

# KAS INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

## SECURITY POLICY AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

■ **“The Potential Role of Germany in the Globalised World of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”**

*Christian Wulff*

■ **Obama’s Foreign Policy Legacy – Retreat or Repositioning?**

*Alessandro Scheffler Corvaja*

■ **Georgian-Russian Relations: Between Necessity and Ambivalence**

*Canan Atilgan /*

*Florian C. Feyrerabend*

■ **Japan 70 Years on from the End of the War: Balancing Act en Route to a New Security Architecture**

*Paul Linnarz*

■ **Inconclusiveness as a Guiding Principle? Six Decades of South Korean Unification Policy**

*Norbert Eschborn /*

*Andreas Kindsvater*





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**7 | 15**



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## EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

“The idea that Germany needs to take more responsibility for the world should not always be reduced to new weapon systems and increased military expenditure.” This was former German President Christian Wulff’s statement in a speech given on the occasion of the 30-year anniversary of *KAS International Reports*, which we commemorate in this issue. And he is right: Assuming responsibility in the world cannot be limited to the military sphere. Of course Germany must be prepared to fulfil its responsibilities towards its allies and deploy soldiers if the need arises. In light of the international threats, Germany must not abdicate its responsibilities in this area. But assuming responsibility means more than that.

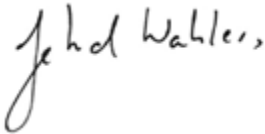
Among other things, assuming responsibility means to face up to one’s own past, as Germany has pursued for decades since World War II and should continue to do. Just how difficult this process can be, particularly when dealing with darker chapters in one’s own history, can be seen in the case of Japan, which Paul Linnarz examines in his article for this issue.

But of course assuming responsibility also means to remember moments in one’s history that are less dark – even uplifting – and to draw appropriate lessons from them. There can hardly be an event in German history that illustrates this better than German reunification. As Germans, we appreciate how fortunate we count ourselves to have achieved unity in peace and freedom when we follow Norbert Eschborn and Andreas Kindsvater in turning our gaze towards Korea, which has been a divided country for 70 years now.

Finally, assuming responsibility means to reassure one’s allies and partners. The USA remains one of Germany’s closest friends. Consequently, developments there are also of great significance for us, on this side of the Atlantic. We must bear this in mind when reading Alessandro Scheffler Corvaja’s article, which provides a critical appraisal of President Obama’s foreign policy legacy.

Georgia is one of the countries that has joined the circle of Germany's partners relatively recently. After gaining independence just under 25 years ago, the country has pursued a distinctly Western line in its foreign policy and has repeatedly had to fend off Russia's efforts to impose its hegemonic influence as explained by Canan Atilgan and Florian Feyerabend in their article. Continuing to support states such as Georgia, which are looking to the West in terms of their value orientation, on their path towards democracy, the rule of law and a social market economy also forms part of what Germany's responsibility in the world encompasses.

Coming to terms with the past, the culture of remembrance, the Transatlantic Partnership and support for young democracies – all areas to which the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung makes important contributions thereby supporting Germany in fulfilling its international responsibilities. Christian Wulff's speech on the occasion of the 30-year anniversary of the *KAS International Reports* acknowledged these contributions as well.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'G'.

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## **Content**

### **2 | EDITORIAL**

#### **Security Policy and Crisis Management**

- 6 |** "THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF GERMANY IN THE GLOBALISED WORLD OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY" – A SPEECH GIVEN ON 27 NOVEMBER 2014 TO MARK THE 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF KAS INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

*Christian Wulff*

- 20 |** OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY LEGACY – RETREAT OR REPOSITIONING?

*Alessandro Scheffler Corvaja*

- 35 |** GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: BETWEEN NECESSITY AND AMBIVALENCE

*Canan Atilgan / Florian C. Feyerabend*

- 54 |** JAPAN 70 YEARS ON FROM THE END OF THE WAR: BALANCING ACT EN ROUTE TO A NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

*Paul Linnarz*

- 74 |** INCONCLUSIVENESS AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE? SIX DECADES OF SOUTH KOREAN UNIFICATION POLICY

*Norbert Eschborn / Andreas Kindsvater*

## “THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF GERMANY IN THE GLOBALISED WORLD OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY”

A SPEECH GIVEN ON 27 NOVEMBER 2014 TO MARK THE 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF KAS INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

*Christian Wulff*



Christian Wulff served as President of Germany from 2010 to 2012.

Peter Gardosch was 13 years old when he was deported to Auschwitz. His mother, sister and grandparents were all murdered there. He has written a book about his experiences in Germany as a young boy. I recently had an opportunity to meet Peter Gardosch, and our talk made a lasting impression on me. We talked about his book, his life, about how Germany shouldered a huge burden of guilt about the collapse of civilisation that was the Holocaust, and also about how Germany has faced up to its responsibilities since then.

Today – a good 70 years after the Holocaust – Germany is respected around the world. Young Israelis even think our capital is totally hip. It’s amazing really.

In the wake of the Second World War, here in Europe we have achieved the seemingly impossible: the reconciliation of bitter wartime enemies. After all the horrors, hands were extended to us. Statesmen came up with visionary ideas. In 1946, just one year after the end of the war, Winston Churchill gave a speech at the University of Zurich in which he said: “We must build a kind of United States of Europe.” He went on: “The first step in the re-creation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany. In this way only can France recover the moral and cultural leadership of Europe. There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany.” These were bold words after two world wars involving Germany and Britain in which Germany caused Britain great suffering.

Photo: © Laurence Chaperon.





Christian Wulff during his keynote address on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *KAS International Reports* in November 2014: "Germany's success would not have been possible without its exchange with the world." | Source: © Jan Roehl, KAS.

Are we capable of this kind of vision today? Is Germany in a position to inspire other countries with our vision and our experience of dealing with our past? Do we have to keep repeating the same mistakes, simply committed by different people?

It's well known that I come from Osnabrück, home of the Peace of Westphalia. This simply heightens my concern that – as Henry Kissinger puts it in his book – the experiences of the Thirty Years' War will be replayed in other places around the world, triggered by other religious conflicts, such as that between Sunnis and Shiites.

I think it is a fascinating undertaking to seek to provide a model for how people of different faiths can live together in peace. I often hear it said that this isn't so easy because everyone is subject to our basic laws, and some religions simply don't fit into this. Then I re-read Articles 3 and 4 of our constitution. Everyone is free to have their beliefs, but they don't have to believe, and if they do, they are free to believe what they want. This is an inalienable right. And as Germans, after the Holocaust we bear a particular responsibility for ensuring that this right is upheld.

When I was President of Germany, I was always impressed when people from around the world told me about great things Germans had done in their countries. It made me feel very proud of our country. There have been German families in New Zealand, Hawaii and Australia, German settlements on the Volga, Bosnia and Slovakia, German expatriates in the USA, researchers in Antarctica, engineers working on the Baghdad railway, doctors and nurses in China, archaeologists in Turkey and land surveyors in Samoa. They have taken photos, made observations, collected and evaluated.

But unfortunately there have also been other examples: Germans have committed colonial crimes in other countries. It was under Bismarck, at the Berlin Conference of 1884, that the foundations were laid for the colonial division of Africa. And the suffering of the Herero people in 1904 also has to be a part of our historical consciousness.



German expatriates are positively remembered in many places. Erich Paulun, founder of Tongji University in Shanghai, is just one example. | Source: Mr. Pommeroy, Wikimedia ©©©.

But the overall picture also includes the fact that the greenest city in China is Qingdao, because the Germans laid out a number of avenues during the colonial period. The Germans built railways in Africa that are still in use today. Land disputes in Samoa are still settled by checking in land registers drawn up by Germans in the brief colonial era. And Tongji University in Shanghai is very proud of its German founder, Erich Paulun.

I hope we will continue to be outward looking over the coming years. Today our world is more interconnected than ever before.

I think it would be interesting to publish a book about famous Germans who have left their mark on the world, and about famous people from other countries who have left their mark on Germany. It would also be fascinating to establish a migration museum in Germany that would demonstrate how we would probably have gone out of the Brazil World Cup in the first round if it hadn't been for Sammy Khedira, Mesut Özil, Miroslav Klose, Lukas Podolski and Jerome Boateng. Germany's success has only been possible because we have been open to the world.

**The German national soccer team would have probably gone out of the Brazil World Cup in the first round if it hadn't been for Khedira, Özil, Klose, Podolski and Boateng.**

In what I view as an homage to our country, British writer Peter Watson has written a review of German intellect and culture from Bach to Benedict XVI. If it had been written by a German, I would be reluctant to quote it, because the author is so effusive in his praise for Germany. Peter Watson presents an encyclopaedic account of the "German genius" and points to German success in engineering, the natural sciences and its contribution to music, medicine, theology and philosophy. He suggests a number of reasons for this, stating that our dissatisfaction and perfectionism prevent us from being complacent.

I would like to cite an example from my own experience. Suppose an engineer inspects a car and finds the boot lid rattles a little. In some countries they would say "it's doesn't matter if it rattles at 180 because we have a maximum speed limit of 80 miles an hour". In other countries they would say "The boot lid rattles at 180", whereas a German engineer would say "No, we have to stop it rattling at 180." This is why we build the best cars in the world.


So it is also interesting to ask whether we have appropriated a few things that are part of our way of solving problems. I'm thinking about our "Mittelstand" of family-run companies; the long-term

management of our businesses; our principle of co-determination; our dual study system; the defence of our industrial core; our method of training people for top careers in industry without insisting on an academic focus.

I am delighted to see that Watson refers to the positive effects of local administration and, above all, federalism. Without federalism, we would not have so many top universities such as those in Tübingen, Freiburg, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart and elsewhere. It is this that had led the individual states to compete and build up their own universities.

Last year, Alain Minc published a book in France titled *Vive l'Allemagne*, rather than "Vive la France". Minc is an intellectual and advisor to former French President Sarkozy. In his book, he states that Germany has become "the healthiest and most democratic country" in Europe.



The French intellectual Alain Minc has published a book titled *Vive l'Allemagne*, in which he praises Germany as "the most democratic and healthiest country" in Europe. | Source: Nigel Dickinson, Fondapol, flickr ©

But at the same time, he criticises Germany for attempting to become a kind of "big Switzerland". He believes the French need to ask themselves whether they would prefer a Germany that has largely said goodbye to its past or a Germany that is ready to take on a position of moderate power. German diplomacy is the exact

opposite of its British and French counterpart. As former colonial powers, Britain and France have sought a position on the world stage that in fact exceeds their significance. In contrast, Germany aims to perform below its true capacity.

Poland and Britain would both like Germany to play a stronger role. In *Cicero*, British journalist Roger Cohen called for new investment in the German armed forces, along with German leadership on the Russian question and a bold revival of transatlantic relations. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will never live up to its promise if Germany fails to think big.

We know the times are changing when Poland, France and Britain advocate for Germany to play a bigger role. We are still reacting to this with restraint, which I think is a good thing. It is better to think twice about stepping back from spirals of violence, better to negotiate one more time, than to prematurely turn to what should be our last resort: military intervention. I believe this interplay of mutual trust and joint responsibility in Europe is a good one.

We have noted how the British House of Commons rejected military intervention in Syria, running counter to previous decisions, and how the USA has pulled back from some operations. We have seen how the Military Academy at West Point has raised the threshold for U.S. military operations, and that we Germans are now taking on greater responsibility – in the Balkans, Afghanistan and by supplying arms to Kurdish fighters.

Today many areas can no longer be viewed as purely matters of domestic policy because issues such as climate change, food security, financial and monetary policy and fighting terrorism can only be resolved together. I would like to briefly outline seven areas for action in multilateral policy.

## **1. FINANCIAL MARKETS**

I believe the global financial crisis is not yet over. Germany is particularly known for its frugality and stability, for example monetary value. But this doesn't make us popular everywhere in the world. Often it is easier for our politicians to pump more money into the market than to manage expenditure in a sound way. But this will lead to problems in the long term.

We urgently need to reach a consensus, at least on the goal of not constantly living at the expense of future generations. We should be united in our goal, even if we have different ideas about how to get there and how long it will take us. Many countries are looking to Germany in this respect. But we are under pressure from the Americans and others to maintain low interest rates to keep the economy running for a certain length of time, without being able to fully assess the long-term consequences.

## 2. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

With 24 official languages, eleven currencies and 28 independent nations, Europe is an unprecedented project, but also a project that serves as a model. So we have to work out our differences, which of course is not always easy.

In France the party with the slogan "The French come first" is now the strongest party. The UK has been a member of the EU since 1973 but is seriously considering leaving. Hungary is putting domestic policies before European issues in a rather peculiar way. The list goes on. So we have to show how we can live and internalise a Europe that is united in diversity, above and beyond national, linguistic, cultural and religious boundaries.



It is crucial for the European project to overcome differences, particularly when countries such as Viktor Orbán's Hungary prioritise national policies over European issues. | Source: Pietro Naj-Oleari, EU / PE-EP, flickr ©①③③.

More than 14 million Muslims live in Europe, making up the continent's second-largest faith community. In Berlin there are now as many Muslims as Catholics. Yet there are so many people who refuse to accept them. The problems of certain minorities, such as racism, anti-Semitism but also anti-Islamism have to be taken seriously. They cannot be part of an enlightened society and modern 21<sup>st</sup>-century democracy. We need more intensive debate and face-to-face encounters among equals. It is a case of accepting that others have their own identities.

It could be so simple, if only everyone would treat others as they want to be treated themselves – with respect and appreciation.

At the conclusion of the Synod in Rome, Pope Francis warned of the temptation of a destructive tendency to do-goodism in the name of a deceptive mercy that binds the wounds without first curing them and treating them. At the same time, he warned of the danger of hostile inflexibility. For him, it is of heartfelt concern to find an unerring path between the two.

This is done by deescalating problems, never letting them become so great that both sides rigidly cut themselves off – separated, split and divided. This is an important task we can shoulder in our society and our Europe and which may serve as an example to the rest of the world.

### 3. AFRICA

No continent is home to more religions than Africa. No continent has more languages than Africa. There are so many states, nations, interests and histories that it is impossible to generalise. Horst Köhler made a great contribution in this area. He warned us about the images in our heads. When we think of Africa, we all too often think of crisis and conflict, war and catastrophe, disease and corruption. Henning Mankell wrote: "The media tell us everything about how Africans die, but nothing about how they live." We should not forget the African economic miracle, the growth of African democracy and the increasing strength of many African countries. There are many brave people who are defending human rights and fighting against corruption. Civil society is gaining strength, women are campaigning for peace, and groups of farmers are vociferously demanding their rights.

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Africa is the youngest continent in the world – half of its population is aged 18 or less. By 2050 two billion people will be living on our neighbouring continent. Nigeria alone will be home to 400 million people, that's almost as many as the population of Europe.



Rescued in the Mediterranean: The flow of refugees can only be reduced through more education and better opportunities in life. | Source: © Darrin Zammit Lupi, Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS).

We must admit openly and honestly that while Africa needs to develop, our society also needs to undergo a transformation; that we need a fair system of international trade that encourages growth and gives African economies more opportunities to develop themselves; that we have to learn how to listen and to develop a culture of talking together as equals, in order to build a true partnership based on respect and trust in which we help people to help themselves and take responsibility.

#### **4. ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY**

It took four million years before the world's population hit the one billion mark in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In just a few decades, it will hit eight billion. Some of these eight billion people leave behind huge footprints, particularly those of us who live in the developed nations and regularly drive cars, fly in planes and so on. We simply can't go on like this. So the German government has drawn up its charter for the future titled "ONE WORLD – Our Responsibility". We need to create the kind of globalisation that is not only designed to benefit the markets and the economy, but that



also benefits people. We need a fundamental shift in our ways of thinking and acting on the national, European and international stages, so that we can change our behaviour as consumers and redefine our concept of prosperity.

I would like us to have a debate about how we can improve educational opportunities for all, increase productivity and give people real prospects, wherever they may live. Otherwise we will never halt the flood of refugees. Europe can do a great deal to help expand civil society and export prosperity.

## 5. TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

At the moment, transatlantic relations are not sailing smooth waters. We need to go beyond international organisations and strengthen the ties between democracies, from the U.S., Canada and South America to Europe, Korea and Japan and on to Australia and New Zealand. This will help us to tackle the weaknesses of the United Nations. When the power of veto constantly prevents meaningful action, we need other forms of cooperation in order to help and intervene effectively on the international stage.

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The friendship between the U.S. and Germany is one of our cornerstones. We could not have built our nation without the help of the Americans: liberation from the National Socialists, rebuilding with the aid of the Marshall Plan, help with German reunification. All this means we owe them a great debt of gratitude.

But the surveillance scandal has dealt a cruel blow to U.S.-German relations, and so far this has not been properly dealt with. We cannot allow bureaucratic reasons to be considered justification for abusing the human rights of prisoners or compromising the rule of law in court proceedings. Otherwise our Western values will fail to have any pulling power. We need new stimuli for our transatlantic relations. The free trade agreement with Canada should be ratified quickly, and the agreement with the U.S. should be accelerated. But in less concrete terms we need signs and symbols that will revive the relationship between Europe and America.

Europe also has to work on itself. Our actions are hampered by the fact that we only rarely speak with one voice. It was encouraging to see how Europe was united on the issue of Russian sanctions.

But this is not the case when it comes to China and its human rights record, or the Middle East when it comes to the question of Palestinian autonomy and UN membership. But unless we speak with one voice we will not be heard in these parts of the world and we will not be taken seriously.

I am concerned that Russia and China are testing us. When the territorial borders of sovereign states are not respected, then there has to be an outcry from the international community, because we all want to live within secure, agreed borders. Annexations for the purposes of territorial expansion fly in the face of our basic beliefs.

We must understand that growth in the world's population means that Europe will – in quantitative terms – become less important. But in qualitative terms we can become more important if we are prepared to offer our values, our innovative solutions, our reliability and our experience. We have been through the Enlightenment, citizen's revolutions, the Reformation, the separation of church and state. These experiences mean we have something to offer the world and can perhaps help others to prevent the kinds of bloody conflicts we have suffered on our continent.

## 6. ASIA

Asia is even more diverse than Europe and Africa. It is home to Buddhists and Muslims, Confucians and Hindus, Christians and traditional religions. Some countries are ruled by military governments, others are democracies. Some have press freedom, others have very little freedom of expression. In Mumbai in India, the most expensive private residence in the world has been built for 800 million dollars next to the biggest slum in Asia. This speaks volumes about the tensions endured by this continent. They can lead to uprisings and revolution and border conflicts are a frequent occurrence.

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As Europeans, our close ties to Asia mean we have a fundamental interest in resolving border conflicts and ensuring that historic conflicts are reconciled. What power we could be unleashed if we could achieve this!



A slum next to an airport in Mumbai: opposites are ubiquitous in Asia. | Source: liquidcrash, flickr ©©©.

Here too, I tend to look on the bright side. We have all heard about the problems in East Timor and the attacks in Aceh province. But how many of us realise that Indonesia, the country with the world's largest Muslim population, peacefully elected a new president after ten years, that there is an autonomy agreement for Aceh and that reconciliation is being achieved in East Timor? In these times, we run the risk of barely being able to handle all the bad news, meaning we have little time to take note of the positive developments in places like Tunisia in Africa and Indonesia in Asia.

## **7. THE ARAB WORLD**

We are concerned about the religious radicalisation of people in the Middle East. We need to hold international talks with the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council about the co-existence of Shiites and Sunnis, the co-existence of the different parties and groups in this region, and we have to come together to fight the international networks of Islamist terrorism. I welcome the fact that the leaders of the major Islamic denominations have distanced themselves from terror and clearly stated that these attacks violate the basic principles of Islam. Now the world has to come together to defend itself, using military force if necessary.

If we pursue multilateralism within a globalised world, if one country no longer simply attacks another country but the conflicts play out in quite different ways, then we need a kind of global police, a global action force. We have to build up the United Nations' forces so that they can be deployed when a resolution is passed by the General Assembly, without individual vetos being in a position to block them. These parties will not be obliged to take part in the operations themselves, but they should not be allowed to prevent such operations. Genocide should not be allowed to take place without international intervention because the pace is being set by the slowest member or by particular ideologies.

