

# The German president's imperialist mission in Africa

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15 February 2016

On February 8, German President Joachim Gauck embarked on a five-day journey to Nigeria and Mali. His trip is entirely in line with Germany's campaign to expand its economic and political influence in Africa. Accompanying Gauck is a high-ranking economic delegation drawn from the boardrooms of German technological and automotive companies, including Mercedes Benz, MAN, Siemens Power and Gas, and Voight.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote last Wednesday: "Lots of people, lots of oil, and lots of problems. That is a rough summary as to why President Joachim Gauck is taking almost four days' for a visit to Nigeria." The "West African giant" is the "largest economy in Africa" and "thanks to its oil deposits it's now more interesting than ever before." That's why "Gauck also brought an economic delegation." The country is already "Germany's second most important trading partner on the continent after South Africa."

As always, Gauck sought to gloss over his role as the frontman of German imperialism with a few select phrases about "democracy," "peace," and "western values." The president's web site declared the state visit to the republic of Nigeria was "in line with the democratic change of power in this important west African country in the last year."

Representatives from 15 countries gathered in the Nigerian capital of Abuja on Wednesday to hear Gauck's speech before the parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The German president began his address by speaking about the parallels between the developmental stages of the European Union and ECOWAS which solidified "fundamental common values" and the joint goal of "peace and prosperity."

But Gauck also spoke openly about the real aims of his trip. In regard to Germany's growing interest in Africa,

he explained: "German businesses have long recognized that it is worthwhile to invest in such cities [Lagos and other West African metropolitan areas]." With his trip, he was seeking to "focus the attention of Germany and Europe on emerging Africa."

With reference to the need for a "stable world order"—a code word for the enforcement of German imperialism's geo-strategic and economic interests worldwide—Gauck addressed the stream of refugees coming to Europe from Africa and repeated his demand for "limiting the influx." He told his listeners, "Migration to Europe will not solve the fundamental problems of development in Africa."

This was a thinly veiled call for the economic and political elite of ECOWAS to detain refugees already in Africa and collaborate more closely with Western governments. Berlin considers the current Nigerian president and former military dictator of the country, General Muhammadu Buhari, whom Gauck met on Thursday, the right man for such a job.

In October, a background paper of the Africa association of the German economy entitled "A good time for Nigeria" welcomed the replacement of former President Goodluck Jonathan with Buhari. "The change brings with it many chances and possibilities of new contracts for the German economy, especially in the agricultural sector and in the area of infrastructure and energy, as well as the consumer goods market," states the report.

Even "before the election," the report goes on, Buhari had "laid out the economic policy orientation of his government." He planned to "promote foreign investments" and "due to falling oil prices" was "urgently working to free the country's economy from its dependency on oil revenues." Additionally, he wanted "to downsize the state and provide more money for business development." For German companies, "the change in government meant, above all, that they would have to

make new contacts in the government and among public authorities.”

One has to view Berlin’s hymn of praise for Buhari in light of the new race among the major powers for raw materials and spheres of influence on the African continent. With a population of almost 180 million people, Nigeria is by far the most populous country in Africa. Nigeria and Mali have at their disposal an abundance of natural resources. Nigeria is the sixth-largest oil producer among the OPEC countries. Eighty percent of the state’s revenue comes from export earnings from natural gas production. The production of peanuts and cocoa as well as the textiles industry play a large role in the remainder of the country’s economy.

Mali, which Gauck will also visit, is Africa’s third largest producer of gold after South Africa and Ghana. The annual gold production volume amounts to approximately 50 tons. Reserves are appraised at approximately 800 tons. In addition to this, the country has at its command high reserves of phosphates, lime, rock salt, bauxite, iron ore, manganese, oil shale, marble, uranium, lead and zinc.

Buhari’s predecessor Jonathan cultivated close relations with Washington, but also developed economic relations with China. Figures from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics for the second quarter of 2015 show that imports from China made up 22.5 percent of Nigeria’s total imports, while the US imports accounted for only 9.6 percent. For years the United States has attempted to offset its dwindling economic influence on the continent by building military bases in Nigeria and other African states.

Buhari and his party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) are strong advocates of western interests. When Buhari defeated Jonathan and his conservative People’s Democratic Party (PDP) in the March 2015 presidential elections, he received considerable support from the American consulting firm AKPD Message and Media. The president of AKPD is David Axelrod, a close associate and former chief campaign strategist for President Obama.

The connections between Buhari and American imperialism go back to the 1970s, when Buhari underwent eight years of training in the American military. He received a degree from the US Army War College in 1980. In 1983, he organized a coup against the democratically-elected president Shehu Shagari and suppressed protests and strike actions.

In reality, the visit by the German president is not “in

line with the democratic change in power,” but rather in line with the implementation of the new foreign policy proclaimed by President Gauck at the end of 2013: In accordance with its economic size, Germany would have to take on “more responsibility” internationally and, when necessary, assert its geo-strategic and economic interests militarily.

Last Friday, Gauck went to Mali where he met up with German troops in the military encampment in Koulikoro, near the capital city Bamako. The visit is intended to bolster the German army prior to the beginning of its “Anti-Terror Missions” in the dangerous northern region of the country. At the end of January, the German parliament voted by a large majority to send 650 additional soldiers to Mali. They are now camped out in the city of Gao.

The German government is apparently planning to expand its intervention in Africa. In the manner of a colonial lord Gauck informed the ECOWAS elite: “In the future, the West African economic community will also have to make its contribution to the security of the region. The fight against terror and violence [...] remains an urgent task. The swamp of organized crime must also be dried up. The piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, the weapons and drug trades weaken the entire region. The building up of standby troops would be another important step.”

The claim that Western military intervention was a remedy against “terror and violence” stands reality on its head. In reality, Mali was first destabilized through the NATO bombardment of Libya in 2011. The Nigerian terror militia Boko Haram is also a by-product of the Western “war on terror.” They grew in influence, above all, after the destruction of Libya, where the West collaborated directly with Islamist militants to bring down the Gaddafi regime. Now Islamist terrorism is exploited in propaganda to expand the Western military presence in Africa.

As a suicide bombing at a refugee camp in Northern Nigeria killed 65 people on Thursday, Deutsche Presse Agentur reports that Gauck was pledging Buhari “support in the fight against Islamist terror militias” and “explicitly” acknowledged his “determined operation against the Boko Haram terrorists.”



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