Position Paper:  
Reflections on the Bundeswehr of the Future

I. Security policy and the status quo

At the start of a decade that will bring increasingly rapid change in economic, environmental and technological terms, it is our urgent task to take a close look at the changes in the security situation of our country as well. We are now called upon to draw the right conclusions from this rapid change for our security and defence policy, and for the mandate, mission and structure of the Bundeswehr.

In 2016, the Federal Government published the current White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr. The analyses, scenarios and conclusions it provided remain valid to this day. Many of the security scenarios described back then have by now become a reality. The resulting higher complexity of the overall security situation has met with little public interest so far, but it is real nonetheless. While we may not think in categories of power politics and dominance, others do, and act accordingly.

Risks and threats

We believe in the primacy of politics. In many places, however, military means are seen as the primary means of conflict resolution again, as for example in Eastern Ukraine, in Syria, in Libya or most recently in Nagorno-Karabakh.

This is accompanied by rapidly evolving weapons technology such as drones, killer satellites, or hypersonic missiles, which make it infinitely more difficult to defend national borders, infrastructure or even one's own armed forces. We are currently ill equipped to defend against some of these threats.

Every day, German data networks are hit by thousands of malicious attacks. Private companies, state authorities and security agencies are equally affected by that.

Human rights, democracy and collaborative politics are attacked with increasing frequency and undermined systematically.

China has turned from an emerging economy to a powerful and, more often than not, openly expansive player.

Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region are increasingly turning towards power rivalry and growing conflict. Partners in the region that share our values are equally concerned by these developments.
Russia self-identifies as an antagonist to the West. With increasing obviousness, Moscow has lately stepped up its military and political threats, knowingly violating international agreements. In recent years, Russia has used military force against its neighbours and has conducted an extensive conventional and nuclear arms build-up.

This situation involves very concrete threats to Germany and its citizens, to which we must respond:

Attacks directed at us and our allies, borders, airspace, territorial waters, and cyberspace. Attacks on critical infrastructures, lines of communication and on our open society.

Overt and covert attacks on the cohesion of our alliances and partnerships with like-minded nations.

The limitation of our political ability to act. We cannot allow ourselves to become susceptible to blackmail.

The cutting off and blocking of international trade routes and supply chains on which global prosperity and our welfare state depend.

The Covid-19 pandemic, too, has exposed our vulnerability and has shown us that whole-of-society resilience has a military facet as well.

Time for a new perspective

Now, in early 2021, the ideal moment has come to intensify our debate on security and drive decision-making. Germany will elect a new parliament in September and some are already discussing defence policy issues. The United States has a new administration, which sees itself as Europe’s partner and rightly expects us to carry a bigger share of the burden – especially us Germans. The United Kingdom must remain a close partner in security matters even after Brexit. Together with France and our European partners, we want to give the European Union greater power in the area of security policy. In NATO, too, future military spending, capabilities, fair burden-sharing and funding are hotly debated topics.

Our focus is therefore on the tasks we must tackle today in order to ensure Germany’s security tomorrow, on the role that Germany must assume in Europe and beyond – and on the armed forces that are needed for both.

We want to determine what Germany’s ambition must be in security policy, and how it can increase its commitment to a free and peaceful order even further. We want to explain why this is rooted in our role as a firmly integrated ally and partner and in our immediate German security interests. Anyone who wants Germany to step up, to boldly take the lead – like we do – must start by helping people understand why we must do this, and how.

II. What this means for Germany

Located at the heart of Europe, and being the economic power that it is, Germany has a special obligation when it comes to security in Europe. Our country must make a contribution to peace and security in accordance with its location and its capabilities – and that includes the military.
Germany bears responsibility for securing its own territory – for national defence – as much as it does for the equally important task of collective defence. A credible military deterrence and defence capability across all dimensions – land, air, sea, space, and cyberspace – is essential to providing both.

When it comes to collective defence, our allies want to and have to be able to rely on us for their security. National and collective defence is a mission that requires our forces to be willing and able to hold their own in combat as well.

Roles

Given this twofold responsibility, Germany must have a broad mix of military capabilities at its disposal. This is the only thing that will enable it to fulfil all its roles:

Its role as a framework nation that its allies can rely on with their capabilities and structures, especially those with limited military assets. This means that the Bundeswehr needs a broad capability spectrum so that we can support our partners in all military areas. A broad military profile is not a luxury, but a strategic imperative. Without a versatile and capable Bundeswehr, there can be no European ability to act.

