

From the Rhine to the Rift Valley:

Assessing Germany's 2025 Defence
Pivot and its Strategic Implications for
East Africa

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At a Glance

- › Driven by global systemic shifts, Germany's *Zeitenwende* defense pivot marks a historic transition toward high-intensity combat readiness, creating an acute normative dilemma regarding its traditional civilian power identity.
- › Concurrently, France is executing a defensive realism strategy in East Africa, weaving its military footprint with substantial geoeconomic infrastructure investments in Kenya to protect its regional interests.
- › While Germany's emerging regional defense posture could complement France's established presence, the lack of a coordinated European framework risks fragmenting EU foreign policy into competitive bilateralism.
- › Ultimately, both nations can mitigate policy fragmentation and counter rising regional competitors by embedding their strategies within the EU's multi-sectoral Global Gateway Agenda while respecting African sovereignty.

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Introduction

Germany's Zeitenwende and France's Strategic Pivot: Navigating Geoeconomic and Security Transformations in East Africa

Germany's Zeitenwende represents a profound and historic shift in its foreign and security policy, driven by a confluence of systemic geopolitical upheavals that have reshaped the international order. This transformation is primarily catalyzed by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which shattered the post-Cold War European security architecture and exposed the vulnerabilities of Germany's longstanding reliance on a security formula based on cheap Russian energy, access to the Chinese market, and U.S. security guarantees. Concurrently, China's rise challenges global economic and technological primacy, while the United States' strategic reorientation toward its Western Hemisphere and the Indo-Pacific demands that European allies assume greater responsibility for their own defence and global security roles.^{1, 2, 3} In response to these tectonic shifts, Germany has embarked on the Zeitenwende defence pivot, a decisive break from its traditional civilian power identity characterized by military restraint, multilateralism, and civilian-led development cooperation. This pivot entails a rapid militarization and strategic autonomy drive, aiming to reposition the Bundeswehr as NATO's European conventional backbone capable of credible deterrence and defence against high-intensity threats.^{4, 5} The Zeitenwende is not merely a military recalibration but reflects a broader geoeconomic context in which economic policy is increasingly subordinated to national security imperatives. Trade, technology, and infrastructure are weaponized as instruments of geopolitical competition, compelling Germany's export-dependent economy and industrial base to pivot toward defence production and strategic autonomy.^{6, 7}

Simultaneously, France is executing a strategic realignment in East Africa, particularly in Kenya, blending military presence with substantial geoeconomic investments to safeguard its regional interests and counter emerging competitors such as Turkey and China. France's approach, rooted in a tradition of interventionism and colonial legacies, has evolved toward a defensive realism strategy that combines hard power with economic and diplomatic tools.

¹ Johanna Möhring, "Bundeswehr: From Zeitenwende to Epochenbruch," *French Institute of International Relations*, 2026, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/j.mohring_bundeswehr_from_zeitenwende_to_epochenbruch_2026_us.pdf.

² Marina Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy," *Cambridge Centre for Geopolitics*, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEGsB8DXt7o>.

³ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), "The Return of Power Politics to the Market: Theory and Practice of the Geoeconomic Zeitenwende," *SWP Research Paper 7*, Berlin, 2026, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2026RP07_Geoeconomic_Zeitenwende.pdf.

⁴ Federal Ministry of Defence (BMVg), "The Overall Concept of Military Defence: Military Strategy and Plan for the Armed Forces," Federal Government of Germany, 2026, <https://www.bmvg.de/re-source/blob/6093998/678875025812878cfa657f9801f62ffc/dl-gesamtkonzeption-der-verteidigung-eng-data.pdf>.

⁵ Möhring, "Bundeswehr: From Zeitenwende to Epochenbruch."

⁶ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

⁷ SWP, "The Return of Power Politics to the Market: Theory and Practice of the Geoeconomic Zeitenwende."

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Its military deployments, including over 800 troops stationed in Mombasa under a bilateral defence agreement, are closely intertwined with economic stakes such as investments in the Port of Mombasa and TotalEnergies' operations in the Lamu Basin.^{8, 9} This fusion of military and economic strategy underscores the securitization of economic assets and highlights the multipolar and competitive environment in East Africa. The intersection of Germany's emerging defence posture with France's established regional presence raises critical questions about the future of European strategic coherence in East Africa. While Germany's militarization could complement France's influence, the absence of a coordinated European framework risks fragmenting EU foreign policy into competitive bilateralism, undermining collective European leverage in the region.¹⁰ The European Union's Global Gateway Agenda (GGA) offers a multi-sectoral framework integrating security, development, digital connectivity, climate action, and socio-economic stability, providing a potential platform to harmonize military modernization with civilian power identity and to embed defence initiatives within value-based partnerships that respect African sovereignty and agency.¹¹

Germany's *Zeitenwende* thus embodies a normative dilemma: how to balance increased defence spending and military modernization with its historic commitments to multilateralism, human rights, and development cooperation. This tension is accentuated by the *geo-economic Zeitenwende*, which pressures Germany to securitize economic relations and pursue strategic autonomy, potentially at the expense of cooperative and civilian-led initiatives.^{12, 13} The challenge lies in reconciling pragmatic security imperatives with a value-driven foreign policy legacy, maintaining legitimacy both domestically and internationally. On the other hand, East Africa, and particularly Kenya and the East African Community (EAC), are not merely passive arenas for external competition but active agents shaping regional outcomes. Kenya's strategic location, diplomatic leadership in regional conflicts, and governance frameworks position it as a pivotal partner for Germany and France alike. The growing influence of Gulf states and the complex humanitarian context, including hosting over 830,000 refugees, further complicate the regional landscape and highlight the importance of African agency in negotiating foreign investments and security partnerships.¹⁴ Recognizing this agency is crucial to avoid reproducing neo-colonial dynamics and to foster equitable,

⁸ Siyad Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa," *Middle East Forum Observer*, 2026, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/frances-kenya-play-to-establish-itself-near-the-horn-of-africa>.

⁹ Larry K., "French Shipping Giant CMA CGM Signs \$820 Million Deal to Upgrade Mombasa Port," *The Kenyan Diaspora Media*, 2026, <https://www.thekenyandiaspora.com/stories/7246/French-Shipping-Giant-CMA-CGM-Signs-820-Million-Deal-to-Upgrade-Mombasa-Port>.

