

Policy Paper

Zeitenwende: Germany's Strategic Shift in Foreign and Security Policy

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German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's 'Zeitenwende' in February 2022 marked a significant shift in German foreign and security policy in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This paper analyzes Germany's new strategic direction, including increased defense spending, reduced energy dependence on Russia, and strengthened NATO and EU alliances.

It examines the domestic political debates surrounding these changes and their implications for European security dynamics. The study also explores the impact on Germany's relationships with key partners including France, the United States, and countries of the Global South.

Finally, it offers recommendations for a more coherent, decisive, and strategic German foreign policy.

POLICY PAPER

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By
Bilal Mahli



INTRODUCTION TO THE ZEITENWENDE

On February 27, 2022, in response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz delivered a landmark speech to the German parliament, the Bundestag, marking a significant shift in German foreign and security policy. This address, referred to as the 'Zeitenwende' or 'Turning Point' speech, signaled a profound reassessment of Germany's role on the global stage. Historically known for its cautious approach to military engagement and reliance on diplomatic solutions, Germany faced mounting pressure to respond decisively to the rapidly changing security landscape in Europe. Chancellor Scholz's speech outlined a series of strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing national defense capabilities, reducing energy dependence on Russia, and strengthening alliances within NATO and the European Union.

This policy paper examines the key elements of Scholz's Zeitenwende, the actions proposed by the German government, and the broader implications for both German and European policy. By analyzing these components, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Germany's policy landscape is evolving in response to new geopolitical realities, and the potential impacts on European security and stability.

I. GERMANY'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY: RELATIONS WITH EUROPEAN NEIGHBORS AND THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

The Speech

Scholz's Zeitenwende speech was prompted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. A Bundestag session was convened at the Federal Chancellor's request under Article 39(3) of the German Basic Law. In his address, Scholz delineated five action points for Germany¹:

1. Supporting Ukraine in Crisis: Scholz stressed the importance of aiding Ukraine, acknowledging the gravity of the situation by stating, *"Firstly, we must support Ukraine in this desperate situation"*. He recognized Germany's past assistance while acknowledging the significant shift due to recent events, noting, *"But with the attack on Ukraine, we have entered a new era"*. Scholz emphasized solidarity with Ukraine's struggle, framing it as a defense of shared democratic values: *"In Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Mariupol, people are not just defending their homeland. They are fighting for freedom and their democracy. For values that we share with them"*.

2. Diverting Putin from War: Scholz underscored the necessity of deterring Putin from further aggression, stating, *"The second course of action that we must take is to divert Putin from the path of war"*. He discussed the comprehensive sanctions imposed by the EU and emphasized their effectiveness, stating, *"We must not be under any illusions—Putin will not change course overnight. But the Russian leadership will very soon see what a high price it will pay"*.

1. Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin. (2022, February 27). Website of the Federal Government | Bundesregierung. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>

3. Preventing Escalation in Europe: Scholz highlighted the need to prevent Putin's aggression from spreading to other European countries: *"The third major challenge lies in preventing Putin's war from spilling over into other countries in Europe"*. He reaffirmed Germany's commitment to collective defense within NATO and emphasized readiness to defend NATO territory alongside allies: *"President Putin should not underestimate our resolve to defend every square meter of NATO territory together with our allies!"*

4. Strengthening Defensive Readiness: Scholz emphasized Germany's commitment to peace and security in Europe, stating, *"In view of the watershed that Putin's aggression entails, our standard is this: what is needed to secure peace in Europe will be done"*. He announced significant funding for the Bundeswehr, highlighting the allocation of a one-off sum of **€100 billion** from the 2022 federal budget **to modernize and enhance defense capabilities**.

5. A Pivotal Moment in Foreign Policy: Scholz discussed the broader implications of the crisis for Europe and emphasized the need for solidarity among EU members: *"This watershed does not just affect our country. It affects all of Europe"*. He urged prioritization of collective decisions over national interests and emphasized the importance of pragmatic diplomacy and open communication channels with Russia.

Chancellor Scholz's speech signified a new era in German politics, characterized by emerging challenges and the pursuit of a redefined security strategy. The war in Ukraine has reshaped Germany's role in Europe and as NATO member. Today, there are heightened expectations from NATO allies that Germany should assume a more substantial role within the alliance, leading to intensified internal deliberations on international security policy. With the Zeitenwende, Germany intended to pave the way in this direction, taking on more responsibility and a leadership role, particularly in air-defense capabilities.

A key element in this effort is the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI), which was established in response to the Russian invasion in Ukraine. ESSI is a German-led initiative focused on the development of an advanced NATO air-defense system. As of now, more than twenty European countries are participating in this initiative, which was formally established on October 13, 2022, at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. ESSI aims to strengthen NATO by filling gaps in defense against long-range ballistic missiles, thereby enhancing the alliance's overall security framework².

Germany is a key contributor of aid to Ukraine in the war against Russia. Between January 24, 2022, and April 30, 2024, Germany allocated €10.196 billion in military aid to Ukraine, positioning it as the second-largest military supporter following the United States, which contributed €50.373 billion³. Within Europe, Germany stands as the foremost supporter of Ukraine. Furthermore, in terms of humanitarian assistance, Germany ranks first, having provided €3.046 billion in aid⁴.

2. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. (n.d.). European Sky Shield – die Initiative im Überblick. bmvg.de. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/european-sky-shield-die-initiative-im-ueberblick-5511066>

3. Ukraine Support Tracker - Eine Datenbank für militärische, finanzielle und humanitäre Unterstützung der Ukraine. (2024, June 6). Kiel Institute. <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/de/themendossiers/krieg-gegen-die-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>

4. Ukraine Support Tracker - Eine Datenbank für militärische, finanzielle und humanitäre Unterstützung der Ukraine. (2024, June 6). Kiel Institute. <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/de/themendossiers/krieg-gegen-die-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>

In addition, Germany has reinforced NATO missions in Eastern Europe, particularly in the Baltic states and Poland, by providing troops and military equipment. This includes participation in the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) initiative. Germany has assumed command of the 'Battlegroup' in Lithuania and, as of September 2022, has additionally stationed a brigade in Germany as part of the enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA). The brigade includes a permanent Forward Command Element (FCE) based in Lithuania⁵. Through the eFP initiative, the Bundeswehr defends NATO's eastern flank.

Germany's move away from dependence on Russian energy has played a vital role in enhancing energy cooperation in Europe. Collaborative efforts to develop alternative energy sources, such as renewable energy projects in the Baltic Sea, emphasize growing economic and strategic partnerships within Europe. On August 30, 2022, leaders and energy ministers from eight Baltic Sea nations signed the Marienburg Declaration. This agreement aims to enhance regional cooperation on offshore wind energy, to reduce reliance on Russian energy sources. The countries involved in this initiative are Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, and Sweden. Additionally, Germany has significantly deepened its energy cooperation with Norway. After the commissioning of NordLink, a submarine cable through the North Sea that connects the electricity grids of Norway and Germany, facilitating the exchange of electrical energy, further agreements were reached in 2023 between the two countries to expand cooperation in the energy sector. These new agreements include plans to construct a hydrogen pipeline, enhancing their collaborative efforts in sustainable energy development.

France's reaction to Germany's Zeitenwende in foreign and security policy was multifaceted, reflecting both optimism about the potential for strengthened European defense and concern about the specifics of Germany's approach. France initially viewed Germany's commitment to increased defense spending positively. This move was seen as a long-awaited alignment with France's own emphasis on military capabilities and strategic autonomy. The €100 billion special fund for the Bundeswehr was recognized as a significant step towards addressing Europe's defense needs, and a potential boost to the Franco-German defense partnership⁶.

The United States welcomed Germany's Zeitenwende as a significant and long-overdue step in the right direction. For many years, both the Obama and Trump administrations heavily criticized Germany's lack of commitment to reaching NATO's 2% of GDP defense spending target. The Zeitenwende marked a change in this dynamic, signaling a renewed German commitment to its defense obligations within NATO.

This shift was seen by the United States as essential to bolster NATO's collective security and demonstrate Germany's readiness to take on a more substantial role in international security. The new foreign policy strategy was expected to not only meet the financial commitments, but also to enhance Germany's leadership position within Europe.

5. Bundeswehr. (n.d.-a). ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE Litauen – eFP Enhanced Forward Presence und eVA. bundeswehr.de. <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/einsaetze-bundeswehr/anerkannte-missionen/efp-enhanced-forward-presence#:~:text=Enhanced%20Forward%20Presence%20dient%20der,Gefechtsstandes%20dauerhaft%20vor%20Ort%20stationiert>.

6. INTERNATIONALE POLITIK QUARTERLY (IPQ). (2023, February 23). The Missing European Dimension of Germany's Zeitenwende: A View from France. Internationale Politik Quarterly. <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/missing-european-dimension-germanys-zeitenwende-view-france>

II. IMPLICATIONS FOR DEFENSE AND SECURITY POLICY

A. Defense Capabilities: Planned Improvements and the '€100 Billion Special Fund'

In his Zeitenwende address, the Chancellor announced the establishment of a €100 billion fund. This would expedite the procurement of essential equipment for the Bundeswehr. It would also help meet the NATO 2% target over a multi-year average of up to five years.

The investments under the €100 billion special fund⁷:

The primary portion of investments, amounting to €33.4 billion, was earmarked for the 'Air Dimension', encompassing needs across the air force, army, and navy. This allocation entailed the procurement of versatile combat aircraft such as the F-35, Chinook CH-47F transport helicopters, and Eurofighter ECR tailored for electronic warfare. Additionally, funding was allocated for Heron TP drones, light support helicopters, ground-based air defense systems, and long-range reconnaissance aircraft.

