

German Attitudes towards the United States under Donald Trump's Presidency,
Based on German Reporting

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Introduction

“The Atlantic Ocean is starting to look awfully wide,” *The Economist* wrote in 2019, referring to the increasing divide between Americans and Europeans on matters relating to trade, defense, foreign policy, and multilateral agreements.¹ Examining the German perspective on the state of US-German relations under former President Barack Obama, and its evolution under Trump, is necessary in order to understand the phenomenon that has taken place in transatlantic relations, as described by *The Economist*. How have German attitudes towards the US evolved under Trump’s presidency? In order to explore this question, this paper examines various political events that affected German attitudes towards the US through the lens of the German press. The research is primarily based on *der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *die Zeit*, three prominent German newspapers, and spans from the concluding months of former President Barack Obama’s presidency to the months leading up to the November 2020 presidential election. A thorough analysis of German coverage during critical junctures such as the US’ withdrawal from the Iran Deal, Trump’s demands regarding German defense expenditures, US sanctions over the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, and other events suggests that German-US relations deteriorated under Trump’s presidency. A major factor in the decline of the relationship was the manner with which American political demands or policy changes were conveyed to German leadership, not necessarily the

¹ “Europe and America Must Work to Stop Their Relationship Unravelling.” *The Economist*, May 14, 2019.

<https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/03/14/europe-and-america-must-work-to-stop-their-relationship-unravelling>.

substance of these changes. Though disagreements over policy and multilateral initiatives played a significant role in disputes between German and US leaders, it was the strongly-worded letters, tweets, and unannounced decisions that ultimately led to a weaker German-US relationship.

The three German publications mentioned above were chosen for their broad influence on German society and political leadership; their analyses and editorials both reflect and shape German sentiment. Nevertheless, articles published by other publications, including *die Welt*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Politico*, and *The New York Times* were examined as well in order to examine sentiments across the political spectrum. The research is also based on various surveys, which serve to quantify German sentiment expressed in the media.

This paper covers various political events that affected German attitudes towards the US, including Obama's approach to the crisis in Syria and the Snowden affair, the transition to the Trump administration and its effect on German foreign policy, US' withdrawal from the Iran Deal, Trump's demands regarding German defense expenditures and his attitude towards NATO, the proposed joint European military, the incomplete Nord Stream 2 pipeline project and subsequent US sanctions, and Trump's plan to withdraw American troops from Germany. (Due to the evolving and complex nature of the coronavirus pandemic, this paper does not address how the health crisis may have affected German attitudes towards the US.) An analysis of how the German media reported on these events is critical to understanding the evolution of German

attitudes towards the US under Trump. Given its broad implications with regard to the global economy, politics, diplomacy, and security, a strong grasp of the current state of German-US relations is essential to examining US foreign policy. Questions regarding the future of the transatlantic relationship have become even more relevant as the United States approaches the November 2020 presidential election.

All English translations of German quotes, titles, or names in this paper were done by the author, unless the citation points to *Spiegel International*, an English edition of the German newspaper *der Spiegel*.

Pre-Trump: German-US relations under Obama

While the possibility of Donald Trump being elected as president certainly frightened German political commentators, they were not thrilled about the state of German-US relations under Obama either. Trump's campaign simply marked yet another deterioration in the way Germans viewed the United States. The slogan "Make America Great Again," Jörg Lau argues in *die Zeit*, reflects the "cognitive dissonance" of the Trump campaign, specifically with respect to American foreign policy. According to Lau, American influence has been dwindling for years; the loss of American power on the global stage was apparent under Obama and his predecessors as well. Lau highlights three "existential crises" that caused a rift between Germany and the US during Obama's presidency; the European Debt Crisis, of which, he argues, German losses were largely America's fault; the crisis in Ukraine, specifically, America's insistence on providing Ukraine with weapons while the EU opposed conducting a

proxy war against Russia; and the American role in the Syrian refugee crisis, the severest of the three, according to Lau.

