

A more traditional foreign policy?

Germany's Foreign Policy under the Grand Coalition

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Germany's foreign policy experienced fundamental shifts during the time of Gerhard Schröder's chancellorship (1998-2005). For the first time since World War II, the country deployed troops outside its own borders, signaling an embrace of a more "normal" course in foreign policy. Furthermore, the coalition of Schröder's Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer's Greens readjusted some of Germany's central bilateral relationships, to the discomfort of the opposition Christian Democrats (CDU), who – assuming a clear victory – announced during the 2005 election campaign their intention to adopt a more "traditional" course in foreign policy.¹

However, electoral deadlock forced the CDU and SPD to engage in a Grand Coalition, making Angela Merkel the new Chancellor and Frank-Walter Steinmeier - a trustee of Gerhard Schröder - the new Foreign Minister.

Given this awkward situation, and one year after the inauguration of the new government, an examination of Germany's foreign policy is in order. What has changed during the past 12 months, where can one only see a slightly different emphasis and in which realms does continuity prevail? To answer these questions, this paper will look at five relationships that remain crucial to Germany's foreign policy: bilateral relations with Russia, the US, France and Poland, and Germany as an actor within the framework of the European Union. Furthermore, the approach of both the Schröder and Merkel administrations regarding security policy – a realm that gained considerable importance and attention from both the German public and German policy makers within the past couple of years – will be compared.

Reassessing Russia

During the years of the Red/Green Coalition, Germany's bilateral relationship with Russia was marked by exceptional intimacy. This was primarily because of Schröder's personal closeness and friendship to Vladimir Putin, which resulted in the fact that the chancellor refused to criticize Russia in public about human rights abuses and increasingly authoritarian governance, even calling the Russian President a "flawless democrat".² Both politicians periodically held consultations and even

were on the guest lists of their respective birthday receptions.³ Schröder assumed the government's main responsibility for the course of bilateral ties with Russia, making cautionary voices from his Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and from within his own party of secondary relevance.⁴

Merkel and the CDU, in contrast, rejected this course and steered toward a more critical relationship with Moscow.⁵ After becoming chancellor, Merkel brought more distance to the countries' bilateral relations. However, the future direction of German-Russian relations remains unclear.

Merkel still endorses the course of a "strategic partnership" with Russia, an approach her predecessor had adopted.⁶ Yet, her rhetoric and actions are far more distancing, criticizing Putin during personal talks amongst other things on his human rights record, his policies on Chechnya and the Northern Caucasus, and his crackdowns on the Russian press. Furthermore, she also met with representatives from Russian NGOs and opposition parties.⁷

A glimpse of the new quality of both politicians' talks was provided by Merkel herself, when she acknowledged during a joint press conference after a meeting with the Russian President in January 2006 that in some areas, "mutual understanding was not immediately reached".⁸ This is particularly true in the realm of energy policies. Russia wants to get access to the European market, a step Merkel is very suspicious about, especially since Moscow tends to embrace a more and more protectionistic approach in several "strategic" sectors such as the defense-, aviation- and energy-industry.⁹

Even though the tone is not as amicable as it was one year ago, both countries' stance towards each other still seems to be very positive. Ironically, this is also a result of Schroeder's legacy. Especially in the economic sphere, both countries' ties continue to strengthen. Germany remains Russia's trading partner number one with a business volume of approximately 47 billion Euros per year and a downturn of that development curve is not in sight.¹⁰

The second pole in Germany's Russia policies is the SPD-led Foreign Ministry under Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The ministry claims a monopoly on this issue for itself and endorses a more Schroederesque approach. In October of 2006, it released a strategy paper that suggested strong engagement with Moscow and only briefly mentioning the human rights dimension. Concretely, the paper asks for "political, economical and cultural engagement [...] with Russia, to make its anchorage in a larger Europe irreversible", obviously representing a counterpoint to more reserved CDU-positions.¹¹

It is difficult to say which part of the government will prevail in Germany's Russia policies, the Foreign Ministry or the Bundeskanzleramt (the Chancellor's Residence). However, the year 2007 could prove to be fertile ground for CDU positions. Germany will hold both the presidency of the EU and the G8, giving Merkel plenty of opportunity to direct the country's Foreign Policy during meetings between heads of state and government which do not include her foreign minister.

