GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

PATRICK A. MELLO

CITATION: MELLO, PATRICK A. (2020) "GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY" IN: JEROEN JOLY AND TIM HAESEBROUCK, ED., *FOREIGN POLICY CHANGE IN EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES SINCE 1991*, BASINGSTOKE: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.

PREPRINT VERSION (SEPTEMBER 2020)

1. GENERAL FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATION

With 83 million inhabitants, Germany has the largest population in Europe. It also comprises the continents' strongest economy, and the fourth largest economy worldwide, as of 2020. If there is one overarching principle of German foreign policy, then it is *multilateralism*. Germany's foreign policy is guided traditionally by a strong orientation towards the European Union (EU) and *European integration*, embodied among others in its close partnership with France. At the same time, Germany places great value on its *trans-atlantic partnership* with the United States, Canada and the country's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Historically, this two-fold foreign policy orientation – both towards North America and Europe – has served German interests: It anchored the country in "the West" under the U.S. security umbrella, which was vital during the Cold War, and it allowed the re-socialization of the Federal Republic of Germany as a committed European and "good citizen" of the international community of states, after Nazi Germany's defeat in the Second World War and the atrocity of the Holocaust.[1]

As a parliamentary democracy with a strong representation of the *Länder* (states) at the federal level of government, Germany's political system is "clearly consensual", as Lijphart (1999: 249) concluded in his comparative assessment of democratic institutions. Among others, the consensus orientation shows in the politics of "grand coalitions", where governments are often formed between the two largest parties: the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), including their Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD).

[1] For earlier assessments of German foreign policy following the country's unification, see, among others, Hellmann (1996), Harnisch (2001), Peters (2001), Geis (2013), and Harnisch (2013).

Between 2005 and 2020, three out of four cabinets under Chancellor Angela Merkel where coalition governments between conservatives and social democrats. The exception was the coalition government between conservatives (CDU/CSU) and liberals (FDP) during Merkel's second cabinet (2009-2013).[2]

While Germany witnessed high unemployment rates during the 1990s up until the early 2000s, following the unification of the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, it has experienced a sustained economic upturn and almost no unemployment during the past decade. The improvement of economic indicators has partly been ascribed to reforms in the labor market (*Hartz-Reformen*), which were implemented between 2003 and 2005 under social democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and which have remained controversial since then, particularly among his own party, the SPD.[3] As export "world champion" with industries that are oriented primarily towards selling abroad (with the automobile and related industries taking a primary position), Germany is a strong supporter of free trade and the institutional frameworks of the World Trade Organization (WTO). At the same time, Germany is seeking to establish multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements with its international partners.

With the end of the Cold War, Germany successfully regained its full sovereignty as part of the "Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany" (*Zwei-Plus-Vier-Vertrag*). The "Two-plus-Four" Treaty, negotiated between the victors of the Second World War (United States, Soviet Union, France, and the United Kingdom) and the two German states also prompted the question of whether Germany would revisit its foreign policy priorities in the future.[4] As indicated above, during the Cold War Germany had taken a transatlanticist and pro-European stance on most foreign policy issues. This served Germany's interests as it helped to rebuild economic relations and political trust with its international partners. While the conservative Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (1949-1963) firmly rooted Germany's foreign policy in

---

[2] Traditionally, the liberals were considered the junior government partner for both of the catch-all parties. Between 1969 and 1982 the liberals governed together with the social democrats and then continued in government as coalition partner for the conservatives until 1998, with whom they had also been in various governments before 1969.

[3] Among others, the reforms in the labor market lead to increases in loan work and low-paying jobs, also through cutting unemployment benefits.

[4] On this central document for Germany's international status, see Weidenfeld (2007).

the West, it was the social democrat Willy Brandt, first as Foreign Minister (1966-1969) and then as Chancellor (1969-1974), who together with his adviser Egon Bahr pioneered a new approach to Eastern Europe, particularly towards the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Soviet Union. The motto was "Change through Rapprochement" (*Wandel durch Annäherung*). Whereas Germany's foreign policy towards the GDR and other Warsaw Pact states had previously been in a conflictual stalemate, Brandt's *Ostpolitik* paved the way for a new relationship with Germany's Eastern neighbors.

In the three decades since its unification in 1990, Germany has had only three Chancellors (Kohl, Schröder and Merkel, who governed with varying coalition partners), another indicator of continuity rather than change. As the Chancellor under whom Germany reunited, Helmut Kohl personifies the shift from the "Bonn Republic" of Western Germany to a larger, unified Germany with Berlin as its capital. This change prompted international observers to express their anxiety about Germany returning to great power status in the center of Europe, cautioning against geopolitical instability due to the reemergence of Germany (Krauthammer 1990; Mearsheimer 1990). Mindful of these fears, particularly its among neighbors, successive German governments emphasized continuity in German foreign policy priorities, underlining the importance of multilateralism, international law, civilian modes of conflict resolution, and democracy and human rights.[5] As will be discussed in the following sections, these priorities did not preclude foreign policy change, but change occurred rather incrementally, and often as a result of external pressure and foreign expectations that Germany ought to assume more leadership in international affairs.

Traditionally, foreign policy, and especially security policy, were conceived as the exclusive domain of the executive, and thereby the chancellery and the foreign office. Formally, as the head of government, the German Chancellor holds the *Richtlinienkompetenz*, which means that the general contours of executive policy are shaped by the Chancellor of the day, allowing an overruling of individual ministries. In practice, several Foreign Ministers, a post traditionally taken by the junior coalition partner (Oppermann and Brummer 2020), have been able to carve out their own profile. This applies particularly to the Liberal Hans-Dietrich Genscher (1982-1992) and

[5] For an account of the continuities and changes in German foreign policy since the foundation of first German nation state under Bismarck in 1871, see Hellmann et al. (2007).

the Green Joschka Fischer (1998-2005).[6] Today, a multiplicity of actors both within and outside of government affect the conduct of foreign policy, influence foreign policy goals, and shape the foreign policy agenda. Apart from the chancellery and the ministries of foreign affairs, defence, and development, this also includes parliamentary committees, other political actors, and individuals, groups, and organizations outside of government, including organized interests, non-government organizations, and the like. All of these actors play roles in what constitutes German "foreign policy".