The instability in the Middle East, which led to the refugee crisis, was largely due to President George W. Bush's unnecessary war in Iraq, Lau explains. For decades, American power was considered inherently good; the war, however, exposed its destructive character. In the years following the war, populist leaders in Europe benefited from anti-migrant rhetoric and the fear that followed a series of terror attacks on European soil. Germany took the brunt of the damage caused by the refugee crisis (1.1 million asylum-seekers arrived in Germany in 2015 alone²), while the US largely disregarded Syrian refugees.³ Obama failed to contain the civil unrest in Syria, which largely contributed to the severity of the refugee crisis. "Obama, the most powerful man in the world for the last eight years," Klaus Brinkbäumer and Holger Stark write in *der Spiegel*, "seemed impotent in the Middle East."⁴

Essentially, Germany became the new land of the free. Arguing that the "can-do spirit has made a trans-Atlantic crossing," Roger Cohen of the *New York Times* explains, "Set aside the fact that the Syrian crisis cannot be disentangled from the spillover of the Iraq war, and so America's direct responsibility is engaged. Set aside the

² Kroet, Cynthia. "Germany: 1.1 Million Refugee Arrivals in 2015." *POLITICO*, January 6, 2016.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-1-1-million-refugee-arrivals-in-2015/>.

³ Lau, Jörg. "Möge die Macht mit dir sein!" (May the Power Be with You), *Die ZEIT*, January 7, 2016.

<https://bit.ly/3dfbN7j>

⁴ Brinkbäumer, Klaus and Holger Stark, "What Will Remain of Obama's Legacy?," *DER SPIEGEL INTERNATIONAL*, November 18, 2016.

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-deep-bond-of-trust-between-obama-and-merkel-a-1122000.html>.

fact that Obama said in 2011 that President Bashar al-Assad must step aside, and so America's responsibility is engaged. Set aside the presidential "red line" not upheld in 2013. Even then, by any reasonable measure, the American response to the Syrian refugee crisis has been pitiful.⁵

Obama's announcement that the US would take on 10,000 Syrians did not impress the Germans either; *die Zeit's* Lau, referring to the stark contrast between Germany's and the US' handling of the refugee crisis, called it a "shamefully low number." Arguing that Obama failed to introduce a new, improved era of transatlantic relations, Lau concludes that American foreign policy, in addition to the refugee crisis, threatens Europe's stability.⁶

The Snowden affair also posed a challenge to the German-US relationship under Obama. When reports emerged that detailed the extent to which the NSA spied on companies, politicians — evidence had allegedly⁷ emerged claiming that the Agency had tapped Merkel's phone, — and institutions in Europe, the international community turned to Merkel to analyze her response to the affair. Addressing Germany's refusal to grant Snowden asylum (the rejection was made in July 2013), Josef Foscemoth, a

⁵ Cohen, Roger, "Germany, Refugee Nation." *The New York Times*, December 21, 2015.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/22/opinion/germany-refugee-nation.html>.

⁶ Lau, "Möge Die Macht Mit Dir Sein!"

⁷ "NSA-Überwachung: Merkel Steht Seit 2002 Auf US-Abhörliste." (NSA Surveillance: Merkel Has Been on the US Bugging List since 2002), DER SPIEGEL, October 26, 2013.

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/nsa-ueberwachung-merkel-steht-seit-2002-auf-us-abhoerliste-a-930193.html>.

professor of contemporary history at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität in Freiburg, wrote in August 2014 in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*,

German-American relations are of greater value [to German political leaders] than dealing with the US secret service's attacks on the fundamental freedoms of [German] citizens.

Given Germany's alliance with the US, especially in matters relating to intelligence-sharing (cooperation between US and Germany intelligence increased significantly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, according to then-head of the NSA Michael Hayden)⁸, it would be best to simply avoid a scenario in which Snowden would reach German soil to testify on the alleged spying. Otherwise, Foschepoth explains, the German government would have to decide between "the US' interests and the constitutionally guaranteed protection of fundamental rights." Germany's security partnership with the US seems to "stand above law and the constitution," he claimed.⁹

When reports suggested that the NSA had wiretapped Merkel's cell phone, tensions between Berlin and Washington, D.C. flared even further. Merkel called Obama to express her displeasure, and, according to a statement by her spokesman, that she "unequivocally disapproves of such practices and sees them as completely

⁸ "BND Intelligence Scandal Puts Merkel in Tight Place" *DER SPIEGEL International*, May 4, 2015.

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/bnd-intelligence-scandal-puts-merkel-in-tight-place-a-1031944.html>.

⁹ Foschepoth, Josef. "In Deutschland Gilt Auch US-Recht" (Us Law Also Applies to Germany), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 11, 2014.

