

Chapter 18: Realignment of the German Security Architecture after 2022

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Abstract

Russia's invasion of Ukraine marks a turning point in European history. With his order to invade the neighboring country, Vladimir Putin has not only shaken the European security framework. He has also called into question the rule-based peace order that applies worldwide. Germany must respond to the changed security policy reality: if we want to continue to live in peace and freedom, we not only need a fully equipped Bundeswehr capable of military service. Germany must also assume more responsibility. Our history obliges us to do so.

Keywords

war of aggression, *Zeitenwende*, security framework, peace order, Bundeswehr, special assets, National Security Council

1 Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the unthinkable happened: Vladimir Putin attacked Ukraine for the second time after 2014. From the outset, the attack was directed not only against military facilities, but also and especially against civilian ones. With this breach of civilization, Putin is also turning the rule-based peace order on its head, which was enshrined in the United Nations Charter in 1947 after the horrific experiences of World War II: "All Members shall refrain from [...] any threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State."¹ At the time, Russia had also agreed to this central principle for the preservation of global peace

1 UNRIC: Charter of the United Nations, Art. 2(4).

and international security. Ignored by Putin, it annexed Crimea back in 2014. In retrospect, this was a “dress rehearsal” for what was to follow on February 24, 2022.

2 Challenges of German Security Policy

As early as 2007, Putin let it be known unequivocally in his speech at the Munich Security Conference that he was striving for a new world order in which Russia would once again assume the role of a world power.² In an article titled “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”,³ which he published in July 2021, six months before the invasion of Ukraine, the Russian president revealed his imperialist, great-power fantasies. The Kremlin ruler claimed not only that Ukraine had emerged on territory stolen from Russia, but also that Ukraine’s state sovereignty was ultimately dependent on Moscow’s acquiescence.⁴ He thus questioned Ukraine’s territorial integrity in violation of international law.

President Putin considers the disintegration of the Soviet Union “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”,⁵ because, in his view, Russia has thus lost importance. Therefore, the central goal of his foreign policy is to make the country a world power again and, on the way there, to force Ukraine back under Russian rule as a first step.⁶ The Russian attack on Ukraine therefore not only directly challenges the security and

2 Putin, Vladimir: Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2007.

3 Putin, Vladimir: On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians, 12 July 2021.

4 Dickinson, Peter: “Putin’s new Ukraine essay reveals imperial ambitions”, Atlantic Council, 15 July 2021.

5 NBC News: “Putin: Soviet collapse a ‘genuine tragedy’”, 25 April 2005; Lechner, Gerhard: “Putin will zur Sowjetunion zurück”, Wiener Zeitung, 14 February 2022.

6 Interestingly, Ukraine was under Russian rule for just under 200 years in its long history, from the end of the 18th century until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Before that (and for much longer overall), Ukraine was under Western influence. The country was perceived as an independent country in Europe already in the early modern period, even if it finally received its state independence only in 1991 (cf. Lechner, Putin will zur Sowjetunion zurück, 2022; Kappler, Andreas: *Ungleiche Brüder. Russen und Ukrainer vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. C. H. Beck: Munich 2017).

principles of cooperation in Europe,⁷ it is also the struggle of systems – autocracy *versus* democracy – in the world.

In the long term, this also has profound consequences for German security policy. The end of the East-West conflict after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 changed the threat perception of Germans, who from then on felt exclusively surrounded by friends. Over the decades, the focus shifted significantly from external to internal security. In recent years, the question of how we can protect our democracy with a free and open society from extremist and terrorist attacks has been at the center of political and social debate.

By contrast, few have given much thought to Germany's external security. This issue was not seriously discussed in political and social debates. Regardless of the crises that were building up around the world, people apparently saw no real reason to do so. This changed abruptly with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Three days later, Chancellor Olaf Scholz rightly spoke in the German Bundestag of *Zeitenwende* – a turning point in (German) history.⁸ Putin's order to invade the neighboring country not only shook the European security framework. Since then, the entire globe has been thrown into unbalance in terms of security policy.

It is no coincidence that Russian foreign policy has become significantly more imperialistic in recent years. For the United States, China has become the biggest rival in the competition of political systems over the past decades. Its security policy focus has therefore been correspondingly directed toward the Indo-Pacific. Russia was already considered merely a "regional power" under the Obama administration.⁹ Thus, while U.S. foreign policy attention was no longer primarily focused on the transatlantic alliance, and while French President Emanuel Macron, frustrated, described NATO as "brain dead",¹⁰ Putin increasingly focused on his neighboring states Belarus and Ukraine.

