

Casualty Shyness and Democracy in Germany

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Abstract: Casualty shyness implies the notion that modern societies have become complacent and unwilling to bear the physical costs of conflict; they have turned into casualty shy and 'post-heroic' societies who may easily be intimidated and blackmailed by a determined adversary. The present article relates this issue to the case of Germany. The analysis of the perceptions of and the reactions to German casualties (in the sense of dead German soldiers) by the political and military elites and by the media, i.e. the press, reveals that German society may be less casualty shy than commonly expected. Indifference and socialization/learning are offered as (complementary) explanations.

Keywords: Casualties, casualty shyness, civil-military relations Germany, Bundeswehr

Casualty shyness is a term that has come up in the political and scientific language within the last decade only. It implies the notion, that, due to processes of modernization, individualization, civilianization, and post-materialistic value change, modern, advanced, affluent and democratic societies have become complacent and unwilling to bear the physical costs of conflict; they have turned into casualty averse/reluctant/shy and 'post-heroic' societies who may easily be intimidated and blackmailed by a determined adversary (Luttwak 1995; Münkler 2002). In the following, we will take up the discussion about the casualty factor and apply it to the German case in order to assess how casualty shy German society is: We will analyze the perceptions of and the reactions to German casualties by the political and military elites and by the media, i.e. the press, while focusing our analysis to casualties in the sense of dead German soldiers (Feaver/Gelpi 1999: 1). We will start, however, with some reflections upon the meaning of death to both society and the military.

1. The Meaning of Death

As Reinhard Koselleck (1994) points out with respect to the historical development of the political cult of the death, a violent death has always been in need of justification, implicating a conversion of religion and politics. Because regardless of the nature of the political community, those killed in battle or war have represented at all times a religious element of its constitution – if it survived. Studies about the political cult of the death and war memorials have shown that attitudes towards a soldier's death and towards war are closely linked – and that they have undergone a considerable change during the last two hundred years (cf. Latzel 1988): In Prussia of the 18th century, for example, the educated bourgeoisie was opposed to the royal wars, and in the military, consisting of foreign mercenaries and forced peasants, a rather fatalistic attitude towards death prevailed. With the introduction of conscription and the spreading of

national sentiments after the French Revolution, however, war was more and more regarded as a national affair and as a patriotic obligation for everyone – and the soldier's death a sacrifice for the nation. In Germany, it was especially during the wars of liberation at the beginning of the 19th century that this reinterpretation of the soldier's death took place with nationalism and religiosity going hand in hand: The soldier's death and the martyr's death were associated and idealized from a national and religious point of view. From then on, the idea of the soldier's death as a national sacrifice became the predominant view. Interestingly, though, in this process, the religious meaning in contrast to the national one has been successively losing in importance.

1945, then, constitutes a fundamental break with the political cult of the death of the past. The monuments and war memorials built after 1945 show this very clearly: In contrast to the monuments of World War I, which are marked by patriotism, but also by righteous defiance, the war memorials of World War II are centered on mourning and are characterized by a strange speechlessness. Instead of celebrating the soldiers' sacrifices, they mourn the victims of the war. With regard to the soldier's death, it is interesting to see another reinterpretation of its meaning, implying a shift from 'sacrifice' to 'victim': During the first years after the war, only the civilian victims, especially those of the concentration camps, were commemorated. But only a few years later – at the time of the debate about the rearmament of the Federal Republic and of the foundation of the Bundeswehr – the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* began to be integrated into the public mourning. Accordingly to the image the Germans had of themselves, the soldiers, too, were now seen above all as 'victims' of Hitler and his National Socialist regime (Wittig 1990; Kühne 2000).

Since then, of course, much has changed: The long and continuous debate about Germany's past, although, for a long time, concentrated on the Holocaust, has not excluded the *Wehrmacht*, and the image of its soldiers as victims has been refuted in many respects (Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung 2002; Müller/Volkman 1999). Overall, we can observe a decline in and discrediting of the meaning and importance attached to war memorials. This loss of meaning of war memorials seems to imply that since 1945 the German society does no longer frame the death of soldiers as a patri-

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otic sacrifice representing a commitment of the survivors to similar devotion. With respect to the developments after the end of the Cold War, one might therefore assume the German society and the political leaders to be very reluctant in risking and accepting German casualties. It is against this background that it seems interesting to explore the way the military and political elites as well as the German media and the public deal with the soldier's death today.

