

# BECOMING AN ARMY ON OPERATIONS: BUNDESWEHR AND THE GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POST-COLD WAR PERIOD\*

*Operasyonel Ordu Haline Gelmek: Federal Alman Ordusu ve Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Alman Dış Politikası\*\**

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## Abstract

This study analyses the increasing involvement of the Bundeswehr in international military operations since the re-unification of the two German states. The main aim of the article is to show the gradual abandonment of the culture of military restraint and the parallel loosening of the restrictions on the use of force in German foreign policy since 1990. In this regard, the first step was the Bundeswehr's involvement in multilateral, peace-keeping and peace-making operations under the auspices of the NATO and the UN throughout the 1990's. The second step came with the Bundeswehr's involvement in the Kosovo War, increasing Germany's role in international politics. This article finally asserts that the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 has opened a new era in German foreign and security policy, in which the Bundeswehr is likely to play a greater role.

**Keywords:** Germany, Foreign Policy, Bundeswehr, Post-Cold War, Culture of Military Restraint.

## Öz

Bu çalışma, Alman dış politikasını şekillendiren sivil güç ve kendi kendisini askeri olarak sınırlama anlayışı gibi yönelimlerin kademeli olarak gevşetilmesini, Federal Ordu'nun 1990'dan bu yana dış politikada artan rolü üzerinden analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Birleşmenin ardından Alman dış politikasında askeri güç unsurlarının kullanılmasını engelleyen kültürel kısıtlamaların kademeli olarak geriletildiği ileri sürülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, ilk adım 1990'lı yıllarda Federal Ordu'nun NATO ve BM şemsiyesi altında çok taraflı, barışı koruma ve barışı sağlama operasyonlarında konuşlandırılmasıdır. İkinci adım ise İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan bu yana Federal Ordu'nun dahil olduğu ilk muharip harekât olan Kosova Savaşı'na katılım ile gelmiştir. O zamandan günümüze askeri olarak sınırlama anlayışı yumuşamış ve Federal Ordu, dünya çapında muharip operasyonlarda aktif hale gelmiştir. Bu makalede son olarak 2022'nin başlarında Rusya'nın Ukrayna'yı işgalinin, Federal Ordu'nun Alman dış ve güvenlik politikasında daha büyük bir rol oynayabileceği iddia edilmektedir. Anahtar Kelimeler: Almanya, Dış Politika, Federal Ordu, Soğuk Savaş Sonrası, Sivil Güç.

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## INTRODUCTION

Among the dominant foreign policy aims under the successive Cold War governments of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) were the deepening of the European and transatlantic integration, multilateralism, the promotion of democracy, human rights and rule of law. On the other hand, a profound anti-militarist culture has characterized the foreign policy of the Bonn Republic as a consequence of the intense collective moral trauma caused by the legacy of a militarist past. Anti-militarism was reinforced further through legal and institutional restraints imposed by the occupying Western Allies (Katzenstein 1987, Schwarz, Hans-Peter 1985, Haftendorn 1983). Thus, the FRG during the Cold War years showed a strict military abstinence to the employment of military power as a foreign policy instrument and referred to as a civilian power that exhibited a culture of restraint with respect to the use of military force (Longhurst, 2004, 25).

However, the reunification of two Germanies in 1990/91 and the attainment of full sovereignty rendered the pursuance of a more independent policy possible and thus sparked debates about the future orientation of Germany in foreign policy. Whether the reunited Germany would once again pursue *Weltpolitik* or stick to its Cold War foreign policy orientation was an object of curiosity (Duffield, 1994, 170; Lantis, 2002, 22).

Despite the institutional, legal and moral barriers inherited from the Bonn Republic, the reunified Germany has vowed to dedicate itself with all means available to the conduct of a more active foreign policy- not ruling out the use of force (Longhurst, 2018: 54-56). The demands of Germany's allies for a more active German response to the challenges of the new international order, and the country's growing self-confidence, have

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caused the reformulation of the traditional culture of military restraint and the introduction of new legislation in order to be able to assume increasing military responsibilities on the international level.

The argument on the necessity of Germany's contribution to world peace under a multilateral framework created the basis for an eventual modus vivendi between the proponents of anti-militarism and military activism in Germany. As a result, the legal and moral restraints of Germany's use of military force were gradually relaxed within the new boundaries of the German Civilian Power concept (Baumann and Hellmann 2001: 4). Accordingly, the 1990s were the years when Bundeswehr soldiers started to be deployed abroad which were for non-assertive purposes and missions involving potential combat were avoided (Duffield, 1994: 174).

Instead, Germany's return "to the world military stage" was compounded to peacekeeping and peacemaking operations conducted on humanitarian grounds, on the basis of a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) mandate, and within a multilateral framework (under the auspices of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) (Maull, 2000: 56). In the early 1990's such activities were not largely favored by the German society (Longhurst, 2018: 57). A societal consensus was reached later on as a result of the rising threat of terrorism and Bundeswehr was tasked with non-NATO operations as well under the auspices of the UN (Pradetto, 2006: 24).