¹⁰ Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa."

¹¹ Daniel Offei, "The Impact of the EU's Global Gateway Agenda on EU-AU Security Relations," *International ResearchScope Journal* 9, art. 4, 2024, <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1142&context=irj>.

¹² Hanns W. Maull, "Germany and the use of force: still a 'civilian power'?" *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 42, no. 2 (2010), <https://sci-hub.ru/10.1093/survival/42.2.56>.

¹³ SWP, "The Return of Power Politics to the Market: Theory and Practice of the *Geo-economic Zeitenwende*."

¹⁴ Judy Mbuga, "Why Kenya-Germany Ties Matter for Stability in the Horn of Africa," *HORN Institute*, 2026, <https://horninstitute.org/why-kenya-germany-ties-matter-for-stability-in-the-horn-of-africa/>.

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mutually beneficial partnerships. The securitization of EU-Africa relations, as exemplified by Germany's defence pivot and France's strategic realignment, risks diverting resources from civilian-led development and human rights initiatives toward hard security objectives. This shift intensifies normative dilemmas and requires careful balancing within a holistic framework that addresses root causes of instability: poverty, inequality, governance deficits, and environmental degradation, while respecting African sovereignty and priorities.^{15, 16}

In turn, this paper addresses the central research question: How does Germany's 2025 militarization initiative alter its foreign and security posture toward East Africa, and to what extent does it intersect with France's concurrent strategic pivot? It explores Germany's normative dilemma in balancing increased defence spending with its civilian power legacy and examines the implications for European strategic coherence in the region. The analysis draws primarily on neorealist theory to understand systemic threats prompting Germany's recalibration, complemented by constructivist insights into identity tensions as Germany reconciles its civilian power self-conception with hard power imperatives.^{17, 18} By integrating military modernization with civilian power tools and embedding defence initiatives within the EU's Global Gateway framework, Germany can navigate its normative challenges and contribute to a coordinated European approach that respects African agency. Similarly, France's strategic realignment, combining military presence with economic investments, reflects an adaptation to evolving regional dynamics and competition. The success of both actors depends on fostering strategic coherence, deepening multilateral engagement, strengthening regional institutions, and balancing security imperatives with inclusive development. Ultimately, this study highlights the complex interplay of military power, geo-economic interests, normative commitments, and African agency shaping the evolving security and economic landscape of East Africa. It underscores the necessity of coordinated European action that promotes transparency, equitable partnerships, and respect for African sovereignty to navigate the contested and dynamic regional environment effectively. Through such an approach, Germany and France can contribute meaningfully to a stable, prosperous, and resilient regional order aligned with their strategic interests and normative values.

¹⁵ Offei, "The Impact of the EU's Global Gateway Agenda on EU-AU Security Relations."

¹⁶ Johannes Muntschick, "The Securitization of Inter-Regional Energy Cooperation between the EU and Southern Africa," *Frontiers in Political Science* 8, 2026, <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/political-science/articles/10.3389/fpos.2026.1720109/full>.

¹⁷ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

¹⁸ Maull, "Germany and the use of force: still a 'civilian power?'"

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The Domestic Catalyst:

Germany's 2025-2026 Defence Architecture and the Normative Dilemma

Germany's Zeitenwende: Redefining Defence Posture Amid Geopolitical Shifts

Germany's *Zeitenwende* marks a watershed moment in its post-Cold War security and defence posture, representing a decisive break from decades of military restraint and civilian power identity. This transformation is driven by profound systemic geopolitical shifts. Most notably Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China's ascendance as a global power, and the United States' strategic pivot toward the Indo-Pacific and Western Hemisphere, which collectively compel Germany to assume greater responsibility for its own defence and global security roles.^{19, 20} The *Zeitenwende* is not merely an adjustment of military capabilities but a fundamental recalibration of Germany's strategic culture, defence industrial base, and normative self-conception. At the core of this transformation is the Bundeswehr 3.0 initiative, the third major restructuring of Germany's armed forces since their founding. It aims to establish the Bundeswehr as NATO's European conventional backbone, capable of credible deterrence and defence against high-intensity threats within the Alliance framework.²¹ This requires a rapid buildup of personnel, equipment, and technological capabilities supported by unprecedented financial commitments, including a €100 billion special fund and constitutional reforms that exempt defence spending beyond 1% of GDP from the debt brake.^{22, 23} Defence budgets are projected to rise steeply, positioning Germany as the largest military spender in Europe by 2029.²⁴

Structural and Societal Challenges in Germany's Military Modernization

However, this rapid militarization encounters significant structural and societal challenges. Industrially, Germany faces bottlenecks in pivoting its economy from civilian sectors, particularly automotive and chemicals, toward sustained military production. The transition demands retraining a workforce accustomed to civilian manufacturing, scaling production capacities for complex weapon systems, and streamlining historically slow and bureaucratic procurement processes.^{25, 26} Procurement reforms seek to accelerate acquisition cycles and embrace technological agility, balancing innovation with interoperability within NATO frameworks.²⁷ In this regard human resources constitute a critical constraint. The Bundeswehr

¹⁹ Möhring, "Bundeswehr: From *Zeitenwende* to *Epochenbruch*."

²⁰ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

²¹ BMVg, "The Overall Concept of Military Defence: Military Strategy and Plan for the Armed Forces."

²² Möhring, "Bundeswehr: From *Zeitenwende* to *Epochenbruch*."

²³ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Möhring, "Bundeswehr: From *Zeitenwende* to *Epochenbruch*."

²⁶ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

²⁷ BMVg, "The Overall Concept of Military Defence: Military Strategy and Plan for the Armed Forces."

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plans to increase active and reserve personnel to at least 460,000 by 2035, reinstating voluntary military service with conscription as a last resort; a significant cultural shift for a society that suspended conscription in 2011 and has long exhibited skepticism toward militarization.²⁸ Public opinion reveals generational divides: older demographics tend to support military normalization, while younger Germans prioritize social welfare, climate action, and civil liberties.²⁹ The government's outreach and incentive programs aim to rebuild civil-military ties and foster societal consensus on security priorities, yet this remains a delicate task requiring transparent communication and education.

