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The New White Paper 2016 – Promoting Greater Understanding of Security Policy?

Markus Kaim and Hilmar Linnenkamp

Security policy White Papers perform several functions. They serve to inform the German Bundestag and the German public, outline the Federal Government's security policy priorities with other countries, especially Germany's most important partners, and assist communication within the Bundeswehr. The White Paper 2016 is the first of its kind since 2006 and upholds this tradition. Its authors seek to redefine Germany's current and future security policy based on events and developments such as the global financial crisis, financial turmoil in the euro area, the suspension of conscription in Germany, upheavals in the Middle East and Russia's annexation of the Crimea. The Federal Government aims to inform the public and its allies in NATO and the EU precisely what the intentions of its security policy are. However, the contours of the Bundeswehr itself and its future remain blurred. The White Paper process, as it is known, was founded on the expectation of being able to openly and publicly discuss all aspects of defence policy. In continuing this process, it is now important to highlight security policy successes, to recognise deficits, to specify action plans and to propose any follow-up work that may be required.

The Federal Government presented its 'White Paper 2016 on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr' in July 2016. The first part gives an account of Germany's current security policy and its strategic priorities. The second part outlines the planned future of the Bundeswehr. So far, so conventional. Unsurprisingly, this White Paper also notes that the principles it sets out are to be given more substance in "follow-on documents". What this follow-up work might entail is outlined in seven subject areas which, on closer inspection, stand out either be-

cause they set a new course or because they merely hint at weighty issues without determining their political consequences. The White Paper 2016 does not have the final say on any of these topics. It therefore represents the beginning and not the end of the debate on security policy.

Level of ambition in shaping security policy

The White Paper 2016 contains almost the same arguments used by the Federal Presi-

dent in his speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2014: that Germany and Europe are facing a series of tectonic shifts in international politics which have given rise to an unusual abundance of conflicts and questioned many certainties in dealing with them. Berlin did not seek its current leadership role within the EU and (to a lesser extent) NATO, as this situation occurred due to the weakness of other, traditional leading powers. This indicates a change of self-image for the Federal Republic into a power with an increased level of ambition and, as a consequence, Berlin now defines itself more as a partner in ensuring and shaping international order. The statement, “Germany’s security policy horizon is global” (p. 56) appears rather ambitious, however. It is undisputed that Germany is affected more than ever by developments around the globe. Nevertheless, Germany’s security policy is likely to focus on the neighbourhood of the European Union, as suggested for the EU in its Global Strategy presented in June 2016. The White Paper rightly points out the limits of German security policy, “Our means and instruments of security policy are extensive and diverse. They are, however, limited. Strategic decisions have to be taken in order to determine whether, when and to what extent Germany will commit itself” (p. 57).

One task for the short term will be to substantiate this level of ambition for more influence in shaping the global order. While Germany’s leadership role in the EU has become more fragile, it is just beginning to take shape in NATO. Germany is visibly contributing to measures adopted at the Warsaw Summit in July 2016 to reassure the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. However, Germany is not even close to meeting its commitments to the United Nations (UN), especially its peacekeeping missions. Although the Federal Government repeatedly points out that Germany is one of the largest contributors to the UN, it also correctly states that the transition from ‘classic’ peacekeeping to complex multidimensional missions with

the UN’s sometimes robust mandates poses significant challenges. The White Paper also gives the UN priority over both NATO and the EU as Germany’s international sphere of influence. But Berlin has only sent 432 men and women to take part in global peacekeeping missions (as of 31st August 2016). In view of Germany’s application for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council in 2019/20, this could be described as half-hearted at best. Despite all the difficulties, the UN’s peacekeeping and peace making missions have been comparatively successful instruments. As a result, Germany’s European partners such as Italy and the Netherlands are about to ‘rediscover’ peacekeeping missions, that is, become more involved in this area in terms of personnel and material. Given this situation, Germany’s reticence is all the more regrettable.

Reshaping transatlantic security relationships

As for transatlantic security relationships, they have taken on a new tone. While in earlier documents, the unequal burden-sharing between the US and its European allies was either ignored or glossed over, the authors of this White Paper have addressed the US’s dissatisfaction with the Europeans and acknowledge that more must be done, “The transatlantic security partnership will grow closer and become more productive the more we Europeans are prepared to shoulder a larger share of the common burden” (p. 31). This applies ostensibly to the financial aspect, that is, the self-professed commitment of all NATO members to increase their defence spending to 2 percent of GDP in the long term. Although medium-term financial planning sees an increase in Germany’s defence budget to 39 billion euros by 2020, this is a long way off the 2 percent target it set itself. And this is likely to remain the case in the long term. The wording in the White Paper that, “The financial resources [...] are provided in accordance with the budgetary decisions of the German Government”

(p. 117) is therefore more likely to signal a permanent restriction rather than a significant increase in the defence budget.

