

MONITOR

SECURITY

The Missed Opportunity: An Analysis Does Not Make a Strategy

German Federal Government publishes first National Security Strategy

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- › The National Security Strategy is an instrument of internal self-assurance as well as external positioning. It documents a fundamental shift in German foreign and security policy since February 24, 2022, but also shows continuity.
- › The National Security Strategy serves as a key and umbrella document for the existing and ten other strategies that are soon to follow e.g.: on China, the German security and defense industry, disinformation, space as well as on climate foreign policy.
- › The focus is on the concept of integrated security. The goals are closer coordination between different government authorities and faster reaction times.
- › According to the strategy, defense spending shall reach the 2 percent GDP target announced by NATO in 2014 (on average) over several years.
- › The National Security Strategy does not live up to the central aims of every strategy paper: Concrete means must be specified with the help of which the goals that have been set can be achieved. This document owes that.
- › A National Security Council will not be created. As a result, a central coordination body remains missing.

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Introduction

Following the White Paper of the Federal Ministry of Defense of 2016¹, the federal government has now published a comprehensive National Security Strategy – for the first time ever. The Federal Foreign Office was in charge, other federal ministries as well as the Federal Chancellery were closely involved in the development process.

The National Security Strategy published on June 14, 2023² comes at a time of multiple crises and conflicts: Russia is not only attacking Ukraine, but is directing its aggression against the entire free democratic world. The European peace order is in dissolution. China is increasingly aggressively pursuing its own claims to hegemony, leading to the escalating conflict between Washington and Beijing. In addition, there are numerous hot spots of crises and conflicts, such as droughts caused by climate change, displacement and migration movements, poverty and international terrorism.

The world order is being attacked, international law is under pressure and the existence and functioning of multilateral organizations are being seriously questioned. During this time of turmoil, the federal government – after numerous countries such as the United States, Japan, France and Sweden have established their own strategy process (some of which have been in place for years) – has managed to record and evaluate national security concerns.

In the light of these circumstances, the strategy should be a guideline for future German foreign and security policy and offer orientation for partners. The strategy has to be seen in close correspondence with the Strategic Compass of the European Union of March 2022 and NATO's Strategic Concept of June 2022.

Slow strategy process equals a lack of unity

The strategy – announced in the coalition agreement of November 2021 – was successively postponed from December 2022 to February 2023 and finally to May 2023, due to considerable differences between the involved German ministries. There were deep controversies e.g. regarding the establishment of a National Security Council, cyber defense and civil protection.³ A characteristic of the inconsistencies in the creation process is that with regard to the topics internal security, cyber defense and civil protection, the actually responsible state level was largely left out when the strategy was created. While the federal states were hardly involved in the process, the federal government involved partner countries such as the USA, France, the United Kingdom and Israel.⁴ However, other important partners e.g. in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe, which directly border Russia and Ukraine, were not included. Their perspective also would have been crucial.

As part of the comprehensive threat analysis, the strategy starts with the "epochal break" in the European peace order caused by Russia's war of aggression. China – in line with the EU and NATO strategy documents – is described as a partner, competitor and rival. Here, the strategy also reflects the public perception of China, with 43 percent of Europeans currently seeing China as a "necessary partner" and 35 percent as a "rival" or even an "opponent".⁵

Integrated security – a new security approach?

The strategy is based on an integrated concept of security. Integrated security demands that all domains of state security across departmental and government levels be thought together, connected and interlinked. Supply chain security as well as the procurement of equipment for the German soldiers are given as examples. According to the concept, security however should also play a role in the development of town twinning, university cooperation, the sale of port shares and companies – this needs to be learned. As a result, the concept of security is becoming more and more broader. While in the 1980s there was talk of extended security ("erweiterte Sicherheit"), later of comprehensive security ("umfassende Sicherheit"), and in the early 2000s networked security ("vernetzte Sicherheit") was considered the key, now the approach is "integrated security". All past concepts aimed at a closer cooperation of government institutions. The difference of integrated security is not explained and the way of establishing it not described.

Furthermore, many security goals are derived from this concept, but they are not prioritized: the development of further cyber and space capabilities, for example, stand alongside continuing support for the Council of Europe and the OSCE. Many goals remain generic. In addition, there is a lack of the necessary provision of funds to achieve the mentioned goals. Overall the strategy is rather a description of decisions and government actions that have already been taken as well as abstract goals.

