**German Defence Policy under the Second Merkel Chancellorship**

*The CDU/CSU/FDP coalition (2009-13) has witnessed the emergence of three important changes in the international security environment: the US ‘Asia Pivot’; the global financial crisis and finally, the fallout of Germany’s backseat role in the Libya crisis. This article will examine how German defence policy has adapted to this changing context. It will explore the reforms which have taken place to the Bundeswehr’s structure and military capability procurement process under Defence Ministers Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg and Thomas de Mazière. The article will also look at German policy toward defence cooperation through CSDP and NATO. The article finds that while some important changes have been enacted to German defence policy, Germany is failing to properly adapt to the changing strategic environment. The article concludes by examining key defence policy challenges facing the government over the 2013-17 legislative period and the implications of the analysis for theoretical debates on German defence policy.*

INTRODUCTION

Chancellor Merkel has displayed a significant measure of disinterest in German defence policy during the 2009-13 legislative period. Merkel’s lack of engagement with defence is understandable given her preoccupation with managing the Euro crisis, as well as her lack of expertise in this policy area.[[1]](#endnote-1) However, the most important factor fostering the neglect of defence policy by the Chancellor’s Office is its status as a potential ‘vote loser’.[[2]](#endnote-2) The fundamental task of Defence Ministers Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (2009-11) and Thomas de Mazière (2011-13) under her second chancellorship has been to keep the policy area off the news agenda and avoid causing electoral damage to the CDU/CSU in both regional elections and the 2013 federal election.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Yet, despite this restrictive domestic political context, the 2009-13 Merkel administration has witnessed instances of bold policy leadership, instigating a number of important changes to German defence policy. Zu Guttenberg suspended conscription and introduced reforms which will enhance the *Bundeswehr’s* deployability and interoperability with alliance partners. Furthermore, his successor, de Mazière , implemented changes to the structure of the Defence Ministry which will augment the capacity of the Bundeswehr to adapt to the challenges of the operational environment and improve its capability procurement process.

However, some fundamental problems remain in German defence policy. Germany’s military capabilities continue to lag behind those of its main European partners. Furthermore, the Merkel administration has eschewed sustained leadership on the ‘pooling and sharing’ of military capabilities through CSDP and NATO. The consequent poor ability of Europe’s most powerful economy to burden-share within NATO and CSDP and provide leadership on overcoming Europe’s capability deficits has serious negative implications for European security. The economic and military rise of the BRIC countries following the turn of the century has been manifested in the ‘pivot toward Asia’ in US security and defence policy. Furthermore, austerity measures make it increasingly for Western Europe’s traditional military powers – the UK and France – to fill the security vacuum within Europe’s geopolitical neighbourhood that is threatened by these changing strategic US strategic priorities. Hence stronger German burden-sharing within CSDP and NATO is imperative for European security.

This article will explore the changes in German defence policy during the last Merkel Chancellorship in greater detail. It will examine changes in German defence policy across four key dimensions: the force structures and capabilities of the Bundeswehr; the institutional structure of the Ministry of Defence and finally, the embeddedness of German defence policy within the key institutional fora of defence cooperation in Europe, CSDP and NATO. Finally, the article will analyse the key challenges – and opportunities – facing the new Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen during the forthcoming legislative period (2013-17).

FORCE STRUCTURES: AN END TO CONSCRIPTION

The reforms to the structure of the *Bundeswehr* initiated by zu Guttenberg and implemented by Thomas de Mazière have put in place a number of changes which will enhance the capacity of the German armed forces to deploy troops as part of crisis-management operations of varying intensity. The most recent German Defence White Paper of 2006 outlined the ambition to be capable of deploying 14,000 troops in up to five separate crisis-management operations, form an overall force of 252,500.[[4]](#endnote-4) However, these ambitions could not be realised and, in 2010, the *Bundeswehr* was capable of deploying only 8,300 troops.[[5]](#endnote-5)

De Mazière reforms have witnessed a reduction of the *Bundeswehr* to 180,000 troops. Much of this reduction has been achieved through the suspension of conscription that has been replaced with a voluntary (minimum 15-month and maximum 23 month) civil-service that will allow service in the *Bundeswehr* or wider community.[[6]](#endnote-6)  Setting-aside conscription is an important step in furnishing the *Bundeswehr* with professional forces necessary for the complex operational environment of contemporary missions. Furthermore, the 15 month minimum service period significantly extends the length of service of volunteers and allows them to undergo sufficient training to participate in overseas deployments.

