

# New Directions: German Security Policy in the Brooding Shadow of War

by Adrian Hyde-Price

## Resumé

Artikeln analyserar hur Tysklands säkerhets- och försvarspolitik omformas i skuggan av Putins anfallskrig och Donald Trumps återkomst, vilket skakat fundamenten i den transatlantiska säkerhetsordningen. Under mer än sju decennier byggde Förbundsrepublikens strategi på *Westbindung* – förankringen i Nato, USA och EU – men denna grundpelare är nu under upplösning. Scholz' historiska *Zeitenwende*-tal markerade en brytpunkt, men genomförandet blev halvhjärtat. Efter koalitionsskiftet till Merz' CDU/CSU–SPD-regering har Tyskland däremot tagit tydligare steg mot ledarskap i Europa, med massiva investeringar i Bundeswehr, förstärkt närvaro i Baltikum och satsningar på gemensamma europeiska försvarsinitiativ. Den nya regeringen har dessutom avskaffat ”skuldbromsen” för att möjliggöra en omfattande militär och infrastrukturell upprustning. Därmed står Tyskland inför ett historiskt vägval: att utvecklas till Europas främsta konventionella militärmakt och en central aktör i EU:s säkerhets- och försvarspolitik. Detta innebär ett fundamentalt skifte från den tidigare rollen som ”civilmakt” till ett land som bär ett allt tyngre ansvar för Europas kollektiva säkerhet.

*The Trump challenge goes much deeper than just policy disagreements—his approach pulls the rug from under the feet of German foreign policy thinking since the foundation of modern Germany in the late 1940s, a rug woven by far-sighted American policy after the war.*

Thomas Bagger<sup>1</sup>

FEW EUROPEAN COUNTRIES have been so deeply impacted by the weakening of the transatlantic relationship as the Federal Republic of Germany, and no country is as important as Germany for determining how effectively Europe responds to the new security challenges it faces. This article examines Germany's response to the existential challenge facing Europe from Putin's war of aggression and the vagaries of U.S. foreign policy under the second Trump administration. Putin's war

and Trump's 'peace-making' – on top of the return of geopolitics and great power rivalry to the global system and the weakening of the rules-based liberal international order – have shaken the foundations of German foreign policy to their core. They constitute a seismic shift in international politics which has forced the Federal Republic to profoundly reshape its foreign and security policy. This paper examines Germany's evolving security and defence policy and its

emerging leadership role in Europe. It argues that under Chancellor Friedrich Merz and his 'black-red' (CDU/CSU-SPD) coalition government, the outlook is promising for Germany to fulfil the promise of the *Zeitenwende* and emerge as a leader in European foreign, security and defence policy. Given its size, economic potential and scientific-technological capabilities, the Federal Republic is of critical importance in filling the gaps in Europe's conventional defence left by any future disengagement of the U.S. military from Europe. The choices Germany makes, therefore, are critical for the future security, prosperity and independence of Europe.

*The United States served as the progenitor, midwife and wet-nurse for the fledgling Federal Republic after cataclysm of the Third Reich.*

## Westbindung Germany and the Transatlantic Security Community

The Federal Republic of Germany's national identity, strategic culture and security strategy are uniquely shaped by and anchored in its *Westbindung* – its post-WWII integration into the West. *Westbindung* had two elements: integration in NATO and the close alliance with Washington on the one hand, and integration into the European community and partnership with France on the other. NATO and the EU were not simply functionally efficient institutional arrangements for Germany – they were the very scaffolding upon which a devastated country and discredited state were rebuilt, rehabilitated, and re-integrated into the international community. The twin pillars of *Westbindung* were

complementary, but ultimately the very security and existence of the FRG depended on American power and transatlantic security cooperation.<sup>2</sup> Whenever the two elements of its *Westbindung* came into conflict, therefore, the FRG always prioritised NATO and the relationship with Washington.

It is hard therefore to exaggerate the importance of the transatlantic relationship to Germany. The United States served as the progenitor, midwife and wet-nurse for the fledgling Federal Republic after cataclysm of the Third Reich.<sup>3</sup> More than any other NATO member, Germany's security and identity are *ontologically* tied to the transatlantic alliance, in the sense that its very understanding of itself as an autonomous actor in international affairs is bound up with membership of NATO and the transatlantic security community.<sup>4</sup> The transatlantic relationship and NATO are thus part of the very DNA – the *Staatsräson* (the reason of state) – of the Federal Republic. When Trump casts doubt on NATO's relevance, it strikes at the core of Germany's post-1945 identity and worldview.

Throughout the cold war, Germany was a 'semi-sovereign' country, embedded in multilateral institutions and closely tied to Washington and Paris. The oft-repeated epigram of NATO's first secretary-general Lord Ismay about the purpose of the alliance – that it was created to 'keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down' – reflected both strategic calculation and identity containment. Being solidly anchored in NATO meant that its military potential could be harnessed to the collective defence of the alliance and enabled Germany to regain legitimacy. With its substantial military presence in Germany, the U.S. also served as 'Europe's American pacifier', helping to assuage fears harboured by the FRG's neighbours and allies about German *revanchism*.<sup>5</sup>

During this ‘semi-sovereign period’ (1955–1990), West Germans were able to move beyond the trauma of the Third Reich and take their place within the community of democratic nations (Bulmer and Paterson 2019). This allowed Germany to cultivate both a *civilian power* identity which emphasised its peaceful intentions and defensive mindset, as well as a role as a *Handelsmacht* (‘trading power’) focusing on prosperity and growth.<sup>6</sup> The benefits accrued from being embedded in NATO and the EU in terms of political legitimacy and acceptance led the FRG to become a ‘reflexive multilateralist’.<sup>7</sup> Germany also developed something of a ‘leadership avoidance complex’ and deferred to the U.S. in security policy and France in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Broadly speaking, the FRG was reluctant to play a leadership role in foreign and security policy and tended to focus on geo-economics rather than geopolitics.<sup>9</sup>

After unification and the end of the cold war, Germany regained full sovereignty and no longer had an existential need for U.S. security guarantees. Nonetheless, successive German governments continued to value the transatlantic security relationship – not least because continued American involvement in European defence allowed the FRG to harvest the ‘peace dividend’ and slash defence spending, whilst relying on the United States to continue to provide security and deterrence for Europe. The transatlantic instincts which formed and moulded the FRG’s national identity and strategic culture have been broadly shared across the mainstream of the political spectrum – with the exception of the far-right and far-left. The reliance on NATO and U.S. security guarantees thus provided the reassurance to Germany and shielded it from making hard choices – choices that became increasingly unavoidable as the liberal assumptions it had harboured

throughout the post-cold war period slowly but inexorably crumbled.

“Germany continued as a major arms exporter but otherwise exhibited a ‘culture of military restraint’.

