

# Stability Operation and Alliance Management: The German View

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## **Introduction**

The German attitude towards Alliance management<sup>1</sup> and stability operations is still not detached from the Cold War concept for the German armed forces (Bundeswehr) and NATO. There was a rather slow adoption to the “new world” in the 1990s and beyond 2000. Only the White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr of 2006, for example, indicates the revision of the structure of the armed forces into the direction of an “Einsatzarmee” (army in action).

The Bundeswehr is today a major partner in stability operations, but with a somehow distinctive approach. These “distinctive features” are related to Germany’s past. There have been many voices within the Alliance – and there are still some – demanding the full “normalization” of Germany’s defense approach in accordance to the practice, for example, of France and the UK. Nevertheless, German policy has only partially fulfilled this demand. There has been substantial adaptation and evolution, especially when there was a consensus among the major powers in the Alliance, the US, the UK and France. However, Germany’s engagement in stability operations still contains something of a “German touch.”

This “defense culture” has its origin in the founding years of the Bundeswehr (1955) and was at maturity in the 1970s. It has a major feature an “embedding approach.” This major feature was a strong integration of the Bundeswehr into society by means of conscription, a special leadership and civic education concept (“Innere Führung”) and strong political control. This embedding approach was also applied to Germany’s engagement in the Alliance: German armed forces didn’t know a central command – military operations of the Bundeswehr could only happen under the command of NATO. In addition, the Bundeswehr’s guiding principle was the notion of “learning to fight in order to not be forced to fight.” In other words, the

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, I use “Alliance” to mean the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). “Management” is understood as an organizational process that includes strategic planning, setting of objectives, managing resources, deploying the human and financial assets needed to achieve objectives, and measuring results. However, I am only able to address a few dimensions of this general definition in this short piece.

German armed forces acted on the basis of deterrence, not on a warfighting culture. And finally, the notion of “defense” was restricted to German territory.

By this, the German approach differed from all major alliance partners, whose armed forces all had a warfighting component and engagements beyond their territory. This specific German “defense culture” was the basis for the political consensus on defense and Alliance matters in the Federal Republic. The consideration for this consensus still plays a visible role in German politics and explains a number of features of Germany’s policy towards stability operations and the management of the Alliance under current circumstances.

With regard to the management of the Alliance, Germany’s interest was to develop and maintain a strong deterrence posture (layer-cake system<sup>2</sup>) and the attempt to influence NATO’s policy by a substantial German military contribution including, in the nuclear field, by a two-key arrangement. The American lead in security and defense was not contested, and neither was the basic, consensual political decision-making structure of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the Military Committee (MC). Military plans were developed for the long term and there was no need for political control of the armed forces on a day-to-day basis.

However, by the break-down of the Communist bloc and the emergence of new security challenges beyond German territory in the 1990s, this system had to be adapted. Otherwise, the Alliance would have been put into question. The Germans could escape from any military engagement during the Gulf War in 1991 by check-book diplomacy and by hinting to the very recent unification as well as to the defensive, territorial-defense oriented structure of the armed forces. This, however, was no longer possible during the fighting in the Balkans (1991-95). Beyond the humanitarian dimension of the bloodshed in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, national interests were at stake by major refugee flows which threatened German national interest.

There was a need to modify the policy towards military operations and the structure of the armed forces. In addition, the question emerged of how the Alliance should be managed under the new circumstances of real military engagements requiring almost daily crucial decisions even on the micro-level of operations, an issue which became a serious challenge for the Alliance during the war against

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<sup>2</sup> This is a dislocation of NATO’s armed forces at the border to the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which made it impossible for the attacker to invade without being confronted with the armed forces of more than one NATO country.

Milosevic's Serbia with regard to NATO's targeting policy.

Against this background, this paper raises the two following questions:

- How did the historical factors above influence Germany's defense culture? How did they evolve after 1990? What is their actual relevance and how do these factors influence the German engagement in Afghanistan?
- What kind of influence has the development of these factors had on Germany's stand on the management of the Alliance and what is Germany's position today?

