



Strategic Deliberations about the Future of German Security Policy

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Key Points

- The liberal international order is currently facing challenges from a variety of actors. Germany, a country that benefits to a particularly large extent from this order, must make efforts to maintain and strengthen it.
- Germany is dependent on a strong Western community and should take measures to counter the narrative of Western weakness and decline.
- When dealing with parties challenging the liberal order, military power and diplomatic conflict resolution are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary: Credible military options will strengthen Germany's diplomatic position and thereby its capability to effect political solutions and finding compromises.
- The structures of Germany's foreign and security policy apparatus must be enhanced to master the dual challenge of continuous crisis management and long-term strategic capability.
- In addition, efforts should be made to explain that the creation of a European identity does not necessarily entail the loss of national identity.

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The greatest security threat consists of the gradual disintegration of the liberal international order.

More than a year on from the speech President Joachim Gauck made at the Munich Security Conference, the impact of his words is still being felt. In view of the crises in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East, his demand for greater German engagement in international security policy has evoked particular resonance. Both crises remain unresolved, and there is every reason to assume that Germany will be faced with further challenges over the coming months. This article therefore puts some pointed reflections on the country's strategic position forward for discussion – in the hope that they will contribute to a creative foreign policy that is focused on problem resolution.

1. The liberal order is coming under increasing pressure worldwide.

Russian aggression in Ukraine, Islamist terror campaigns in Syria and Iraq, China's muscle flexing and territorial ambitions in Asia-Pacific, Iran's urgent pursuit of the nuclear option – however different these defining conflicts and crises of recent months may be, they have one thing in common: revisionist actors are challenging the rules of the established order.

The established order is essentially derived from the liberal international system that was created after World War II under the aegis of the USA and then codified in the Charter of the United Nations. It has been protected by US supremacy ever since and implemented practically throughout the world subsequent to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

We have entered a phase in which authoritarian regimes and fanatical non-state actors are rejecting this "end of history". They are all (as yet) too weak to establish a different order of significant influence, and their alternative models are not capable of attracting the majority support the democratic free-market model enjoys – despite widespread criticism of Western culture. However, these actors are sensing the current weakness of the West and taking advantage of the power vacuums resulting from Western restraint, making clever use of whatever means they have at their disposal (from classic inter-state war to hybrid warfare and terrorism to economic and resource-based pressure).

The looming security threat is therefore not so much a spectacular military defeat but the continuous gradual disintegration of the dependable liberal order. Whenever the rule of law and liberty are restricted and substituted, this poses a strategic problem for Germany and its allies. Without liberal democracy, a market economy and the rule of law, violence, corruption and inhumanity proliferate – the very worst conditions for a comfortable status quo, such as that valued by trading nations like Germany. To say nothing of the moral responsibility to take up the fight on behalf of those who find themselves living under illiberal conditions.

2. The West is suffering from a crisis of self-confidence and showing little will to shape events.

The Western powers interested in the liberal status quo of the international order are currently not taking decisive action to counter the revisionist forces – which in turn encourages the latter and puts them in a more attractive light. The reason for the indecisiveness on the part of the West lies in a lack of confidence in its own power to shape events, which paralyzes the political will to take action. This crisis

The current restraint shown by the West is deemed to be prudently self-imposed, but it encourages challengers and diminishes its own capability to shape events.

of self-confidence is in part due to the rather unsatisfactory experiences of the deployment of Western power in Iraq and Afghanistan as well the aftereffects of the financial, economic and debt crisis.

Confronted with challenging crisis scenarios, Western decision-makers these days therefore tend to point to the limits to their engagement and to their scope of action. They indulge in the rhetoric of modesty and warn against excessive ambitions, cloaking their restraint with a claim to political prudence, as one would thereby avoid repeating the purported mistakes made in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. This stance goes hand in hand with consistently overestimating the current and potential future strength of emerging states (BRICS) and simultaneously undervaluing the enduring advantages of their own countries.

This psycho-political reflex to the supposed overextension of the Bush years manifests particularly clearly in the policy of strategic withdrawal pursued by the Obama government. The exit of US combat troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, the slogans of "nation-building at home" and "leading from behind", the historic cuts in the US defense budget, the shameful wavering about "red lines" in Syria, the announcement of a "re-orientation" towards the Asia-Pacific that has not yet manifested, at least not militarily – the list of controversial security-policy decisions made by Barack Obama is long, and more examples could easily be added.

In their entirety, these decisions paint a picture of a guarantor of the international system that is becoming less and less willing to bear the cost involved in stabilizing it. Allies in Asia-Pacific, (Eastern) Europe and the Middle East are becoming increasingly open in voicing their doubts in the solidity of US security guarantees, while the parties intent on disrupting the international order can take encouragement from people such as Assad and Putin achieving their objectives using great brutality.

