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Modeling the Country's Participation in Armed Conflict Resolution: Case of Germany's Activity in Mali

Philipp O. Trunov  

Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russian Federation
 ltrunov@mail.ru

Abstract. In the early 2020s, the challenges of maintaining a Western presence in the zones of armed conflicts in Asia and Africa increased dramatically. This was most evident in Afghanistan, while notable difficulties were also observed in the Sahara-Sahel region. In trying to understand the reasons for this, the author turned to the situation in Mali, trying to correlate the Germany's actions in Mali with the author's theoretical-practical scheme of participation of an outside actor in the resolution of an armed conflict. Reaching the position of a full-fledged global actor, Germany is especially interested in creating a strategic presence in the instability zones and is sensitive to its loss. At the first stage of the resolution, the key tasks are the bracketing of radical forces, especially terrorist groups, and the reconciliation of the moderate ones, which are interested in preserving the institution of the state as such. The second stage is the time for full-scale international peacekeeping. The third stage is the nationalization of the resolution, i.e. the transfer of control over the process to the authorities and security forces in the country of conflict's origin. The study explores the forms, scale, and geographical features of Germany's use of military tools and diplomatic capabilities in the first two stages of the 2013—2019 resolution. The main "bottlenecks" of the approach are identified, including the persistent delay in applying sufficient efforts and the determinism of this trend. For 2020—2021, two contradictory paths are shown against the background of a new wave of activation of terrorist groups in the south of Mali: an accelerated transition to nationalization with a possible withdrawal of German and French support, and a postponement of the third stage, linked to the preparations for the continued presence of Western countries in Mali.

Key words: instability, peacekeeping, security sector reform, Germany, France, Sahel, terrorist groups

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Моделирование участия страны в урегулировании вооруженных конфликтов: кейс действий ФРГ в Мали

Ф.О. Трунов  

Институт общественной информации по общественным наукам РАН (ИНИОН РАН),
Москва, Российская Федерация
 ltrunov@mail.ru

Аннотация. В начале 2020-х гг. резко возросли вызовы сохранению присутствия стран Запада в зонах вооруженных конфликтов в Азии и Африке. Наиболее отчетливо это проявилось в Афганистане, заметные трудности наблюдались также в Сахаро-Сахельском регионе. С целью выявления причин этого автор обратился к ситуации в Мали, соотнося действия Германии в этой стране с выстроенной автором теоретико-практической схемой участия внешнего игрока в урегулировании вооруженного конфликта. Двигаясь к положению полновесного глобального игрока, ФРГ особенно заинтересована в создании стратегического присутствия в зонах нестабильности и чувствительна к его утрате. На первой стадии урегулирования ключевыми задачами видятся выведение за скобки процесса радикальных сил, особенно террористических группировок, и примирение умеренных сторон, то есть заинтересованных в сохранении института государства как такового. На второй стадии осуществляются полномасштабные международные усилия по миротворчеству и поддержанию мира. На третьей стадии происходит национализация урегулирования, то есть передача управления процессом органам власти и силам безопасности в зоне конфликта. Подробно изучаются формы, масштаб, географические особенности использования Германией военного инструментария и дипломатических возможностей в 2013—2019 гг. на первых двух стадиях урегулирования. Выявляются основные «узкие места» применяемого подхода, в том числе постоянное запаздывание с приложением достаточных усилий. Применительно к 2020—2021 гг. показывается наличие двух взаимоисключающих сценариев на фоне новой волны активизации террористических группировок на юге Мали: ускоренного перехода к национализации с вероятным отторжением поддержки Германии и Франции, и откладывания перехода к третьей стадии в свете усилий по сохранению присутствия западных стран в Мали.

Ключевые слова: нестабильность, поддержание мира, реформа сектора безопасности, Германия, Франция, Сахель, террористические группировки

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Introduction

In the early 2020s there was a sharp reduction in the “window of opportunities” for the Euro-Atlantic states to maintain their strategic presence in the zones of armed conflicts in Asia and Africa. For example, contrary to the initial steps taken by the U.S. to strengthen the grouping in the “Resolute Support” mission in Afghanistan in 2017—2018, the Trump administration ended up negotiating with the Taliban¹ terrorist group

¹ Hereinafter, an organization included in the list of terrorist organizations in the Russian Federation is mentioned.

(Glatz & Kaim, 2020). Against the backdrop of the US withdrawal from numerous international security agreements, the bilateral “deal” with the Taliban of February 29, 2020² became almost the only and, it seems, the most important of the newly signed under D. Trump. The USA actually fulfilled the deal even in the

² Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America // U.S. Department of State. February 29, 2020. URL: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, while stating its desire to distance itself from the decisions of the previous administration, the J. Biden administration, after taking a pause, nevertheless agreed to fulfill the terms of the document. The original withdrawal deadline of May 1, 2021 was moved to September 11, 2021, and then to early July 2021. This demonstrated the urgency of evacuating U.S. troops and their partners in the “Resolute Support” mission from Afghanistan.

The change of power in Mali in August 2020 and especially in May 2021 called into question the continued military presence of France and its EU partners there. Substantially and geographically, the Malian track has been a pivotal one to Western political-military activity in G5 Sahel states, which includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger (Tull, 2017). France was forced to stop in 2021—2022 the operations *Barkhane* and *Takuba*. At the same time Paris, as previously the White House on the Afghan track, actively sought to maintain the military presence in the region (Sidorov, 2021, pp. 23—26; Filippov, 2022, pp. 41—43). There is a risk of a complete withdrawal of the EU military training mission in Mali (*EUTM Mali*) and contingents of the EU member states from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (*MINUSMA*).

The Euro-Atlantic community still has a geographically wide range of areas to secure influence in zones of armed conflicts. At the same time, in most cases the opportunities for the use of political and military instruments here are rather limited. In Syria, given the critical perception of the actions of the U.S. and its partners by official Damascus, supported by Russia and Iran, the increased presence of other Western countries is very problematic (Lukas & Paradies, 2019; Chernega, 2022).

In Yemen, Western powers have long been at the stage of choosing the best forms of influence on the course of the armed conflict (Transfeld, 2022, p. 6). The preparatory phase

to resolve the conflict was too long not only in Yemen, but also in Libya in the 2010s, where the process of resolution began after the Berlin conference in January 2020 (Lacher, 2021). Despite initial successes in establishing a ceasefire and first steps toward reconciliation, the “point of no return” in resolving the situation in Libya has not yet been overcome, as illustrated by the disruption of the presidential elections in the country in December 2021.