## **The Evolution of the Major Factors of Germany's Defense Culture and System**

The founding of the Bundeswehr happened against the massive protest of an "anti-war movement" and against those who had been afraid that the establishment of a German army would give a final blow to any remaining chance to unify the two parts of the country. The historical fact of a "state within a state army" in the 1930s and the actual political resistance made it necessary to embed the armed forces as tightly as possible within the German society and political system. By this, conscription was not only a method to raise enough men for a huge standing army of about 500,000 but was also regarded as an instrument to establish a strong relationship between the society and the armed forces. Regardless of the fact that conscripts are of very limited use in military operations beyond Germany, during all recent discussions on this question, the argument that conscription is an important element in linking armed forces with the society is still put forward. Currently there is a – however, very selective - duty to serve for nine months. The conscripts don't take part in any military operations beyond German territory.<sup>3</sup> This limits the flexibility to use armed forces abroad.<sup>4</sup>

The second element, the so called "Innere Führung" (Leadership Development and Civic Education) has also as its central goal to ensure that Bundeswehr soldiers are part of society. Soldiers are regarded as "citizens in uniform" and not as a "club" apart from German society. Only last year, there has been an adaptation of this

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<sup>3</sup> However, there is a possibility to extend the draft service, if one possesses the preparedness to take part in operations beyond Germany.

<sup>4</sup> The Bundeswehr encompasses currently 247,910 soldiers. Included are 36,418 conscripts and 22,923 conscript soldiers currently serve on a voluntary basis.

concept. Until this moment it did not contain any reference to notions like “fighting” or “killing.” This is an indication of the educational principle of the Bundeswehr soldiers of those days: learning to fight in order to not be forced to fight. This has changed. But still now, the reference to the fighting aspect of military operations is rather abstract. The new Joint Service Regulation ZdV 10/1 hints at the fighting element rather prudently: “After all, military missions may require them (the soldiers, P.S.) to kill in battle and to risk their own lives as well as the lives of their comrades.” The education of soldiers, however, aims at a broad spectrum of skills. Fighting is only one of them. Protecting, mediating and helping are the others which should make the soldiers especially ready for the running of stability operations. This broad approach leads sometimes to the criticism that German soldiers are “armed aid workers.”

A more substantial change happened with regard to the capacity to conduct military operations. Since 2001 there is a national operational command (Einsatzführungskommando) which is capable of leading multinational as well as national operations. However, the national option is preserved for rescue operations only<sup>5</sup> and therefore remains an option not at the heart of the functions of the Alliance.

Furthermore there was a major change with regard to the Cold War defense system in the field of political control and the possibility to engage the Bundeswehr in operations abroad. This happened by a judgment of the Constitutional Court in 1994. It declared that the Bundeswehr is under certain circumstances allowed to operate abroad. However, the political control has been strengthened. One major precondition is that these operations have to be approved by the German parliament, the Bundestag. In 2005, the Bundestag’s right to mandate any operation was specified in a law called “Parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz” and in 2008 the Constitutional Court clarified that even all routine tasks within the Alliance have to be approved by the Bundestag if an armed contest can be expected firmly.

The focus on territorial defense was changed only slowly. During the term of office of Defense Minister Rühle (1992-98) the Bundeswehr operated for the first time beyond German territory, but the basic territorial orientation of the armed forces was not changed for political reasons – the Defense Minister regarded it politically to risky to have two debates at the same time: the struggles on operations abroad and

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<sup>5</sup> See Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien für den Geschäftsbereich des Bundesministers der Verteidigung, Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, Berlin, 21. Mai 2003, p. 23.

on the restructuring of the armed forces.

## **The Evolution of Germany's View of Alliance Management**

During the Cold War, Germany had, due to its geopolitical position at the border of the Warsaw Pact and major contributions to the overall defense system of NATO, a paramount role in the Alliance. The basic political decisions were taken unanimously mainly in the NAC and the MC. More detailed questions related to the integrated military structure of the Alliance were handled in the Defense Planning Committee (DPC), where all members, with the exception of France (since 1966), are represented. There were no propositions on the German side to change this structure.

