and the Middle East by military means. On ARD's "Morgenmagazin" program she stated that as a country of great economic and political significance, Germany "must and will bear responsibility" in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Africa.

The speeches in the parliamentary debate on Thursday left no doubt that the Bundeswehr is intervening in Mali to defend German imperialism's economic and geopolitical interests. The foreign policy spokesman for the SPD, Niels Annen, declared to the applause of the coalition parties,

"The north is under-financed, the state structures are extremely weak,

unemployment, a lack of perspective and corruption are rampant, and also the drug trade has consolidated itself there. This contributes to the destabilisation of Mali. But if you look at the trade routes through the Sahel region and Sahara, it will quickly be realised how strategically important the north of Mali is for the entire region.”

Mali itself, he continued, was

“a country with great potential, particularly in the area of agriculture, which is not being sufficiently exploited. There are also large deficits in the education sector. I could go on. German experts can and will do important work there to help Mali further on its way.”

Agnieszka Brugger, the foreign policy spokeswoman for the Green Party, which has become one of the most aggressive war-mongering parties since its support for the bombing of Yugoslavia, declared her support for the military intervention, saying,

“After the previous German contribution to Minusma was symbolic and disappointing, existing in part only on paper, the German government has decided with the new mandate to make a substantial contribution, particularly in the area of reconnaissance, including 650 soldiers and technical capabilities such as reconnaissance drones. With that, the government is responding to the call of parliament. And we support that explicitly.”

The deputies of the Left Party fraction, the only one to vote against the intervention, did not do so as principled opponents of German militarism and imperialism, but rather as its concerned supporters. The defence policy spokeswoman for the Left Party, Christina Buchholz, who accompanied Von der Leyen to visit troops in Mali in early 2014, warned that “with the expansion of the German intervention to Gao ... the danger [exists] that the German army’s presence will be difficult to distinguish for the residents of northern Mali from the military intervention of the former colonial power, France.”

She added, “Only a third of Malians believe that Minusma is carrying out its tasks satisfactorily or to some extent,” and “many Malians are hostile to the troops and have lost all trust.”

The German government’s plan “to invest €130 billion in military rearmament over 15 years,” was, according to Buchholz, “crazy.” She warned the assembled deputies, “What you are undertaking here has nothing to do with securing peace and stability.”

Buchholz and the Left Party are increasingly concerned that German imperialism is giving up its humanitarian pretensions too quickly, and that in Mali, and especially in Germany, a movement against war will develop that they will no longer be able to control.

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