

## Chapter 17: *Zeitenwende* Without Strength?

### Strategic Mirror Axes of Vital German Security Interests: Eastern Flank and East Asia

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#### Abstract

In 2023, the German government must succeed in balancing the National Security Strategy (NSS) adopted in the coalition agreement for the remainder of the legislative period on the one hand, the strategy needed on a daily basis to counter Russia's war of aggression on the other, and the simultaneous rebalancing *vis-à-vis* Xi Jinping's China. This chapter offers key guidance so that Germany's pending strategic mindset shift can be initiated. Derived from this, the chapter makes novel practical suggestions on how the mirror axes of transatlantic and thus German security, both East Asia and the eastern flank, can be strategically defused in such a way that, at their core, they cannot credibly challenge Germany's security and the alliance's deterrence capability in a global perspective. In this context, war is not regarded as a museum-like category.

#### Keywords

strategic strength, strategic mindset, strategy, two-front war, deterrence

*"... yet, and this may only be a matter of temperament,  
there does tend to be a dark side to the strategic  
imagination that picks up intimations of disorder at times  
of stability, that senses the fragility of human institutions  
even while striving to reinforce them,  
that cannot stop thinking of war while promoting peace."*

Lawrence Freedman

## 1 Introduction

Similar to his speech in Prague on August 30, 2022, Chancellor Olaf Scholz had already said in the German Bundestag on February 27, 2022, that policy toward Russia “presupposes strength”.<sup>1</sup> Whether unconsciously or not, the head of government thus voiced the central criterion in the mutual assessment of international adversaries: the perception of their respective strength or weakness and thus their vulnerability. Central, because such perceptions significantly influence their decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

Over the course of 2021, it seems, the impression of Western weakness he had long articulated had become vehemently entrenched in Vladimir Putin’s perception.<sup>3</sup> After the intense British-French dispute in March over Australia’s realignment of its submarine selection to the United States, the withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan in September that was considered internationally embarrassing, the break in continuity with Angela Merkel’s departure, the election of a new coalition government and its formation in the fall, this perception culminated in Moscow’s already immediate war-preparatory maximum demands in December, in particular for the withdrawal of all American troops from Europe, before Putin then ordered the war of aggression on Ukraine on February 24, 2022.<sup>4</sup> That such perceptions of the weakness of others can go hand in hand with nationalistic hubris in the assessment of one’s own strength, as Putin then had to discover in the first weeks of the war, remains unaffected by this.<sup>5</sup>

Merkel had promoted the perception of German weakness over many years, perhaps unconsciously but at least consistently, by listening to Putin’s shrill speech in 2007 at the Munich Security Conference and nevertheless

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1 Government statement by Chancellor Olaf Scholz, 27 February 2022.

2 Jervis, Robert: *Perception and Misperception*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978.

3 This perception of Western “decadence” is reflected in Putin’s ultranationalist drive to see Ukraine as an essential threat to his sociopolitical ideas and therefore to ethnically and politically cleanse the “brother nation” of its historical “aberrations”. Putin relies, among others, on the fascist Russian intellectual Ivan Ilyin, whom he has read in depth. See *The Economist*: “Briefing. Fascism in Russia”, 30 July 2022, pp. 15–18, esp. p. 17.

4 A largely ignored signal in Putin’s increasingly concentrated war preparations was the failure to fill up Germany’s largest Gazprom storage facility in Rheden in 2021. Pennekamp, Jochen: “Der Mythos vom billigen russischen Gas”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 August 2022.

5 In reverse order, this is what happened to America in Iraq in 2003, shortly after “mission accomplished” was celebrated.

letting him continue to build the “private sector” *Nord Stream 2* pipeline after the Georgia war and despite the Crimea annexation and subsequent sanctions. Also, although it signed the military reassurance at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014, thereby committing itself to ensuring Germany’s defense capability in a politically reliable and materially sufficient manner, its lack of conviction that conventional deterrence is indispensable left the Bundeswehr largely “bare”, as a leading general conceded without mincing words eight years later on the evening of the start of the war. And last but not least, the uniquely radical course set in Europe in terms of energy policy by the Fukushima disaster in 2011 had already prepared the ground for the dependence on Russian gas, which was never officially considered so in Berlin. From all these examples it becomes understandable why Putin remained Germany’s “partner” in Merkel’s world view until her departure.<sup>6</sup>

On February 27, 2022, the chancellor, himself finance minister in Merkel’s cabinet and vice chancellor for many years until September 2021, had to end this approach. Putin, Scholz said, was seeking a “Russian empire”, which is why the German government “will not rest [until] peace is secured in Europe”.<sup>7</sup> Without explicitly saying so, the special assets of the Bundeswehr (100 billion euros) presented in this speech context were initially a signal of strength. All of a sudden, it seemed, the question that had been pending since 2014 about what it actually meant for Germany to assume “more responsibility” had been answered with the necessary clarification of “more of what” and “more for what”<sup>8</sup> – albeit not of its own accord, but by the pressure of events. In the euphoria of the Berlin awakening at the end of February 2022, it was remarkable that China, which has dominated America’s strategic perception for the past decade or so, did not seem to occupy a place in Scholz’s thinking. It was as if the strategic center of strategic equilibrium policy could be located exclusively in Europe, as it was during the Cold War. Therefore, there is no sign of the realization that the eastern flank and East Asia are mutually dependent as mirror axes of vital German security interests.<sup>9</sup>

6 Speech of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Munich Security Conference, 16 February 2019.

7 Speech of the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, 27 February 2022.

8 Giegerich, Bastian/Terhalle, Maximilian: The Munich Consensus and the Purpose of German Power. In: *Survival. Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 58, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 155–166.

