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Foreign and Security Policy Germany in a Changing World



Germany in a Changing World

Writing for the autumn issue of World Policy Journal, published in New York, the Vice President of Federal Academy for Security Policy argues for Germany to adopt a critical leadership position aimed at common goals with others, and for others within EU, NATO, and the UN. A commitment by countries like itself to decide earlier, faster, and more decisively is essential for preserving peace and security for ourselves and others.

by Armin Staigis

At the Munich Security Conference earlier this year, the President of Germany, Joachim Gauck asked the following key questions: “Has Germany already adequately recognized the new threats and the changing structure of the international order? Has Germany shown enough initiative to ensure the future viability of the networks of norms, friends, and alliances, which after all brought us peace in freedom and democracy in prosperity?” A moment later he took it upon himself to provide the answers: “Germany should make a more substantial contribution, and it should make it earlier and more decisively if it is to be a good partner.”

His remarks prompted an intensive debate – immediately narrowed to the issue of Germany’s engagement in and contributions to current and future military operations. However, his remarks were meant as a wake-up call designed to start a much broader discussion of Germany’s role and responsibilities in a changing world, taking into account the broad spectrum of the nation’s power and influence. So far, the debate has failed to engage much of the German public. Still, some now understand that our country cannot play a leading role in economic and financial politics within the European Union and beyond, while at the same time remaining more or less an observer when foreign and security politics are at stake.

Significant changes

The Ukrainian crisis has clearly brought about a substantial change. Germany has taken the initiative and risks within the so-called Weimar Triangle, a grouping of Poland, Germany, and France, and within the European Union. There, Germany has been trying to define and pursue common positions as prerequisites for any approach toward Russia.

The second substantial change was made recently when Germany broke with its long-held policy not to supply lethal weapons to conflict zones. The German government decided to supply weapons to the Kurds in Iraq, in concert with the EU policy on the conflict in northern Iraq. Germany has not only backed the actions of its allies and others, but has taken on its own responsibilities in addressing the threat posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, known as ISIS, which has occupied large parts of Iraq and slaughtered thousands of people.

But there is more to be done. Germany, and in particular the German public, has to understand how dependent its own peace, freedom, and prosperity is on this dynamic and changing world. A broad analysis, like the Review 2014 initiated by the German Foreign Office, is needed to define “long lines” (“lange Linien”) of Germany’s role and responsibilities, including goals, interests, instruments, and resources.

Since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, foreign and security politics were largely determined by six major factors, which contributed to the reunification of the country and the overcoming of the divide in Europe. Though times have changed dramatically since then, these factors must be preserved and further developed – taking into account current and future political challenges and concerns.


France, Germany and the EU

The reconciliation between France and Germany, finalized with the Élysée Treaty of 1963, was an historical achievement. It turned out to be the precondition for the European amalgamation that eventually led to the establishment of the European Union. The Franco-German cooperation as part of this process has been called the “European engine”. When this “engine” was running, Europe made progress. Nothing has changed in this respect – yet. Europe’s political and economic power is located in its center, where France and Germany must develop and pursue the required initiatives for Europe’s future.

At the same time, they must take into account the interests of the other EU members and need to cooperate with these countries closely. A core requirement

for continuing this approach is that France and Germany perceive themselves as equal partners. Yet there are some doubts stemming largely from Germany’s dominance and France’s weakness in economic terms, as well as German reluctance particularly on matters of defense policy. Both states must strengthen their bilateral political dialogue on these issues, with the goal of continuing to strengthen the “European engine”.

It might sound rather contradictory to argue for strengthening the EU while nationalistic movements are becoming stronger in Europe and one important member state, the United Kingdom, is threatening the Union with withdrawal. But it must be emphasized that the European Union actually is a success story, unprecedented in history. It can be an example to other regions on this globe. Moreover, a united Europe is the only answer by the old continent to the new challenges in a dramatically changing world.

