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BEYOND THEIR BORDERS: MILITARY EVOLVES TO FILL INTERVENTIONIST ROLE

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In some Cold War scenarios, World War III would begin as hordes of Soviet tanks poured over West Germany's eastern horizon like armor-plated cockroaches, their tracks churning emerald green fields to muck in their wake. At its inception in 1955, the *Bundeswehr* – West Germany's armed forces – had the single explicit role of holding back those tanks of buying time until U.S. and other NATO units could arrive to stem the tide of T-72s.

But in 1989, everything changed. The Soviet Union collapsed, and the Iron Curtain disintegrated. When the dust settled, the *Bundeswehr* realized that it had become an army without an enemy, it out a role, without a purpose.

The West Germans created an enigma in 1955. The *Bundeswehr* has struggled throughout its history to define its role in a society that today is almost universally opposed to warfare after launching the two most catastrophic conflicts in world history. Now, because of pressure from its NATO allies and the desire to once again play a central role in the international community, Germany has decided to commit its military to missions outside the country. The *Bundeswehr*, forged in the crucible of the Cold War, faces the daunting task of transforming itself into a modern military force capable of fighting and keeping the peace in a range of foreign missions. With every step, the *Bundeswehr* must deal with the obstacles of its present – and the demons of its past – in its search for a purpose.

When the fighting finally stopped in the summer of 1945, Adolf Hitler's Third Reich and its vaunted war machine, the *Wehrmacht*, lay in ruins. Edwin Hartrich, who served as a soldier in the 44th Infantry Division in Germany and later worked as a consultant to German industrial firms, described the widespread devastation in post-war Germany in his 1980 book, *The Fourth and Richest Reich*.

"The war had reduced German cities to dusty heaps of broken stone and brick rubble, desolate facades of gutted buildings: roofless, windowless, and without floors," he wrote.

The human toll was even more devastating. More than 2 million German soldiers had died on battlefields that spanned the globe, from the deserts of North Africa to the hedgerows of northern France and the shattered streets of Stalingrad and Berlin. The Allies

detained about 2.5 million soldiers in prisoner of war camps, and another 3 million were missing in action and presumed dead. Millions of widows walked the streets dressed in black.

"The hospitals were filled with the human debris of war: the sightless, armless, legless; the scarred, burned, and mutilated soldiers, the still-living human sacrifices to Hitler's war making," Hartrich wrote.

Some historians call this time *Stunde Null*, or "zero hour." *Stunde Null* represents the crippling psychological and physical damage that prevailed in Germany at the end of the war. It also represents an abrupt shift in the way Germans viewed the military's place in society and the use of military force. The war's terrible destruction, as well as the horrific atrocities some *Wehr-*

macht units committed under the Nazi regime, fostered an abhorrence of military culture that became ingrained in the German psyche.

The conquering Allies played their own part in *Stunde Null* with their program of Three Ds: demilitarization, denazification and democratization. The first of these was arguably the easiest. Little was left of the *Wehrmacht* save a few captured tanks and field guns. The rest of the army littered Europe's roads and fields with burnt-out hulks. From the beginning, however, the Allies knew Germany could not remain disarmed and neutral for long. In the early 1950s, with the Cold War beginning to heat up, Germany had to face the inevitability of rearmament.

Konrad Adenauer, who took office as West Germany's first chancellor in September 1949, was the first major political figure to push for West Germany's rearmament after the war. Adenauer, Hartrich wrote, saw rearmament "as the instrument with which to free his country from the Allied occupation rule and to obtain almost complete political and economic freedom for the fledgling Republic."

War-weary Germans resisted any plans to rearm, however, and it was only in 1954 that Germany's parliament authorized Adenauer to begin negotiations with the Allies. In October of that year, he signed the Treaty of Paris with representatives from the U.S., Britain and France, ending the Allied occupation of West Germany and re-

cognizing it as a sovereign state. West Germany became the 15th member of NATO, and Adenauer agreed to place the country's full support behind the defense of Western Europe against the Soviet Union.

