Contributors:

J. Edward Fox

Florence Gaub

David E. Johnson

Andrew Monoghan

Christopher M. Schnaubelt

Jan Techau

Rick Waddell

Research Division - Rome, May 2011

18

NATO Defense College
Collège de Défense de l'OTAN

NDC FORUM PAPER

Towards a Comprehensive Approach: Strategic and Operational Challenges

Edited by Christopher M. Schnaubelt

Rome, May 2011

NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE

COLLÈGE DE DÉFENSE DE L'OTAN

Research Division

Division Recherche

Towards a Comprehensive Approach: Strategic and Operational Challenges

Edited by Christopher M. Schnaubelt

Rome, May 2011

NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

No Strategy, Please, We're German – The Eight Elements that Shaped German Strategic Culture

Jan Techau

Introduction

As Germany has entered its third post-unification decade, questions about where it stands as a foreign policy player and as a leader in Europe abound. German government policies on foreign and security issues seem to be inconsistent and hard to classify. Most observers seem to agree that the foreign policy posture of the country has changed since 1990. Some say it has only changed fairly recently. But into what it has changed to seems to be less clear. Studies and articles trying to assess the country's course are numerous. Almost all of them focus on German positions, actions and the motivations of the government's leading personnel.

Another way, however, of assessing a country as a foreign policy player is to look at its strategic culture, i.e. the long-term "soft" factors shaping foreign policy, defense and security decisions. This article will attempt to define, if not "the" strategic culture as such, at least some of the decisive factors shaping this culture as it currently prevails in Germany.[1] It will attempt to provide an additional tool for

---

[1] A small handful of articles have been written on the subject of German strategic culture. Many of them offer excellent original insights on the topic or provide useful theoretical approaches. None of them, however, takes a closer look at the underlying root causes for key German choices such as "restraint" or "multilateralism". Instead, they let these aspects stand as starting points of their deliberations. This paper attempts to fill that gap, thereby adding to the valuable work done by other scholars on this issue. The aforementioned studies include: Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, The Test of Strategic Culture: Germany, Pacifism and Pre-emptive Strikes, in: *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 36, No. 3, September 2005, pp. 339-359, Arthur Hoffmann and Kerry Longhurst, German Strategic Culture in Action, in *Contemporary Security*

analysts and political practitioners to better understand the positions and the behaviour of a country with a very special past and a crucial role for the future of Europe.

Strategic Culture as an Analytical Concept

While the interconnectedness of culture and political behaviour was already known to ancient authors like Thucydides, the concept of strategic culture as a systematic analytical tool in policy analysis first emerged in the United States in the late 1970s. The West's strategy of deterrence at that time developed out of the ongoing Cold War debate about the concept of nuclear deterrence. Against this background, scholars such as Colin Gray, Jack Snyder and Carnes Lord suggested that the effectiveness and, indeed, the entire rationale of Western strategy hinged on the fact that the two opposing parties subscribed to the same fundamental assumptions about the use of military force and, more basically, about the value of human life and one's own survival.[2] The concept of deterrence as followed by the West would be made useless, they argued, if the Soviet Union, infused by revolutionary communist zeal, considered the goal of overcoming capitalism and Western-style open societies so valuable as to willingly sacrifice its own existence. For the entire concept of deterrence with its reliance on power and counter-power was based on the assumption that also the Soviets, in the end, wanted to survive, just as everybody else did, and that mutually assured destruction would therefore render any Soviet

Policy, Vol. 20, No. 2, August 1999, pp. 31-49; Constanze Stelzenmüller, *Die selbstgefesselte Republik*, in Internationale Politik, Januar/Februar 2010, pp. 76-81; Daniel Göler, *Die strategische Kultur der Bundes-republik – Eine Bestandsaufnahme normativer Vorstellungen über den Einsatz militärischer Mittel*, in Angelika Dörfler-Dierken and Gerd Portugall (eds.), *Friedensethik und Sicherheitspolitik*, Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010, pp. *Weißbuch 2006 und EKD-Friedensdenkschrift 2007 in der Diskussion* 185-199; Sebastian Harnisch and Raimund Wolf, *Germany-The continuity of change*, in Emil J. Kirchner and James Sperling (eds.), *National Security Cultures*, London: Routlegde, 2010, pp. 43-65.
[2] See: Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, R-2154-AF, Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1977; Colin S. Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style*, Lanham, Hamilton Press, 1986.

nuclear attack on the West meaningless – and thus prevent it from happening.

According to this school of thought it was therefore of critical importance to undertake a deep analysis of Soviet strategic culture, i.e. the underlying soft factors informing Moscow's policy decisions. Generally speaking, these soft factors typically include patterns of social and political conduct in a given political system, its typical policy preferences, its preferred mode of conflict resolution, its values, tastes and customs. Despite the lack of a cohesive theoretical model and frequent accusations of loftiness and imprecision, the concept of strategic culture has, since then, widely gained traction in academic and foreign policy debate.[3]

This paper defines strategic culture as follows:

> *Strategic Culture is that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving foreign policy and security objectives.[4]*

It is noteworthy that this definition does not confine the term "strategy" exclusively to the military realm. Instead, it widens the concept of strategy to encompass the full range of a nation's external affairs. The reason is simple. War never stands isolated from the politics that preceded it, brought it about, or seeks to prevent or end

---

[3] For a good survey of the history of the academic debate about strategic culture and the contending theoretical approaches, see Alastair Iain Johnston, Thinking about Strategic Culture, in *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Spring 1995, pp. 32-64.