**I believe we should not run around the world wagging our fingers but be humble enough to admit to the trials and tribulations that we have been through with National Socialism and Communism.**

German history shows that democracy, freedom and law are often the result of long-drawn-out processes. So at the end of my tour d'horizon, I believe we should not run around the world wagging our fingers but

be humble enough to admit to the trials and tribulations that we have been through with National Socialism and Communism. We were brought back to the straight and narrow with the help of the Allies and led down the path to democracy and virtue. It is only 25 years since we achieved the unity of our land under the rule of law, freedom and democracy. Let's be grateful for that and allow others to benefit from our experiences.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung on its *International Reports*. A few days ago some criticism was voiced about increased funding for the political foundations. I can only say I think it is wonderful that we are continuing to strengthen this area, promoting democracy at home and civil society and democracy around the world. The idea that Germany needs to take more responsibility for the world should not always be reduced to new weapon systems and increased military expenditure. Instead, it should be possible to increase Germany's influence in all kinds of areas: our Foreign Service, the Goethe-Institut, the political foundations' offices in other countries – all these can make a major difference. They can effectively represent German interests with wisdom and enthusiasm and play their part in preventing armed conflicts. We offer up our model, our values but we don't force them on anyone. We encourage people who otherwise would have no platform to communicate with each other and I am proud that Germany and its political foundations are taking this special path of promoting democracy around the

world, standing up for women's rights and assisting in the spread of education and democratic structures.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Böll-Stiftung, the Naumann-Stiftung, the Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung – all these are working in different countries with different focuses and often under very difficult conditions. Some of their local staff have been sentenced to many years in prison simply for talking to a human rights activist or lawyer or expressing a particular opinion. I have the deepest respect for the representatives of Germany's political foundations everywhere in the world and I feel the *KAS International Reports* serve to keep me excellently informed. When I used to travel abroad in my role as President of Germany, many politicians thanked me for the huge benefits provided by the political foundations. We should be proud of this and I congratulate the Adenauer-Stiftung and its *International Reports* on the important work they are doing.

# OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY LEGACY

## RETREAT OR REPOSITIONING?

*Alessandro Scheffler Corvaja*



Alessandro Scheffler Corvaja is a Research Associate at the Bundeswehr University Munich and at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies.

Barack Obama's election to President of the United States raised hopes all around that it would produce a transformation in U.S. foreign and particularly security policy. Employing a rhetoric modelled on that of liberal President Wilson and focusing on diplomacy, inclusion and, not least, restraint, Obama appeared to be the long-awaited counterpart to his predecessor George W. Bush, whose foreign policy conduct even drew criticism from his own followers towards the end.<sup>1</sup> While, as Christoph von Marschall rightly notes, Obama's election campaign with its slogans "Yes We Can", "Hope" and "Change" may have been aimed first and foremost at domestic rather than foreign policy, his followers at home and abroad had expected a fundamental change in policy with respect to foreign affairs as well.<sup>2</sup> After all, he received the Nobel Peace Prize though he had hardly been in office for a year.

Now that the challengers of the next U.S. election campaign are beginning to stake out their positions, the time has come to take preliminary stock of the results of Barack Obama's presidency in the area of foreign policy. As has been the case for all previous U.S. presidents, there is the question of the legacy. In Obama's case, frequent discussions on this topic have focused on subjects such as the gradual normalisation of relations with Cuba as well as the nuclear agreement with Iran and the conclusion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement.

- 1 | In the end, President Bush's approval rating only was at 22 per cent. "Bush's Final Approval Rating: 22 Percent", *CBS News*, 16 Jan 2009, <http://cbsnews.com/news/bushs-final-approval-rating-22-percent> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).
- 2 | Cf. Christoph von Marschall, "Obamas Außenpolitik", *Internationale Politik*, No. 5, Sep-Oct 2014, p. 68. For an excellent analysis of the development of Obama's speeches on foreign policy cf. also James Traub, "When did Obama give up?", *Foreign Policy*, 26 Feb 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/26/when-did-obama-give-up-speeches> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

Rather than homing in on specific aspects, this article will attempt to gain a broader view of the likely legacy of Obama's presidency in the area of security policy and examine the claims the President made when he took office, what he has achieved, and which challenges this legacy will produce for his successor's security and defence policy.

### **OBAMA'S POLICY OF RESTRAINT – A PROBLEMATIC RECORD**

When he took office in 2008, Obama attempted to realign U.S. foreign and security policy, focusing on diplomacy, reconciliation and restraint. Prominent points on his agenda included a “reset” with Russia after the Georgian crisis – including a reduction in nuclear weapons and project “Global Zero” – as well as reconciliation with the Muslim world – one should recall his speech in Cairo in this context – and a conclusion to the conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, the USA wanted to re-establish its role as a reliable and solid partner in relation to its traditional allies, backtracking from the unilateralist tendencies of the preceding government. This would, however, require that partners play their role and take on greater responsibility, particularly in regard to regional issues.



French combat units at a ceremony on the occasion of the start of the U.S. anti-terrorist operation Barkhane in the Sahel region in July 2014: More responsibility for partners was an essential part of Obama's strategy. | Source: Martin S. Bonner, U.S. Army Africa, flickr ©©.

Many experts view the outcome of these projects as disastrous. It is not for nothing that Patrick Keller describes the results of Obama's period in office as the "Obama debacle":<sup>3</sup> Syria and Iraq have descended into a nightmare under the attacks from the so-called Islamic State and threaten to draw the USA back into the conflict more intensely. Relations with Russia have reverted to a state similar to that during the Cold War, and Ukraine is another failing state now in need of assistance. China is acting with increasing ruthlessness and aggression in Asia, and the achievements made through the USA's engagement in Afghanistan remain vanishingly small. Other initiatives from the early stage of the presidency such as global nuclear disarmament or a resolution to the Middle East conflict appear

**The only countries the United States now has better relations with than two years ago are Myanmar, Iran, and Cuba.**

absurd rather than ambitious seven years on. In an article for the *Foreign Policy* magazine, William Inboden says in summary that the only countries where the United States now has better relations than in January 2009 are Myanmar, Iran, and Cuba.<sup>4</sup> Nor does the President rate particularly highly in the estimation of the American public: In recent surveys, approval ratings for Obama's foreign policy were no greater than around 37 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the President's national security apparatus continue to remain under pressure. Just recently, with the expiry of the "Patriot Act", the intelligence services lost a considerable portion of their powers – far beyond the reforms planned by the administration – and the Senate is writing letters to foreign heads of state seeking to undermine the President's negotiations. While the third Secretary of Defense has now taken office, the fundamental budget problems of the military have remained unresolved and are becoming more serious each year; added to this is the ever-present threat of the so-called sequester hanging over the military.

3 | Patrick Keller, "Das Obama-Debakel", *Internationale Politik*, No. 6, Nov-Dec 2014, p. 126.

4 | William Inboden, "The Obama Legacy and the Next Two Years", *Foreign Policy*, 20 Jan 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/20/pre-butting-the-state-of-the-union> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

5 | Survey conducted by *The New York Times/CBS News* in the period from 28 to 31 May 2015 among 1,022 adults in the USA. The question was: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling foreign policy?. *The New York Times/CBS News*, "Poll", <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.documentcloud.org/documents/2091162/poll-may-28-31.pdf> (accessed 2 Jul 2015). Cf. "How the Poll Was Conducted", *The New York Times*, 3 Jun 2015, <http://nyti.ms/1G8ZLbP> (accessed 2 Jul 2015) for the methodology.



## WEAKNESS OR REALISM?

### OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY GUIDELINES

2015 has brought a summer of significant achievement for Obama with the approval of ObamaCare, the Yes to same sex marriage and the Trade Promotion Authority bill being signed into law. But with less than a year to go before the end of his second term, in the area of security policy primarily seems to leave his successor with a large number of unresolved problems. While no one would go so far as to consider Obama solely responsible for causing these problems, most critics direct considerable blame at his policy of restraint. The accusation in this context is mainly one of omission: if the USA had intervened in many crises more decisively and earlier and demonstrated greater "leadership" at important junctures, this situation may not have arisen. At the core of most of the evaluations is an analysis according to which American weakness had, in fact, allowed these crises to develop in the first place or even provoked them. So is Obama a president of weakness, who has above all shirked responsibility? To understand this criticism requires an understanding of Obama's foreign policy principles.

Obama's most significant fundamental assumption in 2015 is clearly a recognition of the country's limitations – and many see this as a direct consequence of the failures experienced in recent years.<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, it seems that the United States can rarely achieve one hundred per cent success and usually has to be content with "singles" and "doubles" rather than "home runs", as Obama attempts to put it in baseball terms.<sup>7</sup> As he stated in a much-noticed interview with *Vox* magazine this spring, the main idea is to "take the victories where you can" and to "make things a little bit better rather than a little bit worse".<sup>8</sup> In informal discussions with journalists, some from Obama's entourage used the

6 | Cf. Doyle McManus, "Obama's sadder but wiser foreign policy", *Los Angeles Times*, 10 Feb 2015, <http://latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-mcmanus-obama-foreign-policy-20150211-column.html> (accessed 14 Jul 2015).

7 | Cf. Juliet Eilperin, "Obama lays out his foreign policy doctrine: Singles, doubles and the occasional home run", *The Washington Post*, 28 Apr 2014, <http://wapo.st/1JhIZF5> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

8 | Barack Obama, interview by Matthew Yglesias, 23 Jan 2015. "The Vox Conversation: Obama, Part two: Foreign Policy", *Vox*, 9 Feb 2015, <http://vox.com/a/barack-obama-interview-vox-conversation/obama-foreign-policy-transcript> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

phrase “Don’t do stupid shit” to describe his strategy.<sup>9</sup> Obama himself therefore describes his foreign policy as realistic in the proper sense, i.e. characterised by the limited achievability of many of its classic objectives. This restraint goes so far that Obama’s Security Advisor Susan Rice has increasingly been making reference to the concept of “strategic patience”, a phrase that tends to be used in Washington to refer to Europeans making excuses. In response to the emphasis on this idea in the new National Security Strategy from this February, observers have already joked that this could have been Germany’s White Book.<sup>10</sup>



A U.S.-Iraqi police patrol in Basra in 2010: The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in a U.S. commitment in the region lasting for years – including numerous casualties and expenses in the billions. | Source: Adelita Mead, U.S. Army, flickr ©🇺🇸.

This mantra of restraint and “Don’t do stupid shit” is diametrically opposed to traditional conceptions of American foreign policy. When the Republican senator and presidential candidate Lindsey Graham stated at the Munich Security Conference that arms deliveries to Ukraine will make him “feel better”, the difference to Obama’s thinking could not be greater. By pursuing this approach

9 | Mark Landler, “In Obama’s Speeches, a Shifting Tone on Terror”, *The New York Times*, 31 May 2014, <http://nyti.ms/1nQvGUP> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

10 | Cf. Jackson Janes, “The Struggle to Define a Leadership Agenda”, American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 10 Feb 2015, <http://aicgs.org/issue/the-struggle-to-define-leadership> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

of restrained positioning, which his opponents frequently interpret as hesitation, Obama is ultimately fulfilling precisely what he promised during his 2008 election campaign. After the expansionist years of the Bush administration, this agenda was originally welcomed by many experts. The urgent need for a repositioning – combined with Obama’s focus on domestic policy under the motto of “nation building at home” – extended across all political camps at that time.

Most observers had, however, linked the repositioning concept with the idea that the United States would re-enter the global arena in a similar role as before after a period of introspection, merely freed from the unilateralist impulses of the 2000s. In that case, the repositioning would simply have represented a classic phase of retrenchment, taking its place in the usual American wavering between isolationism and expansionism.<sup>11</sup> But any analyst of Obama’s stance described above will soon recognise that the current policy was never considered a phase but is based on a much more fundamental modesty with respect to Obama’s own ambitions – a modesty that has grown over the years.

While Obama made it clear in the above-mentioned interview with *Vox* that having a realistic view of what is feasible in the area of foreign politics does not equate to an admission of retreat by the USA, that is of course precisely what his opponents believe. It is here where we can find the most fundamental problem with Obama’s approach: most Americans are still convinced that the world is in dire need of American leadership. The concept of American exceptionalism, i.e. the idea that the USA has a special role and responsibility in the world, is still deeply engrained in the American psyche. Obama has also tried to solve this dilemma in a typically American way: by emphasising the role of partners.<sup>12</sup>

11 | Cf. Raymond Aron, *Die imperiale Republik. Die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika und die übrige Welt seit 1945*, Stuttgart/Zürich, 1975.

12 | In this context, note the focus on partners in the 2010 *Quadrennial Defense Review* von 2010: “The United States will remain the most powerful actor but must increasingly cooperate with key allies and partners if it is to sustain stability and peace [...]” U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report. February 2010*, p. iii, [http://defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR\\_as\\_of\\_12Feb10\\_1000.pdf](http://defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR_as_of_12Feb10_1000.pdf) (accessed 2 Jul 2015). Regarding the President’s own view reference is made to a speech he made in May 2014: Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony”, West Point, New York, U.S. Military Academy-West Point, speech, 28 May 2014, <https://whitehouse.gov/the-press-of-fice/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

As mentioned above, American foreign policy undergoes a regular cycle of expansion and subsequent retrenchment. While the USA is always prepared to claim the lead role which goes hand in hand with its special capabilities in times of expansion, the call for a stronger engagement by its allies has been a recurring pattern in times of "retreat" such as the present.<sup>13</sup> From Obama's perspective, American "leadership" therefore means "wherever possible leveraging other countries, other resources, where we're the lead partner because we have capabilities that other folks don't have. But that way there's some burden-sharing and there's some ownership for outcomes".<sup>14</sup>

Strong partners should therefore shoulder the main burden, while the United States limits itself to a supporting role. This concept of "leading from behind", which has been positively derided, has proved to be a chimera as well during Obama's latter term. It

**Obama's strategy of Leading from behind proved to be an illusion, as the militarily well-equipped Turkey, Jordan and Saudi-Arabia were not able to prevent the catastrophic failure of an entire region.**

is the case that the USA has succeeded in enhancing the contributions of its own partners and even in handing leadership over to them in some cases – Germany's role in Ukraine is a case in point here. But in the Middle East in particular, these partners were not able to prevent the catastrophic failure of an entire region, although they included some militarily well-equipped regional powers such as Turkey, Jordan and Saudi-Arabia. In Libya, where France and the UK in particular had involved the United States despite its initial resistance, the state practically fell apart after the intervention had ended, with the Europeans looking on from the sidelines. The situation is even worse in the weaker states, where the USA wanted to provide support to governmental and above all military structures through massive investments. In the case of Iraq, the U.S. Secretary of Defense has by now come to accuse the military of cowardice in battle; in Afghanistan, the USA has had to deal with an occasionally openly hostile government for years, and in even more hopeless countries such as Somalia or Yemen, progress has been modest or non-existent. Despite the vast sums poured into the American Train & Equip programs, the USA has not succeeded in creating solid structures in these states.

13 | Cf. Derril Driver, "Burden Sharing and the Future of NATO: Wandering Between Two Worlds", U.S. Army War College Fellowship Paper, 2015.

14 | Obama, n. 8.

## THE FIRST LEGACY: WHICH LEADERSHIP ROLE FOR THE USA?

Obama's restrained security policy will pose a dilemma for his successor with respect to the positioning of the United States. The way foreign policy crises developed during his time in office shows that following a clear policy of restraint does not remain without consequences for a world power. As described above, considerable numbers of Americans make the failure to provide leadership under the Obama administration implicitly responsible for the negative events happening around the world over the last few years. While people generally agree that the USA should remain an important country providing "leadership", there is fundamental disagreement over what concrete form this leadership role should take. Despite all the criticism in Obama's restrained foreign policy, many U.S. citizens share his doubts about the scope of action for the U.S. and are particularly sceptical about large-scale military operations.<sup>15</sup>

This dilemma is also reflected in the current presidential election campaign. On the one hand, the Republican candidates are out-doing each other in their calls for "strength"; even the Republican wing under Rand Paul, which was demonstrating a strongly isolationist tendency just last year, is slowly feeling the pressure and is increasingly moving its focus away from foreign policy to criticising the intelligence services.<sup>16</sup> Most candidates are also becoming surprisingly tight-lipped with regard to greater details about how this strength is to manifest precisely. When pressed for an answer, they ultimately only mention even more sanctions, training, equipment and more air raids – in other

**Many presidential candidates envision a U.S. foreign policy strategy based on "strength" that would manifest in an increase in sanctions, training, equipment and air raids – in other words: more of the same.**

15 | While significantly more Americans now indicate their approval of the deployment of ground forces in Iraq compared to a year ago, the approval rate drops to 26 per cent as soon as a larger deployment is involved. (The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion conducted a survey commissioned by NBC News on 11 and 12 Feb 2015 among 603 adult Americans. The question was "When it comes to combating ISIS, the Islamic State group, do you support the United States:" with the options "Sending a large number of U.S. ground forces", "Sending a limited number of U.S. ground forces" and "Not sending U.S. ground forces at all"). *NBC News/Marist Poll*, 12 Feb 2015, [http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us150211/Complete%20NBC%20News%20Marist%20Poll\\_National\\_February%202015.pdf](http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us150211/Complete%20NBC%20News%20Marist%20Poll_National_February%202015.pdf) (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

16 | Cf. Manu Raju, "Rand Paul to lay out foreign policy vision", *POLITICO*, 23 Oct 2014, <http://politico.com/story/2014/10/rand-paul-foreign-policy-112126.html> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

words: more of the same. Anyone even vaguely suspected of seeking to reintroduce the interventionist policies of Obama's predecessor – like Jeb Bush a few months ago – must reckon with an immediate strong and often very personal adverse response.



Jeb Bush gives a speech in Des Moines, Iowa, in May 2015: Even his own brother was forced to distance himself from the foreign policy of George W. Bush. | Source: John Pemble, flickr ©📷📷.

At the same time, Obama's policy of delegating security responsibility to the alliance partners has failed. While some allies were simply overtaxed by the sudden responsibility, others have increasingly turned away from the USA because of the lack of support. How it will be possible for the USA to return to its previous leadership strength without simultaneously shouldering the majority of the burden for global security yet again will no doubt remain the most interesting question in the upcoming American presidential election campaign.

**THE SECOND LEGACY:  
A SECURITY APPARATUS IN NEED OF REFORM**

While Obama has moved away from the transformative approaches of his initial years in office, his restraint in the area of U.S. foreign policy sets him apart as well. One significant consequence of this has been that many of his experienced foreign policy advisors and officials have maintained (and still maintain) views that are diametrically opposed to his own. Obama's response has been to

also restrict himself increasingly to his closest circle of advisors in the White House where matters of foreign policy are concerned. In doing so he has curtailed the influence of the NSC in particular. Of course this has also had the effect of disabling the crucial coordination function of this body – particularly important in the vast and complex American system. Consequently, many institutions are now following their own agendas, frequently resulting in last-minute power struggles between the White House and the federal departments, which required direct intervention from the Oval Office to be resolved. Daniel Rothkopf, one of the most well-respected critics of the American security apparatus, therefore describes the most recent phase under Barack Obama and his Security Advisor Susan Rice as a “particularly dysfunctional period for the NSC”. Besides his criticism of Obama, who he says prefers to listen to political advisors rather than foreign policy experts, he homes in particularly on Susan Rice, who comes across as a very difficult and combative person.<sup>17</sup> Whoever will succeed Obama will therefore have to face the challenge of once again bringing to bear the traditional strength of the U.S. security apparatus – in fact the envy of many other countries – with greater effectiveness than in recent years.

One of the greatest unresolved issues of American security policy remains the future of the military, which is suffering from the budget cuts of recent years. Under the 2011 “Budget Control Act”, the USA will have to reduce its military spending by 487 billion U.S. dollars for the period from 2013 to 2023 compared to the original planning; the Pentagon will therefore have to make annual savings equivalent to just over the entire budget of the German armed forces.<sup>18</sup> Whenever the so-called Defense Hawks call for exceptions to these cuts the Democrats usually make such cuts dependent on exceptions of equal proportions in the non-military sphere. And the so-called Deficit Hawks on the Republican side, who are opposed to increasing the debt burden, find ways to scupper the latter.

**Based on the Budget Control Act, the Pentagon will have to make annual savings equivalent to just over the entire budget of the German armed forces between 2011 and 2023.**

17 | Jeffrey Goldberg, “A Withering Critique of Obama’s National Security Council”, *The Atlantic*, 12 Nov 2014, <http://theatlntc/1CDSfGS> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

18 | The budget of the German Ministry of Defence for 2015 is approximately 33 billion euros. Federal Ministry of Finance, “Entwurf eines Nachtragshaushalts 2015 und die Haushaltseckwerte für die Jahre 2016 bis 2019”, 24 Mar 2015, <http://bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Monatsberichte/2015/03/Inhalte/Kapitel-3-Analysen/3-1-nachtragshaushalt-2015-eckwerte-2016-2019.html> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

Consequently, while former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta refused to make plans for a potential sequester, living under this sword of Damocles has become a permanent reality for the armed forces. The cuts are hitting the armed forces particularly hard as they have failed to tackle two fundamental problems for some considerable time: the cost explosion relating to personnel and to military equipment procurement.