In Iraq, Somalia and Nigeria, the continuing influence of terrorist groups (the Islamic state,³ Al-Shabab, West African province of IS) and, as a consequence, the next wave of their activation in the early 2020s are a serious obstacle to a settlement with the leading support of NATO and the EU.⁴ The possible strengthening of EU member states’ positions in Niger does not compensate for the loss of strategic positions in Mali and the G5 Sahel countries as a whole.

The strategic withdrawal from Afghanistan caused the large damage to USA and the entire Anglo-Saxon group, while the development of the situation in Mali was detrimental to France. Both situations were rather extremely disadvantageous for Germany. France made a very limited contribution to “Resolute Support,” while the United States, for its part, committed no troops to the *Serval*, *Barkhane* and *MINUSMA* missions. Accordingly, having suffered significant losses in one of the presented areas, official Paris and the White House de facto had no major costs in the other (excluding the damage to the Euro-Atlantic community as a whole).

On the contrary, in both cases, by the end of the 2010s, Germany was the West’s second

³ Hereinafter, an organization included in the list of terrorist organizations in the Russian Federation is mentioned.

⁴ Brose E. Keine Stabilisierung ohne Risiko: Deutschland darf den Irak jetzt nicht allein lassen // Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik. 06.01.2020. URL: <https://www.baks.bund.de/de/keine-stabilisierung-ohne-risiko-deutschland-darf-den-irak-jetzt-nicht-allein-lassen> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

largest contributor, including military efforts, in terms of its politico-military contribution to the regulation (Glatz & Kaim, 2020; Tull, 2019). For Berlin, therefore, the loss of positions was doubly painful. In reality, the situation for official Berlin was even more difficult due to its consistent rejection of the Bundeswehr's use of force. This sharply narrowed the possibility for the Bundeswehr usage in Iraq⁵ and especially in Somali, where in the spring of 2018 Germany stopped its participation in the EU military training mission (*EUTM Somalia*).⁶

It should be noted that Germany is in the role of a “rising” power, i.e., a country moving toward the position of a full-fledged global actor, but has by no means reached it yet, much less consolidated in this status. Hence, Germany is all too sensitive to the decisions of its Western partners to eliminate the largest military presence mechanisms for the Bundeswehr in areas of instability. In Afghanistan, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) leadership tried to avoid troop withdrawal until April 2021. This line could also be traced in Mali, Germany's second and, in the realities of the early 2020s, largest deployment for stabilization purposes. Even in the conditions of the curtailment of the *Barkhane* and *Takuba* operations, which had a distinctly military component, Germany not only maintained but also strengthened its presence in *MINUSMA* in Mali in the spring of 2022.⁷ It was here that the FRG made the most

substantial and chronological use of the experience it had gained in the Balkans in the 1990s, as well as in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The purpose of the article is to explore the system of Germany's use of politico-military instruments to stabilize the situation in Mali. Both Russian and especially foreign researchers have paid considerable attention to the resolution of Malian armed conflict (Sidorov, 2021; Filippov, 2021), as well as to the direct involvement of Germany in the latter process (Hanish, 2015; Lacher, 2021; Müller & Vorrath, 2021; Tull, 2019). Basically, specific aspects are mostly studied, while there are still few attempts to summarize theoretically and practically Germany's efforts in this field as of the early 2020s. Methodologically, the author has tried to construct a three-phase process scheme for armed conflicts, seeking to fit the actions of the FRG into it and to assess their effectiveness.

On the Issue of Theorizing the Scheme for Armed Conflict Resolution

Based on his own research (Trunov, 2018), below the author attempts to propose a scheme for resolving an armed conflict with a focus on the involvement of external actors at each stage of the process (Table 1). This project does not claim to be universal, but the author has tried to generalize the experience of Western countries in combating threats of instability in their zones of origin in the 1990s — 2010s.

It is appropriate to highlight some principal characteristics of the process.

Firstly, the growing number of outbreaks of organized violence in Asia and Africa are characterized by the presence of terrorist groups as a party (or even several parties) to the conflict.

⁵ Brose E. Keine Stabilisierung ohne Risiko: Deutschland darf den Irak jetzt nicht allein lassen // Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik. 06.01.2020. URL: <https://www.baks.bund.de/de/keine-stabilisierung-ohne-risiko-deutschland-darf-den-irak-jetzt-nicht-allein-lassen> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

⁶ Somalia — European Union Training Mission Somalia // Bundeswehr. 2022. URL: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/einsaetze-bundeswehr/abgeschlossene-einsaetze-der-bundeswehr/eutm-somalia> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

⁷ 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. 1—4.

Table 1

The Stages of Armed Conflict Resolution: Political and Military Aspects

Stage	Key goals		Term
	Political-diplomatic	Military	
<i>Stage No. 1. Start</i>	<p>1-a. Destroying of radical structures, especially international terrorist structures.</p> <p>1-b. Reaching a ceasefire and reconciliation talks between all moderate forces, both pro-government and opposition</p>	<p>1-1. Conducting combat operations / force support measures. The goal is to damage illegal armed formations (IAF) of a radical nature in terms of militants and weapons, as well as the maximum reduction of the territories under their control on a permanent basis.</p> <p>1-2 and 1-3. Preparing and beginning the deployment of peacemaking, peacekeeping activities and also the security sector reform (this means, above all, military training activity)</p>	Not more than 1—1,5 years
<i>Stage No. 2. Plateau of international efforts</i>	<p>2-a. Concluding and implementing agreements between moderate forces. Determining the forms of external monitoring, facilitation and incentives for this process.</p> <p>2-b. Consistent discrediting of radical forces, their marginalization in political and ideological terms</p>	<p>2-1. Launching security sector reform: institutional changes, training/retraining the masses of personnel, equipping them if necessary. A principal decision on the quantitative parameters of the army and police personal.</p> <p><i>These measures should be implemented in cooperation with the newly reformed security forces of the country of origin of the conflict the measures should be realized:</i></p> <p>2-2. Deployment of international forces to perform peacemaking and peacekeeping tasks, i.e. de jure non-combat tasks.</p> <p>2-3. If necessary, the presence of a force mission of external actors on anti-terrorist prophylaxis</p>	5—7 years
<i>Stage No. 3. Nationalization of the resolution</i>	<p>3-a. Transferring the management of the resolution process to the local authorities. For external actors — defining forms of organic presence and influence in the conflict zone</p>	<p>3-1. The security forces in the country of origin of the conflict take on most of the practical burden from the external actors. This means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — complete or almost complete (keeping only monitoring groups) withdrawal of international peacekeeping military forces; — termination or reduction of combat antiterrorist activity of external actors; — keeping (in principle) the military instructors and advisers, but with the possibility of adjusting the forms and volume of their use 	Not defined

Source: compiled by the author.