Reviving Transatlanticism

Germany's relationship with the United States went through an ice-age during the years of Schroeder's chancellorship. The disagreement about the Iraq War (and the way both parties handled the dissent) made the stalled transatlantic partnership arguably the most significant long-term aspect of the Red/Green coalition's transatlantic policies.

During that time, Merkel's CDU party constantly criticized Schröder's course, arguing in favor of stronger US-Germany ties.¹² Now, one year after Merkel's narrow victory in the 2005 general elections, transatlantic relations are in better shape indeed. Though rapprochement between the countries already started during the years 2003 – 2005, the results of those efforts were limited and it was only after Merkel's election that things really changed.¹³

Three factors played together to improve the atmosphere between Berlin and Washington:

First and foremost, with the forming of the Grand Coalition, Germany walked away from several foreign policy objectives that were uncomfortable for the US, such as halting pursuit of lifting the EU weapons embargo on China¹⁴ and toning down relations with an increasingly authoritarian Russia.¹⁵

Thus, even though Berlin still rules out sending troops to Iraq, Germany became a more "comfortable" foreign policy partner in the eyes of the U.S. due to the CDU influence in government.

Secondly, Merkel's curriculum vitae and character facilitate a good bilateral relationship. The chancellor's view of the United States is influenced by her perception of the US during her time in Communist East Germany. Thus it is clearly more positive than Schröder's and Fischer's, who both were spawned from the German "68-generation" that – inter alia due to the Vietnam War – generally has a more critical picture of the United States, including its foreign policy.

Personal relations between Merkel and Bush are very healthy, especially compared to the Schröder-era. Besides the Chancellor's positive view of the US, Bush seems also to be fascinated by Merkel, her years in the totalitarian part of the country and the people's struggle for freedom. This became

obvious at a press conference during Merkel's first visit to the White House in January 2006, where Bush pointed out that he was "particularly touched by hearing about her early life in communist Germany."¹⁶

Moreover, Merkel's way of conducting bilateral talks has proven helpful. Whereas Schröder tended to talk confrontationally and thus sometimes complicated dialogue, Merkel tries to be rather moderating – a skill she badly needs to run her own coalition – and in so doing opens ways for engagement, even in case of differing positions.¹⁷ This "Merkel-factor" led to a mutual visitation diplomacy and thus to the new chancellor seizing the handling of the countries' bilateral relations. Accordingly, Merkel and Bush met four times during the first year of the chancellor's reign, with one of that gatherings being a – comparatively private – barbecue in a village within Merkel's own East German constituency.¹⁸

A third factor that helped improving the atmosphere between Berlin and Washington can be seen within the United States itself. Soon after the 2004 presidential elections, George W. Bush had to embrace a more multilateral foreign policy, realizing that he needed support for his goals ahead. This forced him to approach his partners on the other side of the Atlantic. The USA gradually reached out its hand, which could be already seen in early 2005, when the Bush administration virtually started a charm offensive with its European partners, gradually waiving the unilateral course of action of the Iraq War and using placative rhetoric.¹⁹ Accordingly, Bush began to stress US-European commonalities during speeches that addressed European high-level politicians rather than focusing on the divergences over the Iraq War.²⁰

Germany also was on the receiving end of this new approach. At first, it was Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who traveled to Berlin and met with then-chancellor Schröder²¹ and only a few weeks later, the American President himself met with the chancellor. On this trip, Bush used very forgiving rhetoric, stating that this visit should "say to the people of this good country (Germany) and my country (USA) that past disagreements are behind us".²²

Together, the three factors mentioned above led to a more comfortable scenario for Germany. The atmosphere has lightened and – due to relative weakness of the US – Germany does not have to eat humble pie. The countries are cooperating closely on sensitive issues like Iran, without Merkel appearing subservient to the U.S. President. The chancellor can still pursue a rather independent foreign policy and even gained tribute for criticizing the US prison on Guantanamo Bay²³ as well as convincing Bush to get actively involved in the negotiations about the Iranian nuclear issue.²⁴

