

EXIT MALI

Theses on the MINUSMA mission of the Bundeswehr in Mali



Summary of a public meeting on 25 September 2020 in Berlin

[PDF version \(en\)](#)

[Aller à la version française](#)

[German version](#)

Introduction

A representative of the '[Informationsstelle Militarisierung](#)' (IMI) and the '[Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht & Migration](#)' (FFM) informed and debated the causes, effects and motives of the annually prolonged Bundeswehr mission in Mali. There was unanimous agreement on the demand to terminate the international military mission MINUSMA and the police training mission EUTM. An extended audio recording of the event can be found at freie-radios.net (in German).

The 'Initiative gegen das EU-Grenzregime' cited high-level German politicians supporting imperialist military interventions. Amongst various reasons given, they stress the importance of foreign trade and the necessity for free trade.

'Since 2013 the Bundeswehr has been active in Mali with about 1,100 soldiers [...] the country has not been pacified, [...] but it has increasingly been militarised. (Initiative gegen das EU-Grenzregime)

Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer wrote in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 6 November 2019: 'The Federal Republic of Germany, she said, was more dependent than

any other country 'on the fact that we have free trade based on rules' and that there are 'open trade routes'.

In an interview with Deutschlandradio Kultur on 22.05.2010, the then Federal President Horst Köhler demanded that '[...] a country of our size with this orientation towards foreign trade and thus depending on foreign trade must also know that in case of doubt, in an emergency, military action is also necessary to protect our interests, for example free trade routes, for example to prevent entire regional instabilities [...].'

'We should do something about this mission of the German Armed Forces, the German and European imperialism in Mali, we should become active ...' (IMI)

Military foreign assignments becoming normal

Christoph Marischka gave a brief outline of the European and especially German military policy abroad, in particular in Northern Africa, listing officially formulated strategic goals of Germany and the Bundeswehr and numerous examples of how these goals have been pursued successively. Since 1999 at the latest, Germany has been involved in wars abroad not only with weapons and capital, but also with her own troops. In 1999, the EU formulated a common foreign and military policy ('A secure Europe in a better world'). The first European military missions were launched in 2003. Examples are military missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea-Bissau. The first military missions were training missions since a military power hinges on missions to prove herself and analyse experiences. Almost all of these missions have taken place on the African continent.

'The independent EU military operations, the independent 'EU defence policy', they chose that continent. Also because there is no strategic opponent in terms of Russia or China claiming military dominance.' (IMI)

The argument of 'failing statehood' as catch-all

From 2003 onwards, the EU outlined a global approach to intervention under the slogan 'A secure Europe in a better world'. Bilateral military conflicts are no longer the central focus of military strategists. However, intervention should take place where 'failing statehood' is at stake. The model for 'statehood', alas, that's the European model. The purported goals are to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, prevent migration, prevent terrorism, etc. These are regarded as threats to Europe and therefore lie in the self-interest of Europe.

'[...] after two world wars, which Germany had launched and lost, she initially didn't have any army at all and was only allowed to rebuild it in a very limited scale, integrated strictly in NATO, as a NATO defence army or NATO army. Things like strategic air transport, meaning that you could send troops to West Africa or to Afghanistan, the German Bundeswehr did not have the capacity and was not allowed to have it. (IMI)

West and North Africa targetted

The approach of creating a European-style statehood in the Sahel states is absurd simply because these states are two to four times larger than Germany, their population is about a quarter of size of Germany and the gross domestic product of the states is 300 times lower than in Germany.




Germany's border in the Sahel

Migration and trade are passing through the Sahel region. Frontex and other European programmes are no longer working as border management agencies but are analysing and obstructing migration opportunities in the preliminary area. For the European public, the externalisation of borders is no longer a no-go.

'Then, it is relatively obvious that such a [European] form of statehood is hardly feasible in the [Sahel] countries, over all it cannot be financed. ... This idea of a comprehensive military presence, which ... can provide security, is ... crazy. Or even borders of such dimensions as those running through the desert in the most remote regions – how are they supposed to be controlled?