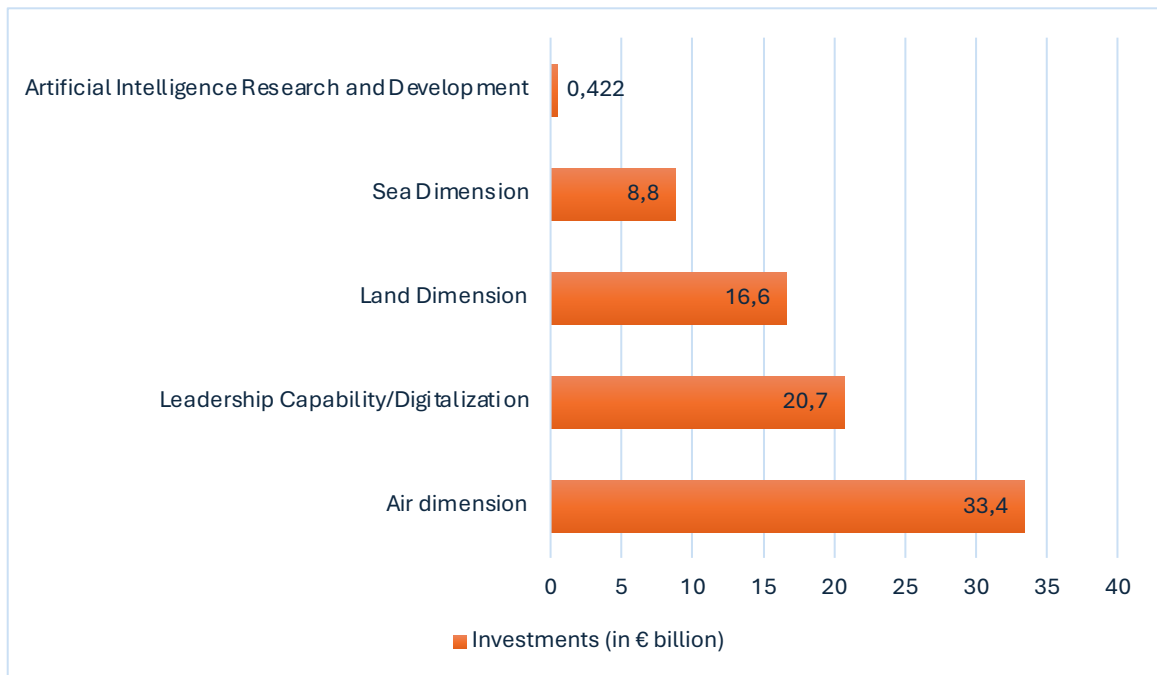
Furthermore, a portion of these resources was intended to bolster the development of the Future Combat Air System (FCAS). Subsequently, the second-largest investment, totaling €20.7 billion, was dedicated to enhancing 'Leadership Capability/Digitalization', with a focus on modernizing radio equipment, ensuring encrypted communication for international interoperability, and fortifying field operations.

For the 'Land Dimension', an allocation of €16.6 billion was designated for the enhancement of infantry vehicles and the development of new combat systems. Meanwhile, the 'Sea Dimension' received €8.8 billion for vessel and submarine development. Lastly, €422 million was earmarked for research and development in artificial intelligence.

7. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung (2022, June 3). Ministerin: „Wir sorgen für eine voll einsatzbereite Bundeswehr“. bmvg.de. <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/ministerin-wir-sorgen-fuer-voll-einsatzbereite-bundeswehr-5438596>

Figure 1:

Split of Investments from the €100 Billion Fund



Source: Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. (2022, June 3). Ministerin: „Wir sorgen für eine voll einsatzbereite Bundeswehr“. [bmvg.de. https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/ministerin-wir-sorgen-fuer-voll-einsatzbereite-bundeswehr-5438596](https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/ministerin-wir-sorgen-fuer-voll-einsatzbereite-bundeswehr-5438596)

B. Internal Debates Around Chancellor Scholz's Zeitenwende⁸:

Reactions from the SPD, Greens, and FDP (The government coalition)

Scholz's **Social Democratic Party (SPD)** generally backed the plans but faced internal divisions. While some members supported the increased defense spending and NATO commitments, others were apprehensive about the shift from Germany's traditional stance on military restraint and diplomatic engagement. Historically, the SPD opposed significant defense budget increases, and Scholz's commitment to exceed the NATO target of 2% of GDP marked a significant policy shift.

The Greens, part of the governing coalition, provided support yet displayed internal conflict. Key figures like Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock endorsed the strong response to Russian aggression and the increased military support for Ukraine.

The Free Democratic Party (FDP), which traditionally advocates for fiscal conservatism, supported the Zeitenwende's emphasis on strengthening defense capabilities. Finance Minister Christian Lindner, an FDP leader, facilitated the creation of the €100 billion special fund for the Bundeswehr by bypassing Germany's debt brake to ensure necessary funding for military modernization. The "debt brake" is a legal provision in Germany designed to control public debt levels by capping the amount of new borrowing that the government

8. Stenografischer Bericht 19. Sitzung. (2022, February 27). Deutscher Bundestag. <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20019.pdf#P.1364>

can undertake. Nonetheless, there were concerns within the party about maintaining fiscal responsibility and the long-term economic impacts of significant defense investments.