Notably, in 2014, then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier initiated a project called "Review 2014 *Außenpolitik Weiter Denken*", which was conceived as a public deliberation and stock-taking exercise on German foreign policy priorities and the country's longer term strategic outlook. The initiative spanned over three phases, starting with focused questions posed to almost 60 international authors – the results of which were openly shared on a dedicated website – and evolving into public deliberations and events held across Germany, before concluding with internal (non-public) deliberations in the Foreign Office. The unifying theme in many contributions, also in speeches by President Joachim Gauck and then Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen, now Head of the European Commission, was that Germany ought to show greater foreign policy engagement and shoulder more responsibilities among the international community, especially when it comes to conflict prevention (cf. Bendiek 2015).

Germany is actively engaged in many international organizations, including the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the United Nations. While Germany is not a permanent member of the UN Security Council, successive governments have articulated the policy goal of reforming the Security Council, also in the hope of attaining a permanent seat for Germany and like-minded countries such as India and Brazil. However, Germany has on five occasions assumed a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council and the country is currently on a sixth term that started in January 2019 (to end in January 2021). During its Presidency of the Security Council in July 2020, the German Foreign Office under Minister Heiko Maas placed thematic emphases on the coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19 as a threat to

---

[6] Since 2005, the Foreign Ministry has seen various changes at the top, with the current President Frank-Walter Steinmeier as longest-serving Foreign Minister (2005-2009 and 2013-2017).

global security, climate change, human rights, as well as conflict resolution and prevention and the fight against sexual violence in conflict zones.[7]

2. DEFENCE AND SECURITY POLICY

Since its foundation in 1949 and throughout much of the Cold War, the Federal Republic of Germany has shown features of an ideal-typical "civilian power", emphasizing multilateral diplomacy, a rules-based international order, and reluctance in using military force in international politics (Maull 1990; 2007).

Against this backdrop, German unification prompted the question whether this change would also affect the country's foreign policy orientation and its role as a civilian power. Would Germany again strive for great power status, as some observers expected (Krauthammer 1990; Mearsheimer 1990)? In sum, the three decades since unification are characterized by overwhelming *foreign policy continuity* in terms of Germany's general orientation in international politics. The country remains steadfastly supportive of the European Union and its institutions, committed to NATO and the United Nations, and it has neither begun to expand its military, nor to develop a nuclear deterrent of its own – contrary to what some commentators expected.

Quite to the contrary, after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, the conservative-liberal government under Chancellor Merkel decided to invoke a nuclear moratorium and eventually to entirely abandon the use of nuclear energy. For Germany, this was an astounding policy reversal because, contrary to the red-green predecessor government of social democrats and greens, both the conservatives and the liberals had long supported the civilian use of nuclear energy and the government had just prolonged the use of nuclear reactors in October 2010 for some eight to fourteen years – half a year before Fukushima happened and this policy was overturned.

That being said, *incremental change* has indeed occurred, particularly in the area of military deployments and the country's increased participation in multilateral military missions (these are detailed in the next section), which has led scholars to engage in repeated stock-taking of Germany's security policy and its alleged role as a "civilian power" (Geis 2013; Harnisch 2001; Mello 2019b). Due to its culture of

[7] See Germany's permanent mission to the United Nations: https://new-york-un.diplo.de/ (last accessed 18 September 2020).

"*sowohl-als-auch*" ("as well as"), Germany's foreign policy has also been characterized as a policy of "consistent ambivalence" (Junk and Daase 2013, 148).

This ambivalence shows, for instance, in Germany's longtime involvement in Afghanistan (Brummer and Fröhlich 2011), where successive governments and defence ministers for a long time refused to acknowledge the fact that this was, in part, a war-fighting mission. Rather than engage in public debate and deliberation about policy goals as support for the Afghanistan missions decreased over time, political actors attempted to shield these military deployments from the public and to shift mandate renewals away from electoral campaigns (Lagassé and Mello 2018).

A significant area of change concerns the structure of the armed forces. While the *Bundeswehr* still comprised about 460.000 military personnel in 1990, this number has been reduced to some 180.000 in 2020. Besides the numerical reduction of the armed forces, a major change was the permanent suspension of compulsory military service in 2011. This decision abolished what had long been regarded by political actors as a central pillar in the institutional framework of the Bundeswehr. The context in which this change occurred was the wake of the global financial crisis of 2009, when the German federal budget faced severe financial constraints, calling for cuts across the board (Kinkartz 2010). The suspension of compulsory military service was initiated by Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (2009-2011), who saw this as a means to reduce the defence budget and also to meet recommendations from an ad hoc parliamentary commission that had advised a significant reduction in the active personnel of the Bundeswehr. In addition to the numerical reduction of troops and the abolishment of the draft, the armed forces were also sequentially restructured to achieve a greater readiness for military deployments as part of NATO or EU operations. However, an area of continuous concern remains the issue of operational readiness of the armed forces. While details are considered classified information, the public part of the 2020 report of the Ministry of Defense lists operational readiness for helicopters as below 40 per cent and highlights "severe needs for improvement" in various branches of the armed forces (BMVg 2020, 4).

Finally, change is also observable in the evolution of Germany's security doctrine. In 2016 the government published a White Book on security policy and the future of the armed forces (Bundesregierung 2016). Among others, this document places renewed emphasis on territorial defence and alliance operations in that context. This was remarkable, since some earlier documents had not even mentioned territorial defence any longer. But in the light of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and

the violent conflict in Eastern Ukraine, territorial defence made a forceful return to the agenda. At the same time, German highlights the "Framework Nations Concepts" (FNC) as an institutional framework for multinational military operations where Germany can act as lead nation in cooperation with its NATO and EU allies and other partner countries.

Military Deployments

The German constitution (*Grundgesetz*) places substantial constraints on any involvement of the German armed forces (*Bundeswehr*) in military operations abroad. This meant that throughout much of the Cold War, Germany was pursuing mostly "checkbook diplomacy" through financial contributions rather than sending the military abroad on conflict resolution and peacekeeping missions.