## Shedding Illusions: Germany and the Return of Geopolitics

With the end of the cold war, the FRG settled comfortable into its self-ascribed role as a ‘civil power’, focusing on its business interests, soft power and diplomacy.<sup>10</sup> As German defence expenditure was repeatedly reduced, the Bundeswehr slowly shrunk and atrophied. Conscription was suspended in 2011 and defence spending dropped to just over 1% of GDP. Germany continued as a major arms exporter but otherwise exhibited a ‘culture of military restraint’. Dr Sylke Tempel, editor-in-chief of *International Politik*, summed this up in 2014 as follows: ‘To some critics Germany once again seems to be an economic giant but a political dwarf that cares most about business, tries to be everybody’s darling and shows little resolve when the going gets tough’.<sup>11</sup>

This approach to foreign and security policy was deeply rooted in a set of assumptions about the changed nature of international politics and the emergence of Kantian peace order in Europe. Central to this was a belief that globalization was replacing geopolitics as the central driver of structural transformation in the global system. In the wake of the *annus mirabilis* of 1989, globalisation was accompanied by the spread of democracy and the ineluctable permeation of liberal norms and values to growing parts of the international system. Globalisation, it

was believed, was also strengthening the need for multilateralism and cooperation through international organisations and regimes, thereby forging the structural pre-conditions for a rules-based liberal world order.<sup>12</sup> German foreign policy increasingly focused on strengthening the involvement of stakeholders through inclusion and cooption, working with ‘rising powers’ (what were termed *Gestaltungsmächte* such as China, Brazil, South Africa, Japan) to strengthen the existing liberal international order (Kappel 2014). ‘Network diplomacy’, it was argued, was replacing more traditional forms of interstate diplomacy.<sup>13</sup>

German policy towards European security reflected these liberal, inclusive and multilateralist assumptions. Germany, it was argued, was surrounded by friends and embedded in a Europe ‘whole and free’, which itself was nested in a cooperative ‘new world order’. Security, it was argued, could only be built with Russia, not against it. Both Schröder and Merkel sought to build on the legacy of *Wandel durch Handel* (‘change through trade’) and deepen economic cooperation with Russia, primarily through the export of cheap hydrocarbons. They also believed in *Wandel durch Annäherung* (‘change through engagement’) and focused on diplomatic engagement with the Putin regime and opposed any policies which might antagonize Moscow. They therefore opposed Ukraine’s membership of NATO in 2008 and resisted NATO contingency planning for the defence of the Baltic states until pushed to do so by President Obama.

Whilst the Merkel government was happy to take a back seat in security and defence policy, focusing instead on diplomacy and soft power, there were indications that Germany was willing to play a more active leadership role in other policy domains when its vital national interests were at stake. The

Eurozone crisis pushed Germany into a more assertive stance, leading to descriptions of it as a ‘reluctant hegemon’<sup>14</sup> – at least where its economic and financial interests were concerned. After 2014, there were also growing indications of a spreading awareness in the German political class and foreign and security policy establishment that the world was changing, and that previous expectations of a Kantian peace in Europe and a liberal world order were misplaced. This emerging German consensus was evident from the 2014 Munich Security Conference, where a succession of German policymakers referred to the return of geopolitics and great power rivalry; the weakening of global governance, multilateralism and international institutions; the contraction of the liberal world order; and the emergence of a more competitive and conflict prone international system. The ‘sleeping-walking giant’, it seemed, was finally waking up.<sup>15</sup>

Change, however, came painfully slowly. After Russia annexed Crimea and ignited a war in eastern Ukraine in 2014, Chancellor Merkel continued to insist that there could be no military solution to the conflict and worked tirelessly to engage Russia diplomatically through the Normandy Format, meanwhile rejecting calls for weapons exports to Kiev. Limited sanctions on Russia were introduced, but Chancellor Merkel continued to focus on diplomatic engagement with the Putin regime and pushed ahead with the Nordstream II project.<sup>16</sup> Germany was no longer a ‘black hole’ in NATO and defence expenditure crept slowly upwards again, but German security policy remained characterized by a ‘culture of military restraint’.

Merkel did, however, acknowledge that with the first Trump Presidency (2017–21), ‘The times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over’, and that ‘We Europeans truly have

to take our fate into our own hands'.<sup>17</sup> By 2018, she was even more blunt: 'Europe', she argued, 'can no longer rely on the United States to protect it'.<sup>18</sup> Despite this however, German security policy under Chancellor Merkel remained characterized by cautious, incremental recalibrations which masked an underlying continuity and strategic stagnation. This was only to change with the watershed of February 2022 and the return of inter-state war to Europe.

## The Promise of the *Zeitenwende*

Chancellor Merkel finally lost power in 2021 after having led Germany since 2005. The three-party 'traffic-light coalition' which replaced her administration came to power on 8 December 2021 committed to a programme focusing primarily on domestic reform, digitalisation and modernisation. The coalition defined itself as a government of progress – an 'alliance of freedom, justice and sustainability'.<sup>19</sup> The 177-page coalition agreement of 7 December 2021 (*Dare More Progress*) included 27 pages on 'Germany's responsibility for Europe and the World' which promised a more assertive and 'feminist' foreign policy along with a Germany's first-ever national security strategy. However, given divisions within the coalition and the focus on domestic modernisation and reform, commitments regarding defence spending, nuclear deterrence and policy towards Russia were left vague and ambiguous.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, there were indications that the Greens and the left-wing of the SPD were lobbying for Germany to leave NATO's Nuclear Planning Group and sign the controversial Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – albeit as an observer.

Within two months, however, the Ampel coalition had to deal with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – a crisis which it had not

foreseen and for which it was not prepared. The response was Chancellor Scholz's historic *Zeitenwende* speech – one of the most consequential speeches in the history of the FRG, and certainly the best and most important speech Scholz has ever given. The speech was delivered to an emergency sitting of the Bundestag on 27 December 2022, three days after Putin's 'special military operation' was launched. Scholz declared a *Zeitenwende* – an historical turning-point – in Germany's strategic outlook, involving an end to the purchase of Russian hydrocarbons, a reaffirmation of Article V to NATO members and a €100bn special fund for rearmament, signalling the most radical transformation of German foreign and security policy since the end of the cold war.

Chancellor Scholz pledged to 'stand unconditionally by our collective defence obligations within NATO' and to 'defend every square meter of NATO territory together with our allies'. To do this, Chancellor Scholz committed Germany to a 'major national undertaking' with the goal of creating a 'powerful, cutting-edge, progressive Bundeswehr that can be relied upon to protect us', with 'aeroplanes that fly, ships that can set out to sea and soldiers who are optimally equipped for their missions. That is what is important' (Scholz, 2022). The centrepiece of the speech was the creation of a €100 billion special fund (*Sondervermögen*) for the Bundeswehr and a commitment to finally meet and exceed NATO's declared goal of 2% GDP defence spending. This signalled a profound break with decades of military restraint and defence underfunding. It also heralded a far-reaching reassessment of its relationship with Russia, with a decision to decisively break with Angela Merkel's policy of dependence on cheap Russian oil and gas. Henceforth, German *Ostpolitik* was to accord priority to its EU neighbours in



East Central Europe and the Baltic, rather than seeking to foster a special understanding with Russia.

*The initial energy and enthusiasm was dissipated, and more cautious security policy instincts kicked in.*

## Limitations of Scholz's Zeitenwende

There can be little doubt that Scholz's Zeitenwende speech marked a rhetorical watershed in German security policy. However, implementation of the new strategy subsequently failed to meet many of the expectations raised both inside and outside of Germany. One reason for this is that his speech was drawn up by a very small circle of advisors, and subsequently there was a failure to engage more decision-makers in the process of policy formulation and implementation. Scholz and his advisors feared that Ukraine could well be overwhelmed by the Russian blitzkrieg, but once they realised that they were facing a long war, the initial energy and enthusiasm was dissipated, and more cautious security policy instincts kicked in. The implementation of the Zeitenwende thus proved halting and half-hearted. Structural procurement delays, legal constraints, and political ambivalence all conspired to delay reforms and constrain progress.<sup>21</sup>

German security and defence policy was characterized a high degree of strategic ambiguity and remained firmly anchored in a transatlantic framework. Chancellor Scholz remained wary of projecting hard power leadership and constantly deferred to the Biden administration, which itself was very cautious. Scholz also led a very weak and

fractious three-party coalition, and the SPD was acutely sensitive to the rise of the AfD in the eastern Länder and was itself riven with tension. Domestic pressures and party politics thus served to undermine the strategic direction of the government and foster ambivalence and hesitancy.

The political divisions within the Ampel coalition were clearly displayed in the debate over the creation of a National Security Council (NSC) and formulation of the country's first-ever National Security Strategy. Both within Berlin and amongst its allies, there is a broad consensus that Germany requires a much more streamlined and effective decision-making apparatus for its security policy, particularly given the comprehensive nature of security in the twenty-first century, which embraces not just military capabilities but also political and diplomatic tools; economic, financial and trade policy; cyber security and critical infrastructure; and homeland security and societal resilience. The formulation and implementation of security policy involved a politically fraught and time-consuming process of inter-ministerial cooperation involving up to seven ministries. This led to a lack of prioritisation and strategic direction, as well as contributing to a relatively weak German strategic culture.

