



**3rd Keynote Address
delivered by
Federal Minister of Defence
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Bundeswehr Command and Staff
College**

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Check against delivery!

It is a great pleasure for me to hold this year's keynote speech here at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College in Hamburg today.

The Command and Staff College, which trains all staff officers of the Bundeswehr as well as its top-level civilian personnel is an important future workshop of the Bundeswehr. It has a formative influence on those who will soon assume responsible positions and help decide the fate of the German armed forces.

Here they are given sound specialist training and a broad education, but more importantly, they learn about integrity and the courage to speak their minds.

Let me therefore start by addressing a very topical subject, which is closely linked to your future roles as leaders and decision-makers:

You have surely been following the news from Lithuania, where deployed German soldiers have been accused of committing very serious and completely unacceptable offences.

With their behaviour, these troops are recklessly putting the reputation of the entire Bundeswehr at risk. These despicable acts have damaged the entire operation and tainted the efforts of their fellow soldiers, on top of jeopardising the good reputation of our country.

We have heard allegations of sexual misconduct and systematic bullying, of irregularities in the handling of ammunition, of anti-Semitic comments, and of Nazi-era songs being sung.

These are particularly serious offences, and the perpetrators will be prosecuted and punished with all the severity of the law – and may even be discharged from the Bundeswehr.

Many in the Bundeswehr, myself included, are deeply disappointed. These soldiers have done to you, to all of us, what nobody should ever do to a fellow soldier: they stabbed us in the back.

And this at a time when the ministry and many members of the Bundestag are fighting to secure more funding for important armaments projects. At a time when we are facing Russian disinformation campaigns in the enhanced Forward Presence.

Such behaviour has no place in the Bundeswehr.

Many questions are being asked now, and they are justified:

- Did those soldiers not have enough training?
- Do they not understand the historical context of German soldiers being deployed to Lithuania today?
- How much did their superiors know? Why did they not put a stop to this? Did they choose to ignore it or even cover it up?
- What, indeed, is the troops' relation to right-wing extremism? Have they not learned anything from the incidents that happened in recent months?

Yes, they were given training. And yes, they were made aware. And yet they did what they did.

Last Friday at the Bundeswehr Commanders' Conference, I said that I want our troops to be steadfast. I want them to have the inner conviction to be steadfast in their commitment to democracy.

To me as their Minister, fighting for steadfast troops also means taking tough measures when necessary.

That being said, there is another point I want to make. It concerns every one of you in this room.

All of you will soon assume responsible positions in field units and agencies.

As superiors, as force commanders, vested with disciplinary authority, you will be our *first line of defence* against extremist activities and other offences committed at the unit level.

I urge you all to be vigilant, to be resolute, to not let things slide or keep secrets!

To bravely defend the Federal Republic of Germany also means to stand by its principles in exactly those situations,

- as superiors,
- as fellow soldiers,
- as instructors,
- as confidant(e)s,
- as citizens in uniform.

This will not always be easy. The direct confrontation that may be necessary in these matters requires courage and judgment of character. But it is indispensable.

The Bundeswehr must measure up to its own high standards in this regard, and must remember this every single day. As general staff officers, as civilian leaders, you carry a special responsibility for this.

Leading by example is not an empty phrase.

What I want you to do is:

- Always fulfil your responsibilities!
- Show your inner convictions!
- Be unambiguous and clear in your leadership!

- Set an example!

At the same time: also stay humble. Your mission, the women and men under your command, must always be your priority.

This is even more important given the tremendous tasks our Bundeswehr will be faced with in the future.

This is why the Chief of Defence and I have recently initiated a debate about the way ahead by issuing the Key Elements of the Bundeswehr of the Future. For us, to serve as leaders means to serve the future.

And this is not just any future, it is your future, ladies and gentlemen. Ten years down the road, you will be the ones fulfilling our collective defence mission. In ten years, you will be the ones conducting our operations. The structures we are building now will have a decisive impact on your service.

What, then, are the tasks the future has in store for us, for all of you?

In many areas of our lives, we feel like there is a new age dawning right now.

Whether we speak of living and working in a fully digital world, or tackling the tremendous tasks of protecting our planet's climate.

Whether we speak of China's rise and ambitions, or the world order and its new centres of power.