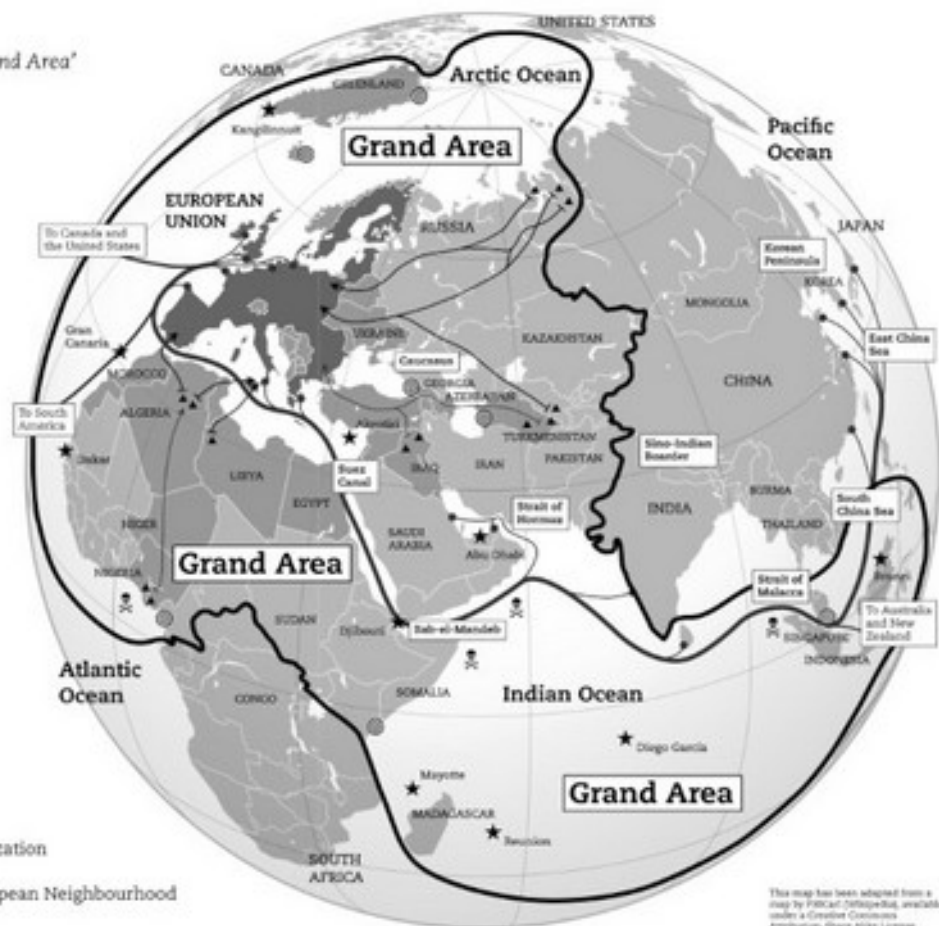
Map 1

The European Union and the 'Grand Area'

-  Maritime communication line with spur and port
-  Gas transmission pipeline with flow direction
-  Planned gas transmission pipeline with flow direction

 Strategic flashpoint or strategic chokepoint

-  Gas producing region
-  Pirate infestation
-  European military station
-  Suggested European military station
-  Countries in an extended European Neighbourhood



This map has been adapted from a map by PIRCE/DefenceMap, available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License.

<https://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2013/09/ep42.pdf>

Geostrategic competition: Establishing a 'Strategic Autonomy'

Competition between power blocs, especially those of the USA, China and Europe, led by France and Germany, also plays a role.

Since 2010, and at the latest since 2014, the concept of 'strategic autonomy' has been prevalent. Geo-strategists have defined an area called 'Grand Area', which includes all strategically important raw materials and relevant trade routes, taking into account existing French military bases.



https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2020_952_e.pdf

Escalation of violence—in European interest?

2011 was an important year for North Africa. NATO has bombed Libya and killed or disempowered its leaders. France also imposed a regime change in Côte d'Ivoire, and South Sudan was seceded from Sudan. The subsequent destabilisation of the Sahel region was foreseeable and, in this respect, at least taken into account. As early as 2010, the Malian state, supported by the European Union, tried to restore the presence of state institutions in northern Mali (police and military posts and a prison). The EU supported a 'state building' in that area, which escalated existing conflicts with Tuareg seeking autonomy. The intervention of the French army in early 2013 was not prepared shortly beforehand. It was at least coordinated between Germany and France. The 'technological high-value capabilities' (re-

connaissance, command structure, communication structure, logistics) for MINUSMA are provided by the Bundeswehr. Germany provided the necessary strategic air support (supply, evacuation, air-to-air refuelling of fighter jets).

