

GERMANY'S STRATEGIC ACTIVITY IN THE SAHEL AND THE PROBLEM OF SOVEREIGNTY FOR REGIONAL STATES: THE CASE OF MALI

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Abstract. Using Mali as an example of a geostrategically important African state, the article explores the extent to which Germany's political and military steps contributed or did not contribute to the sovereignty of the state that was trying to overcome the instability. Taking into account the ambiguous issue of the completeness of the sovereignty of Germany itself, the author analyzes the FRG's fundamental ability to transfer its experience in this field to other states. In the second half of the 2010s, the scope and effectiveness of German efforts to stabilize the situation in Mali were insufficient. Germany, especially in the first stages of the settlement (from 2013 to 2015), did not make a noticeable contribution to peacemaking and peacekeeping activities. The use of the Bundeswehr in the field became noticeable only from 2016–2018; however, it did not lead to the necessary results. By the mid-2010s, Germany had already begun to take an active part in the security sector reform in Mali. However, the qualitative and quantitative parameters of the newly trained personnel of the Malian army were insufficient to ensure peace and security in the country. Having accepted the functions of one of the main external participants in the settlement, Germany did not accompany this with the necessary efforts. In addition, Germany was not ready to ensure efficiently the nationalization of the settlement, that is, to transfer control over the process to those internal forces that were capable of leading the country to peace.

The incomplete resolution of the armed conflict and its degradation since the end of the 2010s have manifested the regress of Mali's gaining sovereignty. Therefore, the Malian militaries, since 2020–2021, have been trying to realize another scenario without the built-in participation of Western democracies. The paper explores the perception by the new Malian powers of the German military presence in the country.

Keywords: formal sovereignty, Mali, Germany, armed conflicts, resolution, regulation, strategic influence, diplomacy, Bundeswehr

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In the early 2020s, Germany was faced with the risk of the collapse of its strategic positions in rather important regions. Trying to prevent this scenario, it has intensified its efforts, including the diverse use of military tools. The most large-scale and ambitious steps have been taken by Germany in the context of the deterrence of “Russia's threat”

(which, in the author's opinion, never existed). This policy includes steps against Russia in the zone of Special Military Operation. By 2024, Germany was the second-largest supplier of weapons and military equipment to Kyiv among "Western democracies" and played one of the major roles in training the personnel of the armed forces of Ukraine on the territory of the EU¹. Also, Germany has been increasing its contribution to the NATO forces, primarily in the foremost part of the alliance's zone of responsibility. Many of the commitments were made by Germany with consideration of the planned expansion of the Bundeswehr, but, given its current capabilities, are difficult to implement at present.

Germany's growing military and strategic attention to the area close to the Euro-Atlantic community had sharply reduced its military opportunities in other key directions. The decision of Joe Biden's administration to implement the "deal"² with the Taliban*³ on February 29, 2020, forced Germany in 2021 to urgently withdraw troops from Afghanistan and cut down its political influence there [Novikova 2022]. Simultaneously with a considerable loss of foothold in the Central Asia, Germany was also faced with the degradation of its strategic positions in the Middle East [Timofeev, Khorolskaya 2022, p. 146-149] and the Sahara-Sahel region [Trunov 2022]. In the Middle East, its presence was rather diversified functionally (the number of missions with the Bundeswehr's participation, their profile) and especially geographically (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, also in Syrian airspace until 2022). This constituted a certain "safeguard". In the Sahara-Sahel region, the number of the Bundeswehr's personnel was larger (up to 1,5 thousand soldiers^{4,5} compared to less than 0,8 thousand in the Middle East^{6,7}), especially the number of instructors, military advisers and ground troops, the latter being in practice the most effective components of the military.

The main efforts of Germany were focused on two missions. The first one was a multidimensional peacekeeping mission called MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; the key goal was to maintain peace and order in the north of the country, which had previously been embroiled in an insurgency by anti-government combatants). The second one was military training mission EUTM Mali (the EU mission that was responsible for training the Malian army). Both missions (that is, all the troops of MINUSMA and the majority of forces of EUTM Mali) were operating only in Mali. This made the entire system of Germany's strategic presence in the Sahel dependent significantly on the situation in Mali. Germany tried to solve partly

¹ So unterstützt Deutschland die Ukraine. *Bundeskanzleramt*. 2024. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/schwerpunkte/krieg-in-der-ukraine/deutschland-hilft-der-ukraine-2160274> (accessed: 24.02.2024)

² The U.S. and Taliban* signed an agreement on peace and withdrawal of American troops. *RBC*. 29.02.2020. <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/29/02/2020/5e5a6a739a79473d7a4e112e?ysclid=lube2cj1e4280406206> (accessed: 12.06.2024)

³ The Taliban movement is recognized as extremist and is banned in the Russian Federation.