Edward Homze, a professor emeritus of modern Germany and the European military at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, studied for two years at the Free University of Berlin in the late 1950s. He spoke at length about Germany's heated debate on the military's place in society.

"When the Germans decided to build their own army, they were badly split," he said, adding that many Germans were afraid the *Bundeswehr* would become an elite, militaristic body similar to the previous army. "How are you to weed out, in the case of the Germans, this kind of authoritarianism that's so inbred in any military organization?"

When the parliament created the *Bundeswehr* in 1955, it built several key elements into the military's framework that served to weave it into the fabric of society. These measures, along with strict political control, were meant to keep the military from becoming a state within a state that could grow powerful enough to guide foreign policy as it had in the past.

The first of these elements is the concept of *Innere Führung*, or "moral leadership." *Innere Führung* states that German law and values should guide a soldier's actions while he is serving in the *Bundeswehr*. This mind-set is meant to create an environment in which German soldiers can think for themselves, thereby preventing the blind obedience to orders that led to so many atrocities during World War II.

Closely related to *Innere Führung* is the ideal of *Bürger in Uniform*. German soldiers are "citizens in uniform" who have the same legal rights and responsibilities as any other member of society.

Conscription, the final and most basic element of the framework, acts as the binding force between the armed forces and society. The universal male conscription system is meant to force participation in the military at all levels of society, again to prevent an elite military class from developing. West Germany called up its first pool of conscripts in 1956.

Col. Hans Reimer, German liaison officer to the United States Joint Forces Command in Norfolk, Va., volunteered to serve in the German army in 1977 when he was 18.

"I didn't even think about anything else than joining the armed forces," he wrote in an e-mail interview with a reporter. "I was ready to die for defending my country."

Both of Reimer's grandfathers had served in the German infantry in World War I, and one later joined the air force. Reimer's father joined the army at age 15 and served in World War II. He was severely injured fighting American troops on the Western front and taken as a prisoner of war.

The term of conscription when Reimer joined was 15 months.

"In [those] days conscription was enforced by very tough laws," he said. "Everybody who was not going to serve in the armed forces had to undergo a very tough process of questioning."

Most of Reimer's friends joined the *Bundeswehr* for this reason. "Most of them," Reimer said, "served because they had to."

Most conscripts also decided to leave after their term. But Reimer stayed.

"I've always been a patriot," he said. "So I wanted to defend my country, and where could I have done this – from the perspective of a young man – better than being a member of the armed forces?"

During the past 30 years, Reimer has commanded platoons, companies and a regiment, he said. His rise through the ranks gave him a better perspective on what the army needed to do to improve. He saw problems he wanted to help solve.

"So I stayed, strived to get up the ladder, strived for positions with more and more influence and tried to contribute to fixing things as best as I could," he said.

For Reimer and every other German soldier, their mission was simple. When it laid the foundation for the German military, the German parliament was clear on a final, unequivocal point: The *Bundeswehr* was created as a defensive force only. Its purpose was to deter the Soviet Union, not to wage war.

In 1989, that purpose evaporated into thin air.

When communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, the Germans found themselves surrounded by friends. More than any other European military, the *Bundeswehr* had been geared toward fighting a static land battle against massive Soviet armored formations. The end of the Cold War prompted a new debate about the *Bundeswehr's* purpose in a new global security environment.

Maj. Alexander Bitter, an air force officer who works as a researcher for the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, knows firsthand the difficulties the *Bundeswehr* has faced in defining its role. His dark brown eyes flashed as he described the military's internal turmoil in the early 1990s.

"We have [had] German soldiers in western Germany since 1955.

They were here for saying ‘stop’ to the Russians,” he said, jabbing his index finger against the table with a thump. “But that was it.”

Reimer also remembers the changed atmosphere in the German military after 1989.

“Some didn’t know what was going to happen,” he said. “But most were bound into daily business.”