Opposition Parties' Responses

The main opposition party, the **Christian Democratic Union (CDU)**, led by Friedrich Merz, welcomed the Zeitenwende as a necessary and overdue step towards fulfilling Germany's NATO commitments. The CDU previously criticized the government's cautious approach to defense, and saw Scholz's announcements as aligning with their calls for increased military spending and a more assertive stance against Russian aggression.

Conversely, the **Left Party (Die Linke)** and the **Alternative for Germany (AfD)** criticized the Zeitenwende. Die Linke, maintaining its pacifist and anti-militarist stance, opposed the significant increase in defense spending and the shift towards a more militarized foreign policy, advocating for diplomatic solutions and humanitarian aid instead. The AfD, while not opposed to increased defense spending in principle, criticized the government for what it viewed as excessive alignment with NATO and the EU, advocating for a more independent German foreign policy.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE: FUTURE EU SECURITY AND SHIFTING POWER DYNAMICS

The Zeitenwende has profound implications for the future of the EU's security architecture and internal power dynamics, with investments likely to shift the balance of defense leadership within Europe. Germany is approaching the 2% defense spending goal, set to increase its defense budget by €20 billion annually, potentially surpassing France in defense leadership. This would represent a significant change, as the French defense budget has traditionally been larger than Germany's for decades⁹.

On March 10-11, 2022, EU leaders met at Versailles, resulting in the issuing of the Versailles Declaration. This declaration was formulated in direct response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and articulated the EU's cohesive stance on several critical issues, including defense, energy independence, economic resilience, and support for Ukraine. A notable objective outlined in the declaration is the pursuit of strategic autonomy, which entails fortifying the EU's defense capabilities and diminishing reliance on external powers. This objective encompasses the augmentation of defense budgets, investment in European defense industries, and the development and deployment of joint military capabilities and rapid response forces. The launch of the European Sky Shield Initiative, which mainly focused on integrating German, U.S., and Israeli defense systems, improved European air defense capabilities, but created further divisions within European defense cooperation. France and Italy, both proponents of a joint European missile defense project, felt marginalized by this initiative¹⁰. The initiative highlights the obstacles arising from the divergences between France and Germany concerning the contours of geopolitical Europe.

Germany's cautious stance on arms deliveries to Ukraine, coupled with its preference for close coordination with Washington, further strained Franco-German relations. This approach created the perception that Germany is pursuing a unilateral strategy in its

9. INTERNATIONALE POLITIK QUARTERLY (IPQ). (2023, February 23). The Missing European Dimension of Germany's Zeitenwende: A View from France. Internationale Politik Quarterly. <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/missing-european-dimension-germanys-zeitenwende-view-france>

10. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Torben Arnold, & Arnold, T. (2023). Germany's Fragile Leadership Role in European Air Defence. In swp-berlin.org (SWP Comment 6). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2023C06_EuropeanSkyShieldInitiative.pdf

defense expenditure, thereby reducing the potential for collaborative initiatives within the European Union.

The intensified transatlantic military cooperation of the German government is also evident in the United States's decision to enhance its military deterrence capabilities in Europe, with Germany set to play a pivotal role. For the first time since the Cold War, starting in 2026, the United States plans to station in Germany Tomahawk cruise missiles, which have a range exceeding 2,000 kilometers, SM-6 anti-aircraft missiles, and hypersonic weapons. Given their substantial range, these weapons have the capability to reach extensive areas of Russia.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR RELATIONS WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Africa

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prompted a significant shift in Germany's foreign policy, particularly in defense spending, altering the power dynamics within Europe. Germany and its allies anticipated that other partners, especially in Africa, would support policies aimed at isolating Russia. However, many African countries have largely maintained a non-aligned stance¹¹. Despite Western countries widely condemning Russia, African nations were divided, with numerous abstaining from United Nations votes against Russia. This divergence is not driven by Russian influence but rather by shared historical contexts, and a sense of marginalization in the global order¹². African countries view the conflict in Ukraine similarly to other ongoing crises on the continent, seeing it as another instance of major powers disregarding international norms¹³.

The conflict in Gaza following the October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel has also significantly impacted the position of African countries. Many African nations have strong ties to the Palestinians and view them as oppressed, a fate they see reflected in their own histories. Dr. Wolfgang Stefinger, a CSU MP in the Bundestag, described this as *"a narrative of the imperialist West against the oppressed Global South"*¹⁴.

Despite the non-aligned stance of many African states, Germany's diplomatic engagement with the continent has increased, introducing new cooperation opportunities. In May 2022, shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Chancellor Olaf Scholz traveled to Africa to strengthen ties with African democracies in response to the war and the increasingly multipolar world order. During his three-day tour, Scholz visited Senegal, South Africa, and Niger, which are among the most significant democracies on the African continent for Berlin¹⁵.