From one strategy make many

In addition to measures and actions – that fall under the categories robustness, resilience and sustainability – the strategy announces the development of further nine separate strategies. A strategy paper for the security and defense industry (p. 33); an overall strategy for a strong, well-fortified democracy and an open and diverse society (p. 47); a strategy to increase our ability to act against hybrid threats (p. 47); a strategy to deal with disinformation (p. 47); a hydrogen import strategy (p. 55); a national economic protection strategy (p. 56); a space security strategy (p. 63); a climate foreign policy strategy (p. 66) and a climate adaptation strategy (p. 67).⁶ In addition, the German government's China strategy has been advertised to follow this summer. So there are ten more related strategies to develop and implement!

In view of the number of strategic papers still to come, further departmental disputes and competences struggles are foreseeable. The formulated claim to specify clear responsibilities is largely shifted to other strategy processes. The only thing that has become clear so far, is that the upcoming strategies must be integrated into the National Security Strategy. How compatibility or integration of the various strategies and instruments can be achieved is not addressed. In general, the National Security Strategy that is now finally available does not do justice to the central claim of every strategy paper: for a real strategy, concrete means must be named with the help of which the goals that we have set ourselves can be achieved. The National Security Strategy fails to do both. The document that is now available, after a six-month delay, is mainly a description of the current world situation and even this – as always in this disputed process – only represents a minimal consensus of the ministries involved.

The missed chance of institutional anchoring

Unsurprisingly, a National Security Council will not be implemented, in view of the discrepancies that had already come to light in the run-up, especially between the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Chancellery. A missed opportunity, which probably won't come back any time soon, as the topic has gained in importance and lost the need to justify security policy, not least because of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine last year and its implications. An upgrading and restructuring under a new National Security Council would have been possible without further ado.

Measured against the newly formulated integrated security policy claim, generally there is a lack of institutional anchoring of the same. The mere prospect of improved cross-departmental cooperation and interdependence does not guarantee an integrative concept of security and does not protect against previous ministerial practice of working in separate silos.

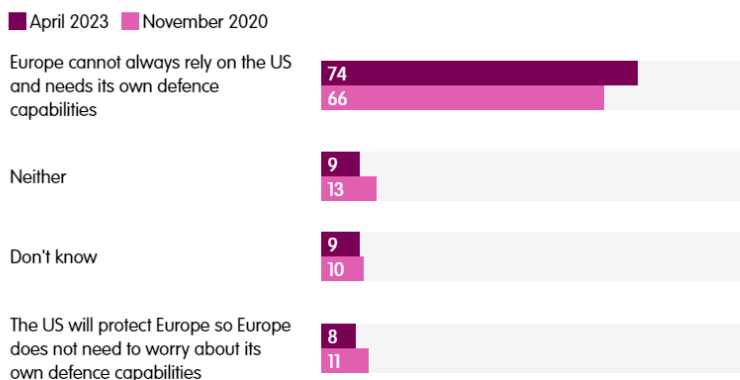
Softened 2 percent target

The focus on the Bundeswehr is concise and correct. However, the two percent target, for example, has been softened: *"Initially, we will also make our 2% GDP contribution to the NATO capability goals through the newly created special fund Bundeswehr on average over a number of years."* (p.11). Therefore, with the multi-year average, there is some leeway at least for the coming years and continuous investments in the Bundeswehr – that are absolutely necessary – can be postponed. Nevertheless, the Bundeswehr is seen as a guarantor of peace, and gaps in capabilities and structural deficits are to be closed quickly. Alliance solidarity with the NATO partners, the EU assistance clause and the obligation to provide assistance to France are cited in the strategy. The core task of the Bundeswehr, the defense of the country and the alliance, is also recorded and the subordination of all other tasks (p.32.). In addition, the promise of a stronger presence in the alliance area is formulated – particularly important for NATO's eastern flank: *"The Federal Government will continue to expand and consolidate its military presence in the alliance area to protect our alliance partners, also in order to be able to serve as a military support partner for our allies."* (p. 33). Also, to be welcomed, are the clear commitments to nuclear sharing and the promotion of a European defense industry.