[4] This definition is an adapted version of the one used by Jeannie L. Johnson and Jeffrey A. Larsen in their Comparative Strategic Culture Course for the U.S. Government's Defense Threat Reduction Agency. See Jeannie L. Johnson and Jeffrey A. Larsen, *Comparative Strategic Cultures Syllabus*, 20 November 2006, at. http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dtra/syllabus.pdf (accessed on 11 September 2010).

it. Clausewitz was right; war belongs in the realm of the political. This is doubly true today, in the age of the Comprehensive Approach, with its emphasis on embedding military action into a wider civilian, economic, cultural and environmental game plan. Strategic culture is that sub-section of the political culture of a state or a nation that relates to all of its external dealings, including the use of military force.

In Search of Germany's Strategic Culture

Today's German strategic culture is almost entirely a product of the post-World War II era. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, this culture emerged, and was framed in deliberate contrast to the country's immediate past. Very few elements of the intellectually rich pre-Nazi era foreign policy and military traditions were embraced after the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany.[5] The few that were did not have a decisive impact on the country's way of thinking, talking and decision-making in foreign affairs. As a consequence, the post-war German strategic culture is a largely generic one.[6] It therefore lacks the self-assuredness, the sense of direction and purpose, and the natural ease that tend to come from traditions formed over long periods of uninterrupted, evolutionary growth.

Naturally, this can (and probably must) be perceived as a deficit. On the other hand, Germany is the rare case of a political system's successful comprehensive reboot of a political system under

---

[5] This paper focuses on post-war developments in West Germany (i.e. the Federal Republic of Germany) only. In the German Democratic Republic, the absence of free public discourse and competitive politics, and the overpowering influence of Soviet thinking created an artificial political culture that lacked legitimacy and collapsed immediately when the Cold War ended. This is not to say that East German notions and attitudes did not have an influence on Germany's strategic culture after unification. Assessing this influence, however, is not the subject of this paper and would require a separate study.

[6] This is not to say that there were no unbroken traditions of German political thinking during that era. Of course there were. The geographic location and the collective memory of a people reach farther back than just a mere 12 years. But these traditions played out differently after 1945 than they did before and were also partly compounded, partly trumped by the new, generic culture that grew out of the mental and physical rubble of the Holocaust and the Second World War.

democratic conditions. In the light of the enormous challenges of the time (i.e. the reconstruction of a functioning and productive society after the deepest imaginable cultural, political, moral, economic and military rupture), this "clean slate" situation could also well be perceived as an advantage.

The political and strategic culture that came out of this reboot is a mosaic of eight key factors. These factors have, between 1949 and now, shaped the German strategic culture and hence German political behaviour. Some of them are closely interlinked and logically emerge as a consequence of others. Some have developed simultaneously but independently. Still others emerged later but turned out to have a lasting impact. Remarkably, the key elements that shaped the strategic culture of the country from the very beginning remain largely intact today.

The First Element: Shame and the Rejection of "Normalcy"

The realization of the full extent of Nazi atrocities and the full scale of crimes committed by Germans during the Second World War and the Holocaust created a lasting, dominant feeling of shame in German society. Shame for the past, to this day, is a powerful sentiment amongst Germans, although its influence on the political culture of the country has somewhat lessened in recent years. In the realm of strategy, shame led the Germans to freely relinquish any claim to self-determined political foreign policy action. Not that they had much of a choice. The country was under strict allied supervision and not to regain substantial sovereignty for some time to come.

But even when putting this harness aside, Germans themselves had a strong feeling that it was morally appropriate to remain passive and not develop too much of a profile for themselves. After the excesses

of the Nazi era, the notion of "normalcy" (whatever its meaning) was rejected. Germans realized that their moral claim to normalcy had been forfeited for quite some time to come. Not being normal, i.e. not having the same rights, obligations and manoeuvring space as other nations had, became the new norm. The culture of guilt, shame and being "abnormal" has so deeply embedded itself in German thinking that this sentiment remain potent today.[7] Still today, claims of German "normalcy", meaning its successful emancipation from the ghosts of the past, and its return to universally applied standards of state behaviour, can lead to significant irritation and publicised dissent.[8]

This had huge ramifications, most importantly in what must be considered the decisive element of any strategy debate: the debate about German interests. As Germans deemed themselves unworthy of normalcy, they also rejected for themselves what was normal for others. Germans started to believe that having interests was deeply inappropriate for them, as it implied that one would actually try to pursue them, potentially against other peoples' interests. Had that not lead to disaster? Should not Germans have learned to be smarter and transcend the selfish non-enlightened notion of interest? Should not everybody act for the common good, not just for one's own?