⁴ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Militärmission der Europäischen Union als Beitrag zur Ausbildung der malischen Streitkräfte (EUTM Mali). *Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 19/19002, 6.05.2020. S. 3.

⁵ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission der Vereinten Nationen in Mali (MINUSMA). *Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 19/19004, 6.05.2020. S. 3.

⁶ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung des Einsatzes bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte – Stabilisierung sichern, Wiedererstarben des IS verhindern, Versöhnung fördern in Irak und Syrien. *Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 19/22207, 9.09.2020. S. 5.

⁷ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). *Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 19/19003, 6.05.2020. S. 4.

the problem by diversifying political contacts with Burkina Faso⁸ and political and military contacts with Niger⁹.

There was a more difficult but also more effective scenario. The way was to improve the effectiveness of the armed conflict resolution efforts in Mali. But Germany was not willing or able to implement it. As a result, the “bottleneck” remained. The Malian military came to power in August, 2020 and then in May, 2021. The first time, the representation of the military in the government was partial, but it has become full the second time. These events were strongly connected with the degradation of the resolution process and the growing critical attitude of Malian society toward the German presence, especially the military one.

A comparison of the situation with the loss of strategic positions in Mali by France (as the former metropole) and Germany is illustrative. Tactically, Berlin had managed to maintain the basis of its presence longer than Paris (up until 2024 and 2022, respectively [Davidchuk, Degterev, Sidibe 2022; Sidorov 2022; Philippov 2022]). But strategically, Germany was also forced to cut down on its military and political presence. The details were different for the two countries. The reaction of French President Emmanuel Macron in 2021 was rather emotional (“Based on the results of our consultations, we will begin a deep transformation of our military presence in the Sahel countries”¹⁰). The position of the leadership of the German Ministry of Defense was more restrained and confined to the fact of stating the withdrawal of troops¹¹. Also, Bundestag approved in May, 2023, the *last* extension of the annual mandate for the Bundeswehr contingent in *MINUSMA*¹². In fact, this was the first time this formulation was used in similar parliamentary documents of the Federal Republic of Germany. Upon coming to power, the military in Mali, as well as in Burkina Faso (in January, 2022) and Niger (in July, 2023), quite harshly and openly condemned official Paris for interfering in the internal affairs of the African countries and insisted on the immediate withdrawal of French troops from their territory [Davidchuk, Degterev, Sidibe 2022; Sidorov 2022; Philippov 2022]). Similar criticism of Berlin was absent or narrowly targeted. But Germany was also encouraged to withdraw the troops from the countries where the Bundeswehr was present. In fact, in 2023 Germany’s forces in Mali (ground troops, special support troops, instructors and advisers) were about 1,4 thousand troops¹³. In a year, by 2024, its presence was reduced 10 times¹⁴ with the prospect of complete withdrawal within a few months.

⁸ Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem Präsidenten der Republik Burkina Faso, Roch Marc Kaboré. *Bundeskanzleramt*. 21.02.2019. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-dem-praesidenten-der-republik-burkina-faso-roch-marc-kaboré-1582980> (accessed: 24.02.2024)

⁹ Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem Präsidenten von Niger, Issoufou in Niamey. *Bundeskanzleramt*. 02.05.2019. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-dem-praesidenten-von-niger-issoufou-1605308> (accessed: 24.02.2024)

¹⁰ Macron said that France is ending Operation Barkhane in the Sahel. *Izvestija*. 10.06.2021. (In Russ.). <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/11622173> (accessed: 24.02.2024)

¹¹ Die Bundeswehr in Mali – zehn Jahre Einsatzgeschichte in Bildern. *BMVg*. 2024. <https://bundeswehr.de/de/aktuelles/meldungen/darum-zieht-die-bundeswehr-aus-mali-ab/bundeswehr-mali-chronik> (accessed: 24.02.2024).

¹² Antrag der Bundesregierung. Letztmalige Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission der Vereinten Nationen in Mali (MINUSMA). *Deutscher Bundestag*, 20. *Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 20/6655, 03.05.2023. 8 S.

¹³ *Ibid*, S. 3–5.

¹⁴ Anzahl der an internationalen Einsätzen beteiligten deutschen Soldaten der Bundeswehr. *Statista.de*. 29.01.2024. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/72703/umfrage/anzahl-der-soldaten-der-bundeswehr-im-ausland/> (accessed: 24.02.2024)

Therefore, a question arises about Germany's actual approach to strengthening the sovereignty of Mali as one of the countries in the Sahara-Sahel region. Finding an answer to this question is the goal of this paper.