These changes have led to a modest improvement in the ability of the *Bundeswehr* to deploy forces overseas by increasing the number of troops available for deployment to 10,000.[[7]](#endnote-7) However, Germany’s troop ceilings look more respectable when viewed within the context of the scaling back of ambition by her Alliance partners. For example, at the height of the Iraq War in 2003, the UK was capable of mobilising a force of 45,000 troops.[[8]](#endnote-8) However, cuts to troop numbers have left the UK with reduced deployability. The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) envisages the capability to simultaneously undertake an enduring (more than six months) stabilisation operation of 6,500, a non-enduring (less than six months) complex intervention of up to 2,000 personnel and a non-enduring simple intervention of up to 1,000 troops.[[9]](#endnote-9)

The reform of the 2009-13 legislative period also takes an important step toward enhancing Germany’s ability to contribute to crisis-management operations by removing the distinction between forces devoted to support, stabilisation and attack operations.[[10]](#endnote-10) This separation of tasks had become increasingly redundant in the light of operational experiences in Afghanistan, where the ability to shift operational modes at short notice – from low to high intensity – was a central feature of the operational environment.

MILITARY CAPABILITIES: THE POLITICS OF PROCUREMENT

Recent German investment in military capabilities has focused on enhancing the jointness of the German armed forces through the procurement of Command, Control, Intelligence Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance assets (C2ISTAR). Such capabilities include networkable radio equipment, space-based reconnaissance systems and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) – so called ‘network-enabled capabilities’.[[11]](#endnote-11) These capabilities are essential not only to enhance manoeuvrability and speed of attack in higher-intensity operations, but also to stabilisation operations at the lower of the conflict spectrum. However, during the Merkel administration, the *Bundeswehr* has fallen further behind its key European Alliance partners in C2ISTAR. While the British and French attained an initial networked capability in 2007, the *Bundeswehr* is yet to reach this stage, having postponed a 2013 demonstrator exercise that was due to test the initial networked capability of the *Bundeswehr*.[[12]](#endnote-12)

This slow progress in acquiring key network-enabled capabilities is the result of a range of factors, including disagreement between the individual services about the consequences of networking for command and control and the need to integrate the lessons gained from participation in NATO’s Afghan Mission Network.[[13]](#endnote-13) However, the central problem in rolling out C2ISTAR lies in a lack of jointness between the single services’ procurement plans. The individual services have developed their own command and control systems which are unable to properly communicate with each other.[[14]](#endnote-14) Of the *Bundeswehr’s* 70 procurement programs in 2010 only 6 were network-ready, 11 had limited NCW capability, while the remaining programs were not network-ready.[[15]](#endnote-15) Yet, as Wiesner highlights: ‘the identification of these problems did not result in a refocusing of command-and-control systems projects. Quite the contrary, service-specific communication platforms…continue to be funded’.[[16]](#endnote-16) In addition to problems in C2ISTAR acquisition, until recently Germany has continued to invest too heavily in capabilities more suitable for Cold War conflict scenarios than for expeditionary warfare.[[17]](#endnote-17)

Germany’s poor record in C2ISTAR problems highlights a lack of responsiveness and incoherence in the weapons acquisition process. The first problem lies in the relationship between civilian and military input to defence planning. The *Bundeswehr*’s Budgetary and Armament Departments consist of a number of civilian personnel who stay in post for several years. This has the positive effect of ensuring that civilian personnel develop expertise and have the ability to challenge the proposals of military personnel, whose tenure in these Departments is usually no longer than two years.[[18]](#endnote-18)

However, until de Mazière’s reform, the key organs responsible for decisions on changes and additions to the *Bundeswehr’s* acquisition programme were dominated by military figures.[[19]](#endnote-19) Such organs include the Integrated Working Group for Capability Analysis (responsible for translating the broader direction on capabilities provided by the 2006 Defence White Paper into decisions on force structures, doctrine and capability procurement), and the Military Advisory Board (that has ultimate decision-making authority on major projects). This provided an opportunity for the *Generalinspekteuren* of the individual services to exert a high-level of influence over military procurement and trade-off support for their key projects. As a consequence, weapons systems were purchased without significant consideration for the implications for the overall capability profile of the *Bundeswehr*.[[20]](#endnote-20)