However, the new types of operations emerging in the 1990s brought about demands for tighter political control even with regard to rather specific military-operational issues. The Kosovo conflict illustrated some of the new difficulties involved in maintaining consensus under these new circumstances. There have been major disagreements on moving from one target cluster to another one. Especially France, but also Germany, was in favor of tough, detailed control of the military operations in order to avoid civilian casualties and political turmoil. In the German case this interest in tight political control of the military was also an expression of the German policy to place great political restraints on the Bundeswehr. The emphasis on deterrence and the reluctance to use the German armed forces in warfighting surfaced even more when the question of the possible use of ground forces came up. Having already postponed the use of ground forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the German Chancellor threatened now even to veto any operation with ground forces.

The question of how to come to a consensus in difficult circumstances became even more paramount when US asked NATO in February 2003 to begin planning to provide Turkey with defensive systems in the event of an attack by Iraq during the impending war. Germany, alongside France and Belgium refused to do so, but accepted later to move this decision to the DPC, where France is not a member. Without France at the table, Germany (and Belgium) was able to change the position and accept NATO's support of Turkey. This demonstrated that Germany was ready to bypass France, if traditional collective defense obligations were at stake – even in the framework of an American attack on Iraq opposed by Germany.

There was another development which must be regarded: during the 1990s the Alliance lost more and more of its political function. Already during the Yugoslav

crisis NATO was, from a political perspective, secondary. The major political consultations during the Bosnian disaster took place in the so called “Contact Group,” the political management of the Kosovo crisis happened in the framework of the “Quint,”<sup>6</sup> and towards the end of the process it was the G-8 which played a major political role. In all cases Germany championed these frameworks and showed an interest in bypassing NATO. The Alliance only came into play in planning and implementing the politically agreed upon stabilization operation in the Balkans.

However, after the disagreements over Iraq, there has been a turnover on the German side: The German government started initiatives to revitalize the political dimension of the Alliance, which it has diminished during the Balkan crisis. Foreign Minister Fischer launched a “new transatlantic initiative” aiming at a close relationship between the Mediterranean dialogues of the EU and NATO in 2004, Defense Minister Struck proposed to reach an agreement on a new “Harmel report,”<sup>7</sup> and finally, Chancellor Schröder argued along these lines in 2005 in proposing to establish a high-ranking panel of independent personalities to review the decision-making structures of the Alliance. However, all these initiatives failed due to the suspicion that they were not meant to strengthen but to weaken the Alliance. And indeed, the propositions lacked some credibility because Germany itself has put much more emphasis on less institutionalized frameworks beyond NATO. The same happened in the case of Afghanistan. Again, Germany privileged non-NATO frameworks for settling major political decisions: the series of international conferences on Afghanistan started in Germany.<sup>8</sup> And indeed, all German proposals were rather abstract - there was a lack of specific propositions indicating the German position clearly. The proposals discussed in the US, like the establishment of a “committee of contributors,” or the “consensus minus rule,” never were officially put forward by the German government. Obviously, Germany was not willing to deviate in any way from the “consensus of all” rule in the Alliance, regardless of the fact that there have been major difficulties in coming to an agreement in such difficult contingencies and an Alliance, which invited more and more countries to become members.

These difficulties in Alliance management focused primarily on issues

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<sup>6</sup> The “Quint” consisted of the US, the UK, France, Germany and Italy. The “Contact Group” met at the beginning without Italy.

<sup>7</sup> NATO’s so-called “Harmel report” (1967) represented a general guideline for NATO’s policy, defining aside “defense,” “détente” as the major task of the Alliance. It was a major document by which it was possible to overcome a major divergence with regard to the general function and outlook of the Alliance.

<sup>8</sup> In a hotel close to Bonn called “Petersberg.”

concerning warfare in one way or another. However, they foreshadowed the intricacies of Alliance management especially in those stability operations which contain a warfare element. And indeed, conflict reality does not adhere closely to academic conceptualizations and distinguishes clearly between “stability operations” and “warfighting.” Operations called “stability operations” can easily change into an operation with a more or less heavy combat component. This is the case in Afghanistan. This operation, called by the German government a “stability operation,” represents a test case for the Alliance’s political and military capacity to sustain a complex stability operation including a substantial warfare element. This is a real challenge for the military as well as the management side of the Alliance.