Navigating the Normative Dilemma: Civilian Power Identity versus Security Imperative

Normatively, the *Zeitenwende* challenges Germany's civilian power identity, which has shaped its foreign policy since the Second World War. This identity is characterized by military restraint, multilateralism, and a commitment to human rights and development cooperation.³⁰ The post-war social contract de-emphasized military service while prioritizing welfare and economic stability, fostering a cautious stance toward the use of force, especially outside NATO's collective defence framework.³¹ The *Zeitenwende*'s demand for high-intensity combat readiness and power projection capabilities thus generates acute tensions between pragmatic security needs and normative commitments. With this in mind, Germany's Military Strategy explicitly addresses this normative dilemma by adopting a "whole-of-government" approach that integrates military capabilities with civilian instruments of state power to build resilience against hybrid threats and safeguard democratic institutions.³² The strategy underscores deterrence through readiness and capability development but simultaneously emphasizes multilateral cooperation and adherence to international law. It acknowledges the dissolution of traditional boundaries between war and peace, civilian and military targets, and highlights the increasing role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, cyber operations, and autonomous systems.³³

Institutional Reform, Technological Adaptation, and Societal Legitimacy

This dual imperative, quantitative expansion and qualitative adaptation, requires agility and innovation in doctrine, procurement, and personnel training. The Bundeswehr's procurement system is being reformed to shorten acquisition cycles and embrace technological agility, recognizing that future warfare will demand rapid adaptation to emerging threats and the integration of advanced systems like AI-enabled reconnaissance and autonomous

²⁸ Möhring, "Bundeswehr: From *Zeitenwende* to *Epochenbruch*."

²⁹ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

³⁰ Maull, "Germany and the use of force: still a 'civilian power'?"

³¹ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

³² BMVg, "The Overall Concept of Military Defence: Military Strategy and Plan for the Armed Forces."

³³ *Ibid.*

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platforms.³⁴ However, bureaucratic inertia and coordination challenges among ministries, private sector actors, and international partners persist, underscoring the need for institutional reform and interagency cooperation.³⁵ More so, the normative dilemma extends beyond institutional challenges to the societal level. Germany's political leadership must navigate public ambivalence regarding militarization, balancing democratic values with security imperatives. Transparent governance, respect for international law, and adherence to democratic norms are essential to maintaining legitimacy domestically and internationally.^{36, 37} The Bundeswehr's Military Strategy reflects this by emphasizing transparency, multilateralism, and the integration of civilian power tools alongside military modernization. Additionally, the *Zeitenwende* also embodies a broader geoeconomic shift, wherein economic policy is increasingly subordinated to national security imperatives. Trade, technology, and infrastructure become instruments of geopolitical competition, compelling Germany's export-dependent economy and industrial base to pivot toward defence production and strategic autonomy.^{38, 39} This securitization of economic relations intensifies the normative dilemma, as Germany must reconcile its civilian power legacy with the realities of a geoeconomic *Zeitenwende* that pressures strategic autonomy and military normalization.

As a result, Germany's 2025 defence transformation represents both a structural and normative pivot. Structurally, it seeks to overcome past capability shortfalls through rapid expansion, modernization, and technological innovation, positioning Germany as a leading military power within NATO and Europe. Normatively, it grapples with the legacy of civilian power identity and societal ambivalence toward militarization, striving to reconcile value-driven foreign policy with pragmatic security demands in a complex geopolitical environment. The success of this transformation depends on Germany's ability to integrate military modernization within a comprehensive framework that includes civilian power tools, multilateral cooperation, and respect for democratic norms, thereby managing its normative dilemma while responding effectively to systemic threats.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

³⁶ Maull, "Germany and the use of force: still a 'civilian power'?"

³⁷ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

³⁸ SWP, "The Return of Power Politics to the Market: Theory and Practice of the Geoeconomic *Zeitenwende*."

³⁹ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

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**The Evolving East African Grid:
*France's Strategic Relocation and the New Geopolitical Balance***

France's Strategic Pivot to East Africa

France's strategic realignment in East Africa, especially its deepening engagement with Kenya, reflects a comprehensive approach that integrates military presence, economic partnerships, and multilateral diplomacy to safeguard its regional interests amid a competitive and evolving geopolitical landscape. This pivot is grounded in a defensive realism strategy, blending hard power with geoeconomic investments to maintain influence and preempt emerging competitors such as Turkey and China.^{40, 41} The Africa Forward Summit held in Nairobi in May 2026, co-hosted by France and Kenya, symbolizes this strategic shift. The summit marked a milestone in Franco-African relations by emphasizing a partnership model based on mutual benefit, economic cooperation, and youth empowerment, while simultaneously reinforcing France's infrastructural and military presence in East Africa.⁴² The event convened an array of stakeholders, including heads of state, business leaders, civil society, and international institutions, to deliberate on shared challenges and opportunities. Central themes included reforming international financial systems, advancing the energy transition, promoting green industrialization, and leveraging emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital innovation.⁴³

Bilateral Defence and Economic Investments

Concurrently, France's military strategy in East Africa is inseparable from its economic interests. Under a bilateral defence cooperation agreement signed in October 2025, France deployed over 800 troops and naval assets to Mombasa, Kenya's principal maritime hub. This agreement facilitates intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and reciprocal troop deployments, granting France significant operational leverage on Kenyan soil.⁴⁴ Such military presence supports not only counter-terrorism and regional stability operations but also protects critical geoeconomic assets, including TotalEnergies' stakes in the Lamu Basin and the port infrastructure at Mombasa.⁴⁵ The strategic importance of the Port of Mombasa is underscored by France's \$820 million investment through the shipping giant CMA CGM to modernize and expand port facilities. This public-private partnership with the Kenyan government aims to upgrade container terminals, enhance cargo handling capacity, and improve

⁴⁰ Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa."

⁴¹ Larry K., "French Shipping Giant CMA CGM Signs \$820 Million Deal to Upgrade Mombasa Port."

⁴² Agence Française de Développement (AFD), "Strategic Realignment in Anglophone East Africa: The Africa Forward Summit Outcomes," *AFD Policy Report*, 2026, <https://www.afd.fr/en/news/africa-forward-key-takeaways-nairobi-summit>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa."

⁴⁵ Larry K., "French Shipping Giant CMA CGM Signs \$820 Million Deal to Upgrade Mombasa Port."