Its role as a “first responder”, which, owing to its central position, must be on the scene quicker than anyone else in the event of crisis, especially on the external borders of NATO and the EU. This applies to everywhere from the Baltic states to the Balkans, from the Mediterranean to the North and Baltic Seas.

Its role as a “hub” within the Alliance, crucial to ensuring the mobility of Allied forces at the centre of Europe. Germany must keep infrastructure and logistic support ready and contribute to coordination and protection measures so that operations can be conducted smoothly across the entire Alliance territory.

Its role as a troop contributor in international crisis management beyond Alliance territory. This is a task that frequently requires specialised “high-value capabilities” such as reconnaissance, air-to-air refuelling, air transport, electronic warfare, or special operations forces.

Its role as a member of a community of values. We are a consistent advocate of the rules-based international order, as part of NATO, the EU, and in our cooperation with allies and partners that share our values worldwide – for example through technological cooperation with Israel or exercises and port visits conducted in Japan and Australia.

Finally, there is the role of ensuring home defence, both in peacetime and in crisis situations. This requires a strong reserve that is available to provide administrative assistance in Germany in a case of emergency, as well as to provide important reinforcements to the other roles.

Future developments

Given the many roles Germany wants to and has to fulfil, German security policy is always multinational, with the Bundeswehr as one of its key instruments. Two main factors therefore determine the future development of the Bundeswehr: our own interests and objectives, and our involvement in NATO and EU planning. Our partners quite rightly expect
us to raise our ambitions, and they expect Germany to honour the agreements it has entered within its alliances. This applies to the two percent target and to the overall capabilities we want to contribute to NATO in line with our size and economic performance, as well as to our commitment as part of the Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union.

We have a common vision of what the Bundeswehr of the future should look like and which capabilities it needs. In this, we are facing a twofold challenge: For one thing, we must fill gaps in and update existing capabilities that have suffered as a result of financial cutbacks in the past. For another, we must make sure that we keep up with the rapid speed of technological developments. That is to say: We must not simply expand the armed forces of the past, but we must pave the way now for making forces, capabilities and structures fit for the future.

The first steps have been taken. Defence spending has consistently been increased in recent years, the Bundeswehr is procuring new materiel, operational readiness is improving. Given the enormous backlog, every delay understandably leads to disappointment, for us and for the troops.

We now have to make decisions. If you are trying to fill gaps and modernise at the same time, you will have to set priorities. More than we have done in the past, we will therefore examine systems and technologies to determine whether they may be helpful, but not absolutely necessary. To this end, we will systematically introduce innovations in the Bundeswehr – at the expense of existing systems, if need be. This is the only way we can build the state-of-the-art technological capabilities we so urgently need. Our choices will be guided by clear criteria:

- What are the threats we must protect ourselves against?
- Which solutions are feasible and rapidly available?
- What will strengthen Germany as an industrial and technological base and create jobs?
- On which procurement projects can we cooperate with our European and international partners?
- And especially and most importantly: What is best for our men and women in the field?
Reliable funding

Looking at this overall situation, we conclude that despite the considerable increase in defence spending in recent years, the Bundeswehr is still underfunded.

 Needless to say, we will continue to be economical in our spending in the future. But efficiency alone will not provide us with the funding that we need. A modern, fully operational Bundeswehr therefore requires a consistently growing defence budget that makes reliable planning possible. This is the only way that multiannual procurement projects can be implemented in any purposeful manner. If the budget stagnates or even decreases, we run the risk that routine duty, i.e. the constantly increasing overhead expenses for salaries, operation, and military sites will consume the funds that are indispensable for research, development and the procurement of capabilities of the future.

The extraordinary mission of the Bundeswehr needs the service of extraordinary people. In order to recruit such talented and highly motivated people, invest in their development and convince them to stay, we must be able to offer them attractive careers and financial security.

Which is why prioritising in this context does not mean cutting back. Prioritising means defining precisely what needs to be modernised. You cannot economise on security.

At this point we would like to point out emphatically that defence is a whole-of-government task that cannot be financed entirely from the defence budget. When it comes to funding major projects of an overarching political nature, especially in multinational armaments cooperation, the Federal Government in its entirety must assume its share of the common burden. The core government task of security must be spread on many shoulders.