The second major problem is the poor capacity of the Federal Auditing Office (BRH) to oversee the procurement process, due to the limited manpower it is able to allocate to this task.[[21]](#endnote-21) Finally, while the *Bundestag’s* Budgetary Committee is required to approve any projects which cost over €25 million, its ability to sanction the Defence Minister for delays and cost over-runs is constrained. German defence policy is characterised by a culture of secrecy that places restraints on the capacity of civil society and government institutions to hold the *Bundeswehr* to account for the mismanagement of procurement. There is no information available in the public realm from either the BRH or the *Bundeswehr*’s Armaments Division on time-slippages and budget over-runs on major defence capability procurement programmes.[[22]](#endnote-22)

The poor level of civilian oversight over military procurement was highlighted most recently by the disastrous procurement of the EUROHAWK surveillance drone that was developed jointly by EADS and Northrop Grumman. Despite investing over 680 million Euros in the 12-year project the Eurohawk was cancelled in 2013 due to the lack of anti-air collision system which would not allow it to operate in European airspace.[[23]](#endnote-23) Indeed, the public perception of de Mazière’s competence was compromised to such as a degree by the EUROHAWK scandal that it proved a central factor in spurring Merkel to replace him with von der Leyen in the new cabinet following the December 2013 coalition treaty.[[24]](#endnote-24)

While these problems in the procurement process led to the end of deMazière’s tenure at the Ministry, they may, in part, be rectified through the reform proposals that he enacted while in office. Firstly, the reform establishes a new Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support Directorate (AIN) that takes over the roles of the individual services in acquisition and is responsible for planning coordinating and controlling national and international acquisition.[[25]](#endnote-25) The creation of the AIN should help to reduce the impact of bureaucratic politics between the services. It will also streamline the complexity of the procurement process by making the Defence Ministry’s Armaments Division, Federal Office of Defence Technology and Procurement (that has now become the Federal Office for Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support) and the IT Division, which were previously overlapping structures (that has become the Federal Office for Information Technology and Management), subordinate to the AIN. The role of civilian personnel within the AIN has also been strengthened, with only 1,000 of the 9,500 posts occupied by military personnel.[[26]](#endnote-26) Furthermore, the reform attempts to optimise the procurement process by avoiding maximalist project specifications and attempting to identify off-the-shelf technology wherever possible to avoid the complexities associated with new projects.[[27]](#endnote-27)

Two further institutional changes also point to greater efficiency in capability procurement. Firstly, de Mazière has enhanced the role of the *Generalinspekteur* (Chief of Staff) at the expense of the individual services, who takes overallresponsibility for the combat readiness of the *Bundeswehr*. As a consequence, while the *Generalinspekteur* only had a decisive decision-making role on the Military Advisory Board, he now enjoys veto power in cases where the services could not reach agreement.[[28]](#endnote-28) Secondly, the reform has established a *Planungsamt* (that will support the work of the *Generalinspekteur*). The *Planungsamt* will, amongst other tasks, take responsibility for the management of capability projects and undertake conceptual development surrounding the future tasks, structure and capabilities of the *Bundeswehr.* The *Planungsamt* will exert stronger centralised control and ensure that greater consideration is given to impact of procurement decisions for the overall capability profile of the *Bundeswehr*. As the single service commands are now located outside the structures of the Defence Ministry, all their input to capability development must be routed through the *Planungsamt.*[[29]](#endnote-29)

Furthermore, the *Planungsamt* will be composed of a significant number of civilian personnel. This stronger emphasis on the role of civilian actors in procurement will not only permit the development of a greater level of knowledge and ‘institutional memory’, but will also ensure a higher-level of impartiality in procurement.[[30]](#endnote-30) The reform process has also established a new Integrated Planning Process (IPP), led by the *Planungsamt* that aims to ensure that fewer, but more coherent procurement plans are put forward to the upper echelons of the Ministry for approval.[[31]](#endnote-31) These new institutional structures should help ensure that procurement has a greater emphasis on jointness and interoperability with Alliance partners.

However, the reform fails to engage with a number of persistent problems which undermine the *Bundeswehr’s* ability to overcome organisational politics between the single services. Firstly, the *Generalinspekteur* remains heavily reliant upon the single services for information. While there will be an increase in the the number of civilian staff in the procurement process, the military staff of the *Planungsamt* consists of officers who are appointed for two-year terms. Should these officers fail to act in the interests of their service they are likely to suffer diminished promotion prospects.[[32]](#endnote-32) Secondly, the reform does not strengthen the ability of organisations external to the *Bundeswehr,* such as the BRH and *Bundestag* to sanction the Defence Ministry for cost and time overruns on major projects. In addition, although the need for fundamental change in the relationship between industry and the *Bundeswehr* is acknowledged in the reform, the procurement reforms do not specify the relationship between industry and the Defence Ministry should alter and precisely how the Ministry can exert greater control over industry when projects are not delivered on time and to cost.[[33]](#endnote-33)