In part as a consequence of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which entailed repeated recruitment drives and increases in financial incentives, the expenditure for salaries and healthcare, for instance, is set to increase by 18 per cent by 2018, hollowing out the budget from the inside at the same time.<sup>19</sup> These cost increases are, in fact, not linked to the need to care for wounded veterans but relate to pensions and expenditure for family members insured under the TRICARE program, whose contributions amount to just 18 to 21 per cent of what comparable families in the private sector have to pay. In January, after an investigation lasting one and a half years, a nine-person Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission tasked by the Pentagon submitted 15 recommendations on how the rising personnel-related costs could be curtailed.<sup>20</sup> While the proposals themselves have drawn harsh criticism, many experts have argued that even these measures could not stop a rise in expenditure.

**The USA will be facing another central challenge over the next few decades: the creeping loss of the U.S. military's technical superiority.**

The costs for military hardware projects are also continuing to rise. The ten largest programs – particularly for ships, UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles), helicopters and satellite systems – are pushing up costs and represent the main drivers of this trend. While the problem has been known for years, once again solutions are hard to come by. This is critical insofar as the USA will be facing another central challenge over the next few decades: the creeping loss of the U.S. military's technical superiority. The key elements of American superiority, such as precision-guided munitions and networking capabilities,

19 | Anthony H. Cordesman, "The FY2016 Defense Budget and US Strategy: Key Trends and Data Points", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 6 Mar 2015, <http://csis.org/publication/fy2016-defense-budget-and-us-strategy-key-trends-and-data-points> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

20 | Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, "Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. Final Report", 29 Jan 2015, <http://www.mcrmc.gov/public/docs/report/MCRMC-FinalReport-29JAN15-HI.pdf> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).



are increasingly being adopted even by less ambitious armed forces, putting the vast superiority, which used to be taken for granted, into question. Potential enemies have evaluated the use of these elements and are making preparations for rendering the USA vulnerable through a targeted response. As these armed forces define the USA as their main potential enemy, they have no need to engage in a broad build-up of capabilities and can concentrate on the areas that would make it more difficult for the USA to advance against them by conventional means. This would make it possible for them to engage in precisely targeted, asymmetrical challenges to the USA. China is the prime example; it is focusing on building a submarine fleet of so-called carrier killers, a measure which is obviously directed against the U.S. aircraft carrier strike groups and which will push the operational range of the carrier fleet in the Pacific up to 2,000 sea miles off the coast.<sup>21</sup>



A continuously growing part of U.S. military expenditure is not going towards care of wounded veterans or the purchase of new weapons systems, but is instead towards pensions and co-insured families. | Source: Brian Glass, U.S. Army, flickr ©©©.

21 | Cf. Robert Haddick, "China's most dangerous missile (so far)", *War on the Rocks*, 2 Jul 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/chinas-most-dangerous-missile-so-far> (accessed 2 Jul 2015). For a more detailed analysis of the threat to traditional American superiority see Andrew F. Krepinevich, "Why Air-Sea Battle?", Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 19 Feb 2010, <http://csbaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/2010.02.19-Why-AirSea-Battle.pdf> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

After a decade in which the military development of the USA has concentrated on so-called “small wars”, many experts therefore think that the time has come for a third “Offset” strategy. This goes back to the endeavours made by Eisenhower (First Offset) and Reagan (Second Offset) to maintain America’s technological superiority over the Soviet Union. Under Eisenhower, measures were taken to compensate for conventional military superiority of the Soviet Union by changing to a nuclear counter-strategy (Flexible Response) and Reagan decided to respond to the parity in nuclear capability with the development of precision-guided munitions and advanced communication systems, which gave the USA a lead it still takes advantage of today. The task of developing the Third Offset has been given to the Defense Innovation Initiative announced in November 2014, one of whose main drivers is Deputy Secretary of Defence Robert Work.<sup>22</sup>

### SUMMARY

While Obama may be able to claim some foreign policy achievements of potentially long-term significance during his last year in office – such as an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program and the trade agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership – the

**Despite the fundamental crises of the last seven years, Obama succeeded in preventing the USA from becoming massively embroiled in further conflicts.**

immediate verdict as to his foreign policy record will be modest at best. Even if many problematic issues of American politics are rooted in events happening before his time in office, the President will not be able to avoid

the accusation that he has done little to improve matters. Obama, for his part, may not see it that way. Despite the fundamental crises of the last seven years, he did succeed in preventing the USA from becoming massively embroiled in further conflicts. However much one may want to criticise the President for his restraint, there is no convincing argument for saying that greater American engagement would have improved the situation in every case.

22 | Cf. Ben FitzGerald/Shawn Brimley, “Press Note: The New DOD Offset Strategy”, Center for a New American Security, 17 Nov 2014, <http://cnas.org/press-note/new-DOD-offset-strategy> (accessed 2 Jul 2015). For further information on the problem of Anti-Access/Area Denial cf. Bill Dries et al., “Securing Operational Access: Evolving the Air-Sea Battle Concept”, *The National Interest*, 11 Feb 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/securing-operational-access-evolving-the-air-sea-battle-12219> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

So what legacy will his presidency leave behind? As Richard Sokolsky and Jeremy Shapiro describe in an article for the American Brookings Institution think tank, seven years of Obama administration have left America markedly more sympathetic to George McGovern's exhortation "come home, America" than to John F. Kennedy's willingness to "pay any price, [...] bear any burden, [...] to assure the survival and the success of liberty". While this can in part still be attributed to the experience of the Bush years, the failure of Obama's transformative approaches has strengthened this tendency. Obama's doubts about the extent to which the USA can and should enforce its influence in today's world, notwithstanding its undisputed importance, have become firmly embedded in the minds of many Americans. As James Traub concludes in his analysis of Obama's rhetoric: "In the end, his [Obama's] failure to move the world as he hoped to is our tragedy, far more than it is his."

Obama's foreign policy legacy will therefore force whoever succeeds him to present a coherent vision of U.S. engagement in the world, which will allow the USA to provide

**Future U.S. engagement in the world will have to allow the USA to provide leadership without having to shoulder the entire burden of global order alone.**

leadership without having to shoulder the entire burden of global order alone. This will have to go hand in hand with developing a sustainable concept for putting the security apparatus back on a solid footing and for delivering the necessary long-term planning reliability for the urgently required investments. Notwithstanding the problems in this area, the basis for such a policy has improved markedly. The economy has experienced an 8.1 per cent growth since 2008 – compared to a 2.2 per cent downturn in Europe – and the difference in growth rates between the USA and the fastest growing economies shrunk from 6.5 to 2.6 per cent in the same period. Leveraging this economic upturn to reposition American foreign policy will represent an opportunity as well as a challenge for the next President.

For Germany this means we will no longer be able to rely on the "old" America leading from the front – with all the advantages and disadvantages this entails. Germany will continue to have to provide leadership and shoulder responsibility in Europe. While there is an ongoing debate on the transatlantic relationship being in crisis – the NSA scandal and the TTIP in particular come to mind –, we have been able to see this relationship develop and grow into a true partnership only recently, in the context of the Ukraine crisis. Never before has the United States relied so much

on Germany where dealing with European issues is concerned, and never before has Germany taken this responsibility as seriously as in the last two years. Ultimately, Germany's coming of age where security policy is concerned may therefore be one of the most enduring legacies of Barack Obama's time in office.

This article expresses the author's personal opinion.

# GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

## BETWEEN NECESSITY AND AMBIVALENCE

*Canan Atilgan / Florian C. Feyerabend*

On 27 June 2014, Georgia signed the Association Agreement with the EU, which represents an important milestone on the European path taken by the young democracy in the Southern Caucasus. Georgia has also made some progress in establishing closer links to the Euro-Atlantic defence alliance. As far back as 2008, the heads of state and government of the NATO member states had expressed their agreement with Georgia joining the North Atlantic Alliance at the Bucharest summit. While the country has not yet received the coveted invitation to join the Membership Action Plan, it has been granted a “substantial package”, which elevates it to a high level of integration.

Since gaining its independence almost 25 years ago, Georgia has pursued a clear foreign policy line with a Western outlook. Particularly after the Rose Revolution in 2003, the country has made efforts to advance its integration with Euro-Atlantic structures. Feeling particularly exposed to pressure from Russian hegemonic ambitions, Georgia is above all seeking security guarantees for its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Memories of the 2008 war are deeply embedded in the minds of the Georgian people; they experienced this war as a punitive action by Russia for Georgia's resistance against Russian power politics and for Georgia's clear Western orientation. Against the backdrop of the annexation of Crimea in contravention of international law and the current crisis in Ukraine, Georgia feels confirmed in its assessment that Russia considers its so-called near neighbourhood its exclusive sphere of interest and is prepared to counter an expansion of Western influence by any means at its disposal. Correspondingly, Georgia



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fears increasing pressure from Russia and consequences for its own security.<sup>1</sup>



Presidential election in Georgia: After the victory in the parliamentary elections in 2012, Georgy Margvelashvili also won the presidential election in 2013 for the "Georgian Dream". The handover of power is seen as the first democratic change of government in Georgia. | Source: Marco Fieber, flickr ©①②③④.

While the relationship with Russia was characterised by disassociation and confrontation under the Saakashvili government, the Georgian Dream coalition government, which has been in power in Tbilisi since 2012, is distancing itself explicitly from the policies of its predecessor government and taking a more pragmatic approach in its dealings with Moscow. However, the government's efforts to reduce tensions have not yet achieved a fundamental improvement in Georgian-Russian relations. The government in Tbilisi does not have any substantial means of countering the creeping annexation of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia. At the same time, Russia is making use of civil society and political organisations supported from Moscow

1 | Cf. Liana Fix, "Georgia Knocking on Europe's Door. Russia, Georgia, and the EU Association Agreement", *DGAPkompakt*, 10, 06/2014, <https://dgap.org/de/article/getFullPDF/25499> (accessed 25 Jun 2015); Alexander Rondeli, "Georgia-Russia: From negative to positive uncertainty", *Expert Opinion*, 3, 2013, [http://gfsis.org/media/download/library/articles/Expert\\_Opinion\\_ENG\\_3.pdf](http://gfsis.org/media/download/library/articles/Expert_Opinion_ENG_3.pdf) (accessed 25 Jun 2015); Michael Cecire, "Georgia's Fifth Column Stirs", *The American Interest*, 19 May 2014, <http://the-american-interest.com/2014/05/19/georgias-fifth-column-stirs> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

to undermine the fundamental pro-Western foreign policy consensus, which still has the support of the majority of the Georgian population.

This situation calls for an examination of the relations between Tbilisi and Moscow, ambivalent and conflict-riven from the start, and for an assessment of Georgia's foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia, which has been wavering between confrontation and appeasement. To what extent can the Georgian Dream government, which has been in power since 2012, realise its election promise of normalising relations with the country's large neighbour? What are the repercussions of the annexation of Crimea? What means of "soft power" are available to Russia in Georgia?

### **A BRIEF HISTORIC OUTLINE OF GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS**

From a historic perspective, Georgian-Russian relations can be described by the terms "necessity and ambivalence".<sup>2</sup> Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia sought protection from the Orthodox Tsarist Empire, which also had expansionist aspirations, because of its geographic location between Europe and Asia and its immediate proximity to the expanding Muslim empires to the south. Russia was therefore initially perceived as a Christian protective power and a force of European modernisation. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the concept of Georgian national statehood emerged in direct opposition to imperialist Russia, which was seen as "uncivilized and unfree".<sup>3</sup> Georgia succeeded in briefly realising self-determination and sovereignty as the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918 to 1921). After the invasion by the Red Army in February 1921, Georgia was annexed to the Soviet Union and did not regain its independence until the spring of 1991 after 70 years of Soviet rule. A brief phase of nationalist, decidedly anti-Russian politics under the first Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia ended soon afterwards, when Eduard Shevardnadze took power in 1992 and began to pursue a multivectoral foreign policy. In acknowledgement of geographic facts, economic interrelations and security dependencies, the "necessity" element manifested in the country's accession to the Commonwealth of Independent States (1993), the signing of a Georgian-Russian friendship treaty (1995), the stationing of Russian peacekeeping troops in the

2 | Stephen Jones, *Georgia. A Political History Since Independence*, London, 2013.

3 | Ibid.

breakaway province of Abkhazia and the acceptance of Russian military bases on Georgian territory. The “ambivalence” element, on the other hand, manifested in the fact that from the early days of its independence Georgia also reached out to the West by participating in the NATO “Partnership for Peace” program and by taking up membership in the Council of Europe, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.<sup>4</sup> The foundations for Georgia’s pro-Western orientation were therefore already laid down under the country’s second President Shevardnadze; Saakashvili would subsequently make strenuous efforts to push ahead with this opening-up to the West.

### **GEORGIA’S BREAKAWAY REGIONS AS PAWNS OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLITICS**

**After the country’s independence from the Soviet Union, the Georgian leadership pursued ethnocentric policies and failed to take proper account of the concerns of national minorities.**

Shevardnadze had risen to power in consequence of a failed minority policy as well as a foreign policy dominated by idealism and nationalism under Georgia’s first President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, which resulted

in the country falling into chaos and civil war. After the country had gained independence from the Soviet Union, the Georgian leadership under Gamsakhurdia pursued chauvinist, ethnocentric policies in a delirium of national fervour and failed to take proper account of the concerns of national minorities in the country. As nationalist policies took hold, dissatisfaction grew in Georgia’s autonomous territories. Abkhazia, which had briefly been independent after the October Revolution of 1917 and an Autonomous Republic within Georgia since 1931, declared its independence from the fatherland in July 1991, unleashing a civil war, which did not end until the autumn of 1993 with a ceasefire, the creation of a UN observer mission as well as the stationing of Russian peace-keeping troops sanctioned by a CIS mandate. In parallel with the armed conflict in Abkhazia, civil war also raged in South Ossetia in 1992, which held the status of an Autonomous Region within Georgia and had already declared its secession from Tbilisi before Georgia gained independence. This conflict ended with a ceasefire that same year, which afforded Russia a military presence under a so-called peace mission similar to the situation in Abkhazia. Under the leadership of Aslan Abashidze, the Autonomous Region of Adjara also attempted to evade control by the central government in Tbilisi. But here, measures to avoid a violent escalation of the conflict as well as the secession of the region were successful.

4 | Cf. *ibid.*



Fig. 1

**Georgia with its secessionist regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia**



Georgia's conflict regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Russia seized the civil wars in Abkhazia (1991-1993) and South Ossetia (1992) as an opportunity to intensify its military presence in the region. | Source: © racken.

From the beginning, the Kremlin pursued a dual track policy in the conflicts involving Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On the one hand, Russia acknowledged Georgia's territorial integrity and presented itself as a peacekeeping force; on the other hand, however, the separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia received active support and encouragement from Moscow. Maintaining the status quo in the "frozen" conflicts was in Russia's interest as this not only ensured a Russian military presence in the Southern Caucasus but also provided a means of influencing the politics of the Tbilisi government.

Georgia continued to maintain its claim to territorial integrity, but ceased to exert government control over the territories in the mid-1990s. An attempt by the Georgian government to force a military solution to the frozen conflicts after a series of Russian provocations failed. Since the five-day war in August 2008, the separation of the two regions from the Georgian fatherland is established more strongly than ever. Subsequent to the military clashes, Russia recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia as sovereign states, but only a few other countries, including Venezuela,

Nicaragua and Nauru, followed its example. In reality, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not sovereign state entities but satellite states, which are politically, militarily and economically dependent on Moscow and most of whose inhabitants have taken Russian nationality.<sup>5</sup> Russia maintains that its intervention in August 2008 was justified on humanitarian grounds, making explicit reference to the need to protect “Russian citizens”<sup>6</sup> – a template for what subsequently happened in the course of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

### **THE SAKASHVILI ERA: PRO-WESTERN ORIENTATION – CONFRONTATION COURSE WITH RUSSIA**

To understand the military escalation of the conflict in 2008 one needs to know the background to Georgia’s accelerated pro-Western orientation after the change in power in 2003. The successful “Rose Revolution” not only initiated a phase of domestic reforms and nation state renewal, it also represented a turning point in Georgian-Russian relations. The revolutionaries of the “United National Movement” around the new President Saakashvili had made three promises to the Georgian people: “Democratisation, strengthening the rule of law, and restoration of territorial integrity”.<sup>7</sup> To Saakashvili’s mind, the natural partners to help realise these promises were to be found in the West, prompting him to seek closer links with the USA and NATO in the first instance.

Relations between Tbilisi and Moscow deteriorated at the same time and became increasingly more confrontational. In the winter of 2004, Russia briefly suspended gas deliveries to Georgia and subsequently imposed a selective price increase – a tactic it would later also apply in its dealings with Ukraine and Armenia.<sup>8</sup>

- 5 | For an up-to-date overview describing the conflicts involving Abkhazia and South Ossetia, see Canan Atilgan/Mikheil Sarjeladze, “Georgia and its Breakaway Regions: No Progress in Sight”, *KAS International Reports*, 6/2012, <http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.31263> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).
- 6 | During the preceding years, Russia had pursued a systematic policy of naturalisation, with the effect that the majority of the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had Russian nationality by 2008.
- 7 | Uwe Halbach, “Bilanz einer ‘Farbrevolution’: Georgien im politischen Wandel 2003–2013”, *SWP-Studie*, p. 24, Dec 2013, [http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2013\\_S24\\_hlb.pdf](http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2013_S24_hlb.pdf) (accessed 29 Jun 2015).
- 8 | Cf. Thomas Kunze/Henri Bohnet, “Between Europe and Russia – On the Situation of the Renegade Republics of Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia”, *KAS International Reports*, 1/2007, <http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.10097> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

In early 2006, Russia imposed a unilateral trade embargo (import bans on wine and mineral water) against the South Caucasian republic. The confrontational course culminated in a diplomatic row when a Russian spy ring operating in Georgia was uncovered to great media attention in late summer of that year, whereupon Russia cut all sea, land, air and postal links to Georgia and deported Georgian guest workers from Russia.<sup>9</sup> Personal animosity between the Georgian President Saakashvili and his Russian counterpart added to the tensions affecting the relationship between the two states. The most significant shortcoming of the Russian policy towards Georgia was the fact that Moscow viewed the country predominantly from a geopolitical perspective, relying purely on military power and economic pressure. The mutual military provocations since 2007 finally sparked the Georgian-Russian war of August 2008.<sup>10</sup> Not only did this war reveal the vulnerability of the east-west corridor to the West, it also meant that NATO membership became a distant prospect for Georgia.<sup>11</sup> Besides the cessation of diplomatic relations between Georgia and Russia and Georgia's exit from the Commonwealth of Independent States, the armed conflict also directly caused the breakdown of all efforts that had been initiated to come to an arrangement about the two domestic conflicts relating to the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

**The most significant shortcoming of the Russian policy towards Georgia: Moscow viewed the country predominantly from a geopolitical perspective, relying purely on military power and economic pressure.**

The Georgian-Russian war and the cessation of diplomatic relations did, however, prompt the establishment of the mechanism of the "Geneva Talks". These represent the only forum where all conflicting parties discuss issues of security and stability in the region together with representatives from the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the EU and the USA. The main purpose is to build trust and deal with humanitarian issues. Until the change in government in Georgia in 2012, the Geneva Talks, which take place regularly but do not produce an official outcome, were the only channel of diplomatic communication between Tbilisi and Moscow until the nomination of Georgian Ambassador Zurab Abashidze as Special Representative

9 | Cf. Svante Cornell, "Getting Georgia Right", *Centre for European Studies*, 2013, [http://martenscentre.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/getting\\_georgia\\_right\\_-\\_website.pdf](http://martenscentre.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/getting_georgia_right_-_website.pdf) (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

10 | Cf. Ashot Manucharyan, "Abkhazia, and South Ossetia – Russia's Intervention in Georgia (August 2008)", *KAS International Reports*, 10/2008, <http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.15189> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

11 | Cf. Cornell, n. 9.

for Relations with Russia in November 2012 and the establishment of the Prague Dialogue as a platform for bilateral exchange. During the meetings held in Prague, Zurab Abashidze engages in negotiation on improving Georgian-Russian relations with the Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Grigory Karasin.



Military parade in Tbilisi: The five-day war in 2008 led to Georgia's exit from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). | Source: Rob Sinclair, flickr ©①②.

