

Germany security policy and the Trump administration: modified rhetoric and moderate commitments

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The new administration of President Donald Trump is pushing for its European allies to increase their defence budgets and their military commitment to international security to a much greater extent than previous US administrations. At the 53rd Munich Security Conference and the meeting of NATO defence ministers in February, the US Secretary of Defence Gen. James Mattis and the Vice-President of the United States Mike Pence spoke in this vein. This message is directed at Germany in particular, which has so far been unwilling to substantially increase its defence budget (in 2016 it stood at 1.19% of GDP, i.e. €34.2 billion), or to send the Bundeswehr to operations abroad.

Berlin's response to the US pressure will take into account both political realities (elections to the Bundestag in autumn 2017) and the broader German approach to security policy. Germany will gradually increase its defence expenditure in the future, albeit without reaching the level of 2% of GDP. At the same time, the German government will seek to redefine how European defence spending is calculated. It wants to include in it not only expenditure for military purposes, but also for development and humanitarian aid. In an election year it is hard to expect any significant expansion of the Bundeswehr's involvement abroad. Instead, Germany will present its efforts to develop the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) within the EU and make the Bundeswehr a hub of military cooperation in the region as its greatest contributions to strengthening European defence. Germany may work towards even greater military integration within the EU, which – if the Social Democrats win the parliamentary elections – could mean favouring European security policy at the expense of trans-Atlantic relations and NATO.

Security expenditure instead of defence spending?

The German defence minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) visited Washington, DC on 10 February with a positive message. She agreed on the need to share the responsibility and costs between the United States and its European allies on a fairer basis. At the Munich conference von der Leyen confirmed that Germany would implement the commitments from the Newport summit to reach 2% of GDP on defence by 2025. She also

referred to her investment package plan for the Bundeswehr, put forward last year; it would be worth €130 billion by 2030, although it has not so far been adopted by the German government. The minister's announcement should not be seen as representing the German ruling coalition's official position, but rather as an expression of the Atlanticist mindset of a part of the Christian Democratic Party and lobbying efforts by the defence ministry to obtain additional funds from the federal budget for the underfunded Bundeswehr (see Appendix 1).

A different view on increasing defence spending was presented by the German foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD). At the Munich conference he warned against overestimating the level of 2% of GDP, and questioned the direct link between an increase in defence budgets and an increase in global security. In his opinion, investing in crisis-prevention instruments, post-conflict reconstruction and economic cooperation, or even the reception and integration of refugees, may be much more relevant. Gabriel also expressed doubt as to whether Germany would be able to spend €25 billion more on defence (additionally to the current spending) within a decade in order to meet NATO's requirements.

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The security policy debate in Germany seems to be evolving into redefining the concepts -away from defence spending towards security expenditure, which covers not only defence budgets but also investment in diplomacy, crisis prevention and development aid (which in recent years has run at 0.5%-0.7% of Germany's GDP). At the Munich conference, Chancellor Angela Merkel also seemed to be in favour of this approach. By changing the discourse, Germany would no longer be the 'whipping boy' in the trans-Atlantic debate, but in fact one of the leaders in implementing the comprehensive approach. In the future, we may expect Germany to gradually increase its defence spending by more than the previously agreed levels, but still fail to meet its NATO obligations. The German CDU/CSU will also be more willing to meet US expectations than the SPD. At the same time, irrespective of the shape of the future ruling coalition, Germany will support the rhetoric of the European Commission's head Jean-Claude Juncker, who in

Munich spoke in favour of considering not only European defence budgets in the trans-Atlantic balancing of the books, but also spending on development and humanitarian aid.

Diplomacy or military: how much German engagement?

The US's expectations refer to more than the level of defence expenditure. Germany anticipates that it will come under pressure to become more involved militarily in crises and conflicts around Europe: in the fight against so-called Islamic State in the Middle East, NATO's operation in Afghanistan or in NATO's activities on the eastern flank. American pressure will certainly revive German discussions on the country's role in European and international security policy, which were initiated by the defence minister, the foreign minister and the president of Germany at the Munich Security Conference in 2014. Their statements changed the German discourse; for three years now, there has been loud talk in Berlin about the 'new responsibility' of Germany as the largest country in the EU with its global economic links and its dependency on the stability of the international order. As a result of these discussions, Germany has increased its diplomatic involvement and its contributions to humanitarian and development aid. The growth of Germany's political role was especially visible after Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggression towards Ukraine. Germany (in consultation with the US) took the lead on behalf of the West in the negotiations attempting to find a solution to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as well as the responsibility to impose and maintain sanctions against Moscow in the EU.

