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Sven Bernhard Gareis
Matthew Rhodes (eds.)

Germany's New Partners

Bilateral Relations of Europe's Reluctant Leader

Verlag Barbara Budrich

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Preface: Germany's New Partners in a Changing World

Germany's role as Europe's leading state is widely accepted – even if the premisses and implications are not. Over the last decades the international system has been changing at a breath-taking pace: within only one generation the world has witnessed the transition from the bipolarity of the Cold War to a global predominance of the United States and its allies and subsequently to the emergence of an increasingly interdependent but geopolitically competitive order with additional state and non-state power centers. This transition has been accompanied by conflicts across the Greater Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa that have contributed to a historic surge in the number of global refugees and migrants – many of them aiming for the industrialized countries of the North. This fragmented order brings rising demand for international cooperation especially within the political West. However, the post-2008 financial crisis heightened conflict amongst the fiscal-economic cultures within the EU. Skepticism of prevailing multilateral practice further fueled a populist political wave exemplified by the United Kingdom's vote for Brexit and Donald Trump's election as U.S. president in 2016. At the same time, those developments have driven stronger German engagement in international affairs in ways that pose new challenges for Germany itself as well as for its allies and partners.

From its founding in 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany's preferred style of pursuing its national interest or exercising international leadership has been in concerted, harmonized action within multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations, NATO and the European Union. Over the past decade, however, Germany found itself confronted especially within Europe with growing expectations for more active, direct leadership on the one hand and revived fears of its potentially excessive dominance (sometimes referred to as a new '*Reich*') on the other. Germany's position as the EU's *primus inter pares* has expanded its opportunities for shaping the emerging global order but also meant assuming unaccustomed responsibilities and burdens, including the delicate task of formulating policy guidance toward unfolding crises and convincing fellow Europeans to act accordingly – and coherently.

Germany's larger role has thus necessarily also brought change to its relationships with old and new partners in Europe, North-America and the world. While in 2015 minister of defence Ursula von der Leyen famously re-emphasized her country's core commitment to 'leadership from the middle' via international bodies, this still entails major adjustments in its interactions with an increasing number of important states. Bilateral relationships always played an important role for Germany's position in multilateral arrangements – with France in Europe, with the U.S. in

the transatlantic realm. Acting in concert with those partners was Germany's way to increase its economic and political weight without reviving historical fears in its immediate and extended neighbourhoods. After the end of the Cold War, Germany had to consider the interests of crucial additional actors in its exercise of cooperative leadership, with Poland being amongst the most significant ones in Europe. Germany's new status, however, raises the question of how seriously it takes its commitment to multilateral arrangements – or how susceptible it is to the temptations of making political and economic deals with powers such as Russia and China at the possible expense of its European and transatlantic partners. German behavior vis-à-vis such new partners can be considered as a litmus test for its avowal of an effective multilateralism. Indeed, the future of European and global security order built on multilateral institutions substantially hinges on the quality of Germany's key bilateral ties.

With such stakes in mind, the authors of this volume offer a comparative assessment of Germany's new and renewed bilateral relationships. Representing a multinational team of scholars, they analyze the background, status, and prospects of a selection of the most significant cases. Their texts (and this volume as a whole) present the personal viewpoints of the authors and do not represent official positions of their respective governments or institutions.

Their work is framed by an introductory chapter by Karl-Heinz Kamp, president of the Federal Academy for Security Policy in Berlin, who offers an internal perspective on how 'game-changers' such as Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the surge of Islamist terrorism and refugees from the Middle East overcame Germany's post-World War II aversion to 'an international role commensurate with its political and economic weight.'

The following two chapters are dedicated to Germany's relations with its traditionally closest friends and allies: Martin Michelot and Martin Quencez look at the extent to which political and economic weakness in France has undermined the traditional Franco-German 'engine' of European integration and security (even as outward appearance of the couple still legitimizes German leadership) as well as how this might be revived as Europe's indispensable tandem under president Emmanuel Macron. Matthew Rhodes charts how coincidence of Germany's shift with the U.S. Obama administration's foreign policy retrenchment partly and provisionally realized the 'partners in leadership' vision evoked by the first president Bush in 1989 – and how this might develop under the Donald Trump administration.

Two further chapters focus on crucial European partners: Marcin Zaborowski dissects the process through which 're-nationalization' of Polish politics since the return to power of the Law and Justice Party has strained what Germans had viewed as their second 'grand reconciliation' (after that with France) and fueled momentum for similar change elsewhere. Graeme Herd argues that while the United King-

dom's vote for Brexit will likely drive Germany and the UK further apart, broader changes in transatlantic ties under a Trump administration might push them closer back together.

