

# Germany - Linking Military Deployments in Africa to National Security

This text is a part of the FOI report *Foreign military bases and installations in Africa*. Twelve state actors are included in the report: China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, Spain, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and United States.

**Germany's military presence in Africa is linked to its increasing military engagement in multinational operations there. In Niamey, the capital of Niger, Germany has established an air transport base, which provides operations and logistics support to its contingents in international missions in Mali. In addition, Germany has a small military presence in Djibouti, which provides operations and logistics support to the EU anti-piracy mission along the Somalian coast. The German contingent in Djibouti operates out of the French naval air base. The main reasons behind the engagement in Sahel are fighting terrorism and preventing illegal migration. The purpose of the military engagement in Djibouti is to secure shipping lanes in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean, a mission that conforms to Germany's national security interests.**

## **SAHEL – FIGHTING TERRORISM AND PREVENTING ILLEGAL MIGRATION**

Having previously focused on development cooperation in its relations with African countries, Germany's increasing political and military engagement in Sahel since 2014 has been labelled a 'turn to Africa'. This new level of engagement can be explained by the willingness of Angela Merkel's third coalition government, which entered into office in December 2013, to assume increased international responsibility. This coincided with the eruption in Mali of a complex crisis on Europe's doorstep. In early 2014, the German government developed new federal guidelines on Africa, linking development to security and promoting a whole-of-government approach to its engagement there.

The major shift in Germany's Africa policy was a result of the refugee crisis in 2015. Although the majority of refugees came from Syria and Iraq, the German

government argued that African migration was a challenge that required Germany to pay more attention to the continent. During a visit to Niger in October 2016, Merkel promised economic support, as well as military advice and vehicles, to help Niger fight militant Islamists and human trafficking. In 2017, in launching a comprehensive strategy on Africa – A Marshall Plan with Africa – the German development minister said that fighting poverty in Africa is not only a moral obligation, but also in the self-interest of wealthy countries such as Germany. The need to prevent illegal migration remains high on the political agenda in Germany. The updated federal guidelines on Africa, launched in March 2019 by Merkel's fourth coalition government, state that managing and shaping migration is one of five core objectives of Germany's engagement on the continent.

## **An air transport base with a focus on logistics support**

Germany has provided logistics support to international missions in Mali since 2013. Its transport aircraft operated out of the French air base in Dakar, Senegal; they originally supported the African Union and subsequently the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA). In 2016, apace with the growth in Germany's contribution to MINUSMA, it established its own air transport base (in German, *Lufttransportstützpunktes*) at a French air base closer to Mali, and adjacent to the international airport in Niamey, Niger.

## *Support to international missions in Mali*

Today, Germany's air transport base in Niamey continues to support its military presence in Mali, serving as a hub for material and personnel transport and for medical evacuations for the German contingents to the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) and MINUSMA.

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According to the latter's mandate, Germany can also perform air-to-air refuelling in support of the international missions in Mali.

MINUSMA's main tasks are to support the implementation of the Algiers peace agreement: this includes the restoration of state authority and the rule of law in the centre and north of Mali, and the protection of civilians and stabilisation of key population centres. In the wake of the Paris terrorist attacks, Germany expanded its role in MINUSMA. In 2016, it decided to support the Dutch contingent on the ground in northern Mali, focusing on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). In March 2017, German NH-90 transport helicopters and Tiger attack helicopters replaced the Dutch helicopters based in Gao, and in December of the same year, Germany took over the management of the UN camp in Gao. In 2018, the ceiling for the number of German troops in MINUSMA was raised to 1,100. More staff were said to be needed to maintain and repair the vehicle pool, manage the camp in Gao, and man the air transport base in Niger. However, in the summer of 2018, Germany's helicopters were replaced by those of other troop-contributing countries.