Russian and foreign experts, in the late 2010s and early 2020s, paid increasing attention to the military presence of Western countries in Mali and in the Sahara-Sahel region as a whole. The key focus was on France, as the former metropole and the actor that was traditionally rather active in the region [Davidchuk, Degterev, Sidibe 2022; Klute 2023; Sidorov 2020; Sidorov 2022; Philippov 2020; Philippov 2022; Philippov 2023]. Germany's activity was studied on a much smaller scale [Mirzekhanov, Trunov 2020; Tull 2023]. The accents had been placed similarly in the works on neocolonialism and modern decolonization, which explored the degree of sovereignty of African countries in this context [Abramova, Fituni 2023]. France and, to a lesser extent, the US and the UK have been identified as key state actors with influence on the situation. Germany has also been undeservedly neglected in this regard. The present paper attempts to partially fill up this gap. Methodically, the author relied on the concept of real sovereignty, which was basically developed by A.A. Kokoshin [Kokoshin 2006; Krasner 1999], and the theoretical concepts of neocolonialism and modern decolonization of Russian scientists on Africa, first of all, D.A. Degterev [Degterev 2023].

ON THE QUESTION OF GERMANY'S ABILITY TO TRANSFER EXPERIENCE IN REAL SOVEREIGNIZATION

First of all, it is necessary to find out to what extent the concept of "sovereignty", or, more precisely, "real sovereignty", is applicable to the foreign policy of Germany itself. The completeness of its sovereignty is more than debatable. The majority of the states/forms of the states (Prussia, the Second Reich, the Third Reich), which successively replaced each other on the German lands, were stressing their sovereignty and demonstrating it in practice, primarily by strengthening the national military and using it in combat. This tendency reached its peak during the Nazi period. The Federal Republic of Germany, which positions itself and is positioned by the "Western democracies" as the antipode of the Third Reich, is organically integrated into the Euro-Atlantic community (de jure, on an indefinite basis). Consequently, Germany has been "dissolving" the absolute majority of its practical steps in multilateral joint efforts with "liberal democracies" as its partners.

In its most complete form, this applied to the military sphere, to a somewhat lesser degree, to the political. "Western democracies", primarily, the most powerful ones (the USA, the UK, France), provided built-in and de jure organic control over the foreign and especially military policy of Germany. This provision applied not only to the Bonn Republic, but also to the Berlin Republic (since 1999). The Two Plus Four Agreement on September 12, 1990¹⁵, fixed the formula for the sovereignization of Germany. But, in reality, that was rather formal and incomplete sovereignty. That is why FRG can hardly fully transfer the experience of achieving and maintaining this condition and an internal sense of self-sufficiency to another state. More likely, the FRG will try to encourage its counterpart to possess only formal, limited sovereignty in conjunction with close

¹⁵ The Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, also known as the 2+4 Treaty, was signed on September 12, 1990, in Moscow. The provisions were the consent of the former Victorious powers to renounce occupation rights in relation to Germany, to the unification of the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR into a single state under the Federal Republic, and to endowing it with formal sovereignty. Two German countries became a single state on October 3, 1990.

cooperation with focal external players, including Germany itself. This tactic has become part of the strategy of Germany itself to become a full-fledged global player.

This tactic of Germany has been most prominent in its dealings with countries in ongoing armed conflicts. Participation in conflict resolution and security sector reform means that the external state intends to help the country involved in an armed conflict enter the phase of peaceful (post-conflict) socioeconomic development and to gain sovereignty. The question will be about the degree of the sovereignty. In helping the countries experiencing armed conflicts, Germany usually pursued two main goals, which were closely related. The first one was to ensure its long-term strategic presence (or, at least, a full-fledged presence). The second goal was to put an end to the armed conflict or reduce its scale. In the latter case, the term “settlement” or “resolution” (achieving a state of peace, eliminating the causes of combat fighting) was in practice often replaced by “regulation”, i.e., the state when outbreaks of organized violence are kept at a certain (by no means zero) level, giving the impression of control over the process of conflict resolution. But this, in fact, is almost always an illusion, because “regulation”, by its nature as an incomplete, unfinished resolution process, carries within itself the factor of suspended but imminent degradation, which is bound to go off sooner or later.