It was hoped that the creation of a U.S.-style National Security Council would address these shortcomings and enhance effective decision-making. However, these plans ran aground on inter-coalition rivalry, with the Greens (who held the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) objecting to the proposed body being located in the SPD-run Chancellor's office. Instead, the proposal was scrapped, and the coalition focused on hammering out a National Security Strategy (NSS). This also took longer than expected because of inter-party wrangling, with the Finance Minister Christian Lindner (FDP)

insisting that the NSS should have no additional financial implications, and differences over policy towards Russia, China, European security cooperation and arms exports.<sup>22</sup> The National Security Strategy was finally published in June 2023, after a fifteen-month drafting process and whilst it does underline Germany's commitment to NATO and European security cooperation, its ambiguities and vagueness reflect the difficulties the Scholz government had in implementing the promise of the *Zeitenwende*.<sup>23</sup>

Because of its half-hearted, cautious and incremental implementation, critics have argued that *Zeitenwende* became more of a branding exercise than a genuine doctrinal shift.<sup>24</sup> Despite its transformative rhetoric, it was argued, it became more of an evolution than a revolution, resulting in a half-hearted process of recalibration rather than a paradigm shift.

## New Directions in German Security Policy

Whilst there is an element of truth to these claims, it is also important to recognise that the *Zeitenwende* did initiate a raft of new initiatives and policies, which taken together, constitute a significant and far-reaching shift in German security policy. The Bundeswehr started receiving significant new investment by the summer of 2023, which was used to purchase numerous expensive weapon systems including 35 U.S. made F-35 combat jets, 60 CH-47F heavy transport helicopters, the Arrow-3 exo-atmospheric ballistic missile defence system, Patriot missile defence systems, maritime reconnaissance aircraft, frigates and submarines. From January 2023, Bundeswehr modernisation and reform process also benefitted from more decisive and energetic leadership from the new defence minister, Boris Pistorius.<sup>25</sup> He explicitly

argued that 'Germany needs a Bundeswehr that can fight and that is operational and capable' – and that it must once again be 'war ready' (*kriegstüchtig*) – a controversial phrasing reflecting his blunt and direct way of speaking, which has also made him one of Germany's most popular politicians.<sup>26</sup>

Germany has taken the lead in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (now redesignated as the Forward Land Forces) in Lithuania, initially stationing a battalion but subsequently agreeing to expand this to brigade strength by 2027. This is a major undertaking for the Bundeswehr and Germany's first military base abroad. German jets now patrol the Baltic skies (based at the Ämari air base in Estonia) and also contribute to NATO air policing in Romania and Slovakia. The German navy has also been explicitly seeking a leadership role in maritime security in the Baltic Sea region (notably with the establishment of the NATO Commander Task Force Baltic (CTF) maritime command centre in Rostock). Germany has long been an advocate of the Framework Nation Concept (FNC) within NATO and has deepened military integration with countries including the Netherlands and Poland. Bilateral defence cooperation with the UK was also strengthened by the Trinity House agreement in November 2024, which is particularly important given the UK and German leadership role in Baltic Forward Land Forces, and Germany's growing role in maritime security in the North and Baltic seas.<sup>27</sup> In terms of defence-industrial cooperation and procurement, the German government has been instrumental in launching the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) which aims to enhance air defence through joint procurement. It also contributes to the European Long-Range Weapon System (ELSA) to give European NATO countries a deep strike capability.

The decision to send military aid to Ukraine was particularly significant. It broke a long-standing taboo in German politics against sending weapons to conflict zones. Germany became the largest European contributor of military aid to Ukraine, second only in volume by the United States. However, German military support for Ukraine also perfectly illustrates the limitations and strategic ambiguity surrounding Scholz's *Zeitenwende*, which remained firmly anchored in a transatlantic context. Scholz constantly deferred to the Biden administration, which itself was very cautious. The government initially provided anti-aircraft tanks, howitzers and MARS multiple rocket launchers to Ukraine, but refused to supply heavier weapons such as Leopard tanks or Marder infantry fighting vehicles. Only after the Biden administration agreed to send Bradley fighting vehicles to Ukraine did Scholz announce that his government would send Marders to Ukraine, and only after sustained pressure from NATO allies (particularly Poland, the UK and the Nordic countries) did Germany provide Leopard tanks. German policy seemed torn between giving enough military aid to prevent Russia winning on the battlefield, whilst worrying about the implications of a Russian defeat for the stability of the Putin regime.

Like other EU and NATO countries, Germany continues to have a broad concept of security which includes secure supplies of energy and raw materials, cyber security, societal resilience and climate change. However, for the first time since the end of the cold war, national and collective defence is now viewed as the central component of a broader security strategy. This is evident from the foreword by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock to German's first-ever National Security Strategy in June 2023. She noted that 'new threats are complex and affect all

areas of state, society and the economy', and thus require 'a policy of Integrated Security'. German security policy, she argued, therefore encompasses three dimensions: 'Firstly, protection from war and violence', which requires that Germany 'must be *wehrhaft* (robust) to protect itself and its allies from external violence'; second, protecting 'the freedom to be able to shape our lives, our democracy, our economy the way we want'; and third, 'the climate crisis' and 'protecting the natural resources on which all life depends'.<sup>28</sup>

*The Bundeswehr is at the heart of the Zeitenwende and its reform, modernisation and expansion is at the very centre of Germany's new security policy.*

Despite the halting and at times overly cautious approach of Scholz government, the significance of the changes which followed the *Zeitenwende* should not be underestimated. They constitute a sea change in German security policy, which has profound implications for its strategic culture. The new strategic direction in security policy indicates a willingness on the part of the Federal Republic's security and defence establishment to assume greater responsibility for the collective defence of Europe. But substantial obstacles and constraints remain. Germany's historical experience continues to exert a moderating influence, and large segments of the German population remain deeply sceptical about the expansion of German military capabilities. The aversion to lethal force and the emphasis on diplomatic solutions remain deeply embedded in German strategic culture. The *Zeitenwende* speech was an attempt to move beyond these historically-derived



cultural sentiments, but Germany remains caught in the tension between its inherited pacifist instincts and contemporary geopolitical pressures.

## Reform and Modernisation of the Bundeswehr

The Bundeswehr is at the heart the *Zeitenwende* and its reform, modernisation and expansion is at the very centre of Germany's new security policy. After decades of underfunded and political neglect, the Bundeswehr has been hollowed out. When Russia launched its war of aggression against Ukraine, the Inspector General of the German Army, Alfons Mais, declared 'The cupboards are almost bare' – an observation seconded by André Wüstner, head of the German Bundeswehr Association: 'We continue to be in free fall'. These assessments were confirmed by a confidential report (subsequently leaked) by the Inspector General of the Bundeswehr, General Eberhard Zorn, to the Bundestag in December 2022, which pointed to a broad range of shortcomings in terms of personnel, equipment, ammunition, IT, logistics and training.<sup>29</sup>

NATO's 2022 New Force Model required Germany to deploy two armoured divisions by 2025 and 2027, which the German Chief of Staff promised would be the 'best equipped army division in NATO'. Under NATO's new capability targets set in June 2025, the Bundeswehr is committed to creating five to seven new brigades, which – as Boris Pistorius has noted – 'will be a major undertaking'.<sup>30</sup> The Bundeswehr currently consists of 182,000 troops on active duty, and the plan is for it to expand to at least 203,000 by 2031.<sup>31</sup> Conscription was ended in 2011, and there are doubts exist whether this expansion can be achieved under the existing policy of voluntary military ser-

vice. Plans are thus being drawn up to bring back some form of mandatory recruitment by 2026 – perhaps drawing on the Swedish model. However, this remains contentious and politically sensitive.<sup>32</sup>

