

THE BUNDESWEHR AND THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

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Introduction

The future of the Bundeswehr had just begun, announced boastfully a spokesman of the ruling CDU party, when German defence minister Rühle enforced the engagement of the German Bundeswehr in Somalia in the spring of 1993, and then tried to make the decision palatable to a largely disinterested public. With this venture, the political and military establishment of the Bundeswehr in fact left the former firm position where both the German society and the military had felt safe for years, and entered an insecure terrain instead - since then experiencing only modest support.

Comparing the officially so called “unavoidable new challenges” to those tasks which so far had been effective in the short life of the Bundeswehr, a deep structural and restorative distortion becomes visible. Those who had personally experienced the Bundeswehr in the fifties and early sixties - the present defence minister did not - suddenly feel taken back to that “future”. Under the new political leadership of defence minister Rühle not only leadership style and social manners in the defence resort have become rude - the cold climate within the troops has carried on. Because the Bundeswehr’s existence can - to a growing fraction of society - hardly be legitimated by defence of the country, additional and different arguments had to be brought in the playground. Suddenly the military should be an “integral part of the reason of state”, an “legitimate means of the state’s foreign policy”, a “military reinsurance against multiple unforeseeable future risks” and should serve as an instrument to “restore international public law” in case it was violated (Nassauer 1993, 53). Confronted with the **new** military missions one cannot be surprised when detecting an increasing number of critics who see the Bundeswehr endangered to drift away to the rightists. Especially liberal officers would “increasingly often take the chance to leave the Bundeswehr before the end of their contract”. And, on the other hand, “there was a clearly visible number of volunteers with political right-wing, if not extreme rightist orientations”.¹

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Reorganisation of the Bundeswehr: From Defence to Deterrence²

Charles Moskos (1992, 1) recently classified the societal development in Western countries after World War II by identifying an early and late phase of the Cold War, followed by an emerging society after the end of the cold war that he characterised a warless society. It obviously is justified to assume that the armed forces of this future society will be in need of fundamental reorientation. This approach roughly applies to German society and its armed forces and will be used in the following.

The date to be set for the end of the cold war is not definitely settled yet. In the developed western as well as in the East European societies at any rate a growing loss of legitimacy and acceptance of everything concerning the military could be noticed long before in Malta Bush and Gorbachev officially declared the cold war's end. In Germany we may equate the end of the cold war with the fall of the Berlin wall in October 1989, although the development along that line had set in both of the German states even long before.

Within the years following the (hot) Second World War until 1989, an **early** and a **late** phase of the cold war can be identified in Germany. While the early phase can be characterised as that of a society "ready for defence" quite appropriately, the consciousness of the subsequent generation "prepared for deterrence" is characterised by the effort to avoid a hot war by the threat of ultimate military means among other things. In the Federal Republic the transition from the society "ready for defence" to the one oriented towards deterrence should probably be set around the mid-sixties.

In 1995, the Bundeswehr of the now united Germany is entering a new phase in its history. At least formally, parts of the forces of the former German Democratic Republic have been fully integrated by now. The strength of military personnel, which before the unification amounted to 495,000 soldiers in West Germany is intended to have dropped to 370,000 men for a territory that due to the unification has extended by about 44%. The Bundeswehr will be provided with a new organisational structure and will have stationed their units on the territory of the former ideological and military opponent, too.

Only when, and as soon as, this formal reorganisation has been completed, however, the Bundeswehr will be faced with the actual fundamental changes. More than ever before, the armed forces will have to face the functional expectations placed in them by society. They will have to examine the decline in the significance of military means for the preservation of peace alongside a simultaneous increase in the reputation of non-military means. In view of the enormous problems connected with the funding of German unity they will also have to allow a more intensive questioning than up to now as to what benefit they make on the funds invested in them.