Leveling ties with France

During Schröder's chancellorship, German-French relations resembled a seven-year rollercoaster ride. In the beginning, the change of government in Berlin facilitated and accelerated the decline of both countries' bilateral relations, which had its start already in the early 1990s. To be fair, both governments bear the blame for that development. The German side, however, can be accused of not having taken into account sufficiently the sentiments of their French neighbors. Examples for that can be found easily. Chancellor Schröder for example, refused to participate at a joint commemoration of the End of the First World War or alienated Paris by embracing a very neoliberal agenda together with Tony Blair's New Labor.²⁵

This diverging development culminated in an open dispute between both countries during the 2000 Nice Summit of the European Union. In the negotiations for a new treaty, the German chancellor wanted to achieve a bigger German weight in the Council of the European Union, constituting a breach of the principle of French-German "*parité*".²⁶

However, after this low point, Berlin and Paris decided to conduct a rapprochement, knowing that good bilateral relations were for both countries reason of state. Therefore, the so-called "Blaesheim-process" was initiated, stipulating more frequent informal bilateral consultations between both administrations.²⁷ However, real progress in the aspired rapprochement was only reached in the context of The Iraq War. Schroeder and Chirac snuggled against each other in order to form a counterweight to – in their view – dangerous unilateral ambitions of the US. As a result of that, German-French relations became closest in a long time – at the expense of both countries' ties with Washington. The new proximity between both capitals even led to the unusual situation that Schröder was represented by Chirac at a meeting of the European Council in October 2003, and the chancellor's vote was confided to the French President.²⁸

Merkel aimed at readjusting this situation. After she came to power, she tried to direct Germany's France policies towards two goals:

Firstly, she wanted to keep good relations with Germany's neighbor since this has proved to be necessary foundation for both countries' foreign policies.²⁹

However – and that is her second goal – Merkel and her CDU argue that strong ties with France must never be at the expense of the US. For this reason, the chancellor refused to speak of a German-French "axis", a term French President Chirac used at a common press conference. Merkel

in contrast is more careful in her choice of words and describes the relation just as a “motor for Europe” even though an “amicable relationship” is necessary.³⁰

This “leveled” relationship between both countries could already be seen in practice.

Even though Germany and the US became closer, Paris and Berlin still closely cooperate in various fields, such as on the Iranian nuclear issue, the integration of immigrants or sending troops to monitor the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Kongo.

Yet the future course of the German-French bilateral relationship remains unclear. The year 2007 will also be crucial in this respect. France will elect its new President and will grow more self-confident after this event. With Germany holding the EU-presidency, tensions could evolve on several issues concerning European integration, such as the EU constitutional treaty, where the likely Elysee-candidates Royal³¹ and Sarkozy³² both have different opinions than the German Grand Coalition. However, it would be wise for both Berlin and Paris to maintain and even extend their cooperation since this would enhance both countries’ weight in the field of foreign policy.

Listening to Polish concerns

Just like in the French case, Germany’s relationship with Poland during Gerhard Schröder’s chancellorship was also characterized by heydays and low points. In 1998, when the Red/Green Coalition assumed power in Bonn (then the seat of government), tensions were prevalent between both capitals, displaying a result of the so-called “paper war”.³³ In May 1998, Erika Steinbach, newly elected chairman of the German “Bund der Vertriebenen” (Federation of Expellees), declared that Poland would have to apologize to Berlin for displacing Germans from its soil at the end of World War II. Shortly after that and in a rather clumsy move, the Bundestag passed a resolution that expressed “its hope that Poland’s accession to the EU will facilitate the resolution of unsolved bilateral problems”³⁴, meaning that due to freedom of movement within the EU, these issues would maybe solve itself. The Sejm (the Polish Lower House), however, interpreted the document in a different way and saw Poland’s territorial integrity under question. In July of 1999 it passed a resolution which expressed concerns about “dangerous tendencies in Germany” and stated that Poland “would not accept a challenge of the territorial order in Europe”.³⁵

