

Accounting for Germany's Foreign and Security Culture

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Germany today plays a leading role in the European theatre, yet is often a supporting artist on the world stage. A principal reason is Germany's foreign and security culture; that is to say the approaches it takes in dealing with other countries and associated security issues, and the principles these approaches are based on. For decades, the fallout from historical experiences helped make Germany a smaller geopolitical actor than its potential suggested, a situation it was not altogether unhappy with. This, and an uncertain awakening from its Cold War 'slumber', raises questions over how genuine a foreign and security culture Germany actually possesses.

This essay will make the case that Germany *does* have a genuine such culture. Despite changes, not least in attitudes to the use of force, it is a culture still subject to many continuities and an adherence to certain fundamental principles. We shall first cover the development of this culture during the Cold War, then analyse how Germany has adapted since unification, its approaches to multilateralism and European integration, and then conclude.

Defeat in 1945 precipitated a fundamental cultural shift. "An entirely different foreign and security posture unfolded, built on cooperation instead of competition, on the pursuit of wealth rather than power, on the quest for integration through transfer of sovereignty instead of a vain search for autonomy, dominance and status" (Maull 2000, p.65). Given Germany's post-war situation there was little choice, yet this matched German inclinations to move towards a constitutionally enshrined antimilitarist, democratic and moralist stance.

These trends in German foreign and security culture were thus not only legally binding, but manifested themselves practically. Rearmament in the Federal Republic of Germany was tentative and controversial, only approved in 1954, but membership of NATO in 1955 helped cement confidence in both cautious allies and within Germans themselves that they were living up to their principles of emphasising defence and multilateralism. Indeed SPD politician Herbert Wehner publicly "endorsed NATO and the Western Alliance as the basis of the Federal Republic's foreign policy" (Kitchen 2006, pp.337-338). The FRG regained full sovereignty in 1955, but almost immediately placed the Bundeswehr under direct NATO command. As well as subsuming itself into an evolving EC and joining the UN in 1973, this firm multilateralism was par for the course during the Cold War, essentially absolving the FRG of many of the foreign and security decisions most sovereign powers of its status often contended with, freeing it to become an economic dynamo, with GDP growing at 12% as early as 1955 and still sustaining 8.6% by 1960, in addition to sharply increased productivity, illustrated below:

(Williamson 2005, pp.318-319)

With NATO's, and thus the FRG's focus on territorial defence, the issue of out-of-area operations rarely emerged. When they did – such as West Germany providing a component for the 1964 Cyprus intervention, or participating in a multilateral fleet to open the 1967 Egyptian blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba – the concerns these events caused led to the government interpreting the constitution as prohibiting any out-of-area operations full-stop, at least regarding Bundeswehr personnel (Maull 2000, p.67-68). West Germany had instead come to see itself as a 'civilian power', placing an onus on political solutions (Wittlinger and Larose 2007, p.484). Thus *Ostpolitik* began in 1970 in an attempt at Eastern engagement, and in addition to NATO's multilateral efforts to sooth relations, Germany placed

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faith in the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (later to become a permanent Organisation largely at German behest) as a vehicle for *détente*. Indeed, the importance Germany placed on diplomacy was demonstrated by the sustained efforts made to keep *Ostpolitik* workable in the face of Russian actions in Afghanistan and Polish measures against Solidarity (Williamson 2005, p.311).

In summary, throughout the Cold War a genuine German foreign and security culture emerged. Moulded by national experience, strategic circumstances and geopolitical events, such a culture may have been influenced by a number of restrictions that limited German room for manoeuvre, but it established humanitarian, democratic and antimilitarist traditions. Such limitations were not necessarily a negative in German perception. Thanks to historical memory concerning the war, Germany was content to reject the use of force unless for defensive purposes and being at the front-line of Cold War Europe ensured that its allies, notably America, were willing to guarantee protection (Williamson 2005, p.312).

Following unification, Germany's foreign and security culture faced new issues and challenges involving NATO out-of-area operations, Bundeswehr reform and how to navigate an increasingly complex foreign and security environment. Michael Stürmer argued that these developments placed Germany at the *Bruchzone* (or geostrategic crux) of Europe, leading to an "obligation to embrace realism, clarity of goals, and predictability of means" (Stürmer cited in Lantis 2002, p.89). Additionally Meiers notes that "as the country grew larger in geographic, demographic and economic terms, the Berlin Republic is no longer the front-line consumer of security but becomes a potential co-producer of security in a wider Europe" (2002, p.197).

