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# **THE GERMAN WHITE PAPER 2016 AND THE CHALLENGE OF CRAFTING SECURITY STRATEGIES**

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**Edited by Gunther Hellmann  
and Daniel Jacobi**

in cooperation with



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International Security  
and Governance

and

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# **The German White Paper 2016 and the Challenge of Crafting Security Strategies**

**Edited by Gunther Hellmann  
and Daniel Jacobi**



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## PREFACE

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*„Flawed interpretations of political affairs – be they foreign, domestic, economic or technical – can lead to disastrous outcomes. But setting wrong objectives or implementing right objectives with wrong means can be just as bad.“*

*(Helmut Schmidt<sup>1</sup>)*

**H**elmut Schmidt is one of the few leading German politicians who pushed strategic thinking on foreign and security policy as essential for public discourse.

It was he who, first as defense minister of the social-liberal coalition from 1969 to 1972, established the parameters of Germany's foreign and security policy in the 1970 White Paper "On the Security of the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of the Federal Armed Forces", co-authored by Theo Sommer and Christoph Bertram.

The White Paper of 1970 is still considered a turning point in Germany's strategic culture debate. It served as the intellectual basis underscoring the political and military logic of the social-liberal coalition's détente policy under Willy Brandt. Embedded within a coordinated NATO policy, the ultimately successful approach was heavily disputed, triggering fierce political debates domestically. However, the détente policy could only be successful when based on three key pillars, that enjoyed broad support in the respective parties in the Bundestag and the majority of the German public:

- Germany's unequivocal alignment with the West and its membership in NATO;
- the transatlantic partnership with the European guarantor power USA;
- and the attempt to garner public backing for this reorientation of German politics.

The Aspen Institute Germany remains heavily indebted to these three key principles of German and transatlantic policy. Willy Brandt and Marion Gräfin Dönhoff being among Aspen's founders, this transatlantic institute – in an unparalleled way – created a safe confidential environment for discussion and debate on strategic questions of rapprochement and disarmament between East and West. The provision of platforms for confidential negotiations and encounters was a key means. Hence, it seemed only logical for Aspen to support this project on the necessities and possibilities of strategic planning today.

From today's perspective, these early approaches towards strategic planning in the 70s and 80s may almost be seen as relatively easy – given the clear structures of the Eastern and Western Bloc and a manageable number of actors along with their relative predictability. Today, strategic planners are confronted with a highly complex global framework and a multitude of disruptive political developments and elements. Hence, the very thought of long-term strategies, doctrines, and rules may seem presumptuous.

The last five years, in particular, have shown that assumptions, trends, forecasts, and scenarios that had previously been seen as gold standard for credibility remain anything but reliable indicators. From the annexation of Crimea to Brexit to Trump – the list of unpredicted and unforeseen developments and events that have radically altered the world is extensive. This means that current trends and developments – e.g. questioning the world order and its structures or the dangers of an uncontrolled cyber-armament – evolve in a chaotic rather than predictable and foreseeable manner. Is it a relapsing into a Hobbesian world marked by uncontrolled and uncontrollable conflicts? Everyone against everyone? Signs for such a trend are unmistakable. This should increase pressure on everybody seeking to avoid these developments. This is why strategic planning that sounds out political options will become increasingly critical, even as the room for maneuver remains narrow.

The authors of this publication deserve a lot of credit, having approached this topic from a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Thanks to them, various findings, valuable suggestions and proposals have been compiled – ranging from calls for strengthening the Federal Security Council to demanding more active involvement of Bundestag in discussion and formulation of Germany's foreign and security policy. I am therefore hoping for an open and positive engagement with this wide-ranging analysis. This may help to encourage a long-overdue public debate on this topic.

Rüdiger Lentz  
Executive Director  
Aspen Institute Germany

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<sup>1</sup> Schmidt, H. 1969. *Strategie des Gleichgewichts*. Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag.



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***Introduction: The German White Paper 2016 and the Politics of Crafting Security Strategies***  
**Gunther Hellmann & Daniel Jacobi**

The introduction surveys the basic challenges to contemporary processes of strategy making. The 2016 White Paper is an important building bloc of such processes. At the same time, it cannot be regarded as anything but a temporary marker along the way of a much wider societal debate on security politics. However, such debates are still impeded by under-complex views of actual strategy making processes as well as equally unproductive reciprocal ascriptions of the actors involved. The chapter therefore advocates a more learning-oriented dialogical security culture that aims at lowering the threshold for entering into security political debates. It closes with a discussion of ongoing efforts at institutionalizing such efforts at the ministerial level in Berlin and in additional advisory bodies of the German armed forces.

***Processes of Strategy Formation. Opportunities and Limitations***  
**Thomas Bagger**

Processes of strategy formation are often overloaded with unrealistic expectations. They are neither a panacea for a missing societal consensus, nor can they reduce the unpredictability of international politics. However, they still provide an added value for policy-makers, ministries, the military, the public and international partners. A comparison between the “Review2014” of the Federal Foreign Office and the 2016 White Paper enables us to draw conclusions about the conditions under which normative preferences, national interests and required resources can be aligned as much as possible.

***Strategy Development as an Institutionalized Process: Strategy and Foresight at the German Ministry of Defense***  
**Frank Richter**

Engaging in strategic foresight enhances the strategic capability of the Federal Ministry of Defense. The continuous analysis of our possible futures is the foundation for a reliable determination of security goals and priorities. Strategic foresight also enhances our capability to think out of the box, thereby overcoming fixed assumptions and inflexible patterns of thinking. Foresight is thus also a mental exercise, preparing us for an ever-changing world. The Directorate-General for Security and Defense Policy at the Federal Ministry of Defense initiated a number of measures to strengthen our foresight capabilities.

*... Because Today will Tomorrow have been Yesterday.  
Future Analysis as an Instrument of Strategy Consulting*  
**Olaf Theiler**

Strategic foresight presents an addition to classical policy advice. The methods of a scientifically-oriented analysis of the future provide additional resources whose particular strength lies in dealing with the "unknown-unknowns" in foreign and security policy. Imagining the future and thinking in scenarios or alternative futures can make important contributions to the development of political strategies. In view of the numerous "strategic surprises" of recent years, it is important to make good use of this instrument in order to be able to develop "future-proof" strategies.

*On the Development of Strategy Formation through Strategic  
Foresight. Example: Storytelling*  
**Norbert Reez**

Strategic foresight (foresight, for short) is also referred to as the continuation of strategy formation by other means. Relevant means are imagination and creativity. Conventional strategy formation, however, predominantly takes as a basis the model of planning or strategic planning (in particular: long-term planning). This is why the author argues for a broader approach called "foresight-based strategy formation". The essence of this idea is to reconsider current practices of strategic planning and cultivating a new, methodologically broader form of strategy formation by making use of creative techniques and foresight methodologies. Finally, the author illustrates his concept by telling a fictitious "story from the future" about climate change in the Arctic region.

*Notions of "Strategy" in the German White Papers and the Idea of  
"Sicherheitsvorsorge"*  
**Jan Fuhrmann**

The lament about a lack of strategy in German security policy is present at the political, academic and media level. However, since the federal government releases guideline documents at irregular intervals, this paper asks about the underlying notion of "strategy" in the White Papers on German Security Policy. Thus, it reconstructs the use of the concept in the documents' language as well as ends and means of German security policy. Thereby, the study reveals a concept of strategy that is evidently more adaptive and dynamic than established academic concepts of (grand) strategy. Finally, the paper argues that this causes a gap of understanding between strategy practitioners and academic practitioners. In its current form, every renewal of the lament about a lack of strategy reproduces this gap.

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***“What Have the Romans ever Done for Us?” Personal Reflections on the Culture of the Strategy Experts’ Debate in Germany***  
**Hans-Peter Bartels**

The contribution comments on the culture of the debate among strategic experts in Germany. It argues that the often-noted lack of security political expertise and corresponding demand for more security political debates does not stand up to closer scrutiny. The article substantiates this via an international comparison and ends with the demand that Germany, while certainly already on the right track, must also dare "more Europe" on the security political terrain.

***A more Audacious Approach. How Self-Reflection and Debate Contribute to Strategic Capability***  
**Roderich Kiesewetter**

Germany’s strategic capabilities are still establishing. Facing an unstable international environment and less predictability, Germany has to balance dangers and risks by scenario analysis. Therefore a permanent and broad debate in parliament is crucial, which generates legitimation for the government to adapt policies. At the same time, institutional learning processes as well as comprehensive thinking inside the government is a core task in a framework of a methodological approach to be capable of strategic acting.

***Country without Qualities? The White Paper 2016 and Germany's Difficult Relationship to its National Security Strategy***  
**Christian Thiels**

Germany struggles with a concrete definition of its own national interests. The debate on security policy takes place only in small, often elitist circles of scientists, military and very few specialized politicians. There is hardly any involvement of society as a whole. In the mass media, security policy is hardly present apart from event-driven reporting. The article examines the causes of this phenomenon and outlines possible ways to broaden the necessary discourse.

***The Illusion of a “Great Debate” about German Security Policy. A Plea for More Citizen Participation***  
**Anna Geis**

Demands for a “great debate” on security policy in Germany have been expressed for a long time. White Papers as strategy documents of the executive can provide impulses for a broader societal discourse. However, such a “great debate” has, again, not taken place after the publication of the 2016 White Paper of the German government. This contribution reviews some of the well-established deficit diagnoses and peculiarities of security communication in Germany in order to

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justify more decentralized formats of citizen participation in foreign and security policy.

***Public Opinion on Germany's Security Policy:  
Military Restraint, Critical Events, and the Case for Political Argument***  
**Sebastian Nieke**

Most of Germany's international partners advocate a more active German role in international security. However, many commentators point to German public opinion as an obstacle to a more active stance on security policy, especially when it comes to military commitments. However, a closer look at public opinion formation on foreign and security policy disproves these claims and shows that substantive political argument can generate support even in contested policy areas.

***Artificial Intelligence as a Challenge for Security Policy***  
**Alexander Stulpe & Gary S. Schaal**

The essay first reflects and discusses the potential range of security challenges induced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a disruptive technology with multiple effects on society, international relations and the future of warfare. It then describes specific forms and dimensions of asymmetric and hybrid threats arising from AI technology which liberal democracies are most likely to be confronted with in the forthcoming years. Finally, it focuses on the question how liberal democracies can cope with these dangers, reduce their vulnerabilities and strengthen their resilience, with special regard to the current situation in Germany.

***Why Europe Needs a Peace Corps - and Why Germany Should Fight for It.  
A Polemic***  
**Stefan Braun**

For decades Europe has enjoyed a special luxury: It was able to make itself extremely comfortable under the political and military umbrella of the United States. But the times are over. And this raises the question for Europeans as to what they want to be and what role they want to play in a world that has become increasingly fragile, heterogeneous and even more dangerous. Proposals and decisions on military cooperation between Europeans have been around for a long time. The idea of a European peace corps, however, in which soldiers and civilians, police and medical officers and development aid workers act under one flag, has not yet been discussed. This article examines the question of why such a peace corps could be useful and why it should be created.

### ***Strategic Thinking, Planning, and Culture in Germany as an Integral Part of European Security Policy***

**James D. Bindenagel & Simone Becker**

In the face of geopolitical upheavals and rifts, Germany's and Europe's "new responsibility" is currently on everyone's lips. The EU will only be able to protect its values and principles using an integrative group leadership approach. This commentary argues that, in order to allow for the EU to take part in reshaping the transforming global order, Germany as the union's biggest member state first needs to develop its long-term strategic planning capabilities. It identifies the lack of a strategic culture in Germany and the missing public debate about goals, priorities, and guiding principles of foreign and security policy as a central weakness of Germany's geo-political reorientation. The commentary calls for Germany to initiate a long-term strategic planning process alongside its European partners and proposes the introduction of a Council for Strategic Foresight to encourage a more informed public debate and promote a culture of strategic thinking.

### ***Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace***

**Ekkehard Brose**

The double impetus of lessons learned in Afghanistan and growing political pressure due to the increasing number of refugees arriving in Germany led to the drafting of inter-ministerial guidelines in 2017. They focus on three foreign policy objectives: strengthening the coherence of anti-crisis measures; enhancing the range of foreign policy instruments available when dealing with crises; contributing to the ongoing debate about Germany's international role. Implementing these crisis-guidelines in a coherent, pragmatic manner will present a permanent challenge. The guidelines will not only facilitate cooperation between ministries, they also demonstrate commitment to multilateralism, international order and a comprehensive understanding of security.

### ***Why Germany Has to Rely on a Comprehensive Strategic Approach for Its Foreign and Security Policies – Now More Than Ever***

**Ulrich Schlie**

Consensus building in a parliamentary democracy can only be achieved through extended political debate about national interests, foreign policy objectives and the domestic impact of international responsibilities. Compared with its most important allies and partners, Germany's strategic approach to foreign and security policy continues to be patchy. A stronger emphasis on dialogue about important aspects of foreign policy in the German parliament (Bundestag) will result in an increased awareness of foreign and security policy. This article identifies large stumbling blocks in German politics that impede progress. Set against the background of Germany's foreign policy debate as well as legal and political developments since reunification, this article argues in favor of a

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coherent national approach. Significant pending decisions about how to adjust key instruments for foreign and security policy – decision-making structures in the Chancellery, the armed forces, the Foreign Ministry and intelligence services – can only be arrived at by concerted action on the part of the German government.

***A German Strategy of Embedded European Leadership.  
Imperatives and Pitfalls***  
**Gunther Hellmann**

Germany's security and welfare have been built on the country's embedment in a closely-knit network of multilateral collaboration in the context of NATO and the European Union. However, the very foundation of this multilateralism is questioned today as never before. This poses particular risks for Germany's embedment in the EU because Germany is increasingly called upon to take over leadership responsibilities also in the military field at a time when its more visible power coincides with a redefinition of the US's role in Europe under President Trump. The article discusses several pitfalls and strategic imperatives, especially the necessity for Germany to enhance the prospects for stable multilateral cooperation in the EU via self-binding.



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# 1. INTRODUCTION: THE GERMAN WHITE PAPER 2016 AND THE POLITICS OF CRAFTING SECURITY STRATEGIES

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Daniel Jacobi  
& Gunther Hellmann<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract:

*The introduction surveys the basic challenges to contemporary processes of strategy-making. The 2016 White Paper is an important building bloc of such processes. At the same time, it cannot be regarded as anything but a temporary marker along the way of a much wider societal debate on security politics. However, such debates are still impeded by under-complex views of actual strategy-making processes as well as equally unproductive reciprocal ascriptions of the actors involved. The chapter therefore advocates a more learning-oriented dialogical security culture that aims at lowering the threshold for entering into security political debates. It closes with a discussion of ongoing efforts at institutionalizing such efforts at the ministerial level in Berlin and in additional advisory bodies of the German armed forces.*

In the summer of 2016, after a ten-year hiatus, the Federal Republic of Germany published a new White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr (White Paper 2016). Published under the seal of the Federal Government for the very first time, it is expected to provide orientation for Germany's security for approximately a decade. With regard to the paper's history, it is particularly noteworthy that its conceptualization follows an approach to political debate that has been established by the Federal Foreign Office in 2013, i.e. as an unprecedentedly public process of security-political deliberation. One might think that things may now return to normal, i.e. the mundane adjustment to the challenges of everyday politics. However, it is precisely the very public character of the White Paper process that has opened up new spaces for broader public exchanges on the politics of security. In particular the document highlights in both content and form one specific security challenge. As some of the participants of the intra-ministerial writing process have emphasized, the White Paper should primarily be understood as a landmark and milestone, not as the end point to efforts to achieve a new reflexive self-understanding of security politics in the Federal Republic of Germany (Breuer and Schwarz 2016, p. 84). In the first speech after her reappointment, Minister of Defense Ursula von der Leyen also highlighted the significance of "further differentiating the White Paper process" as one her six top priorities (von der Leyen 2018a, p. 5). This Report joins the emerging consensus that a more differentiated, continuous and deliberative process of security-political strategy-making is needed. It therefore engages from different angles both the pitfalls and the opportunities of a dialogue on the possible changes in Germany's

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Florian Hubert, Aaron Müller and Francois Weinmann for their tireless support in the production process of this report. We would further like to thank the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Düsseldorf, for co-financing a workshop at the Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik, Pankow, in April

2018 which provided the foundation for this report as well as a Special Issue of the "Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik" in German. Finally we thank the Aspen Institute Germany for supporting this publication.

security culture that have been initiated by the 2016 White Paper process.

## 1 Strategy Making at the Crossroads

In the wake of the fall of the Twin Towers, at the latest, it has become almost commonplace to speak of a distinctly new dynamic of contemporary security politics. Formerly “clear and present” dangers were increasingly being complemented by the risk of abstract threats. Traditional approaches to security politics underwent critical scrutiny, leading to a reexamination of some of their most basic assumptions. Today many security experts spend much time surveying new actors, structures or processes, making security-strategy writing “a *genre* in demand” (Leander 2006, p. 370). Yet, at the same time, the new security dynamics have also provoked a more subtle challenge to one core element of security politics which has, so far, been met with surprisingly little attention: the creation and evaluation of *equally dynamic* security strategies. Only recently, and mostly due to the paradoxical constellation of a *dynamic* security environment and the rather *static* form of security strategic documents, has the awareness grown that notions of “rationalist” or “pure” strategy are of little help and that “real strategies (...) must be demonstrably practical” (Betts 2000, pp. 7-8). However, significant gaps remain as our knowledge of the “nuts and bolts” of processes of constructing and evaluating practical security strategies remains quite limited.

The contemporary dynamics of global security politics therefore call for an equally dynamic security-strategic process. One possible solution is to push for a more comprehensive understanding of how the latter may be organized and evaluated as well as how these two dimensions may be linked with one another. One must then first ask what possibly causes a lack (or lagging) of insight into security strategy-making processes and how these deficiencies can be overcome.

One fairly obvious way of rendering the security strategy-making process more dynamic is that it must transcend the static format of doctrinal fixation in order to handle the security dynamics it encounters in a more flexible fashion. We contend that one major obstacle in the course of making “practical” security strategies exists due

to an historically voided, exclusionary understanding of “theory and practice” which is no longer part of the solution but has become part of the problem. Today this concept of “theory and practice” obscures the fact that the formalization of security strategy as a fixed form reflects merely *one* historical practice. Rooted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it moreover only fully acquired its present understanding some sixty years ago (Heuser 2010, p. 490).

The problem of fixing doctrine in this fashion is particularly obvious in contemporary Western democracies. In modern mass media societies even security politics can no longer escape *public communication*, i.e., commentary, evaluation, acknowledgement or critique far beyond the narrow confines of “political decision-making”. We no longer live in societies (if we ever did) where only those who *make* decisions face their direct consequences. Rather, “complexity, conflict, interdependence seem to be the only elements we can be sure of when we refer to our times” (Mogherini 2015). Hence, the realization of the uncertainties inherent in the new security dynamics and, thus, the riskiness of political decision-making have led to the demand to extend public participation also to the domain of strategy making. Where threats or dangers are no longer “clear and present” but more abstract, their identification also becomes more uncertain – and hence necessarily politicized.

In a longer historical perspective, therefore, security strategy-making has not only been differentiated into a military and a political sphere, but the latter has now also been further differentiated, giving way to a broader public which demands to take part in the production processes of security knowledge and which now must be accounted for in the course of strategy making. Many practitioners nowadays agree that strategy making can no longer be restricted to governmental spheres, that it must reflect a more complex (world) societal foundation and that governments need to justify their practices vis-à-vis broader publics (Steinmeier 2015). Public reviews of their foreign policy have been one result (e.g. Federal Foreign Office 2014).

The present Report takes up these impulses for a more public debate and discusses both pitfalls and opportunities for a more openly conceived

democratic deliberation on security policy. Our core thesis is that the development and life cycle of a White Paper – taken to be an articulation of strategy – should not be understood as cast in the iron mold of ends, means and goals of governmental planning, but rather as a necessarily temporary mode of thinking in a broader public setting about spaces of possibility and practical alternatives in the field of a nation's security. Strategy making in this understanding is not merely reactive or anticipatory as far as threats and risks are concerned, but proactive and democratically empowering because it would successively expand the resonance sphere to a better informed and involved public.

The broad debate accompanying the White Paper 2016 has the particular merit of emphasizing the document's position within the framework of today's security politics more clearly than ever before: Such guidelines are nothing more, but also nothing less, than problem-solving approaches that come with a specific timestamp. They do not offer a timeless vanishing point that provides a safe anchor for political action. Rather, they provide a necessarily temporary, albeit important, and practical orientation in the here and now – with space and time being subject to the respective political contingencies.

## 2 Pitfalls of a Dialogical Security Culture

One wishes that this insight must not be lost. However, even with the never before achieved "observational altitude" of the current White Paper, i.e. its comparatively high degree of abstraction, the dialogue on security politics that follows on from it has not yet come close enough to exploiting its potential in the sense of a more sustainable and comprehensive security communication (Jacobi et al. 2011). A major reason for this can be found in one of the most foundational dimensions of the German security culture: the political and public perception of the security-political process.

Despite the insight into the contingent and societal qualities of strategy making, the very debate on the "theatre of security strategy" literally remains structured by equally dramaturgical metaphors: security strategy is usually performed

by *security strategy actors* on a global stage which is being followed by an audience of *security strategy observers*. From either side, the distinction of actors and observers is asymmetrically structured, relegating one side in favor of the other. This asymmetric structuring is usually done via highly feasible self-descriptions: *Security strategy actors*, ideal-typically, see themselves as insiders, directly wired into the live process of security politics. They usually have more (yet never complete) information and knowledge of the various issues; they can track and influence ongoing and developing events in real-time; they are typically in possession of the adequate equipment and staff to process and deal with security-related occurrences in a timely fashion. Due to their institutional environments, their decisions are usually mediated by specific (inter-)institutional structures or chains of command rather than a range of ideal options. While most security actors would not dismiss reflexivity per se, they demand for it to be so concise that it fits their notoriously short, yet ever-shrinking time frame to prepare and make decisions. They hence experience those who are not an immediate part of their process, particularly experts, as *observers* who overestimate their own role as advisors. Despite their appreciation for a second look, security strategy actors maintain that the first look is the more important one since without it there would be no decisions in the first place. Prolonged reflection may even distract from real world challenges. Insofar security strategies are often seen more as "a distillation of compromises" (Hill 2006, p. 161 in Heuser 2010, p. 490) rather than the application of a set of (often intuitive) "hands-on" principles nurtured in a specific institutional culture.

*Security strategy observers*, ideal-typically, see themselves as residing distinctly outside the core of strategy processes. For scholars, for instance, it is important to their self-description that this outsider status is actually a *conditio sine qua non* for their work: to offer a more removed reflection on what "truly" happens in practice. Not surprisingly, they prefer the second look over the first one as they feel that the latter automatically lacks sufficient reflexivity. The closeness of the security strategy actors to their subject matter is seen as their blind spot. Intel-

lectuals, journalists, think tanks, political foundations and other political publics of interested observers therefore locate themselves in the environment of security strategic practice. They see themselves as holding an equally critical distance as scientific observers; or they may have, at one point, actually been part of “the inside” (i.e., former political or military personnel), then left, but still remain interested. Likewise the “interested citizen” also observes security strategic processes from the distance, not least because security strategic matters touch upon the most foundational aspect of survival. All these observers are typically relieved from any time pressures, providing them with the opportunity to examine security problems at length and in greater detail. They hence experience practical appropriations of their views as trivializations. Security insiders (“practitioners”) are seen as appreciative of outsider (“observer”) information on their environment but also as easily irritated once they themselves become part of the analysis. In the face of the democratic promises of Western societies, observers hence experience the often highly secretive processes as anachronistic attempts to evade responsibility and call for an anchoring of strategy in assessable and thus liable forms.

While this summary most certainly overdraws its ideal types, it does show that the theatrical metaphor introduces a distinction under which both sides strongly build up an exclusionary view which, in turn, reinforces itself: The *audience* should appreciate the skill and quality of the *actors’ performance*, while the accuracy of the performance is seen to primarily hinge on the audience’s (lack of) applause.

### 3 Towards a Dialogical Security Culture

In everyday security politics this restrictive theatrical structure finds its equivalent in what John Dewey called “the invidious distinction between theory and practice” (Dewey 1938, pp. 437, 61-74). Here, most security strategy actors would hold that “theory” follows the primacy of strategic practice, while many security strategy observers would insist on the imperative necessity of theory to first inform strategic “practice”. As a surrogate distinction of “actor/audience” this hence further reinforces the idea that both

domains are so different that there is no way for them to interact in a productive fashion. There are those who “do” and those who “think” security strategy – period.

Such views can easily be refuted based on a longer historical perspective – just think of the dialectic of the formation of “sovereign” political structures and their reflection and rationalization in the political theories of Bodin and Hobbes. What is more, contemporary developments further undermine the distinction of “theory versus practice”. For instance, emphasizing the dimension of *uncertainty* in security strategy, the notion of “risk” forces us to revise our understanding of security problems as a relationship between “problems” and “solutions” in terms of a two-way street: under conditions of uncertainty solutions always lead to new problems which, in turn, demand new solutions. This undermines the traditional understanding of “practice” as mechanical-causal *action* and of “theory” as the intellectually-detached construction of *ideas*. In contrast, both, security actors *and* security observers are first and foremost *perpetually re-solving the same problem*: the complex dynamics of security politics and the challenge of their adequate strategic framing.

“Complexity” thus describes the condition that the new dynamics of security politics can always be observed from more strategic angles than one observer can realize or account for (Luhmann 2005, p. 321). Complexity must be reduced in the first place in order to be able to arrive at an overview of the situation at hand and, in a second step, at possible decisions. Due to the individual or institutional inability to process all imaginable observations and strategic options, “military”, “political” and “public” observations must follow specific selective schemes that account for some choices and dismiss others.

At this most fundamental level of structuring one’s “field of security strategic vision”, “inside” and “outside” observers can be partially liberated from an oppositional stance: Both *do practically* deal with complex dynamics by *theoretically constructing* and re-adapting their most productive strategic schemes to the foggy domain of security politics. At this *specific level* of security strategy-making, “theory” and “practice” then do not only collapse into one another.

What is more, due to a shared problematique non-hierarchical communication and a learning-process become possible where “the human being acquires a *habit of learning*” (Dewey 1930, p. 54, emphasis added).

Thus, rather than perpetuating an understanding of security strategy as either the shackle or anchor of any security politics, this understanding shakes off its exclusive connection with a rather static form and tries to absorb a new real-time quality. The security-making *process* then not merely denotes the distinct time frame between the drafting and passage of a doctrine, coupled with the hope that it should “hold up for ten years”. Rather it sets off a more inclusive process in the shape of a learning-oriented communicative space.

To be sure, this would most certainly not void the problem of implementing specific views. How the political, military and public spheres may do so remains subject to their own logics. Yet, such a revised understanding of “theory and practice” would at least complement the prevailing mechanistic idea of a doctrine and its implementation with a new layer that actually breathes life into the common insight that any decision may always be contested. It does so by establishing specific communicative sites of “social inquiry” (Dewey 1927, pp. 166-219; Dewey 1938, pp. 487-512) among observer-practitioners which methodically provide the opportunity to instigate translational processes between the spheres (Rorty 1989, pp. 44-69). Hopefully, this would strengthen communicative connectivity and open up new opportunities to actually profit by learning from the insights of others.

Institutionalizing such an ongoing exchange about framing strategic problems and decisions will be a challenge, but it also entails some potential to reveal unproductive strategic self-constraints and introduce possible alternative points of view on (and into) a truly continuous

security strategy-making process. Some of this potential is starting to be realized. For instance, at the governmental level “strategy formation” has now been formally institutionalized as a permanent task in the “Policy” Department of the Defense Ministry which includes concerted efforts of outreach based, in part, on contacts established during the While Paper process in 2015 and 2016.

Moreover, at the expert level new forms of institutionalized exchange have been initiated in the format of a “pilot project METIS” at the University of the Bundeswehr in Munich<sup>2</sup> which is closely coupled with the “Network ‘Strategy and Foresight’” bringing together participants from the German government, the business community, academia and civil society.<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 2018 the German Defense Ministry also founded a new think tank, the “German Institute for Defense and Strategic Studies”, as a joint project of the “Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr” and the University of the Bundeswehr Hamburg.<sup>4</sup> In her address at the opening ceremony Minister von der Leyen challenged academics and military experts at the new think tank to become a “sparring partner for the military leadership and the Defense Ministry” by “challenging entrenched patterns of thought and by asking inconvenient questions” – and to operate as a “factory of ideas and a provider of novel impulses” by “initiating debates inside the Bundeswehr, but also among experts domestically and internationally and an interested public” (von der Leyen 2018b).

The latter is an idea which has also been pursued by the editors of this Report in the context of a larger research project on strategy formation (which also forms the background for this publication). Among others this effort will include a workshop in early 2019 between, on the one hand, laypersons in the field of security politics and, on the other hand, experts from the government, think tanks and academia centered

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<sup>2</sup> Pilot project METIS, <https://metis.sowi.unibw-muenchen.de/de/#network>. Also see F. Richter in this Report. On the idea of a “Council of Experts” see J.D. Bindenagel in this Report.

<sup>3</sup> Network „Strategie und Vorausschau“, <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/fuenfte-sitzung-des-netzwerks-strategie-und-vorausschau-25664>

<sup>4</sup> German Institute for Defense and Strategic Studies eröffnet, <https://www.hsu-hh.de/german-institute-for-defense-and-strategic-studies-eroeffnet>.

around the question “Which Security Policy for Germany?” where we hope to practically explore some of the underlying ideas discussed above.<sup>5</sup> Thus, compared to ten years ago Germany looks better prepared to become, in the words of Minister von der Leyen, “more capable to think and act strategically” (“strategiefähiger werden”; von der Leyen 2018b). If this incorporates the theory *and* practice of strategy making as a continuous effort in a dialogical fashion among observer-practitioners from diverse backgrounds it will not only render Germany better prepared but also more secure.

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<sup>5</sup> Dialog-Werkstatt Sicherheitspolitik, 23 February 2019, <https://www.schader-stiftung.de/veranstaltungen/aktuell/artikel/dialog-werkstatt-sicherheitspolitik/>.

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**PART I:**  
**THE PROCESS OF STRATEGY MAKING**

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## 2. PROCESSES OF STRATEGY FORMATION. OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

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Thomas Bagger

**Abstract:**

*Processes of strategy formation are often overloaded with unrealistic expectations. They are neither a panacea for a missing societal consensus, nor can they reduce the unpredictability of international politics. However, they still provide an added value for policy-makers, ministries, the military, the public and international partners. A comparison between the "Review2014" of the Federal Foreign Office and the 2016 White Paper enables us to draw conclusions about the conditions under which normative preferences, national interests and required resources can be aligned as much as possible.*

Strategy formation is commonly thought of as the high art of foreign and security policy. The aim is to provide a view of the 'big picture', to establish order and orientation in a (political) world that is marked by complexity and disorder. It does not come as a surprise then, that processes of strategy formation are regularly requested and as regularly overloaded with unrealistic expectations. The complaint that there is a lack of strategic thought and, more generally, a lack of a strategic community is widespread in Germany. Similarly, it is often claimed that Germany needs a national security strategy that takes all threats into consideration and is connecting all fields of action with all the relevant players. The prevalent assumption is that such a security strategy would make policy more coherent, less contradictory and generally better. At the very least, though, it would prevent allegedly wrong decisions. This is what made the insistence on a German security strategy so popular after the abstention of Germany in the UN Security Council with regards to the intervention in Libya. It was hoped that such a document would prevent the recurrence of such a controversial decision.<sup>1</sup>

A look at the strategy-saturated American reality goes a long way in elucidating that even highly sophisticated strategic documents cannot safeguard foreign and security policy from controversies or catastrophic mistakes. The decision for the Iraq War in 2003 had its very own motivations. The national security strategy which was fundamentally reshaped after 9/11 was hardly part of them. In times where Donald Trump is President, this problem manifests itself ever more clearly. After the first "State of the Union"-speech of the president Ed Luce stated in the Financial Times: "Mr Trump's administration this month released the four-yearly national security strategy. The challenges posed by a rising China and Russia topped the list of threats. On Tuesday night, Mr Trump had nothing to say about either. It was almost as if there were two administrations – one headed by Mr Trump; the other known as the deep state. To put it mildly,

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<sup>1</sup> A reflection process emerged from these demands, co-organized by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) and the German

Marshall Fund. The results were published in the fall of 2013 under the title "New Power, New Responsibilities".

they do not read from the same teleprompter” (Luce 2018, p. 9). But what exactly are the opportunities that strategy formation processes can entail, what is their use and what are their limitations? The Development of the “White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr” (Federal Government 2016) and the “Review2014” that the Federal Foreign Office (2015) completed just shortly before provide several insights into the opportunities and limitations of such processes.

### **1 Self-Assessment, Consensus Building and Guidance for Action: What Can and Should a Strategy Process Achieve?**

Different actors have very different expectations of processes of strategy formation and strategy documents. Bureaucracies, for example, are doing a very good job when it comes to determining responsibilities and jurisdictions, but very rarely do they make the basic assumptions of their actions explicit or question them altogether. Processes that take place within a more open framework and beyond established procedures provide a rare, yet very important opportunity to do just that. In times of fundamental upheavals and increasing uncertainty, it is important to assure oneself of the normative foundations and overarching priorities. In addition to that, the ministerial apparatus is interested in optimally organizing government action. In order to do so, both normative guidelines as well as operational goals should be defined in a way that makes guidance for (policy) action possible. At the same time – and importantly – the necessary resources needed should be provided as soon as possible.

Politicians on the other hand must justify their action. Since political agency in both foreign and security policy is more and more closely connected to domestic support, politicians are increasingly interested in a broad inclusion of the public. For those responsible, the prospect that strategy processes might entail orientation beyond the day-to-day routines competes with the insight that politics often consists of single and contingent decisions that are not easily merged

into a coherent whole. In other words: politicians do not at all solely listen to policy considerations (Krasner 2009). Therefore, strategy processes that are not initiated at the beginning of a legislative period always run the risk of having to serve retrospective rationalization of decisions that have been made in the past.

Ultimately, a strategy conveys transparency for a wider public and predictability in the eyes of other actors. The strategy signals goals, interests and priorities to partners and opponents – the more open and convincing the process, the more credible the message that is being conveyed. The internationalization of modern strategy processes mirrors three aspects in this respect: a) An increasing link between discourses, b) the increasing weight of Germany and c) an increasing interest in the motivation, debates and parameters of German foreign and security policy decisions.

The “Review2014” that was originally planned as a “critical self-assessment” (Steinmeier 2013) by the Federal Foreign Office relied heavily on a broad public debate, both internationally and nationally. This process began with 50 international experts being asked the deliberately provocative question “What is wrong with German foreign policy?” and, in a second stage, led to an ambitious online presence, as well as more than 60 public events in which controversial issues of foreign policy were discussed in a variety of new and unusual formats all over Germany<sup>2</sup>. The inclusion of the public was purposely arranged in a dialogic manner. Instead of just conveying official positions and policy, the intent of the process was to capture questions, expectations, ideas and suggestions from an interested public.

The process for the 2016 White Paper that was conceptualized shortly after the “Review2014” – despite being more strongly focused on guidance for action and building on earlier White Papers – included many of these experiences: an own website, workshops with international participation, interactive discussions and public participation over a period of six months. In ad-

<sup>2</sup> See Bagger 2015 for a more detailed discussion of the genesis and conclusions of the project.

dition it also added novel methodological approaches by increasingly utilizing professional “foresight”-tools.

The debates inspired by these processes exhibit a common structural feature that is often underestimated. Discussing future scenarios is not about certainty but about plausibility and different paths of development. By no means everything shows up in the texts of strategy documents, but it promotes a joint process of reflection.

In the United States, the National Intelligence Council (NIC) publishes its comprehensive perspectival study every four years which can be bought in book stores (in the US with reference to the CIA, probably because it is likely to sell better) under the title: “Global Trends. Paradox of Progress”<sup>3</sup>. Yet, the final product is but a small excerpt from a plethora of conversations, debates, studies, scenarios and a variety of suggestions which the team of authors from the NIC collects worldwide in a perennial process.

These structured conversations, that also took place as part of the Review2014 and the 2016 White Paper – at first with a broad circle of experts and an interested public and then among the participating actors within the Federal Foreign Office or the Federal Government – are part of a consensus building strategy that tries to align experiences, existing uncertainties and preferred courses of action in order to increase the coherence and unity of ministerial action. The process itself, if arranged well and executed correctly, can have a greater benefit than the strategy document itself that emerges as a common denominator at the end of it.

## 2 Priorities, Structures, Resources: What Did the “Review2014” and the 2016 White Paper Accomplish?

In retrospect both strategy processes accomplished remarkable results regarding the “soft” categories of self-reassurance and prioritization.

From the initial question “Do we do the right thing?” the “Review2014” developed dynamically toward an internal and intensive debate of the question “Do we do it the right way?” with broad staff participation. In this debate, next to its policy content, the structures, procedures and the work culture of the Federal Foreign Office were put to the test. The final report under the programmatic heading “Crisis, Order, Europe” (Federal Foreign Office 2014) reflected a prioritization that was supported and consequently implemented by the political leadership of the Federal Foreign Office. A language of greater German responsibility, “negotiated leadership”, a “European reflex” or the “insight into the limits of our own possibilities” and the necessity to “give up the illusion that we can hinder or defuse every crisis in the modern world through prevention or resolute intervention” describe a path of a more realistic German foreign policy that at the same time expands its own practical toolkit (all quotes Federal Foreign Office 2014, p. 12).

This conceptual development of German security policy is reflected in a far more extensive and systematic way in the 2016 White Paper. In the White Paper it is stated that “Germany is prepared to provide a substantial, decisive and early contribution to the international debate, to accept responsibility, and to assume leadership” (White Paper 2016, p. 22) – a language that ten years ago would not have been able to reach consensus.<sup>4</sup> The nine challenges listed in the White Paper reflect a changed threat assessment: from transnational terrorism as a top priority to the newly incorporated cyber and information space to fragile statehood and unchecked and/or irregular migration. The language concerning the five strategic priorities reflects a security concept that is broadly conceived as well as the essential importance of a rule-based international order for Germany.

Only when we look at the specific follow-up steps, at questions of structures and resources,

<sup>3</sup> This is the title of the version that was published by the NIC in 2017.

<sup>4</sup> The formula “[more] substantial...earlier and more decisively” was first coined by the Federal President

Joachim Gauck in his opening speech to the 50<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference. The then foreign minister adopted it for his own speech at the same conference. It can be found in both the final report on the “Review2014” as well as the 2016 White Paper.

do the fundamental differences of the two processes become apparent. Here, the crucial question is the following: can the conceptual consensus be translated into collective action? Do process and document add value to the “unity of purpose”? Here, neither smart analysis, nor elegant formulation, but statecraft that connects as closely as possible the understanding and its consequences for one’s own behavior is crucial.

In the Federal Foreign Office, the responsible minister was able to translate the process “Review2014”, that was deliberately restricted to his department, into an ambitious action plan. The distinctive political will at the top of the Federal Foreign Office to strengthen the tool kit of Germany’s foreign policy made drawing concrete conclusions out of the preliminary analytical and conceptual work possible without delay. With the creation of the new Directorate-General for Humanitarian Assistance, Crisis Prevention, Stabilization and Post-Conflict Reconstruction, with further structural changes and a more general opening of the Foreign Office to policy ideas and input from outside, the most far reaching reform of the Federal Foreign Office in decades was implemented. While questions regarding resources were specifically not part of the “Review”-process, current events massively interfered with the strategy process: in light of the acute political crises (Ukraine, Ebola, ISIS, refugees and migration) in 2015 and 2016, the quickly increasing means and resources of the Federal Foreign Office met a conceptually well prepared and well embedded new structure. Strategic reorientation and an increase in resources went hand in hand.<sup>5</sup>

The 2016 White Paper was faced with more complex challenges from the beginning. As a document that must be adopted jointly by the whole cabinet, it developed a far greater binding force than a review process limited solely to the Federal Foreign Office. Yet, on the other hand, precisely this requirement of consensus restricted the ambitions of the White Paper. While

the Federal Ministry of Defense was able to independently develop a “Part II – The Future of the Bundeswehr” that also includes important milestones with regards to future structures and resources, “Part I – Security Policy” reveals the limitations of the process. They become especially obvious in the section “Key National Areas of Engagement”.