The Red/Green Coalition tried to improve relations yet success did not materialize to a desirable extent. The German administration began to discuss the topic of compensation payments for Polish citizens who were brought to Nazi-Germany between 1939 and 1945 to work there as forced laborers. While Schröder gained merits on the other side of the Oder-Neisse line for starting talks

about this important issue of both countries' common past, the slow process of the negotiations, which were finally ended in December 1999, were rather harmful to the climate between the capitals.³⁶ The quality of German-Polish relations experienced a dramatic improvement after the EU Summit 2000 in Nice. Germany acted as an advocate for Poland, rejecting a proposal by the French presidency that would have weakened the influence of the ten new member states in the new treaty. As a result of Schröder's intervention, Poland now possesses 27 votes in the Council of the European Union and thus has considerable influence in the EU's decision making process.³⁷

Following the Nice Summit, bilateral relations between both countries were in very good shape but this should not last for long. After the year 2003 the climate between Berlin and Warsaw experienced a downturn again. This was mainly because of four reasons, yet only two of them can directly be linked to the Schröder administration's active foreign policy. The other two are rather the product of mutual misunderstandings and oversimplifications. During and after the negotiations for the EU Constitutional Treaty, Poland's stance was very reluctant on giving away privileges, attained in the Treaty of Nice. Warsaw put a strong emphasis on its own national interests, making further integration of the block more difficult. What could be seen here was a fundamental difference in the German-Polish interpretation about the *raison d'être* of the European Union, leading to annoyance among German politicians.³⁸ This became evident when Chancellor Schröder said that "it is inappropriate to join the EU and cast a veto right afterwards."³⁹

Secondly, a planned "Center against Expulsions" put a strain on both countries' bilateral ties. Planned by CDU-politician Erika Steinbach, the Center should document the expulsion of Germans from Polish soil after the end of World War II. Warsaw reacts very declining against that idea, fearing that Germany takes this as step to qualify its own past and thus makes efforts to rewrite history. Even though chancellor Schröder was against the project, it found a lot of supporters throughout the German parliament and consequently complicated German-Polish relations.⁴⁰

More important than the latter two aspects, however, were two factors that were directly affected by the Red/Green Coalitions foreign policy.

First and foremost, the Iraq War laid its shadow also on this field. While Warsaw supported the course of the USA, committing 200 elite-units to George Bush's "coalition of the willing"⁴¹, Germany joined France and Russia in the camp of the most prominent war-opposers. As a result of this split, the French President Chirac called Poland "badly educated"⁴² and Berlin – by not distancing itself from this statement – indirectly supported this accusation, at least in the perception

of the Polish public. In consequence of that, Poland felt passed over by those three countries and during the whole course of the crisis, broad German-Polish dialogue was never reached.⁴³ Of course, this can not only be blamed on the German government. This issue, however, shows one distinctive characteristic in the Schröder administration's Poland policies: In matters of Germany's own national interests, consultations with Poland – as well as other smaller, Middle and Eastern European countries – were not considered as necessary.⁴⁴ While this fact was just slightly being adumbrated in the context of the Iraq issue, a second - and probably the most straining factor for both countries' ties - showed it even clearer. In 2003, Schröder and Putin announced the construction of a 1200 kilometer gas pipeline from Wyborg in Russia to Greifswald in Germany. While this deal “will secure Germany's energy supply for decades”⁴⁵, as Schröder formulated it, Poland's position is characterized by strong opposition. It argues that this agreement would make itself more vulnerable to blackmailing from Russia which could – after the construction of the pipeline – cut off Poland's energy supply without affecting further delivery to Germany.⁴⁶ Consequently, reactions in Warsaw were and are still very emotional. The Polish Minister of Defense, Radek Sikorski even compared this contract to the Hitler-Stalin-Pact, which Poland “does not want to be rekindled”.⁴⁷ Schröder, however, ignored these concerns, saying that “Germany's energy policies are made in Berlin and nowhere else.”⁴⁸