11. Hackenesch, C., Kamwengo, C., Lacher, W., Van Staden, C., & MEGATRENDS Afrika. (2024). The Russia-Ukraine War's Shockwaves in Africa. A Zeitenwende for German Africa Policy? (Working Paper 10). MEGATRENDS Afrika. https://www.megatrends-afrika.de/assets/afrika/publications/MTA_working_paper/MTA_WP10_2024_Zeitenwende_Collection.pdf

12. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, & Singh, P. (2023, September 25). Zeiten-What-Now? Why Germany's idea of epochal change fails to resonate across Africa. Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik (SWP). <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/mta-joint-futures-03-zeiten-what-now-why-germanys-idea-of-epochal-change-fails-to-resonate-across-africa>

13. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, & Singh, P. (2023, September 25). Zeiten-What-Now? Why Germany's idea of epochal change fails to resonate across Africa. Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik (SWP). <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/mta-joint-futures-03-zeiten-what-now-why-germanys-idea-of-epochal-change-fails-to-resonate-across-africa>

14. Global Perspectives. (2024, April 23). German development assistance in the era of the Zeitenwende. HSS - Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung e.V. <https://europe.hss.de/news/detail/german-development-assistance-in-the-era-of-the-zeitenwende-news11275/>

15. EURACTIV, & Noyan, O. (2022, May 23). Scholz reist nach Afrika, um Beziehungen zu Demokratien zu vertiefen. EURACTIV. <https://www.euractiv.de/section/eu-aussenpolitik/news/scholz-reist-nach-afrika-um-beziehungen-zu-demokratien-zu-vertiefen/>

In light of the conflict in Ukraine and the subsequent energy crisis, Germany prioritized forging of new partnerships in the energy sector. As a result, the Federal Republic has expanded its energy cooperation with several African countries. For instance, Germany has intensified its collaboration with Namibia on green hydrogen¹⁶, strengthened cooperation with Compact with Africa countries, and signed a cooperation deal on a southern hydrogen link in North Africa together with Italy and Austria¹⁷. Nigerian and German companies signed two significant agreements in Berlin in 2023, aimed at bolstering economic ties. The first deal, a \$500 million renewable energy pact, was signed between Union Bank of Nigeria and Germany's DWS Group. This memorandum of understanding aims to boost investment in renewable energy projects across Nigeria, particularly in rural areas. The second agreement involves a gas export partnership between Riverside LNG of Nigeria and Germany's Johannes Schuetze Energy Import AG, as part of which Nigeria will supply Germany with up to 1.2 million metric tons of natural gas annually, starting in 2026. These deals, were endorsed during the G20 Compact with Africa conference¹⁸. Furthermore, the Federal Republic of Germany has intensified its energy cooperation with South Africa. On June 27, 2023, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, Robert Habeck, and South Africa's Minister of Electricity in the Presidency, Dr. Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, signed a declaration during the German-South African Binational Commission, aiming to expand the partnership in green hydrogen and power-to-x products¹⁹.

In light of previous diplomatic tensions, the Federal Republic of Germany aimed to open a new chapter in its relations with the Kingdom of Morocco. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has emphasized the importance of strengthening bilateral ties between the states. In August 2022, Minister Baerbock met with her Moroccan counterpart, Nasser Bourita, in Rabat. During their discussions, both parties agreed to enhance cooperation in the development of green hydrogen technology²⁰.

Regarding the Moroccan Sahara, Baerbock underscored in a joint statement that the autonomy plan presented by Morocco in 2007 constitutes a serious and credible effort serving as a foundation for achieving a mutually acceptable resolution between the involved parties²¹.

On June 28, 2024, the foreign ministers convened again in Berlin. During this meeting, Minister Baerbock reaffirmed Germany's support for Morocco's autonomy plan²². Additionally, Minister Bourita met with the German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Svenja Schulze, and the Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, Stefan Wenzel. Both sides signed a declaration to establish a joint alliance for climate and energy aiming to strengthen cooperation in *"climate adaptation, the expansion of renewable energy, and*

16. Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz. (2024, March 20). Zukunftsweisende Wasserstoff- und PtX-Kooperation. Bundesministerium Für Wirtschaft Und Klimaschutz. <https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Pressemitteilungen/2024/03/20240320-zukunftsweisende-wasserstoff-und-ptx-kooperation.html>

17. Landini, F., Amante, A., & Wacket, M. (2024, May 30). Italy, Germany, Austria sign cooperation deal on southern hydrogen link. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/italy-germany-austria-sign-cooperation-deal-southern-hydrogen-link-2024-05-30/>

18. Onuah, F. (2023, November 21). Nigeria and Germany sign \$500 mln renewable energy and gas deal. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/nigeria-germany-sign-500-mln-renewable-energy-gas-deal-2023-11-21/>

19. BMWK - Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. (2023, June 27). Germany and South Africa sign cooperation agreement on green hydrogen. <https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/EN/Pressemitteilungen/2023/06/20230627-germany-south-africa-cooperation-green-hydrogen.html>

20. Auswärtiges Amt. (2022, August 25). Deutsch-Marokkanische gemeinsame Erklärung. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/reise-marokko/2548272>

21. Auswärtiges Amt. (2022, August 25). Deutsch-Marokkanische gemeinsame Erklärung. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/reise-marokko/2548272>

22. Auswärtiges Amt. (2024c, June 28). Gemeinsame Mitteilung zum Deutsch-Marokkanischen Strategischen Dialog. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/-/2665268>

*the production of green hydrogen*²³.