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operational efficiency, thereby reinforcing Kenya's role as a critical trade gateway for East and Central Africa.⁴⁶ The project also incorporates sustainability measures, such as energy-efficient equipment and carbon emission reductions, reflecting France's integrated approach to economic development and environmental stewardship.⁴⁷

Historical Military Presence and Legacy

Historically, France's enduring military presence in Africa is rooted in its post-colonial legacy and strategic culture of interventionism. Approximately 8,700 French troops are stationed across Africa, with permanent bases in Djibouti, the largest French overseas military base on the continent, as well as regional cooperation bases in Senegal, Gabon, and Ivory Coast.⁴⁸ These installations serve dual roles as operational hubs and capacity-building centers, enabling France to project power, conduct counter-terrorism operations, and protect vital economic interests such as uranium mines and maritime routes.⁴⁹ Recent French military operations illustrate the evolution of its strategy from unilateral interventions toward multi-lateral partnerships. Operation Barkhane, launched in 2014 in the Sahel, exemplifies this approach by integrating direct engagement with multinational cooperation and support for UN peacekeeping missions. The operation focuses on counter-terrorism and preventing extremist safe havens but has faced criticism for limited strategic success and fostering dependency on French military support among partner states.⁵⁰ The 2022 withdrawal from Mali, precipitated by deteriorating relations with the Malian military government and the rise of Russian influence via the Wagner Group, underscores the operational and diplomatic challenges France confronts in sustaining its African engagements.⁵¹

Navigating Regional Geopolitical Competition

To add to this is the realization that France's military and economic strategy in East Africa is deeply shaped by regional geopolitical contestation. Turkey's assertive presence in Somalia, including the establishment of a military base and offshore energy exploration activities, poses a direct challenge to French interests.⁵² France's embedding within Kenya's security architecture aims to preempt such encroachments by ensuring Paris remains central to Kenya's response mechanisms, thereby safeguarding its commercial and strategic stakes. This competitive environment is further complicated by the United States' autonomous military

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Anna Sundberg, "France - A Continuing Military Presence in Africa," Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 2019, <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI%20Memo%206814>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Lotfi Sour, "French interventionism in the Sahel: a flawed strategy, imperfect geopolitics," University Mustapha Stambouli of Mascara, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381829117_French_interventionism_in_the_Sahel_a_flawed_strategy_imperfect_geopolitics.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa."

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expansion at Manda Bay airbase, highlighting the fragmented nature of Western engagement in the region.⁵³ France's strategic realignment toward East Africa reflects an adaptation to these challenges and the shifting regional landscape. By combining military presence with economic investments and multilateral diplomacy, France seeks to secure its interests in a contested environment marked by rising regional actors and demands for sovereignty and equitable partnerships.^{54, 55} The Africa Forward Summit's emphasis on economic cooperation, youth empowerment, and sustainable development signals France's intent to broaden its engagement beyond traditional military and security domains.⁵⁶

Economic Partnerships and Security Integration

The economic dimension of France's strategy is further exemplified by its involvement in Kenya's energy sector and infrastructure development. The nuclear cooperation agreement between France and Kenya highlights Paris's commitment to long-term infrastructural partnerships that transcend conventional aid paradigms.⁵⁷ These investments aim to embed France economically and institutionally in East Africa, complementing its military footprint and enhancing its geoeconomic leverage. Although, despite France's efforts to transition toward more multilateral and partnership-based approaches, its strategy remains fundamentally security-driven, focusing on counter-terrorism, stability operations, and safeguarding economic interests. This approach balances interventionism with demands for sovereignty and equitable partnerships, navigating critiques of neo-colonialism and evolving regional expectations.⁵⁸ France's cooperation with African regional organizations, the European Union, and the United Nations reflects this trend toward inclusive security governance, yet the persistence of bilateral defence agreements and unilateral military deployments underscores ongoing strategic competition and operational autonomy.⁵⁹ As a result, France's strategic realignment in East Africa represents a multifaceted effort to secure its regional interests through a fusion of military presence, economic investment, and diplomatic engagement. This approach addresses the challenges posed by emerging competitors and shifting geopolitical dynamics while adapting to evolving regional demands for sovereignty and partnership. France's integration of hard power with geoeconomic and multilateral tools underscores the securitization of economic assets and reflects broader trends in global power projection. As Germany's *Zeitenwende* unfolds, France's established presence and strategic approach in East Africa provide both opportunities for cooperation and challenges for European strategic coherence in the region.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Sundberg, "France - A Continuing Military Presence in Africa."

⁵⁶ AFD, "Strategic Realignment in Anglophone East Africa: The Africa Forward Summit Outcomes."

⁵⁷ Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa."

⁵⁸ Sour, "French interventionism in the Sahel: a flawed strategy, imperfect geopolitics."

⁵⁹ Sundberg, "France - A Continuing Military Presence in Africa."

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**Analytical Comparison of Germany and France's Strategic Approaches
in East Africa:**

Divergent Cultures, Institutional Relations, and Coordination Imperatives

Strategic Culture and Identity:

Narrative Legacy versus Interventionist Realism

Germany's *Zeitenwende* signals a fundamental rupture with its post-Second World War civilian power identity.⁶⁰ This identity has historically constrained Germany's security ambitions, embedding a societal skepticism toward militarization and privileging diplomacy and economic engagement. The 2025 defence transformation challenges this legacy, forcing Germany to reconcile its deeply ingrained normative self-conception with the pragmatic imperatives of high-intensity combat readiness and strategic autonomy within NATO and EU frameworks.^{61, 62} In contrast, France's strategic culture is rooted in interventionism and power projection, shaped by its colonial history and a tradition of maintaining influence in Africa through direct military engagement and geo-economic leverage.^{63, 64} France's established military presence, bilateral defence agreements, and economic investments in East Africa reflect a strategic posture accustomed to balancing hard power with economic and diplomatic tools. This cultural disposition affords France operational agility and a readiness to assert influence, albeit increasingly tempered by demands for multilateralism and equitable partnerships in response to evolving regional dynamics and critiques of neo-colonialism.⁶⁵ The analytical implication is that Germany's normative dilemma of balancing its civilian power identity with hard power demands introduces internal tensions that slow and complicate its regional military engagement. France's historical normalization of military presence enables more assertive but potentially less constrained action. Yet, France must adapt to contemporary expectations of partnership and sovereignty, which moderate its interventionist impulses. This divergence shapes not only their bilateral approaches but also their receptiveness to multilateral European frameworks.

