

Germany is cautious over Mali

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On 11 and 13 January the heads of the Federal Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence expressed their support for the French intervention in Mali, describing it as compatible with UN Security Council resolution 2085 RB of 20 December 2012 and stated that it helps to fight against terrorism in Mali. The German MFA ruled out direct participation in the intervention by Bundeswehr combat units, and on 14 January it announced that it was considering the possibility of granting France medical, logistic and humanitarian support. On 16 January the MFA and the MoD declared however their support for African intervention forces in Mali (AFISMA), which were established following the above mentioned resolution. Germany will provide two transport aircraft for the needs of ECOWAS states. Both ministries also restated their support for the EU training mission which had been agreed by the Council of the EU in November 2012. They did, however, make Germany's involvement dependent on the final shape of the mission. It will be agreed on condition that an internal political agreement is reached in Mali and it is specified which Malian armed forces will be trained by the EU.

The conflict in northern Mali began in January 2012. This led to a military putsch being formed against the incumbent president and also to northern Mali unilaterally announcing its independence. Control over northern Mali was afterwards taken over by Islamists linked with Al-Qaeda who launched an offensive towards the south. The French government decided on an armed intervention with the aim of containing this offensive.

Commentary

- Germany regards France's intervention in Mali above all as securing France's strategic and economic interests. It does also see, however, the risk of an outpost of radical Islamists becoming established in Mali. The German government has initially limited itself to expressing its political support for the French intervention. However, due to the fact that France was unanimously backed by the UN Security Council and public opinion and that military support was declared by such countries as the US, the UK and Denmark, Germany did not rule out offering medical, logistic or humanitarian support as it wished to avoid repeating its policy of "standing apart" from its largest allies (after the crisis in Libya).

- The scope of the aid granted by Germany is, however, limited by the concern that it will be exposing itself to a level of risk considered to be too high. Germany's participation in the French intervention is not seen as important from the viewpoint of German interests. Furthermore, the Bundestag election in autumn 2013 requires the government to be cautious of Germany's involvement in foreign missions. Taking this into consideration, Germany has decided to make two military transport aircraft available to the African AFISMA operation (but not to French forces) which will not be used in areas of military operations, making this very much a "judgement of Solomon". The German government exercises caution even regarding its contribution to the EU training mission in which it will become involved if the specified conditions are met.
- Germany's cautious position on the intervention in Mali, Syria and, earlier, in Libya indicates that a new German doctrine of military engagement abroad is being formed in case of crisis management. Germany is in general not willing to become involved militarily in intrastate conflicts. This is the case even with crises in the EU's neighbourhood, and even more so in foreign culture environments, even with a UN Security Council mandate. Germany shifts responsibility for military crisis management and armed interventions to regional organisations and it perceives its military involvement in terms of logistic and training support etc. Germany champions also the priority of political solutions and emphasises the importance of diplomacy and willing plays the role of an intermediary in crisis and conflict resolution.