Whenever the notion of a German interest implied that Germans could possibly act in their own favour instead of pure altruism, Germans reacted with a strong allergic shock. Even in academia,

---

[7] Ironically, the rejection of normalcy based on shame was markedly distinct but psychologically related to the traditional and long-standing belief of German cultural exceptionalism which had been a rather powerful element of the newly unified German Empire after 1871.

[8] From among the countless English and German language articles, comments, op-eds and analysis on the issue of German "normalcy" that bear witness to the German (and international) pre-occupation with the notion of German "normalcy", the following examples illustrate the debate: Constanze Stelzenmüller and others, Is Germany Normal?, *The American Interest*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2009, Hans W. Maull, Normal-isierung oder Auszehrung? Deutsche Außenpolitik im Wandel, in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, No. 11, 2008; Timo Behr, The normality debate, in Renaud Dehousse and Elvire Fabry, Where is Germany heading?, *Notre Europe Studies and Research* No. 79, Paris, 2010, pp. 37-44.

talking about interests both in theoretical and in policy-related contexts was met with scepticism, even hostility. This was still quite virulent during the 1990s and, despite a more relaxed atmosphere today, the general suspiciousness Germans feel about interests is still palpable. Politicians try to avoid the word and, when they do use it, often do so in conjunction with qualifying disclaimers. The warped relationship Germans have with the idea of the national interest remains one of the most characteristic traits of the German strategic culture.

Guilt, shame and the rejection of the notion of normalcy have also had an impact on another important realm of strategic culture: the very language used to debate these issues. After 1945, Germans preferred to avoid a whole dictionary's worth of words that had been freely used, and frequently abused, by the Hitler regime. Among the words so tabooed were rather neutral and fundamental terms such as "power", "geopolitics", "nation", "national interest" (as seen above), "war", and even "strategy" itself. It was as if Germans wanted to shield their new-found moral purity from being contaminated by incriminated terminology. Only very recently did Germans muster the strength to slowly re-conquer the forbidden vocabulary from the posthumous veto power the Nazis were exercising over it. For a long time, the strategic debate in German was thus lacking the very language required to make it meaningful and precise. In sum language (or rather the lack thereof), i.e. the primary bearer of culture, played an important role in shaping the country's new strategic culture.

The Second Element: Militant Pacifism and Anti-Militarism

A logical and direct result of the culture of shame that was pervasive in the post-war era was the development of a pronounced and demonstratively embraced pacifism as a cornerstone of the mental constitution of the new country. The newly-founded West German Republic had not been equipped with its own military forces and

Germans, by and large, were happy to have it that way. The military traumas of large parts of the population, millions of dead and wounded combatants and civilians, the absorption of the *Wehrmacht* into Hitler's murderous totalitarian system, Germany's far-reaching military aggression, and the wasted sacrifice of both civilians and soldiers had made Germans war-weary and suspicious of the military in general.

Anti-militarism at home went hand in hand with an overwhelming longing for peace in international affairs. When, in the course of the Cold War, re-armament was put on the political agenda in the early 1950s, this caused a fundamental political crisis in West Germany. Germans had no appetite for wearing uniforms again at a time when not even all German prisoners of war had been released from Russian internment. As part of their coming to grips with the past, Germans rejected the military logic of the Cold War and feared being obliterated in a nuclear stand-off between the Soviet Union and the West. The slowly solidifying separation between the two German states furthered this sentiment, as building a new West-German military would further reduce hopes of unification, and a war between the two blocs would have meant Germans shooting at Germans.

How elementary pacifism and anti-militarism had become in the German psyche is illustrated by the political and societal fallout created in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the wake of NATO's dual track decision. Not only did the decision to deploy U.S. missiles in German draw the largest public protests in Germany's post-war history, it also ushered in a fundamental change in the Federal Republic's party system. The Green party, an amalgamation of environmentalists and the peace movement, initially built its agenda on fundamental pacifism which it only half-heartedly shed two decades later, during the Kosovo war. By then, they were an established political force, born out of one of the key elements of German post-war strategic culture.

An important side-effect of German anti-militarism is the irrelevance of the country's military, the Bundeswehr, for the political discourse and the institutional fabric of the country. It was from the beginning, and still is, effectively marginalized.[9] After German re-armament in the mid 1950s, the social status of the military profession has always been relatively low, and has never recovered to levels observed elsewhere.

Equally important, the public debate of security issues is largely devoid of any meaningful or relevant contribution by the military. While in other countries the professional expertise of soldiers is a welcome addition to the discussion of security-related issues, military personnel remained (and still remain) regularly silent in Germany.

The Third Element: Vergangenheitsbewältigung, or: the Entitlement to be Left in Peace

Germans pride themselves on the thoroughness and depth with which they have tackled the ghosts of the past. The process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, i.e. the coming to grips with Germany's dark past by intensively analyzing, documenting and debating it, was timidly started by the allies during their de-nazification campaign right after 1945. But it only really got real traction in the mid 1960s when a new post-war generation started to challenge its parents about their role during that dark period.