Institutional Constraints:

Structural Challenges versus Established Military Infrastructure

Germany's defence transformation confronts significant structural bottlenecks. Its industrial base must pivot to sustained military production, requiring workforce retraining and

⁶⁰ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

⁶¹ Möhring, "Bundeswehr: From Zeitenwende to Epochenbruch."

⁶² BMVg, "The Overall Concept of Military Defence: Military Strategy and Plan for the Armed Forces."

⁶³ Sundberg, "France - A Continuing Military Presence in Africa."

⁶⁴ Sour, "French interventionism in the Sahel: a flawed strategy, imperfect geopolitics."

⁶⁵ Mariella di Ciommo, Poorva Karkare, and Pauline Veron, "The EU and China in Africa: Is it better to compete or work together?" ECDPM, 2026, <https://ecdpm.org/work/eu-and-china-africa-it-better-compete-or-work-together>.

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capacity expansion under compressed timelines.^{66, 67} Procurement reforms aim to accelerate acquisition cycles and integrate advanced technologies, yet bureaucratic inertia and interagency coordination remain persistent obstacles.⁶⁸ Human resource constraints are acute, as Germany seeks to expand the Bundeswehr to 460,000 personnel by 2035, reinstating voluntary military service and considering conscription as a last resort. All measures that challenge entrenched societal skepticism and require extensive public outreach.⁶⁹ Conversely, France benefits from an entrenched military infrastructure with approximately 8,700 troops stationed across Africa, permanent bases such as Djibouti, and operational experience in sustained overseas deployments.⁷⁰ France's institutional continuity and legal frameworks underpinning bilateral defence agreements afford it greater operational leverage and agility in regional engagement. However, France faces evolving geopolitical competition and regional critiques that necessitate strategic recalibration, particularly in balancing interventionism with partnership diplomacy. Analytically, Germany's structural constraints limit the speed and scale of its military engagement in East Africa relative to France, which leverages established capabilities and networks. This asymmetry affects the nature of their regional roles: Germany's approach is necessarily cautious and integrated within multilateral frameworks, while France's is more direct and bilateral. Institutional differences thus underpin divergent strategic postures and operational capacities.

Policy Doctrines and Strategic Priorities: Multilateral Normativity versus Defensive Realism

Germany's *Zeitenwende* defence doctrine emphasizes a "whole-of-government" approach, integrating military modernization with civilian instruments to build resilience against hybrid threats, safeguard democratic institutions, and uphold multilateral cooperation and international law.⁷¹ It situates military engagement within broader development, climate, and migration frameworks, epitomized by the EU's Global Gateway Agenda.⁷² This normative framework seeks to reconcile military necessity with Germany's civilian power legacy, emphasizing transparency, African sovereignty, and value-based partnerships. France's doctrine, by contrast, reflects defensive realism, prioritizing geoeconomic interests and regional influence through a fusion of military presence, economic investments, and diplomatic engagement.⁷³ ⁷⁴ Its strategy in East Africa integrates hard power in the form of troop deployments and defence agreements, with economic stakes such as port infrastructure and energy sector

⁶⁶ Möhring, "Bundeswehr: From *Zeitenwende* to *Epochenbruch*."

⁶⁷ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

⁶⁸ BMVg, "The Overall Concept of Military Defence: Military Strategy and Plan for the Armed Forces."

⁶⁹ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

⁷⁰ Sundberg, "France - A Continuing Military Presence in Africa."

⁷¹ BMVg, "The Overall Concept of Military Defence: Military Strategy and Plan for the Armed Forces."

⁷² Offei, "The Impact of the EU's Global Gateway Agenda on EU-AU Security Relations."

⁷³ Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa."

⁷⁴ Larry K., "French Shipping Giant CMA CGM Signs \$820 Million Deal to Upgrade Mombasa Port."

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investments. While increasingly attentive to sovereignty and multilateralism, France's approach remains fundamentally security-driven and operationally autonomous. The analytical tension here lies in Germany's attempt to embed military modernization within a normative, multilateral architecture, which may constrain rapid or unilateral action, versus France's pragmatic focus on securing tangible geoeconomic assets and operational influence. This divergence reflects differing strategic priorities shaped by historical experience, domestic politics, and external pressures.

Coordination Challenges and European Strategic Coherence

The absence of a unified European strategy in East Africa risks fragmenting EU foreign policy into competitive bilateralism, undermining collective leverage.⁷⁵ Germany's normative emphasis on integrating defence within the Global Gateway framework offers a platform for comprehensive, value-driven engagement, while France's operational autonomy and bilateral defence agreements reflect longstanding independent strategic practice.^{76, 77} Institutional asymmetries between the two complicate synchronization. Moreover, divergent policy doctrines and strategic cultures generate differing expectations about engagement modalities, objectives, and acceptable risk thresholds. Germany and France's overlapping interests in East Africa create both incentives for cooperation and sources of competition.^{78, 79} Germany's normative orientation and emphasis on multilateralism may encourage collaborative frameworks, while France's operational autonomy and historical influence may foster competitive bilateralism. In turn, this dynamic necessitates a nuanced balance: strategic coherence can amplify European influence and regional stability, but rivalry risks policy fragmentation and diminished effectiveness. Germany's technological expertise, commitment to African agency, and multilateral frameworks complement France's military presence and economic investments. Harnessing these complementarities requires institutionalized coordination mechanisms and shared strategic vision within the EU and NATO contexts. Finally, these coordination challenges highlight the risk that without deliberate EU-level mechanisms fostering strategic dialogue, joint planning, and burden-sharing, Germany and France may inadvertently undermine European influence through duplication, competition, or inconsistent messaging. Enhanced cooperation requires reconciling Germany's normative multilateralism with France's pragmatic realism, leveraging complementary strengths while managing divergent institutional and cultural legacies.

⁷⁵ Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa."

⁷⁶ Offei, "The Impact of the EU's Global Gateway Agenda on EU-AU Security Relations."

⁷⁷ Sundberg, "France - A Continuing Military Presence in Africa."

⁷⁸ Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa."

