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[In Retreat? Western Security Policy after Afghanistan](#)

From the Hindu Kush Back to the North European Plain

German Security and Defence Policy after Afghanistan

Nils Wörmer / Philipp Dienstbier

Following the disastrous final chapter of Germany's engagement at the Hindu Kush in the summer of 2021, German security policy should finally focus on what has long been recognised as the primary threat to Germany's interests and, moreover, what is expected and demanded by its allies. Only the Federal Republic can bear the burden of conventional defence in Central Eastern and Northern Europe and act as the backbone of NATO's (non-nuclear) deterrent against Russia. To this end, the Bundeswehr must – within a few years – restore its lost capability for comprehensive national and collective defence.

Firstly, German defence policy should return to what the German armed forces had excellently mastered for decades and, secondly, it should orient itself towards the demands of future warfare in terms of technology and doctrine – an area where Russia and China in particular are setting the standards. In this respect, the recent mission in Afghanistan provides only a very limited blueprint. Stabilisation, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism will continue to play a role in future, but will no longer be core aims determining the structure of the Bundeswehr, as was the case in the 2000s and early 2010s. Rather, the ability to conduct high-intensity combat in all domains of warfare will be the main benchmark for the performance of the Bundeswehr, for Germany's security and defence capabilities, and, not least, for its reliability within the EU and NATO. Since 2014, policymakers have taken vital decisions on establishing a corresponding capability profile for the Bundeswehr, but this should not distract from the fact that only the full implementation of this profile in the coming years will determine Germany's future role in the area of security policy. The key question is whether the German government is politically willing to help Europe assert itself in the face of the unprecedented geopolitical challenges posed by Russia and China, and whether it is prepared to contribute to military defence in a way that corresponds to the justified expectations of its allies and to Germany's political and

economic weight – namely, making the Bundeswehr once again the backbone of conventional collective defence for the protection of Europe, which used to be Germany's traditional role.

The Return of National and Collective Defence

From “Wars of Choice” to “Wars of Necessity”

Almost two and a half decades separated the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. This period represented a historical exception in European security policy. It was characterised by the fact that there was no existential threat to Germany and its EU and NATO allies. The familiar phrase “peace dividend” was circulated in European capitals, and the assumption that Germany was surrounded only by friends became anchored in the minds of Germans. Nonetheless, international politics was marked by many regional and intra-state wars and conflicts, especially in the Middle East and Africa, but also in Europe in the Western Balkans. Western military forces were deployed to intervene in some of these conflicts, mostly in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions and later in the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, against vastly inferior symmetric opponents, but above all in counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and stabilisation roles. In

theory, the governments of the states involved in these deployments and interventions also had the option of not participating or, as the debate in the US in the early 2000s showed¹, intervening in other countries, either alternatively or additionally. The wars waged by Western governments during this period were thus wars of choice².

The beginning of Russia's hybrid warfare against Ukraine in February 2014 is generally regarded as a turning point in Euro-Atlantic security policy.

Even during this so-called “era of intervention”, with the rise of Russian revisionism from 2008, and the military ascent of China under President Xi since 2013, two developments took hold that fundamentally changed international politics. Some observers now speak of a New Cold War, while others at least recognise a systemic competition between the US and Europe on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other. In order to preserve the rules-based international order and the status quo in Europe and the Indo-Pacific region, the US and Europe must rein in Russia and China and prepare to wage wars of necessity in future – but with the aim of deterring them and not having to fight them. In contrast to international crisis management, these are existential issues for allied nations. In the case of a war of aggression directed against the territorial integrity of one or more allies, there can be no other choice for other allies but to uphold their commitment to collective defence. It is now more important than ever for Western democracies to stand up for common values and interests around the world. But above all, the Western nations, which have entered into a joint defence alliance with binding obligations³ within the framework of NATO and the EU, must be able to rely on each other as allies – in peacetime as well as in times of crisis and war.

Russian Revisionism and China's Military Rise

The beginning of Russia's hybrid warfare against Ukraine in February 2014 is generally regarded as a turning point in Euro-Atlantic security policy. In its wake, NATO had no choice but to reinsure its eastern member states, build up the NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)⁴, triple the size of the NATO Response Force, deploy four eFP battlegroups⁵, and, ultimately, put a renewed emphasis on collective defence and deterrence. With regard to China, there were already signs of a shift in US policy away from Europe and the Middle East and towards East Asia (known as the “pivot to Asia”) during President Obama's first term. Meanwhile, the US's security focus has clearly shifted towards creating a counterbalance to China in light of its massive military build-up since 2015. While European nations have also recognised the security relevance of the Indo-Pacific region, and developed some broad-based strategies,⁶ US policy is primarily aimed at containing and deterring China.