Furthermore, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) formulated its own Africa Strategy. The BMZ's Africa Strategy addresses the continent's role within global challenges, particularly noting Russia's growing influence in Africa. Alongside other countries, including China, Turkey, and the Gulf states, Russia is actively involved in Africa, building infrastructure, accessing natural resources, and expanding its political influence²⁴.

The BMZ points out in its strategy that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has marked a turning point in international relations, underscoring the need for a unified global response to crises. This conflict has revealed breaches of international law, increased competition among major powers, and rising nationalism, all of which threaten the rules-based international order.

According to the BMZ, African countries, deeply impacted by these overlapping crises, play a crucial role in addressing these global challenges. The BMZ strategy highlights the importance of partnerships rooted in mutual respect and shared values. Germany and the EU intend to support Africa's development by fostering stable, democratic institutions to enhance global security and sustainable development.

In response to Russia's influence, the strategy advocates flexible and nuanced approaches that take into account the interests of African states. German development policy aims to establish a trustworthy and attractive partnership grounded in human rights and international law.

Germany's Africa Strategy seeks to provide structural support to help the African Union and its member states achieve their development goals, bolster the continent's resilience, and collaboratively address global crises. This includes fostering democracy, the rule of law, and stable governance to counter authoritarian tendencies, which are potentially bolstered by external influences such as Russia.

South America

Germany's new foreign policy strategy fosters cooperation with countries in South America. In 2023, Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Argentina, Brazil, and Chile to explore cooperation opportunities in the energy sector. In the same year, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Labor Minister Hubertus Heil visited Colombia and Mexico²⁵. For instance, Germany and Colombia agreed on a partnership for the production of green hydrogen²⁶. Latin America, with its abundant lithium resources, will play a crucial role in the German transition to electric mobility. Germany continues to advocate for the EU-Mercosur free trade agreement, motivated by the potential benefits for its major industries. However, progress has been hampered by disagreements with France, which has blocked the deal since 2019. French President Emmanuel Macron has criticized the current terms and is advocating for

23. Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung. (2024, June 28). Deutschland und Marokko vereinbaren Allianz für Klima und Energie. Bundesministerium Für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit Und Entwicklung. <https://www.bmz.de/de/aktuelles/aktuelle-meldungen/deutschland-marokko-vereinbaren-allianz-fuer-klima-und-energie-216336>

24. Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). (2022). Shaping the future with Africa - The Africa Strategy of the BMZ. In BMZ. <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/137602/bmz-afrika-strategie-en.pdf>

25. Pieper, O. (2023b, July 12). "Nur mit Lateinamerika gelingt der Kampf ums Klima." dw.com. <https://www.dw.com/de/ohne-lateinamerika-klimawandel-nicht-in-griff-zu-bekommen/a-66201640>

26. Redaktions Netzwerk Deutschland. (2023, June 16). Grüner Wasserstoff: Deutschland und Kolumbien eingehen sich auf Energie-Kooperation. RND.de. <https://www.rnd.de/wirtschaft/gruener-wasserstoff-deutschland-und-kolumbien-ingen-sich-auf-energie-kooperation-O3AXRTM62NJSVB45ANE7KFJSAI.html>

a revised agreement²⁷. This situation further underscores the persistent disagreements between Germany and France concerning the future direction of Europe.

China

A key element of the Zeitenwende is Germany's push for independence, not only in energy but also in trade and technological sovereignty, particularly in relation to China. In 2023, results indicate that goods worth €254.5 billion were traded between Germany and the People's Republic of China (both exports and imports)²⁸. According to the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis), this made China Germany's most important trading partner for the eighth consecutive year, although the United States is catching up with €252.6 billion in the same year²⁹. Despite its reliance on China as a trading partner, Germany aims to avoid the same pitfalls experienced in its partnership with Russia.

On July 13, 2023, the German government presented its new China strategy, including the following measures³⁰:

1. Bilateral Relations:

- **Economic Cooperation:** Germany seeks fair competition and improved market conditions while reducing critical sector dependencies. The strategy emphasizes ongoing dialogues to address differences and enhance reciprocity.
- **Human Rights:** Germany remains committed to advocating for human rights in all interactions with China.
- **Climate and Environmental Protection:** Cooperation on green technologies and climate change is a priority for the Federal Republic.

2. Strengthening Germany and the EU:

- **De-risking:** Reducing dependencies on China, particularly in critical areas such as rare earths and pharmaceuticals, is the main goal. This involves diversifying supply chains, enhancing technological sovereignty, and safeguarding critical infrastructure.
- **Investment Screening and Trade Controls:** Implementing stringent investment screening to protect against unwanted technology transfers, and using trade instruments such as the EU's Anti-Coercion Instrument to counter economic pressures.

3. International Cooperation:

- **Engaging with China on global issues** including climate change, biodiversity, and public health, while ensuring that China's contributions align with global responsibilities.