EUTM Mali, located in Bamako and Koulikoro, in the southern part of the country, is tasked to advise the Malian Ministry of Defence and train both the Malian Armed Forces and the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Germany has contributed to EUTM since its launch in February 2013. While the German contingent focuses on military training in the fields of engineering, logistics, and infantry, it also contributes a field hospital for the mission and regularly provides the EUTM mission leadership. In 2018, the ceiling for the number of German troops in EUTM was raised to 350. This was due to the fact that in November 2018 Germany took over the leadership of EUTM and that, as the training was expanded to include soldiers of the G5 Sahel Joint Force and would be carried out in several locations in Mali, more force protection was needed.

The German contribution to the missions in Mali totalled 1,053 soldiers in December 2018, which, at the time, made it Germany's second largest international deployment, outranked only by the number of its soldiers in Afghanistan. In April 2019, the mandates for the contribution of the German Armed Forces to these missions were renewed for another year, maintaining the same ceilings of German troop numbers.

#### *Bilateral support*

The air transport base in Niamey also plays a role in Germany's bilateral military support in the region, which includes the appointment of bilateral defence attachés to an increasing number of countries in the Sahel. Germany has also increased its bilateral support to Mali and Niger through the German Enable and Enhance Initiative, launched in 2014 and managed jointly by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence. Through this initiative, Germany is supporting projects that aim to strengthen local security services in Mali and Niger. This includes improving facilities at local military installations, such as airports, and providing military advice and vehicles to the armed forces of Niger.

#### *Support to European partners*

Another reason behind Germany's engagement in Sahel has been to support its key European partners, France and the Netherlands. As described above, the German contingent in MINUSMA has over time relieved the Dutch Armed Forces and taken over their tasks. The German deployment to Sahel has also been a way to enhance its relationship with France. The German air transport base in Niamey also provides logistics support to France's Operation Barkhane. The two countries, furthermore, coordinate the military capacity-building support to the regional G5 Sahel Joint Force. In addition, elements of the Franco-German brigade are regularly deployed to Mali. However, the German elements

mainly engage in capacity-building, reconnaissance, and logistics support within the framework of MINUSMA, while the French elements are assigned to Barkhane and to conducting direct military operations. Even though these contributions may be seen as complementary, they underline the difference between the French and German approaches to international operations.

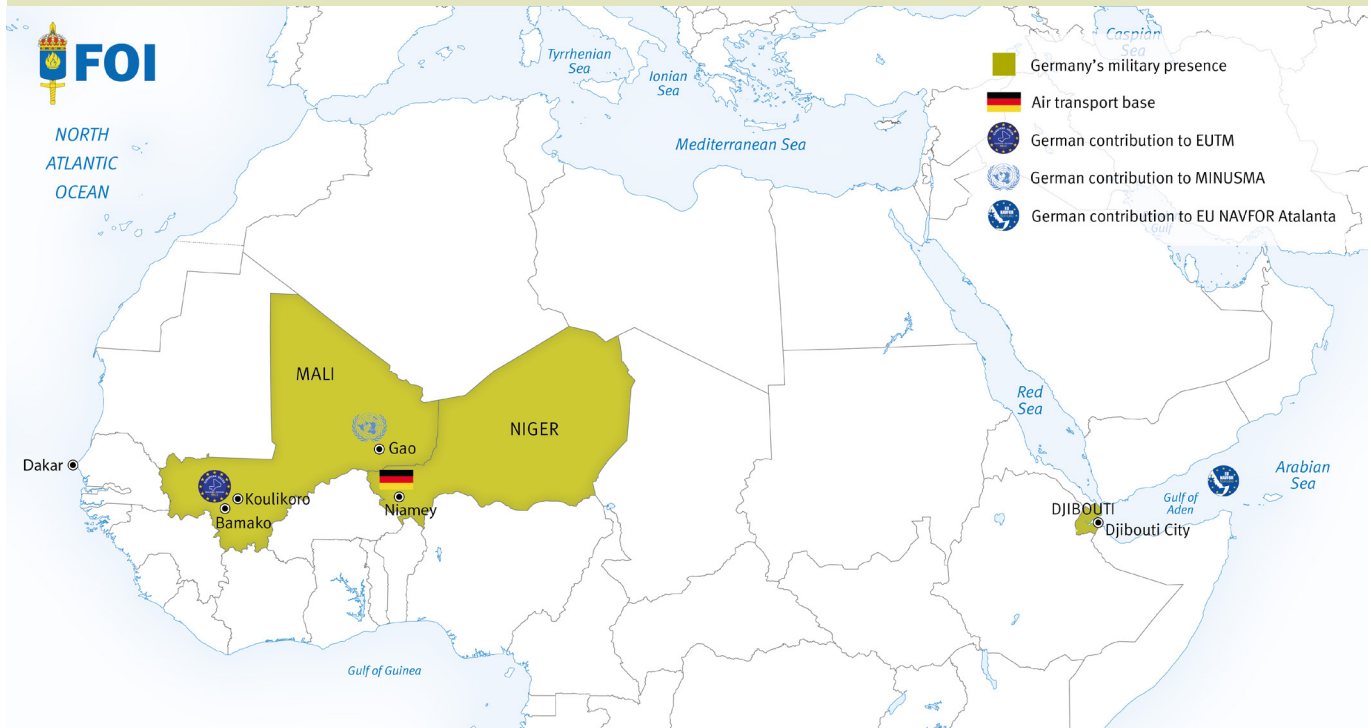
#### **DJIBOUTI – SECURING SHIPPING LANES IN THE HORN OF AFRICA**