Given the selective withdrawal of the US from world politics, the political prospects of burden-sharing will extend much further and beyond NATO. Europe needs to consider itself more of a force for international order, at least in the European neighbourhood, and therefore become more politically committed to crisis management. This is already evident to some extent, especially in its containment of the Ukraine crisis. Its efforts in other challenges, however, remain piecemeal or Europe only plays a secondary role, for instance, in establishing peace in civil war-torn Syria. The special role of German foreign policy in such crises is less related to national power or asserting German interests. Rather, it resulted from the commitment of the Federal Government to achieving a sometimes difficult consensus within the EU and with the US. The majority of German responsibility therefore continues to be expressed in its leadership with other countries and for other countries.

This is accompanied by the need to strengthen the European pillar of the alliance. Without referring to it explicitly, this seems to be a throwback to the 1990s debate as to whether stronger European defence ambitions should be pursued inside or outside NATO. While in recent years its focus has been more on the EU, the White Paper now acknowledges the rising political importance of the NATO alliance and European efforts in security and defence policy are once again more strongly embedded in the North Atlantic Alliance. This was both a reaction to the preferences of many allies and also to the as yet modest political progress made on the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Militarily, the outline for a more prominent European role in the alliance is already in place alongside existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation projects. But even more is needed. Firstly, one should reflect

back on those goals that were once decisive for the development of the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within NATO. These include, for example, improved availability of alliance resources and capabilities with which EU-led operations can be supported. Secondly, close consultation between NATO and the EU would be advisable in planning and implementing those EU operations that utilise the resources and capabilities of NATO. Thirdly, the alliance's command structure must be capable of providing headquarter elements for directing EU operations. All this would severely curtail the autonomy of the EU's security policy, but it would be inevitable.

Politically, the way forward is still unclear, even though individual elements of what were once conceptualised as the ESDI have begun to tacitly influence German and European security policy in recent years. One example of this is the European obligation to more effectively contribute to cooperation between NATO and the EU, for example, by the respective institution participating in North Atlantic Council and EU Council meetings. Further steps towards 'rediscovering' the European Security and Defence Identity might include defining a geographic or functional division of labour between the US and the Europeans in the alliance and to find an institutional form for policy coordination within the European pillar of NATO. A kind of 'European caucus', that is, a European coordinating body within NATO at Defence Minister level would be an expression of European Member States' greater responsibility for security policy.

EU security policy

Against this background, it seems questionable how appropriate it is for this White Paper to talk of greater security policy integration for which the EU has not mustered the energy even in better times. According to the White Paper, the way to a 'European Security and Defence Union', the ultimate aim of German policy, is to further develop

CSDP structures, to integrate civilian and military capabilities and strengthen the European defence industry. But this route could have been taken a long time ago. No one has prevented the EU from deploying its Battlegroups (EU BG) in any crisis in recent years. EU Member States would have been able to operate a ‘permanent structured cooperation’, the core of Franco-German proposals from 12th September 2016 to further develop CSDP.

In short, CSDP has failed to fulfil its potential due to a lack of political will. Using the concept and the term “union” in the context of European integration implies that this can only mean a long-term communitisation of the policy field, as has been the case with monetary union. This could mean, for example, creating the post of a fully-fledged EU Commissioner with authority over EU troops and transferring parliamentary approval from national parliaments to the European Parliament. This significant leap towards integration may well be an objective of German security policy. But those in favour of this objective should be absolutely clear about it and outline the steps to get there with a binding timetable, as was the case with monetary union. Given the current widespread aversion to greater integration, the argument in the White Paper for a Security and Defence Union initially appears ambitious, but it suffers from the impression of indecision and half-heartedness. The Brexit vote by the British electorate on 23rd June 2016 has only intensified and accelerated an ongoing development. While security and defence are a major focus of the Bratislava Process – the EU process of reflection after the Brexit vote – the challenge for Member States now will be to link this policy field with implementing the European Global Strategy and connecting it to strategic considerations on the scope of EU foreign and security policy.

Status of the Euro-Atlantic security order

The White Paper chapter on the Euro-Atlantic security order and the Russian policy of confrontation towards it are remarkably clear. It is said that by annexing the Crimea and destabilising eastern Ukraine, Russia has openly called into question the European order of peace and stability. If it continues on this course, “Russia will constitute a challenge to the security of our continent in the foreseeable future” (p. 32). The German Federal Republic has committed itself within the EU to the regime of sanctions against Russia aimed at upholding the Euro-Atlantic security order whose principles are enshrined in the Paris Charter. Despite differences in the rhetoric from Member States, the Federal Government has succeeded in convincing them all to continue their commitment to the sanctions. Germany’s reaction in the NATO context was much stronger and more determined than many observers had expected. For one thing, the Federal Republic made a considerable contribution to steps agreed at the Warsaw Summit to militarily reassure the countries of central and Eastern Europe. In addition, it simultaneously offered Moscow a dialogue as part of efforts to maintain the status quo of the Euro-Atlantic security order and to prevent its further erosion. German policy is based on the assumption that also underlies the White Paper: Germany’s influence in international politics has never been based on the threat or use of military force for various reasons. Rather, the Federal Republic’s influence in international politics is still based on a cooperative *modus operandi* which is expressed as a rules-based international order. This order is therefore an essential prerequisite for Germany’s ambition to shape the future of global politics in and with Europe.