The Federal Ministry of Finance made sure that the section “Sustainable Financial Parameters” in Part II of the White Paper remained vague enough in order to ensure that it would not exceed the financial plans that have been passed by the cabinet. In Part I on the other hand, ideas on structural reforms did not get very far. In the final stages of the inter-ministerial coordination in April 2016, the leadership of the Federal Ministry of Defense tried to incorporate some of the conceivably more controversial passages – for example the internal deployment of the Bundeswehr and a substantial strengthening of the Bundessicherheitsrat (Federal Security Council) as a coordinating structure at cabinet level – in the final draft of the White Paper. Not surprisingly, this ended in a dispute within the coalition that was also staged in the media and in which the Federal Ministry of Defense, due to the required consensus in the cabinet, came out on the short end. Conversely, the Federal Ministry of Defense blocked considerations by the Federal Foreign Office to strengthen common structures (across ministries) with regards to stabilization and crisis prevention policies. Thus, substantial progress with the structural implementation of the “comprehensive approach” that was already part of the 2006 White Paper and that was corroborated in 2016 got stuck in the rivalry between ministries and coalition partners. The Federal Government continues to make do with piecemeal strategies such as the joint practices *Horizon Scanning* between the ministries, the “Task Force Fragile States” and the inter-ministerial steering group on stabilization among other things.

<sup>5</sup> In this regard the German Foreign Service was an absolute exception. In fact, necessity drove numerous similar strategy and review processes of other European Foreign Ministries – while faced with a drastic

decline in resources – to undertake a new prioritisation, that was predominantly aimed at damage mitigation (compare for example the contributions from Ireland and the Netherlands in the *Hague Journal of Diplomacy* (10) 2015).

Retrospectively, it seems that both questionable tactical wisdom as well as exaggerated expectations of the strategy process of the 2016 White Paper led to the failure to solve these politically laden questions within the bounds of the principle of consensus. In Germany and in the context of coalition governments this would have been an issue better suited for the next coalition talks. In the current coalition agreement one can indeed find a section with the title “Ensure policy and strategy capabilities in foreign, security and developmental policy” (CDU, CSU and SPD 2018, p. 146), in which, however, merely additional means for a list of ten foreign, security and development policy think tanks are promised. Now, while nothing is wrong with the knowledge that is being produced there and which a globally connected country like Germany clearly needs, this alone does not strengthen the capabilities to act or to take strategic action. Especially after the limitations of the White Paper process became apparent, the coalition talks would have been the right place to combine analytic insights and structural conclusions. Yet, the new coalition agreement from 2018 mentions the 2016 White Paper only in passing. This way, the agreement deprived itself of the opportunity to credibly provide the persuasive analytic and conceptual consensus reached in the White Paper with the necessary increase in the defense budget. That both structural questions as well as resource issues remained unanswered, more than any substantial policy critique, marked the limitations of an approach that, via a strategy process, tried to increase the credibility and coherence of German foreign and security policy.

### 3 Strategy Formation for an Open Future. Some Concluding Remarks

Firstly, by looking at the experiences discussed above one could get the impression that strategy processes that are taking place within one ministry more often lead to success. The crucial condition of success – the political will at the top of the leadership – seems to be far easier to organize than a “whole of government”-exercise like the development of a new White Paper. Yet, only seemingly. Even within a single ministry the understanding of the importance of a functioning administrative apparatus has to be sufficiently developed in order to take the political risk of an open strategy process and a serious questioning

of the *status quo*. How rarely this is convincingly implemented – considering the external pressure for change – must be as much a reason for concern as the limited success of the 2016 White Paper.

Secondly, producing such key documents in short intervals is no solution either. Strategy processes are not routines but complex. They are a bureaucratic as well as a political feat of strength that requires curiosity and a commitment to change. It is a process that, in order to have an impact, must not be detached from politics. In an ideal scenario it establishes a link between the needs of politicians, the bureaucratic and military apparatuses and the public. Therefore, it must serve several interests at once and, if possible, increase the common intersection of all players. It should open new room for thought about the future of collective action, but it cannot do that detached from the political and administrative reality. Therefore, there is a lot to say against a regular, mandated repetition of such a process that disregards the political context.

Thirdly, in a fundamentally and fast changing environment, strategy documents can only serve as temporary milestones and focal points that cannot claim timeless validity. Considering new (global) challenges, both interests and capabilities must constantly be reviewed and aligned. Both strategic self-reassurance and reorientation will become increasingly important for Germany that lost many of its (political) certainties – from Brexit to the daily reality of Donald Trump as the US president – within the short period of time since the publication of both the “Review”-conclusions and the 2016 White Paper.

Germany is confronted with a “double gap” that the strategy processes of both 2014 and 2016 tried to address, yet, if anything, despite all efforts only became bigger. On the one hand, this gap is due to excessive expectations others have towards Germany and the reserved, yet, strongly morally charged understanding of Germany’s role in the world within German society itself. On the other hand, it is due to the tension between the outside perception of Germany as an interest-driven actor that tries to maximize its own benefit and a German self-perception as exemplary student intent on universalizing its own and rather unique historical experiences and lessons. A self-perception in which the country

sees itself as the worldwide avant-garde when it comes to the “judicialization” of international politics, i.e. on the spectrum between power and law to continuously move towards the latter and away from the former. While this might be a noble ambition, it must not (any longer) be confused with an allegedly irreversible course of history. If the integration of Germany in European and transatlantic structures, that was identified in both the “Review2014” and the 2016 White Paper as a vital German interest, should continue shall be maintained into the future, prospective strategy processes will have to concentrate even more on this “double gap”.

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### 3. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AS AN INSTITUTIONALIZED PROCESS: STRATEGY AND FORESIGHT AT THE GERMAN MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

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Frank Richter

**Abstract:**

*Engaging in strategic foresight enhances the strategic capability of the Federal Ministry of Defense. The continuous analysis of our possible futures is the foundation for a reliable determination of security goals and priorities. Strategic foresight also enhances our capability to think out of the box, thereby overcoming fixed assumptions and inflexible patterns of thinking. Foresight is thus also a mental exercise, preparing us for an ever-changing world. The Directorate-General for Security and Defense Policy at the Federal Ministry of Defense initiated a number of measures to strengthen our foresight capabilities.*

Conducting strategy development is one of the important tasks of the Directorate-General for Security and Defense Policy at the Federal Ministry of Defense. Among other things, its branch II 1 is responsible for preparing and contributing to various strategy papers on security policy. Consequentially, this branch must also deal with strategic foresight. Strategy and foresight are inextricably linked with each other: In order to have strategic capability, it is crucial to possess a comprehensive awareness and knowledge of what the future might hold. Ideally, strategy developers study a large number of future scenarios. A thorough knowledge of our possible futures and their impact on different policy areas is one of the foundations to define political goals and priorities of long-term reliability.

For this reason, the branch in charge of strategy development at the Directorate-General for Security and Defense Policy has a clear focus on *strategic foresight*. We are committed to continuously developing this capability, as the intensive and continuous work of exploring our possible futures helps us prepare the next strategy paper on security.

The thorough analysis of possible future developments enhances our strategic capability and prepares us for drafting security strategy documents such as White Papers and strategic guidelines or for providing input to security policy documents written by other government ministries.

In today's world, conducting foresight poses quite a challenge. Given the variety and simultaneity of crises and threats it is already difficult to grasp *current* developments in the security environment. International terrorism, Russia's revisionist power politics, cyber-attacks and hybrid campaigns or the worsening situation in the Middle East are examples of the tremendous complexity and dynamism of our global environment. Strategic foresight is therefore an imperative, today more than ever, if we do not want to lose sight of our long-term goals despite the

highly demanding operational day-to-day business, and if we want to facilitate anticipatory political action.

This is why in our White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr we committed to attaching top priority to capability enhancement in the fields of strategic foresight, strategy development and strategy evaluation. The current coalition agreement also contains a commitment to enhance capabilities of strategic analysis and thus ties in with the White Paper. Today, strategic foresight is performed across government in an impressive range of various initiatives. Ensuring complementarity and coordinating the different initiatives is crucial in this context, otherwise we might lose vital insights. To this effect, the long-term objective of all our strategic foresight efforts is the inter-ministerial integration of the topic.

## 1 Strategic Foresight: Potential and Shortfalls

After several years of experience in the field of strategic foresight, one thing seems essential to me: A healthy dose of humbleness! After all, *crystal ball gazing* is only partially helpful – we will never be able to accurately predict the future. Unexpected global developments like the Arab Spring, the migration crisis or the *autocratic drift*, not only in Turkey, have made this abundantly clear. Despite all our strategic foresight efforts we have to factor in that we may completely overlook possible futures, as from today's perspective they are simply inconceivable. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that several – maybe even numerous – future scenarios are possible.

In brief: The future is open – in defiance of all strategic foresight. That is particularly true in this complex century of technology and digital transformation. We must accept, and openly admit, that strategic foresight will never generate guaranteed future scenarios without alternatives. It would be wrong to expect concise security policy recommendations that can be implemented unchanged or transferred directly to the political arena.

So what precisely can strategic foresight help us achieve?

The fact that we will never be able to anticipate our (security-related) future in full detail and with absolute certainty in no way implies that we should not contemplate it intensively. After all, strategic foresight allows us to approximate the future by identifying and discussing trends and risk factors, and thoroughly examine all their consequences.

But strategic foresight can do much more: It has the potential to change the way we think and work. The continuous reflection on global interdependencies and the creative, unbiased approach to future scenarios helps breaking up rigid patterns of thinking and challenge firmly held assumptions or relationships. Strategic foresight requires us to think and discuss without limiting taboos. We are called upon to look beyond our own area of expertise or that of the *community* we are part of.

Strategic foresight is thus not just a conglomerate of activities and methods to identify possible futures but also a mental exercise: It forces us to leave our comfort zone and to handle contrary opinions, even provocative statements and irritation. This strengthens our self-reflexivity, trains holistic thinking and promotes our ability to deal with complexity in a productive manner. With this range of capabilities, we are well-equipped to competently address the future – including all its uncertainties.

It is thus obvious that we are well-advised to further intensify and institutionalize our strategic foresight capacities.

## 2 Strategic Foresight in the Directorate-General for Security and Defense Policy at the Federal Ministry of Defense

In the wake of the publication of the 2016 White Paper, the Directorate-General for Security and Defense Policy at the Federal Ministry of Defense initiated a number of measures to strengthen our strategic foresight capabilities. These measures are, methodologically as well as with respect to ambition and time horizon, complementary to the work by other directorates:



For the early identification of crises, the Directorate-General for Strategy and Operations uses quantitative methods, including big data analysis, and focuses on time periods of up to 18 months. Their main objective is to detect regional and local crises early on. The Directorate-General for Planning, supported by the Bundeswehr Planning Office, is responsible for strategic foresight. They look at a time horizon of up to 30 years and use conventional projection methods such as scenario analysis or wildcards. From the knowledge gained in this process they then draw conclusions for future capability requirements of the Bundeswehr.

#### *METIS* Pilot Project

Named after the Greek goddess of prudence and wise counsel, the pilot project Metis works on today's and tomorrow's strategically relevant questions of international politics. At home at Bundeswehr University Munich, Metis interlinks academic inquiry and policy practice. It combines continuous and scientifically rigorous research with problem-oriented, interdisciplinary counsel to the Directorate-General for Security and Defense at the Federal Ministry of Defense. Metis aims at strengthening strategic thought in German national security policy and contributing to the German national security discourse at large. The Metis team produces periodical studies on strategically relevant longer-term questions of Germany's future security policy, draws up short-term analyses with a focus on current events, organizes and hosts background discussions and offers expertise available at short notice. Additionally, it is part and at the same time co-organizer and co-host of the *Netzwerk Strategie und Vorausschau* regularly convened at the Federal Ministry of Defense.

The Directorate-General for Security and Defense Policy conducts qualitative strategic foresight mostly through institutionalized interaction with experts. We look at a time horizon of up to five years – a period in which political decisions can be translated into concrete action and can have effective results. A key element of our foresight efforts is the *Netzwerk Strategie und Vorausschau* (strategy and foresight network), an interdisciplinary discussion forum we established in 2016. Members of this network

are senior government representatives, academia and business who meet regularly to discuss future security policy issues. The emphasis is on topics such as authoritarian states, extremism, terrorism and radicalization or the security impact of digital transformation.

With the *Netzwerk Strategie und Vorausschau* we deliberately created a forum for an open yet confidential discussion of possible future scenarios, trends and risks. We see the meetings of the interdisciplinary network as *creative spaces* to facilitate free and intensive discussion – detached from day-to-day politics and across various levels of hierarchy. The meetings are held at regular intervals and thus also have a networking effect: Key figures from politics, academia and the business community involved in strategic foresight get to know each other, meet regularly, exchange views and think outside their respective box.

The insights gained in the network's meetings provide new food for thought. They are also intended to inspire both the daily work at the ministry and the professional practice within the Bundeswehr, academia or the business community. Over time, a productive and ongoing exchange on a number of relevant future topics was established, going beyond the regular meetings of the *Netzwerk Strategie und Vorausschau*. Various cooperations with national and international think tanks and foundations serve the same purpose of enhancing our strategic capabilities. We are consistently working on expanding such activities. This includes the pilot project *Metis* that we launched at the Bundeswehr University Munich in 2017. The researchers working on the project advise the Directorate-General for Security and Defense Policy on various future issues with a security dimension.

We are also cooperating with the interdisciplinary research network “Maritime Security” (iFMS) at Helmut Schmidt University / Bundeswehr University Hamburg on future maritime topics, and with Tübingen University which is running a research project on “Early recognition of crises through literature” on our behalf.

The approach taken by our Directorate-General to institutionalize interaction with subject matter experts for strategic foresight is closing a gap.

The targeted interaction with experts and in particular the work in our network complement the foresight activities undertaken by other directorates at the ministry, both in terms of methodology and content. If we systematically connect the various pieces of the puzzle, we get a comprehensive picture that bears the potential to facilitate anticipatory political action.

In the medium and long run, all our strategic foresight efforts aim at strengthening the overall strategic capability of the German Federal Government. To this end, we foster a regular exchange with other ministries and include them in all of our activities. We are working on coordinating our different approaches to strategic foresight even better and to eventually analyze and use the findings jointly. This must be the next step to improve the strategic capabilities of the Federal Government. In the long run, all foresight activities should be combined across ministries.

*“The only constant throughout the universe is change” (Heraclitus)*

Our world is in a state of flux and the global environment is constantly changing. This we cannot change, but we can prepare ourselves as best as possible. Strategic foresight is the tool that allows us to best anticipate possible futures and to stay mentally flexible. The Federal Government’s ambition is to further strengthen its foresight capabilities in the field of security and to foster a culture of anticipation. The Directorate-General for Security and Defense Policy at the Federal Ministry of Defense is already contributing to this goal.

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## 4. ... BECAUSE TODAY WILL TOMORROW HAVE BEEN YESTERDAY - FUTURE ANALYSIS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF STRATEGY CONSULTING

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Olaf Theiler

**Abstract:**

*Processes of strategy formation are often overloaded with unrealistic expectations. They are neither a panacea for a missing societal consensus, nor can they reduce the unpredictability of international politics. However, they still provide an added value for policy-makers, ministries, the military, the public and international partners. A comparison between the "Review2014" of the Federal Foreign Office and the 2016 White Paper enables us to draw conclusions about the conditions under which normative preferences, national interests and required resources can be aligned as much as possible.*

**Press Release by the Central European Commission (CEC) Change in Leadership at the European Defense Office**

Brussels, 3 June 2042; 11:45 AM.

*Mathis DeJong, the new EU Defense Commissioner, has been received with military honors by General Henri Richard, Chair of the Defense Council of the European Armed Forces. The new Commissioner will indeed be faced with challenging tasks. The EU's Land Forces are still struggling to harmonize the six different national acquired armored battle tanks, all still lacking fully compatible Human-Machine-Interfaces (HMIs) as well as the new WAV-C2-Systems (Warfighting Air Vehicles – Command & Control Systems). The accession of Macedonia, Serbia and Greece to the EU security forces in 2045, marking the politically welcome integration of the last three countries of the Western Balkans, will make these technical compatibility problems not easier. Additional challenges are the currently desolate situation regarding the lack of highly specialized Cyborg- and HMI-Controller and the difficult integration of new state of the art Multidimensional Unmanned Maritime Combat Systems (MuMaCS), capable of fighting above as well as below surface, into the European Maritime Forces. If successfully integrated, their autonomous self-defense System HEAIS (High-Energy Anti-Air System) together with the brand new Supercavitation Defense System (SCD), will allow the EU Military for the first time in history to fight underwater targets with hypersonic speed.*

This purely fictional press release by the Central European Commission illustrates a creative approach that Strategic Foresight, a fairly recent instrument in German foreign and security policy, could use to explore new avenues in political consulting. Building on the methods of Future Research this offers an innovative approach to deal with strategic surprises that the future currently seems to offer at abundance.

## 1 Future and Security Policy

Although several debates about a “normalization” of Germany or its “growing international responsibility” took place since reunification, it seems that the Federal Republic of Germany has not yet found its role in the foreign and security policy arena. So far, Germany had left strategic and military thinking up to its partners and allies, fully in line with the tradition of the old pre-unification West-Germany. According to Hanns W. Maull, the consequences of ever more complex interaction, a growing number of actors and, therefore, rising levels of interdependence and power diffusion, are more difficulties in problem solving and higher investments into political efforts to maintain control over events and developments (Maull 2015, pp.31-32). This in mind, Markus Kaim and Volker Perthes stated already in 2012 that in a global environment marked by higher complexity and speed and fewer borders, success, in particular in foreign and security policy, depends increasingly on a smart approach to dealing with uncertainties and unplanned developments. Without a long-term strategy, policymakers risk getting caught up in daily business, unable to do more than react to unforeseen developments (Kaim and Perthes 2012). The still widespread system of short-termism, therefore, is a common reaction to the permanent failure of politics to come to terms with increasingly complex circumstances. As a result, political measures are often temporary and localized, while actors frequently lose sight of long-term developments and necessities under the pressure of current affairs. Finally, according to Perthes and Lippert, the ability to imagine possible future scenarios and consider what could happen if things go wrong or at least do not follow a straight path is rather rare because in day-to-day politics, there is not much time left for these considerations and neither are they a routine matter for bureaucracy. As a result, decision makers often actually feel vindicated in their short-termism and in the end, everyone just reacts and politics as well as politicians become the victims of events (Perthes and Lippert 2013, p.5).

Unfortunately, neither Europe nor Germany are “something like a quite garden in the universal chaos” (DIE ZEIT 2015). Not to adjust to this changing security environment is not an option,

at least it shouldn't be one. But the sad reality remains, that “important decisions can only be made by very few people, Ministers, Deputy Ministers or at best some Branch-Heads. This small number of people simply can't deal with more than two or three crises at the same time. Of course, there are numerous people providing advice and support, but responsibility for decision-making remains limited to few. And the more problems are at hand, the less time remains for anticipation and advance preparation for future challenges” (Brozus 2015). The result of such political pressures and administrative limitations are what Dirk Messner once called “political adhocism” (DIE ZEIT 2008), a constant persistence in a passive-reactive mode of someone driven by external events instead of his own agenda.

The crisis year of 2014 is almost a textbook example. German and European foreign and security policy was caught by surprise strategically by three unknown unknowns at the same time: the Crimea and Ukraine crisis, the advances of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and the Ebola outbreak in Africa. This almost constant state of surprise underscored the need to think ahead and anticipate complex political and security challenges. The impression that political action cannot be planned is deceiving, however. Strategic foresight, if it is done correctly and systematically, can make a valuable contribution towards long-term and sustainable strategy development, and can, as Opachowski puts it, show the way and set the course at the same time. In consequence, the US political scientist Richard Danzig formulated a new requirement for enhanced responsiveness: “Policymakers will always drive in the dark. However, they must stop pretending that they can see the road. A much better course is to adopt techniques to compensate for unpredictable conditions and, in so doing, better prepare us for perils that we will not have foreseen” (Danzig 2011, p.28).

In the coalition agreement of 2013, the German government defined the goal of strengthening strategic foresight competence and capacities in the ministries in order to be in a better position to identify opportunities, risks, and dangers of medium- and long-term developments. This provision gave new impetus to futures analysis and strategic foresight approaches at the ministries,

which had been rather sporadic before. In addition to a stronger focus on these approaches at the ministries, considerable progress has also been made with regards to increased networking between futures analysts since 2013 (Theiler 2015). Unfortunately, daily politics seems to have pushed these progresses aside again and there currently is the renewed risk of abandoning the little progress made regarding anticipatory governance. Nevertheless, strategic foresight and the methods of future research have the stated goal and the proven ability of helping in the process of building long-term strategies against short-term surprises (Opachowski 2015).

## 2 Strategic Foresight as Concept and Methodology in Policy Advice

Strategic foresight is, first and foremost, a process for the systematic and long-term analysis of possible future developments. At the heart of this process are futures analysis methods based on scientific standards – in particular approaches of trend and scenario analysis. These methods are the instrument used to build a solid basis for long-term political decisions (Government Foresight in Germany) which, in turn, are indispensable for the development of a truly sustainable and anticipatory policy (Buehler and Döhrn 2013, p.1). Unlike futures studies, strategic foresight is strictly geared towards action, i.e. directly adapted to the specific long-term decision needs of politics (Kraibich 2008). There is always a connection with uncertainty-management – in other words, dealing with what Donald Rumsfeld, former US Secretary of Defense, called the “known unknowns” and the “unknown unknowns” (DoD News Briefing 2002). With regards to the first group, the known unknowns, strategic foresight offers an approach for developing perspectives that have not been taken into account so far, as if to strategically prepare for the question “what if...?”. The unknown unknowns, however, often require politics to deal with a lack of clear and valid answers to strategic questions. The pre-formulation of such questions can in itself be an important result of strategic foresight.

Strategic foresight approaches political uncertainties by going through possible scenarios and examining them with regard to three crucial

questions: What can happen? Where do we want to go? And, of course, what are we able to do or how can we do it? This clear break with prognoses, forecasts or simple if-then assessments of implications is what differentiates this approach from older concepts of futures studies as well as from traditional methods of political consulting. Instead, foresight offers a well-founded methodical process to mentally prepare for future developments and their opportunities and challenges based on expertise contributed by the client. This offer to decision makers could explain the current high demand for this or similar instruments for dealing with what is referred to as “strategic surprises” in a number of different policy sections.

Strategic foresight first identifies trends in the form of well-founded assessments regarding the development of a situation and then predicts their progression. In addition to possible trend developments and their implications, the most important task is to consider “breaks” in trends and to use all of these aspects to develop a coherent vision of the future. This vision is supplemented by methodical analyses of scenarios, leading to multiple alternative versions of the future, or projections. These are created in the form of narratives and gain profile through using vivid and pointed descriptions such as the fictional press release quoted in the beginning. These descriptions are intended to render projections of the distant future as vivid and concrete as possible for the reader because based on these projections, the reader's attention can then be steered back to the nearer future. This way, identifiable developments or indicators can teach us lessons to use in today's strategic and long-term decisions.

## 3 Strategic Foresight at Work: Challenges and Prospects

Many ministries as well as the Federal Academy for Security Policy used the momentum provided by the 2013 coalition agreement to promote strategic foresight and spread the word on this instrument. While some authorities such as the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Environment Agency, the Federal Criminal Police Office or the Bundeswehr Office for Defense Planning have already successfully completed numerous projects in this context,

other ministries are only just getting started (Nachtwei 2018). If we do not want our expectations to be disappointed, we must know the strengths and the limitations of strategic foresight. The practical experience gathered in the Futures Analysis Branch of the Bundeswehr Office for Defense Planning offers indications and possible conclusions in this regard.

### 3.1 Proximity to Politics

Research or analysis units within the ministries or at subordinate authorities have a distinctive advantage compared to classical policy advice coming from outside institutions, but also a distinctive disadvantage. On the one hand, they know the processes and subjects that the political leadership is currently focusing on. These units can thus directly and immediately adapt the subjects and methodology of their work accordingly and present their results in a language appropriate to the current discourse. Therefore, since external advice is often only partly used or sometimes even fully ignored by policy makers (Fichtner and Smoltczyk 2013), this is much harder to be done if the advice comes out of the system itself. On the other hand, however, these units are subject to the political necessities of such processes much more than any external political consulting agency. Every strategic foresight project can thus, at every stage, be significantly influenced or even hampered by political considerations or fears as well as by internal sensitivities of relevant authorities.

### 3.2 Dependency on Communication and Expertise

In contrast to other types of political consulting, strategic foresight does not present ready-made results, but rather offers a procedure for the joint development of results based on the expertise available at the relevant ministries or contributed by academics and practitioners commissioned for that purpose and applying scientifically sound methods. This also means, however, that the quality of the results depends on the organization and communication skills of the method experts as well as on the expertise and commitment of those participating in the project.

### 3.3 Creativity and Institutional Culture

Creativity is a basic prerequisite for applying the methods of futures analysis. The origin and integration of personnel into the administrative environment of a modern administration do not always live up to this requirement. This means that the performance of the staff ultimately depends on skillful personnel policy as well as on specifically creating and preserving leeway for thinking out of the box. Without the ability to play the Maverick and the freedom to challenge the usual beaten tracks, the specific benefits of strategic foresight will be lost, its creativity potential nullified and the efforts and work in vain.

### 3.4 Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinary work is another important basis for successfully implementing strategic foresight. Experience has shown, however, that this is even harder to carry out within governmental structures than outside. An interdisciplinary composition of staff from the very beginning, as is the case at the Futures Analysis Branch of the Bundeswehr Office for Defense Planning, is thus a rare “luxury”. The Future Analysis Branch offers a civil academic for each of the subjects of the STEEP Approach (Social, Technology, Environment, Economics and Politics) as well as two military staff offices, providing the necessary military thinking, and one IT officer, adding expertise about the cyber realm as one of the most important drivers of future development.

### 3.5 Cross-Ministerial Cooperation

What is even more difficult is inter-ministerial cooperation, which is indispensable for a whole-of-government-approach. This type of cooperation becomes necessary for government action whenever the complexity of a task requires the cooperation of several ministries. In such cases, smooth cooperation is often inhibited by egoistic attitudes at the different ministries, by questions of responsibility, budget issues or simply by practical problems such as working methods and ways of thinking that may differ greatly between the ministries. On the other hand, it is precisely these increasingly frequent cases where the largest benefits can be expected in the interest of a comprehensive approach to security policy.

### 3.6 The Challenge of Communicating (Results)

Drawing up a study or a project report is usually not the end of the actual work, of course. Communicating the study and its results is a crucial part of the process. Method-oriented strategic foresight offers the significant advantage of making many decision makers part of the process even before its implementation, at least at the operational and middle management levels.

### 4 Future-Orientation as Aid for Decision Makers

We have to keep in mind that even in the best and most successful scenario, strategic foresight does not replace strategic action, but is just one of many tools on the way to reaching a decision. The interaction of science and politics continues to be very complex. Neither of the two should overestimate its position and role. The current President of the German Parliament, Dr Wolfgang Schäuble, once explained that “Science, as important as it is, must accept to be only a tool for an end instead of being a navigation system for politics”. In the end, no political decision maker could “transfer his responsibility to science” (Fichtner and Smolczyk 2013, p.65 and p.68). Therefore, strategic foresight as an instrument for policy advice can mainly provide valuable pointers as to future developments, identify the most important signs and indicators for early recognition of decision points on the path to these developments, and offer concrete options for action to provide the best possible preparation for different future developments before they materialize. Experts call this future(-proof) robustness – the ability to achieve such an extent of flexibility in the present that one is prepared for several possible future developments. Meeting this criterion or at least pointing out ways of reaching this goal is an important objective of strategic foresight.

But even in this inevitably cursory description it should have become evident that strategic foresight can help policymakers, as Voß puts it, to take today’s decisions on a more rational basis and safeguard them in a way that they will not have to be regretted later (Voß 1983). Strategic foresight can point out future potentials and give orientation for the future without what

Opachowski refers to as “excessive prognoses or modern skepticism” (Opachowski 2015, p.45). All in all, strategic foresight is not competing with traditional approaches to political consulting, but should rather be considered a complementary concept, an additional means of assistance. Its particular strengths are the principle of robustness as well as the focus on the unknown unknowns of foreign and security policy that are of particular importance today. Albert Einstein allegedly once said: “I am more interested in the future than in the past, because I intend to live in the future.” The method and concept of strategic foresight will help decision makers to actively take part in shaping the future, nothing more, and nothing less.

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## 5. ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGY FORMATION THROUGH STRATEGIC FORESIGHT. EXAMPLE: STORYTELLING

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Norbert Reez

### Abstract:

*Strategic foresight (foresight, for short) is also referred to as the continuation of strategy formation by other means. Relevant means are imagination and creativity. Conventional strategy formation, however, predominantly takes as a basis the model of planning or strategic planning (in particular: long-term planning). This is why the author argues for a broader approach called "foresight-based strategy formation". The essence of this idea is to reconsider current practices of strategic planning and cultivating a new, methodologically broader form of strategy formation by making use of creative techniques and foresight methodologies. Finally, the author illustrates his concept by telling a fictitious "story from the future" about climate change in the Arctic region.*

Strategic foresight is the continuation of strategy formation by other means. The means employed are imagination and creativity. Foresight processes construct possible and imaginable, but not necessarily probable scenarios. *The future is imagined in plural form (as "futures") – as an epitome and an ensemble of possibility spaces. Strategic foresight processes are inspired by lessons learned, emerging developments and trends, sometimes by extraordinary but inconspicuous events – the trivialities of the everyday world. Anticipation requires attentiveness. It is the most useful quality when trying to identify "latency structures" (E. Bloch) and seeds of innovation in the present, using them to create plausible constructs for shaping future policies.*

Strategy formation, too, is a part of shaping the future: strategies are nothing but political means to this end. The path towards the destination, however, is different in this case. Strategic processes are much more directly aimed towards concrete measures. They avoid detours, they must – as is often claimed – comply with much stricter practical requirements (such as statistical probabilities, time constraints, pressure to take decisions). In practice, strategy formation is therefore based on a well-known and seemingly reliable planning model for dealing with an uncertain future. In practice, strategy formation is, in the vast majority of cases, long-term planning. Planning, however, is based on the projection of actual states onto desired target states under consistent conditions. The unspoken assumption is that the context conditions of the plan in question will essentially not change. This form of linear extrapolation is less than complex in contrast to the obvious dynamic complexity of today's globalized world. In other words: The contract that strategic planners want to conclude with reality, insisting on the consistency of circumstances – *clausula rebus sic stantibus* – is more often than not cancelled unilaterally by reality in the form of unexpected events (*wild-cards*), factors not taken into account, which become confounding variables in the implementation process. The result is crisis and political failure (Weidenfeld 2018).

Our hypothesis is: Conventional strategy formation hardly – or too rarely, at least – makes use of the creative means (methods, techniques and procedures) that constitute strategic foresight. It makes sense to make long-term planning more “fit for the future”. Conventional strategy formation should thus be developed into a kind of “scenario planning” (Godet 2000; 2006).<sup>1</sup> The question of the methodology and conceptual instruments to be used in strategy formation is crucial for the further development of what is referred to as “social resilience”, i.e. the preparedness for unforeseen events.

### 1 On the Lack of a “Pre-Process” in the Process of Strategy Formation

The fact that strategy formation requires a process is undisputedly at the heart of every strategy discussion. It is equally undisputed that the strategy is what results at the end of the process. Strategies, so to speak, are final products, epiphenomena, of strategy formation processes. This is a truism. What is not a truism, however, is the question of where this process begins. This is the question of presuppositions, of the set premises that are assumed. Another key question that emerges is that of strategic foresight. Figuratively speaking, a door is opened that leads out of the planning paradigm. Conventional strategy formation wants to control thought processes as much as possible; to ensure, if you will, process control in terms of contents with the aim of operationalizing the agreed action programme in a targeted way. As said before, practical strategy formation mostly operates according to this logic today. It makes the overall process predictable. People thus like to resort to probability calculations and percentages in order to quickly make risks computable, and to prevent strategy development from getting out of hand or producing seemingly absurd solutions. While a little imagination is permissible, too much unconventional thinking is unwelcome, which is a bit like having your cake and eating it too.

In other words: If our observations are correct, strategy formation in current planning staff practice is reductive in theoretical terms and, as a rule, primarily focused on obtaining results. While this is understandable, because what counts ultimately is the result of this often lengthy and complex process, it is possible that problematic assumptions are overlooked this way and possible alternative solutions remain completely hidden. The fact that a new debate has started surrounding the necessity and purpose of strategic foresight in the practice of preparing decisions is obviously a sign that things are changing – both regarding a self-critical view taken by those currently involved in policy advice processes and regarding a theoretical grasp of concrete strategy formation processes such as the White Paper Process (Reez 2018). The strategy debate should therefore concentrate more closely on the period prior to concrete strategy work. This “pre-process”, which has so far been mostly, if not completely, disregarded is decisive when it comes to certain premises and assumptions which can significantly influence the entire process that follows.

### 2 Foresight Processes as Creative Detours

The fact that the door leading to foresight remains closed so often does not seem to be due to ill intent on the part of the individual players. Instead, there is every indication that an underlying cultural conflict exists, a contradiction between two radically different *mindsets*, with “planners” on the one hand and “foresight advocates” on the other.<sup>2</sup> Foresight is said to be a little fanciful and abstract, and thus *per se* useless for political practice. In a way, politicians themselves (at least German ones) have fuelled this preconception by saying things like “If you’re having visions, go see your doctor!”<sup>3</sup> This disregards the fact that *visioning* has proven effective as a method for obtaining strategic points of convergence and reference as part of the reorientation of organizations. As unfounded as the prejudice against foresight is in principle, as under-

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<sup>1</sup> “Scenario planning” is an unfortunate term since it suggests that ultimately, the overall process is about planning.

<sup>2</sup> On the basics of this see Snow (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Reportedly said by former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

standable is the reserve shown by those involved in practice towards what, at first glance, is the confusing complexity of strategic foresight methods.

Foresight uses words as heuristic signs, not concepts. These have fixed contours in terms of content and are taken from certain thought constructs. The means of choice for constructing new, non-standard worlds in the course of foresight processes is natural language. (As yet) uncoded natural language opens up new avenues of thought. During foresight processes, concerted “language games” (L. Wittgenstein) are played, so to speak, which lead the participants to co-creatively presented, alternative futures beyond linear standard worlds. Images, scenarios and narratives of the future are thus developed in dialogue, offering additional options for designing policy. With a view to transformative policies, this may produce reference points for changing existing, and setting new, strategic courses. The language used is completely metaphorical – depictions, descriptions, in short: narratives are the stuff that the new scenarios of possible futures are made of. A kind of narrative *bricolage* is made from subjective and objective impressions contributed by the participants in the process – both experts and laypersons. During the following discussion process, the individual contributions are constantly checked for plausibility. Foresight processes are thus eminently language-aware discursive events that are initially conducted in a deliberately “uncontrolled” way, but nevertheless have a methodical structure. Self-censorship, however, and a spirit of “knowing it all”, a kind of “fetish of assertion” (Sennett 2012), is prevented through appropriate “stage directions” given by the moderators of the process (formal process design). During the phase of exploring future possibility spaces, there is no right or wrong. During this phase, thinking is experimental – outcome unknown. Nobody knows the future or can predict it. This is where legitimate strategic foresight is separated from “future alchemy” (I. Illich) or charlatany. It is the primary aim of foresight processes to reveal pre-suppositions and prejudices, to expose faulty reasoning, perceptual filters or misperceptions. The detection of cognitive dissonance is, in a way, a by-product of the open dialogue among discussion participants within a foresight process, which is aimed at exploring a view of the

future. In this way, foresight is using rhetoric for “detection” purposes. Another thing that may irritate planners, who think in fixed categories and conceptual systems, is the fact that during a non-hierarchical, open discourse, opinions and assessments are produced, but no irrefutable facts. Knowledge is an orientation aid based on the principles of plausibility, tenability and appropriateness, not on hard criteria such as evidence, validity or representativity. The results of foresight processes are thus concerted thought experiments based on a vague, hypothetical foundation. Quality is achieved first and foremost through the composition of the group that intends to solve a problem by means of strategic foresight techniques. A useful rule of thumb is: The higher the diversity and heterogeneity, the better. This is the only way to avoid the *group-think* phenomenon and curb the widespread “silo mentality”. Future workshops contain what is referred to as a “fantasy phase” or “utopian phase” as part of the structured communication process. This illustrates the fact that this phase is a kind of creative detour on the road to solving a complex problem. The discursive-meandering approach is characteristic of all foresight processes. To combine this method with that of conventional strategy formation while keeping in mind the cultural conflict mentioned above is the primary aim of further developing strategic thinking and acting.

### 3 Foresight-Based Strategy Formation

In order to establish foresight-based strategy formation, one must cross the threshold to the possibility spaces of the future. The creative “pre-process” is preliminary, but nevertheless necessary, if you want to avoid false assumptions. The traditional planning paradigm is apparently unable to cope with the excessive complexity of this VUCA environment. The transition from conventional strategic planning to foresight-based decision processes thus primarily becomes a challenge to executive personnel. Strategy formation that – however unwittingly – fails to make room for an imagination, fantasy or creativity phase will, at worst, remain a decision process restricted by technocracy and engineering aspects. This also means that executive personnel must undergo a change of perspective from exclusively “evidence-based” (“There is only one correct solution!”) to a new form that is

“latency-based” (“There can be several possible solutions!”). To a certain extent, this will necessitate a culture change in public authorities. Pragmatic decision-making based on plausibility and appropriateness will gain in importance over the existing normative and methodical, rational decision-making approach that is based primarily on correctness, unambiguity and truth. It is certainly a lot simpler and easier to organize strategy work without creative communication loops. The (terminological) “uncoddedness”, the vagueness and ambivalence of natural language is sometimes felt to be disruptive, inhibiting, unscientific. This, however, is precisely what opens up new avenues of thinking and acting. Today, such opportunities for dialogue are seen by many as unnecessary palaver, a waste of time given the urgency of solving the problem. Instead, one rushes from the analysis of the actual state to the target state without thoroughly thinking through the initial premises. This road is usually smoother and carefully paved with unambiguous performance indicators.

The culture change from conventional strategic planning to foresight-based strategy formation will not be an easy one. Given the increasing “disambiguation of the world” (Bauer 2018), there is a serious risk of the existing practice becoming even more engrained. This practice of preparing decisions is susceptible to forecasts based on the criterion of numerical probability (of occurrence). This will most probably lead to “off-the-shelf” strategy products.<sup>4</sup> This is to say: Powerful prediction technologies are capable of creating a new form of adocracy through mass data processing even now, and more so in the future. Such predictions are bad surrogates for real strategy work. This presents new challenges to future executive personnel to distance themselves a little from machine-calculated decision proposals in favor of remaining open to individual strategic thinking. Insofar, foresight processes also promote social learning, and learning to live with ambivalence and ambiguity.

#### 4 Storytelling – a Practical Example

Storytelling (*narrative foresight*) represents a qualitative-hermeneutical procedure to illustrate complex situations and solve the associated problems (Milojevic and Inayatulla 2015). As comprehensive interdisciplinary research has shown (Martinez and Scheffel 2016), storytelling is constitutive to the way we perceive the world. We understand the world through narratives. By verbalizing, categorizing and communicating our experiences, we may reduce complexities, create alternative worlds and participate in other people’s worlds. Narration and its result, narratives, help organize experiences and ideas around dates, places and protagonists. The narrative perspective is what gives stories a beginning, a middle and an end. To the listener, reader and recipient, it will make sense – if everything goes well.<sup>5</sup> The question is whether the story told is plausible. This, in turn, invites contradiction and debate. Owing to the unrivalled modeling capabilities of storytelling, the narrative technique is considered to be highly suitable for foresight processes (*scenario writing*) and for strategy formation (Milojevic and Inayatulla 2015, p.152). By this definition, stories are assessments within the frame of reference of what is possible; thought experiments creating a narrative simulation space which, in contrast to indicator-based technical simulations, uses the power of language and imagination in order to construct new fictional realities.

The following is an attempt to apply the storytelling technique to climate change.