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/deutsch-amerikanische-beziehungen-in-deutschland-gilt-auch-us-recht-1.2084126>.

unacceptable." The president then assured Merkel that the United States is not monitoring and will not monitor her communications.¹⁰ In April of 2014, at a visit to the White House, Merkel's statements regarding the NSA scandal struck journalists as peculiarly vague. Instead of rebuking the American president, Merkel promised that Snowden will not be invited to Germany to give testimony in the ongoing parliamentary inquiry into the NSA debacle. The reason behind Merkel's rather restrained response, *der Spiegel* noted, "is not difficult to pinpoint." With the crisis in Ukraine "continuing to escalate, Merkel is eager to demonstrate unity with Obama and the two threatened Russia with further economic sanctions." Additionally, the parliamentary inquiry posed "a direct threat to the activities of German intelligence services and to security strategists in the Chancellery."¹¹

Only a few months later, in December, German prosecutor Harald Range, who had launched an investigations into the suspected tapping of Chancellor Angela Merkel's mobile phone by the US, concluded that there is "no proof at the moment which could lead to charges that Chancellor Merkel's phone connection data was collected or her calls tapped."¹² The wiretapping scandal, though unsubstantiated,

¹⁰ Fisher, Max. "Obama's Phone Call with Angela Merkel Sounds like It Was Horribly Awkward," *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2013.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/10/23/obamas-phone-call-with-angela-merkel-sounds-like-it-was-horribly-awkward/?arc404=true>.

¹¹ "Merkel Chooses Unity over NSA Truth," *DER SPIEGEL International*, May 5, 2014.

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/chancellor-merkel-sacrifices-nsa-investigation-for-unity-on-ukraine-a-967596.html>.

¹² Bensch, Fabrizio. "No Proof so Far That NSA Bugged Merkel's Phone: Prosecutor," *Reuters*, December 11, 2014.

would leave a lasting impression on German attitudes towards the US, Max Fisher of *Vox* predicted at the time. Since the Stasi's operations during the Cold War, Germans are particularly sensitive to matters relating to surveillance. Additionally, the "broader NSA hacking programs in Germany, collecting vast amounts of computer and telephone metadata, are real," Fisher explains. Therefore, "many people will continue to believe that Obama personally tapped Merkel's phone, regardless of what evidence emerges."¹³

Obama's final trip abroad as president was to Germany. His visit, journalists noted, represented his continuous support for Merkel. "Obama's visit to Berlin this week was full of messages," Brinkbäumer and Stark wrote in *der Spiegel*, referring to Obama's intention to promote democracy and political engagement over the course of his trip. However, the authors write, Obama's performance in Berlin also made it clear that he wished "to promote his own legacy so that he doesn't go down in history as a failure" after Trump replaces him. Nevertheless, as Ben Rhodes, Obama's deputy national security advisor, put it, Merkel was "the [American] president's closest partner over the course of his entire presidency."¹⁴ Journalists noted the many hours he spent in informal meetings with Merkel over his three-day visit.

In light of his farewell visit to Berlin, Brinkbäumer and Stark presented a short analysis of Obama's tenure. They observed that despite Obama's efforts to conclude his

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-usa-spying/no-proof-so-far-that-nsa-bugged-merkels-phone-prosecutor-idUSKBN0JP1QG20141211?irpc=932>.

¹³ Fisher, Max. "German Investigation Says the NSA Probably Didn't Tap Merkel's Phone after All," *Vox*, December 12, 2014. <https://www.vox.com/2014/12/12/7381539/merkel-phone-tapped-nsa>.

¹⁴ Brinkbäumer and Stark, "What Will Remain of Obama's Legacy?"

presidency on mostly positive notes, it was impossible for him to fully distance himself from Trump's election. Acknowledging that racism was partially to blame — conservative, white Americans had “struck back” and elected a white man in 2016 — Brinkbäumer and Stark point to Obama's insistence on clearing the path to presidency for Hillary Clinton without considering her prior political mishaps as the catalyst for the Democratic Party's failure in the 2016 elections. “The Democratic Party's choice of a candidate was anything but democratic and Obama allowed it to be so,” they write. “That was an enormous mistake.” Nevertheless, Germany respected Obama's legacy. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly referred to as Obamacare, as well as the progress in LGBTQ+ rights deeply impressed America's close ally across the Atlantic.¹⁵

In May of 2015, just a month prior to the official launch of the Trump campaign, the Pew Research Center issued a report on German-US relations. According to Pew's survey, “roughly seven-in-ten Americans see Germany as a reliable ally, and about six-in-ten Germans trust the United States.” Additionally, 59% of Germans were satisfied with Obama's management of the German-US relationship. Two notable topics of conflict between the two countries seemed to be Germany's military role and its attitude towards Russia. While “Americans say they would welcome Germany taking on more strategic responsibilities,” 69% of Germans preferred to limit their military role in world affairs given their country's dark history.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶Pew Research Center, “Germany and the United States: Reliable Allies,” May 7, 2015. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/05/07/germany-and-the-united-states-reliable-allies/>.

