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No more compulsory engagement
The emancipation of German security policy

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Germany's stance on Libya at the UN Security Council and its later decision not to take part in the military intervention gave rise to heated controversy both in Germany and abroad. At home, this was criticised as "an enormous mistake of historic impact"[1]; while abroad this raised questions about Germany's willingness to co-operate with its key Western allies. With its decision on Libya, Germany sealed the process of making its security policy independent from the stances of the US and France. It thus ceased to feel any compulsion to provide not only military engagement but also political support for overseas operations initiated by its key allies, even if these are legitimised by the UN Security Council. Germany's stance, apart from finishing off a certain process, is also setting a starting point for a discussion inside Germany about its military engagement in international security policy. This will bring about a more assertive and selective approach to co-operation with NATO and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.

Multilateralism in German security policy

Until 1994, Germany had perceived itself exclusively as a 'civilian power' (*Zivilmacht*) and employed primarily diplomatic, economic and development aid instruments in its foreign policy. The legal and historical background did not allow Germany to use military means in international security policy. Germany was one of the few NATO member states not to have (and it still does not) an official national defence strategy, approved by the government; instead its Defence Ministry announces 'political and defence guidelines' and 'white books' once every few years. The Bundeswehr, which was created in 1955, could not participate in military operations abroad until the early 1990s, and served only to protect Germany as part of NATO. Conventional threats waned from German perspective with the end of the Cold War. However, soon new challenges to security of the transatlantic area emerged, such as ethnic and regional conflicts and international terrorism. After reunification, with its new geopolitical position Germany had to relinquish the 'civilian power' concept partly by choice and partly under pressure. Since West Germany had been under NATO's protective umbrella for more than forty years, the allies began to expect that the reunified Germany would fully engage in NATO's security policy. The decision of the Federal Constitutional Court of 1994, stating that Germany's membership in collective security systems and collective defence organisations and the fulfilment of the tasks this membership entails do not breach the German constitution, made it possible. Since then the German government could send the Bundeswehr to UN, NATO and EU-led military missions abroad, subject to prior consent from the Bundestag.

[1] Volker Rühe, 'Deutschland im Abseits', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 May 2011, page 7.

From multilateralism… Since the Constitutional Court's breakthrough decision, German security policy has been shaped by the principle of what German analysts call the multilateralism doctrine[2]. It ruled out independent decisions being taken within NATO and the EU contrary to the policy of the US or France. It also assumed Germany's political support and military contribution to overseas operations the US and France called for and led. The reasons for this approach were historical and also due to the belief that it was necessary to build trust in relations with its allies and partners who could feel endangered by the 'remilitarisation' of a unified Germany and feared an independent policy from Germany. Inherent in this doctrine was also the desire to strengthen Germany's significance in NATO, to enhance its influence within the UN (Germany is seeking permanent membership in the Security Council) and to reinforce its position with regard to France and the United Kingdom in the EU. Germany, wishing to strengthen its influence on the policies of these organisations, undertook to increase its participation in foreign military operations. The construction of the multilateralism doctrine was based on the assumption that what was good for the EU and NATO was in line with German interests. This doctrine became a 'mantra' for subsequent governments after 1994 and in a way also justified the Bundeswehr's military engagement abroad to the pacifist public in Germany. Since the mid-1990s,Germany has been gradually enhancing its military engagement; in terms of numbers, tasks and geography. At the same time, it embarked upon the long-term process of transforming its armed forces, the final stage of which is the reform (currently underway) aimed at liquidating conscription and reducing the number of military personnel, improving its performance and optimising its expeditionary skills.