With remarkable straightforwardness, pain and soul-searching, the Germans faced the past, tried to understand it and make up for it, and eventually attempted to come to terms with it. Germany's frankness with itself has been acknowledged abroad and has also, at

---

[9] In German opinion polls, the *Bundeswehr* regularly earns high degrees of trustworthiness as an insti-tution, but this high esteem has never translated into an elevated social or political status. The former German Federal President Horst Köhler characterized the German attitude vis-à-vis its armed forces as "friendly disinterest".

times, been compared favourably to similar but lacklustre attempts in other societies (most prominently Japan). But Germans did not simply leave it at that. During the 1980s, and increasingly so after unification, the model character of their own historical exorcism created pride and a certain proselytizing smugness. Even more important for the nation's strategic culture, it also created a feeling of entitlement to staying clean in the presumably dirty business of international politics.

A mentality of "we Germans know what will come of power-mongering around the world, so please leave us out of it" became pervasive in public discourse. This is illustrated by the many statements invoking Germany's past when assessing other nation's foreign policy decisions, most notably during the Vietnam, Gulf, Kosovo and Iraq wars. This sense of entitlement is still a decisive, yet slowly weakening, element of Germany's strategic culture. It frequently leads to a refusal to acknowledge that the nation's responsibility is not only to retro-actively oppose Hitler but also to provide services for the stability of the world today. Instead, invoking Germany's exemplary self-purging had become a pretext for remaining passive, especially in all security- and military-related matters. The preoccupation with one's own dark past was turned into a pseudo-moralist political bingo chip. No analysis of today's German culture should ignore this very specific and uniquely German predisposition.

The Fourth Element: The Lack of Sovereignty

The regaining of sovereignty was a recurrent motif in the policies of successive pre-unification West German governments. The lack of sovereignty itself turned out to be a decisive factor in the shaping of the strategic culture of the post-war country. As long as the four Western Allies held reserve powers over German politics, specifically its foreign affairs, Germany was not a legally sovereign member of the international community. Germany only regained full

national sovereignty in the Two-plus-Four Treaty of 1990, which paved the way for unity and in which the four victorious powers of World War II ceded all rights that had been theirs since 1945.

The prolonged period of 45 years under Allied political supervision had a profound effect on the mental setup of both Germany's elites and the population. In both groups it created a feeling of ultimately not being responsible for the fate of the nation, especially its decisive foreign and security policy decisions. This was reinforced by the widespread (and largely correct) perception of Germany's own powerlessness when it came to shaping its own political fate.[10] There were exceptions, of course, mostly at the highest leadership level, exemplified by strategic thinkers such as Manfred Wörner, Helmut Schmidt, and Helmut Kohl. But by and large, the big thinking about strategic questions was left to Americans and other key NATO allies. This led to an under-cultivation of strategic-level thinking and to a remarkable parochialism in the German foreign policy debate. It also served as a counter-incentive for young and aspiring politicians to select foreign policy as their career field. More often than not, the best and the brightest in all parties, if they ever dreamed of being appointed or elected to high office, decided to make a name for themselves by dealing with issues such as labour, welfare, education, taxes and the economy.

As a consequence, the strategic community remained small, intellectually weak and isolated, and most foreign and defense ministers had little or no experience in their fields prior to entering office. Also, remarkably, there was (and is) no mandatory strategic-level education for military or civilian leadership personnel within

---

[10] This crucial element of the newly emerging post-war strategic culture of Germany stands in stark contrast to the unbroken traditions of neighbouring France. Here, according to Bruno Colson, one of the "most characteristic preoccupations of French strategic culture is to keep control over one's own fate." See Christian Malis, The Rebirth of French Military Thinking after the second World War, in *Défense Nationale et Securité Collectif*, November 2009, pp. 16-26, here p. 22.

the German government. The German Armed Forces College and the military universities do not offer cohesive strategic education. Instead, they weave bits and pieces from the classic strategic curriculum into their more general and more tactical-level education. The sole government-related institution that offers strategic-level education, the *Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik* (BAKS), is a smallish venue, founded only in 1992, and its courses are attended on a voluntary basis only. No surprise then that German strategic thinking was never on a par with the quality created by the lively debates in the stake-holding societies. The effect is profound: the lack of legal sovereignty of the country has, in the end, transformed itself into a lack of intellectual sovereignty in the field of strategy.

The Fifth Element: Restraint, Passivity, Timidity

Scholars seeking to characterize Germany's post-war foreign policy typically begin by pointing at Germany's culture of restraint. In this paper's list of elements, restraint is not in first place, as it is the result of the previous four elements, not the starting point of the analysis. Germany had very little leeway for its own foreign policy immediately after 1949. With the country slowly emancipating itself from complete Allied oversight after it joined NATO and the European Communities in the mid-1950s, German governments slowly gained more space for their own initiatives. Mostly, their activities centered on re-establishing Germany as a proper member of the community of nations and on tackling some of the bilateral issues stemming from the war (such as diplomatic contacts with the state of Israel and negotiations to free German prisoners-of-war still held in the Soviet Union). For the most part, however, the young German republic remained restrained, mostly out of necessity, but increasingly also out of choice. There are a number of reasons for this.