### **Stability Operations and Alliance Management today – Germany and the Case of Afghanistan**

The German government considers the operations with German participation in Lebanon, Kosovo and Afghanistan as “stability operations.” But indeed, the case of Afghanistan allows the deepest insight into the problems of Alliance management and the German view on how to link stability operations with the management of the Alliance.

In Afghanistan, the Alliance and Germany are facing three principal problems:

- The inclusion and coordination with non-Alliance members
- The question of coordination with other international organizations (IOs) especially with regard to the use of civilian assets
- The question of how to use the military not only as a stability force in the narrow sense but also in a fighting function.

With regard to non-members, the Alliance functions rather well. Already in 1999, NATO agreed on a document setting down the basic principles for cooperation with non-members during operations, which are<sup>9</sup>: self-differentiation, early consultation, an ongoing consultation process within the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) during the planning of an operation as well as pre-planned command arrangements. These principles provide the necessary flexibility for making the

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<sup>9</sup> See Political-Military Framework for NATO-led PfP Operations.

inclusion of non-members a success. Nine partner nations contribute to NATO's operation (Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Finland, Macedonia, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland), and as a non-EAPC nation, New Zealand. Germany has welcomed this procedure and policy.

The major predicament with regard to cooperation lies, however, beyond NATO. It concerns the intricate task to coordinate about sixty states, many NGOs, and a number of IOs represented in one way or another in Afghanistan. This is done, as far as possible, primarily by the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) under the leadership of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Afghan government. Especially the new Special Representative of the UN in Afghanistan, Kai Eide, is playing an important role in this intricate field.

From a more narrow Alliance perspective, however, what is missing is the close coordination of military operations and civilian support for the people affected by those operations in one way or another. This is hardly possible by the heavy and rather bureaucratic JCMB. NATO tries to provide this function primarily by the so-called CIMIC (Civil-Military Co-operation) units. They have the task to provide a secure environment by collecting information, writing situation reports, undertaking reconstruction efforts, and by the support of the armed forces in a general way outside the camps.

The approaches of NATO's member states, however, vary. The Bundeswehr, for example, has few resources attached to this task and there is not enough military support for engagements beyond the Bundeswehr camps. The idea is that the German CIMIC units provide a sort of emergency relief but not a substantial contribution to the stabilization of the region. This contradicts to a certain extent the general tasks German soldiers should be, in accordance with the educational principles of the Bundeswehr, able to fulfill, which are: to protect, to mediate, to help and to fight. This, however, reflects only the German attitude of regarding the engagement in Afghanistan as a civil-military operation, not a combat operation with an emphasis on "civil," not on "military."

Another indication for this approach is the German resistance to merge the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with ISAF, which has been demanded by the US, regardless of the fact that the two missions have been overlapping more and more in recent years. In Afghanistan, German soldiers don't take part actively in the fight against the poppy industry and they use force only in strict application of the proportionality principle. In addition, German armed forces

operate primarily in the ISAF regions in the North and Kabul. This is the result of the rather restrictive German “defense culture” as outlined above and the high priority which German governments put on the question of public support for defense-related questions.

This reveals a general feature of the way in which NATO has to manage the Afghan situation. Consensus is not so much brought about by an agreement on a detailed strategy, but by giving the member states a rather free hand in interpreting the general Alliance strategy.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand this allows each engaged state to apply its resources in accordance with its defense culture and domestic, mostly political, restrictions. On the other hand these caveats create confusion and do not bring into full effect the resources of NATO.

