

IV. GERMANY'S ZEITENWENDE AND THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has made it clear to Germany that it is impossible to shape European security together with Russia for the foreseeable future. Berlin has come to understand that it is necessary to strengthen NATO's collective defence, increase the Allied presence on the eastern flank and arm Ukraine in the face of the Kremlin's aggressive actions. Germany is ready to bear the costs of investing in national and collective defence over the next few years, and to continue delivering military aid to Ukraine.

However, it appears that the Chancellery's long-term preference – in case the war ends and political changes happen in Russia – is a partial return to the post-Cold War concept of European security architecture. That concept was underpinned by arms control measures, self-imposed limits on NATO's presence in the Central European member states, and refraining from enlarging NATO into Eastern Europe, coupled with dialogue and cooperation with Russia. A European security order that would imply a long-term, systemic and costly confrontation with Moscow is for the time being beyond Germany's thinking. Berlin's attitude may only be modified in the future as a result of a shift in Washington's policy: on the official termination of the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the granting of US security guarantees, together with a real NATO membership perspective to Ukraine. This in turn will probably depend on domestic political developments inside Russia itself.

The post-Cold War European security architecture

After the end of the Cold War, the reunified Germany pursued two objectives that were determined by political, security, economic and historical reasons: to stabilise its eastern neighbourhood by expanding NATO (and later the EU) to include the Central European countries, and for those two organisations to develop a strategic partnership with Russia. These efforts in the security sphere, and not only by Germany, resulted in the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security in 1997 and the accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO in 1999.

With regard to the new member states (implicitly those from Central Europe), the NATO-Russia Founding Act stated that in the current and foreseeable security environment, NATO would carry out its collective defence missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for

reinforcement rather than by the additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces. The Alliance also made a political commitment not to deploy nuclear weapons in these countries. As a result, NATO's infrastructure, exercises and military presence on the territory of the Central European member states remained at very modest levels until 2014.

Germany's attitude towards Russia at that time was illustrated by the notion that "European security can only be built with Russia, not against it". In this spirit, Germany regarded the non-NATO and non-EU Eastern European countries (including Ukraine) as a 'common neighbourhood' where the EU and Russia could reconcile the pursuit of their economic interests.¹ Germany did not want to integrate these countries into the Euro-Atlantic structures as this could have jeopardised the development of NATO and the EU's partnership with Moscow, which Germany saw as a priority for stabilising security in Europe. For this reason, Germany opposed the granting of Membership Action Plans (MAPs) to Ukraine and Georgia at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest.

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea and its intervention in the Donbas in 2014, it became imperative for Germany to avoid an escalation of tensions between Russia and Ukraine and to prevent war in Eastern Europe. Germany assumed the responsibility for diplomatic efforts within the Normandy Format aimed at resolving the conflict. At the same time Germany shied away from supplying weapons to Ukraine, arguing that it was acting as an intermediary between the two countries; it was also wary of greater NATO support for Ukraine. Berlin's preferred solution was to resolve the conflict diplomatically by implementing the Minsk agreements. Shortly before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the German government presumably expected to obtain concessions from Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia, which would have *de facto* enabled the Kremlin to influence Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy.

At the same time, after 2014 Germany began to see Russia as a challenge (but not a threat) to the European security order. Official strategic documents (the 2016 White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr) continued to emphasise that Europe's long-term security and prosperity could not be shaped without cooperation with Russia. Maintaining stable and predictable relations with Russia and looking for avenues of cooperation in other areas remained one of Germany's objectives. Energy was the main sphere of bilateral cooperation. Berlin saw an opportunity to increase the competitiveness of the

¹ J. Gotkowska, 'Germany and the Eastern Partnership', *OSW Commentary*, no. 37, 17 June 2010, osw.waw.pl.

German economy and sought to set up a gas hub in Germany, over the interests of the Eastern and Central European countries.