A further major problem for Germany’s capability programme is the low level of spending on defence when compared with its European partners. While Germany is Europe’s pre-eminent economic power, in 2012 it was failing to meet the NATO target of a minimum 2 percent of GDP spent on defence, having committed only 1.3 percent of its GDP to defence in contrast to the UK (2.5 percent) and France (2.5 percent).[[34]](#endnote-34) Furthermore, despite significant cutbacks in the German defence budget during the second Merkel administration, the *Bundeswehr* remains committed to retaining a broad spectrum of capabilities which will allow a residual capability to undertake a variety of operations across the conflict spectrum. In the context of such low defence spending it is questionable how long a commitment to *Breite vor Tiefe* (‘breadth before depth’) can be sustained without further degrading the quality of Germany’s military capabilities.

POOLING AND SHARING MILITARY CAPABILITIES

This restrictive fiscal context means that identifying the possibilities for savings in the defence budget through the European-wide pooling and sharing of military forces and capabilities on a bi-lateral or multilateral basis has emerged as a key priority during the Merkel administration. Furthermore, as outlined in the introduction, the second Merkel administration has witnessed the intensification of the shift in US strategic priorities away from Europe. While the well-publicised ‘Asia Pivot’ in US defence and security policy does not call into question the willingness of the US to underpin NATO’s collective defence function, it has, nevertheless, important implications for European states. Crucially, Europe will need to begin to pick up a greater level of the security burden in terms of dealing with challenges emanating from its geopolitical neighbourhood – notably in North, West and Central Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East. Europe needs, in particular, to begin to think how to reduce its dependency on the US for key strategic enablers.[[35]](#endnote-35)

The 2010 Foreign Affairs Council set in place 11 projects which focused on tackling deficits in a number of enablers. Some progress has been made, with cross-European initiatives on helicopter training, air-to-air refuelling, a medical field hospital and satellite procurement.[[36]](#endnote-36) However, more needs to be done, not least in areas such as drones, future military satellites and smart munitions, while as Biscop highlights, projects such as air-to-air refuelling require an expansion in terms of depth and the scope of EU member state involvement.[[37]](#endnote-37)

While Germany remains committed to ‘*Breite vor Tiefe’* it does need to consider where savings can be made, without significantly compromising its ability to ‘put boots on the ground’ by pooling and sharing either through CSDP’s Ghent Framework, or NATO’s Smart Defence. German leadership on pooling and sharing through the EU and NATO has been stop-start, with statements of declaratory intent followed by a disappointing lack of progress. For example, zu Guttenberg attempted to kick-start a deepening of the EU’s Ghent Framework and an initiation of Permanent Structured Cooperation through the German-Swedish Initiative of 2010.[[38]](#endnote-38) However, de Mazière - a committed Atlanticist - proved more sceptical of initiatives which might have been seen to weaken the Atlantic Alliance and there has been little action in pooling and sharing under his tenure at the Ministry.

NATO’s Smart Defence Initiative has proved difficult for European member states to engage with, due to US pressure on its Alliance partners to buy US defence capabilities, making CSDP’s Ghent Framework and the European Defence Agency (EDA) the key institutions for German cooperation with its European partners.[[39]](#endnote-39) Established in 2004, the EDA’s four main tasks are developing defence capabilities; promoting defence research and technology; promoting armaments cooperation and finally, creating a competitive European defence equipment market and strengthening the European defence, technological and industrial base.[[40]](#endnote-40) In partnership with OCCAR (the Organisation for Joint Armaments Cooperation), the EDA forms an excellent institutional venue for coordinating European pooling and sharing and joint procurement projects – by small or large groups of EU member states. Yet Germany has not taken advantage of the opportunities afforded by the EDA and OCCAR.

Some cite de Mazière’s ideological commitment to Atlanticism as the main stumbling block to more concerted German leadership on pooling and sharing through the EDA during his tenure.[[41]](#endnote-41) However, a range of factors - particularly the structural power exerted by German defence industry - have undermined the willingness and ability of the German core executive to seek greater efficiencies in procurement. Germany’s strong domestically-oriented armaments industry that is highly-sensitive to the loss of market share that could derive from a more open Europe-wide system of tendering of military procurement.[[42]](#endnote-42) In Britain and France prolonged windows of opportunity emerge following national elections to push through unpopular initiatives in defence which may have a detrimental impact on national defence industries.[[43]](#endnote-43) However, in Germany’s federal political system frequent regional elections with significant implications for the ability of the core executive to push its broader political agenda through the *Bundestag*, reduces the ability of defence ministers to create greater efficiencies in the German defence sector through European collaboration.