At the global level, the People's Republic of China (PRC) established itself as a new great power. Sven Bernhard Gareis examines the ambivalent relationship between Germany and China in light of the countries' extraordinarily successful economic partnership on the one hand and growing German wariness of the PRC as a nascent economic and security competitor on the other. Looking at the re-emerging Russia, Pal Dunay analyzes how Vladimir Putin's increasingly raw realpolitik upended the prior German policy paradigm toward Russia based on economic interests and a sense of unique 'understanding.' Finally, Valbona Zeneli considers how the countries of the Western Balkans continue to look less critically to Germany as a "New Brussels" to fill political and economic gaps created by weak governance in the region and slackening engagement by the European Union as a whole.

What emerges from the individual studies is that though active German leadership is more necessary than ever, it remains insufficient for European or broader international security. Indeed, many of the new patterns in relations covered here have proven only partially successful and stand at risk of becoming obsolete before they can consolidate. Contemporary Germany lacks the full-spectrum strength and – most importantly – the political desire to become an independent global power. At the same time, many German policymakers worry of finding themselves in a predicament of 'isolated multilateralism' without others' support. While the multilateral impulse remains embedded in the DNA of Germany's foreign and security policy, disappointments could plausibly push the country back toward either more restrained introspection or hub-and-spoke regional leadership reminiscent of Bismarck.

Germany's capability to productively interact with very different – and sometimes very difficult – partners based on mutual respect and advantage allowed its post-war revival as a widely admired and trusted country. But it has become clearer to Germany and the Germans that 'multilateralism' offers no easy escape from the bitter realities of international politics. The ultimate task –the 'holy grail' – for Germany and its new partners in a changing world is thus to achieve a balanced model of bi- and multilateral cooperation that is simultaneously responsive to both the internal and external challenges that Europe and the world are facing in the twenty-first century.

Münster, Sven Bernhard Gareis
Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Matthew Rhodes

Germany – From Hesitance to Leadership

Karl-Heinz Kamp

Since the foundation of the Federal Republic in 1949, 'Germany' and 'leadership' appeared to be contradictory terms – politically incorrect and, if ever applied in a combined manner, heavily criticized by the public as well as by political elites. In the years of the Cold War it was not even possible, since West German was not a fully sovereign country. Even after the end of the East-West conflict, the expression 'reluctant leader' was often used to characterize Germany's role in international relations.

This attitude seemed all the more surprising as some allies and partners repeatedly encouraged Germany to gradually take an international role commensurate to its political and economic weight. U.S. president George H.W. Bush even invited Germany to a 'partnership in leadership' in May 1989, a remarkable offer just a few months before the Berlin Wall came down. Still, post-Cold War Germany went on cultivating the self-image of an enlarged Switzerland: a country successfully doing business on a global scale but leaving the unpleasant task of contributing to the stability of the international order, if necessary, with military means, to its allies – preferably the United States. Germany in turn purported to remain a 'civilian power'.

The year 2008, with the Russian-Georgian war in the East and the outbreak of an international financial crisis with lasting consequences on the entire European Union, catapulted Germany slightly upward on the leadership scale. It was Germany's economic importance on the one hand and chancellor Angela Merkel's special ties to Vladimir Putin on the other which forced the German government to become more active in international affairs.

The true transformation from civilian power to undisputed European leader finally occurred in 2014 at the Munich Security Conference in February, when German federal president Joachim Gauck as well as foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and defence minister Ursula von der Leyen openly claimed a greater German engagement towards international crises and conflicts. The domestic and international reactions, though, ranged from benign skepticism to outright dismissal. The majority of Germans rejected these ideas, spearheaded by the usual suspects in newspapers and talk shows fantasizing about the 'militarization of German foreign policy'. NATO and EU-allies could hardly believe that Germany should suddenly come up with a fundamentally changed foreign policy approach. Russia had not yet annexed Crimea, and the Middle East had not sunk into the complete chaos in which it finds itself today. Why should the announcements at

Munich be more than the type of typically cloudy intentions often expressed in political sermons on these occasions?