They are a priori destructive forces that aim to destroy the state as an institution of power in its traditional sense and to implement a counter-project, aimed at creating a homogeneous commonality in which the threshold of force in controlled territories is extremely low. From the author's perspective, the key criterion for the

moderation of armed conflict's side is its fundamental willingness to preserve the institution of the state as such and subsequently renounce the use of violence.

Secondly, it is rather important to prevent the conflict from entering an "old" stage. By this term, the author understands a situation

where for 10 years or more there has been a clear continuation of fairly active hostilities and (or) a distinct degradation of the settlement as a whole. Crossing this time limit, equal to half the life expectancy of one generation, can lead to the fact that the mass fatigue of society from armed violence within the country begins to blunt, passing partly into apathy and getting used to the state of instability with “adjusting” to it a part of those who have not left the conflict zone.

Accordingly, chronologically, in terms of the nature, scope and co-direction of the efforts undertaken, especially political-diplomatic and military ones, it is necessary for the external actors of the resolution process be operational and flexible. It is extremely important to set the goal of achieving the resolution itself as the final result higher than egoistic national interests in ensuring a strategic presence, if they are in some degree of contradiction.

The impulse for resolution should be a regular, i.e. at least once every 2—4 years, partial adjustment of the forms, scales, and geographical features of international politico-military activity at the first two stages and at the transition to the third stage (see Table 1). The new tactics of the resolution process are new ways of treating the “patient,” in our case the state. The final result of the settlement should be considered not only the calming of the situation in the broad sense in the country of origin of the conflict, but also the ability of state authorities, both central and local, and security forces to maintain order and security on their own. This means the full-fare functioning without relying on a permanent, highly prolonged or repeated military presence of external actors. The last one is the deployment of military forces in all or a large part of the country of origin of the conflict for the purpose of anti-terrorist prevention, peacemaking and peacekeeping. Accordingly, the presence of military instructors and advisors is not included here,

since they may be present in the country both during and after the period of resolution. The last scenario means that the external actor and former country of origin of the conflict have become partners or even allies. In the latter cases, the peacetime realities may become military bases, territorially more than compact concentration of military forces, including those previously used as part of international peacekeeping contingents.

The use of peacekeepers to “freeze” armed conflicts, usually between states or between the center and regions seeking expanded rights, can be chronologically prolonged. In this case, military forces are deployed not on the territory of the entire state, but on narrow (a few kilometers wide) lines separating the conflicting parties.

Stage One: Germany’s Overcautiousness?

Until the early 2010s, Germany did not pay attention to the Sahara-Sahel region, including the Tuareg problem (Klute, 2013). The situation changed after the proclamation of the independent Tuareg state of Azawad in northern Mali in April 2012. Germany refused to recognize its independence. Berlin was concerned with radicalization of anti-government forces, including the growing influence and capabilities of the radical groups Ansar al-Dine and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,⁸ which partially joined the ranks of the most intransigent Tuaregs (Lacher & Tull, 2013, pp. 1—4). In response, France launched *Serval* Operation against the terrorist insurgents on January 11, 2013.

Germany declared its political support for the operation as soon as it was announced. The decision to provide military assistance in the form of approval of the government’s request

⁸ Hereinafter, an organization included in the list of terrorist organizations in the Russian Federation is mentioned.

by the Bundestag was made on February 19, 2013,⁹ i.e. one month after the start of the operation. This chronological difference was due to several factors.

Firstly, to Berlin's adherence to the concept of "strategic restraint," i.e., minimizing the use of German troops by force (except in self-defense). The decision to send the Bundeswehr to Mali, initially only logistical units and military trainers, was made only after France unconditional defeat of the militants of illegal armed groups (Mezentsev, 2014, pp. 6—8). Since then, Berlin has been ready to "unload" its partner in two ways. The first was the logistical support of French troops and the forces of the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) *AFISMA* mission.¹⁰ In parallel, German instructors trained the Malian soldiers under EU command (*EUTM Mali*). While in the first case the Bundeswehr operated throughout Mali, including the northern provinces that were being cleansed of radicals, in the other the German soldiers were only in the western and central regions, which were hardly considered as pacific.¹¹

Secondly, in Sahara-Sahel region at this time Germany was strategically a newcomer, which at the same time determined its cautiousness and increased dependence on France, which as a former metropolis had rather large influence in West Africa. However, this

⁹ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Entsendung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte zur Beteiligung an der EU-geführten militärischen Ausbildungsmission EUTM Mali // Deutscher Bundestag, 17. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 17/12367. 19.02.2013. S. 4—6.

¹⁰ Security Council authorizes deployment of African-led International Support mission in Mali for initial year-long period // UN Security Council. 2012. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20121226234231/https://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10870.doc.htm> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

¹¹ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Entsendung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte zur Beteiligung an der EU-geführten militärischen Ausbildungsmission EUTM Mali // Deutscher Bundestag, 17. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 17/12367. 19.02.2013. S. 2—4.

connection was far from being absolute. It was reflected in the timing of the decision to militarily support the Fifth Republic and, most importantly, in the fact that Germany was not prepared in principle to engage the Bundeswehr directly in missions under French national command (*Serval* in 2013—2014 and *Barkhane* in 2014—2021). Germany opted for using the Bundeswehr under the command of international structures — the EU and African Union, whose mission had been transformed by July 2013 into the UN *MINUSMA*, in which AU member states participated actively.¹²

Germany's steps were aimed at supporting the EU — UN — AU strategic triangle. Since at least the early 2010s, this format was seen by Germany as a pillar of the regional security system in Africa (Barthel, 2011), as well as a tool for legalizing German strategic penetration in Africa, using both EU and UN capabilities. At the same time, Berlin perceived the French missions in Mali and its own contribution to *EUTM Mali* and *MINUSMA* as a combined effort of EU member states to strengthen the Union's defense capabilities (Von Krause, 2019, p. 3).