However, a major turning point came towards the end of the Millennium with *Bundeswehr's* involvement in the Kosovo War in 1999 in the absence of a UNSC Mandate, which was followed by its involvement in the 2000's and 2010's in anti-terror operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. These military operations since 1999 were regarded as a much more comprehensive deviation from the culture of military restraint if not a fundamental departure (Kraft, 2018: 58).

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Meanwhile, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has triggered major changes in German foreign policy, which may have results to the degree of undermining the above-mentioned key security policy of the country. As an outcome of the growing military threats to Europe from Moscow, Germany is on the verge of abandoning the 'civilian power' role concept in foreign policy and increase both the capacity and the role of its military as evident in the historic *Zeitenwende* (Historical Turning Point) speech of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on 27 February 2022.

Accordingly, the present study aims to analyze the changes in the German culture of military restraint from 1990 to present through traces the increasing trend in the deployment of German soldiers abroad. The main aim of the study is to show in a selective way the gradual abandonment of the traditional culture of military restraint in German foreign policy through discussing the highly controversial military involvements of the Bundeswehr in the 1990s, 2000s, 2010s. It is argued that the ever-growing willingness to contribute to international military operations did not imply a departure from the culture of military restraint up until the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, the war is expected to have a considerable impact on the cultural norms that shaped the German foreign policy to the extent of abandoning them.

To lay the foundation for this argument, the first section discusses the roots of Germany's culture of military restraint. The second section (1) traces the changing German perspective on the use of force after the Cold War, and explains (2) the reluctant steps throughout the 1990s and (3) the more radical ones taken since the Kosovo War, in respect to the Bundeswehr's involvement in international military operations and eventually (4) discusses the possible erosion of Germany's culture of military restraint after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings.

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## THE COLD WAR ROOTS OF GERMAN CULTURE OF MILITARY RESTRAINT

The foundation for Germany's military restraints was laid after the Second World War (Hilpert, 2014: 27). The lessons learnt from the War was obviously the most important moral constraint that West Germany encountered regarding the post war foreign policy. The national guilt made West German public attitude and the political discourse to move in the direction of a 'Friedenspolitik' (policy of peace). This situation led to a 'Machtvergessenheit' (forgetfulness of power) in the Cold War. The pacifist, anti-militaristic sentiments within the German society led to an initial rejection of rearmament (Chappell, 2012: 50). As Henry Kissinger described, West Germany was 'economically a giant but politically a dwarf' (Wittlinger, 2010, 116).

This pacifist culture also implied the construction of a state identity for Germany as a 'civilian power' (Link, 2015, 290-291). In this regard, 'Westbindung' or the 'Westintegration', had enabled the transformation of state-society relations in the FRG through which the West German society embraced democratic principles and values. This constituted the basis for both a German collective/national identity and Germany's 'civilian power' identity in foreign policy (Brady and Wiliarty, 2002: 1).

Accordingly, Germany discredited the use of military for the pursuance of national interests. Political leaders adopted a very cautious attitude towards the use of force except territorial defense. German foreign policy was marked by 'Nie Wieder Krieg' (Never Again War), a slogan first chanted in West German streets during the rearmament debates of the 1950s and then used for decades as an excuse for Germany's non-participation in international conflicts (Kraft, 2018: 52-70).

Furthermore, the domestic legal constraints of the FRG set drawbacks regarding the use of force. In the domestic sphere, the political system of the FRG, and the Federal Constitution (Basic Law) were the main sources of restraint for Bundeswehr deployments abroad. When the Basic Law was promulgated in 1949, it did not provide a framework for the creation of armed forces. The incorporation of the military related articles into the constitution occurred through the 1956 amendment and the introduction of a new clause (87a), stating that the Federation shall establish Armed Forces for purposes of defense (Breuer, 2006: 207).

The Basic Law then became a main source of restriction for the foreign deployment of the Bundeswehr, which committed Germany in foreign policy to peace and cooperative internationalism (Pradetto, 2006: 16). Furthermore, Article 26 of the Basic Law obliged the German government to deem unconstitutional any purposeful act that intended to disturb the peace among nations, especially to prepare for a war of aggression. (Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, art. 26: 1).

On the other hand, the presence of Article 24 which enabled West Germany to “enter a system of mutual collective security for the purpose of preserving peace” created a controversy, as it was interpreted by the legal experts as an Article permitting country’s use of force other than defensive purposes.

During the Cold War, particularly after Germany’s admission to the UN in 1973, the Bundeswehr’s possible deployment for peace missions was debated on several occasions and consensually rejected by the state apparatus. For instance, in 1982, the Federal Security Council ruled against the legality of the deployment of German troops abroad on the grounds of the Basic Law’s restrictions. In 1987 West Germany once again referred to the restrictions of the Basic Law to reject the US call to provide military assistance against Iran in the Iraq-Iran War (Longhurst, 2004: 38).