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…to compulsory engagement. As a result of the evaluation of the international security situation by the US and France and also due to their strategic cultures, the West became more and more frequently engaged in foreign military engagement within NATO, the EU and the UN. Germany felt obliged to offer political support and military engagement in an increasing number of operations. Meanwhile Germany saw these missions as not necessarily having a positive effect on the security situation in Germany itself and as complying with German interests. Furthermore, the internal political costs of the Bundeswehr's engagement abroad started to be evaluated by subsequent governments as too high. The conclusions from the military operations, e.g. in Afghanistan or Iraq were obvious for Berlin: these missions are long-lasting, expensive in economic and political terms, and fail to bring the intended results. However, a refusal to participate in the West's overseas operations would mean, for example, undermining the credibility of Germany as a responsible partner and ally. One German analyst called the situation Berlin had found itself in a 'multilateralism trap'. It can be defined as Germany's obligation to become engaged in NATO- and EU-led foreign military operations and also in 'coalitions of the willing' formed by Germany's key allies[3]. This situation can be illustrated by a quotation from an analysis by Klaus Naumann, former Inspector General of the Bundeswehr: "as regards the Bundeswehr's participation in foreign operations, Germany has almost in all cases participated in missions it in principal did not want to participate in"[4].

[2] Markus Kaim, 'Deutsche Auslandseinsätze in der Multilateralismusfalle?' in: Stefan Mair, *Auslandseinsätze der Bundeswehr*, *SWP-Studie*, September 2007, pages 43-49.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Klaus Naumann, 'Wie strategiefähig ist die deutsche Sicherheitspolitik?' in: *Aus der Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 48, Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 23 November 2009, pages 10-17.

A revision of the German security policy

A gradual withdrawal from the doctrine of multilateralism and compulsory engagement, first in relations with the US, then within NATO, and later with regard to France within the EU, has been observed since Gerhard Schröder's government. The most recent event in this process was the German stance on resolution1973 concerning Libya at the UN Security Council. Germany neither granted political support (it abstained from voting at the UN Security Council) nor engaged in the execution of this resolution (it did not take part in the operation of the 'coalition of the willing' led by France and the United Kingdom, and later by NATO in Libya).

A revision of the German policy towards the USA and within NATO. Unconditional partnership with the US and co-operation within NATO were the landmarks of German policy until the end of the Cold War. They also shaped German security policy throughout the 1990s. A departure from this approach happened when Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) decided to oppose the US intervention in Iraq in 2003[5]. Schröder not only ruled out Germany's participation in the 'coalition of the willing' (even if it had been legitimised by the UN Security Council); he also made opposition to the US on the Iraqi question a subject of the campaign in parliamentary elections already in autumn 2002. In the short term, Schröder's decision was motivated by political calculation. And this was successful: the SPD/Green Party coalition won the elections to the Bundestag. However, in hindsight, one can see that the stance taken by Germany at that time marked a deep change in the nature of German-US relations after the reunification of Germany. Germany's security was no longer unconditionally dependent on US guarantees; Germany began to define itself as a medium-sized power interested in shaping security policy structures which would give due consideration to the German stance and increase Germany's influence on international politics[6]. Although Germany resumed its multilateral rhetoric after Schröder's decision to oppose the US intervention in Iraq, it started to be more assertive towards the US and within NATO. This is best shown by the Bundeswehr's participation in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan, which regularly gave rise to tension between Germany and the US/NATO. Subsequent German governments have successfully resisted US and NATO pressure to increase the Bundeswehr's engagement and rejected NATO's requests to support allies engaged in fierce clashes in the southern provinces of Afghanistan. It was only the deterioration of the security situation in 2009–2010 in the northern part of Afghanistan, where the German military contingent is stationed, which made Germany take more offensive military action in this region.

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A revision of the German policy towards France and the EU. A similar process – Germany's initial engagement followed by its withdrawal from co-operation – has been taking place with regard to France as part of the EU's security policy. The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), which gained momentum in 1999 as a consequence of the Balkan Wars, was initially being pushed through mainly by France and the United Kingdom. However, also Germany supported its civil aspects. After the controversies regarding the US intervention in Iraq, Germany started to support also ESDP's military dimension and to treat France as its priority partner in this area. For example, it took part in the 'praline summit'

[5] Marco Overhaus, 'Die deutsche NATO-Politik', Nomos, 2009, page 306.