9 In the run-up to the chancellor’s trip to China on November 3/4, 2022, it broke out unusually publicly between the foreign minister and the chancellor that the German

The fact that a large country like the Federal Republic of Germany has afforded to forego its strategic orientation for so long has come at a high price. The “peace dividend” was, in other words, expensive. Whether the international *Zeitenwende* of the Russian invasion will bring about a German *Zeitenwende* in the sense of a strategic change of mentality is not a foregone conclusion. Such a change would be reflected in the realization that Germany’s embedding in the institutions of the West is not exhausted by passive membership, but that, on the contrary, this embedding gives rise to a strategic duty to defend this very order with a strong will. Only such a change in the world view would make it possible to comprehend and address *Zeitenwende*, which the chancellor has set for 2022 (but which many see as beginning in 2007, or at the latest in 2014).

However, the not entirely unjustified expectation that the external shock, especially in the largest government faction, would comprehensively challenge previous Russophile and pacifist-peace policy traditions of foreign policy action has not been confirmed. On the contrary, considerable differences remain discernible in the coalition government with regard to the Russian war of aggression.

In contrast to the FDP (e.g. Strack-Zimmermann, Faber) and the Greens (e.g. Baerbock, Habeck, Nouripour, Hofreiter), the traditional peace policy wing is dominant in the SPD’s strong left-wing faction (97 of 206 MPs). For the time being, the grouping around Rolf Mützenich has bowed to the international constraints of the war situation. Not pragmatically, but reluctantly, as the protracted delays in arms deliveries in the first six months already showed by NATO standards. Chancellor Scholz, who is feeling the inevitable international pressure on Germany from the front row, while the category of war remains completely new territory for him in terms of content and concept, navigates, it seems, somewhat precariously between

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government does not have a coordinated China policy. This culminated in advice given medially by Baerbock to the chancellor for his China visit. The nexus between East Asia and the eastern flank was admittedly not addressed in this sharp contradiction. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: “Vor Scholz-Reise: Baerbock pocht auf andere China-Politik”, 1 November 2022. On the failure so far to link the NSS and China strategy, see Terhalle, Maximilian: “Wie strategisch ist die China-Strategie?”, 49security, 23 November 2022; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: “China-Strategie betont Verteidigungslinien gegen Peking”, 14 November 2022, p. 15.

the currents of his party at times.<sup>10</sup> It remains to be seen whether the course of the war and, in particular, the geopolitical speech of its co-party chairman Lars Klingbeil in June 2022, which was closely coordinated with Scholz and in which he emphasized Germany not as a peace power but as a leading power, will make it much more difficult for the Social Democratic left to maintain its traditional stance in the long term than before.<sup>11</sup> In December 2022, it did not look like it.<sup>12</sup> Looking at the 2023 defense budget, the Bundeswehr continues to look “bare”.<sup>13</sup> The question, moreover, of whether, instead of maintaining convinced strategic resilience at home, the socioeconomic costs of war (inflation, recession, energy costs) will become the vehicle for the party left to invalidate Berlin’s placement in the anti-Russian front of NATO, the EU, the G7 and other states therefore makes the emergence of friction more likely, especially in the largest governing party. Putin’s calculation for the winter of 2022/23 would thus work out.<sup>14</sup>

Insofar as Chancellor Scholz meant an exact manual when he said there was no “textbook” for dealing with war, he was initially right. What he overlooked, however, was the body of knowledge offered by *Strategic Studies*<sup>15</sup> –

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- 10 Voices that do not belong to the party left include Michael Roth or Kristian Klinck. See Klinck, Kristian/Müller, Alexander/Nanni, Sara: “Mehr deutsche Waffen für die Ukraine – so geht’s”, *Der Spiegel*, 21 August 2022.
  - 11 See Wehner, Markus: “Leise Führung”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 July 2022, p. 3.
  - 12 The apparent lack of leadership is expressed in the refusal to deliver the *Leopard 2* main battle tanks for fear of leading the way internationally in this regard, see Schuller, Konrad: “USA für Lieferung deutscher Kampfpanzer. Sicherheitsberater sprach sich früh dafür aus, deutsche Leopard 2 an Kiew zu geben”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 December 2022, p. 1.
  - 13 See Carstens, Peter: “Die Armee ist noch immer blank”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 November 2022.
  - 14 See Wehner, Markus: “Wenn Kiews Eliteeinheit auf der Krim zuschlägt”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 September 2022, p. 4.
  - 15 See Luttwak, Edward: *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*. Harvard Belknap: Cambridge 2001 (revised ed.); Haslam, Jonathan: *No Virtue Like Necessity. Realist Thought in International Relations Since Machiavelli*. Yale University Press: New Haven 2002; Howard, Michael: *The Invention Of Peace And The Reinvention Of War*. Profile Books: New York 2002; Howard, Michael: *The Causes of Wars*. 2nd ed., Harvard University Press: Cambridge 1983; Freedman, Lawrence: *Strategy*. Oxford University Press: Oxford 2013; Gray, Colin: *The Future of Strategy*. Polity: Cambridge 2017; Heuser, Beatrice: *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2010; Powell, Jonathan: *The New Machiavelli: How to Wield Power in the Modern World*. Vintage: New York 2011; Kissinger, Henry: *Diplomacy*. Simon & Schuster: New York 1994; Kissinger,