#### **AFTER THE CHANGE IN POWER IN GEORGIA IN 2012: TAKING STOCK OF THE NORMALISATION EFFORTS**

The Saakashvili era ended with the 2012 parliamentary elections and the 2013 presidential elections, which resulted in the Georgian Dream coalition comprising six parties coming to power, led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. While the new political leadership confirmed its commitment to continue pursuing integration with European and Euro-Atlantic structures and spoke of the Pro-Western course being irreversible, Georgian Dream also promised a speedy normalisation of relations with Russia. This course adjustment was welcomed explicitly by Western states as this was expected to bring about a lessening of the tensions and an increase in stability and security. This balancing act between a Pro-Western orientation on the one hand and a conciliatory stance towards Russia on the other also reflects the ambivalence in the relationship with Moscow that is prevalent in the population. It is the case that the efforts towards a rapprochement with NATO and

the EU enjoy a high approval rating among the population and that people continue to look upon Russia as a threat to Georgia's security and sovereignty. But at the same time, people would like to see relations with the large neighbour to the north normalising – particularly where the economy and culture are concerned. This goes hand in hand with an expectation among large swathes of the population that trade will bring about an improvement in the economic situation. According to a recent survey, 85 per cent of the Georgian population would therefore support further dialogue with Russia, and 59 per cent rate the current government's handling of Georgia's relationship with Russia positively.<sup>12</sup> And as many as 31 per cent support accession to the Eurasian Union, almost twice the number as a year earlier.<sup>13</sup>

**85 per cent of the Georgian population support further dialogue with Russia, while 59 per cent rate the current handling of Georgia's relationship with Russia positively.**

Once Prime Minister Ivanishvili took office in October 2012, there was not only a more conciliatory tone apparent in dealings with Moscow, but efforts were made to utilise the new bilateral format of the Prague Talks to achieve progress in areas considered less sensitive such as transport, trade, agriculture, visas and humanitarian matters in a pragmatic manner, leaving security issues to one side.<sup>14</sup> Moscow honoured the efforts by the Tbilisi government in 2013 by lifting the import ban on Georgian agricultural products such as wine and mineral water, which had been in place since 2006, resulting in a 250 million U.S. dollar improvement in the Georgian agricultural trade balance and a strong, eleven per cent growth in the agricultural sector in 2013. Georgia's total wine exports doubled compared to 2012. Over two thirds of its wine exports now go to Russia.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, there is a certain dependence on Russia where agricultural exports are concerned,

12 | Cf. International Republican Institute, "Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Georgia. February 3-28, 2015", [http://iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/iri\\_georgia\\_public\\_2015\\_final\\_0.pdf](http://iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/iri_georgia_public_2015_final_0.pdf) (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

13 | Cf. Davit Sichinava/Laura Thornton, "Public Attitudes in Georgia: Results of a April 2015 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia", *National Democratic Institute*, [https://ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_April%202015%20Poll\\_Public%20Political\\_ENG.pdf](https://ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_April%202015%20Poll_Public%20Political_ENG.pdf) (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

14 | Cf. Ghia Nodia, "Divergent interests: What can and cannot be achieved in Georgian-Russian relations", in: Kornely Kakachia/Michael Ceire (eds.), *Georgian Foreign Policy. The Quest for Sustainable Security*, Tiflis, 2013, [http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_37002-1522-1-30.pdf](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_37002-1522-1-30.pdf) (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

15 | Cf. Stephan von Cramon-Taubadel, "Georgiens Agrarexporte – Chancen und Risiken", *GET Georgien Newsletter*, No. 2, Jan-Feb 2015, [http://get-georgia.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Newsletter\\_02\\_2015\\_GET\\_Georgien.pdf](http://get-georgia.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Newsletter_02_2015_GET_Georgien.pdf) (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

particularly wine products, but overall there is no serious dependency on the large neighbour, which accounts for only ten per cent of total Georgian exports. In the energy sector too, Russia only plays a minor role as Georgia covers some 90 per cent of its demand for natural gas from Azerbaijan.



The region Kakheti is Georgia's major wine-growing area: Dependency on Russia exists only in the export of agrarian commodities, especially wine products. | Source: Mzuriana, flickr ©📷📷📷.

The Georgian government not only succeeded in having the trade embargo lifted, but also made progress in the area of civil aviation. Subsequent to the so-called espionage crisis in October 2006, Russia had cut all air links to Georgia. After a brief resumption of flights in March 2008, the entire air traffic came to a halt after the August war. In October 2014, however, regular flights resumed on the Tbilisi to Moscow route, producing a rise in business and private trips from Russia to Georgia. In the first three months of 2015 alone, over 128,000 Russian tourists visited the South-

Caucasian republic.<sup>16</sup> In April 2015, it was finally announced that, with the assistance of Swiss mediators, the civil aviation authorities of Russia and Georgia had come to an agreement on expanding and intensifying the air routes to Russia.<sup>17</sup>

Georgia found out the hard way that there is a limit to the Kremlin's goodwill towards and interest in full normalisation of relations with Georgia when Russian security forces began moving the administrative boundary between Russian-controlled South Ossetia and Georgia into Georgia-controlled territory in the spring and autumn of 2013 and fortifying it with barbed-wire fencing in violation of the 2008 ceasefire agreement.<sup>18</sup> This is proving to be a serious obstacle to the sustainability of the new course pursued by the Georgian government, which did not only strive to normalise relations, but used a conciliatory approach in its dealings with the breakaway provinces at the same time.<sup>19</sup> This entailed Georgian Dream making a gesture through its appointment policy by nominating the conflict resolution expert Paata Zaqareishvili, who had previously come to prominence as one of the harshest critics of the Saakashvili government's approach to dealing with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to the post of Minister for Reintegration. In addition, the ministry responsible for resolving the territorial conflicts, which had been called the "State Ministry for Reintegration" since 2008, was renamed the "State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality" at the beginning of 2014.<sup>20</sup> The de-facto governments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had always considered the old title an affront and rejected any dialogue with the state ministry. As far back as March 2013, the Georgian parliament published a bipartisan foreign policy resolution in which it confirmed Georgia's unilateral pledge on non-use of force to

16 | Cf. Georgian National Tourism Authority, "Besucherzahlen nach Herkunftsland (2015)", Georgian National Tourism Authority, Apr 2015, <http://gnta.ge/statistics> (accessed 1 May 2015).

17 | Cf. "Tbilisi, Moscow Agree on Expanding Direct Regular Flights", *Civil Georgia*, 15 Apr 2015, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28197> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

18 | Cf. Shaun Walker, "Russian 'borderisation': barricades erected in Georgia, say EU monitors", *The Guardian*, 23 Oct 2013, <http://theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/23/russia-borderisation-barricades-erected-georgia-eu> (accessed 29 Jun 2015); "EUMM Reports on Resumption of 'Borderisation'", *Civil Georgia*, 29 Nov 2013, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26741> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

19 | Cf. Canan Atilgan/Christina Schmitz, "Die Regierung 'Georgischer Traum': Eine erste Bilanz", KAS-Länderbericht, 19 Nov 2012, [http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_32797-1522-1-30.pdf](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_32797-1522-1-30.pdf) (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

20 | Cf. "State Ministry for Reintegration Renamed", *Civil Georgia*, 2 Jan 2014, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26842> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

re-establish territorial integrity announced back in 2010 by former President Saakashvili.<sup>21</sup>

**There is no prospect of a resolution to the conflicts in the foreseeable future. Instead fronts have hardened further against the backdrop of Georgia's Association Agreement with the EU.**

Russia's strategic interest is obviously aimed at preventing Georgia from following a course that would see greater rapprochement and further integration with European and Euro-Atlantic structures, and the unresolved territorial conflicts play an important role in this. There is consequently no prospect of a resolution to the conflicts in the foreseeable future; on the contrary, the fronts have hardened further against the backdrop of events in Ukraine and in view of the signing of Georgia's Association Agreement with the EU after the NATO summit in Wales. With the so-called substantial package, Georgia remains just short of the desired Membership Action Plan; but the package will provide support in terms of equipment as well as basic and advanced training, joint exercises, an improvement in interoperability as well as the creation of a NATO training center on Georgian state territory. In response to the decision by NATO, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov put out an announcement stating that Russia was prepared to respond appropriately to attempts by the West "to drag Georgia into NATO".<sup>22</sup>

#### **AFTER THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA: STATUS OF THE BREAKAWAY PROVINCES**

In light of these Russian threats and due to the country's painful experiences with Moscow, people in Georgia are following Russia's acts of aggression in Ukraine closely and with great concern. Both the Georgian Dream government and the parliamentary opposition parties have condemned the annexation of Crimea and Russian activities in Eastern Ukraine in the harshest terms. Moscow's actions have awakened memories of the 2008 August war among the population. According to a recent survey by the International Republican Institute, 76 per cent of the population consequently now consider Russia the greatest threat to Georgia.<sup>23</sup>

21 | Cf. "Georgia Makes 'Unilateral Pledge' of Non-Use of Force", *Civil Georgia*, 23 Nov 2010, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22880> (accessed 29 Jun 2015); Cf. "Parliament Adopts Bipartisan Resolution on Foreign Policy", *Civil Georgia*, 7 Mar 2013, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25828> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

22 | "Russia to Respond to Attempts to Drag Georgia Into NATO – Lavrov", *Sputnik News*, 18 Feb 2015, <http://sptnkne.ws/jhJ> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

23 | Cf. International Republican Institute, n. 12.





Mikhail Saakashvili at a demonstration of the Euromaidan movement: Numerous members of Georgia's United National Movement party supported the Euro-Majdan movement and Poroshenko's government as a sign of political solidarity. | Source: © Alexey Kudenko, RIA Novosti, picture alliance.

In the conflict with Russia, Georgia has therefore taken Ukraine's side; the opposition party United National Movement has adopted a leading role in this. Party representatives have been given positions in the Ukrainian government by virtue of their reforming expertise. The most prominent case in point is no doubt former President Saakashvili, who was initially made head of Poroshenko's International Advisory Council after the success of Euromaidan and has recently been named Governor of the strategically important Black Sea province of Odessa. In addition, former Georgian Health Minister Alexander Kvitashvili now occupies the same post in Kiev. Similar moves were made by Georgia's former Deputy Minister of Justice Gia Getsadze as well as Georgia's former Deputy Attorney General David Sakvarelidze. They now all serve the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in the same roles. Which consequences this show of political solidarity and Georgian politicians serving the Ukrainian government may have on Russian-Georgian relations, if any, remains to be seen. In any case, Saakashvili's active role no doubt arouses a great deal of suspicion in Russia.

In blatant violation of the 2008 ceasefire agreement, Russia still has considerable numbers of troops stationed in the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and provides these territories with political, military and economic support. In terms of

**In direct connection with the events in Crimea, voices in South Ossetia have been calling for integration into the territory of the Russian Federation, which would effectively mean unification with North Ossetia.**

domestic politics, stability in these areas is only ensured to a limited degree. Without Russian financial support, neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia would be able to survive.<sup>24</sup> In direct connection with the events

in Crimea, there have been voices in South Ossetia calling for integration into the territory of the Russian Federation, which would effectively mean unification with North Ossetia. The majority of Abkhazia's population, by contrast, is against accession to the Russian Federation and supports the course of the de-facto government, which is pursuing national independence in conjunction with a deepening of relations with the countries of the Russian-dominated customs union.

Nevertheless, the Kremlin offered an integration treaty to the self-declared Republic of Abkhazia in mid-October 2014, which was signed later that year as the "Treaty on Alliance and Strategic Partnership" under protest from Tbilisi. Amongst other things, the implementation of this treaty envisages the formation of joint army units, harmonisation of standards to match the regulations of the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union, freedom of movement and a doubling of Moscow's financial support.<sup>25</sup> This will constitute an annexation of Abkhazia into the Russian Federation in all but name. At the same time, an announcement was made that a similar agreement was being sought with South Ossetia; this was finally signed in March 2015 and entails almost total economic and military incorporation into Russia.<sup>26</sup>

The measures to bring the breakaway regions closer to Russia took place only a few months after the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU had been signed. A number of observers had expected the annexation of the breakaway regions or an escalation of the territorial conflicts by Moscow ahead of the signing of the agreement to deter Georgia from seeking further rapprochement with European structures and institutions by the application of "hard power".<sup>27</sup> The experiences from the 2008 Russian-Georgian war and the events in Ukraine have raised

24 | Cf. Atilgan/Sarjveladze, n. 5.

25 | Cf. "Moscow, Sokhumi Endorse Final Text of New Treaty", *Civil Georgia*, 22 Nov 2014, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27841> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

26 | Cf. "Moscow, Tskhinvali Sign 'Integration Treaty'", *Civil Georgia*, 18 Mar 2015, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28143> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

27 | Cf. Fix, n. 1.

the fear that it is not inconceivable that Moscow might decide on military intervention in Georgia as well. Opposition politicians from Saakashvili's "United National Movement" party in particular share this concern. It has been pointed out, for instance, that the Russian staging posts in South Ossetia are only 250 kilometers from the Russian military base in the Armenian town of Gyumri. Concerns on the Georgian side have been fuelled further by reports about Russia planning the construction of a link road through the Greater Caucasus connecting Dagestan, which is part of the Russian Federation, and East Georgia.<sup>28</sup> A Russian advance from South Ossetia or Dagestan would not only split Georgia in two, it would also cut the main transport link and the energy transit corridor between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. Having said that, a military intervention by Russia in Georgia to prevent further European and Euro-Atlantic rapprochement is currently the least likely scenario. At the same time, such imagined scenarios demonstrate the degree to which Georgia feels threatened in its existence by Russia.

### **RUSSIA'S "SOFT POWER" APPROACHES IN GEORGIA**

Russia's "soft power" approaches, in fact, pose a far more realistic threat. A systematic campaign to influence public opinion could, over time, prove an effective tool for undermining the fundamental social consensus on a foreign policy oriented towards the EU and the USA. There are various allies whom the Kremlin can engage in this endeavour.

As part of this approach, Russia provides selective support to NGOs with obvious names such as "Eurasian Choice", "Eurasian Institute" and "Slavic World" as well as to media such as "NewsGeorgia.ru" in order to effectively disseminate anti-Western propaganda and establish a counter-discourse, which is based on the rejection of Western liberal values and places emphasis on traditional social values, conservatism and Orthodox Christianity instead. The Western world and its purported values are vilified as decadent, depraved and immoral. It is frequently contrasted with an imaginary sound and pure Orthodox world, led by Russia, which is painted as being morally superior. These organisations also regularly disseminate political conspiracy theories. Aside from minor nuances, the basic tone and the methods the organisations

28 | Cf. Valery Dzutsev, "Experts See Planned Russian Road Connecting Dagestan to Georgia as Threat to Latter", *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11/223, 15 Dec 2014, <http://goo.gl/sCsiLq> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

employ and their target groups are identical. Most formats are aimed at poorly educated sections of the population and at the rural population in the provinces. One exception is the organisation “Eurasian Choice”, which addresses educated sections of the population and which also commissions reputable-looking surveys. The online portal “NewsGeorgia.ru”, for its part, attempts to disseminate a positive image of Russia in Georgia through biased reporting and Russian-language media content. In isolation, the influence of these organisations and media on public discourse in Georgia can be considered marginal for now, but their impact will increase if the Association Agreement with the EU and the necessary legislative harmonisation were to bring about challenges and fail to produce tangible improvements in living conditions. The pro-Russian organisations have stepped up their activities noticeably since the agreement was signed.<sup>29</sup>



Inauguration of a church in Rustavi: In Georgia, the Orthodox Church regularly intervenes in societal and political decisions. This leads some to call it Moscow’s “fifth column”. | Source: Mzuriana, flickr ©©©©.

There is a real danger of the Patriarchate being exploited to further the anti-Western discourse, which has been relatively low key to date. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia having gained independence as a nation state, the Orthodox Church has

29 | Interview with high-ranking employees of the Georgian National Security Council (anonymised) on the subject of “Activities of pro-Russian NGOs and media in Georgia” conducted by Florian C. Feyerabend on 4 May 2015.

represented the most highly respected and influential institution in Georgian society. Religion also plays an important part in day-to-day decision-making for 83 per cent of Georgians.<sup>30</sup>

The Church is also an influential political actor, interfering proactively in social and political decision-making and in part promoting backward-looking norms in the process. This has become evident, for instance, in the conflict between the Orthodox Church and civil society organisations promoting the rights of religious, ethnic and sexual minorities. This culminated in violent attacks on LGBTI activists on 17 May 2013, in which priests of the Orthodox Church had a major part.<sup>31</sup> The Church also played a controversial role in the discussion about the antidiscrimination bill. It has actively opposed adoption of the bill, which is important for further rapprochement with the EU, and pushed through changes in the wording.<sup>32</sup> The Church is particularly intransigent with respect to ethnic, religious and sexual minorities. While organised radical groups such as the "Union of Orthodox Parents" are not officially affiliated to the Church, it condones them disseminating radical positions in the name of the Church.

Some observers therefore describe the Church rather indiscriminately as "Moscow's Fifth Column",<sup>33</sup> but this does not reflect the complexity of relations between the autocephalous Georgian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate, and it ignores the existence of moderate sections within the Georgian Church. It cannot be denied, however, that the decidedly illiberal and anti-Western statements by Church representatives represent a challenge to efforts to adapt Georgia further to European structures. Surveys show a discrepancy between the consistent commitment to Europe on the part of the population on the one hand and a strongly conservative and traditional value system accepted by many Georgians on the other. The Church could act as a vehicle of change where values are concerned, a change that

**It cannot be denied that the decidedly illiberal and anti-Western statements by Church representatives represent a challenge to efforts to adapt Georgia further to European structures.**

30 | Cf. Sichinava/Thornton, n. 13.

31 | Cf. Amnesty International, "Georgia: Homophobic violence mars Tbilisi Pride event", 17 May 2013, <http://amnestyusa.org/news/news-item/georgia-homophobic-violence-mars-tbilisi-pride-event> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

32 | Cf. "Georgia's Orthodox Church Opposes Antidiscrimination Bill", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 29 Apr 2014, <http://rferl.org/content/georgias-orthodox-church-opposes-antidiscrimination-bill/25366250.html> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

33 | Cecire, n. 1.

will be indispensable in the course of the rapprochement with Europe. However, it has not accepted this role to date and is clinging to a pan-Orthodox normative mindset shared with Russia.

Russia's most reliable potential partners are to be found in the Georgian party landscape. One fundamental problem in this area is the fact that the "United National Movement" had to some degree monopolised the pro-Western narrative under the Saakashvili government. European and Euro-Atlantic rapprochement is therefore linked to Saakashvili in people's mind. To political groupings and parties wishing to mobilise voters on an anti-Saakashvili platform, an anti-Western discourse therefore has a certain appeal. However, to date only the two parties Democratic Movement – United Georgia of the Rose Revolution activist and former Chairperson of the Parliament Nino Burjanadze and the All-Georgian Patriotic Alliance openly take a pro-Russian stance. Both parties form part of the non-parliamentary opposition. In the 2013 presidential elections, Burjanadze, who had stood out through her homophobic remarks, came in third with over ten per cent. According to recent surveys, the two parties could jointly count on support from up to 19 per cent of voters.<sup>34</sup> As is the case for the pro-Russian NGOs, Burjanadze's party at least is suspected of receiving funding from Moscow.

## **OUTLOOK**

Three years on from when the Georgian Dream coalition took over, tensions between Moscow and Tbilisi have eased to a certain extent. There have also been modest advances and achievements in some areas in the bilateral dialogue with Russia. There are, however, limits to a sustained normalisation or fundamental improvement of Georgian-Russian relations. As long as Russia continues to use military power and political pressure as its main foreign policy instruments in its dealings with Georgia, the relationship between the two countries will remain marred by confrontation, distrust and fear. As long as Russia does not accept the principle of territorial integrity and the right of every country to decide its own future freely, there will be no basis of trust for normalisation.

Until the new Tbilisi government came in just under three years ago, the European countries above all were also convinced that it was a lack of political will that prevented a resolution to the Russian-Georgian confrontation. The events of the last few years, however, have shown that Russian policies lack a cooperative element, that Russia is not coming across as an attractive partner to its neighbouring states, and that Moscow is predominantly focused on territorially defined spheres of influence. Consequently, Russia's strategic interest with respect to Georgia is primarily aimed at preventing a course of further rapprochement and integration with European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Where the breakaway provinces are concerned, it is therefore unlikely that Moscow will show any readiness to make concessions, particularly against the backdrop of events in Ukraine and following the signing of Georgia's Association Agreement with the EU and the outcome of the NATO summit in Wales. On the contrary, the Kremlin is now also making attempts to undermine the fundamental pro-Western foreign policy consensus still backed by the majority of the Georgian population by employing means of "soft power". Europe needs to offer Georgia solid prospects as a clear sign of its appreciation of Georgia's decision to ally itself with the Euro-Atlantic community.

# JAPAN 70 YEARS ON FROM THE END OF THE WAR

BALANCING ACT EN ROUTE TO A NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

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Not every good political speech is necessarily "historic". The few seminal addresses that qualify for this special attribute are therefore all the more assured of receiving worldwide attention. It is even rarer for the speech by a top-ranking politician to attract global notice while it is still some time in the future. That is the situation in which Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe finds himself this year.