##### *The End of the Ice Curtain. A Fictitious Story from the Future*

*The satellite images published on the website of the European Space Agency ESA shortly before Christmas 2038 came as a real bombshell. They spread around the world like wildfire – a wake-up call for the global society in terms of climate change. The spectacular images proved beyond doubt what had so far been claimed by only a few climatologists: For the first time, the Arctic Ocean*

<sup>4</sup> Söffner (2018), who claims to have observed an “aversion to storytelling” even in the cultural and social sciences (p.20).

<sup>5</sup> See Weick (2011), who considers the crucial practical question to be that of plausibility, namely whether the story makes “*plausible sense*”

was ice-free – in winter. The Arctic ice cap had melted much faster than anybody had expected. It turned out later that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC had vastly underestimated the influence of the ice-albedo feedback<sup>6</sup> in its simulations. The ESA images and the sudden navigability of the Arctic Ocean throughout the year subsequently proved to be a major game changer: Whereas the Arctic Ocean had hardly been commercially usable in the past owing to its inaccessibility, this had changed completely now. Six times the size of the Mediterranean Sea, the Arctic Ocean turned into a vibrant economic area in a minimum of time. Ships would use the new transarctic route instead of the Suez or Panama Canals, where considerable transit charges had to be paid. Commercial routes between Europe and East Asia, such as the Rotterdam-Tokyo route, were cut by half; dangerous waters plagued by piracy surrounding Indonesia or the Horn of Africa could literally be circumnavigated. The Arctic Ocean became the main commercial route and at the same time a hotspot of international maritime traffic. Cruise ships travelled the area, which had been practically devoid of humans before. Warming Island (Uunartoq Qeqertoq) in particular, an island that had only been discovered in 2005 off the eastern coast of Greenland after a considerable amount of land-based ice had melted, became a popular travel destination. An even more popular destination attracting tens of thousands of visitors, however, were the former Arctic shipping routes along the Canadian Arctic Archipelago (Northwest Passage) and through the marginal seas off the Russian/Siberian coastline (Northeast Passage). Mass tourism, immigration and the establishment of infrastructure quickly changed the face of the Arctic. The vision formulated by Icelandic President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson as early as 2010, namely to transform the Arctic into a “trans-Arctic Panama Canal”, had become a reality within a few years.

The general euphoria is soon replaced by disillusionment, however. It soon becomes apparent that the eight Arctic nations Norway (Svalbard), the Russian Federation (Siberia), the United States of America (Alaska), Canada, Denmark

(Greenland), Finland, Sweden and Iceland are in complete disagreement regarding the political status of the region. There are no legally binding regulations – except for an agreement regarding search and rescue operations in the Arctic. While the Arctic Council based in Tromsø, Norway, has served as a platform for expert exchanges since 1996, its main purpose is the coordination of research and development projects in the Arctic – it has no general decision-making powers. Most neighboring states thus reiterate their previous territorial claims in the Arctic Ocean. They emphatically push their applications for an expansion of their sovereign territories in the direction of the continental shelves in accordance with the Law of the Sea Convention. In order to strengthen their negotiating position in the proceedings, they hasten to conduct what is referred to as mapping missions to explore the extent of the continental shelf. What is more, Canada completes an Arctic deepwater port in Resolute Bay near the centrally located Inuit settlement Qausuittuq in a minimum of time, creating a service and security infrastructure for raw material exploitation in the Arctic Ocean. A race for the valuable resources under the seabed of the Arctic Ocean has begun. The fight for dominance in the Arctic is vicious: It is fought in front of UN bodies, such as the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), in the Arctic Council and increasingly, and very publicly, in the media. In response to an action by Russian Duma member Artur Chilingarov, who had planted a Russian flag made from titanium in the seabed near the Geographic North Pole from aboard a Russian submarine in 2007, US American senator Dan Sullivan also plants a flag there in spring 2041 – this time it is the flag of the United Nations. Sullivan states that his aim is to raise awareness for the necessary internationalization of the sea routes in the Arctic. Russia considers this an act of provocation – the Russian president himself strongly condemns the campaign at a press conference, denouncing it as “gunboat diplomacy”. He claims that the continental shelf in question is, without doubt, an undersea continuation of the Eurasian landmass. The Danish Prime Minister then fiercely objects to this on Twitter, accusing the Russian President of

<sup>6</sup> In contrast to snow and ice surfaces, which reflect the major part of the sun’s energy towards outer

space, darker-coloured land and water surfaces absorb most of this energy, further contributing to global warming. Source: German Wikipedia.

spreading “unfair propaganda” since, she states, the continental shelf claimed by him is part of Greenland, according to “decisive geological findings”. As if this is not enough, the American President openly endorses Sullivan’s campaign after this. He reproaches the Russian President on Twitter for practicing gunboat diplomacy himself. He also accuses Russia of having repeatedly sent Mir nuclear submarines into the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska recently. He announces there will be an “appropriate response” in the future. The conflict escalates. Canada takes Russia’s side and condemns US “military exercises” in Canadian waters, considered to be “international” by the United States in violation of international law. An unprecedented, public dispute between the Arctic nations takes its course. There are daily media updates on new allegations and mutual provocations. Even Denmark and Canada are now arguing out the dispute about their claims on Hans Island near Greenland publicly and with no holds barred. The deep-seated conflicts of interest between the Arctic nations owing to unresolved territorial claims are threatening to turn into a permanent crisis and to jeopardize world peace. The global public and the global economy are following these developments with shock and disbelief. As rapid and promising as the economic boom in the Arctic had been, as depressing is the subsequent political process. Some political observers are not ruling out an armed conflict in the region. The “future of the Arctic is in danger of being gambled away by players who think and act with no strategy whatsoever – and they are dragging down the future of global commerce and the climate with them”, comments the Washington Post.

All hopes now rest on the Arctic Council’s regular ministerial meeting scheduled for autumn. As early November approaches, the time when the meeting in Nuuk in Greenland is to take place with Denmark holding the rotating presidency, the world is watching closely. The diplomatic roundtable is facing a debacle: Disharmony in the Arctic has reached its culmination point so far with Russia’s threat to stay away from the meeting owing to recent events including “obviously false allegations and systematic disinformation by various malevolent neighboring countries regarding Russian activities in the Arctic region”. Only an open letter published by the six Arctic indigenous communities, which have the status of permanent participants and attend the meetings of the Arctic

Council, can convince Russia to relent. Surprisingly, however, the Russian President now decides to attend personally. This leads to all the other members of the Arctic Council also nominating their heads of government as participants. In a rush, Denmark attempts to adapt the “Arctic summit”, as the meeting is by now called worldwide, to the new circumstances in terms of contents and protocol. A failure of the meeting is to be avoided at all cost. The Danish Prime Minister is aware that morale has hit rock bottom among the members of the Arctic Council. At the same time, she knows that the global public and her own people expect concrete steps towards overcoming this crisis of confidence. Detailed planning goes on right up to the beginning of the meeting in order to make the “Greenland summit” a success. The foreign delegations and the expected media representatives are to feel as comfortable as possible during their stay in Nuuk. The accompanying cultural programme contains a visit to the Nuuk Art Museum, a meeting with local artists, and a boat trip to the eastern part of the Nuuk fjord system to watch whales, seals and sea eagles. The meeting’s agenda is streamlined but apart from that remains as it has been prepared by various project groups and expert panels. This is the agenda:

1. Melted permafrost soils and greenhouse gas emissions (methane, carbon dioxide) as well as mercury emissions
2. Coastal erosion and resettlement of indigenous populations
3. Natural disasters caused by unobstructed Arctic autumn and winter storms and floods (called rain-on-snow events)
4. Polar bear populations on the verge of extinction and changing migration routes of animals (reindeer, seals and walruses)
5. Pollution of Arctic rivers
6. Sea traffic management and naval accidents
7. Effects of raw material exploitation in the seabed on Arctic currents (Beaufort Current and Transpolar Drift Current)
8. Miscellaneous

*On the first day of the meeting, the provisionally extended conference centre in Nuuk is filled with a chilly atmosphere despite being densely packed with prominent guests. The Danish Prime Minister welcomes the representatives of all member states as well as the other participants and observers and expresses her hope that the “Greenland summit” may produce some signs of reconciliation among the Arctic nations. She speaks of the high expectations created worldwide by this conference. She points out the enormous agenda and the urgent problems in the region that must be discussed in the course of the conference. Then she hands the floor to seasoned Greenlandic politician and writer Aqqualuk Lynge, who is with the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). He describes the current situation in Greenland with impressive images from his own personal experience. With the sea ice already having vanished during his lifetime, he says, it is now considerable parts of the land-based ice in Greenland that are melting. It is known – and has been calculated – that Greenland’s ice sheet is large enough to make sea levels rise by more than 7m worldwide. Among the greatest foreseeable catastrophes caused by global warming that threaten humanity, he continues, is a collapsing continental glacier, which is why something “fundamental” must be done in order to avoid this. It is, he concludes, up to the decision makers attending the conference to make a difference. The speech has the desired effect. A heated discussion follows on the “fundamental something” underlying the individual points on the agenda. Several of the delegations emphasize the impossibility of simply going back to “business as usual”. Suddenly, the initial speechlessness of the participants is replaced by a general urge to talk and the desire to make a fresh start. Asked by the Danish Prime Minister whether they want to adopt the agenda in its intended form, the participants unanimously answer with no. Instead of a discussion of specific topics, a discussion of principles is requested – for varying reasons – in order to find something of a “strategic approach” to future cooperation in the Arctic region. Someone reminds the participants that the Arctic Council itself once emerged from a similar process of strategy formation, namely the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). On this basis, the Arctic Council was founded in 1996 with the Ottawa Declaration. Consensus is quickly reached that the summit is to focus on “principles of cooperation”*

*and a “new Arctic strategy”. In the course of further discussion, however, it becomes clear that there are quite different ideas and expectations regarding this strategy formation process. While some make a case for creating some kind of “vision” to provide the necessary orientation for problem solving, others advocate a “definition of strategic objectives” that are required to ensure implementation. There is also controversy about what constitutes a strategy and how concrete or abstract it must be in order to be effective. The Danish Prime Minister finally suggests the establishment of a project group under the umbrella of the Arctic Council which will develop a “new Arctic strategy” and commission the University of the Arctic (UArctic) to implement it. Several parties are opposed to this. Finland, Norway and Canada make a passionate plea for a “real fresh start” and suggest not leaving strategy development only to the experts, but to the leaders as well. Given the situation, they want this to be a “lighthouse project”; they claim that this is what is owed to the people living in the region and to the global public. The representative of the Arctic indigenous communities then proposes to establish the project office in a prominent location in the region concerned, instead of at the Secretariat of UArctic in Finland. He further suggests installing the project office for the “lighthouse project” in an actual lighthouse, since there are so many along the coast of the Arctic Ocean. This would be a symbolic reinforcement of the concept of a “lighthouse project”, since like actual lighthouses, this project is about early warning and crisis management, he states. The Russian President emphatically supports this idea. He suggests using Cape Dezhnev on the Chukchi Peninsula at the northern-most point of Siberia as a location. The growing village of Naukan, having benefited a lot from economic developments in the Arctic Ocean, is the perfect location for the intended lighthouse project, according to the Russian President. The American President agrees, stating that it is crucial now to send positive signals of reconciliation and constructive cooperation into the world. He offers Cape Spencer on the Seward Peninsula at the northern-most point of Alaska as an additional location. It is only a little under 100 kilometers distance from what was formerly referred to as East Cape, separated only by the Bering Strait. The American President thinks it will be a token of goodwill to cooperate this closely at this location, the Arctic bottleneck. As far as he knows, he goes on, this is what in*

Alaska, by analogy with the Iron Curtain dividing central Europe during that time, used to be called the Ice Curtain. Therefore, he concludes, to have two project locations for the future “new Arctic strategy” in this place is both a historical obligation and a sign of a new beginning. Everyone present expresses their consent. Eventually, it is decided to take a closer look at the question of whether a “vision” or “strategic objectives” should be preferred in strategy formation separately, at the two locations. In case of doubt, alternatives can be discussed at the next “Arctic summit”, the Danish President concludes and closes the session – clearly relieved.

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## 6. NOTIONS OF “STRATEGY” IN THE GERMAN WHITE PAPERS AND THE IDEA OF “SICHERHEITSVORSORGE”

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Jan Fuhrmann

**Abstract:**

*The lament about a lack of strategy in German security policy is present at the political, academic and media level. However, since the federal government re-releases guideline documents at irregular intervals, this paper asks about the underlying notion of “strategy” in the White Papers on German Security Policy. Thus, it reconstructs the use of the concept in the documents’ language as well as ends and means of German security policy. Thereby, the study reveals a concept of strategy that is evidently more adaptive and dynamic than established academic concepts of (grand) strategy. Finally, the paper argues that this causes a gap of understanding between strategy practitioners and academic practitioners. In its current form, every renewal of the lament about a lack of strategy reproduces this gap.*

The lament about a lack of strategy is a common narrative in debates on German foreign and security policy. This claim is frequently present in the German media as well as in policy and academic debates. While some demand a more strategic German foreign policy, like former foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) in a keynote speech in December 2017, others claim a shortage of strategic research and teaching in the German academia.

However, the German Federal Government publishes strategic documents on security at irregular intervals. The most important and best known of them is the “White Paper on Security Policy and Future of the Bundeswehr”. Even though this document is not literally titled as “national security strategy”, some observers and policy makers partly ascribe the character and function of a national security strategy to it. Therefore, one can assume that the White Papers must at least contain certain notions of the meaning “strategy” and ideas about how German security strategy should work. This paper presents a reconstruction of those notions and ideas.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas the term “strategy” and the adjective “strategic” themselves are rarely used in the White Papers, there is another term that is used almost as an equivalent: *Sicherheitsvorsorge*. One could even interpret it as *the* German security strategy. Its centrality to the German understanding of strategy derives from its semantic connections to a number of concepts which can be regarded as ends and means of German security policy: *responsibility, values and interests, instruments, multilateralism, networked action, and prevention*. However, *Sicherheitsvorsorge* cannot be literally translated into English. Thus, this article aims to present the several dimensions of the term *Sicherheitsvorsorge* and to provide a broader and more detailed understanding

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<sup>1</sup> The basis of this paper is a Grounded Theory study of the author that asks about the notions of strategy in the White Papers of the years 1994, 2006, and

2017 of the German Federal Government. The results of the study are also published in German language: Fuhrmann, Jan (2019).

about the notions of strategy in the White Papers of the German Federal Government.

First of all, I will present the idea *Sicherheitsvorsorge* as the core category of German security strategy and explain the semantic dimensions of the concept, which also contain certain connotations about securities and risk themselves. I will then reconstruct the linguistic usage of the words “strategy” and “strategic” in order to understand the contexts, purposes and meanings in which strategy takes places. Subsequently, I will reconstruct ends and means of German security policy as well as their interrelations. By summarizing my findings, I will argue that the concept of strategy in the White Papers is much more dynamic and adaptive than established academic concepts of *Grand Strategy*. This causes a severe gap of understanding between strategy practitioners and academics.

### 1 The Idea of “Sicherheitsvorsorge”

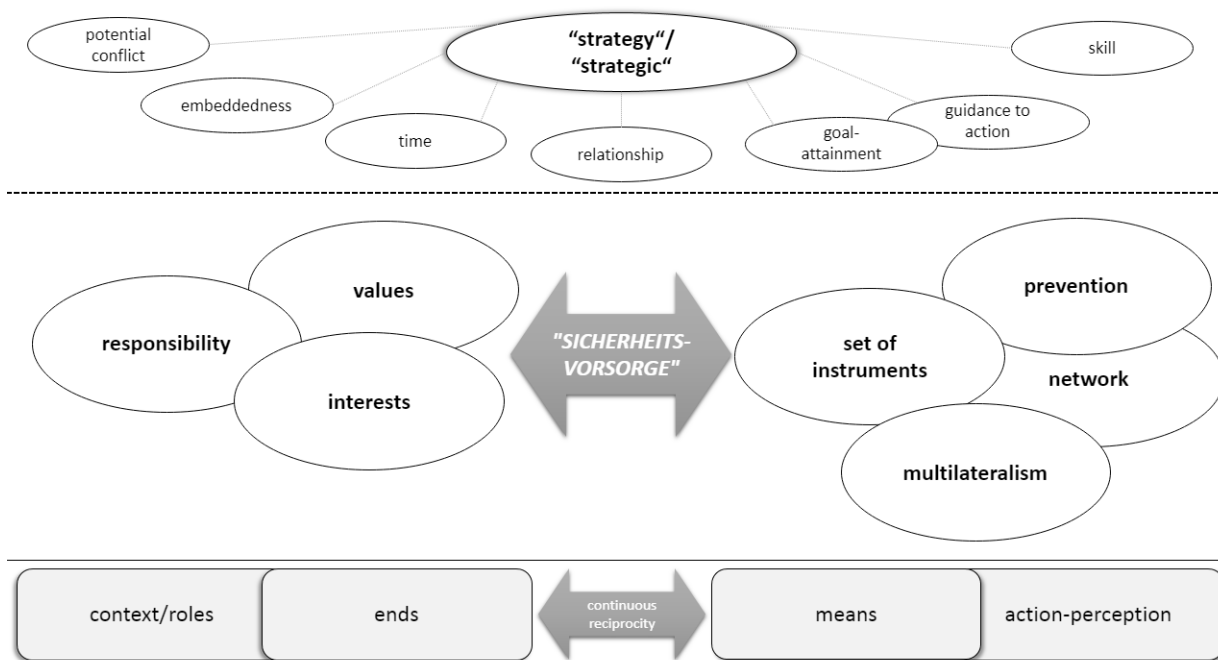
*Sicherheitsvorsorge* is a core category in the concept of strategy in the German White Papers. This means the category itself interlinks a number of other central categories with each other. *Sicherheitsvorsorge* itself is a composite word that combines the terms “Sicherheit” and “Vorsorge”. While “Sicherheit” is the German word for “security” as well as “safety”, “Vorsorge” contains several notions that reach from “prevention” to “care”. Thereby, it does not only contain purposes to action (“security” and “safety”) but also ideas of *how* to act in order to reach those.

Since the term *Sicherheitsvorsorge* is untranslatable to English, the Federal Government uses other words in order to cover the notions which “Vorsorge” contains. These are mostly settled around the linguistic dimension of *prevention*. For instance, in its White Paper 1994 the Federal Government writes: “German security policy consists of taking foresighted, integrated and multilaterally interlinked preventive security measures.” The preventive character of *Sicherheitsvorsorge* is also revealed in the 2006 edition of the White Paper: “Preventive security can hence be guaranteed most effectively through early warning and pre-emptive action, and must incorporate the entire range of security policy instruments.” In 2016, however, the Federal

Government translates *Sicherheitsvorsorge* directly as “Our approach to ensuring security” that “begins in Germany. We must therefore have a synchronized and comprehensive approach to security at national level and coordinate and further develop our instruments.” Quite similarly to this notion of a *comprehensive approach*, the Federal Government also translates *Sicherheitsvorsorge* into “whole-of-government approach to security” in one chapter heading.

The translations of the Federal Government give a good impression of the connotations of *Vorsorge*, which, however, require some further elaboration. In German, *Vorsorge* is commonly used in the semantic field of medical treatments and medical check-ups. Hence, it does not only contain notions of prevention and pre-emption but also the basic idea of screening measures. Re-translated into the semantic field of security this notion could refer to the idea of early warning measures and to a risk-based understanding of security: In order to be secure and take proper preventive action against certain risks, one must first allow diseases or conflicts to show their symptoms. This interpretation again alludes to the discourse on “resilience” that has been ongoing for some years. Thus, *Sicherheitsvorsorge* does also entail a notion of preparedness in order to be able to deal with security challenges.

Due to its origin from the semantic field of medicine and health, *Vorsorge* furthermore contains a notion of care. This connotation raises the question about who has to take care for whom? As a result, it also establishes a hierarchy between a care-giver on the one hand and care recipients on the other hand. Translated into the field of German security policy and following the above mentioned quotes of the Federal Government, the role allocation becomes quite clear: The government regards itself as a kind of care-giver towards the German citizens by providing security. From its own perspective this seems to be best guaranteed by preventive, comprehensive and coordinated government measures.



In the following, I will present my reconstruction of the semantic use of “strategy” and “strategic” in the White Paper as well as a number of categories, which are central to the notion of strategy

of the German Federal Government. In combination, they build the subsequent model of *Sicherheitsvorsorge*:

The upper level of the model describes the connotations of the linguistic usage of the words “strategy” and “strategic”. These connotations build the discursive framework in which *Sicherheitsvorsorge* takes place as the strategic action of the Federal Government. The lowest level is merely descriptive. Its purpose is to structure the model in an area of context, self-conception and ends, and an area of means and ideas about how to use those. In the process of *Sicherheitsvorsorge* these ends and means are in a continuous exchange.

The most important level of the model is the middle one, where *Sicherheitsvorsorge* is situated. The central actor is the Federal Government, continuously practicing *Sicherheitsvorsorge*. Thereby, it tries to combine ends and means of action in a meaningful and problem-solving way. Although ends and means are ordered in an optically divided ends-means-scheme in the figure, it is to notice that this is to be seen rather fluid since ends and means of (social) action can influence each other reciprocally.

This interpretation goes back to the idea of “ends-in-view” by John Dewey. It basically means that means of actions are not necessarily neutral towards ends of actions. Thus, means can possibly also develop into aims or shape those.

In my model this becomes evident in the category of *multilateralism* which is seen as an end in itself by the Federal Government, but also a means to shape and reach its policy goal by acting together with others. Partly, other categories also influence each other in the notion of strategy of the German government. For instance, the category *interests* is shaped and inspired by the category *values*. The category of *responsibility*, which is basically a role-conception, also connects to certain *interests*, for example the protection of the German population. As discussed earlier, the action of *Sicherheitsvorsorge* itself is (literally) based on notions of *prevention* and *networked action*. Thus, *Sicherheitsvorsorge* can be regarded as the Federal Government’s action in which it directs ends and means meaningfully towards action goals.

Since the term *Sicherheitsvorsorge* is used almost synonymously to “security strategy”, the initial question concerning the Federal Government’s notion of strategy in its White Papers can be answered as follows: strategy is a means of action based on an analysis of a current or future

security situation. In doing so, the Federal Government evaluates the effects of this situation based on its own (stability-orientated) *interests* and their (legally inspired) *values*. As an actor conscious of its responsibility (towards citizens, allies, and the international community) the Federal Government derives possible actions that apply a broad *set of instruments* (military and civilian) problem-oriented to cope with challenges and to reach its goals. Thereby, the Federal Government aims to act preventive in order to avoid conflicts and to use minimum levels of (violent) force. It incorporates the interest of its partner in its own action. Thereby, the Federal Government perceives *multilateralism* as an enabling factor for its ability to act, as well as a source of legitimacy for its actions. I will elaborate further on this model by explaining the individual categories and their relationships in the next chapters.

## 2 The Linguistic Usage of “Strategy”

Based upon Ludwig Wittgenstein’s dictum that a word’s meaning is its use, the underlying study to this paper reconstructed the Federal Government’s linguistic use of the words “strategy” and “strategic” in the White Papers 1994, 2006, and 2016. In doing so, six categories were identified: *potential conflict, embeddedness, goal-orientation and guidance to action, relationship, and skill*.

First, the words “strategy” and “strategic” are used in the context of *potential conflict*. This immediately constructs a reference to aspects of security and insecurity. Thus, strategy can be interpreted as a reaction to potential insecurity or potentially colliding interests.

Second, strategy is an action that serves to *attain goals*. In doing so, strategy orders actions and means in a way that their potential effects lead to the achievement of objectives. Hence, actions are mostly derived from ends. Meanwhile, strategy has to prioritize (limited) means of action to achieve the Federal Government’s objectives. Consequently, the adjective “strategic” has the linguistic function to highlight certain aspects

and assigns a value of priority to its reference object.

Third, security policy actions are *embedded* in a “strategic context”, which is constituted of material and immaterial factors.<sup>2</sup> From the Federal Government’s perspective the most important are Germany’s geographic location, its history, economic interdependencies as well as its obligations from the EU and NATO memberships. For this reason, it is one task of strategy to analyze the strategic context or the current situation in order to develop own actions. Thus, strategy can be characterized as a phenomenon of double *embeddedness*: strategy is *embedded* within a security context but aims to *embed* certain actions itself in a meaningful manner.

Fourth, from the German Federal Government’s perspective strategy comprises a dimension of *time*. Meanwhile, strategy is oriented towards the future and concerns rather long-term time spans.

Fifth, the semantic use of “strategy” provides information on the *relationship* between actors in the security realm. This conveys different continuums of relationships: “partnership vs. rivalry” and “defensive vs. offensive”. In its self-description, the German Federal Government sees itself embedded into defensive alliances, which also indicates a fundamentally defensive self-perception of German strategy. The only domain in which offensive military capacities might be used is cyber. Concerning the relationship to other actors, the government does not see itself in rivalry to anyone but rather striving for partnerships and cooperation. This becomes even more evident in the White Paper 2016, where the Federal Government states that it strives for a strategic partnership with Russia, despite the fact that Russia is “placing emphasis on rivalry” (p. 32).

Sixth, following the Federal government, strategy requires certain *skills* or strategic capacity (“Strategiefähigkeit”). This term became very prominent in the 2016 White Paper which even contains a subchapter titled “Strengthening and

<sup>2</sup> The fact that the Federal Government sometimes uses terms like variables”, and “constants” could be

interpreted as a partly mathematical notion of strategy.

Expanding Our Strategic Capacity”. Strategic capacity is best ensured by creating an inter-ministerial committee that serves as starting point for “strategic debates”, as minister of defense Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) put it in her press conference presenting the latest White Paper in July 2016. The aspect of “debates” again underlines the centrality of situation analysis in the framework of strategy. It also adds a dynamic and procedural notion to strategy since certain situations do not naturally cause fixed reactions. It rather requires discussion about possible actions that seem suitable to solve the respective challenge.

### 3 Ends and Means of German Security Policy

As discussed above, the reconstruction of ends and means of German security policy is based on the idea of “ends-in-view” by John Dewey, which states that means are not necessarily neutral towards ends and vice versa. Consequently, we can assume that ends and means can influence each other reciprocally.

The first category in the notion of strategy of the German Federal Government is *responsibility* (“Verantwortung”). It describes both an enabling condition and a role-conception in which the government regards itself as acting in a *responsible* way. Responsibility is directed towards the domestic level by providing security to the citizens and to the international level. Here, responsibility is best expressed by contributions to international crisis prevention and crisis management, whereby the German government fulfils the perceived obligations in the form of external expectations from allies (especially from the EU, NATO, and the United Nations). During the time span of the three analyzed White Papers, the voluntariness of accepting *responsibility* has steadily increased. This also implies a higher demand to take part in shaping international security policy. Also the forms of accepting *responsibility* have broadened: While the category had a strong military reference in the White Paper 1994, the number of civilian instruments connected to *responsibility* has increased with each new edition of the White Paper.

Two other central categories are *values* (“Werte”) and *interests* (“Interessen”). While often described as exclusive and opposed to each other in the academic literature, the Federal Government sees them closely interlinked. Their relationship can be described as *values* directing *interests*. Concrete actions are then derived from this constellation. Values are founded on the German *Grundgesetz*, the national constitution. The White Paper 2016 extends the set of *values* even to European Law, while emphasizing the principle of human dignity and human rights. This character of legally inspired *values* (and *interests*) can be interpreted as a notion of strategy that is committed to national and international law.

Most of the Federal Government’s *interests* are defined *multilaterally*. The list of interests is always led by the interests to protect Germany and its citizens. In 2016, this was expanded by safeguarding the national prosperity. The further interests are then defined in relation to other actors. Overall, the interests can be described as conservative in a sense of stability-orientation. Their common goal is the preservation of achievements. Even when some interests promote change, for instance deepening the European integration, integration serves the purpose of safeguarding stability. Therefore, the notions and articulation of *interests* corresponds strongly with the defensive self-description that was explained earlier.

Considering the aspect of means of action, the set of instruments (“Instrumentarium”) is a central category. The Federal Government seems to have the impression to have a rich toolbox available, ranging from civilian to military tools. In the White Paper 2016 the government finds that “In light of the wide range of potential challenges, our security instruments must be agile and flexible in both design and application” (White Paper 2016, p. 56). This statement underlines the idea of flexibility and the functional logic that underlies the government’s notion of strategy. In relation to the security challenges mentioned in the White Papers the set of instruments refers mostly to external threats. Hence, one could argue that the overall notion of strategy is outward-looking towards the international and global level.

During the timeframe of analysis, the *instruments* themselves have increased in number and scope. For instance, in 2006 the aspect of police was added, as well as legal tools in 2016. The *Bundeswehr*, the German Armed Forces, has steadily gained acceptance. It moves upwards in the lists of instruments and is centrally connoted with German security policy engagements. This can also be attributed to the German operational experiences made in Kosovo and Afghanistan. However, the Federal Government continues to draw a strict rhetorical line between military and civilian *instruments*. The use of the military underlies a case by case logic while the application of force needs to be scalable. This suggests a flexible and rather restrained attitude towards the use of possibly violent means.

The category *multilateralism* is both an action-perception and *instrument* of German security policy. Its high importance is underlined by the statements that alliances are the "core" and "fundament" (White Paper 1994) of German security policy. *Multilateralism* is also constitutionally enshrined in the *values* of the *Grundgesetz*. *Multilateralism* becomes necessary since security challenges seem no longer solvable by acting alone. Furthermore, *multilateralism* follows the purpose to leverage the Federal Government's action capabilities as well as its legitimacy. But *multilateralism* does also link to the use of the *set of instruments* which is to be applied together with partner and alliances. Thus, the *instruments* themselves need to be applicable in a *multilateral* framework. For the notion of strategy of the Federal Government in its White Paper the category *multilateralism* suggests a rather cooperative attitude in the relationship to other actors. Deliberately chosen interdependencies with allies and partners make it necessary for the Federal Government to consider their *interests* and intentions in its own action plans.

Another action-perception and aim of German strategy is the idea of *networked* action, which describes the interconnected use of instruments as well as the cooperation of civilian and military actors. This concerns both the national and international level. In the White Paper 2016 the "comprehensive approach" is regarded as the "guiding principle of our Government". The idea of *networked* security action has become increasingly prominent in the White Papers 2006

and 2016. It follows logics of effectiveness and efficiency since the Federal Government seems to be convinced that "Experience at national and international level has shown that, where fewer resources are available, civilian and military actors achieve greater effect if they pool forces and coordinate their actions for the conceptual planning and conduct of operations." (White Paper 2006, p. 122). Furthermore, the idea of a *network* is imperative for the design of instruments that need to be *networkable*. The notion of *networked* security is of highest importance to the German government. Not least because Minister of the Defense Ursula von der Leyen thinks that strategic capacity ("Strategiefähigkeit") means to "live the comprehensive even more", as she explained in a press statement in 2016.

Finally, *prevention* is the last central category in the model. As an action-perception the Federal Government regards all its security policy as *preventive*. The *preventive* use of *instruments* aims to avoid conflicts and to keep the level of violence as low as possible. This also serves to avoid the use of own forces in international crisis management, if possible. Hence, *prevention* is the preferred mode of action of the Federal Government. The idea of *prevention* does also shape the design of instruments and relates to the whole spectrum of action opportunities. Consequently, this means that the use of the military as an *instrument* can also be *preventive* in nature. The concept is centrally enshrined in all White Papers and has received increased relevance during the timeframe of analysis. It is furthermore rhetorically important since *Sicherheitsvorsorge*, the German government's substitute term for "strategy", contains a literal reference to *prevention*.

## 4 Conclusions

Are German White Papers free of strategy? Not at all! As the analysis in this paper has shown there are a number of notions and ideas that are connected to "strategy" even though this term is rarely used by the Federal Government. The model of *Sicherheitsvorsorge* combines those central concepts and categories and presents their relationships to each other.

The reconstruction of the linguistic usage of the words “strategy” and “strategic” revealed six dimensions in which the terms are utilized: *potential conflict, goal attainment and action guidance, embeddedness, relationship, time, and skill*. Together, they constitute the framework in which the action of *Sicherheitsvorsorge* takes place. *Sicherheitsvorsorge* is the process of combining the ends and means of German security policy: *responsibility, values and interests, the set of instruments, multilateralism, networked action, and prevention*. Having a look at the individual categories, one can easily identify that many of them are regarded both as an end and a mean by the Federal Government. For instance, the category *responsibility* serves as an end: The government wants to fulfil its *responsibility*. And as mean: The government strives to act responsibly in order to act according to its *values and interests*. Or as an action-perception when using the *set of instruments* in a *responsible* manner. In other words, the individual categories are meaningfully used in different ways.

Moreover, the concept of *Sicherheitsvorsorge* itself contains several dimensions that imply a certain understanding of risk and preparedness: Safety, security, prevention, pre-emption, early warning, and care. Thus, *Sicherheitsvorsorge* or “strategy” can be interpreted from the Federal Government’s perspective as the intent to balance ends and means quite flexibly and adaptive in order to solve problems or to cope with (known, imagined, or yet unknown) security challenges. Neither ends nor means are given naturally. Their combinations seem to be much more focused on solving problems than fulfilling fixed goals by applying fixed means. This understanding does also concur with the idea of “resilience” which has become very common in recent years.

However, my analysis reveals a remarkable contradiction to established International Relations concepts of (Grand) Strategy. While the practice-oriented understanding of strategy that I reconstructed is characterized by flexibility and

adaptability of ends end means to certain threats, established concepts are often characterized by a rather one-directional relationship between ends and means, as well as a (Weberian) logic of instrumental rationality: Means are derived from ends, but not vice versa. For instance, Colin Gray writes in his book “Perspectives on Strategy” (2013) that “Grand Strategy is the direction and use made of any or all of the assets of a security community, including its military instrument, for the purposes of policy as decided by politics.” In other words, practitioners (at least in the German Federal Government) and academics have fundamentally different views about the functionalities and logics of strategy.

When adopting the practitioners’ perspective, this becomes even clearer. A high ranked officer who was involved in writing the White Paper 2016 describes strategy as “a complex adaptive system”.<sup>3</sup> To him, “acting strategically means to react properly to dynamics.” The White Paper has to be seen as a “corridor in which we can move without losing ourselves”. Another officer added that “it is a misperception that strategy automatically predetermines certain actions. Sometimes we must be also allowed to take some detours in order to reach our goals”. To sum up, the inherent tension between fixation and flexibility continues to be unresolved.

Coming back to the lament about a lack of strategy which was described in the introduction, it becomes clear that there is no lack but rather different conceptions of strategy. Thus, the mere renewal of this lament does not seem very helpful. On the contrary, it might even widen the gap of understanding between academics and practitioners. It seems to be much more desirable to take strategy making as a common reference object. In order to proceed on our theoretical and practical knowledge about strategy making we need to break up its processes and get behind the underlying logics. Thus, academics need to take the views of practitioners much more into consideration. For them, this will mean to leave

<sup>3</sup> This and the following quotes stem from a Workshop on strategy making organized by Goethe University Frankfurt and the Federal Academy for Security Policy that took place in Berlin in April 2018. The

seminar was held under Chatham House rules. A detailed (German) report by Jan Fuhrmann and Sebastian Nieke will be published in edition 1/2019 of the “Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik”.

their ivory towers and armchairs and seek practical exchange. For their part, practitioners could receive new ideas but also increase the transparency of their work. Hence, an open discussion about the assumptions of strategy cannot only provide new academic insights but also foster a more comprehensive and democratic security discourse.

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## **PART II:**

# **STRATEGIC CULTURE AND THE PUBLIC**

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## 7. “WHAT HAVE THE ROMANS EVER DONE FOR US?” PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CULTURE OF THE STRATEGY EXPERTS’ DEBATE IN GERMANY

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Hans-Peter Bartels

**Abstract:**

*The contribution comments on the culture of the debate among strategic experts in Germany. It argues that the often-noted lack of security political expertise and corresponding demand for more security political debates does not stand up to closer scrutiny. The article substantiates this via an international comparison and ends with the demand that Germany, while certainly already on the right track, must also dare “more Europe” on the security political terrain.*

To be quite honest, I was always slightly puzzled whenever I encountered the cliché that there is no strategic community in Germany, no security think tanks, no proper debate. Poor Germany! Many relevant academics, top journalists and retired military officers have happily spoken in these terms and still do. They can say it in English too. For sizeable sections of our corps of experts, indeed, the Anglo-Saxon fora are the ultimate ideal. And by the way, we do actually have a good few experts.

I intend to try to provide an answer, from my own perspective, to the two questions that arise from this stereotype of German shortcomings and the American ideal, namely if there is any truth in the cliché, and what makes it so popular?

To begin with the obvious, the world’s most colossal, renowned and time-honored event on security policy and strategy is held each year in Germany. It is the Munich Security Conference, formerly known as the Defense Studies Conference. Now, one might regard German Federal Chancellors, US Vice-Presidents, Russian Presidents, Chinese Foreign Ministers or Israeli Defense Ministers, the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and NATO, European Commissioners and peace-loving globetrotters like Bill Gates as strategy charlatans one and all, but then again, one might find that Munich is the world’s grandest annual fair, showcasing the widest possible range of strategic ideas. I believe that “Munich”, which is always prepared by a German team and funded with German money, is a forum that really counts. One up for Germany as a venue for strategic debate!

What is more, the community members who so routinely deny the existence of a German strategic community know from their own appointments diaries that there are many more annual strategic conferences with interpreting booths in Germany, and not only in Munich and Berlin. There is ample discussion. We have no shortage of events.

“Oh, our bleak think-tank landscape!”, say the German experts. Yes, the Americans invented

the term “think tank”, and the list of the relevant American institutes and organizations makes for an impressive reading, ranging from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) through Brookings, Carnegie, Rand, Woodrow Wilson and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) to the Heritage Foundation and the Hoover Institution.

When I was researching something else a few years ago, I came across a ranking of “the 45 best foreign and security policy think tanks”. The top ten included six US think tanks as well as two British ones, so eight were English-speaking, plus one in Sweden (SIPRI) and one in Germany (SWP, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs). The German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) was ranked 16th, and further down the list came a phalanx of another six German institutions, occupying positions 35 (ISPK, the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University) to 40 *en bloc*. Altogether, then, Germany has eight institutions among these 45 think tanks, while the United States has 18. Given the relative size of the two countries, that does not discredit us by any means.

It is my honest view that the German research landscape, for example, in the fields of foreign and security affairs is extremely diverse and reflects the country’s federal structure well. What is lacking, perhaps, is particularly ample funding and staffing of the top institutions such as the DGAP or SWP. Even the Federal College for Security Policy Studies (BAKS) could do with reinforcement in these areas. Serving military personnel, in accordance with the ideal of the “citizen in uniform”, could become more involved in the public debate. Additionally, every four years there should perhaps be a new white paper on the security situation and the future of the Bundeswehr. There is still some room for improvement in these areas.

What distinguishes Germany from all comparable and non-comparable nations, however, is the extremely pluralist approach that our think tanks, especially our political foundations, intentionally embody. Nowhere in the world is the spectrum of national political foundations so wide or their geographical presence so widely dispersed. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation maintains 106 field offices throughout the

world, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation 80 and the Heinrich Böll Foundation 40. In addition to this, there are the offices of the Friedrich Naumann, Hanns Seidel and Rosa Luxemburg Foundations. All of them engage – among other things – in security analyses, absorbing points of view and arguments from the foreign capitals where they are based and feeding them into the security discussion here in Germany and in Europe.

Besides the contacts maintained by our embassies and military attachés, the political foundations are our extremely fine-tuned sensors in the outside world. If the United States had something similar, I would surely have heard of it at some time in these past two decades in the Bundestag.

Our Christian Democratic, Social Democratic, Liberal, Christian Social, Green and Socialist foundations constantly bring subcommunities together, both organizationally and operationally – SPD Members of Parliament with French Socialists or Macron adherents, with think-tankers, journalists and diplomats. And with political soulmates in Poland, Britain and Israel. The formats taken by these discussion sessions, each involving 25 to 100 participants, have names such as *Cercle stratégique* or *German-Polish Tandem*. Travel and accommodation costs are met by Germany. The foundations receive funding from the federal budget for this very purpose.

It is my impression that, for instance, German Members of Parliament and government members, including those of our 16 state governments, do more travelling to other countries to engage in talks than their counterparts anywhere else. There is no comparison at all with U.S. Congress Members, who, in structural terms, are very domestically focused. As we all know, the media love to criticize these trips, but this self-evident German sociability fosters an outlook on the world that most certainly brings great benefit to our country and our international relations.