Solving a state of constitutional ambiguity, in 1994 the constitutional court passed a ruling on German involvement in military operations, in line with a conception of the Bundeswehr as a "parliamentary army". Henceforth, all major military deployments were required to be placed before parliament for an up or down vote. In 2005, the practice was further institutionalized with a formal deployment law that specifies under which conditions parliament has to be consulted and which criteria the government needs to meet in its mandates for military missions. This has led observers to characterize the Bundestag as an "exceptionally powerful and active parliament in controlling the deployment of armed forces" (Wagner 2017, 60). Indeed, when placed in comparison to other democracies, Germany is among the countries where parliament has the strongest position in decision-making on security policy (Mello and Peters 2017; Peters and Wagner 2014). However, it should not be noted that, unlike for instance in the United Kingdom, the powers of parliament do not necessarily show in a veto against deployments (for example the British House of Commons' veto against involvement in Syria in 2013), but rather in the anticipation of parliamentary preferences by the executive and a formulation of deployment mandates that reflects these preferences. Hence, to date all votes on military deployments have passed the Bundestag. Yet, often the consensual nature of policy-making shows in the formulation of mandates, where operational restrictions are imposed to reflect the preferences of the respective parties involved.

In 1990, just weeks before the ratification of the "Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany" (*Zwei-Plus-Vier-Vertrag*) the Persian Gulf War broke out, with Saddam Hussein's Iraq invading neighboring Kuwait. For the German

government this prompted the question whether Germany should partake in a multilateral military coalition under US-leadership, whether such a participation should involve a military role, and, crucially, whether such an involvement would be in line with the constitutional restrictions imposed by the *Grundgesetz*. Eventually, doubting the constitutionality of military involvement, the conservative-liberal government under Helmut Kohl opted for classic "checkbook diplomacy" by shouldering the brunt of the financial burden for the operation, together with Japan, but staying away from any military involvement.[8]

The next foreign policy crises after German unification came with the wars of Yugoslav succession (cf. Melčić 2007). This time, the Kohl government suggested German involvement and in June 1995 the *Bundestag* voted in favor of participating in the multinational peacekeeping force UNPROFOR in Bosnia Hercegovina, after a controversial parliamentary debate (386 out of 655 MPs voted in favor of the deployment).[9] Several factors contributed to this policy change towards a more active role of the armed forces. While center-right parties emphasized Germany's international responsibility and its alliance obligations as a NATO member, center-left parties rather highlighted the humanitarian dimension and military intervention as a last resort to stop human rights violations.

While the UNPROFOR mission constituted the first armed operation of German soldiers since World War II – and hence was of significant symbolic importance – military involvement was limited to reconnaissance with Tornado aircraft, transportation, and medical support functions, explicitly excluding a combat role.[10] In hindsight, the UNPROFOR mission paved the way for a new role for the armed forces. It was the first operation after the ruling of the constitutional court in 1994, which had enabled the Bundeswehr to take part in multilateral military operations if certain

---

[8] On German involvement in the Persian Gulf War, see Inacker (1991) and Hellmann (1997).

[9] The voting on UNPROFOR mostly followed party lines, with nearly all MPs from the governing conservative-liberal coalition (CDU/CSU and FDP) in favor and the majority of the MPs from opposition parties voting against military deployment (SPD, Greens, and the far-left PDS). For an account of German party politics over military intervention in Bosnia, see Rathbun (2004, Ch. 4).

[10] Before its involvement in UNPROFOR, the Bundeswehr had already assumed limited roles in peacekeeping operations in Cambodia and Somalia, but these had not been voted upon in parliament as they preceded the constitutional ruling of 1994. A timeline of Bundeswehr operations between 1990 and 2018 is given in Mello (2019b).

preconditions were met (most importantly requiring a UN mandate, parliamentary approval, and a multilateral institutional framework like NATO or the EU).

Even more contested was Germany's involvement in NATO's "Operation Allied Force" in the Kosovo province of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in March 1999. Parliamentary debates centered on the question of the legality and legitimacy of humanitarian military intervention without a UN mandate (Franck 1999; Henrikson 2000; Rudolf 2000). However, a political majority argued that in order to prevent further human rights violations against Kosovar Albanians at the hand of Serbian forces, Western governments had to step in, despite a lock-down in the UN Security Council over the matter. Notably, the government proposal on military involvement over Kosovo eventually received an overwhelming majority in the Bundestag (500 out of 580 voting in favor), even though the Kosovo War has remained the most controversial use of force in the history of NATO. For Germany, the initial decisions on Kosovo came during the last days of the Kohl government, as when NATO issued "activation orders" in October 1998, which constituted a first step towards air strikes. The governing conservative-liberal coalition had initially been hesitant to support military action, but eventually adopted the NATO position that intervention was legitimate, despite the absence of a UN mandate. Notably, this position was adopted also by the red-green successor government under Chancellor Schröder. Germany decided to participate militarily, with Tornado fighter jets. Yet, their use was restricted to reconnaissance and support flights. Naturally, this provoked the question whether Germany should still be considered a "civilian power" or whether the country was undergoing a process of "normalization" to becoming a regular middle power (Geis 2013; Harnisch and Maull 2001).

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 prompted the red-green German government under Chancellor Schröder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer to send the military abroad, for a second time within two years since the Kosovo conflict. The parliamentary debate over participation in the US-led "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan and Horn of Africa became a highly contested issue that nearly tore the red-green governing coalition apart. Eventually, Chancellor Schröder was able to win a parliamentary vote on the issue because he combined the substantive question with a vote of confidence (Lagassé and Mello 2018). By contrast, the involvement in the ISAF mission was much less controversial. Together, the Afghanistan missions became the largest and most cost-intensive military engagements in the history of the

Federal Republic, with estimated costs of 8.8 billion Euros just for ISAF alone (Brummer and Fröhlich 2011; Thiels 2015).

The next foreign policy crisis followed shortly after the decisions on Afghanistan, when it became clear over the course of 2002 that the United States under George W. Bush were set to invade Saddam Hussein's Iraq under the pretext of weapons of mass destruction. Chancellor Schröder used the opportunity to distance himself from the highly popular U.S. policy on Iraq at an early stage, also in the light of federal elections in the Fall of 2002. Notably, at the time, Angela Merkel, as conservative opposition leader, published an op-ed in the *Washington Post* titled "Schroeder Doesn't Speak for All Germans" in which she did not expressly support the Iraq war but argued, among others, that "the danger from Iraq is not fictitious but real" (Merkel 2003).