 The Franco-German “engine” must be kept alive – and Europeans should hope that one day the UK will join the two countries.

Only free and united can the EU be an acknowledged global actor, preserving its own interests while also contributing to stability and peace. The economic and financial crisis that debuted in 2007 has clearly demonstrated that Europe as a union is already a global actor. Thus, it’s about time that the EU becomes a global player in the field of what is called the Common Foreign and Security Politics of the Union.

First steps have been taken, even in defense policy, but much remains to be done, not as a competitor of the United States, but in concert. Germany, as a leading state within Europe, carries a particular responsibility to move this forward. The Franco-German “engine” must be kept alive – and Europeans should hope that one day the UK will join the two countries in leading in this particular field with all its knowledge, experience, and resources.

Western alliance

In the early years of the Federal Republic, the conservative former Chancellor Konrad Adenauer anchored and embedded West Germany into the Western alliance, one of the wisest decisions in modern German history. Today it has become more trying to argue for preserving or even enhancing the transatlantic relationship – with an instinctive American disengagement from Europe, the U.S. “pivot to Asia”, and the growing mistrust due to the NSA spying scandal and other espionage incidents which have even higher visibility in Germany than in the United States. Germans are asking, “Why do they spy on us when they could and should talk to us?”

Trust between states and people is of extraordinary political value. This should not +



Pushing for initiative: German president Joachim Gauck meets US Secretary of State John Kerry at the 50th Munich Security Conference, January 2014

be neglected by Americans. German irritations about the United States as a viable partner can have a deep and lasting impact on transatlantic relations.

Political ideas or initiatives should normally never be pursued without alternatives. But with respect to good and trusting transatlantic relations, there is no alternative for either the United States or Europe. No conceivable alternative exists for either partner that would allow it to define and pursue common positions – most recently toward Russia in the Ukrainian crisis. We share so many values, and most of our interests are identical. We are partners within the North Atlantic Alliance. Looking at current and future risks and threats, NATO must be strengthened to ensure the security of the U.S. and Europe. In this context, time might be ripe to discuss openly and frankly how freedom and security is to be balanced in this new technological era. Additionally, a debate is essential on a more equal burden sharing between Europe and the United States regarding defense.

There are also opportunities for improvement in the field of economic policy. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Program (TTIP) would combine the two strongest economic centers of the world, with advantages for both the United States and the European Union. TTIP would bring more economic growth, more job creation, and better social standards if both sides were willing to compromise. It would also send a clear signal to all other global partners by setting common

standards. Furthermore, such a pact could be an impetus to search for additional common solutions in transatlantic relations.

Eastward bound

With the Ukraine crisis in mind, it might sound strange to argue for a partnership with Russia. But even during the coldest periods of the Cold War, the Western nations kept political contacts alive with Moscow. In the end, the Ostpolitik (“Eastern Policy”) of Chancellor Willy Brandt contributed very much to the process which tore down the Berlin Wall and overcame the division of Europe. There is no doubt that any kind of partnership policy with President Putin will be difficult. So it is of utmost importance that the United States and the European Union remain united and firmly committed to a common policy toward Russia.

Germany must take a leading role in developing this policy within the EU, given its wide-ranging relations with Russia. This includes bearing possible negative effects on its own economy and sharing the necessary burden in military terms. Such a policy may also require patience and endurance if Putin maintains his nationalistic and hegemonic politics. Russia is an essential part of Europe, and thus the Western nations have to deal with this country and maintain communication and consultation based on their own strength and unity.

Europe as a whole

The 1975 Helsinki Charter – the core of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) process – laid the foundation for the beginning of the end of the Soviet regime and the Warsaw Pact. Citizens in Central and Eastern Europe demanded human rights and the rule of law, referring to this Charter, while succeeding in overcoming the unnatural division of Europe. In 1990, all European states, together with the United States and Canada, as well as the still existing Soviet Union, declared the objective of a “Europe whole and free”.

