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**ZEITENWENDE - STRATEGIC REALIGNMENT IN THE FACE OF WAR:
IMPLICATIONS OF THE UKRAINE-RUSSIA CONFLICT FOR GERMANY**

**O TEXTO CORRESPONDE A TRABALHO FEITO DURANTE A
FREQUÊNCIA DO CURSO NO IUM SENDO DA RESPONSABILIDADE DO
SEU AUTOR, NÃO CONSTITUINDO ASSIM DOCTRINA OFICIAL DAS
FORÇAS ARMADAS PORTUGUESAS OU DA GUARDA NACIONAL
REPUBLICANA.**

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DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDOS PÓS-GRADUADOS**

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Orientador: Coronel Luís Eduardo Marquês Saraiva

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Eu, **Daniel Lennartz**, declaro por minha honra que o documento intitulado **Zeitenwende - Strategic Realignment in the Face of War: Implications of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict for Germany** corresponde ao resultado da investigação por mim desenvolvida enquanto auditor do **Curso de Estado-Maior – Conjunto 2023/2024** no Instituto Universitário Militar e que é um trabalho original, em que todos os contributos estão corretamente identificados em citações e nas respetivas referências bibliográficas.

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Pedrouços, 06 de maio de 2024



Daniel Lennartz



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Resumo

Este trabalho analisa a reorientação estratégica da Alemanha face ao conflito Ucrânia-Rússia, conhecida como *Zeitenwende*. Este ponto de viragem permite várias interpretações e marca, entre outras coisas, uma mudança de paradigma na política externa e de segurança alemã, com efeitos profundos na orientação estratégica e na organização operacional da Bundeswehr. O trabalho analisa o desenvolvimento histórico da estratégia de segurança alemã desde a reunificação, a reformulação da estratégia através do atual documento da Estratégia de Segurança Nacional e o papel da Bundeswehr no âmbito deste realinhamento. A primeira parte do trabalho faz uma análise crítica da política alemã até 2022 e examina a forma como a Alemanha alicerçou a sua estratégia, principalmente, na força económica e na contenção geopolítica. Na parte seguinte, são discutidos o conteúdo e o significado da nova Estratégia de Segurança Nacional, que formula pela primeira vez uma Grande Estratégia para a Alemanha. Esta estratégia sublinha a necessidade de uma maior prontidão da defesa, de uma cooperação mais intensa no âmbito da União Europeia e da NATO e de uma maior ênfase na defesa global. Por fim, o estudo considera o papel específico da Bundeswehr no contexto da reorientação estratégica, incluindo os desafios que têm de ser ultrapassados para alcançar o necessário aumento da prontidão da defesa.

Adicionalmente, este trabalho visa familiarizar o público internacional com a *Zeitenwende* e com os desenvolvimentos associados da política de segurança na Alemanha, país chave na NATO e na União Europeia. Ao analisar os realinhamentos estratégicos que a Alemanha está a empreender, este estudo contribui para o debate global sobre política de segurança. O estudo esclarece a forma como a Alemanha está a redefinir o seu papel no âmbito da arquitetura de segurança transatlântica e, assim, proporciona uma nova perspetiva para académicos, decisores políticos e peritos em segurança interessados nas implicações destes desenvolvimentos para a segurança e a estabilidade na Europa.

Palavras-chave: Alemanha, Estratégia de Segurança Nacional, Forças Armadas Alemãs, *Zeitenwende*



Abstract

This military thesis examines Germany's strategic reorientation in the face of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, known as the "Zeitenwende". This turning point allows for various interpretations and marks, among other things, a paradigm shift in German foreign and security policy, which has profound effects on the strategic orientation and operational organisation of the Bundeswehr. The thesis analyses the historical development of German security strategy since reunification, the reshaping of the strategy through the current National Security Strategy document and the role of the Bundeswehr within this realignment. The first part of the thesis takes a critical look at German policy up to the year 2022 and examines how Germany based its strategy primarily on economic strength and geopolitical restraint. In the next part, the contents and significance of the new National Security Strategy, which formulates a Grand Strategy for Germany for the first time, are discussed. This strategy underlines the need for increased defence readiness, more intensive cooperation within the EU and NATO and a stronger emphasis on overall defence. Finally, the study considers the specific role of the Bundeswehr in the context of the strategic reorientation, including the challenges that must be overcome to achieve the necessary increase in defence readiness.

This thesis also serves the purpose of familiarising an international audience with the "Zeitenwende" and the associated security policy developments in Germany, a key country in NATO and the European Union. By analysing the strategic realignments that Germany is undertaking, this study contributes to the global discussion on security policy. It sheds light on how Germany is redefining its role within the transatlantic security architecture and thus offers insights for academics, policy makers and security experts interested in the implications of these developments for security and stability in Europe.

Keywords: *Germany, National Security Strategy, German Armed Forces, Zeitenwende*



List of abbreviations and acronyms

B

- BMVg - Federal Ministry of Defence; *Bundesministerium der Verteidigung*
BwBBG - Bundeswehr Procurement Acceleration Act;
Bundeswehrbeschaffungsbeschleunigungsgesetz

C

- CFR - Council on Foreign Relations
ChoD - Chief of Defence; *Generalinspekteur der Bundeswehr*
CIR - Cyber and Information Domain Service; *Cyber- und Informationsraum*
CQ - central research question
CSDP - Common Security and Defence Policy

D

- DGAP - German Council on Foreign Relations; *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik*
D-LBO - digitalisation of land-based operations
DQ - derived question

E

- ECFR - European Council on Foreign Relations
EinsFüKdoBw - Joint Forces Operations Command; *Einsatzführungskommando der Bundeswehr*
EU - European Union

G

- GDP - Gross Domestic Product
GIDS - German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies

I

- IFRI - French Institute of International Relations; *L'Institut français des relations internationales*
ISPK - German Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel

K

- KdB - Bundeswehr Concept; *Konzeption der Bundeswehr*

L

- LKdo - *Landeskommando*; regional 'CIMIC' commands
LV/BV - National and alliance defence; *Landes- und Bündnisverteidigung*



M

MO - main objective

N

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NSC - National Security Council

NSS - National Security Strategy

NVA - National People's Army; *Nationale Volksarmee*

O

OpFüKdoBw - Operational Command; *Operatives Führungskommando der Bundeswehr*

OPLAN - *OPLAN Deutschland*; Concept Total Defence in Germany

S

SKB - Joint Support and Enabling Service; *Streitkräftebasis*

SO - specific objective

SWP - German Institute for International and Security Affairs; *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*

T

TerrFüKdoBw - Bundeswehr Homeland Defence Command; *Territoriales Führungskommando der Bundeswehr*

V

VPR - Defence Policy Guidelines; *Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien*



1. Introduction

The participation of a German officer in the Portuguese General Staff Course is not only an honour and a unique opportunity for the participant's development, but also invites him to act as a kind of ambassador of his own armed forces and country to convey specifically German developments in the field of security and defence strategy to the readers of this military thesis. A highly topical issue in the field of foreign and security policy is the so-called German *Zeitenwende*, whose starting point, the Ukraine-Russia war, requires a strategic reassessment by Germany. The German term *Zeitenwende* literally means "turning point." However, this translation doesn't do justice to its meaning and the connotations associated with it. Consequently, English-speaking experts (for example, the authors of the renowned magazine *Foreign Affairs*) refrain from translating it, treating the expression similarly to other German words that carry a deep philosophical dimension (for example, *Zeitgeist* or *Weltschmerz*).

An important preliminary remark of this thesis, which is entitled "*Zeitenwende* - Strategic Realignment in the Face of War", is that every German soldier must exercise restraint in political matters, but as a citizen in uniform is also called upon to think independently and critically and to adopt his own standpoint. This thesis achieves this balancing act.

The **main objective (MO)** of this study is to analyse Germany's strategic realignment in the context of the Ukraine-Russia war, focusing specifically on the German Armed Forces.

The MO is auxiliated by defining three specific objectives (SO):

SO 1: Analyse the German Policy from 1990 until the *Zeitenwende* in 2022.

SO 2: Analyse the most current German strategic document, the National Security Strategy, to understand how Germany is adapting to the new geopolitical situation and the implications of these adaptations.

SO 3: Examine the role of the German Armed Forces in the context of strategic realignment, considering selected aspects.

To guide this investigation, the study is centred around a central research question (CQ) and three derived questions (DQ):

CQ: How has Germany's strategically realigned in response to the Ukraine-Russia war?

DQ1: How can Germany's strategy be characterized until the *Zeitenwende* in 2022?



DQ2: What changes have been made to Germany's latest strategic document to adapt it to the new geopolitical situation?

DQ3: How has the role of the German Armed Forces changed within Germany's new strategic orientation?

The investigation will concentrate on analysing Germany's strategic realignment following the *Zeitenwende* declaration, with particular attention to the development and implementation of the National Security Strategy. It explores the rationale behind this strategy and its implications for the *Bundeswehr* as an instrument of foreign and security policy.

Despite the content, temporal, and spatial delimitations, for a better contextual understanding of Germany's strategic shift, reference will be made to the country's approach to defence and security from Germany's reunification until 27 February 2022. This retrospective view aims to highlight the evolution of Germany's strategy in response to the changing geopolitical environment.

Following this introduction, the work continues with five further chapters. Chapter 2, State of the art, structuring concepts, and methodology. This section lays the foundational understanding necessary for grasping the complexity of Germany's strategic realignment and sets the academic frame for the analysis. Next, Chapter 3 offers a review of German policy until 2022, providing crucial background and context. This part delves into Germany's defence and security policy stance leading up to the pivotal moment of *Zeitenwende* announced in February 2022. It is essential for understanding the baseline from which the strategic shift occurred and answers DQ1. The analysis then proceeds to Chapter 4, Realignment in the form of National Security Strategy, which addresses the DQ2. This section highlights how these documents have been adapted to the new geopolitical realities, marking a significant departure from previous strategies.

In the following Chapter 5, Role of the German Armed Forces, the thesis answers DQ3. It explores various aspects such as the adjusted defence strategy, the increase in the defence budget, personnel, total defence, armament and procurement policy, and structural adjustments.

Finally, the thesis culminates in the Chapter 6, Conclusions, where the findings are summarised, and the central question is answered. This concluding part reflects on the implications of Germany's strategic realignment, considering its future defence posture and security policy, and suggests directions for further action and research.



2. State of the art, concepts, and methodology

2.1. State of the art

The *Zeitenwende* in Germany has attracted widespread attention from both German and international research institutes and think tanks. Among the leading German institutes that deal intensively with this topic are the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), the German Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel (ISPK), the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and the German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies (GIDS). Internationally, the topic is also intensively analysed by institutions such as the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), the US-American Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI). At the time of finalising the present work, no Portuguese study on the subject was known.

The turning point is also widely covered in the media, which emphasises the relevance and urgency of the topic. The contributions of these institutes and their representatives, such as Carlo Masala (2023) and Herfried Münkler (2023), who are both known in Germany for their well-founded analyses in the fields of security and political science, form a central basis for the sources of this work. The current articles and contributions from specialised journals such as *Indes*, *Internationale Politik* and *Foreign Affairs* complement the understanding of Germany's strategic reorientation and offer profound insights into the political and military considerations behind this turning point.

Official German government documents and statements on security policy developments also serve as primary sources. The announcement of the *Bundeswehr* reform on 4 April 2024 represents the most recent and at the same time the end point of the consideration of sources for this work. Research gaps inevitably arise from the non-utilisation of confidential documents that could potentially have provided deeper insights into internal developments and discussions within the *Bundeswehr* and other security agencies. These gaps emphasise the challenges of researching security policy decision-making processes while taking all relevant aspects into account.

The structuring concepts and the methodological approach of this work are explained in more detail in the following sections to make the methodological procedure and the theoretical foundation of the analysis transparent.



2.2. Structuring concepts

2.2.1. Geopolitics and Strategic Studies

Geopolitics and Strategic Studies are two essential pillars in understanding international relations and security policy strategies. While geopolitics is concerned with analysing the impact of geographical and political factors on the behaviour of states and other actors, strategic studies focus on the application of these insights to the development and implementation of security strategies.

Geopolitics, as detailed in Appendix A, utilises geographical, political, and historical perspectives to understand the motivations and actions of states (Santos, 2007b). This discipline not only provides a dynamic model for predicting short-term phenomena based on geographic conditions, but also incorporates long-term strategic considerations that are central to modern geopolitics as described by Flint (2022).

Strategic Studies, discussed in Appendix B, offer an interdisciplinary approach that focuses on the practical application of theoretical concepts in international security and modern warfare (Mahnken et al., 2008). These studies include not only military aspects, but also political, economic, and cultural factors (Graça, 2014).

The synthesis of these two disciplines in practical application is reflected in the need for countries such as Germany to integrate both geopolitical and strategic considerations into their security policy to respond effectively to threats such as the current confrontation with Russia. This requires a deep understanding of both historical contexts and current geopolitical dynamics to develop a balanced and effective strategy.

2.2.2. Conceptual understanding of *Zeitenwende*

The term *Zeitenwende*, or turning point, is used in many ways in academic and political discussions in Germany to describe significant geopolitical changes that separate one epoch from the next. According to Dörr (2022), *Zeitenwende* implies the end of a coherent epoch and the beginning of a qualitatively new phase, triggered by the Russian attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

Franke (2023) expands the concept to include its semantic dual role, which encompasses both the problem and the associated solutions. The term serves as a useful tool in security policy debates by simplifying complex issues and providing a concrete narrative for discussions. This use makes the term both a symptom of geopolitical change and a means of dealing with it.



Mair (2022) sees the *Zeitenwende* as a fundamental change in Europe's security policy landscape. He describes it as a wake-up call for Germany (and Europe) to recognise the need for a strategic realignment and a significant strengthening of defence capabilities. This turning point marks a shift away from the post-Cold War era of military de-escalation towards a time in which military deterrence and defence preparedness will once again become central pillars of the European security architecture.

Masala (2023) and Terhalle (2023) also emphasise the strategic and defence policy implications of the *Zeitenwende*. Masala also sees this as a wake-up call for a comprehensive reassessment and redesign of German security policy, while Terhalle emphasises the need to rethink defence strategies and strengthen defence readiness.

Meißner (2023) offers a critical reflection on the term *Zeitenwende*. He points out that the geopolitical events that are often cited as triggers for a turning point actually represent a continuity in foreign policy strategies and therefore not a sudden change in geopolitics. This critical view underlines the need to carefully analyse the term and critically question its use in political discourse.

According to the main interviewee of this thesis, Lieutenant General Kammerer (2024), “The *Zeitenwende* is an apt and precise term for the fundamentally new situation we are in, requiring an overall review of our government's beliefs, perceptions, and actions. It is a trigger point to define and set new priorities.”

The term *Zeitenwende* is thus multi-layered and multi-functional. In this study, it is used as a historical marker, as a call for strategic reorientation and as a narrative to describe the implications for the *Bundeswehr*.

2.2.3. Security Strategy and Grand Strategy

A Grand Strategy and a National Security Strategy (NSS) are key elements of a state's security and defence policy. While a Grand Strategy represents a state's comprehensive theory of how it can best ensure security for itself by identifying likely threats and designing remedies at political, economic, military, and other levels (Giegerich & Jonas, 2012), a NSS focuses on a detailed action plan aimed at achieving a desirable future security state. This includes the definition of security objectives and priorities, the planning of measures and the allocation of resources (Knudsen, 2012). A NSS can certainly be seen as a form of grand strategy, especially if it takes a broad and long-term approach. Both concepts share the goal



of protecting a country against a variety of threats by integrating not only military, but also political, economic, and other dimensions of security.

An effective NSS should include the definition of threats relevant to security policy, the formulation of security policy goals and interests and the identification of suitable instruments and means to achieve these goals (Major & Mölling, 2022). It serves as a national master plan to clarify security policy responsibilities within the government and avoid duplications, contradictions, and gaps (Giegerich & Jonas, 2012).

The development of an NSS is a complex, interdisciplinary process that involves a variety of actors, from the executive and relevant ministries to security agencies and the National Security Council. This process also includes consultation with external experts, academic institutions, the public and various stakeholders to ensure a broad consensus and a comprehensive perspective on security policy (Giegerich & Jonas, 2012; Knudsen, 2012).

As early as 2012, Giegerich and Jonas recommended an inclusive model of strategy development for Germany that provides for the broad involvement of representatives from various ministries, parliament, business, academia, and civil society. This approach should be coordinated by a high-level figure or a specially established body and include phases of consultation, development, and monitoring to continuously update and adapt the strategy.

2.2.4. Change by Trade

The concept of "Change by Trade", in German *Wandel durch Handel*, is based on the idea that economic exchange and close trade relations can promote political convergence and democratic reforms in non-democratic countries. This belief was particularly widespread in Germany after the Cold War and influenced German foreign policy towards countries such as Russia. The assumption was that economic interdependence and dependencies would create a mutual interest in maintaining stable relations, which could ultimately lead to political rapprochement and change towards more democracy. This strategy differed significantly from the American interpretation of the end of the Cold War. The United States saw victory in the Cold War as the result of its policy of strength and accelerated arms race, which ultimately forced the Soviet Union into negotiations and collapse. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine highlighted the limits and weaknesses of the concept of "Change by Trade" (Fix & Brenner, 2022; Münkler, 2023).



2.2.5. Peace Dividend

Peace Dividend refers to the economic and political benefits that a state or region can reap after a prolonged period of military conflict or high defence spending if these conflicts end, or the level of military spending is significantly reduced. The theory is that resources previously committed for military purposes can now be used for civilian projects such as education, infrastructure, healthcare, or other public services. This can contribute to higher economic growth and an improved quality of life (Schwegmann, 2024).

2.2.6. Hierarchy of German strategic documents

Until the publication of the first NSS in 2023, the documents outlined below formed the foundation of German defence and security policy. They represent the evolutionary development of German defence strategy and reflect the adaptation to changing global and regional security challenges.

The *Weißbuch*, or White Book, a key basic security policy document, set out the guidelines of German security policy and the role of the *Bundeswehr*. It was published by the Federal Ministry of Defence (BMVg) at irregular intervals and provides a comprehensive overview of Germany's current security policy challenges and objectives (BMVg, 2015). This document played a decisive role in formulating the fundamental direction and priorities of national security policy (BMVg, 2016).

The *Verteidigungspolitischen Richtlinien* (VPR), or Defence Policy Guidelines, supplemented the White Books by specifying the strategic orientation of the *Bundeswehr*, but were never necessarily published as a result of an actual White Book. They define the role of the *Bundeswehr* in national and international security policy and set out the priorities and guidelines for the development of the armed forces. The VPR are of importance for determining the medium and long-term goals of the *Bundeswehr* and serve as a guideline for its structural and organisational development (BMVg, 2011).

Hierarchically subordinate to this is the *Konzeption der Bundeswehr* (KdB), or *Bundeswehr Concept*, a comprehensive planning document that describes the long-term structure, organisation, and orientation of the *Bundeswehr* in detail. This document sets out the *Bundeswehr's* capabilities required to meet the changing security policy challenges. The KdB is a central instrument for the long-term planning and orientation of the German armed forces (BMVg, 2018a).



Finally, the *Fähigkeitenprofil der Bundeswehr*, or *Bundeswehr Capability Profile*, focuses on the specific military capabilities required to achieve the objectives set out in the VPR and the KdB. This secret document covers important aspects such as equipment, personnel, training, and logistics. It serves as a guide for developing and maintaining the operational capabilities required to fulfil the *Bundeswehr's* tasks (BMVg, 2018b).

