

THE LAST DECADE has seen a dramatic change in the rhetoric of German foreign policy. During the 1990–91 Gulf War, Germany – fretting on the sidelines – contributed only funding to the coalition war effort. Long disparaged as economically powerful, yet politically diffident and militarily timid, Germany now says it is willing to expand the military component of its foreign policy. After the events of 11 September, German leaders were among the first to pledge ‘unconditional solidarity’ with the US-led campaign against terrorism. On 11 October, in a speech explicitly recasting Germany’s place on the international stage, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder declared that the country’s postwar role as a supporting player was ‘irrevocably over’ and that he was ready to send troops abroad ‘to participate in military operations in defence of freedom and human rights’. ‘The readiness to make a military contribution to security [...] implies that Germany has a new perception of its foreign policy’, Schröder told the *Bundestag*, adding that ‘avoiding every direct risk cannot and must not be the guiding principle of Germany’s foreign and security policy.’

This statement was received with equanimity in the rest of Europe, and enthusiasm in the US. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told a German newspaper that Berlin’s offer of ‘robust military force’ had been accepted with ‘great gratitude’, and that Germany had ‘truly stepped out of the shadow of its past’. On 7 November, the German cabinet approved a US request for military support, indicating its willingness to provide up to 3,900 troops. Schröder revealed that the German contribution would include, *inter alia*, up to 100 Special Forces soldiers – potentially of the *Kommando Spezialkräfte*, or KSK; nuclear, biological and chemical decontamination vehicles; transport aircraft; and medical evacuation aircraft. Schröder’s initiative was taken in the context of a foreign policy posture that has evolved gradually since German reunification in 1990. Although new principles to underpin the conduct of foreign policy are being espoused, the practical implications of this move are nonetheless likely to be fairly limited in the foreseeable future.

Leaving the past behind

Post-reunification, Germany’s first forays overseas were strictly humanitarian in nature. Contributions to the UN humanitarian missions in Cambodia (1991) and Somalia (1992) operated under

tight constitutional constraints, accompanied by public agonising over fears of resurgent German militarism. Until 1994, the consensus was that the constitution permitted the use of military force in self-defence and in defence of NATO allies, but prohibited out-of-area missions. The increase in peacekeeping operations in the early 1990s forced a rethink. German participation in NATO’s 1995 Bosnia peacekeeping mission followed a ruling from the Federal Constitutional Court in 1994. This groundbreaking decision allowed out-of-area operations, but only if parliament consented. It was made possible by a number of factors, including a general softening of public attitudes towards the *Bundeswehr* and overseas deployments; increasing national self-confidence after reunification; and a wish to move decision-making power to the legislature. A further departure came in Kosovo in March 1999, when German soldiers went into armed combat for the first time since the end of the Second World War, sent by Schröder’s newly-elected Social Democrat and Green Party coalition (ironically, both parties had opposed sending German troops out-of-area for decades). Six months later, a German general was given command of

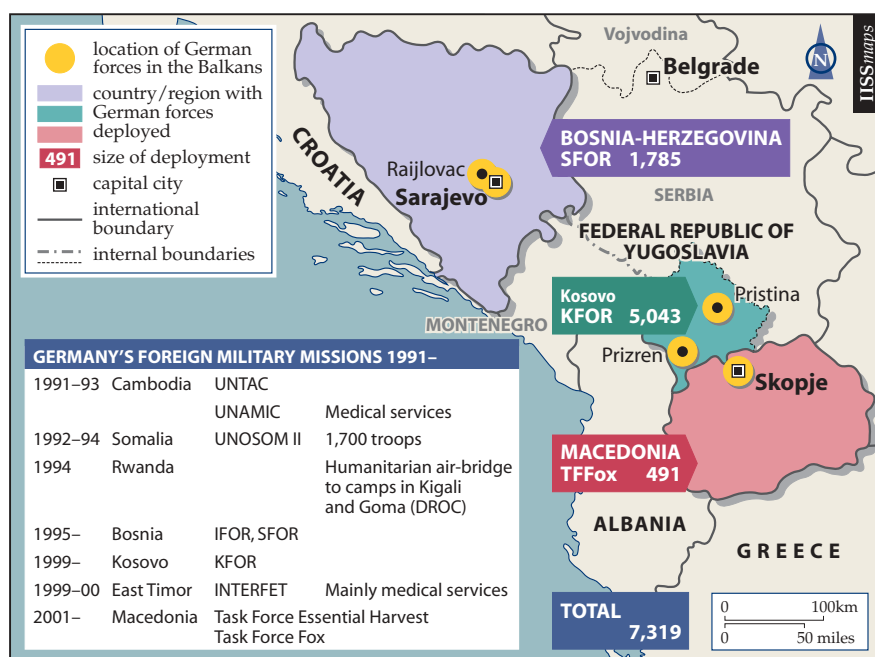
NATO peacekeeping troops in Kosovo. Another precedent was set in September 2001, when Germany sought and took the lead in NATO’s Operation *Essential Harvest* in Macedonia.