a doctrine shaped in particular by security policy practitioners and grounded in international academia, but “largely unknown” in Germany, despite diverse intellectual-historical lines of connection.<sup>16</sup> It cannot indicate the political path to be taken in a textbook-like and well-ordered manner, but it can offer orientation in decision-making by means of a *continuing* compass.<sup>17</sup> Such a compass is now required – if there is a serious will to change the mentality – for top-level politics insofar as their ministries currently have to manage the balancing act between the National Security Strategy (NSS), which is designed for the remaining election period and was agreed in the coalition agreement, on the one hand, and the strategy against Russia’s war of aggression, which is needed on a daily basis, and the rebalancing *vis-à-vis* Xi Jinping’s China, on the other. Incidentally, Scholz mentioned his “clear internal compass” in the fall of 2022,<sup>18</sup> but did not explain it further. However, if one assumes the inevitably dynamic complexity of international events, it seems tantamount to squaring the geopolitical circle to draft a future concept by the NSS valid until the end of the legislative period that assumes both a Russian victory and a Russian defeat with regard to Europe’s security and at the same time probes the implications of a two-front war (USA *versus* China/Russia) that cannot be waged by America.<sup>19</sup>

For a Europe conceived as part of the Russian imperium, so described by Scholz, would reduce the object of protection of the NSS, the security of the alliance and national territory, and thus the undertaking of the strategy designed until 2025 *ad absurdum*. Consequently, it is not a *bias* to exclude such an assumption, but merely to point out that a Russian victory would render *a priori* obsolete the NSS to be elaborated. Therefore, this chapter does not include in its analysis variously expressed options for a

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Henry: Leadership. Allen Lane: New York 2022; von Bismarck, Otto: Gedanken und Erinnerungen. Verlag der Wissenschaften: Berlin 2014-1 (Vol. 1–3).

16 Busse, Nikolas: “Die erste Schlacht der neuen Zeit”, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 14 July 2022, p. 1.

17 Gaddis, John: On Grand Strategy. Penguin: New York 2018, p. 17.

18 Interview with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 7 September 2022, p. 3.

19 Counterfactual considerations, as Niall Ferguson has done, are helpful here as a mirror of possible, (undesirable) futures. See Ferguson, Niall (Ed.): Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals. Penguin: New York 1997. See therein, e.g., Burleigh, Michael: Nazi Europe: What if Nazi Germany had defeated the Soviet Union? (Chapter 6).

ceasefire and peace negotiations described as such.<sup>20</sup> Rather, the interaction between developments in the Ukrainian theater of war and the assumptions about the future of European security incorporated into the NSS explicitly highlights the need for strategically oriented political leadership. This is especially true in the event that a (major) war in East Asia would very likely present Europeans with the almost impossible difficulty of maintaining support for Ukraine without America capitulating to NATO's psychological weakening in Europe – and thus to Russia. In the meantime, it cannot be assumed from a strategic perspective that America views its security guarantee for Europe in isolation from Germany's economic policy toward Beijing.

This chapter approaches the issue of strength, the compass of German security policy, and thus the NSS as well as Russia and China strategies, in three steps. First, the chapter provides a concise, conceptual vocabulary without which the power politics of international affairs will continue to be reflexively or unwittingly rejected in the future and the preconditional change in mentality will not be achieved.<sup>21</sup> The second step addresses the importance of the factor of time in strategic planning. Based on these assumptions, this chapter, in contrast to the view of the *Zeitenwende* focused solely on Russia, thirdly reveals the strategic contours of world politics. China's weight in America's calculations is essential here. Finally, concrete strategies for German and European security are derived from this.

The basic understanding of the analysis is shaped by the definition of strategy by Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert: "Strategy is not merely the art of preparing for the armed conflicts in which a nation may become involved and planning the use of its resources and the deployment of its forces in such a way as to bring about a successful issue. It is also, in a

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20 A strategically unfinished, always based on believed peace-oriented negotiations, which does not name Russian defeat as a war goal, can also be found in Wolfgang Ischinger's proposal, "to see the war end quickly ... on as favorable terms for Ukraine as possible." In "Germany's Ukraine Problem", *Foreign Affairs*, 10 August 2022. In a remarkably direct manner, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's three-point plan presented the Kremlin's "willingness to negotiate" in *Stern* magazine as the right option for Berlin to act (reprinted in the August 4, 2022 issue, pp. 25–27). Johannes Varwick, professor of political science in Halle, among others, "read the original" of Schroeder's/Putin's positions. He summed up that in the "central point[s]" he could "see no scandal; on the contrary, these are probably the lines along which a solution would be conceivable." (*Twitter* entry, 4 August 2022).