The last major foreign policy crisis occurred over the conflict in Libya in 2011. During the vote in the UN Security Council, Germany abstained, siding with China and Russia, rather than its Western NATO allies. This prompted observers to proclaim a major rupture among NATO members, and particularly between the U.S., France, and the U.K. on the one hand, and Germany on the other. In hindsight, it became clear that German skepticism about the Libyan intervention and regional security was not entirely unfounded, but publicly the case went down as "Libya fiasco" in German foreign policy and was interpreted as a sign of weakness and undecidedness in times of crisis (Oppermann and Spencer 2016).

Since then, Germany has participated in a host of other military operations – notably in Mali alongside France, and also in Syria as part of the coalition against ISIS ("Counter Daesh"). As of 2020, the armed forces are involved in seven operations in Africa, from observing a ceasefire in West Sahara (MINURSO), EUTM and MINUSMA in Mali, UNAMID and UNMISS in Sudan and South Sudan, to an observer mission in Yemen (UNMHA), and a naval mission off the Horn of Africa (ATALANTA). These missions differ in their scope and the kinds of tasks involved, but they resonate broadly with the aims of supporting the fight against transnational terrorism, fostering the development of democratic institutions, and securing trade routes, as essential goals outlined in the 2016 White Book on security policy (Bundesregierung 2016).

The involvement against Daesh is particularly noteworthy, as the ad hoc coalition against Daesh does not formally involve an organizational framework and parts of it can be deemed difficult to reconcile with traditional interpretations of German constitutional restrictions (Mello 2019a, 44). Nonetheless, there was also continuity in

the policy, as Germany participated with Tornado bomber aircraft, yet these were not used for combat operations but limited to reconnaissance functions. Again, this marked a typical German approach of "*sowohl-als-auch*" – striking a balance between military participation and abstaining from more robust military operations. Why did Germany decide to participate in the coalition operation against Daesh? Clearly, European solidarity and particularly solidarity with France after terrorist attacks on the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and elsewhere played an important role in the public deliberations and parliamentary debates on the issue. At the same time, the German government again put restrictions in place to limit its military involvement and it did not immediately join the anti-Daesh coalition, but only followed at a later stage.[11]

Defence Spending

In recent years, the German defence budget has witnessed steady increases in absolute terms. These resonate with the political aim of reaching the "two percent goal" of defence spending in relation to economic strength (measured in gross domestic product), in line with the declaration passed by member states at NATO Summit in Wales. According to the Wales Summit Declaration, issued on September 5, 2014, member states pledged "to move towards the 2% guideline within a decade".[12]

Since the election of U.S. President Donald Trump and his vocal calls for increased defence spending among NATO allies the topic has been on the agenda and been the source of controversy among the governing coalition among conservatives and social democrats. Arguably, the Wales declaration is often shortened to "two percent" in public discourse, without mentioning that the goal is to be reached "within a decade". However, while the German government has repeatedly decided to increase the defence budget, it is unrealistic to expect the country to reach the two percent goal in the coming years. The debate about the federal budget for 2020 also indicates that defence spending may rather *decrease* in the medium to long-term, also due to a weaker economic situation and other, more pressing investment needs in

---

[11] For a comparative assessment of the anti-Daesh coalition, see Haesebrouck (2018).

[12] See https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm (last accessed: September 21, 2020).

infrastructure and other areas, particularly in the light of the coronavirus pandemic and its economic impact.

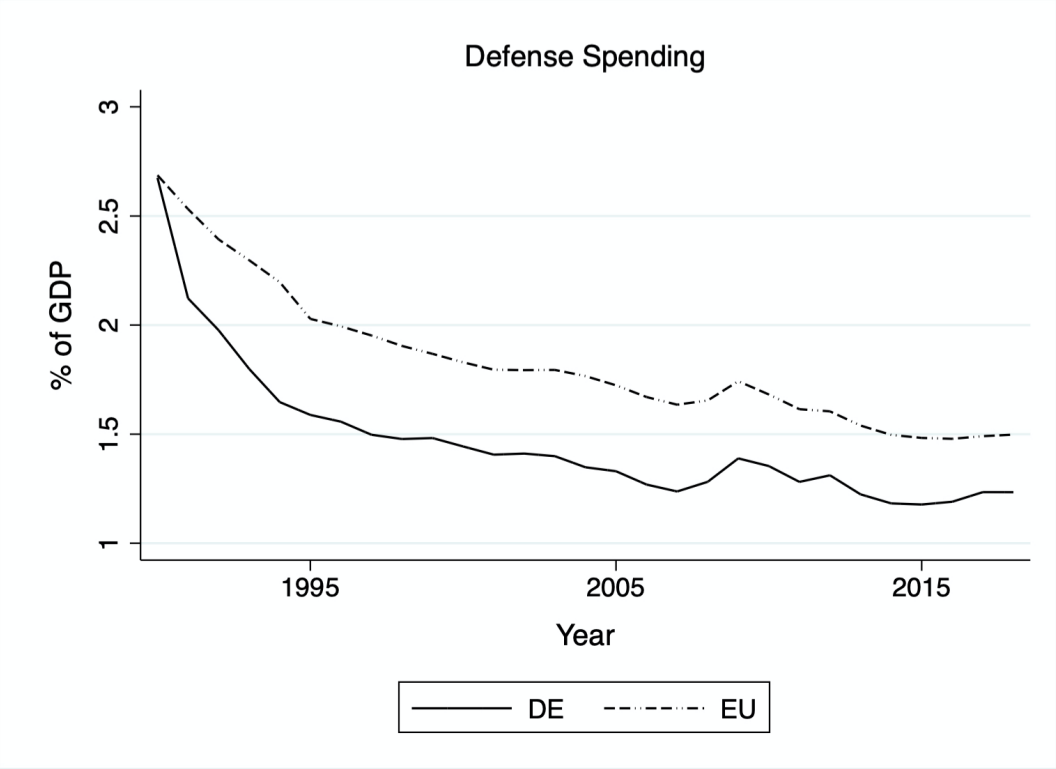
While in 2014 the overall budget for defence amounted to € 32.4 billion, it reached € 37 billion in 2017 and was further increased to € 43.2 billion in 2019 and to € 44.9 billion for 2020.[13] The increases in the defence budget were politically justified mainly in reference to the requirements of investing to maintain the status quo. This was especially urgent due to the low operational readiness of the Bundeswehr (see earlier discussion above). At the same time, international crises provided for a context within which it was easier to justify extended spending on defence (e.g. Russian annexation of Crimea, Trump's repeated threat of withdrawing from NATO, and so forth).