Mission	Mandate	Location	Dates	Personnel Deployed	African Troops Deployed/ Trained	Annual Budget (\$ mil)
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)	UN Ch. VII Peace Operations	Mali	2013-present	15,900	8,250	1,070
G5 Sahel Joint Force	UN endorsed/ AU endorsed	G5 Sahel countries	2017-present	5,000	5,000	130
Operation Barkhane (France)	UN endorsed	Sahel	2014-present	4,500	n/a	797
EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM)	EU military training mission	Mali	2013-present	580	12,000	34
EU Capacity Building Mission in the Sahel (EUCAP Mali)	EU civilian capacity building mission	Mali	2015-present	140	6,000	38
EU Capacity Building Mission in the Sahel (EUCAP Niger)	EU civilian capacity building mission	Niger	2012-present	200	13,000	36

<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/review-regional-security-efforts-sahel/>

Military consolidation of the EU in the Sahel

The European Training Mission (EUTM): With up to 450 soldiers, the Bundeswehr is massively involved in the European Training Mission (EUTM). At the beginning of 2020, EUTM was extended to Mauritania, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso. These so-called G5 Sahel states were now to form a joint intervention force, fighting under the command and air support of France rather than under the control of the sending states.

The EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali): The police, gendarmerie and border guards also have the function of curtailing migration routes.

The air force is increasingly operating military bases in the Sahel states. A new Franco-German air base in Niamey (Niger) will ensure the supply of German Bundeswehr units and French anti-terrorist forces. In addition, the use of the German air base near Dakar (Senegal) has been stabilised.

The 'Refugee and Migration Research Society' (FFM) analyses the social contexts of migration and the interactions between the militarisation of Mali promoted by the EU and local social movements. The EU's position around 2000 was to establish a stable cordon in its southern neighbourhood that would make the Mediterranean safe and establish a relationship between a European centre and peripheral states in North Africa.

[Germany and France trained G5 special forces,] 'which are often less under the control of their respective governments but actually more like henchmen of the 'French Foreign Legion'. (IMI)

'Often, we are made to believe the difference between benign MINUSMA securing peace and evil French engaged in post-colonial or re-colonial anti-terrorist wars – that theses simply cannot be maintained'. (IMI)

'The security cordon of Europe was smashed' (FFM)

The EU migration policy became obsolete in 2011 due to the 'Arabellion' and the bombing of Libya. Firstly, the Arabellion as a social awakening brought about migration. Furthermore, the bombing of Libya had the effect that migration to Libya became increasingly difficult and that migrants residing in Libya had to go to Europe. Both the uprisings and the military responses to them increased the motivation for migration across the sea.

Migration defence in the Sahel – Europe's answer to the Arabellion

The EU therefore had to change its approach to migration in the Sahel. As a result of the major migration movements to Europe in 2015, the Sahel states—especially Niger—were forced to close and militarise their borders. However, most of the border technology supplied by the EU is not yet operational. There is a lack of electricity or of technical equipment for vehicles.

The new centre of the Nigerian Border Police in the capital Niamey, which opened in September 2020, was financed by the USA and equipped by the EU with electronic equipment, software and hardware for detection technology and databases.



Opening ceremony of the Nigerien Border Police Centre on 15/09/2020

The situation after the coup in Bamako

The head of the putschists, Goita, sought advice from former president Moussa Traoré shortly after the coup. During his reign from 1968 to 1991, Mali had opened up to the West. The current interim president Bah Ndaw was a close confidant of Traoré. Traoré died in September 2020.

On the geography and political situation in Mali

Mali is an extremely heterogeneous entity. Bamako with about 2 million inhabitants is located far in the south-west, Mali has a total of about 20 million inhabitants. The north is very sparsely populated (among others by Tuareg). In the centre of Mali, especially in the region around Mopti, unrest is currently taking place, which is referred to as jihadism. The vast majority of state institutions have withdrawn to Bamako or to the capitals of the provinces, so they are not represented in the more remote areas of the country.