Whether we speak of the rapid development of new technologies or previously unknown types of warfare.

We instinctively feel that something entirely new is coming. And it will radically change the world as we know it.

For all the rapid change, a sense of confidence could be felt at the G7 and NATO summits this week. “The West is back” was one of the phrases repeatedly heard.

While this is an important piece of good news, the G7 agenda and the debate surrounding NATO 2030 made it clear that great changes are ahead of us.

In our country, too, the upcoming elections will bring a new political constellation – whatever the final result.

This change may also bring a new dawn.

This new world that is coming primarily means for Germany that two major tasks must be accomplished:

First:

It is imperative that we master the technologies of the future. The best possible scenario of course would be for those technologies to come from Germany, having been invented and developed here.

We must do more than just admire or endure rapid technological change, we must actively contribute to it in Germany, in Europe and across the world – especially in the area of security and defence.

Our security, our prosperity, our social systems and our ability to achieve political objectives will depend to a considerable degree on Germany and Europe assuming a leading and pioneering role when it comes to technology. For this, we need to become faster, more innovative, more creative, bolder, and maybe also just a bit cleverer.

Second:

Germany has to accept its responsibility in Europe. It is time that we started exercise genuine leadership.

- as a large and productive country at the heart of the continent,
 - which everyone looks to and counts on,
 - which is self-aware and confident,
 - with no need for dominance and no sense of entitlement,
 - firmly embedded within the frameworks of NATO and the EU
- as a country that is able to protect itself and others, including by military means. We need to give some muscle to the fight for our values. Our partners, friends and allies must be able to count on us.

The Bundeswehr is one of the yardsticks by which we will be able to measure our future ability to master the following two tasks: to actively shape progress and to lead responsibly.

I know that some people in our country still find this hard to stomach, partly because of our history. Our history is something we can never leave behind us.

But our neighbours know to trust in our living and stable democracy by now. We are deeply embedded in NATO, the EU and the United Nations. Germany takes a prudent approach towards its armed forces.

Which is why we can accept this role of responsibility with a clear conscience.

In future, we must and will do more to defend Europe, our own security and our own interests. We must and will do more for Western values, an open society and the rule of law.

And we must and will do more not only because people are relying on us to do so, but also because some of the challenges are directly on our doorstep.

Europe's security is under a bigger threat today than it was ten years ago. Every day, Germany is hit by thousands of cyberattacks.

Our principal ally and protector, the United States, even under President Joe Biden, has moved its priorities towards Asia. A few days ago, I visited the American Pacific island of Guam, where this is tangible every step of the way.

There is therefore a lot of room for us Europeans to assume greater responsibility for ourselves.

For example in our eastern neighbourhood, where Russia is – overtly and covertly – waging a war, conducting a massive military build-up and – again: overtly and covertly – threatening its neighbours, our friends and partners.

Or in our southern neighbourhood, where Islamic terrorism is spreading, even though this hardly makes headlines these days, and where the Mediterranean Sea has become the scene of geopolitical disputes, migration and smuggling.

Or when it comes to China, which is our partner at the same time as it is shouldering its way into Europe with power and money in order to become, for all intents and purposes, a veto power in the region.

China's leaders have just openly declared that they would increasingly make use of propaganda and disinformation in their quest for global power.

Even now, Beijing is deploying “little blue men” in the South China Sea in much the same way that Russia has done with its “little green men” in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

The international order we rely on is under massive pressure. We Germans are directly affected. No region is really far away from us. More than half of the jobs in Germany depend on our global exports, on free markets and open trade routes.

Here in Hamburg, where shipping traffic is ubiquitous on the river Elbe and millions of containers are handled at the port, this is a well-known fact. Incidentally, the dual role played by China as a partner and a challenge also becomes apparent at this port.

And precisely because we are so globally connected, I have decided to send a frigate to the Indo-Pacific. Stability, freedom and security in that region are a direct concern for us here in Germany.

Germany and Europe have much to lose in this new world that is emerging: peace, freedom, prosperity. We must and we will therefore do more, because this is of existential importance for us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When I speak of defending peace and prosperity, freedom and the rule of law, then of course, as a minister of defence, I speak of the entire spectrum from diplomacy and negotiations to defence by military means.

In this context, I would like to clear up some things that cannot be addressed often enough – or openly enough – in Germany.