The Bundeswehr underwent a significant restructuring in April 2024 with the Osnabrücker Decree which created a unified operation command system, replacing the previous division between domestic and foreign operations and providing 'the formal basis for a war-ready leadership organisation'.<sup>33</sup> It also created a fourth branch of the military specialising in cyber warfare. In January 2025 a Homeland Security Division was created alongside the existing three divisions, which will be placed under the army's new centralised command.<sup>34</sup> It will be responsible for the protection of ports, railway facilities and freight shipment points, as well as pipelines and digital infrastructure. This reflects the strategic importance Germany has an operational base for NATO and a hub for logistics and reserves.<sup>35</sup>

Investments in the army are matched by those in the navy and air force, both of which will receive new capabilities and personnel. The air force will receive dual-capable F-35s, along with additional Eurofighter Typhoons, enhanced strategic airlift and aerial refueling assets, new transport helicopters and the Eurodrone, which is being developed with France, Italy and Spain. Its capability for monitoring near-earth space are being enhanced, and a new Tactical Air Defence System is being developed. Considerable emphasis is also being placed on digital transformation to increase operational effectiveness.<sup>36</sup>

The German Navy (*Die Deutsche Marine*) is small compared to its UK or French counterparts, but is the largest in the Baltic Sea region, and technologically sophisticated. The navy is now focused on the Baltic and

Norwegian seas, and over recent years has been relearning traditional concepts of sea control, maritime striking power, littoral and coastal defence and underwater warfare, along with the newer NATO concept of multi-domain operations. It is expanding through the acquisition of new F127 air defence frigates and F126 anti-submarine and general purpose frigates, as well as upgrades to its existing Type 212A submarines and the development (in cooperation with Norway) of a new Type 212CD submarine.<sup>37</sup> New unmanned systems are also being developed to address the threat to Critical Underseas Infrastructure. The strategic development of the German Navy has been laid out in the 2023 document *German Navy Objectives for 2035 and Beyond*, and May 2025 *Navy Course 2025* commits to achieving full operational readiness by 2029.<sup>38</sup>

The modernisation and transformation of the Bundeswehr to meet NATO's new force model and become *kriegstüchtig* ('war-capable'), however, faces a series of structural, administrative, political and legal constraints. Procurement has been historically slow, ponderous and bureaucratic, and modernization faces deeply entrenched bureaucratic inertia and structural impediments. These problems have been laid bare in a report by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) which criticised cumbersome procurement decisions and regulatory hurdles, excessive parliamentary oversight, European protectionism and restrictions on innovation funding at many public universities and national research institutes. This, it was argued, makes defence procurement projects less transparent, more expensive and vulnerable to lobbying.<sup>39</sup>

In her report to the Bundestag in March 2025, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces Eva Högel, painted a dismal picture of the state of the Bundeswehr.<sup>40</sup>

After decades of underfunding, the German Armed Forces were in a parlous state. 'The situation is serious', she noted; 'We are still not where we need to be and there is still much to do to improve the conditions for the Bundeswehr'. Staffing and personnel shortages were perhaps the most serious problem. Despite a concerted recruitment drive, the Bundeswehr is still shrinking in numbers. This is linked to the decrepit state of military infrastructure, with barracks in a disrepair and a huge backlog in maintenance and upgrades. The Bundeswehr lacks the tools to fight a modern war, with outdated equipment and a lack of munitions. 'The Bundeswehr still has too little of everything', Eva Högel concluded. Stationing a brigade in Lithuania was a 'major effort' which stretched Germany's already thin military capabilities even thinner.<sup>41</sup>

## The Munich Security Conference and Transatlantic Security Relations

The Ampel coalition collapsed in mid-December 2024 when Chancellor Scholz lost a vote of confidence in the Bundestag.<sup>42</sup> This left Germany with a caretaker government on the eve of Trump's return to the Oval Office and therefore unable to respond resolutely and swiftly to the period of diplomatic 'shock and awe' which characterised Trump's first one hundred days in office. This led the UK and France to take the initiative in coordinating a coherent European response to Trump's idiosyncratic and unpredictable foreign policy initiatives and organising a 'coalition of the willing' in response to his 'peace plan' for Ukraine. The subsequent election campaign took place against the background of an increasingly fragmented and polarised public opinion and deepening

sense of *Unbehagen* (unease or discomfort) in Germany at the steady deteriorating in the external security environment.

Towards the end of the election campaign the debate on security policy was ignited by dramatic events at the annual Munich Security Conference (MSC), which met from 14-16 December 2025. The MSC provides a high-profile forum for discussions between policy-makers, experts and stakeholders on contemporary international security, with a particular focus on Europe. With the return of Donald Trump to the White House, there was great interest and anticipation in what figures from the Trump administration would say about NATO and transatlantic security cooperation. However, few were prepared for the incendiary remarks made by Vice President Vance in his speech.

Vance said very little about European security or Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and instead choose to underline the ideological and normative differences between the Trump administration and Europe's liberal democracies. 'The threat that I worry the most about vis-a-vis Europe is not Russia, it's not China, it's not any other external actor,' said Vance. 'What I worry about is the threat from within. The retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values—values shared with the United States of America.' He went on to criticize immigration and champion a series of right-wing and populist politicians and movements in Europe, condemning their exclusion from government and the political process. The response from European politicians was one of shock and disappointment. 'We are also fighting for your right to be against us', Defence Minister Pistorius responded, citing one of the mottos of the Bundeswehr, which he argued, was also representative of democracy. 'This democracy was called into question by the US vice president ear-

lier, not just in Germany but in Europe as a whole. If I understood him correctly, he compares conditions in parts of Europe to those under authoritarian regimes', Pistorius argued; 'That is not acceptable. And this is not the Europe, and not the democracy, in which I live, and where I am currently campaigning.'<sup>43</sup>

It is hard to overestimate the explosive and far-reaching significance of Vance's speech. Taken together with the subsequent humiliation of President Zelensky by Trump and Vance in the Oval Office, and other derogatory remarks made by key figures in the Trump administration about Europe, it signalled the final demise of the post-cold war European security order, and the deracination of the transatlantic security community. Having repeatedly ignored calls by successive U.S. administrations for more equitable 'burden-sharing' and for Europeans to assume greater responsibility for their own security and defence, it was clear that Europe could no longer outsource its security to America and rely on NATO article V security guarantees. 'This is really now the change of an era', Friedrich Merz noted after Vance's speech; 'If we don't hear the wake-up call now, it might be too late for the entire European Union'.<sup>44</sup> His subsequent remarks shortly after his election victory in February also heralded a profound shift in German security policy;

I never thought I would have to say something like this on a television program. But after Donald Trump's statements last week at the latest, it is clear that the Americans, at least this part of the Americans, this administration, are largely indifferent to the fate of Europe.<sup>45</sup>

Again, it is hard to overestimate the enormity of these developments for Germany. As we have seen, the post-war security policy

of the Federal Republic was constructed around *Westbindung* and the transatlantic security community. NATO was a key part of the ‘rug woven by far-sighted American policy after the war’ upon which German foreign policy has stood, and Trump has pulled it ‘from under the feet of German foreign policy thinking since the foundation of modern Germany in the late 1940s’ (Thomas Bagger).<sup>46</sup> Trump’s equivocation on NATO’s relevance and Vance’s rejection of the liberal norms and values at the heart of the transatlantic security community thus strike at the very heart of the FRG’s identity and worldview.

## The Bundestag Elections and the CDU/CSU-SPD Coalition

As expected, the CDU/CSU emerged from the election on 23 February 2025 as the largest party with the AfD surging to second place. Shortly afterwards, Merz began negotiations with the SPD, now led by Lars Klingbeil, to form a ‘black-red’ coalition government. The coalition negotiations were conducted under great pressure, in part because of the challenges posed by the Trump administration and Russia’s ongoing war against Ukraine. As the talks got underway, the CDU/CSU and SPD recognised that to fund the expansion and modernisation of the Bundeswehr – which was now more pressing than ever – and to undertake long overdue investments in infrastructure, they would have to address the obstacle of the ‘debt break’ (*Schuldenbremse*).