A quarter century later the question must be asked if this really has been achieved. Sadly, the Ukrainian crisis provides us with a negative answer. Not all countries are sovereign and independent, and not all people are free and living under the rule of law in democracy and peace, particularly not those in Russia and its neighborhood. What went wrong, and what remains to be done?

First, the EU member states, the United States, and Canada must care more in political, economic, and military terms about the states in Eastern Europe, which are neither members of NATO nor the EU. Second, a common Western policy toward and with Russia must be pursued. Finally, the Organization for Security +

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), successor to the CSCE, must be invigorated with a special focus on peace and security.

Within the UN

Not until 1973 did both Germanys, the communist East and the free West, become members of the United Nations. After 1990, reunited Germany has always taken an active role within the United Nations and is one of its largest financial contributors. During the last UN reform process, Germany sought, in vain, a permanent seat in the Security Council. Unfortunately, UN structures, especially the Security Council itself, still reflect the world order of 1945. All reform endeavors in this respect have failed, limiting or even impeding efforts and initiatives in the important fields of peace, security, stability, and development. This leads to one of the most serious deficiencies in world politics.

Since 2011, the disastrous civil war in Syria has been the prime example. The UN is the only global forum providing the framework for a rule-based international order, including the unique right to legitimize the use of force outside the universal right of self-defense. So strengthening the United Nations and its affiliate organizations, while taking on its national responsibilities within the UN remains an important goal of German foreign policy. At the same time, Germany is fully aware of the fact that improvements can only be achieved in close cooperation with its Western partners and in concert with such other major powers as China, Russia, India, and Brazil.

Globalization has created new political, economic, and social networks, which now span the globe. This reality has caused an unprecedented degree of interdependencies, but also vulnerabilities, with profound consequences for Germany and its partners. Germany is more exposed to globalization than many other countries and must therefore consider these interdependencies and their concurrent vulnerabilities in developing its political approaches.

Rising powers, failed states

This group of rapidly rising nations includes first and foremost China, but also developing countries such as India, Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia. Some share such values as the rule of law and good governance. But many do not see the West as a role model and are reluctant to grant political and social rights and freedoms. The current and probable future focus of these states is on their eco-



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conomic growth, which may generate economic cooperation, but also challenges competition with Western countries, including Germany. The willingness of these rising states to take on responsibilities for peace, security, and stability within the international order is rather limited to their respective regions and mainly aimed at preserving their own interests.

In the case of China, an aggressive policy toward its neighbors leads to a continuing state of high tension in East Asia, where a balancing policy of the United States in support of these neighboring countries is of utmost importance. However, even this cannot guarantee peace in that region. Any conflict there would have serious global implications. Inevitably, these polycentric developments will lead to competition, even to conflicts by the new economic and political powers with the West. A concerted Western policy, which combines engagement where possible and containment where necessary, must be further developed. The EU and Germany need to play an active role. The best case scenario should lead to a new architecture of the international order with these new powers appropriately represented, while preventing the formation of new blocks.

At the same time, the international community is faced with too many fragile or failed states. In all too many such nations, what begins as an internal conflict quickly spills over to neighbors, quite often engulfing an entire region. In a globalized world, a local problem can quickly develop into a regional, even international crisis. However, it becomes a problem when the regional, even international community is not engaged early enough and proactively. During the last two decades' crises, conflicts, even wars in the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia offer clear evidence that the international community acted or reacted too late, or worse yet, not at all.

Conflict prevention is the catchphrase. It requires the willingness of political leaders and their voters to act in a timely fashion by using all instruments required, if necessary also military means, to end and resolve a conflict. With the experience of less successful military engagements in the last decade and conscious of their reduced resources, the United States and Europe do feel exhausted regarding any further international involvement. However, when analyzing political, economic, and social fragility in many countries, largely within the European neighborhood, it seems high time to develop a renewed common and comprehensive policy on conflict prevention. In concert with a global American policy, the EU, and therefore Germany as one of its leading states, has a particular responsibility for preserving peace and security in and for Europe by using its wide range of instruments.