The country of an ongoing armed conflict a priori cannot have real sovereignty with a “regulation” process going on its territory. A necessary, but not sufficient, prerequisite for it is the settlement of the conflict, the completed resolution process. The achievement of a full resolution drastically reduces the country’s need for the further support of external players, especially for their military presence in the form of large-scale military formations such as battalions and brigades. This is less the case for the smallest military units (such as squads or platoons) and groups of military instructors.

It is characteristic that the efforts of Germany and other “Western democracies” to stop the majority of the armed conflicts in the Middle East and Africa north of the equator bear all the hallmarks of a conflict regulation process. Therefore, the question arises: was Germany (and its partners) unwilling or unable to provide a conflict settlement? The answer is rather difficult and unique in each case. From the author’s point of view, Germany’s line was based, in the majority of cases, not only on inability [Kaim 2021, S. 25-27] (in particular, the inability to ensure a critical weakening of the institutions of international terrorism without the possibility of their re-emergence), but also on a certain unwillingness. Moreover, in any case, the incomplete resolution of the conflict, no matter what the reasons were, meant that the country of the conflict did not possess full sovereignty.

It is necessary to underline an increasingly common rule in the FRG’s foreign policy: it tends to link the process of peacebuilding in a country with the process of encouraging this country to gravitate towards the community of “Western democracies”. Though the goal was uniform, the tactics leading to it could differ: for example, encouraging the country’s leaders to sign an Association Agreement (or an Association and Stabilization Agreement) with the EU; or offering Germany and its partners as guarantors of the agreements on ceasefire and reconciliation. This addition, or, rather, the politicized “superstructure” to the settlement process itself, made it difficult to implement and very often led to the degradation of the process. It had repeatedly caused dissatisfaction among significant population groups, including the military (the latter being the key group responsible for the country’s transition to the peaceful, post-conflict stage of socioeconomic development), which led to demonstrative rejection of the Western-proposed settlement (regulation) schemes.

Perhaps the most important condition for the success of the resolution process (and, accordingly, for achieving sovereignty) is *nationalization*. This means the transfer of control over peacekeeping activity to the local forces, which are able to achieve success by relying on broad public support in the country that is experiencing a conflict. The first goal here is to correctly identify the relevant internal forces as well as the forms and volumes of support from external actors. Another key goal is to effect the nationalization of conflict resolution *in time*. Delaying it increases the risk of a deterioration of the settlement and also leads to the emergence and aggravating of the effect of an imposed foreign presence, primarily for the military contingents of the countries that participated in peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities. The problem of belated nationalization was often closely intertwined with two other difficulties: the internal forces that relied on the support of the “Western democracies” and should have accepted full responsibility often lacked the means thereof, while the “Western democracies” themselves were unwilling to delegate the power to the local authorities. Thus, the sovereignization process in the country that sought its way to the post-conflict stage of socioeconomic development was regressing.

The presented patterns fairly fully characterize the main features of Germany's efforts to counter the threats of instability in Mali and the Sahara-Sahel region as a whole.

THE CASE OF MALI. DEGRADATION OF SETTLEMENT AS PRESERVATION OF INCOMPLETE SOVEREIGNTY?

In 2013–2015, during the first attempts to resolve the armed conflict in Mali, Germany's military contribution was rather small, its efforts being concentrated on diplomatic activity. In the case of MINUSMA, the Bundeswehr has only provided logistical and medical support for Germany's partners (primarily France) who were fighting against radical illegal armed groups. In the case of EUTM Mali, the Bundeswehr's contribution was more significant, but the volumes were still small in absolute terms: by the end of 2014, only 5 battalion tactical groups had been trained¹⁶. Taking into account the small size of the government army and the scale of the military tasks in the north of the country, such assistance was completely insufficient. This was all the more problematic as Mali, just like any other country in similar conditions, needed substantial and, most importantly, highly efficient external aid during the first crucial stages of the resolution process. However, Germany was cautious for fear of being drawn into hostilities. The loss threshold (sensitivity of society and especially of the parliamentary corps to the death of military personnel) in Germany was noticeably higher than in other Western powers.

Germany's approach had evolved since the inter-Malian agreements (between the authorities in Bamako and moderate anti-government combatants) on May 15 and June 20, 2015¹⁷. The negotiations were provided and the agreements were signed in Algeria, while France and Germany played the role of mediators and de facto moderators of the process. The basis of the agreements was the principle of maintaining the territorial integrity of Mali in exchange for guaranteeing expanded powers to the administration in

¹⁶ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Militärmission der Europäischen Union als Beitrag zur Ausbildung der malischen Streitkräfte (EUTM Mali). *Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 18/3836, 28.01.2015. S. 5.