2. Casualty Shyness: The German Case

The Bundeswehr has little experience with violent death and casualties so far. During the first five decades of its existence, German soldiers died of natural causes and because of illnesses; they committed suicide or were killed by accidents – albeit not in battle, by the enemy, but usually off duty. This reflects the very fact that the Bundeswehr for the most part of its existence represented a military that has been designed, structured, manned, equipped and trained to deter and, if that failed contrary to common expectation, eventually fight the 'Red' mass armies of the Warsaw Pact countries conventionally attacking Germany and Western Europe in a Cold War turned hot and turning, later on, 'flexible response' nuclear.

With the end of the Cold War and the change of the international macro-constellation this has changed, too. In its foreign, security and military policy the (re-)united and now fully sovereign Germany tried to respond and to adapt to the new international environment, its risks and challenges. In line with the processes of globalization, transnationalization and internationalization German foreign, security and military policy assumed an orientation that was even more globally defined than before – which implied the operation of German troops abroad and out of area. To be sure, this did not come in a sweep but was rather a protracted process that involved some debate in German politics and in German society. In this regard, in our view there were three watershed events that decisively shaped and defined German policy in the 1990s (cf. Schwab-Trapp 2002).

The first event was the second Gulf War in the early 1990s. Here, the conservative-liberal Kohl/Genscher Administration did not participate militarily in the US-led alliance forces against Saddam Hussein's Iraq attacking Kuwait and, interestingly, cited constitutional rather than political reasons which would restrain the Bundeswehr's area of operation to NATO territory, while Germany served as a major financial sponsor of this endeavor. Although this might persuade one not to see any changes at all, it is important to note that indeed, there was an intense debate in German politics and in German public opinion, the most notable feature of which were the incipient attitudinal shifts in segments of German politics and society that were hitherto strongly opposed to any German military participation in a combat mission.

The second and third events brought this even more to the fore. It was the civil war, the atrocities and the acts of ethnic cleansing on the Balkans on the one hand and the precarious humanitarian situation in Somalia on the other that

made Germany rethink substantially the deployment of German soldiers and the participation of the Bundeswehr in out of area missions. Both events triggered another debate within the German polity about war and German participation therein. The result was that German soldiers were involved both in the humanitarian military operation authorized by the United Nations in Somalia and in the wars on the Balkans, i.e. in the peace enforcement missions in Bosnia (with a UN-mandate) and in Kosovo (by a self-mandated NATO which led to severe mass demonstrations in German society). Interestingly, the constitutional arguments used in the first event were overruled by political arguments in the latter two events, the legality of which was testified and stated by the ruling of the German Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) of 1994.

Meanwhile, out of (NATO) area operations are quite common to German soldiers who, in recent years, have been found on duty in Afghanistan (ISAF), in Kuwait, in Djibouti, East Timor, on the Balkans, in Congo, in Georgia and elsewhere. In total, currently, i.e. as of July 2004, there are about 7,000 German soldiers involved in international military missions.¹ The return of war into the life-world of Western democratic countries has thus reached Germany also. This implies that the Bundeswehr in particular and German society in general had, still has and are going to have to face the issue of casualties. Since the Bundeswehr suffered its first 'real' casualty in 1993, 41 German soldiers have died and have been killed in out of area missions under various circumstances as Table 1 shows.

Given our coining of the term casualties, in the following sections, we will not cover all of these incidents because most of the German soldiers died in accidents. Rather, we will deal with the five combat-related incidents of 14 October 1993, 8 October 2001, 6 March 2002, 29 May 2003, and 7 June 2003. Yet, since the accident of 21 December 2002 was widely discussed in German politics and in the media, we included this additional incident in our analysis. Thus, six incidents in total provide the empirical foundation of our analysis.

2.1 UNTAC²

In October 1993, only a few weeks before the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) troops were supposed to leave the country, a sergeant of the German medical corps, one of around 150 Bundeswehr soldiers stationed in Phnom Penh, was killed. For unknown reasons he was shot in his car by a motorcyclist near the UN headquarters at around 8:00pm local time when he was on his way to the petrol station. The murderer could not be identified.

1 See the complete list in <http://www.bundeswehr.de/forces/grundlagen/einsatz/index.php>.

2 This section is based on: *Die Tageszeitung*, 16 October 1993: 1, 10; 23 October 1993: 4; *Die Welt*, 15 October 1993: 1, 3; 16-17 October 1993: 1, 2, 6; 18 October 1993: 3, 6; 19 October 1993: 1, 3; 23-24 October 1993: 1; *Die Zeit*, 22 October 1992: 2; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 October 1993: 1, 2; 23 October 1993: 3; *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 16 October 1993: 1, 5; 23 October 1993: 1; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 October 1993: 1, 4; 16-17 October 1993: 1, 4, 6; 18 October 1993: 2; 19 October 1993: 1; 23-24 October 1993: 6.

