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Germany: A Lynchpin Ally?

Markus Kaim

At first glance, a chapter on Germany's alliance policy does not seem to call for a title suggesting that Berlin is playing more than a peripheral role in the international system. For most German observers, the notion of Germany as a 'lynchpin ally' is an unusual perspective. For decades the German political class has framed the Bonn and Berlin republics as a sometimes reluctant, sometimes reliable ally within NATO and the European Union, but has never intended to create the perception in other capitals that the future of the Euro–Atlantic security institutions is attached to Germany's military capabilities and the political will to use them. Also, in terms of domestic politics, German politicians have traditionally avoided communicating to their constituency that Germany could or even should play a bigger, more responsible role in international affairs and in multilateral crisis management in particular.

But, due to a variety of factors, things have already changed and will continue to change for the years to come. First, under President Barack Obama, the United States has been prioritising domestic issues and carefully selecting those regional orders and crisis in which to play a more restrained role than previously, thereby leaving a vacuum in terms of sustaining the global international order. Second, the crisis of the European integration process continues with more and more EU regimes falling apart and traditional Europe-shaping powers, like France and the United Kingdom, following an introspective *modus operandi*. Therefore, in its current form, the European Union cannot fill the vacuum that

the United States has left behind. Third, with the annexation of Crimea and the continuing military destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, Russia not only put into question the political and territorial status quo in its neighbourhood, but challenged the norms and principles of the Euro–Atlantic security architecture as laid down, for example, in the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe and following documents. This *acquis*, agreed upon by all member states of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), has been the cornerstone of European (and German) security since the end of the Cold War. These determinants together have, since 2014, triggered a debate in Germany about the changed environment with which German foreign policy is confronted and the more active, more engaged role Berlin has to play within this environment. This debate has just started, but the first shifts, which are probably lasting, are clearly visible now. While this strategic reorientation might not represent Germany as a *transatlantic* lynchpin, it is established as such within the context of Europe and the European Union. This has implications for Germany's foreign policy.

A Different Level of Ambition

A major strategic debate started among German foreign policy elites three years ago. Guided by Chancellor Angela Merkel's foreign policy, this debate was opened by Federal President Joachim Gauck at the Munich Security Conference 2014. In his speech, Gauck pointed to the conflicts that confront Germany and its allies. He called for Germany to have a more active foreign policy:

For the key question is: has Germany already adequately recognised the new threats and the changes in the structure of the international order? Has it reacted commensurate with its weight? Has Germany shown enough initiative to ensure the future viability of the network of norms, friends and alliances which has brought us peace in freedom and democracy in prosperity? ... And, in cases where we have found convincing reasons to join our allies in taking even military action, are we willing to bear our fair share of the risks? Are we doing what we should to attract new and reinvigorated major powers to the cause of creating a just world order for tomorrow? Do we even evince the interest in some parts of the world which is their due, given their importance? What role do we want to

play in the crises afflicting distant parts of the globe? ... In my opinion, Germany should make a more substantial contribution, and it should make it earlier and more decisively if it is to be a good partner.¹

Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Minister of Defence Ursula von der Leyen made similar points in their speeches at the same conference.² Taken together, these speeches mark a notable shift in Germany's approach to its foreign policy since 2014. In many ways, Germany is the locus point of EU foreign policymaking. During a time plagued by wars and conflict, Merkel managed to show leadership while also integrating other EU countries into a specifically German approach. That was no mean feat for a country so often criticised for not taking on responsibility commensurate with its size and economic power. If anything, the foreign policy ambition of Merkel's third government is remarkable. It is definitely higher than that of her previous coalition, which wouldn't be difficult given the government's lacklustre approach in this field. It's not that Germany didn't use its weight under the first two Merkel governments. Ask anyone in Greece whether they think that Berlin was unaware of its power as it insisted on tough austerity measures for the single currency area. But Germany's weight and influence were mainly geared toward just that—economic and structural reform in the Eurozone—rather than toward foreign policy issues.

This balance changed with the Ukraine crisis. When Russia began meddling in Ukraine, Merkel proved her critics wrong. Those critics claimed that her interests in foreign affairs and international security policy were limited. Indeed, it is Merkel who has been engaged in crisis management efforts, and engaged with Russian President Vladimir Putin, as delegated by Obama. At the same time, Merkel and Steinmeier coordinated the EU approach toward Moscow and, despite immense differences among the 28 member states over Russia, have maintained European unity on the sanctions imposed against Moscow.