¹⁷ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung und Erweiterung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission der Vereinten Nationen in Mali (MINUSMA). *Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 18/7206, 6.01.2016. S. 4.

northern Malian provinces¹⁸. This negotiating formula was aimed at strengthening the sovereignty of the Malian state. However, for the time being, at least, it was only de jure. Achieving this de facto depended on the complete implementation of the agreed conditions in practice. The process was strongly dependent on Germany and France as guarantors of the implementation of the inter-Malian agreements in Algeria in 2015. Accepting this role was supposed to provide France and Germany with the possibility of a long-term strategic presence in Mali. In practice, there were major problems. First of all, it was necessary to see some results in the resolution process itself in order to be able to get a political dividend from it in the form of strengthening one's influence. It was also important to find such forms of military presence that would not cause rejection among the population of Mali and would not be perceived as imposed.

Diplomatically, Germany was encouraging the Malian leadership (first of all, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita himself) to give expanded powers to the administration in northern Malian provinces¹⁹.

In practice, the results of those Germany's efforts were small. In 2018, the new presidential elections were held throughout the whole territory of Mali (unlike those in 2013). This was supposed to increase the legitimacy of the power of the re-elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. But this tactical success was not accompanied by political steps towards a compromise with the local authorities in the north of Mali. Autonomization was never implemented here. As a result, one of the most important causes of the armed conflict, and thus an obstacle to sovereignization, has remained. In this matter, Germany's political line in many respects was similar to that which it was implementing simultaneously in the Ukrainian direction. In the second half of the 2010s, Berlin indicated its desire to move forward in the implementation of the Algiers (2015) and Minsk 2 (2015) agreements. It was declared in the dialogue with the official powers of Mali and Ukraine and supported by concrete initiatives (for example, the Steinmeier formula)²⁰. However, in both cases, there was an increasingly noticeable "slipping" in the settlement process. Moreover, Germany was rather unconcerned about this fact. The main thing, in the perception of Germany, was that both processes were going on. However, this promotion had become mostly nominal, almost zero. In the case of Mali, as well as Ukraine, Berlin failed to ensure any noticeable progress in the resolution through the implementation of the 2015 agreements. This policy did not contribute at all to the sovereignty of the respective countries, on whose territory the armed conflict continued to "smolder".

In the short and medium term, the incompleteness of the resolution largely corresponded to the interest of the country's authorities in Germany's support and preserving its influence. At the same time, Germany itself was interested in it, cooperating with the powers in Bamako and also with the authorities in the north of Mali. For this reason, Germany was in a state of being not only a leader in the dialogue, but also a follower, for fear of losing the trust relationship with each partner. Also, the last reason was rather important for Germany's unreadiness to encourage the country's

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem Präsidenten der Republik Mali, Keita in Berlin. *Bundeskanzleramt*. 08.02.2019. <https://bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-dem-praesidenten-der-republik-mali-keita-1578816> (accessed: 24.02.2024)

²⁰ The compromise scheme, in order to resolve the deadlock in the settlement process, envisaged the entry into force, on a temporary basis, of the Ukrainian law on a special procedure for governing in certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions on the day of the elections, i.e., reciprocal concessions from the official Kyiv and Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics.

powers (both in Mali and in Ukraine) to grant more autonomy to the other side of the conflict.

At the same time, there were differences between the two cases. While in Ukraine Germany had demonstrated a fundamental rejection of the DPR and LPR and refused any contacts with them, in Mali, on the contrary, it was very actively in contact with the Tuaregs and, in general, with influential people in the northern provinces of the country²¹.

This was both an advantage for the Mali settlement process, since it had the potential to simultaneously encourage both sides to move towards each other politically, and a disadvantage. As in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, the very active contacts between Germany and the north of the country, on the whole, did not contribute to ensuring territorial integrity and thereby sovereignization. An illustration of this is the desire of the authorities in the north to use the support of Germany in attempts to increase the degree of their autonomy, up to full-fledged independence. The leadership of Iraqi Kurdistan tried to use it as support after the positive outcome of the independence referendum (2017), the Tuaregs, by the end of 2022, de facto and partly de jure, tried to withdraw from the inter-Malian agreements (2015).

In the first case, there was a prompt negative reaction from Germany. Then it had refocused on contacts with the central powers in Baghdad, while at the same time keeping the dialogue with the authorities in Erbil²². In Mali, the situation was more difficult. In the long-term perspective, from the beginning of the multifactorial stage of stabilization, the transition from the resolution to the regulation had created big risks for Germany's positions, taking into account the obligations it had assumed as a guarantor of the agreements (2015).

