

German Foreign Policy: Parameters and Current Challenges

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German reunification marked the beginning of a new phase in the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany. The first phase of the new state's foreign policy after the Second World War had been dominated by the debate and decisions on whether the Federal Republic of Germany should integrate into the Western community (1949–1955), the second had been marked by the “Eastern Treaties” (1969–1972) and the third had been defined by the confrontation over the modernisation of the country's military capabilities (1977–1983). Following reunification in 1990, the Federal Republic of Germany was able to define its foreign-policy priorities untrammelled by the constraints of the East-West conflict as a fully sovereign state.

Since 1990, the reunited Germany's foreign policy has been largely characterised by its continuity. Change has taken place primarily at the level of strategies and instruments – as, for instance, in the field of European policy. One exception has been the deployment of German soldiers on foreign operations outside the NATO area. These operations have been undertaken both in response to the heightened expectations among our Alliance partners that Germany would commit itself more strongly and due to a learning process within German society that even today has still not run its course – as has been made plain above all by the current debate about the mission in Afghanistan.

NEW CHALLENGES

Germany – like Europe as a whole – faces major challenges in the field of foreign and security policy. International terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction pose direct threats to our security. The disruption of our energy supplies and flows

of other raw materials or international trade would endanger our prosperity to a considerable degree. Some of the main driving forces behind these new challenges are rooted in the developments that are frequently summed up under the heading of globalisation. While Germany profits on the whole from its strong integration into global structures, there is also another side to the coin, since globalisation opens up new operational opportunities for terrorists and organised crime groups, who have been transformed from local or regional factors into global threats.

The current financial and economic crisis as well as the increasing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and, in particular, climate change are forcing the nation state to acknowledge the limits of its capacity to resolve problems.

As far as Germany is concerned, the European Union is the most important structure within which answers can be sought for challenges it is not possible to counter as efficiently, if at all, at the level of the nation state.

This is why European integration remains the most important pillar of German foreign policy. The European Union's capacity to resolve problems will be considerably bolstered once the countries that have still not ratified the Treaty of Lisbon do so as expected this autumn and the Treaty subsequently enters into force.

However, our membership of the European Union does not just shape our relationship to our European partners, but is also an important factor in our relations with third countries. This is the case above all in the field of foreign trade, where the European Commission possesses far-reaching competencies, but to an increasing degree in the classic field of foreign and security policy as well.

Apart from the EU, we attach great significance to our relations with the USA, Russia and Asia, where attention is centred mainly on China.

THE USA – OUR MOST IMPORTANT PARTNER OUTSIDE EUROPE

Our shared basic values, the profound exchange of ideas between our societies, our strong economic interdependence and our intensive political consultations make the USA Germany's most important ally outside Europe. Through its commitment within NATO and the security guarantees this commitment underpins, the USA has contributed decisively to the peace and stability enjoyed

by Europe since the end of the Second World War. It is essentially thanks to the USA that communism was overcome and German unity was achieved in peace and freedom. Today, the USA is still the indispensable superpower, and it will retain this status for a long time to come even though new powers are emerging. We share key foreign-policy interests with the USA. Only if Europeans and Americans act in concert will we stand a chance of dealing effectively with the central global challenges we face. The German Federal Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has succeeded in regaining the trust that was lost in Washington under her Social Democratic predecessor and initiating a new phase of collaboration. At the moment, the trusting relations that have been reestablished over the last four years are being rapidly expanded with the new American government under President Obama.

RUSSIA – A DIFFICULT PARTNER

Our relations to Russia are of course completely different in nature. Russia is part of Europe and therefore our geographical neighbour. The hopes that the development of Russian democracy would follow a smooth, linear progression have unfortunately not been fulfilled. The absence of the rule of law is one fundamental reason for the country's lack of economic and social dynamism in comparison to other states. Russian foreign policy exhibits clear neoimperial tendencies.