1 Joachim Gauck, 'Germany's Role in the World: Reflections on Responsibility, Norms and Alliances', speech at the opening of the Munich Security Conference, 31 Jan. 2014, www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2014/01/140131-Muenchner-Sicherheitskonferenz-Englisch.pdf?__blob=publicationFile. See also Alison Smale, 'Spurred by Global Crises, Germany Weighs a More Muscular Foreign Policy', *New York Times*, 1 Feb. 2014.

2 'Speech by the Federal Minister of Defense, Dr. Ursula von der Leyen, on the Occasion of the 50th Munich Security Conference Munich, 31 January 2014', www.securityconference.de/fileadmin/MSC_/2014/Reden/2014-01-31-Speech-MinDef_von_der_Leyen-MuSeCo.pdf.

But the concern for Germany goes further than Crimea or the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy. More clearly than many other observers, Merkel has understood that there is a linkage between the Ukraine crisis and the German ability to shape and influence the world. Since 1949, German policy has been based on the existence of effective international organisations and established norms and principles rather than on military capabilities. In this respect, German engagement in the Ukraine crisis is not only about helping others; the Russian-induced erosion of the Euro–Atlantic security order directly affects Berlin's capability to shape and influence international affairs. The government's decision to apply for the OSCE chairmanship in 2016 reflects these considerations and the increased will to shoulder more responsibility in the global arena.³ Another example is Berlin's interest in running for a rotating seat in the UN Security Council in the years 2019/2020.

It's not only the Ukraine crisis that has preoccupied the Merkel government in recent years. One of Germany's more strategic diplomatic endeavours has been its leading role in negotiations with Tehran on Iran's nuclear program. This role should not be underestimated. Berlin initiated the talks together with Paris and London back in 2003 and was a driving force behind them until the agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in July 2015. This strong engagement is consistent with Germany's commitment to the security of Israel, its general interest in furthering arms control, and its firm economic and political relationship with Tehran. Being a key trading partner of Iran certainly furthered Germany's interest in finding a diplomatic solution to the dispute over Iran's nuclear program.

More recently, the worsening situation in Syria has spurred the Merkel government to adopt a more active, multipronged approach to this part of the region. This includes the acceptance of more than 200,000 Syrian refugees into Germany (not including the additional number of Syrian asylum seekers, whose applications have not been decided yet), support for trans-border humanitarian support into Syria, and increased efforts by the German security services to monitor and stem the flow of foreign fighters from Germany to Syria and Iraq. In an unexpected turn,

3 Federal Foreign Office, 'Renewing Dialogue, Rebuilding Trust, Restoring Security. The Priorities of the German OSCE Chairmanship in 2016', www.osce.org/cio/215791?download=true. See also Hanns W. Maull, 'What German Responsibility Means', *Security and Human Rights*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2015, pp. 11–24. doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02601012.

Berlin also decided in the summer of 2014 to provide arms and training to the Kurdish Peshmerga forces to help contain the expansion of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In December 2015, a large majority of the German Bundestag voted in favour of the deployment of up to 1,200 troops (according to the mandate—the actual number is 268 as of 8 May 2017) to reinforce the international alliance against ISIS, following the 13 November Paris terrorist attacks. This led Germany to provide support in the form of reconnaissance and logistics as well as protection components. In addition to satellite reconnaissance, Tornado jets have been deployed to help obtain a precise picture of the situation on the ground. Over and above this, Germany has provided an aerial refuelling plane, a frigate to escort a French aircraft carrier and staff unit and headquarters staff. While these decisions reflect Germany building its influence in a regional conflict, there is still continued reluctance from the German Government to engage German armed forces in any large-scale combat operation. And, even more importantly, this support lacks the necessary strategic underpinning: the military as well as the political goal remain undefined and rather unclear.