First of all, the allies simply would not let Germany go about its

own business. Mistrust of Germany and Germans, after the experiences of two major wars, stayed alive for a long time.[11] Also, there were serious doubts about whether Germans, this time around, would be successful in their latest experiment with democratic government. So the allies kept the short leash on Chancellor Adenauer's government. (German chancellor Konrad Adenauer's creative and sometimes rather cheeky but mostly symbolic attempts to lengthen the leash became legendary.)

Secondly, the Germans maintained a high level of insecurity about themselves, not knowing where the new system would lead them. Immediate, concrete matters such as economic survival, housing, and re-industrialization were prevalent. The country was very much in an inward-looking mode, allowing for only little time and few intellectual resources, let alone material ones to be spent on foreign policy. This inward-looking mode, in an astounding case of history repeating itself, was adopted again in Germany after 1990, when the unified country spent an entire decade digesting the unprecedented process of merging two societies into one, only to be rudely awakened to the realities of the outside world by the Kosovo war in 1999. Arguably, the post-unification period finally ended for good with Chancellor Schroeder's open and demonstrative opposition to the American invasion of Iraq in 2002/2003.

Thirdly, Germany had completely lost a rather important driving force behind foreign policy activism: a national mission. Nothing was left of the erstwhile pride and confidence in the superiority of the German way of going about things. By purging the Nazis, Germans had thrown out the baby with the bathwater: suddenly, not only the Nazi era, but all of its history looked suspicious. No source of pride was

---

[11] This is nicely illustrated by the reluctance to embrace the possibility of German unity by European political leaders such as Margaret Thatcher, François Mitterrand or Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers in 19989/1990.

left. What, at any time in history, has driven American, British, French and Russian foreign policy, i.e. the urge to spread the good gospel, the values, the culture and the civilisation these nations believed they stood for, had completely disappeared in Germany. (A faint shadow of "mission" was to resurface only much later, both passively, in the form of the above-mentioned entitlement mentality, and actively, within the framework of the European Union in the early days of the 21st century.)

Fourthly, Germans also greatly enjoyed the retreat into the realm of the private, reviving, in a way, the apolitical and restorative *Biedermeier* culture of the early 19th century. They also did not find it uncomfortable to be relieved of the heavy lifting on the international political front. In essence, the foreign policy passivity that followed the founding of the Federal Republic was in the interest of almost everybody involved. It also served the country well, paving the way for international recognition, trust and, ultimately, influence. Germans learned that demonstrative passivity was sometimes very much what was needed in order to reach a foreign policy goal that otherwise would have been pursued actively.

Initially, Germany and its neighbours and partners geratly benefited from the new culture of timidity. As a consequence, this culture wrote itself deeply into the DNA of the new emerging German society. It remained a guiding element of German strategic culture long after the parameters of German foreign policy had fundamentally changed, and long after those interested in restraint at an earlier stage were openly seeking a more active stand of the country. Finding the right balance between activism and restraint, between leadership and passivity, remains the crucial political challenge in Germany's foreign policy today.

The Sixth Element: Europe as Ersatz-Religion, or Attritional Multilateralism

When Germans set out to create a livable, functioning and internally peaceful society after the war, the concept of the nation was not available to them as a crystallizing point around which a new society and a new identity could be constructed. What once had been so hard fought-for during the long way towards German unity in the 19th century, a sense of national belonging, could not be invoked as a foundation for the new post-war society. But not only was the idea of anything "national" rejected as being tainted, discredited and potentially dangerous, it was also unavailable because West Germany clearly could not speak for the entire German nation. A large chunk of that nation was on the other side of the Iron Curtain, and was unable to partake in the new Western experiment with democracy. So the idea of the nation became doubly unserviceable.

In its stead Germans embraced the idea of Europe, reconnecting themselves with an idealistic idea from the 1920s[12]. Europe, henceforth, served as the concept and the project into which Germans could freely project their hopes and dreams about a better future. That Europe was a vague idea at best and, initially, did not entail any more than unified markets for basic commodities (coal, iron ore, steel), was all the better, as it made the projection even easier. Germans, willing to transcend the nation and to demonstrate their willingness to live in peace with themselves and their neighbours, developed into exemplary Europeans (*Mustereuropäer*). The multilateralism that was at the heart of any European idea or project was much after Germans' post-war taste for a politics of inclusion and mediated conflict. It also allowed for an elegant, constructive negation of their own stained nationality.

---

[12] The Paneuropean Union was founded by Count Richard Nikolaus von Coudenhove-Kalergy in 1922 and had a lasting impact on cosmopolitan and integration-minded European elites.

The same multilateralism was to be found in NATO and, later, in the United Nations, all three of which became the irreplaceable pillars of German foreign policy. Multilateral organizations became the living embodiment of the German urge "to never again go it alone".[13] Crucially, Germans instinctively learned about the usefulness of the paradoxical: that by relinquishing sovereignty, they could gain it back. Giving up national rights and feeding them into a multilateral conflict-resolving apparatus benefitted the Germans massively. This way, they reassured their neighbours and partners about their good intentions while, at the same time, as one of the bigger players in the game, they gained influence and affluence far beyond what would have been possible for Germany on its own.[14]

Furthermore, multilateralism, for the first time, made the Germans fit in comfortably with their geopolitical location in the center of Europe. No longer were they the awkward, unguided, unbound big boy in the middle of the neighbourhood. They were now where they belonged: peacefully embedded in the center of Europe.