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## KEY LEGAL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE POST-COLD WAR PERIOD REGARDING GERMANY'S CHANGING PERSPECTIVE ON THE USE OF FORCE

The end of the bipolar world and reunification of the two Germanies pinpointed a shift in the foreign policy context of the Federal Republic of Germany. Starting from the early 1990s the reunited and fully sovereign Germany was obliged to re-evaluate its culture of military restraint. Accordingly, a "Deutscher Weg" (German way) had to be followed, however, neither the German public&politics nor the legal structure allowed the country to accomplish a quick shift in foreign policy. Therefore, the transition from a non-interventionist position towards an interventionist one was going to be slow (Junk and Daase, 2013: 144).

An important step to this end was the introduction of a constitutional amendment which lifted the legal barriers for the German military deployments abroad. The Federal Constitutional Court ruling on 12 July 1994 established a new authoritative interpretation of the articles 24 and 87a of the Basic Law that allowed for Germany to militarily deploy abroad (Mattox, 2014).

This way the court legalized the participation of the Bundeswehr in peace building and peace enforcement operations under the condition of approval by the Bundestag and paved the way for the German military to play a more active role in international affairs (Peters, 2018: 247-248). Although up until then the German constitution did not totally forbid out-of-area deployments, with the 1994 ruling of the Court, the German military was now legally better equipped to engage in such activities. Since then, the legalist arguments put forward by those against Germany's military missions have been replaced by the discussions on German political culture.

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The evidence of the shift towards Germany's more assertive military role in foreign policy can also be found in various German defense and security guidelines such as the "White Papers" (WP) and "Defense Policy Guidelines" (DPG) which offer insight into Berlin's security and defense policies and set the strategic framework for the missions and the tasks of the Bundeswehr. Compared with the Cold War defense and security document which had vague statements concerning Germany's national interests, the ones published in the post-Cold War period argued that Germany's interests required robust military engagement abroad.

Published in 1994, following the Constitutional Court's ruling, the first post-Cold War WP of the German Ministry of Defense entitled "White Paper on the Security of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Situation and Future of the Bundeswehr" indicated a slight reversal of the notion of "civilian power". The Bundeswehr's mission became defined as contributing to "multinational NATO and Western European Union crisis-management activities, together with the capability to participate in an appropriate manner in operations conducted under the auspices of the UN and the CSCE on the basis of the Charter of the UN and the Basic Law" (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 1994: para. 519). The 1994 White Paper for the first-time placed crisis management operations on an equal footing with the defense of national borders and the borders of the NATO allies (Glatz et al., 2018).

The DPG published in 2003 following the 9/11 terrorist attacks by the then Defense Minister Peter Struck (SPD), brought a new dimension to the understanding of the defense of Germany. It argued that defense was no longer possible through the old methods and within Germany's borders. In contrast, the Bundeswehr had to safeguard Germany's security with capable armed forces and together with allies and partners wherever it was in jeopardy. Through this, foreign deployments were signified as the most important task of the Bundeswehr (Hilpert 2014: 73). On the other hand, the DPG underlined the use of military means to enforce or



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restore freedom, human rights, stability and security as a sine qua non of a credible comprehensive approach to security policy. Thus, enabling the Bundeswehr's preventive security actions with the aim of avoiding and containing crises and conflicts. It was also mentioned that the Bundeswehr should be capable of participating in covering the entire operational spectrum, including combat operations (Struck, 2003: 3)

The next WP entitled "White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr" was published by Defense Minister Franz Josef Jung in 2006 stated that Germany's military operations abroad were no longer a matter of controversy and they were already part of the 'normal' modus operandi of the Bundeswehr. The 2006 WP, that was contextualized in the post-9/11 context stated that an effective response to new asymmetrical threats requires the implementation of a wide range of security and defense instruments in order to prevent, and resolve conflicts. The document stated the tasks of the Bundeswehr as international conflict prevention and crisis management including the fight against terrorism, protecting Germany and its citizens, rescue and evacuation, and subsidiary forms of assistance (Glatz et al., 2018).

However, the extreme legislative oversight that the Bundestag had on the Bundeswehr put the WP projections at greater risk and caused a setback in the ambitious efforts of the first Merkel government. In this context, Germany's contributions to ISAF in Afghanistan and UNIFIL II mission in Lebanon were enshrined through consecutive Bundestag resolutions in September 2006 (Meiers, 2007: 632).

On the other hand, certain incidents caused quite a stir about the role of Germany at the international stage such as the refusal of the country to participate in the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its abstention as the then non-permanent member of the UNSC from voting on the Resolution 1973 on the Libyan no fly zone. These harsh breaks in 2003 and 2011

from the policy of supporting the Western Allies militarily were the two most controversial foreign policy decision of the previous decades taken by Berlin (Brockmeier, 2013: 63). They were evaluated as the return of Germany's 'culture of restraint' on military matters (Mauil, 2012: para.7).