Within NATO, Germany favoured a combination of strengthening collective defence and engaging in some elements of dialogue with Russia, including on arms control and sectoral cooperation. In 2016, Germany agreed to an Allied military presence in Poland and the Baltic states, but at the same time argued that it should be limited in line with the NATO-Russia Founding Act. Germany's (and the United States') adherence to the provisions of this political document resulted not in a permanent but a rotational presence of four NATO battalion-size battlegroups (around 1000 troops) in Poland and the Baltic states. In the process, Germany became the framework nation for a battlegroup in Lithuania, deploying 600–700 Bundeswehr soldiers there, and it began to participate in military exercises in the Baltic states. Although this was a relatively minor commitment, it helped to overcome Germany's reluctance to take part in NATO activities aimed at deterring Russia.

In 2018, the German Ministry of Defence adopted the Bundeswehr Concept, a document that placed the defence of the national and Allied territory on a par with German participation in crisis management operations. As part of the Bundeswehr Capability Development Plan for 2018–2032, Germany committed itself to developing capabilities for the NATO Defence Planning Process. The German Army was scheduled to deploy one fully equipped brigade to the VJTF in 2023, one fully modernised division for NATO Response Force (NRF) by 2027 and another two by 2031. The German Air Force would send four operational air force groups, while the Navy would contribute 25 surface ships and eight submarines. The plans called for increasing the size of the Bundeswehr to 203,000 soldiers in active service (the current level stands at around 180,000 soldiers) and another 90,000 in reserve service.²

The *Zeitenwende*: the short-term consequences

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 took Germany by surprise. The German government had short-sightedly and dogmatically believed that its strategy towards Russia would deter it from further aggression and stabilise the situation in Eastern Europe. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's speech on 27 February 2022, which proclaimed an 'epochal turn' in German policy,

² J. Gotkowska, 'The war in Ukraine: consequences for the Bundeswehr and Germany's policy in NATO', *OSW Commentary*, no. 436, 30 March 2022, osw.waw.pl.

was focused on the shift in Germany's attitude on arms supplies to Ukraine and included pledges to impose sanctions on Russia, reinforce NATO's eastern flank, create a special fund to modernise the Bundeswehr, allocate 2% of the country's GDP to defence, and reduce Germany's dependence on imports of Russian energy resources.

At the same time Germany assumed that Kyiv and most of Ukraine would be captured within a matter of days, and thus initially decided to provide only limited arms supplies. Thanks to the effective Ukrainian armed resistance, and pressure from Ukraine and the NATO allies, the German government began to expand its support as of the summer of 2022. Berlin is now planning long-term supplies of arms and military equipment to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. In July 2023, Germany signed a G7 Joint Declaration that announced the launch of negotiations to formalise long-term bilateral security commitments and arrangements to provide military aid to Ukraine.

It is difficult to calculate the exact value of the German military aid to date. According to official figures it amounted to €2 billion in 2022, and is expected to reach €5.4 billion in 2023; the German government wants to allocate €10.5 billion for this purpose over the next few years. These are large amounts, but they encompass not only the value of the equipment that Germany has transferred and pledged to deliver from the Bundeswehr's stocks or ordered from arms manufacturers; they also include Germany's contribution to the European Peace Facility and the costs of purchasing arms and military equipment for the Bundeswehr to replace those that have been handed over to Ukraine. To date, Germany has mainly supplied logistics and air defence equipment (such as the Patriot, IRIS-T SLM and Gepard systems) as well as protective and non-lethal material, but much fewer heavy 'offensive' weapons.³

This type of support reveals the concerns of the Chancellery, which shapes Germany's policy towards Russia and Ukraine. It dreads either a (nuclear) escalation of the conflict or the negative consequences of a (chaotic) collapse of Putin's regime in the event of a resounding Russian defeat in the war. For these reasons, Germany is more interested in achieving a controlled stabilisation of the conflict, of a kind which could involve freezing the front lines and finding diplomatic solutions, combined with maintaining the pressure from sanctions on Russia. Germany has been and remains cautious (much more so than the

³ Germany has been supplying artillery, tanks and infantry fighting vehicles in small numbers or in cooperation with partners such as Denmark and the Netherlands. See 'Liste der militärischen Unterstützungsleistungen', Die Bundesregierung, bundesregierung.de.