Militarily, Germany not only refused to use the Bundeswehr in combat forms, but also to send its combat units to Mali in 2013—2015. At the same time, in Mali, for the first time Germany used troops in parallel in two missions — the AU / the UN peacekeeping mission and the EU military training mission. In addition, the training of police, gendarmerie and National Guard was carried out under *EUCAP Sahel* mission in Niger.¹³ Until the mid-2010s,

¹² Antrag der Bundesregierung. Entsendung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte zur Beteiligung an der Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission in Mali (MINUSMA) // Deutscher Bundestag, 17. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 17/13754. 05.06.2013. S. 3—5.

¹³ EUCAP Sahel Niger: European Union Capacity-Building — Civilian Mission // European External Action Service. November 30, 2020. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eucap-sahel-niger/eucap-sahel-niger-european-union-capacity-building-civilian-mission_en?s=364 (accessed: 21.07.2022).

Germany preferred *EUTM Mali* to other military missions. For example, its troop “ceiling” was initially higher than *MINUSMA*’s — 180 versus 150, given that the multidimensional value of several military instructors is usually higher than of support unit. By spring 2015, the military “ceiling” for *EUTM Mali* had almost doubled to 350 soldiers and officers, while it remained consistently low for UN forces.¹⁴ Germany assumed the role of a “framework state,” i.e., non-official coordinator of all activities and the largest military contributor in *EUTM Mali*¹⁵ and purely auxiliary in *MINUSMA*.

Thus, following the scheme of the table, Germany completely abandoned the implementation of the *I-1* component of resolution process (see Table 1), made a minimal contribution to component *I-2*, and at the same played rather active role in component *I-3*.

Apart from the general reasons already mentioned — adherence to the principle of “strategic restraint,” and lack of strategic experience in the region there were a number of more specific reasons. The training of Malian militaries was considered more preferable in image-making and practical terms. It demonstrated Germany’s value to the official Bamako, and also provided the possibility to establish effective control over the Malian national security forces in cooperation with France and EU partners.

Germany took into account the negative experience of training activity in Afghanistan, where mass training of the armed forces started very late (about a decade) after the start of peacekeeping and peacemaking activities. Germany was not ready to launch full-scale land activity in Mali before internal peace agreements were reached. On the one hand, de

jure, this could have been justified, since the legitimacy of the peacekeeping presence of external actors was only partly legitimized. On the other hand, de facto, Germany did not contribute militarily to the first stage of the peace process (see Table 1), when radical insurgents turned out to be the most weakened and did not yet have sufficient capacity for active insurgency.

At the same time, Germany played rather active role in establishing and supporting an inter-Mali dialogue, between the authorities in Bamako and the truly moderate Tuaregs, who were willing to abandon the idea of an independent Azawad and not affiliated with international terrorist groups. The negotiations took place in Algiers. Together with France, Germany took on the role of mediator, and, in fact, the organizer of the reconciliation process.¹⁶ The ceasefire agreements were already signed in June 2014.¹⁷ This in itself created a “window of opportunities” within the *MINUSMA* mandate, but by the mid-2010s Germany had not used this opportunity. On the whole, Berlin focused on component *I-b* of the resolution process (see Table 1) and to a lesser extent on *I-a*.

Stage Two: Germany’s Incomplete Potential?

On May 15 and June 20, 2015, peace agreements were signed in Algeria.¹⁸ The documents were based on a formula of zero independence for Azawad, implying the preservation of Mali’s territorial integrity in exchange for more rights to its northern districts, i.e., a partial federalization of the country.¹⁹ Special attention was paid to security

¹⁶ Ibid. S. 5.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Accord Pour la Paix et la Reconciliation au Mali — Issu du Processus d’Alger // Peace Agreements Database. June 20, 2015. URL: <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewdocument/2059> (accessed: 21.07.2022).

¹⁹ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission der

¹⁴ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der EU-geführten Ausbildungsmission EUTM Mali // Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 18/3836. 28.01.2015. S. 3—5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

sector reform (Tull, 2017, pp. 2—3). Just half of year after the agreements were signed, Berlin sent a combat ground force of 500 troops²⁰ (the equivalent of a “core” battalion tactical company), which was deployed to northern Mali. By the time they arrived there, there had been significant success in pacifying the situation, achieved not only by France (as part of *Barkhane* operation), but also by the Dutch contingent, which, in fact, was replaced by the Bundeswehr (Hanish, 2015, pp. 1—2).

However, the process of disarming, demobilizing former Azawad fighters and reintegrating them into the Malian army was far from complete. And the process of empowering the municipal authorities had not yet begun. In this regard, Germany’s increased involvement in *MINUSMA* seemed logical. Germany was the de facto guarantee of the 2015 Algiers agreements and established contacts not only with the authorities in Bamako, but also with the leaders of moderate Tuareg and other tribal-ethnic groups in northern Mali. Indeed, Berlin encouraged the authorities in Bamako to implement the idea of federalization.²¹

In January 2016, the “ceiling” of German military personnel in *MINUSMA* was increased to 650 militaries, a year later it raised to 1,000 troops²² and in spring 2018 to

1,100 soldiers and officers.²³ In addition to its existing functions (logistical support for *MINUSMA* and monitoring the situation in its area of responsibility), Germany took on the role of “framework state” in operating and protecting Camp Castor, a key *MINUSMA* mission base, as well as tactical reconnaissance for the entire mission. For this purpose, multilateral units involving about 10 EU member states (mostly from Western and Northern Europe) were created with the leading participation of the Bundeswehr, teams of low-altitude unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) produced in Germany and one long-range reconnaissance UAV leased from Israel were deployed.²⁴

The mandate of the *MINUSMA* Bundeswehr is to participate in close coordination with the Malian army in peacekeeping non-combat activities and thus exclude anti-terrorist activities (Tull, 2019, pp. 2—3). Above all, the latter task was handled by French forces (under *Barkhane* operation) and Malian government troops. However, the de facto contingents of *MINUSMA* were inevitably involved in the fight against *Ansar al-Dine* and *Islamic State in the Greater Sahara*. The most active steps by *MINUSMA* were in Gao, located in the south-east of Mali near Burkina Faso. By the early 2020s, there was a growing activity of radicalized militant groups. At the same time, the largest group of *MINUSMA*

Vereinten Nationen in Mali (MINUSMA) // Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 18/7206. 06.01.2016. S. 4.

