



DIMENSIONS OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY. A CHRONOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The Federal Republic of Germany and its armed forces, the Bundeswehr, stand as a cornerstone of the European and NATO defence and security. It is vitally important to understand one of the major European conventional powers' policies, concepts and overarching capabilities, along with the history behind them in a 21st century evermore complex security environment. The following paper examines the Bundeswehr historical evolution the major focal points in its strategy and capabilities development, since the beginning of the Cold War. The paper extends the historical discussion towards the present moment and the security policies undertaken in the 21st century, reaching the major policy re-evaluations occurring in 2022 and their importance both for the German state and its allies.

Keywords: Bundeswehr; Germany; security; defence policy.

Introduction

In the 21st century third decade, the global security environment is defined by an accelerating fragmentation process that the established post-Cold War United States of America Centred unipolar system is facing along with a movement towards an international multipolarity system. This process has been facilitated by inordinate factors, amongst which the re-emergence of the Russian Federation (Russia) as an international actor with aspirations for regional and global military, economic and political importance can be mentioned, as well as the People's Republic of China (China), which has similar ambitions for an international affairs leading role. At the same time, and in an increasingly conflict-prone international environment, the United States of America (United States/USA), strives to maintain its role as the preeminent power post-Cold War era, an objective whose fulfilment has come to be in direct competition and even confrontation with the Russia and China's goals for redefining the balance in world affairs. For the European states, belonging to both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and as greater Euro-Atlantic community and US allies and members the shift in global affairs brings

a multitude of risks and challenges that require a re-evaluation of security policies and approaches towards individual and collective security and defence matters.

With the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict early 2022, the European security environment has been greatly compromised, resulting in the near complete fracturing of relations between the Russian Federation and the Euro-Atlantic Community. As past structures and models providing for and ensuring security in Europe collapse into the past, it is of vital importance to adequately allow deterrence capabilities to go forward, with a view to preventing a wider military escalation.

In the European security and NATO framework context, the Federal Republic of Germany (Germany) and its Armed Forces (the *Bundeswehr*), encompass a pivotal importance role. Despite a massive reduction in size after the end of the Cold War and the reunification of the German state, the *Bundeswehr* remains the second largest NATO force in Europe and is considered one of its premier armed forces. The German Armed Forces thus play a central role in NATO defence planning, serving also as a cornerstone in multinational combined military formations in the European theatre, both on the NATO and EU levels, and the German armaments industry being one of the largest and most developed on the world stage. Despite these principal aspects of German defence capabilities, the German Armed

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Forces and general German security and military policy have been — for decades — subject to major criticism and debate. The current security situation on the European continent has become an enabling factor in fostering needed public and political consolidation and consensus on Bundeswehr future development as part of increasing NATO and EU military capabilities. It is thus important to understand the many aspects that make up the German security and defence policy debate, as well as the armed forces capabilities. These aspects can be subdivided into three broad categories: the armed forces and defence policy historical development since their formation when Cold War started, a long evolution process that gradually led into the 21st century and the armed forces state prior to the last German defence policy major overhaul; the most recent official defence policy assessment covering the 2016 White Paper, whose main focus was the introduction of a drastically new course for Germany and address the state of the armed forces and deficiencies in equipment and policy in a changing global security environment; lastly, the recent developments owing to the changed security environment starting in 2022, which provided a further transformational factor in the previously assigned course.

A Complex Past

In understanding the German Armed Forces contemporary state and the Federal Republic of Germany security and defence policy, it is vital to understand defence as a historical concept with a complex evolution both in relation to Germany and with the defensive NATO framework in an expansive timeframe spanning the past seven decades. It is important to note some of the key challenges that have come to materialise in this period of time and to understand their impact in the contemporary era.

On defence matters the Second World War outcome had a profoundly deep impact in shaping the context for the policies and concepts development within the modern German state. This context continues to encompass a diverse set of social, political and economic factors that have shaped the opinions and policy towards state defence capabilities even to this very day. In a manner of some similarity to Japan, the post-war German state had severe restrictions placed by the

greater international community on its military capabilities development (Bundeswehr 2015). These restrictions and more importantly the deep scars left within the German national mindset shaped Germany's defence posture, constitutional framework, and the general stance that both the population and political elites had towards a more restrained approach on the armed forces size, military spending, rearmament and military forces deployment beyond the nation's borders (Szabo 1990, 13-25).