2.2.7. Total Defence

Gesamtverteidigung, or Total Defence, is a comprehensive concept that goes beyond purely military measures and requires a state-wide preventive effort (BMVg, 1989). This approach not only takes into account the elimination of material deficits in the armed forces, but also aims to efficiently utilise the potential of the state as a whole. Interministerial cooperation is essential here, involving all federal ministries and federal states and thus implying a joint defence concept. This includes defence within the alliance, including with allied forces on German soil. In view of Germany's geographical location at the centre of the enlarged North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the changing geopolitical situation since 1989, the requirements for deterrence and collective defence have changed significantly. It is not only about the defence of German territory, but also about material and supply support for the armed forces, even if German territory is not directly threatened (Lange, 2018).

Although the organisation of military and civilian defence is independent, both are inextricably linked as part of Total Defence. In order to implement this approach, close cooperation between the military and civilian sectors under a unified political leadership is required. Furthermore, the active participation of society is essential for an effective Total Defence (TerrFüKdoBw, 2024).

The concept of Total Defence was not mentioned in the strategic policy documents of 2011 and 2016, whereas it is at least seen as a complementary part of total defence planning in the KdB 2018. The increased importance and necessity of revising this concept is back on the agenda with the publication of the NSS 2023 and the VPR 2023.

2.3. Methodology

The methodology of this research is fundamentally interdisciplinary and integrates different perspectives to enable a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the Ukraine-Russia conflict on German security and defence policy as it also laid out in the model of



analysis (App C). The focus is on a qualitative approach, which involves extensive collection and analysis of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official documents, government statements and speeches by leading politicians, while secondary sources include academic articles, expert analyses, and historical context studies (Santos & Lima, 2019). This broad database allows for the inclusion of both the official position of the German government and the opinions and analyses of experts and academics.

The methodical challenge lies primarily in the collection of data, as basic conceptual documents are classified up to the -secret- level. For this reason, the author's participation in a symposium of the "*Bundeswehr Homeland Defence Command*" (TerrFüKdoBw) on 25 January 2024 in Berlin, to which representatives of politics, science and business were invited, was of utmost importance.

In addition, expert interviews were conducted based on a specially developed semi-structured guide (Anx A). The experts were active German staff and general staff officers from the rank of lieutenant colonel to colonel from the areas of planning, armaments, military policy, and operations. In addition, the interview with the former Vice Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General (ret.) Reinhard Kammerer, who made himself fully available for this study, and with Dr. Henning Riecke, Acting Head of the Center for Strategic Foresight, Federal Academy for Security Policy, play a special role. In this way, it is possible to critically analyse the aspects dealt with in this study in compliance with national legal regulations, as all official documents are classified from confidential to secret. The guide comprised open-ended main questions and secondary questions subordinate to these, aimed at gaining in-depth insights into the experts' opinions (App D). All interviews were conducted by e-mail with the prior consent of the participants and standardised in writing. For ethical reasons, the interviews were anonymized, except for Kammerer and Riecke. This study refers to them as "Stakeholders (2024)".

The transcribed interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2015). Firstly, a coding guideline was developed based on the theoretical assumptions of the study and comprising both deductive and inductive codes. The text data was systematically analysed, and relevant text passages were assigned to the pre-defined codes. This step made it possible to identify patterns and themes across the interviews.

Once the data had been coded, the information was summarised and interpreted. The analysis aimed to identify overarching themes (Figure 1) that shed light on the research questions.

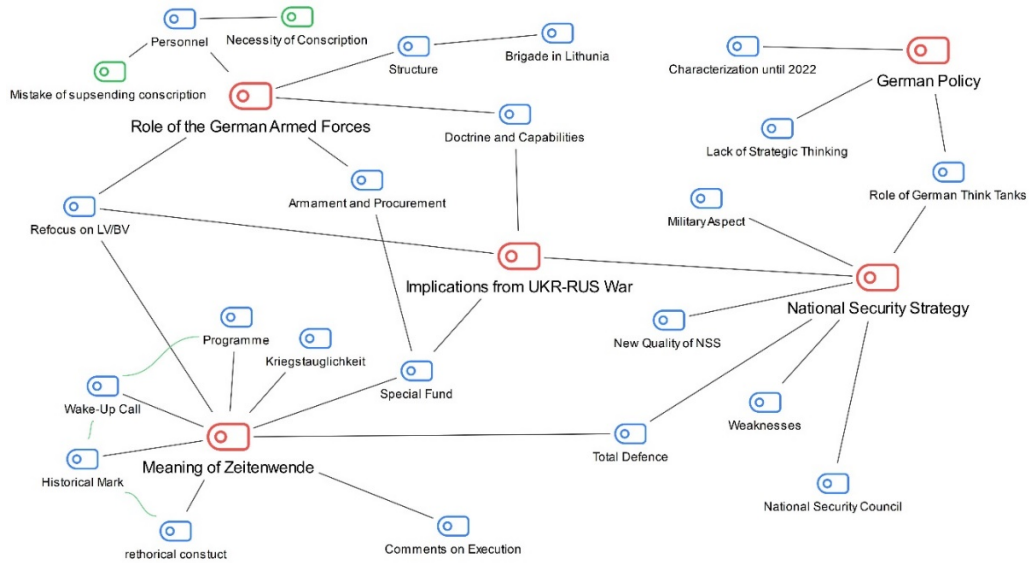


Figure 1 – Interview Codes

Source: Author (2024) based on Analyse Tool MAXQDA

The analytical evaluation was further refined using the IT application MAXQDA (Figure 2), resulting in the selection of fourteen categories into which the Stakeholders' statements were summarised (App E).

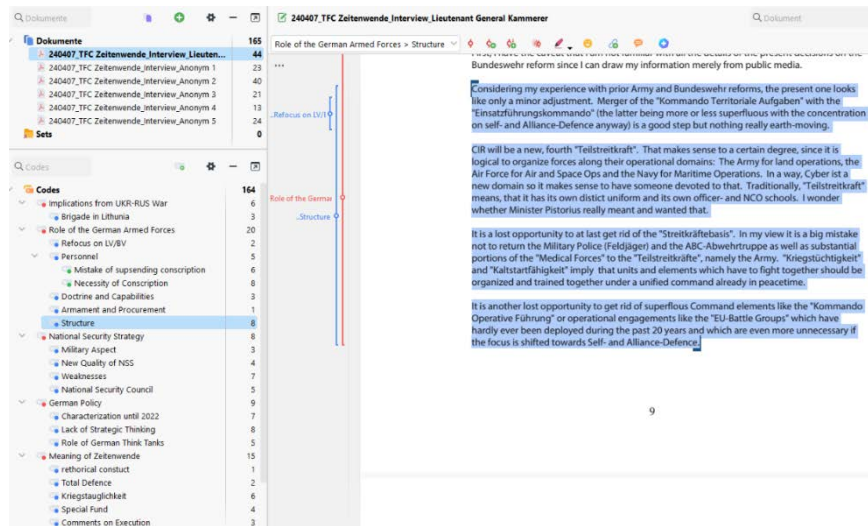


Figure 2 – MAXQDA

Source: Author (2024)



3. Review of German Policy until 2022

3.1. The historical development of the German Strategy in the light of geoeconomics

Since the end of the Cold War, Germany's Grand Strategy and defence policy have undergone a fundamental change in their strategies due to the shift in global power structures and increasing globalisation. This change represents the reflection of the evolving geopolitical situation in terms of interests and results from the transition from the traditional military-based strategy to the geo-economic strategy, whose core strength lies in economic stability and growth (Szabo, 2015).

In this context, Edward Luttwak (1990) coined the term geoeconomics to describe a development in global relations in which economic strategies and resources are increasingly replacing traditional military approaches. Here, financial investment and economic influence are replacing military strength and the physical presence of troops. Luttwak emphasises that despite this shift towards economic instruments, the underlying international dynamics are still characterised by a conflict-oriented logic. Geoeconomics thus describes the intertwining of economic activities with the inherent conflictual nature of inter-state relations, like how Clausewitz saw war as a continuation of politics by other means (Kundnani, 2014, p. 103).

The main reason for this was Germany's growing dependence on resources such as oil, gas, and minerals for its economic prosperity. In this respect, economic and trade policies are becoming more important as they provide protection for economic and trade strength compared to traditional military policies. Globalisation and the associated interdependence of global economic actors have created an environment in which Germany's security and prosperity depend heavily on its integration into global trade networks. Accordingly, Germany's Grand Strategy reflects the need to maintain and strengthen its export power, which at the same time represents a potential vulnerability. Germany's dependence on foreign markets and resources makes it susceptible to external shocks and geopolitical frictions that may lie beyond its direct control (Szabo, 2015).

To understand the German strategy, however, it is necessary to consider not only the geopolitical changes but also the social environment, on which the consequences of the Second World War still have an impact today and give rise to an irrational resentment towards geopolitical considerations and everything military. 'Irrational' was chosen deliberately because these aversions are closely linked to feelings such as guilt and the belief



that no other nation in the world has a special obligation to moral responsibility - the German *Sonderweg* in its moral form, so to speak.

The historical experience of the Second World War and the crimes of National Socialism have led to a deeply rooted political culture of military restraint in Germany. The principles of “Never again war” and “Never again Auschwitz” symbolise the desire not to repeat the mistakes of the past and to resolve conflicts as peacefully as possible. This stance was supplemented by the principle of “Never again alone”, which underlines the importance of multilateral decision-making and involvement in international organisations such as NATO and the European Union (EU) (Szabo, 2015).

The German population, as well as the political class, had a distanced relationship with the military since the *Bundeswehr* was established. The first Chancellor of the Bonn Republic had to push through the *Bundeswehr* against the resistance of the Social Democrats. It was not until the 1960s that it was accepted as a “necessary evil”. The phenomenon was similar in East Germany, but at least the National People's Army (NVA) was part of the state ceremonial (Münkler, 2023).

In the thinking of the German political class, a view of the world had prevailed in which war was seen as a traditional construct and the irrationality of nuclear escalation as highly improbable. Maintaining military potential as an important factor in German strategy was pushed into the background. Even the experiences with terrorism, with 11 September 2001 as a turning point and other asymmetric threats, were not to change this. On the contrary, these developments reinforced the conviction that the security challenges of the 21st century could no longer be met by conventional means.

Furthermore, the German population's experience with terrorism and other asymmetric threats has shown that the security of the 21st century cannot be guaranteed by conventional military means. Germany has learned that such a comprehensive security strategy should include not only military, but also economic and diplomatic means to meet the various challenges of the globalised age (Szabo, 2015).

In sum, compared to traditional geopolitical considerations, Germany's geoeconomic orientation reflects its adaptation to a world in which economic power and influence determine the extent of its national security and living standards - which obscured its view of defence policy reality, as the following sections will discuss.



3.2. Germany's Strategic orientation after reunification

Thus, Germany's strategy after reunification which “marked the first big *Zeitenwende* for post-war Germany – in a very positive direction” (Kammerer, 2024) can be characterised by a pronounced geo-economic orientation, which implies a strategic restraint in traditionally military and geopolitical matters. Kundnani (2011) was one of the first to analyse this perspective in detail, showing how Germany strengthened its role in Europe through economic means rather than relying on military power or traditional geopolitical strategies. This perspective was later also taken up and further developed by Szabo (2015, 2017) and Münkler (2023).

Kundnani (2014) describes how Germany, particularly since the Schröder era (1998-2005), has increasingly used its economic resources to exert influence within the EU and assert its own interests. This ‘hard’ form of geoeconomics, like strategic warfare in the sense of Clausewitz (2014), but with economic means instead of military force, is based on the close interdependence between state actors and the export economy (Kundnani, 2014, pp. 104-105).

After the end of the Cold War, the German military potential was oversized with around three quarters of a million soldiers and large reserves. This would have caused major security concerns among its European neighbours. For this reason alone, Germany had to disarm. Since the 1950s, the Western consensus had been that Germany should build up economic power, but not military power. In the event of an emergency, i.e. a confrontation with the Soviet Union, German divisions would have been placed under NATO command. In this respect, Germany's military disarmament was also a prerequisite for European acceptance of German reunification in 1990 (Münkler, 2023).

The changed geopolitical realities following reunification and the pressure of globalisation meant that Germany's foreign policy was almost inevitably economically oriented. During the Cold War, the West Germany was primarily striving for rehabilitation and security. After reunification, these goals were largely achieved, Germany was strategically saturated and there was a lack of overarching strategic goals (Kundnani, 2014).

The increased competitive pressure caused by globalisation and the challenges and costs of reunification reinforced this trend, which became clear through the targeted use of economic means to cushion social upheaval in the East, while at the same time military spending was further reduced. In the mid-1990s, Germany was a hotspot for demilitarisation in Europe. During Kohl's term of office (1982-1998), a country with the highest military



density became one of the lowest. The peace movement was highly regarded socially and war as a continuation of politics by other means disappeared from the consciousness of the political class. Although the possibility of a nuclear conflict between the USA and Russia continued to exist, this also disappeared from the consciousness of the German public. Instead, the continued existence of this nuclear destruction capacity was concealed by the reduction of conventional weapons (Münkler, 2023).

Szabo (2015) also highlights Germany's role as a leading geo-economic power, increasingly defining its security interests through economic interests and prioritising relationships with states that represent important markets or provide critical resources. This shift towards an economically driven foreign policy reflects Germany's adaptation to changing global conditions and demonstrates its search for a new place in the post-Cold War order (Kundnani, 2014).

In summary, it can be said that after reunification, Germany pursued a more geo-economic strategy characterised by a close interdependence between state actors and the export economy, a prioritisation of economic interests over military and geopolitical ambitions and an adaptation to the changed global environment. This development reflects Germany's endeavour to redefine its role in a changing world order, with the hope of being able to act as an uninvolved observer while other powers, such as the USA, ensured global security with major military investments (Münkler, 2023).

3.2.1. Intensification of geoeconomic strategy

In the years following reunification, Germany increasingly focussed on geo-economic strategies, with a particular emphasis on securing supplies of critical raw materials and cultivating relationships with strategically important countries. A key aspect of this strategy was the emphasis on the need to secure access to rare earths and other vital resources for German industry. Since Germany relies on importing most of these resources, its economic approach is largely influenced by their supply. A notable case of this approach is the collaboration with Kazakhstan in the area of rare earths, which followed the successful natural gas cooperation with the Soviet Union in the 1970s. This collaboration demonstrates Germany's attempts to reduce its reliance on resource imports by establishing strategic partnerships with essential countries. The energy cooperation with Russia, particularly the dependence on Russian gas supplies, emphasises the importance of securing energy supplies



and exemplifies the priority given to relations with countries supplying critical resources (Szabo, 2015).

Furthermore, the economic orientation of German foreign policy was emphasised by the relationship with China, which was also intensified under Chancellor Schröder. Germany actively sought economic cooperation with China, which led to large contracts for German companies, while politically sensitive issues such as human rights violations were treated less critically (Kundnani, 2014, pp. 80-81, 93-94).

Thus, Germany considered the security of supply of critical raw materials and the cultivation of relations with key countries as the centrepieces of its foreign policy. The aim was to protect the country's economic interests while effectively managing its dependence on external resources (Szabo, 2015).

3.2.2. The relationship with Russia using geoeconomic means

Germany's relationship with Russia under the Schröder government (1998-2005) marks a paradigmatic case of the country's *realpolitik* turnaround. The joint opposition to the Iraq war (2003) led to an increasingly close personal relationship between Schröder and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Schröder even praised Putin as a "flawless democrat", despite increasing authoritarian tendencies. This rapprochement was clearly manifested in the construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, as shown in Figure 3, which increased Europe's dependence on Russian gas and made Germany the main distributor (Kundnani, 2014, pp. 78-81).



Figure 3 – Nord Stream Pipelines

Source: Gazprom adapted by Aljazeera (2022)

When Angela Merkel succeeded Schröder in 2005, she announced a return to a value-based foreign policy, but economic relations, especially with Russia and China, remained a central element of German foreign policy. This continuity emphasises the complexity of German foreign policy, which always balanced between economic interests and its own claim to promote values (Kundnani, 2014, pp. 80-82).

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Germany reacted without fundamentally redefining its role as a geo-economic power. It implemented economic sanctions while minimising its military options. This strategy showed Germany's willingness to play a proactive geopolitical role, but also revealed a lack of creativity in adapting its grand strategy. The 2016 White Book responded to the changing security threats and emphasised the need for a cooperative relationship with Russia, but also recognised the importance of the EU, NATO, and transatlantic relations (Szabo, 2017). However, this did not mean a change in strategic direction.

The argumentation of authors from Germany's party-affiliated foundations, such as the *Konrad Adenauer Foundation*, shows that the German strategy was not fundamentally questioned even after 2014, but that a "principled pragmatism" was pursued. This approach focuses on the defence of democracy, human rights and rules-based multilateralism and aims to have a pragmatic influence on as many states as possible. Germany had thus made a



fundamental strategic decision that set it apart from a fixed position alongside a great power and positioned it as a flexible actor between the poles of power (Meng et al., 2020).

The emphasis on multilateralism and a stronger European role in foreign and security affairs, as well as in the development of a European strategic culture, reflects Germany's pro-European role with multilateral preferences. This orientation corresponds with the previous findings and shows Germany's commitment to cooperative and multilateral action on the international stage (Meng & Scheller, 2020), which deliberately shifted the question of the possibility of the military component as a continuation of policy by other means to the level of international organisations to avoid having to face this unpopular issue among the political class and the public.

3.3. Analysis and criticism of the German strategy

The previous sections of this chapter have shown how the strategy for pursuing German interests has undergone significant developments since reunification, characterised by different periods of government. A profound change was particularly evident under the Schröder government (1998-2005) and continued under Merkel until 2021. Relations with key nations such as Russia and China as well as the focus on multilateralism and European integration were central elements of these changes.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, European media and politicians (including Germany) criticised Germany's lack of strategic thinking and naivety, particularly regarding energy policy and “especially if compared to the Anglo-Saxon countries” (Kammerer, 2024). However, Germany **did** pursue a very consistent Russia policy, which was based on the German experience with the successful *Ostpolitik*¹ of the 1970s. Very briefly summarised, this policy was based on the transfer of prosperity through joint economic integration with a subsequent pacification of the partner, as a military confrontation would simply not be economically worthwhile – “Change by Trade”. The criticism that Germany should have rethought its policy after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 at the latest, but did not do so, can be explained by “path dependency”. The German conclusion after 2014 was not that the previous Russia-friendly policy, the neglect of its own defence capabilities and the joint economic integration had been wrong, but that it had obviously not been integrated strongly enough. The unwavering adherence to

¹ *Ostpolitik* refers to the Foreign Policy of the Bonn Republic towards the German Democratic Republic, Poland, and Soviet Union. Chancellor Brandt his famous kneeling in Warsaw is often connected with this term.



Nord Stream II after the annexation of Crimea is the best example of this (Münkler, 2023). Germany's self-perception plays a role here that must be considered.

Szabos (2015) provides a differentiated view of Germany, which led from a military power (Prussian style) to a leading geo-economic power in Europe. This transformation is characterised by a preference for diplomatic and economic solutions, participation in military operations under a NATO mandate in exceptional cases, and the conviction that economic power is more important than military strength. A preference that was reinforced by the fact that the German population's distrust of military force has always played a significant role in foreign and security policy choices (Szabo, 2015).

Daase and Junk's (2012) insights into Germany's strategic culture since the end of the Cold War complement the picture by analysing four dimensions: the level of ambition, the restricted scope of action of the executive, foreign policy traditions and orientation, and the cautious attitude towards the use of the military. These dimensions illustrate that Germany adopts a defensive, reactive, and moderately cautious position, which is characterised by multilateral cooperation and a reluctance to engage in interventionist policies (Daase & Junk, 2012), which is also underlined by the former Vice Chief of German Army:

I believe that there is definitely a lack of strategic thinking and an under-developed strategic culture in Germany [...] Most important, however, is the German reluctance to clearly define our national interest. Best example for this is the resignation of *Bundespräsident* Horst Köhler in 2010. After having stated that open and secure maritime trade routes are essential for an export-oriented country like Germany and that they might have to be secured by military means, he drew so much criticism and so little support that he chose to resign. (Kammerer, 2024)

Finally, Germany's strategic misjudgements regarding its energy dependence on Russia and the implementation of the energy transition reveal fundamental errors. The assumption that Russia is as reliable an energy supplier as the Soviet Union and the neglect of the signalling effect of the German energy transition on Russia are significant misjudgements. Added to this is the underestimation of the importance of “hostile feelings”² and the disregard for the cultural and socio-economic differences between Russia and the West (Münkler, 2023).