## **LONG SHADOWS:**

### **WHICH WORDS ARE APPROPRIATE TO DESCRIBE THE PAST?**

The conservative head of government is due to make a statement in mid-August on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Japanese surrender. And representatives from politics, academia and the media have already been discussing the content of this statement for months. The main question is the wording that will be used to acknowledge Japan's role in World War II and as a colonial power. All eyes will be on Abe to see whether he will change the wording of earlier speeches, and if so, in what way. The assessment will take the statement made in August 1995 on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Japanese surrender as its main reference point. This is considered a "milestone" by people around the world. At that time, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama referred to the fact that Japan "caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations". The former head of government expressed his "deep remorse" and "heartfelt apology".<sup>1</sup> Ten years later, in August

1 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Statement by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama", 15 Aug 1995, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/pm/murayama/9508.html> (accessed 19 Jun 2015).



2005, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi reproduced this phrasing in his speech almost word for word.<sup>2</sup>

At a press conference at the beginning of January, Abe explained that his administration “has and will uphold statements issued by past administrations”.<sup>3</sup> However, several weeks later, the Prime Minister indicated that he may choose different phrases than those used by his predecessor: “Rather than decide whether to use the wording we have been using, I want to issue (a statement) from the viewpoint of how the Abe administration considers the matter [...]”.<sup>4</sup> This may entail the head of government not merely expressing remorse, but also speaking about his country’s pacifist stance since the end of World War II and about Japan’s future role in the international arena.



China’s foreign minister Wang Yi: Ever since his appointment, he has questioned several times Japan’s handling of its past – just as he did at a meeting of the UN Security Council this spring. | Source: Jean-Marc Ferré, UN, flickr ©1133.

- 2 | Cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi”, 15 Aug 2005, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2005/8/0815.html> (accessed 19 Jun 2015).
- 3 | Quoted from: Per Liljas, “Japan’s PM Abe to Express Remorse on 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of WWII Surrender”, *The Japan Times*, 6 Jan 2015, <http://time.com/3655187/japan-shinzo-abe-world-war-2/?xid=IFT-Trending> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).
- 4 | Quoted from: “New expressions planned for Abe’s WWII statement”, *The Japan News*, 27 Jan 2015, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/asia/new-expressions-planned-abes-wwii-statement> (accessed 17 Jul 2015).

The reason why speculation about the precise wording of the upcoming August speech is not abating is that South Korea and the People's Republic of China demand that Japan provide a clear acknowledgement of its past now that 70 years have passed since the end of the war. Relations between Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo have been under great strain for years.

**Experts look forward to Shinzo Abe hopefully making an effective contribution to détente in the region by the "right" choice of words.**

Europe and the USA are monitoring the situation in the Far East with concern. Renowned experts therefore look forward to Shinzo Abe hopefully making an effective contribution to détente in the region by the "right" choice of words. If that comes to pass, this year's statement by the Japanese head of government will indeed deserve the attribute "historic" in view of the deep-rooted problems between Japan, China and South Korea. However, renewed escalation is also conceivable, as Tsuneo Watanabe from the Tokyo Foundation explains: "If the statement contains a self-righteous tone attempting to rewrite the past, it would provide a perfect excuse for an anti-Japan propaganda campaign."<sup>5</sup> Without naming a specific country, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi made the following critical remark at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council in February: "[...] although the historical facts have long been made clear on the war against fascism, there are still some who are reluctant to recognize the truth and even attempt to overturn the verdict and whitewash past crimes of aggression."<sup>6</sup> Motohide Yoshikawa, Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, subsequently affirmed in a brief statement that peace, democracy and human rights now constitute an inherent part of the identity of the Japanese people. "That is proven by the fact that, based on feelings of deep remorse regarding the Second World War, our people have endeavoured for 70 years to build a free and democratic nation respecting fundamental human rights and the rule of law." Yoshikawa went on to say that this path was "the pride of Japanese people" and that it would never change.<sup>7</sup>

5 | Quoted from: Masaaki Kameda, "All eyes on Abe for war's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary", *The Japan Times*, 2 Jan 2015, <http://japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/02/national/politics-diplomacy/all-eyes-on-abe-for-wars-70th-anniversary> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

6 | UN Security Council, 7389<sup>th</sup> meeting, protocol S/PV.7389, 23 Feb 2015, p. 4, [http://securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFC9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_pv\\_7389.pdf](http://securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFC9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_7389.pdf) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

7 | *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Shinzo Abe has been making sustained efforts for months to dispel any doubt in this line. Only in December 2013, the head of government drew sharp criticism above all from Beijing and Seoul for visiting the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, a memorial to the souls of 2.5 million war dead, including 14 convicted war criminals. Just over a year later, he laid a wreath at Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial to the martyrs and heroes of the State of Israel, during a visit to the country. "This year, which marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war's end as well as the liberation of Auschwitz", Abe said in Jerusalem, "we declare our determination not to repeat such a tragedy, ever again". The head of government continued with this exhortation: "We must continue our efforts to realize a world without discrimination and war and a world that protects human rights. Japan is determined to more proactively contribute to the peace and stability of the world."<sup>8</sup>



Shinzo Abe visits the Yasukuni Shrine: The Japanese government is repeatedly criticised for its remembrance at this location. | Source: © Shizuo Kambayashi, AP Photo, picture alliance.

8 | Quoted from: "70 years after WWII: Regional diplomacy / Abe's statement in August holds key to easing tensions", *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 1 Apr 2015, <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0001865754> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

During the Asian-African summit in Jakarta, also referred to as the “Bandung Conference” after the location of the first meeting 60 years ago, the Japanese Prime Minister reminded his audience of some of the fundamental principles to which the states represented at the conference had committed themselves, including the following: refraining from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country as well as the settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means. Abe added that “[...] Japan, with feelings of deep remorse over the past war, made a pledge to remain a nation always adhering to those very principles throughout, no matter what the circumstances”.<sup>9</sup>

The Tokyo daily *The Japan News* noted that the Japanese head of government had already been very particular about the wording of the English version of the script for his speech in Jakarta. The paper called attention to the fact that *The New York Times* had also used the word “remorse” in its English translation of a speech delivered in September 1989 by then West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II and that his speech was praised overseas at the time.<sup>10</sup>

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Literally every word was also closely scrutinised in many media reports and analyses when Shinzo Abe paid a visit to the USA just a few days after the Asian-African summit.

The 60-year old Liberal Democrat was the first Japanese head of government ever to be permitted to speak in front of both houses of the U.S. parliament in late April. “[...] on behalf of Japan and the Japanese people”, Abe said in Washington, “I offer with profound respect my eternal condolences to the souls of all American people that were lost during World War II”. And he continued: “Our actions brought suffering to the peoples in Asian countries. We must not avert our eyes from that.” He confirmed that he would uphold the views expressed by the previous prime ministers in this regard. And Abe once more expressed his “deep remorse”.<sup>11</sup>

9 | Quoted from: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Asian-African Summit 2015”, 22 Apr 2015, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/rp/page3e\\_000325.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page3e_000325.html) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

10 | Cf. “Abe kept sharp eye on English translation of Bandung speech”, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 25 Apr 2015, <http://asianewsnet.net/Abe-kept-sharp-eye-on-English-translation-of-Bandu-74405.html> (accessed 31 Jul 2015).

11 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to a Joint Meeting of the U.S. Congress”, 29 Apr 2015, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e\\_000241.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e_000241.html) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

While some critical comments were voiced in the USA, the speech by the Japanese head of government was well received by both Democrat and Republican Representatives. When talking to journalists U.S. Vice President Joe Biden stressed that Abe had “made it very clear that there was responsibility on Japan’s part”, and that the Prime Minister had also shown “empathy to all his Asian neighbors”.<sup>12</sup> According to media reports, Republican Senator John McCain praised the speech as a “historic recognition of two peoples reconciled with their shared history”.<sup>13</sup> During a press conference, however, a journalist put it to Abe that he had “stopped short of a full apology for Japan’s actions during World War II”, in his statement before Congress, “including with regard (to) the estimated 200,000 women enslaved by Imperial Forces”.<sup>14</sup> Abe responded by affirming “[...] I am deeply pained to think about the comfort women who experienced immeasurable pain and suffering as a result of victimization due to human trafficking. This is a feeling that I share equally with my predecessors. The Abe Cabinet upholds the Kono Statement and has no intention to revise it”.<sup>15</sup>

The so-called “Kono Statement” goes back to 1993 and is considered to be similarly ground-breaking as the Murayama Statement two years later. It goes back to then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono, who pointed out that the so-called “comfort women” were made to work as prostitutes on the Korean Peninsula “generally against their own will” and had “suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds”. “Undeniably, this was an act, with the involvement of the military authorities of the day, that severely injured the honor and dignity of many women”, for which the Japanese government was once again extending “its sincere apologies and remorse” in the Kono Statement.<sup>16</sup>

12 | Quoted from: Naoyo Yoshino, “Abe’s remorse goes deep enough for some in Congress”, *Nikkei Asian Review*, 1 May 2015, <http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/Abe-s-remorse-goes-deep-enough-for-some-in-Congress> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

13 | Quoted from: Justin McCurry, “China and South Korea criticise Japanese prime minister’s speech in US”, *The Guardian*, 30 Apr 2015, <http://gu.com/p/48xn3/sbl> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

14 | The White House, “Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan in Joint Press Conference”, 28 Apr 2015, <http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/28/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press-confere> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

15 | Ibid.

16 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of ‘comfort women’”, 4 Aug 1993, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9308.html> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

One remarkable aspect of the recent statement the Japanese Prime Minister made in Washington was that although the expression “sincere apology” was omitted, Abe did point out that Japan wanted to “lead the international community in eliminating sexual violence during conflicts”.<sup>17</sup> He also used the term “human trafficking” in connection with the fate of the “comfort women” for the first time.



A monument remembering Japanese “Comfort Women” was inaugurated in the United States in 2013: Japan is still struggling with this chapter of its history. | Source: Melissa Wall, flickr ©©.

There are critics in the USA, but of course above all in South Korea and China,<sup>18</sup> who maintain that while the new wording “could be seen as some degree of progress”, because it implied the coercion to which the “comfort women” were subjected,<sup>19</sup> there was still no answer to the question of who bore responsibility for the “human trafficking”. The term itself can also be interpreted in various ways; the United Nations apply it not only to sexual exploitation but also to forced labour and to illegal organ removal. Contrary to custom in Japan, the “comfort women” are therefore predominantly

17 | The White House, n. 14.

18 | Cf. “‘Human trafficking’ just tip of comfort women issue iceberg”, *Global Times*, 31 Mar 2015, <http://globaltimes.cn/content/914716.shtml> (accessed 17 Jul 2015).

19 | “Abe may have changed his wording, but his attitude is still the same”, *The Hankyoreh*, 30 Mar 2015, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_editorial/684595.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_editorial/684595.html) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

referred to as “sex slaves” internationally. Addressing the UN Human Rights Committee in mid-2014, the responsible representative of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs by contrast said “the State party had carefully considered the (Geneva) Slavery Convention (of 1926) and did not consider comfort women as a slavery issue”.<sup>20</sup>

In Japan, the issue of “facing up to the past” also caught up with the Japanese Prime Minister during Chancellor Merkel’s visit in early March. When asked during a press conference what Japan should do in the near future to improve relations with China and South Korea, the German head of state stressed that she had not travelled to Tokyo “to give Japan advice”. She could only talk about “what Germany has been doing”. She explained how there had been numerous very intensive discussions – occasionally very harrowing discussions – on how to come to terms with the past and how to face up to the horrors. National Socialism and the holocaust were a terrible guilt the Germans had incurred. In this respect, making efforts to come to terms with the country’s past had been a prerequisite for being able to create the conditions for reconciliation.<sup>21</sup>

Despite her affirmation that she did not wish to give advice to Japan because each country had to find its own way, the Chinese news agency Xinhua reported on the Chancellor’s visit under the headline: “Merkel tells Japan to look squarely at history.”<sup>22</sup> A commentary in the *China Daily* newspaper stated: “It is time for Abe to understand that when West German Chancellor Willy Brandt knelt down at the monument to victims of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, his nation stood up.”<sup>23</sup> The commentary did not deal with the realisation that “of course reconciliation always needs two sides”, as Chancellor Merkel had pointed out during her visit

20 | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Human Rights Committee considers report of Japan”, 16 Jul 2014, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14878> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

21 | “Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem japanischen Ministerpräsidenten Abe”, 9 Mar 2015, <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2015/03/2015-03-09-bk-abe-japan.html> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

22 | Miah Song, “Merkel tells Japan to look squarely at history”, Xinhua, 9 Mar 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-03/09/c\\_134051396.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-03/09/c_134051396.htm) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

23 | “Abe needs German courage”, *China Daily*, 10 Mar 2015, [http://china.daily.com.cn/opinion/2015-03/10/content\\_19764080.htm](http://china.daily.com.cn/opinion/2015-03/10/content_19764080.htm) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

to Japan.<sup>24</sup> She went on to say: “We Germans will never forget the hand of reconciliation that was extended to us after all the suffering our country had brought to Europe and the world. We can count ourselves lucky that so much trust was placed in the nascent Federal Republic at that time.”<sup>25</sup> In the Far East, by contrast, the distrust is still deeply engrained even 70 years on from the end of World War II.

#### **JAPAN IN THE PRESENT: BETWEEN REFORMING ZEAL AND THE NEED TO GIVE ACCOUNT**

The past is not the only thing standing in the way of reconciliation between Japan, South Korea and the People’s Republic of China; there is also the fact that the debate on the issues is happening

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at a time when Tokyo and Washington are in the process of reorienting their security policies. The Japanese government is planning reforms aimed at enhancing its capacity to act in the international arena and its capa-

bility of taking on greater responsibility in Asia and beyond. At the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Prime Minister Abe presented “Proactive Contribution to Peace” as the new leitmotif at the end of May 2014.<sup>26</sup> In connection with this reorientation, new Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation<sup>27</sup> were agreed in Washington this April.

Because of its pacifist constitution, Japan is far more limited than many other countries with respect to expanding its international engagement. Article 9 of the constitution states: “Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.” To this end “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained”. Furthermore, the

24 | N. 21.

25 | Federal Government, “Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel bei der Tageszeitung ‘Asahi Shimbun’ am 09. März 2015”, 9 Mar 2015, <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Rede/2015/03/2015-03-09-merkel-asahi-shimbun.html> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

26 | “Keynote Address: Shinzo Abe”, The ISS Shangri-La Dialogue, 30 May 2014, <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/2014-c20c/opening-remarks-and-keynote-address-b0b2/keynote-address-shinzo-abe-a787> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

27 | “New Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation”, 27 Apr 2015, [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/anpo/shishin\\_20150427e.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/shishin_20150427e.html) (accessed 31 Jul 2015).



“right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized”.<sup>28</sup> These stipulations are deemed exceptional by comparison with other countries around the world. Media at home and abroad therefore frequently associate the reorientation of Japan’s security policy with the desire to become a “normal country”.<sup>29</sup>

Against this backdrop, criticism in the lack of owning up to the past and criticism in the current restructuring of the country’s security architecture frequently become linked. According to an opinion piece published in April by the Chinese news agency Xinhua “[...] without seriously reflecting on its past crimes against peace and humanity, the island country is untrustworthy”. The commentator fears that if Japan were to “get emboldened, it would be more likely to retake its self-destructive path and bring about regional troubles and even global disasters”.<sup>30</sup> In June 2014, after the speech given by the Japanese Prime Minister at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, a commentator stated the following in the *Korea Times* in Seoul: “Abe’s historical revisionism is all the more worrisome, as it combines with his foremost objective to make Japan a ‘normal’ country – one that can conduct war – reviving Japan as a global military power.”<sup>31</sup> At the beginning of May, another commentary from Beijing displayed a similar view in an assessment of the outcome of Shinzo Abe’s trip to the USA: “Such miscalculations will risk peace and stability in the entire region, and escalating tensions between Japan and its neighbors will also jeopardize U.S. interests.”<sup>32</sup>

Understandably, Tokyo and Washington have a totally different take on the matter. A joint statement about the new Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation by the foreign and defence ministers of the two countries – the so-called 2+2 Security Consultative Committee (SCC) – published in Washington in April contained

28 | The Constitution of Japan, [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution\\_and\\_government\\_of\\_japan/constitution\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

29 | The phrase does not originate with Shinzo Abe but with Ichiro Ozawa’s 1993 original Japanese version of the book *Blueprint for a New Japan: The Rethinking of a Nation*, Tokio, 1994.

30 | Zhu Dongyang, “Commentary: Abe’s dodging on war history shames Japan, insults world”, Xinhua, 30 Apr 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/30/c\\_134199198.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/30/c_134199198.htm) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

31 | “Watered down apology”, *The Korea Times*, 20 Jun 2014, [http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2014/06/202\\_159511.html](http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2014/06/202_159511.html) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

32 | Liu Tian, “Commentary: Abe’s speech in U.S. Congress disappoints Asian neighbors again”, Xinhua, 1 May 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-05/01/c\\_134201695.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-05/01/c_134201695.htm) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

the affirmation: "In light of the evolving security environment, the Ministers reconfirmed the Alliance's commitment to the security of Japan and to maintenance of international peace and security."<sup>33</sup> In this statement, the American side not only pays tribute to the new Japanese leitmotif of a "Proactive Contribution to Peace", it also stresses its support for the "recent monumental achievements" of Abe's government at the same time. In this connection, the text makes reference to the reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution approved in July 2014.<sup>34</sup> It gives Japan the right to "collective self-defence" subject to strict conditions. "Collective self-defence" in this context means providing military support to an allied state or to allied armed forces that are under military attack.<sup>35</sup> The USA also explicitly welcomes the regulations on arms exports, which the Japanese government

**The USA has praised the Japanese government for its "monumental achievements", including the establishment of a "National Security Council" and the "Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets".**

approved in April 2014.<sup>36</sup> While the new regulations include strict conditions as well, the "Policies on the Control of Arms Exports"<sup>37</sup> mean that, with some exceptions, the export ban on arms exports, which had been in place for almost 50 years, has now been lifted.<sup>38</sup> The "monumental achievements" the USA has attested the Japanese government include the establishment of a "National Security Council" at the end of 2013, the "Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets" (SDS), which came into force in December 2014 and covers information and documents that are officially classed as secret, as well as the "Cyber Security Basic Law" approved by the lower house of the Japanese parliament in November 2014.

33 | "A Stronger Alliance for a Dynamic Security Environment: The New Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation", Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee, 27 Apr 2015, [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/anpo/pdf/js20150427e.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/pdf/js20150427e.pdf) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

34 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Cabinet Decision on Development of Seamless Security Legislation to Ensure Japan's Survival and Protect its People", 1 Jul 2014, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/np/page23e\\_000273.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/np/page23e_000273.html) (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

35 | In greater detail: Paul Linnarz, "Erweitertes Einsatzprofil für japanische Selbstverteidigungsstreitkräfte", KAS-Länderbericht, 1 Jul 2014, <http://kas.de/japan/de/publications/38233> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

36 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan's Policies on the Control of Arms Export", <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/disarmament/policy> (accessed 25 Jun 2015).

37 | Ibid.

38 | In greater detail: Paul Linnarz, "Japan stellt die Weichen für künftige Rüstungsexporte", KAS-Länderbericht, 2 Jul 2014, <http://kas.de/japan/de/publications/37320> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).



Prime Minister Abe together with U.S. Secretary of Defense Hagel: The U.S.-Japanese defense cooperation has persisted for decades. | Source: Aaron Hostutler, U.S. DoD, flickr ©.

Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation were first agreed in 1978 and were subsequently revised by Tokyo and Washington in 1997. The regulations detailed in the Guidelines are based on the “Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan”, which was signed in 1952 and amended in 1960.<sup>39</sup> The new Guidelines approved this year supersede those from 1997. The first aspect to note is that the text makes no mention of either the People’s Republic of China, South or North Korea or, for instance, the Senkaku Islands (Chinese: Diaoyu) in the East China Sea. In their joint statement on the new Guidelines, however, the foreign and defence ministers of Japan and the USA stress “[...] that the Senkaku Islands are territories under the administration of Japan and therefore fall within the scope of the commitments under Article 5 of the Japan-U.S. Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, and that they (Japan and the USA) oppose any unilateral action that seeks to undermine Japan’s administration of these islands”.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the new Guidelines themselves, the associated joint ministers’ statement also makes mention of “key partners” in Asia. In this connection, the statement expresses Tokyo’s and Washington’s wish to expand trilateral and

39 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan”, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html> (accessed 27 Jul 2015).