From a German perspective, it is particularly sobering that the European Union is not showing any signs of being capable of compensating for this reluctance on the part of the US even in its own strategic backyard. The debt crisis, reservations by Member States with respect to sovereignty issues, as well as the structural complexity involved are still preventing the EU from taking on a more active role on the global political stage. The leading strategic actors – the UK and France – are finding themselves forced into a comparatively restrained international role due to their own economic and structural crises. While the Europeans have been successful in exerting a calming influence in the most recent armed conflicts in Ukraine and in the Middle East, they have not been able to accomplish their objectives in countering the revisionist actors. The strategic goal "Europe" is ultimately pursuing in its eastern regions and at its southern flank has also remained unclear.

3. Germany in particular is called upon to take greater responsibility for the stabilization of the liberal international system.

Germany is not longing for a new role in international politics, let alone for greater responsibility in security matters. The response Gauck's speech elicited in Germany demonstrates very clearly that the typical reservations, which can be summed up as the result of "excessively effective re-education" by the Allied Powers, still prevail. Neither should one underestimate the impact of over four decades of a country being largely absolved from taking responsibility for its own survival on its strategic culture.

That said, adopting a new role will be unavoidable as Germany has gained in relative power. Since problems began in 2008, Germany has been more successful in overcoming the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis than any other European state. Particularly in comparison with the crises suffered by its major European partners, the UK and France, Germany is in an excellent position economically. Other factors, including population size, geographic position and political stability, complement Germany's economic supremacy. Germany being an export nation, this supremacy is based above all on a stable Europe and a stable liberal international system. The "globalization winner" Germany benefits disproportionately from this system, which also reflects and encourages our values – the rule of law, universal human rights, etc.

With great power
comes great
responsibility.

The Spider-Man doctrine "With great power comes great responsibility" applies to present-day Germany. Germany's allies demand that it lives up to this doctrine, and so do increasingly the German elites themselves. Strong leadership should no longer be restricted to the areas of the economy and EU integration policy, but be extended to international politics. Foreign Minister Steinmeier's Review process and the White Book process recently initiated by Defense Minister von der Leyen are pointing in the right direction. There, "leadership" is not understood as pursuing a unilateral *Sonderweg* (special path), but demonstrating problem-solving approaches, providing the necessary means and making efforts to convince partners to join Germany along its chosen path.

So much for the prose. In practice, "leadership" will require three steps: the clear articulation of the country's own interests; the willingness to make difficult and costly decisions to assert those interests, to explain those decisions and to suffer their consequences; the ability to endure criticism and opposition from allies. Occasional efforts in this direction have been made, but they have so far not had an enduring impact on German security policy. While travelling along this path, it will be advisable to bear in mind one primary goal and two key objectives.

4. German security policy must be based on one primary strategic goal and two parallel key objectives.

a) The primary strategic goal of German security policy must be to consolidate global stability by strengthening the West.

The liberal international order is a Western invention. It can only prevail if emerging non-Western states will also identify with this system and support it as stakeholders. However, besides moderate reforms to integrate these new power centers in a fair manner, this will require above all a strong, unified and self-confident West, which defends and asserts the fundamental principles of this order.

The strategic goal
of German security
policy must be to
strengthen the West.
In concrete terms,
this means that
Germany needs to
strengthen NATO and
the EU.

The strength of the West manifests in the vitality of its most important international institutions: NATO and the EU. It is therefore in the national interest to place support for these two institutions at the center of German foreign policy. Cohesion between Member States, their will to shape events in the global context and their strategic orientation are the most important areas in which Germany should provide leadership through creativity and willingness to engage.

Within security policy in the narrow sense, it is obvious that NATO must be given priority over the EU, simply because of the transatlantic dimension and the incomparably more credible deterrent power. However, even a policy of "NATO first"

allows a great deal of scope for the necessary increase in effectiveness and efficiency of the EU's security policy.

Strengthening the West and its institutions will not succeed without abandoning the infatuation with the narrative of weakness and decline. Germany in particular would do well to counter this with a more realistic narrative. This should include references to the typical Western power of self-renewal, to the fundamental resilience and creativity of our liberal societies and to the options our considerable wealth opens up for us – as long as we are prepared to make some sacrifices in order to use it to improve our children's future. And it should not shy away from mentioning the increasing social, political, economic and ecological problems in authoritarian states such as Russia, China and others. While our model may not be perfect, there is no need for it to fear challenges – the strategic withdrawal by the West is self-imposed and reversible.

b) The first key objective of German security policy lies in improved crisis management.