⁷⁹ Henke, "Zeitenwende or Continuity? Germany's Quest for a Grand Strategy."

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East African Agency and Kenya's Strategic Role in German and French Foreign Policy

Kenya's Centrality in Regional Security and Diplomacy

East Africa, and Kenya in particular, play a pivotal and active role in shaping the foreign policy engagements of Germany and France in the region. Contrary to narratives that portray East Africa merely as a passive arena for external power competition, the region exercises substantial agency, influencing the strategic calculations, priorities, and operational modalities of these European actors. Kenya's geopolitical significance in East Africa stems from its strategic location at the nexus of the Horn of Africa, the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), and the East African Community (EAC). Nairobi serves not only as Kenya's capital but as a diplomatic hub for regional and international actors. Kenya's active mediation and leadership in managing protracted conflicts in neighboring Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia underscore its role as a regional security anchor.⁸⁰ Germany's appointment of a Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa based in Nairobi and its financial support to regional institutions such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the EAC reflect recognition of Kenya's indispensability in regional stability architectures.⁸¹ Kenya's diplomatic agency is evident in its capacity to broker peace initiatives, coordinate humanitarian responses, and lead multi-lateral security collaborations. This agency shapes German and French foreign policy by necessitating partnership models that accommodate Kenyan priorities, respect sovereignty, and reinforce local ownership of security and development agendas. Both European powers must navigate Kenya's nuanced foreign policy, which balances relations with Western partners while engaging with emerging actors such as China, Turkey, and Gulf states, reflecting a pragmatic and diversified approach to external partnerships.

Governance Frameworks and Negotiation Capacity

Kenya's institutional and governance frameworks are critical determinants of its agency in managing foreign investments and security cooperation. The Kenyan government exercises considerable leverage in negotiating terms that align external engagements with national development goals and regional integration objectives.⁸² This includes oversight over bilateral defence agreements, infrastructure projects, and humanitarian assistance programs. For instance, Kenya's negotiation of France's military presence under the 2025 bilateral defence cooperation agreement, which includes over 800 French troops stationed in Mombasa, reflects a strategic calculus that balances security benefits with sovereignty concerns. Similarly, Kenya's management of economic partnerships, such as the \$820 million CMA CGM

⁸⁰ Mbuga, "Why Kenya-Germany Ties Matter for Stability in the Horn of Africa."

⁸¹ Federal Foreign Office of Germany, "Germany and Kenya: Bilateral relations," *Federal Foreign Office Policy Brief*, March 27, 2026, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformatio-nen/kenia-node/kenya-228906>.

⁸² *Ibid.*

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investment in the Port of Mombasa, exemplifies its agency in framing infrastructure development to serve national and regional trade facilitation goals while ensuring sustainability and local capacity-building.⁸³ Kenya's governance challenges, such as corruption risks, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and political contestation, pose constraints but also create space for strategic negotiation and conditionalities. European actors, including Germany and France, must engage with these realities, tailoring cooperation to reinforce governance reforms, transparency, and accountability mechanisms. This interplay highlights Kenya's role not only as a recipient but as an active shaper of partnership modalities.

Economic and Security Priorities Shaping External Engagement

Kenya's foreign policy orientation prioritizes economic development, regional integration, and security enhancement, which directly influence German and French strategies. The country's Vision 2030 development blueprint and its emphasis on infrastructural modernization, digital connectivity, and renewable energy align with Germany's Global Gateway Agenda (GGA), facilitating synergies in development cooperation. At the same time, Kenya's security priorities, encompassing counter-terrorism, maritime security, and regional stability, intersect with France's defensive realism approach and Germany's evolving military engagement. Kenya's cooperation with France in counter-terrorism operations, supported by French military deployments and intelligence sharing, illustrates a pragmatic alignment of security interests. Concurrently, Germany's emphasis on multilateralism and capacity-building resonates with Kenya's preference for strengthening regional institutions like IGAD and the EAC to address transnational threats and humanitarian challenges. Kenya's agency in setting these priorities compels European actors to adapt their foreign policy tools. Germany's integration of military modernization with civilian power instruments and France's blending of hard power with economic investments are both mediated by Kenyan strategic objectives. This dynamic underscores the necessity of flexible, context-sensitive approaches that respect Kenyan leadership and developmental imperatives.

Navigating Multipolar Competition and African Agency

Kenya's strategic positioning within a multipolar environment enhances its agency by enabling it to engage multiple external partners competitively. The growing influence of Gulf states through bilateral security arrangements and proxy support, alongside China's Belt and Road Initiative investments and Turkey's military and energy activities in the Horn of Africa, create a complex geopolitical landscape.^{84, 85} Kenya leverages this diversity of partnerships to maximize developmental benefits, security guarantees, and diplomatic capital, often balancing competing interests to preserve autonomy and avoid overdependence. This multipolar engagement challenges simplistic donor-recipient paradigms and requires Germany

⁸³ Larry K., "French Shipping Giant CMA CGM Signs \$820 Million Deal to Upgrade Mombasa Port."

⁸⁴ Mbuga, "Why Kenya-Germany Ties Matter for Stability in the Horn of Africa."

⁸⁵ Madey, "France's Kenya Play to Establish Itself near the Horn of Africa."

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and France to compete constructively by offering value-based, transparent, and mutually beneficial cooperation. African skepticism toward Western securitizing narratives and neo-colonial dynamics further accentuates Kenya's agency. The insistence on sovereignty, equitable partnerships, and local ownership compels European actors to recalibrate their strategies.⁸⁶ Germany's Global Gateway framework's emphasis on African agency and France's gradual shift toward multilateralism and partnership diplomacy reflect adaptations to these demands. Kenya's assertiveness in these dialogues shapes the contours of European engagement and influences policy coherence.

