



## **Does Germany need a National Security Council?**

**by Maxim Worcester**

On the very first day of the new British Government Prime Minister David Cameron chaired a meeting of the newly established National Security Council. The meeting was attended by the new National Security Advisor, the Deputy Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary, Defence Secretary, Secretary of State for International Development, Minister for Security, Minister for the Cabinet Office, Cabinet Secretary, Chief of the Defence Staff, Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Director General of the Security Services and the Director of GCHQ.

The formation of this body is a part of the Governments Unified Security Approach and takes into account the changing threats faced by the UK following the two Iraqi Wars, the war in Afghanistan and the continued threat of terrorist and Cyber attacks in the UK. The National Security Council will be responsible for all national security policy decisions. It also has a brief to draw up and implement a National Security Strategy and to oversee a Strategic Defence and Security Review that implements the new strategy.

This new and integrated approach to national security will bring some significant changes to the rather haphazard approach the previous Government adopted. Emphasis will be on reducing the need for military intervention by building a capacity for preventative action and a more integrated approach to post-conflict resolution. It will also focus on border security and cyber security, threats which were widely ignored in the past. It will also focus on strengthening the country's critical infrastructure, food security and security of energy supplies.

Chancellor Merkel has in principle long wanted to establish a similar body which would more effectively identify and mitigate risks to the country. It would replace Bundessicherheitsrat, a body in which the Military is not fully represented, in spite of its name. The establishment of a US style German National Security Council is strongly opposed by the SPD. In a speech on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2008 the then Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, argued that such a step would not be a path to the future, but rather a step back to the past. He argued that the US National Security Council suppressed all counterarguments to the Iraq war in 2003. Other senior Social Democrats oppose the plans as this would wrestle policy away from the Foreign Ministry and favour the chancellery. Unsurprisingly, the Greens oppose any such move as it would dramatically redefine the role of the Bundeswehr and that sending German soldiers to war for oil and water could not be the answer to global crises and global warming. Guido Westerwelle, at the time in opposition, believed that such a step would massively shift and

damage German Foreign Policy and that it could be used as an initial step in allowing the domestic deployment of the Bundeswehr, a plan which the FDP has long rejected.

We are now well into a new government in Germany and there is no sign of the Coalition addressing this thorny issue. The problems Germany is facing are very similar to those the UK faces. Both countries are major trading nations and are threatened by disruption of supply chains. Both are importers of energy and are dependent upon stability in the regions which supply oil and gas. Both nations are involved in an ever escalating war in Afghanistan and both the UK and Germany are facing budget cuts in their respective defence budgets which need to be taken without unnecessarily reducing the effectiveness of their armed forces. Yes, it is easier for the UK to introduce a National Security Council. Britain does not carry the same baggage of history, nor does it have a Basic Law or a Federal Structure which makes such a decision complex and difficult.

Complexity and difficulty should however not be a reason to postpone the decision to form a National Security Council in Germany. The Government should realise that foreign and domestic policy are not separate when considering national security. They are linked and should be considered together and furthermore, German foreign policy should promote national security. Furthermore, effective security is a competitive advantage in today's global economy.

The Bundessicherheitsrat as it stands today has changed little from when it was formed out of the Bundesverteidigungsrat in 1969. The world has changed, however, and today's threats are more complex than they were in the days of East-West confrontation. Urban terrorism, Cyber attacks, supply chain security, transnational crime and asymmetric warfare are new threats which need to be confronted with a new and integrated approach.

Germany needs a National Security Council along the lines of the newly established model in the UK. Such a body should draw on all Ministries involved, reflecting the increased complexity and interconnectivity of the risk faced by the country. It needs to address thorny issues such as the future role of the Bundeswehr and should map the national interests against the risks the country faces and develop strategies to mitigate such risks. Such a body needs parliamentary oversight and needs to ensure that proposed security measures do not in any way compromise civil liberties. Such a body would provide the Government with a much clearer sense of direction as it would address national security issues for what they are, not as a particular Ministry sees or perceives them. A German National Security Council would also help narrow the gap between rhetoric and action which has been the hallmark of the Governments National Security Policy since it was elected.

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*Remarks:* Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.



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