In August 2020, the Malian military removed Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and the government from power. Initially, army officers had limited influence in the newly created transitional government, but in May 2021, as a result of a new change of power, they took leading positions. Germany and "Western democracies" had condemned the change of power. The changes in Mali meant a revision of its focus on cooperation with EU member states and attempts to nationalize the process of resolution without the support of external actors.

What were the reasons for the change of power in Mali in the context of Germany's activity in the country? The Algiers Agreement (2015) and the weakening (but not defeat) by this time of radical armed groups in northern Mali were perceived by Germany as a "window of opportunities" for establishing its full-fledged strategic influence in the country [Hanish 2015, pp. 1–3]. From 2016 to 2019, the cap of the Bundeswehr's contingent in MINUSMA was raised from 150 to 1 100 troops. The majority of them were sent to Gao province^{23,24}. Predominantly, the Bundeswehr soldiers and officers were deployed to guard and maintain the multinational UN peacekeeping base Camp Castro

²¹ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission der Vereinten Nationen in Mali (MINUSMA). *Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 19/8972, 3.04.2019. S. 3–5.

²² Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung des Einsatzes bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte – Stabilisierung sichern, Wiedererstarben des IS verhindern, Versöhnung fördern in Irak und Syrien. *Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 19/22207, 09.09.2020. S. 4–8.

²³ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung und Erweiterung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission der Vereinten Nationen in Mali (MINUSMA). *Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 18/7206, 06.01.2016. S. 3.

²⁴ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission der Vereinten Nationen in Mali (MINUSMA). *Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 19/19004, 06.05.2020. S. 3.

and, in noticeably smaller numbers, to conduct reconnaissance (primarily aerial, using drones) and to patrol the territory [Tull 2019, pp. 2–3]. In parallel, Germany involved the largest, among the EU member states, contingent of instructors and advisers in the mission EUTM Mali (its maximum number ranged from 300 to 450 instructors). Not only was it training the Malian army, but it also controlled the situation at headquarters and in the new military formations through the Bundeswehr officers assigned to the units²⁵. In other words, Germany sought to establish a system of built-in monitoring and control in the Malian security forces [Ehlert, Schaefer-Kehnert 2023], which de facto limited the African country's sovereignty.

On the whole, Germany had, on one hand, succeeded in creating a basis for its strategic presence in Mali. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the use of the Bundeswehr's soldiers was rather low. Considering the functionality and priorities of the specific tasks within the framework of MINUSMA, the Bundeswehr had made a more than limited contribution to the fight against radical armed groups [Tull, 2023: 3–5], which had increased their military activities in Gao province and Southern Mali. After the defeats in 2013–2014 in the north, the remnants of the terrorists moved into areas close to Burkina Faso and to the border regions of the neighboring country itself, establishing a symbiotic relationship with organized crime. This allowed the radical forces to significantly restore their potential in various respects: to replenish their numbers, to stock up on weapons and ammunition, to develop a system of bases and caches²⁶.

The Malian military could not resist this due to a number of objective and subjective reasons. Among the first was the insufficient size of the country's army. In 2021, it consisted of only 20 thousand soldiers²⁷, while the population of Mali exceeded 21 million people (i.e., the army constituted only 0.1% of the population, which must be deemed insufficient for a country in a state of ongoing armed conflict), and its territory over 1.24 million sq. km. The Malian authorities had determined the size and organizational structure of the army, with a battalion-level tactical group being its key element, in cooperation with France and Germany. These two Western countries are, therefore, the ones responsible for the incorrectly defined technical requirements for the size of the armed forces of Mali, which became “bottlenecks” in the sovereignization of an African country.

The subjective reasons are, firstly, the insufficient level of combat effectiveness of a number of battalion groups trained by EUTM Mali. Some of them had to be sent back for training within one or two years after completing the initial course, despite the fact that the first one usually lasted 16 months²⁸. Secondly, the leaders of Mali, namely Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, on their part, divided the battalions that had been created by EUTM Mali instructors into smaller units (squads and platoons), which were then used separately, at a great distance from one another [Sidorov 2022: 94-97]. This tactic of acting with “spread fingers” instead of a “fist” was determined not so much by the vastness of Mali's

²⁵ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Militärmission der Europäischen Union als Beitrag zur Ausbildung der malischen Streitkräfte (EUTM Mali). *Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 19/19002, 6.05.2020. S. 6–9.