“Most Germans have positive memories of Barack Obama,” reported *die Welt* in April 2016, during the presidential primaries. According to a survey conducted by *die Welt* and N24, 84% of Germans surveyed considered Obama a “rather good president.” Furthermore, *die Welt* reported that 63% of respondents favored Hillary Clinton, while 6% supported Trump. The remaining respondents favored Bernie Sanders (7%), Ted Cruz (5%), or did not express support of any of the candidates (19%). “Many of the respondents,” according to *die Welt*, “believe that the next US president should focus on better relations with Russia as a matter of urgency.”¹⁷

According to a 2019 Pew Research Center report, 86% of German respondents to a 2016 survey “had confidence in then-President Barack Obama,” while 57% had a favorable view of the US. Following the election of Trump, however, “positive views of the U.S. and confidence in the U.S. president plummeted.” Only one-in-ten Germans had confidence in Trump in 2018, and three-in-ten held a favorable view of the US, levels of antipathy not seen since the end of the George W. Bush administration.¹⁸

¹⁷ “Umfrage: Diesen US-Präsidenten Würden Die Deutschen Wählen.” (Survey: This Is the President Germans Would Vote For), *DIE WELT*, April 21, 2016.

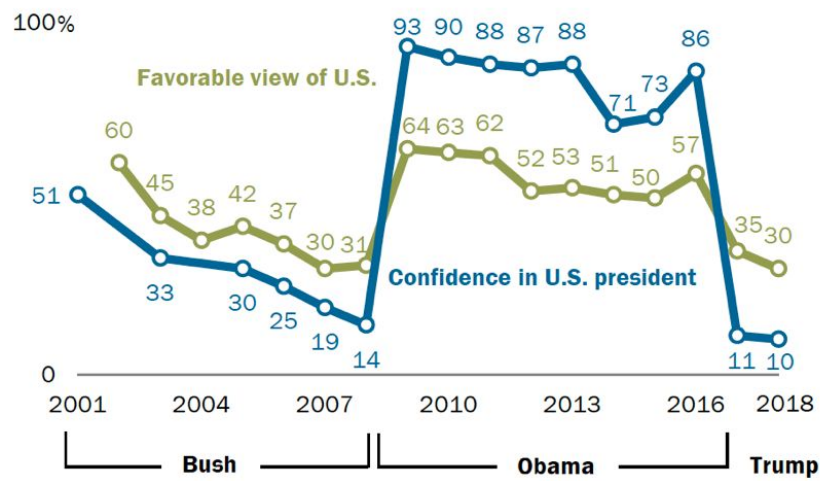
<https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article154605912/Deutsche-haben-klaren-Favoriten-fuer-Obamas-Nachfolge.html>.

¹⁸ Poushter, Jacob, and Alexandra Castillo. “Americans, Germans Disagree on Their Relationship.” *Pew Research Center*, March 4, 2019.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/03/04/americans-and-germans-disagree-on-the-state-of-bilateral-relations-but-largely-align-on-key-international-issues/>.

Negative ratings for Trump and U.S. in Germany

Among Germans ...



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q17a & Q35a.

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Figure 1: Negative Ratings for Trump and U.S. in Germany¹⁹

The Early Years of Trump's Presidency

In the early weeks of Trump's presidency, German and EU politicians across the political spectrum seemed to have reached a consensus regarding the state of transatlantic relations. Expressing concern over the uncertainty regarding the future of America, they stressed that they must become more independent of American influence and power, and that the president and his administration seem unpredictable. According to Pew Research Center, when Germans were asked about German-US relations in 2018, "roughly seven-in-ten (72%) said they would like their country to pursue a more independent approach."²⁰ While most major German politicians

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

congratulated Trump upon his election, it was only the far-right Alternative for Germany (AFD) that seemed to be genuinely celebrating his presidency. “Wir sind Präsident,” (“We are the president”) AFD Berlin tweeted after his election. By contrast, then Defense Minister and current President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen remarked, “Europe has to prepare for the fact that it must provide for itself,” and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said,

We hope that we are not facing greater instability in international politics. During his campaign, Trump was critical not just of Europe, but also of Germany. I believe we must prepare for American foreign policy becoming less predictable. We must prepare for a situation in which America will be tempted to make decisions on its own more often.²¹