However, when placed in relation to the size of the German economy (in gross domestic product), then the budget has remained stable at about 1.2% since 2007 (SIPRI 2019). Expressed as a share of the overall federal budget, defence spending has hovered steadily around 10% of total spending since the mid-1990s, which constitutes the second largest position in the federal budget, after social spending that usually amounts to about 50% of the budget (BMF 2015, 215).

When placed in comparison to other countries, Germany's relative military expenditure more or less equals that of Western European and NATO member countries like Denmark, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and also Canada. That said, relative defence spending remains considerably below the allotted share for defence in France (2.3%), the United Kingdom (1.8%), and the United States (3.2%), as the major military powers within NATO (Figures for 2019, SIPRI 2019). Table 1 summarizes defence expenditures for Germany.

[13] For detailed figures, see the documentation by the Ministry of Defence: https://www.bmvg.de/de/themen/verteidigungshaushalt (last accessed: September 21, 2020).

Table 1 Defence Expenditures



3. DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Foreign and development aid entails a plethora of programs and policies, which also exceed the domain of competence of the ministry of economic cooperation and development (*Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung*, BMZ), which is typically associated with development policy. Indeed, many policy areas are under the domain of other ministries, including trade policy (ministry for economic affairs), debt policy and financial programs (ministry of finance), or global environmental policy (ministry for the environment), to name just a few areas (Nuscheler 2007).

Development policy has witnessed important changes in previous decades. While the policy field has traditionally been associated with donations to developing countries, a much more encompassing conception conceives of the field as "global structural development" (*globale Strukturpolitik*), a term that first made it into government policy under the coalition of Social Democrats and Greens in 1998, who proposed that global structural development should strive to improve the economic, social, ecological and political conditions in developing countries (Messner 2011, 414). The concept continues to inform the official self-conception of German development aid as a field, and the BMZ ministry in particular (Grävingholt 2016, 40).

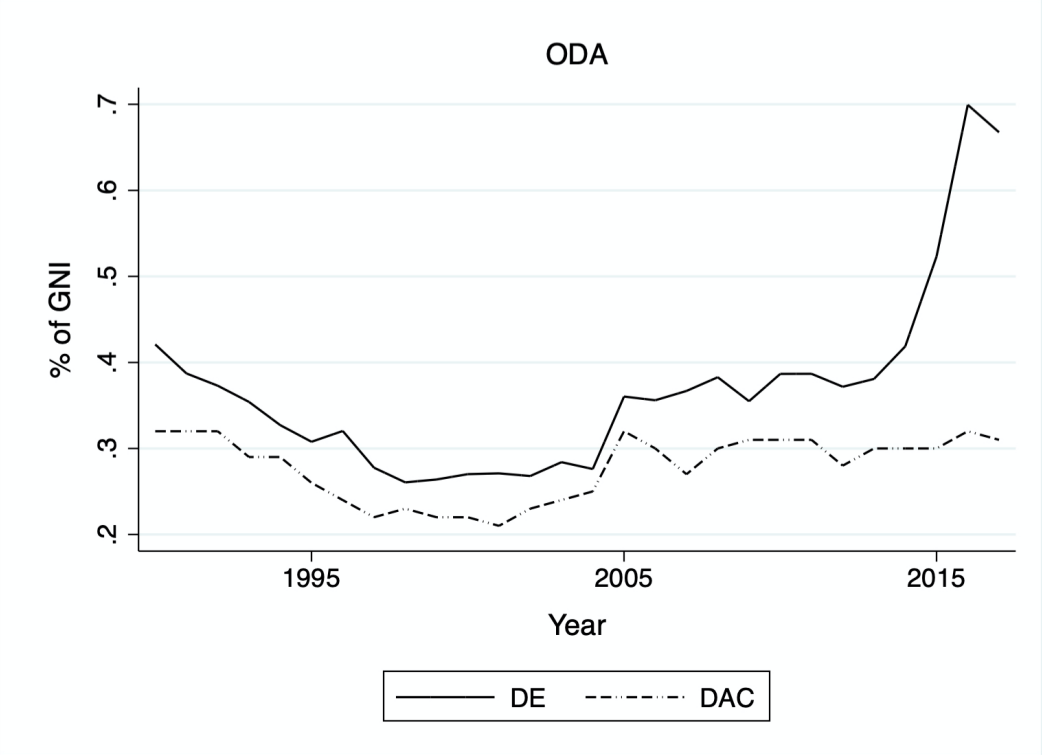
What is striking about the development field is that public expectations do not match the conditions under which the field operates. Most of the OECD countries, including Germany, remain far below the official goal of spending 0.7% of GDP for Official Development Aid. This means that there are substantially fewer expenses in the area of development than in other policy areas, including defence. Since 2015, as the "refugee crisis" reached Europe and Germany, new demands have been formulated for development assistance – both from inside and outside of government. Accordingly, some corners expect development aid to address and solve the root causes of refugee flights in people's countries of origin. But as Grävingholt notes in his review of German development aid, such demands are unrealistic and will likely lead to renewed disappointment (2016, 42).

Over time, German development aid shifted from an individual project orientation towards emphasis being placed on major partner countries in particular regions. This was seen as an effort to concentrate the limited funds for development aid on those countries where the prospects for effective aid are most promising. However, this kind of priority setting had also been criticized, for instance with regards to Latin America were funds were allocated towards small and medium-sized countries like El Salvador and Peru (and others), when the economic and environmental impact of development aid could have been more substantial in countries like Mexico and Brazil (cf. Messner 2011, 419). In 2018, the top ten recipient countries of German development aid were Indonesia, Syria, Colombia, China, Iraq, Afghanistan, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and India (BMZ 2020). Apart from a large group of 39 states that were conceived as development aid general "partner countries", the Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation works with four groups of countries, placing emphasis either on political reforms, economic transformation, the protection of the global commons, and addressing the structural causes of conflict and violence.

