

## GERMAN DEFENSE POLICY: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Since the end of the Cold War, few European armed forces have been subject to greater reform pressure than Germany's Bundeswehr. While Germany has increasingly participated in international stabilization missions since the mid-1990s, deficits remain in the areas of strategic deployability, global reconnaissance, and interoperable command and control systems and assets. The skepticism towards Bundeswehr missions abroad, due to historical reasons, continues to play an important role in shaping domestic opinions on German defense policy.



German UNIFIL soldier on patrol off the Lebanese coast

Alex Grimm/Reuters

In publishing its "White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr 2006" in October 2006, the German government presented a fundamental security policy conception for the first time in 12 years. The defense policy guidelines published by then-defense minister Peter Struck in May 2003 were a mandatory conceptual basis for German defense policy and its defense ministry. However, it is only with the new white paper that the entire cabinet of the federal government has responded to the far-reaching changes in security policy that have determined the international system since the sea change of 1989/90 and especially since 11 September 2001.

As much as German security policy may follow the maxims of the Federal Republic of West Germany before reunification, there is hardly an army in Europe that has

been forced to respond more comprehensively to the transformation of the security policy framework than the Bundeswehr. While the challenges have increased noticeably in the past few years, discrepancies remain between the mission, the tasks, and the assets available to the German armed forces.

### Functional and geographic expansion

After the reunification of Germany, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and the evaporation of the one-dimensional Soviet threat, the scenario of a major inter-state conflict along the fault lines of the former Iron Curtain also became a thing of the past. The necessity of the Forward Defense Strategy of employing high-tech tank armies in close proximity to borders against an expansive territorial force within weapons range vanished. Germany

as a former frontline state in the Cold War became a center of gravity in European politics. And Central Europe, in the words of former German defense minister Volker Rühle, became a "strategic zone of tranquility".

In analyzing the state of affairs in terms of security policy, the white paper follows the logic of the European Security Strategy, according to which classic security policy threats have been gradually replaced by new risks such as terrorism, proliferation and rearmament trends, regional conflicts, the illegal arms trade, obstacles to development, and fragile statehood. These risks have varying degrees of effect on Germany's contemporary foreign and domestic security. In order to be able to manage them, the Federal Republic follows an expanded conception of security in both geographical and functional terms. Defense can no longer be geographically limited. It is perceived as the maintenance of national security. Consequently, defense provision includes stabilization missions, conflict prevention, and crisis management. In this context, the new international commitments serve as a legitimizing framework for the reshaping of the armed forces. This reform process is marked by elements of both continuity and change.

### Multilateralism as the traditional guiding concept

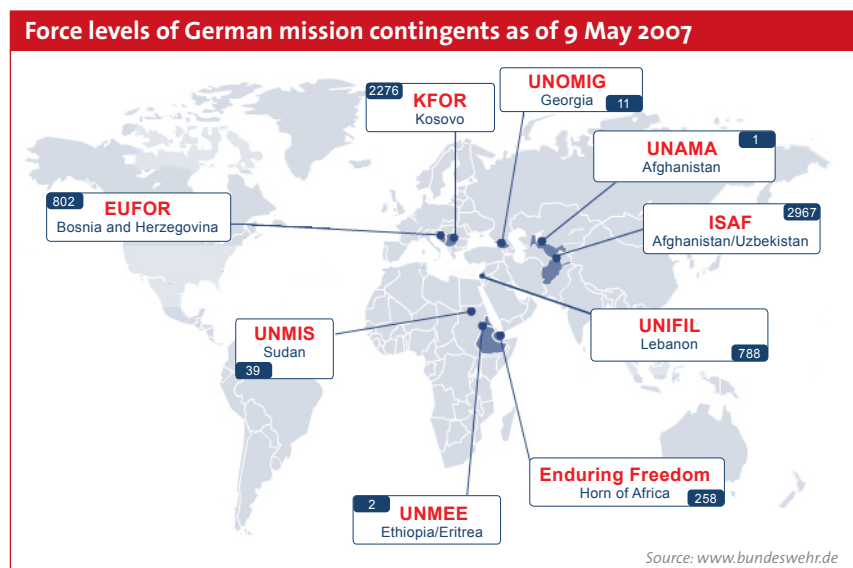
Irrespective of the fundamental change in the international framework and the new tasks it has taken on, Germany since reunification has followed the foreign and security policy traditions of the pre-1989 Federal

Republic. Since the early days of the Cold War, the integration of West Germany into the Euro-Atlantic structures has offered the Western powers security – not only together with, and on behalf of, but also against a resurgent Germany. In return, the policy of integration gave the Federal Republic the opportunity not only to seek recognition as a state with equal rights, but also to have a formative influence on the shape of Western security policy. When the federal government declared its willingness in 1990 to continue its policy of integration and voluntary incorporation into the Euro-Atlantic structures, it dispelled both its allies' and skeptic neighbors' fears of a Germany that would begin again to vacillate between East and West. The German question had been resolved, and the attendant security dilemma had been overcome.