Table 1: German Soldiers Died in International Military Missions Since 1993

Date	Mission	Casualties	Suicides	Accidents & Illnesses	Combat Related*
14 / 10 / 1993	UN Mission in Cambodia	1			Shot for unknown reasons by a Cambodian
20 / 12 / 1995	Supervision of embargo against Yugoslavia in the Adriatic Sea	1		Squashed between two ships' sides when lowering a dinghy	
15 / 5 / 1997	SFOR	1		Cardiac arrest	
23 / 5 / 1997	SFOR	2		Shot by cartridges from a <i>Luchs</i> tank canon due to negligence	
9 / 9 / 1997	SFOR	1		Car accident	
6 / 7 / 1998	SFOR	1		<i>Fuchs</i> tank accident due to heavy terrain	
15 / 1 / 1999	SFOR	1		Firearm accident	
30 / 5 / 1999	SFOR	1		<i>Fuchs</i> tank accident	
17 / 6 / 1999	KFOR	1		Firearm accident	
12 / 10 / 1999	KFOR	2		Car accident	
30 / 10 / 1999	KFOR	1		<i>Wolf</i> military vehicle accident due to heavy terrain	
31 / 1 / 2000	KFOR	1		Natural death	
20 / 4 / 2000	KFOR	1		Firearm accident	
8 / 6 / 2000	KFOR	2		Military truck accident due to heavy terrain	
? / 8 / 2000	SFOR	1		Car accident	
17 / 9 / 2000	SFOR	1		Firearm accident	
22 / 9 / 2000	SFOR	1		Vehicle accident	
21 / 3 / 2001	SFOR	1	Shot himself		
23 / 6 / 2001	KFOR	1		Military vehicle accident following an evasive manoeuvre	
31 / 7 / 2001	KFOR	1	Shot himself		
8 / 10 / 2001	UN Mission in Georgia	1			Helicopter hit by missile
15 / 12 / 2000	KFOR	1		Firearm accident	
6 / 3 / 2002	ISAF	2			Accidental explosion of missile while trying to defuse it
21 / 12 / 2002	ISAF	7		Helicopter crash	
29 / 5 / 2003	ISAF	1			<i>Wolf</i> military vehicle explosion due to a mine
7 / 6 / 2003	ISAF	4			Suicide attack on a bus transporting German soldiers
3 / 10 / 2003	KFOR	2		Car accident	
Total casualties		41	2	30	9

Sources: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 10 June 2003: 2; Berliner Morgenpost, 8 June 2003: 3; dpa-Dokumentation 2003; Jahresberichte des Wehrbeauftragten.

Note: * Entailing weapons, material and/or personnel from the adversary or from one of the conflict parties.

This first casualty of the Bundeswehr was largely covered by the German media. In all major newspapers the news of the killed sergeant made it on the front page. In the following days some newspapers continued to report about the incident and gave more detailed information about the situation in Cambodia and the UN mission there, while others confined themselves to evoke the sergeant's death only in relation to the German foreign and military policy and the Bundeswehr's out of area engagements. Because apart from the details of the assassination and the reaction of the German government and the political parties to it, it was Germany's military engagement in Somalia which the attention centered on. Although the mission in Cambodia was not called into question, most commentators expected an intensified political debate about the out of area missions in general and the role of the Bundeswehr in Somalia in particular, after the US had decided to withdraw their troops until April 1994.

However, the expected conflict did not break out. Representatives of the opposition did try to put an examination of the German engagement in Somalia on the agenda, but everyone seemed to agree with the position of Defense Minister Volker Rühe claiming that the incident in Cambodia would not affect Germany's international engagement and the out of area missions of the Bundeswehr. He went on: »We are having now the bitter experience that other nations have had before us.« Especially this last sentence of the minister's statement was taken up again and again by the media, because here the minister did not only express his condolences, but indicated at the same time that Germany – like other (fully sovereign) nations (assuming their international responsibility) – would have to prepare themselves for (more) casualties in the future. Other comments from members of both the government and the opposition, pointed into the same direction. The general message underlying all these statements therefore was that the Bundeswehr would continue to participate in international military missions, even if this meant that German soldiers might be killed, because this was the 'price' Germany has to pay in order to meet its international responsibilities.