Trump’s election marked a major shift in German attitudes towards the state of transatlantic relations. America had always served as a role model of liberal democracy, a representative of positive Western power; for years, Germany had tried to embody the very same values across the Atlantic. Additionally, as Klaus Brinkbäumer notes in *der Spiegel*, Germans felt indebted to Americans for facilitating their democratization after World War II.²² America’s role in global affairs under Trump sparked a nation-wide debate on the future of German foreign policy. The feeling of betrayal felt by German

²¹ Gathmann, Florian and Severin Weiland, “Berlin Mulls Future Relations with a President Trump,” *DER SPIEGEL International*, November 9, 2016.

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/berlin-mulls-future-relations-with-a-president-trump-a-1120570.html>.

²² Brinkbäumer, Klaus, “Europe Must Defend Itself Against A Dangerous President.” *DER SPIEGEL International*, February 5, 2017. <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/a-1133177.html>.

leaders, especially those who experienced the more tumultuous years in German history, is well-expressed by former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer in an 2018 interview with *der Spiegel*;

The Federal Republic of Germany was probably the greatest success of American foreign policy. Since 1949, a stable, flourishing democracy has emerged under the patronage of the U.S. After two world wars, we Germans have recognized that we cannot do world politics. It almost destroyed us as a nation, both politically and morally. America was responsible for our protection, and we got used to it. Driving in this slipstream was comfortable and understandable from a historical point of view, but that is now over.²³

In a *der Spiegel* article titled "Europe Must Defend Itself Against A Dangerous President," Klaus Brinkbäumer, *der Spiegel* reporter and later editor at *die Zeit*, implores German political leadership to lead a united opposition against Trump. Brinkbäumer points to Trump's disdain for multilateralism and free trade, his positions on climate change and science, and his emphasis on attitudes of "nationalism and xenophobia" as factors which demonstrate just how dangerous Trump is as a leader of the West. It is important to note that while Brinkbäumer makes various impressive statements such as

²³ von Rohr, Mathieu, and Christoph Schult. "The U.S. President Is Destroying the American World Order." *DER SPIEGEL* International, May 22, 2018.

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/former-german-foreign-minister-american-president-is-destroying-american-order-a-1208549.html>.

“German democracy is ideologically antithetical to Trump's vision,” he fails to outline any specific policies or measures to be taken against Trump.²⁴

Trump's approach to foreign policy led many Germans to examine their own political and diplomatic capabilities introspectively. Christiane Hoffmann of *der Spiegel* observes that the United States appears to be withdrawing from the global stage on three fronts: militarily, morally, and as a key leader of the international community. She argues that it is no longer the responsible leading power in the West. While Germany may seem like a fitting replacement, its military power — a requisite to assume the position of the West's leadership — is lacking. “For years,” Hoffmann writes, “Germany was able to get away with a foreign policy that didn't call for it to assume much responsibility.” Thus far, Germany had a sheltered foreign policy, as the country preferred “reaction over (pro)action, as seen in Ukraine and the euro crisis.” Furthermore, she writes,

Germany's global abstinence has permitted it to have the luxury of basing its foreign policy largely on values, while others took care of the realpolitik dirty work. Merkel's refugee policies, which placed humanitarian principles over the cohesion of the European Union, is only the most radical example of this German tradition.²⁵

²⁴ Klaus Brinkbäumer, “Europe Must Defend Itself Against A Dangerous President.”

²⁵ Hoffmann, Christiane, “It's Time for Germany to Learn to Lead,” *DER SPIEGEL International*, January 5, 2018.

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/waning-us-germany-must-learn-to-take-responsibility-a-1186075.html>.

Similarly, Stefan Braun of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* questions the credibility of Berlin's focus on assuming "more responsibility,"²⁶ which was based on Merkel's 2018/19 New Year's speech.²⁷ According to Braun, the expectations set forth by Merkel have not been met. Referring to former Secretary of State John Kerry's remarks at a 2018 dinner in Milan urging Europeans to start believing in themselves, Braun, like Hoffman, maintains that Germany ought to revamp its foreign policies; for even foreign leaders have noticed the "imbalance" between rhetoric and action.²⁸

The US Withdraws from the Iran Deal

2018 marked a turning point in German-US relations in the Trump era. From Trump's insistence that Germany increase its defense expenditures and contributions to NATO ("contribution" is an incorrect term in this context, see below) to the US' ultimate withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly referred to as the Iran Deal, the political events of 2018 may shape the German-US relationship for many years to come.