21 Giegerich, Bastian/Terhalle, Maximilian: *The Responsibility to Defend: Re-thinking Germany's Strategic Culture*. Routledge: London 2021, pp. 16–18.

broader sense, the [...] rational determination of a nation's vital interests, the things that are essential to its security, its fundamental purposes in its relations with other nations, and its priorities with respect to goals.”<sup>22</sup>

## 2 Timeless Strategic Insights

For a long time, a harmonious *one-world thinking* prevailed in Berlin, from which war as a means of international politics had been defined *a priori*. Instead, politics operated exclusively as the solution of global problems affecting all states: *global governance* was international politics among partners. And because economic *win-win globalization* was accordingly the central driving force behind this cooperative world view, the natural law coincidence of “interdependence and enlightened self-interest”<sup>23</sup> was regarded as its optimistic maxim. Whoever deviates from it, “whoever does it after all, harms [...] himself”, Merkel said during her fourth term in office in 2019.<sup>24</sup>

The “world in which we woke up on February 24”,<sup>25</sup> however, contrary to the credibly shaken core principles, is not an unknown one, not only to the foreign minister. It is a world that has always existed, before and during the “peace dividend”, as it were, as the indestructible, “dark side” of world politics, as Lawrence Freedman has called it.

The astonishment resonating in the chancellor's words, “and yet it [war] has happened again”,<sup>26</sup> therefore relentlessly reveals the Germans' danger-

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22 Craig, Gordon/Gilbert, Felix: Reflections on Strategy in the Present and the Future. In: Paret, Peter/Craig, Gordon A./Gilbert, Felix (Eds.): *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*. Princeton University Press: Princeton 1986, p. 869.

23 On this mantra of (also) federal liberal international thinking, see Terhalle, Maximilian: Warum das Governance-Axiom gescheitert ist – eine notwendige Kritik. In: *Zeitschrift für Politik*, Vol. 62, Issue 3, 2015, p. 269.

24 Merkel, quoted at the 2019 Munich Security Conference. Edward H. Carr (*The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919–1939*. Palgrave: Basingstoke 2001, pp. 42–61) had already subjected the theory of harmony of liberal-cosmopolitan thought to analysis in the years before World War II – with meaningful parallels to today.

25 Baerbock, Annalena: “In anderer Welt aufgewacht...”, *Deutschlandfunk*, 24 February 2022.

26 German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, televised speech, 8 May 2022. See the position of *Der Spiegel* (“Schmerzhafter Aufklärung”, 23 April 2022, p. 15): Scholz “is deeply convinced of his own positions; after all, he has read, thought through, understood all the files and many books on the subject. But war and peace have not been topics



ous unfamiliarity with the invariably recurring, timeless features of strategic affairs. To have completely ignored them, to have “always too credulously [...] underestimated”<sup>27</sup> actors like Putin, as Chancellor Merkel’s long-time chief foreign policy advisor was able to concede unscathed shortly after the outbreak of war, reveals how deficient strategic thinking really is in Germany. For war was and is not a museum-like category of international politics.

With norms, treaties under international law and a liberal belief in co-operation, a progressive linearity had been lived internationally, but hard questions of power had been consigned to the 19th and 20th centuries with historical-political serenity until February 23 with Sunday speech. Liberal peace utopias such as that of outlawing war, symbolically connoted by the Briand-Kellogg Pact of 1928, have regularly failed because of the phenomenon of war. Not least for this reason, the recently deceased European doyen of military history, Michael Howard, convincingly described the recurrent failure of this unilateral reliance on the diplomatic-notarial “Invention of Peace”.<sup>28</sup> In 2000, he was honored for his work by the Ebert Foundation, which has close ties to the SPD.

Because in this chapter the author recognizes the core weakness of German foreign policy in *Zeitenwende* that has not been conceptually penetrated, four central parameters of this dark side of world politics are first presented here. In this sense, the analysis considers *Zeitenwende* independently of a – distant – end of the war against Ukraine; rather, it uses these parameters to denote timeless, strategic insights that will remain inescapable in the future thereafter.<sup>29</sup>

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of Scholz’s life so far. They are unfamiliar territory for someone whose passion has so far been the basic pension, the minimum wage, or housing, where problems could be solved with laws and official files. Scholz rarely needed the big word, the catchy message; after all, he had all the paragraphs in his head. But suddenly there is this lawless state of a war of aggression, the old laws and messages no longer apply.”

27 Schuler, Ralf: “Ex-Berater von Kanzlerin Angela Merkel, Christoph Heusgen ‘Wir haben Putins Brutalität immer unterschätzt’”, *Bild*, 22 February 2022. It is noteworthy that Heusgen, already out of office, still defended the former chancellor’s Russia policy with verve in November 2021 (Heusgen’s *Dinner Speech* at the Adenauer Foundation, at which the author was present).

