

# Kramp-Karrenbauer's Quest for a meaningful German Army



In the future, according to the will of Germany's Defense Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer, the Bundeswehr needs to take much more responsibility and fight side by side with the allies. A noble and long overdue vision. However, does Germany possess military capabilities after having focused on diplomacy for decades and no real combat situations?

The idea was first brought up when Kramp-Karrenbauer (AKK) said the Bundeswehr could play an active part in a delicate mission between Turkish, Syrian, Kurdish and, not least, Russian forces after the Turks had invaded Northern Syria. Foreign Minister Maas and his SPD were outraged. The international response was ranged from shock to excitement, as Germany has been known for making excuses whenever dangerous combat missions require actual work from the international community.

A few days later, AKK reemphasized her plan by stating that the German armed forces should in future be more courageous and committed in foreign missions. As an example, she mentioned the conflict in Mali, where the division of labor with the French troops stationed there also means that the main burden of the fighting against Islamist terror lies with the French.

The French will happily confirm this notion immediately. Indeed, no nation, whether Americans, Britons, Italians or even the Poles would complain if Germany was to become more involved not only diplomatically and in terms of being glorified water boys, but also militarily.

Those, who oppose the new approach are German themselves. Pacifist, non-realists, who cannot bear the thought of German troops being involved in a combat mission, due to the country's past. What they lack in solidarity to the other nations, who have done the heavy lifting in all these decades, they possess in finger-pointing whenever a state does not seem to listen to Germany's "dispute resolutions". It remains a shameful, irresponsible display of German foreign policy.

Apart from the political dispute, however, the military capabilities must be considered also. An increase in engagement – or in Germany's case an engagement – can only occur if the Bundeswehr is sufficiently equipped and trained. AKK realizes this and has pledged to finally satisfy the NATO agreement of spending 2 percent of GDP towards defense by 2031. What does not quite sound like German efficiency, is indeed a true paradigm shift at this stage. Usually, Germany would rather pay for a set of magic beans than for defense.

However, it also means that currently, Germany is simply not there yet. How could it be? Germany has sold or scrapped 90 percent of its tanks and 75 percent of its warships in recent decades, greatly reduced its air force and air defense while also suspending military service.

Accordingly, the Bundeswehr's skills can also be described as rudimentary at best. While practice tends to make perfect, procrastination delivers quite the opposite result. A cynic might argue the difference between Germany's army and the Salvation Army is infinitesimal at this stage.

Particularly, as abilities for major military conflicts have been abandoned altogether, such as the landing with amphibious troops or ships for example. At the end of the Cold War, Germany still operated twenty-two landing crafts. Today, it operates one – and it is fifty-three years old. Six destroyers used to operate in the Baltic Sea. By now, the only "fleet" that is left consists of corvettes and frigates and are, thus useless for any combat mission. Moreover, many of the large and extremely expensive military systems have reached their time limits such as combat aircraft, transport helicopters, heavy tanks, and air defense. Maintaining the status quo carries enormous costs, costs that Germany has not been willing to invest in the past.

Currently, Germany is still spending only 1.2 percent of its GDP on defense. If the two-percent target was achieved by 2031, the Bundeswehr could provide ten percent of the NATO capabilities, as promised to the partners in the Alliance. It would be a welcomed sight and an adequate response to the end of Pax Americana.

Kramp-Karrenbauer has now laid the foundation for a stronger, more responsible Germany and one can only hope, that the rest of the politicians are cognizant enough to support a military rebuild. Europe's de facto leader must not continue

to hide behind other nations whenever the chips are on the table.

Moreover, Kramp-Karrenbauer has broken a German taboo by attempting to talk the Bundeswehr into relevance and one should commend her for it.

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