Contrary to its allies' expectations, Germany's 'new responsibility' discourse has not really translated into more military involvement abroad. Germany is still reluctant to send troops on foreign operations; this has been done only under considerable pressure from

its allies, particularly in the case of operations where the Bundeswehr may participate in combat (in Europe's southern neighbourhood), or a politically controversial engagement (such as strengthening NATO's eastern flank).

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Around 3300 soldiers of the German armed forces are currently involved in more than a dozen missions and operations, but they mainly carry out logistical, reconnaissance or medical tasks (see Appendix 2). In the case of Europe's southern neighbourhood, it was pressure from France after the Paris attacks in November 2015 which forced Germany to send six Tornado Recce aircraft for reconnaissance operations over Syria, and to increase the quota of German military trainers in Iraq to 150 soldiers in early 2016. In the case of reinforcing NATO's eastern flank, it was largely pressure from the US, Poland and the Baltic countries which forced Germany to make a more meaningful contribution. Germany agreed to increase its participation in the exercises and joint training in the Baltic Sea region, and to take over the role of the framework nation for a battalion-seized battle group in Lithuania (with 450 soldiers). The main reason was not so much the aggressive policy of Russia as Berlin's desire to maintain the cohesion of NATO and its own credibility within the Alliance.

In a year of parliamentary elections, it is difficult to expect that the German government will take (or the Bundestag will accept) any decisions on the participation of Bundeswehr soldiers in operations in which they might become involved in combat, such as sending aircraft to bomb Islamic State positions in Syria and Iraq. However, it may safely be assumed that

Germany will be willing to expand its training, logistical and reconnaissance activities abroad. Even an altered geopolitical situation – such as crises and conflicts in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods of Europe, and tensions in trans-Atlantic relations – will not be able to easily change the German strategic culture. Germany defines itself as a civilian power, is convinced of the primacy of political over military solutions and takes a comprehensive approach to security policy. Only constant pressure from its allies, as well as the influence of regional crises and conflicts, can bring about a gradual change in Germany's approach to the role and use of military force in a security environment which is changing to the detriment of Europe and the wider world. A change in German security policy will also require a dialogue with the German public, which is sceptical of Germany's assumption of a new role.

The German response: more Europe

Since Germany will struggle to give a positive response to the US in terms of increasing defence expenditure and foreign military involvement, Berlin will primarily emphasise its efforts in strengthening European defence. Germany will emphasise and continue its policy aimed at strengthening the CSDP, and at developing the Bundeswehr's military cooperation with the armed forces of Germany's neighbouring allies. Germany was the main promoter of developing the CSDP in 2016. Together with France it authored a non-paper in September 2016 entitled 'The revival of the CSDP. Towards broad, realistic and credible defence in the EU'. Berlin was, and still is, interested in implementing a comprehensive approach to security and improving the efficiency of the EU's civil-military crisis management in Europe's southern neighbourhood; in strengthening the integration of European armed forces; in increasing the number of multilateral procurement projects; and in creating a common market for arms and military equipment. These

proposals were partially covered in the conclusions of the EU Council and the European Council in November and December 2016. Berlin's initiatives serve not only a common European goal; they are also aimed at strengthening Germany's own political, military and industrial position – by making the Bundeswehr the hub of regional military cooperation, and by increasing export opportunities for the German arms industry.

In response to US pressure, Berlin will primarily emphasise its efforts to strengthen the CSDP and develop the Bundeswehr's military cooperation with the armed forces of Germany's neighbouring allies.

Germany has, within NATO, the EU and in its bilateral relations, consistently pursued the 'framework nations' concept (which it initiated in 2012), with the Bundeswehr as the backbone of the structural integration of the armed forces in the region. The concept is being applied in the German land forces in particular, in which division headquarters develop the capacity for integrating allied units. So far, the German land forces' main partner has been the Netherlands, which affiliated two-thirds of its brigades to the German divisions. Currently Germany is developing cooperation with its Central European allies; on 15 February Germany signed a letter of intent with the Czech Republic and Romania. The Czech 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade (one of two Czech brigades) is to be affiliated to the German 10th Armoured Division, and the Romanian 81st Mechanised Brigade (one of 10 Romanian manoeuvre brigades) to the German Rapid Forces Division (see Appendix 3). This cooperation will include common activities of staff elements, training and exercises, development of concepts and common military requirements, joint procurement and logistical support. Developing cooperation will