² Hostile feelings in the sense of Clausewitz's *Feindselige Gefühle*



3.4. Conclusion and reflection on the strategic orientation

In summary, German foreign and security policy since reunification has been characterised by a series of challenges and strategic adjustments.

Well then, how can Germany's strategy be characterised until the *Zeitenwende* in 2022 (DQ1)? It can be characterised as a geo-economic orientation based on multilateralism, economic integration, and restraint in military engagements. This strategy reflects Germany's endeavours to exert influence at international level through economic strength while avoiding an escalation of conflicts. Despite the recognisable success in creating strong economic ties, developments up to 2022 clearly show the limits of such an approach, particularly when it comes to responding to unforeseen security challenges. The annexation of Crimea and the subsequent invasion of Ukraine have exposed the weaknesses of a predominantly economically oriented security policy and emphasised the need for a more balanced approach that effectively integrates military as well as diplomatic and economic measures. Germany is therefore faced with the task of adapting its strategy to ensure not only economic but also security policy stability and to be prepared for future geopolitical shifts.

The following section of this paper will analyse the extent to which the *Zeitenwende* is now attempting to address this.



4. Realignment in the form of the National Security Strategy

The NSS was presented on 14 June 2023. It was the first of its kind in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. It represents an attempt at a grand strategy that had already been planned before the start of the war in Ukraine but was only actually developed in earnest afterwards. This chapter is dedicated to the geostrategic starting point of the paper, outlines its development, highlights the key strategic considerations in relation to defence policy and concludes by categorising the NSS as a central document in the context of Germany's strategic realignment.

4.1. The shock as an opportunity for reflection

On 14 July 2022, a group of renowned experts in Germany drew attention in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to the urgent need for a critical examination of current German foreign and security policy. This initiative expressed collective concern about the inadequacies of the German response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and outlined a framework for a strategic reorientation in a changed geopolitical context. The need for this realignment is also supported by the observations of Münkler (2023), who emphasises the positive ability of democracies to carefully weigh the pros and cons to develop effective long-term strategies (Asmussen et al., 2022; Münkler, 2023).

Joachim Krause (2023), also a member of the aforementioned initiative, identified seven key mistakes in German *Ostpolitik*, including the idealisation of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, the overvaluation of disarmament and dialogue, and the ignoring of authoritarian developments in Russia. Complementing Krause's analysis, Dörr (2022) and T. Lindner³ (2023) underlined the neglect of the *Bundeswehr* and emphasised the need for a stronger focus on defence preparedness, while Rotte (2022) added that the historical continuity of Russia's aggressive actions must be given greater consideration in Germany's defence strategy.

At the time of the initiative, the term *Zeitenwende* had already established itself as a heading for all considerations and recommendations related to a strategic reorientation. In this phase (2022-2023), the narrative prevailed that the turning point was not only a description of reality but would also require a comprehensive review of Germany's security and defence strategy. Alongside Strack-Zimmermann⁴ and T. Lindner, Bayer (2022) also

³ Tobias Lindner, politician, and member of the Green Party (not to be confused with Christian Lindner, FDP)

⁴ Marie-Agnes Strack Zimmermann, politician, and member of the FDP



emphasised the urgency of a strategic reorientation, including the strategically justified use of military means. Möhring (2023) added that the adaptation of German defence policy and engagement within NATO must be strengthened to effectively counter Russia's direct and indirect methods, including nuclear threats and hybrid warfare.

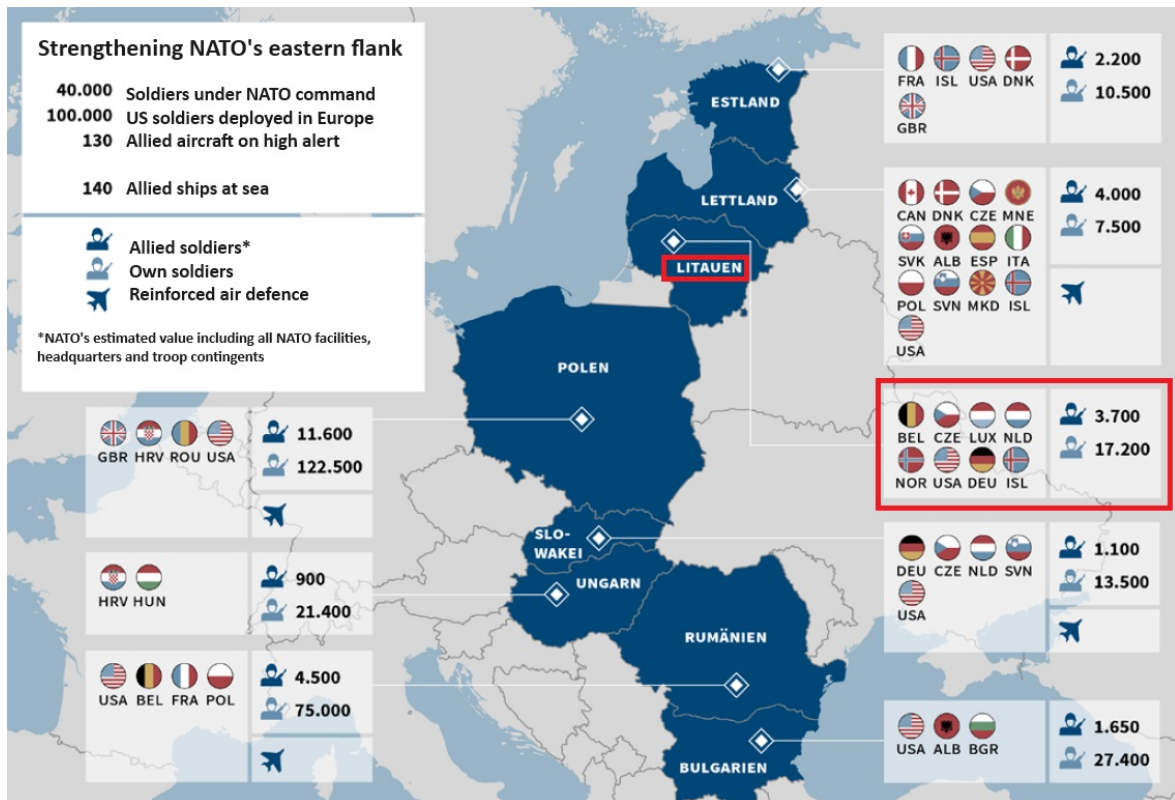


Figure 4 – Germany's commitment to NATO's eastern flank

Source: NATO (2022) adapted by SWP

A central pillar of the reorientation should be the upgrading and modernisation of the *Bundeswehr*. Strack-Zimmermann (2023) and Lindner (2023) called for a significant increase in defence spending, a concern supported by Bayer (2022), who pointed out the need for a comprehensive nationwide defence strategy. Terhalle (2023) sees Germany's strategic weakness as a lack of engagement with geopolitical realities. He argues in favour of increased German involvement in securing the eastern flank, what Germany already does as depicted in the Figure 4 above and emphasises the need to put Germany in a leading position militarily as well as economically and technologically. A demand that would have been taken less seriously just one year before the invasion of Ukraine due to the German sensitivity explained in Chapter 3.

The discourse initiated by Scholz, adequately illustrated by the demands and recommendations set out above, reflects a conscious confrontation with the changed



geopolitical realities of the 21st century. It is now clear that Germany has awoken from a strategic deep sleep, motivated by the urgent need to respond adequately to new security policy challenges (Niehr, 2022).

4.2. The path to a National Security Strategy

It is important to emphasise that the intention to create a NSS was already set out in the coalition agreement between the SPD, Green Party and FDP in November 2021. However, no measures had been taken until February 2022. It was not until the Chancellor's speech on 27 February 2022 that the creation of the NSS became a top priority, which has since been driven forward urgently and across all ministries (e.g. the Ministries of the Interior and Economic Affairs were involved in addition to the Foreign and Defence Ministries).

A two-stage process was planned for the creation of the NSS: First, a consultation phase that included discussions with national experts as well as ideas from key partner countries, followed by a writing phase conducted by a permanent working group at the Federal Foreign Office. The consultation phase aimed to integrate a broad range of opinions and expertise into the strategy process, starting with a meeting of all stakeholders at the end of March 2022. The Federal Foreign Office took the lead in the strategy process, while the Ministry of Defence was keen to strengthen defence policy and the *Bundeswehr* as central pillars of the security strategy. The involvement of the closest allies, particularly within NATO and the EU, was achieved through intensive diplomatic efforts. The constructive contributions during the consultation phase, such as the US recommendation to focus on a few clear messages and France's desire for a broad-based process, reflected the experiences and expectations of the international partners. The first draft of the NSS 2023 defined key elements of German foreign and security policy and laid the foundation for further discussions and adjustments. Despite several rounds of revisions and internal votes, which included controversial points such as the two per cent target for defence spending and the introduction of a National Security Council (NSC), the final version of the NSS 2023 was finally adopted and presented to the public (Kamp, 2023) by all involved heads of government departments as demonstrated in Figure 5.



Figure 5 – Presentation of NSS by all involved government departments

From left to right: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chancellor, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the Interior

Source: Schwarzer (2023)

During the development process, different security policy perspectives and priorities emerged within the German government, which led to discussions on various controversial points. According to Schwarzer (2023), this reveals the complexity and challenges of formulating a comprehensive security strategy, the core statements of which with regard to defence policy are presented in the following section.

4.3. Germany's National Security Strategy

Now that the historical and cultural background of Germany's strategy has been explained and Russia's attack on Ukraine has been described as the impetus for a profound reflection on the previous failed strategy, which ultimately led to the publication of the NSS 2023, this section summarises the key messages of the NSS regarding defence policy.

The NSS 2023 of the Federal Republic of Germany is a comprehensive 76-page document based on three central pillars: Defence, resilience, and sustainability. In line with the preamble to the German constitution, the aim of this strategy is to serve the peace of the world through a comprehensive security perspective in a united Europe. Resilience as a core element emphasises the resolute defence of Germany and its allies against aggression, especially in view of the **threat posed by Russia's war against Ukraine** and the challenges of a **multipolar** world. The importance of resilience through preparations for disasters and



cyber-attacks as well as sustainability in the fight against climate change are emphasised. These pillars serve to protect Germany in a complex global environment and anchor its security policy across Europe and globally (Bundesregierung 2023, p. 19).

The NSS 2023 emphasises the **uniqueness of Germany's geopolitical situation** resulting from its position at the heart of Europe. Surrounded by allies that are close to Russia and may be exposed to direct threats, this situation emphasises the need for strong defence preparedness and close **cooperation within European and transatlantic security structures**. The inseparable link between Germany's security and that of its neighbours and the stability of the continent require a proactive and solidary security and defence policy (ibid., pp. 20-21).

The security environment in which Germany finds itself is increasingly complex and characterised by dynamic global changes. Russia is identified as a significant threat that justifies an increase in Germany's **defence capabilities**. China is seen as a complex actor that is both a partner and a systemic rival. In addition, regional conflicts, terrorism, cyber-attacks, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are cited as significant uncertainty factors. Against this backdrop, the NSS emphasises the decisive role of the German Armed Forces and the importance of an integrated security policy that acts cooperatively to counter these multifactorial challenges (ibid., pp. 22-27).

The *Bundeswehr* is emphasised as a **central actor** for Germany's defence capability and as an integral part of the European and transatlantic security architecture. The strategy plans to increase Germany's military presence in the Alliance area to strengthen its deterrence and defence capabilities, particularly in view of the challenges posed by state actors such as Russia (ibid., pp. 30-34).

Another key aspect is *Gesamtverteidigung*, which includes comprehensive security provision that encompasses military capabilities and civilian aspects of security. This includes the resilience of critical infrastructures and the ability of society to respond to crisis situations. The defence industry is seen as crucial to strengthening European defence and action capabilities, with the German government planning to update its strategy for the security and defence industry to expand its capabilities (ibid., pp. 31, 33, 38).

Finally, the NSS 2023 takes a position on Germany's security policy identity, which is based on the country's deep roots in the European and transatlantic community. Against the backdrop of its historical responsibility and reconciliation with its European neighbours,



Germany sees itself obliged to **assume a leading role** in the context of current threats, particularly from Russia (ibid., pp. 19-20).

4.4. Analysis of the Realignment

The analysis of the NSS 2023 reveals a complex examination of the current geopolitical challenges and the demands of experts as outlined in section 4.1. While the NSS takes remarkable steps to respond to these challenges, the points of criticism and the comparisons with the expectations of a Grand Strategy shed light on significant discrepancies and potential for improvement.

The group of experts mentioned in section 4.1 called for a profound reflection and reorientation of German security policy, particularly about Russia's aggression against Ukraine (Asmussen et al. 2022). The NSS takes up this demand by emphasising the need to strengthen defence readiness and European cooperation. However, it is also evident that despite these efforts, the strategic missteps identified by Krause (2023), such as the overvaluation of dialogue and disarmament, are not fully addressed.

The criticism by Strack-Zimmermann (2023), who called for a comprehensive NSS and a permanent increase in defence spending as well as the consideration of Eastern European security interests, is particularly relevant. The NSS strives for such a comprehensive approach by including economic, social, and environmental dimensions. However, questions remain regarding the concrete implementation of this holistic perspective, particularly when it comes to mobilising the necessary resources and coordination between the actors involved.

The NSS attempts to fulfil the characteristics of a grand strategy by integrating a broad spectrum of security aspects and long-term goals for Germany's security policy. Nevertheless, based on the criteria for a grand strategy set out in section 2.2.3., the requirements for an NSS and the critical observations of Ross et al. (2024), the NSS falls short of expectations in terms of the clear prioritisation of interests, values and alliances and the operationalisation of its objectives. Kammerer (2024) adds to the criticism regarding the lack of concrete objectives within the NSS, arguing that the strategy "says everything and nothing at the same time. Conflicting goals are being named but no decision taken which one will have the priority." This reflects a broader concern with the strategy's ability to set clear priorities and limit the potential of the NSS to act as a coherent and effective basis for German security policy. Remarkably, Kammerer also highlights a critical oversight in the



NSS's scope, stating, "Interestingly enough, the threat to our security, well-being, social system, and coherence of our population posed by largely irregular migration is definitely so perceived by our population but nearly absent in this 'Strategy'." This observation underscores the NSS's potential underestimation of issues that are felt keenly across the German population, pointing to a gap in addressing comprehensive security concerns.

A central theme of criticism of the NSS is the aforementioned lack of concretisation and operationalisation of objectives. Although the NSS outlines the ideal of integrated security, it does not present an explicit plan for mobilising the necessary resources. This raises questions as to how Germany can effectively implement its security policy in an increasingly uncertain global environment, particularly in view of the need to strengthen Germany's defence capabilities and geopolitical strategy, as highlighted by Terhalle (2023), for example.

Moreover, the absence of political and social dialogue is denounced. Although the NSS emphasises the importance of cooperation between the government, military, business and civil society, the practical implementation of this approach remains unclear. This lack of unity and coordination potentially weakens the effectiveness of the strategy and its ability to pursue a unified approach. Consequently, criticism of the absence of a NSC in Germany is evident in both expert remarks and the opinions of various Stakeholders (2024). Riecke (2024) highlights that an NSC could have served as an institutional symbol for the *Zeitenwende* and could have smoothed inter-ministerial quarrels, crucially speeding up decision-making. This view is supported by Kammerer (2024), who criticizes the non-establishment of the NSC as "definitely a missed opportunity" that could have contributed to the coherence of the various security policy efforts of the ministries. Stakeholders (2024) also emphasize that an NSC could bundle the various security policy endeavours of individual ministries and align them towards a common goal, particularly by promoting cooperation between the military, diplomacy, security, and development sectors. Despite recognizing the necessity and potential benefits of such a council, they also highlight the political and structural challenges that could complicate its establishment, doubting its political feasibility under current circumstances.

Nevertheless, the NSS 2023 represents an important step for Germany in responding to the complex security threats of the 21st century (Riecke, 2024; Kammerer, 2024). It recognises the geopolitical threats, underlines the goal of strengthening defence capabilities to an unprecedented extent since reunification and focuses on an integrated concept of



security. It also recognises that the world is multipolar, and that Germany is “somehow” committed to the EU and transatlantic cooperation. This formulated strategy ends, at least on paper, the pragmatic course of geoeconomics as outlined historically in Chapter 3.

However, the strategy largely remains a status quo analysis that comprehensively describes the current situation but is less specific in its foresight of future developments and the resulting demands on security policy (Schwarzer, 2023).

4.5. Conclusion

The adoption of the NSS 2023 signals a turning point in German security policy, reflected by a clear paradigm shift initiated by Chancellor Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech what is to be assessed as a direct response to Russian aggression against Ukraine (Scholz, 2022b)

Analysing the development and content of the NSS shows that Germany has undertaken a reflection on its previous foreign and security policy. Inspired by the realisation that the previous strategy is inadequate in a drastically changed geopolitical context, the NSS aims to make Germany more resilient. It explicitly recognises the direct threat posed by Russia to German security and positions Germany on the side of the Euro-Atlantic community in a multipolar world order.

The challenges in formulating such a grand strategy are manifold and complex. Schwarzer (2023) emphasised in her analysis that although the NSS provides a realistic assessment of current threats, it is less clear when it comes to anticipating future developments and defining concrete measures to strengthen German and European defence capabilities. It is added to this analysis that the NSS 2023 is the best, because tangible, evidence of Germany's turnaround, i.e. strategic reorientation, and emphasises that the effective implementation of the visions set out in the NSS is the real challenge and depends on concrete political decisions and the provision of the necessary resources.

However, the NSS 2023 is more than a strategic document; it is a first step and an invitation to German politics and society to actively and consciously engage with the new realities of international security policy. The strategy lays the foundation for a comprehensive security policy discussion in Germany and emphasises the need to strengthen the concept of resilience in order to better prepare German society for the diverse security risks, for example through an ideology-free discussion on setting defence spending at 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by law or reactivating compulsory military service.



The NSS 2023 is “only” a first step because the adaptation of institutional structures and the securing of the necessary financial resources were still largely outstanding until at least March 2024 and, with regard to the document itself, it must be continuously developed in future (e.g. as a mandatory document at the beginning of each legislative period) in order to continuously adapt and develop Germany's strategy to current and future geopolitical challenges.

So, in conclusion, **what changes have been made to Germany's latest strategic document to adapt it to the new geopolitical situation (DQ2)?** The NSS, as the first strategic document of the German Government - and no longer just of a specific department - clearly defines Germany's national interests and objectives. It identifies Russia as the greatest threat and sets out how these goals must be pursued. The military and the strengthening of defence capacities by reinforcing the armed forces are of great importance here. Particular attention is paid to the concept of Total Defence, which integrates civilian and military measures to ensure comprehensive security provision and the rejection of unilateral dependencies. Germany is not afraid to view the military as a legitimate means in the context of an overall strategy and is unwaveringly committed to its integration into NATO and the EU. This reflects the recognition that an effective defence policy in today's multipolar world order requires both robust military capabilities and broad societal resilience.



5. Role of the German Armed Forces

Chancellor Scholz's speech on 27 February 2022, the *Zeitenwende* speech, marked a turning point in German defence policy, which was expressed in tangible form in the publication of the first NSS in Germany's history. The Ukraine-Russia War has made it clear that an adjustment of Germany's strategy orientation and defence capabilities is unavoidable. This chapter examines how the *Zeitenwende*, understood as historical marking point and a narrative for linked adjustments, impacts the German Armed Forces, especially which measures have already been taken and which are still planned. The identified problem areas are also outlined (Scholz, 2022b).