From a European perspective, these developments mean that, for the first time since the founding of the EU and NATO, their member states no longer have uniform threat perceptions and security priorities. For the states of Central, Eastern, and Northern Europe, the main security challenge is clearly Russia's aggressive and revisionist policy. On the other hand, the Southern European countries continue to see their security threatened by failed states in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel, along with the resulting flows of refugees and migrants, and the continued existence of terrorist organisations on Europe's southern periphery. For the EU and NATO, this poses the danger that such rifts and conflicts between countries of the eastern and southern flanks regarding priorities, strategies, and resource allocation could become fundamental crises for the organisations. Moreover, in contrast to the Cold War and the era of intervention, the US cannot and does not want to bear the main burden of security engagement on the southern or eastern flanks. Much of the US's attention and military





President Vladimir Putin visits annexed Crimea in November 2021: For the states of Central, Eastern, and Northern Europe, the main security challenge is Russia's aggressive and revisionist policy.

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resources are consumed by China's openly aggressive posture in the Indo-Pacific. At a Senate confirmation hearing in early 2017, Senator John McCain asked retired general James Mattis, back then nominee for the post of US Secretary of Defence, as to whether the US military was capable of deterring both China and Russia. The answer was an emphatic no.⁷

Defence Policy in Europe: Germany Bears the Main Burden on the Eastern Flank

Looking at the four largest European states with the strongest military capability – Germany, France, the UK, and Italy – the question arises as to where their strategic focus will lie in future. The UK's latest security position paper, of March

2021, appears to mainly focus on nuclear deterrence, maritime capabilities, cyber warfare, intelligence and reconnaissance as well as special forces. Along with the capability for nuclear and maritime deterrence against Russia, the UK's armed forces are particularly suited to conducting limited interventions and operations alongside the US, including in the Indo-Pacific region. British forces will have only very limited resources for land-based operations on the European continent in future. Similar to the situation in the UK, the French military spends a significant portion of its budget on maintaining and developing its nuclear forces and primarily maintains capabilities for limited interventions, stabilisation operations, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism. France defines itself

as an Indo-Pacific nation, as underlined in its Indo-Pacific Strategy,⁸ so it is likely that future investments will focus more on the maritime domain as opposed to capabilities for land-based operations with heavy units. The Italian armed forces have abandoned some reforms initiated in 2013 and have received more combat brigades, including armoured units, than originally planned. Nevertheless, Italy's security focus and military capabilities are clearly directed towards the Mediterranean region, the Sahel, the Middle East, and the Horn of Africa.

The “Trend Reversals Materiel and Personnel” have fallen short of the desired results over recent years.

Therefore, to protect Europe, it is still mainly up to Germany to restore all the forces, capabilities, and measures needed for deterrence and defence in order to stand up to Russia in a potential conflict, and thereby ultimately achieve the deterrent effect in peacetime that will mean a war never actually has to be waged. It is only for this reason – and not because of the missions in Afghanistan and Mali – that the German Bundestag increased the defence budget from just under 30 billion euros in 2011 to more than 50 billion euros in 2021. Since the new German government has promised future spending increases and more investment in other areas, such as social and climate policy, while also wanting to reapply the constitutional budget deficit limit from 2023, there is a danger that this positive trend could at least grind to a halt for the time being or even be reversed altogether.

The Bundeswehr Undergoing Transformation

National and collective defence have not only been defined (by the 2016 White Paper) as a Bundeswehr mission equally important to international crisis management, but they shape