The high-profile of the German *Laender* create powerful regional politicians within the two major political parties (the CDU/CSU and SPD). Many post-Cold War German Defence Ministers (notably, Volker Ruehe (1992-98); Rudolf Scharping (1998-2002) and Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (2009-11) were driven by the ambition of becoming Chancellor.[[44]](#endnote-44) This ambition made these Ministers wary of upsetting important regional politicians within their parties from areas such as Germany’s north coast and Bavaria by sanctioning European initiatives which may have an impact on the German defence industry.[[45]](#endnote-45)

This political context fosters an environment in which the lobbyists who work on behalf of the German defence industry can exert a high-level of influence on the procurement process. The German defence industry expects politicians to prioritise its interests over the savings which can be made by investing in collaborative European ventures. The interests of the German defence industry are particularly pronounced on the Budgetary Committee of the *Bundestag* where politicians from the north of Germany and Bavaria have strong influence. All procurement projects necessitating expenditure of over 25 million Euros have to be sanctioned by this Committee. On a number of occasions the German Defence Ministry has been thwarted in its attempts to initiate or join joint work in the EDA because of the opposition of politicians within the Budgetary Committee who are acting to protect the German defence industry. These politicians have stalled German participation in European projects by awarding a contract to different supplier, or have raised so many questions about a project that it its location within the EDA becomes impractical.[[46]](#endnote-46)

A further problem restricting de Mazière to limited leadership within the EDA has been the poor ‘institutional fit’ between the EDA and the structures of the German Defence Ministry. Until the recent structural reforms to the Bundeswehr and German Defence Ministry, the main point of contact for the EDA was within the Defence Ministry’s Armaments Directorate. This institutional constellation allowed the Army, Navy and Air Force Chiefs an excessive amount of influence on issues of armament procurement. In addition, collaboration between the EDA and the Defence Ministry is undermined by the long-term financial planning in the Defence Ministry that stands in stark contrast to the speedy decision-making processes which characterise the EDA. The Defence Ministry’s budget is established in advance by the *Bundestag* and there is little flexibility to move funds around between sub-budgets. As a consequence Germany faces significant financial constraints on its ability to join projects within the EDA at an early stage of development. It was, for example, a major factor in Germany’s reticence to lead up the first Joint Investment Programme on Force Protection in the EDA of January 2007, into which Germany had to be ‘cajoled and shamed’ to participate.

However, two recent reforms to the institutional structure of the Germany Defence Ministry which have been implemented under de Mazière should help to remedy some of the above problems. Firstly, the reduction in the power of the Single Service Chiefs should have a positive impact on the capacity of Germany to play a more proactive role within the EDA. The higher-level of responsibility carried by the *Generalinspekteur* for operational readiness creates greater incentives for a more objective approach to capability requirements, including consideration for the opportunities presented by the EDA for the pooling and sharing of forces and capabilities. Secondly, the key contact point for the EDA has been embedded within the Political Division of the Defence Ministry. The Division for International Armaments (that is within the Political Division) takes responsibility for proactively liaising with experts within the Armaments Directorate to try to establish opportunities for initiating and participating in international projects. This development will provide an important motor for international procurement within the Defence Ministry. [[47]](#endnote-47)

However, the ability of the Political Division to persuade the Armaments Directorate to push ahead with collaborative European projects is limited by the unsatisfactory experiences of the Armaments Directorate with earlier post-Cold War collaborative European initiatives. In particular, the NH-90 and Tiger Helicopter projects were characterised by weak project management and the absence of a design freeze that fostered significant delays and over-spend. These experiences have left leading figures within the Armaments Directorate highly-pessimistic about the ability of the EDA and OCCAR to act as effective institutional venues for armaments procurement. [[48]](#endnote-48)

The preoccupation of German politicians with sustaining the domestic defence technological and industrial base has also hampered Germany’s ability to help reduce the fragmentation of European defence industry. In October 2010 Chancellor Merkel blocked the merger of BAE Systems and EADS and stymied a significant opportunity to foster greater efficiencies in European defence as a merger of BAE Systems and EADS would have created a defence industrial giant spanning a wide range of defence equipment and capabilities. Merkel’s opposition to the merger derived from a perceived lack of German influence within the new company and her fear about the implications of this lack of influence for the future of 50,000 EDAS employees based in Germany and the potential for a loss of high-tech jobs.[[49]](#endnote-49)