At the end of 2022, the Federal Ministry of Defence presented a confidential report that critically assesses the state of the *Bundeswehr* and was leaked to *Business Insider*. The report identifies significant deficits in areas such as personnel numbers, equipment, and infrastructure. Despite decades of efforts to modernise and increase efficiency, there are profound shortcomings that make it difficult to respond quickly and effectively to military threats (BMVg cited by Lehner & Petersen, 2023).

Several important steps have already been taken in response to the turning point and the increased security policy requirements. These include increasing the defence budget, accelerating procurement processes, and introducing reforms to increase the operational readiness of the armed forces. Other planned measures include modernising equipment and technologies and realigning the defence strategy to allow the *Bundeswehr* to react more flexibly and quickly to new threats (Lehner & Petersen, 2023).

Despite the measures introduced, significant challenges remain. These include the ongoing difficulty of recruiting qualified personnel, the need to improve the integration of civilian and military defence efforts and the management of technological and material backlogs. These problem areas require continuous attention and innovative solutions (BMVg, 2022 cited by Lehner & Petersen, 2023).

5.1. Defence strategy

5.1.1. Pressure to adapt and challenges

In the run-up to the publication of the VPR on 9 November 2023, which is regarded as the strategic continuation of the NSS, numerous critical voices were raised in Germany. These discussions continued via the Chancellor's government statement (Scholz, 2022b)

until the publication of the NSS in July 2023 and shaped the discourse on the realignment of the defence strategy.

In his analysis, Möhring (2023) identified the challenges that the Russia-Ukraine War poses for Germany, particularly in hybrid warfare. He emphasised that the *Bundeswehr* must strengthen its capacities in counter-disinformation and psychological warfare to respond effectively to hybrid threats and improve the resilience of the population.

At the same time, Masala (2023) pointed out the weaknesses of German air defence and argued that there was an urgent need to strengthen defence capabilities against missile attacks (Stakeholders, 2024). He also criticised the cuts made to the defence budget since 1990, which have led to essential defence capacities being neglected which culminated in an embarrassing public discussion of the low readiness of weapon systems to which the date in Figure 6 refers.



Figure 6 – Readiness of the Bundeswehr’s primary weapon systems in 2017

Source: BMVg (2017) adapted by IFRI (2023)

Graf (2023a) went on to explain that the war in Ukraine, as an “exogenous shock”, has profoundly changed the image of Russia and alliance solidarity among the German population. He pleaded for a strategic return to the original defence tasks of the *Bundeswehr* and NATO to be able to counter the threats posed by Russia's aggressive actions.

These discussions and analyses make it clear that the following VPR must provide a comprehensive response to a global security situation characterised by new military and technological challenges. The points of criticism and concerns expressed also indicate that a



comprehensive modernisation and strengthening of German defence capabilities is essential to effectively meet current and future security policy challenges.

5.1.2. Geostrategic Positioning

On the same day that the new Defence Policy Guidelines were published on 9 November 2023, the Minister of Defence, and his Chief of Defence (ChoD) addressed the public in an article in the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper. They not only signalled transparency, but also prepared the population for important upcoming discussions. These discussions could be challenging for a nation that had previously taken a militarily reserved role. The article used the term *Zeitenwende* to communicate unequivocally that war was once again raging in Europe and that Germany would have to take an active role. The term *Kriegstüchtigkeit*, or war capability in particular, chosen by the Minister of Defence, marks a clear departure from previous language. It emphasises the need to be both physically and mentally prepared for an emergency (Pistorius & Breuer, 2023).

This clear rhetorical positioning continues in the latest Defence Policy Guidelines, where the word 'war' is now used openly. Compared to the 2011 guidelines, where the term was only mentioned in relation to 'civil war', this shows a clear shift in the communication strategy (BMVg, 2011), to which the former Vice Chief of the German Army added: "After all those years of careful denial of clear wording we can be grateful that Minister Pistorius clearly states what is needed. The criticism that ensued after he coined the term *Kriegstüchtigkeit* just shows the length of the way ahead to reach that goal" (Kammerer, 2024).

In the latest VPR the tone is differently set. "As a geographically central and economically powerful country in the centre of Europe, Germany is the backbone of collective defence in Europe. This also poses a particular threat to Germany, including militarily" (BMVg, 2023d, p. 10).

Germany's geostrategic position is now emphasised as essential for European security and stability. As a central and economically strong country in Europe, Germany has a special responsibility within the collective security structure of NATO. This role requires a strengthening of its defence and alliance capabilities to be able to act as a reliable partner. It is also crucial that Germany ensures a constant presence on NATO's eastern flank and assumes a leading role in European security policy. The stationing of German Armed Forces (as standing forces) in Lithuania underlines Germany's commitment and obligation to



collective defence and deterrence. In addition, effective utilisation and further development of civil-military cooperation is necessary to strengthen resilience against hybrid threats. The recognition of Germany's geostrategic importance leads to a comprehensive strengthening of its defence capabilities. This includes increasing the operational readiness and modernisation of the *Bundeswehr* as well as deepening multinational cooperation and promoting European defence initiatives (BMVg, 2023d, pp. 15, 21-22).

The 2023 guidelines also emphasise the concept of Total Defence as a central pillar of the German defence strategy. In view of the complexity and multi-layered nature of the security situation, it is emphasised that an effective defence capability requires a holistic approach that combines civilian and military capabilities in a coordinated approach. The need to review and adapt existing structures is particularly emphasised (BMVg, 2023d, pp. 9, 13, 17, 21, 24).

The core mission of the *Bundeswehr*, as defined in the current guidelines, focuses on national and alliance defence (LV/BV⁵). Adapting to the new security environment requires the *Bundeswehr* to be highly ready for deployment and defence, both nationally and in an alliance context (BMVg, 2023d, pp. 17, 24).

The *Zeitenwende* is used as a central concept in the 2023 Guidelines to describe the fundamental changes in the international security environment. This phase requires a comprehensive rethink of German defence policy to do justice to the new security policy realities and redefine Germany's role within NATO (BMVg, 2023d).

Against this background, the guidelines on pages 9 and 13 explicitly emphasise the Russian Federation as the main threat to security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. This explicit designation acts as a clear signal of reorientation, underlining the need for a reversal in defence policy (BMVg, 2023d).

This new defence policy reflects the realisation that the previous focus on international crisis intervention no longer meets the comprehensive security requirements. Instead, the core mission of national and alliance defence is moving to the fore, which represents a clear departure from the primary focus on foreign missions for crisis management. The guidelines formulate the need to reposition Germany in its role within the collective security structure, in particular NATO, and emphasise the importance of expanding and restoring military capacities and structures that guarantee credible deterrence and defence capabilities. This

⁵ LV/BV is both a commonly used term for national and alliance defence and an abbreviation of the original German term “*Landes- und Bündnisverteidigung*”.



adjustment is considered essential to effectively meet the changed security policy challenges and signals a comprehensive reorientation of German defence policy (BMVg, 2023d, p. 6).

This leads to a comprehensive roadmap for the strategic reorientation of the *Bundeswehr*, which is set out in the VPR 2023. Consistently focusing the *Bundeswehr* on its core mission of national and alliance defence would require an adjustment of structures, capabilities, capacities, and resources to ensure credible deterrence and defence capability. This goes hand in hand with the demand for a complete equipping and comprehensive modernisation of the armed forces, which includes not only the renewal of outdated systems, but also the integration of modern technologies and the strengthening of cyber and information space-related capabilities. The guidelines also underline the importance of resilience and overall national defence capabilities, which includes intensified civil-military cooperation for effective defence against hybrid threats and crisis management. In the area of international security policy, the deepening of cooperation, particularly within NATO and the EU, is considered essential for strengthening collective security. Finally, sustainable financing is emphasised as a basic prerequisite for achieving these objectives, with the long-term goal of spending at least 2% of GDP on defence. Overall, these guidelines reflect a holistic approach that focuses on both the internal strengthening of the *Bundeswehr* and external cooperation to protect Germany and its allies more effectively (BMVg, 2023d).

5.1.3. Strategic reconsideration and positioning in relation to NATO and EU

The geostrategic positioning set out in the VPR 2023, the unambiguous naming of Russia as the main threat and the desired transformation from an intervention army to an armed force that focuses primarily on LV/BV naturally has implications for the armed forces, but the role of NATO and the EU must be considered first and foremost.

NATO remains the primary framework for Germany's security and collective defence in Europe. The VPR 2023 underlines the importance of the Alliance as a guarantor of deterrence and defence against current and potential threats. Germany reaffirms its commitment to an enhanced presence and leadership role within NATO, symbolised by the stationing of a combat brigade in Lithuania, demonstrating not only support for the Baltic states but also a strong awareness of its responsibility in collective defence (BMVg, 2023d).

In the EU context, Germany emphasises the importance of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The EU is seen as an important security actor that contributes to security through economic and civilian measures and the strengthening of partners. These



aspects complement NATO's military measures, particularly in areas where civilian and political instruments are prioritised (BMVg, 2023d).

Hence, the *Bundeswehr* is shifting its focus more to national and alliance defence, a change that Lieutenant General Alfons Mais (Chief of the Army) notably explains in an interview with Linnemann (2024) as a n already taken response to the geopolitical shifts since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. This strategic adjustment was further advanced by the Army's provisional operational guidelines in 2021 (confidential document) and by an in-depth staff study to strengthen the land dimension. Russia's land forces show that the German Army needs more aggressive and quick-moving wheeled forces. These forces, which NATO calls "medium forces", will be part of the army structure in the future (Pfitzner, 2024).

Another critical element of the defence strategy highlighted by Lieutenant General Mais is the need to improve command and control capabilities through advanced technologies and digitalisation. The *Digitalisation of Land-Based Operations* (D-LBO) initiative plays a central role in this for Mais by strengthening the effectiveness of command-and-control structures and enabling faster decision-making on the battlefield (Linnemann, 2024).

The revision of the *Bundeswehr's* operational doctrine will continue to include interoperability as a key component. This is because Germany is not and does not want to go down a *Sonderweg*, or a "German special path", but is "marching [...] in step with NATO and its allies" (Schwegmann, 2024). In the context of NATO's regional plans, Germany will most likely assume territorial responsibility for Eastern Central Europe, the Baltic Sea, and the Baltic States, where Germany will permanently station a combat brigade of around 5,000 soldiers. This de facto German garrison abroad is not only a historic turning point for the *Bundeswehr*, but also a remarkably determined and robust contribution to NATO's concept of forward defence (ibid.).

Lieutenant General Mais underscores the need for doctrinal approaches that integrate conventional military capacities with contemporary technologies and involve tight coordination between civilian and military actors. In particular, the integration of reconnaissance and surveillance technologies, such as drones, is emphasised, making it possible to identify and respond to threats at an early stage, enabling a faster and more efficient defence response. This holistic view of defence strategy underlines the need to strengthen Germany's overall defence structure to ensure a robust and responsive defence



readiness. The use of state-of-the-art technologies, strategic planning and the training and equipping of troops are an integral part of these considerations (Linnemann, 2024).

The strategic realignment of the *Bundeswehr* also includes significant changes for the air force and explicitly for air defence. In response to the now potentially serious threat of Russian air attacks and the need for a stronger collective defence capability, Germany has significantly expanded its air defence capabilities (Stakeholders, 2024). This includes the planned acquisition of modern air defence systems, such as the Iris-T-SLM system and the Israeli Arrow 3 system, which are intended to provide Germany with improved defence against medium-range ballistic missiles (Hoffmann, 2024).

A key aspect of the reorientation is Germany's decision to procure the F-35 from Lockheed Martin. This decision is not only a response to the technological and tactical requirements of modern air warfare, but also a clear commitment to nuclear sharing within NATO. This unequivocal commitment also puts an end to the political discussion about ending it, which had arisen from time to time in the German political arena before 2022. The F-35 will play a central role in this by significantly strengthening Germany's ability to carry out NATO alliance defence tasks, including nuclear deterrence. Thus, the commitment to nuclear sharing emphasises Germany's role as a reliable partner within NATO and reaffirms its commitment to European security. This strategic decision shows that Germany is willing to invest in advanced technologies and now also procure market-available systems outside Europe if this is in the national interest (Péria-Peigné & Tenenbaum, 2023).

The vision for 2035 of the German Navy Command (2023) outlines a clear strategic reorientation of the German Navy, which aims to increase its presence and operational capacities in the North Sea and Baltic Sea regions as well as in the North Atlantic.

The North Sea and Baltic Sea are identified as crucial maritime transport routes that are vital for Europe's trade and energy supply. Due to their strategic importance, these waters are central to the defence policy of Europe and Germany, especially in view of the potential threat from Russia, the German Navy Command (2023) emphasises the need for effective surveillance and defence of these waters to ensure the free use of these critical sea lanes and deter potential military conflicts. Péria-Peigné & Tenenbaum (2023) support this view by highlighting the strategic relevance of these waters for the European security architecture and emphasising the need to invest in these regions to strengthen maritime surveillance and security.



The vision for 2035 calls for a specific adaptation of naval capacities to meet the challenges in these special operating areas. This includes the development and procurement of platforms and weapon systems that are specially designed for the conditions in the North Sea, Baltic Sea and North Atlantic. This also includes increased surface and underwater naval warfare and coastal defence. Péria-Peigné & Tenenbaum (2023) expand on this point by emphasising the importance of anti-submarine warfare and the use of unmanned underwater vehicles, which are important given the increasing threat from enemy submarines and mines. Figure 7 illustrates the planned build-up.

SYSTEMS		MISSIONS	2031	2035+
Frigate Type 127		Surface/AA warfare	5	6
Frigate Type 126		Anti-submarine warfare	6	6
Frigate Type 125		Stabilisation, crisis management	4	3
Corvette Type 130		Surface warfare	10	6 à 9
Future Combat Surface System		Surface warfare	-	18
Mine warfare platform		Mine warfare	11	12
Minewarfare USV		Mine warfare	-	?
Maritime patrol aircraft P-8A		Combat/Reconnaissance	8	8
Reconnaissance UAV		Combat/Reconnaissance	-	6
NH-90 MRFH <i>Sea Tiger</i> helicopter		Combat/Reconnaissance	31	?
Helicopter UAV		Combat/Reconnaissance	10	22
NH-90 NTH <i>Sea Lion</i> helicopter		Transport	18	17
Submarine type 212CD		Combat	8	6 à 9
UUV		Reconnaissance	-	6
Intelligence ship Type 424		Intelligence	3	3
Logistic ship Type 702		Logistic, medevac	3	3
Oil tanker Type 707		Logistic	2	3
Support ship		Logistic, SpecOps	6	6

Figure 7 – German navy’s capability goals

Source: BMVg (2023) adapted by IFRI (2023)

The German Navy also plans to expand its capabilities in electronic warfare and cyber defence to improve operational capabilities in a rapidly changing technological and security environment. Péria-Peigné & Tenenbaum (2023) see these developments as essential to support NATO's defence strategy and promote interoperability within the alliance.

5.2. Defence budget

5.2.1. Development of military expenditure since 1990

In the year of reunification, defence spending accounted for 2.5% of GDP. In the years that followed, the peace dividend was consistently reaped, and the share was successively reduced to the absolute lows of 1.1% in 2005, 2014 and 2015, then rose again slightly and remained stable at a low 1.4% until 2022 (World Bank, 2024). In this regard Figure 8 clearly

underscores the huge financial turnaround of the Ukraine-Russia War on the former constant decline.

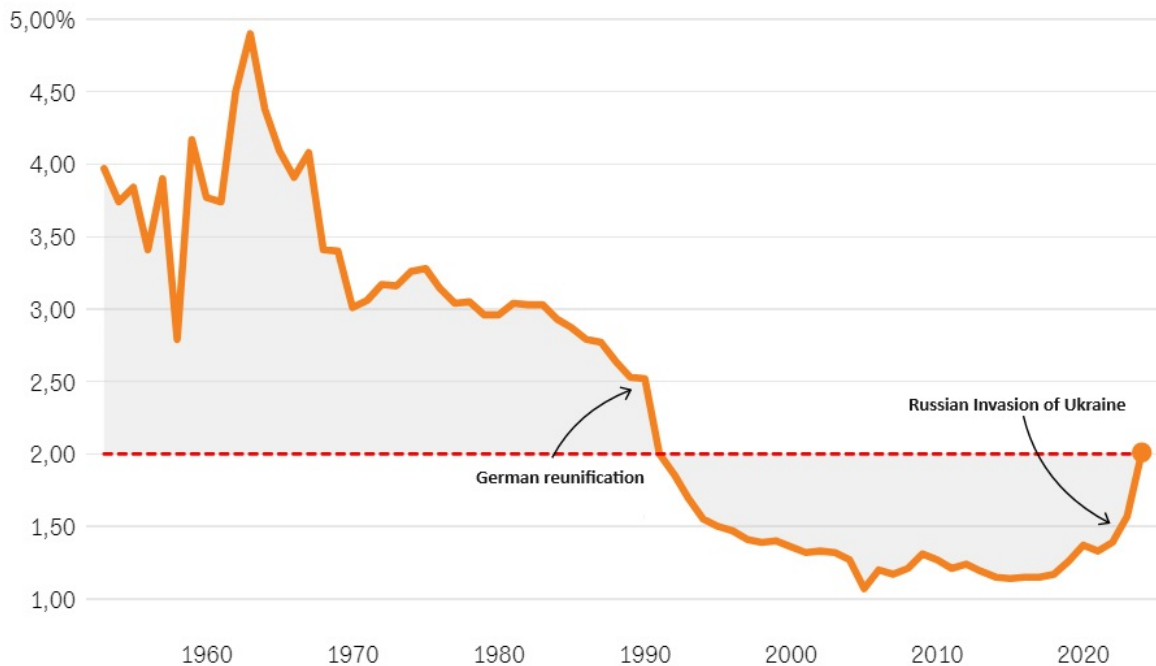


Figure 8 – Military expenditures in perspective of peace dividend and UKR-RUS War

Source: SIPRI (1953-2022), NATO (2023), dpa (2024) adapted by Handelsblatt (2024)

The defence budget for 2024 will increase by 1.7 billion euros to a total of 51.8 billion euros. With the help of the special fund of 100 billion euros, which was set up after the Chancellor's *Zeitenwende* speech (Scholz, 2022a), the defence budget for 2024 will be increased by a further 19.2 billion euros. With a resulting total defence budget of 71 billion euros, this marks the 2% GDP for the first time. As part of the financial plan up to 2027, it is also planned to increase the defence budget by a total of around 7.3 billion euros over the next few years (BMVg, 2023c).

5.2.2. The importance of the Special Fund for the *Bundeswehr*

The Special Fund of the *Bundeswehr* represents a decisive financial initiative. The Chancellor surprisingly announced this in his *Zeitenwende* speech as follows:

But let's not kid ourselves: Better equipment, modern equipment, more personnel - that costs a lot of money, and we will set up a special fund for the *Bundeswehr* [...] The 2022 federal budget will provide this special fund with a one-off sum of 100 billion euros. We will use the funds for necessary investments and



armaments projects. From now on, we will invest more than 2 percent of gross domestic product in our defence every year. (Scholz, 2022b)

The importance of this Special Fund is underlined by its strategic orientation, which is aimed at fully equipping and modernising the *Bundeswehr* in terms of personnel and equipment. The authors Péria-Peigné and Tenenbaum (2023) analyse the Special Fund as a central component of the financial realignment of the *Bundeswehr*. They argue that the special fund makes it possible to invest in new technologies and equipment over and above regular defence spending as illustrated in Figure 9.