²⁶<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/new-year-s-address-by-federal-chancellor-angela-merkel-at-the-turn-of-the-year-2018-2019-in-berlin-on-monday-31-december-2018-1564940>

²⁷ von Bullion, Constanze, "Merkel: 'Müssen Mehr Verantwortung Übernehmen'" (Merkel: 'We Have to Take on More Responsibility'), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 1, 2019.

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/merkel-neujahrsansprache-regierung-1.4270684>.

²⁸ Braun, Stefan. "Deutschland Braucht Endlich Einen Außenpolitischen Plan" (Germany Needs a Foreign Policy Plan), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 17, 2018.

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/bundesregierung-deutschland-braucht-einen-aussenpolitischen-plan-1.3982972>.

“Lately, the American president has emerged as a great unifier of Europe,” *der Spiegel* staff wrote after Trump’s executive order announcing the termination of the US’ participation in the Iran Deal was released on May 8.²⁹ The Iran Deal, according to a White House press statement, merely delayed the pursuit of nuclear weapons while allowing Iran to “preserve nuclear research and development.” Furthermore, the US would be re-imposing sanctions that had been lifted under the deal, for “the regime has instead funded a military buildup and continues to fund its terrorist proxies, such as Hizballah and Hamas” instead of using the money to support the Iranian people. By withdrawing from the Iran Deal, the US government is hoping to “pressure the Iranian regime to alter its course of malign activities and ensure that Iranian bad acts are no longer rewarded.”³⁰ Across the Atlantic, some Germans were skeptical of the Iran Deal as well. According to YouGov, an international data and analytics group, 62% of Germans supported the Iran Deal in July 2015, “even if there is great uncertainty that the country will stick to the deal.”³¹ In 2015, Hans Rühle, who previously worked at the German Defense Department and NATO, wrote in *Welt*, “Iran is cheating and continues

²⁹ “Trump Strikes a Deep Blow to Trans-Atlantic Ties.” *DER SPIEGEL International*, May 11, 2018.

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/trump-humiliates-europe-with-exit-from-iran-deal-a-1207237.html>.

³⁰ “President Donald J. Trump Is Ending United States Participation in an Unacceptable Iran Deal.” The White House, May 8, 2018.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-states-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal/>.

³¹ Schmidt, Matthias. “Mehrheit Der Deutschen Zufrieden Mit Iran-Deal.” (Majority of Germans Pleased with Iran Deal), *YouGov*, July 21, 2015.

<https://yougov.de/news/2015/07/21/mehrheit-der-deutschen-zufrieden-mit-iran-deal/>.

to cheat ... the P5 + 1 have effectively institutionalized the potential of fraud.” Noting that the deal is being scrutinized by American politicians on both sides of the aisle, he wrote that the Republicans’ opposition has “good, indeed compelling, reasons.”³² Similarly, Clemens Wergin argues in *die Welt* that Obama responded to criticism of the Iran Deal by painting a “black and white picture” of the issue and claiming that there are only two alternatives to the deal — “an unsatisfactory deal or war.” Wergin called this portrayal “nonsense” and claims that,

With more patience and willingness to engage in debate, one could have built up a lot more pressure. But this is how the Iranians used Obama's will for unity wisely and received concessions.³³

Merkel, too, was not a major proponent of the deal. “She went along with it rather than vehemently pushing it forward,” wrote *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Unlike her European counterparts, Merkel expressed understanding for Israeli concerns over the deal; she “did not seek demonstrative closeness to the government in Tehran” and never invited Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to Germany, which is why he did not attend the security conference in Munich. Her approach to the deal was mostly pragmatic. She, too, was concerned about the so-called sunset clause, however, as *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

³² Rühle, Hans. “Ein Abkommen, Viel Misstrauen” (One Agreement, Lots of Mistrust), *DIE WELT*, September 16, 2015.

https://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/politik/article146453068/Ein-Abkommen-viel-Misstrauen.html.

³³ Wergin, Clemens. “Benjamin Netanjahu Steht Vor Der Rede Seines Lebens” (Benjamin Netanyahu Faces the Speech of His Life), *DIE WELT*, March 3, 2015.