Germany has traditionally cultivated good relations with Russia, which we want to preserve. However, these relations should not – as occasionally in the past – flourish at the expense of third parties. Our dependence on each other, above all when it comes to the energy and raw materials sectors, on the one hand, and technological cooperation, on the other, means there are plenty of opportunities for cooperative action from which both countries benefit. The CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag has supported the negotiations that have begun concerning a new partnership and cooperation agreement between the EU and Russia, which would place this cooperation on solid foundations. At this juncture, it is necessary to recall that at the beginning of this year the Russian government was prepared to let the gas dispute with Ukraine escalate to such an extent that member states of the European Union too would inevitably suffer

interruptions in supply, despite the political and economic costs incurred by this step. This experience and Russia's conduct during its war against Georgia have made it quite clear that the strategic partnership between Europe and Russia invoked by some people may be desirable, but is still far from being a reality.

CHINA – A PARTNER FOR THE FUTURE

Its economic and political rise has transformed China into a significant actor on the international markets and in international politics. China's influence is expanding not just economically, but also politically and diplomatically, culturally and in the sphere of military strategy. As a result of its growing economic weight, its increasing 'soft power', its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and its more active engagement in regional and multilateral structures, Chinese contributions are now essential to the resolution of many regional and global difficulties. China is an emerging world power. China's rise has also made German and European relations to this country ever more important. China has become one of our most important economic partners around the world. German-Chinese relations are close, substantial and robust. For us, China is an important partner in Asia; for Peking, we are just as important as a political partner in Europe. There is a broad range of structures within which discussions are taking place between the two sides in fields such as the economy, academic life, the environment and politics, discussions that also encompass a dialogue on human rights and the rule of law. In this respect, however, we should not overlook the fact that, with China, a non-democratic, non-liberal state is climbing up through the world's economic and political hierarchies, an impression confirmed once again last spring when media censorship was intensified around the 20th anniversary of the bloody suppression of peaceful student protests on Tiananmen Square. Nonetheless, we have a great interest in building up our relations with China and other important partners in Asia, such as India, Japan and the ASEAN states.

NEW HOPE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

It is highly welcome that, unlike his two predecessors, President Obama has put the Middle East conflict high on his personal

agenda right from the beginning of his period in office. It is greatly to be hoped that the offers of dialogue and cooperation in the region set out during his recent speech at Cairo meet with a positive response. Angela Merkel, the German Federal hancellor, has repeatedly articulated Germany's strong interest in the Middle East peace process starting to move forward with greater momentum again towards the goal of a twostate solution.

The international community must maintain a united front in its handling of the Iranian nuclear programme. The aim continues to be to obtain objective guarantees from Iran that its nuclear programme will be used permanently for peaceful purposes alone and to do everything to ensure this can be achieved by diplomatic means. Regrettably, the strategy pursued by the UN Security Council and the EU 3 + 3 has not hitherto prevented Iran from carrying on with the enrichment of uranium. There is no alternative to a strengthening of the twin-track strategy of sanctions and offers of cooperation. So far, Teheran has reacted only vaguely to the offer of talks from President Obama. Sadly, the recent Iranian elections have not boosted the moderate political forces as it had been hoped they would.

FIGHTING TERRORISM IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

The devastating terror attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 were planned from Afghanistan. Since then, it has been possible for the terrorist threat that emanated from that country to be largely stemmed. Nevertheless, stabilising Afghanistan remains one of the most urgent tasks for international security policy, something that is necessary in order to prevent Afghanistan once again from becoming a safe haven for terrorists determined to act on a global stage. We were therefore much encouraged by President Obama's decision to make Afghanistan a foreign policy priority and also involve Pakistan in the action that is being taken. Without close cooperation with Islamabad aimed at making sure the Afghan Taliban are not able to retreat to the Pakistani-Afghan border region, there will be no hope that lasting peace can be brought to Afghanistan. Furthermore, Pakistan needs our support if it is to successfully combat the threat from terrorism on its own territory. We very much welcome that, with its new Afghanistan strategy, the fresh US administration has adopted

a European-style ‘comprehensive approach’ that is focussed on strengthening the civil reconstruction effort and improving the integration of civil and military measures. It continues to be our goal to put the Afghan government into a position where it is itself capable of ensuring the country’s security, stability and development. In the future too, Germany will remain committed to this task and the special responsibility it has taken on for the north of Afghanistan.