Unlike Japan, and disregarding both internal and external attitudes towards German rearmament in the aftermath of the Second World War, the immediate position the divided Germany had within the European post-war security situation, ensured that both the Federal Republic of Germany and its socialist counterpart, the German Democratic Republic, would play pivotal roles in the security and defence architecture held by NATO and the Warsaw Pact as emergent opposing factions. Thus, by the emergence of the already mentioned alliances in the early 1950s, the position both Germanies had as frontline states necessitated their rearmament and military expansion to a degree where they could successfully fulfil the broader tasks and objectives associated with the both security alliances' planning. The West German Armed Forces, or the Bundeswehr, came to be founded in 1955. During the Cold War, considering a possible ground war on the European continent and specifically on the territory of Germany, the Bundeswehr was expanded to become the second largest state within the NATO alliance armed forces in Europe, numbering nearly 500,000 active-duty personnel (NATO 2006, 1), second only to those of the French Republic. This proportionality of the size the Bundeswehr had compared to other European NATO states continues to this day, with 183,000 active-duty personnel (IISS 2022, 109). In consideration of the assigned military objectives within NATO planning dating back to the late 1950s, when planning evolved to include the defence of Germany itself, the Bundeswehr was geared towards the main tasks of facing Warsaw Pact forces on land, and thus developed itself towards achieving superiority in this specific field, unlike the French and British militaries, which were also geared towards a broader set of strategic level objectives. As such, Germany, steadily



became the primary guarantor and factor for NATO forces conventional military deterrence in Western Europe (Bundeswehr 2022). Conventional military deterrence was further enhanced through nuclear deterrence capabilities, as part of the “nuclear sharing” program with the United States since 1957 (Lutsch 2015, 16-18) and the US nuclear doctrine evolving concepts for initially “*massive retaliation*” and later “*flexible response*”, which in many ways dictated the German state engagement on the nuclear sharing matters. The German Air Force, the modern Luftwaffe, thus became a key element within NATO and US nuclear deterrence planning, operating air-delivered weapons, initially based on the infamous F-104G Starfighter and later Panavia 200 Tornado aircraft, as well as on Pershing 1a theatre ballistic missiles (Bundeswehr 2022). In this principal arrangement, the modern Bundeswehr did not stray from its force structure and objectives. Conversely, it continued to maintain a strong conventional military force, with a principal focus on armoured and mechanised force composition, supplemented by the ability to enable the utilisation of a credible nuclear deterrent as part of the US and NATO nuclear posture. This, in turn, has led to certain deficiencies when considering strategic deployment capabilities and the German Armed Forces lack of engagement in broader NATO operations, especially after the end of the Cold War. Such a policy course for Germany has been a matter of state’s role and perceived importance as first- the principal military actor within NATO’s conventional forces in Europe, and second – the wide public and political opinions within Germany that would not get engaged in major military operations overseas, aside from peacekeeping within both the UN and NATO frameworks, and even then, with force much limited size contingents and mission assignments compared to other NATO members.

Germany’s military specific development processes and role within the European security framework were further enhanced by the additional commitment to Bundeswehr integration and cooperation with other NATO European member states armed forces. Germany has been the cornerstone of multinational formations in cooperation with France, Denmark and the Netherlands since the Cold War, and more recently with its Eastern allies, Poland, the Czech Republic,

Romania, and the Baltic states. Such cooperation processes and integration have determined a high percentage of the Dutch forces to be directly integrated in the Bundeswehr command structure. They have further been encapsulated in efforts to consolidate into a separate EU led security initiative, which had some successes, but no far-reaching results over the years, largely due to spending considerations on the defence structures creation, parallel to NATO’s.

Another most important factor in understanding Germany’s security and defence policy is that of the national military industrial complex role, capabilities and limitations. As the German Armed Forces were allowed to expand, great impetus was also provided to restarting Germany’s dormant military-industrial complex, which a mere decade before the foundation of the Bundeswehr had been one of the largest in the world. This was seen as a necessary step in sustaining a large military force for Germany, but would later grow to become a vitally important one for NATO’s overall defence capabilities. Some of the Cold War and Post-Cold War major companies eras include Porsche, Rheinmetall, Thyssenkrupp, MAN, Heckler & Koch, as well as others, which have retained Germany’s status over the decades as the highest quality leading arms manufacturer. The German military industrial complex has since the 1960s been able to provide the Bundeswehr with most defence material needs except for the aircraft development, where a greater emphasis was placed on foreign purchases partly due to the interoperability need for the US nuclear weapons deployment along with the German aircraft development initial constraints. In the modern German military-industrial complex evolution a strong emphasis was placed on the quality of material, as well as on the engagement with other NATO states in common armament programs. Such programs were often unsuccessful in providing results; however, such outcomes did not prevent the German armaments sector development, deriving useful experience and becoming a vital light and heavy armaments exporter to both other smaller NATO and non-NATO members by the late Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War, this process has only accelerated, especially with the enlargement of NATO, to the point where the German Leopard 2 tank and its variants is the main