These setbacks which were temporary and predominantly linked with domestic factors were followed with the taking of more confident steps. For example, just a couple of months after Germany's abstention from voting on the Resolution 1973, the then Federal Minister of Defense Thomas de Maizière published a new DPG entitled "Safeguarding National Interests-Assuming International Responsibility-Shaping Security Together". The new DPG indicated a more active involvement of the Bundeswehr in crisis-management operations and the willingness to assume a role of co-decider in these operations (German Ministry of Defense).

The 2014 Munich Security Conference was a critical step towards more decisive, and more substantial military engagements of Germany in foreign policy. During the Security Conference, the leading representatives of the Federal Republic, Federal President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Minister of Defence Ursula von der Leyen promised to assume a greater responsibility for the Bundeswehr in international security matters. The statements of the German leaders, which were later termed as the "Munich Consensus", emphasized that the Bundeswehr would intervene 'earlier, more decisively, and more substantially' on the international stage (Munich Security Report', 2020: 9).

The last of the WP's entitled "White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr" was published in 2016, in the post-Munich Consensus environment. It was another corner stone of the debate on the military operations of the Bundeswehr setting far-reaching goals in foreign policy including the expansion of foreign operations within

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the EU, as both part of NATO and independent of the Alliance. It listed international crisis management on equal footing with other missions of the Bundeswehr and stressed Germany's new responsibility on the world stage (Kaim and Linnenkamp, 2016: 1).

## **THE DEPLOYMENT OF GERMAN FORCES ABROAD IN THE POST-COLD WAR PERIOD**

### ***1990'S: THE TIMID STEPS TAKEN FROM REUNIFICATION TO KOSOVO WAR***

As a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the global East–West split, the Bundeswehr became an 'Armee ohne Feindbild' or in other words, armed force without a concept of an enemy (Longhurst, 2014: 55). However, this did not mean that there was no need for an army. Berlin was aware of the fact that threats to its security were global. Moreover, the international expectations for Germany to play a more active role in the international security were on the rise. It is for these reasons that, after reunification, as a country playing a key role not only in Europe but also in world politics, Germany had to accept the necessity for a change in the perception of the role of its military power.

Throughout the 1990s, Germany slowly adapted itself to the changing international environment. The Bundeswehr was for the first time deployed to 'out of area' missions of NATO in different parts of the world, from the Balkans to Africa on the grounds of varying reasons such as civilian crisis management, humanitarian aid, and etc.

However, Germany's anti-militarist public sentiment and a society reluctant to participate in collective security efforts was posing an obstacle for the Bundeswehr's deployment abroad. Being part of combat missions was perceived by the overwhelming majority of Germans as contrary to the culture of military restraint (Baumann and Hellmann,

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2001: 64). Germany hid behind the constitutional prohibitions (Article 24) against the use of military force, therefore, the Bundeswehr's involvement in the First Gulf War in 1991 an offensive military mission, could not be materialized (Berenskoetter and Giegerich, 2010: 430). Still, Germany provided the war efforts in Iraq with more than 10 billion USD (Flemes and Ebert, 2016: 2).

On the other hand, there was growing pressure from the international society and Germany's NATO allies for an increased involvement of the German forces in UN and NATO operations. In response to these demands, the government, federal parliament and some segments of the German population acknowledged the necessity for Germany to assume more responsibility through joining operations of the UN blue-helmet missions (Peters, 2018: 247). Therefore, the deployment of the Bundeswehr to operations worldwide began that complied with certain criteria such as the presence of a UN mandate, a multilateral framework, a clear mission statement, as well as an unambiguous humanitarian dimension (Longhurst, 2018: 69).

The first out-of-area mission of NATO took place in 1992 as part of a UN peace operation in Cambodia, where German doctors were assigned to provide medical care for the UN peacekeeping forces (Seiffert et al., 2012: 11). The first deployments of the Bundeswehr, which were justified as a non-combatant, humanitarian aid mission, found proponents among the German public but still led to protests all around Germany (Noetzel and Schree, 2008: 219). 1992 was quite a busy year for the Bundeswehr, since it was tasked with the organisation of providing food and medical aid for Bosnia, along with a patrol duty of the Bundesmarine over the Adriatic Sea for the observation of any potential break of the UN sanctions on Serbia. In the same year, the German soldiers were also sent to other non-combatant missions, such as the one in Kenya to provide food airlifts to Somalia under UN Operations in Somalia I (UNOSOM I) (Kamp, 1993: 166).

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Later on, in 1993, the Bundeswehr soldiers were deployed in Somalia under the UNOSOM II operation with the aim of dealing with the humanitarian crisis in the country. Therefore, the use of force was necessary to bring stability and to reshape the political order in the region, as the operation in Somalia was not part of a humanitarian aid campaign, yet a military act. The Bundeswehr ground troops were dispatched for the first time since World War Two beyond the NATO borders with UNOSOM II. However, the German military's role was limited to supply and transport (Kamp, 1993: 165).