28 Howard, Michael: *The Invention of Peace and The Reinvention of War*. Basic Books: New York City 2002.

29 More detailed on this: Terhalle, Maximilian: *Strategie als Beruf*. Tectum: Baden-Baden 2020, pp. 11–18.

## 2.1 Wars Cannot Be Banned, Only Defined Away

Contrary to what many Germans, who have long neglected NATO and have just as long felt liberated from any actual perception of existential threat, assume, there is no global authority that can credibly and effectively prevent violent attempts to abuse the territorial integrity of states. Outside protected NATO territory, anarchy applies, so to speak. Anarchy in the sense that a mostly larger state has, to this day and in the future, the *de facto* possibility of attacking another state militarily, of imposing its will on it through war, without there being any effective prohibition against it. This logic, which is structurally anchored in international politics, can be ignored, but an attitude refusing this structure cannot thereby escape strategic affairs. This is not *self-fulfilling* war rhetoric, but an approach that sees being vigilantly prepared for the possibility of war as the best guarantee against being overwhelmed. In such, vigilance must be anchored the will to resist: “War is not the best way of settling differences, but it is the only way of preventing them being settled for you.”<sup>30</sup>

The only historically proven possibility to contain the danger of this dynamic on a trial basis therefore lies in amassing credible armament of one’s own and, where this is not sufficient, gaining membership in a military alliance. Germany’s “bare” lack of its own effective armament, admitted on the eve of war, is currently made up for by membership in NATO. However, a poorly armed member weakens its alliance from within – and thus, also its external perception.

## 2.2 Strategists Do Not See “Policy Areas”, Only Instruments of State Power

This anarchic characteristic implies that the nature of world politics is antagonistic. Especially since larger states are usually in a constant struggle for more power or defense against the loss of existing power. In doing so, they always think and plan for the *worst case* of conflict discharge due to incompatible interests in a war, because one of these states wants to – and can.

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30 G.K. Chesterton, quoted in Coker, Christopher: Can War Be Eliminated? Polity: Cambridge 2014, p. 5; see also Freedman, Lawrence: Does Strategic Studies Have a Future? In: Baylis, John et al. (Eds.): Strategy in the Contemporary World. 6th ed., Oxford University Press: Oxford 2019, p. 418. Klingbeil’s speech above also hints at such thinking.

Unless and until a direct warlike confrontation arises, it is common for strategists to view all elements of state power instrumentally. Accordingly, they consistently view the spectrum of these elements as instruments,<sup>31</sup> with which the opponent can be weakened because one's own position must remain superior to that of the opponent. Economic strength, industrial power, and innovative strength thus not only serve the *win-win* of global prosperity; strategically, they are the foundation of military sustainability and must be used politically for this purpose. Economic-industrial power is therefore a fundamental strategic tool to make possible future adversaries dependent by offering market access, government bonds, or raw material supplies. Economic power alone, networked through interdependence, is ultimately no guarantee against aggression by other states. Economic-industrial power is thus the material backbone in the rivalry of states and is capable of (pre)deciding this; in war, it is the backbone of a state's perseverance.<sup>32</sup> It is similar with questions of technology. Of course, it serves the civilizational progress of societies. Strategically, however, it is also true here that states capable of cutting-edge research in *dual-use* technologies have decisive advantages in the constant – only varying in intensity – struggle with other powers.<sup>33</sup> Small states can also use such *know-how* to interest a protecting power. In addition to their original purpose, both instruments, economy and technology, thus always have the central function of raising a country's military striking power to the highest possible level, or at least to a level superior to that of a potential adversary, and, far more difficult, of maintaining it.

Contrary to what Germany has long thought and politically lived as a peace power, the international perception of a state as strong or weak, as mentioned at the beginning, depends at its core on its ability and will to use the aforementioned material instruments of power strategically. Democracies (without a missionary hubris) also have the normative advantage of being able to have a more attractive effect on others because of the defend-

31 Thus Carr in conversation with Jonathan Haslam. See Haslam, *No Virtue Like Necessity*, 2002, p. 36.

32 America's sanctioned ban on exporting semiconductors to China is a recent example of such a rivalry in which one side (in this case, the U.S.) strategically leverages its technological superiority. Böge, Frederike: "Kampf gegen China", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 October 2022.

33 The U.S. chip war against China should be seen in this light. See Miller, Chris: "Warum Computer-Chips über das Machtgleichgewicht zwischen Amerika und China entscheiden werden". In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 November 2022, p. 21.

ed ideal of freedom than those that deprive others of their freedom in order to implement their interests.

### *2.3 Not International Law, Only Power-Political Will Preserves Internationally Its Own Concept of Order*

International orders are not effectively maintained and protected by international law and norms because the latter can always be disregarded and broken. Like all other prior orders, the present one is based on power, on the above-mentioned economic-military-technological power preponderance of the West. Only these hard power bases thus guarantee the framework of the order's liberal orientation. Just as the present order was not born out of international law but through existential struggle (World War II) or credible will to struggle (Cold War), its stability and future is based on the will of those who see their world best reflected in this order. In other words, orders always have the one particular normative character, not an arbitrary one.<sup>34</sup> Since this is Western-liberal, it would no longer be Western-liberal in the case of a strategic, Russian-Chinese supremacy at the international level.<sup>35</sup> Western norms and international law would be a thing of the past in this case.

Thinking in these categories includes robust resistance to developments that are detrimental to the order. External strength is thus based on internal resilience, i.e., the demonstrated will to be able to confidently confront violent challenges to one's own fundamental values.<sup>36</sup> And yet external, material strength can weaken and inner strength can be undermined by discord and self-doubt.

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34 Normative coexistence is by no means unattainable, or even desirable, as long as this excludes the manifest, military struggle against this very order.

35 No liberal NGO would be able to succeed in a Russian-Chinese order. Liberal critics of the West sometimes forget the basic power-political preconditions without which their criticism would not be possible. See Hurrell, Andrew: *Global Order*. Oxford University Press: Oxford 2007, pp. 112, 115–116.

