

# COUNTRY CHAPTER ON GERMANY

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# GERMANY'S VIEW OF THE FUTURE OF NATO: NECESSARY BUT IN NEED OF REPAIR

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Historically, Germany has been a reliable partner within the alliance and able to reconcile its obligations towards NATO with its post-war security culture, based on multilateralism and military restraint. In fact, most German pundits share the assessment that NATO will remain a building block of German and European security. Yet, there is also a widespread sense that NATO is in crisis concerning its cohesion and purpose. This sense is fuelled by uncertainties about the future course of the United States but also Turkey's nationalist foreign policy, the deviations from the rule of law in some member states, and increasing internal heterogeneity and immobility. Despite the talk of crisis, however, many scholars are convinced that NATO, because of its character as a collective defence organization and a community of values, will be able to adapt (Deitelhoff/Daase 2020).

Beyond this general consensus, the German debate on NATO's future is characterized by at least three fault-lines. The first runs between proponents of détente and those who acknowledge the enduring relevance of deterrence. The second runs between supporters of a transatlantic orientation and those who favour a European one. The third, recently emerged fault-line runs between proponents of a value-based policy and advocates of pragmatism.

## CHINA/GLOBAL NATO

The rise of China figures in discourses on the future of NATO, for two reasons. First, perceptions of China are changing rapidly. Second, scholars acknowledge that China's evolving power and assertiveness will accelerate the US pivot to Asia and impact NATO's internal architecture.

Only a few years ago, China was perceived as an economic opportunity that Germany could not afford to miss. This image has changed profoundly (Tatlow 2020).<sup>1</sup> Expectations that increased trade and communication would foster China's transformation have been disappointed. Today, experts emphasize China's role as a technological, regulatory and normative competitor that adversely affects the resilience of Western societies and deliberately challenges liberal val-

ues in Europe and globally. Others focus on security. While scholars do not perceive China as a military threat, they acknowledge the nexus between technology and security, as well as China's growing military footprint in Europe and adjacent regions, including its naval exercises in the Mediterranean and, together with Russia, in the Baltic Sea.

Despite this changing perception of China, the debate on how Germany should react to these challenges and on NATO's role in this regard is just beginning. On China, the abovementioned fault-lines overlap and two broad camps are emerging.

The first camp consists of proponents of a value-based policy who advocate a tougher line on human rights and of those who emphasize the security and military aspects of the relationship and advocate, among other things, stricter monitoring and control of Chinese (economic) activities in Europe. The second camp consists of pragmatists and proponents of détente. Pragmatists underline the importance and benefits of a working relationship with China and caution that Germany and Europe will have to deal with China as it is. They continue to support a policy of engagement. However, they, too, call for a more level playing-field – for example, on investment – and precautions to make sure that growing interdependence does not allow China to change German and European norms and values (Godehardt 2020; Riecke 2021). Proponents of détente are concerned about the repercussions of a securitization of relations and expect that interdependence will have civilizing effects on the conflict.

One emblematic issue in this debate is the participation of Chinese companies in the construction of Germany's 5G network. The inter-agency compromise of autumn last year will not exclude companies formally, but will restrict the use of Huawei components (Bartsch/Laudien 2021: 25). According to members of the first camp, this compromise falls short of what is needed. Germany should ban Huawei outright from building the 5G network (Schwarzer/Burns 2020). Members of the second camp take a more balanced view of security risks and economic benefits and point to the direct and indirect costs that the exclusion of Huawei would entail.

This fault-line overlaps with the transatlantic/European divide. Members of the first camp react favourably to the

<sup>1</sup> A widely read paper by the Association of German Industries captures this changed mood: BDI 2019.

## »The Archimedean point of future transatlantic relations will be China policy.«

German Transatlanticists Group 2021: More Ambition, Please! Toward a New Agreement between Germany and the United States.