Consequently, quite similar to Schröder's situation seven years before, Merkel came to power in times of a strained German-Polish bilateral relationship. However, from everything that can be said so far, her policies differ a little bit from those of her predecessor. The new Chancellor – in contrast to Schröder – aims at strengthening dialogue with smaller, Middle and Eastern European countries, even in the context of vital German interests. Merkel made clear that her new foreign policy does not aim at forming an axis of Berlin, Paris and Moscow, a fear that evolved in Poland especially in the wake of the Iraq War.⁴⁹ Prior to consultations with other major countries, the chancellor now uses her political counselors to clarify the agenda and the topics of the talks and thus ensure the highest amount of transparency.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Merkel held several talks with the Polish President Lech Kaczynski and his brother Jaroslaw, the country's Prime Minister, in which the chancellor addressed the pipeline issue. Merkel repeatedly tried to integrate Poland into this project and stated that “other countries – especially Poland – will profit from this pipeline as well”.⁵¹ She also offered the construction of a branch that could provide gas supply for Poland.⁵² This offer, however, was rejected and Merkel's strategy of improving relations by strengthening dialogue has not proven

successful so far. Poland is still highly concerned about the planned “Center against Expulsions” and the fact that Merkel – in contrast to Schröder – supports the project exacerbates a quick rapprochement even though the Chancellor suggested an involvement of Germany’s eastern neighbor in this project.⁵³

It even seems like the countries’ bilateral relationship has deteriorated within the past 12 months. The administration of the Kaczynski-twins even magnifies small incidents to major diplomatic tensions. Accordingly, Poland called upon the German government to apologize for a cartoon of the German tageszeitung – newspaper, in which Lech Kaczynski was shown as “Polands new potato”.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Jaroslaw Kaczynski repeatedly accuses the German government of not doing enough to prevent the Prussian Trusteeship – a Federation of German Expellees – from suing Poland for banishing Germans after the end of World War II. This organization, however, is just a marginal force in German society and it is a longstanding position of German governments not to support their claims.⁵⁵

Acting as a broker on the European stage

It is hard to assess changes and continuity in the Grand Coalition’s behavior within the framework of the European Union since most of the Merkel administration’s (new) EU policies will not become apparent until next year, when Germany holds the rotating presidency of the EU. As this field consists of a huge array of policy issues and only a limited amount of them have been worked on so far, a full scale analysis is not feasible yet.

Yet if one looks carefully at the fields of EU policies that have already been touched by the new government in the past twelve months, it is already possible to make a first assessment about Germany’s role in the bloc. The first striking factor is that continuity appears to be the prevailing characteristic. This has mainly two reasons.

Firstly, EU policies in Germany are traditionally a field with a remarkable high degree of bipartisan consensus. Both CDU and SPD agree that the constitutional treaty is necessary for the further development of the EU.⁵⁶ The Schröder administration strongly supported the idea of the treaty and argued in favor of an ongoing ratification process even after the negative referenda in France and the Netherlands.⁵⁷ Merkel is continuing this course and announced that she wants the constitution – or at least “its substance” - to come into effect in 2009.⁵⁸

With respect to further EU enlargement, there are also almost no changes. On October 26, the Bundestag - with a overwhelming majority - voted in favor of admitting Bulgaria and Romania to the Union, demonstrating a continuation of the former administration's course of strong support for the issue.⁵⁹ General consensus and continuity can also be seen with respect to other potential EU aspirants such as Croatia. The government still supports the country's bid for EU membership but also states that prior to an eventual succession, the EU has to find a way out of the constitutional crisis.⁶⁰ As a result of that, it is highly unlikely that Croatia will become a member of the EU before 2009.