Strategic capability

Since the Bundeswehr is a parliamentary army, it ultimately acts on behalf of all German citizens. It is therefore crucial that we openly and clearly provide information about the worsening security situation and the need for investment. We want to promote strategic capability and strategic culture in our country by making room for strategic debate:

- Within the government, by developing the Federal Security Council into a National Security Council that pools security policy expertise from the ministries and reliably coordinates our strategic instruments.
- Within the ministry, by establishing a Federal Advisory Council on Security, which systematically collects security policy expertise from science, research and society.
- In parliament, we suggest that a “security week” be established, similar to the existing “budget week”, including an annual report by the participating ministries on the threat and security situation.
- And as regards funding, we propose a Bundeswehr Planning Act to create a solid, multiannual basis for financing the armed forces like in other countries, without affecting the budgetary sovereignty of the Bundestag.

III. The future of the Bundeswehr
The Bundeswehr of today is not sufficiently prepared for the challenges and threats of tomorrow.

With its reorientation in 2011, the focus of the Bundeswehr was solely directed towards international crisis management missions abroad. Now we are realising that in addition to capabilities and equipment, the structures and the command and control organisation must be adapted to the situation, and soon. With an eye towards national and collective defence, the support provided by the Bundeswehr most recently in the COVID-19 pandemic clearly exposed vulnerabilities in terms of territorial structures and military decision-making processes.

These and other shortfalls have been thoroughly analysed and recorded in the last years – both internally and externally. The problems are known, requirements and recommendations are on the table. Now, the right conclusions must be drawn and workable solutions must be found and implemented.

Our goals are:

- to continue to modernise the capabilities of our armed forces for all roles in our country and across the entire spectrum, and to adapt them to technological change,
- to fill the gaps in equipment and materiel,
- to create structures that are leaner, more functional and more resilient, as well as shorter and therefore faster processes in the military command structure, the procurement and in-service management organisation and in the Ministry of Defence,
- to place responsibility where it is most useful.

In this, we are guided by the following additional questions:

- What capabilities do we need, and in which qualities and quantities – also with an eye to the prioritisation of critical sectors such as comprehensive and modern air defence, rapid deployment of fully operational forces, intelligent reconnaissance systems across all dimensions, and a consistent digital command capability?
- How can we generate targeted and effective innovation, in order to tap into new technologies quickly and adapt them for use by the armed forces?
- How can we strengthen the soldiers in the field and counter the “top-down imbalance” in the Bundeswehr?
- How can we put multinational cooperation to more effective use, improving procurement, in-service use and interoperability?
- How can operational readiness be enhanced even more?

As we attempt to answer these questions, we will also take a close look at civilian areas of the Bundeswehr, primarily the procurement sector and the issue of responsibility for usage and maintenance of materiel. As integral parts of the Bundeswehr as a functioning overall system, these aspects are inseparable from the operational readiness and adaptability of the armed forces. We are already taking steps to develop the procurement sector further. We
will monitor the impact of these steps, and if it is not sufficient, we will initiate more comprehensive changes.

The aim is to establish a modern procurement organisation that is focused on its core tasks. This includes fully digitalised procedures and an independent Bundeswehr purchasing system.

At our first planning conference, we have begun to impose reasonable limitations on requirements. In a next step, this will be laid down for all levels and then continued throughout all phases of procurement. We will rely even more on commercially available systems.

Of course, we will also take a close look at the organisation and structure of the Ministry of Defence. This will primarily concern the need for clear and undivided responsibility as well as strategic planning and controlling.

IV. Next steps

The last two decades have brought profound changes for the Bundeswehr. There were personnel reductions and harsh austerity measures, all while it conducted worldwide operations. Now that the Bundeswehr is growing again, it needs to undergo comprehensive modernisation.

We will set about dealing with the challenges ahead of us quickly. The results of our analyses are here. We have no time to lose now. If there are decisions we can take immediately, we will do that. Decisions not ready to be taken will be prepared in such a way that they can be taken as soon as the new legislative term has begun.

This aims to provide an impetus to rethink Bundeswehr planning with a long-term perspective so that our armed forces will remain an effective instrument for ensuring and defending the freedom and security of the Federal Republic of Germany.

In March 2021, we will present a comprehensive evaluation of the topic of ground-based air defence.

By the end of the first quarter, we will have forwarded the procurement submission for MALE RPAS / Eurodrone to the German Bundestag.

In the second quarter, we will make a decision on the procurement of a heavy transport helicopter.

In April 2021, we will present principles of modern home defence for our times.

In May 2021, we will issue key elements of a Bundeswehr of the future, which will contain specific proposals for the future development of the armed forces in terms of their capabilities, structures and operational readiness.

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