




Ein Taktisches CIMIC TEAM (TCT) der gemischten Aufklärungskompanie (ISR Coy) des 4. Deutschen Einsatzkontingents MINUSMA geht über den Wochenmarkt in Wabaria nahe Gao/Mali, am 07.02.2017. ©Bundeswehr/Sebastian Wilke. [\[Quelle\]](#) [\[Bild in voller Größe\]](#)

RISKS OF MORAL EXPLOITATION OF SOLDIERS THROUGH UNREALISTIC RECRUITMENT

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 Eine frühere Version dieses Beitrags erschien bereits auf dem Blog [Just Peace and War](#).

by *Stephan Jockheck*

Not unlike the recent report *Filling the ranks* on the recruitment problems of the British Army shows for the UK, the German armed forces (Bundeswehr) *struggle badly to meet their recruitment goals* and to fulfill the “*Trendwende Personal*” (the turnaround in the personnel strength) as proclaimed by the German Defence Minister *Ursula von der Leyen*. Last year the recruitment department of the Bundeswehr tried a new way of targeting especially young people on YouTube. With a series of 59 episodes called *Die Rekruten* (The Recruits) YouTube users followed a couple of German Navy recruits through their basic training at the German Navy Technical School.

The series was widely criticised for not showing the serious implications of military service. Two weeks ago, the new series *MALI* on the deployment of German forces with the United Nations mission *MINUSMA* in Mali started as a sequel. But does the new series give a realistic impression of the challenges and risks of being a German soldier today and why should this be a requirement for a YouTube series?

TWO WAYS OF MORAL EXPLOITATION

In their *award winning* blogpost “*Are soldiers morally exploited?*” *Michael Robillard* and *Bradley J. Strawser* (both veterans themselves) of the *Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict* explain why soldiers are morally exploited by the societies they serve in two ways. First and in

general applicable to all soldiers, with her enlistment a soldier has to carry not only the risk to be maimed or killed in war, but she must also carry a heavy moral burden, because of the endless difficult moral decisions she needs to make in a conflict zone. Secondly, Robillard and Strawser state that especially in countries without conscription, only a small proportion of society chooses military service as an occupation, who are especially vulnerable due to their young age or their economical situation. These soldiers are morally exploited in particular because of their vulnerability. Their decision for enlistment is not as free as society would like to believe, either because they have no other options to improve their economical situation or they are too young and/or ill-informed to make a sound decision as a 2007 report shows for the UK.

This problem is a familiar one in Germany. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces (Wehrbeauftragter) in his last report criticised insufficient advice career centres gave to candidates about career opportunities and possibilities for reassignments after basic training. Others like the mechanised infantry officer major Marcel Bohnert in his new book see the emphasis on technical training or higher education possibilities in recruitment campaigns critically as it omits the physical, mental and moral risks of the military profession. This criticism was also directed against last year's YouTube series *Die Rekruten*, claiming that basic military training is presented as a summer adventure camp without any serious discussions on the possible risks for the young

recruits in future deployments. Therefore, the series *Die Rekruten* contributes to the second way of moral exploitation discussed by Robillard and Strawser.

THE NEW YOUTUBE SERIES *MALI* - FIRST IMPRESSIONS

With the new **YouTube series *MALI*** the Bundeswehr wants, amongst other things, to respond to this point of criticism. According to the **deputy spokesman of the German Federal Defence Ministry** colonel Holger Naumann, the new series is supposed to give an impression of the reality of German military deployments and to deal with the risks of being wounded or killed during a deployment. This decision is probably not so much founded on an insight by the ministry that these topics need to be addressed in a recruitment campaign, but by the fact that **two German pilots of a Tiger attack helicopter died in a crash in Mali** during the period the series covers.

The main protagonists of the series are eight German soldiers, two female, six male, aged between 23 and 41, including one enlisted man (Stabsgefreiter/specialist), six non-commissioned officers (Stabsunteroffizier/sergeant; Oberfeldwebel/staff sergeant; Hauptfeldwebel/sergeant first class) and one officer (Hauptmann/captain). Three of them are part of the quick reaction force (responsible for force protection) and one of the reconnaissance detail, operating mainly outside the German camp Castor next to the **city of**

Gao. The other four serve in logistics and support departments or in the command & control centre inside the camp. The cast of the series shows that the target group for this recruitment campaign are young people (generation YouTube) who could be interested in careers as an enlisted soldier or a non-commissioned officer. Thus, they make up part of those whom Robillard and Strawser identified as especially vulnerable.

After watching the first eight episodes it is too early to say if the series really addresses the criticism regarding the omission of the dangerous and difficult aspects of being a soldier, but the first impression gives reason to be hopeful. The protagonists are without doubt eager to give an insight into their work and their experiences during their deployment with MINUSMA in Mali. Furthermore, the more experienced soldiers like sergeant first class Daniel or captain Michael (surnames are not made public out of safety reasons) try to explain their mission and the background to their deployment to the viewer and do not leave out the risks they encounter. However, one must wait for the following 32 episodes to see how this approach will develop and how the protagonists will deal with unavoidable disappointments and crisis such as the death of comrades.

HIGHEST POSSIBLE STANDARDS FOR MILITARY RECRUITMENT

Due to the German history, including starting two world wars, and the following critical distance of the German society to the military, the possibilities for the Bundeswehr to get in touch with young people are very limited today. Unlike in the United States or the UK there are no career centres on high street (except one showroom in Berlin) and no cadet units in schools (which also provoke criticism as [Jonathan Parry](#) shows). Only so called youth officers ([Jugendoffizier](#)) are visiting German schools to give speeches or seminars on issues of defence and security policy topics, but they are explicitly not allowed to run recruitment campaigns. With the end of conscription in Germany in 2011, the Bundeswehr has to find new ways to reach young people for military service. But due to the historical background and because of the risk of moral exploitation, military recruitment in Germany must be held to the highest possible standards. This means the recruitment campaigns and the career centres must not only give accurate information on career possibilities and technical training or higher education one can receive by joining the Bundeswehr, but they must inform about the physical, mental and moral hazards as well. Without doubt, the YouTube series *Die Rekruten* fell short of this requirement. We shall see in the next weeks if the new series *MALI* fulfills this requirement.

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Tags: bundeswehr die rekruten Mali recruitment web series

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