A second element that contributed to continuity in Germany's EU policies is the SPD influence in government. This can be observed in the context of Turkey's bid for EU membership. The Red/Green Coalition strongly argued in favor of admitting the country to the EU, contributing significantly to the eventual start of accession talks on October 3, 2006.⁶¹ Merkel's CDU party strongly opposed - and still opposes - full EU membership and supports the idea of a "privileged partnership".⁶² Knowing that complete mutual consent would not be reached, CDU and SPD agreed on the principle of "pacta sunt servanda". Accordingly, the government is still committed to the accession talks but emphasizes in the Coalition Treaty that the negotiations must be open-ended.⁶³

Yet with this diplomatic formula, the problem is not solved and even erupted to the surface in November 2006, when the European Commission issued its progress report for Turkey in which the country was heavily criticized inter alia for its judicial system, the status of its minority rights as well as for not ratifying the so-called Ankara protocol, which would open Turkish ports for Cypriot ships. Especially the latter issue was used by some high-ranking CDU politicians to argue for an (at least temporary) interruption of the accession talks if the Turkish government doesn't ratify the protocol until December.⁶⁴ The SPD in contrast is of the opinion that especially in this crucial situation, the EU "must not slam the door"⁶⁵, as vice-chancellor Franz Müntefering put it. Merkel did not make concrete statements but said that in case of non-compliance in the Cyprus-question, Turkey has to fear "serious consequences".⁶⁶

Despite those factors, there are also fields in which the new German government's EU policies differ from those of its predecessor. During his years in government, Schröder always put strong emphasis on German national interests. This could be seen in Germany's wish for more votes in the Council of the European Union during the Nice Summit 2000 or its strong commitment to lowering the German payments to the European Union. Moreover, in some cases, the Chancellor's approaches seemed to

be a little bit too frank for European politics. At the EU Summit in December 2003, Schröder pleaded for setting an upper limit on the EU's budget. Poland – as the one being most affected by that proposal – felt blackmailed and thought that this was just because it expressed strong skepticism about the Constitutional Treaty.

As a result of this emphasis on national interests and the lack of diplomatic conduct, Germany lost its traditional honest broker role within the European Union, at the same time diminishing the country's influence, which could be seen when Schröder – in an alliance with Chirac - was unable to make Guy Verhofstad the new President of the European Commission.⁶⁷

From what can be said so far, Merkel tries to undo these changes. During the negotiations for the EU budget 2007-2013, the chancellor successfully arbitrated between France and Great Britain, reaching a compromise between both countries' confronting claims.⁶⁸ Consequently, Germany is on its way to recover its role as a mediator again.

Another field in which the Grand Coalition apparently pursues a different course than the Red/Green Coalition is the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Even though the Schröder administration initially gave great support to a further strengthening of the CFSP and strongly supported the creation of the ESDP (European Security and Defense Policy) in 2000⁶⁹, Germany's policies until 2005 rather weakened a common European foreign policy. Especially two factors have to be mentioned in this context. Firstly, the chancellor's decision of loosening ties with France heavily impeded the further development of that sector since history has shown that further European integration is just feasible with combined French-German efforts.⁷⁰

Secondly, Schröder's way of handling the Iraq war had negative effect on the CFSP, dividing Europe into the camp of the war-supporters and those who objected it. The chancellor did not make any real efforts to find a common European position on that matter and refused right from the start to take military measures even if the United Nations Security Council had given its mandate.⁷¹ With the country looking at its navel and Schröder announcing this "German way", the European CFSP heavily suffered from the events in 2002 and 2003.

The Merkel-administration, however, seems to put more emphasis into that particular field. In the Coalition Treaty, both CDU and SPD state that they want to enhance the ESDP as a part of GASP to a European Security and Defense Union.⁷² Moreover, in the recently published "White Paper" about Germany's future security policies, the government also puts strong emphasis on the CFSP, acknowledging that: "Europe can best exert its influence, when it speaks with one voice".⁷³

In late November, the chairman of the SPD, Kurt Beck, caused a stir when he suggested the creation of a European army with a single military command.⁷⁴ Even though this proposal seems not to be feasible, it illustrated both parties' commitment to the CFSP and from everything that can be said so far, all of this is definitely more than just lip service. With troop deployments under EU flag to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Germany showed commitment to the CFSP and also the Lebanon-mission, where Germany - together with several other EU-member states - sent more than 1000 naval officers, contributed to a strengthening of European cohesion in military affairs.⁷⁵