Privatizing violence

Globalization has accelerated the privatization and individualization of violence in its major forms of terrorism and organized crime. Fragile or failed states combined with political and religious extremism nurture both. However, the negative effects of terrorism and organized crime spill over to other nations and regions with profound implications for internal security. The situation is worsening due to the fact that terror organizations are occupying and controlling entire geographical areas, sometimes across state borders, such as Hamas in Gaza, ISIS in Syria and Iraq, the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Boko Haram in Nigeria. Military operations alone cannot resolve these problems. In many cases they may even generate more hatred, especially if Western states get involved.

There is no simple answer on how to deal with such threats. What is required is an internationally agreed upon, comprehensive political approach employing all instruments of diplomacy, economic, and development cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and decisive military action, if necessary, with the main effort directed toward the suffering local population. Furthermore, close cooperation with reliable local and regional authorities and organizations is imperative. At least, good governance and economic and social welfare at an appropriate level have the effect of eradicating the influence of extremists. Only the United States and the EU are able and also obliged to pursue such a policy due to their political, economic, and military capabilities, but more importantly due to their commitment to universal norms like human dignity, freedom, and democracy.

As for organized crime, with its involvement in human, drug, and weapons trafficking, and money laundering, the roots are mainly to be found in fragile and failed states. But the involvement of criminal elements of our own societies is immense and alarming. These criminals, many with white collars, misuse the opportunities of globalization – open borders and open societies – to their personal profit and by doing so diminish or even destroy the reputation and credibility of the West as a role model for the rule of law and justice. Solutions can only be found internally with swift and sure criminal proceedings, and externally with an enhanced information exchange and better international cooperation of police and judicial authorities.

New nuclear threats

In addition to the known nuclear armed states, at least 30 other countries have the capacity to join the nuclear club in a rather short timeframe. Such a prospect would make this world a much more dangerous place to live. The ongoing P5+1

(five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany, in Europe named the E3+3) negotiations with the Iranians should be seen in this broader context. If Iran became a nuclear weapons state, it would not only destabilize the Middle East but open Pandora’s box, kickstarting a new nuclear arms race with severe implications for security on a global dimension.

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As the present course of the negotiations indicates, this nuclear reality is also understood by Moscow and Beijing. The United States, the EU, and the three European negotiating partners, Great Britain, France, and Germany, have to keep Russia and China on board and moving toward an acceptable solution with Iran during the next months. An agreement with Iran is an essential step, probably a prerequisite for a successful review conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2015. This treaty

is still a controversial and to preserve fragile component of international law. Adaptations and additional commitments by nuclear-armed states may be requested during this conference and may even be necessary. But its preservation is of utmost importance to global security and peace.

Climate change

Policy makers and the public are still confronted with controversial scientific views on the consequences of the climate change. Whoever and whatever is right, too many have turned a blind eye to this issue, some out of indifference, others to preserve their economic interests. We all notice the effects on the environment and our lives, but there is still a strong reluctance in too many parts of the world, including the West, to consider the medium- and long-term consequences and take the necessary steps now.

If the required measures are not implemented soon, in a few years we will all be exposed to much more serious health risks stemming from increased pollution; living conditions will be severely impacted by weather catastrophes and droughts; and in nearly 50 years, some countries, or at least some parts of them, will have disappeared from this globe as a result of rising water levels. This all will have political, economic, social, and humanitarian repercussions, with an immensely important security dimension.

Germany and many other states have begun to act in a timely and appropriate fashion, addressing their environmental challenges with national initiatives and legislation. But solutions are essential on a global level. It is important that a new UN Climate agreement be prepared for implementation in 2015. The United +

States and the EU should play an active and decisive part in this process, and both should do everything possible to involve China and the developing world.