²⁰ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung 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. 5—7.

²¹ Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem Präsidenten der Republik Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in Bamako // Bundeskanzleramt. 09.10.2016. URL: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-dem-praesidenten-der-republik-mali-ibrahim-boubacar-keita-847470> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

²² Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der

Multidimensionalen Integrierten Stabilisierungsmission der Vereinten Nationen in Mali (MINUSMA) // Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 18/10819. 11.01.2017. S. 3—4.

²³ 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 19/1098. 17.03.2018. S. 3—4.

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 19/8972. 03.04.2019. S. 4—7.

peacekeepers, including most of the Bundeswehr contingent, operated in the Gao municipalities.²⁵

In practice, however, the effect of Germany's intensified *MINUSMA* efforts has been ambivalent.

On the one hand, between 2016 and 2018, Germany became a full-fledged member of the UN mission, taking the lead at several important segments at once. During this period, Germany's troop "ceiling" increased more than sevenfold, and annual funding reached almost 270 million euros.²⁶

On the other hand, the lag has fully manifested itself even at this stage. Its increased engagement in *MINUSMA* took place between the third and seventh years of the mission, when the second stage of the process as a whole (see Table 1) was well underway. And one should not exaggerate the real value of Germany's contribution. The number of German soldiers was less than 10% of the total *MINUSMA* contingent. Half of the German contingent consisted of UAV support, the security personal of the Camp Castor base and support units. This means that there were only about 500 German military personnel in the field, designated for this purpose in 2016, without actually receiving a significant increase in the 2017—2018 raises.

As of 2019, the overall "ceiling" for *MINUSMA* remained unchanged, reflecting Germany's ability to deploy just over 1,000 troops in Mali. This is more than in Afghanistan in the 2000s and early 2010s. A key reason for this is seen as not the least important Malian

dimension to German foreign policy. Since 2014, Berlin has been forced to reduce military presence outside NATO's zone of responsibility. This happened as a result of Berlin's allocation of substantial additional forces to the newly created rotational groups of the Alliance in Europe to "contain" Russia since the mid-2010s.

Taking into account the size of Gao and Kidal districts (170.6 and 151.4 thousand km²) the average density was more than 320 km² per one active Bundeswehr soldier, i.e. extremely low. Bearing in mind the Bundeswehr forces were not involved in fighting in Timbuktu (409 thousand km²) the role of Germany in stabilizing the situation in northern Mali should be considered as punctual: the main burden lay with the contingents of the AU members in *MINUSMA*, France and the government troops themselves.

Quantitative problems for German soldiers were closely related to others. The German military, anxious to minimize casualties that might otherwise result in the removal of the Bundestag mandate, often used the same or similar routes, at roughly the same time, usually during the day (Tull, 2019, pp. 2—4). This stereotype made it easier for insurgent militants to infiltrate, regroup and create caches. Germany sought to compensate for these "bottlenecks" in its activities with "smart," i.e., technical and technological sophisticated support of partners in sensitive segments (intelligence, logistics in general, Camp Castor base operation), using the respective limited capabilities of the AU member states and Mali itself. At the same time, Berlin was not ready to join *Barkhane*, although it became multilateral after Britain and Estonia became involved, but also of using the Bundeswehr in combat in principle. Thus, on the whole, Germany made a limited contribution to component 1-2 of the resolution process (see Table 1) and refused in principle to participate in the implementation of component 2-3. This happened precisely at the stage 2 of the resolution process, i.e., when the

²⁵ 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, 11—12.

²⁶ 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 19/1098. 17.03.2018. S. 3—4.

efforts of external players in terms of volume, geographic scope and efficiency should have been maximized.

Stagnation was also observed in the track 2-1. Continuing to be a “framework state” in the *EUTM Mali*, Germany did not increase the “ceiling” of its militaries there until the early 2020s.²⁷ Moreover, in the mid-2010s, there was even a temporary reduction. The reasons for this can be seen in Germany’s confidence in the effectiveness of the EU mission, as well as in Mali’s own small army. By the early 2020s, it had about 20 000 militaries, including support units,²⁸ which was the equivalent of a division. Since the mid-2010s, the number has not increased much (about 17 000 soldiers). Given the size of Mali’s territory (over 1 240 000 sq km) and population (about 39 million people in 2020, i.e. the armed forces accounted for less than 0.05% of the country’s total population), the size of the national armed forces was hardly sufficient to ensure peace and security in the country even during peacetime. In this situation the armed forces could hardly guarantee security in the country. This task was too ambitious for 20,000 militaries in the situation where the conflict was not fully resolved. That is, Germany, as a “framework state” in the *EUTM Mali*, together with France, was responsible for these problems, the unwillingness to realize necessary steps and explain the Malian government how to solve the problems.

The technical requirements for the prospective shape of the armed forces, their number necessary to ensure order and peace in

²⁷ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der EU-geführten Ausbildungsmission EUTM Mali // Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 19/8971. 03.04.2019. S. 3.

²⁸ 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. 11.

the country, have not been worked out and agreed with the Malian military. At the same time, such calculations should be made, given the presence since 2014 of military advisers (parallel to the work of the *EUTM Mali* instructor force) from France and Germany at the headquarters and units of the Malian army.²⁹ The slow reintegration of former Tuaregs into the Malian armed forces, as well as of new soldiers from the northern regions, was also a problem. The reason for this was the problems with federalization in Mali.³⁰ In terms of military organization, the lack of forces manifested itself in the fact that the battalion remained the highest level of the military unit, which did not contribute to the effectiveness of the counterterrorism fight at the provincial level.

The *EUTM Mali* itself also faced significant problems. By the spring of 2020, it had trained about 14,000 soldiers.³¹ Technically, this was only 70% of the number of soldiers in the Malian army; in reality, the figure was lower, about 45—50%. Some military units were trained a second and third time because of insufficient combat efficiency.³² In addition, some of the trained military personnel retired. This means that the German-French tandem did not achieve a full-scale reorganization of the Malian army and unofficial control over it. This

²⁹ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der EU-geführten Ausbildungsmission EUTM Mali // Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 18/3836. 28.01.2015. S. 5.

³⁰ 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. 11—12.

³¹ Ibid. S. 13.

³² Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der EU-geführten Ausbildungsmission EUTM Mali // Deutscher Bundestag, 18. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 18/3836. 28.01.2015. S. 5.

is evidenced by two changes of power (2020, August; 2021, May) by the military.

Bamako authorities did not effectively use the results of military training (15 months, including internal unit reorganization, combat training, and political awareness). Battalion-level cohesive groups were used scattered by small units (Sidorov, 2018). This significantly reduced their ability to strike with the necessary force against illegal armed groups; hence, the flawed practice of “spreading their fingers” was being implemented against a backdrop of severe troop shortages. In doing so, the authorities in Bamako sought to avoid a repeat of the anti-government actions of the military, ultimately achieving just the opposite result.

Why did Germany and France not even raise the issue of establishing a fairly large security force in Mali? The Malian authorities were partly against it, fearing the strengthening of the national armed forces, but also relying heavily on external support. But the latter were not too keen on growing the Malian army too quickly either.

Apart from the difficulties in recruiting new military personnel (especially in the north of the country), the reason was the desire to maintain conditions for increasing the duration of their (primarily French and German) military presence in Mali, as well as in the Sahara-Sahel region and Africa as a whole. Indeed, the Malian forces, with 20,000 soldiers or even a few more need outside help, above all *MINUSMA*. Without it (including the deployment of additional German soldiers to Gao, where the situation was too dangerous), the Malian armed forces cannot send new troops to the southwest (Tull, 2019, pp. 2—3). Further steps toward military build-up here again depended on external partners, primarily Germany as *EUTM Mali*'s “framework state.” At the same time, there were objective difficulties for the growth of the Malian army. This could lead to a sharp decrease in the already low average level of combat effectiveness of military units in Mali.

These problems were closely linked to the difficulties of the political settlement process. One reason was the insufficient German contribution to the implementation of component 2-*a*. German diplomacy's encouragement of the authorities in Bamako to devolve more powers to the districts in the north did not have enough results.³³

Failure to implement the principle of federalization discredited not only the country's authorities, but also the settlement process itself. While the presidential elections in Mali (2013) took place only in some territories of the country, the new ones (2018) were organized in all districts. But this legitimizes the power of the president, as Berlin and Paris expected.³⁴ However, this did not lead to the legitimization of the supreme power that was hoped for by official Berlin and Paris, as demonstrated by the change of power in Bamako in August 2020. It questioned the diverse activities of EU member states to introduce the principles of Western democratic principles in Mali's political field,³⁵ including providing a broad framework for the strategic consolidation for Western strategic consolidation in the Sahara-Sahel region.

The key reason, as well as the reason for the return to power (2020) was the profound dissatisfaction with the results of the anti-terrorist struggle on the territory of the country by the national armed forces. Initially, only the former leadership, led by I.B. Keita, was considered the main culprit. But gradually the new authorities (and they were officers) began to perceive Western countries as the culprit as

³³ Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem Präsidenten der Republik Mali, Keita in Berlin // Bundeskanzleramt. 08.02.2019. URL: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-dem-praesidenten-der-republik-mali-keita-1578816> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Militärmission der Europäischen Union EUTM Mali // Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 19/28804. 21.04.2021. S. 2—6.

well. Why? Germany partially failed at the track 2-*b* (see Table 1). In northern Mali, especially in Gao,³⁶ pacification was achieved. But the main security problems were in the southwest of the country in the Bamako area. Radical militants, especially those belonging to *Ansar al-Dine* and *the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara*, were able to rejuvenate and intensify (Tull, 2021, pp. 2—3) through symbiotic links with organized criminal networks.³⁷ The zone of instability encompassed not only the territories of Mali, but also Burkina Faso (Müller & Vorrath, 2021, p. 88). This determines not only the quantitative and qualitative “narrow places” of Western military activity, but also the low effectiveness of political and ideological steps aimed at consolidating the ethno-tribal groups of southern Mali and debunking the appeal of pseudo-ideals of terrorists.

Regulation by the Early 2020s: Contradictory Scenarios for a Return to the Third Stage of the Process

In the early 2020s, the degradation of the resolution process in Mali became truly noticeable. Until this time, the level of responsibility for mistakes in the settlement in Mali and other G5 Sahel countries made by Western countries was much lower in Germany than in France. It was *Serval* (2013—2014) and *Barkhane* (2014—2021) under French national command, as well as *Takuba* (2020—2022), in which France acted as a “framework nation,” that were seen as key to combating radical insurgencies. By the end of the 2020s, there were 5,100 French soldiers in the Sahel (Sidorov, 2021) and only 1,300 to 1,400 German soldiers (4:1). Accordingly, it was France that bore the greatest responsibility for

restoring the capacity of radical insurgents, their regrouping and activation. All this again turned the territory of Mali into a full-fledged hotbed of instability (Filippov, 2022).

The key military mistakes during the *Takuba* operation were the dispersion of forces, the lack of practical coordination with government troops, and the incomplete defeat of the already weakened of radical Islamic insurgents (Sidorov, 2018; 2021). One of the reasons for this was the lack of troops: the entire grouping was the equivalent of one reinforced brigade, operating not only in Mali, but also in all G5 Sahel countries (Sidorov, 2021).

The system of relations with various forces interested in defeating radical illegal armed formations, in particular with the military that recently came to power in Bamako, turned out to be not fully thought out either by France. Not only Paris was to blame for the failure, but also Berlin. The volume of German military efforts in the second half of 2010s was less than necessary. Furthermore, Berlin did not encourage France to take greater account of the internal political situation in Mali.

It should be emphasized that the German side realized the most important gaps in its activities and the need to follow the second way even before the change of power in August 2020. The starting point was the publication of the federal government’s report on the situation in Mali on March 25, 2020, which gave a rather unsightly picture of the degradation of the peace process and summarized the results of many years of German engagement in that African country since 2013.³⁸ The timing of the publication of the document — the end of March 2020, i.e. the time of the first wave of COVID-19, which had the greatest influence on the partial “freezing” of world political processes, is indicative. The fact that the issue of Mali was addressed at a time when Germany itself faced acute socio-economic problems reflected the exceptional importance of this vector for German foreign policy. Under

³⁶ 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—6.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. S. 1—17.

COVID-19, the German government was forced to evacuate part of its military contingent in March 2020 (Major, Schulz & Vogel, 2020, pp. 2—5), which weakened its control over the situation in Mali in general and its armed forces in particular. But already in the summer of 2020, all units and instructors were returned back, and the “ceiling” of the German staff of the *EUTM Mali* mission in May 2020 increased to 450 militaries.³⁹ This indicates a belated desire to extend the training system to the entire Malian army and prepare for the possible growth of the national armed forces.