This was also taken up by the press. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, for example, commented on October 1993: »After the assassination of the soldier the political climate might change and the role of German troops abroad might be questioned again. However, it would be better if – however painful this process will be – the death of the sergeant would open the eyes for reality: If the Federal Republic does not want to claim a special position in the world, if it wants to keep on helping the community of nations with its medical soldiers, doctors and logistics troops, there will be more victims to mourn.«

2.2 UNOMIG¹

Since 1994, Germany has been contributing a handful of soldiers annually to the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) that was designed in 1993 and manned with about 120 unarmed military observers after Abkhazia had declared its independence from Georgia in 1992. In this peacekeeping mission that has largely been neglected by German public opinion, a German military doctor who was serving as the UNOMIG Junior Medical Officer in the medical facilities for UN personnel in Zugdidi died on 8 October 2001. At 10:00am local time, a surface-to-air missile hit a UN-white-colored helicopter which was manned with 9 unarmed military observers while they were flying over the Kodori Valley in the border region of Georgia and the neighboring province of Abkhazia. All of the military observers died when the helicopter crashed and although the UN sent an expert team to find out the details of the incident it is still unclear who or which group of the conflict is responsible for firing the missile. Interestingly, this incident did not make it to the front pages of the newspapers and went by as much neglected as the German participation to UNOMIG in general.

2.3 ISAF I²

In early March 2002 a heavy accident occurred among the German-Dutch-Austrian-Danish International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops in Kabul. On 6 March at around 5:00pm local time, two German and three Danish soldiers of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit died while they tried to destroy two Russian SA 3 GOA surface-to-air missiles in a location specifically designed for these purposes. In addition to this, five soldiers were heavily wounded and two more soldiers were lucky to survive with minor injuries only. Obviously, the security distance to the missiles had not been kept and there had been some more violations of security regulations due to negligence as the following closer inspection revealed.

It was Inspector General Harald Kujat who first brought the accident to the attention of the German public, by pointing out that the explosion was a tragic accident. Since, as he said, the soldiers had been well-equipped and experts in their fields and since the security regulations had been strictly kept, he could not offer an explanation for what happened and how it happened. Insinuations that their deaths were to be attributed to deficient material, however, were strictly opposed by him. Although he maintained that the German soldiers in Afghanistan »are professional

1 This section is based on: *Die Tageszeitung*, 10 October 2001: 11; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 October 2001: 7; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 9 October 2001: 11; Bundeswehr Intr@net aktuell.

2 This section is based on: *Berliner Morgenpost*, 7 March 2002: 4; 8 March 2002: 1; 9 March 2002: 6; *Berliner Zeitung*, 7 March 2002: 1, 4, 10; 8 March 2002: 1, 8; 9/10 March 2002: 1, 4f.; *Der Spiegel*, 11 March 2002: 172-186; 25 March 2002: 32f.; *Die Tageszeitung*, 7 March 2002: 1, 2, 12; *Die Welt*, 7 March 2002: 1, 3; 8 March 2002: 1f., 8, 10; 9 March 2002: 4, 7; *Die Zeit*, 7 March 2002: 1; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 March 2002: 1f.; 8 March 2002: 1f.; *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 7 March 2002: 1-3; 8 March 2002: 1; *Neues Deutschland*, 7 March 2002: 1; 8 March 2002: 1; 9/10 March 2002: 1, 4; 11 March 2002: 1; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 March 2002: 1, 4; 8 March 2002: 1, 4, 8; Bundeswehr Intr@net Aktuell.

enough to cope with such a situation«, he conceded that this »accident does not have positive effects on the soldiers' motivation.« In contrast to that Colonel Bernhard Gertz, President of the German Bundeswehr Soldiers' Association (*Deutscher Bundeswehrverband*), pointed to the »job description« of the military profession and called the accident »a piece of soldierly normalcy«.

When it comes to the Defense Ministry, Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping in a press conference presented himself deeply moved by the incident and offered the dead soldiers' families his condolences. In addition to this, he declared that this accident would not affect the basic rationale of the Bundeswehr mission in Afghanistan. Further on in the political realm, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder spoke of a »deep grief« that had befallen »everybody« and added that the German participation in the anti-terrorism mission was beyond debate.

