



Bundesministerium
der Verteidigung

Speech by Federal Minister of Defence

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer

**at the Helmut Schmidt University /
Bundeswehr University Hamburg**

**17 November 2020
Hamburg**

Check against delivery!

Professor Dr Beckmann,
members of the university management,
generals,
ladies and gentlemen,
and, most importantly, students!

Once again, we had to yield to the virus and move this event to a virtual platform.

Nevertheless, I am pleased to be able to speak to you today for the first time, and I look forward to our discussions. I sincerely thank everyone who has helped make this possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are currently witnessing a tremendously significant moment. The overall strategic situation is changing before our very eyes; it is becoming more tangible and increasingly clear.

The results of the presidential elections in the United States of America have presented us with old challenges and have opened up new options in international politics, including in security and defence policy.

It is now up to us Europeans to show that we will seize this opportunity, and how.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, the first real drone war in human history has just been conducted between Azerbaijan and Armenia, with devastating consequences for the losing side.

China has just finalised the world's largest free-trade agreement with fourteen other Indo-Pacific countries. This agreement, concluded in the most dynamic economic region worldwide, illustrates how the global balance of power is shifting towards the Pacific region.

At the same time, Russia is relentlessly continuing to equip itself with conventional and nuclear missile systems, which essentially amounts to rearmament – in the immediate neighbourhood of the European Union, right on NATO's eastern border.

This severely disrupts the strategic and potentially the nuclear balance in Europe.

And all of this while the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread across the world. We cannot yet fully predict all the economic, political, social and strategic consequences that this tiny pathogen will have.

At a webinar that we both participated in two weeks ago, my Australian colleague Linda Reynolds very aptly said that as defence ministers, we had the job to see the world as it is – not as we wished it to be. This is not always easy for us in Germany.

But if we do our job right, we can help Germany and Europe evolve in the direction that we want them to in terms of foreign and security policy.

Therefore, it is a good thing that we have a cross-party consensus nowadays that Germany and Europe should assume more responsibility.

But does this consensus mean that our citizens can and should be expected to accept the – possibly uncomfortable – truths associated with this higher responsibility?

It is arrogance to believe that they cannot or should not be expected to do that. It is disrespectful to people. It is treating them like children.

Citizens in a democracy have a right to know uncomfortable truths.

For if we want to move from a consensus on more responsibility to a consensus on concrete action in Germany; if we want to move from an abstract discussion of the awareness that Germany must do more to its concrete implementation, then this will not be possible without the democratic legitimation by the people.

The challenges are evident, and so is the global competition between systems.

Some states oppose the Western model of an open society, democracy and the rule of law with another model that is in no way compatible with our values.

Some are aggressively expanding their influence in Europe using various methods, trying to meddle in the governance of our countries and institutions.

Authoritarian systems are expanding economically, socially and militarily and are working hard to rewrite and distort international law.

Trade routes and supply chains are coming under pressure.

In the cyber world, we are confronted on a daily basis with a large number of attacks staged by states or by entities close to states, many of them targeting our democratic institutions or critical infrastructures.

State-of-the-art weapon systems are being employed or will be soon, ranging from AI-controlled drone swarms to hypersonic missiles that are still virtually impossible to defend against.

Unfortunately, crises and wars are dominating everyday life in our European neighbourhood, too.

At the same time, terrorism, especially Islamist terrorism, remains a plague that affects everyone everywhere in the world.

Thirty years after the Cold War has ended, we are facing the truth that the end of the Cold War was not the “end of history”. Peace did not break out everywhere. Our security, our prosperity, our peaceful coexistence is coming up against some very real threats.

What is more, we are facing profound uncertainties within NATO and the European Union as well right now:

- How reliable is the United States of America?
- Is our threat perception the same everywhere in Europe? In Riga or Stockholm, for example, people look at Russia differently than in Paris or Rome.
- How strong is Germany’s resolve?
- Will we Europeans be able to rely on each other when push comes to shove?

Ultimately, COVID-19 will take its toll on defence policy as well. Defence spending will have to continue to increase, however. For the threats and challenges I have described will continue to exist, even during the pandemic.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To respond appropriately to these developments we need to have an open and serious debate.

As the responsible minister, I want to do my share.

A connected world needs a connected approach to politics. We need a well-coordinated foreign, security, defence, trade and development policy if Germany and Europe are to play a bigger role in world politics in the future, and if our capabilities are to evolve into an effective defence diplomacy.

Last year at the Bundeswehr University in Munich, I therefore proposed that a National Security Council be established in Germany.