Introduced in 2009 by Angela Merkel’s CDU/CSU government, the ‘debt break’ was a constitutionally enshrined limit on public borrowing. Initial expectations were that the new coalition would create a new ‘special fund’ for the Bundeswehr of perhaps €200 billion, but what emerged was something

much more momentous.<sup>47</sup> The coalition partners agreed to create a €500 bn special fund for German infrastructure and to effectively end borrowing limits on defence spending. What was also clear was that the necessary constitutional amendment would not be passed once the newly Bundestag was in place, given a blocking minority of the far left and far right. Consequently, the CDU/CSU and the SPD reached an agreement with the Green Party to hold a special session of the old Bundestag to remove the debt break and open the way for unlimited defence spending. Removing the debt break was politically damaging for Merz, but, he argued, ‘I want to make it very clear: in view of the threats to our freedom and peace on our continent, the following must now also apply to our defense: ‘whatever it takes’.<sup>48</sup>

Merz hailed the agreement to remove the debt break with the words, ‘Germany is back’: ‘It is a clear message to our partners and friends, but also to our opponents, to the enemies of our freedom’, he declared; ‘we are capable of defending ourselves and we are now fully prepared to defend ourselves’. Social Democrat co-leader Lars Klingbeil also hailed the decision as a “powerful boost” for Germany’s economy, arguing that ‘We have laid the foundation for Germany to get back on its feet and protect itself’.<sup>49</sup> The removal of the debt break has opened the way for implementing a profound and far-reaching paradigm shift in German security policy. The Bundeswehr is now on course to become the largest conventional armed forces in Europe. With a defence budget larger than that of the UK and Poland, Germany is set to become a major military power. This will have far-reaching implications for Germany, NATO, the EU and political relations across Europe.

The coalition agreement was agreed on 9 April and finally signed on 5 May 2025.

Merz was voted in as Chancellor on 6 May 2025 (after two rounds of voting) at the head of Germany's fifth 'grand coalition'. Unlike the Ampel coalition, the new 'black-red' coalition comes to power with a clear understanding of the security challenges facing Germany and Europe, and with a clear strategy for strengthening deterrence and defence in Europe. German rearmament, Merz has argued, is not only about supporting Ukraine; 'It's about ensuring peace in Europe from Russian aggression, which we face here in Germany every day: the threat to our infrastructure, the threat to our data networks, the threat to the data cables under the Baltic Sea.'<sup>50</sup> He is also aware of the immense expectations from Germany's allies and partners, and has declared a determination to assume responsibility for leadership in European security and defence; 'Everyone expects Germany to take greater responsibility for leadership', Merz noted;

I have repeatedly called for this. Germany is by far the most populous country in Europe. Germany is situated in the geo-strategic center of the European continent. We must fulfil this role.<sup>51</sup>

## The 'Black-Red' Coalition and German Security Policy

The augurs bode well for Chancellor Merz's ambitions for Germany to assume a leading role in European foreign and security policy, and for the Bundeswehr to become the future bulwark of European conventional defence. There are solid grounds for cautious optimism that, as Merz promised, 'Germany is back'.<sup>52</sup> The new government meets three critical prerequisites for a successful foreign and security policy: a clear sense of strategic direction and purpose; a cohesive and effective leadership in terms of

policy formulation and implementation; and adequate funding and resources.

Merz affirmed his government's readiness to assume greater responsibility and leadership within NATO and the broader Euro-Atlantic community

Addressing the Bundestag on 25 May 2025, Merz affirmed his government's readiness to assume greater responsibility and leadership within NATO and the broader Euro-Atlantic community (Merz, 2025). He has clearly indicated his intention to make foreign and security policy his *Chefsache* (top priority), giving special attention to European policy. His intention is to strengthen Germany's bilateral relations in Europe in order to give Berlin a pivotal role in European diplomacy. Germany, Merz has argued, must change from being a 'sleeping middle-sized power (*Mittelmacht*) to a leading middle-sized power'.<sup>53</sup>

The 'Black-red' coalition also appears to be much more cohesive than the previous Scholz-led 'Ampel coalition'. The two most important SPD ministers in the government are Lars Klingbeil (Vice Chancellor and Finance Minister) and Boris Pistorius (continuing as Defence Minister). Both share similar approaches to Merz on foreign and security policy, and have championed a stronger and more capable Bundeswehr, resolute support for Ukraine and a German leadership role in European security and defence.<sup>54</sup> More importantly perhaps, the first time since 1966, the Chancellery and the Foreign Office are held by the same party (the CDU, with Johann Wadephul becoming foreign minister). Usually in German coalitions, the Foreign Office was headed by the smaller



coalition partner, often resulting in competition between the chancellor and the foreign minister and a degree of foreign policy incoherence. With a CDU-led Chancellery and Foreign Office, this rivalry might cease. It will also make possible the creation of an effective National Security Council as a ‘hub and pivot of the federal government’ capable of forging a coherent and integrated approach to foreign and security strategy amongst different ministries.<sup>55</sup> This will be placed in the Chancellery and led by Merz’s close aide Jacob Schrot. The creation of a National Security Council is widely seen as a long-overdue reform which will enhance Germany’s capacity to provide leadership for European security and defence policy.

Having relaxed the ‘debt break’, the new government has been able to commit to NATO’s new 5% defence spending. Defence expenditure will increase to 3.5% of GDP by 2029, with an additional 1.5% allocated to infrastructure and cyber defence – effectively doubling German military spending by the end of the decade and giving it a defence budget equal to that of the UK and Poland combined.<sup>56</sup> Whereas Scholz’s €100bn special fund has been mainly used to fill capability gaps and replacing aged military equipment, the new €500bn infrastructure funds will be used to invest in upgrading barracks, infrastructure, logistics and training areas, allowing Germany to steadily grow its armed forces.<sup>57</sup> The government is committed to reforming and speeding up the defence procurement process, and Germany has a strong defence-industrial base (including Rheinmetall, Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, Airbus Defence and Space and the Diehl Group) which is already expanding to meet the demands of military modernisation and transformation.<sup>58</sup>

Defence reform and military modernisation in Federal Republic is notoriously slow,

ponderous and bureaucratic. Nonetheless, Merz has set the goal of making the Bundeswehr the ‘strongest conventional army in Europe’.<sup>59</sup> This is welcome news for the Nordic-Baltic 8 and Poland who live in the shadow of Russia and face escalating grey-zone aggression in the Baltic Sea region. In a ceremony in May 2025 marking the activation of the 45<sup>th</sup> Panzer Brigade (Lithuania) in Vilnius, Chancellor Merz declared ‘The security of our Baltic allies is also our security. We stand firmly by the side of our partners in the Baltic States’.<sup>60</sup> A modernised and expanded Bundeswehr – working closely with Europe’s other major military powers such as France, the UK and Poland – will provide Europeans with the ability to take over an ever greater role for deterrence and defence from the U.S. military, which is of vital importance given the vagaries of American foreign policy and its strategic pivot to the Asia-Pacific region.

“Nagging concerns about the reliability of US security guarantees mean that German-US relations will never again be as close and dependent as before.”