Biden's administration) about supplying Ukraine with the more modern offensive arms and military equipment (currently fighter jets and long-range missiles) that would allow the Ukrainian Armed Forces to recapture the territories that Russia has seized.

Germany has abandoned the concept of Ukraine as a 'common neighbourhood' between the West and Russia. Berlin now seems to perceive Ukraine rather as a satellite of the Euro-Atlantic structures, albeit not necessarily an actual part of them. Since June 2022, Germany has officially supported EU enlargement to include the Western Balkan countries as well as Ukraine, Moldova, and in the longer term Georgia, linking this process to the need for internal reform of the EU.⁴ However, the official rhetoric has failed to dispel doubts about the steps Germany is actually taking towards admitting Ukraine to the EU, and the timeline for achieving this. On the issue of Ukraine's accession to NATO, Germany officially supports the open-door policy and the position that was agreed back in 2008, which says that Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance at some point in the future. However, in practice Germany (like the US) is still reluctant to make an unequivocal promise of membership to Ukraine, or to set out a clear path to achieving this goal. With such an approach Ukraine might find itself stuck in a security grey zone between the West and Russia. The provisions of the communiqué from the July 2023 NATO summit in Vilnius about the required consent of all the member states and the need for Ukraine to fulfil certain conditions *de facto* reflect the lack of consensus on this issue.⁵

However, there has been a shift in Germany's stance on NATO's collective defence. In June, for the first time, Russia was clearly defined in the freshly published German national security strategy as posing a threat to the security of Germany and its NATO and EU allies and partners. In the document, the government emphasised NATO's key role as a collective defence organisation, and again highlighted the importance of NATO's conventional and nuclear deterrence. After the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Germany increased its presence in NATO's activities on the eastern flank,⁶ albeit to a far

⁴ This position was also included in Germany's national security strategy released in June 2023. See L. Gibadło, J. Gotkowska, 'Germany's first national security strategy: the minimal consensus', *OSW Commentary*, no. 519, 26 June 2023, osw.waw.pl.

⁵ J. Gotkowska, J. Graca, 'NATO Summit in Vilnius: breakthroughs and unfulfilled hopes', *OSW Commentary*, no. 526, 13 July 2023, osw.waw.pl.

⁶ The German Air Force has stepped up air policing of Polish and Romanian airspace; the Navy has become more involved in maritime operations in the Baltic and North Sea; the Army has temporarily increased its presence to 900 troops in the NATO battlegroup in Lithuania, and has also deployed a tank company to the newly formed battlegroup in Slovakia. The Bundeswehr has also contributed to the strengthening of air defence in Slovakia and Poland by deploying Patriot systems in both countries.

lesser extent than the United States. In June, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius declared that Germany was ready to permanently deploy a brigade of around 4000 troops to Lithuania, provided that the Lithuanian government prepares an adequate military and social infrastructure, although this could only become a reality in 2026 at the earliest.

Germany has also begun to ramp up its defence spending. In June 2022, the Bundestag approved the creation of a €100 billion special fund for modernising the Bundeswehr; the fund was only activated this year. In 2023, €8.4 billion from the fund will co-finance the armament programmes, while up to €9.6 billion from the regular defence budget (which totals €50.1 billion, or 1.57% of GDP) will also be allocated to modernisation. In 2014, the Defence Ministry is set to receive an additional amount of up to €19.2 billion from the fund. According to calculations by the German Ministry of Finance, the additional funds will allow Germany to reach the NATO target for spending 2% of the country's GDP on defence in 2024 and possibly beyond. Meanwhile, the regular defence budget will remain constant at €51.8 billion per year in the coming years.⁷ However, apart from strengthening Germany's air defence (the Arrow-3 system), the government currently has no plans to revamp and enhance the Bundeswehr's capabilities, as the defence investments are based on the 2018 Bundeswehr Concept and the Bundeswehr Capability Development Plan for 2018–2032.