Defence means: deterrence by threatening military force in order to create room for political solutions.

If necessary, however, it means: using military force – fighting.

On Tuesday, I went along for a ride on one of our submarines off Eckernförde. I was shown a state-of-the-art, highly complex weapon system. A weapon system that can deter, and, if necessary, fight. There are reasons why we operate such systems. It is important to know this, but also to fully comprehend this.

I say this very clearly, because fairness towards our military personnel dictates that we do not betray them by keeping their actual tasks a secret, as if we were ashamed of them.

This is a responsible, democratic and sober-minded country – I think we can be expected to be this honest.

And another thing is part of this honesty: Those who defend peace and freedom must know that there is a moral price to pay for this. They must be prepared to pay that price.

In questions of war or peace, in questions of existential needs, all available options are almost always varying degrees of bad. An ideal solution is rarely achievable.

To maintain one's ability to act, one must be able to make decisions even when caught in a moral dilemma.

This is precisely why it is so important that we have steadfast troops. It takes strength of character and integrity to do the right thing when faced with a difficult matter of conscience.

I believe that Germany and Europe can do this. I believe that we have the prudence and the confidence to do this. And so have our servicemen and women. I have every faith in that.

Another reason we can do this, by the way, is that we are an inextricable part of the Western world. We are part of a community of values that functions as a mutual corrective, stands up for one another and cares for one another. This “Westbindung” means that we will never have to take difficult decisions on our own.

Some rulers seize power and hold on to it all their lives. They have eliminated the need to be elected.

Our strategic advantage in the West, however, is that we have real friends that stand by our side.

A few days ago, I attended a meeting of the “Quad”. Standing next to the Americans, the French and the British, you get a very tangible feeling of what it means to be part of a community of values, to be partners.

Westbindung remains crucial for the fate of our democracy. If in doubt, side with the West – this has been and will be our policy, my policy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

By combining this matter-of-fact assessment of what is necessary with a confident appraisal of its own qualities, the Bundeswehr can achieve a lot for Germany.

Our military personnel can be much more than mere defenders of our country. They can be true agents of change for the future of Germany.

As agents of future change, we consistently advance the digital transformation of the Bundeswehr.

We use state-of-the-art technology and are building a modern command and control structure which matches the challenges of our times, reduces top-heaviness, strengthens the unit level, reduces red tape.

Being an agent of change also means to be confidently rooted in our homeland.

In this era of globalisation, the concept of the homeland is still very much in keeping with the times. And it is an important concept. Patriotism must not be left to extremists and other confused minds. Our homeland is where our roots are – while still being part of the larger world!

Being an agent of change for the future therefore also means to promote voluntary services, to relentlessly combat extremism, and to set an example every day of what it means to live by one's values.

And, not least, it means to put trust in people and their abilities and to let them take responsibility for their freedom, time and again.

The Bundeswehr has expertise in all these areas, so much so that it can often take a pioneering role. This makes it one of the forces in society that make our country fit for the new era.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Earlier in my speech I called on you to not shy away from conflict. So I want to follow my words with deeds. Allow me to address another issue that has broad implications for the future.

The annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea by Russia in blatant violation of international law in 2014 was a herald of that new world I was talking about.

But it was not an isolated attack. It was flanked by a war in Eastern Ukraine, which is still ongoing, by an attempt to undermine the Ukrainian state through destabilisation and to keep it in a state of perpetual uncertainty.

Add to that Russia's systematic military build-up near its western border, with large-scale exercises close to the border, newly formed major military components, and a pinprick policy in the air and sea domains.

Russia's missile technology and modernisation of its nuclear arsenal have once again turned our attention to the issue of nuclear deterrence.

It is a reminder of how much our security and political freedom of action depend on the security guarantee provided by the United States. Nuclear deterrence is part and parcel of NATO's security guarantees.

This is why nuclear sharing is such a core issue for NATO. Germany will have to make a fundamental decision on this matter during the next legislative period. Do we continue to participate in nuclear sharing?

I have made my position very clear: Germany must absolutely stay involved in nuclear sharing, and it must quickly procure a Tornado successor system to enable its continued participation. I presented my proposal on the successor systems last year.