During the early phase of the cold war the predominant mood among the population of the Federal Republic and, after their formation in 1956, among the Bundeswehr as well was one characterised by fear of, but also by a high degree of readiness for war. The **de facto** absolute rivalry between the two opposing ideologies, the communist and the "western" one, manifested itself in mutual hostility. They spoke of a cold war and behaved accordingly. Disregarding the irritations dating back to the time the Bundeswehr was built up that lingered on for some year ("count-me-out" movement) we can say that in the Federal Republic of Germany the public looked upon its own forces as well as upon the allied forces stationed in the Federal Republic favourably or at least without major reservations.

This was fundamentally due to the fact that society perceived a massive military threat emanating from the East. There was no ambiguity as to where the threat came from and who the enemy was and there was no disagreement about the fact that if need be he

would have to be countered vigorously by military means. Because of the threat the state and its armed forces had joined closely. The state was represented “by its army”. On the other hand, the armed forces regarded themselves as important upholders of the concept of the state in the Federal Republic.

In the mid-sixties, the basic concepts of security policy characterised by fear of and readiness for war began to be superseded by the strategic concept of nuclear deterrence. Although deterrence of an opponent by military means is as old as humankind itself, only modern mass destruction weapons rendered it possible to threaten the potential opponent convincingly with total destruction and thereby to prevent him from military aggression. In place of war, the threat became the means of affecting the enemy’s intentions.

Some twenty years later at the threshold to the eighties, severe doubts concerning the sense of nuclear deterrence began to arise. Increasingly, nuclear weapons themselves became perceived as unusable in principle. They were increasingly understood as political weapons or, to be more precise, as weapons of a politically symbolical character. This change resulted from the understanding that due to the limited controllability of their effective radius, due to the fact that present-day societies are not suited for war and due to the unpredictable collateral damages weapons of mass destruction when employed would also destroy what is actually meant to be protected by their existence. Since then, for Central Europe at least, war no longer automatically constitutes the continuation of politics by other means.

Since the seventies, new perceptions of threat have assumed concrete shape. It is characteristic of these threats that they extend beyond the previous confines of ideological systems and intra-social demarcation lines. It is assumed that the former “enemy” is affected by the risks and thus by the threats just like oneself. This “solidarity” enforced by circumstances results in a fading of old enemy images. In substance, this concerns environmental disasters (ozone hole, climatic disaster), the resurgence of “irrationalisms” that were supposed to have been outgrown (nationalism, religious fundamentalism) and shifts of economic power.

In the “ready for defence” Bundeswehr, the soldier was supposed to orient himself professionally towards the role model of the heroic fighter — perfectly in analogy to the social perceptions of threat and in continuation of historical experiences derived from the Second World War that had happened only a few years ago. The identification with respectable military virtues and values handed down from ancient times determined self-concept and motivation and thus the identity of the corps of regulars and temporary-career volunteers.

The transition to the society “prepared for deterrence” in the mid-sixties left the Bundeswehr’s mission of preserving peace **formally** unchanged. It was, however, given another connotation regarding security policy. While previously the Bundeswehr believed that it had to be prepared for a “hot” war, now it was primarily a matter of convincingly demonstrating deterrence to restrain a potential aggressor from a military attack. **The soldier had to be capable of fighting to avoid the need to fight.** It was a logical part of this doctrine that was nevertheless taken little notice of that the Bundeswehr would have been compelled to admit the failure of its military mission if the potential enemy had started a military intervention. **The “emergency” was no longer represented by war but already by peace.** Service in the Bundeswehr was “a war prevention service”³ and the Bundeswehr were declared a “peace movement”⁴.

Thus for the soldier the old dichotomy of war and peace to a large extent had lost its function of creating an identity. Starting in the late sixties in the soldier’s professional field the readiness for heroic self-sacrifice on the battlefield was increasingly replaced by the political-technical management of the state’s monopoly to use force as an instrument

of deterrence. In the soldiers' professional self-concept, the fundamentally modified tasks increasingly caused the values of market economy to be added to the traditional military values. Managers endowed with qualifications as those requested in the economic field were in demand. Civilian or technical-economic performance qualifications were adopted for officer education and training. The civilian usability of the capabilities and skills obtained in the forces became an important incentive in military recruiting campaigns. The soldier's profession changed to a "job" comparable to many others. At any rate, the so called *sui generis* debate conducted for a long time and in some cases doggedly was no longer the focus of attention.