The army’s first task was to integrate 88,000 soldiers from the East German National People’s Army into the *Bundeswehr*. The army’s ranks swelled to almost 530,000 but had to be reduced to about 370,000 to comply with an agreement signed in 1990 by the four occupying powers and East and West Germany.

“The National People’s Army was a force that recruited a lot of its personnel by conscription,” Reimer said. “So it was not that hard to reduce the numbers.”

Reimer said the *Bundeswehr* initially offered no real incentives, such as a bonus or an offer for another job, for soldiers to leave the armed forces.

“On the other hand there was also no obligation to stay,” he said. “If a member of the forces wanted to quit because of better chances on the private market – only East Germans – he could simply apply, and it was approved.”

In the early 1990s, some Germans believed the *Bundeswehr*’s role should be expanded to include participation in NATO and U.N. missions outside the country. However, the 1991 Gulf War illustrated that Germany was still hesitant to use force, despite pressure from its NATO allies to participate. Germany sent a handful of obsolete aircraft to Turkey and a few minesweepers to patrol the Persian Gulf after the fighting had stopped.

The Gulf War, however, did convince some Germans in the conservative Christian Democratic Union party that Germany had to do more if it wanted to retain its credibility in the international community. In the years after the Gulf War, Germany embarked on a series of small, low-profile missions in an incremental approach to military intervention. These small steps would set precedents and lay the groundwork for larger missions. Many Germans were convinced that, in the new security environment, Germany had both the means and the responsibility to take a more active role in international peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.

The first real step came in 1992. For the first time since 1945, German soldiers left their native soil; they entered a land emerging from years of civil war. But still, they did not go to fight. About 140 German soldiers arrived in Cambodia in May 1992 as part of a U.N. peacekeeping mission. The Germans set up a field hospital to assist victims

of the Khmer Rouge. One year later, the CDU-dominated parliament committed 1,640 troops to a U.N. peacekeeping mission in Somalia to provide food, water and protection from local warlords. In July 1992, Germany began participating in an arms embargo against Yugoslavia by providing airborne reconnaissance and control aircraft.

The more liberal Social Democratic Party, however, disputed the legality of sending German troops abroad. The “out-of-area debate” focused on two articles in the German Basic Law that stated the military could be used only for defensive purposes or within a system of collective security like the U.N.

In July 1994, the German Constitutional Court finally settled the debate by ruling that the conservatives’ incremental approach was legal, provided that any *Bundeswehr* deployment receive a majority vote from the parliament. This effectively gave the CDU consent to continue its approach and made it legal to deploy the *Bundeswehr* on a variety of missions in the future.

In March 1999, the German military launched its first combat mission. Four Tornado strike aircraft stationed at an airbase in Italy flew bombing missions against Serbian troops in Kosovo to prevent the expulsion and oppression of the Muslim population there. The mission represented a new step in Germany’s acceptance of the use of military force. Then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder justified the NATO mission by saying that Germany had a moral obligation to lend its support and that “there was no other option open but to end the murdering in Kosovo.”

Reimer served as an adviser to the commanding officer in a brigade headquarters during the Kosovo campaign.

“I supervised the whole spectrum of tasks to be fulfilled in peacebuilding missions, like running a jail, supporting forensic research, hunting down indicted war criminals, you name it,” he said.

Reimer also helped start an Albanian-language newspaper *Days of Hope*. He said the newspaper “opened the local population’s ears to our messages.”

While the missions in Kosovo, Somalia, Yugoslavia and Cambodia helped make Germans more accustomed to the use of military force, they had revealed deep flaws within the *Bundeswehr*’s structure and way of thinking. The German military was a creature of the Cold War, and, as the 20th century came to a close, military planners saw that the structure – and the very mentality – of the *Bundeswehr* would have to adapt to modern conflicts that varied in scope and intensity.

The Bundeswehr Transformation Center is a sprawling complex of white stucco buildings and gravel driveways planted among the pine trees a few miles east of Berlin. In an ironic twist, the complex

once housed the East German military command, a subtle, everyday reminder to Capt. Friedhelm Stappen of how quickly the winds can shift.