This more ambitious, more engaged German foreign and security policy approach of the last two years has gone hand in hand with a parallel intellectual effort to provide a sober analysis of Germany's changed security environment, and the role Germany should play in it, as encouraged and requested by Gauck in Munich three years ago. Importantly it should come as no surprise that the decision to draft two major strategic documents date back to 2014, because the recent crises revealed an ongoing lack of a durable and coherent strategic orientation for German foreign policy.⁴

In February 2014, the German Foreign Office launched a public discussion process by introducing the project *Review 2014: A Fresh Look at Foreign Policy*, which posed two deliberately provocative questions to experts in Germany and abroad: What, if anything, is wrong with German foreign policy? What needs to be changed? The overarching aim of the review was to conduct a process of reflection on German foreign policy's future prospects by way of dialogue between the federal Foreign Office and the most important foreign and security policy stakeholders, including civil society. In February 2015, Steinmeier presented the final report *Crisis –*

4 Adrian GV Hyde-Price, "The "Sleep-Walking Giant" Awakes: Resetting German Foreign and Security Policy", *European Security*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2015, p. 605.

Order – Europe to the German Bundestag and the public.⁵ It encapsulated the three phases of the review process, including discussion with experts from Germany and abroad, and talks with federal Foreign Office staff. The conclusion was that, as the world changes, so should German foreign policy. Germany's medium-term foreign policy challenges included crisis prevention, crisis management and post-crisis support; shaping the elements of a new global order; and embedding German foreign policy even more firmly in Europe.

Germany's need for strategic reflection and orientation is also illustrated by von der Leyen's decision to define the country's security policy priorities in a new defence white paper, *White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr*.⁶ In the previous white paper—published in 2006—Germany's security policies were mostly attuned to Afghanistan. Russia was defined as a partner, and the Arab Spring and the emergence of ISIS terrorist militia were still in the distant future. Now German politicians are facing a different environment: war rages in Ukraine, Russia and NATO members eye one another like they did when the Iron Curtain still stood, and Germany is actively participating in the fight against ISIS. Two guidelines seem to be certain: first, it has emphasised Germany's self-perception as a middle power in international affairs with aspirations to shape the world together with European and transatlantic partners, thereby striking a different tone compared to the widespread isolationist, anti-integrationist and anti-globalist mood in France and the United Kingdom. Second, the white paper prioritises Germany's level of ambition. Although the country is highly globalised and affected by global events like only a few others, its foreign policy ambition is not global. Instead, German security policy will focus for the years to come on crisis management in the neighbourhood of the European Union.

The Political–Societal Background

Germany's foreign policy does not reflect the mood of the constituency. In spring 2014, Germany's leading electoral and political research institute, TNS Infratest, conducted a survey to gauge the public's general

5 For the final report, see *Review 2014: A Fresh Look at Foreign Policy*, Berlin: Federal Foreign Office, 2014.

6 See *White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr 2016*, Berlin: Federal Ministry of Defence, 2016.

approach to foreign and security policy. While there was widespread interest in foreign policy issues, there is only lukewarm support for greater international involvement: 60 per cent believe that Germany should continue to exercise restraint in the area of foreign policy, whereas 37 per cent are in favour of greater German involvement. The positions have changed dramatically compared to attitudes in 1994: 37 per cent were in favour of German restraint, whereas 62 per cent were in favour of assuming greater responsibility.⁷ Asked about the reasons for their opinion, 73 per cent of the respondents state that the main reason why they are in favour of greater restraint is that Germany has enough problems of its own, and that it should try to resolve them before dealing with other issues. And 50 per cent justified their reticence by referring to German history, a stance that tends to be taken in particular by respondents over 60 years of age; 37 per cent believe that Germany's influence in the world is too small to make much of a difference. Taken together, public opinion in Germany shows the same 'introspective mode', which can be observed in the United States and a lot of European countries.

The 37 per cent who are in favour of greater involvement adduce the following arguments in support of their views: Germany owes its economic prosperity to international trade and should thus make a contribution to world peace and global security (93 per cent); Germany's greater political and economic significance should be reflected in the assumption of more international responsibility (89 per cent); and Germany is globally respected as a mediator (85 per cent).