But even in the context of all this demythologisation of the soldier, in substance his identity remained linked to a large extent to conventional military conceptions of his part and patterns of war. Only hesitantly and incompletely the temporary-career volunteers began to develop an "identity oriented towards deterrence" adequate to the new strategy. Above all, it could not emerge because of the lack of empirical evidence: Ultimately, it was never possible to say with certainty whether deterrence would work at all in the long run.

The Bundeswehr in Search for a New Identity

After the unification of the two German states the self-concept of the soldiers of the Bundeswehr has begun to falter, particularly by the Gulf War in the spring of 1991. Being occupied themselves with the "painful birth pangs" caused by the emergence of all-German forces, the Bundeswehr firstly had to allay the foreign countries' suspicions that it intended to evolve into a new military power dominating Europe. Only a little while later the Gulf War confronted the German armed forces with the same foreign countries' demands for active participation in joint military action. "Since 1989 foreign critics have tended to make opposite demands: On the one hand, pressing the new Germany to allay fears over reviving militarism by confirming that policy would be determined by the peace commitment of our constitution. ... On the other hand, castigating Germany for not playing a more prominent military role in the Gulf crisis" (Ramsbotham 1993, 3). The political sovereign — parliament and government — to whose primacy the soldiers had subordinated themselves so far could then not resolve this contradiction and was at a loss for giving the soldiers the guidance required. Ever since then the political parties in power and those in the opposition have tended to define the mission and international role of the German armed forces in different ways.

The fiercely disputed legitimacy of employment of German soldiers in military (combat) missions outside national and alliance boundaries and/or on behalf of the United Nations or the CSCE is distracting from the actual question as to what meaning may be left for the Bundeswehr after the threat existing during the time of the cold war has ceased to exist. Since the mid-sixties the Bundeswehr as a part of NATO had been tasked with deterring the potential enemy from a military attack at the borderline between the Western and Eastern system. According to the Bundeswehr this mission has been successfully accomplished: "For more than 35 years the German Army in co-operation with the armies of our allies, has made a significant contribution to the preservation of peace in freedom — of this we are proud."⁵

Now all of a sudden the parties in power demand that in view of the changed general security setting the Bundeswehr should get rid of their original task of war prevention. "On a radically changing and troubled continent",⁶ German armed forces "are to continue in future to national defence ... and make military contributions to international security within the collective defensive alliance" of NATO, "the United Nations and possibly also the EC/WEU and future CSCE commitments in order to preserve territorial sovereignty".⁷

Constituting a “peace army”, the Federal armed Forces so far had drawn their legitimisation from preventing the application of military force. In this context, their mission was designed in such a way that, strictly speaking, deterrence and along with it the Bundeswehr would have failed if belligerent acts had taken place. Henceforth the German armed forces are to see themselves as a protecting and regulating power, as peacekeeping and peace making forces, even as forces of intervention operating all over the world and threatening with the use of military force to assert vital interests. “Unfortunately, the employment of military means of power for achieving political objectives even in Europe and the adjacent regions cannot be ruled out in future”.⁸

The Bundeswehr soldiers’ professional concept that has evolved over many years, namely “to serve the Federal Republic faithfully and to defend bravely the law and the freedom of the German people”,⁹ does not include tasks of this nature. On the contrary, faced with the experience of the Second World War the philosophy of the Basic Law and German military legislation were aimed at precluding once and for all the application of military force by German armed forces for other reasons than the defence of their own territory and that of NATO states.