LOOKING FORWARD: KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR VON DER LEYEN

While the reforms of zu Guttenberg and de Mazière have addressed some of the problems which beset the ability of the *Bundeswehr* to participate in multinational crisis-management operations, they have done little to challenge the high-level of public opposition to the use of force as a tool of foreign policy. This public scepticism of the utility of force was, according to some commentators, a central factor in German non-participation in the 2011 NATO Operation Unified Protector in Libya.[[50]](#endnote-50) Libya formed a low-point in Germany’s relations with its Alliance partners during the second Markel administration, as Germany found itself siding with Russia and China against its NATO partners. Germany also failed to commit combat troops to French and EU-led military operations in Mali and the Central Africa Republic.[[51]](#endnote-51) The continued political sensitivity of German troop deployment overseas and perception of defence as a ‘vote loser’ has incentivised the core executive to adopt a highly-reactive position that shadows, rather than leads, public opinion.[[52]](#endnote-52) This problem is compounded by the German federal system, whose frequent regional elections provides little opportunity for bold policy leadership on behalf of re-defining the ideological bases of German defence and security policy.[[53]](#endnote-53)

However, there are signs that the core executive is attempting to establish a higher-level of autonomy in defence policy in order to overcome some of the constraints associated with public opinion. Following the Libya crisis, the Chancellor’s Office came under pressure from the administration of US President Barack Obama to reform the *Bundestag’s* role in sanctioning overseas troop deployments as a means of strengthening the ability of the core executive to resist public opinion.[[54]](#endnote-54) The Chancellor’s Office response sanctioned two high-profile defence experts within the CDU/CSU *Bundestagfraktion,* Roderich Kiesewetter and Andreas Schockenhoff, to consider how the process of parliamentary approval for multinational operations could be reformed and reassure Alliance partners of Germany’s credibility.[[55]](#endnote-55)

On 30th May 2012 the two MPs released a paper titled ‘Strengthening Europe’s Ability to Act in Security Policy: It is High Time’.[[56]](#endnote-56) Amongst a number of proposals to bolster European defence and security cooperation, the paper suggested that the *Bundestag* should grant approval to the core executive in advance for multilateral operations in order to establish a basis of certainty for Alliance partners that a situation such as Libya would not occur again.[[57]](#endnote-57) While the Chancellor’s Office had no expectation that the paper would lead to policy change during the 2009-13 legislative period, it had been hoped that it would stimulate a public debate about the need to decouple decision-making on defence from public opinion and concentrate greater powers in the core executive in defence policy.[[58]](#endnote-58)

The proposal met with vigorous opposition from the SPD and other political parties.[[59]](#endnote-59) However, a public debate did not emerge, mainly due to the poor timing of the paper’s release. The NATO Chicago Summit had taken place only ten days previously and there was a sense of saturation with defence and security issues at this point in time, leading the major newspapers to place the story a long way down the news agenda.[[60]](#endnote-60) However, these proposals resurfaced in the CDU/CSU September 2013 federal election programme and, despite SPD opposition, there is no commitment in the coalition agreement to protect the rights of Parliament in respect to mandating troop deployment. Hence reforming the *Bundestag’s* role in multilateral troop deployment has emerged once more as a theme in the 2013-17 legislative period with concrete proposals to be developed by a cross-party Commission led by former CDU/CSU Defence Minister Volker Ruehe.[[61]](#endnote-61)

Changing the relationship with Parliament will do little to solve the fundamental problem of a public who fail to understand the importance of defence and security policy. However, von der Leyen has an excellent opportunity to ignite a broader societal debate. Zu Guttenberg and de Mazière received criticism from experts within the German defence and security policy community for not updating the 2006 Defence White Paper before their structural reforms to the *Bundeswehr*.[[62]](#endnote-62) Hence there is now an urgent need to bring the strategic guidelines of German defence policy up to date with challenges such as the Asia Pivot, the implications of the Arab Spring and the growing instability in North, Central and West Africa. A new defence white paper – twinned with German leadership at a European level on behalf of a new European Security Strategy that is also in need of recalibration – would provide von der Leyen with the opportunity to ignite a public debate about German defence and security policy. In this way she could make the case to the German public for standing shoulder-to-shoulder with her key EU and NATO alliance partners in meeting security challenges in Europe’s geopolitical neighbourhood.