It is worth noting, that the 'signal of Munich' did not come out of the blue. In fact, the origins of that policy shift are deeper and range back to the Libya crisis in 2011. Not only had Germany refused to take part in the NATO-operation against the Gaddafi regime in Tripoli. Even worse, the coalition partner in Berlin (at that time led by an openly reluctant foreign minister Guido Westerwelle) forced the German government to abstain from the vote in the United Nations Security Council – opposing its Western allies. All of a sudden, Germany found itself aligned with Russia, China and Brazil, snubbing its closest friends and partners who were asking for a mandate for military intervention in Libya. The price Germany paid for this lack of Alliance solidarity was considerable and painful. For many months, Germany was excluded from inner circle debates in NATO and lost much of its clout on developments within the Alliance. Even close EU-partners like France kept a certain distance from Germany for quite a while. Thus, when Angela Merkel became chancellor for her third term in 2013, there was a tacit consensus among the new coalition of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats that such a disaster must never happen again.

Arguably, the three Munich speeches alone might not have sufficed to put Germany on a new foreign policy course. Instead, it took a political catalyst in the form of two game changers in 2014 in order to transform Germany's expressed intention to lead into visible policies of substantial international engagement. The first one was Russia's revanchist course culminating in the illegal annexation of Crimea. Moscow's actions in Eastern Europe revealed a policy change that the Russian leadership had long been planning. For quite some time now, Russia has been defining itself as an anti-Western power advocating an orthodox nationalist worldview that contrasts with Western values, which Moscow considers even degenerate. In addition, Moscow thinks in terms of spheres of influence and grants only limited sovereignty to parts of what it calls its 'near abroad'. That is why the EU, NATO and primarily, of course, the United States are considered as a threat because in the Russian view, both organizations (remote-controlled from Washington) have diminished Russia's *cordon sanitaire* by admitting Eastern European states. Most importantly, by using military force to change borders in Europe and to annex territory of a sovereign state, Russia has sacrificed the existing European security order for the benefit of its own world power ambitions. Although Russia lacks the economic, military and soft power (leaving aside its demographical situation) to underpin its ambitions as a global power in the long term, it will continue to regard itself as such. Russia's policy is therefore not a spell of bad weather but rather a fundamental climate change in international relations. One of the major consequences is that NATO finds itself back in an 'Article-5-world', *i.e.*

a security environment in which deterrence and defence in line with Article 5 of the Washington Treaty is the core mission of the Atlantic Alliance. Even if not everybody in the German government came to these conclusions simultaneously, today Germany stands firm against Russian aggression and helps to keep up a unified position in NATO and the EU. It is not by chance that the 2016 German White Paper on security and defence explicitly defines alliance solidarity as a German *raison d'être*.

A second game changer resulted from the upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa – frequently but imprecisely called the 'Arab world'. In this region, outbreaks of violence by state and non-state actors far exceed the occurrence of conventional crises and revolutions. These outbreaks are indicative of a lasting erosion of statehood, with the consequence that states like Syria, Iraq and Libya are disintegrating, spontaneously established caliphates are dissolving existing borders, and countless Islamist groups are fighting one another with support from different regional powers. All of this leads to an export of religious violence far beyond those regions and to the creation of huge floods of refugees into Europe, especially into the well-off EU states.

It is virtually impossible for the European countries to adopt military, political or economic measures to stabilize this highly fragile situation. Where states and governments cease to exist, there are no actors on whose behalf (or against whom) it is possible to intervene. Even such initially successful operations as the NATO intervention in Libya do not necessarily lead to a stable post-conflict order. Instead, they apparently accelerate processes of political disintegration. Hence, it is little wonder that European and North American societies are getting increasingly fatigued with any form of military intervention. NATO and EU members are facing both a fundamental and long-term problem. They have to cope with the consequences of the developments in the Middle East (conflict escalation, Islamist terrorism, refugees) – yet without being able to fight the root causes in the region effectively.

It was the flow of refugees in 2015 which significantly contributed to the growing public acceptance of a larger international German footprint. With almost a million migrants and refugees crossing Germany's borders within just a few months, it became obvious to many Germans that foreign policy abstinence is no longer an option.

Hence, there was hesitant but growing public support for measures taken by the government which had been perceived as impossible only a few years earlier. To counter Russia, Germany beefed up its military engagement in Eastern Europe by stationing combat troops on a rotational basis, surprising most of its NATO allies. Even the increase of the German defence budget was no longer a taboo. At first implemented rather homeopathically, the official NATO pledge of spending two percent of GDP for defence – long regarded as impossible to reach by German

governments – is now taken as a serious benchmark. In the EU, Germany pushes its partners to keep up sanctions against Russia and to support Ukraine on its difficult path of political and economic transformation.

