

Introduction

On December 1 the Program on International Security at the Atlantic Council of the United States brought together members of the greater Washington foreign policy community for a briefing on the recently released German “White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr” with German ambassador Dr. Klaus Scharioth along with Germany’s defense attache Brigadier General Dr. Henning Hars.. The White Paper, a Federal Ministry of Defense publication, represents a significant step forward for German foreign and security policy in light of the drastic changes in the international environment since the end of the Cold War. The White Paper describes a world, and charts a course for German security policy and the Bundeswehr, in which Germany will play an increasing role abroad supporting friends and allies, as well as preventing and containing crises and conflicts that could, if left unchecked, threaten the well-being and interests of Germany, Europe, and the transatlantic community. Furthermore, the White Paper strongly reaffirms Germany’s commitment to international organizations such as the UN, the OSCE, NATO, and the EU. Based on this world view, the White Paper describes the transformation of the Bundeswehr towards a deployable and sustainable force with significantly more robust mobility, C4ISR, and engagement capabilities than today.

The drafting of the White Paper began in 2000, and is the first major strategic document of German security policy since 1994. In the period since 1994 Germany and the Bundeswehr have participated in numerous peacekeeping missions, such as in Bosnia and Kosovo, and this list of operations has been extended further since the drafting began with operations ranging from stability and reconstruction to counterterrorism in, among other places, Congo, Afghanistan, and Lebanon. These operations, as well as events such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have clearly influenced subsequent drafts of the White Paper.

German Security Policy

At the security policy level the White Paper takes a broad view of security, in which military power is only one of many tools available to meet security challenges with. The White Paper also affirms Germany’s belief in the use of “effective multilateralism”. Furthermore, the White Paper states that Germany cannot meet security challenges by itself. Instead, it holds that Germany’s security rests upon international and regional organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the EU. NATO is, in the words of Ambassador Dr. Scharioth, a “corner stone of German security”.

While the importance of NATO and the bilateral U.S.- German relationship has not diminished, according to the White Paper, the EU’s role has certainly increased in recent years. The White Paper states that it is an “overriding goal” of German security policy to consolidate and expand European integration. The White Paper also describes an approach to security and foreign policy much in line with the European Security Strategy (ESS), which was adopted in 2003. The ESS outlines a global security environment where Europe must meet global challenges such as globalization, competition for natural resources, and energy dependence. Furthermore, the ESS labels terrorism, WMD proliferation, regional conflicts, and failing states as

“key threats” to European and global security. This world view has been adopted by Germany through the White Paper.

While the White Paper emphasizes security and political developments in Europe and the transatlantic community it also takes a global view. It recognizes current developments in, and challenges from, the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and other regions. It also notes the rapid economic rise of India and China. The White Paper advocates engagement with these regions through regional security cooperation, as well as training assistance, development work, and other measures.

The Transformation of the Bundeswehr

The White Paper outlines a transformation of the Bundeswehr that would significantly change the traditional look of the Bundeswehr. The future tasks of the Bundeswehr are described as ranging from being a “international conflict prevention force” to supporting allies and conducting rescue and evacuation operations. The transformation process will take the Bundeswehr from being a static force dedicated to the defense of Germany in case of invasion towards a more deployable force that can operate together with its EU and NATO partners far from Germany’s borders.

The force structure of the Bundeswehr will significantly change in the coming years. The Bundeswehr is currently developing joint forces intended for deployment abroad. Included in this concept is a response force of 35,000 for high-intensity operations, as well as a stabilization force of some 70,000 intended for low to medium intensity operations over a longer period of time. The response force and stabilization force are supported by a support force of close to 148,000. These three forces will form the contribution to the EU’s Battle Groups as well as NATO’s Response Force. Furthermore, the Bundeswehr will, over the coming years, invest more resources to increase its strategic mobility, C4ISR, and “effective engagement” capabilities.

The transformation of the Bundeswehr will also significantly reduce the numerical size of Germany’s military forces. From a Cold War high of over half a million troops, the transformed Bundeswehr will comprise close to 250,000 service men, and a little over 80,000 civilians.

While the White Paper outlines the areas of transformation in German security policy and the Bundeswehr. It also emphasizes the traditional pillar of Germany security thinking that will remain substantially unchanged - conscription. Unlike other NATO allies, such as the United States, France, Britain, who have moved away from conscription to fill its military ranks, Germany has chosen, for both national security and domestic policy reasons, to maintain its conscript military. The White Paper reaffirms Germany’s commitment to this personnel system. The Bundeswehr is, however, considering “intelligent conscription”, a concept in which conscripts would be encouraged to become short term volunteers, through higher pay and other incentives, in order to fill the Bundeswehr’s units intended for rapid reaction deployment abroad.

Atlantic Council Commentary

The White Paper is an important document that establishes the principles for Germany's future approach to international peace and security that is wholly multilateral and transatlantic. In some respects, however, the White Paper merely codifies "facts on the ground". Germany and the Bundeswehr have made significant contributions to peace and security under the umbrella of the UN, NATO, and the EU in the Balkans, Africa, Afghanistan, as well as other places since at least the mid-1990's.

While the White Paper is an important step in transforming German security policy, much work remains to be done. The White Paper rightly points out that NATO and the EU are not competitors, but partners. Germany, as one of the largest member states in both the EU and NATO, now has an opportunity to jump-start the work towards a strategic agreement on EU-NATO cooperation on security related matters. In order to better manage security challenges NATO and the EU are in need of being able to conduct joint planning, pre-crisis exercises, as well as integrate NATO's and the EU's military and civilian capabilities. Furthermore, NATO's own Strategic Concept of 1999 is in need of an up-date in light of NATO's changing role and operations far from the European continent, and Germany is in a good position to drive this initiative forward as well. With Germany's turn to lead Europe, through the rotating EU-presidency, coming up soon, Berlin is in a advantageous position to make these much needed changes in the relationship between NATO and the EU.

One should also be concerned about the current transformation of the Bundeswehr. While there are several good reasons for Germany to maintain its conscript force, it is unclear whether this personnel system will hamper the Bundeswehr's ability to man its response and stabilization forces intended for rapid deployment outside of Germany's borders. Furthermore, it is crucial that the Bundeswehr's investments in increased mobility and C4ISR capabilities can be sustained over time. Budgetary constraints may make this difficult in coming years. The White Paper points out this potential shortfall as well. If the Bundeswehr is unable to continue its transformation because of budgetary constraints, the EU and NATO, as well as the United States, could potentially lose important contributions to international peace and security from their German friend and ally.