40 | N. 33, p. 2.

multilateral cooperation, particularly with the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Australia as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The new Guidelines now envisage both an “Alliance Coordination Mechanism” and a “Bilateral Planning Mechanism” for the U.S.-Japanese Defence Alliance. One of the principles laid down for coordinated activities is that “Japan will maintain primary

**Japan and the USA have made a commitment to provide “mutual protection of each other’s assets”. This statement is not further specified in the Guidelines.**

responsibility for defending the citizens and territory of Japan”.<sup>41</sup> According to the new Guidelines, the USA, for its part, will “take actions to shape the regional environment in a way that supports the defense of Japan and re-establishes peace and security”.<sup>42</sup> Japan and the USA have further made a commitment to provide “mutual protection of each other’s assets”. What this covers precisely – ships, technical equipment, buildings, etc. – is not specified in the Guidelines. An indication that the U.S.-Japanese Defence Alliance will no longer necessarily be restricted to Japanese territory is provided by the following passage: “The Alliance will respond to situations that will have an important influence on Japan’s peace and security. Such situations cannot be defined geographically.”<sup>43</sup> This could mean, for instance, that the USA will deploy ships and aircraft to support its ally in evacuating its citizens from a foreign country if they become embroiled in a military conflict. The most important provisions of the new Guidelines further include the commitment that the two governments “will cooperate closely with each other on measures to maintain maritime order based upon international law, including freedom of navigation”.<sup>44</sup> And Japan and the USA even intend to cooperate in space in the future. To this end, they “will share information to address emerging threats against space systems and will pursue opportunities for cooperation [...] that will strengthen capabilities and resiliency of the space systems [...]”.<sup>45</sup>

In an article about the new Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation, the *China Daily* newspaper quoted the following pertinent opinion of a Chinese commentator in New York at the end of April: “It not only aims to contain the influence of China but also

41 | Ministry of Defense of Japan, “Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation”, 27 Apr 2015, p. 10, [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/ano/pdf/shishin\\_20150427e.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/ano/pdf/shishin_20150427e.pdf) (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

42 | *Ibid.*, p. 11.

43 | *Ibid.*, p. 7.

44 | *Ibid.*, p. 6.

45 | *Ibid.*, p. 21.

seeks to defend hegemony of US-Japanese alliance in East Asia.”<sup>46</sup> U.S. President Barack Obama, on the other hand, declared that while there were some “real tensions that have arisen with China around its approach to maritime issues and its claims, [...] that’s not an issue that is arising as a consequence of the U.S.-Japan alliance”. According to Obama, the partnership between Tokyo and Washington should not be seen as a “provocation” but “as a continuation of the important work that we (Japan and the USA) have done to ensure that you have a stable area where there are diplomatic conflicts, a healthy economic competition”.<sup>47</sup>

In the meantime, several hundred demonstrators took to the street in Tokyo in mid-May to protest against the legislative package for expanding the range of potential scenarios warranting the deployment of the Japanese self-defence forces, which the government has signed off on. Ahead of the approval by parliament, which is expected to take place by July, Prime Minister Abe has made efforts to dispel criticism in the new provisions among the population and the opposition parties. He also called people’s attention to “hard reality” in this context. Bloomberg reported on the Japanese head of government providing the following explanation: “The number of scrambles by our Air Self-Defense Force against planes of unknown nationality that approach our air space is (now) seven times what it was 10 years ago.”<sup>48</sup> Abe stressed that Tokyo would only take advantage of the new right to collective self-defence under the new legislation if an attack on a close ally posed a “clear danger” to the survival of Japan and its citizens and if there were “no other appropriate means”. The Prime Minister made this promise to journalists: “Some people have vague concern that (Japan) will be dragged into a war the U.S. engages in. I say to them clearly here that such a situation will never happen.”<sup>49</sup>

**According to Abe Tokyo would only take advantage of the new right to collective self-defence if an attack on a close ally posed a “clear danger” to the survival of Japan and if there were “no other appropriate means”.**

46 | Quoted from: “US, Japan unveil new defense guidelines”, *China Daily*, 28 Apr 2015, [http://chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-04/28/content\\_20561799.htm](http://chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-04/28/content_20561799.htm) (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

47 | The White House, n. 14.

48 | Quoted from: Isabel Reynolds/Maiko Takahashi, “Abe Vows to Limit Use of Force After Approving Defense Bills”, *Bloomberg*, 14 May 2015, <http://bloom.bg/1H4pzCm> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

49 | Quoted from: Masaaki Kameda, “Abe: Japan won’t slide into U.S. war despite collective defense loophole”, *The Japan Times*, 14 May 2015, <http://japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/14/national/politics.diplomacy/abe-says-new-security-bills-are-not-war-legislation> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

## CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE – SUBJECT TO SOME RESERVATIONS

As things stand, India is probably the first country worldwide that will purchase military hardware from Japan under the new regulations on arms exports, most likely by the end of the year. This involves several amphibian aircrafts of the type ShinMaywa US-2, which the Indian Navy intends to use for search and rescue (SAR) missions. Negotiations about the purchase of aircraft have been going on since 2011. At that time, it was not the Liberal Democrats (LDP) under Shinzo Abe who were in government but the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) under Prime Ministers Naoto Kan and later Yoshihiko Noda.

**Japan handed over the first of a total of three patrol boats to the Vietnamese Coast Guard as a gift in February.** The Philippine Coast Guard expects to take delivery of two or three patrol boats of Japanese manufacture in the third quarter of 2015.<sup>50</sup> Japan already handed over the first of a total of three patrol boats to the Vietnamese Coast Guard in February by way of a gift. The boat is already over 20 years old and was thoroughly overhauled before delivery.<sup>51</sup> In March, Japan made an agreement on closer cooperation with Indonesia as well. The main aim is to improve communication between the foreign and defence ministries of the two countries to enhance cooperation in the area of security policy.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the criticism voiced in some media reports about Japan's role in the global defence equipment business, one should bear in mind that the island state only plays a minor role in this area compared to other countries. For the period 2010 to 2014, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) lists the USA, Russia, China, Germany and France as the largest arms export nations. These five states alone account for almost three quarters of the entire market. The USA and Russia had a joint

50 | Cf. Jerry E. Esplanada, "Patrol boats from Japan start arriving in 2015", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 31 May 2014 <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/590453/patrol-boats-from-japan-to-start-arriving-in-2015> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

51 | Cf. "Japan gifts patrol ship to Vietnam after upgrade", *Thanh Nien News*, 6 Feb 2015, <http://www.thanhniennews.com/politics/japan-gifts-patrol-ship-to-vietnam-after-upgrade-38522.html> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

52 | Cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Towards Further Strengthening of the Strategic Partnership Underpinned by Sea and Democracy", Japan-Indonesia Joint Statement, 3 Mar 2015, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000072695.pdf> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

market share of close to 60 per cent. With its global market share rising to five per cent, China replaced Germany as the third largest defence equipment exporter in the relevant period. According to SIPRI, exports of defence equipment from the People's Republic rose by 143 per cent between 2005 to 2009 and 2010 to 2014. Almost 70 per cent of all military equipment from Chinese manufacture exported within Asia was supplied to Pakistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh alone. According to SIPRI, China's customers also include 18 African countries. Japan, on the other hand, figured neither among the ten largest exporters nor among the most significant importers. China, by contrast, was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> worldwide on the SIPRI list with respect to the import of defence equipment and South Korea 9<sup>th</sup>.<sup>53</sup>

**Almost 70 per cent of all military equipment from Chinese manufacture exported within Asia was supplied to Pakistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Among China's customers are also 18 African countries.**

Reports about the "record budget" for the Japanese self-defence forces, which the parliament in Tokyo approved in April, also need some explaining.<sup>54</sup> At 4.98 trillion yen, currently equivalent to some 37 billion euros,<sup>55</sup> the relevant budget for the current fiscal year (1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016) is the highest in post-war history. However, according to a report by the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AHK) in Tokyo, this only constitutes a nominal rise of 0.2 per cent over the period from 2003 (4,969 trillion yen) to 2015. China, by contrast, increased its military spending fourfold from 2003 to 2013 to the equivalent of 160 billion euros according to the AHK.<sup>56</sup> This year, the Chinese defence budget is expected to increase by a further ten per cent according to media reports.<sup>57</sup> Looking elsewhere, South Korea has also announced a significant increase for the next few years. According

53 | Cf. Peiter D. Wezeman/Siemon T. Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2014", SIPRI Fact Sheet, Mar 2015, <http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1503.pdf> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

54 | Cf. "Diet enacts record Y96.34 trillion budget for fiscal 2015", *Japan Today*, 10 Apr 2015, <http://japantoday.com/category/politics/view/diet-enacts-record-y96-34-trillion-budget-for-fiscal-2015> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

55 | As of: 10 May 2015.

56 | Cf. "Verteidigung: Die Mär von Japans 'Rekord'-Rüstung", *Japan Markt*, 15 Jan 2015, <http://japanmarkt.de/2015/01/15/wirtschaft/verteidigung-die-maer-von-japans-rekord-ruestung> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

57 | Cf. Franz-Stefan Gady, "Confirmed: China's Defense Budget Will Rise 10.1% in 2015", *The Diplomat*, 5 Mar 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/03/confirmed-chinas-defense-budget-will-rise-10-1-in-2015> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

to news agency Yonhap, Seoul is responding to the North Korean nuclear and missile programs with the planned budget rise.<sup>58</sup>



China is one of the countries which consistently increase their defense budget dramatically. Meanwhile, regional tensions continue to exist. | Source: Chad J. McNeeley, U.S. DoD, flickr ©©.

Of course none of these developments are conducive to lowering tensions in the Far East; but there are some positive indications too, which were totally unthinkable only a year ago! The first of these was the summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in November of last year in Beijing. This was the first official occasion<sup>59</sup> at which Japan's Prime Minister Abe met Chinese Head of State Xi Jinping. Representatives from the two sides had agreed four points for improving bilateral relations only a few days before the meeting, which lasted just under half an hour. The English translation of these points on the website of the Chinese news agency Xinhua<sup>60</sup> does not match the wording on

58 | Cf. Oh Soek-min, "S. Korea to raise defense spending by 2020", Yonhap News Agency, 20 Apr 2015, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/search1/2603000000.html?cid=AEN20150417009700315> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

59 | The two top-ranking politicians had briefly met before on two occasions; once in September 2013 at the G20 summit in Saint Petersburg and once in October of the same year at the APEC CEO Summit on the Indonesian island of Bali.

60 | Cf. Yamei Wang, "China, Japan reach four-point agreement of ties", Xinhua, 7 Nov 2014, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/07/c\\_133772952.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/07/c_133772952.htm) (accessed 30 Jun 2015).



the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan<sup>61</sup> in every detail; but in this agreement, the two countries basically declare their willingness (1.) to continue to promote the development of a mutually beneficial relationship based on strategic interests, (2.) to overcome political differences (here the two text versions also make reference to the past with different wordings), (3.) to prevent the situation in the East China Sea from deteriorating through dialogue and consultation and (4.) to resume dialogue at a political and diplomatic level as well as in the area of security through various bilateral and multilateral channels. Also, China and Japan are prepared to make efforts to build mutual trust.

On the occasion of the Asian-African summit in Jakarta in April, Xi Jinping and Shinzo Abe then had another meeting lasting close to half an hour. Many media reports emphasised the fact that both politicians smiled when they greeted each other this time. President Xi subsequently spoke about China-Japan relations having “improved somewhat” since the APEC summit in November 2014.<sup>62</sup> Prime Minister Abe shared his assessment.<sup>63</sup>

A meeting between the foreign ministers of China, South Korea and Japan had been scheduled to take place in Seoul back in March, the seventh of such trilateral dialogues; the previous meeting had, however, taken place almost three years earlier. While the discussions in March lasted less than two hours overall, the three ministers agreed a joint press release, in which they acknowledged the “steady progress in trilateral cooperation in various areas, despite fluid situations in the Northeast Asian region in recent years”.<sup>64</sup> March also saw the deputy foreign ministers of China and Japan meeting in Tokyo for a one-day round of talks on security issues. This was the first meeting at this level for four years. After a gap of over five years, Japan and South Korea resumed their “2+2” talks in April. The meeting in Seoul was

61 | Cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Regarding Discussion toward Improving Japan-China Relations”, 7 Nov 2014, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/cn/page4e\\_000150.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page4e_000150.html) (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

62 | Quoted from: Hasyim Widhiarto, “Abe and Xi discuss regional stability”, *The Jakarta Post*, 23 Apr 2015, <http://thejakartapost.com/news/2015/04/23/abe-and-xi-discuss-regional-stability.html> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

63 | Cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-China Summit Meeting”, 23 Apr 2015, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/cn/page1e\\_000041.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page1e_000041.html) (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

64 | Foreign Ministry of Japan, “Joint Press Release of the Seventh Trilateral Foreign Ministers’ Meeting among the Republic of Korea, Japan, and the People’s Republic of China”, Mar 2015, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000072163.pdf> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

attended by high-ranking officials from the foreign and defence ministries of both countries. Reportedly, regional security issues were at the center of this round of talks as well.<sup>65</sup> During the same month, the ministers responsible for tourism from China, South Korea and Japan met in Tokyo, where they presented a joint initiative for attracting tourists to the Far East (“Visit East Asia”).

**Representatives from the Japanese government coalition made an agreement with the Communist Party of China to resume participation of party members in events of the respective other country.**

There have also been a remarkable number of meetings at a party-political level during the last few weeks and months. Representatives from the Japanese government coalition of LDP and Komeito, for instance, made an agreement with the Communist Party of China in March to resume a program involving party members taking part in events of the respective other country. The three parties had begun to maintain contacts at this level back in 2006; but the program was put on hold in 2009. The printed version of *The Japan News* quoted the following statement made by LDP General Secretary Sadakazu Tanigaki after the decision had been made to resume the initiative: “We had sad times before, and we should overcome them [...].” According to the newspaper report, Yu Zhengsheng, Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, voiced the view that the “Japan-China relationship is heading in the right direction, though the momentum is weak [...]”.<sup>66</sup> Within a very short time, at the beginning of May, an eleven strong delegation of Japanese parliamentarians headed by LDP Vice-President Masahiko Komura paid Beijing a three-day visit.<sup>67</sup>

After the various bilateral and trilateral rounds of talks over the last few months, the term “thaw” has been used several times in the international media to describe relations between Japan, China and South Korea. The economic conditions are also conducive to Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing taking a serious interest in an easing of

65 | Cf. “South Korea, Japan hold first ‘two plus two’ talks in five years”, *The Japan Times*, 15 Apr 2015, <http://japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/15/national/politics-diplomacy/south-korea-japan-hold-first-two-plus-two-talks-in-five-years> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

66 | Quoted from: Yusuke Amano, “Japan, China ruling parties to resume exchanges”, *Asia One*, 25 Mar 2015, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/asia/japan-china-ruling-parties-resume-exchanges> (accessed 31 Jul 2015).

67 | Cf. “Japanese lawmakers hold talks with China’s No. 3 leader”, *Nikkei Asian Review*, 5 May 2015, <http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/Japanese-lawmakers-hold-talks-with-China-s-No.-3-leader> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

tensions. China, for instance, which had to announce a decline in its economic growth to seven per cent for the first quarter of 2015 in April,<sup>68</sup> has a great interest in reviving direct Japanese investments in the People's Republic. These had decreased by almost 40 per cent year on year in 2014.<sup>69</sup> The tensions in the bilateral relationship had been mentioned as one of the reasons besides rising wages.<sup>70</sup> Tokyo, for its part, is focusing more strongly on tourism for its economic growth – partly in anticipation of the Olympic Summer Games in 2020. The number of foreign visitors to Japan already reached record levels last year. And almost 60 per cent of all people holidaying in Japan in 2014 came from China, South Korea and Taiwan alone.<sup>71</sup> The number of Chinese tourists visiting Japan in February represented a year-on-year increase of almost 160 per cent.<sup>72</sup>

Of course a renewed escalation of the security situation in the Far East would not be conducive to economic interests and developments in China, South Korea or Japan. Insofar, there is definitely cause for cautious optimism at this level as well. However, no one can predict for certain whether the trend towards détente will consolidate. The reactions to Shinzo Abe's speech on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Japanese surrender will provide important indications as to whether there is indeed a thaw in the offing in the Far East, at least with respect to the Japan's relations with China and South Korea. Beijing will make another pronouncement on the topic by September at the latest. That is the time when the People's Republic will hold its own events to commemorate the end of World War II. This year is the first time that a military parade is to be held in the Chinese capital on this occasion.

68 | Cf. Kevin Yao/Koh Gui Qing, "China growth slowest in six years, more stimulus expected soon", Reuters, 15 Apr 2015, <http://reut.rs/1aRGsxA> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

69 | Cf. The State Council of the People's Republic of China, "China boosted by Japanese inflows", [http://english.gov.cn/state\\_council/ministries/2015/02/17/content\\_281475057126350.htm](http://english.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2015/02/17/content_281475057126350.htm) (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

70 | Cf. Norihiko Shirouzu/Kaznori Takada, "Two years after protest, 'China risk' still haunts Japan firms", Reuters, 12 Sep 2015, <http://reut.rs/1xSsZJD> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

71 | Cf. "Rise in Foreign Tourism Brings Economic Benefits to Japan", *Nippon*, 24 Feb 2015, <http://nippon.com/en/features/h00098> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

72 | Cf. Japan Tourism Marketing Co., "Statistics of Visitors to Japan from Overseas", 13 Apr 2015, <http://www.tourism.jp/en/statistics/2015-04> (accessed 30 Jun 2015).

# INCONCLUSIVENESS AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

SIX DECADES OF SOUTH KOREAN UNIFICATION POLICY

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When known criminal 55-year-old Kim Ki-jong attacked the Ambassador of the United States of America Mark Lippert with a knife during a breakfast meeting of the “Korean Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation” in Seoul on the morning of 5 March 2015, seriously wounding the diplomat, news of the attack spread around all major media outlets world-wide. While South Korea's official initial reaction was a rush to explain that the incident did not cast a shadow on the long-standing alliance between the two countries, the analysis of Kim's motives by the South Korean media indicated that the act of violence was primarily an act of his vehement rejection of military cooperation between Seoul and Washington. Kim considered this cooperation, documented by the joint, simultaneous manoeuvre held by both powers annually, mainly at sea, to be the cause of the increasing alienation and frostiness between the two Korean states.<sup>1</sup>



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The question of the quality of inter-Korean relations and the inevitably associated debate on the reunification of the two countries on the Korean Peninsula generally do not lead to these kinds of escalations in everyday politics in South Korea. On the contrary, foreign observers are often given the predominant impression that this issue is on the country's political agenda particularly because it is considered “good form” for society and the key players in politics, the media and business have no choice but to address it. In terms of content, this discourse, seemingly artificial at time, has long been accompanied by a variety of institutions: Not only is there a Ministry of Unification,<sup>2</sup> but there is also a so-called

- 1 | Cf. Sang-ho Song, “U.S. envoy hurt in knife attack”, *The Korea Herald*, 5 Mar 2015, <http://koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150305001232> (accessed 30 Jul 2015).
- 2 | There have been a total of 38 ministers since the ministry was established in 1969 (authors' own research).

National Unification Advisory Council. The Ministries house departments for unification issues, and in individual institutions, plans are already in place for how to proceed on “Day X” should this suddenly transpire, as learned from the case in Germany.

Table 1

**South Korea’s total budget and the Ministry of Unification’s share between 2005 and 2014 in trillions of South Korean Won (KRW) and billions of U.S. dollars (USD)**

Year	Total	Ministry of Unification			
		KRW	USD	KRW	USD
2005	209.6	204.2	0.6	0.6	0.3
2006	224.1	238.5	0.8	0.8	0.3
2007	238.4	253.4	0.6	0.7	0.3
2008	257.2	190.4	0.8	0.6	0.3
2009	301.8	253.4	0.5	0.4	0.2
2010	292.8	258.3	0.5	0.4	0.2
2011	309.1	267.1	0.6	0.5	0.2
2012	325.4	303.1	0.5	0.5	0.2
2013	349.0	328.9	0.4	0.4	0.1
2014	355.8	322.3	0.3	0.3	0.1

Sources: For the total expenditures: Statistics Korea, [http://index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx\\_cd=2739](http://index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx_cd=2739) (accessed 10 Jul 2015); for the Ministry of Unification’s share: Ministry of Strategy and Finance, [https://www.digitalbrain.go.kr/kor/view/statis/statis01\\_02\\_01.jsp?fsc1\\_yy=2015&code=DB010102&fsc1\\_div1\\_cd=1&x=46&y=5](https://www.digitalbrain.go.kr/kor/view/statis/statis01_02_01.jsp?fsc1_yy=2015&code=DB010102&fsc1_div1_cd=1&x=46&y=5) (accessed 10 Jul 2015).