[6] Michael Staack, 'Normative Grundlagen, Werte und Interessen deutscher Sicherheitspolitik' in: Stephan Böckenförde, Sven Bernhard Gareis, *Deutsche Sicherheitspolitik*, Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2009, pages 45-96.

in 2003 and – with France, Belgium and Luxembourg – backed the creation of the European Security and Defence Union. In 2004, Germany, France and the United Kingdom put forward the concept of European Union Battle Groups. By strengthening the EU's position in international security policy Germany wanted to gain more influence on the policy being formed by the USA in NATO. However, following the EU missions in the Balkans, Berlin remained unable to answer the key question: What are the German interests as regards EU security policy as well as conducting military and civil-military operations; Where, how and when should the EU become engaged? In practice, it was mainly France who shaped the debate on the use of the ESDP instruments and often treated the EU as a tool for implementing its own policy. For this reason Germany started blocking proposals to use EU Battle Groups with German participation in 2006 (Chad) and 2008 (Congo)[7]. This was an effect of the belief commonly shared in Germany that Germany was being made involved in military operations which serve the interests of other member states. As a result, Germany decided not to participate in similar missions in the future. At least since the French presidency of the EU in the second half of 2008, France has started to perceive Germany as a country which slows down the development of European security policy. The flagship projects of the French presidency in the EU aimed at revitalising the ESDP, namely a revision of the European security strategy and the development of military capacity, were unsuccessful partly due to Berlin's policy[8]. France's dissatisfaction with the co-operation within the EU so far (military, operational, political and that of the arms industries) gave rise to the military and political deal France and the United Kingdom struck in November 2010. The common stance of these two countries on Libya exemplified their collaboration. Meanwhile, Germany's decision to abstain from voting at the UN Security Council and its refusal to participate in the international and later NATO-led operations proved Germany's increasing assertiveness primarily with regard to France, its largest European partner in security policy.

The German stance on Libya can be seen as a symbolic act finishing off the process of Germany becoming independent from the USA and France in international security policy.

As with Schröder's decision concerning the intervention in Iraq, in the short term the German government's stance on the intervention in Libya was strongly affected by Germany's internal politics. Local parliamentary election campaigns were underway in two important federal states. The government coalition parties (the CDU/CSU and FDP) did not wish to lose support as a result of backing and participating in the military intervention in Libya. The Foreign Minister, Guido Westerwelle (FDP), hoped that the German abstention would win more public support for his party. In the longer term, however, the government's stance showed a profound change in the German policy towards France and the EU. The new German assertiveness resulted partly from the essential political and economic reinforcement of Germany within the EU during the economic crisis. The German stance on Libya can be seen as a symbolic act finishing off the process of Germany becoming independent from the USA and France in international security policy.

Possible scenarios of the development of German policy in NATO and the EU

The German stance on Libya is also setting a starting point for the development of a new German approach to security policy, which will affect a further development of NATO and the EU. A constant element of this approach will be the focus on the development and use of civil instruments covering diplomacy, development policy, economic and financial

[7] Claudia Major / Christian Mölling, 'EU-Battlegroups. Bilanz und Optionen zur Weiterentwicklung europäischer Krisenreaktionskräfte' SWP-Studie, August 2010, pages 22-23.

[8] Bilateral talks between the Defence Ministries of France and Germany in summer and autumn 2010 on enhancing military co-operation were also unsuccessful. Christian Mölling, Sophie-Charlotte Brune, Marcel Dickow, 'Finanzkrise und Verteidigungskooperation' SWP-Arbeitspapier, October 2010, page 9.

co-operation, and police and military co-operation[9]. Germany's military engagement abroad however is now under debate. An analysis of German discussions and policy has shown that Germany will be guided in the future mainly by its own interests in foreign, economic and security policy. Over the past two years, precisely the issue of protecting German economic interests – not only the security of maritime routes but also ensuring supplies of natural resources – has been addressed increasingly often in the public discourse concerning the Bundeswehr's participation in foreign operations[10]. What will be Germany's policy within NATO and the EU is an open question. Judging from German debates and actions, the following two scenarios seem probable.