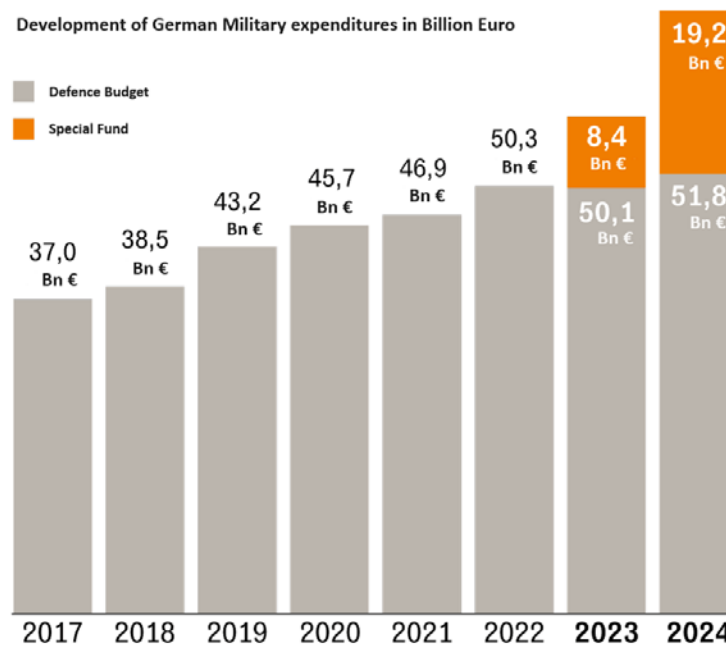


Figure 9 – Development of military expenditures incl. Special Fund (2017-2024)

Source: Handelsblatt (2024)

However, these investments are critical not only for modernisation, but also for strengthening the operational capabilities of the *Bundeswehr*, as a significant proportion of the regular defence budget is still required for running costs such as personnel and maintenance.

Lieutenant General Mais emphasised that the special fund has enabled projects such as the digitalisation of land-based operations (D-LBO) in particular, which would not have been financially feasible without these additional funds (Linnemann, 2024).

Schwegmann (2024) also states that the budget increase is a direct response to the security policy challenges caused by the Ukraine conflict. He also emphasises that these investments are not only intended to strengthen national defence, but also to fulfil



international obligations, particularly within NATO, reflecting Germany's desire to act as a reliable ally and achieve the target of 2% of GDP for defence spending.

The VPR 2023 emphasised this: "An indispensable prerequisite and essential measure of German credibility for the implementation of the *Zeitenwende* is the sustainable and comprehensive financing of a fully staffed and materially equipped *Bundeswehr* with modern equipment" (BMVg, 2023d, p. 31).

What is remarkable about the previously quoted formulation is that it refers to the *Zeitenwende* as something to be implemented, i.e. that it is understood as a programme or agenda and not just as a statement of a paradigm shift.

5.2.3. Uncertain financial planning

The establishment of a Special Fund for the *Bundeswehr* in 2022 was an unprecedented undertaking in the history of the German defence budget and was important to address long-standing deficits in the equipment and readiness of the armed forces. As a result of the announcement, this was also received positively by experts and the media but was also viewed with some scepticism as a step in the right direction to improve Germany's defence capability, but also on the condition that the Ministry of Defence would effectively overcome existing procurement problems in the future (Dörr, 2022).

More critical voices, who criticised the increased defence spending as outdated Cold War logic, countered Masala (2023) that **the financial contribution, which is often misunderstood as "rearmament", actually represents necessary "equipping"** that serves to finally fulfil long-standing commitments to NATO. The special fund provided the *Bundeswehr* with the funds to invest in urgently needed equipment, which it was previously unable to do due to capacity deficits. This investment in equipment, which could even go beyond previous commitments, shows Germany's serious endeavour to fulfil its alliance obligations, which was also seen internationally as a clear and positive signal (Mair, 2022).

However, despite the introduction of the Special Fund, the German defence budget in 2023 still fell short of the NATO target of 2% of GDP. Tallis (2024) therefore underlined the urgency of a significant and sustainable increase in the defence budget to achieve the strategic goals of the *Zeitenwende* and ensure an adequate defence capability. Criticism of the hesitant allocation of funds from the special fund continued until the end of 2023. This criticism has since been overtaken by the facts, as according to Hamilton (2023), the funds are now almost completely tied up in projects until 2027. The discrepancy between the



financial commitments and the actual implementation of the defence budget poses a significant challenge. Meißner (2023) therefore emphasised that the inadequate implementation of financial commitments can weaken the effectiveness of the German defence strategy in the long term and calls for a revision of the budget priorities, which includes a sustainable increase in the defence budget and a more effective allocation of resources.

Although the Special Fund 2022 also promised a financial turnaround, the analysis of the experts quoted shows the need for a more far-reaching, long-term financial strategy that goes beyond the current special fund. Only by continuously adjusting and increasing the overall defence budget can it be ensured that the financial resources meet the real needs of the *Bundeswehr* and guarantee a long-term strengthening of Germany's defence capability (Péria-Peigné & Tenenbaum, 2023).

5.3. Personnel

5.3.1. Framing the personnel problem

After German reunification and the associated "2+4 Treaty" between Russia, France, the United States and Great Britain, Germany was forced to disarm down to 370,000 soldiers by 1994. This personnel disarming, as clearly demonstrated in Figure 10, was followed by further reductions through structural reforms that took account of the changed security environment, transforming the *Bundeswehr* into a deployed army and leading to the suspension of compulsory military service in 2011 (Kammerer, 2024). This reform provided for a personnel strength of only 185,000 soldiers in 2013 but was revised after Russia's annexation of Crimea by proclaiming the *Trendwende Personal*, or the personnel turnaround, which now envisages an increase in the armed forces to around 203,000 soldiers by 2030 - without reintroducing compulsory military service (BMVg, 2023e).



MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE BUNDESWEHR

Annual average from 1959 to 2014



Figure 10 – Development Bundeswehr's manpower (1959-2014)

Source: statista.com as of 29 Jan 2019 adapted by BMVg (2019)

These structural changes had already led to a significant personnel problem before the turning point in 2022. Lieutenant General Mais emphasises that despite efforts since 2014 to align the German Army with the requirements of national and alliance defence, there are still considerable personnel deficits. This impairs the ability to fully fulfil the core mission (Mais, 2024).

This problem is further exacerbated by the difficulties in recruiting and retaining personnel, as Péria-Peigné and Tenenbaum (2023) point out. Turning to Figure 11, it is evident that the demographic development complicates the competition for personnel even more.

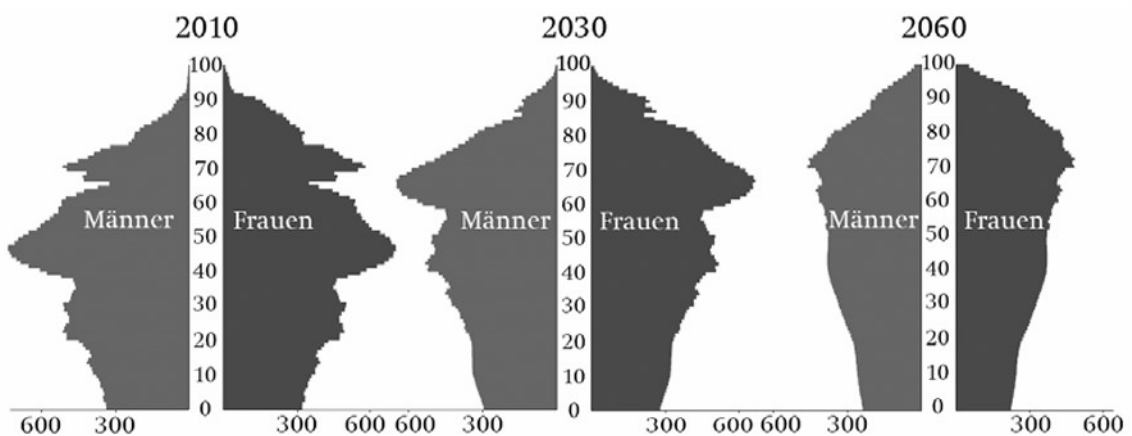


Figure 11 – Age structure in Germany (in years of life resp. thousands)

Source: Apt (2010)



The public perception of the *Bundeswehr* as a less attractive employer, due to negative media coverage and a social distance to the military, makes it considerably more difficult to recruit personnel (Stakeholders, 2024). In addition, the increasing ageing of German society is reducing the recruitment potential and visibly intensifying competition with private companies. A comprehensive strategy to improve the public image of the *Bundeswehr* and increase its attractiveness as an employer is therefore urgently needed.

However, the personnel challenges go beyond recruitment. In addition to the *Kriegstüchtigkeit*, or war capability, invoked by the Minister of Defence that addresses the entire German society, *Bundeswehr* personnel must also undergo a change in mentality. This is because managers and decision-makers in the *Bundeswehr* mainly have experience in the reduction and reorganisation of armed forces, but hardly in their development or expansion. This leads to a lack of strategic expertise, which is necessary for coping with new requirements. The *Bundeswehr* must recruit qualified personnel and carry out comprehensive further training and reorientation of existing personnel, which includes both military training and adaptation to modern warfare technologies (Meißner, 2023; Mais, 2024).

But even if the *Bundeswehr* were to reach the ambitious target of 203,000 soldiers in 2030, Masala (2023) critically notes, Germany has hardly made any provisions for mobilisation. On the contrary, over decades of downsizing the armed forces and strategic orientation as an operational army, the *Bundeswehr* had reduced essential capacities and no longer has the necessary reserve structures that would be required for rapid mobilisation.

5.3.2. The revival of the conscription debate

Since the Russian attack on Ukraine and under the heading of the *Zeitenwende*, the debate on the reintroduction of compulsory military service in Germany has been reignited and the *Zeitenwende* is cited as justification for the increased urgency to discuss it and is increasingly driving the topic into public and political discourse (Deutschlandfunk, 2024).

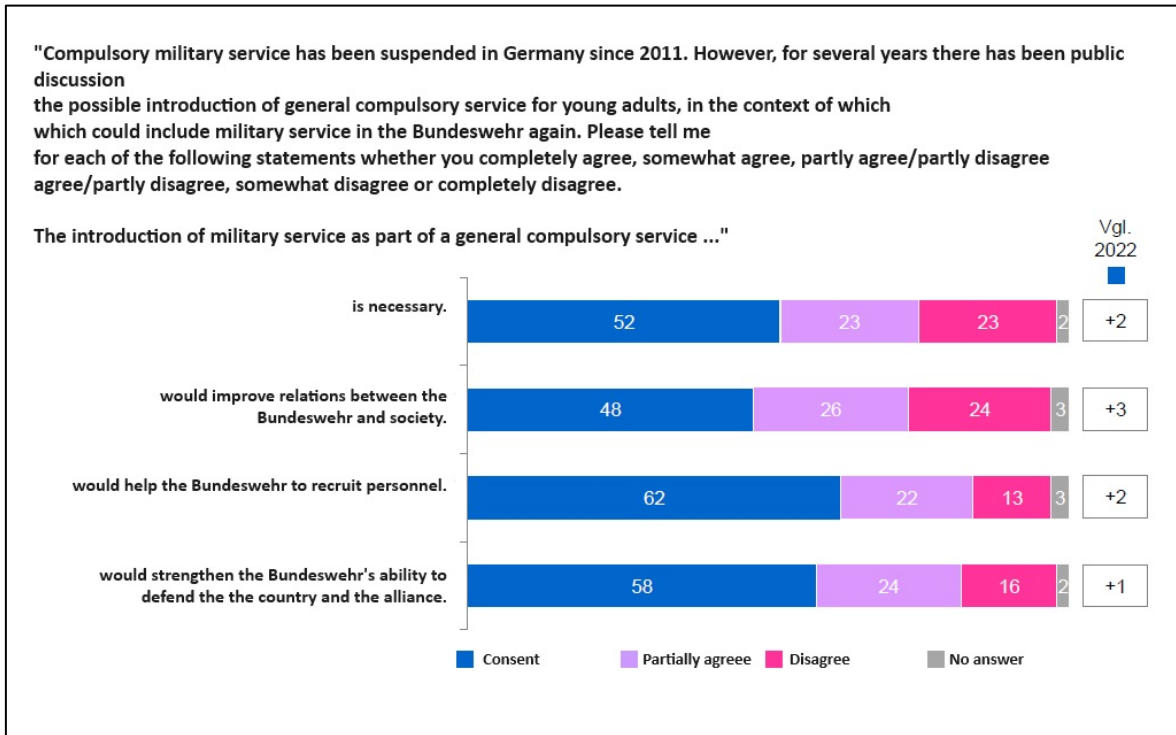


Figure 12 – Survey on the reintroduction of compulsory military service

Source: Graf (2023)

According to latest surveys (Figure 12), 52% of Germans are slightly in favour of reintroducing compulsory military service. This data illustrates a growing awareness among the population of the importance of national defence preparedness, even if there are significant age differences in approval. The older generation appears to be more willing to support such a measure, while younger people are more likely to oppose it (Graf, 2023b; dpa, 2024b).

Defence Minister Pistorius has examined various compulsory service models. One of the models is modelled on the Swedish system, in which all young people are conscripted, but only some are called up for service. These considerations are part of a broader debate about the structure and future direction of the *Bundeswehr* (Tagesschau, 2023).

Despite the perceived need for a stronger military presence and readiness, there are considerable reservations about the reintroduction of compulsory military service. Critics fear interference with personal freedom and potential disadvantages for the professionalism of the armed forces. The implementation of such a measure would require extensive preparations and considerable financial investment to create adequate training and infrastructure capacities (Deutschlandfunk, 2024).



The discussion is being further intensified by the current security policy tensions. Without the Russian attack on Ukraine and the resulting reassessment of the security situation, the debate about compulsory military service might not have reached the same intensity or urgency. The conflict has not only revived the discussion but has also significantly influenced public opinion on issues of national security and the need for a defence policy that strengthens resilience (Specht, 2023).

Masala (2023) nevertheless argues against compulsory military service, stating that it was already based on an unfair selection mechanism that resembled a lottery at the time of its suspension. In addition, the duration had been reduced to six months, during which conscripts could effectively no longer be taught anything, so that they were merely "hanging around" in the barracks. With today's technical requirements of weapon systems, specialised knowledge is also necessary, which takes at least two years to impart. Setting up the structures required for compulsory military service would involve high costs that would be better spent elsewhere (Masala, 2023).

In contrast, other experts such as Mühle (2023) and Specht (2023) see compulsory military service as a necessary measure to strengthen Germany's defence capabilities.

In addition, the reserve plays a decisive role in the overall defence strategy, and the reintroduction of compulsory military service could serve to quickly cover personnel requirements in times of crisis and at the same time strengthen the civil-military relationship in society (Stakeholders, 2024). This would of course require extensive structural adjustments, including the creation and expansion of training centres specialising in the rapid and efficient basic training of recruits. However, this is a question of political will and not an argument in favour or against (Mühle, 2023).

The Swedish model of compulsory military service, which is constantly being brought into the public debate by Defence Minister Pistorius, focuses on the recruitment of a specific part of each year group based on a comprehensive aptitude and motivation test. This model could potentially also be implemented in Germany, as compulsory military service has not been abolished here, but merely suspended. According to Article 12a of the German Constitution, it is still possible to conscript men from the age of eighteen, which would enable the legal reactivation of compulsory military service without amending the constitution. Selective conscription could be particularly advantageous for personnel management, as the targeted selection of conscripts who fulfil both the necessary physical



and psychological requirements would enable the *Bundeswehr* to build a highly motivated and capable force (Richter, 2023/2024).

The debate on the reintroduction of compulsory military service in Germany thus reflects the need to strengthen the *Bundeswehr's* personnel resources to be able to respond effectively to the modern requirements of national and alliance defence. However, this requires careful consideration of the costs, social acceptance and structural requirements associated with such a measure and, despite slight support for it among the population, is meeting with considerable political resistance both within and outside the current government. However, it can be predicted that as long as the phenomenon of the *Zeitenwende* is discussed as a programme to increase defence capabilities, the associated discussions will remain closely linked to the issue of reintroducing compulsory military service, in whatever form.

5.4. Total Defence

As a direct consequence of the Ukraine-Russia War and the explicit call for an overall defence strategy in the NSS and the VPR 2023, the symposium "Germany. Together. Defend." was held in the form of a public press event. Originally classified as secret, the *OPLAN Deutschland* (OPLAN) was discussed in several panels to make the necessity, urgency, and characteristics of this plan tangible to the public.

The new OPLAN symbolises a remarkable change in German defence strategy, which emphasises comprehensive, nationwide defence readiness. This plan was obviously developed in response to rise of hybrid threats by Russia. According to one representative of the hosting command, Germany is experiencing attacks daily.

Lieutenant General Bodemann, Commander of the Homeland Defence Command (TerrFüKdoBw), underlines the aim of the OPLAN to promote closer networking between the *Bundeswehr* and security authorities, disaster control organisations and industrial companies to ensure a coordinated response in the event of tension and defence (Janssen & Hippert, 2024; dpa, 2024a).

The OPLAN also reflects Germany's geostrategic position in Central Europe and aims to secure the transit routes for allied troops through and over Germany (TerrFüKdoBw, 2024). It covers the protection of German territory and its population, the defence of critical infrastructure and host nation support (TerrFüKdoBw, 2024; Janssen & Hippert, 2024).



The threats addressed by the OPLAN are diverse and reflect the complex nature of modern conflicts. These include fake news and disinformation, cyberattacks, targeted spying and sabotage aimed at disrupting freedom of movement or damaging critical infrastructure (TerrFüKdoBw, 2024; dpa, 2024a; ZEIT ONLINE, 2024). That there is a need for a broader discussion is illustrated by a striking quote during the symposium which shows the necessity and at the same time the lack of awareness of this overall societal defence effort: "We are talking about the defence of an entire society. 80 million are sitting on the spectator's bench and watching 180,000 get it right" (TerrFüKdoBw, 2024).

Close cooperation between military and civilian actors is essential for the effective implementation of the OPLAN. Civil defence and the involvement of civilian companies, especially in the areas of logistics and supply, play a decisive role here (TerrFüKdoBw, 2024; ZEIT ONLINE, 2024). However, the challenges of federalism and the associated diffusion of responsibility at state level make it difficult to implement the plan quickly and effectively in crisis situations (dpa, 2024a; ZEIT ONLINE, 2024).

A special feature of the OPLAN is its dynamism and adaptability since it is a document to be updated every six months with the involvement of the regional *Landeskommandos* (LKdo) and civilian actors. This regular updating ensures that the plan meets the constantly changing threat situations and requirements (TerrFüKdoBw, 2024).

Lieutenant General Bodemann summarises the current situation succinctly: "We are not at war, but we are no longer at peace either." (TerrFüKdoBw, 2024). This statement underlines the urgency with which Germany must adapt its defence strategy in the face of new and unconventional threats. The OPLAN therefore not only stands for a strategic reorientation, but also for the hope of initiating a social discourse on the need for a collective effort in security and defence policy.

5.5. Armament and procurement policy

Regarding the *Zeitenwende* and its implications for *Bundeswehr* procurement, Eßig (2023) poses three central questions that arose after Russia's attack on Ukraine and the resulting geopolitical reassessment. These questions address the essential aspects of procurement in the context of the *Zeitenwende*. Firstly, the decision to initiate procurement measures itself, which was confirmed by the provision of considerable financial resources by the *German Bundestag*. The second question centres on the content of the procurement projects, which is not insignificant for the strategic orientation and effectiveness of the



procurement efforts. Thirdly and finally, the question of how to procure must be answered (Eßig & Glas, 2023).

The *Bundeswehr* faces a challenge in its arms and acquisition that, if successfully met, will enhance its defence capacity. Chancellor Scholz stressed that Germany should "be the main pillar of conventional defence in Europe" and have the "best-armed force in Europe" (Scholz, 2022a).

