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The Balancing Act

Continuity and change in contemporary German foreign policy

Germany is indisputably one of the most important nations on the modern world stage. Germany is not only an economic juggernaught that supports the Euro with its financial might, but also a political powerhouse in every relevant international body. In order to fully understand the contours of contemporary German foreign policy, it is necessary to first explore the basic tenants of pre-reunification German foreign policy. This will provide a framework through which I will analyze the changes and continuities in German foreign policy since reunification.

In 1955, Bonn Germany regained partial sovereignty from the three allied powers of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. While occupation of West Germany was not lifted at that time, the allies did allow Germany to form a national army: The Bundeswehr. However, Germany needed to convince the world that it would never again threaten European peace. In such a climate, it was politically and socially infeasible for Germany to exert any form of military power. This began a long politically and socially entrenched tradition of antimilitarism (Langenbacher 333). However, Germany still needed a way to promote its interests on the international stage, so the nation turned to "checkbook diplomacy" (Langenbacher 339). Germany was already the largest European economy by 1900, so the German government began using its wealth to influence international affairs (Langenbacher 332). It supported the burgeoning economies of developing nations and built bilateral trading partnerships whenever

possible. These financial alliances have allowed Germany to easily communicate with nations such as Iran that shun negotiations with practically every other Western country.

Furthermore, German foreign policy has reflected a strong propensity for multilateralism. Germany is an active member of both the United Nations and NATO. Most importantly, Germany has also played an integral role in increasing the political and economic entanglement of European nations. In 1957, Germany helped create the European Economic Community (EEC), which was a precursor to the European Union (Langenbacher 344). Germany was also a driving force for the creation of the EU in 1993, and the Deutschmark became the backbone of the Euro in the early 2000s.

The final component of post-1945 German foreign policy is Atlanticism. During the Cold War, Bonn Germany had to contend with the Soviet threat directly across its Eastern border. In order to protect itself, Bonn Germany sought to improve political ties with Washington, Paris, and London. Each of Germany's foreign policies has evolved since 1945, but we will only consider their change across the period of German reunification in the early 1990s.

Germany tried to maintain continuity of foreign policy through the process of reunification but has ultimately failed in this endeavor. In multiple instances, Germany has been forced to decide which tenants of post-1945 foreign policy to maintain at the expense of others. In the 1999 Kosovo War, the German military entered another nation for the first time since World War II. At first glance, Kosovo seems to be a clear example of a departure from German antimilitarism. However, Germany only engaged its air force and ground troops against Serbia as part of a broader NATO multilateral strategy to halt the Serbian genocide of the Kosovar people (Overhaus 33). Germany had to make a calculated choice whether to abandon multilateralism and refuse to engage in a NATO operation or to take action and forsake antimilitarism; there

simply was no third option. The Kosovo decision also had a profound connection to German society. The country's commitment to peace was forced to contend with ideals of equality and justice. Ultimately, justice for Kosovo won the day and the key slogan of German antimilitarism, "Never Again War," became a slogan of humanitarianism, "Never Again Auschwitz." In the case of Kosovo, Germany sacrificed antimilitarism to preserve its policy of multilateralism.

Two years later, after the September 11 attacks in the United States, Germany again broke with antimilitarism to conserve its commitment to multilateralism and Atlanticism. After determining the origin of the September 11 attacks as Al Qaeda, President Bush invoked NATO's mutual defense pact, calling upon member nations to invade Afghanistan and destroy the terrorist organization. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder fully supported the United States and agreed to honor the pact. In doing so, Germany again sent its military forces abroad, despite the nation's continued opposition to the global use of military force. However, in echoing its support for the United States, Germany preserved its commitment to multilateralism; the invasion of Afghanistan was a joint NATO operation (Overhaus 30). Had Schröder refused to answer President Bush's call to action, the German-US relationship would have greatly suffered, and Germany would have drawn a clear political divide between itself and the other Atlantic powers.

Despite Germany's clear desire to retain favorable relations with the United States in 2001, Germany did not support the United States in its 2003 invasion of Iraq. Again, Germany was forced to choose between three tenants of its foreign policy: multilateralism, Atlanticism, and antimilitarism. The decision not to invade Iraq signaled a clear victory for German antimilitarism, however the decision's effect on German Atlanticism and multilateralism are more difficult to interpret. Specifically, the invasion of Iraq divided Europe into two camps, forcing

Germany to choose between the United Kingdom, who supported the invasion, and France, who did not (Karp 65). Germany made the conscious choice to side with France and improve multilateral ties with the bloc of European nations that opposed the invasion (Feldman 64). Therefore, while Germany's decision to not invade Iraq clearly damaged relations with the United States, it is difficult to say that Germany's policies of multilateralism and Atlanticism departed greatly from their post-1945 state. Thus, Germany was able to maintain its commitment to antimilitarism while simultaneously suffering only moderate modifications to its policies of Atlanticism and multilateralism. While we have only analyzed changes in German foreign policy with regard to potential military involvement, the question of continuity also applies to purely political foreign policies.

Germany's emerging role as a global leader and international arbiter has threatened to shift Germany's policy of multilateralism in a new direction. German multilateralism is changing from following-multilateralism to leading-multilateralism; Germany still acts multilaterally, but now Germany has begun to directly lead and drive the agendas of multilateral coalitions of nations. Since 1945, Germany has been perfectly content to take a backseat in international affairs. While Germany exerts great political and economic force, until recently, it has done so at the behest of powerful allies such as the United States and international bodies such as the UN and NATO. Now, Germany's previously established trade relationships are paying dividends as they allow Germany to serve as a moderating power in global affairs. In the Middle East, Germany is acting as a "'bridge-builder' between the West and the Arab world" (Crawford 176). Germany maintains a special bond with Israel while also engaging Arab nations in discourse. Germany's relationship with Iran was the foundation upon which the US-Iran nuclear deal was built.

Economic relations between Germany and Russia — facilitated by Nord stream pipeline — may lead to a resolution of the Crimea dispute in the near future.

Germany's role as a unifying force presents a unique dilemma. If Germany maintains its political trajectory, it will likely usurp the United States as the international ideal of Western society and government — a global force for good. If Germany fully emerges into the spotlight, it will also once again reckon with the concern of other nations that Germany's growing political power is a sign of danger (Langenbacher 333, 338). However, Germany can not easily abandon its newly-assumed role of international political leadership. Some European leaders such as former Polish foreign minister Radek Sikorski have called upon Germany to take even greater responsibility for Western leadership, leaving Germany between a rock and a hard place (Langenbacher 337). As Germany seeks to harmonize traditional foreign policies with modern circumstances, the future of German foreign policy quite literally hangs in the balance.

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