Obviously, the German government feared another debate on general principles of the German engagement in Afghanistan and the anti-terrorism activities – all the more so since central conclusions of the report of the Commissioner for Education and Training (*Beauftragter für Erziehung und Ausbildung*) of the Inspector General had been leaked to the press. What obviously made the government somewhat nervous was, in particular, the report's finding that the troops »were no longer unconditionally backing the military leadership«. Here, soldiers were reported as doubting the objective of the mission. According to these voices the efforts were too high, the risks too numerous and the reconstruction effects in the country too little. And, indeed, this accident occurred amidst a debate about the possible extension of the ISAF troops and their mandate in Afghanistan to demobilize the Afghan warlords' about 2 million fighters and create national Afghan forces that were capable of providing security in the country. Against this background, in the political debate following the incident representatives of all German parties, except the left-wing PDS which demanded the withdrawal of the Bundestag mandate, warned to raise fundamental doubts about the German ISAF mission in general. Instead, they confirmed the political legitimacy of the military mission and argued that it was right to engage in Afghanistan.

Overall, then, the casualty aversion syndrome is clearly to be felt both in the military, in the Defense Ministry and in politics. It also comes to the fore in press comments, e.g. when Constanze Stelzenmüller expressed her concerns in *Die ZEIT* of 7 March 2002: »What will become of morale, if the first Germans die in combat?« The second major German weekly paper, *Der Spiegel*, in a report by Michael Fröhlingsdorf and others on 11 March 2002, found German society to be »psychologically disarmed«. And Jochim Stoltenberg, in a comment to both *Die WELT* and the *Berliner Morgenpost* of 7 March 2002, expressed his concern for the backing of Germany's military missions by society and perceived German society and politics in a learning and adaptation process: »The two Bundeswehr soldiers are the first German soldiers who die while on duty thousands of kilometers away from home. This is still an extreme experience

for a country that has difficulties with his new role, also in military terms, in world politics. Every military mission entails high risks, including life-threatening ones. This was suspected by all and said by many. Now we are forced by the bitter reality to also fully grasp this. This is a bitter, but inevitable learning process.«

At this point, it is interesting to look at the hard data of public opinion survey. Here, indeed, an *EMNID* survey following the deaths of the two German soldiers did not find an effect of this incident on public opinion. Asked whether they agree to the current participation of Bundeswehr soldiers in Afghanistan, 55 percent were positive compared to 57 percent before the incident (quoted in *Die WELT*, 9 March 2002: 4). Accordingly, there is some truth in Hugh Smith's (2003: 1) finding, that governments, politicians and the media may be casualty shy »while the public is casualty ready«, especially in cases when military operations are considered quite legitimate as was the war against terrorism in Afghanistan (in contrast to the Kosovo campaign). Another interpretation might be that the public was much more aware than both politics and the media that this incident, though combat related according to our definition, was much more a military accident involving weapons from the conflict parties.

2.4 ISAF II³

In December 2002, three days before Christmas, a transportation helicopter of the Bundeswehr crashed only a few kilometers away from the German headquarters in Kabul. None of the passengers survived. With seven dead soldiers, this was the worst accident for the Bundeswehr so far. The helicopter was on a routine tour when the incident happened. Again, the accident of the Bundeswehr helicopter was reported in all big newspapers.

Chancellor Gerhard Schröder immediately expressed his condolences to the family of the dead soldiers, stressing that the »courageous and responsible engagement« of German soldiers in Kabul deserved »all our respect« and pointed out that »our soldiers fight for human rights, against war and oppression« and that »the defense of freedom and life itself [and of] (...) our value system« were at stake. Thereby he simultaneously provided consolation to the victims' relatives and legitimacy to the military mission. Minister of Defense Peter Struck said that »overall Germany is joining you [the relatives, friends, etc.] in mourning« and added to this that the crash had been an accident with no evidence that the helicopter had been shot. Yet, investigations of specialists of the Bundeswehr a few days later revealed that the crash was

³ This section is based on: *Berliner Morgenpost*, 22 December 2002: 1, 3; 23 December 2002: 1f.; 27 December 2002: 4; *Berliner Zeitung*, 23 December 2002: 2, 4; 24-26 December 2002: 6; 27 December 2002: 7; 28-29 December 2002: 5; *Die Tageszeitung*, 23 December 2003: 1, 7; 28 December 2002: 12; *Die Welt*, 24 December 2002: 4; 27 December 2002: 4; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 December 2002: 1, 3; 24 December 2002: 3; 27 December 2002: 2; *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 23 December 2002: 1, 6; 24 December 2002: 6; 27 December 2002: 1; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23 December 2002: 1f.; 24-26 December 2002: 1; 27 December 2002: 1; *Neues Deutschland*, 23 December 2002: 1, 6; *Y. – Magazin der Bundeswehr*, January 2003; Bundeswehr Intr@net aktuell.

caused by a technical defect. This, quite naturally, provoked a violent debate on the adequacy and the quality of the Bundeswehr's equipment in out of area missions.