Processing the country's security policies

Germany's security policies gained a lot of attention from the public as well as from policy makers within the last couple of years, being the result of major events in this field. It is, however, not very reasonable to look at this realm of the Merkel administration's foreign policy in categories of continuity and change. Rather appropriate is a consideration of this array as an evolutionary process in which further development is natural and necessary for a country with Germany's past and the long-lasting constraints that came with it. Consequently, the question that I want to answer in this part is: "how does Germany's new administration contribute to the evolution of the country's security policies?" To answer this, it is necessary to give a brief overview about the policies of its predecessor since this topic can only be analyzed in a broader context.

From 1991 - when Germany conducted mine cleaning operations in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf and thus started its first military engagements after World War II - to 1998, when Gerhard Schröder assumed chancellorship, the country was only involved in very few military engagements, all of them having at the utmost the character of peacekeeping missions.⁷⁶

The Red/Green Coalition, however, increased the amount of military commitments, extended the geographical range of their operational area and instituted a change of their very nature. Two decisions of the Schröder-administration were very important in that respect.

Firstly, Germany's participation in the NATO-war against Yugoslavia has to be considered as very significant. In order to anticipate genocide against the Albanian Kosovars, the country utilized its airforce to bomb Serbian targets and thus used its armed forces (called the "Bundeswehr") for the first time since World War II for more than peacekeeping operations.⁷⁷ This decision was highly controversial among both the German public and policy makers and it required the strong convincing skills of Chancellor Schröder and Foreign Minister Fischer to get the Red/Green Coalition to vote in

favor of a necessary mandate of the Bundestag.⁷⁸ Yet the argument of anticipating genocide weighed heavy and finally made the military operations possible, setting a precedent for theoretical similar situations in the future.

The second decision of utmost importance was Schröder's expression of "absolute solidarity" for the US after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC on September 11th of 2001.⁷⁹

The phrase implied German support in the US' campaign against the Taliban since Berlin – similar to the rest of the international community – began to realize that the new nature of emerging threats made it necessary to redefine strategies for national security. Consequently, Minister of Defense Peter Struck expressed that "Germany's security needs to be defended on the slopes of the Hindu Kush"⁸⁰ and Chancellor Schröder talked about Germany's new responsibility for worldwide military engagements.⁸¹ However, a backing of the US invasion of Afghanistan was also highly controversial among policy makers and Schröder had to call for a vote of confidence to get parliamentary support for it.⁸² Eventually, Germany's share in the downfall of the Taliban was rather limited. The country basically made its contribution by taking over responsibilities of American troops – e.g. securing American bases in Germany or conducting intelligence operations over American airspace – and thus releasing them for the war in Afghanistan. However, Germany's commitment to tackle terrorism and other newly emerging threats has always been more than just pure words. In the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the country deploys up to 1300 naval officers at the Horn of Africa to anticipate trade of goods that could be used to support terrorist activities.⁸³ Additionally, Germany is heavily involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, providing a small amount of secretly working elite ground units for OEF and approximately 2700 troops – the second biggest contingent – within the NATO-led ISAF mission.⁸⁴

All in all, the Schröder-administration made important steps to adapt Germany's security policies to the 21st century. In October 1998, when Schröder assumed power, Germany had not deployed more than 2800 troops, all of them on duty in Bosnia and Georgia. If one looked at the map in October 2005, the situation had drastically changed. At this time, Germany had more than 7000 troops in countries of the Balkans, the Caucasus, the greater Middle East and Africa.⁸⁵

This further development of Germany's security policies was continued by the Merkel-administration within the past twelve months.