Humanitarian Development and Maritime Governance

Kenya's role as host to over 830,000 refugees amid underfunded global aid regimes adds a humanitarian dimension to its agency. The country's management of refugee flows, humanitarian assistance, and social cohesion directly affects regional stability and shapes the scope of German and French involvement. Germany's status as Africa's second-largest bilateral donor and its support for peacekeeping and humanitarian initiatives underscore its recognition of this dimension. Kenya's agency in channeling aid, setting development priorities, and coordinating regional responses requires European partners to integrate security cooperation with inclusive development frameworks. This holistic approach aligns with Germany's normative commitments and France's evolving strategic realignment, emphasizing the interconnectedness of security, development, and governance. In addition, Kenya's ambitions to develop its blue economy and enhance maritime governance in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) further exemplify its agency in shaping regional geopolitics. The WIO's strategic importance for trade, energy flows, and security necessitates robust governance frameworks to manage fragmented mandates, diverse capacities, and competing external interests.⁸⁷ Kenya's leadership in maritime domain awareness, anti-piracy operations, and sustainable resource management aligns with European priorities and provides a platform for cooperation.⁸⁸ Germany's focus on maritime security and France's protection of port infrastructure investments converge with Kenya's blue economy strategies, underscoring the potential for coordinated, agency-respecting partnerships.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ International Maritime Organization, "IMO spotlights regional action at EU Maritime Security Week," December 11, 2025, <https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pages/whatsnew-2401.aspx>.

⁸⁷ Lizza Bomassi and Rossella Marangio, "Ocean of Stakes: The Western Indian Ocean's Complex Maritime Order," *EUISS Brief*, 2025, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-12/Brief_2025-27_Western%20Indian%20Ocean.pdf.

⁸⁸ European Union External Action Service, "Mombasa hosts high-level Kenya-European Union conference on enhancing maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to address safety and security challenges," June 9, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kenya/mombasa-hosts-high-level-kenya-european-union-conference-enhancing-maritime-cooperation-indo-pacific_en.

⁸⁹ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Session 6: Regional Maritime Security Architecture: Information Sharing and Operational Coordination," presentation document, April 2026, <https://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/2026-04-MSS-WIO-Day-2.pdf>.

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**Policy Recommendations and Strategic Directions:
*Coordinated Approaches for Germany, France, and Kenya to Foster Security, Development, and Regional Stability in East Africa***

Germany

1. Develop an Integrated Strategic Framework:

Align Germany's defence modernization under the Zeitenwende with the EU's Global Gateway Agenda (GGA) to harmonize security, development, digital connectivity, climate action, and migration management. This integrated approach should reflect East Africa's complex geopolitical realities, including EU-China competition and regional rivalries, while balancing Germany's civilian power legacy with pragmatic security engagement.

2. Enhance Support for Regional Institutions and African Agency:

Prioritize capacity-building and multilateral engagement with regional organizations such as the East African Community (EAC) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Strengthening governance, security cooperation, and humanitarian response mechanisms will promote African ownership and mitigate risks of fragmented bilateralism.

3. Prioritize Maritime Security Cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean:

Invest in maritime domain awareness, anti-piracy operations, and sustainable resource management initiatives that complement EU efforts. Reinforce a rules-based maritime order by supporting regional governance frameworks and enhancing partner capacities to address piracy, trafficking, and maritime terrorism.

4. Leverage Bilateral Partnerships to Foster Regional Stability:

Deepen strategic relations with Kenya and other EAC members by supporting security sector reform, humanitarian assistance, and projects addressing migration and climate vulnerabilities. Encourage strategic convergence with France to present a coordinated European approach, avoiding counterproductive competition.

5. Embed Military Modernization within Civilian Power Tools:

Integrate defence capabilities with diplomatic, development, and normative instruments to manage Germany's normative dilemma effectively. Ensure transparency, respect for international law, and African sovereignty in all security initiatives to maintain legitimacy domestically and internationally.

6. Expand Cooperation on Renewable Energy and Climate Adaptation:

Align with global climate commitments by promoting renewable energy projects, climate-smart agriculture, and technology transfer within the GGA framework. This will enhance Germany's role as a sustainable development partner and address geoeconomic competition in East Africa.

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France

1. Balance Military Presence with Economic and Diplomatic Engagement:

Continue to integrate military deployments with substantial geoeconomic investments, such as port infrastructure and energy sector participation, to secure long-term influence. Simultaneously, emphasize multilateral cooperation with African regional organizations and the EU to respond to evolving demands for sovereignty and equitable partnerships.

2. Adapt Interventionist Legacy to Partnership-Based Approach:

Recalibrate military strategy to address critiques of neo-colonialism by fostering inclusive security governance frameworks. Enhance collaboration with regional bodies, UN peacekeeping, and EU initiatives to complement bilateral defence agreements and maintain operational effectiveness.

3. Strengthen Regional Capacity-Building and Security Cooperation:

Invest in training, intelligence sharing, and joint exercises with East African partners to build sustainable security architectures. Focus on counter-terrorism, maritime security, and stability operations that align with regional priorities and France's geoeconomic interests.

4. Expand Economic Investments with Sustainability Focus:

Pursue infrastructure projects like the CMA CGM port modernization with integrated environmental stewardship. Promote green industrialization, energy transition, and inclusive economic growth that support regional development and reinforce France's economic foothold.

5. Mitigate Geopolitical Competition Through Strategic Diplomacy:

Address challenges posed by emerging regional actors such as Turkey and Russia by reinforcing France's centrality in Kenya's security architecture. Coordinate with European partners where feasible, while maintaining operational autonomy to safeguard strategic interests.

6. Enhance Transparency and Governance in Economic and Security Partnerships:

Ensure that defence agreements and economic investments are accompanied by robust governance frameworks to prevent corruption and foster equitable benefits. Promote accountability mechanisms that align with Kenya's development goals and regional integration efforts.

**From the Rhine to the Rift Valley:
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Maintain leverage in dealings with Germany, France, and other external actors by aligning foreign investments and security cooperation with national development priorities and regional integration objectives. Avoid overdependence by diversifying partnerships and emphasizing sovereignty.

2. Lead Regional Security Cooperation and Institution-Building:

Strengthen the East African Community's security architecture and support IGAD's conflict resolution mechanisms. Promote intelligence sharing, joint training, and coordinated responses to transnational threats such as terrorism, piracy, and organized crime.

3. Invest in Maritime Governance and Blue Economy Development:

Develop comprehensive maritime governance frameworks that ensure sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and maritime security. Leverage international partnerships to build capacity for maritime domain awareness and enforcement, positioning Kenya as a regional maritime hub.

4. Embed Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development in National Plans:

Prioritize climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, focusing on vulnerable sectors like agriculture and energy. Collaborate with partners such as Germany under the GGA to access technical expertise and financing for renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture.

