

Germany's Contribution and Perspective on the Future of World Order



Dr. Christoph Schwegmann¹³, Senior Defense Advisor, Policy Planning Staff, German Federal Foreign Office

Writing this article in December 2017, Germany has elected a new parliament, but does not yet have a new government. Moreover, it is unsure if the German Bundestag will manage to elect a new government any time soon – or even at all. A minority government or new federal elections seem possible. While such circumstances give a hint on fairly new developments in Germany's domestic politics, speculations about Berlin's future foreign and security policies seem even more difficult and speculative.

Among the few things we do know, are the following:

1. For the moment – and if no new elections are held – Chancellor Merkel is going to stay in power.
2. The German government issued its 2016 White Paper on security policy only a year ago. The paper was well received, overall, and did not earn a great deal of criticism in the German public or in the Bundestag. It seems to reflect a broad consensus that would provide a basis for any future government.
3. Germany's perspective on regional and world order, as well as its contribution to it, was quite stable over the last decades. Germany has been a very committed actor in almost all international fields, from climate to human rights to security. In fact, with the so-called Munich consensus,¹⁴ the government and the federal president promised a greater German role and leadership in European and world affairs. Indeed, it was a promise that was certainly kept if we look at Germany's intellectual and practical contributions to NATO's new role in its eastern states and the contribution to MINUSMA in Mali or in promoting the UN's Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.

However, while it is likely that Germany will continue to stay on course, the world is not. Instead, changes occurred that affected the three main action areas and instruments of Germany's foreign and security policy: the European Union, NATO, and a rule-based international order. Brexit has shaken the EU to its core. And although the EU and the UK will continue

¹³ The thoughts and ideas expressed here are the personal views of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the position of the German government.

¹⁴ The term refers to the speeches of Federal President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen at the Munich Security Conference 2014.

to have a very close relationship in the years to come, this event will remain a challenge for both sides. For the remaining 27 members of the EU, the preservation of European unity should be a major goal.

However, populist political parties and an economic divide within Europe make it difficult to agree on the next steps for further EU integration. Still, France's president Emmanuel Macron has presented interesting ideas for the future of Europe that raised attention in other member states. Moreover, in the field of European Security and Defense Policy, we have seen decisive steps toward more common defense and security cooperation (e.g., PESCO, CARD, European Defense Fund).

While NATO is in good shape, despite the great challenges on its eastern and northern flanks, a new interpretation of American leadership by the U.S. government and disagreements between Turkey and the U.S. on policies in Iraq and Syria raise concern in the alliance. On a broader level, it is observed that the U.S. left a political vacuum in some parts of the world. States like Russia and China are eager to fill such gaps, while the EU, Germany, and other European countries are in most dossiers not yet in a position to compensate for the absence of U.S. leadership. With China rising, North Korea going nuclear, and continuous tensions in the war-ravaged Near and Middle East, international order will remain under stress.