battle tank choice among the larger part of NATO states. However, somehow ironically, the German military industrial complex apparent effectiveness in providing a high quantity of quality equipment does not necessarily materialise within Germany itself. After the reunification of Germany and the end of the Cold War in 1991, the qualitative edge of the Bundeswehr had fallen off dramatically due to an array of factors that created a self-propagating process. Germany's military budget had fallen to a low-point of 25 billion USD in 2001, from its historic high of 40 billion USD in 1990 (The World Bank 2022). This change in spending policy was largely due to the Armed Forces size reduction after the Cold War and the population and politicians' unwillingness to support a strong peace-time military. The limited budgets have also been hamstrung by what has been described as equipment acquisition ineffective bureaucracy and legal system, expressed in a parliament vote dependent limitation on armament purchases beyond a 25 million Euro threshold on the one hand, and on the other in the organisation of the "*Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment, Information Technology, and In-Service Support*" (BAAINBw), which is tasked with testing, certifying and approving purchases, culminating with numerous consecutive governments inability to properly address an exponentially worsening situation in the Bundeswehr (Deutsche Welle 2022). Overall, the limited budgets and a questionable bureaucratic apparatus are assumed to have gradually introduced a situation of extreme equipment disrepair and lack of readiness for the Armed Forces, in a period lasting more than two decades. By 2015, the Bundeswehr, detailed situation was presented to the wider public in a series of leaked documents and later governmental public admission which both represented a grim reality for the Armed Forces. At that time the Bundeswehr status, in all the armed forces branches presented equipment operability levels at below 50%. Only 42 of 109 Eurofighters, and 38 of 89 Tornado were operational (Deutsche Welle 2014), whilst in the armoured branch, 70 of 180 GTK Boxer armoured personnel carriers, remained combat capable, with the tank force of 306 Leopard 2s reaching reported level of inoperability of nearly 80%; and the navy possessing only 1 operational Type 214 submarine out of 4 (The

Washington Post 2014) (Spiegel 2014). The reasons for the equipment situation are complex. On the one hand they combine the limited budgets and mismanagement while on the other they also include a of rotating units equipment strategy depending on deployment or training demands, thus reducing the ready equipment overall need (IISS 2022).

Regardless, such policy decisions were considered erroneous in retrospect and, in turn, led to a gradual change for the German defence policy. The developing situations in the international security environment by 2015 required a further re-evaluation of the previously undertaken policies in relation to the armed forces capabilities and tasks, aligned with the broader NATO policies undertaken. The 2016 Defence White Paper was the initial result, which sought to alleviate concerns, chart new directions for the Armed Forces and overall define Bundeswehr current and future role in Germany and allies' increasingly worsening security situation allies.

Addressing German Defence Policy. The 2016 Defence White Paper

The 2016 White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, is the latest (by 2022) comprehensive policy document presented by Germany. Its creation was based upon the need to remedy the many deficiencies found in the Bundeswehr at the time, as well as to provide the groundwork for the armed forces future development in an increasingly more complex and dynamic security environment, with a principal emphasis placed upon committing Germany to a leadership role in the European defence and the need for the armed forces to contribute to NATO collective-defence tasks (IISS 2022). As the document has remained in force up until 2022, and has thus been the guideline in reshaping German policy and its armed forces, it is important to understand its many aspects.

The document followed the wake of the Ukraine 2014 conflict, the subsequent worsening relations with Russia and the increasingly more active foreign and military policy in China, as well as the still ongoing conflict in North Africa and the Middle East, with their aftershocks being felt in Europe at the time. As such, a principal document starting notion was the international order



changing nature and the German state's overall security environment which is described as "[having] become even more complex, volatile, dynamic and thus increasingly unpredictable" (Federal Government of Germany 2016, 28).

The move towards a multi-polar world order is clearly underlined as a main transformation factor, and a process that is unlikely to slow down in the future. Specific attention is placed on China and its growing economic potential, as well as the likelihood of the current system's relations fragmentation between states and new blocks formation. Regardless, the United States' central role is recognised as remaining vital for Germany and Europe's security interests. It is stated that there would be a greater need for security responsibilities consolidation and equalisation between NATO members facing a greater number of systemic challenges (Federal Government of Germany, 2016, pp. 30-31). As a principal risk to peace and security established systems specifically for the European continent and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the document identifies Russia, defined as "*openly calling the European peace order into question with its willingness to use force to advance its own interests and to unilaterally redraw borders guaranteed under international law*" (Federal Government of Germany 2016, 31-32). The policy document recognises Russia "as challenge to the security of [the European] continent", but at the same time recognises the broad range of common interests and relations, as well as the impossibility to establish Europe's peace and security without the Russian participation.