Assertive multilateralism… The German Defence Ministry appealed for the development of German policy in this direction in May 2011 in its 'Political and Defence Guidelines'. The Defence Ministry points to the need to reinforce the international position of Germany through actively taking part in crisis and conflict management, including with the participation of the Bundeswehr. The ministry assumes that NATO and the EU, functioning effectively in political and military terms, are necessary to preserve the German model of development in the future, given the uncertainty over a further development of the international security environment. Germany should be working towards strengthening NATO and the EU while pursuing an assertive policy in these organisations by influencing their discourse and strategy and by formulating clear conditions for carrying out military operations abroad. Due consideration has to be given to German interests at the time of making decisions on German participation in foreign military operations. However, Germany should also consider taking part in operations alongside its allies which bear no direct impact on its interests if the political costs of refusal could be too high[11].

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…or selective engagement? This line of development seems likely on the basis of discussions in Germany with Libya as a good case in point and actions taken so far by Germany within NATO and the EU. In this scenario, Germany will not be eager to become engaged in NATO- and EU-led military operations and will prefer the use of diplomatic solutions and civil instruments to prevent and manage conflicts. This will be influenced by increasingly strong energy and economic connections and the desire to develop good relations with Russia and the other BRIC countries (Brazil, India and China), as well as the wish to maintain Germany's positive image, mainly in the Muslim countries. NATO and the EU's security policy in this scenario are structures which can be used when needed for German military engagement abroad (such as the Atalanta mission aimed at securing maritime routes along Somalia's coastline). However, they should be rather weak so as not to impose a political or military obligation on Germany to support operations Germany does not wish to participate in. However, if necessary, they should enable Germany to form 'coalitions of the willing' and to conduct foreign military operations.

Given the policy Germany has pursued so far within NATO and the EU, the selective engagement scenario seems more likely than assertive multilateralism. In the case of NATO, the shifting of the focus of the US security policy towards South-Eastern Asia and the Middle East and the desire to include European allies in counteracting threats in these regions have little in common with German interests. Another example is the US wish to enhance NATO's tasks to ensure energy security or cyber security[12]. The German reactions after

[9] According to Germany, civil instruments are the best response to the new types of threats and have thus far proven sufficient to secure German interests.

[10] Anna Kwiatkowska-Drożdż, 'The natural resources deficit: the implications for German politics, *OSW Commentary*, 8 February 2011.

[11] Justyna Gotkowska, 'The Bundeswehr reform – what does Germany need a professional army for?, *OSW CEWEEKLY*, 25 May 2011.

[12] Justyna Gotkowska, 'The German vision of NATO's future – The Alliance as a building block of Germany and European security' *OSW Commentary*, 24 April 2009.

the statement by the US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates can be seen as an indicator of the German stance on the future of NATO. Gates said that if the European allies did not start investing in military capacity and being engaged in NATO's foreign missions, the US may not be willing to invest further in NATO and European security in the future[13]. Gates's speech, which was widely commented on in Europe, did not lead to any major discussion on the future of NATO in Germany. In the case of the EU, the Libya issue convinced Germany that there are situations when it is difficult to reconcile the interests and approach of France with security policy and the approach of Germany, as well as to develop EU instruments as part of the common security policy. Therefore, Germany will still not wish to participate in a stronger integration of the armed forces within the EU, despite sticking to pro-European rhetoric regarding building closer military co-operation[14]. Germany will reject solutions which could make it dependent on its allies, increase the political pressure on Germany to carry out certain operations or block actions of the Bundeswehr[15]. Germany will remain sceptical about the operational use of battle groups. Berlin envisages participation in enhancing co-operation in the areas of training, logistics and command structures. As part of enhancing European co-operation, Germany will still be interested in developing the civil dimension of the EU's security policy as well as supporting and promoting the German arms industry in the process of the creation of the 'European technological and industrial base.'

[13] Valentina Pop, US Defence chief: 'Europe may no longer be worth defending', euobserver, 10 June 2011, http://euobserver.com/?a-id=32473

[14] The most recent German activities in the EU (the German-Swedish Ghent Initiative) for enhancing military co-operation, propagated as a revival of the Common Security and Defence Policy, are interpreted in France and the United Kingdom and also in Germany itself as insubstantial and limited to declarations to a great extent.

[15] 'Bericht des Generalinspekteurs der Bundeswehr zum Prüfauftrag aus der Kabinettsklausur vom 7. Juni 2010' page 17, www.bmvg.de

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