In several articles in the press, the capacity and the reliability of the Bundeswehr's equipment in general and of the type of helicopter involved in the accident in particular were discussed. Some representatives of the German Bundeswehr Soldiers' Association complained about the poor and inadequate equipment of the Bundeswehr.⁴ Although quite a few newspapers published chronicles of Bundeswehr casualties since the beginning of Germany's military engagement abroad and especially referred to the dangerous situation in Afghanistan, the German participation in out of area missions was never generally questioned. Even more: the question of how Germany's and the Bundeswehr's international responsibility should look like was not even raised, which is to be explained by the very fact of this incident being an accident. Instead, Germany's engagement in Afghanistan was generally taken for granted: Only one day before the crash, the Bundestag had voted with great majority for an extension of the German ISAF mandate for one year.

Interestingly, in this case there was also a *public* commemoration service on 29 December at the Cathedral of Bonn. Numerous political and military representatives of the Federal Republic attended the ceremony, among them Minister of Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer, Defense Minister Peter Struck, Inspector General Wolfgang Schneiderhan and President Johannes Rau who gave the commemoration address speech. The commemoration service, this time, was broadcast by radio and television and widely reported in the newspapers. In our view, the decision to have a public commemoration service in a public and not 'only' military place to orchestrate the state's grief of the dead soldiers has to be understood in the context of Christmas which is generally felt as being a particularly emotional and sensitive period of the year. This applies also to the military which is evidenced, inter alia, by the 23 December Christmas Address of Inspector General Schneiderhan where he used Christmas as the frame in which he paid special and additional tribute to the work and the performance of those soldiers who were on duty in Afghanistan these days and thus had to celebrate Christmas far away from the families, relatives and friends.

2.5 ISAF III⁵

At around 1:00pm local time on 29 May 2003 German soldiers were driving in two unarmoured *Wolf* vehicles on patrol in heavy terrain far out from Kabul, 15 kilometers south of Camp Warehouse when one of the cars came across a mine. While one of the two soldiers in the car was only slightly injured, the other died thereby increasing the German death toll in the ISAF operation to ten. According to

Defense Minister Peter Struck the German patrol was acting on a clear order and the incident was a tragic accident; also, there were no indications that this was a planned and calculated attack on the vehicle and its drivers in particular and on the ISAF troops in general. At that time Germany was co-lead nation with the Netherlands in the ISAF mission and contributed close to half of the overall ISAF troops of 4500 soldiers. Contrary to the previous case, and quite surprisingly, media coverage and political debate of this incident was small which is indicative of a vacillating media interest in the topic depending on the specific political situation.

2.6 ISAF IV⁶

Just a few days later the ISAF contingent of the Bundeswehr became the scheduled target of an attack by a suicide bomber. On 7 June 2003 at 7:50am local time, a man in a car full of explosives followed a German bus that had just left Camp Warehouse to drive along Jalalabad Street to Kabul Airport in order to get the German soldiers to return to Germany. After several manoeuvres he set the explosives off to detonate when he was right beside the bus. Four German soldiers died, another 29 German soldiers were injured, in some cases heavily. Casualties would have been substantially higher had the soldiers not worn protection vests. The examination of the incident revealed later that the suicide attack was most likely committed by an Al Qaida member with affiliations to the former Taliban regime and to militia leader Gulbuddin Hekmatjar.

On the occasion of the Kabul commemoration service, ISAF Commander Brigadier General Robert Bertholee from the Netherlands said: »We can show our respect for the sacrifice that our comrades made in one way only: Continue our mission as well as we can; show determination; and make clear that we will not be intimidated. That will also help to overcome our grief. (...) We will not forget them.« On the private commemoration service Defense Minister Struck tried to give meaning and sense to the deaths of the four soldiers by saying that they »had been working for human rights and freedom, against war and to expand security in the country (...). They died in service for us all, they died for peace, for our security and thus for our country.« He also pointed out that the Bundeswehr soldiers were well aware of the fact that something similarly may happen with further casualties and added that the German society had to be well aware of this also.