Flexibilisation and ad hoc cooperation

The explicit reference in the White Paper to Germany's participation in ad hoc cooperation is new. It means forming groups to tackle or at least contain specific security problems outside fixed institutional formats. While **political** cooperation of this kind is certainly not new – there are many examples of it, including the E3+3 format for negotiating the conflict over Iran's nuclear programme and the Normandy format for managing the Ukraine crisis – **informal** military cooperation is virgin territory for German security policy and politically more problematic. One example is the international coalition against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, in which Germany is also participating.

There are four important aspects to consider here. Firstly, political control is informal and opaque. There is a difference between ad hoc coalitions and cases in which multilateral organisations have been entrusted with the command of such operations, such as the North Atlantic Council (for NATO) or the Political and Security Committee (for the EU). It is unclear, however, precisely how and who controls the “Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve”, the military framework for the German operation in the Middle East. Secondly, a multilateral cooperation forces participants to formulate conceptual ideas as to what should be achieved politically by military missions abroad. By contrast, the trend towards informal coalitions encourages the depoliticisation of such missions. Thirdly, there are no agreed procedures for sharing the financial burden and providing military capabilities. Fourthly, the tendency to enter into ad hoc cooperation also has constitutional implications. To date, Bundeswehr missions abroad have been conducted in line with Federal Constitutional Court jurisdiction, in particular as part of a system of collective security in accordance with article 24, paragraph 2 of Germany's Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*). Ad hoc coalitions are incompatible with this legis-

lation because they are based neither on permanency nor reciprocity. The reference to article 42, paragraph 7 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) does not help either because the Syria/Iraq deployment is not led by the EU. It is apparent that – for the medium and long-term – Bundeswehr missions abroad require another form of legitimacy if this practice of informalisation is to become firmly established. Just recently, a debate began over whether article 87 of Germany's Basic Law can provide the legal basis for mandates. The precise meaning of the term ‘defence’ needs to be clarified here as this will be extremely important for future missions abroad.

Enabling – a new objective

There will be no German majority in favour of major overseas missions for the foreseeable future because, given their dubious success in Afghanistan, they are seen as expensive, ineffective and therefore dispensable. This changes the function of these operations, as outlined again in the White Paper. The aim of previous missions was to fundamentally restructure the state order based on ‘nation-building’ or promoting democracy after a conflict had ended. However, the aim of future missions is to enable individual governments or regional organisations according to the principle of subsidiarity, to meet security policy challenges on their own and to ensure peace and international security in accordance with the UN Charter. Even if one function does not completely replace the other, it is obvious particularly in the case of EU missions that the focus is shifting from ‘security provider’ to ‘security consultant’.

If this policy is to be successful it must meet two conditions. Firstly, those forces that are supported must be democratically controlled and embedded in a system of functioning political institutions. Otherwise, the competencies offered by the Bundeswehr might possibly achieve the opposite of what was intended. If training and equipment were later abused for violent

takeovers or internal political repression, this would lead to instability and would thus undermine the normative basis of German foreign policy.

Secondly, the permanent military enhancement of a government or regional organisation must be anchored in a comprehensive national and regional strategy. Additional foreign policy tools are required, including support to establish political institutions and targeted European development cooperation. For example, the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) has been training several thousand soldiers in the Malian army with German participation since February 2013. However, their effectiveness has hardly improved at all. Islamist rebels in the north of the country have been on the rise again in recent months and the security situation has deteriorated considerably.

Internal development of the Bundeswehr: modernisation and its downside

One of the most common and key functions of White Papers has always been to paint a vivid picture of the Bundeswehr and especially the future of the armed forces. This aids self-understanding and satisfies legitimate public interest in them as an instrument of foreign and security policy. Armaments play a pivotal as well as controversial role in this. The Bundeswehr should not be suspected of selectively removing them from public scrutiny. Instead, they should be seen in the context of general technological advancements and modernisation in major organisations.

