

# Pacifism unbound: Why Germany limits EU hard power

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>> The Libya crisis has confirmed the view that the EU is essentially a soft power. Ambitions to turn the EU into a fully-fledged power with military capabilities have experienced a set-back. The Libya crisis has made even more evident the deep division over military power between Germany on the one side and France and Britain on the other side. At the root of this lie a number of factors that explain a renewed pacifist drift in German foreign policy.

Berlin has refused to join the military intervention led by Paris and London. At the UN Security Council, Germany did not back Resolution 1973 which authorised 'all necessary means' to protect civilians in Libya. What sharpened the rift among the three big EU powers was that Berlin not only abstained from the vote, but up to the last moment tried to prevent the resolution from being passed at all.

In the following weeks, the EU was completely sidelined in the Libya intervention. EU foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, appeared to be against the intervention and her reported stance might have prevented her from playing the role of a broker between London, Paris and Berlin.

What Germany disputed were not the ends, but the means. Berlin's strong opposition was only directed towards the military part of the operation, not towards the West's reshaped Libya policy in general. German chancellor Angela Merkel and foreign minister Guido Westerwelle have called for Gaddafi to step down, and for the protection of Libyan civilians. But Berlin didn't come up with an alternative, non-military strategy to reach these goals.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Germany's refusal to participate alongside the UK and France in the Libya campaign reflects a growing confidence to stay aloof in international security questions.
- Germany's rising economic weight within the EU is not giving rise to a will to exercise foreign policy leadership.
- Given this powerful trend in German foreign policy, the prospects for a more 'hard power' EU are slim.

»»»»» **SOUL-SEARCHING**

The main explanation given by Westerwelle for Germany's stance was the fear that Germany might be obliged to send German troops to Libya. But this argument has caused some consternation on the part of German experts: Resolution 1973 explicitly rules out foreign occupation and a positive vote in the UN Security Council does not mean an obligation to participate in the military action.

While many have emphasised Westerwelle's personal ideology, it is important to keep in mind that Merkel also backed the abstention. While there are conflicting accounts about the respective roles played by Westerwelle and Merkel in the run-up to the vote, with Merkel later trying to sweeten the decision, it is clear that both were united in the determination not to support the Libya intervention.

The vote was not expedient but rather a rationalised expression of Berlin's political will. Germany could have found a compromise between its unwillingness to participate in a military mission and the demands of its key international partners. As many observers have pointed out, to vote in favour of the resolution and to find a face-saving way not to participate in the military operation would have been feasible. But it appears that Berlin was not interested in a compromise.

This was a major turning point as Germany was obviously ready to frustrate its key Western allies and to undermine a fledgling common EU foreign and security policy. Why? Westerwelle's and Merkel's hostility towards the Libya intervention has largely been linked to elections in Baden-Württemberg (which they lost). But this is not an explanation and raises questions itself: Why do voters reject military intervention? Why did none of the main German parties disagree with the vote, and why was no-one arguing that a humanitarian intervention to save civilians is a noble cause? And why were German leaders not overly nervous about the possible international costs of this manoeuvre?

The Libya crisis has reiterated that, more than two decades after unification, Germany's foreign policy culture is not converging with those of France and Britain. The dissent on the use of force is unlikely to disappear over time -as many observers had expected. Quiet the contrary: it seems that the two tendencies are moving further apart. The Libya crisis has demonstrated that German leaders are increasingly less willing to look for compromises with their international partners. European unity on foreign policy and the EU's role as a global actor clearly are not priorities in Berlin's decision-making process.

**UNITED IN PACIFISM**

As an international actor, Germany is and remains different from France and Britain. Even if their role has diminished since the Second World War, France and Britain are still major world powers. Both have nuclear weapons, an army that is used to fighting, and a permanent seat with a veto at the UN Security Council. Both have a long history of empire which has led to privileged relationships with many countries in other parts of the world. Both possess a strategic culture which links politics with universities and the media. As they see their relative weight on the world scene declining, both are trying to find ways to stay 'on top' with diminishing resources. Neither considers the use of force taboo. Having emerged from the Second World War victorious, they see war as a last, but legitimate resort to achieve political ends.

Germany is quite different. It has no nuclear weapons and no permanent seat at the UN Security Council. Western Germany only very reluctantly built an army purely for defence. Since the Second World War, the notion of war has a very different sound to German ears. For a large majority of Germans, war is synonymous with senseless destruction. Germans tend to look at war from the side of defeat, not of victory. When Westerwelle declares that 'war is not a solution', he is expressing a view held by a very large German majority. Unlike in many Western

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countries, there is neither a conservative tendency that often accepts the use of force if the national interest is at stake, nor a left-liberal one that would accept the use of force for humanitarian reasons. Principled pacifism has become an object of national pride: while others still make war, we have learned the lessons of history and become a force for peace.