German relative spending on Official Development Assistance (ODA) has steadily decreased between 1990 and 1998 but has increased since, with strong growth since 2014. While in 1990 the country spent 0.42% of its GDP on ODA, the relative share dropped to 0.26% in 1998. Since then, the share has increased, reaching 0.42% in 2014 and 0.67% in 2017 (OECD 2019). Despite these increases, Germany is thus barely meeting the UN goal of spending 0.7% of GDP on development aid. In comparative terms, German spending on foreign aid is between the Netherlands (0.60%) and the United Kingdom (0.70%), while Denmark (0.74%), Norway (1.0%), and

Sweden (1.0%) traditionally have comparatively higher shares of ODA (OECD 2019). Table 2 summarizes Data on Official Development Aid for Germany.

Table 2 Official Development Aid



4. BILATERAL RELATIONS

As the largest EU member state, with a heavily export-oriented economy, and nine neighboring countries, Germany is embedded in a close net of bilateral relations.[14] As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, Germany's foreign policy is traditionally both European and transatlantic in its orientation. Based on these two poles, the two most important bilateral partners for Germany are the United States of America and France. The US remains important as NATO partner and security guarantor. In 2019, the US were also the top destination for German exports, followed by France and China. Germany's Eastern neighbor, Poland, has become increasingly important and the economies of the two countries are closely interlinked. In 2019, Poland ranked 6th in foreign trade with Germany (exports and imports combined).

[14] For accounts of Germany's bilateral relations with its most important partner countries, see the respective chapters in Schmidt et al. (2007) and Jäger et al. (2011).

The United States has been of historical importance during the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949 and throughout the Cold War. However, the amiable and close relations between Germany and the United States have seen their ups and downs, especially in the last two decades with the controversial Iraq War and NSA surveillance initiated during the Bush years (and continued throughout Obama's terms) and Trump's erratic tariffs against key industries, hostility towards international organizations and multilateral cooperation, and his accusations that Germany as NATO ally was not spending enough on defence. Consequently, a recent opinion poll by the Pew Research Center, published in March 2020, concluded that there is "a wide divergence in views of bilateral relations and security policy between the publics of both countries" (Poushter and Mordecai 2020).

The relationship with France has been of equal historical importance to Germany. From its foundation, the Federal Republic sought to establish amiable and trusting relations with France. This was achieved mainly through the early institutions of what became the European Union, but also political, economic, and cultural exchange between the two countries. As the former "motor" of the European Union, especially during the times of Giscard D'Estaing and Schmidt and also with Mitterrand and Kohl, relations have somewhat cooled in recent years, particularly between Macron and Merkel, as it became evident that governments in both countries had diverging interests within Europe and beyond.

While relations with Russia have been traditionally close, particularly among Eastern Germans, in recent years these have been overshadowed by the Russian violation of international law with the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine; cyber operations against the Bundestag, which have been linked back to Russian state agencies, and in 2020, the poisoning of opposition politician Aleksei Nawalny and his subsequent treatment in a Berlin hospital. This has also impacted upon economic relations, as the construction of the controversial "Nord Stream 2" pipeline that runs directly through the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany have been put on hold, also because of U.S. sanctions. The Nawalny poisoning has caused a number of politicians from the governing coalition to call for a moratorium on the pipeline project.

Relations with China are of considerable economic significance to Germany, as China is considered Germany's overall most important trading partner with a volume of nearly 200 billion Euros (export and imports combined, as of 2019). However, despite strong economic relations, fundamental differences remain with regards to matters of international law, human rights and individual freedoms. Most recently, this

has become evident again with China's violent stance against protestors in Hong Kong, its assertive policy in the Indo-Pacific region, and its uncompromising position on Taiwan, which the reigning Communist Party continues to see as part of mainland China.[15]

Finally, Germany has a special relationship with Israel, due to the systematic genocide of six million Jews in Europe under the reign of the National Socialists (1933-1945). Against this backdrop, Chancellor Angela Merkel pronounced Israel's existence and security to be Germany's "historical responsibility" and, as such, to be in the German national interest (*Staatsraison*).[16] Merkel's comments made observers question whether this prompted a policy change towards Israel. However, as others noted, while the formulation may have been new, its substance was firmly in line with previous policy and thus another marker of continuity rather than change.

5. EU, MULTILATERAL, AND NICHE DIPLOMACY

Since its foundation in 1949, the Federal Republic has been championing the European idea and supported the strengthening of EU institutions. With the election of Ursula von der Leyen as President of the European Commission in 2019, it is the second time since the 1960s and Walter Hallstein that a German leads the European institutions (then the European Economic Community, EEC). For a long time, German identification with Europe has been reflected in generally positive attitudes towards the EU among the public.

However, with the rise of populist parties across Europe and elsewhere, Euroscepticism has also reached Germany. This coincided with the Eurozone crisis and the subsequent emergence of the AfD ("Alternative für Deutschland"), which was founded initially on a Eurosceptic platform that was mainly directed at the economic policies of the EU, before turning towards the far right and openly xenophobic positions. In 2017, the AfD gained 12.6 per cent of the votes at the federal election,

---

[15] German concerns about the developments in Hong Kong and elsewhere where most recently expressed during Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Berlin in September 2020: https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/china-node/maas-wang/2380352 (last accessed: September 21, 2020).

[16] See Merkel's speech before the Knesset, on March 18, 2008 in Jerusalem: https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/bulletin/rede-von-bundeskanzlerin-dr-angela-merkel-796170 (last accessed: September 5, 2020).

which made her the third largest party in the Bundestag, after the CDU and the SPD. Yet, the electoral gains of the populists should not imply that Germans have become Eurosceptic at large. Clearly, a majority of voters elected parties that support European institutions and further European integration.

Germany has been a dedicated member of the UN since its accession to the organization in 1973. Since the 1990s, it has been official government policy to seek a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, either through a restructuring of the existing council or through the accession of several new permanent members, including Japan, India, Brazil, and Germany. These initiatives came to naught and officially ended in 2005 when the UN General Assembly did not reach a qualified majority in favor of a reform of the Security Council.

Since these failed attempts at reforming the council, Germany has placed its emphasis on attaining a non-permanent seat in the Security Council. In January 2019, Germany took a seat as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, which has been the sixth time that Germany took on the two-year non-permanent position over the course of its membership in the UN. The German government has placed the issues of conflict prevention and conflict management on its agenda for its two-year term in the Security Council.