every political debate on the German armed forces' capability profile and, derived from this, their future scope, structure, equipment, and armament. As the Bundeswehr's largest component, the Army faces the challenge of reorganising its major units from the “Army 2011” structure, which is geared towards international crisis management. The “Trend Reversals Materiel and Personnel” initiated in January and May 2016 respectively, were intended to create one of the key prerequisites for this. However, both these initiatives have fallen far short of the desired results over recent years. After the Bundeswehr had, in the summer of 2016, recorded its lowest level of personnel since the conclusion of its deployment phase, with around 166,500 soldiers, the personnel target for 2027 has now been set at 203,300 service posts. In fact, the headcount has levelled off at between 183,000 and 185,000 over recent years, which means the additional personnel required by 2027 will be almost 20,000 men and women. Against this backdrop, the introduction of a compulsory (military or civil) service was briefly debated during the last administration, and a voluntary military service programme for homeland security was created. A decision was also taken to rebuild the reserve service to include around 120,000 reservists. In the area of procurement and material readiness, clear progress has been made compared to the disastrous state prevailing in 2014. Nevertheless, in 2021 the material readiness of the Bundeswehr's 71 major weapon systems averaged just 77 per cent, and was even below 50 per cent for certain important systems; mainly due to the poor condition of legacy weapon systems and at times serious delays in the supply of new, large-scale equipment.⁹ Compared with the consistently high readiness levels of the old Bundeswehr during the Cold War, this is a completely unacceptable state of affairs. That is because it would have serious ramifications in the event of an actual war – namely, rapid defeat, at least in the initial operations.

Thus, at the start of 2022 German policymakers are grappling more than ever with the challenge of how best to position the Bundeswehr

for the next two decades in view of a fundamentally changed threat situation, rapid advances in technologies along with changes in the four dimensions of warfare. In every area – the land, sea, air, and cyber and information domains – landmark decisions are pending, some of which are long overdue.

There can be no talk of the frequently cited “rearmament”. Rather, the planned steps are aimed at restoring capabilities.

**The Land Dimension:
Three Fully Deployed Divisions by 2032**

Back in 2021, the Inspector of the German Army, Lieutenant General Alfons Mais, had to concede that other brigades would have to provide equipment and materiel to the lead unit for the third VJTF under German command in 2023. This says everything about the condition and operational readiness of the German armed forces. The original objective was to ensure that the 37th Panzergrenadier Brigade, the designated lead unit for the NATO VJTF, had the necessary equipment and operational readiness to conduct the mission independently. The deficiencies are apparently nowhere near as severe as when the VJTF was deployed in 2019, when 30,000 individual items of equipment “from battle tanks to night vision goggles”¹⁰ had to be borrowed in order to meet the commitments made to NATO. Nevertheless, this illustrates how difficult it will be to generate the fully deployed and operational division with three combat brigades¹¹ promised to NATO as an interim goal by 2027, and to achieve the target of three fully staffed and equipped divisions, with eight to ten combat brigades, as announced for 2032. Still, this target size would constitute merely 25 per cent of the strength of armoured combat units that the Bundeswehr had in 1990. Moreover, the “heavy” quality of Germany’s future land force contribution requested by NATO in 2015 and promised

by Germany in the form of three tank/armoured infantry divisions (including substantial combat support forces at the division and corps levels), has already been scaled back to just one heavy, one medium, and one light division in the latest Army plans. This makes it clear that there can be no talk of the frequently cited “rearmament”. Rather, the planned steps are aimed at restoring capabilities that the Bundeswehr previously possessed – to a much greater extent – but abandoned since then.

The main challenge for policymakers is, therefore, to recruit the personnel needed for this increase and to procure the necessary materiel and latest highly digitalised weaponry and command and control systems for joint multinational domain operations. Another pressing issue is the lack of individual capabilities in the land dimension. This primarily applies to the former Heeresflugabwehrtruppe, an army air defence force tasked with protecting its own combat units from enemy airborne attack, which was decommissioned in 2012. The fact that this mission was subsequently transferred to the German Air Force on a makeshift basis has now led to a situation where army brigades have limited abilities to fight combined arms missions. This represents a major military deficit, especially against a potential adversary with very strong air force and combat helicopter units. Therefore, one of the most pressing challenges is to re-establish an army air defence capability as part of an integrated air defence covering a broad spectrum, from drones at close range to tactical ballistic missiles.

The main areas of focus with regard to the land dimension include developing a successor for the Leopard 2 main battle tank under the Main Ground Combat System planned with France. An additional challenge lies in returning to the Army elements of the logistics tasks that were outsourced to the Joint Support Service and civilian service providers some years ago. Other difficulties include restoring the recently neglected command and control capability at brigade and division level and achieving appropriate digitalisation of land forces.

