



Why Germany Won't Be Dropping Bombs on Syria, Iraq or Mali

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By Douglas Peifer

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Abstract: Following the Paris terrorist attacks of November 2015, Germany's Angela Merkel promised "to give France every support" in its war against jihadi terrorist groups, affirming that the "the Islamic State must be fought militarily." After considerable debate, the Bundestag approved the deployment of German forces to the Middle East, Mali, and elsewhere, leading some to claim that Germany has set aside its reservations regarding the utility of force. A closer look at German contributions to UN and NATO missions from the 1990s through 2016 reveals, however, that Germany continues to draw a red line in terms of coercive airpower and direct combat operations. This reluctance stems from its interpretation of the past, demonstrating that constructivist approaches to strategic culture remain valid.

On the evening of November 13, 2015, three teams of terrorists struck multiple locations in Paris, killing 130 people and injuring over three hundred. Most of the perpetrators had either been born or raised in Europe, but had become captivated by the violent jihadi ideology espoused by Daesh, the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). They slaughtered innocent young Europeans sipping drinks at Parisian cafés, enjoying dinner in its restaurants, and listening to music at a popular concert venue. A suicide bomber attempted to enter the Stade de France where thousands were watching a friendly soccer match between France and Germany, but he detonated his explosive vest at the stadium's entrance as a security guard was patting him down. Millions of Europeans watched the attacks unfold on their television screens, finding it hard to believe that the sorts of brutal terrorist acts associated with the Middle East and North Africa were taking place before their eyes in the City of Lights, Paris.

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U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter pays respects as a military member places his wreath at the Place de La Republique in Paris, in memory of the victims of the November attacks. (DoD photo by Stephanie Dreyer, Jan. 20, 2016)

Shortly after the attacks, Daesh issued an online statement claiming credit for the attack. President François Hollande responded in a speech to the joint session of the French Parliament on the November 16, declaring that “France is at war. [...] Friday’s acts of war were decided upon, planned and prepared in Syria. They were organized in Belgium and carried out on our soil with French complicity. [...] We are facing an organization, Daesh, which has a territorial base, financial resources and military capabilities... Every day, it massacres and oppresses populations.”¹ He pledged to destroy Daesh, called upon the international community to join in combatting terrorism, and proclaimed that French aircraft had already struck Daesh strongholds in Syria.

Hollande announced that he would meet with both Presidents Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin shortly, and indicated that France was taking the unprecedented step of invoking Article 42 (7) of the Treaty on European Union which obligated members to provide “aid and assistance by all the means in their power,” if an EU state was attacked. Hollande warned that Daesh was not just France’s enemy, but it was Europe’s enemy.

The reaction in Germany to the Paris attacks was one of shock, sympathy, and solidarity. In a telephone call to Hollande the day after the attack, Chancellor Merkel assured Hollande that Germany stood shoulder to shoulder with France, and

¹ Speech by M. François Hollande, President of the Republic, to a joint session of the French Parliament, Versailles, Nov. 16, 2015.

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