5. Enhance Governance, Transparency, and Accountability:

Strengthen institutional frameworks to ensure transparency and accountability in foreign direct investments and security cooperation. Implement rigorous assessment and monitoring mechanisms to safeguard national interests and promote long-term development.

6. Promote Inclusive Economic Growth and Social Cohesion:

Address root causes of instability by fostering inclusive growth, reducing inequality, and creating employment opportunities. Engage civil society and coordinate government efforts to enhance education, social cohesion, and migration management, thereby strengthening regional stability and Kenya's attractiveness as a partner.

**From the Rhine to the Rift Valley:
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*Germany and France's Strategic Recalibration in East Africa***

This paper has examined the profound transformations shaping Germany's and France's strategic postures toward East Africa amid a shifting geopolitical landscape marked by systemic challenges and emerging multipolar competition. Germany's 2025 *Zeitenwende* defense pivot represents a historic rupture from its post-Cold War civilian power identity, driven by the imperative to assume greater responsibility for its own security and global roles in response to Russia's war in Ukraine, China's rise, and the U.S. strategic reorientation. This shift entails rapid militarization, institutional reform, and a normative recalibration as Germany seeks to reposition the Bundeswehr as NATO's European conventional backbone capable of credible deterrence and defense against high-intensity threats. However, this transformation faces significant structural and societal hurdles, including industrial bottlenecks, public ambivalence, and the challenge of reconciling pragmatic security demands with Germany's deeply ingrained normative commitments to multilateralism, human rights, and development cooperation. On the other hand, France's strategic realignment in East Africa, particularly its deepening engagement with Kenya, reflects a long-standing interventionist tradition adapted to contemporary geopolitical contestation. France integrates military presence with substantial goeconomic investments and multilateral diplomacy to safeguard its regional interests and preempt emerging competitors such as Turkey and China. Its bilateral defense cooperation agreement with Kenya, military deployments in Mombasa, and significant infrastructure investments such as the CMA CGM port modernization demonstrate a fusion of hard power with economic and diplomatic tools. This approach underscores the securitization of economic assets and highlights the multipolar and competitive environment in East Africa.

The comparative analysis reveals divergent strategic cultures and institutional realities shaping Germany's and France's engagements. Germany's normative dilemma introduces internal tensions that slow and complicate its military engagement, which is necessarily cautious, multilateral, and integrated within broader civilian power tools and frameworks such as the EU's Global Gateway Agenda. Conversely, France's interventionist realism and established military infrastructure afford it greater operational agility and direct bilateral influence, albeit increasingly moderated by demands for sovereignty, partnership, and multilateral cooperation. These asymmetries generate both opportunities and challenges for European strategic coherence in East Africa, as the absence of a unified European framework risks fragmenting EU foreign policy into competitive bilateralism and undermining collective leverage. Additionally, a critical analytical gap identified is the limited agency afforded to East African actors, particularly Kenya and the East African Community (EAC), in shaping regional outcomes. Contrary to portrayals of East Africa as a passive arena of external power competition, Kenya exercises substantial agency through its strategic location, diplomatic leadership, governance frameworks, and negotiation capacity. Kenya balances relations with multiple external partners, including Germany, France, China, Turkey, and Gulf states, leveraging this multipolar environment to maximize developmental benefits, security guarantees, and diplomatic capital while safeguarding sovereignty and avoiding overdependence. This agency compels European actors to adapt their foreign policy tools toward flexible, context-sensitive, and mutually beneficial partnerships that respect African priorities and governance realities. Concurrently, the securitization of economic relations emerges as a central theme

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intertwining military, economic, and diplomatic dimensions for both Germany and France. Germany's *Zeitenwende* reflects a broader geoeconomic shift where trade, technology, and infrastructure are subordinated to national security imperatives, compelling a pivot in its export-dependent economy toward defense production and strategic autonomy. France's integrated approach similarly securitizes economic assets through investments in critical infrastructure and energy sectors, combining these with military deployments to protect geoeconomic stakes. This fusion of hard power and geoeconomics exemplifies contemporary global power projection dynamics and the increasing blurring of boundaries between economic development and security strategy.

The normative dilemmas inherent in these strategic realignments require delicate balancing acts. Germany must reconcile its civilian power identity with the imperatives of militarization and strategic autonomy, managing societal skepticism and maintaining legitimacy through transparency, multilateralism, and respect for international law. France, while historically more interventionist, faces evolving regional expectations for partnership, sovereignty, and multilateral governance, necessitating recalibration toward inclusive security frameworks and equitable economic cooperation. Both actors confront critiques of neo-colonialism and must navigate complex operational and diplomatic challenges posed by regional competition and shifting alliances, such as the rise of Russian influence in Mali and Turkey's assertiveness in Somalia. For this reason, policy recommendations emphasize the necessity of coordinated European action that leverages the complementary strengths of Germany's normative multilateralism and France's operational presence. Institutionalized coordination mechanisms within the EU and NATO contexts are essential to avoid duplication, competition, and policy fragmentation. Strengthening regional institutions such as the EAC and IGAD, enhancing African agency, and embedding military modernization within broader civilian power tools and development frameworks will promote sustainable security and stability. Maritime security cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean, climate resilience, and transparent governance in economic and security partnerships are critical areas for joint focus. Kenya's centrality as an active regional actor underscores the importance of aligning foreign engagements with its development priorities and governance capacities to foster mutually beneficial and sustainable partnerships.

In conclusion, the evolving security and economic landscape of East Africa presents both opportunities and challenges for Germany and France as they recalibrate their strategic postures. Germany's *Zeitenwende* embodies a normative and structural pivot that seeks to balance military modernization with its civilian power legacy, while France's strategic realignment continues its tradition of interventionism adapted to contemporary geopolitical contestation through a fusion of military and economic tools. The success of these transformations depends on overcoming internal constraints, enhancing European strategic coherence, and respecting African agency. A coordinated, multilateral, and context-sensitive European approach that integrates hard power with geoeconomic investments and diplomatic engagement offers the best pathway to fostering regional stability, equitable partnerships, and sustainable development in East Africa's complex and contested environment.

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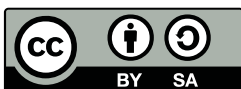
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