Just as territorial defense during the East-West conflict was only conceivable in a multilateral context, Germany's security policy measures today are embedded within cooperative action in conjunction with allies and partners. In this connection, a key role is attributed to NATO and the European Union. In both of these organizations, Germany has argued in favor of vertical and horizontal integration – to include new tasks, in view of the changes in the security policy environment; and to include new members, in order to expand the space of security and stability in Europe. NATO as the traditional copula connecting North America and Europe has become a pan-European security institution with an increased political orientation, tasked with global missions in the area of stability projection, conflict prevention, and crisis management. The EU has developed into a political union with comprehensive foreign and security policy tasks located mainly on the European periphery. These two developments are viewed by the federal government as complementary processes.

### Crisis management as the new main task

The Federal Republic has drawn two key conclusions from the fact that Germany's territory is unlikely to be threatened by conventional forces in the foreseeable future. First of all, the Bundeswehr's contributions today are regarded as part of a comprehensive conception of "civil crisis prevention", with an emphasis on the principle of coherent action encompassing all government portfolios and integrating all available instruments. Initial



steps towards building up a network structure were taken with the construction of the "Foreign Office Crisis Response Center", the "National Situation and Command Center for Airspace Security", the "Joint Counterterrorism Center", and several federal and state bodies in the area of civil defense, all of which are designed to be part of a networked security policy. However, an effective interlocking of instruments ranging from domestic counterterrorism measures to development aid and military action is not feasible by any stretch of the imagination, as discussions on security policy in Germany continue to be determined by individual viewpoints and particular departmental considerations.

Secondly, the Bundeswehr's tasks have been reshuffled in terms of priorities: International conflict prevention and crisis management are the tasks that shape force structure and have moved to first place in the mission spectrum. Skills and capacities that have only been maintained for traditional territorial defense are no longer required. The fundamental transformation from a training force towards deployable, flexible, more 'joint' forces capable of engaging in international conflict prevention and crisis management and from alliance-based territorial defense to international operations in a multilateral context can be seen in the fact that Germany has contributed more than 200,000 troops to international peace missions since the early 1990s. At the same time, the mission spectrum has continually broadened. However, in consideration of the historically determined culture of restraint, all administrations have gone to great lengths to define the missions as

logistical support, monitoring, or humanitarian missions. The only exceptions were *Operation Allied Force* against the government in Belgrade and the deployment of the Special Forces Command (Kommando Spezialkräfte, KSK) to Afghanistan.

In addition to the functional expansion, the Bundeswehr also implemented a geographic broadening of its mission spectrum. While the humanitarian missions in Cambodia, Iraq, and Somalia in the early 1990s were among the minor deployments, the Bundeswehr today supplies one of the largest international contingents on the Balkans as well as in Afghanistan and off the coast of Lebanon. All of these missions took place in a multilateral framework in reaction to international expectations or requests – and thus occasionally also independently of Germany's own strategic interests. Furthermore, these missions were mostly carried out in a largely pacified environment and with the consent of the parties to the conflict. German troops took on leadership tasks in civilian aspects of crisis prevention and post-conflict operations, but not in peace enforcement missions.

### Transformation of the armed forces

The shift from a multi-layered forward defense deployment for repelling a possible military attack to stability projection in a geographically expanded security policy environment has confronted post-unification Germany with unique challenges. More than any other armed forces of the two alliance blocs, the Bundeswehr and the National People's Army of the German Democratic Republic were designed in terms of their mission, tasks, structure,

and training for the concept of territorial defense. After reunification, Germany had one of the largest armies in Europe, but unlike the armed forces of Britain and France, which were traditionally geared towards power projection, the Bundeswehr was completely unprepared for the new security situation. It was therefore understandable that Berlin, while taking on a leading role in the vertical and horizontal expansion of NATO and the EU, was nevertheless unable to keep up with Britain and France in shaping the operative aspects of the changed alliance strategy.