In the political and public debate following the incident, these propositions went by largely unchallenged by the opposition parties except for the PDS again. Equally unchallenged remained the Defence Minister's earlier commitment

4 Interestingly, later on the German helicopters have been equipped with dust collectors.

5 This section is based on: *Berliner Morgenpost*, 30 May 2003; *Berliner Zeitung*, 30 May 2003: 2; *Die Tageszeitung*, 30 May 2003: 2; *Die Welt*, 30 May 2003: 1; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 30 May 2003: 1; *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 30 May 2003: 1; *Neues Deutschland*, 30 May 2003: 1; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30 May 2003: 1, 11.

6 This section is based on: *Berliner Morgenpost*, 8 June 2003: 1, 3; 10 June 2003: 1; 11 June 2003: 1, 3; 12 June 2003: 4; *Berliner Zeitung*, 10 June 2003: 1f., 4; 11 June 2003: 5; *Die Tageszeitung*, 10 June 2003: 1; 11 June 2003: 11; *Die Welt*, 10 June 2003: 1, 3; 11 June 2003: 1f.; 12 June 2003: 1, 4; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 June 2003: 1f.; 11 June 2003: 1f.; *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 10 June 2003: 1-3, 11 June 2003: 1; *Neues Deutschland*, 11 June 2003: 1; 12 June 2003: 1; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 June 2003: 1f., 4; *Y. – Magazin der Bundeswehr*, July 2003: 28f., 64f.; Bundeswehr Intra@net aktuell.

to the continuation of the mission which he perceived as beyond doubt since the determination not to give in but to continue was something the Bundeswehr felt to be like an obligation to the dead soldiers. The Schröder administration was also fast in conveying this message to and assuring Washington that this incident did not have an impact on the German inclination to continue its mission in Afghanistan. Yet, the debate became polarized on security issues again because several politicians of both the coalition and the opposition parties demanded that the security of the German ISAF soldiers should be improved by better material and equipment and by more closely followed or even better security regulations. Struck, however, declared that the German contingent would not be equipped with heavier and more armoured equipment. He heavily opposed the insinuation that the Bundeswehr had somehow acted negligently and confirmed that Germany was still thinking of an extension of the German ISAF engagement into the Herat region. With regard to the questioned German policy of transparency and openness including a non-martial public appearance in relation to the Afghan people Struck defended this policy by saying that »[y]ou cannot generate trust by hiding in armoured vehicles.«

The commentaries in the press focused on the objective, the goal and the purpose of the mission and also on the issue of casualties. Karl Feldmeyer nicely put this in a comment *Binding Standard* in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 11 June 2003: »The decisive question that has received renewed importance revolves around the legitimacy of international military missions and the Bundeswehr's participation therein. What reason justifies that German soldiers have to bear life-threatening risks? (...) [The Bundeswehr's] use or non-use impacts on Germany's world political position and Germany's structuring and ordering options. Since this is particularly evident, it is even more surprising that these aspects are somewhat hidden behind humanitarian arguments. This is barely understandable because looking after one's national interests is nothing indecent, but the duty of politics.« One exception to this quite unanimous and coherent way of commenting was *Neues Deutschland*. This daily paper, quite close to the socialist party, the PDS, published a commentary by Wolfgang Hübner on 11 June 2003 in which he precisely lamented the factual giant coalition of conservatives, liberals, social democrats and greens, plus journalists from different newspapers, in basic military policy. He identifies this large-scale consensus as aiming at enabling the Bundeswehr to be even more often deployed abroad in the future, which he, in turn, perceives as evidence of an overall militarization of German foreign policy. But, so far, these voices do not find substantial resonance within the larger public.

Evaluating the suicide attack of 7 June 2003, we come to the conclusion that this event, due to its dramatic scope and the attack element in it, served to renew the issues which have been around earlier on. Our impression is that although no mass demonstrations of society against the mission had ensued – a fact which rather contradicts the assumption of a generally wide-spread casualty shyness within the German

society – the reactions to this event in politics and the media were of a somewhat higher intensity than before. The consolation provided to the families and relatives of the dead soldiers, the efforts to provide meaning and sense, the affirmation and determination to go on with the mission, the fear of societal casualty shyness – all this seems to have assumed an even greater importance than before, which is also evidenced by interventions in the public sphere on behalf of a transition to an all-volunteer army. The reason for this seems to be the following: While in 1993, with the first German casualty, the political elites and the public opinion agreed that Germany has to accept casualties, one decade later, the question is no longer if Germany should participate in military mission and running the risk of losing German soldiers' lives. Today, it is rather the question of when and how German soldiers should risk their life – and exactly this question has not been answered definitely and unanimously yet. Dealing with casualties, then, has by no means become a routine action.