Shortly after the inauguration of the new government, the first decision in this field had to be made: A request by the United Nations asked the European Union to safeguard the July 2006 presidential

elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The decision making process on this issue was very rocky and for a long time, support for this mission was rather limited.⁸⁶

This was partly because of the very imprecise nature of the request by the United Nations, but another factor that explains some of the hesitancy among German policy makers was the uncertainty whether this operation would really serve German interests.⁸⁷ Beginning at the end of World War II, Germany's foreign policy always seemed to be guided by something more abstract than own national interests. Hans-Dietrich Genscher once even said that Germany has no national interests because those would only be European Interests.⁸⁸ Gerhard Schröder changed this by referring to own national interests in the context of several foreign policy decisions. A precise definition thereof, however, has never been made and consequently it was just a matter of time until this discussion had to erupt to the surface. Eventually, Germany committed 800 troops and demonstrated its willingness to act as a country with a security policy of global scope.⁸⁹ Yet again: national interest or conditions for a deployment of the Bundeswehr were not formulated at this time.

Only a few months later, discussions started in Germany, whether the Bundeswehr should commit troops to secure the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel. Merkel spoke in favor of that by stating that "securing the existence of Israel must be reason of state for Germany".⁹⁰ This argumentation served as an explanatory statement for the deployment of more than 1000 naval officers to secure Lebanon's border and to anticipate rearmament of the Hezbollah via the seaway.⁹¹ However, not all doubters were convinced that way and once more, questions about the countries' national interests and the role of its armed forces spawned.

An important step to answer at least some of those problems could have been made by the administration when it published a "White Paper" about Germany's future security policies and the role of the Bundeswehr. However, the document has a lot of shortcomings.

The definition of Germany's national interests appears to be very vague. Besides the countries' care for life and limb of its own people, international terrorism and the advocacy for human rights, the document states that "the settlement of regional crises and conflicts" as well as "free and unhampered world trade" are considered to be national interests.⁹² These imprecise definitions make it very unlikely that the discussion, which erupted in the wake of the Kongo and Lebanon missions, end quickly.

Moreover, the White Book does not state when Germany should participate in an international mission, neither defines it very precisely the role of international organizations in Germanys security

policies. The document only states that the country remains committed to multilateralism and that EU as well as NATO play a critical role.

Besides that, the document also announces major changes in Germany's security- and defense policies, some of them constituting clear improvements.

Accordingly, the White Paper acknowledges that the Bundeswehr – in the medium-term – has to receive more money from the countries' budget, a step that is badly needed since the German military has received less and less money over the years even though its task list has dramatically expanded.⁹³

Furthermore, the document tackles the problem of sparse serviceable German military personnel, which can be seen as the biggest advancement that is stipulated in the document. Back in November 2006, Germany had more than 9000 troops abroad, already leading to discussions about a military overstretch. In late October, Minister of Defense Jung announced a plan to gradually withdraw troops from Bosnia to counteract those tendencies.⁹⁴ The White Paper acknowledges that the Bundeswehr is an "army in use" and according to the document it must be ready for a future in which the level of engagement could even rise. Consequently, the document calls for transforming the German military in a way that the country disposes over approximately 35.000 well equipped troops in the peace-enforcement sector, enabling Germany to act against a military well-organized enemy. Additionally, the document announces an enlargement of the countries' capabilities in the peacekeeping sector to approximately 70.000 serviceable troops.⁹⁵

Both of those steps could lead to an improvement in Germany's freedom of action in military matters and can be considered to be an important step into the future.

Conclusion

Taking all of the above into consideration, it seems safe to say that Germany's foreign policy did get a new direction under the Grand Coalition. With readjusting its position towards other important bilateral partners as well as with slightly changing its behavior within the framework of the European Union, the country regained its role as a balancer on the international level – a role Schröder deliberately gave away by putting great emphasis on own national interests. This balancing role characterized Germany's foreign policy throughout many years since the end of World War II and it was during those times, when the country could exert its biggest influence on the world stage. For that reason, the Grand Coalition's course in foreign policy can be seen as a return to a more

traditional foreign policy. However, in contrast to the Red/Green Coalition, the Merkel-administration was not faced with a major crisis like the Iraq War, which at that time unsettled the whole international system. A new crisis like this could well put the countries' new foreign policies to the test again. However, as long as the situation on the world stage allows it, the role as balancer and mediator seems to be suitable for Germany and it appears to be likely that the Grand Coalition will further pursue this course.

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