As mentioned in earlier sections, successive governments have carved out unique areas of niche diplomacy for Germany. This started with the *Ostpolitik* under Chancellor Willy Brandt, which was a clear departure from the trans-atlantic instincts that still held sway during the early years of the Federal Republic. More recently, Germany took a leading role in negotiating the Iran nuclear deal that had been sealed under President Obama in 2015 and scrapped by President Trump, during the early days of his Administration. However, the German government expressly stated that it would aim to preserve the agreement.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Across the areas considered in this chapter, Germany's foreign policy since 1990 has been characterized by *continuity rather than change*. This is not to imply that there has been no change, but for the most part these have been *incremental adjustments* rather than abrupt changes in policy. This also mirrors earlier analyses of German foreign policy since unification (Harnisch 2013; Hellmann et al. 2007; Rittberger and Wagner 2001).

To be fair, whether one detects continuity or change sometimes remains in the eyes of the beholder. For instance, during the government of Chancellor Schröder and Foreign Minister Fischer, many declarations clearly differed (and were intended to differ) from the Conservative-Liberal government under Chancellor Kohl. In his rhetoric, Schröder clearly took a more assertive foreign policy position than his predecessor. However, at the same time, Fischer emphasized continuity and self-restriction as guiding principles for the Red-Green government (Peters 2001).

Like other Western democracies, Germany's domestic politics are undergoing changes – most of all in the party system, which has shifted from a system of "two-and-a-half" parties (Conservatives, Social Democrats, and Liberals) until the 1990s, to a *Bundestag* that currently holds six parties (the former parties plus The Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*), The Left (*Die Linke*), and the far-right Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*). This new party system means that government formation has become more complicated, as witnessed after the general elections of 2017, where the process to establish a new government took an unprecedented 171 days, including failed talks between Conservatives, Greens, and Liberals. Ultimately, these changes in the party system may also affect the conduct of foreign policy – though it is too early to make predictions about potential future changes.

Table 3 summarizes foreign policy in Germany between 1990 and 2020, using the typology introduced by Hermann (1990). While where has been no case of "international orientation change" or "goal change" during the observed time period, there have been instances of "adjustment change" and "program change". The most pronounced cases are from the security realm, where Germany has repeatedly adjusted its position and reinterpreted its role in international affairs. This happened in the 1990s in the face of atrocities during the Yugoslav wars, where the new red-green government had to redefine German policy in a way to reconcile a pacifist and "civilian" impetus with humanitarian crises in the country's near abroad. This constituted a program change where Germany's role among the international community, and specifically the role of its armed forces was redefined towards a more engaged position. Likewise, Germany adjusted its policy throughout the course of the Afghanistan war, by reducing the scope of its aims and, simultaneously, accepting a more robust military involvement and rules of engagement for its armed forces. This also showed in the government decision to become involved in Syria in the coalition effort against Daesh, despite the fact that the operation was not based on a UN mandate and occurred outside of established organizational frameworks like the EU

or NATO. Arguably, these changes were mainly driven by external factors such as shifts in the international system and Germany's security environment since the end of Cold War, its increased economic and political importance, as well as raised expectations of key allies and international partners.

Table 3 Foreign Policy Change in Germany

	Instance Change / Example	Drivers and Inhibitors
Adjustment Change	e.g. Adaption of rules of engagement in military operations (especially in Afghanistan)	Response to a changing security environment and allies' expectations
Program Change	e.g. Reorientation of the armed forces, towards active participation in multinational military operations	International system change and international expectations
Goal Change	N/A	N/A
International Orientation Change	N/A	N/A

7. REFERENCES

Bendiek, Annegret. 2015. "Review 2014: Grundpfeiler deutscher Außenpolitik und weltweite Erwartungen." *SWP-Arbeitspapier* (FG EU/Europa, 2015/Nr. 03).

Bundesministerium der Finanzen. 2015. *Finanzbericht 2015*.

Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. 2020. *Bericht zu materiellen Einsatzbereitschaft der Hauptwaffensysteme der Bundeswehr*.

Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung. 2020. *Bi- und multilaterale Netto-ODA nach Ländern, 2014-2018*.

Brummer, Klaus, and Stefan Fröhlich, ed. 2011. *Zehn Jahre Deutschland in Afghanistan.* Wiesbaden: VS.

Bundesregierung. 2016. *Weissbuch zur Sicherheitspolitik und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr*.

Franck, Thomas M. 1999. "Lessons of Kosovo." *The American Journal of International Law* 93 (4): 857–60.

Geis, Anna. 2013. "Burdens of the Past, Shadows of the Future: The Use of Military Force as a Challenge for the German 'Civilian Power'." In *The Militant Face of*

Democracy. Liberal Forces for Good, edited by Geis, Anna, Harald Müller and Niklas Schörnig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 231-68.
Grävingholt, Jörn. 2016. "Entwicklungspolitik im Gefüge einer "neuen deutschen Außenpolitik"." *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 28-29: 38-43.
Haesebrouck, Tim. 2018. "Democratic Participation in the Air Strikes Against Islamic State: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 14 (2): 254-75.
Harnisch, Sebastian. 2001. "Change and Continuity in Post-Unification German Foreign Policy." *German Politics* 10 (1): 35-60.
Harnisch, Sebastian. 2013. "German Foreign Policy: Gulliver's Travails in the 21st Century." In *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior*, edited by Beasley, Ryan K., Juliet Kaarbo, Jeffrey S. Lantis and Michael T. Snarr. Los Angeles: Sage, 71-93.
Harnisch, Sebastian, and Hanns W. Maull, ed. 2001. *Germany as a Civilian Power? The Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Hellmann, Gunther. 1996. "Goodbye Bismarck?: The Foreign Policy of Contemporary Germany." *Mershon International Studies Review* 40 (1): 1–39.
Hellmann, Gunther. 1997. "Absorbing Shocks and Mounting Checks: Germany and Alliance Burden Sharing in the Gulf War." In *Friends in Need: Burden-Sharing in the Gulf War*, edited by Bennett, Andrew, Joseph Lepgold and Danny Unger. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 165-94.
Hellmann, Gunther, Reinhard Wolf, and Siegmar Schmidt. 2007. "Deutsche Außenpolitik in historischer und systematischer Perspektive." In *Handbuch zur deutschen Außenpolitik*, edited by Schmidt, Siegmar, Gunther Hellmann and Reinhard Wolf. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 15-46.
Henrikson, Alan K. 2000. "The Constraint of Legitimacy: The Legal and Institutional Framework of Euro-Atlantic Security." In *Alliance Politics, Kosovo, and NATO's War*, edited by Martin, Pierre and Mark R. Brawley. New York, NY: Palgrave, 41–55.
Hermann, Charles F. 1990. "Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy." *International Studies Quarterly* 34: 3-21.
Inacker, Michael J. 1991. *Unter Ausschluß der Öffentlichkeit? Die Deutschen in der Golfallianz*. Bonn: Bouvier.
Jäger, Alexander, Alexander Höse, and Kai Oppermann, ed. 2011. *Deutsche Außenpolitik.* Wiesbaden: VS.
Junk, Julian, and Christopher Daase. 2013. "Germany." In *Strategic Cultures in Europe: Security and Defence Policies Across the Continent*, edited by Biehl, Heiko, Bastian Giegerich and Alexandra Jonas. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 139-52.
Kinkartz, Sabine. 2010. "Bundesregierung beginnt Sparklausur." *Deutschlandfunk* 6 June.
Krauthammer, Charles. 1990. "The German Revival." *New Republic* (26 March).