So much for the cliché of a German lack of practice in and potential for strategic international thinking and talking. The German experts’ lament sometimes sounds a bit like the famous scene in the *Life of Brian* that revolves around

the question "What have the Romans ever done for us?"

Why is this strange cliché nevertheless so popular? Could it be that some participants in the debate, which is actually taking place in Germany, really mean to say, "It is the *wrong* strategic debate; Germany is discussing the *wrong* issues, reaching the *wrong* conclusions, engaging in the *wrong* political practice?" Perhaps those very experts who always hold up the Anglo-Saxon ideal would rather reach *different* German conclusions and have a *different* strategic orientation.

When American political scientist Robert Kagan associates the United States with Mars, the god of war, and Europe with Venus, the goddess of love, in order to bring home with maximum effect the difference between the strategic cultures, he does have a point, for we are unquestionably dealing with two different strategic cultures.

And even in Continental Europe, not every member of the EU is a 'Venus'. France, for example, with its permanent seat on the UN Security Council, its nuclear arms and the defunct French-speaking colonial empire behind it, marches to a different beat than Germany.

During my visits to our troops involved in operations in the Balkans, in Afghanistan and in Africa, I have occasionally been asked by British and American interlocutors why we Germans are so reticent about military intervention. Between the lines, I read, "Get stuck in, damn it! We know you can!"

I am sure there is no need here for me to set out the historical reasons for Germany's truly well-founded culture of military restraint. We – and others with us – had particular experiences in the 20th century of guilt and war and terror and wartime destruction, of annihilation, displacement and flight. The Anglo-Saxon democracies, never occupied themselves, were the only nations able to deploy their troops as expedition forces to end the conflict – and they did. They were – and they remained – democracies, on the right side, ultimately victorious. The world owes them an inestimable debt of gratitude. That, however, still affects the way in which the use of

military force is regarded in the Anglo-Saxon strategic culture today.

Germany's present-day political rationale is, for good reason, to pursue the most effective multilateralist path possible, to strive for the rule of law in international relations. We prefer value-based foreign policy to pure *realpolitik*, to policy based on spheres of influence, to power politics. The maxim "Germany first" would not be an option – never again.

Assessing the strategic cultures of Germany and the United States today, we might criticize the fact that the United States is often too militarily focused. For every crisis in every corner of the globe there is always one of six US regional commands, such as EUCOM, CENTCOM and PACOM, with responsibility for a military option. But in the age of the so-called war on terror, the success of military options does not seem to have been very decisive, at least not so far.

The gist of criticism towards the *German* strategic culture, on the other hand, tends to be that Germany is too oblivious to its power, that it cultivates a veritable phobia of military force, that it does not openly specify its national interests. I believe, however, that our German national interests very largely coincide with those of our partners in Europe as well as mostly matching those of the United States, Canada and Japan, with which we share common values – the "normative project of the West". There are no special German national interests in sight that we would have to or want to defend unilaterally against others *by military means*, none at all. No special course, no going it alone.

Is this German strategic culture a problem for the world or for Germany? Quite the contrary! For years, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the BBC, has been conducting a global survey in which people in 25 major nations around the world are asked which countries have a beneficial influence on world politics. And which country has always come out on top? Germany. Sometimes followed by Japan, sometimes by Canada. The United States and China are in the middle; Pakistan, North Korea and Iran bring up the rear. No one could wish for higher esteem. Germany's

role as a global exporting power and trustworthy honest broker is not a mere fact of life but hard-earned good fortune.

We know that we have military solidarity obligations in NATO Europe, in EU Europe and for the United Nations. Following the turning point of 2014, we must now invest considerably more in defense. For the first time, our Bundeswehr must now be able to do both things – to engage, with reasonably sized contingents, in out-of-area operations like those that have developed over the past two and a half decades and to contribute to collective defense in Europe with the entire Bundeswehr.

It should be clear that, in alliances, we intend to incur the same risks, and indeed that we have no alternative. If we have made a collective decision that the alliance – be it NATO or the EU – is to take military action, we must contribute everything that is needed to ensure that our joint efforts are truly successful. In every case, this contribution will include strenuous non-military efforts. This is a lesson we – at least we Europeans – ought to have learned from Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya.

The EU must now feature more and more as an international player, as a military alliance as well as the European pillar of our transatlantic alliance. The European *Global Strategy* of June 2016 – even preceding Trump – speaks of the aim of “strategic autonomy” for Europe. This imposes a major integration task in the military domain. Things are moving. This movement is encapsulated in the terms “Framework Nation Concept” (NATO Europe), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO - EU Europe) and “European army” or “army of Europeans”. It is about Europe asserting itself in especially turbulent times. In every survey in all member countries of the EU, majorities of the populations come out in favour of the option of more Europe in the realm of defense. Do we talk too little about it? Or is it the wrong strategy? I don't think so.

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## 8. DARING MORE COURAGE – HOW SELF-REFLECTION AND DEBATE CONTRIBUTE TO STRATEGIC CAPABILITY

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Roderich Kiesewetter

**Abstract:**

*Germany's strategic capabilities are still establishing. Facing an unstable international environment and less predictability, Germany has to balance dangers and risks by scenario analysis. Therefore a permanent and broad debate in parliament is crucial, which generates legitimation for the government to adapt policies. At the same time, institutional learning processes as well as comprehensive thinking inside the government is a core task in a framework of a methodological approach to be capable of strategic acting.*

The White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr published in 2016 was an important milestone on Germany's path towards assuming greater responsibility. It was preceded by the realization that the rapidly changing world order impacts directly on the interests of Germany and the European Union. By then, the post-Cold War order was no longer viewed as immutable and the White Paper provided a snapshot of the central challenges, interests and goals of German security policy.

Yet uncertainties within the international system continue to grow, in light of the considerable irritation and puzzlement caused by Trump's relationship with NATO, and the fact that the new President does not appear to view Western unity as being in his interest. This creates further risks and threats which directly affect Europe's security. The US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran undermines the rules-based order which is paramount for Europe, since it breaks with the principle that agreements entered into must be kept (*pacta sunt servanda*). Trump's views on Russia remain unclear and (so far) no common EU-NATO line can be identified on how to keep existing arms control treaties alive and on the confidence-building measures with Russia required to avert the risk of military accidents. Germany must therefore steer a course through rough waters and cannot rely on seeming certainties.

### 1 Further Developing a Strategic Culture

The tangible erosion of solidarity within the Western alliance is taking place in parallel with the desire for greater "strategic autonomy" in German and European foreign and security policy. Germany's strategic interests could be reduced to the following sentence: defense is everything which serves the interests of Germany and Europe. The security of Europe's citizens is at the centre of the 2016 European Union Global Strategy, which replaced the European Security Strategy adopted in 2003. The goal of Europe's

interests being served by a “ring of well-governed countries” has clearly not been achieved and an increasingly complex web of interrelated factors has to be considered in the context of threat analysis in order to formulate political answers. Europe’s shared interests are served by cooperation with the countries of origin of migrants, allowing the creation of positive perspectives there, as well as the prevention of terrorism and human trafficking through capacity-building measures for the border police and military. Ethnic conflicts, food insecurity, climatic changes, corruption and financial mismanagement widen the potential scope of political action. It is not in Europe’s interests for populations to become increasingly disaffected due to the cementing of corrupt elites’ power structures, for European engagement to be rejected and terrorism and migration thus fostered. This example shows that contexts are too complex for sustainable solutions to be found by separate ministries striving to tackle individual phenomena on the basis of ministerial autonomy.

This uncertainty means that Germany must be able to react rapidly to unexpected developments, to coordinate its capabilities with other European states and to define those challenges which it views as top priorities.

To this end, Germany’s strategic culture must be further developed, since Germany is unable to use its foreign policy potential coherently to feed in capabilities in the best way to a more effective and more rapidly deployable EU civil-military toolbox. In order to allow this, Germany must make clear what contributions it is prepared to make for specific EU deployment scenarios. Prevention and planning for crises and disasters by means of a rapid reaction force, coordinated management of security-sector reforms or disarmament/demobilization efforts are examples of specific strategic goals for which Germany could express willingness to integrate capabilities. These intentions must be reflected in the strategy, so that the European strategic culture can develop as the foundation for shared goals to be achieved through integrated capabilities.

Solidarity within Europe is vital for a shared strategic culture. A strong core, primarily Germany and France, must therefore develop initia-

tives and get other EU partners on board, in order to create the framework for the civil and military PESCO capabilities to be developed together. In order for Germany to work with France as the motor of an EU able to take effective action in the foreign policy field, it must develop its own national strategy. The national military, diplomatic and development-policy instruments must be made coherent with this, in order to coordinate and pursue shared aims at the European level.

In our liberal democratic system, discourse and the legitimacy of foreign policy action play a decisive role. The White Paper has re-ignited this debate and highlighted some uncomfortable truths about what is needed to safeguard our peace and prosperity in Europe. An ongoing open debate within society must be an integral part of our strategic culture, rather than simple being initiated on an occasional basis when new strategy documents are being formulated. In this context, it is important that the executive in particular becomes accustomed to this reoccurring and interactive process. Parallel to this, proactive dialogue should be sought with academics, think tanks and civil society, as well as relevant specialist policymakers from the European Parliament, Bundestag and Bundesrat.

In the following, I draw attention to four aspects of strategic capacity: First, which self-understanding should underlie the strategy-development. Second, which kind of structures and processes are necessary. Third, how strategic thinking should strengthen policy-making in ministries and their logic of organizational behavior. Fourth, which role the parliament should play in terms of accountability and evaluation.

## 2 Enhancing Strategic Capacity through Learning Processes and Improvisation

Inter-ministerial cooperation at operative level is still affected by disputes over questions of jurisdiction. A shared understanding is lacking: of the changing world order, its consequences for Germany’s security, the potential for action and existing weaknesses, or the capabilities needed to tackle those threats relevant for Europe and Germany. The 2016 White Paper is thus a step in the right direction, since it defines interests for



the first time; yet the operative conclusions focus too strongly on military aspects. The same applies to the guidelines on civilian crisis prevention for which the Federal Foreign Office has lead responsibility. The next step must therefore be to perceive strategy development as an ongoing shared task and to lay the foundations for this cooperation. Ultimately, this should lead to a national security strategy embedded within a process, as is the case in many other responsible nations across the world.

The creation of a shared reference document in the form of a “national security strategy” would thus bring added value. Germany should engage in debate and deliberate on the paradigms which should apply to this strategy, and how it can serve as a framework for inter-ministerial cooperation, since party-political rivalry between the ministries currently hinders inter-ministerial coordination – as has perhaps also been the case historically, due to the arithmetic of coalition governments.

Since publication of the White Paper, two further events of decisive importance for the future direction of German and European foreign and security policy have occurred: the election of Donald Trump and the planned exit of the UK from the EU within the foreseeable future. Both these events place intense pressure on Europe – and thus especially on Germany and France – to build their capabilities, in order to pursue their own interests and be perceived as an attractive and reliable partner within the NATO alliance, and in Europe’s neighborhood.

This leads to two realizations: firstly, strategies should not be seen as set in stone, since the world order is far too volatile and unforeseen events may force corrections, so long-term “planning” is impossible. Secondly, this kind of “master plan” or “grand strategy” setting out foreign policy goals and the instruments to achieve them would be unrealistic, since the German constitution does not give the Federal Government full authority to manage and coordinate the work of the ministries – which have the autonomy to steer an individual course regardless of such a strategy.

Thus, a foreign-policy master plan with no practical relevance when implemented by the responsible ministries would not be the correct approach. Instead, we must develop credibility, predictability and reliability in dealings with partners who have trust in our intentions. This would also signalize to our opponents and strategic rivals our resolve to achieve our foreign-policy goals. Such a strategy should be developed as a framework for orientation and to serve as guidance for inter-ministerial implementation, allowing swift reaction to different scenarios and unexpected events. The new signs of changes in the foreign and security policy environment, such as the increasingly scathing American criticism of Europe’s defense spending, the instability in the Middle East and the growing danger of arms control treaties being eroded require close coordination between the ministries in defining interests and possible options for action. This will not allow every last detail to be planned – something which would be neither possible nor useful. Instead, the ability to take joined-up decisions is necessary, should the threats analyzed together in advance materialize. Thus, constant reflection and adaptation of action are needed. This strategy would mean intelligent cooperation between the ministries – *emergence* – promoting learning processes and the capacity to react early to crises when scenarios emerge which were not part of the planning process. This avoids not only incrementalism, in the sense of “muddling through”, but also a situation in which ministries only coordinate their activities on a case-by-case basis under extreme pressure.

### **3 Using the Federal Security Council as a Central Forum for Inter-Ministerial Coordination**

Within the planning process for the national security strategy, it is important to recognize the tension, which exists between the definition of long-term interests and their advancement at operational level on the one hand, and feedback mechanisms and evaluation on the other. It must be possible for foreign-policy goals to be revised on the basis of evaluation and decision-making structures and for them to be complemented by short- or medium-term goals. Thus, it is not the plan itself which is central, but rather the readiness to undertake revisions and the joined-up

thinking, analysis, decision-making and evaluation processes.

In order for Germany to boost its strategic capacity, central foreign-policy goals must be set at the highest political level within the executive. In an increasingly insecure world where existing norms and institutions can no longer be taken for granted, constant adjustment, along with clear guiding principles, is vital. A rigid document which is not embedded in permanent coordination mechanisms would not be able to bridge the gap between the different perceptions of problems which exist in implementation in the ministries.

Threats for Europe must be defined, Germany's interests, intentions and goals set out and gaps in capabilities identified through analysis of the tasks at hand and the instruments required – this must take place in an overarching process, which is not compartmentalized into the ministries' individual areas of responsibility. All of this must be communicated by means of intelligent strategic communication to Germany's own population, along with the Western partners, as well as opponents and strategic rivals. In view of the current unpredictability of developments, the focus should be more on medium-term goals.

It is important to ensure acceptance within the executive and the legislative and not to make radical systemic changes which might be unconstitutional, but instead to build on existing instruments. The Federal Security Council, though it was historically intended for other tasks, has in effect become an arms export control panel. It must now finally be used, together with coordinated inter-ministerial planning, to create the necessary strategic capacity through the forecasting of possible scenarios or trends.

Here is a brief example: one scenario which may be considered during a predictive analysis is the disenchantment of wide swathes of the Iraqi population with the political system and a fundamental de-legitimation of Western engagement in this region, combined with further migratory flows due to escalating violence and climate change. Taking this scenario as a starting point, progress reports can be written at regular intervals, using specific evaluation criteria and criteria for success agreed jointly – and an end to

or intensification of engagement, or change of mandate, planned accordingly. In this way, military and civil engagement would be dovetailed from the outset. One trend with security-policy implications is that of increasingly prolonged hot spells in Iraq with temperatures hovering around 50 °C. This is increasingly weakening the agricultural sector, thus fuelling internal migration and ultimately fanning religious and ethnic conflicts. Thus, security-policy analysis must encompass unexpected disruptive events or events such as climate change, which may not be regarded as factors in security policy in the first instance and have so far not been taken into account in classic military strategic planning.

These considerations in the context of an overall strategy cannot be achieved by ad-hoc working groups for individual topics and regions; a permanent coordination structure is needed, going beyond the meetings at state-secretary level. The Federal Security Council should therefore be upgraded and developed into the central forum for inter-ministerial coordination.

The Federal Security Council, as the central body for foreign-policy decision-making and coordination, should thus fulfil three tasks:

- 1) The definition of long-term interests and goals, structured priority-setting and forecasts of global trends and central foreign-policy issues (trade war, engagement in Iraq, arms-control policy, impacts of climate change, etc.).
- 2) Coordination of ministerial activities through packages of measures agreed for priority regions and fields, such as migration policy in Africa and regional engagement such as that in Iraq.
- 3) Regular evaluation and adaptation of goals, measures and instruments, as well as rapid response to crises by means of inter-ministerial deliberations in the Federal Security Council or in a special subcommittee for crises and integrated action, along with progress reports.

The more detailed work and operative implementation must take place in the framework of downstream inter-ministerial coordination. This coordinated top-down approach in strate-

gic forecasting helps create a common awareness of the problems which exist, with a focus on various scenarios and an institutional structure allowing foreign-policy action to be adapted and updated.

The core expertise in the ministries should be preserved, but placed in a wider context of overarching security interests and willingness to change approaches. The ability to reflect on strategies and approaches will not be achieved by a training course merely for the top echelons, or through a process of inner-ministerial navel-gazing. The opportunity to enhance Germany's strategic capacity should be seized by both the executive and the legislative. In order to ensure the capacity for learning and improvisation, foreign-policy communication must not take place in isolation from parliamentary discourse.

#### 4 Reflection and Internal Training as Engines of Strategic Capacity

The institutional framework for enhanced strategic capacity must be accompanied by the necessary process of "socialization" in the ministries – in order to facilitate learning processes and bearing in mind the scarcity of resources (or competition for resources) – as well as through openness to improvisation. For strategy development requires a new culture of inter-ministerial cooperation which is reliant on education. This internal aspect of strategic capacity requires the development of didactic skills to understand how cooperation works and how it can be enhanced. Ministries should not be persuaded to pursue a shared strategy by the necessity of finding compromise, but through staff learning a methodology for strategy development and implementation. Cutting-edge researchers and the Federal Academy for Security Policy should be involved in the process through the provision of consultancy or training services to the ministries. In the context of inter-ministerial training, too, this enhances the coherence of executive action, acting as a pedagogical factor and allowing the occurrence of various parallel crises to be tackled through enhanced cognitive abilities.

The discussion in Germany on a "strategic culture" is only just beginning to take off and will

need to be measured on the basis of these ideas and requirements. The idea of promoting groups of "young leaders", which enjoys wide currency at think-tanks and foundations, as well as at the Federal Academy for Security Policy, should be initially focused on promoting "young experts", who are well-skilled in their fields and undoubtedly have the potential to develop into young leaders and leaders at some point with the right support. Leadership is an art which – in security policy more than any other field – requires creative thinking, excellent training and progressive methodology and didactics, along with a great deal of experience.

Strategic capacity, in the sense of intelligent cooperation between different players, also requires reflection and oversight. The permanent process of strategy development is not conceivable in our political system without Parliament. However, the 2016 White Paper is currently in danger of becoming a rigid document, unless this rigidity is countered actively, or the promises made by the executive in the 2016 White Paper process fulfilled. In the future, Parliament must not, as it did with regard to the 2016 White Paper, miss the opportunity to hold a debate on strategy documents. Instead, it must be able to engage pro-actively in the debate and set out its positions. Strategic capacity can only flourish if oversight, transparency and implementation are intertwined, and it must be called for by Parliament. An institutionalized White Paper process would thus promote the legitimacy of foreign-policy action and allow assessment of whether the government has met its promises, which would also boost our credibility in the eyes of our partners.

#### 5 Parliament Creates Transparency and Legitimacy

Public discourse within Germany's parliamentary democracy is an important mechanism for a comprehensive security strategy guided by long-term interests. The positions taken by the different political parties regarding concrete decisions on Bundeswehr deployments vary quite widely. A security strategy aimed at continuity must not only ensure transparent debates, but also force the parties to take a clear stance re-

garding the goals and risks of foreign and security policy measures and to develop positions which reflect this to the public.

It ought therefore to be in the Federal Government's interests to establish an ongoing "debate" and "culture of debate" and not to reduce "strategic communication" to a technocratic instrument used to influence public opinion and win support for foreign-policy action. Just as "joined-up action" must constantly react to changing circumstances, so the debate with and amongst the public must mean constant discussions and the weighing up of advantages and disadvantages, risks and alternative options for action.

Firstly, this would enhance transparency: parliamentary debate and evaluation serves as a yardstick for the executive, indicating the degree of leeway it has. Reflection on the work of the different ministries and an annual discussion would provide an opportunity to flexibly adapt goals and instruments. This would allow measures to be adjusted and would enable consideration of whether shorter-term or longer-term goals should and can be pursued.

Secondly, it would enhance legitimacy: a lack of transparency in the debate can lead to the next government simply reversing far-reaching decisions taken by the previous one. For many years, the fear of exposing itself to attacks from the opposition and critical organizations has prevented the government from translating "strategy development" into an enhanced ability to take action. Explaining and weighing up our interests and goals creates a broader foundation of legitimacy. This allows political majorities to be found for urgently needed fundamental decisions. The idea that Germany must take on more responsibility – which is often cited to persuade society that the 2% goal is correct, that more development cooperation and even stronger military engagement in Africa is needed – cannot be successful unless integrated resource provision goes hand in hand with an integrated discourse. This would directly boost Germany's reliability and predictability and avoid the public being catapulted unprepared into new crises, or our closest Alliance partners being unable to clearly identify Germany's exact intentions. Reliability and predictability are extremely valuable in themselves during the current international era

with its multiple parallel crises; they must therefore be constantly cultivated and cherished.

Both the government and the parliamentary groups must set out unambiguous and clear-cut positions, in order to reduce the complexity of the challenges of globalization. At present, with 18 debates on Bundeswehr mandates, where the focus is indeed only on military aspects, the accusation of a militarization of foreign policy is easy to make. Only in an overarching debate not focused on any individual mandate can knock-on effects, blind spots and contradictory aims be identified and the differences between the options presented by the political parties more easily highlighted. Agreement on a regular foreign and security policy debate – to take place annually for example – would be a first step towards an ongoing dialogue on German security policy. A debate of this kind would enhance coordination of the activities of the ministries and would, by means of evaluation mechanisms, set out clear imperatives for the government, with results which could be measured more transparently using the goals thus defined. Further checks on the work of the executive would be desirable in this context. The executive cannot limit itself simply to effective PR work to justify its own actions. Instead, it must involve the public in the search for solutions, by presenting a forecast which is subject to public debate and institutionalizing this debate – involving media, think-tanks and NGOs. The discussion and deliberations could centre on an independently produced report, which would be debated in the Bundestag. Many experts and former diplomats have already made this suggestion and it is one which the government should take seriously.

This broad-based foreign and security policy discourse must ultimately be rooted in Parliament. Clearly setting out long-term interests and ensuring joined-up working between the ministries – on a top-down basis – as well as anchoring reflection and improvisation as principles for strategic capacity – on a bottom-up basis – must be seen as two sides of the same coin. We should be aware of what the consideration of both sides of the coin and concrete implementation of the measures presented here mean in terms of education, underpinned by knowledge, experience, methodology and didactics. This requires crea-

tivity and the necessary political will to look beyond the dimensions of a four-year electoral term, in order to equip Germany for the globalized era in security policy.



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## 9. COUNTRY WITHOUT QUALITIES? THE WHITE PAPER 2016 AND GERMANY'S DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIP TO ITS NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

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Christian Thiels

### **Abstract:**

*Germany struggles with a concrete definition of its own national interests. The debate on security policy takes place only in small, often elitist circles of scientists, military and very few specialized politicians. There is hardly any involvement of society as a whole. In the mass media, security policy is hardly present apart from event-driven reporting. The article examines the causes of this phenomenon and outlines possible ways to broaden the necessary discourse*

### **Prologue: The “Summer Hole” and the German Bomb**

**T**here is a time that is not accidentally called the “summer hole” by the media. In the months when the Bundestag is not in session, the lawmakers and ministers being on vacation and political Berlin getting some rest, some more or less offbeat or unusual ideas emerge as regularly as the Loch Ness monster from that very summer hole. Usually, they are suggested by rather less significant backbenchers from the Bundestag, but sometimes also by quite knowledgeable scientists. Therefore, it might be too shortsighted to dismiss them as mere self-promotion. One may speculate that it is important for some of the people involved to avidly promote an issue whose significance they are particularly convinced of – as well as their personal interpretation of the cause. It is remarkable that all this takes place largely independent of how realistic the implementation is.

In the summer of 2018, one of these ideas was the nuclear armament of Germany. Already in 2016 and 2017, scientists such as Maximilian Terhalle (Tagesspiegel 2017, Jan. 23) and journalists like Berthold Kohler (FAZ 2016, Nov. 27) had tried to put this topic on the public agenda - without considerable success (see Tagesspiegel 2017, July 20). Now we experience a kind of renaissance of that idea: a couple of articles, a few essays, and a handful of scientists and publicists who give their unsolicited advice on the subject (Welt am Sonntag, Aug. 2018, Aug. 29). While doing this, they largely ignore international law, the general attitude in German society and the political majorities, which, taken together, should have immediately banished the entire idea to the realm of hypothetical intellectual finger exercises. Nonetheless, those who raised the issue insisted that a debate was going on in Germany. But no one of political significance or influence took part.

This example is one of many that can serve as proof that security policy issues in the Federal

Republic are (if at all) often discussed detached from Realpolitik and society. The group of participants is rather small, they meet in the same circles to exchange their views but communication with the society as a whole is the exception. Therefore, one might assume a certain degree of detached thinking. Questions such as “How does Germany define its role in the world?” or “What means is the Federal Republic willing to use to pursue its own interests?” are of national importance. Not only would it be worthwhile to discuss them broadly, it is absolutely necessary.

### 1 Germany's Structural Pacifism: The End of Prussianism

“War must never again originate from German soil,” Willy Brandt said frequently. For a part of the politically conscious post-war generation, this sentence expresses a fundamental pacifist attitude. Its constitutional expression is set out in article 26 of the *Grundgesetz*, Germany's Basic Law, with the ban on preparations for a war of aggression.

German restraint in the use of military means to achieve political goals has been a core component of the convictions of large sections of the political class since 1945 and continues to have far-reaching appeal in the circles of intellectuals, journalists, culture and science.

One reason for this may be the efforts of the victorious powers to exorcise German militarism with thorough denazification. Given the horrible atrocities of the Nazi dictatorship and the suffering in the Second World War, after 1945 the Allies made at least every effort for an efficient re-education of the Germans. In the West, the French, British, and Americans had the goal of turning the perpetual Prussians into upright democrats. And with some success. Since then, Germany - despite rearmament, NATO membership, the Cold War and out-of-area missions - sees itself primarily as a “civilian power” or “peace power” and relies on a culture of military restraint, considering armed forces (if at all) only as *ultima ratio*. The country struggles with a concrete definition of its national interests.

The student movement of 1968 with its critical attitude towards authoritarian structures and the rejection of hierarchies certainly worked here as a political catalyst for this particular attitude within society. The former German NATO general Hans-Lothar Domröse once described Germany's security hesitancy as the “aftermath of the Nazi regime”.<sup>1</sup> Long-time Defense Minister Franz-Josef Jung agrees: “My feeling has always been that there is a great deal of empathy for pacifist ideas in our population. And that is obviously an aftereffect of the world war situation.”

A culture of “structural pacifism”, which Joseph Verbovszky considers the Germans to promote (Verbovszky 2018), sometimes makes open debates on questions of security policy more difficult. An example of this is the strongly ideological discussion about armed drones. It is rarely conducted with an emphasis on specific legal or technical-military issues, but is primarily discussed through the eyes of moral and philosophy (see Die Zeit 2018, Aug. 14). Of course, such arguments are important and legitimate in the debate, but as soon as they raise a claim to ethical absoluteness that might silence the consideration of other (allegedly less ethical) arguments, they finally narrow the necessary dialogue down to a one-way street open only to the politically correct view. In many debates, one can already witness a remarkable rigorism that seldom pays any attention to facts or seeks objective consideration.

This pacifist and sometimes uncompromising attitude is borne primarily by parts of the political-intellectual establishment, characterized by a certain skepticism towards all military. If this particular attitude is being promoted above all by the political class and the multipliers in media and society, this cannot be without consequences for the overall climate in society. In comparison to other nations, there is at least some indifference to the Bundeswehr and its soldiers in Germany's majority society. Although the need for armed forces is acknowledged, the Germans show relatively little empathy for their troops (Welt 2013, June 16). The former Federal President Horst Köhler got to the heart of it with his notion of “friendly disinterest” (Köhler 2005,

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<sup>1</sup> Domröse in personal conversation.



p.6), soldiers of the Bundeswehr, like Marcel Bohnert, sometimes even feel to be a “stepchild of the nation” (Deutschlandfunk 2018).

At the same time, a majority in Germany's population is quite open to a more active role for Germany in foreign policy including military means, as suggested by the annual population surveys of the Center for Military History and Social Sciences of the Bundeswehr (Steinbrecher 2017, p.66). But the enforcement of political objectives with military force is still a taboo in the political discourse of the Federal Republic - with individual exceptions though. A military intervention to prevent an imminent genocide e.g. might well be tolerated. The acceptance of such interventions often relies on Germany being more or less directly affected. In other words, the genocide on the doorstep may be more likely to make military intervention seem politically opportune than similar crimes at the other end of the world. The problem is that Germany does not seem to have a clear strategy when and where it wants to engage globally.

## 2 “Land without Qualities”: Germany's Role in the World

The preamble of the German constitution states the security policy creed of Germany, declaring that the German people are inspired by the will “to serve the peace of the world in a united Europe”; a statement that no one can seriously disagree with. However, after the end of the Cold War and after reunification, many allies took the view that the country they had been protecting for decades with their own soldiers should now take on more responsibility in the world. And indeed, Germany has been committed to this kind of responsibility for some years now. In their speeches at the Munich Security Conference 2014, Federal President Joachim Gauck, Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen unanimously emphasized Germany's willingness to not only comment on world politics “from the sidelines”. But the implementation of that promise remained vague in the eyes of many observers. Although Germany has been involved in many world regions for years, a strategy based on specific (and therefore predictable) interests is hardly recognizable. General (ret) Hans-Lothar Domröse recalls discussions with French

and American military officials, who always demanded that Germany clearly commits itself to its own interests. But Germany has been “too modest” to do so, says Domröse, citing criticism by his allied counterparts. And indeed, Germany is obviously having a hard time to clearly state what specific interests it is pursuing in the world - at least beyond the rather vague formula of a “value-based foreign policy”. The SPD lawmaker and security politician Thomas Hitschler puts it this way: “If you speak with a Frenchman and ask: What are the interests of your country, he will roll out a map and show it accurately. On the other hand, if they ask us: What are the interests of Germany? We are unable to respond decidedly.” Germany's definition of spheres of interest (e.g. regionally) has remained cloudy for years. Sometimes there is talk of Africa, sometimes of the Balkans. Even in official documents of the Foreign Office or the Federal Ministry of Defense, there is only very unspecific talk about German interests, of world peace and stability and free trade routes, for example.

But even the latter - probably not a surprising priority for an export nation - is called into question in the political discourse. Jürgen Trittin of the Green Party parliamentary group stated during the debate on the government declaration on the reform of the Armed Forces on May 17th, 2011: “International responsibility does not mean, as some believe, that unilateral care is taken to secure resources [...] International responsibility means that we focus on the dangers to security that arise in the world” (German Bundestag 2011, p. 12825).

These dangers can evidently surface everywhere and - logically - have to be addressed everywhere. Trittin continued in the same debate: “Germany must live up to its international responsibility. This is aimed in particular at securing and establishing the rule of law. We cannot tolerate any legal vacuum on this globe, meaning: Training, alignment and equipment of the Bundeswehr must be clearly based on this priority.” Putting it in a nutshell, one could argue that the German Military (in the eyes of Trittin) shouldn't serve to defend Germany's access to global resources or markets. It should rather serve as a kind of “global auxiliary policeman” in case of human rights violations. Consequently, the Bundeswehr could be deployed wherever on

the globe the rule of law is threatened and the Federal Republic's military engagement could take place arbitrarily anywhere on the globe, without the need for a strategy or clearly defined, far-reaching interests.

One could call this the foreign policy strategy of an ethical bellicist – and judge its implementation to be rather unrealistic at the same time. Because up to now, Germany's global involvement tends to appear more or less event-driven. A consistent foreign and security policy strategy is hardly recognizable in everyday politics – apart from political prose in resolutions, white papers and parliamentary speeches. The increased German involvement in Mali is a good example. In November 2015, the Federal Government formally justified this particular decision with the terror attacks in France. But the Defense committee of the Bundestag had already been discussing the reinforcement of German troops in the African country months before – the Netherlands had asked for relief. A compelling factual connection between the terrorist attack and the extended military presence in Mali was literally nonexistent – apart from sending a political signal of solidarity with the ally France (Spiegel Online 2015, Nov. 17). Only months later, the deployment in Mali has been (and still is) justified with the fight against terrorism and illegal migration. It remains unclear why it is particularly important for Germany to tackle these two problems in Mali and not anywhere else. The lack of consistency in the German security strategy might be further illustrated with Berlin's refusal to engage in the fight against the Libyan dictator Gaddafi or to limit participation in the fight against ISIL to logistics, reconnaissance and training.

### **3 Between Indifference and Ignorance: Security Policy in the Media, Politics and Science**

Supposed that there really is a certain speechlessness in terms of German security policy strategy, the question inevitably arises as to who is responsible for the fact that questions of obvi-

ous existential significance for the Federal Republic are not being discussed more intensively and with the involvement of society as a whole.

The problem at hand is not just the possibly meager soil that such a debate might be cultivated on, but also the tight-lippedness of the actors – especially the politicians involved. “The culture – as far as the debate is concerned – is definitely inadequate and it is also not a fundamental issue for politics as a whole”, complains André Wüstner,<sup>2</sup> chairman of the German Armed Forces Association. Security policy is no vote-winner for members of the Bundestag and thus the number of acknowledged security politicians is rather small.

Even outside politics, expertise in matters of security policy is in rather short supply. Former Defense Secretary Thomas de Maizière complained in August 2011 that the security community was too small for a country the size of Germany, that there were too few think tanks and that the contributions of universities to the debate were much too modest. De Maizière's bottom line: “The security debate is happening between too few actors and is too detached.” The dialogue within the defense community leaves the population largely out in the cold. To de Maizière it is not the job of politicians alone to change that: “The security community on their part must speak in a way that it reaches a population that understands or wants to understand nothing or little, it must speak evocatively and interesting and it must make people curious. I see too little of that.”

Now, it could also be the task of the media in a pluralistic democracy to promote public awareness for security policy. Especially since the political decisions about out-of-area missions are inevitably almost always decisions on life and death of German soldiers and thus have a great significance for society. However, the affinity of the vast majority of journalists for the topic is relatively modest – except for procurement problems and supposed and real scandals regarding the behavior of individual soldiers.

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<sup>2</sup> Wüstner in a personal conversation.

De Maizière: “We also have too few journalists, and of the few, quite frankly, many are rather old.” The reason for the relatively small number of knowledgeable reporters and the likewise manageable amount of respectable publications in German could also be found in political preferences of media professionals and their associated value orientation. In surveys, a good third of Germany's journalists say that they have no party preference. Of the remaining two-thirds, a disproportionately large number (compared to election results) has a tendency towards more or less pacifist parties, such as the Greens (Lünenbourg et al 2010, p.13). Consequently, in-depth and unbiased reporting on security policy is rare. The number of Berlin journalists, who have been actively contributing to this field for a significant number of years, can be counted on two hands. The armed forces are still a kind of “yuck topic” in many newsrooms. Anyone familiar with the Bundeswehr, its weapons and operations, is at least considered strange, more often dubious among his or her colleagues. Even though it is clearly part of professional journalism to dig deep into a topic in order to achieve a sound analytical skill and subsequently also provide reliable reporting.

Meanwhile, the Bundeswehr itself sometimes gives a rather hapless impression when it comes to communication. “There are certainly press officers who play their role as press defense officers”, as blogger Thomas Wiegold describes the ever-strained relationship between military and media. And Matthias Gebauer, chief reporter of Spiegel-Online, recaps that the armed forces frequently try to restrict access to information and decision-makers: “I do not want to say it gets censored, but it's so heavily controlled that it's already close to censorship.”

#### **4 On Responsibility and Disinterest: The White Paper 2016**

During the elaboration of the *White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr in 2016*, the Ministry of Defense chose a somewhat revolutionary approach. Instead of working in the back rooms of the Bendlerblock on Germany's most important security policy document, the process was to be “inclusive” and transparent. In fact, a whole series of workshops with external experts was being carried out - a political

premiere with a clear goal: an open debate. “We want to hear many different opinions”, Defense Minister von der Leyen stated on Feb 2nd, 2015 at the beginning of a series of events that would last nearly one year. In addition to the workshops, citizens were able to contribute their views on the Internet. This comprehensive and hitherto unprecedented approach earned the praise of former Defense Minister Franz-Josef Jung who published his own White Paper in 2006: “I think it is absolutely right that we discuss the question: what is the security strategy of our country?” But Minister von der Leyen did not put her policy document in the Bundestag up for debate - unlike her predecessor. There was no official involvement of the parliamentary committees for Defense, Foreign Affairs and Development, although individual MPs were invited to the workshops. And the contributions of the population? Suggestions of people who entered the process on the Internet where not being integrated to a measurable extent into the paper according to the authors of the White Paper.

The presentation of the final version of the White Paper 2016 took place on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016 - right at the beginning of the parliamentary summer break. The timing and the lack of a parliamentary discussion might have contributed to the relatively poor perception of the document in the mass media. The white paper was acknowledged and analyzed in some articles in renowned daily newspapers with limited circulation. There were also contributions to television, radio and the internet, but there was no in-depth debate on the content. Many prominent politicians and experts who might have been able to critically analyze the paper were absent due to holiday-season. Bad conditions in a traditionally restrained media environment. A principle of journalistic reporting is that the importance of a political voice is also reflected in the extent of media perception. In that respect, a chance has been wasted - by the media and politics.

There are a number of positions in the White Paper that deserve a deeper debate nonetheless. The document states, for example, that a “coalition of the willing” could be a normal option to address security challenges outside the framework of the United Nations. It also deals with the

question of arms exports with an emphasis on capability building - as promoted by the Chancellor. But the discussion about the White Paper and its contents remained introverted, one might even call it elitist. Even though the document sparked a fairly lively debate in science and the usual security circles. But even the most dynamic discussion between experts within the security policy bubble is no substitute for a public debate. The White Paper process did not reach into society as a whole - despite the Department of Defense's notable efforts for an inclusive process.

### 5 War and Peace. How the Security Debate Can Reach Society

The perception of security issues is still underexposed in the Federal Republic despite its enormous importance. Challenges of immigration e.g. are primarily viewed from a domestic policy point of view - although it is common knowledge that migration movements are to a large extent caused by war and conflict. However, the public debate on effectively combating the causes of migration is less intense than the political debate on issues of border security or integration. The majority of public debates lack a truly holistic approach. In the discussion about the financial resources of the Bundeswehr, security policy arguments do not seem to play a leading role. It is difficult to objectively weigh a politically desired level of global ambitions, national interests, a military mission spectrum, the necessary structures and corresponding financial support when politicians are conjuring up a new arms race.

The traditional rather pacifist attitude of significant parts of the political and social establishment makes things even more complicated. Of course, pacifism is just as valid in the discourse as any other political position. But if every opposing view is being denounced as illegitimate because it is morally reprehensible, the debate narrows down to one perspective only and consequently leads to nothing more than ideological self-reassurance. Needless to say that this applies to a pure military interventionist approach as well.

Germany's significance - at least in Europe, and perhaps also in the world - requires an open and

honest debate on security policy and the national interest of the Federal Republic. If Germany would follow this path, this would also be a sign of transparency and predictability. Will Germany be militarily committed to its values and interests, to democracy and freedom in the world? Or should it impose strict limits on the use of force as a means of foreign policy, sticking to the notion of being a "peace power"? There are good and important arguments for both positions that need to be weighed and debated. Whatever the result, it is imperative to find a consensus within society for a lasting position of the Federal Republic.

It is not enough if elitist circles become intoxicated on clever research papers. Furthermore, it is self-delusory if they confuse academic and sometimes vain competition for the best thesis with a lively, societal debate on existential questions. All actors are called upon to seek and promote the exchange with the population. Politicians should not be afraid of the people in our country. On the contrary, an open debate in a democracy can lead to broad support for the political compromise to be found. The White Paper 2016 process would have been an excellent opportunity.

The means and methods already exist. Many political parties organize so-called "Town Hall meetings" to discuss essential issues with their own party base or citizens. Even the Federal Chancellor has already participated in these events. It is regrettable that the Ministry of Defense refrained from organizing something alike in the white paper process. The document could have achieved a much greater perception in society if one had dared to include the opposition in order to achieve the widest possible basis for discussion along the lines of a true competition of ideas. Media coverage might have been much larger thus promoting a broader debate in German society. The core issues of war and peace, of intervention or isolationism, and ultimately of the self-perception of a nation are too important to leave them to a small group of like-minded academics, politicians and officers.