When asked more specifically about the use of military force, public opinion gives a rather traditional response: 82 per cent of respondents were in favour of cutting back on German military missions. This attitude was reflected in all age groups, and was particularly noticeable for those over the age of 60 (90 per cent). A small majority rejected support for other countries in armed conflicts without direct German military participation, and a clear majority were even against arms deliveries to allied countries. Respondents would support intervention by German armed forces only if peace and security in Europe were directly threatened, for humanitarian purposes, in the case of a direct threat to Germany's allies, in the context of peacekeeping measures based on international agreements, and in order to prevent genocide and the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

⁷ *Involvement or Restraint? Findings of a Representative Survey Conducted by TNS Infratest Policy Research on German Attitudes to Foreign Policy*, Hamburg: Körber Foundation, May 2014, p. 2.

Although the protection of human rights is considered to be the most important task of German foreign policy, and genocide an important reason for military intervention, a majority of Germans (66 per cent) are not prepared to give their blessing to a military mission for humanitarian reasons without the requisite UN mandate. Only 33 per cent would support intervention for humanitarian reasons in the absence of an appropriate mandate from the UN Security Council. Regardless of the multilateral framework in which German expeditionary missions might take place (United Nations, NATO, European Union), the decision to deploy German armed forces or even to use military force remains a contentious issue in Berlin, to address which requires a lot of political capital to be invested by the political class.

Multilateral Crisis Management

Since the normalisation of German foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, one narrative has guided all German governments regardless of political orientation: although the prime purpose of NATO traditionally has been collective defence, the changed security environment after 1990, with its plethora of diverse security challenges, has made this task largely irrelevant. Due to several rounds of NATO and EU enlargement and the lack of a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security, Germany would be encircled by a ring of friends and the ongoing success of the European integration process would perpetuate Germany's stability and security. Smaller armed forces and a decreasing defence budget could not only be possible, but also a strategic choice as a welcome peace dividend and contribution to a more peaceful world.

The only remaining circumstances in which the use of military force could be legitimised has been the deployment of the German armed forces for collective defence, mandated by the UN Security Council and conducted within a multilateral framework. And, in this case, Germany has come a long way. Berlin has contributed to an array of military operations over a wide geographical area since the beginning of the 1990s including UN peacekeeping in Cambodia and Somalia, peace support operations in the Balkans, humanitarian military intervention in Kosovo, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, Common Security and Defence Policy missions in Africa and maritime security operations in the Mediterranean and off the Horn of Africa.

Until the crisis years, and even today, Germany's military engagement has focused on collective security. It is the driver behind the largest and longest engagements of the German armed forces. By January 2017, 880 German soldiers were participating in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission (RSM), the follow-up to the International Security Assistance Force mission, which brought the first German soldiers to Afghanistan in 2001 and ended on 31 December 2014. They continue to help train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces without participating in combat. In Kosovo, more than 500 soldiers are still deployed as part of the Kosovo Force (KFOR), the NATO-led international peacekeeping force that has been responsible for establishing a secure environment in Kosovo since 1999. After the end of the immediate hostilities between Serb and Kosovo Albanians, KFOR today focuses on contributing to a safe and secure environment, coordinating the international humanitarian efforts, facilitating the development of a stable, democratic, multiethnic and peaceful Kosovo, and supporting the development of the Kosovo Security Force. More than 150 German soldiers participate in the two EU-led maritime missions: 120 have been deployed within the framework of the European Union Naval Force—Mediterranean, which aims to undertake systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels to fight human smugglers and traffickers due to the human emergency in the Mediterranean Sea. Roughly 30 of them continue to contribute to the European Union Naval Force—Operation Atalanta. As a reaction to the expansion of Somali-based piracy and armed robbery at sea off the Horn of Africa and in the western Indian Ocean, and its impact on international trade and maritime security and on the economic activities and security of countries in the region, the European Union protects vessels of the UN World Food Programme, the African Union Mission in Somalia and other vulnerable shipping since December 2008. At the same time, it deters and disrupts piracy as well as armed robbery at sea and monitors fishing activities off the coast of Somalia.

The most recent decisions of the German Bundestag to deploy up to 1,200 soldiers to Syria and, in January 2017, 1,000 soldiers to the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) operation follow exactly the same paradigm: that Germany can and should strengthen the UN system of collective security regardless of the multilateral organisation through which these operations are conducted.⁸

8 'Germany to Deploy Helicopters, More soldiers to UN Mission in Mali', *Reuters*, 11 Jan 2017, www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-un-germany-idUSKBN14V131.