The Army is in the process of undertaking a radical doctrinal U-turn back to its traditional remit. Once again, it has to be able to conduct defence, delay, and (counter-)offensive operations, but this time on the Northeast European Plain rather than the North German Plain.¹² It is true that the scale and geographic scope of such a scenario has changed since the 1980s. However, basic requirements from the rapid mobilisation of reserve units (which have yet to be built up)¹³ to the rapid deployment of large units across Germany remain largely unchanged. It is also important to guarantee ongoing obligations in the area of crisis and conflict management: stabilisation, training, and consulting, and, where appropriate, counterinsurgency. In line with the concept of a single set of forces,¹⁴ the Army will in future have to generate the forces required for international missions, such as in Mali, from units set up for national and collective defence.

The Air Force requires a major overhaul of structure and equipment in both the conventional and nuclear domains.

Defence of Allied Airspace and Nuclear Deterrence

The return to collective defence on land will only work if the Army is adequately supported from the air in accordance with the joint multi-domain approach¹⁵. Along with conventional defence, the German Air Force – and this sets it apart from other military branches – also has a role to play in the extended nuclear deterrence of NATO. The Air Force requires a major overhaul of structure and equipment in both the conventional and nuclear domains over the next twenty years in order to accomplish both these tasks. The foundations for this must be laid at the beginning of the current legislative period.

In conventional defence, the primary objective of the German Air Force is to contribute towards establishing a favourable air situation for NATO

air forces; without this prerequisite, land force operations would be doomed to fail. In the event of crisis, Germany has promised NATO that it will supply around ten per cent of combat mission flights. This applies both to potential air warfare in rearward Central Europe, frontline operational areas, and enemy airspace, where enemy air defences would first need to be neutralised to establish air superiority, as well as to air operations in support of NATO land and naval forces. However, some glaring deficiencies are becoming apparent in this respect. In the event of a high-intensity attack by Russia, combined with high-attrition air combat, German flying units would probably be unable to fight and operate for more than one to two days at the moment. This is because peacetime cost-cutting measures have left the Air Force without the stockpiles of ammunition, first-class armament and spare parts necessary for a prolonged operation, and the arsenals could not be quickly replenished during the transition to crisis or war. However, if Germany were to get serious about its defence mission and the role of its Air Force in warfare, the first priority would be to ramp up its readiness and operational capability. In addition, Germany, which has committed to providing four mixed operational squadrons to NATO, must be able to form large flying units of 150 to 250 aircraft in joint forces with allied air units for defence purposes. In order to improve interoperability in the Alliance in this respect, Germany, as the framework nation, is coordinating the establishment of a Multinational Air Group by 2026, 75 per cent of which will be provided by the German Air Force and 25 per cent by Eastern partners.

Ideally, such trained, operational, and functionally interoperable air forces would also benefit from sharing a common platform with sensors and weapon systems that can operate together in a coordinated manner. In NATO, fourth-generation fighter aircraft are currently being successively replaced by American F-35s. In addition to its highly acclaimed stealth capabilities, this fifth-generation fighter aircraft¹⁶ features advanced connectivity and is de facto establishing itself as the Alliance's



Numerous challenges in the land dimension: One major task is to develop a successor for the Leopard 2 main battle tank as part of the Main Ground Combat System planned with France. [Source: © Fabian Bimmer, Reuters.](#)

new standard platform. Germany's fundamental political decision not to join the "F-35 family" so as to invest in the 6th generation combat aircraft planned with France and Spain for 2040 as part of the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), is thus proving an obstacle for the performance of integrated air forces within NATO. Even though FCAS represents a step in the right direction in terms of both armament policy and weapons technology, prioritising a system that, with all the usual delays, is not expected to enter service for more than two decades means the Air Force will face a capability gap over the medium term.

The non-procurement of the F-35 and the still pending decision about a successor to the Tornado takes on even greater political importance in the context of Germany's future role in NATO's nuclear sharing agreement. Germany's

ongoing participation in this process is an important element of risk- and burden-sharing within NATO. It increases the Alliance's cohesion and credibility and ensures that Berlin can exert a special influence on (nuclear) defence planning processes in Brussels. Since the current nuclear weapons capable aircraft, the Tornado, is completely obsolete, a successor system has to be found by 2030. The principle is that American nuclear weapons can only be carried by aircraft certified by the US military. Since the Eurofighter arguably does not meet this requirement, the F/A-18 Super Hornet and EA-18 Growler are to be procured as an interim solution – although it remains unclear whether FCAS would be able to take up the nuclear sharing role in the long term. Together, the two versions would close a gap in the Alliance's capability profile, and are therefore favoured by the German Air Force as the next best alternative to the F-35. Here, it is

Well equipped? The fact that the Navy has been granted a considerable share of the upcoming maritime armament projects should not obscure the fact that Germany's maritime forces are too small for future assignments.