²⁶ Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung. Bericht der Bundesregierung zur Lage und zum deutschen Engagement in Mali/Sahel. Aktuelle Lage, Ziele und Handlungsfelder des deutschen Engagements. *Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 19/18080, 25.03.2020. S. 5–8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, S. 11.

²⁸ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Militärmission der Europäischen Union als Beitrag zur Ausbildung der malischen Streitkräfte (EUTM Mali). *Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 18/3836, 28.01.2015. S. 4–8.

territory, but by the desire to reduce the risk of new military coups (as it happened in 2012). In practice, it made it easier for the radical illegal armed groups to fight the Malian army, not reducing, but, on the contrary, increasing dissatisfaction in the army with the central civilian authorities and the desire to remove them from power.

The “narrow places” of EUTM Mali activity also included the unwillingness of Germany to use its political (for example, the high-level negotiations) and military (its instructors and advisors) tools to alter Ibrahim Boubacar Keita’s stance on the tactics of use of the new battalion groups. On all these points, Germany did not contribute to the sovereignty of the country.

In general, Germany’s actions, both in the military and political and diplomatic spheres, led to the continued dependence of Mali on external support at a time when the conflict was far from over. It did not contribute to the country’s sovereignization, especially where the real sovereignty was concerned. The reaction of the Malian military was to nationalize the process of conflict resolution.

The primary and strongest criticism of the new (from 2020–2021) Malian authorities was caused by the activities of France. Paris was forced to stop the operations Barkhane (launched by France in 2014 as the successor to operation Serval) and Takuba (launched under the EU mandate in 2020) in 2021–2022. The missions were unable to provide an effective settlement: the jihadists managed to regain strength and become more active; Malian citizens increasingly perceived the French military presence as imposed and ineffective [Philippov 2021]. The key reasons for this attitude of the new authorities in Bamako toward France lay in the role of the latter not only as the former metropole, but also as the key contributor of military personnel for the use in Mali. Even taking into account its noticeable growth, the military presence of Germany here did not exceed 1.5 thousand soldiers by 2021, while France had more than 5 thousand military personnel in Mali and the Sahara-Sahel region as a whole. Whereas the Fifth Republic was actively using its military personnel in combat, Berlin did so exclusively in non-combat operations, i.e., in those that did not involve direct combat against radical formations.

At the end of the 2010s–early 2020s, in Mali and the Sahel Germany, was *strategically* maintaining close cooperation with France, but *tactically* had noticeably distanced itself from it. Thus, Germany refused to use the Bundeswehr forces not only in the Serval and Barkhane operations, but also in Takuba²⁹. The latter was not only carried out under the EU mandate, but represented a precedent-setting use of the multilateral crisis response force of the European Union, in which Germany, as well as France, were the key players. The key reason for Germany’s unwillingness to participate in the missions was its desire to avoid being associated with France as the former metropole, given the current escalation of the situation in Mali. Germany itself had been using its military contingents only under the auspices of international structures, the EU and the UN; moreover, since the mid-2010s, growing Germany’s attention had been paid to the UN. In Mali, the UN was perceived as a more neutral structure than the EU, with its close ties to the Euro-Atlantic community. At the same time, at the beginning of the 2020s, it was the “Western democracies” that were playing the leading role in UN activities aimed at resolving armed conflicts [Degterev 2023].

This difference emerged shortly after the Malian military came to power. Their position forced the announcement of the cessation of EUTM Mali on April 5, 2022. The

²⁹ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission der Vereinten Nationen in Mali (MINUSMA). *Deutscher Bundestag, 20. Wahlperiode*. Drucksache 20/1761, 11.05.2022. S. 9–11.

diversification of the international legal frameworks for Germany's presence in Mali, which included not only the EU but also the UN mandate, allowed Germany to maintain the basis of its presence. The FRG had enlarged its contingent from 1.1 thousand to 1.4 thousand soldiers³⁰. Moreover, until the beginning of 2023, some EUTM Mali instructors continued to operate de facto in northern Mali, which was politically endorsed by the well-established relations between Germany and the local authorities. Germany performed these actions in the context of growing tension between the Tuaregs and the new leadership of Mali, which was gradually escalating into military clashes.

Against this backdrop, the attitude of Bamako towards Germany began to gradually but noticeably deteriorate. The mutually reserved and critical attitude, which could already be clearly seen in the spring of 2022, grew and reached an insurmountable level about a year later. It was important that Germany had distanced itself from France only tactically, to a certain, strictly limited degree. Berlin was more than skeptical of the position of the new Malian leaders on ending operations Barkhane, Takuba, and especially EUTM Mali. In the latter case, Germany had initially designated the EU decision on the forced suspension of the mission as temporary and reversible³¹. Naturally, official Berlin did not believe that these missions were not contributing to the sovereignty of Mali.