The degradation of the resolution process led to the emergence of two options for overcoming this difficulty, largely contradictory.

The *first scenario*, a transition to an accelerated nationalization of the process, was advocated by the most determined part of the Malian officers, who were less interested in the support of peacemaking by the West, in particular Germany. After a violent change of power in August 2020, the militaries agreed to establish a transitional civilian government headed by President Ba Ndao. Did this mean following the scenario of 2012, when then-President D. Traore was ousted from power by officers, followed by a rapprochement of new government with France and the EU member states as a whole? A significant difference was already evident from the outset — by agreeing to convene a new government; the military became part of it. The leader of the coup, A. Goita, became vice president, retaining control of the situation and not about to give it up, as he did during the events of 2012. Less than a year later, on May 23—24, 2021, there was a second violent change of power. The already transitional

leadership, led by Ba Ndao, who was suspected of trying to negotiate with radical illegal armed formations, was pushed aside. This time power was fully concentrated in the hands of the military, led by A. Goita, who became the transitional president. In contrast to the situation in the autumn of 2020, the reopening of the Malian military to power was accompanied by a marked increase in the degree of negativity of the Western military presence in Mali.

The *second (alternative) scenario* implied an increase in Western countries’ efforts with the prospect of a transition to nationalization of the resolution, but only in the distant future with the utmost preservation of the role of official Paris and Berlin as external guarantors of Mali’s security and stability. In practice, this meant maintaining and even increasing the volume of activity and personnel of at least some of the missions.

Initially, between spring 2020 and May 2021, when the second change of power took place in Bamako, France tried to implement the second scenario, as illustrated by the launch of the *Takuba* mission in February 2020, involving Canada, Britain and some EU member states. In general, Germany was ready to support a partner. Berlin increased *MINUSMA* funding, as well as the “ceiling” of the personal for *EUTM Mali* up to 600 militaries,⁴⁰ a record in the practice of the Bundeswehr. This move was aimed at increasing the scale of control of the Malian armed forces and their individual units. At the same time, Berlin was not ready to send troops to *Takuba*.⁴¹ Why? Germany demonstrated its

³⁹ 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. 06.05.2020. S. 3.

⁴⁰ Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Militär-mission der Europäischen Union EUTM Mali // Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 19/28804. 21.04.2021. S. 3—4.

⁴¹ 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. 7.

unwillingness to use the Bundeswehr in a forceful manner and to simply follow Paris, especially in a situation where the operation could have ended unsuccessfully.

No less important was another task, not a declared one. Amid the growing perception within Mali of the military presence of official Paris as an imposed foreign presence, it was necessary to minimize the risk of the same perception with regard to the Bundeswehr. Germany's reaction to the change of power on August 19—21, 2020, was more prominent than that of France. Germany demanded the release of I.-B. Keita and ministers, but did not raise the issue of the Bundeswehr troops withdrawal. Moreover, during special hearings in the Bundestag, the federal government already in April 2021 provided support for a continued military presence.⁴²

Germany consistently tried to maintain it during the summer of 2021 to the spring of 2022, when France was forced to terminate *Barkhane* and then *Takuba* operations. Mali's new authorities began to demonstrate a negative attitude towards the military presence as an imposed foreign one, not only in the case of France, but also Germany. The new Malian government began to discourage the arrival of additional units of military equipment and banned the use of Bundeswehr UAVs at night.⁴³ Taking into account Germany's commitment to "strategic restraint" in the use of the Bundeswehr, another difficulty was the withdrawal of French units from Mali. These ones were struggling against radical illegal

⁴² Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an der Militärmission der Europäischen Union EUTM Mali // Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 19/28804. 21.04.2021. S. 3—4.

⁴³ The head of the German Defense Ministry questioned the continued presence of Bundeswehr soldiers in Mali // TASS. February 15, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/13707449> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

armed formations,⁴⁴ also acting as a "shield" for non-combat activity of the Bundeswehr.

In the autumn of 2021, Germany tried to find a way to keep its military presence in Mali. That is why Berlin initiated the contacts with A. Goita at the highest level.⁴⁵ But position of the Malian authorities on this issue remained unchanged. That is why during the change of government in Germany (when Angela Merkel's "Rea" ended) Berlin really thought about withdrawing the contingents. But by April 2022, it was clear that Germany decided to keep a presence in principle. This scenario was first emphasized by the new German government by foreign minister A. Baerbock during her visit to Mali and Niger.⁴⁶ In final version this position was formulated as a mandate by the Bundestag (May 11, 2022). The new "ceiling" for the Bundeswehr contingent in *MINUSMA* rose to 1,400 militaries⁴⁷ (+27% over the previous one) with the possibility of short-term (de jure due to rotation) exceeding it. The new funding exceeded 453 million euros for the year from June 1, 2022.⁴⁸ The additional 300 soldiers

⁴⁴ 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. 5—7.

⁴⁵ Bundeskanzlerin Merkel telefoniert mit dem malischen Übergangspräsidenten Assimi Goïta // Bundeskanzleramt. 30.09.2021. URL: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/bundeskanzlerin-merkel-telefoniert-mit-dem-malischen-uebergangspraesidenten-assimi-goïta-1964498> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁴⁶ Klimakrise und Stabilisierung im Sahel — Reise von Außenministerin Baerbock nach Mali und Niger // Auswärtiges Amt. 14.04.2022. URL: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/regionaleschwerpunkte/afrika/baerbock-mali-niger/2522296> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁴⁷ 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. 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid. S. 4.

relate primarily to transport aviation and medical units. Their tasks before were carried out by French soldiers.⁴⁹ At the same time, it was stated that the Bundeswehr contingent, especially in the context of the elimination of combat support from France, needed help from partners in its defense.⁵⁰ Germany has not abandoned the concept of “strategic restraint” in the new realities.