contribute to creating multinational divisions under German command as part of the force pool for larger formations in NATO. Germany also wants to 'Europeanise' its navy; in 2016, Germany offered to take the role of framework nation for multilateral operations in the Baltic Sea with the German navy's Maritime Operations Centre building the core structures. As Germany signed a German-Norwegian agreement in February this year on the joint purchase of six 212A-class submarines produced by the German TKMS (four for Norway, two for Germany), it also submitted a proposal to create an international training and exercise cluster for submarine warfare using the structures of the *Deutsche Marine*. Berlin hopes that Poland and the Netherlands will also join in case they decide to purchase German submarines. The German air force is less capable of developing framework capacities, as it struggles to maintain old and introduce new military equipment (A-400M transport aircraft, Eurofighter jets, Tiger and NH90 helicopters). For these reasons, Germany is willing to participate in European cooperation projects on an equal footing with its other allies, though it will try to develop smaller projects like the NH90 multinational MEDEVAC unit.

It is possible that Germany in the future will call for greater European integration within the CSDP framework. If the SPD wins the general elections and forms a ruling coalition, there will likely be more emphasis on developing the CSDP at the expense of trans-Atlantic relations and NATO. However, it is unlikely that even a government dominated by the Social Democrats would propose strategic autonomy for the EU. This would mean the need for a significant increase in German and European civilian and military engagement, as well as the development of a European nuclear deterrent, which (despite individual voices within Germany favouring such a move) has no political or social support.

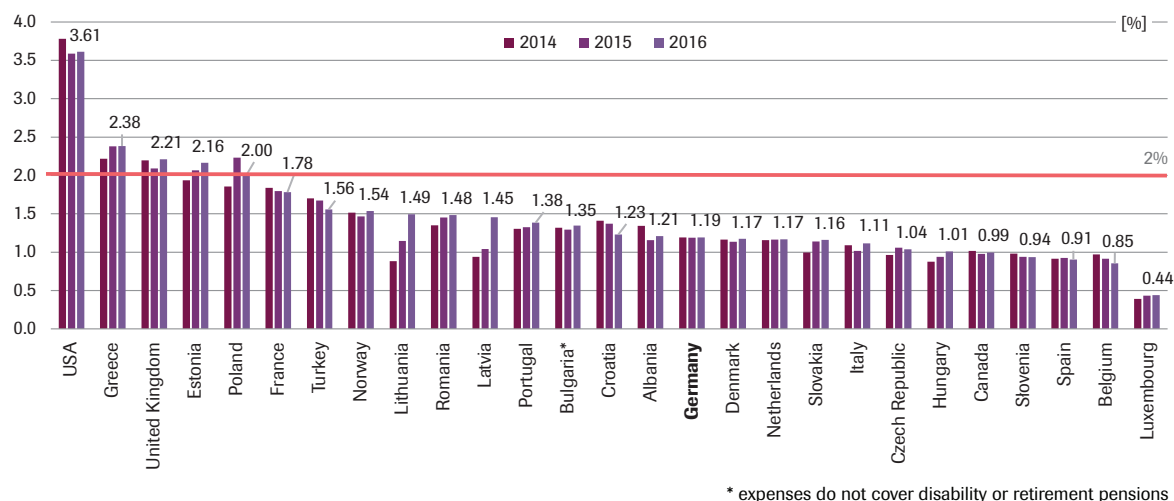
APPENDIX 1

Military spending (as a percentage of GDP) and expenditure on investment by Germany and other NATO member states

The reference point for trans-Atlantic discussions on defence expenditure is the declaration adopted by NATO at the Newport summit in 2014 on the allies' intentions to increase defence spending to 2% of GDP within a decade, 20% of which is to be spent on investments in arms and military equipment. In recent years, Germany has spent around 1.1-1.2% of GDP on defence, which in terms of real expenditure fluctuated between €32bn and €34bn a year by 2016. According to NATO data, Germany spent the fourth biggest amount of NATO states in 2016 (US\$40.6bn) with the USA in first place (US\$664bn), then Great Britain (US\$60.3bn) and France (US\$43.6bn).