This pacifist worldview has been challenged in the past. After German unification, the US expected Germany to become a 'partner in leadership'—which would of course include participation in military operations. Christian Democrat Chancellor Helmut Kohl managed to fend off such expectations by referring to Germany's past. It was Kohl's Social Democrat successor, Gerhard Schröder, who led the countries into two wars: Kosovo in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001.

The Kosovo war was promoted as a humanitarian intervention. Schröder's foreign minister Joschka Fischer (Greens) made the case that Germany must prevent another Auschwitz from happening: "I have

not only learned: 'Never again war'. I also learned: 'Never again Auschwitz'. And participation in the Afghan mission two years later was pushed through by Schröder with a vote of confidence in German parliament. The background was sympathy with Ame-

rica at its most difficult hour, and Schröder's dedication to play a larger role on the world stage. But for years, the Afghan intervention was presented to the German public as a rebuilding mission, and Berlin tried everything to keep Germans out of the fighting. It was not until 2010 that Defence Minister zu Guttenberg referred to the Afghanistan mission as a 'war'.

Some observers interpreted these moves as a sign that Germany had given up its post-war pacifist

identity and taken on a more robust role. Germany appeared to have 'normalised' or 'grown up' (with 'normality' being defined by the examples of France and Great Britain). The country appeared to have accepted that the use of military force can be a necessary tool in foreign policy.

But in retrospect, one must conclude that Germany has just flirted with such a robust identity and quickly rejected it. In 2002 Schröder made his 'resistance' to the Iraq war a main issue in the German election campaign, and found himself rewarded with a second term. And a stream of bad news from Afghanistan has only confirmed German scepticism. It is clear now that the rejection of military force is a central pillar of German identity, not just a post-war mood. Pacifism is here to stay, as a major factor in German foreign and security policy. What has changed in Germany in recent years, by contrast, is the readiness of German governments to challenge this pacifist mood.

### TECTONIC SHIFTS

A comparison between Schröder's opposition to the Iraq war in 2002 and Merkel's and Westerwelle's opposition to the Libya intervention is illuminating. In 2002, Germany stood against the United States, but it had France on its side. In 2011, Germany stood alone against all major Western partners: Washington, Paris and London. In 2002, it was Schröder, a chancellor from the left-liberal Social Democratic Party, traditionally sceptical of Germany's closeness to the West, who challenged American dominance, together with a foreign minister from the Greens, Joschka Fischer. In 2011, it was Merkel from the traditionally pro-Western Christian Democratic Party (CDU), together with a foreign minister from the Liberals, Westerwelle, who cold shouldered Germany's allies. Isolation is no longer feared.

This is in fact the tectonic shift in Germany's foreign relations since the end of the Cold War: the growing unwillingness of German governments to

## Germany has no ambition to translate its economic power into leadership on foreign policy

4

»»»»» act against public opinion at home in order to put themselves in line with its Western partners abroad. Emboldened by a steadily growing economic weight in Europe, German leaders simply follow German public opinion.

During the Cold War, German governments had to carefully balance between US demands to contribute to Cold War efforts and an unwillingness or even hostility of large parts of the electorate towards those contributions. Konrad Adenauer (Christian Democratic Party) pushed through German re-armament against broad popular resistance. Helmut Schmidt's (Social Democratic Party) chancellorship collapsed in 1983 over mass protests against the deployment of NATO missiles. While German governments tended to share Washington's threat perceptions, and knew that Western German security ultimately relied on America's security umbrella, anti-war sentiment, a certain hostility towards America and an isolationist mood were wide-spread in the population, especially among intellectuals.

With the end of the Cold War and the re-ordering of Europe, the whole constellation has changed. The threat to Germany's very existence has disappeared. Unification made Germany the biggest, and due to its economic success, the most powerful country in Europe. Germany now had geopolitical options. At least theoretically it could chose between a close partnership with Washington, a leadership role in Europe and a more autonomous status on the world stage.

These new options have never been systematically discussed in Germany. If there was an overwhelming motto to German foreign policy since German unity after 1990, it was continuity. Germany was keen to anchor itself deeply into multi-lateral frameworks, both in order to assuage fears of German hegemony, but also because this embedding was seen as a key element of Germany's post-war successes.

But below the surface of continuity, things had changed. In 2002, Germany's stance against the

Iraq war looked like a bold, risky gamble. In 2011, Merkel's and Westerwelle's rejection of the Libya intervention was presented in a very quiet, businesslike fashion. In 2002, many in Germany were worried about German-American relations. In 2011 the German vote at the UN Security Council was not even a big story in Germany.