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# 10. THE ILLUSION OF A “GREAT DEBATE” ABOUT GERMAN SECURITY POLICY. A PLEA FOR MORE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

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Anna Geis

## Abstract:

*Demands for a “great debate” on security policy in Germany have been expressed for a long time. White Papers as strategy documents of the executive can provide impulses for a broader societal discourse. However, such a “great debate” has, again, not taken place after the publication of the 2016 White Paper of the German government. This contribution reviews some of the well-established deficit diagnoses and peculiarities of security communication in Germany in order to justify more decentralized formats of citizen participation in foreign and security policy.*

## Introduction: White Papers as Catalysts of a “Great Debate” on Security Policies?

Why is a state like Germany, firmly embedded in the multilateral frameworks of NATO and the governance structures of the European Union, in need of a national strategy document on security policy? How autonomous are the German government and the German parliament in determining security policies in a setting that is shaped by transnational and global security threats which no state can address on its own? In contemporary democracies, such strategy documents are not only considered as reference documents for internal governmental communication and a summary of political guidelines and some more specific projects for a wider audience – ideally, White Papers on security policy should stimulate a fundamental public debate: They do not only contain strategies and political plans but also normative self-images of a specific political community. In a highly condensed format they also express images of friends and enemies, imaginations of the political and the world which might provoke public responses and contestation.

During the run-up to the most recent White Paper of the German government, published in 2016, a broad range of actors, including representatives of the military and the Ministry of Defense, repeatedly pointed out that a higher degree of public participation in security policy debate is desirable and overdue. Such a demand is not new, though. The call for a “broader” or “great debate” about German security policies has recurred during the last decades but has also proved to be a persistent challenge. While such a “great debate” might be desirable as such, it is also more unrealistic than ever, given the enduring and rapid transformation and fragmentation of publics in a digitalized age<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacobi 2019.

I would like to argue in this chapter that instead of waiting for the great debate, it might be more worthwhile including more citizens in decentralized dialogue formats on foreign and security policy issues. German debates on security issues seem to display some peculiarities and deficits, as critics from quite different angles have been maintaining for years. In the following, some of these "deficits" and peculiarities of German security communication – exemplified by the "(no) war in Afghanistan" controversy – will be outlined in order to introduce my plea for more citizen participation. To which extent such decentralized formats prove as attractive for citizens and which effects they have on political elites is an empirical question but there are also some initial experiences with these in German foreign policy.

### 1 Media, Academia, Population: On the Same old Tracks for too long?

Which tasks to be assigned to one's military, to which missions abroad – or within the domestic sphere – German soldiers should be sent is an especially sensitive issue in Germany due to historical reasons. At least this is very often alleged in academia and the policy realm. If this was true, then one should expect passionate controversial debates about deployments of the German army (*Bundeswehr*) in parliament, in the "the media" ("traditional" ones?, "new social" ones?), on the streets, in families and within the institutions of education. The slow and gradual expansion of "out of area" military missions of the *Bundeswehr* since the 1990s has not been without controversies, indeed. However, the "great" debate on security policy, which many experts in the policy realm, in the media and in academia have been calling for, has never taken place.

The peculiarities of German debates on security policy issues have been problematized by a number of observers in detail (e.g. Chauvistré 2009; Naumann 2010; Krause 2016). They paint a bleak picture of cowardly politicians who lack the courage to tell their voters the truth about some of the military missions; of elites in politics, military and academia who lack strategic

knowledge and fail to ask the crucial questions, let alone give useful answers to those; and of a German population that displays a "friendly indifference" towards its military and that largely prefers to keep detached from the world's turmoil and shirks its "responsibilities" in the international sphere. The discursive tenor of the German executive representatives during the 2014 Munich Security Conference and the so-called "Review" process of the German Foreign Office were intended to sensitize a German population, that is perceived in its majority as "hesitant", to the "new responsibility" discourse of the elite: due to the increased "weight" of the country and its benefits from a globalized world, Germany "has to" adopt more responsibility in the global order, which also includes the deployment of soldiers.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, the German population seems to be considered more like an object of education than as a community of mature citizens who might have developed their political attitudes and opinions for good reasons.

For example, Ulf von Krause (2016, p. 21) criticizes that the German society has identified itself too much with the "civilian power" concept. A state of affairs for which the political elite is to be held responsible since the gradual "normalization" in security policies since the 1990s was an elite project only and the society was insufficiently familiarized with this change. According to von Krause, politicians lack the courage to convey the realities of military missions to the public and tend to veil their "robust" nature in order to correspond with the basic mood in the German society (Krause 2016, p. 22).

Apart from the politicians who are made responsible for the deplorable state of German debate culture in security politics, representatives from media and academia are also accused of taking sides too quickly and of ideological blinders. Christian Tuschhoff, for example, concludes in his analysis of reactions to the speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck at the 2014 Munich Security Conference that the dominant interpretation of many media – that Gauck has advocated a militarization of German foreign and security

<sup>2</sup> For the debate on "adopting more responsibility" see the contributions in Hellmann et al. (2015); for an

analysis of the "Review" process of the Foreign Office see Geis and Pfeifer (2017).



policies – was one-sided and rather leaning towards the position of public opinion since the journalists could be sure that they would receive the audience’s approval (Tuschhoff 2015, p. 105). This would prevent a debate. In addition, parts of academia are criticized: They, too, would always know what is “right” – at a time that is marked by high uncertainty for all. Therefore, it would be an important task to emphasize that foreign policy is characterized by dilemmas (Tuschhoff 2015, p. 113). A different line of critique directed at German academia, especially Peace and Conflict Studies, identifies a “massive research gap” in studying the dynamics and strategies of war(s), which would be due to ideological (self-)restraints and mental blockades in academia (Schmid 2013, pp. 232-233, 243).

## 2 Germany is (not) Fighting a “War” in Afghanistan

One crucial phase in German security policy has been the transformation of the Afghanistan mission from 2007 onwards, which increasingly acquired the character of a counter-insurgency mission and thus claimed more casualties among combatants and civilians. The public debate whether German soldiers were (not) fighting a war in Afghanistan brought one striking peculiarity of German security communication into collective awareness: the avoidance of the term “war”. This revealing debate will be briefly reconstructed in this section. The Afghanistan ISAF (*International Stabilization and Assistance Force*) deployment is considered by some as a “formative” mission for both the German army and the German society. One prominent advocate of this transformative view was conservative Defense Minister Thomas de Maizière who stated in a remarkable interview with *Spiegel online* on 23 December 2011:

“The Afghanistan-mission has not only drastically changed the *Bundeswehr* but the entire Federal Republic. With this mission, as controversial as it was and still is, Germany has proven itself as an adequate and resilient member of NATO. Before the ISAF-mission few of our partners believed that German soldiers are indeed able to fight and that their leadership dares to give the order to do so. We have proven that we are able to do that and that we are also willing to make sacrifices. We have abandoned the image

of armed medics and election observers and have become a full-fledged army that is well respected by our partners. The fight in Afghanistan, the broad use of the army in battle, has transformed the *Bundeswehr* and Germany, and so it will remain.” (cited in Schroeder and Zapfe 2015, p. 190)

While many citizens would currently rather argue that the refugee policy of the Merkel government since 2015 has “transformed” the country, only a few would probably consider the Afghanistan mission as having such a significant impact. Was the German Minister of Defense exaggerating his diagnosis at that time, or do the citizens lack knowledge about the mission and its consequences? The ISAF mission was completed in 2014, but that from 2015 onwards a large number of German soldiers has been deployed to Afghanistan again as part of the *Resolute Support* mission does hardly arouse any interest in the larger public. The purpose of that mission seems to be fairly unknown to date, while there is a more intense debate on Afghan refugees in Germany and their deportations back to Afghanistan.

The German *Bundeswehr* is a so-called “parliamentary army”: the German parliament (*Bundestag*) possesses comparatively far-reaching control and oversight powers. Military missions other than for humanitarian assistance require the prior approval of the parliament. During the Afghanistan deployment of the *Bundeswehr* (2001-2014), four different coalition governments ruled in Germany. The various Ministers of Defense, who also act as commanders-in-chief, played an important role in shaping the political discourse on the Afghanistan mission between 2001 and 2014. The only parliamentary party that has never been part of the ruling coalitions was the far left party *PDS/Die Linke*. It has consistently presented itself as “the only” true “anti-war” and “anti-militarist” party in the parliament, often using the concept of “war” to criticize the other parties’ decisions

A large majority in the German parliament maintained a fairly optimistic view on the first years of the German “engagement” in Afghanistan and emphasized the normative commitment to bringing democracy and human rights to the war-torn country. A few years later, the vague

concept of "stabilization" became ever more prominent in the parliamentary discourse and replaced the idealistic goals of the first years. However, the extent and scope of the German deployment and its geographical responsibility broadened as the changing mandates by the *Bundestag* showed over the years. The changed rules of engagement notwithstanding, the political discourse of the "stabilization operation" kept "lagging behind" the (counterinsurgency) military realities on the ground (Noetzel 2011, pp. 416-417).

The slow change in the political discourse on the Afghanistan mission in Germany came about in 2008/9, with the further deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, and with the so-called "Kunduz Affair" in September 2009. It was relevant for the German political discourse that the military operations in Afghanistan were based on different mandates which the parliament was requested to extend on a regular basis. These mandates were met with differing degrees of critique and opposition over the years. The formal separation of the OEF (*Operation Enduring Freedom*) and the ISAF mandates resulted in some artificial rhetorical maneuvers in the parliamentary debates since speakers carefully tried to avoid creating the impression of being (perhaps) involved in a "war" (Robotham and Röder 2012, pp. 205-207).

De-emphasizing terms such as "stabilization operation" or "reconstruction operation" for the *Bundeswehr* mission in Afghanistan match an image of the soldiers that has been promoted for years in the political culture of the "civilian power" Germany: If there are pictures presented to the German public, then these often portray German soldiers as "armed social workers", not killing and not being killed on their missions abroad. While the role differentiation of the "postmodern" soldier in "postmodern wars" – being a fighter, a social worker, a diplomat with inter-cultural skills in one person – is a phenomenon that affects all Western interventionist armies, the notion of *Bundeswehr* soldiers actually fighting in combat operations "out-of-area" remains troubling to large parts of the German public today.

It is interesting to note that representatives of the military prepared the changes within the political discourse in 2008. They pointed out that the *Bundeswehr* was involved in combat operations and that the soldiers' experiences on the ground differed from the political rhetoric far away in Berlin. The soldiers also claimed that their "war-like" experiences in Afghanistan were not understood at home, complaining about a lack of recognition for their difficult mission by the political leadership and population in Germany. Against this background, the first subtle but still significant change in discourse appeared in using the war-acknowledging term "fallen soldier" for German soldiers killed in Afghanistan. When reporting or speaking about *Bundeswehr* casualties in the German public, it would usually be said or written in rather neutral terms that these had been "killed" or that they had "died". The term "fallen soldier" (*Gefallene*) is associated with combat, large-scale war, and, as a legacy of the German past, also reminds some of a problematic and obsolete rhetoric of glorifying war experiences.

Whereas the US, the British and the Canadian armies had far higher numbers of casualties in Afghanistan, the Germans, who stayed in the comparatively "calm" Northern provinces, lost 55 soldiers, 35 of them killed in action (Nieke 2016, p. 85). The death of larger numbers of soldiers killed in combat was a new experience for the Federal Republic of Germany. It was Defense Minister Jung (CDU) who first referred to "fallen soldiers" at a funeral ceremony for two killed soldiers on October 20, 2008. This change of rhetoric was quite well received in the German media and by the soldiers. A detailed analysis of twelve such funeral ceremonies for soldiers killed on the ISAF mission between 2007 and 2011 shows how the "official" rhetoric of the political leadership has been changing around 2009/10 (Nieke 2016). The respective Ministers of Defense and in three cases also Chancellor Angela Merkel took part in the ceremonies and delivered a speech.

It was the young Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (CSU) who began to change the framing of the whole Afghanistan mission most significantly, speaking now of "war-like circumstances" and also of "war". Chancellor Merkel (CDU) also began using this wording in her

speeches and declarations in 2010. Importantly, the Minister and Chancellor either adopted the subjective perspective of the German soldiers who *experienced* combat situations that *might be perceived* as “war”, or they distinguished between an international legal terminology and a colloquial use of the concept “war”. The change of the Ministers’ and Chancellor’s rhetoric in the funeral speeches reflects the change in the larger public discourse in which members of civil society, members of parliament, the military, the media and other actors have been involved in discussing intensely around 2009/10 whether Germany is now in a “war in Afghanistan” or not. In particular, one incident played key role in the whole debate: It was the so-called “Kunduz airstrike” of 4 September 2009 in Afghanistan and the subsequent “Kunduz Affair” in the German public that received a lot of media attention. The German Colonel Georg Klein ordered an airstrike on two fuel tankers near Kunduz City since the tankers were considered (intelligence was given by one informant) to be captured by Taliban insurgents. Two US fighter jets bombed the tankers. Estimations of the casualties ranged from 90 to 140 people, many of them civilians. As a consequence, the questions of what the *Bundeswehr* was actually *doing* in Afghanistan and what the political goals of this mission were, were debated in the public more intensely than ever before. The “Kunduz airstrike” did not only engage expert circles in the Defense Ministry, the Parliament, and the military but became a “game changer” also for a wider public.

The military incidents and combat experiences in Afghanistan, the changed rules of engagement and the weak prospects of “success” in the mission resulted in a political contestation of the concept “war” in which many diverse actors were involved. The political leadership hesitated to use the term “war” but conceded the compromise wording of “war-like circumstances” or “experiences like war” and thus pointed to the subjective perspective of the soldiers on the ground. Journalists, of different political leanings, were especially outspoken about this perception of an “avoidance” discourse (Chauvistré 2009; Kornelius 2009). The perception of a rising gap between inadequate political statements in Berlin and unsettling news from Afghanistan increased the pressure on politicians to rethink

their public assessments of the situation in Afghanistan.

Why did ministers, the chancellor and many members of parliament – the core of the political elite – avoid the term “war” for so long? They rather reacted to discursive pressure from other actors, including media reports and soldiers’ depictions of their experiences on the ground, when they finally used terms such as “war-like circumstances” or “experiences of war”. No other group of actors had these reservations. Interestingly, *both* advocates and critics of the Afghanistan “engagement” demanded to use the concept of “war” and reproached the government with dishonesty, hypocrisy and evasive behavior. The reasons for this avoidance are grounded in (1) legal considerations, (2) collective imaginaries shaped by memory politics, and (3) attempts to maintain a widely favored self-image of a “civilian power”. They are usually invoked in a manner that fosters depoliticization and a closure of public discourse, i.e. attempting to avoid contestation and potential rejection of a military mission that has been framed as “good and necessary” for so long.

(1) There are several juridical reasons why high-ranking politicians usually avoid the term “war” in this context, among others, issues of international law: The *Bundeswehr* was not involved in an inter-state armed conflict with the Afghan government. The ISAF troops were legitimated by a UN mandate and later on developed into conflict parties in an asymmetric violent conflict with non-state actors. The term “war” has been replaced in contemporary international law by terms such as “armed conflict” and “non-international armed conflict” for civil war-like situations. However, the argument that using the term “war” in Afghanistan would imply the recognition of the Taliban as a legitimate conflict party – put forward, among others, by Defense Minister Jung – is legally incorrect.

(2) Legal terminology and controversies notwithstanding, many academic disciplines and many “ordinary” people keep on using the concept “war” and seem to have certain intuitions of what this entails. In the specific context of the German debate, the imaginary of “war” is still largely shaped by the Second World War. Some journalists and politicians in the “war/no war”

discourse on Afghanistan have pointed out that many of the elderly Germans would still invoke their own (or their parents') experiences of the Second World War when they hear the term "war". "War" in this sense is associated with a maximum of destruction and annihilation of civilians and arouses strong emotions whenever the term is invoked. Defense Minister Jung referred exactly to this aspect of vivid memories of the Second World War when he expressed his strong reservation about calling the "war on terrorism" in Afghanistan a "war" (Krause 2011, pp. 234-235). While images of both World Wars are still very present in the contemporary social imaginaries of the "Western" world, a differentiated imagery about new forms of war(fare) or the hybrid roles of soldiers in peace building and peace enforcement missions has not yet developed.

(3) The most plausible explanation for the concept avoidance is that all German governments since 1990 feared to alienate their voters and the public at large since the "out of area" use of force by German troops has been a "taboo". A controversial ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court in 1994 clarified the legal circumstances under which such missions can be legitimated. By gradually expanding the scope of Germany's participation in military missions, the governments only gradually confronted the public with changing realities. Given Germany's cherished self-perception as a "civilian power", the deliberate avoidance of the concept "war" by many politicians *can* be intended to lower the domestic political inhibitions to engage in international military interventions. However, with hindsight, it emerges that the consequences for the governments in the Afghanistan case were not critical: Neither did the "Kunduz Affair", which occurred three weeks before the federal election in September 2009, noticeably affect the results of the election nor were the German troops withdrawn from Afghanistan. The German governments, who are often depicted as especially sensitive to voters' attitudes about military deployments, continued the mission in Afghanistan although the approval rates by the population had been dropping since 2008. Since 2010, a majority has been rejecting the deployment.

Less benign interpretations of the political discourse on military missions accuse the political

leadership of a blatant lack of strategic thinking and the population of a problematic indifference towards their own army and its missions, increased by the suspension of conscription in 2011 (Naumann 2010). Not speaking of "wars" appears in this interpretation more like a manifestation of self-deceptions, illusions and incapability of policy-makers. Another interpretation argues that Germany lacks pluralist deliberative forms of security communication that would enhance public disputes and controversial engagements about the contingencies and complexities of modern security politics (Jacobi et al. 2011). It is the latter aspect that will be taken up in the next section.

### 3 The German Citizens as Objects of Education or as Dialogue Partners?

#### 3.1 "Top-down": Strategic Communication for the Education of the Citizenry?

Many commentators and political actors in the realm of German security politics create the impression that the German population suffers from some kind of "deficit". Interestingly enough, this insinuation is not followed by a reference to a valid comparative social group. Compared to whom? Which population elsewhere might provide a role model here – and for what exactly? The deficit diagnosis maintains that the majority of Germans are too "reserved" or "eschewing responsibility" with regard to international commitments, or too indifferent towards their army and its deployments abroad. All this, however, has obviously not prevented the German parliament from frequently debating about mandates for military missions abroad.

"By the way, the German Bundestag has held some 240 debates on overseas deployments of the Bundeswehr since 1994. These debates have been conducted in an exemplary manner. However, in the same period, parliament has held fewer than ten fundamental debates on German foreign and security policy. But we need such debates – in the Bundestag and everywhere: in the churches and trade unions, in the Bundeswehr, in the political parties and in all kinds of associations. For foreign and security policy is not just a matter for the elite.

Basic existential issues should be a matter for reflection in the heart of society. Matters that affect everyone should be discussed by everyone.” (Gauck 2014).

In his much cited and much criticized opening address to the 2014 Munich Security Conference, Federal President Gauck pointed out a democracy deficit: once again, he called for a broad societal debate which would also enhance the legitimacy of the elites’ discourses. In a similar way, then Foreign Minister Steinmeier justified in 2014 the conduct of dialogue formats with more public participation in the framework of the so-called “Review” process of the Foreign Office. Foreign policy, he argued, is traditionally a subject matter of exclusive circles in Berlin and Brussels but should be negotiated at the “heart of society” (Geis and Pfeifer 2017, pp. 227-232).

However, the appeals of the political executive – that Germany is in need of a debate on foreign and security policies also conducted by the population at large – are also tied to an expectation: that the population should comply with the political elite’s position that Germany *has* to adopt more responsibility in the international realm. From the executive’s perspective, it is a debate with a pre-designed result. Critical observers of the participation formats of the German Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defense (in the context of the recent White Paper production process) thus speak of “educational campaigns” and “sham participation”.

After the Second World War, the “re-education” programs of the Western allies were designed to turn the defeated Germans in their occupation zones into peaceful democrats – speaking in today’s consolidated German democracy of “education” in foreign and security policy issues is thus quite confounding. Have today’s Germans learned their “lessons” *too* well and appear now as pacifists in an unsettling world of turmoil? In my view, such collective assessments about “the Germans” are wrong. It betrays a quite questionable concept of mature citizens to think about waking the Germans up with the “breaking of taboos” (such as the proposal that Germany should acquire nuclear weapons of its own). In contrast, the ideal notion of democratic deliberation is based upon giving and taking “good” reasons, arguments and justifications within an open-

ended communication process. “In a deliberative forum, each is accountable to all. Citizens and officials try to justify their decisions to all those who are bound by them and some of those who are affected by them. This is the implication of the reason-giving process of deliberative democracy” (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, p. 128).

### 3.2 “Bottom-up”: The Inclusion of Citizens

A “great debate” on security policy in Germany might be desirable but it is quite unlikely that it will unfold. Democratic publics have been undergoing a number of transformations, the most recent one is marked by digitalization and a multiplication of public fora and arenas (Jacobi 2019). The fragmentation of publics is not new as such; prior to the rapid digitalization there has been a massive differentiation of actors, fora and arenas that are all part of “the public”, but that constitute expert publics or semi-publics in themselves. In particular, the security policy debate in Germany is usually characterized as confined to a very small circle of experts and not reaching out to the public at large. The media usually focuses on “scandals” or on specific violent events such as terrorist attacks but do hardly cover day-to-day business in security politics. To what extent security politics really is “distinct” or “different” from other issue areas cannot be addressed here adequately – suffice it to say that there are also no “great debates” on climate change, digitalization or education (to name but a few) in Germany. It seems as if the enduring democratic desire for a “great societal debate” that might “seize” a large majority of a population and then somehow “clear the air” resulting in a policy consensus is an illusion in itself.

A more realistic but perhaps also more elaborate and time-consuming way of creating “public participation” in foreign and security policies builds upon decentralized formats of (informal) citizen participation and dialogue fora. There are a number of reasons why such formats might be justified. In the following, three of them will be outlined: (1) broader legitimacy; (2) the notion of “resilience” in contemporary security strategy documents; and (3) the increase of knowledge on security matters within the population.

(1) The issue areas of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defense have traditionally been the domain of the executive in democracies. That officials of both ministries profess to an enhanced participation of the public can be interpreted as an increased need for legitimation of politics in general. For some two decades now, there have been intense debates in both academia and the policy realm how to “modernize” and complement traditional elements of representative democracy in such a way as to correspond with socio-cultural transformation processes in contemporary societies. Many citizens do have an interest in participating more actively in political issues. Experiments with “democratic innovations” are designed to provide some corresponding (informal) formats but they also raise questions as to their legitimacy and effectiveness: whether they create new forms of exclusion and how they might be linked with the established legal procedures and institutions of representative democracy (Merkel 2015). There have been experiments with such formats such as mini-publics, citizens’ dialogues, fish bowls, mediation, planning cells etc. in domestic policy fields, especially on a local level and with regard to infrastructure projects or environmental issues. However, there are only few experiences with such formats to date in foreign and security policies.

(2) The provision of security is one of the core tasks of the modern state. The expansion of the notion of “security” during the last three decades and the phenomenon of securitization of ever more policy issues can result in an overtaxing of the state apparatus and a de-liberalization of societies. Although the physical risks to the European Union’s (EU) citizens are currently relatively low, recent opinion polls show that a very high number of citizens express feelings of fear and threats (Kinnvall et al. 2018, p. 249). What these citizens probably do not know since they address their expectation of security provision exclusively to the state: They themselves are now also held responsible for their security. The key concept for this has been well known in other issue areas but has only more recently been imported into international security policies: “resilience”.

The *Global Strategy* of the EU, published in 2016, mentions the concept some 40 times. The new

buzzword has also entered a number of White Papers on security and defense policies of Western democracies. The most recent German White Paper also assigns “resilience” an important new role in security provision that has hardly been debated by the public:

“Although absolute security for the people of Germany remains unattainable, a comprehensive security policy can reduce risks. This is why a resolute approach to ensuring security must be conceived and carried out in a whole-of-government manner. Such an approach comprises hazard prevention and defense, organizes them for the purpose of tackling internal and external threats, and uses resources with foresight and sound judgment. [...] National security is not only a task of the state, but increasingly a joint task of the state, industry, the scientific community, and society. A common understanding of potential risks is the basis on which to build whole-of-society resilience.” (White Paper 2016, p. 59)

“Building long-term resilience in our open and democratic system is therefore a whole-of-society task. Society’s ability to protect and help itself in the event of a crisis complements public and commercial measures to prevent and manage crises.” (White Paper 2016, p. 60)

To date, only few German citizens will be aware of the fact that the White Paper envisages an important role for them in a joint security provision endeavor. What this exactly means at closer inspection – the notion of resilience refers also to the daily lives of the population – should be debated and negotiated with the citizens themselves. It is *their* “resilience” vis-à-vis risks and future crises that the executive strategy documents allude to and seeks to enhance. The concept “resilience” contains some paradoxes in its practical application that also deserve a public debate: Society is expected to be prepared for something one cannot really prepare for. The state, on the one hand, expands its security measures and invokes ubiquitous threats and risks, but, on the other hand, also warns against panicking and calls for the self-composure of the citizens.

(3) Following the end of the Cold War and German reunification, the *Bundeswehr* has undergone a structural transformation into an interventionist army. This significant change in German security policies has not caused a major public uproar. In a much cited phrase, Federal President Köhler complained in 2005, during a speech on the occasion of 50 years of the *Bundeswehr's* existence, that the German population would display a “friendly indifference” towards their army. Against the background of an increasing participation in military missions abroad, he also called for a broad societal debate about German foreign, security and defense policies. No ten years later, in 2014, Federal President Gauck (2014) counted some 240 debates on military mandates in the German parliament. And the German public still does not seem to be “impressed” or “touched” by this development – as Köhler had already pointed out in 2005.

What do individual citizens know about the Afghanistan ISAF mission? What do they know about the successor mission “Resolute Support” in which the *Bundeswehr* participates with a high number of soldiers? What do they know about the Mali mission and its goals? Does the “anti Da’esh coalition” have a mandate under international law? What is happening there? According to their own statements in surveys on security policy, many respondents admit that they know relatively little (or even nothing at all) about the *Bundeswehr* missions but they do state an opinion whether they support a specific mission or not (Biehl et al. 2015, pp. 80-88). In addition, such surveys have shown a certain pattern in opinions since the 1990s: A majority of respondents supports a mission as long as it can be framed as “humanitarian” in character – and that support rates drop significantly if a mission seems to contain combat elements. This pattern in surveys provides the evidence that might motivate the more recent problematization by some political actors that a majority of Germans perceives combat missions with great unease or rejects those. This element of German strategic culture also provides incentives for the political elite to establish strategic narratives which downplay or even veil the “military” character of a specific mission.

While then Minister of Defense de Maizière argued in 2011 (see the quote above) that the Afghanistan mission has transformed both the German military *and* the country, this can hardly be discerned as such. On the contrary, studies from military sociology identify a growing and problematic alienation between the German population and the soldiers that is not only the result of suspending conscription. The debate whether Germany is in a “war” in Afghanistan or not has also shown that many soldiers perceive a lack of understanding by “their” population and wish for more recognition of their service abroad which has been mandated by the German parliament. How politics and society deal with a growing number of “veterans” of the *Bundeswehr* has been discussed more intensely in expert circles but has no resonance in a wider public (Daxner 2016). Even the White Paper of 2016 dedicates merely two pages to the topic “Strengthening the Bundeswehr’s Place in Society” although this aspect is especially relevant for the legitimation of the military missions and security policy at large.

A comprehensive and transparent stock-taking of the military missions, as some politicians and representatives from academia and civil society have repeatedly demanded, could enhance societal knowledge, awareness and self-enlightenment on what “we” are actually doing in all these missions – what can be achieved with civilian and with military means and what cannot be achieved. Since the missions are conducted within multilateral frameworks, this stock-taking is a task for all of the involved democratic states.

#### 4 More Experiments with Citizen Participation?

There are many occasions for conducting “great” debates on security policy: a stock-taking of military missions, resilience, impact of the military missions on the German society, procurement of so-called combat drones, the privatization of security, the army’s lack of defense capabilities are only a few of such topics. They are discussed in expert circles but not in a wider public. Instead of clinging to the illusion of a great societal debate – that is also lacking for a lot of other pressing political issues such as climate change or digitalization – which is expected to lead to some

consensus or “fixable” result and thus “terminate” a policy process, it is perhaps more useful to conduct decentralized small formats of citizens’ dialogues and participation. As first assessments of such formats in the broader field of foreign policy suggest (Adebahr et al. 2018), citizens do have an interest in debating foreign and security policies and they would also take part in more interactive formats that go beyond the hitherto dominating form of dialogue and debate formats with representatives of ministries. Especially face-to-face formats require a lot of resources and preparation but can also help to strengthen citizens’ democratic skills and general trust in democracy and the state. The participation bias that is also known from direct democracy – well educated, male, higher income persons are disproportionately represented – re-occurs in these formats. How to reach out to people who are not already interested in politics is a challenge that is well-known to those organizing such dialogue and workshop formats. However, in my view, the limitations of inclusion should not prevent further experiments regarding the core matters of security policies, too. Waiting in vain for a “great debate” is no good alternative.

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# 11. PUBLIC OPINION ON GERMANY'S SECURITY POLICY: MILITARY RESTRAINT, CRITICAL EVENTS, AND THE CASE FOR POLITICAL ARGUMENT

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Sebastian Nieke

## Abstract:

*While most of Germany's international partners advocate a more active German role in international security, many commentators point to German public opinion as an obstacle to that role, especially when it comes to military commitment. However, a closer look at public opinion formation on foreign and security policy disproves these claims and shows that substantive political argument can generate support even in contested policy areas.*

In Germany, many commentators point to public opinion as an obstacle to a more active foreign and security policy, especially when it comes to military commitment. The saying goes that the Germans are pacifist and that the media is only interested in bad news. Hence, the more substantial German role in international security advocated by most of Germany's international partners could not be communicated to the national public. However, a closer look at public opinion formation about foreign and security policy disproves these claims. After a short discussion of the peculiarities (1) and survey methods (2) of public opinion in this policy area, I turn to its basic drivers identified by public opinion research. These are collectively shared beliefs (3), critical events (4) and political opinion leadership (5). My discussion shows that neither is "pacifism" the right word to describe the Germans' attitudes towards international security, nor that critical events automatically restrict the scope of political action. On the contrary, substantive political argument can generate public support for decision-making – even in contested fields of action.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 The Problem of Distance: How Many Hours per Day Does Your Neighbor Take Interest in Foreign Affairs?

Until the 1960s, American pollsters adhered to the so-called Almond Lippmann Consensus: Public opinion towards foreign and security policy was considered volatile and inconsistent, and hence it neither could nor should have any impact on the government's decision-making in these affairs (Holsti 1992, p. 442-444). After the consistently growing opposition to the Vietnam War had already challenged this dictum, US public opinion research widely debunked it at the latest during the 1980s (Cf. Mueller 1971, pp. 366-367; Powlick and Katz 1998, p. 30). Since then, many American scholars use the term

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coined by Robert Shapiro and Benjamin Page (1988) and consider the (US) population a “rational public” that does, at least in the aggregate, engage in cost-benefit-calculations regarding foreign and security policy.

German public opinion research also considers public opinion a relevant factor in this policy area. Yet, in Germany, many scholars remained a lot more skeptical when it comes to cost-benefit-calculations – not least because the political system in the Federal Republic is much more shaped by representative democracy than by direct democracy (Cf. Rattinger 2007, p. 320; Endres et al 2015, pp. 43-44). This skepticism reflects a problem stemming from the usually large distance between this policy area and the population's everyday life: In contrast to, for example, tax or welfare policy, the effects of foreign and security policy do not overtly affect people's lives every day, and thus it is not easy for the broader population to cogently evaluate them (Kriner and Wilson 2010, p. 5).

Because of that distance, media coverage has even more impact on public opinion here than in other policy areas, because any news, ranging from facts and figures over their interpretation to commentary on governmental policies, reaches the population almost exclusively via the mass media. Studies on media usage show that television still plays a major role, while radio and press have their, albeit decreasing, share, as well. The importance of online media is growing enormously: In 2018, Germans spent more than three hours per day online, among them over 80 minutes for news media consumption, with upward tendency (ARD/ZDF-Medienkommission 2018). However, the rise of online media does not yet seem to result in severe changes in public opinion formation, because the users obviously resort to internet news formats similar to their offline counterparts – a newspaper enthusiast reading his daily paper online, or a television viewer browsing the large networks' online content. It is questionable whether the growing use of social media will change that in the long term because, here in particular, the issue of individual “filter bubbles” is even more noticeable than in other media.

## 2 “I only believe in statistics that...”

Although Winston Churchill likely never said the often misattributed catchphrase about statistics, this saying nevertheless points to some risks in opinion polling that even today's elaborate research methods cannot fully preclude. Polls usually do not feature open questions but instead apply fixed response options, and oftentimes these precast answers have been derived from an ongoing political debate about possible policy options. For example, the respondents are then offered *either* diplomatic means *or* military means *or* means of development cooperation, thus suggesting contradictions between them, whereas the German approach of networked security actually seeks to provide a comprehensive toolbox of diplomatic, military and other means. Apart from that, there is always a risk of distortion by language. For example, the renowned institutes Infratest dimap (“ARD Deutschland-trend”) and Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (“ZDF Politbarometer”) delivered figures of public support for the Bundeswehr's Afghanistan deployment varying as much as 14 percent – just because the wording of their polls differed from one another.

The effects of digitalization also have to be considered. For decades, public opinion research has been working with random sample interviews by telephone. Yet, with more and more people using smartphones as well as messenger apps and less landline phones being in use, opinion pollsters must keep up if they want to avoid growing blind spots in their surveys. While many German institutes still adhere to telephone samples, others apply more cost-efficient online methods. The British corporation YouGov, for example, uses a growing “panel” of registered users, and the German company Civey, founded in 2015, embeds click-based polls directly in online news articles and other websites. Currently, the polling business is going through a fierce debate about whether such non-sampled approaches deserve the hallmark of “representativity”. It remains to be seen what methods will eventually prevail to deal with the ongoing changes in communication behavior.

### 3 Collectively Shared Beliefs: Military Restraint is not Pacifism

Given these conditions, how does public opinion on foreign and security policy come about? In German debates about foreign affairs, many voices point to *collectively shared beliefs*. With regard to the Federal Republic, the most salient of these beliefs are a preference for multilateralism and skepticism towards the use of military force in international politics. In fact, when Germans are being asked what options they prefer for their nation's foreign and security policy in general, stable majorities recommend economic sanctions, military training for international partners, or development cooperation. In contrast, combat missions or providing armament to third parties are met with skepticism and refusal (Cf. Steinbrecher et al 2017, p. 27). Foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr are accepted by a majority of the German population already since the 1990s, yet sometimes with a clear preference for caveats regarding offensive action within these missions. Already in 1993, when the Bundeswehr was about to be deployed in its first armed foreign mission to Somalia, a majority of Germans supported a restriction to "repairing roads and drilling wells" (68 percent) as well as "protection for food transports" (80 percent), while "policing tasks" (42 percent) or the fight against "armed gangs" (37 percent) were dismissed (Emnid 1993). In part, this pattern can still be found in polls about current Bundeswehr deployments as well. It is worth noting though, that in European comparison, the Germans are by no means alone with this particular attitude (Biehl and Giegerich 2011, pp. 62-70).

The close integration into the EU, NATO and the UN is virtually part of the genetic code of German foreign and security policy. To act outside of this multilateral framework is rejected by an overwhelming majority of Germany's population, too. The fact that this preference for multilateralism does not necessarily point towards military restraint has definitely contributed a lot to today's acceptance of Bundeswehr deployments. At the same time, the side by side of these convictions can lead to some discrepancies as well. For example, a large majority of Germans are in favor of the Federal Republic's NATO membership, while a lower number of them would deploy the Bundeswehr for collective defense in

case of an attack against one of Germany's NATO partners.

Such widespread skepticism towards the use of force cannot simply be dismissed. In the 1990s, international research on German foreign policy has therefore coined terms such as antimilitarism, culture of military restraint and civilian power (Maull 1992; Berger 1998; Duffield 1999). These convictions do not show, however, that the German population was "pacifist". Apart from the basic acceptance of foreign military deployments, this becomes most clear when looking at the current debate about the funding of the Bundeswehr and its troop levels. Since 2015, almost half of the German population supports an increase of the Federal Republic's defense budget, while about one third responds favorably to at least maintaining the current funding. In the preceding years, only about one fifth had wanted to increase the budget and half of them would have kept the funding as it had been. Polls regarding the troop levels show quite similar results (Steinbrecher et al 2017, pp. 64-65). The Bundeswehr has also been ranking high regarding trust in government institutions for years, ranging closely behind the police and next to the Federal Constitutional Court, public schools as well as the Federal Criminal Police Office (ibid., p. 48). In addition, many young Germans can imagine serving in the armed forces. In 2017, a survey among pupils named the Bundeswehr the third-most popular employer behind the police and the Adidas sports brand (Trendence Institut 2017). Given these numbers, it would be a severe oversimplification to attest the Germans "pacifism".

### 4 Critical Events, Media Coverage and the Scope of Political Action

Nonetheless, collectively shared beliefs are neither the only nor the most influential factor to public opinion formation on foreign and security policy. Public opinion researchers rather point at two other factors instead. The first are critical events transmitted by the media – for example casualties sustained in a Bundeswehr deployment abroad or the peaceful conduct of democratic elections in a fragile state supported by Germany. In close connection with the concept of a rational public, pollsters consider such events to be the foundation for the population's attention,

interpretation and evaluation of government policy (Cf. Gelpi et al 2005/6, p. 12; Eichenberg 2005). Actually, polls are oftentimes conducted precisely on the occasion of such critical events – on the one hand because a survey with today's gold standard of at least 1,000 respondents is expensive, on the other hand because it offers up-to-date news value.

It is a commonplace that due to the logics of mass media, usually negative events are concerned. For example, scholars consider the Bundeswehr deployment to Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014 a case in which the worsening situation there, transmitted by the media, clearly affected the German population's perception of chances for mission success and thus caused a decline in support (Cf. Fiebig 2012, p. 201; Wanner 2015, pp. 56-58; Mader and Fiebig 2015, pp. 108-109). Likewise, the increased approval for a higher German defense budget after 2014 can also be traced back to media coverage of the changing security situation in Eastern Europe and of frequent flaws and failures in the Bundeswehr's equipment. Hence, critical events do not automatically pose a restriction on the scope of political action. In addition, it becomes clear that only an increased and clearly visible occurrence of such events over a prolonged time span can cause a sustainable change in public opinion.

In contrast, the short-term effects of single incidents on public opinion are anything but predictable. The September 2009 air strike against two hijacked road tankers near Kunduz on request of a Bundeswehr commander, for example, was soon criticized as a catastrophic mistake throughout the German media. The Germans' support for the deployment to Afghanistan, however, did not decline. The "ZDF-Politbarometer" poll did not show any significant change, and according to the "ARD-Deutschlandtrend" poll, the approval even increased by ten percent for a short time. This seemingly paradoxical outcome can be grasped by the abovementioned problem of distance. While the media had not shown much interest in the German Afghanistan deployment for a long time, the incident caused an almost unprecedented level of attention. Subsequently, the population was provided with a much greater density of information about the mission, and due to the contentious debate, a

larger number of politicians argued for its continuation (Cf. von Krause 2011, p. 240; Naumann 2013, p. 47). Despite the incident itself, both factors eventually led to a short-term positive effect on public opinion.

## 5 Opinion Leadership and the Case for Political Argument

The seemingly paradoxical effects of the tanker bombing indicate the second contributing factor brought forward by pollsters to explain public opinion on foreign and security policy. More skeptical researchers do not discard the importance of critical events, but they point to opinion leadership as an influential factor instead. According to these scholars, public opinion formation on foreign and security policy critically depends on statements made by senior officials, because only these statements will cause sufficient media attention and offer the necessary reduction of complexity – be it for or against a particular policy option (Larson 1996; Berinsky 2007). From this perspective, cross-party consensus in particular is considered to have a strong effect on opinion formation.