American invitation to closely coordinate policy on China within NATO. In their view, the transatlantic allies, together with East Asian democracies, should form a united front in talks with China on trade, investments and the security-related aspects of technologies and export controls in particular (Schwarzer/Burns 2020). According to DGAP scholars Brauss and Mölling (2021), »allies should develop a common approach on how to tackle China's geo-economic initiatives«. Liana Fix of the Körber Foundation and Steven Keil of the German Marshall Fund state that »greater cooperation on China is needed if Germany is to be a partner to the United States in leadership in a new geopolitical era« (Fix/Keil 2021). Proponents of a value-based policy, too, are all the more inclined to accept NATO as a venue for coordinating policy on China, the more NATO presents itself as an alliance of democracies that stand up for democratic values globally. A recent policy paper by Ellen Ueberschär, co-chair of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, and Patrick Keller, Deputy Director of the Federal Academy for Security Policy, co-signed by 17 pundits, exemplifies this overlap. The paper notes a convergence of American and European views on China and calls for a close coordination of policy between the United States and the EU on issues ranging from human rights to export controls. (German Transatlanticists Group 2021).

Members of the second camp are sceptical about turning NATO into the main forum for consultation and coordination on China. They emphasize differences in interests and approach between the United States and European states and are more inclined to strengthen the EU as a common voice in relations with China. In their view, European states should formulate an EU policy first and coordinate with the United States in areas such as digital infrastructure and technology in an EU-US format (Rizzo 2020; Rudolf 2020a). The Indo-Pacific strategies launched by Germany and the Netherlands at approximately the same time are also seen as stepping stones towards a genuine European response to the rise of China (Godement/Wacker 2020).<sup>2</sup> The debate on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between China and the EU exemplifies this difference. Members of the first camp criticize the adoption of the CAI and argue that the EU should have consulted with the incoming Biden administration on developing a common approach. Members of the second camp support the Agreement on the grounds that it establishes a genuine European approach towards China (Abb 2021).

Regarding the repercussions of China's rise for NATO's internal architecture, the differences are less pronounced. Members of the first camp call for more German and Euro-

pean burden-sharing.<sup>3</sup> Members of the second camp conclude that Germany and Europe must, at the same time, safeguard their economic interests and compensate militarily for the looming relocation of American forces and crucial assets (Masala/Tsetsos 2021).

## RUSSIA

NATO's relationship with Russia is one of the thorniest issues in the current German security debate. Scholars agree that the annexation of Crimea and Russia's intervention in Eastern Ukraine violate key norms and should not be accepted. They disagree in their analyses of the causes of the conflict and appropriate responses, however.

Proponents of détente<sup>4</sup> tend to blame both sides for the deterioration of relations that began prior to 2014,<sup>5</sup> and argue that Russia is acting, on one hand, out of a combination of resentment, bitterness over what it perceives as a denial of respect and the fear of being cut out of Europe, and on the other hand, based on a misguided perception of its relative strength that bolsters its geopolitical aspirations and its provocative behaviour. In this view, the high levels of military tension are driven at least partly by action-reaction processes. Proponents of détente and pragmatists agree that despite Russia's structural weakness, attempts to enforce a change of policy or even of the regime are futile. Instead, NATO will have to deal with Russia as it is. More promising than a strategy of regime-changing coercion is a strategy aimed at co-existence and hopes of the »civilizing« effects of societal and economic exchange (Dembinski/Spanger 2017). In this view, NATO's military measures to bolster deterrence are sufficient. The alliance should preserve the NATO-Russia Founding Act and advance the dialogue part of its dual-track strategy (Finckh-Krämer 2021). To facilitate dialogue, NATO should either suspend future enlargements (Ganser/Lapins/Puhl 2018) or develop alternative institutional arrangements to guarantee Ukraine's and Georgia's security (Dembinski/Spanger 2017).

Advocates of deterrence perceive Russia as inherently aggressive. Russia never identified with the post-Cold war order of the Paris Charter. Instead, it is bound to reclaim, by coercive means if necessary, a sphere of influence. In their view, the combination of Putin's authoritarianism and the

<sup>2</sup> The German Indo-Pacific Guidelines express the expectation that this initiative will lead to a European policy approach towards the Indo-Pacific region. See: Die Bundesregierung 2020:11.