After the end of the Cold War at the latest, it was no longer conceivable for all those responsible that tanks would once again be rolling through the heart of Europe. Cyberattacks and asymmetric threats as well as conflicts

7 Die Bundesregierung: Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz am 27. Februar 2022; Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung: 45 Jahre Schlussakte von Helsinki, 2020.

8 Die Bundesregierung, Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz am 27. Februar 2022.

9 Die Welt: "Obama verspottet Russland als 'Regionalmacht'", 25 March 2014.

10 Tagesschau: "Macron nennt NATO 'hirntot'", 7 November 2019.

between state and non-state actors were the main threat scenarios in the Bundeswehr's White Paper.¹¹ It was not until Russia's annexation of Crimea – a violation of international law – that the issue of national and alliance defense returned to the center of German security policy. Today, we face a new reality. We need a fully equipped Bundeswehr that is fit for military service again, because after the fall of the Berlin Wall it was simply cut to the bone. For more than 25 years, whenever the federal government sought funds in the budget, it always turned to the defense account. The Bundeswehr was reduced to 182,000 men and women, and important investments in material and infrastructure were postponed indefinitely. Since 2014, the defense budget has been successively increased, but restoring full operational readiness is still a long way off.

The Bundeswehr's special fund of 100 billion euros is now a great opportunity to modernize the German troops so that it can also fulfill its international obligations within the framework of the EU and NATO. The Bundeswehr, which for years has been geared to maximum efficiency and economy, now lacks the capability to simultaneously perform its tasks worldwide when required. In view of the reality of security policy, this is no longer appropriate. The Bundeswehr must be equipped in such a way that it can perform its tasks not only consecutively but also simultaneously. If necessary, this must also be achievable within the shortest possible time. This does not necessarily require more personnel, though.

Military strength is not defined exclusively by the number of armed personnel. Rather, it comes down to excellent training and the weapon systems and infrastructure available. If combat swimmers are stranded for ten years because they lack a training pool, or pilots lose their licenses because helicopters don't take off and they therefore cannot fulfill the necessary flight hours, that is a huge problem. In the worst case, soldiers have to sign off on skills because they cannot practice for their missions. In the future, however, the Bundeswehr will only be able to acquire good people and keep them if the appropriate material is available. After all, operational readiness means attractiveness. For the sake of honesty, though, it should also be mentioned that the poor state of the Bundeswehr is not just a question of money and complicated procurement rules, but also one of organization and efficient leadership. The Bundeswehr has too many command positions and command staff. For greater operational readiness, however, it needs significantly more troops.

11 Bundesministerium der Verteidigung: Weißbuch 2016.

We need a strong and effective Bundeswehr to be able to respond to the changed security situation and live up to our responsibility in the world. Germany is involved in various alliances. Our partners must be able to rely on us one hundred percent. They also expect Germany to take the lead. In the global financial crisis that began in 2007 and subsequently developed into the worst economic crisis of the post-war period, we took on this role as a matter of course. But when it comes to security in Europe and the world, we are reluctant to take the lead. There are members of the federal government who have problems accepting this responsibility.

Seventy-eight years after the end of World War II, Germany is a stable democracy and an economically strong country. Precisely because of our historical responsibility, we should be committed to freedom in peace worldwide. Our international partners also expect us to do so. Leading the way does not, of course, mean not involving our allies. On the contrary. Bilateral partnerships can also be launched and lead to a greater unity.

For this reason, too, Germany should press ahead with the establishment of a permanent National Security Council modeled on the *U.S. National Security Council*. This body advises the U.S. president on matters of foreign, security, and defense policy. Away from day-to-day politics, it analyzes interdepartmental international developments that either already have an impact on their own country or could do so in the future. Such an interdepartmental early warning system would also be relevant for Germany's future security architecture. Most events that happen around the world also affect us in Europe as a consequence. In a global world, we are indirectly affected by many developments, even if they happen on the other side of the planet.

3 Conclusion

Russia's invasion of Ukraine concerns us directly. Anyone who tramples on the rule-based order, and does so in the heart of Europe, must expect resistance from the free Western world. The outcome of this war will determine whether the *law of the strongest* or the *strength of the rule of law* will prevail in the future. We want to live in peace, preserve our democracy and freedom, increase our prosperity, maintain the welfare state, and protect human rights, as our Basic Law, the best constitution in the world, tells us.

The goal of our security policy strategy must therefore be unambiguous. Anyone who attacks our free legal order must expect fierce resistance.

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