There are signs that the Merkel administration is willing to initiate this debate about Germany’s role in international security. The speech of German President, Joachim Gauck at the January 2014 Munich Security Conference outlined the intention of the Merkel administration to adopt a more proactive position in dealing with foreign and security policy issues.[[63]](#endnote-63) While Gauck emphasised Germany’s commitment to diplomatic solutions, he also stressed the importance of a more active role for the *Bundeswehr*. This discourse hinting at a greater willingness to use force as a tool of foreign policy was echoed by Defence Minster von der Leyen: ‘To sit and wait is not an option. If we have the means, if we have capabilities, we have the obligation and we have the responsibility to engage’.[[64]](#endnote-64)

Furthermore, von der Leyen also emphasised the importance of Europeans ‘planning and acting together’ in order to remain a credible actor in security policy.[[65]](#endnote-65) While these statements are encouraging – not least given von der Leyen’s commitment to the creation of a federal ‘United States of Europe’ – a number of her predecessors, such as zu Guttenberg, have also espoused the importance of European foreign and security policy coordination and the pooling and sharing of force and capabilities, with little end product.[[66]](#endnote-66) As the previous analysis has highlighted, a number of domestic impediments to a more proactive German role in the EDA exist which have thwarted attempts to route German capability procurement through the EDA. Von der Leyen has, however, been touted as the crown-princess successor to Merkel.[[67]](#endnote-67) As a consequence, although she may profile herself as an innovator in office – which may well include initiatives at the European level, she will be unwilling to make enemies within her political party by undertaking any measures which, while fostering greater efficiencies in the German defence budget, could weaken Germany’s defence-industrial base.

Developments in military technology will also shape debates on German defence policy during the 2013-17 legislative period. While the longer-term utility of Unmanned Aerial Combat Vehicles (UCAVs, more commonly known as ‘drones’) in targeting terrorist suspects is questionable, semi-autonomous and autonomous weapons systems will be a key feature of future warfare.[[68]](#endnote-68) If Germany is to remain interoperable with its Alliance partners it will need to invest in such capabilities for reconnaissance, as well as precision-strike tasks. Concern about ensuring close *Bundestag* involvement in decisions about the use of force by the *Bundeswehr* have fostered a significant amount of resistance within the German defence and security policy community to the acquisition and deployment of UCAVs. While the CDU/CSU has considered the acquisition of Reaper combat drones, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) is highly-resistant to such remotely-piloted precision-strike capabilities.[[69]](#endnote-69)

The presence of the SPD in a Grand Coalition with the CDU/CSU will complicate the acquisition of these capabilities. The December 2013 Coalition Treaty between the CDU/CSU and SPD postpones the purchase of UCAVs to allow for further consideration of the legal and ethical issues associated with their use.[[70]](#endnote-70) This debate is very welcome given the lack of public debate about the myriad of difficult legal and ethical issues associated with drone use in other states which are employing these capabilities – notably the US and UK. However, von der Leyen must ensure that the coalition treaty is not be used as an excuse to push this issue ‘into touch’ during the forthcoming legislative period. Otherwise Germany will increasingly fall behind its Alliance partners in this crucial area of military technology – and indeed, must alongside the UK and France (who have already established bilateral links to develop drone capabilities) provide leadership on enhancing Europe’s defence technological base in these crucial capabilities.

Finally, von der Leyen must deal with the implications of the setting aside of conscription for military recruitment. The loss of conscription will compound the negative effects of demographic change on the *Bundeswehr’s* abilityto attract the necessary quantity and quality of applicants by increasing the requirement for regular soldiers and removing an effective recruitment tool. Germany’s population is expected to shrink from 81 million in 2014 to 69 million by 2050 and this will be accompanied by a significant aging of Germany’s population.[[71]](#endnote-71) In 2014 27 percent of German society was aged 60 or older, giving it the second oldest population in the world.[[72]](#endnote-72) By 2050 this figure is expected to increase to 39 percent of the population.[[73]](#endnote-73) The *Bundeswehr’s* new personnel model necessitates an annual applicant pool of around 60,000, however it received only 42,500 applications in 2012 and the quality of the physical condition and educational attainment of applicants is also decreasing.[[74]](#endnote-74) Hence the pool of potential recruitsis falling dramatically at a time when more highly-skilled recruits will be required to respond to a complex set of security challenges and the *Bundeswehr* will consequently need to significantly improve its appeal as an employer.[[75]](#endnote-75)