In sum, multilateralism was, and still is, one of the key elements of German strategic culture. Some of the other elements of German strategic culture have over time become less important, or have even turned from an asset into a liability. By contrast, multilateralism remains an imperative for a country that is bigger than any of its nine

---

[13] Germany's focus on multilateralism is illustrated in the famous slogan "never again, never alone", which has become a standard catchphrase for describing the country's foreign policy. See: Hanns W.Maull, *Germany and the Use of Force: Still a Civilian Power?*, paper prepared for the Workshop on Force, Order and Global Governance - An Assessment of U.S., German and Japanese Approaches, The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, July 1-2, 1999. "Never again, never alone" is now so widely accepted that it is being used in official German government information on German foreign policy. See, for example, the website of Germany's diplomatic missions in the United States: http://www.germany.info/Vertretung/usa/en/05__Foreign__Policy__State/02__Foreign__Policy/03/__Law.html, accessed on 30.09.2010.

[14] The cunning politics behind Germany's demonstrated multilateralism were once called "attritional multilateralism" by Timothy Garton Ash. He defined it as "the patient, discreet pursuit of national goals through multilateral institutions and negotiations".See: Timothy Garton Ash, Germany´s Choice, in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 4, July/August 1994, p. 71.

immediate neighbours, and that is closely tied into the EU, NATO and the United Nations. Germany's taste for multilateralism is also its most important contribution to the EU and NATO. Whether the presumed new German assertiveness will change the country's instinctive attachment to multilateralism remains to be seen. If so, this could turn out to be a problem – for all of Europe.

The Seventh Element: The Great Transatlantic Bargain of 1949

The former U.S. ambassador to NATO, Harlan Cleveland, once famously described the post-war European security architecture as the product of a great transatlantic bargain.[15] This bargain, Cleveland explained, put Europe under American military protection in return for serious commitments by the war-weary European allies to carry a part of the defense burden against the Soviet Union. More recently, this bargain has been described slightly differently by Robert Shapiro, a former economic advisor to President Bill Clinton. In his version of the deal, America gave protection to Europeans in return for a disproportionate U.S. influence on European political affairs (primarily administered through NATO).

But the Europeans did not only gain in security. They were also able to invest the saved money (which, without U.S. engagement, they would have been forced to spend on defense themselves) to create substantial and far-reaching welfare states.[16] US engagement (and investment) thus not only kept the Warsaw Pact at bay, it also enabled the Europeans to maintain the fragile social peace in their conflict-ridden post-war societies.

For Germany, the bargain was a perfect deal. It completely

---

[15] Harlan Cleveland, *NATO: A Transatlantic Bargain,* New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
[16] Robert Shapiro, *Futurecast: How Superpowers, Populations, and Globalization Will Change the Way You Live and Work*, New York, St. Martins's Press, 2008, p. 219.

accommodated its strategic leanings while (a) providing the much-needed security guarantee and (b) relieving the empty post-war coffers of a potentially heavy defense burden. Essentially, this deal remains functional to this day. Ultimately, German security (in the widest sense, as it also includes the protection from potential external political blackmail) still relies on the U.S. nuclear umbrella in return for which the country contributes the relatively small recompense of around 1.3 per cent of its GDP as defense spending.

The bargain however, also had its detrimental effects on the development of a viable German strategic culture. First of all, it reinforced the tendencies of passivity and pacifism as it lessened the need of Germans to spend the minimal amount of money, thinking, creativity and political capital on defense issues. Furthermore, it created only a rudimentary understanding in the German public about the real nature of security threats. The Cold War threat by the Soviet Union had always been a rather abstract one for many Germans, as could be observed in the peace movement and the large German demonstrations against NATO's dual track decision. Used to this kind of strategic complacency, Germans even today find it difficult to accept that the world is essentially a dangerous place and that Germany is amongst the nations potentially threatened by international terrorist networks.[17]

Differing threat perceptions remain a key challenge to the partners in the great transatlantic deal. Most importantly, however, the great bargain has completely distorted the understanding of a healthy

---

[17] In a popular annual poll focusing on what political, economic and private issues Germans are fearful of (conducted by a major insurance company and met with large media resonance each year), foreign policy-related issues did not feature prominently on the list of fears. The highest-ranking issue was terrorism, ranking ninth on a list of sixteen, with 46 percent of Germans saying that they feared it. Fear number one was economic meltdown, garnering 66 percent of the vote, with unemployment (65 percent) and inflation (63 percent) following closely behind. On this list, war – the only other foreign policy-related issue of no-table relevance – was ranked thirteenth, with 31 percent of those polled saying they were fearful of it – a comparatively low number. See: *Die Ängste der Deutschen 2009*, Wiesbaden: R+V Versicherung, 2009.

relationship between security as a public good and the assets needed to produce and sustain it. To put it more bluntly, the great bargain, as practical and useful as it was (and still is), has lastingly spoiled the prices for security in Europe. Germans believe, by and large, that they can have it on the cheap.