Long-term challenges

The implementation of the three regional defence plans that were approved at the NATO summit in Vilnius will be an equally, if not more important measure to strengthen collective defence over the next few years.⁸ The degree and pace of the Bundeswehr's involvement in these plans will show how seriously Germany takes the need to ensure credible Allied defence. In view of the greater demands that NATO has placed on the allies, after the next round of the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) the German Defence Ministry should prepare a new Bundeswehr concept and a new capability development plan. These would replace the guidance documents from 2018 and bring the

⁷ In the first instance, the fund will be used to finance (in whole or in part) the purchase of 60 US-made CH-47F heavy transport helicopters, 35 US-made F-35 aircraft, the Israeli-American Arrow-3 exo-atmospheric ballistic missile defence system, and the Main Ground Combat System (MGCS) programme developed in cooperation with France.

⁸ The assignment of specific units to these plans, the increase in combat readiness of the Allied forces and the conduct of enhanced exercises will be the subject of further discussions in 2023 and 2024. See footnote 3.

German Armed Forces into line with the current Allied planning. However, any further enhancement of Germany's military capabilities will depend on the country's long-term defence funding. Although the government has announced that it will allocate c. 2% of Germany's GDP to defence from 2024 onwards, it is difficult to predict whether this level will actually be maintained in the following years. This will depend on the speed of the procurement process for new arms and military equipment, as well as what investments are made in military infrastructure. On the other hand, if the Ministry of Defence uses the money from the special fund each year, future governments will face the challenge of significantly increasing the regular defence budget after 2027 in order to maintain the NATO-agreed level of spending – and this will be difficult to do.

The key questions about Germany's current strategy relate to Russia and Ukraine's position in the future European security architecture. Germany does not want to see the official termination of the NATO-Russia Founding Act because the Chancellery and the co-ruling SPD want to keep open the possibility of returning to the provisions of this document as part of the future arrangement of NATO's relations with Russia. Germany opposes a complete rejection of the post-Cold War constraints enshrined in the Act, as it hopes that these could be helpful in restoring cooperative security with Russia after the war ends and if any political changes take place there. At the same time, Germany and other allies have agreed that the self-imposed limits on the conventional (though not nuclear) Allied presence on the eastern flank will not apply until Russia abandons its aggressive policy and returns to compliance with international law. The Alliance has so far refrained from taking any steps to actually demonstrate that the Act is no longer applicable. The declaration of the permanent deployment of a German brigade in Lithuania is an important signal from Berlin, which suggests that Germany is stepping away from the limits imposed by this document. In addition to Germany, Canada has also announced that it will increase its military presence (in Latvia). Therefore, NATO forces could be expanded to two brigades in both these Baltic states in the coming years, provided that Berlin and Ottawa have the political will and military capabilities to deliver on their pledges.⁹

Even if it is ready to increase its engagement in NATO's deterrence and defence in the short term, it appears that at this stage Germany does not envision a systemic, long-term confrontation with Russia and devising the future

⁹ Estonia and the UK have not as yet agreed on a similar arrangement.

European security architecture accordingly. This is why it is not ready to discuss the enlargement of NATO to include Ukraine. Germany's attitude may change in the future as a result of a change in Washington's stance, such as official denouncement by the US of the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the granting of US security guarantees to Ukraine, which the Biden administration is currently unwilling to do. The United States is wary of any additional long-term engagement in Europe to directly face off against the Russian Federation in Ukraine (apart from the defence of NATO's territory); any shifts in this approach will probably depend on domestic political developments in Russia itself.

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