To achieve these ambitious goals there is a need to rethink and improve the efficiency of the procurement system. The latter is expected to be a core competency of the armed forces that directly supports strategic and operational requirements (Eßig & Glas, 2023). Nevertheless, there are considerable difficulties, such as the lack of material readiness, as previously illustrated in Figure 6 (p. 30), which Masala (2023) criticises. But it must be borne in mind that Germany follows a market economy model in which defence equipment is produced by private companies and not by state institutions. This also means that the *Bundeswehr* is dependent on supplies from outside, which requires strategic management of the supplier base (Eßig & Glas, 2023).

However, the dependence on external suppliers and the market-based approach to procurement also have their limits, especially when historical financial restrictions come into play. The *Bundeswehr* continues to suffer from technical deficiencies and insufficient availability of essential systems such as the Puma infantry fighting vehicle and the NH90 multipurpose helicopter. Modern technologies such as drones are only available to a limited extent, while at the same time there is a lack of adequate stocks of ammunition, spare parts, and operating resources (Eßig & Glas, 2023).

		Date	Deviation in months compared to	
			first parliamentary debate	current contract
Average of 18th armaments report			29	9
1.	A400M	Mai 03	195	47
2.	EUROFIGHTER mit AESA	Mai 88	63	19
3.	K130 2. Los	Jun 17	34	26
4.	PEGASUS (SLWÜA)	Jun 21	20	20
5.	EURODROHNE	Mrz 21	10	0
6.	F35A	Dez 22	0	0
7.	F126	Jun 20	0	0
8.	U212CD	Jun 21	0	0
9.	NH90 MRFH	Nov 20	0	0
10.	STH CH-47F	Jul 23	0	0

Figure 13 – Delays in defence projects

Source: BMVg (2024)



Another problem that Masala addresses is the tendency to strive for so-called "gold-edge solutions" - i.e. the tendency to demand weapon systems and equipment with the highest possible technical specifications, which often goes beyond what is actually necessary and leads to further delays and cost increases and which is collectively depicted in Figures 13 and 14. This practice exacerbates the problems in the procurement process, as it prevents a rapid and flexible response to current security policy challenges (Masala, 2023).

The experts cited above thus state that the *Bundeswehr's* procurement system is dysfunctional. This fact has a social and political dimension, because the negative public and media perception of the procurement processes can lead to reduced support for the necessary provision of additional funds, which is of particular importance regarding the uncertain follow-up financing of the special fund described in 5.2.3.

The war in Ukraine has emphasised the urgency of diversifying and accelerating the *Bundeswehr's* procurement strategies (Bendiek & Bossong, 2022). In this context, Meißner (2023) also points out that an acceleration of procurement cycles is essential. This requires the defence industry to be closely involved in strategic planning and the promotion of innovative approaches. The development and procurement of new technologies must be made more efficient and better adapted to the real operational needs of the *Bundeswehr* (Meißner, 2023) by rethinking traditional procurement procedures, which are characterised by bureaucratic processes, and replacing them with flexible, rapid adjustments (Mölling & Schütz, 2024).

The demand for faster procurement cycles is also reflected in the broad political debate. The *Bundeswehr's* current procurement process is criticised by various experts and politicians as inefficient and overly bureaucratic. Masala (2023) emphasises that bureaucratic obstacles, lengthy procedures (Figure 13), and a culture of risk avoidance mean that necessary equipment and technologies cannot be provided on time, which in turn leads to an increase in costs (Figure 14).



	Date	Deviation in total volume compared to first parliamentary debate in € million	in %	
Total 18th Armaments Report		14.177	20%	
1.	A400M	Mai 03	1.621	18%
2.	EUROFIGHTER mit AESA	Mai 88	9.071	34%
3.	K130 2. Los	Jun 17	521	21%
4.	PEGASUS (SLWÜA)	Jun 21	211	14%
5.	EURODROHNE	Mrz 21	1.392	38%
6.	F35A	Dez 22	0	0%
7.	F126	Jun 20	810	13%
8.	U212CD	Jun 21	396	14%
9.	NH90 MRFH	Nov 20	155	6%
10.	STH CH-47F	Jul 23	0	0%

Figure 14 – Cost increase in defence projects

Source: BMVg (2024)

Politicians Dobrindt and Merz (2024) are therefore calling for a comprehensive reform of armaments and procurement policy to strengthen the strategic and operational capabilities of the *Bundeswehr*. They propose accelerating procurement procedures, making them more transparent and intensifying cooperation with industry. The early involvement of industry in the planning and development phase of new defence projects is considered essential for increasing efficiency (Dobrindt & Merz, 2024).

In response to this criticism, the *Bundeswehr* has already begun to implement significant changes to the procurement process. These reforms are aimed at increasing efficiency and optimising the procurement process. In an interview with the *Handelsblatt* newspaper, the President of the Procurement Office reported an increase in the number of contracts concluded and a strategic simplification of procurement processes. The “*Bundeswehr Procurement Acceleration Act*”⁶ and the “*Acceleration Decree*” have streamlined processes, resulting in considerable time savings and more efficient use of resources (Fasse & Specht, 2024).

Masala (2023) and Zum Felde (2023) emphasise the need for the *Bundeswehr* to have more robust and less complex weapon systems to improve operational readiness and resilience. In particular, they emphasise the importance of systems that are less dependent on advanced computer technology and should be easier to maintain and handle. Moreover, Zum Felde (2023) highlights the importance of adjusting to irregular warfare and prioritizing cyber defence, electronic warfare and intelligence and surveillance technologies.

One major problem that both Masala (2023) and Keller & Schröder (2024) address is the critical situation regarding ammunition stocks. Masala criticises the fact that the

⁶ German: *Bundeswehrbeschaffungsbeschleunigungsgesetz* (BwBBG)



Bundeswehr's current ammunition stocks are only sufficient to last three days instead of the 30 days required by NATO. This assessment is confirmed by Keller & Schröder (2024), who also point to the insufficient industrial capacities in Germany (but also in Europe as a whole), particularly for the production of 155 mm artillery shells. They argue that without significant investment in infrastructure and political measures, it will not be possible to build up capacity.

In response to these challenges, Germany has adapted its policy about what is to be procured. The focus is now increasingly on rapid availability and increasing stocks of critical systems and equipment. The most striking example of this is the rapid procurement of the F-35 to ensure nuclear sharing. According to the current “18th Armaments Report” (BMVg, 2024), a central aspect of the modernisation of air defence includes the procurement and upgrade of systems such as the Patriot and the Arrow system, which are essential to strengthen air defence, especially against missile threats. These systems provide a comprehensive shield against multiple air threats by intercepting both higher-flying and long-range threats.

In the area of land systems, the focus is on extensive modernisation and procurement measures aimed at strengthening the ground forces with state-of-the-art technologies and equipment. This includes the procurement of additional vehicles such as the Puma infantry fighting vehicle and the GTK Boxer. Both systems play a central role both in the mechanisation of the infantry and for building up the medium forces and, in addition to improved armour, also offer increased firepower and improved networking capabilities. The GTK Boxer, a flexibly deployable wheeled vehicle, is being further developed in the role of a heavy weapon carrier to significantly increase the firepower of the infantry. Its modular design enables various configurations that are specifically tailored to the needs of the *Bundeswehr*, including equipping it with heavy weapon platforms for direct fire support in combat scenarios (BMVg, 2024).

Also, Germany is currently experiencing a significant increase in its ammunition production, driven by a initiative and extensive investment by leading German defence companies, as well as a newly introduced practice in the procurement office, which now awards contracts as a complete package. *Rheinmetall*, a key player in this area, has invested heavily in expanding production capacity, as illustrated by the construction of new factories in Niedersachsen and the doubling of powder production capacity at several sites (Seliger, 2024; Tagesschau, 2024).



5.6. Structural adjustments

Lieutenant General Mais emphasises the need to create structures that enable the rapid mobilisation and deployment of robust troops to respond to threats. "We need to adapt our structures to allow the rapid deployment and effective use of our Medium Forces," Mais explained in an interview with the CPM Defence Network (Linnemann, 2024).

In view of this reorganisation, the army developed a new structure to which Mais (2024) refers in following Figure 15.

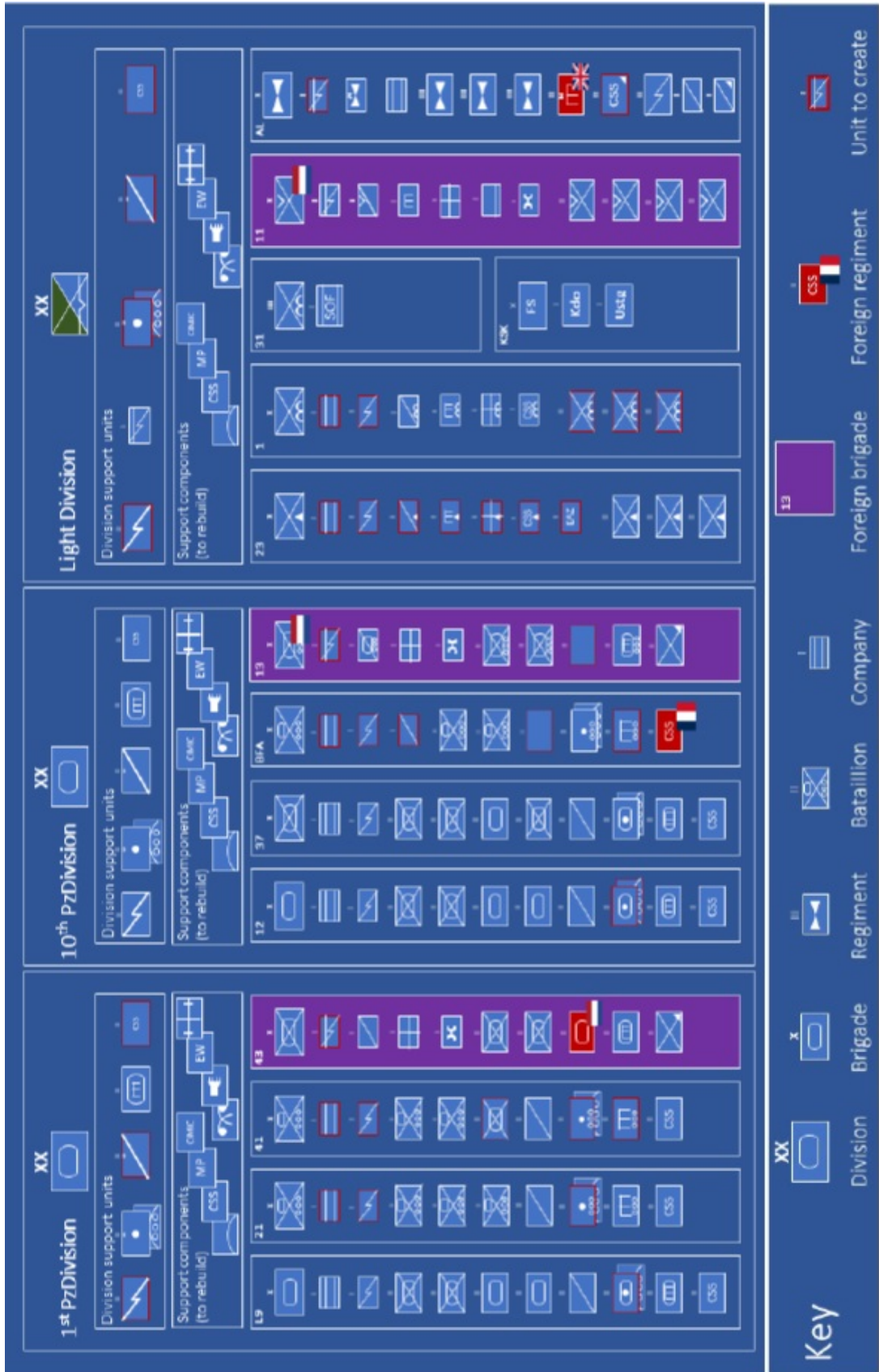


Figure 15 – Initially planned new structure of the German Army in 2023

Source: BMVg (2023) adapted by IFRI (2023)



It provides for three divisions with eight national brigades in a cohesive network. These units are “cold-start capable”, which means that they can be fully operational within a very short time. Three heavy brigades have received special focus: *Panzerbrigade 12*, *Panzergrenadierbrigade 37* and *Panzerlehrbrigade 9*. These units form the backbone of Germany's contribution to NATO commitments and are crucial for rapid response capabilities in the context of national and alliance defence. As part of this restructuring, the 10th Armoured Division is to be known as "Division 2025". This division will initially consist of two German mechanised brigades and possibly a Dutch brigade⁷. The future operational and tactical plans for this division will be tailored specifically to the requirements of the Central European region. Another key aspect of the structural adjustments is the reorganisation of the reserve. In the “Army's Vision”, non-active elements at the unit and sub-unit levels are deeply integrated to support the operational readiness of the active forces with personnel who are already well trained in peacetime, even in the event of a cold start. This includes non-active units at division and brigade level as well as non-active units at battalion level, which are trained under the responsibility of the active unit until operational readiness is achieved. The planning for adapting the troop structures began in close coordination between the Army Command and the Army Development Office. The rough structural adjustments developed are to be adapted in a timely manner with the staggered development of fine structures and will be successively implemented from 2023 onwards (Frank, 2023).

A central aspect of this reorganisation is the introduction of the Medium Forces Brigade type, which is designed as a flexible and fast-reacting military unit. *Panzerbrigade 21 "Lipperland"* was the first of this new category to be restructured and now consists of a mechanised infantry battalion (wheeled), two infantry battalions and specialised support units such as reconnaissance, artillery, engineer, and supply battalions. The command-and-control capability is ensured by a staff and supply company as well as a communications company. Another important area of structural adjustments concerns the modernisation and equipping of the troops. The brigade will be equipped with state-of-the-art vehicles and technologies, including wheeled infantry fighting vehicles, wheeled howitzers, and wheel-based mortar systems. This equipment plays a decisive role in the mobility and rapid deployability of the units. In addition, the integration of wheeled engineer capabilities and other wheel-based systems is planned to strengthen the brigade's

⁷ At the time of finalising this work, this was still pending.



comprehensive capabilities. The *Bundeswehr* has also introduced interim structures with proportional operational readiness to gradually make the units fully operational. This approach allows for flexible integration of new technologies and equipment while building up operational capabilities. Full operational readiness of the first Medium Forces Brigade is planned for 2026, with another full brigade to follow in 2027. However, the structural adjustments pose considerable challenges, particularly in the procurement and integration of modern technologies. The aim is to create a highly mobile and technologically advanced force that can respond effectively to threats. The Medium Forces are seen as the engine of modernisation within the *Bundeswehr* and are central to Germany's strategic realignment in the context of the *Zeitenwende* (BMVg, 2023b).

The structural adjustments are also reflected in the permanent presence of the *Bundeswehr* in Lithuania, Périá-Peigné and Tenenbaum (2023) emphasise. This presence is an integral part of NATO's strategy to secure the eastern flank and at the same time a sign of solidarity with the Baltic states and can be seen as a contribution to strengthening collective security in Europe. The experience gained from this engagement is of great value for the further development of the *Bundeswehr's* military capabilities and strengthens the ties between NATO partners, especially on the eastern flank (Périá-Peigné & Tenenbaum, 2023, pp. 66-67)

However, adjustments must not be limited to the tactical level. As Meißner emphasises, excessive centralism has manifested itself in the organisation of the *Bundeswehr* in the past, which has often led to inefficiencies and slow reaction times. In this respect, a key element of structural adjustments should be the reduction of bureaucracy. The existing central authority structures must therefore be reviewed and aligned to increase the ability to act and effectiveness (Meißner, 2023).

The Minister of Defence's announcement on the reform of the *Bundeswehr* on 4 April 2024, appropriately entitled *Bundeswehr der Zeitenwende*, is the first step in this direction.

One of the most significant structural changes of this reform is the merger of the Homeland Defence Command and the Joint Forces Operations Command (EinsFüKdoBw) into a single Operational Command (OpFüKdoBw). This integration is intended to create a centralised operations centre that provides a common situation picture both for the management of ongoing operations and for decision-making support in the ministry. This step is aimed at reducing duplicate structures and increasing the *Bundeswehr's* reaction speed in crisis situations. Another important adjustment is the elevation of the military organisation



area Cyber and Information Domain Service (CIR) to an independent branch of the armed forces. This decision reflects the growing importance of digital and information-driven warfare. The CIR will not only be crucial for the ongoing digitalisation of the *Bundeswehr* but will also play a central role in the fight against disinformation and cyber threats (Stakeholders, 2024). The previously independent military organization areas of the Joint Support and Enabling Service (SKB) and the *Bundeswehr* Medical Service will be combined into a comprehensive support area. This reorganisation is intended to ensure that all branches of the armed forces can access all support capabilities as required. In addition, contrary to initial considerations, the NBC defence forces, and military police will remain part of this support area and will not be assigned to the army (as still depicted in figure 15). The central management of these resources is the responsibility of the Deputy ChoD of the *Bundeswehr*, which should improve the coordination and availability of critical resources in conflict situations. The civilian organisational areas of the *Bundeswehr* are also to be aligned more closely with the requirements of war capability. This includes preparations for the resumption of compulsory conscription for basic military service, a measure that is considered necessary regardless of the current political debate on compulsory military service to be able to react quickly in the event of a defence or tension situation. The structural adjustments announced by Minister Pistorius are designed to make the *Bundeswehr* more flexible, faster, and comprehensively ready for deployment and reflect a profound understanding of the need for comprehensive modernisation and adaptation to current security policy challenges (Wiegold, 2024, BMVg, 2024).

5.7. Analysis

This critical analysis refers to the previous discussions in sections 5.1 to 5.6 to assess current developments in the areas of defence strategy, personnel management, overall defence, armaments and procurement policy and structural reorientation.

As discussed in section 5.1, NATO remains the most important point of reference for Germany. The enduring and unchanged importance of the NATO partnership ensures stability and provides a clear strategic direction. However, this close relationship places high demands on the flexibility and adaptability of the *Bundeswehr* to meet the dynamic security needs of the Alliance (Section 5.1.3). The interviews with Stakeholders (2024) show that the reorientation of the *Bundeswehr* towards LV/BV is seen as a key realignment that has become increasingly important since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. A hypothetical



question would logically be whether the turning point had not actually already taken place in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea, which the author denies because the annexation manifested a lower quality of threat to the alliance than in 2022 and the geopolitical conditions were also different in 2014 because there was no need to doubt the American commitment to NATO beforehand (Riecke, 2024).

As outlined in section 5.2, the increase in the defence budget and the creation of a Special Fund shows a willingness to invest in modernising and strengthening the *Bundeswehr*. The former Vice Chief of the German army emphasises that the 100 billion Euro provided to eliminate urgent material shortages are "the most visible and absolutely necessary step" (Kammerer 2024). These measures are crucial to ensure long-term and sustainable funding and to meet the growing security policy requirements. However, the challenge remains to secure continuous and sufficient funding to ensure the effectiveness of these measures, particularly in view of the uncertain follow-up funding discussed in section 5.2.3.

As explained in section 5.3, demographic change represents the greatest challenge in personnel. The *Bundeswehr* is faced with a shrinking pool of potential recruits, and there are no convincing strategies as to how the target of 203,000 soldiers can be achieved without reintroducing compulsory military service (Section 5.3.2). Kammerer (2024), on the other hand, notes that the abolition of compulsory military service "was not a mistake, but long overdue" and advocates a professionalised volunteer army. However, the question of a possible reintroduction of compulsory military service in Germany is the subject of intense debate, as can be seen from the expert interviews (App E). The arguments range from categorical rejection to conditional support, with opinions being strongly influenced by security policy, social and economic considerations. Some experts are in favour of the reintroduction of compulsory military service to credibly strengthen national defence capabilities and build up sufficient personnel reserves. They emphasise that conscription could be particularly useful for tasks that do not necessarily have to be carried out by highly qualified soldiers and that it could help to strengthen social cohesion and promote identification with the state. Other voices are sceptical about the reintroduction of compulsory military service due to a lack of faith in its political feasibility. Alternatives and modern approaches, such as targeted and offensive recruitment based on the Swedish model, combined with a comprehensive professionalisation and modernisation of the armed forces, are preferred by some experts. They suggest that it would be more appropriate to make the



Bundeswehr more flexible and focus on its core tasks instead of returning to general conscription.