The crises in Ukraine and Syria/Iraq remain pressing. The new aspect of this situation is that German strategists and crisis managers have to look in two geographic directions simultaneously for the first time. During the Cold War, those engaged in strategic thinking looked predominantly to the east (containment of Soviet communism); in the 1990s, the focus turned to the Balkans and the Mediterranean region. Now, both need to be dealt with simultaneously. Added to this is the fact that there are two different types of conflict involved – a quasi-classic inter-state war in one region and aggression by non-state actors in the other.

This dual challenge makes new demands on German security policy. It is highly unlikely that it is sufficiently prepared in terms of either institutions or intellectual resources. The recent creation of a new department at the Federal Foreign Office dedicated to crisis prevention, management and follow-up is a welcome first step, which must be followed by others.

However, while there is an urgent need for better crisis prevention, crises and conflicts will continue to "take us by surprise". Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya – none of these major military operations of NATO had been foreseen just six months prior to the respective resolutions. Despite all efforts, this will generally continue to be the case in future. At the same time, according to Minister Steinmeier, "the emergence of crises will probably be the rule during the next ten to fifteen years." All the more important for Germany to maintain the political, diplomatic and military capabilities required for fast crisis management so that it can respond as soon as a crisis unfolds.

c) The second key objective of German security policy lies in improving the country's long-term strategic capability.

Acute crises will continue to determine the majority of day-to-day operations. But even if the time, location and type of the next crises cannot be foreseen, Germany must prepare itself for responding adequately to their onset. This will require systematic and detailed strategic planning. German politicians, the German government and the consulting institutes must spend more time than they have done in the past considering the question "What needs to be done if xyz happens?" There is no shortage of examples of potential scenarios that would affect our security

The West's narrative of its own weakness and decline must be countered by stressing its power of self-renewal.

Germany must learn to deal with several very different crises simultaneously.

Crisis as the norm.

(in)directly: What needs to be done if the Chinese leadership is brought down by its contradictions? What needs to be done if violence breaks out once again between the opposing nuclear powers of India and Pakistan? What needs to be done if Iran acquires a nuclear weapon in defiance of all the negotiations? What needs to be done if the simmering proxy wars over regional supremacy between Iran and Saudi Arabia escalate further? What is Europe's vision for a stable and liberal Northern Africa/Middle East region, and how can Germany contribute to bringing it about?

Successful prompt crisis management requires long-term preparation and strategic thinking.

In future, Germany will not be able to leave it to its allies to deliberate about such questions systematically, to outline answers, to set priorities and to derive and develop appropriate capabilities. Instead, Germany will need to drive joint efforts to address these questions within the Alliance and within the EU in order to maintain the capability of the West to shape events.

5. Recommendations

To achieve the above objectives, German security policy will have to evolve. The following seven aspects should be taken into account and are provided to serve as inspiration.

a) The mantra that there are "no military solutions" to any current crisis needs to be put to rest. For one, it is simply untrue. President Putin definitely achieved what he considers "solutions" by the use of military force in Ukraine. That he is not alone in his reliance on the usefulness of military power is also demonstrated by the considerable defense spending of China and other states – even if many Germans consider this "19th century thinking".

Military strength contributes to political solutions.

Secondly, the mantra is misleading, as it suggests that simply because a political solution cannot be achieved by military means alone the military is useless or at least of secondary relevance on principle. The opposite is, in fact, the case. In a dispute with strategic adversaries, political efforts can only be successful if they are underpinned by credible military strength. This is how the German Defense Policy Guidelines put it: "Armed forces are the expression of a nation's willingness and preparedness to assert itself."

Germany must therefore modernize and expand its military capabilities and link them more effectively with those of its allies and partners.

b) The German debate about the use of military means for crisis management suffers from a strange bipolarity. Military intervention is usually equated to massive combat action and uncontrollable escalation. It is therefore for good reason that decision-makers and the public demonstrate reluctance and advocate non-military options. However, the alternatives are not restricted to the extremes of nuclear war and doing nothing. Discussions about the many shades of grey in between are too rare and badly informed. There are numerous ways of influencing a conflict in one's own interest by military means, ranging from the exchange of information to providing support with defense in cyberspace to the execution of special operations – without automatically provoking escalation and open warfare.

Serving members of the military should (be allowed to) take a greater part in the public debate about security policy.