<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/review-regional-security-efforts-sahel/>

Foreign NGOs co-governing

There has been a kind of dual rule in Mali, especially since the famines of the 1970s, because since then a great many NGOs have gone to Mali, and they also serve as advisors in the ministries. That is a democratic problem on the one hand but above all it has led to a dualism between NGOs and Malian representatives, which establishes a specific form of governance.

The state is one of several competing forces (jihadists, ethnicised militias, Malian military, international troops) on the borders between the Sahel countries. The coup will not change this situation. These forces have economic interests in border controls or political motives.

'The question arises ... whether the organisation ... of these spaces of violence is something that is taken as a permanent state of affairs for the European situation. (FFM)

'The EU needs ... militarised states in the Sahel to close their borders. The aim is to penetrate the whole area militarily. (FFM)

The war as a permanent source of income

- Neither the military nor politics in Mali have any interest in ending the war. In northern Mali, peace talks are blocked, partly in the state's interest in perpetuating the war, because otherwise they would lose financial resources.
- Neighbouring countries have no interest in ending the war either, because they sell military services, mainly through the pay of the military personnel deployed (G5 and MINUSMA).
- In Bamako, some families earn money from the war by sending family members to the military or one of the NGOs.

MINUSMA thus creates jobs. In addition, MINUSMA transports petrol and diesel, and the delivery of fuel is a key factor in MINUSMA's acceptance.

Capitalist valorisation of the country as a cause of unrest?

Particularly in the countryside, insecurity and displacement may be a factor in land being depopulated. Both the peasant population (e.g. Dogon) and the Peul (Fulani, pastoralist populations) are displaced, live in refugee camps, the land is set free and cattle farms or new gold mines emerge. The war is thus a means to monetise land because the displaced persons can no longer claim their property rights. Agriculture is supposed to be made possible according to capitalist principles.

Example: Extension of the Office du Niger¹

Existing villages are increasingly squeezed from the north by the spread of the desert and from the south by agriculture. The land in the Office du Niger is largely cultivated by farming family groups. The income from the cultivation of cash crops on the irrigated land is barely enough for a livelihood. However, the state favours large agribusinesses, such as the cultivation of sugar or plants for biodiesel production. The consequence is direct or indirect displacement.

Another example of displacement can be found in the Mopti region. The villages are shrinking to a smaller area because they are afraid of militias and only farm in the immediate vicinity.

' ... when talking about jihadists, these are ... modified youth gangs, but under the guidance of experienced jihadist leaders, some of whom have immigrated from Algeria.'



Often, these are young people whose families have themselves been victims of such violent situations and who take it as a matter of honour or revenge to go to the militias for a while. Preventing migration also plays a role here. The population of Mali is very young. Migration of these young people has always taken place, in the 1960s to Côte d'Ivoire, in the 1990s and 2000s to Libya, to the capital Bamako or the towns of their provinces in any case. In the current narrowing of possibilities, the alternative is to join militias. Primarily, they are not jihadists who devote themselves to religious struggle, and the young men are usually not particularly religious either. They do this for a while, earn some money and gain experience, and then return to their villages. The militias are ethnicised, the Fulani youth tend to join jihadist militias. The Dogon peasant youth have a tendency to join ethnic militias.

In the traditional villages, a strict paternalism (rule of men over women, rule of family tradition) still existed 20 years ago. The departure of young people from these villages is an essential factor of change. Traditional migration has meant and still means remittances of money and the transport of new experiences.

Mali is a very mobile society, which is very limited at present. The restriction of mobility contributes to social conflicts in a confined space, which contributes to violence.

'Where can these young people go? Is it possible to gain experience, earn money for a while... and escape these patriarchal structures? This applies not only to the young men but also to the young women.' (FFM)

'If there is now a means of combating this violent situation ... then it seems to me that the most important thing is ... to facilitate this migration, to open the borders ... and not to fuel this violence with more military.' (FFM)

What political perspectives do you see for Mali?

FFM: There are different perspectives regionally and between the classes and populations of Mali.

Around and in the capital Bamako there is a comparatively small group close to the ruling political class that does not represent any representative positions. This group seeks income and it manoeuvres between government jobs and NGOs. They are incapable of building a nationwide consensus.

In the periphery, which is inhabited by the majority of Mali's population, broad sections of the population are in resistance to the state authorities, who face them primarily as corrupt mayors, tax collectors and security forces.

A solution to the manifold conflicts is not possible through the state and the military—if it is it will be through demilitarisation, local negotiated solutions and freedom of movement. But there are many interests at stake, not least the interests of the EU.