This unintended side-effect of the great bargain is a most relevant one. It has shaped an important part of Germany's strategic culture and permeates almost all security-related thinking in Germany, down to the most recent plans for the reform of the German armed forces, proposed by former German Defense Minister Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg in the summer of 2010. With the great bargain increasingly being challenged by both a changing security landscape (Europe is of less strategic importance to America, Europe is less willing to follow America), and dwindling resources on both sides of the Atlantic, this problem is prone to become even bigger.

America already demands more contributions from its allies to the shared task of providing stability services around the globe. And America's need for support will increase. With the relative decline of American ability and willingness to project its power around the globe, Europeans might some day wake up to a world in which they will have to see after their strategic interests themselves. All of that will cost a lot more money than Europeans, and particularly Germans, have been used to spending under the great bargain.

The Eighth Element: The Great German Foreign Policy Consensus

In essence, the West German foreign policy posture created after the war, flowing from the described elements of strategic culture, rested on a "three-plus-three" pillar consensus. The first three pillars represent Germany's multilateral embeddedness, i.e., the country's leading role in the European Union, its firm support for the United

Nations, and its military integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The additional three pillars include the nation's key bilateral relationships, namely, close ties with the United States, reconciliation and real friendship with France, and a pragmatic, yet distanced relationship with the Soviet Union/Russia. By the mid 1970s, after the successful implementation of Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and the accession of both German states to the United Nations (1973), all elements of this posture were firmly in place and had been fully absorbed by the relevant mainstream political forces and by the public in general.

Then, in the mid 1990s, the newly unified – and now fully sovereign – country was asked to develop a more proactive stance on international affairs, most notably in its approach to the deployment of military forces abroad[18]. Ever since then, successive governments, regardless of their ideological background, have changed Germany's foreign policy significantly, yet went to great lengths to keep these changes rhetorically within the established consensus. Meanwhile, Germany has slowly but surely expanded its international military footprint, most notably in the 1999 Kosovo campaign and, starting in 2002, in Afghanistan.

Despite some minor flare-ups of controversy, this process of change was largely accepted by the public, although it was never fully explained or justified by the political leadership. A widespread public debate on Germany's geostrategic interests, obligations and capabilities

---

[18] No longer exempt from the demands of the international community and its allies in NATO and in the EU, Germany was forced to reconsider its niche-like position in international affairs. Military deployments in, e.g., Cambodia, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan followed. Both Gulf Wars demanded a political positioning of unified Germany. Similarly, the drive towards a more cohesive EU foreign policy led to a – so far incomplete – learning process in terms of Germany's strategic interests and responsibilities. For an analysis of these changes, see: Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, The Test of Strategic Culture: Germany, Pacifism and Pre-emptive Strikes, in *Security Dialogue* No. 3 (2005): 339-359; and Arthur Hoffmann and Kerry Longhurst, German Strategic Culture in Action, in *Contemporary Security Policy* No. 2, 1999, pp. 31-49.

was never held. Although, step-by-step, the elements of Germany's strategic culture either lost their historic urgency or even turned into liabilities (most notably in form of high parliamentary hurdles which complicate swift military action) both the public and large parts of the political elite kept embracing the established consensus as a sacrosanct truth that could and must not be challenged.[19] Voters were equally complacent. They never requested political parties to present any vision of Germany's foreign affairs, and, in turn, politicians were only too eager to avoid these issues altogether. Indeed, as recently as during the parliamentary election campaign of 2009, this tacit agreement did its part in keeping foreign policy issues mute in public – despite the large number of pressing and imminent issues that could well have generated debate (such as Afghanistan, Iran, energy security, the EU's Lisbon Treaty, etc.).

The agreement to keep unchallenged a foreign policy posture formed more than a generation ago is evidence of how firmly established the elements of German strategic culture are. Changing prevailing beliefs, preferences and perceptions is one of the most difficult and demanding social undertakings imaginable. It requires firm political leadership, stamina, and a dedication on behalf of the leaders to be in for it for the long run. One can argue that, in the light of an increasingly complicated international system, emerging new threats and an appalling lack of direction in the EU, Germany would be in urgent need of that change. But this change would also entail altering some of the fundamentals of the nation's self-perception. Whether the country has the leaders (and the appetite) to accomplish this task is doubtful.

---

[19] See: Sebastian Harnisch and Raimund Wolf, *Germany-The continuity of change*, p. 46.

A Strategic Culture that Doesn't Produce Strategy

Having identified the elements that shape German strategic culture, how then can this culture be characterized as a whole? What kind of output does it produce? The answer is clear. Germany is operating foreign policy in the 21st century with a strategic culture that is deeply steeped in the 1950s. Many of its elements, such as restraint, pacifism and the lack of sovereignty, have either long lost their foundation or have turned into a liability. It thus lies in the nature of Germany's current strategic culture that instead of facilitating and fostering debate about strategic policy choices, it makes the debate about strategy extremely difficult, if not all but impossible.