“We are quite an example of how things have changed in Germany and in the world,” said Stappen, the center’s deputy commander. “Our outlook has changed completely, and our mission – the mission of the armed forces – has changed.”

The *Bundeswehr*’s new role is to act as an interventionist force that can fight small regional conflicts, combat terrorism and stop or prevent civil wars, non-state violence and ethnic conflict. The Bundeswehr Transformation Center, founded in 2004, is a German Defense Ministry think tank responsible for planning and managing the transformation process in cooperation with other defense policy groups. It is working to make the *Bundeswehr* leaner and more lethal, with each military branch working seamlessly with the others, an elusive quality called “jointness.”

In other words, its job is akin to changing a sumo wrestler into a triathlete.

Reimer said the most important change the *Bundeswehr* must make is in its mind-set.

“You may have heard the phrase that there is just one thing harder than to get a new idea into people’s minds,” he said, “and that is to get an old idea out of it.”

Bitter, the think-tank researcher, agreed and added that the *Bundeswehr* was not yet fully prepared for overseas missions.

“We have kind of a mindset from the Cold War, and we try to change the structures to be more effective,” he said. “We don’t have the strategic airlift capacity, we don’t have weapons, we don’t have light armored trucks – and we are changing that.”

Those structural changes cost money, however – lots of money. Indeed, funding has proved to be transformation’s greatest obstacle. Chronic under-funding has hamstrung the *Bundeswehr* since the mid-1990s, and the defense budget remains stagnant.

In 2003, Germany’s defense spending was about 1.5 percent of its gross domestic product, compared to about 4 percent in the United States. According to an October 2006 article in *Deutsche Welle*, Germany also spends less on its military than Norway, Holland or Finland.

A 2003 report by the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies at The Johns Hopkins University takes a close look at the *Bundeswehr*’s transformation process, including the funding problem. According to the report, more than half of the *Bundeswehr*’s

budget goes to salaries and benefits for its personnel while only about 13 percent goes to new equipment. The trend extends across Europe: “European nations spend far greater proportions of their defense budgets on personnel costs than does the United States and spend only about one fourth of their budgets on research and development.”

Some critics within Germany suggest that the *Bundeswehr*’s current strategy is like trying to change a flat tire while still driving down the road. They argue that the *Bundeswehr* has taken on too many missions while trying to modernize its equipment at the same time, straining an already thin budget. Instead of investing in research and development of new weapons, it is funneling money into the maintenance of obsolete vehicles and equipment.

“Funding is always a big issue,” said Benjamin Schreer, another researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. “The baseline is that there will not be a substantial increase in money to fund for arms or defense transformation.”

A few ongoing defense programs illustrate the difficulties the *Bundeswehr* faces in modernizing its equipment. The military needs communications systems, intelligence gathering equipment and precision-guided weapons, to name a few.

Schreer, who specializes in military transformation, said the army has a particular shortage of armored fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers for use in Afghanistan – where German troops have been operating since shortly after Sept. 11, 2001 – largely because the army can’t afford new ones.

“They are mostly outdated, or they are in too few numbers to be deployed on a larger scale,” Schreer said. “So at the moment, you see in Afghanistan some interesting developments with the army getting more armor on their vehicles, but it’s a very slow process.”

Another problem area is strategic airlift capability, a vital requirement for any military that wants to reach crisis points quickly. According to the 2003 Johns Hopkins study, the U.S. has 250 heavy transport aircraft – its European allies have 11. To increase its airlift capacity, the German air force has ordered 60 Airbus A400 M heavy-lift transports, the first of which should be delivered in 2010. Until then, the *Bundeswehr* continues to lease former Russian aircraft from Ukraine.

“The European A400 M is still a long way to go,” Schreer said, “so that is a severe problem when looking at operations in Afghanistan when there have already been instances in which the *Bundeswehr* was unable to fly out their troops with their own aircraft.”