<sup>3</sup> More Ambition, Please! Toward a New Agreement between Germany and the United States. Available at: <https://anewagreement.org/en/> (accessed 19 May 2021).

<sup>4</sup> This rather heterogeneous group includes observers such as Alexander Rahr, who shows some appreciation of Putin's policies, but also scholars such as Wolfgang Zellner who, despite noting fundamental differences between Russia and the West, make the case for détente.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the Report by the Panel of Eminent Persons 2015. Wolfgang Ischinger was the German member of this panel.

need to divert attention away from internal contradictions motivates Russian conflictual behaviour (Meister 2015; 2020). Emboldened by the alliance with China and the perception of Western weaknesses, Russia sees no need for compromise and instead uses a combination of asymmetric instruments and military threats to weaken the West. Nord Stream II, which Russia advances for geopolitical reasons, is a case in point (Umbach 2018). Proponents of a value-based policy take a similar view. Ralf Fücks, formerly of the Böll Foundation and now chairman of the Zentrum Liberale Moderne, argues that the policy of »Wandel durch Annäherung« (change through rapprochement) has failed. The Putin regime is inherently corrupt, repressive and bound to undermine the West and its values.<sup>6</sup>

Proponents of deterrence see the greatest danger in NATO's weakness in the face of Russia acquiring coercive options across the board, from grey-zone instruments to nuclear weapons (Brauß/Krause 2019). With regard to the latter, Brauß and Krause (2019) and Brauß and Mölling (2019) suggest that Russia aims at regional escalation dominance that potentially would allow it to occupy the Baltics and deter Western counter-measures with a nuclear escalate to de-escalate strategy. To check these aspirations, NATO should »go back to basics« and focus on collective defence. Germany should concentrate on its role as a logistics hub and on heavy armaments and rapid reinforcements. Instead of rotating troops in and out of Poland and the Baltic states, NATO should deploy additional combat units permanently (Schwarzer/Burns 2020). A violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act would be acceptable as the circumstances under which this agreement was sealed in 1995 changed with the annexation of Crimea. Conventional defence needs to be augmented with credible nuclear deterrence. Members of this school see the envisaged deployment of US nuclear sea-launched cruise missiles as a step in the right direction. However, NATO should also plan for the deployment of conventional and possibly nuclear-armed land-based intermediate-range missiles on European soil (Brauß/Mölling 2019). In addition to military strength, adherents of the deterrence and values camps advocate economic sanctions, including halting the Nord Stream II pipeline project (Meister 2020; Friedrich 2020). Concerning future enlargement, both camps argue that NATO should keep its doors open and intensify military cooperation programmes with Ukraine and Georgia to prepare them for eventual accession.

## ARMS CONTROL

German scholars are generally supportive of arms control and non-proliferation. However, most scholars endorse *negotiated* arms control (Kühn 2020). While adherents of the deterrence school are more sceptical of controlling

Russia's armaments, the German peace research institutes, scholars at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) and researchers at centres such as Metis at the University of the Armed Forces in Munich take a strong interest in arms control. Wolfgang Zellner and his co-authors of the OSCE Network of Think Tanks have presented detailed proposals to reduce the risks of conventional deterrence in Europe (OSCE Network 2018). A group of international scholars, including German participants from the SWP, the IFSH and PRIF, produced a report on risk reduction and arms control in Europe that, among other things, calls for a continuation of the Open Skies Treaty and a specification of the deployment limitations in the NATO-Russia Founding Act as a stepping stone for confidence-building and conventional arms control (Expert Group 2020). SWP's Wolfgang Richter emphasizes the danger of inadvertent military conflicts and presents a catalogue of conventional arms control and confidence-building measures (Richter 2020; see also Pieper 2020). The IFSH and PRIF have developed detailed proposals for dialogue on emerging technologies.