From Security Provider to Security Consultant

Given the widespread disillusionment in the political class as well as the broader public about what has been accomplished with German military engagements in the past, for example, in Afghanistan, the Merkel government has made it clear that Germany wants to take on more responsibility in foreign policy but is keen, as far as possible, to avoid direct military involvement in the future. Confronted with a rising number of crises in Europe, Merkel has advocated a subsidiary policy to support other countries and regional organisations in providing security and stability in their respective environments. Providing training and equipment for governments and regional organisations in crisis areas enables them to create and maintain peace and security by their own efforts. Hence, Germany was one of the driving forces of the December 2013 European Council meeting of EU leaders, which emphasised the importance of empowering global partners to take more responsibility for regional security.

The concept of capacity-building—providing advice, training and equipment to strengthen partners' own capabilities—has featured on Germany's foreign policy agenda for some years now, albeit mostly in the context of broader crisis prevention and management efforts. One priority in this regard has been Germany's engagement in Mali. The restoration of security and lasting peace in Mali is a major issue for the stability of the Sahel region, as well as Africa and Europe more broadly. In February 2013, at the request of the Malian authorities, the European Union launched EU Training Mission Mali, a training mission for Malian armed forces. For this purpose, roughly 130 German soldiers have been deployed to the West African country. The aim of the mission is to support the rebuilding of the Malian armed forces and to meet their operational needs by providing expertise and advice, in particular as regards operational and organic command, logistic support, human resources, operational preparation and intelligence. The mission is not involved in combat operations. The EU Training Mission Somalia (with 10 German soldiers) follows more or less the same approach.

While a controversial mission, since the beginning of 2015 more than 150 Bundeswehr soldiers have participated in a training mission for Iraqi armed forces and Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in northern Iraq.

The context for this mission is the developments since summer 2014, when ISIS started its military advances in Iraq and Syria. Many people were killed and hundreds of thousands were forced to flee their homes. Germany has also responded to an earlier request from the Iraqi side and Kurdish–Iraqi forces and gave its approval for the Peshmerga fighters to be supported through the provision of military equipment and weapons. Germany is providing this help within the framework of the international alliance against terror, which comprises more than 60 countries and provides military and humanitarian aid in the fight against ISIS.

Together with a handful of smaller contingents, the German armed forces have currently (2,500 as of 8 May 2017) deployed 2,900 soldiers for different kinds of out-of-area operations.

The Return of Collective Defence

Even before the Ukraine/Russia crisis, the focus of NATO was shifting away from large-scale stabilising operations. One explanation for this is that decision-makers have been realistic about the political constraints they face, realising that stabilisation operations cannot be the core tasks of NATO. Instead, the focus has been on a gradual reduction of global military engagements and on preserving interoperability activities, as seen in Kosovo, Libya and Afghanistan. This policy has been illustrated by the efforts of NATO's Connected Forces Initiative (CFI) of 2012, an attempt designed to increase allied interoperability. Through three lines of effort—training and education, exercises and better use of technology—the CFI was designed to help the alliance maintain the tremendous level of operational and tactical interoperability it has developed in the years before.⁹

In this respect, the Ukraine crisis has only accelerated an already existing development. Collective defence as NATO's prime purpose has, however, been 'rediscovered' by the German political class and the wider public due to the revisionist Russian foreign policy under Putin, and the growing fear among Central and Eastern European NATO countries that they could also be confronted with growing political pressure, territorial ambitions

9 Stephen J Maranian, *NATO Interoperability, Sustaining Trust and Capacity within the Alliance*, Research Paper no. 115, Rome: NATO Defense College, 2015.

and forms of hybrid warfare.¹⁰ That does not mean that Russia is perceived as a permanent threat to Germany's security. On the contrary, Russian foreign policy enjoys an understanding in Germany like in no other Western country. But the decision to contribute to reassurance measures for Eastern neighbours is driven by two strategic considerations. First, their security concerns will not be alleviated by vague rhetorical assurance of alliance solidarity, but only by a credible NATO military posture (with a clear German footprint). Otherwise the alliance's credibility would be weakened, its commitments hollow and, at the end of the day, the Central Eastern European NATO members might look somewhere else to protect their political sovereignty and territorial integrity. Second, an unequivocal German commitment to the protection of those countries gives Berlin the necessary leverage to influence their foreign policy behaviour and to avoid any unwanted escalation in the relationship between NATO and Russia. In this respect, military reassurance and the de-escalation of the conflict as well as the exploration of all diplomatic avenues for a political solution are, in the eyes of the Merkel government, two sides of the same coin.