Bitter, at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, described the prolonged development of the Eurofighter, the crown

jewel of the air force's modernization program. Bitter chuckled as he recalled several name changes required by delays in getting the fighter, whose development began in the 1980s.

"It was called Fighter '90, then it was called Eurofighter 2000, and now we call it Eurofighter because the 2000 felt so old," he said.

Bitter said the bill for the 180 Eurofighters the air force plans to buy and for the A400 M program runs to about 20 billion Euros, or \$26 billion. The *Bundeswehr* receives nearly 23 billion Euros a year in funding, with much of that going to air force programs, a major point of contention within military circles.

"The navy is in Lebanon, the army is all over the world, the air force is nearly nowhere and gets most of the money," Bitter said. "So it will be a hard fight."

The transformation process faces obstacles not only with money and high-tech weaponry. The mindset of the soldiers themselves may be most important. Some argue that the process is paralyzed by bureaucratic infighting, a problem hardly unique to Germany.

Homze, the UNL professor, said that like many large institutions, the *Bundeswehr* has become set in its ways.

"They kind of get used to certain things, doing things in a certain way," he said. "It's hard to restructure them."

Schreer, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs analyst, said much of the resistance to transformation comes from within the leadership of the individual branches of the military.

"Particularly the army, at least until recently, had been very resistant to change," he said.

Planners say the transformation process will be mostly completed by 2010, a date Schreer considers optimistic. "I wouldn't be surprised if the deadline would be met two or three years later."

In 2001, the transformation process took a back seat to a new mission. The terrorist attacks against the U.S. on Sept. 11 led Schröder to pledge his full support to the U.S., and German troops headed for Afghanistan soon after.

But relations between the U.S. and Germany soured in 2003 as the Bush administration tried to gather support among its European allies for an invasion of Iraq. Schröder refused to support the U.S.-led coalition because he felt Germans would not allow the country to play a part in a mission that lacked international backing.

In May 2003, Peter Struck, Germany's defense minister under Schröder, revealed a new set of defense policy guidelines that would have been unimaginable a decade earlier. He said since Germany

no longer faced a conventional threat, it had to protect "our security wherever it is in jeopardy." In one oft-quoted statement, Struck said Germany's defense began at the Hindu Kush, a mountain range in eastern Afghanistan.

In October 2006, the German Defense Ministry released a defense policy white paper, the first of its kind since 1994. The 133-page report stated that the *Bundeswehr* would assume a greater international role and would be capable of deploying 14,000 troops on five simultaneous missions.

Times had changed.

Today, from the rugged hills of northern Afghanistan to the waters off Lebanon and the Horn of Africa, almost 10,000 German soldiers, sailors and airmen have been deployed on foreign missions.

In Afghanistan, 2,900 *Bundeswehr* soldiers are part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, which works to prevent Taliban or al-Qaida attacks on civilians. In 2004, German soldiers also helped administer the first presidential elections in the country's history. Their mission in Afghanistan, however, has strained the defense budget and raised questions about the quality of German soldiers' training. In the fall of 2006, several pictures surfaced in German newspapers of *Bundeswehr* soldiers posing with human skulls while on patrol near Kabul.

The incident is reflective of the problems the German military faces in its new role. Debates continue on the effectiveness of the transformation process and whether Germany should even send troops to places like Afghanistan, where actual combat is more likely than in previous mission areas.

The 2006 white paper also confirmed the *Bundeswehr* would keep the conscription system, which many analysts and military officials say has become obsolete.

Despite the fact that Germany's democracy has been stable for decades, many in Germany see conscription as sacrosanct, a vital safeguard against the possibility of a nationalistic, authoritarian military.

According to the 2003 Johns Hopkins policy report, conscription also "has provided a pool of low-paid workers for public service jobs by way of those draftees who choose civilian rather than military service."