At the symposium "Germany. Together. Defend.", it became clear that although there is a robust plan for Total Defence, the challenges in implementing it have been recognised and can only be overcome together - by civilians and the military. In the interview with Kammerer (2024), the German general also emphasises the need to revitalise civil defence and protect critical infrastructure to ensure resilience to disruptions. However, the persistent question of how the extensive plans is to be implemented without sufficient personnel remains unanswered (section 5.4).

The faster procurement processes, in particular through the acquisition of market-available materials such as the F-35, show that the *Bundeswehr* is able to react promptly to current security policy challenges. This shift and the acceleration of procurement are positive developments that contribute to the modernisation of the *Bundeswehr* (Section 5.5).

The creation of the fourth branch of the CIR as part of the *Bundeswehr* reform is a significant step, which is also evident from the interviews with Stakeholders (2024). However, the decision to downgrade the SKB and the Medical Service to support areas without giving the army direct control over these resources contradicts the demand for a more effective and war-capable *Bundeswehr* (Section 5.6), as also criticised by Kammerer (2024). From the author's point of view, this is a severe setback for a consequent implementation of the *Zeitenwende* as it runs counter to the army's intentions to increase operational efficiency.

Another example of the challenges within the *Bundeswehr* is the restructuring and deployment of a brigade in Lithuania. Although this step should be seen as necessary and welcome, Kammerer (2024) criticises the way in which it was implemented:

Logic would dictate to take one of the existing mechanised brigades in Germany and re-station it in Lithuania. But that would have meant to close a number of bases in our country. The political will for this step was not there. As a result, a new brigade is being created, carved out of the substance of the forces in Germany leaving hollow structures within an already under-equipped and under-manned Army. (Kammerer, 2024)



This criticism shows that the *Zeitenwende* is hampered in practice by political considerations and structural inertia, which undermines the effectiveness and speed of the necessary military adjustments.

The analysis in sections 5.1 to 5.6 shows that the *Bundeswehr* is endeavouring to meet security policy requirements. There has been clear progress, but significant challenges remain, particularly in the areas of personnel and the defence budget, which urgently need to be addressed to ensure the long-term effectiveness and operational readiness of the *Bundeswehr*.

5.8. Conclusion

The fifth chapter presented an in-depth analysis of current developments and challenges facing the *Bundeswehr* in various areas, which were examined in the light of Germany's new strategic orientation. The analysis of the areas of defence strategy, defence budget, personnel management, overall defence, armament, and procurement policy as well as structural reorientation has provided key insights.

The defence strategy clearly formulates the focus on national and alliance defence with NATO as the most important reference point and identifies Russia as the most significant threat to which the entire armed forces must be geared. The increase in the defence budget by the creation of the special fund is a key initiative for strengthening defence capabilities. Nevertheless, it must be ensured that the funding is sustainable and sufficient to support long-term projects and the modernisation of equipment. The challenges in the area of personnel require innovative solutions for recruiting and retaining qualified personnel. The *Bundeswehr* must step up its efforts to be perceived as an attractive employer.

The increased focus on Total Defence and the integration of civilian resources and capabilities into the defence strategy are crucial. These approaches must be further developed and complemented by practicable implementation strategies to strengthen resilience to diverse threats. The *Bundeswehr* faces the challenge of streamlining and accelerating its procurement processes. It is important that new technologies are integrated quickly and that procurement procedures are organised efficiently to increase operational readiness. The *Bundeswehr's* structural adjustments are in line with these considerations, but they face unresolved personnel and financial problems.

Thus, how has the role of the German Armed Forces changed within Germany's new strategic orientation (DQ3)? The role of the *Bundeswehr* of the *Zeitenwende* has



changed in that it now consistently and proactively sees itself as an important pillar of defence on NATO's eastern flank, reflecting both national and alliance interests under the changed global security conditions. This reorientation emphasises the need for an integrated defence capability that addresses both traditional and new forms of threat and adopts a comprehensive security perspective. The *Bundeswehr* is currently adapting to the new security policy realities but faces the ongoing task of continuously evaluating and adapting its structures, processes, and capacities.



6. Conclusions

This research adopted a qualitative analysis, emphasizing document review and interviews. The primary sources included publicly available government statements, policy documents, and expert interviews, providing a comprehensive understanding of Germany's strategic realignment in response to the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

The analysis revealed both shifts and continuities in Germany's defence and security policy, primarily characterized by increased military spending, the German pivot to the East, an unchanged commitment to NATO, and the formulation of a National Security Strategy. These adjustments signify a departure from previous approaches, largely influenced by Germany's recognition of the heightened security environment and the need to bolster national and collective defence capabilities.

This military thesis contributes to the broader understanding of the concept of the *Zeitenwende* beyond Germany's borders. It highlights the challenges and necessary actions associated with this strategic pivot, providing a detailed overview of developments that other nations, especially non-German speaking allies, might emulate or learn from in their own security assessments and strategic planning.

The research was limited by its reliance on non-classified documents and public sources. While the interviews helped to deepen the insights, the absence of classified information might have omitted a layer of depth in understanding the full scope of strategic deliberations and decisions within the German government and military.

Future research could explore the impact of the implemented reforms on the German Armed Forces, including aspects like conscription, procurement optimization, and capability development. Additionally, studies could assess how other NATO members, such as Portugal, can synergize with Germany's strategies to bolster their own defence mechanisms.

In order to answer the central question **how Germany's has strategically realigned in response to the Ukraine-Russia war (CQ)**, it was necessary to look back to the time before. Until 2022, Germany's policy was strongly characterised by a geo-economic strategy that prioritised economic power and interests over military and geopolitical ambitions. However, this stance has proven insufficient, especially considering Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine. The analyses show that until the outbreak of war, German strategies demonstrated a reluctance to develop military capabilities and a preference for economic integration and diplomatic solutions.



The publication of the NSS marked a turning point by highlighting a strategic reorientation and a stronger emphasis on Germany's defence preparedness and military strengthening. This strategy explicitly recognises Russia as a direct threat and emphasises the need for Germany's military capabilities. The NSS reflects a clear departure from the previous geo-economic orientation and refocuses on a holistic defence strategy that integrates civilian and military measures.

The *Zeitenwende* therefore also has a logical impact on the role of the *Bundeswehr* and calls for a comprehensive modernisation of the Armed Forces. The focus is on improving defence capabilities against hybrid and conventional threats and increasing operational readiness. These measures depict an endeavour to position Germany, although facing financial uncertainty and recruitment problems, as a strong and reliable partner within NATO and the EU.



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Annex A – The Interview Guide

However, if you wish anonymity and confidentiality in your identification, the data from your interview will be sufficiently anonymized so that it can be processed without compromising the original source.

Since only freely accessible sources are used for the thesis, your contribution is invaluable for me personally, but also for helping the *Instituto Universitario Militar de Portugal* to understand and categorise current developments in connection with the German *Zeitenwende*.


Thank you very much for your availability and significant contribution.

Identification of the interviewee:

Name: _____
 Position/Background: _____

Questions

Please answer the questions in items 1 to 5 in full. The respective sub-questions are intended to help structure the process. The questions can be answered in German or English.



INSTITUTO UNIVERSITÁRIO MILITAR
 DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDOS PÓS-GRADUADOS
 CURSO DE ESTADO-MAIOR – CONJUNTO
 2023/2024

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Zeitenwende – Strategic realignment in the face of war: Implications of the Ukraine-Russia conflict for Germany

Background

This semi-structured interview script was written as part of the final thesis for the Portuguese General Staff Course 2023/2024 by Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Lennartz and relates directly to the topic of the *Zeitenwende* understood as a historical marker, as a wake-up call, as the title of a political programme and, quite simply, as the designation of a strategic paradigm shift. The general research objective of this thesis is to investigate in what form and to what extent the aforementioned reorientation has been or is being implemented. To this end, the following specific research objectives (SO) were defined:

SO 1: Categorising Germany's foreign and security strategy from German reunification in 1990 to 2022.

SO 2: Analyse the most current German strategic documents to understand how they have been adapted to the new geopolitical situation and the implications of these adaptations.

SO 3: Examine the role of the German Armed Forces in the context of strategic realignment, considering selected aspects.

The interview data is used solely and exclusively to carry out this research, and your participation is a significant asset to the quality of the results obtained.

It is intended that the content analysis of the interview will be appended to the work and mentioned in the bibliography, so that it can be a source for citations throughout the text.

Figure 16 – The interview guide sent out to the experts on 07 April 2024

Source: Author (2024)



Appendix A – Geopolitics and- strategy

Geopolitics can be conceptualised in different ways. The perspective on geopolitics depends on the theoretical basis and the prevailing global power relations at the time the perspective is adopted.

Thus, geopolitics can be described as a science of international relations that uses geography, politics, and history to understand the motivations of states' actions (Tuathail et al., 1998). It can also be defined as the search for relationships between common types of political behaviour and different geographical areas, or as a science that studies the territorial relationships of political processes. Thus, it seeks to study the constants and variables of the space accessible to humans and to project this geographical knowledge into the development and activity of political science. Therefore, geopolitics can offer a dynamic and sequential analysis that attempts to predict phenomena in the short term based on geographical conditions (Santos, 2007a).

These diverse perspectives and definitions of geopolitics lead us to a related but distinct concept: geostrategy. Here the focus shifts from theoretical analysis to a practice-orientated application of geographical and political insights.

Geopolitics and geostrategy can be understood as analytical tools for understanding the relationships between geographical factors, political processes, and strategic considerations. These concepts are relevant not only for states, but also for non-state actors. They help in the formulation of strategies aimed at achieving long-term goals (Martins, 1996, p. 30).

While geostrategy sheds light on the practical implementation of geopolitical insights, it is worth looking at the historical evolution of the term 'geopolitics' itself to understand its roots and its development over time.

The term "geopolitics" was originally coined at the end of the 19th century and developed into a discourse that combines geographical and political considerations. Initially, geopolitics was closely associated with the description of Western imperialism and Nazi policy ("*Lebensraum*") by theorists such as Mackinder and Haushofer. During the Cold War, geopolitics served as an instrument for describing the global conflict between the Soviet Union and the USA. The Truman Doctrine and the Brezhnev Doctrine undoubtedly fall into this category. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, geopolitics again gained new significance. Represented by theorists such as Huntington (1993) or political practitioners such as George Bush (1992), it became increasingly concerned with global challenges such



as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, environmental problems and even civilisational fault lines (Tuathail et. al, 1998).

The historical development of geopolitics, characterised by theories and events, leads us to more modern concepts and interpretations that reflect current global challenges and geopolitical dynamics.

Flint (2022) identifies several key concepts that are relevant in relation to geopolitical strategies, such as geographical concepts, the role of geopolitical actors or networks. Thanks to these concepts, an examination of the interrelation between politics and geography can help to understand the uniqueness of places and their global connections (Flint, 2022).

These modern approaches to geopolitics, which cover a broad spectrum of perspectives and challenges, are particularly relevant for analysing current geopolitical events and structures, such as the Ukraine-Russia war.

Geopolitics can be seen as a means of providing simple explanations for a complex world. It is an important part of "human geography", which simply means that it deals with the relationship between people and their environment and offers a spatial perspective on political events. There are different approaches to geopolitics that have different perspectives and emphases, such as classical, critical, and feminist geopolitics. Their history is closely linked to the development of states and the understanding of global politics in the 20th century. Classical geopolitics is experiencing a renaissance in the modern world, especially in relation to the portrayal of states such as China or Russia as geopolitical threats (Flint, 2022).

The Ukraine-Russia war since 2022 emphasises the dynamics and changeability of the global, but also spatially limited, geopolitical structure. Models used to describe these dynamics include Modelski's (1987) model of "world leadership" and Wallerstein's (1979, 1984) "world system theory".

However, regarding the current research project, models such as those described above are only applicable to a limited extent. They are historical, descriptive models that interpret a large amount of historical data within a simplified framework. They are useful for introducing the idea of a geopolitical structure and providing a context for geopolitical events. However, such historical and descriptive models are subject to the dilemma of historical determinism. The fact that Modelski and Wallerstein have identified cyclical patterns of world leadership or hegemony in the past does not allow the prediction that, for example, the decline of the US or the rise of China is inevitable or predetermined.



Nevertheless, they provide a useful perspective from which to view current geopolitical changes and challenges, even if they do not predict specifically what will happen in the future (Flint, 2022, pp. 227–229).

To apply these concepts to Germany's strategy in dealing with the threat from Russia, could contribute to knowledge gain in different areas of application. For example, Germany's unique geographic characteristics, such as its location in Europe and its historical and current relations with Russia, are crucial to understanding its geopolitical strategies. However, a purely geographical study would not be sufficient. Germany must also be considered as a geopolitical actor that interacts not only at the state level, but also within organisations such as the EU or NATO, which in turn constitute international networks.

Thus, while geopolitics offers a profound understanding of global power relations and their historical roots, it is equally crucial to consider the role of strategic studies in translating these relations into practical and strategic applications.



Appendix B – Strategic Studies

Strategic studies is an interdisciplinary field focussing on strategic logic as a transversal phenomenon of social reality. It deals with the science and art developed by social actors striving to acquire and consolidate power. Beside traditional aspects as resources or size of the population (Tellis et. Al, 2001) key themes include deterrence (Brodie, 1959) decision-making processes, information management, alliances, networks and the influence of knowledge, innovation, and technology on national power structuring. The studies recognise that social processes such as cooperation, competition and conflict can co-exist and use history as an example. These studies focus on the present and consider the historical context and prospects of social actors (Graça, 2014).

While these studies cover a wide range of topics, one focus is on practical application in the field of security policy.

Strategic studies is not a self-sustaining field, but a practical subject focussing on the means-ends relationships that political bodies seek to manage regarding security. One conclusion is that despite the complexity and unpredictability of the future, strategic studies can contribute to strategic planning by narrowing the assumptions and explaining the structure of security challenges (Gray, 1992).

These practical applications of strategic studies have profound geopolitical implications. However, despite their historical development, strategic studies are not exclusively focussed on military matters. In peacetime, they reflect a non-armed conflict reality in which political, economic, and cultural factors intersect. In the 1970s and 1980s, strategy also made strong inroads into the fields of corporate governance and public policy, leading to a reflection on competition and the resulting non-armed conflictuality. These approaches were discussed in journals such as the "Strategic Management Journal" and the "Journal of Economics and Management Strategy" and expanded the spectrum of strategic studies to include areas such as strategic decision-making, competition, alliances, networks, mergers and acquisitions, culture, innovation, and globalisation.

After 11 September 2001, the picture of strategic thinking on national security in the USA and Europe changed fundamentally. New threats, in particular transnational terrorism, moved centre stage. This led to an adaptation to a new concept of national security on a global level that takes political, economic, social, and cultural factors into account. The flexible disciplinary boundary of strategic studies became even more intertwined with other



area studies, leading to an epistemological impossibility of drawing clear boundaries between these fields (Graça, 2014).

In the introduction to their reader, Mahnken et al. (2008) define strategic studies as a field concerned with the application of theory to practical problems in international security and modern warfare. Conflicts are a subject of academic enquiry in strategic studies and a crucial component of strategy is winning these conflicts. It is important to emphasise that war, as the most violent form of conflict, is not just senseless violence, but an instrument for achieving political goals (Mahnken et al, 2008).

Strategic studies usually use case studies to gain knowledge. The resulting theory can then provide a toolkit for analysing strategic problems and training strategic thinking.

Within the broad spectrum of strategic studies, the focus is on specific challenges and the art of strategy formation - an aspect that is of crucial importance for countries like Germany in their confrontation with global threats.

Gray discusses the challenges and complexities of strategizing, particularly in the context of military and political history. He emphasises that successful strategy requires both practical knowledge and a deep understanding of history and current geopolitical dynamics. Gray emphasises that despite technological advances and theoretical insights, the core challenges of strategy remain, such as the unpredictability of conflict and the difficulty of translating theoretical principles into practical applications (Gray, 2008, pp. 392–397).

About Germany's strategy in dealing with the threat from Russia, Gray's comments on strategic studies are of relevance. Germany faces the challenge of finding a balance between diplomatic, economic, and military measures to respond to the Russian threat. Gray's emphasis on the importance of historical understanding and the need to combine theory and practice point to the need for Germany to consider its historical experience and current geopolitical realities to develop an effective strategy. It is also important to recognise that despite advanced technologies, the unpredictability and complexity of security threats remain, requiring flexibility and adaptability in strategic planning.

The specific challenges that Germany faces in the context of the Russian threat could include the need for a multidimensional strategy that includes both defensive and diplomatic elements, as well as consideration of the economic linkages and dependencies between Germany and Russia. Lessons from the past and the current geopolitical situation could guide Germany in formulating a balanced and effective response to the Russian threat and the "turning point" proclaimed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Baylis et al., 2019).