4. Policy Coordination and Expertise Building:

- **Enhancing coordination** among German federal ministries, European partners, and international stakeholders to develop a coherent and unified approach to China.

27. Pieper, O. (2024, May 21). EU-Mercosur-Abkommen - eine unendliche Blockade-Geschichte. dw.com. <https://www.dw.com/de/eu-mercotur-abkommen-eine-unendliche-blockade-geschichte/a-69110081>

28. Federal Statistical Office. (n.d.). The People's Republic of China is again Germany's main trading partner. Retrieved July 1, 2024, from <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Economy/Foreign-Trade/trading-partners.html>

29. Federal Statistical Office. (n.d.). The People's Republic of China is again Germany's main trading partner. Retrieved July 1, 2024, from <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Economy/Foreign-Trade/trading-partners.html>

30. The Federal Government. (2023). Strategy on China of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2608580/49d50fecc479304c3da2e2079c55e106/china-strategie-en-data.pdf>

In comparison to 2022, trade between Germany and China decreased in 2023³¹:

Germany's top trading partners Jan-Nov 2023 in comparison to previous year

| Country | Value of traded imports and exports in € billions | Year-over-year change in % |
|-------------|---|----------------------------|
| China | 254.0 | -15.2% |
| USA | 252.2 | +1.1 |
| Netherlands | 216.4 | -4.8% |
| France | 187.3 | -0.4% |
| Poland | 171.3 | +0.2% |

The trade value from January to November 2023 amounted to €254.0 billion, making China still the largest trading partner of the Federal Republic. However, compared to 2022, this represented a decline of approximately 15%. This decline can be attributed particularly to the decrease in imports from China to Germany. From January to November 2023, almost all major categories of goods imported from China experienced significant declines³²:

Value of German imports from China in € billions from January to November 2023; change compared to the same time period in previous year in percent

| Product | Value in € billions | Change compared to same time period in previous year |
|---------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Electronics | 41.0 | -13,1% |
| Electrical engineering | 27.6 | +8,1% |
| Textiles, Clothing, Shoes | 12.4 | -25,6% |
| Machinery | 11.1 | -19,0% |
| Chemical Products | 7.7 | -69,4% |
| Automobiles and Parts | 7.0 | +35,6% |

Main Observations on the Future of German Foreign Policy

Germany aspires to assume a greater leadership role on the international stage, as shown by increased defense spending and engagement in international security measures, but often hesitates in fulfilling this role. This ambivalence has several causes and leads to mixed reactions both domestically and among international partners. German hesitation is particularly evident in situations such as the Leopard-2 tank debate (the debate centered

31. Germany Trade & Invest, & Viklenko, K. (2024, January 27). Ist China bald nicht mehr Deutschlands größter Handelspartner? GTAI. <https://www.gtai.de/de/trade/china/wirtschaftsumfeld/ist-china-bald-nicht-mehr-deutschlands-groesster-handelspartner--1072614>

32. Germany Trade & Invest, & Viklenko, K. (2024, January 27). Ist China bald nicht mehr Deutschlands größter Handelspartner? GTAI. <https://www.gtai.de/de/trade/china/wirtschaftsumfeld/ist-china-bald-nicht-mehr-deutschlands-groesster-handelspartner--1072614>

around whether Germany should supply its advanced Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine, balancing the need to support Ukraine's defense against Russia with concerns over escalating the conflict and the geopolitical ramifications) and the discussion on delivering Taurus missiles to Ukraine. The delayed decision-making and reluctance to provide the Taurus missiles led to criticism and frustration among international partners.

A significant factor contributing to Germany's hesitancy is the discord within the coalition government, comprised of the SPD, Greens, and FDP. These parties have differing views on the direction of foreign and security policy. Defense Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) is seeking an additional €6.5 billion for the 2025 defense budget, despite the existing €100 billion special fund³³. Pistorius had proposed a budget of €58 billion. However, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD), Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck (Greens), and Finance Minister Christian Lindner (FDP) have agreed on a compromise that increases the budget by only €1.2 billion, resulting in a total of €53 billion³⁴. Pistorius emphasized that his requested amount still falls significantly short of the anticipated needs for the coming years. He noted that the additional funding requirements will continue to rise in the following years, as the special fund will be fully committed and exhausted by the end of 2024³⁵. These internal tensions hinder swift and decisive action, impacting Germany's ability to act effectively on the international stage.

The Chancellor's decision to deploy U.S. intermediate-range missiles in Germany has caused internal discord within the SPD. Rolf Mützenich, a party colleague of Scholz and the faction leader, has openly criticized this deployment. The SPD politician believes there is a realistic potential for escalation in this matter. He contended that NATO already possesses comprehensive, graduated deterrence capabilities, even without the new systems, and expressed his incomprehension about why Germany should be the sole country to host such systems³⁶.

Germany's hesitancy is often met with misunderstanding by international partners. Countries including the U.S., France, and eastern European states have repeatedly urged for more decisive and quicker support for Ukraine. Germany's reluctance, particularly in security policy matters, is perceived as a lack of resolve and leadership.