In 1994, 10 German medical officers and military (UNOMIG) observers were sent to Georgia as part of the UN peace-keeping force. More importantly, the Federal Republic sent soldiers (with a mandate to use force) to join NATO's Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) fleet as part of the Operation Deny Flight to observe the violations against the 'no fly zone' over Bosnia-Herzegovina. This decision was preceded by disputes regarding the legality of the operation and the decision was carried to the Constitutional Court by two political parties: the small partner of the coalition government the FDP (Freie Demokratische Partei) and the main opposition party, the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) which ended up with the landmark 1994 constitutional amendment.

The Bundeswehr was also authorized to take part in NATO's Implementation Force (IFOR) peace keeping operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1995 through 1996 and in Stabilization Force (SFOR), which took over the functions of the IFOR from 1996 to 2004. In fact, during the IFOR operations, the Bundeswehr soldiers were there to assist the stabilization efforts rather than the participation in the military action (Kundnani, 2012: 44). However, the involvement of the Bundeswehr in SFOR meant the symbolic crossing of Rubicon through joining for the first time a combat mission with a security task since the Second World War (NA 1997).

The above-mentioned military operations of the Bundeswehr do not refer to a paradigmatic shift in the way of a deviation from Germany's culture of military restraint and civilian power. Rather, they constitute a re-interpretation of these German values for Berlin to respond to the ever-increasing calls from the international society and NATO for a greater German responsibility in international military mission (Mauß, 2006: 1)

### **KOSOVO WAR**

The Kosovo War marked a departure from the long-established restrained foreign policy practice in German foreign policy. The Bundeswehr's presence in the Operation Allied Force (OAF) as part of a combat mission without a UNSC Mandate, therefore with a questionable legal basis, has been a 'watershed' for German foreign policy and the most important indicator of transition in countries security and defense policy in the aftermath of the Cold War (Miskimmon, 2009: 561). Besides that, OAF was not a support mission, as was the case in Cambodia, Somalia, and Bosnia; Bundeswehr was actively taking part in a NATO-led military operation with the goal of freeing Kosovo from Serbian soldiers (Puhl, 2000: 51).

The Bundeswehr's presence in the OAF and its direct involvement in combat missions caused debates across the country regarding its future role in German foreign policy (Gross, 2007). Since the end of the Second World War, German identity had been characterized by its multilateral orientation; thus, the Kosovo war brought about fundamental questions as to Germany's self-perception as a 'civilian power' and the future role of the Federal Republic in reframing the post-Cold War order in Europe (Hyde-Price, 2001: 19). For Berlin, the Kosovo War was a good reason to take greater responsibility in the international community in order to prevent atrocities similar to the ones experienced during the Second World War (Miskimmon, 2009: 562-563).

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The existing sensitivities which had resulted from the Third Reich's role in the Balkans during the World War II and the German bombing of Belgrade in 1941 created fears and evoked memories of the Nazi Regime; however, the significance of being a reliable and committed NATO ally and the willingness to make up for the past mistakes led German government to take part in the Kosovo War (Miskimmon, 2009: 563).

The Kosovo crisis and the subsequent refugee crisis escalated during a transition in German domestic politics, in which the Christian Democrat-Liberal government was being succeeded by the Social Democrat-Green coalition under the Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and the Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (the Alliance 90/The Greens). In this regard, the deployment of the Bundeswehr soldiers to Kosovo was the first "Bewährungsprobe" (test) for the leaders of the coalition government, who belonged to the '68ers' generation, which had no direct involvement in the Second World War and its aftermath (Hyde-Price, 2001: 24).

The Kosovo War also presented a breakthrough for the German left-wing political parties' attitudes towards military missions. In fact, both Schröder and Fischer were known for their anti-militaristic attitude and their opposition to the deployment of German soldiers abroad. After the end of Iraq-Iran War in 1988, both had showed up in the protests against the USA. Particularly, Fischer had "never missed a single opportunity beforehand in order to criticize NATO" (Friedrich, 2000: 2).

However, due to the changing political conjuncture, they had to show their commitment to the Alliance after coming to power. Schröder and Fischer took advantage of the post-war history of Germany to justify the German involvement in the Kosovo War, advocating that it was the "moral obligation" of Germany ('Stopping the Catastrophe', 1999: para.5). Joschka Fischer reframed the long-established phrase "Nie Wieder Krieg" (Never Again War) as 'Nie Wieder Auschwitz' (Never Again Auschwitz), and 'Nie Wieder Völkermord' (Never Again Genocide) to increase support within the German society for the protection of the human rights in Kosovo.

In several aspects the Kosovo War caused dilemmas in foreign policy behavior of Germany, evoking questions regarding the function of the military force and put Germany at odds with its culture of military restraint and the civilian power foreign policy. It also marked a breakthrough in Germany's attitude towards military operations: the Kosovo operation was the largest combat mission since the Second World War and one without a UNSC authorization. However, as Hanns Maull (2000) argues, the decision to join the NATO campaign was "not the fundamental rupture with the culture of military restraint and the civilian power foreign policy but an evolution of German attitudes towards the use of force".