36 The fear of internal unrest, popular uprisings even, communicated by cabinet members in June and July 2022 in the course of curbing Russian gas supplies demonstrates how initial self-doubt can undermine external credibility from within.

## 2.4 Strategists Do Not Disregard the “Big Picture” that the Military Superpowers Draw of an Era

The important equality of all states under international law does not exist in matters of international security because their material power weights are regularly unequal. Therefore, the concentration of the strategic approach is always on the policy of the military great powers of an era.

The reason for this is that their action or inaction can cause the greatest tensions, dislocations, or war, just as, conversely, they are central to substantial progress in cooperation on international affairs, i.e. substantive problems, in times of clear imbalances or in periods of accepted dominance.<sup>37</sup> The great powers therefore also dispute the future of the international order among themselves. This gives rise to the “*big picture*” determining international politics, which essentially determines the respective “*grand strategy*” of the great powers.

Allies can help themselves and their alliances to achieve greater power potential and broader acceptance. Smaller and medium-sized states cannot survive without a strategically well thought-out positioning with one of these great powers, which guarantees their own integrity in an emergency. The assumption among the latter states that they can offer mediation between the major powers in times of crisis not only overestimates their own stature, but also underscores the external perception that the reliability of the mediator is doubted in their own camp and that the adversary recognizes in this the fragility of an opposing alliance and inevitably exploits its weakness.

Lawrence Freedman’s opening quote aptly summarizes the strategic “temperament” behind these four assumptions as that “dark side to the strategic imagination that picks up intimations of disorder at times of stability, that senses the fragility of human institution [...], that cannot stop thinking of war while promoting peace.”

## 3 Strategy, the Time Factor and Strategy Planning

This strategic vocabulary, outlined here only very briefly, ideally permeates the process of designing, implementing, and readjusting the respective

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37 As stated above, the existence of the dark power, the military challenge of the existing remains unaffected.

strategy planning (*strategy-making*) and thus also the current German one. Three aspects with regard to the *time* factor are significant here.<sup>38</sup>

First of all, it should be noted that the attribute “strategic” is usually equated with “long-term”. Top politicians and administrators thus seek the aura of a far-sighted approach, understandably due to the 24/7 pace of *day-to-day* business. But what is the relationship between this short-termism, which does not have positive connotations but is effective, and the long-term? The long-term view and its associated goals cannot be abstract objectives materialized in a distant future. Rather, the steps to ensure these overarching goals (i.e. vital interests) are sustained and must be calibrated in the present today for the future. Only in this way can the long-term goal be achieved. Strategy is thus always simultaneously short- and long-term.

Second, the strategist, like other observers, faces the complexity of international events on a daily basis. Even in possession of the vocabulary outlined above, it may be obvious to accompany the *status quo* of the present attentively but reactively. In doing so, however, it involuntarily exposes itself to the constant danger of being surprised by developments and thus depriving itself of the existing time advantage of being able to shape them. Merkel’s reactive on-sight driving offers an example here. The classic difficulty here is that – if you do not want to succumb to political passivity – you always have to make decisions regarding an unclear future without knowing exactly what your counterpart’s decisions will be. In short, this is the “art of the possible”. It is not about what is possible in real terms at the present time (*status quo bias*), but what is possible to make in the future, to which the present becomes inevitable.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is at least necessary not to be fatalistic and not to want to leave the scope of action and the initiative to the opponent. The frequently quoted Weberian mantra, which regards politics as the “strong slow drilling of hard boards”,<sup>40</sup> is not helpful in this respect. This is especially not the case because the sequence of political-historical time is by no means exclusively linear.<sup>41</sup> Rather, fractures, frictions, and countervailing tendencies continually produce opportunities for clever,

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38 For more detail, see Terhalle, *Strategie als Beruf*, 2020, pp. 20–22.

39 Since Bismarck’s saying, this has been simplified and misunderstood – and with it Bismarck himself. See Gall, Lothar: *Bismarck: Der weiße Revolutionär*. Frankfurt: 1980, pp. 23, 127–128, 729.

40 Weber, Max: *Politik als Beruf*. Duncker & Humblot: Berlin 1993, p. 67.

41 The distinction of time development into *chronos* (linear, chronological) and *kairos* (non-linear, jumpy, condensing, not necessarily progressive) was presented by the (ancient) Greeks.

sometimes energetic, but always forward-looking action that increases or at least secures one's own power.

Finally, strategy requires the formulation of a concept of the future of international politics. This concept of the future must describe that state of international affairs which determines the safeguarding of a country's vital interests ("*strategic vision*").<sup>42</sup> The strategies to be developed must then demonstrate how they look backwards from the future in order to plan in the present in such a way that they can make the overarching concept of the future adaptively achievable.

Such strategic action, i.e. action in which the existential security of a country and thus its strength are at stake, cannot be achieved without a name. Strategy requires a strategist. Ideally, the strategist must have internalized the above vocabulary. Ultimately, it is his/her personality that wisely penetrates the complexity of international events and seeks to confidently shape the always uncertain future through strategic leadership. The extent to which the leadership of the Federal Republic, convinced for so long of preserving the *status quo* that was taken for granted, produces such characters or allows them to grow out of the war situation, initially describes only a current development.<sup>43</sup>

In the following, strategies will now be outlined on how Berlin can strategically understand and shape the approaching future of international politics.