Germany's arms support for the Kurdish Peshmerga against ISIL in Northern Iraq since 2014 is a good example of this. In general, the German population is divided about arms shipments as a means in international politics – even if allied states were the recipients of such deliveries. In a 2015 poll, roughly a third of Germans were generally in favor of supplying arms to partners, while another third was against it and closely less than a third deemed it ambivalent (Steinbrecher 2015, p. 68). Another 2015 poll, asking specifically for the Peshmerga supplies, yielded a result of 43 percent being in favor and a quarter rejecting them, the rest being ambivalent (TNS Emnid 2016, p. 48). Notably, the support for the Peshmerga gained more acceptance than the idea of delivering weapons in general, although the receiver was a non-state actor and there was a contentious debate in the media. Obviously, due to media reports about ISIL's atrocities and terrorist attacks, even some respondents who were against arms shipments otherwise had changed their minds in this particular case.

Yet, even much stronger approval was created by the Federal Government's clear and unequivocal

advocacy for the arms support. During the aforementioned 2015 polls, the arms deliveries had already faded from public debate. One year before, the situation was quite different though: Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel (in a state of the nation address), Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen (in a joint statement) as well as a large majority of the German Parliament had decidedly argued for the arms shipments. In a 2014 poll with the very same question, one quarter of the Germans rejected the arms deliveries as well, but a majority of 52 percent approved them, and only one fifth of the respondents were undecided – a difference of almost ten percent (TNS Emnid 2016, p. 48).

## 6 Conclusion

A look at the drivers of public opinion formation leads to two major findings. First, public opinion is not only shaped by collectively shared beliefs, but all the more by critical events and political argument. The necessary criterion is media coverage. Second, because in political reality these three factors are always interlocked, media attention and critical events should not be regarded as obstacles to the scope of political action but as chances for explanation and discussion. Debates like the one on lacking spare parts for Bundeswehr equipment or on arms shipments for the Peshmerga show that plain language about problems and dilemmas can contribute to the population's understanding of an otherwise distant policy area. If decision-makers are ready to make their case cogently and transparently, they can generate public support – even in contentious fields of action. It is worth the argument.

There is a continuous trend for short-term polling on behalf of the news media on any topical issue, such as conscription, fear of terrorist attacks, or possible reactions to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Especially online media will soon come up with surveys and exploit their results in order to score in the daily race for newsworthiness. Such single polls should be used as political argument only with great caution and only when comparative figures from earlier surveys are available. On the other hand, given today's accelerated and polarized media landscape, poll results can sometimes even serve as arguments of temperance. For

example, online media often resort to Twitter discussions as a would-be excerpt of “the public mood”, although they hardly reflect the thoughts of the broader population. Vice versa, populist voices claim to represent a majority of “the people” whereas statistics yield completely different results. In both cases, public opinion can provide some levelheaded contrast and thus contribute to a more factual debate.

Public opinion on foreign and security policy will never be free from inconsistencies. The Germans' widespread support for NATO in contrast to their lesser willingness to deploy the Bundeswehr in a collective defense scenario is a steady reminder for this. But it would be completely wrong to complain about such discrepancies. In fact, they are a wake-up call for better education, increased media coverage and more cogent political argument for foreign and security policy. This may sound very ambitious, but several school curricula on the state level, such as the secondary school syllabus in Rhineland Palatinate, have already put more emphasis on this topic. Meanwhile, most nationwide media have already proceeded much further – it is hard to remember any public broadcasting primetime news program that was not full of foreign and security policy issues during the last years. Now it is the decision-makers' turn to take up these issues and make the case for action without shying away from political contention.

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**PART III:**  
**THE FUTURE AND CHALLENGES OF STRATEGY MAKING**

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## 12. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A CHALLENGE FOR SECURITY POLICY

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Alexander Stulpe  
& Gary S. Schaal

**Abstract:**

*The essay first reflects and discusses the potential range of security challenges induced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a disruptive technology with multiple effects on society, international relations and the future of warfare. It then describes specific forms and dimensions of asymmetric and hybrid threats arising from AI technology which liberal democracies are most likely to be confronted with in the forthcoming years. Finally, it focuses on the question how liberal democracies can cope with these dangers, reduce their vulnerabilities and strengthen their resilience, with special regard to the current situation in Germany.*

According to Marvin Minsky, Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to “the science of making machines do things that would require intelligence if done by men” (Geist and John 2018, p. 9). Today's AI systems are often faster, better and cheaper in solving problems than human experts in their fields of application. And even now, in certain cases, the superiority of artificial, mechanical intelligence over natural, human intelligence is so great that intelligent machines are able to perform tasks that people fail to perform because the brain is unable to process the masses of data required for these tasks with even approximately the same precision and speed as artificial neural networks are capable of in view of the computing and storage capacities available today: Based on supervised and unsupervised learning, self-learning algorithms, which recognize patterns in huge data, can generate knowledge and make autonomous decisions *within* their programmed tasks (Range 2018, pp. 43-52; Vowinkel 2017; Dieckow and Jacob 2018). They cannot yet transcend the tasks for which they have been programmed – this would be *strong AI*, a truly disruptive technology not yet developed.

The recent breakthrough in the sequencing of the bread wheat genome is due to the use of self-learning algorithms and raises hopes for an improvement in the global food situation, in terms of genetic engineering, especially in view of climate change (Frankfurter Allgemeine 2018; Spiegel Online 2018, 17 Aug.). In medical applications, various studies have shown in recent years, particularly in cancer diagnosis, that appropriately trained AI systems identify metastases and melanomas more precisely and reliably than experienced specialists, with correspondingly improved healing chances for patients (Albat 2018; Ärzteblatt 2017). And robots, understood as “Artificial Intelligence integrated into a physical body” that can “perceive their environment and interact with it in a targeted and autonomous way” (Franke and Leveringhaus 2015, p. 298; Dieckow 2015),<sup>1</sup> combine the AI-specific precision and speed with the advantage of being

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from German sources translated by the authors.

applicable to tasks whose performance would be too monotonous, dirty or dangerous for humans (“dull, dirty, dangerous”) (Frank and Leveringhaus 2015, p. 297) – or also in an environment that is inaccessible to humans, e.g. due to extreme heat or coldness, lack of oxygen, contamination with toxins or pathogens. In the near future (Ackerman 2018; Schäfer 2018; Engelking 2015) it could also be feasible to liberate hostages in complex environments through the use of military robotics: with the help of swarms of combat drones, which can distinguish the victims from the kidnappers due to their trained image recognition software and can effectively neutralize the latter autonomously without collateral damage.

The military use of drone technology and other autonomous systems, especially if they can achieve kinetic effects, i.e. being armed (“killer drones”, “killer robots”), is highly controversial (Kurz 2018; Lobe 2017; Armbruster 2017). But the above scenario of an effective fight against the most serious human rights violations and war crimes could open the view to a more differentiated approach. Apart from that, the assessment of the positive effects of AI in civilian areas seems easier: hunger and disease, two of the three major problems humanity has had to contend with since the very beginning (Harari 2017) – the effects on the third one, war, will be addressed later –, will be solvable due to scientific and medical advances through AI. If we can assume that these advances will benefit all those who need them, the malnourished and the sick, this reminds us that the evaluation of new technologies as “curses or blessings” cannot be made independently of the political and economic order which decides on the distribution of the benefits of these technological achievements. In addition, the technological development of AI – beyond all questions about the good and just order – could have dramatic consequences for the fate of mankind if, due to the disruptiveness of this technology, a “strong AI” would emerge in a revolutionary development, which, in contrast to the “weak” AI systems that exist today, has consciousness, its own identity and interests and, as a mechanical “superintelligence” (Bostrom 2016), enslaves or annihilates mankind (Vowinkel 2017; Ramge 2018, pp. 18–19, 81–

87). But even if one limits the analysis to the security policy challenges resulting from weak AI, the situation is already complex and ambivalent.

AI is initially a “dual-use technology” which, as the authors of a recently published study on the “Malicious Use of AI” emphasize, can be used defensively as well as offensively, militarily as well as civilian, with harmful or beneficial intentions (Brundage et al. 2018, p. 16) – and finally, as can be added from a specific political perspective, by “friend and foe” (Schmitt 1987). Obviously, the listed distinctions are not all congruent: not every civilian deployment is useful, not every offensive deployment is harmful, not every military deployment is offensive – what is judged useful or harmful is essentially determined by the political perspective. The question of whether and to which extent AI systems are a security policy challenge can therefore be specified at a first, actor-related level with regard to the question, who uses AI applications for what purposes and with what objectives? Due to its duality in security policy, AI technology offers liberal democracy the means to defend itself, to combat its enemies, to reduce its vulnerability and to strengthen its resilience (Hanisch 2016), just as it provides its enemies with the means to attack. What is needed is a “political-strategic hermeneutics” (Münkler and Wassermann 2012), i.e. putting oneself in the perspective of a potentially hostile actor in order to recognize the potential harmful applications of AI technology and thereby identify the threats it poses, and what vulnerabilities can be exploited or arise from it.

The complexity of the findings increases further if one considers that AI is a “cross-sectional technology” which, in the context of a comprehensive “digital revolution”, fundamentally encompasses the entire modern society regarding its modes of communication and production (Ramge 2018, p. 20). This is reflected by social science in terms like “digital society” or “digital age” (Stengel et al. 2017) or “culture of digitality” (Stalder 2016). The mass unemployment expected by many experts as a result of the replacement of humans by robots and other AI systems (Ramge 2018, pp. 22–25) poses a serious challenge in the perspective of an extended concept of security (Daase 2010) as well as from a narrower understanding of the politico-military security of liberal democratic states. Because on the one hand

it directly affects the economic security and life prospects of individuals, and on the other hand indirectly affects the stability conditions and resilience of liberal democratic communities.

Other non-intentional and systemic effects of the use of AI concern the field of international relations. Geist and John (2018) show that the danger of a thermonuclear escalation through the military use of AI is growing. This is because the system of deterrence as a guarantor of stability – already weakened after the end of the Cold War by a growing number of nuclear powers in a multipolar world – threatens to collapse completely if there is a belief or even certainty among the relevant state actors that it is possible, with the help of AI-supported technology, to destroy the opponent's arsenal of nuclear weapons with their own nuclear missiles and thus deprive him of all chances of retaliation. The guarantee of stability, which is based on the survivability of the nuclear arsenal of retaliation, i.e. credible deterrence, is questioned by this. The MAD doctrine (mutual assured destruction) of the Cold War is thus undermined (Geist and John 2018, pp. 6-12), and for potential aggressors the prospect of carrying out a conflict-decisive nuclear first strike with which the opponent's ability to retaliate is destroyed becomes tempting. For actors threatened by this prospect, on the other hand, it seems to be a question of survival to use their own retaliatory weapons, whose survivability is no longer guaranteed, before they are destroyed by the enemy: either in a pre-emptive strike or while the enemy's intercontinental missiles are approaching – or are being suspected of approaching – according to the motto: "use it or lose it" (Geist and John 2018, p. 18). In the latter case, a false alarm would suffice to trigger a thermonuclear escalation. And in general, for these scenarios it does not matter whether the AI-supported weapon systems are actually so powerful that they can reliably destroy the opponent's arsenal as long as decision makers are convinced they are able to. In fact, however, in the case of an aggressive first strike or a preventive strike it would be less fatal if it were really possible to completely take away the opponent's ability to retaliate, because then the further escalation would cease – which, conversely, means that precisely in the overestimation of one's own abilities, which can lead an aggressive or fearful actor to such a first or preventive

strike, lies an additional danger that increases the risk of a thermonuclear self-extinction of mankind. A "tracking and targeting system" that is operational is less dangerous than one that is thought to be just that (Geist and John 2018, p. 1).

Other reflections on the future of war are concerned with the possible effects of the proliferation of military AI systems, which has skyrocketed in recent years, particularly in the field of robotics, especially of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), i.e. armed and unarmed drones (Franke and Leveringhaus 2015, pp. 303-305). Franke and Leveringhaus (2015) present five possible scenarios: The "Olympic Perspective" of a "revolution in military affairs" is expected from the military use of AI and the resulting improved possibilities for reconnaissance and surgical interventions of "more precise, faster, more successful, possibly even more humane" wars. The "Terminator Scenario" articulates the fear that "robots make decisions about life and death" – and may not be controllable. The "Terrorism Scenario" warns of the enormous damage caused by UAS armed with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons in the hands of asymmetric actors and advocates the avoidance of proliferation with stricter arms control instruments. The scenario of a "Normalization of War" criticizes the fact that, in particular through the use of lethal UAS as low-risk long-range weapons for the attacker, the inhibition threshold to military use is lowered and the difference between war and peace is blurred, so that a "latent state of war in which anyone could attack anyone at any time would become normality". And finally, the supporters of the "Sceptical View" are neither particularly optimistic nor pessimistic with regard to the opportunities and dangers of military robotics and plead for "calmness" towards the representatives of the other four scenarios (Franke and Leveringhaus 2015, pp. 305-309).

Calmness is certainly an appropriate and desirable attitude in principle. The situation is confusing and, with regard to its further development, can hardly be predicted. And this is true, along with all other, actor-related and systemic, social and international factors, just because AI is a disruptive technology, of which it cannot be known what leaps in development it will make in the coming years. Even if the next leap should not be

the technological singularity that would dramatically change the security situation due to strong AIs, one can assume that digital technology provides a potential of leap innovations that will lead to an undefined number of unknown unknowns in the area of security challenges. This does not mean that there is no answer to the question of what liberal democracy has to expect in this respect. It simply means that any answer to this question is necessarily incomplete and that one can be aware of this – and that one should take this into account in the follow-up question of how liberal democracy can adapt to it. The following two sections try to approach these two questions regarding the “what” and the “how”.

## 2 Hybrid Threats and Strategic Vulnerabilities

If one asks, against the background of the outlined panorama of possible security policy challenges posed by AI, which of these challenges the German security and defense policy should strategically adapt to, one will primarily look at the area of asymmetric and hybrid threats posed by the hostile use of AI applications and the associated exploitation of 'strategic vulnerabilities' (Münkler and Wassermann 2012), as described in particular by Brundage et al. (2018). The problem of unknown unknowns resulting from the disruptiveness of technology must not be underestimated – and, in fact, one aspect of the adequate strategic response to those asymmetric and hybrid challenges will at the same time be the best possible solution to the problem of unknown unknowns, namely investment in research and development. For various reasons, the other challenges do not primarily represent strategic problems, even if they indirectly generate a need for political action: Germany is not a nuclear power, so that the question of introducing AI systems to improve its own nuclear strategy does not arise here. This, however, does not preclude involvement in international negotiations and agreements on the control of such technologies. The latter also concerns the currently virulent topic of “autonomous weapon systems”, even if the associated fear, prominently and resonantly expressed by Elon Musk, that they posed a “greater danger than atomic bombs” for humanity (Robinson 2018; Armbruster 2017), still appears quite abstract and, in

order to make it plausible, would require the leap known as “technological singularity”, which would subject humanity's fate to a mechanical superintelligence (Bostrom 2016). In this case, the danger of a global nuclear war would indeed be “trivial”, because such a super-intelligent, strong AI would either – if it is benevolent – liberate mankind once and for all from the danger of its thermonuclear self-destruction, or – malevolently – make use of precisely this existing arsenal of weapons to extinguish mankind. Finally, the mass unemployment induced by AI cannot be dealt with strategically in the narrower sense, but still calls for urgent political action. The questions, how the political and economic order will be (re-)shaped by digital technology lies beyond the focus taken here.

According to Brundage et al. (2018), liberal democracies will have to adapt to a broad spectrum of hostile attacks that endanger their security in the areas of cyberspace (“digital security”), the integrity of people and physical objects of infrastructure (“physical security”) and the political stability of the liberal democratic community (“political security”) (Brundage et al. 2018, pp. 3-6, 30-49). In the field of digital security, these include cyber-attacks that can be carried out with previously unknown precision and magnitude using AIs, such as DDoS attacks (“distributed denial-of-service”), but also AI-optimized exploitation of human and software vulnerabilities and finally the manipulation of AI systems, for example through the “poisoning” of data controlling their self-learning process (Brundage et al. 2018, p. 17; Geist and John 2018, p. 19). In addition, any form of hacking optimized by AI and/or attacking AI systems can also aim to capture “cyber-physical” systems – power grids, nuclear power plants and other critical infrastructures, but also robots, autonomous vehicles, smart homes and other networked objects (“Internet of Things”), to use them to cause damage in the physical world, for example through sabotage or assassination.

This addresses the area of physical security, which, in addition to high-value targets, encompasses the entire range of soft targets that are particularly threatened by attacks by (semi-)autonomous weapon systems, from recreational drones converted for attack purposes to genuine military combat drones to autonomous micro-



drone swarms. Brundage et al. (2018, p. 27) are discussing a scenario in which terrorists smuggle a cleaning robot as an assassination droid – equipped with face recognition software and an autonomous explosive charge that triggers in the moment of target recognition – into a ministerial building in order to kill the head of government. In addition, the authors identify specific threats and vulnerabilities in this area that endanger democracy through the use of AI for the purpose of automated surveillance, manipulation and deception of the population with the help, for example, of Big Data analyses, targeted propaganda, manipulative image and video material and behavioral and mood analyses, which in each case become more efficient or only possible through this technology (Brundage et al. 2018, pp. 43-49).

Especially the last examples of AI applications that endanger the political security of liberal democracies, for example in the hands of aggressors who apply hybrid strategies, are at the same time examples for the benefit that authoritarian regimes can derive from this technology to strengthen their “political security”, in the sense of stabilizing their internal rule. This raises the question of whether the technological development of AI does not generally favor the enemies of liberal democracy from a security point of view. The list of security-relevant properties of AI by Brundage et al. (2018, pp. 16-18) at least suggests that asymmetric actors can benefit more from AI than liberal democratic states. Simply because even individual actors or small groups are able to carry out attacks with a low risk of self-endangerment or identification, and with the precision, damaging effect and destructiveness previously possessed only by the arsenal of state military. But this does not mean, of course, that AI systems cannot also be used by better organized and more resource-rich actors, especially state actors, to improve their offensive and defensive capabilities.

So, what do you have to be prepared for? Brundage et al. (2018, pp. 5, 18-22) expect, firstly, an expansion of already existing threats with regard to the quantity and diversity of possible targets, the increase in the frequency of attacks and the expansion of the number of actors capable of doing so. Secondly, according to the authors, new threats are to be expected which are made

possible by the offensive use of AI or which exploit specific vulnerabilities of defensive AI systems. And these (old and new) threats will, thirdly, typically be characterized by the fact that they are particularly effective and targeted in attacking and exploiting vulnerabilities, and difficult to track in terms of their origin.

In view of this landscape of new threats, liberal democratic states cannot avoid improving their capabilities through research and development: in order to know what is to be expected; in order to ward off concrete attacks or, if necessary, to cope better with their consequences; in order to neutralize threats and minimize their own vulnerabilities through preventive measures. In addition to strengthening AI resilience (in the three p-dimensions “preparedness”, “persistence”, “prevention”), it is also important not to lose touch with the global development in the AI field, for reasons of national military and economic security, but also for reasons of international political influence. In this field, authoritarian systems seem to have an advantage over liberal democracies because they advance technological development centrally and without regard to constitutional and human rights principles, especially in the mass collection of data, the “raw material of Artificial Intelligence” (Ramge 2018, p. 88). The competitive advantage that China in particular has over liberal democracies, could, however, be put into perspective by the fact that, as the Chinese social credit score advances the social standardization process (Ramge 2018, pp. 90-92), the data become more and more homogeneous – and thus, despite all the quantity, their quality for the purposes of machine learning, their diversity, deteriorates. If AI systems are trained only with pictures of dogs and cats, they cannot recognize wolves (Dickow and Jacob 2018, p. 2). And the example of the USA shows how successful liberal democracies can be in developing digital technology.

### 3 On the Road to Resilience?

Fifteen years ago, Franconian computer scientist Franz Josef Och won the Pentagon's legendary DARPA's Machine Translation (MT) competition with a program that enabled him to train his computer to translate Hindi into English in just four weeks (Evers 2003). Soon afterwards he became head of Google's MT-department, where he

and his team quickly developed further systems, thanks to improved algorithms and “to the internet and the availability of data there” (Och 2010). This story is relevant and symptomatic in the present context in several respects: for the issue of brain drain in Germany; for the efficiency of AI; for the key role of DARPA in technological innovation, to which humanity also owes the existence of the Internet; and for the dual applicability of AI, as in this case for civilian purposes (Google Translate) as well as for purposes of military and intelligence reconnaissance, which induced DARPA's interest in machine translation after 09/11, with special regard to languages of the Greater Middle East.

One can also understand the task of the DARPA competition and Och's solution strategy as a metaphor for the security situation in view of the challenges outlined by AI. The participants in the competition only learned at short notice for which language their computers should make translations, and therefore had to design the programs in such a way that they could in principle be applied to any language for which sufficient training data was available, so that the moment the competition language was announced – “The surprise language is Hindi ... good luck!” (Evers 2003, p. 170) – Och's Computer could immediately begin learning Hindi and solving the problem. With regard to the security policy challenges posed by AI, one can also know in the abstract what is to be expected in a spectrum of relatively concrete threat scenarios, in which the question is not so much whether they will occur as when, and including the notorious unknown unknowns caused by the disruptiveness of digital technology. The strategic challenge is not to be too surprised by what happens then, i.e. to be sufficiently prepared and able to react in the event of any surprises – just like Och's algorithm that was fed Hindi training data immediately after the announcement of the surprise and was therefore ready to solve the translation task within a short time.

Emmanuel Macron recently explained in a conversation about France's AI strategy that, given the disruptiveness of the technology, the only way not to be overrun and marginalized by developments in the field of AI is to be part of this disruption, i.e. to invest massively in research and development in this field and thus play an active role in the “AI revolution” (Macron 2018).

In the “Weißbuch” (“White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr”) from 2016, an analogous insight can be found. Under the heading “Innovation as the key to securing the future” it says that the Bundeswehr must, among other things, “participate more strongly in innovation outside its own R&T [research and technology]” and, to this end, also “approach” new innovation drivers such as start-ups and the entire digital economy“ and “provide funds also for explorative, disruptive research”. In addition, “the development of an agency or society which acts as an interface to innovation actors and, if necessary, also controls funds for participation in studies or start-ups in key technologies” must be supported, because “today's challenges in the areas of cyberspace, information space and digitalization, autonomous systems and hybridization [demand] the further development and extension of the classical R&T approach with own resources: Many forward-looking technological sources of innovation increasingly exist outside the defense sector. Innovation is less linear, but increasingly disruptive and exponential. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence have many applications that not only need to be planned, but also developed exploratively” (White Paper 2016, pp. 131-132).

AI is explicitly mentioned in the Weißbuch merely in this passage, but some of the challenges of AI outlined above are implicitly addressed elsewhere (White Paper 2016, pp. 36-37), in particular the observation that “not only the quantity, in particular the quality of the threat, has changed noticeably”, for example due to the “technical development from simple viruses to complex, difficult to detect attacks”, due to the “easy and cheap access to software with high damage potential”, which is also possible for terrorist or criminal organizations, groups or individual perpetrators, and due to the possibility of “high-value attacks”, which are “tailor-made for the respective target system”. In addition to cyber-attacks on critical infrastructures, the “use of digital communication to influence public opinion [...] as an element of hybrid warfare” is of central importance as a “special challenge for open and pluralistic societies”. In addition, the new “Konzeption der Bundeswehr” (KdB) (“Bundeswehr Concept”), issued in July 2018, can be used to assess the official “AI

awareness” in the Federal Ministry of Defense (BMVg). The KdB addresses “Artificial Intelligence” explicitly only once, as an example of “innovative paths and approaches” or “instruments and methods for the acquisition, bundling, analysis and evaluation” of findings that are to be used for early crisis detection, information acquisition and information management (KdB 2018, p. 49). The KdB then emphasises the “outstanding importance” of the “potential of unmanned systems and their deployment perspectives from the point of view of capability development”, which is why “further military research, development and use of unmanned systems must be intensively investigated and implemented, should it be promising” (KdB 2018, p. 49). And in May 2018, the Federal Minister of Defense talks about the risks of AI, addressing hostile “deployments of drone swarms against civilian targets”, “cyber-attacks against critical infrastructure” and other “hybrid new threats” to which the German Army must adapt (Leyen 2018, p. 9). At the same time, she also calls for a decisive improvement in forecasting techniques in the area of early crisis detection using AI supported infrastructure (Leyen 2018, p. 13).

Against the background of this assessment, important steps have already been taken by the German Federal Government. These include in particular the establishment of the “Organisationsbereich Cyber- und Informationsraum” (CIR) (“Cyber and Information Space”) within the Federal Armed Forces (KdB 2018, pp. 43-44, 74) and the establishment of the “Cyber Innovation Hub” (CIH), both in 2017. According to the Weißbuch, the CIH should proactively approach new innovation drivers in the digital field outside the defense sector – and thus, in the Federal Minister’s words, fulfil the function of “treasure hunters”, “who go out to search the eco-system of start-ups for the technologies or start-ups that might be of interest to us in the long run. This means that we don’t wait until this has turned into an important company that comes to us with an offer, but go out early and look for the relevant players who might one day be the right ones for us” (Leyen 2018, p. 14). Another important step is the establishment of the “Agentur für Innovation in der Cybersicherheit” (“Agency for Innovation in Cyber Security”) in the area of responsibility of the BMVg and the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), which was approved

by the Federal Cabinet in August 2018. Its aim is the promotion and financing of highly innovative research in the area of cyber security and related key technologies (Spiegel Online 2018, 29. August) and thus, according to the Federal Minister of Defense, “should actually develop the basic principle of DARPA here, too” (Leyen 2018, p. 14). It may be argued that, compared to the annual budget of 3 billion US Dollar DARPA has at its disposal, a five-year budget of 200 million Euro is modest in order to achieve the Agency’s declared objective of taking “the lead, or at least a leading position, internationally in the field of cyber security” (Spiegel Online 2018, 29 August). But it is a move in the right direction to stay in touch with the most advanced international research in the field of AI. Still, the question remains, if developments in Germany are fast enough to keep pace with international developments.

NSA head Mike Rogers recently described the significance that AI will have in the future as “foundational”: “It’s not the if, it’s only the when to me” (Brundage et al. 2018, p. 32). The fact that the awareness of the problem is already present among security policy experts and those responsible in Germany is reflected in assessments of the former State Secretary in the BMVg, Katrin Suder, recently expressed in an interview, which lend more depth to the selective mentions of AI in the Weißbuch and the KdB. Suder talks about the increasing vulnerability of both military and civil infrastructure as a result of digitalization, the resulting importance of cyber security and the “question of what role AI plays in this. AI can be used, for example, as a tool to drive cyber-attacks or to defend oneself against them. AI can recognize cyber-attack patterns, and whoever manages to develop the best AI has a defense or even attack advantage. That’s why AI plays such an important role in security policy – like any technology, it’s all about dominance. We are in the middle of a global competition, especially between the USA and China” (Suder 2018, p. 17). AI “definitely has the potential to change the entire dynamics of cyberspace. It’s an ability that can produce superior effects. Thus it is about the core of security”, also beyond the area of digital security with regard to the effects on physical reality (Suder 2018, p. 18), from asymmetric and hybrid threats to critical infrastructures and the

chances of using AI systems for early crisis detection and battlefield reconnaissance to the advantages of using autonomous weapon systems for missile defense – and the ethical problems of their use against humans (Suder 2018, pp. 16–19). With regard to the last point, the topic of “killer robots”, the negative attitude of the Federal Government is clear and Germany is committed to more international regulation in the field, but “what other countries will make is – unfortunately – not under our control” (Suder 2018, p. 16).

A conference held in August 2018 at the Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr (FüAkBw), the Military Academy of the German Armed Forces, under the title “Artificial Intelligence – Opportunity and Challenge” is a good example of how the topic of AI has reached the inner circle of German security policy experts and decision-makers, who, however, also complained that compared to other nations that “already use Artificial Intelligence and have implemented concepts, Germany with a lack of a robust AI strategy has so far lagged behind this development trend” (Hoffmann and Scheffler 2018). In the same month, on the occasion of the first meeting of the Digital Council of the Federal Government, the Chancellor announced that the government now wanted to “develop a strategy for Artificial Intelligence” (Spiegel Online 2018, August 21). In view of the security policy challenges posed by AI and how they are dealt with in Germany, this is symptomatic both regarding problem awareness and conceptual knowledge existing among the relevant (political) actors and experts and of the deficits and backlogs in implementation in this area, which, as outlined above, have recently been made up for. Whether this is sufficient, however, to keep up with international competitors – or even to achieve the ambitious goal of a leading position in this field – is doubted by some experts.

In addition to expert knowledge on the one hand and the will to implement changes on the other, the question of public awareness of the opportunities and risks of AI brings into play a third factor, which itself is a challenge for security policy. A liberal democracy can only adequately adjust to the digital, physical and political security dangers posed by AI, if the democratic public is aware of them. And only on the basis of a broad

social discourse is it possible to expect insights into the necessity of defense measures to counter these threats. It is difficult to determine whether Germany has an adequate public AI awareness. Some indications, such as the conferment of the “Big Brother Award” in May 2017 to the Federal Minister of Defense for the establishment of the CIR unit on the grounds that the German Army is “opening up” a new battlefield and “declaring” cyberspace a “war zone” (Gössner 2017), speak against it.

If security policy in a liberal democracy requires social support and public dialogue not only for reasons of legitimacy, but also to ensure that it can be implemented and to improve its quality (Jacobi and Hellmann 2018), then the relevant actors and institutions must make an active contribution to attracting public support also in the area of cyber and AI security and to raise awareness of the dangers that liberal democracy has to prepare itself for in this area, so that it can adapt adequately to them. However, the “security-communicative vulnerability paradox” is in effect here: “The more openly a society communicates about its vulnerability, the more vulnerable it can become”. Because on the one hand this can lead to a sense of insecurity within the population that is detrimental to social resilience and potentially destabilizes the political and societal order, and on the other hand, because enemies can draw their “own strategic conclusions” from open “risk communication” (Münkler and Wassermann 2012, p. 17). The unforgettable words of former Federal Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizière at a press conference on the occasion of an allegedly thwarted terrorist attack, that he could no longer inform the public about its background because it would lead to insecurity, are a telling example of how not to communicate with the public in this sensitive field. But they are also an example of how difficult it is to find the right balance here, also with regard to the normative transparency expectations of the democratic public sphere – and this under conditions of a fragmented public sphere (Jacobi and Hellmann 2018), which is increasingly susceptible to “fake news” and other manipulations due to filter bubble and echo chamber effects, but also to hybrid attacks exploiting these, in which the possibilities to abuse AI discussed above also play a role – and will probably do so even more in the future. The

strengthening of social resilience to cope with the dangers and risks emerging from AI by promotion of appropriate public awareness is therefore a serious challenge for future security policy.

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## 13. WHY EUROPE NEEDS A PEACE CORPS - AND WHY GERMANY SHOULD FIGHT FOR IT. A POLEMIC

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Stefan Braun

**Abstract:**

*For decades Europe has enjoyed a special luxury: It was able to make itself extremely comfortable under the political and military umbrella of the United States. But the times are over. And this raises the question for Europeans as to what they want to be and what role they want to play in a world that has become increasingly fragile, heterogeneous and even more dangerous. Proposals and decisions on military cooperation between Europeans have been around for a long time. The idea of a European peace corps, however, in which soldiers and civilians, police and medical officers and development aid workers act under one flag, has not yet been discussed. This article examines the question of why such a peace corps could be useful and why it should be created.*

Europe should thank Donald Trump. This may sound absurd given his verbal provocations and poisonous attacks. But the incumbent US President makes it clearer than ever to Europe and Germany that the extremely comfortable times under the protection of the United States are over. His radicalism can hardly be surpassed; his threats against European partners and his “NATO-is-not-so-important-for-me-anymore” should jerk even the last one out of the twilight sleep that made life easy for Europeans. America offers the greatest protection, America provides the most weapons and soldiers, America takes care of the major crises - all this was comfortable for decades and will be over in the not so distant future. Not in one step, not necessarily as radical as Donald Trump usually sounds. But the consequence remains the same: Europe and Germany must take care of themselves.

The new world with its cracks and conflicts forces the Europeans (and thus also us Germans) to clarify the question of who we want to be in the future. First and foremost, it is a question of our own self-conception. It is about the questions of how much democracy, how much solidarity, how much cosmopolitanism, how much economic freedom the states in Europe want to live and embody. These are questions that are controversial in both the EU and Germany - and will therefore require a great deal of effort to answer them.

But there is also the even more complicated question of what role the EU wants to play in the world. In a world that will at least for the foreseeable future be shaped by Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other authoritarian state leaders. Democracy is not on the rise, it is in distress. And the number of crises and conflicts that endanger entire regions is not decreasing but rising dramatically.

Does Europe want to hide in this new world? Or does it want to help shape the world? Does it want to stand on the sidelines or fight for liberalism and multilateralism? Above all, however, does it want to leave the major challenges such as refugee movements, civil wars and climate hazards to others or set a good example?

These questions have been discussed in expert circles for some time now. But to this day only a small minority is really pushing them forward comprehensively. Yes, the Bundeswehr has been deployed to many of the world's hot spots for years. And German development cooperation is active and highly regarded in numerous countries of the Second and Third World. But this does not follow a conclusive and comprehensive concept and has repeatedly and increasingly been the reaction to current emergencies. The operations in Afghanistan, off the coast of Lebanon, in Djibouti or in Mali - they all have one common characteristic: They are the spontaneous response to calls for help from partners; and they were all designed without an overall strategic concept.

Sometimes this takes place under the umbrella of NATO, sometimes under that of the United Nations, and perhaps soon under the umbrella of a coalition of the willing who have agreed on a common goal. In a world that is changing so rapidly, this development is not wrong per se - but it has to be explained. And one question arises with every further mission: What are we doing here? Who do we want to be? And what about all this fits in with our understanding of a liberal, democratic, cosmopolitan Europe?

For this reason, this short polemic formulates the idea of a European peace corps, which historian Herfried Münkler first introduced into the debate in November 2017. Such a peace corps could be made up of soldiers and development aid workers, police officers, administrative experts and medical experts, all of whom, under one flag, embody the basic security concept of Europe. In order to understand this plea, however, it is necessary to remember what failures preceded the idea.

Failures of the government as a whole, which far too rarely speaks openly and publicly about the changed world and its consequences for Germany; failures of the responsible ministries, which to this day are more concerned with their own interests than actually drafting a common strategy. And omissions by political parties which, for fear of being punished by the electorate, have never attempted to convince a broad public of the necessity and sense of greater German involvement in the world. The

emptiness in the last election campaign is sad proof of this.

Now, informed observers could argue that the Chancellor, the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Defense had spoken out clearly. In particular, Angela Merkel did so after the G7 summit in Italy in early summer 2017, when she appeared in a public gathering in Munich and declared: "We Europeans really must take our fate into our own hands." The sentence was clear: It could have been the beginning of a great debate and educational work. But as strong as this sentence would have been as a heading for such a process - the extensive debate did not take place until autumn 2018. Merkel did not even consider a government declaration necessary. Not to mention a cabinet retreat in which the whole government alone would deal with the question of what the changed world will actually and really mean for Germany and Europe.

Nevertheless, it can be argued (and this is exactly how the Chancellor has treated the matter so far) that the Foreign Minister, the Defense Minister and the Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development are responsible. And it can be stated that Heiko Maas quite often states that there is no better answer to Trump's "America first" than a very decisive "Europe united". One can point out that Ursula von der Leyen has been stressing for months that the Bundeswehr needs more money now at the latest. And one can remember Gerd Müller's words, who never hesitates to promote his Marshall Plan With Africa.

But although all this is true and all three are formally doing what their task as ministers is - the German government remains attached to old ways of thinking. Foreign and security policy are still thought separately instead of being linked. The interests of the ministries remain the interests of the ministries and do not converge. And the understandable, but politically devastating jealousy and vanity factor fuels competition and demarcation instead of giving oneself a comprehensive common concept.

The lines of conflict described are no pettinesses, but a serious problem when it comes to raising awareness, not only among experts, of a dramat-



ically changed world. As long as there is no debate about the new, more dangerous, more desolidarized world, any broader support for more foreign policy engagement will remain fragile. And this at a time when international cooperation and the reliability of multilateral agreements are being massively questioned. For no other industrialized country is this as dangerous as it is for Germany; an exporting nation like Germany owes its wealth precisely to the reliability of agreements, treaties and international rules.

This development has given rise to the idea of a European peace corps. As an internal message, based on the motto: We want to promote security, stability and development. And as a signal to the outside world, in the sense of: Europe offering not just soldiers but comprehensive assistance in crises and conflicts.

In this context, the idea of a peace corps could help to overcome previous blockades. And it could counter the widespread speechlessness with new imagination and a desire to shape the future. In essence, it is a question of a common European force that is deliberately given a broader mission and a more comprehensive composition than previous military cooperations. The point is no longer to view the military, economic, police and humanitarian aspects of foreign policy separately. It is about the idea of consciously dovetailing the military with the civil, the humanitarian and the legal questions in order to make it recognizable and tangible to everyone that this Europe does not want to be a purely military intervention power – and that its commitment will always consider and support stabilizing civil society, the police and the economy.

To this day, barriers, borders and impossibilities in this area dominate thinking. This starts with the fact that development aid workers have always vehemently opposed wearing uniforms because they fear that they are being mistaken for soldiers and thus for enemies. At the same time, there are still too many soldiers who are convinced that they are the most important in difficult stabilization and pacification missions - and that all the others will at best join them afterwards. And that's not all - even the self-image of many diplomats has changed very little to this

day. They also believe that they are the most important players - and that others are far from having the wisdom and tactics to act successfully in conflicts.

Nowhere else can this be better studied than in Afghanistan. Yes, the cooperation between the military, development aid workers and diplomats has improved over time, but no, they were not able to overcome mistrust and disagreement – and they don't find a common ground in the fight against terrorism. Few has changed in terms of distance and separate strategy and planning. And this despite the fact that the so-called "comprehensive approach" to foreign and security policy has existed for a long time. It is at least as old as Germany's engagement in the Hindukush, when the pressure for cooperation between the military and civilians became undeniable.

But the fact is that this requires a new structure of its own. A structure that embodies its own self-image – with soldiers and paramedics, with development aid workers and administrative officials, with constitutional lawyers and policemen who do not only cooperate during a mission, but also act under one roof, one name and one uniform. Such a proposal has only been vaguely envisaged in intellectual circles. Yet that is exactly what the debate could change, especially in Germany.

If international missions of Europeans were to take place under a European label like this, the strong focus on the military would be replaced by a more comprehensive focus on the needs of a country, a region, a situation. That would, in short, bring the Europeans' image closer to their own self-image; it would make Europe more credible in its commitment to democracy and multilateralism. It would dramatically increase the chance that European operations would be able to make the differences between European engagement and American military intervention clear. At least as long as the Europeans do not want to be a substitute for the Americans (or the Russians) in the face of more international responsibility.

A joint peace corps of the Germans, the French, the Benelux states and the Scandinavians as a nucleus of a coming peace corps would therefore

carry a different message than just a military one. Europe as a continent and responsible community of states, that consciously wants to be more than an army of soldiers – that would be the best way of establishing a new image of Europe.

Of course, European military cooperation has long existed beyond NATO, especially the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). And there is an organizational concretization called PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), with the aim of accelerating and improving cooperation. But neither can replace the political power a European peace corps would radiate, because it would not only connect itself to a civilian component, but integrate it firmly; and because it would underline the fact that Europe wants to give itself a new, a special, an extraordinary face in this sensitive and important field.

Yes, there are concerns: Too expensive! Culturally impossible! Takes too long! You can't, because you will never bring such different ideas and people together under one roof! All these concerns are justified. But they are no reason to let the chance go.

There is no question that if France, Germany and some other EU states should come up with such an idea in order to establish a structure for international crisis operations of all kinds, it would be expensive. But, after all, every international engagement in upcoming years will be expensive. Even without such an integrated peace corps, Europe would have to spend a lot of money on precisely these tasks. Especially at a time when the US have become unpredictable and the world is under increasing threat.

Money is therefore not a convincing argument. Whether Europe wants it or not, climate crises and refugee catastrophes, water conflicts and ethnic wars will force the continent to take action all by itself. It can only be an advantage to prepare early and wisely for such complex missions with everything you need.

Is it culturally impossible because the distance between soldiers and aid workers are still too great today? Practical reason could help here in a special way. Above all, a common approach and

mission could help the soldiers enormously, especially in debates in Germany, whose population is highly sensitive for good reasons and is usually highly critical towards military missions abroad.