Demographics

Demographic shifts influence internal politics in countries and regions, while impacting foreign and security policy on a global level – a trend that is only likely to grow in importance. Looking only 15 to 20 years ahead, several assumptions on population figures should be taken into account. The United States will maintain its current level, while Europe’s population may decrease up to 25 percent, though immigration might change this to a certain extent. China’s population will plateau, but Beijing will be confronted with intensifying social problems stemming from an ageing society caused by the one-child-policy. In total contrast, the population of Africa and the Arab world will double within the next 15 years, with 40 percent under the age of 20.

A central question is whether the affected African and Arabic nations will be in a position to provide their young people with a satisfying future. And then there’s the question of how much the West is able and willing to support these countries. Whatever might happen is likely to occur in the European, and therefore German, neighborhood. The current refugee crisis in the Mediterranean region, with unacceptable humanitarian consequences, may provide us with a first impression of what may be at stake.

Furthermore, if we expand our focus to all of North and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the Middle East, we face many states with weak governance, economic, and social structures, which trigger social unrest, violence, and insecurity. Major problems lie ahead of us, which can only be resolved within the affected countries. Due to their close proximity, the EU, with Germany as a leading but also affected nation, must define ways and means to assist and support in close cooperation with these states. Such an approach also requires the engagement of the United States, the rising nations, and the more prosperous Arab countries. Thinking ahead, such initiatives are a prerequisite for preserving our own freedom, prosperity, and internal and external security.

Cyber revolution

Cyber technology must be recognized as a revolution and is influencing nearly all aspects of our lives. Looking back it seems to be that we have not understood the effects of this new technology to the extent necessary, and looking ahead we will need more time to get a full grip on the consequences. Cyberspace provides us with a scale of transparency never known before and with opportunities of par-



New responsibilities: a German soldier of the Camp Marmal Force Protection Group on patrol, North Afghanistan, August 2011

ticipation never experienced. Furthermore, cyber technology has strengthened public officials and the private sector by providing capabilities to monitor and influence, and more critically, to control citizens. So extensive cyber networks suggest new risks and threats to our security are imminent.

Cyber security is the future, demanding challenge for states, their institutions, and infrastructure, including the military, for enterprises and finance institutes, as well as individuals. On the other hand, cyberspace offers an amount of information and opportunities for participation never before seen. This can be used with negative impact by spreading misinformation and propaganda, but also for positive impact like engaging citizens in political and social processes.

Western societies and the global community are confronted with important politico-strategic questions – such as how to preserve our freedoms and human dignity, how to ensure the security of our citizens, and how to balance both in this information age. Germany and all other states are only in a position to determine national legislation with rather limited impact as cyber networks operate globally. So, global solutions are necessary and overdue. As a first step, a legal framework dealing with cyberspace is essential within the UN. The United States carries particular responsibilities on cyber issues by virtue of its dominance in this field. Still, frank and open consultations between Americans and Europeans are necessary to overcome differences on important cyberspace issues – the bal- +

ance between freedom and security of our citizens, leading to a common transatlantic position which could pave the way to a vital global legal framework.

Values and conflicts

States and their citizens are confronted regularly by values and conflicts in this polycentric world. Democratic states with political systems focused on the individual are challenged by authoritarian regimes where a small group rules the collective. Too many countries, particularly some rising nations, are pursuing this authoritarian course. In this sense, China is clearly an authoritarian regime, while Russia certainly seems headed in this direction. Are these states or these political systems attractive to others, in the case of China due to their economic success? What about the attractiveness of our own Western values and way of life?

A comprehensive analysis of the Western model and its impact on the daily life of our citizens might suggest some important answers. Americans and Europeans are fully committed to human dignity, civil liberties, rule of law, and political participation. However, globalization and the economic crisis have undeniably negative effects on our states and their citizens. Societies have become more fragile, social contracts more brittle. All of us within the EU should be concerned about the reality that as many as half the youths in southern EU states are unemployed or do not have a chance to study. Then there are the realities of a widening inequality of wealth and income in our Western societies. We should not harbor the illusion that modern democracies are immune to populist temptations or to anxious attempts to pull up the drawbridges.