What other examples of military intervention by Germany or other EU states do you see?²

IMI: E.g. in the Great Lakes region in Africa motivated by the presence of strategically important raw materials. Mali is seen rather as the 'backyard' of the EU or Germany. Another motive for prolonged military operations are the German or French troops themselves. They have an interest in perpetuating the operations in order to prevent the feeling and revelation of a loss of control in the region.

How do you assess the military situation after the coup on 18 August? Is it right that under the military council, there is increased action against jihadist groups in the north?

IMI: The IMI does not at present have a sound assessment. The tone of the coup d'état bodes well for 'unity of the country' and 'partnership with France and the EU'. The ability to act, especially the military ability to act in offensive projects against jihadist militias in the north remains doubtful in view of the geographical conditions, among other things. The Military Council has so far shown no signs of negotiation or reconciliation with the parties to the conflict.

FFM: It is very good to have a representative of AEI speaking. Of course, the vote of the people in Mali is decisive, but even AEI with its good connections to Mali can only see certain segments. FFM is concerned that the Malian military cannot represent the interests of the people of the Sahel states. MINUSMA finances the armies of Mali, Niger, Chad and the political class in Bamako. MINUSMA and some political classes are causing the borders to close. However, the ECOWAS states as a whole have an interest in free migration and trade routes. To this extent, there should be a conflict of interest between the Military Council and MINUSMA on the one hand and the majority of the population on the other. FFM does not see that the Military Council has an interest in negotiations in northern Mali.

How do you see the perspectives of the people in Mali and the consequences if MINUSMA would leave Mali?

IMI: 'I cannot terminate MINUSMA. But I demand that the Bundeswehr shall be withdrawn. I believe that in a less militarised Mali you are more likely to hear the 'voices of others'. At the moment only armed groups and the M5-RFP are articulating themselves. A comparison with Afghanistan is possible. There, after 20 years of military intervention with enormous commitment of personnel and money, nothing has improved yet. The Taliban have become stronger, opium cultivation has expanded, and

the security situation is catastrophic (in the countryside). Only recently have there been slight improvements—through negotiations.

FFM: MINUSMA should be ended, because it is not in the interest of the social groups in Mali to keep the restrictions of movement and the borders closed.

Ini against the EU border regime: MINUSMA does not have the official function of protecting the population, but is intended to protect the Malian military. Reference to statement by Nigerian journalist Moussa Tchangari: 'The population has two problems—corrupt governments and foreign military forces.'

FFM: Without Fortress Europe, MINUSMA would not have existed. We should abolish Fortress Europe and allow migration.

What are the economic interests (other than the militarisation of the region) of the governments of Germany and other states?

IMI: Refers to the illustration of the Egmont Institute 'Grand Area'. It is also about the general 'control policy' in the region. Imperialism can also be understood as the idea of keeping other powers out of the region. There are some strategically important raw materials for the own economy in the whole region: gold, rare earths, uranium. Although uranium mining in the region has declined sharply and prices have also fallen, for France, uranium remains a raw material of first priority. It is a 'hotchpotch of interests'. One of the examples is *Desertec*, a foundation with the aim of raising funds for extremely large solar plants.

FFM: Capitalism needs gold, uranium etc. But it does not need a large number of people. FFM would not favour an economic definition of imperialism. Instead, imperialism is a killing machine.

Contribution of a representative of AEI: The theses about the respective interests should be communicated to the people in the Sahel and in Mali, because it is important that the opinions of the people concerned are taken seriously. For example, the role of MINUSMA as a necessary backup for Operation Barkhane is largely unknown in the region. The effort to start a transnational discussion on this may be worthwhile. Transnational protests against deportations from Europe to the Sahel states have been successful in the past.

Further links

For listening (excerpts): freie-radios.net

[Initiative against the EU border regime in Africa](#)

[Informationsstelle Militarisierung / Information Centre on Militarisation](#)

[Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht und Migration / Research Society for Flight & Migration](#)

Further reading: information portal *migration control*: <https://migration-control.info/>

Berlin, November 2020

-
1. Large former colonial irrigation project from the 1930s.

2. Question by a representative of the Mali-AG of Afrique-europe-interact (AEI), <https://afrique-europe-interact.net>