Since then, a number of events in this unique year of 2020 have shown how helpful such an instrument would be for coordination and strategic purposes. One of these events is the COVID crisis.

I am convinced that this topic will come up in the next coalition talks.

I am pleased that the German government has adopted comprehensive guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region, which also encompass security and defence policy. This fully recognises the strategic relevance of the region.

Closer cooperation on defence and security will bring to life the multilateralism that is so important to us, strengthening the partnership with our friends in Australia, Japan, South Korea or Singapore.

Germany is increasing its presence, for instance by dispatching more liaison officers, and by deploying a German navy vessel next year, if the pandemic situation allows.

We will take a stand for our values, interests and partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the end of World War II, Germany has enjoyed a stability that it created together with its European neighbours and the United States.

We have always needed allies to ensure freedom, peace and a good life for the people in our country, and we still do.

The United States of America has been, and will foreseeably continue to be, our most important ally in security and defence policy. Without America's nuclear and conventional capabilities, Germany and Europe cannot protect themselves. Those are plain facts.

According to estimates by the renowned London-based RUSI institute, the United States currently provides 75 percent of all NATO capabilities.

It provides 70 percent of what we call “strategic enablers”, which include reconnaissance, helicopters, air refuelling and satellite communications capabilities.

It contributes almost 100 percent of defence capabilities against ballistic missiles to NATO. And of course, the United States provides the vast majority of nuclear deterrence capabilities.

Some 76,000 US soldiers are deployed in Europe. This is not counting the troops that the United States would send for reinforcement in the event of war.

Credible estimates suggest that to compensate for all this would take decades, and would leave our current defence budgets looking quite meagre.

We thus have a vested interest in ensuring that America continues its commitment to defending Europe while shifting its strategic focus to Asia.

The best way to achieve this is to do more for our own security. Only if we take our own security seriously will America do the same.

The French President has recently made that same observation – and I agree.

At the same time, I can only reiterate what Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said a few days ago on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the Bundeswehr:

“Relying exclusively on the EU would create a divide in Europe. We will continue to depend on the strongest and biggest partner in the Alliance. But only a Europe that has the will and the ability to credibly protect itself will have the best chance of keeping the United States in the Alliance.”

This is what is important now. This is a paradox that we Europeans must live with: While continuing to rely on the United States in terms of security policy, more of what America has done for us so far we will have to do ourselves.

The idea of strategic autonomy for Europe goes too far if it is taken to mean that we could guarantee security, stability and prosperity in Europe without NATO and without the US. That is an illusion.

But if we take it to refer to our capacity to act independently as Europeans where our common interests are concerned, then yes, that is

our common goal and reflects our common understanding of sovereignty and ability to act.

Germany and France both want Europe to be able to act autonomously and effectively in the future whenever it becomes necessary.

We want Europe to stand shoulder to shoulder with the United States as a strong partner, not as a helpless child.

The new American President, Joe Biden, must be able to see and feel that this is exactly what we are striving for.

I therefore think it is important that we Europeans present a common proposal, a New Deal, to the incoming Biden administration.

From the vantage point of German defence policy, I see three key points that are of particular importance in this respect:

- That we expand our defence capabilities and reliably boost our defence budgets to this effect, even in times of coronavirus.
- That Germany commit to the role it plays in NATO's nuclear sharing.
- That when it comes to China, and where this is compatible with our interests, a common European agenda with the United States be possible and based on political will.

All this fits seamlessly and is completely in line with our ambitions in Europe: We want Europe to be able to do more, through NATO and the EU.

For this very reason, Germany has advanced important EU projects during its EU Council Presidency:

- Building on a common threat analysis, we are preparing a Strategic Compass to provide a clear direction for security policy.
- As we are learning from the COVID crisis, we are intensifying cooperation between our medical services. The European Medical Command is being reinforced, in cooperation with NATO Allies.
- Third-state participation in PESCO, our structured European security cooperation, expressly allows the involvement of non-European partners.
- And by way of the European Peace Facility, we are looking for a good European solution enabling us to appropriately equip the armed forces of the partner nations that we are training.

A European army, as certain voices are again proposing at the moment, is one vision among many. Whatever one's position on this point, one thing is clear: to take such a big step eventually, one must consistently take all the little steps that come before. That starts with honouring the existing commitments in NATO and the EU.

Rather than abstract talk about Europe's ability to act, this must take the concrete form of investments, votes, and deeds.

The costs of strategic autonomy in the sense of a complete de-coupling from the USA would, by the way, be much higher than the two percent of Gross Domestic Product that we have committed to in the Atlantic Alliance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must become more European in order to remain transatlantic. To do that, Germany has to start at home. We cannot delegate it anywhere else.