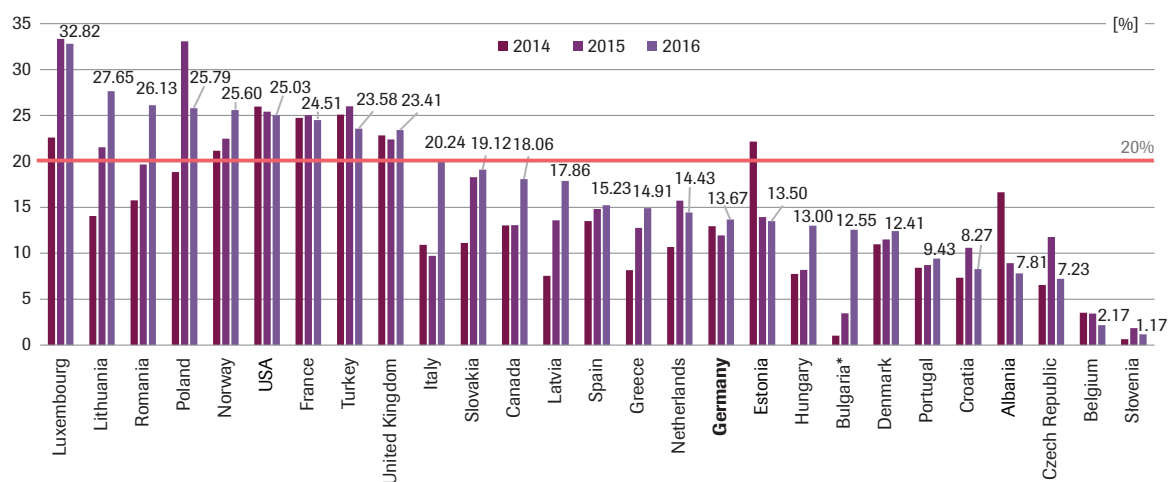
In 2016, the German government decided on a small increase in military spending by 2020. The defence budget for 2017 was increased by 8% (€2.8 billion) to €37 billion; according to current plans, expenditure should reach the level of €39.2 billion by 2020. Despite this nominal growth, however, German spending will continue to stay at the level of 1.2-1.3% of GDP. The reasons for Berlin's decision to increase expenditure were: the increased involvement on the eastern flank of NATO, as well as in Africa and the Middle East; the need to invest in arms and military equipment; the need to increase the attractiveness of service in the armed forces (in January this year there were 178,000 soldiers in full-time, contractual and voluntary service, i.e. there were 7000 vacancies in the armed forces which formally number 185,000); increasing the size of the Bundeswehr (up to 198,000 by 2024); and full funding of retirement benefits for civilian and military employees as of 2015 (these had previously been financed from a separate pool of the federal budget). The current plans to increase the defence spending have been assessed as insufficient by the Ministry of Defence itself.

Defence Expenditure as a share of Gross Domestic Product



Source: NATO, Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2009-2016)

Equipment as share of Defence Expenditure



* expenses do not cover disability or retirement pensions

Source: NATO, Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2009-2016)