3. Conclusion

Given the comparatively very limited number of casualties due to the rather recent and short history of Bundeswehr military operations in peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions, our findings are surely somewhat tentative. Nevertheless, we think that there are some quite substantial conclusions to be derived from the empirical case studies.

The overall number of German soldiers who died in military missions abroad is quite low compared to other countries and is considerably higher than the number of 'real' casualties, i.e., those that are combat related and/or genuinely related to a military mission. Furthermore, our analysis revealed that casualty reluctance may be less pronounced and articulated in society than commonly expected. We offer two hypotheses for this:

- (1) In a benign interpretation, this may signal the success of some socialization and learning process in German society. In this view, German public opinion has learnt the lessons of the changing international system under the auspices of profound globalization and has fully grasped the rules of the international chess board; it has become well aware of the necessity to keep armed forces and of the willingness to use them for the sake of the national interest and in order to make its voice heard internationally and contribute to international stability, peace, democracy, freedom and prosperity.
- (2) In a less benign perspective, our findings are to be taken as an expression of societal indifference to the military (Moskos 2000). This is in line with the systems theory of functional differentiation; one could argue that, the armed forces being a subsystem of society and of politics and the soldier being a 'personal subsystem' of the military subsystem, the death of a soldier does or even should mainly concern the military and the political actors responsible for the military and not society as a

whole. In this regard, it is only 'natural' that casualties are mainly dealt with by the military and funeral ceremonies take place in a military framework. This could also explain the fact that casualties are taken up the media more or less selectively, that is according to the respective political circumstances and not only to the incident itself.

The existence of the casualty aversion syndrome can hardly be overlooked and is a permanent element of the political, military and media debate. Reactions to casualties in both government, overall politics and the media (the press) are dispersed with elements of the casualty shyness syndrome. In this view, German society – although some 'progress' is acknowledged – is still to be characterized as 'psychologically disarmed'; at least German society is perceived as being highly sensitive when it comes to dead German soldiers. Therefore, both the government and the Bundeswehr try to contextualize casualties.

Yet, the contents of the provision of meaning and sense have clearly shifted in Germany. Today, much stress is laid upon cosmopolitan and humanitarian causes, like dying for peace, democracy, freedom, human rights, the people of country X etc. compared to the much narrower nationalistic causes of the past. We propose that both of our hypotheses entail some elements of truth and that they can even be combined – a proposition which is to be further analyzed in more detail in empirical and theoretical studies: According to the systems theory of functional differentiation societal indifference to casualties nowadays is much more pronounced than it was in the past, which is a consequence of modernization. But Germany also appears to have undergone a substantial learning and adaptation process and seems ready to accept casualties for the 'right' cause. Our assumption is that both of these processes are at work and that they are valid for different segments of society; yet, these parallel processes converge in their result which is: German society is less casualty shy than is mostly assumed.

This finding leads to two conclusions:

(1) The 'socialization/learning hypothesis' points to the need of those involved in the decision-making process to clearly indicate and define the objectives of a mission, to provide strong legitimacy for the mission and to provide the armed forces the respective means to conduct such a mission successfully. In this business of framing, of legitimacy production, however, Germany appears to be somewhat reluctant to resort to the category of interest, especially to the category of national interest. In this sense, the German path may still be regarded a German *Sonderweg*. Yet, this may backfire, because cosmopolitan and humanitarian arguments alone may not hold when a certain threshold of 'real' casualties is surpassed. As Hugh Smith (2003: 2f.) has put it: »The casualty factor increases the further a particular war or military operation is removed from core national interests, and the more that decision-makers are divided amongst themselves. In terms of national interest, there is a hierarchy of causes for which citizens are willing to

fight and die, and for which governments are willing to commit their armed forces.« Our analysis shows that there are indications that this is slowly disseminating into the minds of the decision-makers.

(2) The 'indifference hypothesis' is by no means a cause for complacency. Rather, it is a cause for heightened attention and alert, since, under certain conditions, indifference carries with it the potential for a reversion to indifference. In a specific setting, one day German casualties may make a difference to people who have formerly been indifferent to German casualties. Therefore, both politics and the military are called to fight functional differentiation to a certain degree. The indifference hypothesis thus corroborates the finding of the socialization/learning hypothesis: What is needed is nothing less than a broad, explicit and sincere debate about the basics of German foreign, security and military policy within society in order to advance socialization and learning and to fight indifference. Because for the further development of German casualties unfortunately there seems to be only one direction: growth, perhaps on an accelerated pace.

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