Lagassé, Philippe, and Patrick A. Mello. 2018. "The Unintended Consequences of Parliamentary Involvement: Elite Collusion and Afghanistan Deployments in Canada and Germany." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20 (1): 135-57.

Maull, Hanns W. 1990. "Japan, Deutschland und die Zukunft der internationalen Politik." In *Auf der Suche nach der Gestalt Europas*, edited by Thies, Jochen and Günther van Well. Bonn: Verlag für Internationale Politik, 171-92.

Maull, Hanns W. 2007. "Deutschland als Zivilmacht." In *Handbuch zur deutschen Außenpolitik*, edited by Schmidt, Siegmar, Gunther Hellmann and Reinhard Wolf. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 73–84.

Mearsheimer, John J. 1990. "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War." *International Security* 15 (1): 5–56.

Melčić, Dunja, ed. 2007. *Der Jugoslawien-Krieg: Handbuch zu Vorgeschichte, Verlauf und Konsequenzen.* Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Mello, Patrick A. 2019a. "National Restrictions in Multinational Military Operations: A Conceptual Framework." *Contemporary Security Policy* 40 (1): 38-55.

Mello, Patrick A. 2019b. "Von der Bonner zur Berliner Republik: Die „Zivilmacht" Deutschland im Spiegel parlamentarischer Debatten zu Auslandseinsätzen der Bundeswehr, 1990 bis 2018." In *Zivilmacht Bundesrepublik? Bundesdeutsche außenpolitische Rollen vor und nach 1989 aus politik- und geschichtswissenschaftlichen Perspektiven*, edited by Brummer, Klaus and Friedrich Kießling. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 295-316.

Mello, Patrick A., and Dirk Peters. 2017. "Parlamente in der Friedens- und Sicherheitspolitik: Parlamentarische Kontrolle von Streitkräfteeinsätzen im Licht der Forschung." *Sicherheit und Frieden* 35 (2): 53-59.

Merkel, Angela. 2003. "Schroeder Doesn't Speak for All Germans." *The Washington Post* 21 February.

Messner, Dirk. 2011. "Entwicklungspolitik als globale Strukturpolitik." In *Deutsche Außenpolitik*, edited by Jäger, Thomas, Alexander Höse and Kai Oppermann. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 414-42.

Nuscheler, Franz. 2007. "Entwicklungspolitik." In *Handbuch zur deutschen Außenpolitik*, edited by Schmidt, Siegmar, Gunther Hellmann and Reinhard Wolf. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 672-83.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019) "OECD Data, Net ODA."

Oppermann, Kai, and Klaus Brummer. 2020. "Who Gets What in Foreign Affairs? Explaining the Allocation of Foreign Ministries in Coalition Governments." *Government and Opposition* 55 (2): 241-59.

Oppermann, Kai, and Alexander Spencer. 2016. "Telling Stories of Failure: Narrative Constructions of Foreign Policy Fiascos." *Journal of European Public Policy* 23 (5): 685-701.

Peters, Dirk. 2001. "The Debate about a New German Foreign Policy after Unification." In *German Foreign Policy since Unification: Theories and Case Studies*, edited by Rittberger, Volker. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 11-33.

Peters, Dirk, and Wolfgang Wagner. 2014. "Executive Privilege or Parliamentary Proviso? Exploring the Sources of Parliamentary War Powers." *Armed Forces & Society* 40 (2): 310-31.

Poushter, Jacob, and Mordecai. 2020. *Americans and Germans Differ in Their View of Each Other and the World*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Rathbun, Brian C. 2004. *Partisan Interventions: European Party Politics and Peace Enforcement in the Balkans*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Rittberger, Volker, and Wolfgang Wagner. 2001. "German Foreign Policy since Unification: Theories Meet Reality." In *German Foreign Policy since Unification: Theories and Case Studies*, edited by Rittberger, Volker. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 299-325.

Rudolf, Peter. 2000. "Germany and the Kosovo Conflict." In *Alliance Politics, Kosovo, and NATO's War*, edited by Martin, Pierre and Mark R. Brawley. New York: Palgrave, 131–43.

Schmidt, Siegmar, Gunther Hellmann, and Reinhard Wolf, ed. 2007. *Handbuch zur deutschen Außenpolitik.* Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2019) "Military Expenditure Database."

Thiels, Christian. 2015. "Die Kosten des Krieges: Bundeswehr-Einsatz in Afghanistan." *Tagesschau.de* 27 June.

Wagner, Wolfgang. 2017. "The Bundestag as a Champion of Parliamentary Control of Military Missions." *Sicherheit und Frieden* 35 (2): 60-65.

Weidenfeld, Werner. 2007. "Der "Zwei-plus-Vier"-Vertrag." In *Handbuch zur deutschen Außenpolitik*, edited by Schmidt, Siegmar, Gunther Hellmann and Reinhard Wolf. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 112-24.