On the contrary, we Europeans and Americans alike must strengthen our common values and our way of life by granting even more liberties and participation to our citizens, fighting injustice with all legal and economic means available, and provide our societies, particularly our youth, with attractive future prospects. If this is done successfully at home, it provides us with the instruments and the credibility to advocate for these values and our way of life in our foreign policy. Then, in medium- and long- term perspectives, we will win the competition on value systems and contribute to a better and safer world.



A concerted Western policy, which combines engagement where possible and containment where necessary, must be further developed.

Principles for Germany

Germany shares a host of foreign and security challenges that affect most other states, and especially its Western allies, in this globalized world. It's therefore

advisable to define principles relevant for Germany, which might be also applicable to the foreign and security policies of other countries.

The first principle could be called the imperative of multilateralism. No state, neither Germany nor other European states nor the United States as the only remaining global power, can act on its own. All nations have largely lost their autonomy. The scope and the content of sovereignty in international affairs and the role of the national state in general must be reexamined. We are getting ever closer to an end of the Westphalian Order of 1648, when the first real nation-states were created in the European region under a principal of recognition of sovereignty. In the age of globalization, solutions require multilateral approaches. In this sense, the European Union might set the political example for other states and regions. And for Germany, multilateralism has been and will remain a state's *raison d'être*.

The second principle calls for the end of any zero-sum approaches. They are to be replaced with win-win situations, requiring empathy for the others, or as Henry Kissinger put it, "watching the world through the eyes of others". This should apply to the whole spectrum of political affairs. There may be some leaders unwilling to accept this rule. But they will be the future losers. President Putin may just prove to be the first example.

All Western states, Germany included, must not apply double standards in pursuing their policies. Any approach and action should be fully compatible with the values for which they stand. Consider this a call for a value-based foreign and security policy, the third principle. It is true that conflicts may occur between values and interests, especially dealing with authoritarian states, extremists, or even terrorists. Unfortunately, there are too many examples, particularly related to security interests, where Western states, including their military leaders, failed to follow their own values and comply with international law. This must be changed if we are to preserve and enhance our credibility and reassure others that the West is bound to its own values and is reliable in respecting them.

Any foreign and security policy solution requires a comprehensive approach from the beginning – the fourth principle. Separate diplomatic, economic, social, and especially military approaches will fail to resolve any problem, whether in terms of conflict prevention, crisis management, or peace consolidation. This requires us to decide on clear and achievable political objectives, followed by an intensive information exchange, and close coordination and cooperation aimed at integrated action between the different actors on national and international levels.

The final principle applies specifically to Germany. For decades, Germany was a consumer of a security guaranteed by NATO and especially the United States. The reunited Germany, due to its size, power, and influence, especially its +

economic strength, must exercise more responsibility. Allies expect Germany to contribute significantly to the shaping of international policy and to become a security provider. In this sense, the narrowed internal German debate, which focuses exclusively on Germany's military engagements, is misleading. Much more is required. Germany must play a critical leadership position aimed at common goals with others, and for others within the EU, NATO, and the UN.

Public debate in Germany

Germany has never been as prosperous, secure, and free as it is today. Many Germans take this reality for granted and falsely assume these times will last forever. Yet our freedom, security, and prosperity are dependent on Europe and the world as a whole. These realities and our role, responsibilities, and concerns as a member of the international community must be communicated by our politicians, policy makers, and civilian and military experts.

Germany's President, Joachim Gauck, launched this process at the Munich Security Conference last January. However, much more must be done if our citizens are to understand and accept what it means to contribute substantially to the stability of the international order. With the speed at which international crises are evolving today, a commitment by leading countries like Germany to decide earlier, faster, and more decisively is essential if we are to preserve peace and security for ourselves and for others. ■

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