It also makes that discourse politically costly for politicians, thereby reducing the incentives to hold it. It stifles innovation and under-equips German policy makers and diplomats for the competitive environment of international negotiations and decision-making, thereby reducing German influence in the international arena. Instead of informing the public and enabling it to build opinions based on facts and competing ideas, it hinders public discourse by hiding or cloaking up issues. It does not raise understanding for the geopolitical complexities of Germany's location, nor does it encourage the policy-oriented debate of German interests. It keeps people in the dark about the political and pecuniary price tag attached to security and stability.

Instead, it furthers the belief that the old transatlantic bargain can last forever. It encourages silence on the issue of German leadership in Europe and in the world. Instead, it supports isolationist public tendencies and provincial thinking. It undermines the legitimacy of the political system, as it forces politicians to make decisions without being upfront about the reasons or the full scope of them. Finally, it poses a risk to national security as it leaves the public ignorant about and unprepared for the real threats to their well-being. In other

words: it is dysfunctional. It's a strategic culture that does not produce strategy.[20] For a country with the size, the economic power and the unique historical and geopolitical necessities of Germany, this should be unacceptable.

How damaging the widening gap between an ossified strategic culture and the demands of the real world can be has been proven by two recent incidents. Both illuminate the political price governments and, ultimately, entire societies have to pay when they (voluntarily or involuntarily) decide to ignore reality. On 3 October 2009, the German-led bombing of fuel trucks hijacked by Taliban fighters near Kunduz, Afghanistan, led to a political earthquake in Germany that cost several high-ranking government officials their jobs and seriously undermined Germany's Afghanistan policy. The disproportionate ramifications of that incident were all homemade and had only partly to do with the catastrophic crisis management and communication policies in the immediate aftermath.

The entire discourse about Afghanistan and the official government line on the German troop deployment in Afghanistan since 2002 had been very much in line with German strategic culture, and thus paved the way for problems: the true nature of the mission was from the outset cloaked in euphemistic language. Rarely was the mission explained on the grounds of German interests. Also, it could not be called a war, because Germans don't make war. As a consequence, public (and, at least partly, elite) appreciation for the nature of military action in the field, the stress and fear under which soldiers are operating, and the fog of war they are surrounded by, was severely underdeveloped. When the news from Kunduz broke, Germans acted as if they were surprised that their troops were also doing the shooting, and that, indeed, in war, grave errors can be the

[20] For an illuminating short analysis on the absence of a German security strategy see Stelzen-müller, *Die selbstgefesselte Republik*, p. 77.

consequence.

Instead of a sober debate about the pros and cons of Germany's participation, a public outcry occurred, followed by small-minded political trench warfare which, for a protracted period of time, bogged down large parts of the decision-making process at the German Ministry of Defense. The government was only able to regain some of its maneuvering space by changing its Afghanistan-related language overnight and by firing the former Defense Minister in charge at the time (who had taken on another portfolio in the meantime), a Deputy Minister of Defense, and the German Chief of Defense. Never before had the old narrative so drastically collided with the new realities. Never had such a clash created so much of a public disturbance. And never had an outdated German strategic culture demanded so high a political price.

The second incident unfolded when the then German Federal President, Horst Köhler, in a radio interview, claimed that the German armed forces also existed to protect German economic interests abroad. What is taken for a natural fact of life in most other nations deeply violated key elements of the German strategic culture, most notably the notions of restraint and pacifism, and the taboo on the concept of national interests. As a consequence, again, an outcry followed, including accusations of "imperialism", "neo-colonialism" and "war-mongering" against Köhler, a known advocate of fair trade and development cooperation. So severe were the attacks on the dumbfounded president (and so timid the support he received from those who know better) that, deeply wounded, he decided to resign from office.[21] Once more the clash between geostrategic realities and the outdated yet still cherished strategic culture had caused a political crisis and severe unforeseen political fall-out.

---

[21] See my remarks on the incident in Jan Techau, *Geopolitischer Allergieschub*, Handelsblatt, 31 May 2010.

As these examples show, operating a 21st-century foreign policy on a dysfunctional strategic culture can be harmful for the nation, its interests, its political peace at home, and its international credibility. However, the nation has decided to live with the contradiction of meeting today's challenges with the cultural toolbox of the 1950s. And although, each time, the bridging of this gap comes at a price, this price has so far obviously not been considered too high. It seems that the nation has decided that it would be easier to endure continuous strategic schizophrenia than challenging some of the fundamental beliefs it feels attached to. How long this can be sustained without serious damage to the legitimacy of the political system is a serious question. When the gap between reality (and government action) on the one hand and a firmly established strategic yet anachronistic strategic culture on the other hand widens, there are two possibilities: either government policies fall in line with the culture (thereby leading the country into political never-never land), or the culture will start to change (thereby creating significant cognitive dissonance and substantial pain as a result of change). There are examples for both scenarios in Germany. It is so far undecided which option will prevail.