In terms of broader German security policy, challenges groups the document identifies an assortment of asymmetric threats and risks, with a "*mutually reinforcing dynamic*", possessing the ability to coalesce into larger systemic threats. These challenges derive from: transnational terrorism; challenges from the cyber and information domain; interstate conflict; fragile states; global rearmament and WMD proliferation; uncontrolled migration; climate change; and finally, pandemics (Federal Government of Germany 2016, 34-44). All of the indicated outside challenges can be summarised to derive from the immediate historical situation in the years leading to 2016, and the primary challenges faced by the German state. These include the

collapse in the immediate European vicinity, the rise of transnational terrorism deriving from such conflict zones and their transfusion into Europe through uncontrolled migration flows, as well as the rearmament of both China and Russia in this period, and both Iran and North Korea's nuclear weapons pursuit.

With the categorisation of the diverse set of both specific and more abstract challenges to German security interests and concerns, the German state's policy places a clear focus on Bundeswehr's future development and on the need to vastly increase capabilities, compared to previous levels, and even compared to the role undertaken during the Cold War. The German future role is taken to be that of both "*a substantial and leading*" force in NATO and EU military efforts, specifically in increasing deterrence capabilities along the periphery of the alliance structures. Such deterrence capabilities are realised to differ from the principal Cold War conventional deterrence to include a range of both overt and covert, hybrid and traditional threats, which would require a structure and capabilities that would "enable the Bundeswehr to deliver effects across the entire operational spectrum" (Federal Government of Germany 2016, 88-89).

The topic of available financial resources is considered essential to meeting NATO objectives. It is expressly recognised that the state possesses neither the resources, nor structures necessary to provide for such resources and in a flexible manner to support adequate levels of mission-ready forces as of the document period, (Federal Government of Germany 2016, 117). However, there is no concrete undertaking to reach the 2% of GDP in a specified period, as per NATO obligations. Instead, it is understood that gradual increases should be made over time and over consecutive yearly budgets spanning the period through 2019. The German government's conclusion, is that such increases will fulfil both the German armed forces' expanding tasks array, their respective maintenance and reequipment needs, as well as allow the allied states' increased cooperation and capability fostering and development within the EU and NATO.

Joint development initiatives within the EU and NATO mainly feature in German efforts within the set national strategy and German overall

conduct in the past decade. Emphasis is placed on both increasing the multinational military units cohesion and ability and the national command structure broader cooperation, a process that has been a cornerstone for the German efforts, both within NATO structures, as well and more recently, for the initiatives to create independent European structures and military capabilities. Furthermore, the concept of a cohesive approach towards defence matters is also seen as key in developing the military industrial complex abilities on the EU level, described as “[remaining] highly fragmented along national lines” and “[resulting] in unsatisfactory cost structures, disadvantages in international competition, and potentially higher burdens for [the German] defence budget” (Federal Government of Germany 2016, 129). Thus, it can be summarised that the Federal Government, has moved towards seeking a comprehensive and more economical approach based on international consolidation and coordination, in recognition of key deficiencies within the military spending capabilities and development. The 2016 Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr White Paper followed decades of downsizing and neglect for the German armed forces and thus had the ambitious task of setting the groundwork for their rebuilding in an increasingly complex international security environment. With six years having passed since its adoption, the situation in Europe has dramatically deteriorated in 2022 with the events in Ukraine, materialising a new and sudden transformational factor for the security and defence planning of the German state and the German armed forces.

German Defence Capabilities and Ambitions Going Forward. Developments in 2022

The 2020 and 2021 Covid pandemic deeply shifted the focus away from the defence spending, limiting the outcomes of 2016 policy paper set program and further delaying efforts to re-establish and expand military capabilities. Coupled with a reorganisation of the internal political landscape and a new ruling government format by late 2021, the debate on defence was expected to undergo a re-evaluation, especially considering the ever-worsening geopolitical situation. By late 2021, the new ruling coalition had set the ambitious task of moving forward with accomplishing the set goals,

as well as creating the “first” proper national security strategy for the country (Federal Foreign Office 2022) (Singh 2022). However, intended efforts which sought to continue the policies on military budget gradual increase and facilitate discussion on overall defence policy goals took an abrupt turn in early 2022 with the proverbial explosion of the security environment on the European continent.

