



Germany's Geopolitical Role in an Age of Great Power Rivalries

III. Security and defence policy

by *Benedikt Meng and Stefan Scheller*

The authors are members of the Working Group of Young Foreign Policy Experts. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of organisations with which they are associated.

- ▶ The Bundestag needs to enhance its structures in the area of security and defence policy. Since the 1980s, its committees have tended to work in parallel to each other, but now it would be useful to take a more networked approach and build the Bundestag's strategic capability, for example by setting up an expert parliamentary committee for strategic foresight.
- ▶ The federal government should support the proposed transformation of the Federal Security Council into a National Security Council in order to improve the management and synchronisation of German security policy. Efforts should also be made to establish a counterpart at EU level in the form of a European Security Council to consolidate a common strategic culture.
- ▶ For the EU, acquiring strategic autonomy in the area of security and defence policy is –along with capacity building – primarily a training mandate. It is already in a position to draw on certain harmonised or common training mechanisms.

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Germany and the EU are increasingly finding themselves in a world of great power rivalries and systemic competition. This is affecting almost every aspect of international relations. It is hampering multilateral cooperation, impacting world trade and technology policy, and having an effect on conflict situations linked to security and defence policy. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated and intensified the global power shifts and tensions that have been observed over recent years and that posed a challenge to Germany even before the current crisis. This is especially true of the rivalry between China and the US. Germany and Europe cannot remain neutral in this respect. The transatlantic alliance has to remain a cornerstone of German foreign policy. Nevertheless, Berlin will have to find a way of working with its European partners to find answers to the immense challenges they face in this age of great power rivalries.

In three related papers, members of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Working Group of Young Foreign Policy Experts address the question of how Germany can assert itself in a world where competition between the great powers is on the rise. The papers are divided into three areas: strategic foreign policy (I), economic and technological policy (II), and security and defence policy (III), and provide recommendations for action for Germany's policymakers.

1. Geostrategic status quo

The geopolitical realities of 2020 are posing some major strategic challenges for Germany and its EU and NATO allies. The crises in the neighbourhood of southern Europe have posed numerous foreign policy and security challenges for Germany and Europe, such as transnational terrorism, fragile political systems and humanitarian disasters. And after its interventions in Syria and Ukraine, Russia is now expanding its strategic intentions in North Africa, just off the coast of the EU. The forces currently deployed in Libya threaten to build a bridgehead in Europe's sphere of influence. Meanwhile, China is establishing itself as a counterweight to the West (including militarily) and to the existing rule-based international order, representing the greatest systemic challenge of the 21st century. Common challenges such as climate change and global health crises like the Covid-19 pandemic are threatening to widen the rifts still further.

The complexity of the strategic challenges involved makes it imperative for countries to cooperate. Europe must be united and resolute in defending its common values and interests. Germany needs to demonstrate stronger leadership in this area. The focus here is on the core elements of its (common) capacity to assess, make decisions and take action on security policy, which is then dealt with in the political, military and economic dimension.

The complexity of the strategic challenges involved makes it imperative for states to cooperate

2. Demonstrating the capacity to make political decisions and take decisive action

The principle of executive prerogative applies in security and defence policy. However, the Bundestag is not in a satisfactory position to evaluate an overarching commitment by the federal government. This is why parliament should enhance its structure in the area of security and defence in order to continue to be a hub for transparent and democratic debate. It would make sense to replace the parallel committee structure that has existed since the 1980s with a more networked approach, and to give committees more authority than that enjoyed by the weak subcommittees that exist at present. It is also important to consolidate the Bundestag's strategic capability, for example by establishing a parliamentary expert council for strategic foresight. The orientation towards trends and dangers provided by this body would take the parliamentary debate forward and focus it on the question of how to match our values and interests with actual capabilities. In addition, parliament's right to co-determine the mandate of foreign missions conducted by the Bundeswehr should be reformed. The federal government would be well advised to examine the results of the Rühle Commission of 2014, update them as required, and implement them in order to improve the decision-making process.

The structure of Bundestag committees needs to change

Closely linked to the debate on Germany's decision-making capacity is the coordination of key ministries, which often require more effective steering and synchronisation. In the Federal Security Council (BSR), the federal government already has a formal council that serves as a coordination and control body for security-related cabinet issues. But in fact the Council only handles decisions on arms exports. Germany needs to more effectively harmonise and coordinate its interests and issues relating to foreign, defence and economic policy, national security and development policy. This requires a comprehensive, integrative national security strategy that no longer focuses solely on protecting Germany's people and territory but also takes a more joined-up approach to current and future opportunities and risks in a strategic foresight for society.

A comprehensive, integrative national security strategy to more clearly align and coordinate its interests

Political responsibility for a national security strategy should lie with the Federal Security Council, which should be turned into a National Security Council (NSC). A number of scientific and political proposals are already on the table. It is essential to turn the NSC into a preparatory body for strategic decisions by supporting it with an appropriate infrastructure and expert knowledge from federal ministries. The establishment of a counterpart at EU level in the form of a European Security Council (ESC) should also be sought in order to consolidate a common strategic culture.

The Federal Security Council should become a National Security Council

3. Developing a common strategic culture

In recent years, Germany has increased its defence budget and military alliance capabilities within the EU and NATO. Whether we call it strategic autonomy, strategic independence or something else, a degree of European emancipation on security issues is based on a common strategic culture. This starts in the minds of the generals and officers who lead the armed forces in each Member State. For the EU, along with developing capabilities, acquiring strategic autonomy in security and defence policy is primarily a training mandate. It is already in a position to draw on certain harmonised or common training mechanisms. However, all too often, different procedures or language barriers still stand in the way of harmonisation. In order to ensure an overarching leadership capability, it is important to develop a common understanding of leadership organisation, behaviours and support. It is, therefore, important to introduce future leaders of the European armed forces to a common strategic culture at an early stage.