## Merz and Transatlantic Relations

Since his formal appointment as Chancellor, Merz has toned down his rhetoric on independence from the USA, describing the transatlantic partnership as a “great success story that should be continued, even under the new conditions”.<sup>61</sup> Like other European NATO members, the German government recognises that Europe will not be able to effectively defend itself against Russian aggression for at least a decade, and that the

American security commitment to Europe is indispensable in the short to medium term. The coalition agreement explicitly spoke of the need for transatlantic security cooperation, and Merz made strenuous efforts to forge a personal bond with Trump and strengthen the US security commitment to Europe. His first meeting with President Trump went well and both leaders seem to have struck up a good rapport.<sup>62</sup>

Nonetheless, nagging concerns about the reliability of US security guarantees mean that German-US relations will never again be as close and dependent as before. The German government is doing all it can to ensure a continued US commitment to Europe, whilst steadily boosting its capabilities to defend itself and its European NATO allies in the future. Longterm, the goal is now to make Europe militarily strong enough to deter Russian aggression, whilst maintaining the US commitment to NATO in the short and medium-term. Clearly this strategy is replete with its own risks and contradictions, but it is the only viable strategy in an era of US disengagement from Europe and a 'clear and present danger' from Russia.

## Conclusion

For the first time in many decades, Germans have found themselves living in 'the brooding shadow of violence'.<sup>63</sup> As Chancellor Scholz noted in the debate on the confidence vote which triggered the early elections, 'a highly armed nuclear power is waging war in Europe just two hours' flight from here'.<sup>64</sup> This has transformed the security agenda in Germany, focusing attention on the critical importance of national and alliance security, territorial integrity and sovereignty, and highlighting the importance of effective military capabilities.

Since Putin launched his war of aggression against Ukraine, fundamental – almost existential – issues of security policy have been discussed and debated in Germany. Long-cherished liberal shibboleths such as *Ostpolitik* with Russia; *Wandel durch Handel*; *Wandel durch Annäherung*; diplomacy not rearmament; the solidity of liberal institutions, norms and values associated with the liberal world order – all of these assumptions have been questioned and found wanting. The shadow of war has infused the German political debate with a new sense of urgency and seriousness. Deeply held convictions about German and European security are being questioned – and discarded. Above all, the reliance on U.S. security guarantees that were central to *Westbindung* and which have underpinned German security policy for nearly eight decades are now in doubt. The Federal Republic's reflexive transatlanticism of the past eight decades has been ended by Trump, Vance and Musk. A key anchor of German ontological security has been shattered.

German security and defence policy is thus entering a new era. The dream of being a *Zivilmacht* nested in a cooperative Kantian peace order has ended, and the German political class is adjusting to a new world of interstate war, geopolitical competition and great power rivalry. The new German government aspires to become Europe's premier conventional military power with a leadership role in European security and defence policy. Not all Europeans may be comfortable with this, and future grumbling about German 'hegemony' is to be expected. German domestic politics are also increasingly fractious and contested, and anti-militarist and pacifist sentiments remain endemic in substantial parts of German society and political culture. Many difficulties and pitfalls therefore lie ahead, but German security

policy is in the throes of being fundamentally recast. Security and defence cooperation remains deeply embedded in the DNA of the FRG, but it will increasingly be cooperation focused on its EU and European partners. How Europe – and Germans themselves – will react to Germany's emergence as a major military power is yet to be seen. What is clear is that Germany is stepping into uncharted territory, both for itself and for its European partners and allies.

The author is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg.

## Notes

1. Bagger, Thomas: "The World according to Germany: Reassessing 1989", *Atlantik Brücke*, 2019-02-14, <https://www.atlantik-bruecke.org/the-world-according-to-germany-reassessing-1989/>.
2. Hyde-Price, Adrian: *European Security in the Twenty-First Century: The Challenge of Multipolarity*, Routledge, London 2007, p. 126.
3. Hyde-Price, Adrian: *Germany and European Order*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2000.
4. Mitzen, Jennifer: "Ontological security in world politics. State identity and the security dilemma", *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 12, no. 3 2006, pp. 341-370.
5. Joffe, Josef: "Europe's American Pacifier", *Foreign Policy*, no. 54 (Spring 1984), pp. 64-82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148355>.
6. Harnish, Sebastian and Maull, Hanns: *Germany as a Civilian Power: the Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2001; Kundnani, Hans: "Germany as a Geo-Economic Power", *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3 2011, pp. 31-45; Szabo, Stephen: *Germany, Russia, and the Rise of Geo-Economics*, Bloomsburg Press, London 2014.
7. Anderson, Jeffrey J. and Goodman, John B.: "Mars or Minerva? A United Germany in a Post Cold War Europe" in Keohane, Robert et al. (eds): *After the Cold War: International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1993, p. 60.
8. Bulmer, Simon, and Paterson, William: "Germany and the EU: From 'Tamed Power' to Normalised Power?", *International Affairs*, vol. 86, no. 5 2010, pp. 1051-73; Paterson, William: "Foreign Policy in the Grand Coalition", *German Politics*, vol. 19, 2010, pp. 497-514.
9. Kundnani, "Germany as a Geo-Economic Power", pp. 31-45.
10. Harnish and Maull, *Germany as a Civilian Power: the Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic*.
11. Tempel, Sylke: "Germany's Strategy towards an Intransigent Russia", *European Leadership Network*, 2014-03-12, <https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/germanys-strategy-towards-an-intransigent-russia/>.
12. Bagger, "The World according to Germany: Reassessing 1989"; Masala, Carlo: *Weltunordnung: Die Globale Krisen und die Illusionen des Westens*, Verlag C.H.Beck, Munich 2023, pp. 18-19.
13. Bagger, Thomas and von Heynitz, Wolfram: „Der vernetzte Diplomat”: Von Vernetzter Sicherheit zu einer „netzwerkorientierten Außenpolitik”, *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik*, vol. 5, no. 1 2012, pp. 49-61, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12399-012-0279-y>.
14. Paterson, William: "The Reluctant Hegemon: Germany moves centre-stage in the EU". *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1 2011, pp. 57-75.
15. Hyde-Price, Adrian: "The 'sleep-walking giant' awakes: resetting German foreign and security policy", *European Security*, vol. 24, no. 4 2015, pp. 600-616, DOI:10.1080/09662839.2015.10654842015.
16. Forsberg; Tuomas: "From Ostpolitik to 'frost-politik'? Merkel, Putin and German foreign policy towards Russia", *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 1 2016, pp. 21-42.
17. Paravicini, Giulia: "Angel Merkel: Europe must take 'our own fate' into our hands", *Politico*, 2017-05-28, <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-europe-cdu-must-take-its-fate-into-its-own-hands-elections-2017/>.
18. "Merkel: Europe can no longer rely on US to 'protect' it", *Euroactiv*, 2018-05-11, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/merkel-europe-can-no-longer-rely-on-us-to-protect-it/>.
19. *Dare more progress: Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability*, Coalition agreement 2021-2025 between the SPD, Alliance 90/Greens and the FDP, [https://italia.fes.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/German\\_Coalition\\_Treaty\\_2021-2025.pdf](https://italia.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/German_Coalition_Treaty_2021-2025.pdf).
20. Mölling, Christian et al.: "A new foreign policy for Germany? Experts assess the German coalition deal of 2021", *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Aussenpolitik*, 2021-11-25, <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/new-foreign-policy-germany>.
21. Giegrich, Bastian and Schreer, Ben: "Zeitenwende one year on", *Survival*, vol. 65, no. 2 2023, pp. 37-42, <https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/me>