We have already made successful efforts towards this goal: in terms of readiness, national and collective defence, operations abroad, personnel build-up or materiel procurement.

Also, by the way, as a player in international defence diplomacy, which allows us to work for freedom, peace and conflict resolution from a position of strength, be it through our NATO presence, through enablement or as military observers.

The Bundeswehr is already doing all of this now.

At the same time, I would like to emphasise that the Ministry of Defence alone cannot ensure that our reliability as an ally is strengthened when it comes to security and defence.

This is a whole-of-government task. Securing the long-term funding of the defence budget must also be the common goal of the government.

I can therefore well imagine following the example of other European countries and adopt a defence planning act in future legislative periods that will provide for a longer-term financing of our security.

This would ensure that security were less exposed to the whims of the economy and short-term moods, but would remain continuously funded as an absolute core task of the state.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are talking about the money required for our security, and here, too, it helps to take a realistic and critical look at the world as it is.

Let me point out an uncomfortable truth: The demands placed on Germany are increasing and their nature is changing.

One consequence of this is that we repeatedly have to adapt our planning to this yardstick.

In the past, our priorities often resulted from the constraints of scarce resources. Today, our priorities are dictated by a rapidly changing global situation. What takes precedence? What has more urgency right now? We will define this precisely. In future, not everybody will get what they dreamed of.

It is also important to me that we coordinate well in the Alliance. We will continue to be a partner to lean on. And we must not skimp on our ability to cooperate on operations.

And we must certainly not in any way skimp on the security of our servicemen and women!

This brings me to a central point: I will not agree to the financing of major projects at the expense of basic equipment and resources for routine operations.

This is a mistake that the Bundeswehr has made in recent decades and it has hit the armed forces to the core. It must not happen again.

As attractive as new major projects may appear and as convenient as it would be to possess the capabilities that they promise, they can only be realised if they are allocated additional funds or if other large projects are dropped instead.

That is why I am glad that in the current budget negotiations we already managed to agree on providing some projects with a financial perspective for the medium term:

- the Eurofighter;
- the NH 90 helicopter;
- and the eurodrone.

This is good for the troops, demonstrates reliability to our Allies, promotes European independence, industrial capabilities and technology, and it is visible proof of the German government and the parliament delivering on their overall responsibility.

Students,

Some of you are officers already; some of you are still officer candidates. All of you will soon play a part in shaping the future of our Bundeswehr.

You have consciously chosen a challenging career in a serving role. Quite a few of you will come to share in the responsibility for the strategic fortunes of this country.

You will no doubt have noticed that large, complex organisations like the Bundeswehr can tend to engage in navel-gazing.

In Germany and in Europe, too, there is a tendency to do so while the world is changing rapidly and others are busy shaping it according to their own liking – creating facts even in our direct neighbourhood.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Together we must look out at the world, rather than only at ourselves. My aspiration is – our aspiration must be – for Germany and Europe to actively shape their own neighbourhood and the global order.

To keep our eyes trained on what our interests are, how we are serving them, what goals we are pursuing in the world and how we can reach them in cooperation with others.

I would like to see you practising this early on, widening your perspective steadily and never losing it again, no matter at what echelon you may be serving, be it in a command position or at the military policy level.

This will require you to be curious and open, and us to provide opportunities for geopolitical and geostrategic training.

I would like to follow this up with an initiative whose aim it is to strengthen this perspective, i.e. the geopolitical and geostrategic training of the servicemen and women, the employees in the Bundeswehr.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Soldiers belong to Germany, they are more than just members of an institution or a constitutional body.

Naturally, men and women in uniform are integral to all parts of society. Nowhere is this more visible at the moment than in the assistance provided by military personnel during the coronavirus pandemic.

More than 7,700 members of the Bundeswehr are currently supporting around 280 public health offices, many hospitals as well as care and nursing homes all over Germany. And the numbers continue to grow.

Our servicemen and women are there for our country, and people are noticing it.

Men and women in uniform belong to our society, are citizens, neighbours, fellow human beings. They have undertaken to give more to this community than others do if the worst comes to the worst.

Those who promise to bravely defend our country and our democracy, even at the risk of their health or even their lives, deserve special respect.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Helmut Schmidt, the namesake of your university, once wrote:

“I believe that the problems of the world and of humanity cannot be solved without idealism. However, I believe that one should be realistic and pragmatic at the same time.”

As you make your way through the Bundeswehr, I hope that this healthy mix of idealism and realism will become a yardstick for you, and that you will always manage to strike a good balance between the two.

I now look forward to your questions and to our discussion.

Thank you very much.