MODERNISING NATO

NATO remains the central instrument of our trans-Atlantic security and defence policy. Apart from the key commitment to collective defence that is still vital to its identity, its functions now range from robust stabilisation missions in Europe, on its peripheries and far beyond the borders of the Alliance area to humanitarian operations in disaster areas. At NATO’s anniversary summit in Kehl and Strasbourg last April, the Alliance decided to revise its ten-year-old strategic concept. This offers an opportunity to set about the modernisation of NATO. Any such strategic concept for the future will have to reflect the radical changes that have taken place in security policy over the last few years and address the transformation of NATO that has still not been completed. It must be rooted in a comprehensive analysis of new threats and security-policy challenges that can hardly be delimited in geographic terms any longer. In this respect, non-military aspects such as ecological, economic, social and cultural issues will also have to be taken into consideration. These issues include questions that relate to missile defence, cyber defence and energysecurity.

The overarching goal is to build a new consensus about the risks and threats the Alliance faces, as well as the burdens it should be shouldering and the reach of its operations. This will require all the Alliance’s members to be reassured that they are covered by the Article 5 guarantee. NATO must also continue to be open to new members. They should be allowed to join if the Alliance’s accession criteria are satisfied and this would deliver added value for the Alliance in security terms. It is just as important to enhance NATO’s relations with its partners, especially the countries in Asia that are contributing their own soldiers to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the relationship between NATO and the EU requires urgent improvement. In view of the growing responsibilities borne by NATO and the ESDP, the civil and military capacities that are available have to be used more efficiently and expanded.

REINFORCING DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION

The new initiatives on disarmament, arms control and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction that President Obama announced in his Prague speech are very much to be applauded. They hold out a new opportunity to drastically reduce the number of nuclear weapons and limit the size of the world's conventional forces. We are hoping for a rapid conclusion of the current US-Russian negotiations about a legally binding follow-on agreement to the START I treaty on the reduction of strategic nuclear arsenals that is due to expire in December of this year, in part as a way of reinforcing the nonproliferation regime and preventing the number of nuclear powers from rising further. As the cornerstone of international non-proliferation policy, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is central to any attempts to prevent the dissemination of nuclear weapons. This Treaty regime needs to be strengthened in view of the growing risks of proliferation, for instance in Iran and North Korea.

In order to rule out the further dissemination of nuclear material, nuclear technology and nuclear know-how, countries that wish to use nuclear energy to generate power must be helped to identify methods of doing this that will minimise the risks of proliferation. President Obama has called for the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty to be ratified by the US Senate. If this proves possible by the spring of next year, it will supply an important stimulus for the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference that will be taking place at that time, the results of which will be crucial for the future of the Treaty regime. Unfortunately, it is rather unlikely at present that Obama will soon obtain the majority in the Senate this would require. Export controls that restrain the spread of technology for the production of weapons of mass destruction, military missile control technology and above all dual-use products are instruments that are just as indispensable in the struggle to contain proliferation. It is therefore very much to be welcomed that South Korea recently joined the Proliferation Security Initiative, which

is intended to halt proliferation and combat nuclear terrorism. This move is all the more important given that the greatest dangers of proliferation currently emanate from North Korea, which has recently conducted another nuclear test and several missile tests.

RESOURCE SECURITY AND CLIMATE PROTECTION

As an open economy closely integrated into the world market, Germany owes much of its prosperity to the stability of the international financial system and open world markets, as the current global economic and financial crisis has so starkly demonstrated. The last few months have shown that we need to adapt the global financial architecture to the requirements of a globalised world and energetically oppose any burgeoning protectionist tendencies. In addition to this, as a heavily export-oriented economy, we have a great interest in securing maritime trading routes. This is why it is right for the German Navy to be involved in fighting piracy at the Horn of Africa.

Germany's security depends not least on the most unrestricted possible access to the markets for energy and other raw materials. The German Federal Chancellor has made energy and raw material security an important theme of her chancellorship. The risks that are associated with our heavy dependence on energy supplies from abroad were made abundantly clear by the Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict at the beginning of the year.

Climate protection is closely connected with questions of energy security. The EU has decided to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 20 percent by the year 2020. In this context, it is very much to be applauded that President Obama too is pursuing a new energy policy and has subscribed to the fight against climate change. We must work together, in particular to persuade threshold countries with high emissions such as China and India to make appropriate contributions. The goal of limiting the rise in global temperature by the end of the century to two degrees Celsius compared to the preindustrial level, and so keeping climate change within manageable dimensions, must be given binding force under international law.

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