Many conscripts choose to don scrubs instead of camouflage fatigues. Conscripts are allowed to opt out of military service and work instead at hospitals, assisted-living centers and other health care facilities. The *Bundeswehr* screens out many other conscripts because of health problems. Schreer admits the military is struggling to attract the kind of people it needs to fill its professional ranks

and that about half of military service.

Joseph Cicmanec, a 24-year-old university student in Stuttgart, chose to take a civil service assignment instead of joining the army.

"I chose the civil service because I wanted to stay here and play soccer for my team," he wrote in an e-mail.

Cicmanec worked at a care center for the elderly where he cooked and served meals for residents, took them shopping and accompanied them on visits to the doctor.

"I was there to make their lives easier," he said.

He added that one of his friends worked for the same agency, but most of his friends joined the army, despite the negative images of the military that many Germans still have.

"Some of my friends think about the *Bundeswehr* that it is a waste of time," Cicmanec said.

When it began in 1956, conscription required each soldier to serve 12 months. Conscripts today have only nine-month service requirements, not enough time to receive effective training for modern warfare, according to the Johns Hopkins report. The report concludes that these conscripts "will be more of a nuisance than an asset."

Schreer said German soldiers go through a basic training program that is similar to those of other Western armies. After that, their specialized training depends on the type of unit they are assigned to or for which they volunteer.

"Some of them go to highly complex units," Schreer said, such as paratrooper detachments, for example. "Others are, you know – they end up as a barkeeper."

Eliminating conscription could finally ease the *Bundeswehr's* budget constraints and free up money the military now spends on personnel costs. With an all-volunteer army, like those of the United States and many of its allies, the *Bundeswehr* could be more effective in its new interventionist role.

Despite misgivings in some circles, Schreer said the number of out-of-area missions the *Bundeswehr* takes on will probably increase in the future, mainly because of Germany's desire to boost its stature within the international community, especially within the U.N. and the European Union.

"If you want to be credible and fulfill that role, of course you have to contribute more to international security," he said, "and I think we are seeing an increase in the number of international operations."

The *Bundeswehr's* story illustrates the fact that Germany views defense policy far differently from the way the United States and many

of its European allies do. The Germans have rejected unilateral military action and adopted an ideal of "never on our own," a mind-set demonstrated by the German refusal to participate in the U.S. war with Iraq.

Trade, diplomacy and developmental aid – not just military force – are also important to German defense policy. The U.S. views its military as a tool that can be used to solve many foreign policy problems, including terrorism. The Germans see military force as a last resort.

"In the United States, or in particular in certain elements of the U.S. Army, you have this war-fighting ethos," Schreer said. "You don't have that in Germany, likely due to historical experiences after the second world war."

Today, the German soldier serves as a peacekeeper and a humanitarian, not a war-fighter. The *Bundeswehr's* current missions within the U.N. and NATO frameworks are a good fit for this philosophy, a senior German press official at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin said.

"Germany is good at the type of reconstruction mission it is now undertaking in Afghanistan because Germans are good at organizing large projects," the official said. "That's what we do well. As for the fighting part, that's not really for us."

Bitter, however, said future combat missions for the *Bundeswehr* are inevitable. NATO has already placed great pressure on Germany to send troops to the more volatile southern region of Afghanistan, where U.S. and British troops now play the largest role. German special forces units have already participated in some combat action in the south, and the parliament has approved the deployment of a number of Tornado reconnaissance aircraft to assist NATO forces there.

"They will come. There is no doubt," Bitter said, referring to future combat missions. "But it is a process that the society has to deal with. It is a very slow process, and it is a change of mindset."

Despite all the obstacles, the *Bundeswehr's* transformation into a leaner, more flexible foreign policy tool has begun. The process will last until the end of the decade and cost billions of Euros and countless headaches and heartaches for German soldiers, politicians and civilians. Germany still wrestles with memories of its dark military past, but it has learned to balance respect for those memories with responsibility in the international community. The *Bundeswehr* has found a purpose, and after decades of soul-searching, the German armed forces have finally stepped back into the sun.