Achieving strategic autonomy for the EU is also a training mandate

This should be based on the ability to evaluate, decide and act, and should, therefore, be part of a harmonised officer training across Europe. It is, therefore, necessary to expand and deepen EU-wide joint training for military officers. The European Security and Defence College (ESDC) already exists as a (virtual) institution for joint European officer training. In combination with existing training facilities for staff officers in EU Member States, such as the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL), the ESDC should also be enhanced and its content optimised. The language of instruction at BALTDEFCOL is English and the content has already been optimised for use by all branches of the military. The establishment of a common training institution would not only send a strong signal for European integration, but also – due to deployment – highlight the strategic importance of the EU's Baltic states. The uniform understanding of leadership resulting from this common training would provide one of the foundations for a future common European strategic culture.

Create a common
European officer
training programme

Another component of this foundation would be a common perception of security policy challenges. The threat analysis that forms part of the "Strategic Compass" announced by the German presidency of the EU Council is a prelude to this. In this context, it is important to clearly identify strategic challenges for the EU's security and defence policy interests. In this respect, the EU Intelligence Centre (EUINTCEN) could play a key role by coordinating intelligence and carrying out expert evaluations of the situation reports that form the basis of the threat analysis. The final analysis should record the results geographically and thematically in matrix form. By prioritising the geographical and thematic challenges, it is possible to calculate factors such as the level of ambition (LoA) to form the nucleus of a common military doctrine.

Carry out a joint
analysis of security
policy challenges

In addition, the strategic orientation of the European Defence Union (EDU) must be underpinned by enhanced and consolidated capability planning. To this end, the existing eleven capability clusters in the 2018 Capability Development Plan should also be prioritised in the next review process in order to better serve the priorities of the common LoA. The close interlocking and implementation monitoring of PESCO projects (Permanent Structured Cooperation) has to remain a constant. Consequently, PESCO projects of strategic importance should also be prioritised. Member States should be encouraged to participate in them on a preferential basis and projects should be subject to a strategic review in rotation. It should also be possible to connect and synchronise all processes with the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), the Framework Nations Concept (FNC) and Smart Defence in terms of the "European pillar in NATO". The principle of no unnecessary duplication still applies.

Move forward
with a European
pillar in NATO

4. Strengthening industrial cooperation

To date, European integration has been driven by economic cooperation. The EU's weight in international relations is based on the economic strength of its members and a united voice on trade issues. For this reason, the establishment of the EDU has primarily been achieved through industrial cooperation and economic incentives. This fact was underlined once again when the European Commission established the DG Defence Industry & Space (DEFIS). Under Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, political leaders are aware that European consensus is currently strongest in the area of industrial cooperation. The planned European Defence Fund (EDF) is in the starting blocks, a key instrument designed to give a major boost of 13 billion euros to enhance the research and capacity building capabilities of the EDU from 2021 onwards. In the negotiations between institutions on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021–2027, the amount earmarked for the EDF was opposed by the European Council. The planned adjustment of the MFF 2021–2027 due to the Covid-19 pandemic could also lead to a further reduction in the EDF

budget. The EDU cannot be built solely on industrial cooperation and economic incentives, but this potent vehicle should be used to help achieve long-term political goals. Key technologies and competences for the future of industry should be identified and uniform arms export criteria based on the EU's common position should be implemented. European demand and capability planning and harmonisation also has to be conducted in such a way that Member States are ultimately in a position to build their military capabilities, produce industrial goods in full, and continue to use them in the long term.

Implement uniform
arms export criteria

Strengthening the European pillar in NATO requires the ongoing development and harmonisation of the capabilities of the EU Member States. The focus here is on countries whose armed forces have inadequate operational readiness, lack equipment, or have obsolete weapon systems. A European Strategic Investment Programme (ESIP) would be used within the EDU for capacity building. Alongside the EDF and the planned European Peace Facility (EPF), this would be a third financial pillar for the EDU. The focus would be on internal upgrading through training and equipment, institutional capacity building and multinational and joint military exercises. Once fields of action have been prioritised and the Member States have submitted funding applications to the European Commission, in accordance with the PESCO agreements this extra-budgetary EU programme could put in place upgrading measures in the target countries and reduce the pressure for arms exports. This would serve to advance the harmonisation of European weapons systems. In addition to internal upgrading, in a second strand of the programme the ESIP would facilitate the initial "enablement" of CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) missions by providing initial financing. Separate from the Athena mechanism, this could focus on the preparation of operational contingents for CSDP missions and the financing of Operation and Force Headquarters (OHQ/FHQ) and host nation support (HNS) activities.

Enhance and harmonise the capabilities
of EU Member States

5. Germany must expand its role

There is no doubt that the expectations of our European and transatlantic partners towards Germany have been growing over recent years. In addition, Germany is facing a wide range of security and defence policy challenges. Radical and lasting changes to the political, military and economic spheres are needed if Germany is to defend our common values and play a key role in ensuring the EU holds its own in a world of great power rivalries and systemic competition. Germany's contribution should, therefore, not merely be measured in terms of political ambition and military capabilities, but also in terms of overall decision-making power.

Expectations
of Germany are
on the rise

Editorial information

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For more information (German only) on the Working Group of Young Foreign Policy Experts, see: www.kas.de/jungeaussepolitiker

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Publisher: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. 2020, Berlin
Design & typesetting: yellow too, Pasiek Horntrich GbR

ISBN 978-3-95721-779-0



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