Source: © Fabian Bimmer, Reuters.

important to begin work on the procurement and nuclear certification without delay in early 2022. Whether or not the new German government adheres to the decision to buy the F/A-18 Super Hornet (and EA-18 Growler) will effectively also be a decision for or against continuing Germany's involvement in nuclear sharing.

The budget will have to be stretched further in order to achieve the required increase in ocean-going vessels.

Other challenges confronting the Air Force include ensuring tactical airlift by procuring heavy transport helicopters¹⁷ and rebuilding ground-based air defence, which had been massively reduced before 2012, in order to protect against the greatly increased threat from missiles and aircraft. In particular, the replacement of the outdated Patriot system would urgently require the development of a successor system, but politicians have repeatedly delayed this. Most recently, another long overdue step was taken with the declaration of intent to introduce armed drones into the Bundeswehr. Yet, the debate in recent years has given the impression that the use of armed drones is solely for the protection of troops on international missions. However, wars in Europe or its periphery, such as in Nagorno-Karabakh, Libya, and Ukraine, show that, in modern warfare, drones are being deployed far more widely and linked with land forces to provide air support. With the introduction of the weapon system, the Bundeswehr must now acquire this capability as quickly as possible in order to be able to compete in future symmetrical conflicts.



Enlarged Task Spectrum for Small Navy

In the maritime dimension, policymakers are faced with the problem that, historically, Germany has rarely had a smaller navy than it does today, whereas it is precisely in this dimension that the range of tasks has exploded over recent years. Germany's role as the lead nation in the Baltic and its substantial contribution to the Alliance's presence in the North Atlantic lie at the



heart of the requirements and associated commitments to counterbalance Russia within NATO. What is more, maritime missions have steadily increased, notably in the areas of embargo monitoring, and combating piracy and trafficking in the sea areas of the Mediterranean, the Horn of Africa, the Persian Gulf, and, more recently, also in the Gulf of Guinea. The growing importance of the Indo-Pacific and the need to show solidarity with allies and countries with shared values in this

region through a temporary or even permanent, albeit very limited, maritime presence, has led to the emergence of a further sphere of activity that requires significant resources. Germany has promised NATO that it will provide at least 25 surface units and eight submarines on the high seas over the long term, thus ensuring the capability for surface and underwater warfare, including littoral warfare¹⁸, anti-submarine warfare, sea mine defence, as well as maritime air defence.

The fact that the Navy has been granted a considerable share of the upcoming maritime armament projects should not obscure the fact that Germany's maritime forces are too small for these existing commitments and future assignments. The F125 class frigates (Baden-Württemberg class) most recently introduced by the German Navy are intended primarily for use in asymmetric threat scenarios, based on the experiences and requirements of the 2000s. This, along with the smaller numbers of the most recently procured classic air defence frigate F124 (Sachsen class), means the German Navy lacks combat-ready surface units for symmetric warfare. In January 2021, the Bundestag approved the purchase of four next generation F126 frigates (formerly Mehrzweckkampfschiff 180) with a non-binding option for two more ships. However, if Germany is to take a real step forward and be able to adequately fulfil its maritime assignments and obligations, it should at least use the option of procuring a fifth and sixth F126-class unit by 2027. It will also depend on the contract for the six planned next-generation F127 air defence frigates being awarded without any delays. Intended as a replacement for the Sachsen class, they should be commissioned by 2032. Following decades of underfunding, including of the naval forces, the quality of the Navy has now at least been secured at a minimum level thanks to a spending increase, most of which was approved in 2021. However, the budget will have to be stretched considerably further in order to achieve the moderate increase in ocean-going vessels that is needed for the future.

In terms of the Navy's capability profile, there are still deficiencies in the areas of mine hunting and undersea warfare. Germany is one of the few NATO allies that still has mine warfare capabilities. These are particularly important in the Baltic, but it is in danger of losing this key capability if there is a lack of procurement and modernisation. In view of the naval armament of Russia and China, the procurement of a seventh and eighth submarine with a slightly increased range can only be the starting point – and by no means the end point – for the German

Navy, especially since four of the six submarines in the existing fleet are already deemed outdated. And the most pressing question of all – the shortage of skilled personnel – also remains unresolved. No branch of the Bundeswehr was hit harder by the suspension of compulsory military service than the Navy, which has been struggling with massive recruitment problems ever since. There is currently a shortage of suitable candidates in all areas, particularly for the demanding, technical work of handling state-of-the-art equipment that has been procured or will be commissioned in the coming years.