This is also the case with the nine Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), five in the North, and four in the West of the country. The military elements of PRTs are integrated in the ISAF chain of command the civilian side is exclusively under national control.<sup>11</sup> Again, this allows the countries engaged to enjoy a rather free hand in building up PRTs in accordance with their own policies. The main principle of the German PRTs is close cooperation between civilian and military experts. The military side has as a primary task to make the camp a secure place. However, there is substantial criticism that, due to the restrictive rules of engagement, German soldiers are more occupied with protecting themselves than producing security in the wider area of the PRTs.

Another dimension is the very fact that NATO has a civilian representative in the region but basically, with the exception of those resources attached to CIMIC, no other civilian assets at its disposal. This brings into play the difficult relationship between the EU and NATO.

Whereas in the framework of the so-called Berlin-plus agreement, the EU has the possibility to use NATO assets for its military operations, there is no Berlin-plus-reverse agreement giving NATO a chance to use civilian assets of the EU or the member states within its own framework.<sup>12</sup> The EU Commission, for example, made a €1 billion pledge after the fall of the Taliban in 2002, and presented recently

<sup>10</sup> See “Revised operational plan for NATO’s expanded mission in Afghanistan” adopted by NATO’s Foreign Ministers on 8 December 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See Michael Paul, Zivil-militärische Zusammenarbeit im ISAF-Einsatz, in: Peter Schmidt (ed.), *Das internationale Engagement in Afghanistan. Strategien, Perspektiven, Konsequenzen*, SWP-Studie, S 23, Berlin, August 2008, pp. 43-48.

<sup>12</sup> See Volker Heise / Peter Schmidt, *NATO and EU - Reversing Berlin-Plus?* in: Peter Schmidt (ed.) *A Hybrid Relationship. Transatlantic Security Cooperation beyond NATO*, Frankfurt 2008, pp. 295-301.

a new € 610 million package. The spending of the money is not directly coordinated with NATO. In addition, member states have their individual programs which are also developed without coordination with the Alliance. This is, indeed, a missed opportunity to make the engagement of the international community in Afghanistan more effective.

With regard to the question of solidarity or risk-sharing, the pressure for more solidarity among the Alliance members engaged especially in the Southern and Northeastern parts of Afghanistan became stronger and stronger over the last years. Sharing the risks of being engaged became especially a demand by Canada, the UK, the US and the Netherlands, countries which suffer from heavy death tolls. The challenges on the ground as well as the solidarity required to maintain the Alliance has forced the German government to gradually increase its support of those countries which carry the primary burden of fighting with Taliban forces. The concept entitles the Bundeswehr to provide support by air transport, medical aid, communication and air reconnaissance (RECCE-Tornados) to the whole of Afghanistan.

This tendency towards increased flexibility continued in 2008, when the Bundestag accepted a new mandate for the Afghanistan mission. The Bundestag agreed on a flexibility clause, which allows the Bundeswehr to operate beyond the area of responsibility in the North, if these operations are limited in time and scope and are necessary to fulfill NATO's mission as a whole.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the Bundeswehr has taken on the responsibility for the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) from Norway in July 2008, which has the task to come to help in the Northern region, if NATO units come into danger.

In addition, the North is no longer a space of peace. Today Norwegian and German troops are planning these days, for example, a joint operation together with the Afghan army in the Northwestern Ghormach region. The task is to fight against an estimated number of 150 Taliban there. There is still some prudence on the German side when it comes to the question of what the task of the Bundeswehr will comprise of. Officially, the function of the German units is described as a support role. What this means in concrete terms is, however, left open.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 16/10473 16. Wahlperiode 07. 10. 2008, Antrag der Bundesregierung. Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an dem Einsatz der Internationalen Sicherheitsunterstützungstruppe in Afghanistan (International Security Assistance Force, ISAF) unter Führung der NATO auf Grundlage der Resolution 1386 (2001) und folgender Resolutionen, zuletzt Resolution 1833 (2008) des Sicherheitsrates der Vereinten Nationen.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,601284,00.html> The concept of 2007 was more prudent in this regard.

Obviously, the challenges NATO is facing in Afghanistan these days, the pressure by Alliance partners and the entangling character of the NATO institution forces the Germany government to give up some of the caution, prudence and consideration with regard to the traditional factors shaping German defense policy.