Even before the visit of the German foreign minister to Mali, on April, 5, 2022, Germany supported the decision to stop *EUTM Mali* at the EU level. At the same time, the EU stressed that this decision was temporary and reversible, i.e., subject to revision.⁵¹ The decision of the Bundestag re-tracked the decision, and also announced the rejection of the usage of the Malian militaries that were trained by *EUTM Mali* in cooperation with the Russian military group “Wagner.”⁵² The group was invited by the new Malian authorities. The decision was aimed at more effective replacement of the EU member states (first of all German and French) military instructors. Both Western powers were perceived the triple negative: as a loss of their own positions in the context of the Cold War between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia. Russia’s forced special military operation in Ukraine has been used as a pretext for the growing criticism of Russia’s military group “Wagner” in its struggle against international terrorism, as well as for lobbying the idea of keeping a German military presence in Mali.⁵³ In addition, Germany has intensified its activity to contain Russia in West as well as North Africa. One of the reasons for the German course was the catastrophic loss of

strategic positions by Berlin in Afghanistan in the spring and summer of 2021 and the unpreparedness of Germany to face the same fact in Mali. The *MINUSMA* mission outside the NATO zone of responsibility was the last sufficiently large ground contingent of the Bundeswehr in the early 2020s.⁵⁴

It is noticeable that Germany formally temporarily ceased activities under the *EUTM Mali*, but at the same time kept the military instructors after April 2022.⁵⁵ What does it mean? Berlin used French tactics in Mali in the second half of 2021. With the critical attitude of the authorities in Bamako toward military groupings with active Western involvement (*Barkhane, Takuba, EUTM Mali*), France and its partners were forced to stop these structures. At the same time, the troops remained as long as possible in the former areas of use and were gradually withdrawn to neighboring Niger;⁵⁶ when the situation changed, troops could quickly return to Mali.

The situation with German instructors in *EUTM Mali* was even better. They lived in camps of the Bundeswehr contingent at *MINUSMA*. The last one was the UN mission and allowed for a continued presence even in the face of official Bamako’s criticism of the continued military presence of Germany in general.

In the current geographical situation, Germany acted in northern Mali. What were the reasons for this? Formally, the key task for Germany was to implement the Algiers agreements (2015),⁵⁷ that is, to support the

⁴⁹ 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. 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid. S. 9.

⁵² Ibid. S. 5.

⁵³ Ibid. S. 5—10.

⁵⁴ Anzahl der an internationalen Einsätzen beteiligten deutschen Soldaten der Bundeswehr // Statista.de. 02.05.2022. URL: <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/72703/umfrage/anzahl-der-soldaten-der-bundeswehr-im-ausland/> (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ 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. 8—10.

⁵⁷ Ibid. S. 5.

further integration into a unified Malian state of districts Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu, which are to become autonomous. There, in a situation of central power dialogue in Mali, Germany hoped to use sufficiently developed contacts with local authorities, given the slow transfer of expanded powers from the state level. Germany also hoped to exploit the neighborhood with Niger. The country had rather good relations with Germany, Western actors and, above all, France. The main forces of the French military forces from Mali were withdrawn to Niger.

Also, Germany played rather active role in the training of Niger army and police, especially Special Forces.⁵⁸ Another important reason was the unwillingness of Germany to use the Bundeswehr in the fight against *the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara*, whose militants had become active in the southern part of Mali and also in neighbouring Burkina Faso.⁵⁹ Germany also tried to avoid clashes between the Bundeswehr contingent and “Wagner” group, which also means a new element of degradation in relations with the authorities in Bamako.

In general, Germany perceived its own contingent in Mali as a “pillow” for the possible restoration of a large-scale presence of Western actors in the country after a change in the position of the authorities in Bamako or their own change. In such a scenario, France would at least formally follow Germany’s lead.

This means that Germany felt that the turn to the nationalization in the resolution process (see Table 1), *the 3rd stage* of the process, in a situation of degradation, was premature. Indeed, Germany and France were not prepared to assume responsibility for this in principle. At the same time, the change of power in Bamako demonstrated the interest not

only of the army but also of society in a new, more effective tactic for fighting international terrorism. A key way of doing this was the *malization* of the resolution process. In such situation the coming of the “Wagner” group as an alternative to French and German military activity was the result of the degradation of the situation with the responsibility of Western powers.

In this regard, the German line of May 2022 can be perceived as measures to artificially delay the transition to nationalization in the resolution process. Berlin’s intention was not only and not so much to correct its own previous mistakes, as to preserve its strategic position in Mali. Without this, it is impossible to secure them in the G5 Sahel countries as a whole.

Conclusion

Given the dramatically increased degree of interdependence in the context of globalization, the resolution of any armed conflict must be a matter for the entire international community. In the case of Mali in the mid- and second half of the 2010s, France and Germany were largely responsible for the successes, but also for the failures in the resolution process. Germany increased its activity on all fronts, showed flexibility in the forms, scope and nature of its cooperation with France. At the same time, Berlin gradually reduced its orientation toward its partner in Mali and the G5 Sahel.

Overall, Berlin and Paris synchronized and tried to harmonize their goals and objectives in Mali. There, the two powers, *first*, played a guiding role for the Euro-Atlantic community as the whole. The group of Anglo-Saxon states, above all the United States, was less involved in stabilizing Mali. The small and medium-sized EU member states took a position led by Germany and France (the Netherlands since 2016). *Second*, Germany and France were critical of the growing activities of the “Wagner” group. It is also possible that their perception of China’s participation in

⁵⁸ 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.

⁵⁹ Ibid. S. 5.

MINUSMA, which was positive at the time when the German-French tandem did not fully engage in the new Cold War in the Far East, will tighten significantly (Stanzel, 2021, pp. 7—20). *Third*, France, as well as Germany, tried to coordinate the activities of African states, especially some AU member states. The Bundeswehr played the role of a “framework state” on some important aspects of *MINUSMA*, and for the *EUTM Mali* as a whole was a symbol of Germany’s willingness to be a guiding element for the EU — UN — AU strategic triangle.

What was the key reason for the German losses in Mali? First of all, the national interests were placed above the goal of a successful resolution. In 2013—2019, this can be illustrated by the insufficiency of German efforts, especially in the military sphere (not only in terms of quantitative shortages, but also in terms of chronological delay). By the early 2020s, Germany was not ready to turn to the nationalization of the resolution process without its own full participation. Expecting this, the scenario was all too realistic during the spring-summer of 2022.

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About the author: *Trunov Philipp Olegovich* — PhD (Political Sciences), Senior Research Fellow, Department of Europe and America, Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences, Russian Academy of Sciences; ORCID: 0000-0001-7092-4864; e-mail: 1trunov@mail.ru