In the cyber domain, too, the most serious problem is the huge demand for personnel.

Growing Challenges in the Cyber and Information Space

The newest organisational area of the Bundeswehr, the cyber and information branch, is growing in importance for the performance of the armed forces on land, at sea, and in the air due to a progressive digitalisation in the military. At the same time, the growing importance of digital command and control and information systems in the Bundeswehr has dramatically increased the threat posed by cyber and information warfare; areas in which China and Russia have built up considerable capabilities and gained substantial experience through a range of operations. In the cyber and information space, first and foremost the Bundeswehr must prevent any interception, distortion, or delay of its own communications and data processing through electromagnetic attacks or cyber attacks, and build its own offensive capabilities in this area, too. Besides threats at the technical level, however, there are also hybrid attacks such as (dis)information and propaganda campaigns that influence opinion and challenge information sovereignty, especially when these campaigns directly target soldiers.

In contrast to the land, air, and sea dimensions, the particular challenge in this field is that defensive and offensive capabilities not only have to be trained and kept for defence purposes, but also need to be used on an ongoing basis to some extent, because the weapons used in the cyber and information domain are generally non-lethal and hence below NATO's Article 5 threshold; that is to say the transition from a state of peace to a state of war. This means that cyber and information warfare is ongoing, which requires the Bundeswehr to continuously defend against activities such as the undetected penetration of networks in order to compromise them in an emergency, or the influencing of developments in the information sphere. Since this is not the sole responsibility of the Bundeswehr, but must be understood as a task for society as a whole, this dimension has much stronger links to other policy areas than other military domains.

The main areas being worked on at present include developing the offensive component of the Bundeswehr's Cyber and Information Domain Service (KdoCIR) and improving its electromagnetic response capabilities; the recent decision to procure Pegasus aircraft and new fleet service ships has already strengthened and expanded signals intelligence from the air and sea. However, in the cyber domain, too, the most serious problem is the huge demand for personnel – several hundred positions are currently being created in the Cyber-IT Competence Centre alone – as well as the shortage of specialist staff in the face of competition from dynamic and attractive employers in the civilian sector. This problem is unlikely to be solved in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion and Outlook

German policymakers are confronted with quite a challenge. They have to initiate far-reaching reforms in all four dimensions of warfare in order to restore the Bundeswehr to its position as the guarantor of Europe's conventional defence. Refocusing on national and collective defence, restoring the ability to conduct operations with large military formations

in conventional types of combat, ultimately returning to its role as the backbone of NATO's conventional deterrence in Europe: these are manageable contributions that Germany is expected to make.

It is the task of politicians to convey to the public that German society's widely held assumption of being surrounded solely by friends is a fallacy.

Despite its political importance, looking back at Afghanistan will be of limited help. Clearly there is a need for a detailed reappraisal and analysis of the total collapse of structures built up over almost 20 years in Afghanistan and the subsequent end of the civil engagement. This evaluation should encompass the instruments used and their interaction – the networked approach – but it should also focus clearly on goal setting, the use of resources, and overall strategy. Germany must never again participate in a war in such a politically naive, operationally haphazard, and dishonest manner. In light of continuing engagement in the Middle East and ongoing operations in the Sahel region, lessons learnt from the Afghanistan debacle must also find their way into current policies, from the political down to the tactical level. However, when it comes to what Bundeswehr capabilities will be required in future, the Afghanistan mission does not offer many insights. The Taliban and their supporters in Afghanistan placed great pressure on the Bundeswehr in infantry combat in their area of operations. However, in terms of the intensity and scale of the engagements, as well as the complexity of the air situation, and parallel cyber operations, this is likely to pale in comparison with scenarios that the Euro-Atlantic forces have to prepare for on the eastern flank.

It is tragic that European countries were unable to independently keep Kabul airport open for a few days following the withdrawal of the last

US troops. However, it is an outright danger for Europe's security and the continued existence of the "political West" that eight years after the Ukraine crisis and a gradually deteriorating security situation on the eastern edge of the EU and NATO, Europe is still unable to establish a credible conventional deterrent against Russia without substantial support from US forces. In this respect, the end of the Afghanistan mission might even be helpful – by finally freeing up resources and, more importantly, no longer distracting from the actual existential security threat.