However, the anticipated realignment in German foreign and security culture did not materialise. Germany instead chose to progress European integration efforts, reaffirmed rejection of aggressive use of force, continued to renounce weapons of mass destruction and agreed a ceiling for its armed forces, one which was never reached in any event thanks to significant defence cuts from 3.2% to 1.5% (Maull 2000, p.70). Rather than being spurred into a new assertive posture, Germany has often been reactive rather than proactive, leading to ad-hoc responses and reforms that, in order to face certain geopolitical realities, have done just enough to appease demands made of it yet have not gone so far as to outright contradict German foreign and security culture priorities, even in European security integration where Germany has traditionally been proactive.

Though many see the Kosovo campaign as a turning point in Germany's attitude to deployments, changes had begun much earlier. Failure to participate in the 1991 Gulf War had given Germany cause to reflect on how this decision had affected allied perceptions of it. The Federal Constitutional Court ruled in July 1994 that German forces could in fact participate in out-of-area operations under international mandates and with a simple majority in the Bundestag (Crawford 2007, p.91). This opened the way to participation in extracting UN Protection Force personnel from Bosnia in 1995 and involvement of Luftwaffe Tornados in actions against Bosnian Serbs, though both actions were taken reluctantly and the Luftwaffe operated under such strict constraints that many questioned their actual usefulness (Maull 2000, p.58 & p.64).

Nevertheless, though tentative, such increase in force participation was in-keeping with the strong humanitarian inclinations of German foreign and security culture; it merely took time for political parties to reconcile the idea that force was sometimes necessary in order to uphold those principles. This was characterised by the CDU/CSU's earlier 'normalisation' efforts to expand Bundeswehr functions via incremental 'salami slice' initiatives (Harnish and Maull 2001, p.53), and eventual SPD/Green recognition of the rationale for interventions, providing there were specific humanitarian dimensions (Rathbun 2006, p.73-76). For example, following the Kosovo war their coalition demonstrated this realisation – as well as again showing multilateral solidarity – by increasing the Bundeswehr commitment to become the second highest peacekeeper contribution, consistent with the traditional German disposition towards peacekeeping and reconstruction; as Rudolph Scharping declared before backing the Bosnia contribution; "We are in principle prepared to help set up civilian administration, ease suffering and rebuild destroyed cities" (Miskimmon 2007, p.81).

We therefore see a degree of change in the greater acceptance of the use of force, but continuity in that those measures were only acceptable in the context of preserving the democratic, multilateral and humanitarian principles

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that formed the bedrock of German foreign and security culture.

Multilateralism is a key aspect of German foreign and security culture. With Kosovo the SPD/Green coalition desired to prove a reliable alliance partner and maintain the credibility of the multilateral institutions in which Germany placed so much stock. Nevertheless, German operations were largely limited to reconnaissance and humanitarian activities, and this was in parallel with traditional German desire for diplomatic outcomes. These included efforts to bring Russia back into the fold, to secure a swift UN mandate for post-conflict operations and support for the OSCE's Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe, a Marshall Plan-style scheme in line with German civilian power sentiments (Mauß 2000, p.72 & p.74).

However it would be misleading to suggest that the importance Germany places in multilateralism means that other principles of its foreign and security culture can be bypassed. For instance, though America attempted to build a broad coalition for the Iraq War, Germany saw such moves as faux multilateralism and announced that, even if UN backing was forthcoming, it would not participate in what it deemed a clearly offensive war compared to its contribution to a 'defensive' Afghan conflict. This was "considered a shocking unilateral move by those who think in terms of instinctive German multilateralism" (Rathbun 2006, p.77). However, such actions by Germany, though rare, have precedent in the past and present.

For example in Kosovo, notwithstanding allied pressure to join, Germany participated without a UN mandate due to overwhelming humanitarian concerns; indeed as Rathbun notes of this pragmatic approach; "leading leftist politicians recognized that a club of five powers which often made decisions on the basis of their narrow self-interest was not the imprimatur of legitimacy for the international community" (ibid, p.77). However with the recent Libyan crisis there has been a similar case for humanitarian intervention, as well as broad international support backed by a UNSC resolution, yet Germany has taken its own path, motivated by reluctance to become engaged in open-ended conflicts. However, in both cases Germany has tried to maintain balanced positions, emphasising diplomacy after Kosovo as noted, and diverting AWACS to Afghanistan to assuage criticism from allies over its UN abstention on Libya (Spiegel Online International 2011a).