The loosening of the military restraint was embedded in search for political solutions to military conflicts. The position of Germany was that military responses to crises need to be accompanied by political efforts of conflict management. In this regard, Germany in general and Foreign Minister Fischer in particular had a leading role in supporting the political process through mediation efforts for ending the Kosovo War.

## **2000'S: TWO STEPS FORWARD ONE STEP BACK**

### ***BUNDESWEHR'S TROUBLED ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE WAR IN IRAQ***

Following the Kosovo War, the Afghanistan mission was another decisive turning point for Germany's military deployments abroad. It was the first time that the Bundeswehr was participating in a counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operation of major international scale (Seppo, 2021: 139). After the 9/11 attacks Germany announced that it was in solidarity with the US. However, becoming part of a full-scale war in Afghanistan created a controversy among the then governing Social Democrat-Green coalition. While Chancellor Schröder expressed "unqualified



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solidarity with the US” and agreed upon support for the upcoming military campaign, the Green Party, SPD’s smaller coalition partner, did not wish to support Schröder (Lombardi, 2008: 588). However, the Bundestag voted (with a slim majority), for the deployment of the Bundeswehr soldiers to Afghanistan under the scope of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) (Wagner 2017: 62).

Germany became an important contributor to ISAF by providing the mission with both fiscal and military aid. It was the third-largest contributor after the United States and the Great Britain for the operation Enduring Freedom with more than 3,500 troops, and over time it became the second largest provider of troops with approximately 150,000 soldiers deployed until the total withdrawal in 2021. Germany functioned as the lead nation for the Regional Command-North (RC-N) (Gallenkamp, 2009: 1).

The German participation in NATO’s operations in Afghanistan was in principle planned as missions of civil construction, police and military training (Bindenagel, 2010: 98). However, starting from the very beginning, Germany was seriously involved in the security missions. To illustrate, soon after the adoption of the UNSC Resolution 1386 on 20 December 2001, Bundeswehr soldiers started to patrol in Kabul. Moreover, the Federal Republic decided to settle provincial reconstruction teams in the two northern cities of Afghanistan, Kunduz and Faizabad in 2003, and in 2006 a German general was appointed as the commander of the regional command north. In addition to all these, until 2007, the Bundeswehr was in charge of training the Afghan police.

Participating in such an active combat mission contradicted with Germany’s non- interventionist history and identity, and this identity conflict was mirrored in a heated and ongoing discourse on foreign military engagements and the Federal Republic’s identity as a responsible

actor in world politics (Engelkamp and Offermann, 2012: 235). During Bundeswehr's participation in ISAF (2002-2014) the Federal Governments (Schröder II, Merkel I, Merkel II) had to cope with those who were either against the participation of the Bundeswehr forces in missions abroad or disagreed with the way in which the German soldiers were tasked with. Both the legitimacy of the Bundeswehr mission to combat the threat of terrorism, as well as the way the Bundeswehr mission should be called were questioned both by the opposition and the German public. Germany was not fighting a war against another state but conducting an anti-terror operation against a criminal regime. Whether it could be called a 'war' or simply a 'stabilization operation' was a major public controversy (Lombardi, 2008: 589).

The Afghanistan conflict was justified both within the frame of a moral responsibility for Afghanistan's future and also of self-defense and self-interest of the Alliance. It was portrayed by both the public and large parts of the political elite as a 'civilian development project than a war'. Similarly, a large majority of German citizens, instead of considering the situation as a 'war on terror', regarded Afghanistan as a failed state whose people were left impoverished and underdeveloped (Lombardi, 2008: 590). Therefore, the main aim of the deployment of German soldiers to Afghanistan was reflected as to rebuild the country rather than waging a bloody war.

However, the attitude began to change after the security situation started to deteriorate significantly and the German forces encountered a number of suicide attacks first in 2003 and then between 2007 and 2008, and insurgent groups detonated bombs on roads against the ISAF and the Afghan forces. It was obvious that there was a serious security problem in the German main area of responsibility, and due to the worsening security situation, there was a fierce debate in the parliament on whether the ISAF mission could be successful (Kaim, 2008: 611).

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The public perception and support for the mission changed entirely subsequent to the Kunduz attack in September 2009, and it was clear that Germany was at war. Hereupon, the majority of German citizens asked for an immediate withdrawal (Bindenagel, 2010: 105-106). After the Kunduz attack, violence in the RC-N area gradually increased and security conditions worsened (Gallenkamp, 2009: 1).

Increasing numbers of attacks on the Bundeswehr soldiers and casualties caused controversy over Germany's Afghanistan mandate and German citizens to develop a general anti-war attitude. "Get out of Afghanistan!" had already been the slogan articulated by the Left party (Die Linke) since the beginning of the ISAF operation (Fürstenau, 2021: para.2). On the other hand, the SPD was not supporting the withdrawal of German soldiers from Afghanistan, but their massive reduction, while the CDU/CSU was supporting the continuation of German presence in the country.