- dia-library---content--migration/files/publications---free-files/survival/2023/04/65-2-05-cm1-giegerich-and-schreer.pdf.
22. Schreer, Ben: "Germany's first-ever National Security Strategy", *International Institute of Strategic Studies*, 2023-06-20, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2023/06/germanys-first-ever-national-security-strategy/>.
  23. Kamp, Karl-Heinz: "The Zeitenwende at work: Germany's national security strategy", *Survival*, vol. 65, no. 3 2023, pp. 73-80, DOI: 10.1080/00396338.2023.2218698, <https://www.kas.de/documents/270955/271004/The+Zeitenwende+at+Work+Germany+s+National+Security+Strategy.pdf/61227d80-6075-1579-c65e-8bbo162c8dfe?version=1.0&t=1686757712344>.
  24. Techau, Jan: "Germany: Now for the Real Zeitenwende", *Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)*, 2025-02-27, <https://cepa.org/article/germany-now-for-the-real-zeitenwende/>; Deni, John and Rathke, Jeffrey (eds.): *Assessing the Zeitenwende: Implications for Germany, the United States, and Transatlantic Security*, United States Army War College Press, Pennsylvania 2025, [https://americangerman.institute/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/20250311\\_Deni-Rathke\\_Zeitenwende\\_Final.pdf](https://americangerman.institute/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/20250311_Deni-Rathke_Zeitenwende_Final.pdf).
  25. Olsson, Jonas: "Germany surges to fourth largest global military spender: SIPRI", *Breaking Defense*, 2025-04-28, [https://breakingdefense.com/2025/04/germany-surges-to-fourth-largest-global-military-spender-sipri/?utm\\_medium=email&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz-PqMutVDwqcich\\_NK5FV4NNmqxLLcOIk6cLSFwjtgVQCvR1t\\_v\\_peQCoonJO85yYHTP7kL3Um117bf90ZC2axJr4FT5w&\\_hsmi=358747725&utm\\_content=358747725&utm\\_source=hs\\_email](https://breakingdefense.com/2025/04/germany-surges-to-fourth-largest-global-military-spender-sipri/?utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-PqMutVDwqcich_NK5FV4NNmqxLLcOIk6cLSFwjtgVQCvR1t_v_peQCoonJO85yYHTP7kL3Um117bf90ZC2axJr4FT5w&_hsmi=358747725&utm_content=358747725&utm_source=hs_email).
  26. Pistorius, Boris: "Wir müssen bis 2029 kriegstüchtig sein", *Deutsche Bundestag*, 2024-06-05, *Befragung der Bundesregierung, Bundestag*, <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2024/kw23-de-regierungsbefragung-1002264>.
  27. Hyde-Price, Adrian: "Reforging European Deterrence: Plurilateralism and 'Coalitions of the Willing'", *Royal Swedish Academy of Military Sciences*, blog, 2025-04-11, <https://kkrva.se/reforging-european-deterrence-plurilateralism-and-coalitions-of-the-willing/>.
  28. Bundesregierung: *National Security Strategy: Integrated Security for Germany, Federal Republic of Germany*, pp. 6-7, <https://www.nationalesicherheitsstrategie.de/National-Security-Strategy-EN.pdf>.
  29. Gebauer, Matthias and von Hammerstein, Konstantin: "The Bad News Bundeswehr: An examination of the truly dire state of Germany's Military", *Der Spiegel*, 2023-01-17, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-bad-news-bundeswehr-an-examination-of-the-truly-dire-state-of-germany-s-military-a-df92eaaf-e3f9-464d-99a3-ef0c27dcc797>.
  30. Werkhäuser, Nina: "NATO summit: Germany's military faces new challenges", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-06-24, [https://www.dw.com/en/nato-summit-germanys-military-faces-new-challenges/a-72987209?maca=en-newsletter\\_en\\_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at\\_medium=Newsletter&at\\_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at\\_dw\\_language=en&at\\_number=20250623&r=27372492542024382&lid=3495482&pm\\_ln=300179](https://www.dw.com/en/nato-summit-germanys-military-faces-new-challenges/a-72987209?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at_medium=Newsletter&at_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at_dw_language=en&at_number=20250623&r=27372492542024382&lid=3495482&pm_ln=300179).
  31. Noll, Andreas: "Germany eyes strongest EU army by 2031", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-05-18, [https://www.dw.com/en/germany-armed-forces-bundeswehr-eu-defense-spending-nato-trump/a-72570394?maca=en-newsletter\\_en\\_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at\\_medium=Newsletter&at\\_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at\\_dw\\_language=en&at\\_number=20250518&r=27372442252024303&lid=3442503&pm\\_ln=295877](https://www.dw.com/en/germany-armed-forces-bundeswehr-eu-defense-spending-nato-trump/a-72570394?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at_medium=Newsletter&at_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at_dw_language=en&at_number=20250518&r=27372442252024303&lid=3442503&pm_ln=295877).
  32. Jones, Timothy, and Connor, Richard: "Pistorius outlines plans for military draft", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-07-08, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-updates-pistorius-outlines-plans-for-military-draft/live-73191356>.
  33. "Germany launches military reform with new command structure", *Deutsche Welle*, 2024-04-04, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-launches-military-reform-with-new-command-structure/a-68740863>.
  34. "Germany plans new homeland security army division", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-01-11, [https://www.dw.com/en/germany-plans-new-homeland-security-army-division/a-71273187?maca=en-newsletter\\_en\\_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at\\_medium=Newsletter&at\\_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at\\_dw\\_language=en&at\\_number=20250111&r=2](https://www.dw.com/en/germany-plans-new-homeland-security-army-division/a-71273187?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at_medium=Newsletter&at_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at_dw_language=en&at_number=20250111&r=2)



- 7372262822024332&lid=3268232&pm\_ln=280684.
35. Whittle, Helen: "Fear of War: How Germany needs to step up preparedness", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-03-13, [https://www.dw.com/en/fear-of-war-how-germany-needs-to-step-up-preparedness/a-71909074?maca=en-newsletter\\_en\\_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at\\_medium=Newsletter&at\\_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at\\_dw\\_language=en&at\\_number=20250316&r=27372352342024319&lid=3353419&pm\\_ln=288298](https://www.dw.com/en/fear-of-war-how-germany-needs-to-step-up-preparedness/a-71909074?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at_medium=Newsletter&at_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at_dw_language=en&at_number=20250316&r=27372352342024319&lid=3353419&pm_ln=288298).
  36. Bundeswehr: "The German Air Force in Transformation – Fit for the future", 2025, <https://www.bundeswehr.de/en/the-german-air-force-in-transformation-fit-for-the-future-5067196>.
  37. Naval Technology: "TKMS lands €800m deal to modernise German submarines", 2025-06-30, <https://www.naval-technology.com/news/tkms-german-submarines-contract/?cf-view>.
  38. Bundeswehr: "German Navy objectives for 2035 and Beyond", 2023-04-20, <https://www.bundeswehr.de/en/organization/navy/news/german-navy-objectives-2035-plus-5625058>; Inspekteur der Marine: *Kurs Marine: Den Gegner abschrecken. Die Freiheit auf See verteidigen*, Rostock 2025, <https://www.bundeswehr.de/resource/blob/5939752/c083fa236013e9dfdad9b8bba0049a35/kurs-marine-2025-broschue-re-final-data.pdf>; Häggblom, Robin: "German Naval thoughts and plans", *Royal Swedish Academy of Military Sciences*, blog, 2025-06-05, <https://en.kkrva.se/tyska-marina-tankar-och-planer/>.
  39. Rombach, Philipp: "Zeitenwende reloaded: Cash is good, but can Germany reform its procurement processes?", *Breaking Defense*, 2025-04-10, [https://breakingdefense.com/2025/04/zeitenwende-reloaded-cash-is-good-but-can-germany-reform-its-procurement-processes/?utm\\_campaign=Breaking%20Defense%20Air%20&utm\\_medium=email&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9xmGjjoXTWH1vTkoJqbtCl8IGFou8hg-hJv\\_v6JxAUqOOnvKbGNbQVFsZfoYP\\_20SSChYDoigMoXRAQumlR5bUHuPXIA&\\_hsmi=356314931&utm\\_content=356314931&utm\\_source=hs\\_email](https://breakingdefense.com/2025/04/zeitenwende-reloaded-cash-is-good-but-can-germany-reform-its-procurement-processes/?utm_campaign=Breaking%20Defense%20Air%20&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9xmGjjoXTWH1vTkoJqbtCl8IGFou8hg-hJv_v6JxAUqOOnvKbGNbQVFsZfoYP_20SSChYDoigMoXRAQumlR5bUHuPXIA&_hsmi=356314931&utm_content=356314931&utm_source=hs_email).
  40. Deutscher Bundestag: *Unterrichtung durch die Wehrbeauftragte*, Drucksache 20/15060, 2025-03-11, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/150/2015060.pdf>.
  41. Lunday, Chris: "Germany's Military is struggling as Trump tests NATO, report shows", *Politico*, 2025-03-11, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-military-struggling-us-donald-trump-nato-report/>.
  42. Alipour, Nick: "Germany poised for snap election as Olaf Scholz loses confidence vote", *The Times*, 2024-12-16, <https://www.thetimes.com/article/fac693ba-c42a-4a3e-af04-208339dd-f75e>.
  43. Latschan, Thomas: "Deep rift between US and EU opens up in Munich", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-02-15, [https://www.dw.com/en/deep-rift-between-us-and-eu-opens-up-in-munich/a-71624354?maca=en-newsletter\\_en\\_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at\\_medium=Newsletter&at\\_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at\\_dw\\_language=en&at\\_number=20250216&r=27372312492024372&lid=3314972&pm\\_ln=284930](https://www.dw.com/en/deep-rift-between-us-and-eu-opens-up-in-munich/a-71624354?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at_medium=Newsletter&at_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at_dw_language=en&at_number=20250216&r=27372312492024372&lid=3314972&pm_ln=284930).
  44. Bleika, Carla: "Trump, Merz and the future of US-German friendship", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-07-27, [https://www.dw.com/en/trump-merz-and-the-future-of-the-us-german-friendship/a-71762866?maca=en-newsletter\\_en\\_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at\\_medium=Newsletter&at\\_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at\\_dw\\_language=en&at\\_number=20250227&r=27372332182024303&lid=3331803&pm\\_ln=286249](https://www.dw.com/en/trump-merz-and-the-future-of-the-us-german-friendship/a-71762866?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at_medium=Newsletter&at_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at_dw_language=en&at_number=20250227&r=27372332182024303&lid=3331803&pm_ln=286249).
  45. Rothwell, James: "German conservatives win election as AfD surges into second", *The Daily Telegraph*, 2025-02-24, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2025/02/23/germany-election-conservatives-projected-win-afd-second/>.
  46. Bagger, "The World according to Germany: Reassessing 1989".
  47. Moody, Oliver: "Shaky coalition and debt – how Germany's gamble could reshape Europe", *The Times*, 2025-03-07, <https://www.thetimes.com/article/7377c848-caao-4b4b-af7e-884a256ed5cc>.
  48. Rothwell, James: "How the return of the German army could help save Europe", *The Daily Telegraph*, 2025-03-05, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2025/03/05/return-of-german-army-could-help-save-europe/>.
  49. Hubenko, Dymtro: "Germany: Parties agree on historic debt deal", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-03-14, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-parties-agree-on-historic-debt-deal/a-71922888?maca=en>