These options will need to be considered in greater detail and debated in the political discourse. A stronger presence of serving military personnel in the public debate on these issues would also be desirable, as they can speak particularly authoritatively about the possibilities and risks of a wide range of military options.

c) Technological progress is changing the way in which military conflicts are fought. There have been tentative discussions already about this in connection with drones and cyber security, for example. But one should also consider the consequences arising from new developments in the areas of robotics, miniaturization, bio-technology and 3D printing with respect to their strategic implications. The debate must be both public and well informed to prevent technophobic scaremongering and cold-blooded misuse.

d) Nuclear weapons and their strategic significance are regaining relevance. The Ukrainian crisis has made it necessary to revive NATO's deterrent policy vis-à-vis Russia. While the preliminary result, the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), consists exclusively of conventional military components (and is therefore referred to as CRAP by some nuclear strategists), it does illustrate that by virtue of being a nuclear alliance, NATO ultimately relies on nuclear capacities as a deterrent. This is essential, particularly in view of Russian investments in its nuclear capabilities.

The violation of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum (in which Ukraine declared its willingness to give up its nuclear weapons in return for recognition of its territorial integrity – including the Crimea – by Russia and others) has created new incentives for the possession of nuclear weapons. At the very least, it is likely to discourage states that possess such weapons from trading them in exchange for contractual assurances.

After nuclear strategy having mainly been restricted to "Global Zero", the potential end to nuclear sharing and similar disarmament initiatives over recent years, there is now once more a need for a serious examination of the political usefulness of nuclear weapons and the consequences of their proliferation.

However, there are many unanswered questions about the condition, political usefulness and terms of deployment of Western nuclear weapons (key phrase: escalation dominance). Deliberation about these strategic questions appears to be in a state of hibernation – notwithstanding some rather obscure documents such as the 2012 NATO Defense and Deterrence Posture Review.

While Germany does not have any nuclear weapons of its own, it does have an involvement with these questions through the nuclear sharing arrangements and its obligations within NATO. In view of its increasing responsibility, Germany must develop ideas and a stance in this area as well. You only need to look at the dearth of activity in the field of Strategic Studies at German universities to see that a great deal remains to be done.

e) The regional focus of German security policy is necessarily centered on Europe and its immediate neighborhood. However, Germany must also look at the bigger picture because it has a great interest in global stability as well as (in collaboration with allies and partners) the capability to make contributions to it. It would thus be desirable to develop specific security strategies for the African continent and for the Asia-Pacific. These regions should no longer be viewed predominantly through the lens of development cooperation or trade policy. They are becoming increasingly more important to Germany's well-being.

f) The state institutions involved in German security policy must adapt to the changing landscape. Given that the top of the executive is attracting increasing attention, it is surprising that the staff of the Directorate-General for Foreign, Security and Development Policy at the Federal Chancellery comprises less than

In view of the
resurging importance
of nuclear weapons,
Germany must develop
greater competence
in the area of
nuclear strategy.

30 employees – including administrative and secretarial personnel. By comparison: the US President's Security Council comprises a staff of over 350.

Obviously, size does not necessarily determine the quality of decision-making. But it is also obvious that a Chancellery with such limited resources is limited in its effectiveness. In the new era of revolutionary information and communication technology, the Federal Foreign Office has also lost its claim to the exclusive right to speak on matters of foreign policy, particularly as many government departments (and the Bundestag) have stepped onto the foreign policy stage. With a view to a coherent security policy, it would therefore be advisable to consider strengthening the Federal Chancellery and revive the old idea of a reformed Federal Security Council.

There is a need for encouraging (even) greater expertise in security strategy in the government departments, the Chancellery and the Bundestag.

Furthermore, all government departments involved in security-policy, in particular therefore the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry of Defense, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Federal Ministry of the Interior, require dedicated planning staff exempt from dealing with the urgent business of the day, who can deliberate on long-term strategic issues and who can invite input from external experts and contribute to public discourse as well. In this context, the policy planning staff at the Federal Foreign Office headed by Thomas Bagger can point to several exemplary initiatives, including the "Review 2014" process and the collaboration on "New Power New Responsibility" with Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik and the German Marshall Fund.

g) The Bundestag continues to play a central role in German security policy: as a monitoring body, a source of ideas and a conduit between decision-makers and the public. All the more important for Germany's greater prominence in international security policy to be reflected in parliament as well. However, all political parties are finding it difficult to raise an adequate number of committed and knowledgeable MPs. The mistaken belief that one cannot win elections with foreign policy and the undisputable fact that security policy issues are particularly difficult to convey to the public given its "benevolent indifference" have left their mark on the German party landscape. The party leaderships have the strategic obligation of encouraging and fostering the appropriate expertise.

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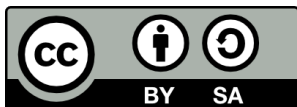
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