The rapid development of information technology has increasingly shaped the global arms industry. Software updates have become the key instruments of modernising complex systems. However, there is very little mention of this distinctive technological trend in the White Paper. In any case, the document does not contain any information about the current or future state of arms in the German Army,

Air Force or Navy. In terms of practically shaping the Bundeswehr's military capabilities, two topics deserve particular attention: autonomous systems (in particular, 'lethal autonomous weapon systems', LAWS) and the organisation of cyber capabilities under the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Defence.

In the past three years, there have been two public debates about autonomous or semi-autonomous airborne systems. The first was related to the reconnaissance system, Eurohawk, which is supposed to be able to operate in European airspace without endangering civil aviation, and the other was about the potential acquisition of armed drones. Neither debate came to a conclusion. Even though or perhaps because neither of these two topics appear in the White Paper, the Federal Government will not only have to explain its arms and cooperation policies but also its arms control policy on combat drones.

The growing importance of cyberspace requires conceptual but also organisational clarification. Here, the focus is on the complex issue of how to strike a balance between offensive and defensive capabilities. In 2015, the Minister of Defence publicly announced a restructuring of the Ministry and its subordinate authorities in such a way as to remove the fragmentation of competencies and capacities in this field. There are no details about these plans in the White Paper.

It is the ongoing task of arms modernisation to provide command and control, weapons and support systems – on time, of high technological quality and at reasonable cost. All major projects and programmes were thoroughly checked. The result is an 'Armaments Agenda' whose key terms are Europeanisation, transparency and innovation. It would be helpful to describe changes in arms management based on key projects and to confront the stated aims of the White Paper with defence industrial and cooperation policy requirements. This is the only way to find out what a "value-based leadership culture" and "a culture of

trust, responsibility and error management” (p. 128) in arms management really mean.

The Ministry of Defence’s modernisation programme also includes a reform of personnel policy. Since the end of conscription, the Bundeswehr has no longer been able to recruit from an endless pool of long-serving and professional soldiers. Today, the Army has to advertise in the labour market and offer attractive career opportunities. Some changes are being introduced, such as regulations on working hours, family-friendliness and improvements in infrastructure. But it is still a difficult task to recruit and keep enough qualified personnel. Almost incidentally, the White Paper also contains a revolutionary, albeit hypothetical proposal: to open up the Bundeswehr to citizens of the European Union. After thorough legal examination, it may prove worthwhile to discuss the idea with our partners in a multilateral dialogue.

Conclusion

The first part of the White Paper, which deals with security policy, justifies and affirms increased expectations on Germany’s contribution to international crisis prevention and conflict management. This updates a policy which, beyond peace rhetoric, reflects the fact that contingents of the Bundeswehr have been engaged in international crises and conflicts for over twenty years. What experience has Germany had in this regard? What lessons has it learned and to which has it paid heed? What successes can the Federal Government and the Bundestag build on for future missions? These questions should be discussed openly and transparently in public, not least because they are only hinted at in the White Paper. Missions, arms exports and training assistance – all these instruments deserve to be accounted for in detail. This should be part of the follow-up work of an ambitious White Paper.

Specifically, the Federal Government should participate in all three of the areas

of security policy addressed in the White Paper for Germany:

- ▶ It should outline the next steps in NATO’s reassurance and deterrence strategy and Germany’s contribution to it. In this context, it will have to clarify, more so than it has done in the White Paper, the importance it attaches to nuclear deterrence in the future. As well as protecting its own territorial integrity, it should also make greater efforts to protect the political sovereignty of its allies.
- ▶ It should more clearly define its level of ambition for the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU in the Bratislava Process. Whilst the Franco-German paper on the renewal of CSDP from 12th September 2016 does outline steps towards greater cooperation, it remains unclear as to how willing the Federal Government really is to push for security and defence policy integration.
- ▶ It should reinforce its noticeable appreciation of the United Nations as an action field for Germany’s security policy by providing substantial and sustainable contributions to peacekeeping operations. At the same time, it should make greater use of these contributions to realise its regional and global policy objectives. For that, it would be helpful to take up key positions in UN missions, such as Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General or Force Commander.

In terms of the development of the Bundeswehr, the Federal Government should clarify the link between political priorities and military capability planning. This link was rather vaguely described in the White Paper. It therefore makes sense to debate general statements of intent – on balanced armed forces, more intensive cooperation with NATO and the EU, modernised research, development and procurement processes – with the aid of specific projects. Greater transparency would promote support of Germany’s armed forces among its citizens. Many want to know what the German Navy can achieve today and in ten years and what the capabilities of the Air

Force and the Army could be deployed for with any prospect of success. The question of how the Federal Government intends to achieve the dual objectives of adequate breadth and necessary depth of its military capabilities is also of interest.

Although the White Paper is an executive document and, given their powers to finance and legitimise defence and security policy action, members of the Bundestag and the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces should have a greater say in the positioning of security policy. An annual debate on Germany's security and defence policy might stabilise the discussion process this White Paper is intended to stimulate.

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