Controversies have emerged with regard to proposals that go beyond negotiated arms control. The treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons is supported by scholars from the German peace research institutes (see, for example, Meier 2021; Baldus 2021) and the Böll Foundation,<sup>7</sup> but viewed rather critically by others. SWP scholar Jonas Schneider, for example, argues that the prohibition treaty is deficient and does not serve Germany's security interests as long as nuclear weapons are an important element of Russia's military posture (Schneider 2021). The expert community is also divided on the issue of Germany's withdrawal from NATO's nuclear sharing commitment. PRIF scholar Sascha Hach (2020) makes the case for the unilateral withdrawal of the remaining US nuclear weapons in Germany. Others take a more cautious view. Peter Rudolf doubts that these bombs have any military rationale (Rudolf 2020b: 17). IFSH scholars Pia Fuhrhop, Ulrich Kühn and Oliver Meier (2020) argue that instead of taking unilateral decisions now, Germany should propose a multilateral five-year moratorium on the introduction of destabilizing weapons into Europe and use the time for new arms control negotiations. Proponents of the deterrence school oppose a unilateral withdrawal from NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement. A Federal Academy for Security Policy (BAKS) paper argues that such a step could result in the re-deployment of nuclear weapons to Poland (Brose 2020). A DGAP study reveals widespread support for NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement among European governments and concludes that »nuclear sharing is caring« and essential for the cohesion of NATO (Becker/Mölling 2020; for a similar view see Volz 2020). Some proponents of the value-oriented camp share this view. For example, the abovementioned »More Ambition, Please!« paper argues that Germany should continue to take part in NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements.

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/beziehung-russland-deutschland-100.html>. See also his op-ed in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 February 2021: [https://libmod.de/fuecks\\_faz\\_russland\\_mischung/](https://libmod.de/fuecks_faz_russland_mischung/) (accessed 19. May 2021).

<sup>7</sup> The Böll Foundation published a sweeping endorsement of the prohibition treaty by two ICAN members: Balzer/Messmer (2020).

## HYBRID THREATS

Scholars differ in their assessments of Russian disinformation campaigns and hybrid threats and disagree on NATO's role in countering them. Pragmatists and proponents of détente tend to perceive cyber-attacks attributed to Russia, disinformation campaigns and Russian meddling in democratic processes as disturbances rather than existential threats. In their view, NATO does not add much value by countering these kinds of Russian interference, and should focus instead on deterring hybrid military threats and highly disruptive and damaging cyber-attacks. Adherents of the deterrence camp are more inclined to see such interference as part of an escalation spectrum. In their view, resilience against malicious activities and the protection of key civilian infrastructure »constitutes NATO's first line of deterrence and defence«. NATO should play a leading role and »set national resilience targets to ensure a common standard« (Brauss/Mölling 2021).

## NATO AND OUT-OF-AREA INTERVENTIONS

The perceived failures of NATO's ISAF mission and the missions in Libya and Iraq impact on the German debate about NATO's future role. The expectations of the late 2000s that NATO would transform itself into an expeditionary alliance and that the German armed forces would follow this trend are gone. The German armed forces retain some of their expeditionary capabilities and contribute to capacity-building and UN peace operations. However, there is an awareness that NATO is unlikely to engage in major out-of-area combat operations. Regarding the more likely capacity-building, training and peace support operations, scholars generally argue that a UN mandate or similar legitimization should be a prerequisite.

## NATO-EU RELATIONS

After the four chaotic years of the Trump administration, and with the Biden administration endorsing European defence initiatives, the erstwhile divisions between Europeanists and proponents of a transatlantic orientation have softened. Scholars across the above mentioned fault-lines share the conviction that the EU member states will have to share more of the burden and that the EU will play a role in coordinating national efforts. In fact, most scholars agree that strengthening the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) need not come at the expense of NATO (Major 2019: 39; Puglierin 2020). Conversely, traditional proponents of a European orientation accede that NATO will remain responsible for collective defence (Lippert/von Oндarza/Perthes 2019: 19).

