

# Germany to expand global military missions

The German government wants to extend six military missions, including in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Mali. Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen took to the media to make the case for more Bundeswehr interventions.



The German government wants to expand and adapt its foreign military missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Mali, Angela Merkel's cabinet agreed on Wednesday. The German parliament will have the final say, as it does on all of Germany's military operations.

Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen told public broadcaster ARD on Wednesday morning that the Bundeswehr needs to redirect its efforts in Iraq after the successful defeat of the Islamic State militia in the country. The focus would now be to support efforts to reconstruct Iraq.

"It's in our interests that it becomes a stable country over the years," she said.

Von der Leyen claimed that the Bundeswehr mission to train the Kurdish peshmerga fighters in northern Iraq, which is due to end at the end of April, had been "a great success," and that in future the Bundeswehr would maintain a

presence in Baghdad and Irbil, where it would advise on building ministries and providing soldiers with medical supplies.

Germany will also continue to fly reconnaissance missions with their Tornado fighters, and keep refuelling planes in Iraq.

She went on to underline the fact that the mission complied with international law. “We have the invitation of the [Iraqi] prime minister and we are there shoulder to shoulder with the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, and many other countries.”



German soldiers have been stationed in Mali since 2013

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### **The never-ending Afghanistan mission**

Von der Leyen also used Wednesday’s interview to call for an expansion of the Bundeswehr’s mission in Afghanistan, where Germany has contributed to NATO missions for the past 17 years.

Von der Leyen described the Bundeswehr’s contribution to NATO’s two missions (ISAF from 2001 to 2014, Resolute Support since 2015) as a “story of progress on the one side, but of course also setbacks.”

The defense minister argued that the educational opportunities for children, the

status of women, health care and infrastructure in Afghanistan had all improved over the years, but that Afghanistan's own army, now comprising some 350,000 soldiers, was still struggling to keep the country safe. The Afghan military controls around 60 percent of the country, though Taliban fighters have still managed to carry out attacks on government facilities - as well as the German embassy in Kabul.

Up until now, the Bundeswehr has kept a maximum of 980 troops in the country, though von der Leyen wants to raise that limit to 1,300.

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### **Mali - the most dangerous mission**

Meanwhile, the Bundeswehr is to send an extra 100 soldiers to join the United Nations' mission in Mali, Western Africa, increasing the German contribution to a maximum of 1,100 officers. The proposal came in a joint letter to the cabinet from von der Leyen and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, leaked to news agency DPA.

The Bundeswehr has been part of the Mali mission since 2013, when the UN sent troops to help maintain a peace agreement after the France military conducted a military operation against Islamist rebel groups in the north of the country. There are a total of 12,000 UN soldiers in the country, as well as 1,700 UN police officers. Some 100 soldiers have been killed in Mali so far, with hundreds more seriously injured.

Germany is also intending to extend for another year the Bundeswehr's contribution to the UN mission in Darfur, South Sudan, and its contribution to the NATO Sea Guardian mission in the Mediterranean, which is supposed to secure shipping routes.

Germany currently has a total of 3,900 soldiers in active operations around the world.

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