- newsletter\_en\_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at\_medium=Newsletter&at\_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at\_dw\_language=en&at\_number=20250314&r=27372352282024367&lid=3352867&pm\_ln=288096.
50. Thureau, Jens: "Germany's new government will face foreign policy challenges", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-02-19, [https://www.dw.com/en/new-german-government-will-face-foreign-policy-challenges/a-71677215?maca=en-newsletter\\_en\\_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at\\_medium=Newsletter&at\\_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at\\_dw\\_language=en&at\\_number=20250220&r=27372322232024373&lid=3322373&pm\\_ln=285392](https://www.dw.com/en/new-german-government-will-face-foreign-policy-challenges/a-71677215?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at_medium=Newsletter&at_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at_dw_language=en&at_number=20250220&r=27372322232024373&lid=3322373&pm_ln=285392).
  51. Ibid.
  52. Rothwell, James and Crisp, James: "Friedrich Merz: The man Europe has been waiting for", *The Daily Telegraph*, 2025-04-10, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2025/04/10/friedrich-merz-man-europe-waiting-for-germany-right-cdul>.
  53. Gebauer, Matthias; Kormbaki, Marina; Krüger, Paul-Anton and Schult, Christoph: "Aussen vor", *Der Spiegel*, no. 27, 2025-06-28, pp. 26-28.
  54. Cliffe, Jeremy and Puglerin, Jana: "From Fence-sitter to pace-setter: How Merz's Germany can lead Europe", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2025-05-06, <https://ecfr.eu/article/from-fence-sitter-to-pace-setter-how-merzs-germany-can-lead-europe/#:~:text=But%20Germany's%20incoming%20leader%20has,remains%20of%20the%20Western%20alliance>.
  55. Busch, Andreas: "New Chancellor Merz will put a special focus on foreign policy", *UK in a Changing Europe*, 2025-05-08, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/new-chancellor-merz-will-put-a-special-focus-on-foreign-policy/>; Turner, Ed: "Merz makes a false start, but don't write off the new government just yet", *UK in a Changing Europe*, 2025-05-08, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/merz-makes-a-false-start-but-dont-write-off-the-new-government-just-yet/>.
  56. Höller, Linus: "Germany plans to double its defense spending within five years", *Defense News*, 2025-06-26, [https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/06/26/germany-plans-to-double-its-defense-spending-within-five-years/?utm\\_source=sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=c4-overmatch](https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/06/26/germany-plans-to-double-its-defense-spending-within-five-years/?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=c4-overmatch).
  57. Heinemann, Noah: "What are the main drivers of member states' defence procurement practices: the German case", *French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS)*, no. 108, February 2025, [https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ARES\\_2025\\_01\\_108\\_Defence\\_Procurement\\_Practises\\_Germany\\_Note.pdf](https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ARES_2025_01_108_Defence_Procurement_Practises_Germany_Note.pdf).
  58. Schröder, Simon: "Schwarz-Rot macht Ernst: So will die Merz-Regierung die Bundeswehr aufrüsten", *Merkur*, 2025-04-25, <https://www.merkur.de/politik/schwarz-rot-macht-ernst-so-will-die-merz-regierung-die-bundeswehr-aufruesten-zr-93697054.html>.
  59. Höller, Linus: "Germany plans to double its defense spending within five years", *Defense News*, 2025-06-26, [https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/06/26/germany-plans-to-double-its-defense-spending-within-five-years/?utm\\_source=sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=c4-overmatch](https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/06/26/germany-plans-to-double-its-defense-spending-within-five-years/?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=c4-overmatch).
  60. Bundesregierung: "Federal Chancellor in Lithuania: 'Investing in our own safety'", 2025-05-22, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/merz-in-lithuania-2349224>.
  61. Moody, Oliver: "Friedrich Merz to cut foreign aid for countries who do not take citizens back", *The Times*, 2025-04-10, <https://www.thetimes.com/world/europe/article/friedrich-merz-foreign-aid-cuts-germany-fbxst5pdc>.
  62. Hairsine, Kate; Hubenko, Dmytro and Jones, Timothy: "Germany's Merz 'extremely satisfied' with Trump talks", *Deutsche Welle*, 2025-06-05, [https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-merz-extremely-satisfied-with-trump-talks/live-72794062?maca=en-newsletter\\_en\\_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at\\_medium=Newsletter&at\\_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at\\_dw\\_language=en&at\\_number=20250605&r=27372472092024396&lid=3470996&pm\\_ln=298080](https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-merz-extremely-satisfied-with-trump-talks/live-72794062?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-xml-newsletter&at_medium=Newsletter&at_campaign=EN%20-%20Daily%20Bulletin&at_dw_language=en&at_number=20250605&r=27372472092024396&lid=3470996&pm_ln=298080).
  63. Waltz, Kenneth: *Theory of International Politics*, Reading Massachusetts, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979, p. 102.
  64. Alipour, Nick: "Germany poised for snap election as Olaf Scholz loses confidence vote", *The Sunday Times*, 2024-12-16, <https://www.thetimes.com/article/fac693ba-c42a-4a3e-af04-208339ddf75e>.