<https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article137995525/Netanjahu-steht-vor-der-Rede-seines-Lebens.html>.

phrased it, her rationale may have been, “I live now, in 2018, and the world is safer with this agreement,” which is why she tried to save the deal even after Trump pulled out.³⁴

In 2020, Rühle published an article reflecting on all the mishaps and red flags that had taken place in the last decade and a half with regard to the deal. Citing Mossad intelligence, studies by the Institute for Science and International Security, Michael Hayden, and a member of the Obama Administration, Rühle emphasized various issues in the deal, especially the untrustworthiness of the Iranian regime.³⁵ It is important to note that while this research paper mainly focuses on coverage by *der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *die Zeit*, the argumentative pieces by Rühle and Wergin were published in *die Welt*.³⁶

Despite its concerning elements, Germans viewed the Iran Deal as a representation of the potential of international diplomacy. Negotiations had spanned twelve years; Trump’s decision to withdraw, therefore, was received as “an attack on

³⁴ Brössler, Daniel, Nico Fried, Hubert Wetzel, and Christian Wernicke. “Atomabkommen-Ausstieg Der USA: Rette Sich, Wer Kann.” (The US Withdraws from the Nuclear Deal: Save Yourself If You Can), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 11, 2018.

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/seite-drei-zum-atomabkommen-rette-sich-wer-kann-1.3974016?reduced=true>.

³⁵ Rühle, Hans. “Iran-Konflikt: So Ließ Sich Barack Obama Täuschen.” (The Iran Conflict: This Is How Barack Obama Was Fooled), *DIE WELT*, January 7, 2020.

<https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/plus204811462/Iran-Konflikt-So-liess-sich-Barack-Obama-taeuschen.html>.

³⁶The author was unable to find dissenting opinions in *der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *die Zeit*. While the focus of this research is primarily based on these three publications, the author believes it is necessary to provide a wide range of views on the Iran Deal. This paper aims to present an overview of German attitudes — which includes those farther on the right of the political spectrum.

the pride of European foreign policy," *der Spiegel* wrote. The successful implementation of the deal, which bears the signature of former Secretary of State John Kerry — who at the time had represented the United States in negotiations with Iran and European countries — was almost personal to the many European leaders who had worked on it. It appears, from careful reading of German coverage at the time, that it is not the US' withdrawal that caused outrage in Europe, but the manner in which it was conducted. According to *der Spiegel*,

In the end, Trump backed out of the deal in the most brutal manner possible, with a combative speech and the reintroduction of all sanctions against Iran. He was unable to offer any convincing reasons for why he has chosen this particular moment in time to leave the deal. He wasn't even able to claim that Iran hadn't lived up to its end of the bargain because Tehran has demonstrably adhered to its provisions.³⁷

It is important to note, however, that the *der Spiegel* article did not address Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's April 2018 speech in which he claimed that "Iran lied about never having a nuclear weapons program" and that "even after the deal, Iran continued to preserve and expand its nuclear weapons know-how for future use."³⁸

³⁷ "Trump Strikes a Deep Blow to Trans-Atlantic Ties." *DER SPIEGEL International*.

³⁸ "FULL TEXT: Netanyahu Claims Iran Nuclear Deal Based on Lies." *Haaretz*, April 30, 2018.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/full-text-netanyahu-s-reveals-iran-s-atomic-archive-in-speech-1.6045556>.

“More than anything though,” *der Spiegel* wrote, Trump has humiliated Europe to a greater degree than any U.S. president before him. Though the most powerful leaders of Europe — Macron, Merkel, and Boris Johnson — personally travelled to Washington D.C. to appeal to Trump, their efforts, according to *der Spiegel*, were “all in vain.”³⁹

Indeed, diplomats from Berlin, London, and Paris had met with an American delegation — led by Brian Hook, a Republican attorney — in Washington D.C. in January 2018 to renegotiate the Iran Deal after Trump first expressed his dissatisfaction with it. Despite intense negotiations that spanned another four months, and many meetings all over Europe, European representatives fail to save the deal.⁴⁰ The stakes were particularly high because Iranian President Rouhani and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif declared that they would not enter a deal with the Europeans unless the US partook in it as well. The US’ participation was vital to the success of the negotiations.⁴¹ In April 2018, Trump met with Macron to discuss the deal. According to *die Zeit*, Trump asked, “Who is Brian Hook?” after Macron said that negotiations had gone well with the attorney. Two weeks later, the US left the Iran Deal. “It seems like the American president never intended to seriously renegotiate,” noted *Zeit*.⁴²

³⁹ “Trump Strikes a Deep Blow to Trans-Atlantic Ties” *DER SPIEGEL International*.