Multilateralism still dominant

Early in his administration, Schröder unnerved friends and allies alike when he declared that Germany had ‘come of age’ and suggested that it would now pursue its interests without feeling unduly burdened by historical guilt. In the event, the government affirmed postwar multilateralist traditions on most core issues. It is committed to European enlargement and integration, staunchly Atlanticist and pro-UN – probably in that order of priority. It dutifully continues to cultivate the Franco–German special relationship as a motor of European integration. Also, it follows the lead of former chancellor Helmut Kohl in maintaining strong ties with Russia, mindful of Moscow’s crucial role in permitting peaceful reunification. In the Balkans, Berlin’s civilian commitment by far exceeds its already substantial military presence of 7,319 soldiers. It is investing heavily in Balkan stability, providing

Germany’s ‘new’ foreign policy

Principles and practicalities



money (around 400m Deutsche Marks [\$182.5m] annually), personnel and energy. Berlin has braved US hostility to forge a wide-ranging international coalition of states and non-governmental organisations for an International Criminal Court, and has even moved into areas previously off-limits. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer's recent shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East has been welcomed by all parties, although the official German line remains that Berlin will not be a mediator. Departing from the pacifism and anti-Americanism of their radical youth, as well as the parochialism of their early careers in state-level government, Schröder and Fischer have both overcome their aversion to the use of military power and developed a genuine taste for diplomacy. Nonetheless, before 11 September, German foreign and security policy had not found the confidence to match the country's size and influence.

Replacing indecisiveness ...

Before deciding to go into Macedonia, Berlin had dithered for weeks. On US plans to deploy missile defence systems, it was not until Schröder discovered the potential – if unspecified – technological benefits involved that Germany softened its sceptical stance. NATO enlargement is another case illustrative of indecision: the pledges of support for certain candidates – the Baltic states, for example – that emanated from some European capitals have met with silence in Berlin. Such silence also greeted the resumption of US military actions against Iraq in December 1999.

Nor has Berlin fared well on those occasions when it draped itself in the mantle of morality. German leaders' invocation of the Holocaust to justify NATO intervention in Kosovo struck many as ill-judged and overheated, while their robust condemnation of the participation of the party of populist right-wing politician Jörg Haider in the Austrian government has been contrasted with Berlin's stance on the Chechen conflict. Only a month ago, Schröder, determined to draw Russian President Vladimir Putin into the international coalition against terrorism, anticipated his guest's most urgent wish by offering, unprompted, a 'more modulated assessment' of the war in the Caucasus.

... with a more muscular policy?

Although Schröder has announced a 'new perception' of foreign policy, the exact

meaning of this term is open to debate and its practical implications are still being considered.

In the meantime, the parliamentary approval required by constitutional law before any German troops can be deployment in support of the anti-terror campaign carries clear problems for the government. Solid as the stance of the ruling coalition's party political leadership has been, concern among the grass-roots membership is on the rise as the US bombing campaign in Afghanistan continues without producing noticeable successes. In the run-up to the *Bundestag* debate and vote on German troop deployment, scheduled for the third week of November, there have been growing signs of tension within the ruling coalition. Although Fischer has given strong backing to the proposed deployments, his Green-party colleagues in the *Bundestag* are much more equivocal. The Greens are presented with the difficult choice of alienating their dwindling voter base by supporting the deployment or jeopardising the coalition, with the possibility of being replaced by the all-too-eager Liberals. Even if an alternative coalition cannot be assembled, there is a possibility that Schröder's Social Democrats could continue in a minority government until the next election. Nonetheless, Schröder's administration has less room to ignore public opinion. Recent opinion polls indicate that support and opposition for German military involvement in the war against terrorism is finely balanced in favour of participation. Public sympathy for US retaliation is likely to wane, however, if the number of casualties in Afghanistan increases or the plight of refugees worsens. With a recession looming and Federal elections coming up in less than a year, Schröder must strike a careful balance between ambition in foreign policy and prudence in domestic politics. Schröder has already pledged not to commit German troops to combat zones.

Military constraints must also be taken into account. The conscription-based *Bundeswehr* is already overstretched by its Balkan engagements, and is in the middle of a complete structural overhaul, undertaken on a falling budget, which is not scheduled to be completed until 2010. Even the 1.5bn-Deutsche Mark annual budget boost announced last month will not remedy the situation fast enough.

The KSK, meanwhile, is a relatively new force not yet up to strength. Also, notwithstanding the praise for German troops and their commanders in the Balkans, and the fact that *Bundeswehr*

soldiers in Kosovo fired in anger for the first time since 1945, Germany's armed forces, unlike their UK and French counterparts, have little or no combat experience. This inexperience does not recommend German forces for service in Central Asia.

Still, a number of recent developments seem to indicate planning for the long-term. July saw the foundation of the first national military headquarters (*Einsatzführungskommando*) since the Second World War, primarily to manage operations in support of ESDP/Petersberg tasks. Germany is also trying to address deficiencies in strategic airlift capability, and is a keen proponent of the A-400M project. Steps have been taken to improve intelligence capabilities – particularly signals intelligence, although human intelligence is also receiving attention. The fact remains, however, that offers of assistance to the US must be seen in the light of present capabilities.

Change – but how much?

As yet, no date for German deployments has been fixed. Berlin has noted that, since Kosovo, Washington has evinced little interest in waging war by committee. German policymakers are thus aware that their country's main role in the war against terrorism may be as a supplier of political support and clout – and that a limited military contribution is an extension of this political support.

Germany's continuing priority will be to keep the US talking to its allies; encourage it to continue measuring its rhetoric as well as its actions; and discourage it from extending the campaign to other theatres indiscriminately. A second priority is to re-engage the debate in several multilateral institutions, including: NATO, which has been sidelined despite having invoked the mutual assistance clause in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty; the EU, which has been sidelined – at least in military terms – because of the invocation of Article 5; and the UN, which has no military clout, has given Washington what amounts to a legal permit for its campaign and whose work, through offices like those of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, is being directly affected by the war.

Paris and Berlin recently optimistically agreed on a post-Taliban programme of humanitarian aid for Afghanistan, to be implemented by the EU under the aegis of the UN. It still seems reasonable to expect that Germany's financial contribution to the war on terrorism could significantly exceed its military support. 