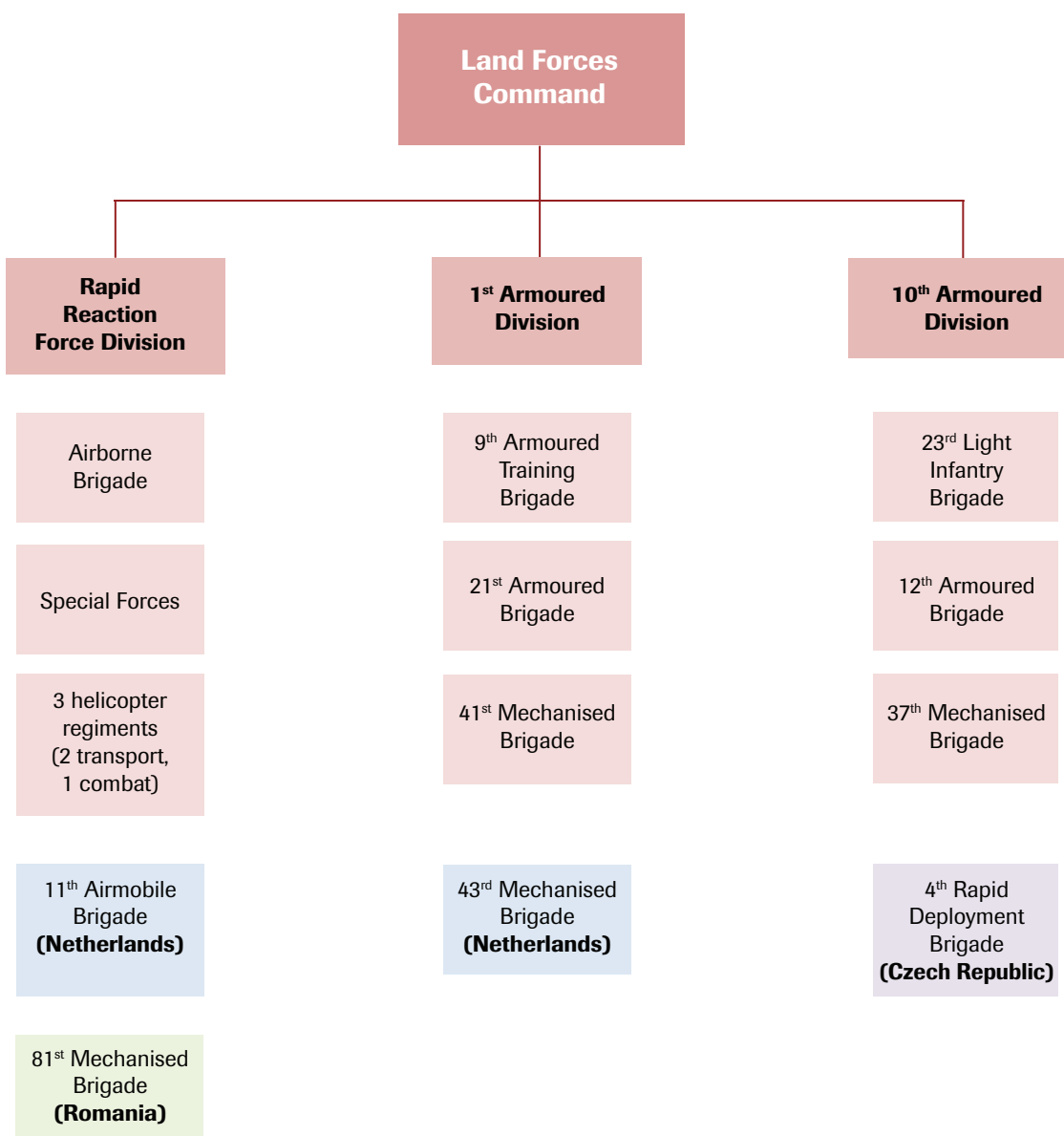
APPENDIX 2

Bundeswehr's participation in foreign operations (as of February 2017)

Operation	Area	Number of soldiers	Tasks and contribution
Resolute Support (NATO)	Afghanistan	966	responsibility for the command of NATO forces in the Northern region (Germany is the framework state in the north of Afghanistan for about 20 allies and partners); training and mentoring the Afghan army and police; logistics, intelligence and reconnaissance, medical service
KFOR (NATO)	Kosovo	532	officers in KFOR headquarters, field hospital, engagement in the German-Austrian operational reserve force battalion stationed in Germany, sent to Kosovo if necessary (last time in 2012)
Sea Guardian (NATO)	Mediterranean Sea	0	currently no contribution, rotating presence
EUTM Mali (EU)	Mali	130	officers' training and special training for the Malian army in the south of the country
EUTM Somalia (EU)	Somalia	9	consulting and training Somali armed forces
EUVAVFOR Mediterranean –Sophia (EU)	Mediterranean Sea	105	reconnaissance of and combatting smugglings network off the coast of Libya, training Libyan navy and coastguard, sea rescue operations (1 supply ship)
EUNAVFOR Somalia – Atalanta (EU)	Horn of Africa	32	protection of maritime routes, currently reconnaissance activities (1 P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft)
MINUSMA (UN)	Senegal, Mali	865	command, reconnaissance, strategic air transport (materiel, personnel, medical evacuation), tactical medical evacuation (4 NH90 transport helicopters), protection of personnel in the EUTM Mali mission (4 Tiger combat helicopters)
UNIFIL (UN)	Lebanon	127	monitoring sea routes, smuggling weapons (1 K130 corvette)
UNMISS (UN)	South Sudan	16	protecting civilians, human rights monitoring, securing supplies of humanitarian aid
UNAMID (THE UN)	Sudan	7	logistical, IT, medical and technical support
Operation against ISIS (international coalition under the aegis of the US)	Middle East	273	reconnaissance (6 Tornado Recce aircraft), refuelling in the air (1 Airbus 310 MRTT), German NATO personnel on AWACS airborne early warning and control aircraft
Training mission in Iraq (international coalition under the aegis of the US)	Iraq/ Kurdistan	143	training Iraqi armed forces

APPENDIX 3

Simplified structure of the Bundeswehr's land forces with the affiliated allied brigades



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