Thus, the first task of politicians is to convey to the public that German society's widely held assumption of being surrounded solely by friends is a fallacy. The foundation for Germany's security and prosperity continues to be the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance, both of which are by no means surrounded only by friends at their external borders. It is, therefore, not only Germany's responsibility but also in Germany's interests to guarantee the security of eastern allies. The new Federal Government needs to clearly communicate this uncomfortable truth to the German people.

Moreover, German policymakers must not misuse the – albeit justified – substantial funding needed to combat climate change and respond to the pandemic as a pretext for calling into question the hard-won increase in funding designed for the "Trend Reversals Materiel and Personnel" of the Bundeswehr. Creating a capability profile that meets the emerging threat situation, the requirements for future warfare, and the expectations of allies in the EU and NATO – measured in terms of Germany's standing in the alliances and the commitments it has made – will require substantial, long-term investment.

It remains to be seen whether the planned personnel strength of 203,300 soldiers is sufficient for meeting the capability profile. If this figure is not achieved, policymakers will have to find solutions to the Bundeswehr's glaring recruitment problems. The debate about compulsory military or civil service in Germany certainly

provides a starting point here. It is true that the old form of compulsory military service was no longer in keeping with the times and required reform. However, simply abolishing it without public debate and with no detailed preparations for alternative ways of recruiting personnel is proving to be one of the main burdens on the Bundeswehr's overall capability for national and collective defence. At no point after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 would Germany have abolished military service if it had still existed at that time. The extent to which this action was a total misjudgement of the long-term security situation has also been illustrated by Russia's threats towards Ukraine in spring 2021 and again since last autumn.