New Military Missions and the Bundeswehr’s Strength in Peace

At present there are two partly complementary functions which society expects the military to fulfil.¹⁰ In the first place, current developments no longer allow us to define security mainly in military terms but require us to relate it first of all to “ecological and demographic disasters with global border-crossing effects ... (such as) ... population explosion, climatic disasters, lack of resources” (Vogt 1990, 17). The forces in a post-military society are advised to undergo a change of paradigms. Military power potentials would have to be reduced to forces that, due to their structure, have no attack capabilities. They would, however, be armed and employed to resist new threats to security. The future tasks of the Bundeswehr would inevitably result from the predominant risks of the future. The relatively small remaining military tasks concerning basic security would be supplemented by tasks such as military mediator functions and pacifying actions in areas of conflict and relaxed tension (promotion of peace by assuming a “constabulary” function); verification tasks in the course of the disarmament process; technical disaster relief during floods, earthquakes, forest fires, etc., or humanitarian assistance in case of industrial and environmental disasters (Vogt 1990, 80).

A second pattern of reasoning is immediately linked with the one above. Participating in the accomplishment of tasks that are considered necessary and useful by society may help the Bundeswehr resolve their dilemma of public legitimisation (see Kohr and Lippert 1990, 7; Kern 1990, 23). Dedicated to the common cause of protecting society from the risks of modernisation, the Bundeswehr might win back some of the social approval (and acceptance) that they have lost during rising criticism about their exclusively military-oriented defence system. Actually, the Bundeswehr has always brought its admittedly efficient technical assistance into focus when providing help in the wake of disasters at home and abroad; and it has done so with excellent publicity. However, this led to the result that the Bundeswehr has gained status in a field that cannot — at least not necessarily — be derived from the original objectives of the military.

By taking over secondary functions, the Bundeswehr would come closer to the image they are associated with by the public. In public perception, primary military functions clearly play a minor role. Social tasks come first, as for example, “assistance in the wake of natural and technological disasters”, or “getting the unemployed off the streets” or

“teach discipline and order to the youth” (Kohr and Rader 1989, 13).

Technically, there are, however, a lot of points against charging the Bundeswehr with non-military tasks. Basically, the military organisation is appropriate for the fast and concentrated employment of large-scale technical equipment and extensive manpower, even for non-military purposes. But military work is still characterised by “order and obedience” and still requires most soldiers to do their “duty” in the military service which involves “the renunciation of a part of the civil rights.” The restrictions of these basic rights that are guaranteed in our democratic constitution are justified by the idea that without these restrictions the military would not be able to protect democracy against threats from **outside**. But where tasks are concerned that can be mastered with less restrictive organisational patterns, military structures become obsolete, or at least need to be justified. To state the facts over subtly: Charging the Bundeswehr with other than military tasks would be equal to a socially controversial militarization of the social sectors and institutions concerned.

In political practice it would be difficult, anyway to charge the Bundeswehr with non-military tasks. As a matter of fact, the “socio-economic field has almost completely been taken over by civilian organisations which are constantly on their guard against interference from rival institutions” (van Dorn 1976, 57). In Germany, civil defence and disaster control services are provided by the Technisches Hilfswerk (Technical Emergency Service), a federal agency, by private organisations, and by professional fire brigades. In the accomplishment of **humanitarian** tasks the Bundeswehr would, in addition, face competition from the central associations of private welfare and their member institutions.

Extending their activities beyond the key military missions and diversifying these missions would very likely expose the Bundeswehr to the reproach of acting with a view to further legitimising military structures. “The adoption of non-military objectives by the military (would be) understood as the obvious attempt ... to keep alive an evidently superfluous and costly institution” (van Dorn 1976, 57).

So there are good reasons for the Bundeswehr to stick to their military last like the proverbial cobbler. This will probably include verification tasks in the wake of disarmament procedures and the integration of Bundeswehr units in international and multinational component forces. A “Centre for Verification Tasks of the Bundeswehr” has already been established. And it is probably only a question of time that the required constitutional basis for the employment of Bundeswehr’s units for peace-keeping tasks on behalf of the UN and outside the NATO area will be provided.