Since the structure and abilities of the Bundeswehr remained aligned towards the operative requirements of territorial defense for a long time even after the hesitant redefinition of its mission in the mid-1990s, Germany's armed forces still have substantial shortcomings in key capability areas more than 15 years after the end of the Cold War. These deficiencies include the areas of leadership capabilities,

| Operational requirements / commitments by Germany |   |
|---|---|
| NATO Response Force                               | up to 15,000 troops, of which 5000 are on standby and 10,000 involved in preparation and follow-up activities |
| European Headline Goal                            | up to 18,000 troops   |
| UN Standby Arrangement System                     | up to 1,000 troops  |
| Rescue and evacuation operations                  | up to 1,000 troops  |

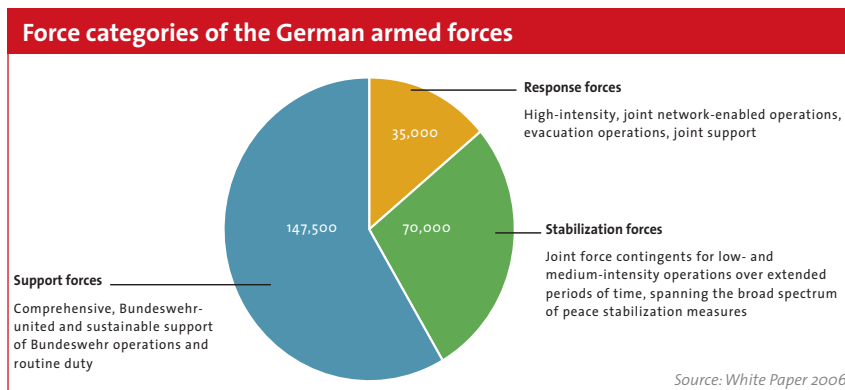
Source: White Paper 2006

sification of force categories is intended as a measure to alleviate this deficiency. At the same time, it should meet the increasing requirements of peace support missions.

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political considerations. Parts of the population are generally opposed to the use of force in crises. There is no broad agreement on the necessity of foreign military operations, and in fact support for such missions has even decreased further in recent years. In the run-up to the decision-making process, politicians are not only guided by the historically conditioned culture of restraint, but also take into account public sentiment or their perceptions thereof. Thus, not only are military missions generally questioned, but mandates may also be defined too narrowly, with negative consequences for the overall multilateral mission, such as in Afghanistan.

In the coming years, German security policy will continue to be determined by tensions between the expectations of allies on the one hand, and the traditions of German post-war policies and the preferences of the German people on the other. Furthermore, in the future, the German claim to equal partnership will increasingly meet with demands to supply the necessary funding. Far beyond the demands of individual missions, it is an indispensable requirement for a balanced alliance such as NATO, as well as for the EU as a strategic actor, that Germany implement the radical reforms of the defense white paper in a determined manner and harmonize the mission, tasks, and funding of the German armed forces.



Source: White Paper 2006

intelligence-gathering and reconnaissance, mobility, efficiency in action, support and sustainability, as well as protection. While the defense policy guidelines of 2003 had introduced radical reform steps, it is the white paper of 2006 that, as an official government document, underlines the urgency of implementing those reforms. This created the possibility of improving capabilities for global force projection, a greater response capability, and a high degree of sustainability. To this end, the armed forces are divided into three categories – intervention, stabilization, and support forces – which are trained, equipped, and deployed according to their respective missions.

With around 7,300 troops deployed in international missions, Germany is currently operating at the limit of its capabilities. It is unable to deploy more than 10 per cent of its forces to foreign theaters. The reclas-

sification of force categories is intended as a measure to alleviate this deficiency. At the same time, it should meet the increasing requirements of peace support missions. While the available funds continue to decrease in real terms, a reduction of the total force to 250,000 troops while maintaining conscription should allow the share of investments within overall defense expenditures to remain constant at over 30 per cent. This amount would, however, still remain unmistakably lower than comparable spending by major European allies Britain and France. The same applies to the share of German defense spending as a percentage of GDP. While London and Paris already increased their defense budgets in 2001, a freeze was imposed on the German defense budget, and expenditures have been reduced in relative terms. As a percentage of the overall budget, Germany's defense expenditures are below average compared to other NATO member states.

### Domestic aspects of security policy

Against the structural background of the Cold War, German security policy until 1989/90 ultimately enjoyed the support of public opinion. However, the tectonic shifts in the international system have resulted in a situation where Germany's foreign and security policy actions are subject to stronger influence of domestic

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