Even today, many Bundeswehr soldiers perform more than just military tasks in numerous missions. Nevertheless, in many discussions in Germany they are not defended, not supported, not praised for these much more far-reaching efforts, because hardly anyone knows how much they contribute, for example, to stabilizing a country and maintaining order. If the German public and the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag would discuss and decide in a broader sense on the benefits of a mission, this could bring the soldiers out of their isolation, which many soldiers perceive as dramatic.

And the development aid workers? The policemen, the administrative experts? It is quite possible that they, too, would initially defend themselves because they simply could not imagine something like this. On closer inspection, however, this also seems absurd. If you look, for example, at the officials, policemen and experts who in recent years have travelled through the crisis regions of the world via the Centre for International Peace Operations (ZIF), then there are probably very few who have not had to deal with supporting military personnel in one way or another. As great as the distance in principle may be, they have cooperated pragmatically when reason has dictated it.

So, is such a peace corps coming? It would be nice, but it remains unlikely. However, it was Foreign Minister Heiko Maas who, at the latest Ambassadors' Conference, came up with an idea that comes close to this. Maas spoke of a civilian "European stabilization corps". This should strengthen the civilian side of the common security and defense policy. In doing so, the Foreign Minister sticks to the separation between the military and the civil - and at the same time makes it clear that the Europeans should nevertheless increasingly think it together. And in order to prevent this idea from coming up and then disappearing again, he announced the establishment of a competence centre for civilian crisis

management. This can be read as a final separation - or as an introduction to ever closer integration.

Shortly before, Maas had complained that Germany had been in a “discursive vegetative state” for decades regarding the debate on its foreign policy. The idea of a stabilization corps shows that he wants to overcome this vigilant coma.



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## 14. STRATEGIC THINKING, PLANNING, AND CULTURE IN GERMANY AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF EUROPEAN SECURITY POLICY

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James D. Bindenagel  
& Simone Becker

**Abstract:**

*In the face of geopolitical upheavals and rifts, Germany's and Europe's "new responsibility" is currently on everyone's lips. The EU will only be able to protect its values and principles using an integrative group leadership approach. This commentary argues that, in order to allow for the EU to take part in reshaping the transforming global order, Germany as the union's biggest member state first needs to develop its long-term strategic planning capabilities. It identifies the lack of a strategic culture in Germany and the missing public debate about goals, priorities, and guiding principles of foreign and security policy as a central weakness of Germany's geopolitical reorientation. The commentary calls for Germany to initiate a long-term strategic planning process alongside its European partners and proposes the introduction of a Council for Strategic Foresight to encourage a more informed public debate and promote a culture of strategic thinking.*

Germany is currently standing at an inflection point in foreign policy. For one, the tectonic external power shifts are starting to have tangible effects on Germany and the rest of Europe. Numerous crises, rifts, and the disintegration of long-standing international structures are increasingly affecting traditional cornerstones of German foreign policy. The United States with its European allies established a global order in the wake of World War II that has served as the vital framework for German foreign policy for the last decades. That order is beginning to show signs of distress. Second, these changes are currently leading Germany to a tipping point in foreign policy: As external conditions are changing, Germany is also confronted with a looming change in its foreign policy DNA. The question of Germany's foreign policy reorientation is debated with increasing urgency in political and academic circles, and simultaneously still met with considerable resistance in the German public: What responsibilities should Germany assume in this changing global environment, and on what principles, goals, and guidelines should this new role be based? As one of Europe's biggest and most powerful states, Germany's stance on foreign policy is of vital importance to the EU's shared foreign policy and must be viewed within the European context. Meanwhile, when discussing Germany's evolving role in international politics, there is one factor of particular importance that urgently needs attention: The state Germany's strategic thinking capabilities in terms of its overall strategic culture and its engagement in strategic foresight.

### 1 Recalibrating Germany's Foreign Policy Role

Germany's foreign and security policy is based in the German constitution, the Basic Law, and rests on the two pillars of democracy and human rights. According to the Basic Law, German policy shall be "inspired by the determination to serve the pursuit of world peace as an equal partner in a united Europe" (Preamble of the German Basic Law). The Basic Law also obligates all state authority to the "respect and protection

of human dignity" (Article 1). These constitutional principles, anchored in the lessons from Germany's past and in its commitment to seeking a better future, have shaped Germany's role on the global stage. Since the end of World War II, Germany's role has been characterized by two major principles: pronounced restraint, captured in its pledge that never again war will emanate from German soil, and a firm commitment to multilateral cooperation, treaties, and international institutions, combined with a commitment to lead in partnership, not unilaterally.

The 1990 Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany (known as the 2+4 Agreement) restored full sovereignty for united Germany. The country has since balanced its growing economic and political weight with its reluctance to return to past claims to power: As one of Europe's economic heavyweights, it has become increasingly difficult to stay out of international conflicts and challenges. However, the country firmly rejected renewed power projections and has, since its unification, assumed a role as a "Zivilmacht," or civilian power, as coined by Hanns W. Maull (2007). Resting on the premise of an increasingly interdependent global system that prompts states to establish reliable institutions and internationally recognized norms, a civilian power as defined by Maull is committed to contributing to a stable and rule-based international order. It does so by strengthening internationally recognized standards, cooperation, and multilateral institutions instead of engaging in power politics and military intervention, striving to replace the concept of *politics by force* with the concept of *politics by legitimacy*. These core elements have shaped Germany's political identity and its foreign policy with its strong emphasis on peacemaking, democracy, and human rights over the last few decades. More recently, these same pillars of German political identity have remained crucial in Germany's reorientation towards more global engagement. The underlying principles of German foreign policy engagement help explain Germany's current efforts to recalibrate its role in foreign policy – and the challenges it faces in doing so.

Russia's breach of international law by invading Ukraine and annexing Crimea continued fighting in Eastern Ukraine, as well as the ongoing flow of

refugees from Syria and Iraq to Europe, make it increasingly clear that Germany and Europe do not live in blissful isolation of world events. Meanwhile, the United States is retreating from its role as the primary guardian of the order it created after WWII. China's One Belt, One Road Initiative, Russia's open challenge to the existing global order, and the unpredictability of the current U.S. administration's foreign policy make it clear that the traditional benchmarks of German and European foreign policy are shifting. Recognizing these changing realities, leading officials in Germany have begun to accept more responsibility. Germany is coming to terms with its historically-determined limitations and the growing requirements of today's foreign policy demands. Germany is slowly starting to assume more responsibility on the global stage. Since Trump's election, some have even suggested that Germany might become the new "leader of the free world." However, the truth is that these notions go too far. For one, such analysis misjudges Germany's geopolitical leverage and the restrictions that arise from the country's strategic culture. Secondly, Germany's relevance as a foreign policy actor is dependent on Europe, specifically on the European Union. Even if the country manages to overcome its strategic culture deficits, it can only take part in shaping the emerging world order as a part of Europe.

In the process of recalibrating its foreign policy, Germany has assumed a new role as a "leader in partnership" with other countries: Germany remains firmly opposed to any form of renewed unilateralism. It exercises its full national sovereignty but in a sovereign obligation to the EU. It deploys Bundeswehr soldiers only in alliance with NATO or the United Nations and with a parliamentary mandate. Deeply ingrained in the political culture is the commitment to Europe found in the preamble of the Basic Law. Germany's current approach to foreign policy constitutes a model of multilateral leadership that is guided by principles of rules-based cooperation, integration, and multilateral institutions, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, recently emphasized again during a speech in Tokyo in July 2018 (Maas 2018). In many ways, Berlin's current approach to foreign policy is the opposite of Donald Trump's nationalist, antagonistic understanding of foreign policy that has

resulted in his “Make America Great Again” policy.

For Germany, the European Union plays a central role: German and European foreign and security policy are deeply intertwined. As former Minister for Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier concluded in his 2016 review, the Federal Republic’s international role can only emerge “through a global Europe,” and more specifically through the wider framework of the European Union which turns Germany’s economic power into “a strategic and political asset – or liability” (Garton Ash 2017, p. 13). Changing global realities or not, the German Basic Law commits Germany to peaceful cooperation, which remains at the heart of German foreign policy.

## 2 Reluctance, Strategy, and Foresight

So much for Theory. In practice, however, Germany’s foreign policy stands in stark contrast to any declaration of wanting to assume leadership and providing “early, firm and substantial impulses,” as the current White Paper from 2016 states (White Paper 2016, p. 22). Germany remains, for the most part, firmly settled in a strategic culture that lacks the kind of clear goals and strategic thinking that are needed to fulfill these demands. The prevailing strategic culture is still reluctant, shies away from leadership and avoids compromises in morally ambiguous situations where there is no easy way out – the kind of moral ambivalence that is characteristic of foreign policy. Instead, Germany often tends to opt for non-action. The critical issue is that Germany lacks a clear strategic vision, firm guidelines for political action, and strategic foresight as a basis for a shared strategy with its partners. What’s more, the lack of coordination between ministries and departments that are a result of the German “Ressortprinzip” significantly hinders long-term thinking guided by an overarching strategy.

The debate (or complete lack thereof) about possible German military involvement in Syria in late summer 2018 was a vivid example of this. If

after Assad allegedly used chemical weapons on his populations again, would Germany intervene militarily? The SPD immediately rejected any German involvement. Now, the point here is not whether Germany should or should not have participated in this future mission. SPD-Vize Chairman Rolf Mützenich submitted very valid reasons against military strikes (Mützenich 2018). However, the premature decision precluded any thorough evaluation of the issue and came without internal coordination among the governing parties. International partners were not consulted. Nor was a thorough strategic debate conducted, completely disregarding the long-term strategic consequences of hastily publishing such a conclusion.<sup>1</sup>

Given the long history of a similarly reluctant positioning, it is precisely this lack of coordination and strategic thinking that leaves Germany’s allies disillusioned about its strategic policies. Its partners seem to be taking Merkel’s “We Europeans need to take our fate into our own hands” as little more than a lip service without real consequences, as a commentary from Bittner et al. recently diagnosed. In Paris, for instance, Germany is largely viewed as “hiding behind France” (Bittner et al. 2019). Four years after high-ranking German politicians first announced their intention to shift gears at the MSC 2014, the German government is adhering to crisis management in old patterns: When push comes to shove, Germany often remains on the sidelines, leaving the heavy lifting to others.

This reluctant leadership is partly due to constitutional restrictions. Furthermore, decision-makers often cite the German Bundeswehr’s insufficient capacities as the reason for staying out of armed conflicts. However, the German problem goes way beyond these issues. Europe’s most significant and economically most robust country does not have a strategic approach to foreign and security policy. In Germany, the lack of strategic thinking, the missing public debate about security issues and the country’s historical resistance against an excess of foreign policy engagement are all closely interlinked (Bittner et al 2019). The Körber Stiftung recently contrasted

<sup>1</sup> For further reference on this debate, see also Jan Techau 2018: “Das vorschnelle Nein. Warum die

übereilte Festlegung gegen eine Militärintervention in Syrien außenpolitisch schadet.”

calls for greater German engagement with the German public's opinion about greater involvement: 52% of Germans prefer international restraint over increased participation, a value similar to past years (Körber Stiftung 2017, p.3). For the most part, Germans remain deeply skeptical of all issues related to international engagement, security, and the identification of national interests. Assessing Germany's current role in the world, Timothy Garton Ash concluded that "there has been no historical caesura since 3 October 1990 large enough to justify talking about a 'new' Germany" (Garton Ash 2017, p. 12).

The German culture of remembrance with its vivid memory of German history from National Socialism and the Holocaust to East German communism must act as a restraint on German foreign policy excess, but not as an obstacle to action. It is neither possible nor advisable to draw a line under Germany's history and move forward without looking back. The current global disorder raises the question whether it is possible for Germany, after a Hegelian-like transition from a militaristic dominance to a civil power's inaction, to find an acceptable balance between the two. Using its devastating historical experience as a justification not to act in the present is becoming increasingly dangerous and is starting to wear on Germany's allies. The German foreign policy problem is how to seek and build an overall stable, reliable and predictable global framework. The political leadership hesitates to engage in a more strategic approach to future challenges and explore the full range of possible scenarios that might unfold. Particularly now that Washington is retreating from its role as Europe's primary security guarantee and closest ally, the vision of stability reveals itself as hope or wishful thinking. Although hope dies last, Germany is indeed debating its international responsibility and is showing significantly more presence in regional conflicts, but still is a reluctant leader. To live up to its objectives, Germany will have to implement change. Europe's most powerful country will have to rethink its approach to foreign policy: Germany needs to overcome its strategic deficits and establish a broad public debate about security, foreign policy, goals, and guidelines. While remaining rooted in the principles laid out in the Basic Law, Germany, well positioned in the center of Eu-

rope, can initiate a broad, informed strategic debate about current and future challenges in foreign and security policy through strategic thinking.

### 3 Strategic Foresight and the 2016 White Paper

First and foremost, it is necessary to distinguish between predictions of the future on one hand and strategic foresight on the other. Unlike Germany's Economic Council that projects macroeconomic projections, strategic foresight is not designed to make forecasts as it presents scenarios that form a basis for political discourse. Strategic foresight aims to outline various possible scenarios under certain circumstances based on current trends and developments. By carefully evaluating interests, values, and goals and subsequently developing clear guidelines for political action, strategic thinking allows for the development of various courses of action for these possible scenarios.

The crucial characteristic of strategic thinking is the preparation process: It opens space to proactively and considerably shape foreign and policy issues instead of having to resort to purely reactive crisis management. Former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower once said that understanding the difference between plans and planning lays the foundation for effective policy-making: "Plans are worthless, but planning is everything. There is a very great distinction because when you are planning for an emergency, you must start with this one thing: the very definition of 'emergency' is that it is unexpected. Therefore it is not going to happen the way you are planning" (Eisenhower 1957). To engage in strategic thinking means to evaluate objectively current trends and developments and map out a wide range of possible scenarios. Strategic foresight includes a clear understanding of the vital interests, goals, and guidelines for foreign and security policy as well as the development of the essential political elements that are required to realize a strategic vision. These two pillars determine the resources needed to implement the strategy.

The 2016 White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr is an essential step in this direction. It acknowledges the



changing global realities and addresses answers to them. The 2016 White Paper's first ten pages may be seen as a rough draft for a national security strategy. Rarely in the Federal Republic's history, have vital national interests and foreign policy goals been outlined. The interests laid out in 2016 include the protection of Germany's citizens, maintaining the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as that of its partners and allies, upholding the rule-based international order by international law, promoting responsible handling of natural resources, and deepening European integration (White Paper 2016, pp. 24f.). In practice, however, the White Paper is overall more of a plan for crisis management. It has one critical deficit: It fails to explore possible foreign and security policy scenarios and engage in strategic foresight that fully recognizes current trends and potential shifts in the framework within which German foreign policy operates. While acknowledging the upheavals shaking the international system, it nevertheless still assumes a vision of overall geopolitical stability and predictability that is becoming increasingly elusive, especially given Washington's current alignment.

As a result, while the 2016 White Paper does mark a milestone in the development of Germany's strategic culture, more can be done to reach the goal of establishing a broad, informed debate about foreign and security policy. The White Paper already outlines fundamental interests and goals in a relatively precise manner. However, a coherent security strategy needs a clear vision that integrates goals, values, instruments, and priorities. The list of Germany's foreign policy goals is long. It includes supporting France as an equal partner within the EU, deepening cooperation with China, managing Brexit and the resulting fallout, dealing with the consequences of the Trump presidency for the international order, and effectively managing the refugee crisis starting by more effectively addressing the causes of international refugee flows. Instead of trying to resolve these issues on a case-by-case basis, however, Germany's foreign policy efforts need to be guided by an overarching strategy. To reach a strategic planning approach the country first needs to establish a broad and informed public debate about challenges, goals, and possible instruments of German foreign and security policy that will then make it possible to

find political answers to these challenges, underpinned by broad democratic legitimization.

#### 4 German and European Security Strategy

Disruption in the international system and Washington's leadership retreat raise the urgent question what order will emerge next and who will lead it. The United States has questioned its security guarantee for Europe. Although a civilian power relies on a stable global framework within which it can act, the world has become less stable since Germany developed its post-war foreign policy profile.

Moreover, the international order that allowed Germany to focus on its economic growth while keeping a low profile in foreign and security policy is no longer uncontested. Germany vitally depends on the liberal order: Located right in the heart of Europe, with its export-dominated economy deeply reliant on international trade and its preference for a foreign policy based on diplomacy and multilateralism, keeping up a rule-based global order is a matter of quintessential national interest. For Germany, defending the values laid out in the Basic Law will only be achievable by stepping up, and by extensively cooperating with its allies and partners. Germany and most of its partners – particularly the other European powers, but also others such as Japan – are far too small to make the rules for a new international order by themselves. Still, over the last seven decades, the EU has grown into a political union that, as the world second largest economy, holds 22.8% of global economic output and has steadily developed its foreign policy footprint with a common foreign and security policy. What this suggests is that Europe might be able to do more than watch the global upheavals from the sidelines. By pooling their strengths to a greater extent than they have in the past, Germany, the EU, and its partners could become what Heiko Maas recently called “rule shapers,” a coalition of states committed to cooperation and democratic principles who jointly contribute to shaping the framework of global politics and stabilize the international system.

Security concerns and demands differ substantially across Europe. The Baltic States' proximity to Russia, for instance, leads to different security

concerns than those faced by Southern European countries bordering the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, overarching goals and values unite Germany and its partners. These range from maintaining territorial integrity and peace on the European continent to strengthening multilateral institutions and promoting shared European values such as civil rights and liberties, democracy, free trade and the rule of law as guiding principles of international politics. The European Security and Defense package built on the 2016 EU Global Strategy and approved by the European Council in December 2016 already aims to demonstrate heightened European cohesion on the international stage. It also created some urgently needed tools and measures for cooperation in the area of security and defense such as supporting the European Defense Action Plan (EDAP) with new financial instruments for capability development and defense cooperation. However, the EU's underlying strategic vision still needs to be further developed and put on a much broader footing. It does appear that most Europeans agree that their approach to foreign policy and security needs revision and that this requires intensified cooperation. Emmanuel Macron has presented his vision for a reformed European Union to step up to global leadership, suggesting that change might be on the way. However, Europeans will need to become more confident, and more concrete. A vague consensus is not the same as a strategy. This lack of European strategy is becoming an especially urgent issue now that the transatlantic relationship is increasingly strained, weakening one of the main pillars of European foreign and security policy. Trump has reinterpreted the EU as a foe of the United States in trade issues, and he may become a catalyst for the EU to advance further this endeavor of crafting a common strategy. If it does not want to get overrun by the upheavals shaking international politics, Europe will need a fully coherent joint approach to foreign and security policy which is democratically sustained by the European public and underpinned by a clear strategic vision.

German and European security are inextricably linked. Germany can only emerge as a credible foreign policy actor through its role in the European Union. On the other hand, due to its size, location, and economic weight, Germany is also a critical strategic actor for Europe. For the EU to

come up with a coherent strategy, it is paramount that Germany takes a clear stand on foreign policy and security issues. Against this background, the crucial question is this: Will Germany be able to develop a coherent security strategy together with its partners given rapidly changing global conditions? Even though Germany holds a key position in Europe, it cannot and may not impose its will on its European partners. Germany cannot strive to dominate the European Union unilaterally on foreign policy and security issues. A common European security strategy differs substantially from a German one in that regard that it must take other national interests and approaches into consideration as well. Due to Germany's size and weight, it is also nearly impossible to remove Germany from the equation when it comes to establishing an effective joint EU approach to foreign policy. The only way out of this dilemma is to create a broad, open strategic debate about European foreign policy and security with all European partners. If Germany thoroughly evaluates and openly communicates its strategic positions with its partners, an open discussion could help lay the foundation for European policy. For Europe to develop a broad, joint debate on its strategic goals, interests, and guidelines, Germany must develop one too.

### **5 Promoting Public Debate and Engaging in Strategic Foresight: An Independent Council of Experts to Support Strategic Thinking?**

While taking into account all of the debate on strategy, one fact becomes increasingly clear: The Federal Republic as a crucial EU member state needs to overcome the deficits in its strategic culture. Only by laying down clear, concise and coherent positions will Germany be able to effectively contribute to establishing a strong, united EU foreign and security policy. A viable option to overcome the deficits that hinder strategic thinking in German foreign policy would be the introduction of a new element into Germany's strategic culture: a scientific advisory board as an independent body within Germany's foreign policy structures. As recently laid out in detail by James D. Bindenagel and Philip A. Ackermann, an independent council of experts could complement and interlink the White Pa-

per, the responsible ministries and the other actors who are involved in the realization of German foreign policy processes (Bindenagel, Ackermann 2018). As a complement to the work of the SWP (the German Institute for International and Security Affairs), the GIZ (German Society for International Cooperation), and the DIE (German Institute for Development Policy) and others, such an independent board of experts could contribute to a sound foreign and defense strategy. It could be modeled after the German Council of Economic Experts, which publishes an annual report outlining possible scenarios of economic development and reports directly to the government. Accompanied by extensive media coverage, the Council's economic report annually serves as the basis for a broad public debate about the priorities, goals, and instruments of German economic policy. Similarly, a Council of Experts for Strategic Foresight could provide an analytically substantiated report of potential foreign policy and security threats and scenarios, which could serve as a starting point for strategic debates. It might thus help resolve the dilemma of Germany's strategic culture. By mapping out trends and possible developments connected to foreign policy and security issues, a comprehensive security report would provide impulses for a broad, fact-based and informed debate about threats, goals, and guidelines of German foreign policy engagement. As a politically impartial body, a Council of Experts would be neither caught up in inter-ministerial or intra-coalition rivalry nor influenced by political bias, interests, and election campaign trade-offs. The point of such a new body would not be to make forecasts or give political assessments of policy proposals to counter security threats and foreign policy trends. Neither would it compete with democratically elected politicians in policy making, determining priorities, and making political judgments on the burning issues of the day. Instead, it would promote open debate and strategy development at a point where it is still early enough to prepare for various scenarios. This planning process would make it possible to debate and gauge priorities, goals, and possible courses of action as well as their long-term strategic implications based on politically neutral analyses that are not caught up in day-to-day operations. It could also help overcome barriers to a strategic approach that arise from Germany's strict separation of departments and ministries

and the resulting lack of coordination between them by providing an overarching, long-term perspective.

An informed public debate is a foundation for a strategic approach to policymaking. Introducing a Council for Strategic Foresight might help Germany to overcome its reactive, crisis-management style and implement a more strategic approach to dealing with the complexity of today's foreign policy realities by providing an impartial, fact-based basis for discussion. The lessons from Germany's remembrance culture out of the horrific historical experiences need to guide its foreign policy engagement. However, history should not become an obstacle to proper planning, which will ultimately do more harm than good. Planners need to recognize and tackle security issues at an early stage to make possible clear thinking, goal evaluation, cost estimates, and to make informed decisions about possible courses of action. That way, strategic thinking increases the likelihood of upholding values, such as the principles laid out in the German Basic Law, in the long run.

## 6 Conclusion

Democracies are traditionally reluctant to engage in strategic thinking if they are not forced to do so to defend themselves. Given the currently unfolding perfect storm of unraveling world order, far-reaching security challenges, and rising unilateralism, it becomes apparent how urgently Germany and Europe need to develop a broad strategic debate. The growing desire to retreat into nationalist thinking notwithstanding, the world today is deeply interdependent. Institutions and structures for multilateral cooperation that were once needed only to a limited extent are now becoming necessary to confront primary political challenges. Foreign policy and security issues from climate change to international terrorism and global streams of refugees, as well as their underlying causes, can only be solved through global cooperation. Sustaining global institutions and an overarching framework for international collaboration and shaping the newly emerging international order to grapple with today's challenges effectively will require much effort. It is also a question of political survival.

The EU can no longer hide from the fact that the U.S. is retreating from its role as Europe's security guarantor at a time of mounting political challenges. Neither can it ignore the fact that Germany, with its size, location, and economic weight, is a critical strategic actor for Europe. Europe's security is in part dependent on Germany's ability to develop a coherent strategic vision. If Germany and the EU want to meet the arising challenges that the unraveling global system are bringing, Germany needs to initiate a long-term strategic planning process alongside its European partners. Establishing a Council for Strategic Foresight may support this process by promoting a broad, informed strategic debate and ultimately help the EU develop a coherent, more effective global strategy.

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## 15. PREVENTING CRISES, RESOLVING CONFLICTS, BUILDING PEACE

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**Ekkehard Brose**

**Abstract:**

*The double impetus of lessons learned in Afghanistan and growing political pressure due to the increasing number of refugees arriving in Germany led to the drafting of inter-ministerial guidelines in 2017. They focus on three foreign policy objectives: strengthening the coherence of anti-crisis measures; enhancing the range of foreign policy instruments available when dealing with crises; contributing to the ongoing debate about Germany's international role. Implementing these crisis-guidelines in a coherent, pragmatic manner will present a permanent challenge.*

*The guidelines will not only facilitate cooperation between ministries, they also demonstrate commitment to multilateralism, international order and a comprehensive understanding of security.*

The large number of emerging crises in regions bordering Europe calls for a carefully considered plan of action that supplements the White Paper on security policy. The Federal Government has reached agreement on a comprehensive, primarily civil, strategy for addressing crises: the Guidelines *Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace*, which were adopted by the Cabinet in June 2017. As well as serving as a useful frame of reference for cooperation between the Federal Ministries, in the context of current transatlantic uncertainties, the Guidelines have since gained additional significance. They espouse multilateralism; in accordance with Germany's membership in the Security Council from January 2019, they emphasize a growing willingness to take on responsibility for international order; they constitute an implicit rebuttal of any notion that reduces security policy to a debate about percentages. At a time of great challenges, the Guidelines provide strategies for a confident approach to the complex world around us.

### 1 Finding the Opportune Moment

Bad news from abroad dogged the beginning of Foreign Minister Steinmeier's second term in office: in February 2014, Russia's aggression in Crimea; just four months later, ISIS incursion into Iraq; the Ebola epidemic in West Africa; the incessant violence in Syria; finally, and a result of these and other crises, the influx into Germany of up to one million people the following autumn. Foreign Minister Steinmeier sums up the events and prevailing mood: *The time is out of joint*. Political pressure is building.

In fact, there were already plans for dealing with crises and the consequences of fragile statehood, for example the Action Plan *Civil Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Peace-building* of 2004 or the *Inter-Ministerial Guidelines: For a Coherent German Government Policy Towards Fragile States* from 2012. During the course of that year, the planning staff of the Federal Foreign Office had begun systematic scrutiny of the lessons to be drawn from a period of more than ten years deployment in Afghanistan. The experience gleaned from civilian projects designed to stabilize the economic and social environment of the

military presence in the Balkans and in Afghanistan gradually led to a crucial insight: practical projects tailored to the situation in the host country can potentially increase the impact of our foreign policy, particularly during crisis situations. The concept of *Außenpolitik mit Mitteln* (Foreign Policy Supported by Tailor-Made Projects) took shape. This rather modest approach was in tune with the times since the more far-reaching western concept of *nation building* had already lost its appeal in Afghanistan and Iraq. The nascent foreign policy concept was not yet a full-blown strategy, as conditions in 2012/13 still lacked the necessary sense of urgency. The following two years more than made up for this.

At the start of Foreign Minister Steinmeier's second term in office, the planning staff of the Federal Foreign Office commissioned a comparative study of stabilization policies, in view of the numerous crises in Europe's neighboring regions and bearing in mind the new thinking about effective crisis policies. The study was published in March 2014 and focused mainly on the institutional structures in place in the United Kingdom, Canada, the US and the Netherlands for implementing stabilization policies. Exactly a year later, following the "Review 2014", a critical internal review that also invited public comment, "Department S" – as in stabilization – was founded in the Federal Foreign Office. It was only when the concepts that accompanied this step were consolidated in the government Guidelines on stabilization, however, that the formative process within the Federal Foreign Office reached its conclusion. Germany now shared an institutional and conceptual framework with its closest international partners with regards to stabilization.

The Guidelines were developed in a process led by Department S, in close cooperation with the most relevant Ministries: Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ), Defense (BMVg), Interior (BMI) and, under the title *PeaceLab*, in dialogue with interested parties outside government. In the course of several months a comprehensive vision of the values, goals and instruments of crisis policies began to emerge. It is based on existing concepts, various ministerial approaches to crisis management and is in line with the idea of *Außenpolitik mit Mitteln*. The resulting Guidelines successfully passed Cabinet in

June 2017, in one of the last meetings of the legislative period.

In retrospect, it is particularly *PeaceLab* – six months of public debate and vigorous exchange of views with experts in the field – that leaves a lasting impression. Many non-governmental organizations with experience in crisis management were able to make a valuable contribution to the debate with their broad field experience, and to challenge bureaucratic arguments. A successful exercise that lives on in the *PeaceLab Blog*.

## 2 Why Issue Guidelines?

The particular circumstances that gave rise to a strategy do not provide a sufficient answer as to its purpose. When the Guidelines were formulated, the Federal Foreign Office had three particular aims in view: (1) promoting the coherence of crisis management under clear political guidance; (2) strengthening specific foreign policy instruments for dealing with crises; (3) providing a response to questions about Germany's role as a global player.

### 2.1 Modern Security Policy and Civil-Military Cooperation

The authors of the current White Paper on security policy pursued strategic goals both in terms of domestic policy and the international security policy debate. They were inspired by the speeches of Federal President Gauck, Federal Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defense Minister von der Leyen at the Munich Security Conference in 2014, which all agreed that Germany could and should no longer stand on the sidelines of security policy decision-making. The policy sections of the White Paper espouse a comprehensive concept of security and also draw attention to fragile states, the risk of climate change and other non-military factors of (in)security. This approach reflects the reality of the situation. Current crises clearly demonstrate that the use of military, police or civil instruments should not be planned in isolation. An example from Iraq: the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to areas liberated from Da'esh, which constitutes the most important civil stabilization measure, would be unthinkable.

ble without prior clearance of explosive remnants and the provision of secure conditions by local police forces, among others.

There is widespread consensus in military circles that the current complex crises faced by fragile states can rarely be resolved by military means alone. This realization calls for the use of civil measures that are often essential in transforming military achievements into political success. “The long-term stabilization of fragile and failing states require(s) a comprehensive approach that can make a timely and substantial contribution to the mobilization of appropriate foreign, development and security policy instruments in the area of prevention and crisis management” (White Paper 2016, p. 40). With the Guidelines, Germany now has the required comprehensive concept for dealing with crises. The two policy documents are thus not unrelated and certainly not irreconcilable. The political intent is clear: Germany’s involvement in crises “respects the primacy of politics” (Guidelines 2017, p. 57) and the use of military force “remains a last resort for German policy” (Guidelines 2017, p. 58). Military action must always be part of a comprehensive, integrated policy approach and should be accompanied, from the outset, by non-military measures. Taken together, the two policy papers provide a compendium of current German thinking on security policy.

## 2.2 “Außenpolitik mit Mitteln”

The Stabilization Department of the Federal Foreign Office brings together qualified staff and a broad set of instruments of modern foreign and security policy, instruments that are deployed primarily in situations of crisis or violence and are designed to increase the flexibility and impact of foreign policy when it really matters. Examples include mediation, security sector reform, disarmament/demobilization/re-integration of combatants, promotion of the rule of law, strengthening the active role of women in conflict situations, and including provision of basic services in support of IDP return where politically indicated. The Guidelines provide the blueprint. In view of the whole-of-government character of the Guidelines, they evidently also include the specific input and contributions of

other ministries such as transitional development assistance, development cooperation or the role of the police. The Federal Foreign Office placed importance on making a strong case for the concept of stabilization in the Guidelines: support for political processes of conflict resolution and containing violence, using non-military means wherever possible.

The use of policy instruments requires adequate financial resources. In the course of the three years since the creation of the Stabilization Department of the Federal Foreign Office in the spring of 2015, the budget for securing peace and security trebled to almost 2.7 billion Euros, just over 50% of the overall budget of the ministry in 2017. During this time, the relevant budget allocations in other ministries, particularly the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, also recorded increased growth rates. Such rapid expansion not only requires suitably qualified personnel and specific procurement directives but, above all, a clear set of objectives for effective political management. The Guidelines offered a conceptual frame of reference at the right moment.

## 2.3 Germany’s Responsibility as a Global Player

Furthermore, the Guidelines help provide a response to the expectations frequently expressed by the international community that Germany, given its economic strength and political maturity, should take on more responsibility for a system of international order that is increasingly under threat. These expectations have continued to grow since the beginning of the Trump presidency. The German Guidelines and analogous international concepts follow the same paradigm. In April 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Sustaining Peace* resolution; two months later, the EU agreed its *Global Strategy*. Since 2013, a group of countries that have well established instruments in place and are particularly engaged in crisis management, including USA, UK, NL or CAN, together with Germany, make up the so-called *Stabilization Leaders Forum*. Germany gladly supports UN Secretary General António Guterres, an ardent supporter of greater efforts for crisis prevention.

Germany had already demonstrated willingness to take on increased international responsibility during the crisis in Ukraine. It was evident again when Da'esh challenged the international system and legal order in Iraq and Syria during the summer of 2014. Early on, the German government worked to provide the conceptual basis for the *Working Group on Stabilization* in the Anti-IS Coalition and assumed its co-chairmanship. Since May 2015, the German Ambassador to Iraq, together with the Prime Minister's chief of staff also co-chairs the local *Task Force Stabilization*. Germany gained international recognition for its pioneering role that helped ensure military action against Da'esh was closely followed by civilian measures of stabilization. Early reconstruction of basic infrastructure forms the basis for the successful return of two-thirds of Iraqi IDPs – four million people – to areas liberated from Da'esh. Germany's conceptual and political engagement is underpinned by humanitarian aid and stabilization measures up to the value of 1.4 billion Euros since 2014.

### 3 The Guidelines at Work

The history of the Guidelines and their intended function has been outlined above, but little has been said about their true importance in shaping foreign policy. Does the whole-of-government approach work in practice? Do the policies of Security Sector Reform deliver what the Federal Government anticipates? What real contribution does Germany – and does the EU – make to civil crisis prevention? It would be presumptuous to give an unqualified positive answer to all these questions. Crisis management makes great demands on ministries' ability to work together in conditions of uncertainty - conditions that necessitate decisions fraught with risk.

#### 3.1 The Whole-of-Government Approach in Practice

The Guidelines call for a whole-of-government approach in dealing with crises. They were themselves the product of such a process, which highlighted the common ground between the participants. The diversity of the instruments in the Guidelines is a reflection of the obvious complexity of crises and of efforts to identify their root causes. This approach is driven by the conviction that only a broad set of measures, flowing

from a coherent political strategy, can successfully address complex crises in the long term.

In practice, this widely held conviction meets with stumbling blocks. For example, the lack of qualified staff to deal with the labour intensive and sensitive process of building consensus at the national and international levels is often a source of frustration; turf wars between ministries or uncoordinated national initiatives; at times, the lack of clear boundaries between humanitarian challenges, stabilization, security and development which can make the division of labour difficult. The Federal Foreign Office takes the lead in defining overarching (foreign) policy strategy, in other words, defining the framework and direction of government consensus-building in crisis management. *Task Forces* for individual countries or regions in crisis, chaired by the responsible Regional Director from the Federal Foreign Office, serve to implement the whole-of-government approach as well as sessions of the inter-ministerial coordination group under a rotating chairmanship. The German diplomatic missions abroad also have an important role to play in ensuring coherence in policy analysis and communications. Nevertheless, an honest answer to the question posed above would have to concede that the whole-of-government approach has not yet been fully implemented. The most important requirement for further enhancing the common approach would be a substantial degree of political consensus at ministerial level.

The increased role played by the Federal Foreign Office in the area of stabilization policy and its expanding scope of action beyond humanitarian aid, which has traditionally been administered by it, has at times led to considerable tensions between the Federal Foreign Office and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The beginning of the new coalition government, however, inaugurated a new spirit of cooperation between the two ministries precisely on this issue. A clear demarcation of competencies in crises often fails in the face of reality. The Federal Foreign Office tends to focus on instruments for the containment of violence and crisis prevention that require close political supervision. The measures of the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, on the other hand, concentrate on sustainability and



longer-term structural impact. Some inconsistencies and overlaps remain unavoidable. In practice, it will be a question of reaching agreement on a common approach through better coordination between ministries before individual projects are commissioned. On that basis, the responsibility for the (few) remaining contested cases should be settled pragmatically.

### 3.2 Enhancing and Enabling

Within the Chancellery, the idea that the military capacities of important security partners in the Middle East and Africa needed to be strengthened began to take shape in the years 2011/12. The emphasis on assisting and training local security forces was designed to strengthen their military capacity and, at the same time, to ensure democratic control and adherence to the rule of law. The thinking was that reformed security forces would stabilize security from within, obviating the need for direct armed intervention by the West; time and again, such interventions had proved to be problematic, as in Afghanistan or in Iraq in 2003.

When measured against these goals, enhancing and enabling partners' capacity has, in practice, produced mixed results. Nowhere is the cooperation between the Federal Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defense closer than in this area, from reaching agreement on the designated countries to joint administration of the budget, but the quality of the consultation and control mechanisms sometimes falls short of the high aspirations. However, this year's Peace Report (2018) overstates the point; the authors criticize the enhancement and training of Iraqi forces, in view of the shortcomings of democratic control. True enough, but enhancement and enabling will always take place, by definition, in less than ideal conditions. The solution should be firm integration of the enabling measures in an overall political strategy, not evasion of calculated risks.

### 3.3 Crisis Prevention and other Challenges

The logic of taking early action is convincing – in human, political and economic terms. Not only UN Secretary General Guterres and the World Bank, but also the Guidelines of the Federal Government lay down that signs of crisis should be

identified as early as possible and prompt action taken in order to prevent the occurrence of serious crises. There is no shortage of sources of early warning, but in reality the step from *early warning* to *early action* often proves to be a stumbling block. Ongoing, not potential crises dictate the ministerial agenda. The lack of personnel and resources and, at times, a residual lack of sensitivity to this complex topic, hamper a systematic approach to prevention. The German membership in the UN Security Council will provide opportunities to demonstrate the extent of commitment to prevention in a multilateral context. For example: in July 2018, the UN decided to draw down the Peace Mission in Darfur (Sudan), UNAMID, over a period of two years. In parallel, civil stabilization measures are designed to help prevent a relapse into tensions and crisis. Now that the international community has spent a billion USD each year on the military mission, a strong commitment to civil efforts is needed in order to bring the endeavor to a successful close.

A more active role for the EU regarding many of the aspects of crisis management mentioned above appears both politically desirable and necessary. The Federal Foreign Office maintains close contact with the crisis management unit of the EU, PRISM. Initiatives in the right direction have been taken, such as the EU mission to Mopti/Mali. In a speech in Berlin on 13<sup>th</sup> June, Foreign Minister Maas suggested the creation of a European Corps for Stabilization. The creation of a European Centre of Excellence in Berlin for civil crisis management is under discussion. On the European level, there is certainly still much untapped potential. It will soon be needed.

## 4 In Conclusion: A Strategic Approach

Simply adopting the Guidelines does not guarantee that they will be translated into practical policies. Governments and International Organizations and even the UN itself struggle with the problem of implementation. A clear concept, however, can help transform constructive criticism into actual improvements.

Actions in the context of crisis must follow a strategic purpose. In practice, this often appears not to be the case: a multitude of separate projects of different ministries or international actors that

are loosely connected at best, with no apparent *leitmotif*. This leads to criticism, which is in part justified. Yet, the creation of a second level of coordination such as a National Security Council would be no improvement. In both the national and international context, the obvious answer is: a (more) coherent set of goals, effective communication of the political narrative, qualified personnel and consistent teamwork. The Federal Foreign Office is committed to ensuring coherence in foreign policy and is playing this role with dedication, precisely in the context of crisis diplomacy. The necessary instruments of coordination are available; they must now be used constructively in close cooperation with all ministries involved.

Though there may be grounds for criticism, it must be kept in mind that the means available to contain crises have been working beyond capacity for years, whether at the national level, with our partners, or internationally. At the same time, current crises appear to mark the beginning rather than the end of an alarming phase of instability affecting the state system and international order. The World Bank's assessment that in little more than ten years, fifty per cent of the global population will live in states torn by violence and instability points to the sheer scale of the challenges that may still lie ahead. At the same time, political crisis management is clearly not a case of *quick in, quick out*; all parties are in it for the long haul.