With respect to the crises in the South, Germany crossed a long held political and constitutional threshold by delivering weapons in an ongoing conflict in order to empower the Peshmerga in Iraq to fight against the Islamic State (IS). Furthermore, Germany constantly increased its military engagement in crises management missions in Africa – first and foremost in Mali. Today, witnesses of the Munich speeches have to acknowledge that the announcements made in 2014 have been implemented to a degree hardly anyone had expected.

At the same time, Germany painfully experiences two unpleasant implications of international leadership. The first one is the well-known fact that those who lead get criticized, regardless of the specific political direction. 'Damned if you do and damned if you don't' is an experience familiar to other leading powers – particularly the United States. For Germany, it is still painful to see Greek demonstrators reviling chancellor Merkel as an Adolf Hitler caricature, particularly as it was Germany who pushed for keeping Greece in the Eurozone after other EU-members were no longer willing to provide further assistance for Athens. A second disillusioning experience is that leadership or even good policies are apparently no longer enough to cope with the ongoing crises. Despite foreign policy machinery running at highest speed, the net results in eastern Ukraine, Syria or Afghanistan remain extremely limited. Germany cannot close itself off from the humbling insight that the current challenges apparently go beyond what foreign and security policy can successfully deal with. It is telling that even the United States as the largest political and military power on Earth seems unable to stop the mutual killing in a single spot like Syria.

Despite these sobering facts, the need for German leadership will not decline but increase. The aforementioned crises have gained speed and been amended by other challenges. For instance, Russia has even intensified its threatening course in its neighbourhood and beyond. It further increases its military capabilities and costly engagements in the Middle East and elsewhere despite its shaky economic base. Oil and gas revenues are likely to remain too low to fund the mushrooming state expenditures. Because of decades of missed economic, political and societal modernization, Russia has nothing to offer on the world market but weapons and commodities. This simple reality, plus kleptocratic state structures and corruption on all levels, foreclose any hope for economic recuperation. As a result, the long term concern is not only a potentially aggressive Russia but a country subtly disintegrating as the state might no longer be able to provide the basic needs for its citizens. Nationalism fueled by the pipe dreams of the leadership might delay this process but will not work forever. Thus, Germany has to encourage the Euro-At-

lantic community to stick to its dual approach vis-à-vis Russia: strong signals of deterrence and defence combined with the readiness for cooperation in areas of common interests – provided Moscow ends its aggressive and revanchist course in its neighbourhood.

In the Middle East, chaos and violence have in the meantime reached a level which make observers draw an analogy to the Thirty Years War – a conflict fueled by culture, religion and sheer power ambitions. What worries most in this is not only the presumed length of the current crisis (three decades or more) but the fact that the war in the 17th century ended not through victory but by complete exhaustion on all sides. Therefore, the engagement of Germany and its allies will be required for many years to come.

Since 2014 some additional challenges have emerged, making Germany's international engagement even more important. In the Asia-Pacific region tensions between a rising China and its neighbours mount and might lead to open military exchanges. North Korea even threatens nuclear destruction to almost everyone. As in the Middle East, Germany and its European allies are about to realize that geographic distance is no longer a protective shield from international conflicts. A potential blockade of the Malacca Strait for merchant ships or a severe crisis between the six nuclear states operating in the region (China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Russia, United States) could affect Germany's vital interest in an unprecedented manner.

The ongoing crisis of the EU is affecting the bedrock of German foreign policy of the last half of the century: namely the German belief that uniting Europe is beneficial not only for Germany but for all countries involved. This is apparently no longer the case. The United Kingdom leaving the EU (BREXIT), the incapacity of many EU members for internal reform, or lacking European solidarity in the refugee crisis erode the pillars of the Union and put the entire idea of an integrated Europe into question.

Furthermore, the result of the presidential elections in the United States has left a paralyzed superpower mostly occupied with itself. Even worse, the election of Donald Trump might put the entire idea of Western liberal democracy into question. How will it be possible to advocate the benefits of democracy against dictatorship or autocracy if the United States as the democratic leader in the world has proven that the visible demonstration of incompetence and ignorance is a quality that can lead to the most senior political duties? How can pluralism, alliances, commitments or solidarity be promoted if the leadership in Washington seems not aware of the virtues of any of these principles?

It was certainly an exaggeration when some commentators characterized the German chancellor Angela Merkel becoming the last remaining leader of the democratic world. Even if the chancellor won the elections in 2017 and is leading the