Despite the hesitancy, it cannot be overlooked that Germany is one of the main supporters of Ukraine. Germany has provided substantial military, humanitarian, and financial aid, and plays a central role in supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz assumed office with the goal of being a 'Chancellor of Peace'. His mission to promote peace and resolve conflicts through diplomatic means has always been central to his political agenda and might explain the reluctance to deliver the Taurus missiles. However, this objective has evolved into a challenging balancing act in the context of the Ukraine war. Scholz's hesitation to supply Taurus missiles reflects his caution in avoiding actions that could escalate the conflict or further strain relations with Russia, while still supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and security within the broader framework of European and transatlantic alliances.

33. Hauck, U. (2024a, May 17). Pistorius steht bei Haushalt und Wehrpflicht vor zwei Baustellen. tagesschau.de. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/pistorius-verteidigung-haushalt-100.html>

34. Eydlin, A. (2024, July 8). Ampel-Einigung im Haushaltsstreit: Boris Pistorius kritisiert fehlende Milliarden im Wehretat. ZEIT ONLINE. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2024-07/bundeshaushalt-boris-pistorius-verteidigung-ruestungsausgaben-svenja-schulze>

35. Eydlin, A. (2024, July 8). Ampel-Einigung im Haushaltsstreit: Boris Pistorius kritisiert fehlende Milliarden im Wehretat. ZEIT ONLINE. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2024-07/bundeshaushalt-boris-pistorius-verteidigung-ruestungsausgaben-svenja-schulze>

36. Der Spiegel. (2024, July 20). Bedenken bei Verteidigungsfragen - Fraktionschef Mützenich kritisiert Stationierung neuer US-Raketen in Deutschland. DER SPIEGEL, Hamburg, Germany. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/fraktionschef-muetzenich-kritisiert-stationierung-neuer-us-raketen-in-deutschland-a-c2ca9aaf-2f62-474c-a383-a74e6548b689>

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, to enhance Germany's foreign policy, the Federal Republic should establish a unified and coherent foreign policy framework that is actively supported by all coalition partners. Achieving this requires consensus-building among the SPD, Greens, and FDP, aligning their differing perspectives towards a shared vision of Germany's role on the global stage. A cohesive approach will strengthen Germany's international standing and ensure consistent and reliable engagement in global affairs.

Second, Germany must enhance its capacity to respond swiftly and decisively to international crises. This involves streamlining bureaucratic processes and establishing efficient decision-making mechanisms. A more agile response framework will enable Germany to act promptly, reinforcing its reliability and leadership within NATO and the EU, and ensuring timely support for allies in critical situations.

Third, it is imperative for Germany to develop a robust long-term strategy for foreign and security policy that is adaptable to evolving geopolitical dynamics. This strategy should delineate Germany's roles and responsibilities within the EU and NATO, incorporate measures to bolster European security, and promote strategic autonomy.

Lastly, Germany should invest in diplomatic efforts to explain its strategic shifts to the Global South, seeking to build trust and understanding. The West faces increasing competition from China, which has significantly expanded its influence in Africa through substantial investments in infrastructure, mining, and technology sectors. To compete effectively and differentiate its approach, Germany should emphasize partnerships that promote sustainable development, respect for local governance, and adherence to international transparency and human rights standards. This strategy can position Germany as a counterbalance to China and also as a collaborative partner that aligns its initiatives with the long-term interests and sovereignty of African nations.

CONCLUSION

Germany's Zeitenwende marks a pivotal moment in its foreign and security policy, catalyzed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's landmark speech highlighted a significant shift from Germany's historically cautious approach to military engagement, signaling a readiness to take on greater responsibility in European and global security. By committing substantial resources to enhance national defense, reducing energy dependence on Russia, and strengthening alliances within NATO and the EU, Germany aims to position itself as a central player in the evolving geopolitical landscape.

The establishment of the €100 billion special fund for the Bundeswehr exemplifies Germany's commitment to modernizing its military capabilities. This investment, alongside strategic initiatives such as the European Sky Shield Initiative, underscores a proactive stance in bolstering NATO's defense posture, particularly on its eastern flank. Increased defense spending and leadership in regional security initiatives have not only reassured its NATO allies but also prompted other European countries to reevaluate their defense policies.

However, Germany's journey towards a more assertive foreign policy is not without challenges. Internal divisions within the coalition government and hesitancy in decision-making have occasionally undermined its ability to act decisively on the international stage. To fully embrace its leadership role, Germany must strive for a coherent and unified foreign policy framework supported by all coalition partners. Streamlining decision-making processes and developing a robust long-term strategy for foreign and security policy are

essential steps to enhance Germany's capacity to respond swiftly to international crises. In addition, the implications of this strategic realignment are global, influencing Germany's relations with countries in the Global South. These nations have shown a complex array of responses that highlight the need for Germany to carefully balance its security interests with diplomatic engagement that respects the diverse priorities and historical experiences of these countries.

In conclusion, Germany's Zeitenwende represents a transformative shift in its approach to foreign and security policy. By addressing internal challenges and reinforcing its commitments, Germany can solidify its leadership role within NATO and the EU.

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