However, what have the governments of South Korea actually done since the end of the Korean War in 1953 to meet the requirement set out in Article 4 of the constitution,<sup>3</sup> wherein South Korea seeks unification under the principles of democracy and freedom and aimed to implement peaceful policies? While Germany is now able to look back on 25 years of reunification, the division that

3 | Constitution of the Republic of Korea on the Constitutional Court of South Korea’s homepage, [http://www.english.ccourt.go.kr/home/att\\_file/download/Constitution\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Korea.pdf](http://www.english.ccourt.go.kr/home/att_file/download/Constitution_of_the_Republic_of_Korea.pdf) (accessed 10 Jul 2015).

has separated Korea for 70 years appears further than ever from reaching that goal.



A section of the Berlin Wall in Seoul: While it is already the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Germany's reunification this year, Korea has been divided for almost 70 years. | Source: © Norbert Eschborn.

Although the need for unification is regularly expressed in Seoul, South Korea's current policy of reunification is characterised mainly by its inconclusiveness. Despite President Park Geun-hye pursuing highly ambitious targets with her foreign policy strategy of "Trust policy"<sup>4</sup> on the Korean Peninsula, in Northeast Asia as a whole and ultimately throughout the Eurasian region, this policy lacks determination and the will to take politically courageous action. Despite every such announcement, no dialogue has yet been initiated with North Korea without preconditions.<sup>5</sup> The reasons for this do not rest solely on the shoulders of the current government. Instead this lack of results has been the defining characteristic of South Korean unification policy since the end of the Korean War, with former Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's "Sunshine Policy" between 2000 and 2007 marking a notable turning point. Since the inauguration of Park's predecessor, Lee Myung-bak, in 2008, however, a return to the classical guiding principles of South Korean North Korea policies has been observed, resulting in, among other things, the current standstill.

4 | Presented in: Geun-hye Park, "A New Kind of Korea", *Foreign Affairs* 90, 09-10/2011, p. 13-18, <http://foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-east-asia/2011-09-01/new-kind-korea> (accessed 21 Jul 2015).

5 | Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Fig. 1

**East Asia: China, Japan, DPR Korea and ROK**

Source: © racken.

### **SOUTH KOREAN UNIFICATION POLICY SINCE THE KOREAN WAR**

In retrospect, we can differentiate between five phases of South Korean North Korea policy. These phases can be distinguished by their respective domestic political circumstances and developments in world politics, both of which massively influenced Seoul's reunification policies.

#### **1953 to 1970:**

##### **Antagonism as the defining feature**

The relationship between North and South Korea has been marked by open conflict since the 1950s. Thus the Korean War ended in 1953 with a nearly identical return to the border demarcation along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, with a conflict-ridden truce that persists to this day.<sup>6</sup> The prospect of violent reunification at the enemy's expense has united the two states. As early as 1953, the first South Korean president, Rhee Syngman, refused to sign the ceasefire agreement between the warring parties and insisted

6 | Japanese rule over the Korean Peninsula ended on 2 September 1945 with Japan's surrender in World War II. Korea was then divided between the victorious powers of the Pacific War, the USA and the Soviet Union, along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

on continuing the war until Korea's ultimate reunification.<sup>7</sup> In the years that followed, Seoul attempted to guard itself against the communist North through a strong military alliance with the U.S., while North Korea turned to the People's Republic of China and the USSR. Both constituent states pursued their own form of the Hallstein Doctrine, in which diplomatic relations were only maintained with those states that did not recognise the respective other Korean "enemy state".<sup>8</sup> The first phase of North-South relations was therefore characterised by the formation of blocs and mutual rejection. Efforts in favour of a peaceful reunification were not seen on the South Korean side.



In 1950, UN combat forces withdrew from the 38<sup>th</sup> degree of latitude: Ever since this border was drawn, not much has changed in regard to the peace conditions there. | Source: U.S. Army, flickr ©133.

### 1971 to 1988:

#### Cautious rapprochement in the era of regional upheavals

This inter-Korean standstill was first broken in 1971. Seoul and Pyongyang both felt that U.S. President Richard Nixon's revolutionary visit to Beijing called into question the security guarantees provided by the superpowers. In the years following Rhee Syngman's resignation in 1960, an authoritarian military regime had been established in the Republic of Korea. Beginning in 1963,

7 | Cf. Karl-Gottfried Kindermann, *Der Aufstieg Koreas in der Weltpolitik*, München, 2005, p.118-122.

8 | Cf. Charles Armstrong, "Inter-Korean Relations in Historical Perspective", *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, No. 2, Vol. 14, 31 Dec 2005, p. 5.



President Park Chung-hee cemented his rule through economic development work, the accumulation of constitutional power and selective repression. The military ties to the USA became systematic supporting pillars

**In 1971, not least due to concerns surrounding the changing relationship between the world's superpowers, South Korea made contact with the North for the first time through the Red Cross.**

of the state system of rule. In 1971, not least due to concerns surrounding the changing relationship between the world's superpowers, South Korea made contact with the North for the first time through the coordination offices of the Red Cross. In a remarkably proactive gesture, Park Chung-hee sent the head of South Korean intelligence, Lee Hu-rak, to Pyongyang to engage in direct negotiations one year later. Lee met with North Korean leader Kim Il-sung and they agreed on the need for consultation between the two countries. Further covert meetings ultimately resulted in the "North-South Joint Statement" in 1972. In addition to creating a North-South Committee, this 17-point program in particular included the North-South Joint Communiqué seeking non-violent reunification without seeking the involvement of foreign powers.<sup>9</sup> However, by mid-1973, North Korea had already withdrawn from the newly created committee.<sup>10</sup>

Pyongyang attempted to use social tensions in South Korea resulting from sometimes civil war-like conditions for its own gain by exploiting the brutality of the South Korean government for propaganda purposes. The by then rapidly deteriorating North-South relations culminated in the failed assassination attempt on Park Chung-hee in 1974 (though his wife did fall victim to this attack),<sup>11</sup> before he ultimately died at the hands of an assassination plot devised by his own intelligence corps in 1979. Despite the failure of rapprochement between North and South Korea in the early 1970s, this marked the first break with previous reunification policy in Seoul. However, no additional significant rapprochement was achieved until the late 1980s, with the exception of a few coordinated family reunions.

### **1988 to 1997:**

#### **A rethink in the era of global change**

With the inauguration of President Roh Tae-wo in 1988 came renewed drive in North-South relations. Through the initiative of rapprochement with the Warsaw Pact countries and communist

9 | Cf. Kindermann, n. 7, pp. 163-171.

10 | Cf. Armstrong, n. 8, p. 5.

11 | Cf. Park, n. 4, p. 13.

China, which became known as “North Policy”, Roh robbed Pyongyang of its monopolistic position as the only Korean constituent state to engage in relations with the world’s socialist countries. This resulted in a diplomatic asymmetry that continues to this day at the expense of North Korea.<sup>12</sup> With respect to the Korean Peninsula, Roh significantly distinguished South Korean reunification policy by its model of “national community”:<sup>13</sup> the intention was for a two-state community with a common identity to arise through intensified cooperation and joint representation on the basis of which reunification would ultimately take place. Despite initial reluctance, North Korea proved willing to cooperate. The outcome of these policies was an end to the mutual Korean Hallstein doctrine, North and South Korea’s accession to the United Nations in 1991 and a further increase in bilateral contacts. During this phase, geopolitical upheavals forced Seoul and Pyongyang to accept more sovereignty and released them from the static equilibrium of the East-West conflict. However, the state of war that had existed between the two countries remained in place even after the end of the Cold War. As a result, an economically strong South Korea that embraced democracy in 1992 stood in opposition to a North Korea driven by weakness and uncertainty. In the wake of German reunification, the regime of Kim Il-sung feared the real risk of absorption by the economically successful South.

**Due to the diplomatic asymmetry seen on the Korean Peninsula and the elimination of Soviet aid, North Korea soon fell into an existential crisis.**

Rho’s “national community” model remained vague, but has nevertheless generated a hitherto unseen cooperation between North and South Korea since 1972. The basic treaty set out between the two countries in December

1991 and the “Joint Declaration on the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula” of 1992 are considered highlights of this development.<sup>14</sup> However, due to the diplomatic asymmetry seen

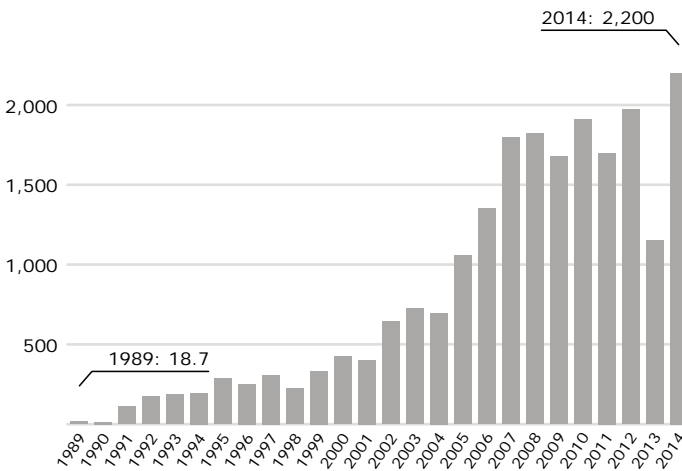
12 | While South Korea was able to engage in diplomatic relations with the former Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China in 1991/1992, an equivalent normalisation of North Korea’s relationship with Japan and the USA has as yet failed to materialise. However, between 2000 and 2003, Pyongyang was able to open embassies in Canada and some EU countries, including Germany, in 2001. For a more detailed overview of North Korean diplomatic relations, see: The National Committee on North Korea, “DPRK Diplomatic Relations”, <http://ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/dprk-diplomatic-relations> (accessed 19 Mar 2015).

13 | Cf. Young-Ho Park, “South and North Korea’s Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations”, The 2<sup>nd</sup> KRIS-Brookings Joint Conference, 2014, <http://brookings.edu/~media/events/2014/1/21%20korean%20peninsula%20unification/park%20young%20ho%20paper.pdf> (accessed 10 Jul 2015).

14 | Cf. Armstrong, n. 8, pp. 6-7.

on the Korean Peninsula and the elimination of Soviet aid, North Korea soon fell into an existential crisis. The 1990s were marked by economic collapse, devastating food shortages and desperate attempts to preserve the regime. At the same time, the decision makers in Seoul and Washington failed to exploit North Korea's isolation starting in the mid-1990s to push for further de-escalation. Instead, they increased pressure on the regime, which in turn encouraged the desperate attempts to secure the regime through aggression and radicalisation.<sup>15</sup>

Fig. 2  
**Inter-Korean Trade Volume 1989 to 2014**  
(in millions of U.S. dollars)



Sources: Nicole M. Finneemann et al., "Tomorrow's Northeast Asia. Prospects for Emerging East Asian Cooperation and Implications for the United States", *Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies*, Vol. 11, 2011, [http://keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/jukas\\_2011-08\\_lee.pdf](http://keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/jukas_2011-08_lee.pdf) (accessed 21 Jul 2015); "Inter-Korean trade hits 8-year low in 2013", N.K. News, via: Yonhap News Agency, 23 Feb 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2014/02/23/21/0401000000AEN20140223001700315F.html> (accessed 21 Jul 2015); "Inter-Korean Trade Hits New High", Arirang News, via: *The Chosun Ilbo*, 29 Jan 2015, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2015/01/29/2015012901713.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2015/01/29/2015012901713.html) (accessed 21 Jul 2015); "KOTRA on DPRK trade", North Korean Economy Watch, 19 Sep 2012, <http://nkeconwatch.com/2012/06/01/15690> (accessed 21 Jul 2015).

15 | Cf. the notable achievements of the former South Korean foreign minister in the Roh Moo-hyun government, in Young-kwan Yoon, "Nordkorea-Problem hätte längst gelöst sein können", *Die Welt*, 7 Apr 2013, <http://welt.de/115062316> (accessed 10 Jul 2015).

### 1998 to 2007:

#### Sunshine Policy

The most important era in South Korean reunification policy began in 1998 with the election of Kim Dae-jung as the head of state. Kim Dae-jung's inauguration in 1998 heralded the first peaceful transfer of power between two democratic governments in South Korea. Kim took office with the intention of fundamentally changing his country's policy towards North Korea.

One of the most decisive moments of the birth of his so-called Sunshine Policy was Kim Dae-jung's speech at the Freie Universität Berlin in 2000. In his speech he declared that the aim of South Korea's unification policy was by no means to absorb North Korea, but instead to propose a rapprochement and foster coexistence with intensified economic, infrastructural and political cooperation.

In exchange for abandoning its nuclear weapons program, South Korea declared itself willing to assuage North Korea's security concerns and extricate Pyongyang from its diplomatic isolation.<sup>16</sup> This speech soon resulted in secret negotiations between representatives of the two countries at the end of which the first Inter-Korean Summit was agreed. With the world watching, the heads of state of North and South Korea met directly with one another in June of 2000 in Pyongyang. In the "June 15 Joint Declaration", both sides agreed to a cooperative reunification process without the use of force and without absorption. In addition to the reunification of separated families, the declaration agreed to the intensification of a cultural and economic exchange. As

**The rapprochement between the two countries became the goal of reunification policy, whereas addressing the question of actual unity was tactically tabled.**

the first step towards a hypothetical nation-state, a loose vision of a supranational union modelled after the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the early European Community was to be sought.<sup>17</sup> However, the real milestone of the Summit was the North Korea's willingness to officially negotiate with the South on an equal footing. In the same vein, instead of striving for all-out reunification with no alternative, South Korea now prioritised a gradual shift in its relations with the DPRK that included North Korean interests. The rapprochement between the two countries thus became the ultimate goal of reunification policy, whereas addressing the question of actual unity or other uncomfortable issues was tactically tabled. The "normalisation"

16 | Cf. Kindermann, n. 7, pp. 325-326.

17 | Cf. Chung-in Moon, *The Sunshine Policy*, Seoul, 2012, pp. 44-50.

of North Korea became the absolute priority. What followed was a fundamental break with classical reunification policy of South Korea and the previous relationship between the two constituent states with one another.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, the tensions between North Korea and the USA massively limited the success of Kim Dae-jung's policies. While a normalisation in U.S.-DPRK relations seemed to emerge during Bill Clinton's last year in office, this trend ultimately collapsed after the election of George W. Bush in 2000. Despite all this, Kim Dae-jung's successor, Roh Moo-hyun, attempted to continue "Sunshine Policy" upon taking office in 2003. This then led to another Inter-Korean Summit in 2007, which included the "4 October Joint Declaration". In it, both sides stated their desire to end the war permanently. Though a revival of the dynamics of 2000 was achieved for another few months, by 2007, newly-elected President Lee Myung-bak had declared that the previous policy had failed.

#### **Since 2007:**

##### **A return to stalemate and alienation**

President Lee's leadership instead saw the reversion of the "Sunshine Policy". South Korea's relations with its U.S. allies were prioritised, while reactionism became the defining aspect of the country's policy towards North Korea. This was based on the erroneous perception that the North Korean regime was close to collapse. Accordingly, the drafting of joint intervention plans between Seoul and Washington in the event of such a breakdown was ramped up, while the previous policy of rapprochement with Pyongyang was in turn abandoned. With Lee's "Vision 3000", Seoul presented the North with a proposal of economic assistance from South Korea spanning ten years in exchange for immediate denuclearisation

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18 | Nevertheless, "Sunshine Policy" also had its downsides. As became known in late 2003, the Hyundai Group had apparently paid the North Korean regime nearly 500 million U.S. dollars on behalf of the South Korean government shortly before the first Inter-Korean Summit. This scandal, which became known as the "cash-for-summit" scandal, saw Kim Dae-jung accused of having bought his Nobel Peace Prize and inter-Korean rapprochement with high bribes. Upon learning of the scandal, the Supreme Court of South Korea ruled in an investigation that 100 million U.S. dollars had been verifiably illegally paid on behalf of the government. Many members from Kim Dae-jung's sphere were convicted of this, with some even committing suicide. Kim himself went unpunished, though the public's perception of his "Sunshine Policy" did suffer badly as a result of the scandal; cf. Moon, n. 17, p. 36 f.

by Pyongyang. This proposal had no intention of appeasing North Korean security concerns, nor did any of Lee's subsequent proposals (including a three-stage reunification plan with the introduction of a reunification tax). Any rapprochement failed to materialise, and North-South relations once again dropped to a low point.<sup>19</sup> The consequences of these policies based on false expectations are still felt to this day. Under the leadership of President Park Geun-hye, who took office in early 2013, South Korean unification policy has been based on the principles of what is known as *Trustpolitik*. As part of cross-regional initiatives (in particular the "Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative"), this policy officially aims at overcoming the confrontation on the Korean Peninsula and actively working towards the "national jackpot" of reunification.<sup>20</sup> The process of building trust as a necessary condition here is eponymous. However, so far the Park administration has not been able to achieve any appreciable success with its continued foreign policy dependence on the U.S.<sup>21</sup> The impression is given that Park Geun-hye's North Korea policy is dominated by inflexibility and a lack of willingness to take risks. No results-oriented policy of reunification has been observed, at least as yet.

## DETERMINANTS OF REUNIFICATION POLICY

The historical view taken by Seoul's North Korea policy reveals a complex system of factors that influence one other, the effects of which are responsible for the development of South Korean unification efforts.

### Diverging interests and the South Korean public

Since the end of the Cold War, the absorption of North Korea by the economically superior south has established itself in South Korea as the reunification scenario that is generally expected. However, this view has proved problematic. Against the backdrop of the 1990s, which were disastrous for North Korea, the primacy

19 | Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 3-8.

20 | The Korean term "daebak" used by the President is also translated differently by South Korea's English-speaking media as "bonanza" or "jackpot". Cf. Tae-ho Kang, "Unification Bonanza (Daebak) Buzz and the Absence of a Peace Process", *EAF Policy Debates*, No. 1, East Asia Foundation, 10 Apr 2014, [http://keaf.org/book/EAF\\_Policy\\_Debates\\_No1\\_Unification\\_Bonanza\\_\(Daebak\)\\_Buzz\\_and\\_the\\_Absence\\_of\\_a\\_Peace\\_Process](http://keaf.org/book/EAF_Policy_Debates_No1_Unification_Bonanza_(Daebak)_Buzz_and_the_Absence_of_a_Peace_Process) (accessed 21 Jul 2015).

21 | In a one-on-one discussion with the author, N.E., on 8 Oct 2014, a senior South Korean presidential official expressed scepticism in regard to the chances of success.

of safeguarding sovereignty and power has risen to become the main theme of the regime. Seeking reunification modelled on that of Germany, perceived to be a model of absorption, therefore contradicts these ideas and continues to generate fierce opposition in Pyongyang today.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the South Korean public is gradually drifting towards a collective conformity of prosperity. According to popular opinion, socio-economic stability is preferable to a costly reunification, while the sense of a nation-state community is currently massively diminishing amongst South Korean teenagers.<sup>23</sup>



Park Geun-hye at a ceremony commemorating national independence: Under the office-holding president, South Korea's unification policy orients itself toward the principles of the so-called trust policy. | Source: Jeon Han, Korean Culture and Information Service, flickr @@@.

With respect to the alternative option of a cooperative, integrative reunification systematically executed over a longer period of time, divergent ideas in North and South Korea limit Seoul's flexibility here. The "Korean National Community Formula" has formed the basis for the official reunification policy of every government from 1989 up to Park Geun-hye's administration, while the North Korean vision of a "Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo" has defined Pyongyang's stance since 1980. Both approaches combine

22 | Observations from the author's (N.E.) discussions with staff of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of [North] Korea between 2011 and 2014.

23 | Cf. Steven Denney, "The Generation Gap on Korean Unification", *The Diplomat*, 29 Jan 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/the-generation-gap-on-korean-unification> (accessed 10 Jul 2015).

the vision of a supranational community of two political systems existing in parallel as a basis for later reunification. However, the DPRK's focus here also aims at securing its survival within a loose confederation; it in no way seeks to merge with South Korea to become one liberal democratic Korea. However, while Pyongyang's stance would nevertheless provide enough manoeuvrability for rapprochement with a correspondingly rational formulation of interests, public opinion in South Korea is cause for far greater problems. In addition to the fears the public has adopted concerning the exorbitant costs of reunification and the waning interest, the focus here lies primarily on the "bunker mentality" towards the DPRK.



A stockpile of ammunition of the U.S. army in South Korea: South Korea's desire for military ties with the United States is unbroken. | Source: Expert Infantry, flickr ©.