Between the spring of 2021 and the spring of 2023, the FRG was persistently encouraging the new authorities of the country to basically maintain the previous scheme of conflict resolution, with the leading role of the "Western democracies". Such attempts were mainly made at high levels (i.e., ministers of foreign affairs and defense)³², but not at the highest level. Thus, Germany emphasized its perception of the military's stay in power in Mali as illegitimate. The result was the opposite of what was expected. The presence of Germany began to be naturally perceived as part of the system of influence of the "Western democracies" as a whole and as an obstacle to sovereignization, which meant the need to dismantle the presence of Western forces.

* * *

In the mid-2010s–early 2020s, Germany did not provide an adequate contribution to the resolution of the armed conflict in Mali and, consequently, to the country's movement towards sovereignty. The Germany's line became one of the reasons for the regression in both processes. It is characteristic, that at the turn of the decade, Germany did not reduce but, on the contrary, increased its contribution to the two international missions in Mali (EUTM Mali and MINUSMA), which means that it considered the long-term prolongation of their already prolonged activities there acceptable and even necessary. Germany did not promptly and properly prepare for the transition to the nationalization of the resolution process. For these reasons, it can be assumed that Berlin was, in practice, willing to accept Bamako's formal sovereignty only.

This explains the critical attitude of Germany towards the alternative scheme of settlement and sovereignization, which began to be implemented after the military came to power in Mali in 2020–2021. Moreover, the new leadership itself initially did not have a negative attitude towards the presence of Germany (especially under the auspices of the UN mission). This attitude changed, as Germany became more and more clearly unwilling to provide its partner with real freedom of choice in determining the settlement

³⁰ Ibid, S. 6–9.

³¹ Ibid, S. 7–9.

³² Außenministerin Baerbock vor ihrer Abreise nach Mali und Niger. *Auswärtiges Amt*. 11.04.2022. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/baerbock-mali-niger/2522386> (accessed: 24.02.2024)

and sovereignization scheme, with or without the decisive support of Western countries. The fact that in Mali, for both of these processes, Germany did not show up in the initially expected quality was decisive for the negative attitude towards it in the context of the change of power by the military in Burkina Faso (January 2022) and then in Niger (July 2023). Not having full-fledged real sovereignty itself, Germany's actions did not contribute to its strengthening in Mali. To a certain extent, this was a manifestation of neocolonialism in its modern form.

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СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКАЯ АКТИВНОСТЬ ФРГ В САХЕЛЕ И ПРОБЛЕМА СУВЕРЕНИТЕТА СТРАН РЕГИОНА (НА ПРИМЕРЕ МАЛИ)

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Аннотация. На примере такой геостратегически значимой африканской страны, как Мали, автор показывает, насколько политические и военные шаги Германии содействовали или не способствовали суверенизации государства, которое преодолеvalo состояние нестабильности. Учитывая дискуссионность полноты суверенитета самой ФРГ, ставится вопрос о ее принципиальной способности передавать опыт в данной сфере другим государствам. Во второй половине 2010-х гг. объем и эффективность усилий Германии по нормализации ситуации в Мали были недостаточными. ФРГ, особенно на первых этапах урегулирования (с 2013 по 2015 гг.), не вносила заметного вклада в деятельность по миротворчеству и поддержанию мира. Использование бундесвера на этом треке стало заметным лишь с 2016–2018 гг., однако и оно не дало требуемых результатов. Уже к середине 2010-х гг. ФРГ стала активно участвовать в реформе сектора безопасности, однако качественные и количественные параметры вновь обученных кадров армии Мали оказались недостаточны для обеспечения мира и безопасности страны. Приняв функции одного из основных внешних участников урегулирования, ФРГ не сопроводила этого необходимыми усилиями. Кроме того, германская сторона не торопилась обеспечить национализацию урегулирования, то есть передачу нитей управления процессом тем внутренним силам, которые были способны вести страну к миру. Незавершенность урегулирования вооруженного конфликта, его деградация с конца 2010-х гг. означали регресс страны на пути суверенизации. На таком фоне малийские национальные вооруженные силы с 2020–2021 гг. пытаются реализовать альтернативный вариант без участия «западных демократий». Рассматривается эволюция подхода новых властей Мали к присутствию ФРГ.

Ключевые слова: Формальный суверенитет, Мали, Германия, вооруженные конфликты, урегулирование, регулирование, стратегическое влияние, дипломатия, бундесвер

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