Over time, German public opinion has become more critical about the military missions abroad, and this was partly because of the collapse of the allegedly civilian-oriented Afghanistan policy of Berlin (Münch, 2020: 74). Albeit starting as a peace mission with no combat role, German soldiers fought and died in Afghanistan under 'warlike' circumstances in the later stages of the mission. Germany's abstention from the UNSC vote on a resolution regarding military intervention in Libya (resolution 1973) in 2011 also indicated that Germany and its public opinion had already re-started to adopt a culture of military restraint as the increasing bills-financial and economic, or in terms of body bags, of the war in Afghanistan came in (Blumenau, 2022: 1904).

A diplomatic split occurred between Berlin and Washington after the invasion of Afghanistan in 2002 amid the US invasion of Iraq as Germany decided not to participate in the "Coalition of the Willing" due to the incompatibility of the war with German civilian power notion (Forsberg,

2005: 215) and the public mistrust to the US foreign policy which also began to dominate the ranks of the governing SPD-Green party coalition. This led to a temporary withdrawal from Germany's long-standing tradition of Atlanticism as well as a temporary return to a pacifist foreign policy in Berlin until the the 2010's.

### **2010'S: OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR) IN IRAQ AND SYRIA**

The Iraq War (2003-2011) and the civil war that broke out in Syria in 2011 have left an authority gap in the Middle East, and the region became a hub for fundamentalist groups in the 2010s. This led Germany to reconsider its role in the Middle East and the Federal Republic began to play an active role in Iraq and Syria. The involvement of the Bundeswehr in Iraq (2014) and Syria (2015) was justified as part of a collective self-defense against the IS with the aim of helping Iraq and France. This justification was an overly broad interpretation of international law. The participation of the Bundeswehr soldiers in Syria against the IS was based on the UNSC Resolution 2249 along with Article 51 of the UN Charter. However, Resolution 2249 which "Calls upon Member States that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures in Syria and Iraq, to redouble and coordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL" (UNSCR, 2249) did not allow for the use of force, whereas Article 51 clearly authorizes the use of force in case of an armed attack, but it is confined to attacks that are imputable to another state (Terry, 2016: 26).

At this point, the problem aroused as the so-called IS is not a state actor. However, Berlin used other justifications in the law of nations for the use of force in Syria such as Article 42(7) TEU (The Treaty on European Union), and resolutions 2170 and 2199 of the UNSC (Peters, 2018: 261).

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The legal justifications put forward by Germany was not enough to convince the opposition in the Bundestag. “Members and factions of the parliamentary opposition filed a complaint before the Constitutional Court against the deployment decisions in the context of the OIR” (Peters, 2018: 261).

### ***2020’S: A U-TURN FOR GERMANY: THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE***

The war which Russia launched on Ukraine in February 2022 seems to have had fundamental effects on Germany foreign policy, marking a major break from its culture of military restraint. Upon Russia’s aggression, prior to the invasion of Ukraine, the Scholz government, which came to power in December 2021, decided to suspend the Nord Stream 2 project. Putin’s aggression has not only made Berlin reconsider its energy policy, it has also caused the SPD, FPD, and Green party government coalition to take more resolute action towards Russia. Finally, when the invasion started on 24 February 2022, Germany started making arms shipments to Ukraine, reversing a decades-long principle of not sending weapons to crisis regions (Blumenau 2002: 1897), and began re-evaluating the role of the Bundeswehr (Macgillis, 2022: para.1).

On 27 February 2022, Chancellor Scholz made a historic speech to announce his government’s response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In his speech, Scholz described Russia’s invasion as a turning point (Zeitenwende) and explained his government’s plans to cope with it including a massive increase in defence spending up to more than 2% of the economic output (twice the size of annual defense budget), thereby meeting NATO requirements.

Accordingly, an amendment was made on article 87a of Basic Law creating the constitutional basis for the Bundestag to establish a special trust with its own credit authorization for a single amount of up to 100

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billion euros to strengthen Germany's alliance and defense capabilities. This includes the purchase of armed military drones, the provision of new aircraft to extend Germany's participation in nuclear sharing arrangements, and the acceleration of joint European defense projects.

The decision to strengthen the Bundeswehr on a scale which has not been seen since the Cold War marks a 'Zeitenwende' or a turning point in Germany's history. In his historic speech, Scholz said 'we need airplanes that fly, ships that can set out to sea and soldiers who are optimally equipped for their missions' (Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz am 27. Februar 2022). As put by Blumenau (Blumenau, 2022: 18961911), through the Zeitenwende speech, Scholz acknowledged the necessity for Germany to revive its support on the security of Europe and NATO countries. His speech marked a break with the restrained approach pursued for more than two decades, in other words, German half-hearted shift towards a more active Bundeswehr abroad, which have been unthinkable before. This would also have possible implications for further out-of-area missions held under the auspices of NATO and the UN, making Germany to change its role from a hesitant partner to a backbone force and a leader.