Influenced by the experiences of a merciless fratricidal war, radical anticommunism and unconditional military ties to the United States were promoted as cornerstones of South Korea's self-perception between 1953 and 1970. Government-mandated patriotism generated an atmosphere characterised by a lack of empathy for the North, while values such as democracy, freedom and liberality were primarily abused as fighting words meant to maintain the south's position of power. As a result, North Korea unintentionally became a source of identity for South Korean nationalism. This only changed with the onset of change in North-South relations in the late 1980s and the democratisation of South Korea. Subjects



such as the forced prostitution of Korean “comfort women” by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II or the fate of North Korea, which have previously been considered taboo, have been the focus of increased public debate. Kim Dae-jung attempted to co-opt this moment of awakening in civil society and mobilise public opinion for a radical change in North-South relations. However, these efforts were quite obviously a failure. Ever since Lee Myung-bak took office in 2008, a declining trend has been apparent in South Korea. Indifference and apathy towards North Korea are once again on the rise, whilst the sense of community as part of a supranational Korean people is now decreasing rapidly amongst young people. According to recent studies, 33.7 per cent of all *yishipdae*<sup>24</sup> indicate that different perceptions of values (instead of divergent political and economic systems) are the primary reason for the social distance between North and South Korea. Fewer than 71.8 per cent are interested in reunification (compared to 77.1 per cent in 2012). This places this group at the bottom of all age groups surveyed. In addition, only 36.3 per cent of young South Koreans specify a common nationality as the main driver for reunification (again compared to 46.3 per cent in 2012), while economic interests dominate the opinion of all age groups under 50. This has resulted in a progressive general loss in the sense of national unity with the people of North Korea.<sup>25</sup> The expected high costs of reunification massively reinforce this trend. According to the South Korean Financial Supervisory Service’s latest calculations, unification with North Korea would consume at least 400 billion euros, while the Finance Ministry estimates expenditures of nearly 800 billion U.S. dollars in a similar study. Given the fact that South Korea’s nominal gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated at forty times higher than that of North Korea’s (in comparison: in 1990 West Germany’s GDP was ten times that of the GDR),<sup>26</sup> these massive economic concerns are not surprising. Nevertheless, this way of thinking is increasingly eroding the foundations for shaping a successful reunification policy. Instead of counteracting this trend by cooperating with civic groups and through educational projects, however, South Korean leadership prefers to apply a policy of inaction.

24 | This is a colloquial term in Korean for young people in their twenties.

25 | Cf. Jiyeon Kim/Karl Friedhoff/Chungku Kang/Euicheol Lee, *Asan Public Opinion Report. South Korean Attitudes toward North Korea and Reunification*, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2014 [http://thediplomat.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/thediplomat\\_2015-01-29\\_13-53-09.pdf](http://thediplomat.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/thediplomat_2015-01-29_13-53-09.pdf) (accessed 10 Jul 2015).

26 | Cf. “Einheit mit Kim würde 500 Milliarden Dollar kosten”, *Die Welt*, 19 Nov 2014, <http://welt.de/134496873> (accessed 10 Jul 2015).

## Influential personalities

A defining factor in the development of South Korea's policy on North Korea has always been the president himself. These variable personalities, dominated either by ideological narrow-mindedness or, alternatively, by pragmatism, therefore play a major role in determining a policy's success or failure. Reviewing key moments in North-South relations demonstrates just how closely policy development is linked with this.

In his twelve years as South Korea's first president, Rhee Syngman had a significant and lasting effect on both policy development and national identity. However, against the backdrop of domestic disputes and the Korean War, Rhee's government failed in creating a democratic system of government. As a radical anti-communist

**As a radical anti-communist and nationalist, Rhee refused on principle to accept the existence of North Korea. He introduced an era of dogmatic inflexibility and lack of political pragmatism.**

and nationalist, the self-perceived "Father of the Nation" refused on principle to accept the existence of North Korea. As such, he refused to sign the ceasefire agreement in Panmunjom in 1953 and insisted the war be continued. In striving to implement crucial

elements of a Confucian state and political understanding in a democratic and liberal state as set out by the constitution, Rhee ultimately introduced an era of authoritarian presidential governments, which could only then yield decades of dogmatic inflexibility and lack of political pragmatism.<sup>27</sup>

As a result, the first steps towards inter-Korean rapprochement only took place in 1972 under the leadership of Park Chung-hee. Beginning in 1964, Park established an authoritarian police state, which, among other things, mercilessly persecuted political opponents using the notorious secret KCIA (Korean Central Intelligence Agency). Park's political style was characterised by military discipline coupled with a coolly calculated articulation of interests. Despite repeated provocations from the North, in 1971 he acknowledged the need for contact with the antagonistic DPRK. In doing so, Park was also prepared to take proactive steps, resulting in him personally sending former KCIA chief Lee Hu-rak to Pyongyang to conduct secret negotiations in 1972. However, due to increasing social instability this brief period of inter-Korean rapprochement soon crumbled. North-South relations reached a new low when the president's wife was killed in 1974 during a

27 | Cf. Kindermann, n. 7, pp. 67-69 and pp. 134-137.

failed North Korean assassination attempt on her husband's life.<sup>28</sup> President Park himself died in 1979 at the hands of former KCIA chief Kim Jae Kyu.<sup>29</sup>

The pragmatism that had become evident in sections of the South Korean military in the case of President Park Chung-hee reached its peak with the "Northern Policy" put in place by General Roh Tae-woo, who became president in 1988. He skilfully applied his expertise in psychological warfare in the negotiations with South Korea's opposition and the North Korean leadership.<sup>30</sup> Roh used his foreign policy campaign to rob the North Korean regime of its exclusive position in China and Eastern Europe, thus forcing Pyongyang to cooperate. Seoul benefited from this significantly, and it set the stage for its rise to a Northeast Asian middle power. This break with the static policies of his predecessors ushered in a new political era in the Republic of Korea.

**Roh used his foreign policy campaign to rob the North Korean regime of its exclusive position in China and Eastern Europe, thus forcing Pyongyang to cooperate.**

Kim Dae-jung's election nearly ten years later likewise marked a historical milestone. Never before had South Korean reunification policy assumed such a high profile. The driving force behind this development was President Kim himself, whose own biography was closely tied to the history of Korea. Kim Dae-jung had been the victim of the repressive governments in Seoul for decades. Kim took office in 1998 with the intention to bring about a new beginning in South Korea and the desire to implement a policy of "national reconciliation and unity".<sup>31</sup> In addition to cross-party cooperation and the mobilisation of civil society, this also included proactive outreach to North Korea. Honouring his "Sunshine Policy" and the rapprochement it brought about between the two Korean constituent states, Kim was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000.<sup>32</sup>

However, in 2008, North-South relations once again toppled when former Hyundai CEO and mayor of Seoul, Lee Myung-bak, took office. Taking a hardline policy, South Korea abandoned the path taken by Kim Dae-jung and his successor, Roh Moo-hyun, instead returning to a confrontational policy of reunification.

28 | Cf. Park, n. 4, p. 13.

29 | Cf. Kindermann, n. 7, pp. 139-183.

30 | Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 239-247.

31 | Cf. *ibid.*, p. 314.

32 | Cf. Bernd Weiler: "Ein Mandela für Korea", *Die Welt*, 14 Oct 2000, <http://welt.de/538505> (accessed 10 Jul 2015).

### Increasingly complex decision-making processes

**Ever since Rhee Syngman's administration, the South Korean president has directed the nation's foreign policy based on their far-reaching constitutional powers.**

In addition to the programmatic orientations of South Korea's presidents, systemic processes also have considerable effects on the shaping of South Korean unification policy. As a result, in this context the current system of political decision-making is based on a complex construct of mutual control and participation, whilst the responsibility for policy-making during the authoritarian regimes until 1992 lay almost exclusively with the president. However, the democratisation of South Korea was also accompanied by a massive increase in the complexity of state policy formulation. Ever since Rhee Syngman's administration, the South Korean president has directed the nation's foreign policy based on their far-reaching constitutional powers (and, in practice, powers that go beyond even that). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs then tacitly implements these instructions in collaboration with the South Korean intelligence services. Parliament has only functioned as a "rubber stamp", whilst the important decisions were taken at the highest level behind closed doors. This has resulted in the president taking control of shaping policy with relatively few obstacles. There was no functioning system of separation of powers in place; the judiciary was under governmental control and the opposition was kept in check through repression. It was only the private sector that gained increasing political influence beginning in the late 1960s. However, the President remained the formative designer of foreign policy.<sup>33</sup>

Yet this considerable power to shape policy ceased in the early 1990s. The authoritarian construct of governance gave way to a more Western-style presidential system together with democratic checks and balances. Although the president, who is elected directly, has continued to hold the policy-making power, the ratification of international treaties requires a majority vote by the South Korean National Assembly. Government officials may be summoned to testify before the Assembly upon request to give their opinion, and impeachment proceedings may be initiated if the president is suspected of overstepping his or her authority.

33 | Cf. Scott A. Snyder/Leif-Eric Easley, "South Korea's Foreign Relations and Security Policies", in: Saadia M. Pekkanen et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of The International Relations of Asia*, New York et. al, 2014, p. 449.

In practice, in addition to providing checks to the executive, these instruments also allow foreign policy efforts to be delayed or even stopped on the basis of ideological motivations. The South Korean Constitutional Court also has this power at its disposal, albeit in a weakened form. In 2011 the court directly influenced Lee Myung-bak's policy towards Japan by ruling that the state be obligated to demand the payment of damages for pain and suffering to those Korean "comfort women" who were still living. Given the constitutional definition of the North Korea complex of problems as an intra-state problem, the judiciary may yet play an important role in future reunification issues. Furthermore, the Republic of Korea has for years exhibited a deep-rooted "culture of mass demonstrations". Many a time since the early 1990s the public has been able to successfully formulate its own opinion regarding topics that have historically been considered highly sensitive and has successfully contributed to the political decision-making process through various methods (petitions, picketing, etc.). However, there is still a risk that well-organised interest groups may be able to influence public opinion by through mobilisation measures, thereby torpedoing policies concerning North Korea they view as risky.

**Since the early 1990s has the public has been able to contribute historically highly sensitive topics to the political decision-making process through various methods.**

The biggest hurdle in the Republic of Korea's current political system is the high degree of inter-institutional integration in the complex process of policy formulation. The president remains the central figure. However, the multi-layered nature of the problem necessitates constant cooperation with several core ministries (Unification, National Defence, Trade and Foreign Affairs), the intelligence services and other states. This communication is undertaken internally via joint coordination committees, whilst in the case of multilateral negotiations, simultaneous internal communication is necessary. The decision-making process is made considerably more difficult by conflicting interests, overlapping spheres of power and the additional influence held by private sector stakeholders, and the policy design options actually available to the president are therefore massively limited.<sup>34</sup>

Given the social "inertia" that can be observed and the complexity of the policy-making process, it is clear that the issue of reunification threatens to systemically degenerate to become a "universal

34 | Cf. *ibid.*

issue". Due to the public's low expectations, such an escape to engaging in the rhetoric of reunification provides a cost-effective means of successful self-profiling, both at home and abroad. This is particularly true in mobilising voters in the run-up to elections and distracting them from domestic policy failures or uncomfortable topics. This trend has re-emerged since 2008, and can be observed in the practical formation of South Korean reunification policy.

### **Global lines of conflict**

Despite the economic and political success story that is the Republic of Korea after 1953, the dynamics on the Korean Peninsula are significantly affected by external influences even today. This is the continuation of a historical constant: For centuries, the fate of Korea was determined by competing regional powers, until the powers that emerged victorious from World War II ultimately decided to divide the country. Korea remained a geopolitical pawn in the game of foreign interests.

Influenced by the experiences of the Korean War, existential uncertainties returned to take center stage in foreign policy in North and South Korea in the 1950s. The countries' subsequent alliances with protective forces with conflicting interests then

**Since the end of the Cold War, the USA have immense power in shaping policy through its presence on the Korean Peninsula and its hostility towards North Korea.**

massively increased their influence. Regional and global lines of conflict were the defining factor of inter-Korean relations, and rapprochement was only undertaken in times of structural upheaval. Since the end of the

Cold War, this role has been taken up by the United States, which wields immense power in shaping policy through its presence on the Korean Peninsula and its hostility towards North Korea. Washington has therefore been promoted to a key player in South Korean reunification efforts.

In the same vein, the initial rapprochement between North and South Korea in 1971 was the result of regional power shifts. As a result of the surprising rapprochement between China and the USA, the South Korean leadership suddenly found itself at the heart of a security dilemma within the alliance: Would the U.S. continue to be willing to defend South Korea? Could the leadership in Washington drop their South Korean allies in favour of more advantageous agreements with Beijing? Against the backdrop of the USA's break with Taiwan, such fears did not appear

unfounded. In fact, in 1971 the Chinese national government, with the USA's support, excluded Taiwan from both the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations, nullified the relations between Taipei and Washington and announced an end to the 1954 joint alliance treaty. The United States broke with its previous "One-China Policy" in favour of normalising relations with Beijing. The consequences of this "Nixon Shock" reverberated in Seoul to great concern, especially since the U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, William J. Porter, had announced in 1970 that the USA had no obligation to station American troops in Korea and would advise the leadership in Seoul to take up contact with Pyongyang if at all possible.<sup>35</sup> It is against this backdrop that structural changes compelled the South Korean leadership to pursue rapprochement and break with South Korea's previous policy on reunification.

With the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the USSR looming, the South Korean leadership under Roh Tae-wo sovereignly exploited global power shifts and skilfully transferred those dynamics to a regional level. As a result, Seoul freed the inter-Korean conflict from the solid structures of the Cold War and generated a new configuration on the Korean Peninsula. Pyongyang was diplomatically isolated and feared being absorbed by the South, similar to the German scenario. However, it was precisely these fears that the South Korean leadership took advantage of until 1998, and, with its "Sunshine Policy", it pursued a hitherto unseen policy of rapprochement between the two Koreas. This success was made possible structurally by

the upheaval the U.S. was experiencing at the same time with respect to its own North Korea policy: Based on a White House study spearheaded by former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, the Clinton administration publicly supported the South Korean leader-

**The Clinton administration publicly supported the South Korean leadership, eased sanctions against North Korea and sought to normalise bilateral relations in exchange for Pyongyang abandoning its nuclear weapons program.**


ship, eased sanctions against North Korea and sought to normalise bilateral relations in exchange for Pyongyang abandoning its nuclear weapons program. This led to a breakthrough rapprochement between North Korea and the USA, which culminated in U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to Pyongyang in late October 2000. Whilst the North Korean newspaper *The People's Korea* had already heralded the start of a new era in bilateral relations, a visit by the U.S. President seemed imminent.<sup>36</sup> Since the

35 | Cf. Kindermann, n. 7, pp.159-165.

36 | Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 343-345.

efforts of the South Korean leadership at this time largely correlated with the regional interests of the USA, a productive policy of rapprochement was able to be achieved.



Permanent surveillance: North Korean border guards focus their eyes on the country's southern border. | Source: U.S. Army, Edward N. Johnson, flickr .

This development collapsed with the inauguration of George W. Bush and saw a return to a more confrontational North Korea policy. A conflicting constellation of interests unfolded on the Korean Peninsula, which ought to have strongly called into question the problem-solving capacity of South Korea's "Sunshine Policy". Tensions between North Korea and the United States intensified in view of U.S. non-proliferation efforts and the global "War on Terror" following the 11 September attacks in 2001, among other things. In his State of the Union address in January 2002, Bush called North Korea part of the "axis of evil" that threatens the world with weapons of mass destruction – a situation the United States would not permit. The Foreign Ministry in Pyongyang then announced that it understood these statements to be a declaration of war against North Korea.<sup>37</sup>

Against this supra-regional backdrop, the North Korean leadership ultimately decided that the development of nuclear weapons combined with apocalyptic war rhetoric was the ultimate deterrent

37 | Cf. *ibid.*, p. 354.



against external threats. South Korean efforts to continue its “Sunshine Policy” have failed given this massive confrontation between the regime in Pyongyang and the USA.

Due to this new and immediate threat to South Korea posed by nuclear weapons, as of 2008 President Lee Myung-bak joined in the USA’s hardline policy. Since then, the

three powers have diametrically opposed one another: Whilst Washington and Seoul call for North Korea’s nuclear disarmament as a precondition for the resumption of mutual talks, Pyongyang first demands extensive security

**Whilst Washington and Seoul call for North Korea’s nuclear disarmament as a precondition for the resumption of mutual talks, Pyongyang demands extensive security guarantees.**

guarantees and the normalisation of relations with the USA. The resulting inconclusiveness has persisted for years now and has blocked all attempts at inter-Korean rapprochement against the backdrop of an immovable nuclear confrontation between North Korea and the United States. Again, the future of Korea has become a pawn for foreign powers since the formulation of a successful South Korean policy towards North Korea requires a complex balancing act of simultaneously pursuing rapprochement with a cornered North Korea and projecting a confident attitude towards South Korea’s powerful allies in Washington.

## CONCLUSION

Between two faceless office blocks in an unremarkable part of downtown Seoul stands a section of the Berlin Wall. Nothing gives the impression that the location is a memorial of some kind, nor is there any recognisable trace of a reference to this historical object. It seems as though this section of the wall was placed here without thought to its significance. For foreign observers, it offers a parallel to South Korea’s reunification policy: It exists, but it is neither passionate nor pragmatic. As a result, it is unconvincing.

In the 1980s, the regular exchange of specialist officials between the West German Ministry of Intra-German Relations and the South Korean Ministry of Unification at the time found one point of agreement: that Korean reunification would happen before German reunification and that it would be easier. When German reunification took place a short time later, South Koreans were shocked.<sup>38</sup> Since then, they have filled entire libraries with analyses

38 | Discussions held by the author, N.E., with contemporary witnesses from the Ministry.

of German reunification, primarily concerning the problems and putative errors involved. In reading such publications, one sometimes gets the impression that the people of South Korea are looking for excuses to avoid its own unification. The reason for this: the issue only appeals to some. Unification seems to place the younger generation's dreams for their own lives in jeopardy. Above all, this includes the hope of maintaining the prosperity of the middle generation, which has just been so recently achieved. It is only the older generation, those bearing witness to the civil war that took place between 1950 and 1953, who still carry the desire for national unity. But how long will this continue? In 1990, Helmut Kohl warned that a country that avoids reunification for financial reasons will disappear into the backwaters of history;<sup>39</sup> in South Korea, this does not appear to concern anyone much at present.

South Koreans live well even without national unity. Germans are admired for their historic achievement in mastering the coalescence of East and West, despite all the difficulties. Yet it is for this reason that 9 November is far from being a day of hope for South Koreans for the unification of their people (and neither is 3 October, which marks their "National Foundation Day", the day on which the first Korean state was founded). That Koreans exhibit a certain essence of contradiction cannot be denied, despite ample unification rhetoric. In Seoul there is no truly formative monument urging Korean reunification and would be present in the minds of South Koreans. If so, it would possibly only represent a phantom pain that is South Korean society.

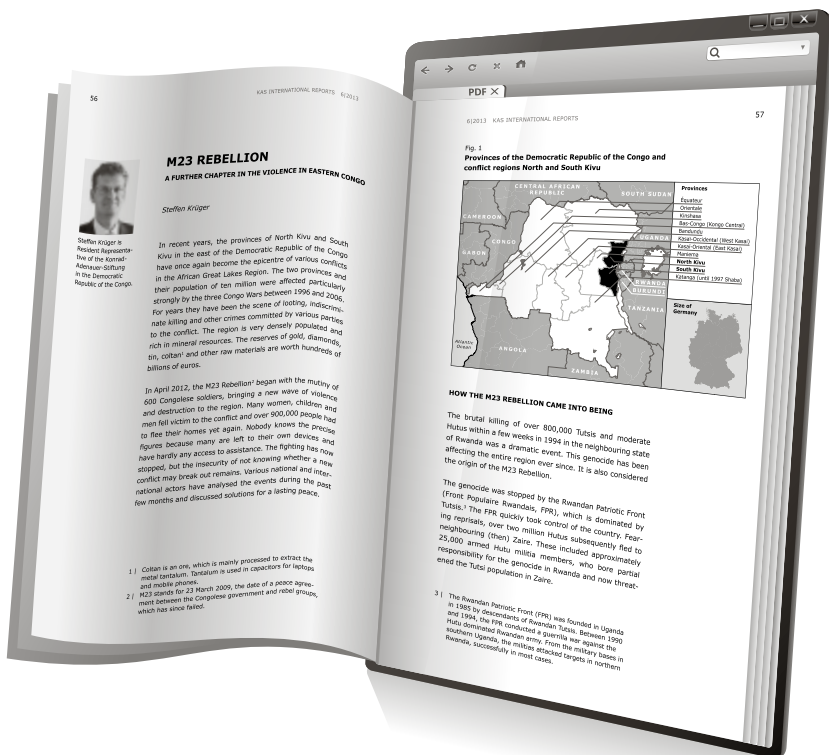
The authors would like to thank Reto Pikolin and Jan Kupka for their important research for this report.

39 | Cf. Helmut Kohl, *Vom Mauerfall zur Wiedervereinigung. Meine Erinnerungen*, Munich, 2009, p. 269.

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7 | 15



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