“The Future Emergency is Represented by War”¹¹

Regarding the Bundeswehr’s missions in a world after the Cold War the main political parties in Germany - whether in government or in the opposition’s role - are trapped in a deep and fundamental dilemma. The Christian democrats (CDU, CSU) and to a minor degree the smaller liberal partner in the coalition (FDP) publicly argue the so-called new world order would put new demands on a — after the unification — bigger Germany. The international “community of nations” (Völkergemeinschaft) would expect Germany to take their part of responsibility in protecting **world-wide** human rights, in preventing genocide, in keeping world peace. German soldiers’ obligation as a matter of course would be to risk their own lives in fulfilling this new mission.¹² “To identify Germany’s new role with a militarization of it’s foreign policy would mean a grotesque contortion”.

When the German Basic Law in 1949 came into existence no military forces were provided. The German rearmament in 1956 (and the respective change of the Basic Law), however, was solely dedicated to defence of the own and the NATO’s territory. Although Germany in 1973 signed the UN charter which includes military operations under UN

guidance, the Basic Law was at that time not adjusted in this respect. And despite significant doubts, whether the Basic Law and the UN Charter really match, the government now simply declares military peace-keeping and peace-enforcing operations, NATO out-of-area missions and even combat missions like the one during the last gulf war compatible with the Basic Law, as compatible as humanitarian missions and international disaster relief measures. Because at present only humanitarian help and disaster relief find support by the majority of the German parliament, the governmental parties refrain from military combat and “blue helmet” peace keeping missions, but they emphasise that they legally could order these, too.

The parliamentary opposition, especially the social democrats (SPD), vehemently contradicts this statement insisting in what they call a consensus in German society at large, that finally should end in a constitutional amendment, if that would be the outcome of a consensus. Only if and when this adoption would be reached a definite mission for the Bundeswehr after the cold war could be defined. The question, however, whether there is a political need for adapting the Basic Law splits the SPD in several fractions¹³, thus presenting the party in the public in a bad shape. A strata of “peace nicks” favour a total military abstinence and see no reason to change the Bundeswehr’s obligations at all. Another group supports only peace-keeping “blue helmet” missions, excluding any combat operation. Another fraction recommends to fully take over the obligations from the UN charter, chapter 7, that is to carry out any UN request for military measures, including combat operations.

Unable to change the Basic Law according to its own ideas — this would require the votes of the opposition — the Federal CDU/CSU/FDP Government is changing the practical application of the constitution instead: “Little by little it is extending the limits separating it from free disposal of the Bundeswehr. It is setting precedents and trying to establish customary rights. German soldiers have cleared mines in the Gulf, taken care of Kurds refugees to Iran, and are providing medical assistance in Cambodia - altogether activities worthy of praise, but without exception resting on an uncertain legal basis” (Mutz 1992, 35). The German government has followed a “policy of ‘grandmother’s footsteps’”. As a result there are already ... (even before the vexed engagement in Somalia) ... several hundred German soldiers stationed around the world” (Ramsbotham 1993, 2).

At present we do not experience an attempt to define a role for Germany that is oriented towards peace and humanity and to search for a large societal consensus. Instead it is attempted to dissolve the “culture of restraining” towards the application of military violence. ... The up to now by a majority of the population rejected idea of extending the tasks of the Bundeswehr shall be undermined step by step. ... The German soldiers have more obligations than just to defend the territory and the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany (Huber 1992, 20).

This exactly seems to be the mid-term strategy of the present government and its defence minister: that the German public all that sudden couldn’t get along with new international measures by the Bundeswehr applying military violence. “After forty years of education for peace the population only with difficulties can be convinced of combat missions”.¹⁴ German society therefore should be given its time to become accustomed to new realities. It is only consequent when speakers of the CDU comment on the German military involvement in Somalia that “the future of the Bundeswehr just began”¹⁵ or that Germany now gives up the special role held so far and should be prepared to face all challenges that the UN would put on it.¹⁶

Main strata of the news mass media in Germany however warned that Somalia meant a multiple uncertain adventure for the Bundeswehr and for the government.¹⁷ “A dangerous step-by-step policy, a strategy of slow assimilation ... because a decent change