In response to the Ukraine crisis, NATO allies decided at the September 2014 summit in Wales on the most fundamental military evolution of the alliance since the end of the Cold War. The objective was a large-scale reinforcement and reorganisation of defence capabilities, requiring considerable political, military and financial input from all allies. Additional measures were adopted at the 2016 Warsaw summit that are intended to ensure credible deterrence. These include establishment, on a rotational basis, battalion-sized force contingents in each of the three Baltic states, as well as in Poland.

Berlin played a considerable part in shaping the Wales decisions and the partners continue to expect Germany to bear a substantial military and financial burden because of its economic strength. With regard to assurance measures, Germany has, for instance, increased its naval participation in the Baltic Sea and is sending significantly more soldiers on NATO exercises. As for the agreed adaptation measures, Germany has been the first state to take on the command of the new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) in 2015.¹¹ The Multinational Corps

10 Heidi Reisinger & Aleksandr Golts, *Russia's Hybrid Warfare. Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defence*, Research Paper no. 105, Rome: NATO Defense College, 2014.

11 Jan Abts, *NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. Can the VJTF Give New Elan to the NATO Response Force?*, Research Paper no. 109, Rome: NATO Defense College, 2015.

North-East, which Germany, Poland and Denmark are jointly running in Stettin, Poland, will increase its readiness, take on more tasks and will become a hub for regional cooperation. Most strikingly, Berlin recently announced its willingness to serve as a ‘framework nation’ on the Eastern flank of the alliance, promising to lead a multinational battalion in Lithuania as part of NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence.¹² In overview it turns out that, among the European NATO members, Germany is providing the backbone for the successful implementation of the Wales and Warsaw decisions. Without Berlin’s participation, they would be hardly feasible.¹³

Conclusion

With regard to political will, it has become evident that the Merkel government since 2014 has had a higher level of ambition in foreign and security policy than in the years before. This can be explained to a certain degree by different personnel in key ministries, but also—and even more importantly—by the changed power structure of the international system and higher expectations of Germany from its traditional allies within the European Union and NATO. As long as the United States and major powers within the European Union continue to be preoccupied with domestic priorities, Germany cannot escape the role of a Führungsmacht (leading power). In the German context, leading always means ‘in a European context’ and ‘together with others’—however, German foreign and security officials do not deny any more that the Merkel government has the political will to influence European and international security.¹⁴ At least two caveats come into play, however. First, Berlin does not pretend to be a global power. Instead priority will be given to crisis management in the European periphery to the east (the ongoing Russia–Ukraine crisis), to the south-east (the advancement of ISIS in

12 Diego A Ruiz Palmer, *The Framework Nations’ Concept and NATO: Game-Changer for a New Strategic Era or Missed Opportunity?*, Research Paper no. 132, Rome: NATO Defense College, 2016.

13 Rainer L Glatz & Martin Zapfe, *NATO Defence Planning between Wales and Warsaw. Politico-military Challenges of a Credible Assurance against Russia*, SWP Comments no. 5/16, Berlin 2016.

14 Here the author disagrees with Sten Rynning’s assessment that ‘[t]he sum total is a Germany which seeks to inspire confidence abroad, which invites cooperation, but which is ill prepared to take a leading role. Germany is peaceful but insular in this sense’ (*Germany is More Than Europe Can Handle: Or, Why NATO Remains a Pacifier*, Research Paper no. 96, Rome: NATO Defense College, 2013, p. 5). See also Franz-Josef Meiers, ‘The Stress Test of German Leadership’, *Survival*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2015, pp. 47–55. doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2015.1026061.

Syria and Iraq) and the south (the fragile situation in North Africa after the revolutionary wave of 2011). Second, the current German strength has a lot to do with the temporary weakness of others. A more ambitious and engaged French president might change the power equation. In this respect, Berlin's central political role will be temporary. But, as long as things stand as they are, Germany is a lynchpin ally, maybe less within a transatlantic context, but definitely for and among Europeans.