The adoption of the Guidelines was noted with interest at the international level. As well as a coherent conceptual basis, Germany has considerable resources at its disposal, ranging from humanitarian aid, prevention, stabilization and development cooperation to police training and military advisory missions. In many conflicts, Germany is regarded as an honest broker whose impartial agenda is focused on stability and peaceful coexistence. What is needed now is the political will to play its part, as Germany did in Ukraine and Iraq.

## References

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## 16. WHY GERMANY HAS TO RELY ON A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC APPROACH FOR ITS FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICIES – NOW MORE THAN EVER

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Ulrich Schlie

### Abstract:

*Consensus building in a parliamentary democracy can only be achieved through extended political debate about national interests, foreign policy objectives and the domestic impact of international responsibilities. Compared with its most important allies and partners, Germany's strategic approach to foreign and security policy continues to be patchy. A stronger emphasis on dialogue about important aspects of foreign policy in the German parliament (Bundestag) will result in an increased awareness of foreign and security policy. This article identifies large stumbling blocks in German politics that impede progress. Set against the background of Germany's foreign policy debate as well as legal and political developments since reunification, this article argues in favor of a coherent national approach. Significant pending decisions about how to adjust key instruments for foreign and security policy – decision-making structures in the Chancellery, the armed forces, the Foreign Ministry and intelligence services – can only be arrived at by concerted action on the part of the German government.*

For a long time, reunified Germany neglected the link between foreign policy and strategy. Only of late have there been increasing calls for an enhancement of Germany's strategic capabilities; for the setting up of a strategy council and a strengthening of strategic thinking (Bindenagel and Ackermann 2018, pp. 253-260). It would, however, be premature to take such statements alone as indications for a more in-depth debate about the basic orientation of Germany's foreign and security policy. Even the 2014 'Munich Consensus' (*Münchener Konsens*), based on the realization that Germany needs to take on greater responsibility in matters of foreign policy, should not be mistaken for a result. The speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck on 31 January 2014 at the Munich Security Conference was certainly carefully prepared, thoughtful and ground-breaking; as such it was not dissimilar to Roman Herzog's famous 'jolt speech' (so called because he called for a jolt (*Ruck*) to go through Germany to electrify the nation and make it receptive for change). Gauck's Munich speech has been quoted incessantly, and there can be no doubt that it helped to spread an understanding of Germany's growing international role. "In future, it won't be enough merely to invoke the tried and tested," Gauck said. "The key question is this: Has Germany become sufficiently aware of the new dangers and the changes that have affected the structure of the international order? Is its reaction appropriate to its weight? Is the Federal Republic of Germany sufficiently proactive in future-proofing this web made up of norms, friends and alliances that, after all, gave us peace in liberty and prosperity in democracy?" (Gauck 2014).

But these were not new insights. As early as March 1995, then-Federal President Roman Herzog had come to similar conclusions in his speech before the German Society for Foreign Affairs (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik*): "In a world newly become confusing, foreign policy requires both the willingness and the ability to learn. We must expand our knowledge unceasingly. We require a quantity of analysis that we do not yet have. These new

chances and risks demand a new know-how of a type that cannot be found in traditional foreign policy alone. There are cases where old answers and old tools no longer apply. We have to source new economic, scientific and cultural ways of producing new understandings. What we need most of all are fresh impulses in our cultural relations. Having become bigger and stronger, we do not automatically gain more sympathy and more friends around the world. Indeed, the opposite can be true. As Germany's decisions have become more far-reaching, our behavior is being observed with proportionally greater interest: so do we need to share information about ourselves and our policies in proportionally greater terms with the world. We need to actively try to boost Germany's popularity abroad. That is a basic prerequisite not only for our foreign policy, but also for economic and trade relations across the globe; it is a task not only for politics and cultural institutions, but also for the German economy which needs to meet the challenge of this global aspiration. We stand at the beginning of a new phase for German foreign affairs – what I have called the globalization of German foreign policy. In Germany we've only started to develop a foreign policy culture" (Herzog 1995).

Almost twenty years lie between those two speeches: two eventful and at times troublesome decades during which German security policy struggled to achieve the targets and aspirations outlined by Roman Herzog. This is especially true for the strategic groundwork, because the insight that a comprehensive strategy for foreign and security policy in Germany is vital has not grown significantly in the past two decades.

The entire history of post-reunification German foreign and security policy could very simply be summarized in three chapter headings: "Increased International Responsibility – Greater Role – Higher Expectations of Alliance Partners." If we wanted a symbol for the resulting changes, it could easily be found in the foreign deployments of the German army, the *Bundeswehr*. The 1990s saw passionate debates about the *Bundeswehr's* out-of-area assignments, earnest discussions about German participation in UN mandated peacekeeping missions under Chapter VI and – according to the Clinton doctrine – an imaginary Chapter VI 1/2 of the UN Charter; heated arguments about the question whether the *Bundeswehr* could ever go to places ravaged by the

*Wehrmacht* in World War II, and, finally, about whether there could be such a thing as a right to humanitarian intervention. The decision to take part in a NATO-led mission without a UN mandate in order to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo was, unsurprisingly, regarded as a decisive turning point. The reasoning now was that the *Bundeswehr* ought to go especially to those places that had been ravaged by the *Wehrmacht* in World War II. History was deployed as an argument by both sides. This, too, is one of the particularities and peculiarities of Germany's foreign and security policy debate.

If we wanted to find milestones of the public debate over foreign and security policy in Germany, one noticeable feature would be that in almost all cases policy decisions came about due to external influences such as international constellations, obligations to allies or pressure from partners. Furthermore, they usually coincided with vigorous debates about how to interpret the legal foundations.

A symptomatic example is the discussion that took place ahead of the Federal Constitutional Court's (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) ruling on 12 July 1994 about *Bundeswehr* out-of-area assignments (*Bundesverfassungsgericht* 1994). At question was the legal conception of an applied practice. It was probably a unique case in the European community of states, in that one part of the government – the parliamentary group of the Liberal Party (*FDP*) headed by the Foreign Minister at the time, Klaus Kinkel – had to take its own government to court in order to achieve clarity over a contentious interpretation. It is significant that the Minister would describe the event, even in his speeches, with the phrase, 'The Federal Constitutional Court has cleared the way.'

If there is a constant feature to Germany's foreign policy debate, it is the referencing and the exploitation of juristic problems. The Commission for the Review and Safeguarding of Parliamentary Rights Regarding Mandates for *Bundeswehr* Missions Abroad (*Kommission zur Überprüfung und Sicherung der Parlamentsrechte bei der Mandatierung von Auslandseinsätzen der Bundeswehr*) was headed by the former Defense Minister Volker Rühle. Its brief was to "examine how parliamentary rights can be safeguarded

against a background of progressing alliance integration and despite a diversity of tasks". The Commission had been established in March 2014 and published its final report in June 2015, but apart from a number of minor practical adaptations and clarified interpretations of the Parliamentary Participation Act (*Parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz*), it failed to achieve a breakthrough in terms of resolving the contradiction between the involvement of parliament and an effective provision of individual military capabilities (Deutscher Bundestag 2015). This was in part due to a self-imposed limitation of its mandate. The commission regarded an "in-depth discussion of the current political and constitutional debate" to lie outside its remit and merely repeated a rather obvious recommendation that the *Bundestag* deliberate "in a suitable procedure the possibility of reforming the constitutional framework for foreign deployments of the *Bundeswehr*". It is true that parliamentary reservation is not necessarily a fundamental obstacle to multinational co-operation and integration; it merely sets an absolute boundary for Germany relinquishing sovereignty in deploying armed forces, and its effect on the political discussion over mandates is both difficult to quantify empirically, and pre-emptively restrictive in view of deployment decisions and the detailed nature of standards regulating the deployment of forces. Its impact on alliance policy is also restrictive in that it can pre-emptively influence the quality of deployment decisions, while the requirement of parliamentary control is regarded as an obstacle to secrecy, too. To this extent, the statement in the report that parliamentary reservation would not constitute an obstacle either to the progressive integration of the alliance or the provision of military capabilities is correct at first glance, but on closer inspection turns out to be debatable, or at least in need of interpretation. The fact that the *Bundestag* in recent years made no use of the possibility of obtaining consent under the 'simplified procedure' anymore should be seen in the same context.

The *Bundeswehr* engagement in Afghanistan in 2001 was ultimately also a foreign policy decision; one that demonstrated alliance solidarity after 9/11 – so far the only case of *casus foederis*

under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty – and that had originally started out as a UN mandate to fight terrorism. Then Defense Minister Peter Struck attempted to provide a retrospective strategic basis to Germany's participation in the Afghan mission by stating, "Our security is being defended not only, but also in the Hindu Kush". This statement caused much debate and was frequently attacked – not least because a single, throwaway sentence said in answer to a journalist's question can hardly be regarded as justification of a strategy (Struck 2004, p.11).<sup>1</sup>

Looking back over the past twenty-five years it becomes obvious that foreign policy debate in Germany was not defined by crucial policy documents in the period since the controversy over NATO's double-track decision. The years between 1994 and 2006 were entirely without white papers and it would take another decade until the German government passed another white paper in 2016 (White Paper 2016). The 2011 Defense Policy Guideline with its triad of aspirations that prefigured the 2014 Munich Consensus ("assume international responsibility, maintain national interests, shape security together") was, however, largely ignored by the media (BMVg 2011). The new term "networked security", introduced by the 2006 white paper, at least provided better co-ordination between Houses in determining policy on Afghanistan; it also made it easier to agree joint political guidelines within the federal government (BMVg 2006). In retrospect, the Afghan mission can be regarded as a pacemaker of security policy in the Noughties.

The strategic debate of this first decade of the current century that probably did most to advance these matters took place in connection with the Afghan mission. Under the aegis of Minister Jung, the term "war-like conditions" entered the Federal government's position on the international law of war; some time later, Minister zu Guttenberg adopted the term "war" to describe operational realities in Afghanistan. It is significant that neither the suspension of conscription to basic military service in 2012 nor the Dresden Decree (BMVg 2012) on the reorientation of the *Bundeswehr* in the same year led

<sup>1</sup> For the genesis of this quote originating in a press conference in 2002, see Siebert 2002.

to a revision of the security policy lead document within the Federal Government.

This can be explained with the disinclination prevalent in the German political community – both in the executive and legislative and among experts – to instrumentalize policy documents for strategic control and to increase public awareness that a comprehensive security policy is needed. And this despite the fact that the case for a need for strategic policy documents and the importance of a strategic debate had already been made by Helmut Schmidt in a number of programmatic publications as far back as the 1960s; a case that remains just as pressing today, because the basic postulate in favor of strategy-oriented action has remained the same. The sentences written by Schmidt, at the time leader of the parliamentary group of the SPD, in the preface to *Strategie des Gleichgewichts* (“Strategy of Balance”) have retained their validity to this day. “With this book I want to make clear and transparent what the scope of German politics is. [...] Ten years ago, during a period of highly emotional debates about foreign policy and defense in the German *Bundestag*, I felt that it was necessary to provoke German politics, the media and also the *Bundeswehr* into taking a rational approach to our security problem.” (Schmidt 1969, p.11) Elsewhere, Schmidt had already emphatically written about the need to permeate foreign policy as well as military and strategic processes in a scientific and methodical manner, describing this as one of the main tasks for German politics. “Today and in future we Germans urgently need to carry out a methodical analysis of the global, the European and our own situations in order to lay the groundwork for our own political and military strategy” (Schmidt 1968, p. i).

This is, in a nutshell, still the valid rationale for the necessity of practicing strategic politics – something Helmut Schmidt did when he presented his second white paper on German security policy in 1970 as ‘the result of the *Bundeswehr* having scrutinized itself in a manner and an intensity not seen before’ (BMVg 1970). Self-scrutiny, however, is not a key strength of today’s *Bundeswehr*. As early as the 1950s, Henry Kissinger had proposed with great penetration and as a matter of course the premise that “an adequate strategic doctrine [was] the

basic requirement of American security” (Kissinger 1957, p. 380). A similar statement would not have been made in Germany (except, perhaps, by Helmut Schmidt and Franz Josef Strauß) – and if it had, it would have been deemed in need of explanation by many.

The contempt in which strategic policy documents are held, or the unwillingness to come to terms with French or British strategic foundations and their impact on Germany, find their equivalent in the absence of debates about those subjects in the *Bundestag*. The only place in Germany where white papers on German security policy and the future of the *Bundeswehr* can be debated is in government statements – if at all. Any other form of parliamentary debate, let alone a vote, is unimaginable; as is the very idea that individual parliamentarians might be involved in creating such documents – something that was a perfectly ordinary part of the French process of drawing up white papers.

Germany also lags behind developments in Canada, Switzerland or Norway in terms of inter-agency thinking. This becomes obvious when we compare it with where Canada was post-2006 in coordinating its activities in Afghanistan, or the state of inter-agency progress in Switzerland. To explain these obvious deficits, it is not enough to point to the “law of nature” of coalition governments, where specialist departments – the foreign ministry, defense, or development – are assigned to the respective parties, who each make sure that agreements are being adhered to and boundaries respected. We better get to the root cause, which has to do with political culture; or to the fact that questions of foreign and security policy are considered less important in terms of career paths in the parliamentary groups represented in the German *Bundestag*; not enough pressure from the professional public; and, not least, leading civil servants failing to be aware of the requirements of an inter-agency approach. Similar problems tend to be encountered by the Federal Intelligence Service (*Bundesnachrichtendienst*), in particular with regard to public appreciation of its work or questions of parliamentary control of its activities. Such are the key peculiarities of the German situation, which will continue to shape the debate on security policy in Germany, and which need to be addressed if one wants to see significant changes.

In Germany as elsewhere, the media and the specialist public regard themselves as duty-bound critical observers of foreign and security policy; they have more than once given important impulses. The national daily and weekly press provides impressive foreign policy coverage that has repeatedly brought individual topics to public attention. But it would be asking too much, and indeed it would misjudge the role of the media as a constant presence and an asker of critical questions, if one were to demand that they play the key part in the formation of an enhanced strategic culture. One should, however, not underestimate the benefits of including them in a dialogue, addressing and consistently making use of them in the understanding of a modern and transparent public discourse strategy: This approach offers unexplored possibilities, even compared on a global basis.

There is unlikely to be any dispute over the recommendation to continue to include the public in the process of producing policy documents – in NATO parlance, the “big tent approach” – and it is therefore also unlikely that any future white paper process in Germany will fail to comply with Defense Minister von der Leyen’s decision on public inclusion in the 2016 white paper process. The fact that, in recent years, Germany’s Federal Academy for Security Policy (Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik) promoted itself as a place of strategic debate and shared understanding of security policy also contributed to broadening public awareness of the importance of security policy. Political science and its neighboring disciplines – contemporary and military history and international law – can also be expected to provide valuable impulses in advancing the discourse on security policy in Germany. The strategic debate in Europe has further been advanced by a number of new and promising think tanks based in Brussels.

But decisive impulses can only come from the executive and the legislative. The media frequently deplore the fact that the *Bundestag* is not a place of strategic debate on foreign and security policy in Germany, but this should not make us forget that Bonn’s *Alter Plenarsaal* and the *Wasserwerk* once hosted pioneering debates about foreign and security policy. But the *Bundestag* has not so far distinguished itself as a source of inspiration for strategic policy documents. Fundamental changes in strategic culture

with a view to exacerbating the necessity for a sufficient strategy rationale cannot be achieved without the involvement of the *Bundestag*. Important impulses could be generated by joint meetings of the Defense and the Foreign Affairs Committees, the annual debate as part of a government declaration by the Federal Chancellor on the state of the nation; or by strategic joint conferences of, for example, the *Bundestag* and the French *Assemblée Nationale*.

Secondly, there is the executive. Why do we in Germany find it so hard to follow the path of a comprehensive strategic approach sketched out for us by Helmut Schmidt? This, again, is related to a number of factors: Germany’s strategic culture; the way future political leaders are recruited; the self-imposed obstacles put in the way of incisive reforms; structural access to questions of foreign and security policy. Looking at the gallery of former Federal Chancellors and Defense and Foreign Ministers since the days of Helmut Schmidt, we can count those who had put dealings with foreign and security policy at the centre of their careers already prior to their appointment on one hand. It would be a different picture in France or the United Kingdom. German generals can exhibit a peculiar dichotomy between their sublime professional self-image on the one hand, and inferiority reflexes towards politics and diplomacy on the other. Both phenomena probably result from a general undervaluing of military service in German society compared with other Western European and transatlantic allies. This is still an after-effect of the deep impact made by the misuse of all things military during the National Socialist period. On the plus side, this rupture caused a consistent rejection of militaristic tendencies. But to this day the military continues to be regarded with a certain suspicion in German society. This disdain finds expression in a variety of ways: sober, unadorned uniforms; a low visibility of anything martial in public space; the treatment of veterans and, finally, the role played by military history and military music in society. The curricula and research priorities of both schools and universities contain no provisions for promoting a comprehensive understanding of diplomacy and military strategy among the next generation. Beyond the questions of arms export policy, the Federal Security Council fulfils no coordinating –

let alone a controlling – function in security policy.

A comprehensive strategic approach would require a joint briefing room, joint instruments for planning and analysis, inter-agency project teams, and exchanges throughout and at all levels. It would be efficacious in strategic positioning in a number of ways. This is due to the invariable impact of a networked approach; the integrated structures within the North Atlantic Alliance; the increasing importance of a coordinated approach among the states; a common security policy within the European Union; and the growing interconnectedness that is the result both of the voluntary surrender of sovereignty to supranational units and a consequence of globalization.

The sufficiency that in Germany there frequently is no incentive and no understanding of the necessity for a strategic approach, no wish to improve the status quo, can be regarded as the current main obstacle. This phenomenon is increasingly at odds with globalization and the technological quantum leaps triggered by it, as well as with the fact that we in our modern, super technological societies, are struggling with growing strategic uncertainties. The need for a more consistent, comprehensive strategic approach will grow in Germany over the coming years. It is going to become a problem for Germany's foreign and security policy to the same extent that structural and mental adjustments to the changing reality will not be made. An intensified dialogue with the public about strategic questions is therefore a *conditio sine qua non* on the road towards a more in-depth strategic understanding. Schools, universities, extra-mural research institutions and the media are all equally called upon, as are *Bundeswehr*, Foreign Intelligence Service and ministry training facilities. In this way, Ortega y Gasset's frequently quoted insight that the way is the goal will achieve a deeper meaning.

One thing is crucial: changes in the area of strategy and the public sphere in Germany will only happen if the structures for foreign and security policy are changed, and if this in turn leads to a real change of consciousness. This holds true for questions of structural organization within the Federal Government, for the relationship between politics and the armed forces, and for the area of parliament and foreign policy. It is particularly true for the role played by the long-term

political orientation in meeting current and future challenges. It presupposes the ability to define and enforce one's own interests; to link up areas and to create budgetary conditions so that the joined-up instruments can be equipped with the resources they will need to achieve their altered goals. The best political conception will be ineffective if the correct strategic analysis is not being put into practice. A long time ago, Helmut Schmidt came to the conclusion that foreign policy, economic policy and, in the classical sense, military strategy need to operate within the same framework. It is to be hoped that one day, this insight will be fully realized in Germany, and that all three areas will be guided by one truly comprehensive concept.

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## 17. A GERMAN STRATEGY OF EMBEDDED EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP. IMPERATIVES AND PITFALLS

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Gunther Hellmann

*Europe is our future. Europe is our destiny. Europe remains a question of war and peace, with everything included: besides peace this is liberty, prosperity and democracy.*

*(Helmut Kohl<sup>1</sup>)*

### Abstract:

*Germany's security and welfare have been built on the country's embedment in a closely knit network of multilateral collaboration in the context of NATO and the European Union. However, the very foundation of this multilateralism is questioned today as never before. This poses particular risks for Germany's embedment in the EU because Germany is increasingly called upon to take over leadership responsibilities also in the military field at a time when its more visible power coincides with a redefinition of the US's role in Europe under President Trump. The article discusses several pitfalls and strategic imperatives, especially the necessity for Germany to enhance the prospects for stable multilateral cooperation in the EU via self-binding.*

Helmut Kohl's European convictions expressed in the introductory quote may not be shared today to the same extent as 30 years ago. However, it is undeniable that "Europe" has, once again, become a "question of war and peace" even though it may remain ambivalent whether "Europe" refers to the geographical continent or the political unit "European Union". The first two sentences seem to include both, the third, however, probably applies more narrowly to the EU, thereby excluding, among others, Russia, Ukraine and Turkey.

There are contexts where the frequently observable *pars pro toto* usage of the term "Europe" or "European" – i.e. the identification of the EU with the continent – should be avoided. This applies in particular to issues to be addressed in this essay. For that reason the slightly irritating notation "EUropean" will be used when I want to clarify that the reference is not the European continent, but the EU. This type of precision is not marginal, especially in an article about "strategy", because the EU can be an "actor" in a manner which can never apply to the continent of "Europe" as a whole.

The strategy which results from convictions such as Helmut Kohl's is not new: As in the past Germany's outstanding strategic interest must be to strengthen multilateral cooperation and the integration and embedment of Germany in a dense network of EUropean multilateral structures. Why this is important (but much more demanding than often assumed) will be summarized in this first section. There I reconstruct multilateralism as a distinct "institutional form" (Ruggie 1992) and spell out its implications for

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<sup>1</sup> Bild 2014. I am grateful to Jan Fuhrmann, Sebastian Nieke and Christian Tuschhoff for comments. For research assistance I thank Florian Hubert.

Germany. In section 2 I will argue that the conditions for (strengthening) multilateralism have significantly changed during the last four years, mostly for the worse. As a result of these changes Germany must cope with fundamentally new strategic challenges. These challenges are illustrated with reference to the so called “Framework Nations Concept” which figures prominently in Germany’s White Paper 2016, the key strategic document. The article concludes with a plea for embedded German leadership in the EU which systematically combines leadership tasks (with a particular emphasis on forging and facilitating institutional compromises) and (self)binding among EU member states in order to shield and strengthen European multilateralism. Since this is an extremely demanding task in an increasingly unreceptive environment the essay also considers whether a more defensive strategy of restraint aimed at maximizing resilience at home provides a fallback position.

### 1 Imperatives: European Multilateralism and German Embedment

If it is correct that “Europe” remains a question of “war and peace” the principal strategic imperatives which guided German foreign and security policy in the past also continue to apply for the foreseeable future. A German “grand strategy” aimed at security and welfare would then continue to be guided by the overarching aim to secure and strengthen the “unique order of peace” (as it is called in the White Paper 2016) which, for the past decades, had been “built on the idea that European security is indivisible”. The guarantor of this order of peace has been, and still remains, “a tight network of multilateral regional and pan-European organizations and institutions which is characterized by cooperation among themselves as well as with third parties on the basis of common values and rules for their implementation” (White Paper 2016, p. 31).

It is an essential part of any “strategy” to state overarching goals clearly and explicitly. In Germany’s case “order of peace”, “multilateralism” and the “open world order” which former Federal President Joachim Gauck called for in his speech at the Munich Security Conference 2014

all hint at ambitious goals which, in Arnold Wolfers’ terminology, would be called “milieu goals” in contrast to “possession goals” (Wolfers 1962, p. 73-74). The latter are competitive because they aim at values of limited supply (which is, as Wolfers put it, why they are often “praised for being truly in the national interest”). In contrast to “possession goals” nations pursue “milieu goals” “not to defend or increase possessions they hold to the exclusion of others” but because they realize that, indirectly, their realization of the national interest, more narrowly defined, may depend on conditions such as “peace” or an “open world order” beyond their national boundaries which can never be in the “possession” of any one nation at the exclusion of others. For instance, if Germany succeeded in strengthening a multilateral regime, the advantages accruing from it would benefit all parties in this sphere of activity.

Obviously, the establishment of an open and stable “order of peace” is closely connected with practices typically associated with the term “multilateralism”. However, multilateralism is more than intergovernmental cooperation “among three or more states” (Keohane 1990, p. 731). It should more properly be conceived as a distinct and “generic” form of intergovernmental cooperation, based on generalized rule of actions such as the principle of *non-discrimination* (as in trade agreements), the *indivisibility* of common goods (such as “peace”) or the principle of *diffuse reciprocity* (Ruggie 1992, pp. 571-572). The latter needs to be highlighted because cooperating parties engage in extended cooperative *relationships* beyond a fixation on the instant realization of benefits in classical *quid-pro-quo* exchanges. The latter forms one key characteristic of “bilateralism” as the opposite “form” of international cooperation. Transactionalism of this type obviously benefits strong powers because their leverage can be applied in a much more direct and targeted fashion in order to secure possession goals compared to multilateral arrangements. Among others, this is why Donald Trump hates to deal with the EU and why he has recently renegotiated NAFTA on a bilateral basis with Mexico and Canada (Danielle 2018).

The reconstruction of the difference between multilateralism and bilateralism is important for the *strategic* orientation of German foreign and

security policy because European multilateralism becomes ever more important but also much more difficult to maintain. On the one hand, the EU represents the most far-reaching realization of multilateral cooperation in the history of the modern system of states. On the other hand, multilateralism still remains a relatively novel form of interstate cooperation in a longer historical perspective, besides being a fragile and “extremely ambitious institutional form” of intergovernmental cooperation (Ruggie 1992, p. 593). This is so because powerful states are tempted by their very position to shun the sovereignty-restricting consequences of multilateral binding. This temptation obviously increases in an international system which celebrates the renaissance of sovereigntism such as the present one.

For Germany to stick with existing multilateral arrangements (or even push forward with expanding them) is increasingly challenging when a rising number of important strategic partners drift, or openly stir, towards bilateralism. Still, the benefits of European multilateralism remain plain given the thoroughly positive experience which Germans in particular have made with its stabilizing, pacifying and confidence-building effects: the European project has contributed to achieve a level of trust, peace and prosperity among European nations unheard of in the history of the continent. From a more narrowly German perspective it has also contributed to embed an increasingly powerful Germany (well before unification) in a densely knit network of European institutions which helped to create mutual voice and control opportunities and, thus, provide reassurance to all EU members.

To the extent that “strategy” refers to an overarching plan to secure the vital interests of states, Germany’s vital interests are not limited to the classical goals of protecting its citizens and the territorial integrity of itself and its partners. Strengthening multilateral cooperation in Europe is also one such vital interest. One could argue that the German government’s White Paper 2016 in fact reflects this form of prioritization (cf. Table 1 where the formulation “deepening European integration” seems to be used interchangeably for “strengthening multilateralism”).

In this sense the foundational preconditions necessary for fostering multilateralism are still in place.

**Table 1 “Security Interests of Germany”**  
(White Paper 2016, pp. 24-25)

The White Paper 2016 names seven “security interests of Germany”:

- protecting our citizens as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country;
- protecting the territorial integrity, the sovereignty and the citizens of our allies;
- maintaining the rules-based international order on the basis of international law;
- ensuring prosperity for our citizens through a strong German economy as well as free and unimpeded world trade;
- promoting the responsible use of limited goods and scarce resources throughout the world;
- deepening European integration and
- consolidating the transatlantic partnership.

## 2 Pitfalls: The New Imponderabilities Associated with Germany’s Traditional Security Pillars

Against the background of Helmut Kohl’s plea to embrace “Europe” as “our future” the previous section argued from an explicitly normative point of view that strengthening multilateralism should be one of Germany’s overarching strategic aims and that this is also reflected in official policy. Both are based on the assumption that German security and European integration are “fatefully” intertwined. The German word “Schicksal” which Helmut Kohl used, may imply different things in English, though, depending on whether it is translated in terms of “fate” (something that cannot be changed) or “destiny” (which always includes an element of choice). When Angela Merkel spoke of Europe’s “Schicksal” after the first visit of President Trump to

NATO in May 2017, she was clearly referring to Europe's "destiny" since this could indeed be shaped by the Europeans themselves by taking it "into our own hands" (Merkel 2017).

In this section I will discuss in some more details why "Europe" has indeed become an ever more *fateful challenge* for Germany. Three aspects stand out: First, Europe (here referring both to the political unit EU *and* the continent as a whole) today poses multi-faceted and competing new challenges for Germany because important transnational developments in recent years (such as the renaissance of nationalism, authoritarianism and populism) have undermined the very pre-conditions of a pacified and prosperous Europe which had, among others, helped to embed a politically and economically ascending new Germany. Political choices among Germany's partners in the East and West, such as the popular vote in favor of "Brexit", the turn to nationalist and/or populist parties in Poland or Italy, or "color revolutions", such as the one in Ukraine, have been shaping the European milieu well beyond the steering capacity of a single state actor. In this sense recent European developments are fateful indeed – and well beyond Germany's control.

Secondly, today's Germany is called upon to exercise "leadership" in European matters as never before. The White Paper 2016 explicitly accepts this "responsibility". This, obviously, is not "fate" but part of Angela Merkel's plea to take Europe's "destiny (...) into our own hands". However, it is questionable whether all Europeans are ready to be included in Angela Merkel's "we Europeans" under German leadership given the legacies of German "leadership" during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At first sight the difference today seems to be that some Europeans are recognizing that Germany's milieu goals are at least compatible with their own (possibly even more narrowly defined) national interests. This might be called tacit agreement with the statement by former Polish foreign minister Radek Sikorski when he said that he "feared" "German inactivity" more than "German power" and that Germany, in this view, had become "Europe's indispensable nation" (Sikorski 2010, p. 9). However, for each Sikorski sympathizer you will find at least one supporter of Italy's interior minister Matteo Salvini who perceives Germans as treating their EU partners as

"slaves" (Huffington Post 2018). In other words, calls for (and Germany's acceptance of) German leadership are, at a minimum, ambivalent.

In more narrowly military terms leadership also carries significant risks. President Trump's incessant push for Germany to increase defense spending even beyond the 2 percent commitment agreed upon at the Wales NATO Summit is particularly counterproductive in this regard because it would, if realized, turn Germany into the most powerful military actor in Europe besides Russia right at a time when binding ties are loosening. Recent calculations showed that Germany would not only have to increase defense spending by 129 percent in 2024 (from a defense budget of €37 billion in 2017 to a budget of €85 billion in 2024) to meet the 2 percent target from the Wales Summit, it would also have to outspend both Britain and France by €30 billion and €27 billion respectively to do so, prompting a classic security dilemma situation (Major et.al. 2018). This is one of the reasons why Angela Merkel warned Germany's highest military leadership in May 2018 that Germans must be "a bit careful" that defense spending increases are "not interpreted as a militarization of Germany" (Merkel 2018).

Third, and perhaps most important, is the posture (and perception) of the United States as an "indispensable" ally. In the White Paper 2016, published four months before Donald Trump was elected president, the US was still characterized in these terms (White Paper 2016, p. 64). However, today "indispensability" can no longer be taken for granted. To be sure, Germany still depends on NATO and realizes that it *should not dispense* with the alliance. However, calling something (like US support) "indispensable" does not mean that such support will *actually be forthcoming* if and when it is needed. It is precisely because these doubts now exist (and keep being nourished by the US-President and "Commander-in-Chief" himself) that responsible strategy making cannot blindly trust in the US sticking with its alliance commitments as in past decades. The President's allies in the US Senate themselves have their doubts given that some of them are considering legislation aimed at preventing the president from declaring a withdrawal from NATO (Demirja 2018). Given presidential powers (and President Trump's proven

determination in using them) the visible efforts from Atlanticist Republicans in the current administration aimed at reassuring European allies about US support can only have limited impact under these conditions.

The intangible indispensability of the US as a challenge for German strategy formation is mirrored in a similar “indispensability” of strengthened “European autonomy” vis-à-vis the US as called for by Germany’s foreign minister Heiko Maas last year. Poland, for example, which is an indispensable partner of any credible European strategy favored by Germany remains very hesitant to strengthen European security at the expense of NATO, not to mention Polish opposition vis-à-vis the “balanced partnership” between Europe and the US propagated by Maas and his plea to “form a counterweight when the US crosses the line” (Maas 2018). In this regard more Poles would probably out themselves as followers of Salvini rather than their own former foreign minister Sikorski. What is more, Poland is even advertising itself to the Trump administration as a counterweight vis-à-vis Germany by offering its territory as an alternative stationing option for US troops currently deployed in Germany (Hudson et.al. 2018; Żemła and Tu-recki 2018).

To sum up, German currently faces increasingly complex and partly contradictory strategic challenges. The traditional reference points of Germany’s strategizing, the US and Russia, are no longer available in their hoped for roles: The US has ceased to be a sufficiently reliable guarantor of European security via NATO (not to mention its role as a “partner in leadership” with Germany as propagated by President George H.W. Bush after German reunification (Bush 1989)). Russia has ceased to be the hoped for “partner for modernization” (Steinmeier 2008) or even the less ambitious partner in securing a stable European security order via the NATO-Russia-Council. Even within the EU it seems anything but clear that a sufficiently large number of relevant strategic partners will be available to collectively secure a common and credible “autonomous” or “sovereign” European security policy in line with the goals formulated in the “Global Strategy” of the EU or by French President Macron (EU 2016; Macron 2017).

### 3 Germany’s New Multilateralism in Practice: The Perils of the Framework Nations Concept

If one looks for strategic tools which Germany can and may want to shape based on its own interests, the so-called “Framework Nations Concept” (FNC) stands out (White Paper 2016, pp. 67-68; Glatz and Zapfe 2017). Originally developed by Germany within the NATO context, the so-called “Conception of the Bundeswehr” (which amount to executive guidelines by the defense ministry, issued in mid-2018, translating the broad political objectives of the White Paper into administrative tasks at the ministerial level) expands it well beyond the NATO context. In principle, Germany’s readiness to serve as lead nation in FNC contexts is mostly welcome in NATO and the EU because few nations have the capacity (at least in principle) to serve in such a coordinating leadership role. However, Germany’s emphasis that it will be a “partner across the entire range of security instruments” while at the same time expecting its partners to specialize militarily, creates asymmetries which contradict multilateral arrangements among strong and weak powers. Therefore, such an arrangement may become problematic in the long term because these dependencies may become lopsided, producing distinct advantages for the German military at a time when the differential in military prowess between Germany and its allies is already increasing.

Besides, recent signals from Germany’s most important strategic ally in Europe, France, indicate that this type of security cooperation may come at the expense of closer Franco-German collaboration right at a time when President Macron is calling for the creation of a “true European army” (Möller 2018). Such fears are at least not dampened if one recalls that in 2016 Germany for the first time expressed its readiness to not only contribute to “ad hoc coalitions”, but also to initiate them under its own leadership (White Paper 2016, pp. 81, 108-109). Similarly, the more recent “Conception of the Bundeswehr” also specifies the necessity of building capabilities for “autarkic national missions” (Bundeswehr 2018, p. 36-37). Although Germany’s precise intent is unclear, the language of these strategic formulas serve as an indication that

Germany neither seems very confident that multilateral cooperation can be safely relied upon, nor that Germany itself should focus on enhancing the likelihood of it succeeding by offering symmetrical self-binding arrangements to its partners.

Against this background a “realist” strategy planner in Warsaw should be forgiven if he or she would be cautious in placing medium- to long-term Polish strategy making on German declarations alone. To be sure, a lot would have to change politically and militarily for the Bundeswehr to pose a material threat to its EU neighbors. However, if one combines the significant pressures on Germany to increase its defense spending with the strategic implications of Germany’s FNC preferences, significantly enhanced German capabilities could be envisaged on the horizon which could transform a genuinely multilateral arrangement among European forces into an asymmetrical situation of dependency under German leadership. This very outlook could add to hesitations about intensified European defense cooperation, thereby undermining its multilateralization.

The subjunctive “could” needs to be emphasized here because at this time there are no signs whatsoever that Germany aims to enhance asymmetric dependencies among its allies in order to maximize German power. Such aims would also be completely counterproductive because they would almost instantly mobilize balancing instincts. However, it needs to be recalled that multilateral cooperation is an extremely demanding form of cooperation and that powerful states have more unilateral and bilateral options to secure their goals than weaker states. As a result the stability of multilateral arrangements depends significantly on whether *potential* hegemony can credibly demonstrate their commitment to be equally bound by the same rules as weaker partners. In the context of arrangements such as the FNC this is important because smaller states surrender capabilities unilaterally, thereby potentially perpetuating critical asymmetrical dependencies.

An obvious solution to escape the strategic dilemma of having to define leadership roles while ensuring well-balanced mutual dependency

would be to explicitly identify reassuring compensation to smaller partners willing to enter FNC-type arrangements. It is unclear to what extent such considerations are entertained among Germany’s strategy planners. PESCO provides a platform, however, where such issues can (and should) be addressed materially.

#### **4 Embedded German Leadership – and a Fallback Position**

Traditionally security policy has been the ideal-typical sphere of interstate competition following a zero-sum logic. Trust, mutual predictability and the readiness to accept sovereignty-restricting cooperative arrangements are accordingly rare. Yet contrary to the skepticism of “realist” theory the novel political configuration of close “transatlantic” security cooperation after 1945 succeeded in developing ambitious new forms of multilateral institutionalization. Neither NATO nor the EU would have been conceivable in their particular institutional forms had the participating members not agreed to (more or less far-reaching) sovereignty-restricting measures. All participating states have benefited tremendously, especially in Western Europe – and particularly so as far as Germany is concerned.

For different reasons this form of multilateralism seems much less attractive today. Since Germany benefitted significantly it may also suffer disproportionately. Renationalization is particularly threatening for Germany because German security and welfare have prospered in multilateral settings while providing reassurance to its partners. Therefore waxing German power under conditions of evaporating multilateralism poses significant risks because it may well accelerate a downward spiral of disintegration.

As a result, the central strategic challenge for German security policy can be phrased in the following fashion: Against many odds and temptations the most powerful EU member must accomplish the feat of combining its readiness to lead with the initiation of enhanced (self-) binding arrangements. To be sure, practicing leadership *and* self-binding simultaneously is a major challenge. However, given the experience of the past seventy years Germans are not unprepared in handling such a balancing act. Still, the chal-



enges are significant because reliable safeguards against crashes (such as the “pacifier”-role played by the US earlier) are no longer available. Moreover, governments in EU member states (the German government not excluded) must stand up simultaneously against rising challengers at the EUropean *and* at the domestic level who are deeply suspicious of least-common denominator compromises that necessarily result from a strategy of leadership and (self)binding. Moreover, international and domestic challengers instinctively opt for contradictory preferences: the EUropean critics of Germany of the Salvini type prefer to contain or even counter German power (which makes effective leadership almost impossible); domestic critics (such as the right-wing populist “Alternative for Germany”) in turn castigate what they perceive to be excessive concessions based on exaggerated EUropean considerateness (which renders (self-)binding arrangements politically risky). It is not hard to see, therefore, that a strategy of embedded leadership carries almost dilemmatic traits. As a result it may not materialize even if Germany’s political class would prefer it.

Is there an alternative? Obviously, a strategy of embedded German leadership is attractive because it helps in sustaining multilateral cooperation at a time when it has come under attack. It also carries significant benefits for Germany itself, so pursuing multilateralism is not just a milieu goal but also serves Germany’s more narrowly defined “national interest”. One of its downsides is, of course, that it invites free riding by EU partners because Germany is signaling its willingness to carry a significant portion of the bill (e.g. increased defense spending or a higher proportion of the EU budget in the aftermaths of Brexit etc.). A more restrained posture on the part of Germany might help in deterring such free riding, especially if EU partners depend on EUropean multilateralism as much (or possibly even more so) as Germany does. Such a posture could be applied on a case-by-case basis when Germany faces a choice between pushing ahead rather forcefully in order to realize a favored multilateral scheme or retrenching in favor of less ambitious cooperative arrangements. Rather than fanning fears about an overbearing German hegemon such a restrained posture would accept the limits of German power and focus instead on expanding domestic resilience

against external shocks in order to minimize the harmful effects of failing multilateralization. After all Germany is less directly exposed to some external threats, at least in geographic terms, than many of its EU partners. Moreover, if history bears lessons about German leadership, one of them would hint that German restraint is more easily digestible for Germany’s European neighbors than German assertiveness. Therefore, restraint and a form of “strategic resilience” which includes communication to partners that Germany aims at reducing its own strategic vulnerabilities (Münkler and Wassermann 2012) are potent, non-aggressive strategic tools to possibly render EUropean partners more receptive to consider multilateral solutions. In this sense embedded leadership *and* restraint may actually be two sides of the same coin in developing Germany’s strategy.

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