– translated from German –

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- 1 After the rapid military success against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in autumn 2001, the US administration and, to some extent, the public debated the possibility of further “external regime change”. While President Bush called Iraq, North Korea, and Iran an “axis of evil”, his designated Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice went before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and identified Cuba, Myanmar, North Korea, Zimbabwe, Iran, and Belarus as “outposts of tyranny”. Cornwell, Rupert 2005: From the axis of evil to the outposts of tyranny, *The Independent*, 20 Jan 2005, in: <https://bit.ly/3xZHrl1> [6 Dec 2021].
- 2 A debate on “wars of choice” and “wars of necessity” was conducted in the United States primarily in the context of the second Iraq war, after Richard N. Haass, a top advisor to the Bush administration, had clearly diverged from the official line by describing the invasion as a “war of choice”. Haass clearly sets out his thoughts on the matter in his 2010 book “War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars”. With regard to Afghanistan, a distinction must be made between the overthrow of the Taliban regime and the dismantling of al-Qaeda structures in late 2001 as a direct response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the almost 20-year engagement that followed. In the case of the latter, the US administration had a choice. Many voices in the government repeatedly advocated a “light footprint strategy”.
- 3 These obligations not only include the commitment to effective collective defence on the basis of Article 5 of the NATO Washington Treaty in the event of an attack against one or more allies. Euro-Atlantic allies are also required to meet their commitment under Article 3 to provide all the forces, capabilities, and measures necessary for deterrence and defence in peacetime. To some extent, Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union also imposes an obligation of aid and assistance on EU Member States.
- 4 The Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) is a brigade-sized combat unit within the NATO Response Force (NRF) comprising around 5,000 troops. Since 2015, the lead role has rotated among NATO member states on an annual basis. Germany led the first VJTF, which was initially set up on a provisional basis in 2015, then its Panzerlehrbrigade spearheaded the VJTF in 2019. The country is now preparing the 37th Panzergrenadier Brigade to head up the VJTF in 2023.
- 5 The NATO Enhanced Forward Presence, eFP, was adopted at the 2016 Warsaw NATO Summit as a way of supporting the three Baltic States and Poland. Led by the US (for Poland), the UK (for Estonia), Canada (for Latvia), and Germany (for Lithuania), multinational battalion-size battle-groups have been deployed in each of the four NATO member states since 2017.
- 6 While French and British Indo-Pacific policies are dominated by security concerns, the German government’s 2020 Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region and the EU’s 2021 Indo-Pacific Strategy provide very broad-based initiatives in which security is one field among many. German Federal Government, Federal Foreign Office 2020: Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, 2 Sep 2020, in: <https://bit.ly/38AvCGK> [6 Dec 2021].
- 7 Hennigan, W.J. 2017: James Mattis draws little flak at confirmation hearing to head Defense Department, *The Los Angeles Times*, 12 Jan 2017, in: <https://lat.ms/3ds4WK6> [6 Dec 2021].
- 8 Ministère de L’Europe et des Affaires étrangères 2021: France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, 2021, p. 5., in: <https://bit.ly/3rGuXOm> [6 Dec 2021].
- 9 Put simply, in too many cases the force’s inventory of large equipment is barely half of the Bundeswehr’s book inventory, and of this inventory, in turn, often only half is ready for deployment. Federal Ministry of Defence (BMVg) 2021: Bericht zur materiellen Einsatzbereitschaft der Hauptwaffensysteme der Bundeswehr II/2021, 15 Dec 2021, in: <https://bit.ly/3rlsJMJ> [24 Jan 2022].
- 10 Mais, Alfons 2020: Inspekturbrief zum Wechsel der nationalen Verantwortung NRF (L) Brigade, 16 Dec 2020, in: <https://bit.ly/31pJzXK> [6 Dec 2021].
- 11 A fully equipped combat brigade, including command and support units, comprises around 5,000 troops.
- 12 Defence, delay, and (counter-)attack were the three types of combat that the Bundeswehr traditionally trained for and practised. The familiar phrase of fighting on the North German Plain came about not only because the 9th Panzerlehrbrigade “Lower Saxony” was (and still is) located in the Lüneburg Heath area, but also because the North German Plain would have been one of the incursion vectors of an attack by the Soviet Union, and thus one of the places where the Bundeswehr would have been prepared to mount a broad-based defence.
- 13 The Bundeswehr’s capability profile envisages at least 60,000 active-duty soldiers and 20,000 reservists for the troop reserve by 2031.
- 14 The Bundeswehr faces the challenge that its diverse capabilities are mapped into a single force structure that can perform all tasks equally but not simultaneously. This situation is known as a “single set of forces”. The concept of the Bundeswehr states in this regard: “The Single Set of Forces consists of forces and means limited in scope, which fulfil all tasks of the Bundeswehr in a broad spectrum of different operational possibilities. [...] The Single Set of Forces is therefore fundamentally geared towards performing the most demanding tasks at any time. [...] This is a prerequisite for multifunctionality and multi-role capability and enables flexible action to carry out tasks.” BMVg 2018: Die Konzeption der Bundeswehr – Ausgewählte Grundlinien der Gesamtkonzeption, Apr 2018, p.11, in: <https://bit.ly/3EhZNh> [6 Dec 2021].

- 15 The multi-domain approach goes back to the “AirLand Battle” doctrine developed by the US Army in the 1980s. It is the basic concept of modern warfare and aims to conduct military operations holistically across the various operational domains (land, air, sea, cyberspace and space) through integrated command and control (C2), thus interweaving the various potential battlefields. Jones, Marcus A./Diaz de Leon, Jose 2020: Multi-Domain Operations – Awareness continues to spread about the importance of operating in multiple domains, *The Three Swords Magazine* 36, Nov 2020, pp.38-41, in: <https://bit.ly/3G615PT> [3 Jan 2022].
- 16 The stealth of an aircraft is characterised by the use of certain design features, technologies, and combat tactics that make it more difficult to detect, or that delay its detection, thus increasing its survivability.
- 17 The fleet of medium-weight CH-53G/GS/GA/GE transport helicopters that has been used by the German armed forces for 50 years is now seriously outdated. Accordingly, the helicopter is struggling with high obsolescence; of all the Air Force’s flying weapon systems, the CH-53 currently has the lowest operational readiness. In 2019, an average of just 22 helicopters were available out of a total inventory of 71 CH-53s. *Bundeswehr-Journal* 2019: Von 71 CH-53 momentan nur 22 Maschinen einsatzbereit, 14 Jul 2019, in: <https://bit.ly/3osaqe8> [6 Dec 2021].
- 18 Littoral warfare, distinct from open sea operations, refers to naval operations in shallow waters, often near the coast. Littoral combat is particularly significant in the Baltic due to its geography, with its numerous straits and islands, and shallow waters. This has an impact on the tactics and means employed, such as the use of sea mines, mine counter-measures, or the use of corvettes and other small warships.