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42 Brzezinski, Zbigniew: *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*. Basic Books: New York 2012; on the general difficulty of planning for the future, see Freedman, *Strategy*. 2013, pp. XVIII-XIX.

43 Such strategic intelligence also includes techniques of applying power, whether callousness, calculated threats and lies, or exploiting moments of surprise. See, among others, Kissinger, *Leadership*, 2022; Schwarz, Hans-Peter: *Von der Machtbesessenheit zur Machtvergessenheit*. DVA: Stuttgart 1985, p. 165. The ethical reproach weighs heavily here that democracies should not use the means of dictatorships. That is correct at first. And yet, in an anarchic international environment, techniques and means of (preventive) action must be considered that ensure one's own superiority, or at least one's own survival. In the event of war, this problem becomes inevitable – or dictated by the constraints of the situation.

#### *4 Zeitenwende Must Be Strategically Thought of Globally, not in Terms of Central Europe*

The Western order is challenged by a military enemy. Dictators, as Germans should know from their own historic experience, are never saturated unless they are stopped from advancing by military force. Berlin's war goal, which can only be achieved by means of Ukraine, should therefore be Putin's defeat. Only then can a peace order be negotiated from a position of strength.<sup>44</sup>

If Berlin were to follow NATO's Secretary General in saying that Russia could lose the war, Germany's strategic goal would be clearly described: Europe without Putin. And yet Moscow's nuclear arsenal would remain, even if Putin's failure brought about its fall. Therefore, Europe's security order will be born only of Western strength.

Where this strength lies was recently answered intuitively by EU members Finland and Sweden: in NATO, not the EU. The mutual assistance obligation in Art. 42 (7) of the EU Treaty is not convincing in terms of *Realpolitik*, although it does include nuclear protection. In essence, contrary to all debates on strategic autonomy, the issue is the quality of U.S. assistance, which the EU cannot afford. This is particularly true of the reference to the Franco-German engine, which has been put to the test in terms of security policy. Not only from an Eastern European perspective does the war represent the failure of this axis; it also excludes Great Britain, one of Europe's two nuclear powers, from the debate.

However, because NATO has proven itself to be the guarantor of European security before everyone's eyes, it is also the central place for discussing this security in terms of *Realpolitik*. Two factors in this debate compel Europe to act: Putin's successor will also have nuclear weapons, and China's world power aspirations are crystallizing in Taiwan.

War, Berlin should have learned, cannot be prohibited by norms. Opponents can be deterred on their own. Europe cannot do that at present. Nor – frighteningly – can America. Because, as former U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis put it unequivocally in 2017, the U.S. cannot wage a two-front war, and cannot credibly deter Russia and China at the same time. This is the Achilles heel of Europe's strategic security.

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44 This section is partly based on earlier contributions by the author. See Terhalle, Maximilian: "Für eine europäische Atommacht", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31 May 2022, p. 8; Krause, Joachim/Terhalle, Maximilian et al: "Putins Politik nicht belohnen", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 July 2022, p. 8.



And this even if Russia and China have not yet strategically concerted to the extent that they could form a nuclear front against the U.S. This means that the question of Europe's deterrent capability, which Macron unprecedentedly raised in 2020 with Germany and which Berlin has not responded to, must be addressed anew. The first major war since 1945 does not give the Germans and the French the legitimacy of security leadership which they believe themselves to have.

If the U.S. nuclear umbrella is now absorbed by a not unlikely war with China, 3,750 U.S. warheads must be capable of obliterating all of China's major cities and military installations through a second-strike option, as well as providing deterrence against North Korea and for Australia, Japan, and South Korea. In this case, it is questionable whether the U.S. can, and will, continue to signal that it is willing to risk the nuclear destruction of Boston, for example, to protect Berlin. Therefore, it is imperative that Europe becomes a strategic nuclear power: within NATO, as a European nuclear pillar. A new Article 5a should formulate the nuclear umbrella for NATO-Europe, establishing the deterrence of a Russian first strike in the event that East Asia militarily appropriates America.

America is aware of its strategic limitations, but remains silent on the subject. The core interest of the naval nuclear powers Great Britain and France in enlarging their own arsenals is therefore nourished by the fact that both cannot want to allow a vacuum to arise from the emerging nuclear power imbalance in Europe. Berlin should support Paris and London financially on a *pro rata* basis. At the same time, however, it should itself equip the Dakar-class submarines produced in Kiel, which are supplied to Israel to enable its nuclear second-strike capability, with analogous nuclear equipment and have them patrol the Mediterranean. And to strengthen Warsaw, Berlin should transfer tactical nuclear weapons from Büchel. The coordination of deterrence against Russia by the European NATO core group consisting of these four countries should be carried out by existing *command-control* structures of the alliance, which should, however, be adapted.

As unlikely as it is after Putin's war of aggression that an eventual Trump 2 cabinet would unexpectedly revert to the 2017 *status quo* and leave NATO, crucially, Europe would have credible reassurance against Russia up its sleeve even as a rump NATO.

Concerns that Paris and London are historically unwilling to subordinate their arsenals to NATO structures as a European pillar overlook the fact

that no nuclear power is probing about the crown jewels of its security as long as Berlin alone fails to voice a weighty proposal on the subject.