Within the first couple of months after the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine in late February, 2022, Germany made concrete commitments to drastically change its approach towards the Bundeswehr capabilities, with more drastic and timely commitments which have become the hallmark of Germany’s change in defence and security policy in the first half of 2022. Thus, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz government committed to a 100-billion-euro defence expenditure, and a steady increase of defence spending towards the 2% GDP NATO goal (Singh 2022) (Frankfurter Allgemeine 2022). The stated defence spending bill is mainly focused on remedying said deficiencies in the Bundeswehr. The sum is stated to be spread across a period of three years, on top of the regular defence budget, thus bringing overall defence spending close to the NATO goals of 2% of GDP, or roughly 80-billion-euro, marking a substantial increase over preceding years.

However, the spending bill is, in its essence and main objectives, geared towards specific goals, with the primary being materiel acquisitions, and such should be viewed as complementary to Bundeswehr’s defence budget and not as an outright systemic increase. The first primary acquisition is meant for the United States 35 fifth-generation F-35A multirole fighters and 15 Eurofighter ECR specialised electronic-warfare fighters (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2022). The F-35A purchase is of particular interest, as it is meant to replace the Tornados ageing fleet in the Luftwaffe arsenal. As had previously been stated, this aircraft’s main role in the German arsenal is that of a nuclear deterrence through the United States “nuclear sharing” program. Considering that similar proposals in preceding years had been rejected on numerous occasions and in conjunction with the ever-going debate on the presence of nuclear



weapons within Germany, this step on the part of the German government should be measured as a reaffirmation and expansion upon the commitments made with the United States and the overall strategic posture within Europe. Overall, the purchase of both aircraft systems makes up for a considerable commitment in the spending bill, and a considerable commitment for the future in their maintenance and deployment cycles.

In its essence, the budgetary commitments represent an attempt towards a paradigm shift in German security and defence policy. It is the overcoming of both a physical and psychological barrier in the German security culture, and an attempt to re-establish the Bundeswehr's security importance on the European continent. This process further results will be represented in the national security strategy to be adopted. Based on the current course of events in Europe, the perceived outside threat arising from the events in Ukraine and Russia, in particular, will most likely be dominant, alongside Germany's role as a European defence cornerstone in a defence commitments bilateral system. This bilateral system will continue the historical course reaffirmed in the 2016 policy paper, and Germany's overall defence posture, namely that of a key NATO power in Europe, but also that of a the main actor in the independent EU defence capabilities formation. To achieve tenable results in both directions, the Bundeswehr capabilities and the previously mentioned associated hurdles will have to be overcome, which cannot happen in the immediate short term.

With the long standby endeavour to revitalise the Bundeswehr, the purchase of the F-35 platform, and 35 aircraft (in limited quantities), one can consider this to represent one step in a long transformation process covering the set tasks before Bundeswehr's return to its Cold War-era roots as a primary security provider. As it has been established, the Bundeswehr is to defend a primary conventional force position on the European continent and should be a capability enabler for both NATO and EU defence efforts on every front – from multinational battlegroups to consolidation and integration of the European defence industry. In facilitating this process, the German Bundeswehr would require years of sustained change and adjustment, of acquisitions

and spending. With the polarisation of global politics and the foundation of new security structures opposed to one another, the course of remilitarisation, albeit often an unwanted one, is the course of greater certainty.

Conclusion

In historical terms, the Federal Republic of Germany armed forces were created and settled as a NATO security provider. Historically, this has been a policy at odds with post-World War II perceptions within the German public and political circles, outweighed however, by the Cold War-era security environment immediate demands. In the Cold War aftermath, with the defence spending cuts and the shift away from the security and defence matters, the Bundeswehr capabilities had suffered greatly and over an extended period of time, calling into question Germany's ability to provide for its own security needs, those of its NATO allies and its further leader aspirations for an EU focused security complex. By 2016, the lack in the German armed forces capabilities required urgent action, as well as a re-evaluation of German security policy in a changing international system, along with a deteriorating security situation on the European continent. With efforts placed on rebuilding the Bundeswehr as a main force in Europe, the escalating situation in Europe, specifically the Ukraine conflict and the German status towards Russia, all became a key enabling factor in garnering both the public, political and financial support as well as willingness to commence the armed forces reequipment and consolidation large-scale process, as well as the formation of concrete national security strategies. The German process and commitments have ambitious aims; however, they also face years of neglect and inefficiency, which require sustained remedial action and measures. Whether Germany will fulfil these goals and to what extent, as well as how it would later utilise a potential potent and capable military within the broader security policies formation and actions within both NATO and the EU is still to be seen. It is also still uncertain how the broader international system will react to such an outcome, considering the opposing sides' hastening remilitarisation, in a confrontational multipolar system with a European focal point.

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