It could be posited that before Afghanistan many deployments were generally straightforward affairs, featuring defined exit-strategies or relatively stable environments making it politically acceptable for Germany to remain to facilitate development and recovery. However recent polling regarding the Afghan deployment shows that 89% of Germans are pessimistic regarding a positive outcome, and that 44% believe German forces should withdraw in 2011 if conditions permit, with 35% preferring immediate withdrawal, both figures the highest in the EU (Transatlantic Trends 2010). Perhaps with Afghanistan being far more protracted and combative than anticipated, the confidence accrued through prior out-of-area operations has been gradually eroded, and that "for the German government, the 'small war' in northern Afghanistan is a politically very exhausting undertaking" (Noetzel and Schreer 2008, p.211). Such an experience may have prompted the renewal of the kind of reluctance to engage in open-ended affairs, like Libya, that previously characterised Left-wing reservations, even though the present government is of the supposedly more 'normalising' centre-right and is, ironically, a target for criticism from Green member Joschka Fischer and former Bundeswehr top-man Klaus Naumann (Spiegel Online International 2011b). While public opinion has largely mirrored the evolution of political parties in accepting the case for armed intervention for humanitarian reasons, especially when backed by international mandates, a general aversity to active war-fighting remains entrenched.

Therefore though positions on, for example, Kosovo and Libya may seem contradictory, German responses have been perfectly in-keeping with the priorities of its foreign and security culture; that of supporting humanitarian efforts, yet expressing significant wariness of sustained conflict. The *specific* circumstances of those events have been important in explaining these varying responses, but the application of those responses in the context of German foreign and security culture has been genuine and largely consistent.

One important element of multilateralism has been Germany's desire to facilitate European integration. As Meiers notes, "Germany's unequivocal commitment to the European integration process was anchored in the constitution when Article 23 of the Basic Law was amended to include commitments to development of the European Union and 'the realisation of a united Europe'" (2002, p.198). Given obvious disparities between European and American

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capabilities in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, Germany has supported efforts to enhance cooperation in security and defence. Indeed, German initiatives predate those conflicts, as demonstrated by the 1992 Franco-German announcement of a Eurocorps, a force intended for territorial defence, peace-keeping/enforcement and humanitarian assistance (ibid, p.201). These principles, especially the defensive and humanitarian aspects were, as we have seen, fundamental to Germany's foreign and security culture and have found institutional expression in the Petersberg Tasks.

Wagner notes that German policy has ensured that "many features of European security and defence governance come close to what the German government originally had in mind" (2005, p.466). However, "European security and defence policy has assumed a life of its own beyond the institutionalism and symbolism characteristic of German policy... Most importantly, new emphasis is now put on delivering the goods" (ibid, p.466). The impact of Germany's foreign and security culture, especially on defence budgets and Bundeswehr structure, has created difficulties in fulfilling promises made for ESDP/CSDP contributions. For instance, strained defence budgets meant that Germany had to scale down its promised procurement of seventy-three A-400M aircraft to sixty, generating criticism from European partners over perceived German unreliability (Wagner 2006, pp.137-138).

Procurement issues have caused difficulties within Germany itself, for so much of the defence budget has gone towards sustaining manpower. The need to professionalise the military, not least for participation in out-of-area crisis-management and peacekeeping, was evident for years, and the stipulation of the Helsinki Headline Goals that by 2003 Germany be in a position to contribute 20,000 troops to a 50-60,000 EU force only compounded the issue (Dyson 2007, p.90). The Weizsäcker Commission produced a report in 2000 that recommended significant reductions in Bundeswehr conscripts, reducing a force of 338,000 to 240,000 by 2006, with 210,000 being professional, though ultimately reforms were watered down due to the political and economic importance placed on conscription and so, in Dyson's opinion, "despite the opportunity afforded by international events and a range of EU and NATO initiatives, domestic political considerations triumphed" (ibid, p.88-89). There were gradual reductions admittedly, but given the key place conscription has occupied in German foreign and security culture, it has taken over a decade for definitive progress to be made, with a compromise 'suspension' of conscription due for July 2011, further reducing the Bundeswehr from 250,000 to 185,000 (Jones 2010). However, this is unlikely to have been an easy shift, no doubt encouraged by the drive towards budgetary consolidation and efforts to save €13 billion through defence savings (Graham and Siebold 2010).

Despite recent initiatives, it can be suggested that when reality confronts its foreign and security culture, German response can be lukewarm at best, begrudging at worst, as it seeks to balance its inclination towards European and international cooperation with a wariness to depart too radically from its traditional anti-militarism, showing just how genuine and entrenched this foreign and security culture remains.

In conclusion we have seen both change and continuity in German foreign and security culture. Incremental 'normalisation' has occurred, but often subject to strict criteria and caveats. Germany is an enthusiastic multilateralist, but will not blindly follow others if it harbours doubts over whether actions comply with its core principles. And though Germany embraces European integration, when times have come to act on initiatives its passion often cools in the face of necessary compromises. Overall we have seen significant changes that have facilitated an increased scope and ambition to German engagement compared to prevailing attitudes before and shortly after unification, but neither have these changes dramatically undermined the essential continuities in German foreign and security culture; a culture that is genuine and has become intrinsic since 1945.

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