### 5 *No Zeitenwende Without Strategic Mindset: Three Flaws*

Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping have repeatedly called the West (G7 and Australia) decadent. Whether it was the financial crisis, Barack Obama's red lines in Syria, the start of the Corona crisis, the AUKUS deal, or the Afghanistan withdrawal, they took all these examples as confirmation of their assumptions. In doing so, reading Raymond Aron's *In Defense of Decadent Europe* would certainly have helped them not to succumb to their own misperceptions.<sup>45</sup> The resilience that Aron describes, reflected in the West's unity since the start of the war in Ukraine, certainly had a not insignificant element of surprise in store for both authoritarian rulers. However, whether the moderating element contained in the surprise will still prevent Xi Jinping from militarily enforcing China's dominance in East Asia after his enthronement as Mao II, which took place at the end of October 2022, is not a foregone conclusion. For it could be that he becomes convinced that it is not Putin, but only he, who can put the decadent West in its place. Taiwan's military annexation of the mainland could be used to make the unmistakable and constantly announced example, possibly sooner than military planners assume.<sup>46</sup>

East Asia and NATO's eastern flank are the mirror axes of Germany's security. Regardless of who wins the 2024 U.S. election, Germany should plan with Poland, France, and the United Kingdom for Europe's nuclear deterrence in consultation with America in the event of a two-front war. Whether Washington would be willing to transfer parts of its deactivated arsenal to the Europeans because of the unpredictability of the time remaining is one of the many questions currently being explored there.<sup>47</sup>

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45 Aron, Raymond: *In Defense of Decadent Europe*. Routledge: London 1979, p. xviii.

46 See Beckley, Michael/Brands, Hal: *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China*. W. W. Norton & Company: New York 2022; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung: "Blinken: Peking könnte früher gegen Taipeh vorgehen", 19 October 2022, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/us-aussenminister-warnt-china-koennte-frueher-gegen-taiwan-vorgehen-18397375.html>; The Economist: "Preparing for a Fight. China's New Military Chiefs Stand Out For Their Loyalty to Xi Jinping and Careers Focused War With Taiwan", 5 November 2022, p. 53.

47 Author's conversation with Pentagon officials, summer 2022.

In light of these international dimensions, the German government has taken on a great deal in drafting the National Security Strategy, a China strategy and a Russia strategy – without yet adequately measuring the interactions between the factors. The point that Donald Trump’s inglorious departure in 2021 may have been ticked off far too quickly and that the China factor has not yet been penetrated in America’s strategic thinking are probably two of the most serious flaws in German foreign policy after the Russia disaster.

The third flaw, which has only been turned into a painful learning process in parts of the federal government, inevitably comes back to the perception and signaling of strength in international politics. At its core is the strategic *mindset* that has yet to take hold in crucial parts of the cabinet. This *mindset*, the basic assumptions of which were outlined in the second section, is what Quentin Skinner has called the “Machiavellian revolution”:<sup>48</sup> Machiavelli’s demonstration of a new vocabulary of power politics for the rulers of his time, who were forced by the *Realpolitik* failure of the old (Stoic) concepts to seek and find a new beginning. Today, the German government is in a similar situation. The chancellor’s eloquent announcement to “say goodbye to old certainties. This means rethinking, also strategically” basically points in the right direction.<sup>49</sup> That would mean, in particular, that Germany’s top war goal would have to be the defeat of Russia in Ukraine, so that Russia is as far away from NATO’s eastern flank as it was before February 24, 2022.

The German *Zeitenwende* will not work without substantial military armament, superior economic and technological power, and thus external strength. This message seems to have reached at least some parts of the “traffic light” leadership. Without a strategic *mindset* and thus *internal* strength, however, it will fail. A Germany that, out of ignorance or peace policy conviction, believes that the parameters of the strategic struggle of the militarily strongest powers of this era are not essential, harms the vital interests of the country.

To want to negotiate a ceasefire in Ukraine in the winter of 2022/23 in order to supposedly mitigate the socioeconomic costs of war (inflation, recession, energy prices) by eliciting Putin’s goodwill would reflect such

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48 Giegerich/Terhalle, *Responsibility to Defend*, 2021, p. 17.

49 Rede von Bundeskanzler Scholz bei der Bundeswehrtagung am 16. September 2022, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/rede-von-bundeskanzler-scholz-bei-der-bundeswehrtagung-am-16-september-2022-2127078>.

peace policy ignorance, as would the belief that the U.S. security guarantee, vital to Europe, is in its nature politically independent of Germany's economic strategy toward China.

Berlin's strategic obligation to NATO is not to allow this to happen. And, at the same time, not to demand deterrence through fine speeches, but to endow it in the defense budget with the power to make a credible impact.<sup>50</sup> The German government's strategy papers will be able to prove whether the *Zeitenwende* will simultaneously measure through the fundamental implications for Europe's security of the impossibility of an American two-front war against China and Russia.

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50 Significantly, the defense budget for 2023 does not reflect this. Power in the largest government faction, it seems, remains de facto with the peace policy wing around the SPD faction leader. See Carstens, Peter: "Die Armee ist noch immer blank", Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 28.11.2022, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/bundeswehr-wie-lambrecht-bei-der-ausruestung-der-armee-versagt-18488456.html>.

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