Appendix C –Model of Analysis

Chart 1 – Model of Analysis

Topic	Zeitenwende - Strategic realignment in the face of war: Implications of the Ukraine-Russia conflict for Germany				
Subject of Study	The strategic reorientation of German security and defence policy in the context of the Ukraine-Russia conflict and the resulting implications for the <i>Bundeswehr</i> .				
Research Problem	Main Objective (MO)	Analyse Germany's strategic realignment in the context of the Ukraine-Russia war, focusing specifically on the German Armed Forces.			
	Central Question (CQ)	How has Germany's strategically realigned in response to the Ukraine-Russia war?			
Limitation	Time	Space	Content		
	1990 - 2024	Germany	Defence and Security Policy		
Methodology	Strategy:		Research Design:		
	Qualitative		Case Study		
Specific Objectives (SO)	Derived Questions (DQ)	Concepts	Dimensions	Indicators	Data Collection
SO1: Analyse the German Policy from 1990 until the <i>Zeitenwende</i> in 2022.	DQ1: How can Germany's strategy be characterized until the <i>Zeitenwende</i> in 2022?	Geopolitics and -strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical context • PMESI • Security policy environment • Alliances and partnerships • doctrinal considerations • military capabilities • structure • armament and procurement • personnel • finance • readiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time frames of important political or military events • Institutional and legislative changes in the field of security policy • Key documents and guidelines that mark the development process. • Identified threats and alliances • Changes in the allocation of resources for defence and security • Media coverage and public discourse on security issues • defence budget • equipment • organisational structures • development of new doctrines • reforms to chains of command and control 	<p>(exploratory interviews)</p> <p>Documentary analysis</p> <p>Open semi-structured expert interviews</p>
SO2: Analyse the most current German strategic documents to understand how they have been adapted to the new geopolitical situation and the implications of these adaptations.	DQ2: What changes have been made to Germany's latest strategic documents to adapt them to the new geopolitical situation?	Strategic Studies			
SO3: Examine the role of the German Armed Forces in the context of strategic realignment, considering selected aspects.	DQ3: How has the role of the German Armed Forces changed within Germany's new strategic orientation?	German Strategic Documents Wandel durch Handel-Change by Trade Friedensdividende-Peace Dividend Grand Strategy Total Defence			

Source: Author (2024)



Appendix D – Overview questions of semi-structured interviews

Table 1 – Questions of semi-structured interviews

Category	Question	Related sub-questions
German foreign and security policy from reunification to 2022	How would you assess Germany's foreign and security policy regarding its geopolitical situation between 1990 and 2022?	<p>a. To what extent was German foreign and security policy characterized by a clear strategic line until 2022?</p> <p>b. In your view, is a strategy recognizable and if so, how would you describe it?</p> <p>c. In your opinion, were there any problems in strategic thinking? If so, what were or are the reasons for this?</p> <p>d. In your view, is there an independent "community" ("think tanks") of experts in the field of foreign and security policy, especially defence strategy, who actively play a vital role in the formulation of a strategy? Can you give examples of exchanges or consultations between security experts and policy makers that have shaped policy up to 2022?</p>
Understanding of the Zeitenwende	How do you interpret the term Zeitenwende in the context of German security and defence policy?	<p>a. Is the term a historical statement, a wake-up call to society, the heading of a program, something that addresses several aspects or, in your view, something completely different?</p> <p>b. Is the term suitable for aptly describing Germany's strategic reorientation if this exists in your view?</p> <p>c. What impression do you think the term has on policymaking, society, and the Bundeswehr?</p>
National Security Strategy	How do you personally categorise the National Security Strategy of 2023?	<p>a. Do you consider the National Security Strategy to be fundamentally new and a "step forward" or a continuation of existing approaches (e.g., Weißbuch)?</p> <p>b. Are there any aspects of the National Security Strategy that you think should be criticised or given special attention?</p> <p>c. Do you agree with the statement that the National Security Strategy gives the military dimension, especially the Bundeswehr, a more prominent role than other dimensions?</p> <p>d. How do you assess the fact that it was not possible to agree on a National Security Council during the development process of the National Security Strategy? Is this a missed opportunity or negligible? If you judge that the National Security Council would have been an asset, what role would you expect it to play or what added value do you see in it?</p>
Consequences and implications for the Bundeswehr	How do you see the first steps of the recently announced Bundeswehr reform?	<p>a. Considering your experience with previous Bundeswehr reforms, how would you categorise the current one (extent, ambition, challenges)?</p> <p>b. Are there specific lessons that can be learnt from the Ukraine-Russia war, especially regarding the Bundeswehr (capabilities, structure, doctrinal development, mindset)?</p> <p>c. If the return to national and alliance defence is already topical following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, what is the new quality in the transformation of the Bundeswehr der Zeitenwende?</p> <p>d. How do you categorise the term of Kriegstüchtigkeit, which is intricately linked to the term of a Zeitenwende? "Deutschland muss wieder kriegstüchtig werden.". In your view, what is needed to classify armed forces as fit for war?</p>
Conscription or Compulsory Service	What do you think about the debate on the reintroduction of conscription or the introduction of compulsory universal service?	<p>a. In your opinion, is there a Zeitenwende especially in the Bundeswehr without compulsory military service?</p> <p>b. In your opinion, can the regular personnel requirements of the armed forces be met without a form of compulsory military service?</p> <p>c. In retrospect, was the suspension of compulsory military service in 2011 a mistake?</p>

Source: Author (2024)



Appendix E – Summary of the Interviews

Table 2 – Summary of the coded transcribed interview elements

Category	Summary of the coded transcribed interview elements
Implications from UKR-RUS War	<p>A key finding is the importance of shortening the sensor-to-shooter time and the extensive use of unmanned systems for both reconnaissance and attack purposes, which was observed both in the air and at sea. It also emphasises the need to be able to defend against hostile unmanned systems and the importance of the electromagnetic spectrum and air defence at all levels.</p> <p>The interviews show that these technical developments have led to intensive discussion at ministerial level, such as by the head of the planning/management staff, Major General Dr Christian Freuding, and the formation of a drone task force under Brigadier General Wolfgang Jordan. These steps are examples of direct responses to the challenges of the conflict.</p> <p>Furthermore, the reorganisation of the Bundeswehr is directly linked to the influence of war. The intention to achieve war-readiness is cited as the driving force behind this reorganisation. In particular, the establishment of the LITAUEN brigade and the planned build-up to "Division 2025" and the acquisition of new, innovative solutions with artificial intelligence are cited as examples of the proactive and innovative response to the new images of war.</p> <p>One stakeholder emphasises the need to learn from the UKR war and to analyse and anticipate a possibly changed and future image of war. The need for new responses to the challenges illustrated by the "victory of fire over manoeuvre" is emphasised. The topics of cyber warfare, ground-to-air defence, UAVs of all kinds and casualty replacement (personnel and materiel) are highlighted as key learning areas.</p> <p>The creation of the brigade in Lithuania is described as necessary and logical, although it led to existing structures in Germany being weakened. This shows the tension between military necessity and political will, which manifests itself in the decision not to close existing bases in Germany, but instead to build new structures, which in turn further strains the already scarce resources of the Bundeswehr.</p>



Role of the German Armed Forces	<p>It is emphasised that the Bundeswehr reforms, in particular the creation of the cyber and information space as a new "branch of the armed forces", are seen as a logical consequence of the increasing digitalisation of the battlefield and modern warfare. The merging of commands and the streamlining of structures are seen as positive, but not revolutionary steps. The missed opportunity to reform the SKB in such a way that certain parts, such as the military police and NBC defence force, are reintegrated more closely into the armed forces to ensure more efficient preparation and responsiveness in times of crisis is criticised.</p> <p>The suspension of compulsory military service is the subject of controversial debate. Some experts see the abolition of compulsory military service as a mistake and argue for its reintroduction to strengthen personnel reserves and ensure a comprehensive defence capability. Others argue that professionalisation and concentration on a volunteer army are more effective and better meet today's requirements. It is pointed out that compulsory military service is hardly accepted by society today and that an attractive, modern, and well-equipped Bundeswehr is needed instead to attract qualified volunteers.</p> <p>The experts emphasise that the Bundeswehr does not operate in isolation from society but must be understood as part of it. The perception of a threat and the willingness of society to get involved in defence are decisive for the effectiveness of the armed forces. It is proposed that local militia systems and the involvement of civilian organisations such as the Federal Agency for Technical Relief and the volunteer fire brigade strengthen resilience and the protection of critical infrastructure.</p> <p>The need to react to a changing image of war and to adapt the armed forces accordingly is seen as central. The reforms should not just meet new challenges by chance but should be strategically planned to transform the Bundeswehr into a flexible armed force fit for war in the 21st century. Overcoming entrenched thought structures is seen as an essential prerequisite for the success of the reforms.</p>
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<p>Role of the German Armed Forces > Refocus on self- and alliance defence</p>	<p>The refocusing of the Bundeswehr on national and alliance defence (LV/BV) is seen in the interviews as a key strategic reorientation that has become increasingly important, especially since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The experts address the need to organise and train the armed forces in such a way that they can respond effectively to threats that directly affect their own country or alliance partners.</p> <p>Holistic view and operational readiness: A central aspect of the discussion is the holistic view of the armed forces, which includes not only the military units, but also the associated authority and command structures. It is emphasised that effective national and alliance defence requires the seamless integration and cooperation of all elements involved. The principle of "train as you fight", i.e. organising the training and basic readiness of troops in such a way that they correspond to real operational conditions, is seen as essential for war fitness and rapid deployment capability ("cold start capability").</p> <p>The return to focussing on LV/BV is described by some experts as not yet fully recognisable. Continuous adaptation and review of structures and processes is required to ensure that the Bundeswehr is always fit for war and ready for deployment.</p>
<p>Role of the German Armed Forces > Personnel</p>	<p>Stakeholders discuss various aspects of the personnel situation, including volunteer recruitment, the need to build up reserves and the tensions between civilian labour markets and military requirements.</p> <p>It is emphasised that the Bundeswehr has no problems finding enough volunteers in traditionally military functions such as paratroopers and mountain troops. The challenges tend to arise in areas where civilian labour market opportunities are comparable or better, particularly in logistics and IT services. This makes it necessary for the Bundeswehr to offer an attractive overall package that includes not only monetary remuneration, but also other aspects of job quality.</p> <p>Compulsory military service and its alternatives: The debate surrounding the reintroduction of compulsory military service shows that a return to compulsory service is not currently being sought politically or socially. According to some interviewees the Chancellor and other political leaders have made it clear that there will be no return to a conscript army in the traditional sense.</p> <p>The importance of a strong reserve is emphasised.</p> <p>In summary, the interviews with stakeholders reveal a critical view of the Bundeswehr's personnel situation, emphasising both the need to make military careers attractive and the strategic importance of building up reserves and emergency preparedness.</p>



<p>Role of the German Armed Forces > Personnel > Mistake of suspending conscription</p>	<p>The abolition of compulsory military service in Germany in 2011 is viewed from different perspectives in the interviews, whereby opinions on the appropriateness of this decision are divided. Some experts argue that the suspension of compulsory military service was not a bad decision, but a necessary adjustment to the changed geopolitical and social conditions after the Cold War. They emphasise that conscription in its former form was inefficient, as it only covered a small proportion of the population and offered many opportunities to avoid service. Furthermore, they argue that a professional volunteer army would be better suited to meet modern military requirements and that conscription in its former form was no longer constitutionally and structurally tenable.</p> <p>Other voices in the material see the suspension of compulsory military service as a mistake. They argue that the cancellation of conscription has significantly weakened the Bundeswehr's recruitment base and undermined the armed forces' ability to respond effectively to national security challenges. It is argued that a retained but reformed conscription system, geared towards a smaller, highly professionalised force, could have provided the necessary personnel support while allowing savings to be made. It is also argued that the political decision to suspend conscription was also driven by short-term financial considerations, which led to structural problems in the long term.</p> <p>Between the lines:</p> <p>Some comments suggest that the political and military leadership at the time of the suspension of conscription may have underestimated the long-term implications of this decision. It is suggested that the assessment of the situation at the time may have been naïve and that a greater emphasis on strengthening the reserve and a comprehensive reform of the military structure would have been necessary to effectively equip the armed forces for future challenges.</p>
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<p>Role of the German Armed Forces > Personnel > Necessity of Conscription</p>	<p>Arguments in favour of reintroducing compulsory military service: Some experts argue that a reintroduction of compulsory military service is necessary to credibly strengthen the overall national defence capability and build up sufficient personnel reserves. Conscription could be particularly useful for tasks that do not necessarily have to be carried out by highly qualified soldiers. It is also emphasised that compulsory service could help to strengthen social cohesion and promote identification with the state.</p> <p>Arguments against the reintroduction of compulsory military service: Other voices in the interviews are sceptical about the reintroduction of compulsory military service. They emphasise that the motivation of young people to perform compulsory service is no greater than in previous decades and that without a perceived threat, willingness remains low. It is also pointed out that the Bundeswehr cannot compete directly with the private sector for personnel and that financial incentives alone would not be enough to attract enough volunteers. In addition, the declining birth rate is seen as a problem for recruitment, as is the economy's need for labour, which competes with the recruitment of soldiers.</p> <p>Alternatives and modern approaches: Some experts are in favour of alternative models, such as targeted and aggressive recruitment based on the Swedish model, combined with comprehensive professionalisation and modernisation of the armed forces. They suggest that making the Bundeswehr more flexible and focussing on its core mission would be more expedient than a return to general conscription. The idea of a broader social service, in which military service would only be one option among many, is also mentioned.</p>
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<p>Role of the German Armed Forces > Doctrine and Capabilities</p>	<p>A central theme is the need to integrate modern developments such as unmanned systems on land and in the air, artificial intelligence, and advanced communication systems into the military doctrine of the Bundeswehr. It is emphasised that it would be a mistake to simply replicate the armed forces of the 1980s with new weaponry. Rather, the focus should be on utilising technological advances to improve operational capabilities and increase the efficiency and responsiveness of the Bundeswehr.</p> <p>The need to develop new doctrines and ways of thinking is seen as crucial for the transformation of the Bundeswehr. These new approaches should be geared towards making the Bundeswehr more comprehensive and holistic, which means that both defence capabilities and alliance commitments need to be rethought. The change in doctrine also reflects an adaptation to multi-domain operations, which emphasises the simultaneous and integrated use of different military domains (land, air, sea, cyber and space).</p> <p>Specific reference is made to the development and establishment of IAMD (Integrated Air and Missile Defence) capabilities, including systems such as IRIS-T and Arrow. Furthermore, the command of a brigade in Lithuania is cited as an example of the practical implementation of new strategic concepts.</p>
<p>Role of the German Armed Forces > Structure</p>	<p>CIR: The introduction of cyber and information service as a new "branch of the armed forces" is seen as a logical consequence of the digitalisation of the battlefield. This adaptation is intended to strengthen the Bundeswehr in modern warfare. However, there are also concerns regarding the concrete implementation and integration into the existing military structures.</p> <p>Reforms to command structures:</p> <p>The merging of various commands is seen as a step in the right direction, but not radical enough to achieve significant improvements. The main criticism is that many of the structural adjustments are only superficial and do not address deeper structural problems.</p> <p>Criticism of the implementation of the reforms: A recurring theme in the interviews is the criticism that the reforms are not far-reaching enough and that the Bundeswehr continues to be burdened by outdated structures and ways of thinking. The "turnaround" is seen as a necessary but insufficiently implemented initiative. The experts criticise the fact that real change is being held back by internal resistance and a lack of political assertiveness.</p>



National Security Strategy	<p>The experts' statements reflect a wide range of opinions and assessments that highlight the strengths and weaknesses of this comprehensive document. The experts recognise that the NSS is intended as a holistic approach that encompasses all departments of the Federal Government and is not only supported by the Ministry of Defence. This marks a significant step forward in the way security policy is formulated in Germany. Nevertheless, there are also significant points of criticism, which focus primarily on the specific content and implementation of the strategy.</p> <p>Holistic approach: The NSS is seen as a step forward as it defines security policy as a cross-departmental task for the entire federal government. This should lead to an integrated view of all security-relevant aspects.</p> <p>Interdepartmental approach: The strategy promotes a joint approach by the various ministries, which is seen as an important development towards a more coherent security policy. A first: As the first document of its kind in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, the NSS represents an important milestone that puts the policy of integrated security on a new formal footing.</p> <p>Weaknesses of the NSS: The strategy is criticised for being formulated too generally and at the same time containing contradictory objectives without setting clear priorities. This leaves room for arbitrary interpretation, which makes the actual strategic direction unclear.</p> <p>Lack of a National Security Council: Many experts see it as a missed opportunity that no National Security Council has been established to effectively coordinate the various departments and drive the implementation of the NSS. This is seen as critical to bringing together and effectively managing the various aspects of security policy.</p> <p>Lack of clarity in implementation: There is uncertainty as to how the strategy should be operationalised, particularly with regard to timeframes, resource allocation and the involvement of the federal states.</p> <p>Contradictions between values and interests: The strategy attempts to combine both value-based and interest-driven foreign policy, which can lead to conflicts, especially when economic interests clash with the propagated values.</p>
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<p>National Security Strategy > National Security Council</p>	<p>The opinions of the stakeholders emphasise the need for such an institution, but also highlight the challenges and possible limitations associated with its establishment.</p> <p>Improving coherence: A National Security Council could help to bundle the various security policy endeavours of the individual ministries and align them towards a common goal. This institutional coordination would particularly promote cooperation between the military, diplomacy, security, and development sectors.</p> <p>Increasing decision-making speed and agility: The ability to react quickly and agilely to security policy challenges is seen as one of the main advantages of a National Security Council. This could be particularly important in crisis situations.</p> <p>Lack of holistic awareness: The absence of a National Security Council is seen as one reason for the lack of a comprehensive awareness of necessary changes in security policy, both at the political level and in wider society. Isolated approaches: Looking at the needs of different security sectors, such as the armed forces, in isolation, without an overall national security perspective, is seen as problematic. A National Security Council could help to overcome these isolated views.</p> <p>Political feasibility: Some experts point out that although the establishment of a National Security Council would theoretically be possible within existing structures, its implementation could be politically difficult. It is doubted that such a council could find sufficient political support to function effectively.</p>
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German Policy until 2022	<p>The classification of German foreign and security policy from 1990 to 2022 by the interviewed stakeholders shows a complex picture characterised by different phases and challenges. These range from reunification and participation in international peacekeeping missions to responding to new global security threats. The different perspectives illustrate the difficulties and often also the hesitations with which Germany has responded to these challenges.</p> <p>After reunification in 1990, Germany found itself in a new role that was characterised not only by the integration of the two German states, but also by a changed geopolitical situation. Germany was now surrounded by friends and endeavoured to deepen European integration and expand NATO and the EU to the east. Nevertheless, this period was also characterised by a certain pacifism and restraint in military matters, which was partly due to historical reasons.</p> <p>German foreign and security policy from 1990 to 2022 shows a picture of adaptation and change, but one characterised by uncertainties and strategic incoherence. While Germany has strengthened its role in international security structures such as NATO and the EU, questions remain about the strategic direction and societal support for a proactive security policy. This emphasises the need for a clearer definition of German interests and a stronger strategic orientation in foreign and security policy.</p>
German Policy > Lack of Strategic Thinking	<p>Lack of strategic culture: A recurring point is the allegedly underdeveloped strategic discourse in Germany, especially in comparison to countries such as the USA or the UK. This lack is often justified historically or explained by the distance between the academic world and military practice. University "civilian clauses", which restrict military research, are cited as an example of this separation.</p> <p>Unclear definition of national interests: A key problem is Germany's reluctance to define clear national interests. This became particularly clear after the resignation of Federal President Horst Köhler, who was criticised after making statements about the need to secure trade routes militarily. This episode symbolises the difficulty in Germany of openly and publicly discussing military and strategic necessities.</p> <p>Reactive instead of proactive policy: German foreign and security policy is often described as reactive, without a long-term, strategic line. The events surrounding the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine have shown that Germany was strategically unprepared and reacted to short-term goals without long-term strategic planning. One stakeholder criticised the fact that although there is a strategy department or the Bundeswehr Planning Office in the Ministry of Defence, polycymaking is often an ad hoc approach driven by current political interests rather than a well-thought-out strategy.</p>



<p>German Policy > Role of German Think Tanks</p>	<p>The role of think tanks in German security policy is complex, but it is often perceived as limited, both in terms of their influence and their independence. The views from the interviews offer insights into the challenges and potential of these institutions in Germany's political discourse.</p>
<p>Meaning of Zeitenwende</p>	<p>The interviewed stakeholders show a mixed attitude towards the importance and effectiveness of the "turnaround".</p> <p>1. Strategic reorientation: "Turning point" symbolises an urgently needed strategic reorientation triggered by recent global security developments, in particular the conflict in Ukraine. This term serves to signal a reassessment of defence policy and a strengthening of military capabilities, as demonstrated by the provision of 100 billion euros for the Bundeswehr. The term also emphasises the need to strengthen civil resilience to be able to respond to disruptions to critical infrastructure, as well as the revitalisation of civil defence in Germany.</p> <p>2. criticism and challenges: Despite the strong rhetorical emphasis on the "turnaround", there is criticism of the actual implementation of the associated measures. The political willingness to take the necessary steps does not always seem assured, and the implementation of new defence initiatives often proves to be slow and bureaucratic.</p> <p>Political and social resistance: Some politicians and sections of the population are critical of military armament. The challenges range from political resistance to the procurement of unmanned systems to a general lack of social awareness of the importance of a strong defence policy.</p> <p>Need for a concrete strategy: Although the term "turnaround" implies a necessary strategic reorientation, there is a lack of a clear and coherent strategy as to how this reorientation should be implemented. There are concerns that the term is more rhetorical than a substantive change in policy.</p> <p>3. social and political dimension: Increased attention and budget: The "turnaround" has at least led to an increased budget allocation for defence and improved awareness of the need for strong armed forces. Nevertheless, the rapid acquisition of new equipment and the implementation of plans face considerable bureaucratic hurdles.</p> <p>Long-term prospects: The long-term effectiveness and acceptance of the changes initiated by the "Zeitenwende" remain uncertain. It remains to be seen whether the initiatives will actually lead to a lasting and far-reaching transformation of German security policy.</p>

Source: Stakeholders (2024)