But differences remain. Representatives of the transatlantic camp reject concepts such as European sovereignty and autonomy in security. For the foreseeable future, the

EU lacks the means, political will and strategic culture to guarantee security in Europe. Moreover, an inflated rhetoric of European autonomy might – perhaps inadvertently – serve as an excuse for an American withdrawal. Transatlanticists insist that the project of European defence autonomy should take a back seat whenever it conflicts with declared US interests. They particularly object to the idea of a closed European defence market, the creation of integrated European units that do not also benefit NATO, and any attempt to coordinate European positions and speak with one voice in the North Atlantic Council. In contrast, proponents of the European camp argue that in the future, Europe cannot rely on American protection as it has done in the past. Building European defence necessitates a certain level of discrimination, such as an exclusive PESCO (Lübckemeier 2020). Scholars also disagree with regard to the possibility of future European nuclear deterrence based on a restructured Force de Frappe. While Europeanists such as Eckhard Lübckemeier (2020) find it worth considering this perspective, others, such as IFSH's Barbara Kunz (2020), express strong reservations.

## BURDEN-SHARING

Scholars acknowledge that burden-sharing will remain contentious. They disagree on the adequacy of NATO's 2 per cent Defence Investment Pledge (DIP) and on possible alternatives. The deterrence school tends to defend the 2 per cent goal (Kamp 2019; Schwarzer/Burns 2020). Others are less categorical. Henning Riecke (2019) argues that Germany should realize Chancellor Merkel's announcement to increase spending to 1.5 per cent of GDP by 2025 and specify how and when Germany will reach the 2 per cent goal in the future. However, he also proposes that NATO should go beyond the artificial metric of 2 per cent. This critique is widely shared. The 2 per cent metric has obfuscated the massive increase in defence spending since 2014. German defence expenditures, for example, rose from €34 billion in 2014 to €51.4 billion in 2020. According to many scholars, the 2 per cent goal does not adequately reflect either military efficiency or real contributions to NATO. For example, while most of Germany's defence spending strengthens NATO, other alliance members spend a substantial part of their defence expenditures on projects that do not benefit NATO directly. Claudia Major (2019: 31), senior researcher at the SWP, notes that NATO itself is aware of the shortcomings of the 2 per cent metric and uses three parameters in its internal assessments: Cash, capabilities and contributions to NATO operations. Echoing this critique, some argue that NATO should use a more differentiated set of input criteria that also take into account expenditures on crisis prevention or the modernization of logistical infrastructure (Richter 2020b). Others propose the use of output criteria (Ganser/Lapins/Puhl 2018) such as the financing and provision of the capability packages that states promised to provide in the context of NATO's Defence Planning Process (NDPP) (Meyer zum Felde 2018).

## COHESION AND CONSULTATION

Scholars acknowledge NATO's lack of cohesion, intra-alliance conflicts, the occasional blocking of decisions and sometimes the lack of willingness to inform and consult on decisions that affect the security of other members. They question NATO's ability to change member states' behaviour, however. Because deviations from the consensus principle and/or more delegation of competences to the Secretary General or other NATO organs are not deemed realistic, some scholars are favourably discussing proposals for an institutionalization of coalitions within NATO.<sup>8</sup>

## VALUES AND SCOPE OF NATO

German scholars and proponents of the value-oriented camp in particular emphasize the value-based character of NATO (Major 2019: 15). In this view, common democratic values are an antidote against destabilization from within. However, they rarely discuss in detail what this implies for dealing with partners such as Turkey. Regarding the Reflection Group's proposal to broaden NATO's portfolio and include various aspects of security, ranging from climate to natural disasters, the debate has just begun. Claudia Major (2019: 40) sees merit in this idea and BAKS Vice President Patrick Keller (2020) argues that NATO should formally introduce a fourth core task under the heading of resilience. Others like the head of German Society for Security Policy (GSP) Johannes Varwick seem to be more skeptical and ask whether the Alliance might lose its focus.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See 16. Petersberger Gespräche zur Sicherheit: Die Weiterentwicklung der NATO, 16 March 2021; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z28V25HqYoM&t=1s> (accessed 21 May 2021)

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

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