In May 2014 von der Leyen outlined eight measures, supported by 100 million Euros of funding over five years which are designed to enhance the attractiveness of the *Bundeswehr* to new recruits. These measures include changes to the organisational culture of the *Bundeswehr* to instil support for better working conditions; improvements to the recruitment process; fostering greater balance between family life and military service; creating a stronger level of autonomy within the working environment; enhancing the diversity of career paths within the *Bundeswehr*; greater attention to the physical and psychological well-being of employees; improving the quality of accommodation and finally, ensuring that the *Bundeswehr* remains anchored in society following the suspension of conscription.[[76]](#endnote-76) While these changes are an important step in the right direction, given the ageing population, the competition that the *Bundeswehr* is facing from other public services/the private sector for personnel and the diminishing quality of recruits, these measures alone will not suffice.

It is, therefore, likely that by the end of the 2013-19 legislative period von der Leyen will be forced to consider further steps to bolster recruitment, including permitting overseas recruits to serve as soldiers in the *Bundeswehr*. Such a measure would, however, necessitate controversial changes to the employment rights of German soldiers that will require von der Leyen to expend significant personal political capital.[[77]](#endnote-77) In her previous position as Labour and Family Affairs Minister von der Leyen proved willing to make decisions – including the expansion of childcare provision, the establishment of a quota system for women on company boards and improving paternity leave – which met with resistance from her party.[[78]](#endnote-78) However, von der Leyen’s status as a potential successor to Chancellor Merkel may incentivise a more risk-averse approach that leaves some of the more difficult decisions associated with recruitment unresolved.

CONCLUSIONS: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORETICAL DEBATES ON GERMAN DEFENCE POLICY

Since the end of the Cold War, German defence policy has been a testing ground for cultural and realist approaches to the sources of military change. Realists point to Germany’s gradual convergence with the defence reforms of its European partners as evidence of a process of military emulation. This process, realists argue, is driven by the imperative of establishing greater interoperability with Alliance partners in order to contribute to a broader European process of ‘reformed bandwagoning’ on US power.[[79]](#endnote-79) European states, conscious of the decreased willingness of the US to underpin European security are developing Europe’s capacity to deploy autonomous military force within their geopolitical neighbourhood, while simultaneously seeking to remain an important Alliance partner for the US through NATO.[[80]](#endnote-80) Cultural approaches, on the other hand, emphasise the ‘path dependency’ of German historical memory and the institutionally and societally embedded German ‘strategic culture’ that sanctions the use of military force only as a matter of last resort.[[81]](#endnote-81)

The second Merkel Chancellorship provides evidence for both theses. While Germany does appear to be converging with the defence reforms of its European partners, Germany remains a long way from convergence due a range of intervening domestic level factors which have slowed the pace at which Germany is responding to the imperatives of the international security environment. As the above analysis has highlighted, these intervening variables include culture as well as the institutional structure of the state. The German Federal System not only reduces the willingness of policy makers to reshape culture, but also magnifies the impact of German defence industry on the capacity of the Defence Ministry to take advantage of the opportunities for joint procurement through the EDA.

Hence the empirical evidence points to Neoclassical Realism as the most appropriate theoretical framework for the analysis of German defence policy from the end of the Cold War up to the 2013 federal elections. While recognising the centrality of ‘systemic-level’ variables in driving policy choices in defence and security policy, Neoclassical Realism also devotes significant attention to the impact of an array domestic-level variables – such as culture, nationalism, ideology and the institutional structure of the state – in slowing down the transmission belt from systemic imperative to domestic policy response.[[82]](#endnote-82) Neoclassical Realism has received criticism for its theoretical indeterminacy due to its focus on the intervening impact of cultural as well as material domestic-level variables.[[83]](#endnote-83) However, as Rathburn notes, under Neoclassical Realist theory states are free to allow ideology and culture to determine their defence and security policies.[[84]](#endnote-84) Neoclassical Realists simply expects to see states which do this to lose relative power over the medium to long term as their defence and security policies became increasingly unsuited to the imperatives of the balance of power/balance of threat. It will, therefore, be interesting to see whether Germany’s limited level of burden sharing within NATO and CSDP is an astute use of resources – a form of ‘buckpassing’ where Germany passes responsibility for security challenges onto others – or a strategy that leads to a loss of international power and influence. Further research on this issue over the coming years would go some way to verifying the extent of Neoclassical Realism’s analytical leverage in conceptualising German defence and security policy.

NOTES

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