As evident in Scholz's historic words, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused a dramatic reversal of Germany's foreign policy. Berlin set a confrontational course with Russia as it came to the realization that using trade and energy along with insistence on dialogue in order to build ties with Moscow have been a wrong policy to challenge Russian revisionism. This means leaving the traditional restraints in foreign policy behind and taking important steps on the way to 'including the military in the toolbox of international policy (Hoff, 2022: para.11).

A new Cold War that the invasion of Ukraine may trigger, can cause Germany to actively take part, thus changing Germany's civilian power approach and culture of military restraint in the short term for the sake of

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the security in Europe. Nils Schmid, the foreign affairs spokesperson for the SPD asserted that this new era would be more about containment and deterrence along with defense against Russia (McGuinness, 2022: para.5). With the war in Ukraine, Germany has perhaps left behind a special and unique kind of restraint in foreign policy and moving towards using its military more effectively. (A New Era: Germany Rewrites its Defence, Foreign Policies, 2022).

## **CONCLUSION**

The reunited Germany have created doubts regarding the continuation of the country' role as a civilian power and raised questions about whether the country would remain committed to its traditional principle, the culture of restraint in the post-Cold War period. As early as the early 1990s many scholars argued about a possible return of the German revanchism. In fact, the Bundeswehr's more active participation at the world stage was putting Germany at odds with its culture of military restraint and the civilian power foreign policy. However, Germany has succeeded in adjusting itself to the world order by not abandoning but reinterpreting these principles.

In this regard, the culture of military restraint has been gradually loosened in the early 1990s as a response to the external pressure on Germany to take more responsibility on the conflicts in different parts of the world. Because of its feeling of an international responsibility, Germany has been more willing to actively respond to international crises. In this regard, the Bundeswehr soldiers have been deployed in crisis regions as part of multilateral, non- combat, peace-keeping and peace-making operations.

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However, the Kosovo War was a turning point in Germany, since it was the first combat war the German armed forces joined after the Second World War. More importantly, the Kosovo operation was without a UNSC authorization. However, it was still not a fundamental rupture with the culture of military restraint and the civilian power foreign policy but an evolution of German attitudes towards the use of force. Since the Kosovo War, the rigidity of the German culture of military restraint has been eased and the Bundeswehr has been actively deployed across the globe as part of combat military operations.

The Afghanistan War was another decisive turning point for Germany's military deployments abroad as the Bundeswehr participated in its first ever counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operation of major international scale. It was also the first ground battle the Bundeswehr participated after the Second World War. The Afghanistan mission is also not a rupture with the culture of military restraint and the civilian power concept because the Bundeswehr's deployment in the country was not for combat missions but for civil construction, police and military training.

The developments of the later years forced the Bundeswehr to engage in ground combats. Moreover, the main aim of Germany's participation in the combat missions against the IS in Syria and Iraq at the request of France and Iraq was carrying out training supplying weapons and military equipment and etc. rather than taking offensive actions.

Since 1992, Bundeswehr has been sent to more than 130 mandates, amounting to more than 60 different operations. Although these operations can be perceived as an evolution of the culture of military restraint, they cannot be interpreted as a deviation from civilian power role as none of these missions was carried out based on an act of aggression or assertiveness. While the country has become more active in military



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operations in the last two decades, they do not constitute a priority in solving crises. However, the Russian offensive on Ukraine launched in February 2022 has had fundamental effects on Germany foreign policy, marking a major break from its culture of military restraint.

The historic *Zeitenwende* or turning point speech delivered by the Chancellor Olaf Scholz three days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, on 27 February 2022, was widely viewed as a major adjustment in Germany's foreign policy and Scholz's promise to spend 10 billion Euros on the Bundeswehr and reaching 2% of the GDP on defense spendings was heralded a significant improvement in Germany's military capabilities. In his speech to the Bundestag Scholz said that Putin's war on Ukraine marked a turning point for his country's foreign policy, too.

He also warned Putin not to underestimate Germany's determination to defend every square meter of the Alliance's territory together with its allies. Scholz also added that whatever was needed to secure peace in Europe would be done and Germany would contribute its share to these efforts in a spirit of solidarity. He said that for the realization of these "the Bundeswehr needs new, strong capabilities". (Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz am 27. Februar 2022, 2022: para.33).

Putin's aggression caused Berlin to overhaul its diplomatic attitude towards Russia and re-evaluate the role of its military. As evident in the historic *Zeitenwende* speech of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the Russian occupation of Ukraine proves a sharp turn from the 'civilian power' concept to the extent of abandoning it.

As suggested by Marsh and Siebold (2022), Putin's aggression pushed Germany to assume a leadership role as a global power, which means more emphasis on the use of military power as a political instrument in foreign policy of Berlin and a through deviation from military restraints.

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This is perhaps not the first time that Germany promises to take the leadership role (the first time being the Munich Consensus of 2014), and it is not yet clear whether Berlin's leadership ambitions are recognized by its partners and allies or not. However, the developments since February 2022 shows that Germany's allies and partners are keener than ever to the leadership of Berlin.

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