While NATO is central to the defense of Europe, the EU is said to be the decisive "geopolitical actor" in the areas of international crisis missions and counter-terrorism, arms cooperation and sanctions policy. In accordance with the limited international engagement of the EU, depicted by the National Security Strategy, the focus should be increasingly directed inwards, towards compliance with human rights, the rule of law and democracy, as well as towards the functioning of the internal market. This assignment of tasks reflects the status quo of the possibilities of the EU, but not the future aspirations or the opinion of the European population, who would like more independence from the USA in security policy: 74 percent believe that Europe needs its own defense capacities (see chart).⁷

Figure/Graphic:

Europeans' views on US defence support. Average across nine countries covered by both polls, in per cent



Countries covered: Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden.
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To be continued

The National Security Strategy does not live up to its promises. It was not integrative right from the start. Numerous ministerial disputes led to delays and watering down. The federal states, which are central to Germany's security, were not sufficiently integrated into the strategy process, especially when measured against the claim of the integrated concept of security. Both leave considerable doubts about the validity and credibility of the document. The fact that numerous other strategies still have to be developed in order to start doing justice to this claim also shakes the self-image.

The National Security Strategy was eagerly awaited by partners, but it is also indispensable for the debate in Germany. It documents continuity as well as far-reaching change – above all the shift in confronting Russia, defending Ukraine and facing China. It describes a strong substantive connection between security issues and breathes the close coordination with partners in the EU and NATO. However, valuable time was lost and the public's acceptance of a comprehensive, integrated security policy with additional expenditures – above all for the Bundeswehr – could quickly decline, especially if the number of individual strategies and measures seems confusing and overwhelming.

In addition, there is a lack of a coordination body and prioritization of security policy goals, as well as the (financial) means and instruments intended to achieve them. Reaching NATO's 2 percent target alone means spending around 78 billion Euro per year for the Bundeswehr. Currently the Bundeswehr budget amounts to 50 billion Euro plus 8.4 billion Euro from the special fund. How are the formulated goals to be achieved with the current budget plans?

Furthermore, how can our society be able to defend itself, become resilient and sustainable if staff shortages in security services and the armed forces cannot be overcome? Community service needs to be discussed. However, these thoughts do not enter the strategy. Overall, the paper seems very cerebral and too detailed in some places – e.g. the strategy is dedicated to the role of the Cyber Agency, but elsewhere it pays too little attention to the topic of hybrid threats.

The first attempt at a comprehensive security strategy for the Federal Republic of Germany failed. However, the beginning of a strategy process that has hopefully only just begun and will continue gives hope. After all, the Federal Republic of Germany has only just begun to seriously and strategically deal with its role and responsibility as the largest economy in the heart of Europe and its complex security environment.

¹ The White Paper "*Weißbuch 2016 zur Sicherheitspolitik und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr*" [weissbuch2016-barrierefrei-data.pdf \(bmvg.de\)](https://www.bmvg.de/weissbuch2016-barrierefrei-data.pdf) contains a comprehensive analysis of Germany's security policy situation and interests. It deals with topics such as Germany's role in NATO, European security and defense policy, the importance of international partnerships, cyber security, dealing with hybrid threats and strengthening society's resilience.

² „*Wehrhaft. Resilient. Nachhaltig. Integrierte Sicherheit für Deutschland*“ National Security Strategy, adopted by the Federal Cabinet on June 14, 2023 and published at: [National Sicherheitsstrategie | Bundesregierung](#)

³ Matthias Wyssuwa: „*Wenn nicht jetzt, wann dann? Christoph Heusgen kritisiert, dass es keinen Sicherheitsrat geben wird*“, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 08.04.2023, Nr. 84, S. 8

⁴ Karl-Heinz Kamp (2023): „*The Zeitenwende at Work: Germany's National Security Strategy*“, Survival, 65:3, 73-80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2218698>

⁵ ECFR: „*Keeping America close, Russia down, and China far away: How Europeans navigate a competitive world*“, 7 June 2023, [Keeping America close, Russia down, and China far away: How Europeans navigate a competitive world | ECFR](#)

⁶ „*Wehrhaft. Resilient. Nachhaltig. Integrierte Sicherheit für Deutschland*“ National Security Strategy, adopted by the Federal Cabinet on June 14, 2023 and published at [National Sicherheitsstrategie | Bundesregierung](#)

⁷ ECFR: „*Keeping America close, Russia down, and China far away: How Europeans navigate a competitive world*“, 7 June 2023, [Keeping America close, Russia down, and China far away: How Europeans navigate a competitive world | ECFR](#)

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