Germany's new assertiveness does not come from a deliberate strategy. It is rather the result of changes in the balance of power between Germany and its international partners. There is no German plan to dominate the European Union, or to undermine NATO. The usefulness of both is rarely questioned (or even discussed) in Germany. Germans still see themselves as reliable pillars of both institutions.

Foreign policy only plays a minor part in Germany's public discourse, and no strategic culture or tendency has emerged since unification. Political leaders still are happy to delegate large parts of foreign and security policy to NATO, EU and the UN. On foreign policy, there is a large consensus among the parties.

The background of Germany's new boldness in Europe is Germany's continuing economic success story, largely unimpeded by the sovereign debt crisis. This success has only underlined the countries' geostrategic weight. Furthermore, German economic success has encouraged Berlin to act with self-confidence in attempts to save the Euro. But contrary to many expectations, inside and outside the country, Germany has no ambition to translate its economic power into leadership on foreign policy.

The relationship between an economic success that is driven by exports and the reluctance to interfere in other countries affairs is the big 'unknown' in the analysis of German's role on the international stage. It could be argued that by staying neutral or by staying in the EU mainstream, German politics manages to avoid confrontations and clashes that might end with interference of its business relations. But how a relative abstinence from foreign policy and a global network of economic

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relations are related to each other over the longer term is subject to speculation. Foreign policy experts rarely look at the economic aspects, and economists tend to ignore foreign policy.

### IN THE EUROPEAN MAINSTREAM

Germany is moving towards the position of a veto-power. It is not questioning the deeply embedded nature of its foreign policy in the structures of the EU and of the transatlantic alliance. It has no appetite and does not possess the capabilities to become an independent player on the international scene. Berlin is not prepared to play a leadership role, and is also inward-looking, focussed on the economy and the distribution of wealth. It lacks the strategic thinking and analytic capabilities that would be prerequisites for leadership on foreign policy.

Germany does not want to be an active player, and in most cases is more than happy to swim in the European mainstream. But it wants to have a veto when its perceived core interests are touched. Areas of primary concern for Germany are relations with Eastern Europe, Russia and Israel.

Given that background, it is not surprising that Berlin did not push hard for German candidates for top positions in the European External Action Service (EEAS). For Germany, the strengthening of the EU's global role is not a priority.

On security and defence, Germany is ready to continue to cooperate with its EU partners, but only at a very low level. As the limits of German cooperation are increasingly defined by German voters, Berlin must be expected to oppose military expeditions and interventions. Germany will not oppose a Common Security and Defence Policy that remains largely unambitious, with small police training and border security missions. But it is likely to shy away from any larger, potentially controversial missions. Ambitions to turn the EU into a global security provider will be frustrated by a Germany that is swinging back to its strictly pacifist stance.

As far as its policy towards the Arab spring is concerned, Germany's rejection of the Libya intervention does not reflect a broader regional strategy. Besides Berlin's close relationship with Israel, described as a German 'national interest' by Angela Merkel, Germany has no policy in the region. As usual, Germany will continue to look for the middle ground. It is ready to use, together with its EU partners, negative and positive incentives cautiously to support reform. And even with regards to Israel, Berlin is moving closer towards the EU mainstream, more open to using pressure on Israel to achieve a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

### LOWERING AMBITIONS

France and Britain must recognise that aspirations to turn the EU into a fully-fledged global power which would also have military power are not shared by Germany. The British and French discourse about national decline and about the need to turn the EU into a world power on equal footing with the US and China has no equivalent in Germany. No leading politician or party in Germany makes the case for pooling and sharing capabilities on an EU level in order to build a strong European military. The message from the Libya crisis is loud and clear: Germany wants the EU to remain a soft power.

Any attempt to turn the EU into a more consistent foreign policy actor must start from that premise. A global Europe cannot be built following the model of the British or the French nation-state - because this will be vetoed by Germany. Hard power will therefore essentially remain in the hands of the states; the EU will be limited to non-military means of power.

But soft power *is* power. Even if it lacks the big stick, the EU can achieve a lot - if it sharpens its tools and moves towards a common foreign policy culture. Instead of fading away amidst dreams of building a muscular European world power, Europeans would be well advised to

## 6

focus on more modest, practical ways to improve their instruments.

Europe's collective weight can matter if is turned into political will. The trick is to keep all the main players on board. France, Britain and Germany must find a way to bridge their different and in many ways conflicting foreign policy cultures. The Libya crisis, during which the US took a back seat, has brought into the open the antagonism between German pacifism on the one hand and British and French ambitions on the other. The future of a common foreign policy depends on both: on the acceptance and appreciation of these differences, and on the capability to achieve what is possible within these limitations.

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