Let me put it very clearly: Germany has been a firm advocate of arms control and disarmament for many years and that must not and will not change. We want fewer and, ultimately, no nuclear weapons in Europe and the world.

But we are not naive. As long as there are nuclear weapons in the hands of states which openly question and even openly fight

- our model of society,
- our democracy,
- our freedom,
- our understanding of human rights,

NATO must be capable of nuclear deterrence. And that includes nuclear sharing.

Nuclear sharing gives selected states that do not have nuclear weapons themselves a say in the United States' operational planning.

It also gives these states an important privilege, which is participation in the most demanding part of Allied solidarity: nuclear deterrence.

A unilateral renunciation of this privilege would be pointless and harmful. It would lessen our influence where we absolutely need it. It would weaken deterrence. It would undermine Alliance solidarity. And it would sow mistrust of Germany amongst our Allies.

Germany does not want to be a nuclear power. But it continues to depend on the nuclear deterrent of its Allies.

These are the realities that we must face in 2021. We must call a spade a spade. This is necessary if we want to keep living in peace. It is not enough to simply desire peace, even though some seem to think so. We have to be prepared to do what is necessary to win and to preserve peace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This leads me to the next delicate issue. It is another issue that demands good sense and sobriety from us: the defence budget.

Since Russia forcibly introduced a new era in European security policy in 2014, the German defence budget has been increasing continuously.

Next year, in 2022, it will exceed 50 billion euros for the first time. The defence budget has traditionally been the second largest item in the federal budget.

Many people consider this, in their words, an “obscene” amount of money.

But they are mistaken, for several reasons:

- For almost 25 years, the defence budget was cannibalised for the benefit of other projects. As a consequence, there is an enormous backlog now. Compared to that, the budget is rather small.
- It is still considerably below 2% of the GDP. That is less than we need, less than we have committed to and less than what any responsible country should be paying for the invaluable asset that is external security.
- Given the new, advanced threats, we have to invest heavily in state-of-the-art defence. Defence will become much more expensive in the future, as it is becoming much more complex. Not to mention increasing operating costs for personnel, facilities, and equipment. Measured against all this, the German defence budget is still much too low.

It will have to be further increased if we want to enjoy security in the future. And if we want the Bundeswehr to be an agent of change for the future of Germany.

I believe that an investment in defence is an investment in the welfare of our citizens.

The defence budget is our insurance for a free and peaceful life.

It safeguards the rights of future generations. It is a yardstick of how serious we are about the oft-cited "right to a future".

We should get into the habit of treating the defence budget as a key investment into the future. We must keep that firmly in mind, because

there will be tough debates about coalition agreements and financial planning soon.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Germany's new strategic role will require us to change our mindset. From now on, we must embrace our leadership role. We must have more honest debates. We must finally confront morally difficult questions. And most of all, we must no longer shy away from investing money into our future.

I would like to add one thing that really matters to me personally. Our new strategic role also finds its expression in the public recognition and appreciation of the service personnel of the Bundeswehr.

I feel that our citizens are well aware of the fact that they can rely on our servicewomen and men. They can rely on their dedication, their loyalty to our constitution, and their willingness to serve our country.

This should become a much more visible part of public life. We are creating the conditions for that.

Free rail travel for military personnel wearing uniform and many pledge ceremonies held publicly throughout the country were first steps – and very successful ones.

Since the beginning of 2020, military personnel have taken one million train trips wearing uniform.

That means one million opportunities to interact, to answer questions, to have discussions, to receive recognition and appreciation.

Suddenly, Bundeswehr personnel became visible again, a part of the everyday scenery. Ceremonial pledges were on the front pages and on prime time TV.

And more is yet to come.

- The pledge at the Bendlerblock on 20 July.
- Public ceremonies to recognise those who served in Afghanistan or provided administrative assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The anniversary of the Bundeswehr in front of the Reichstag building in Berlin in November.

I can only urge you to get out there, to get in touch with people, to proudly represent the Bundeswehr in public.

You are the best ambassadors of the German armed forces!

Ladies and gentlemen,

The future is wide open. Not everything is in our control, but some things are.

I want to see a strong, a steadfast and a proud Bundeswehr in this future.

All of you are especially called upon to share in this responsibility – confidently, prudently, and with integrity.

For your future careers, I wish you the best of luck and God's blessing. Thank you.