In addition to Sahel, Germany has established a military presence at the French naval airbase in Djibouti. Since 2008, Germany has engaged in the EU Naval Force ATALANTA (EU NAVFOR), with the aim of protecting shipping traffic from piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Germany has been one of the main European contributors and has during some periods provided the

“Germany and Europe have an interest to save people's lives, to limit the effects of climate change and avoid ‘climate refugees’, to prevent mass migration and to help create a future for Africa's youth.”

German development minister  
Gerd Müller, 2018

## Assessment of German military presence in Africa



Sources: Bundeswehr (2018), Bundesministerium der Verteidigung (2018), German Federal Foreign Office (2019).

mission leadership. Ensuring prosperity through a strong German economy and free and unimpeded world trade is, according to the 2016 defence white paper, in Germany's national interest.

Since August 2016, Germany has not deployed any naval ships to EU NAVFOR. However, two times a year, between monsoon periods, Germany deploys a P-3C Orion Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircraft. The German aircraft operates out of the French naval air base in Djibouti. In addition, Germany staffs the EU NAVFOR's support element, which provides logistics support to the mission. In December 2018, the German contribution to EU NAVFOR amounted to 72 soldiers. In April 2019, amidst the return of piracy and the ongoing conflicts in Yemen and the Gulf States, the German Armed Forces' mandate for EU NAVFOR was prolonged, at the same level of engagement, for another year. According to German officials, it is also desirable to maintain a footprint in Djibouti between deployments, in order to facilitate new rotations. Djibouti is also considered to be a location of increasingly strategic importance.

### GERMANY LIKELY TO REMAIN IN AFRICA IN THE LONG RUN

Germany does not have a comprehensive strategy for its military engagement in Africa. Considering the shift of focus towards territorial and collective defence and the frequent reports of materiel and personnel shortcomings in

the German Armed Forces, the prospects for substantially increasing the German footprint in Africa are limited. However, there are no defined time limits for the ongoing German contributions to multinational operations on the continent and they tend to last longer than originally planned. The German armed forces have a tradition of taking a larger responsibility for stabilisation operations once those engaged in direct warfighting have left. As one German defence journalist noted, 'Mali could well turn out to be the next Afghanistan mission'. The migration issue is also likely to remain high on the German government's agenda, which may motivate a continued military engagement in Africa.

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