⁴⁰ Follath, Erich, Georg Mascolo, and Holger Stark. “Wenn Einer Aufsteht, Um Dich Zu Töten, Töte Ihn Zuerst.” (If Someone Gets up to Kill You, Kill Them First), *ZEIT*, September 4, 2019. <https://www.zeit.de/2019/37/atomabkommen-iran-usa-donald-trump-vertrag-konflikt>.

⁴¹ Kornelius, Stefan, and Paul-Anton Krüger. “Da Hört Die Freundschaft Auf” (The Friendship Ends Here), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 24, 2018. <https://yulib002.mc.yu.edu:2180/document/?pdmfid=1516831>.

⁴² Follath, Mascolo, and Stark. “Wenn Einer Aufsteht, Um Dich Zu Töten, Töte Ihn Zuerst.”

In the wake of Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran Deal, Civey, a German polling institute, reported that only 12% of more than 5,000 respondents favored the termination of the Iran Deal and wanted Germany to follow Trump's lead.⁴³

Just a few days before Trump announced his withdrawal from the Iran Deal, Michael Thumann of *die Zeit* noted that despite the president's "ruthlessness," the world's most powerful leaders still travel to Washington, D.C. to negotiate matters relating to trade, security, and foreign policy — and Trump seems to be using that to his advantage. As the strongest military and economic power, the US sets the tone on a global stage. However, Thumann claims that, "paradoxically, it is precisely this strength in which the danger of future decline lies." What makes America so great is its focus on globalization, its role in multilateral agreements, and its trade policies. Dismantling these strengths may lead to policies in line with an isolationist attitude; while Trump may be celebrating his short-term victories, his successors will have to lead a "weakened" America "from which many countries have turned away."⁴⁴

Even John Bolton, who served as Trump's national security advisor from April 2018 (just when tensions between Germany and the US started to flare even further) until September 2019 (it is unclear whether Bolton was removed from his post or

⁴³ Schreckenburger, Daniel. "Große Mehrheit Will, Dass Merkel Am Iran-Deal Festhält." (Vast Majority Wants Merkel to Stick to the Iran Deal), *t-online.de*, May 11, 2018.
https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/ausland/krisen/id_83753294/mehrheit-der-deutschen-will-dass-merkel-am-iran-deal-festhaelt.html.

⁴⁴Thumann, Michael, "Von Wegen Absturz." (Collapse? No Way!), *ZEIT*, May 2, 2018.
<https://www.zeit.de/2018/19/donald-trump-usa-erpressungspolitik-gefahr-verlust-vorherrschaft>.

resigned on his own accord) and is generally considered a “hardliner” by Germans, acknowledges in his most recent book that Trump has not quite mastered the art of diplomacy. Referring to Trump’s complaints that Germany does not spend enough money on defense, Bolton writes in his book “The Room Where It Happened,”

The problem, from the perspective of US credibility, steadfastness, and alliance management, was the vitriol with which Trump so often expressed his displeasure with allies’ not achieving the objective, or in some cases not even seeming to be interested in trying.⁴⁵

German Defense Expenditures and “Contributions” to NATO

Though 2018 marked a significant deterioration in the German-US relationship, the year began on a positive note. In April, Merkel paid a visit to Trump in Washington, D.C.; Noting that just a year before, Trump had refused to shake her hand, Merkel and Trump’s meeting was described as “refreshing” by *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Trump wished Merkel “congratulations” upon her fourth term as Chancellor, they shared a meal together, and journalists noted that the meeting was certainly more civilized than previous exchanges between the two world leaders. Merkel expressed understanding

⁴⁵John Bolton, *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 134.

for Trump's insistence that Germany contribute more to NATO and promised to raise defense expenditures.⁴⁶

In May, Trump told Jens Stoltenberg, General Secretary of NATO, that Germany profited too much from NATO without contributing enough. Trump also claimed that the US contributed 4.2% of its GDP to NATO, which, according to NATO data (see below) is incorrect — in reality, the U.S. contributes 3.4% of its GDP to NATO. That year, Germany was to contribute 1.3% of its GDP to military spending. The Cardiff guideline, however, established in 2014 among NATO members, requires member states to spend 2% (specifically, to reach 2% by 2024). Stromberg agreed with Trump's

⁴⁶Denkler, Thorsten. "Merkel Bei Trump - Ein Erfrischend Normales Treffen" (Merkel and Trump — a Refreshingly Normal Meeting), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/merkel-bei-trump-ein-erfrischend-normales-treffen-1.3960982-2>.

analysis; “We must do more,” he said.⁴⁷

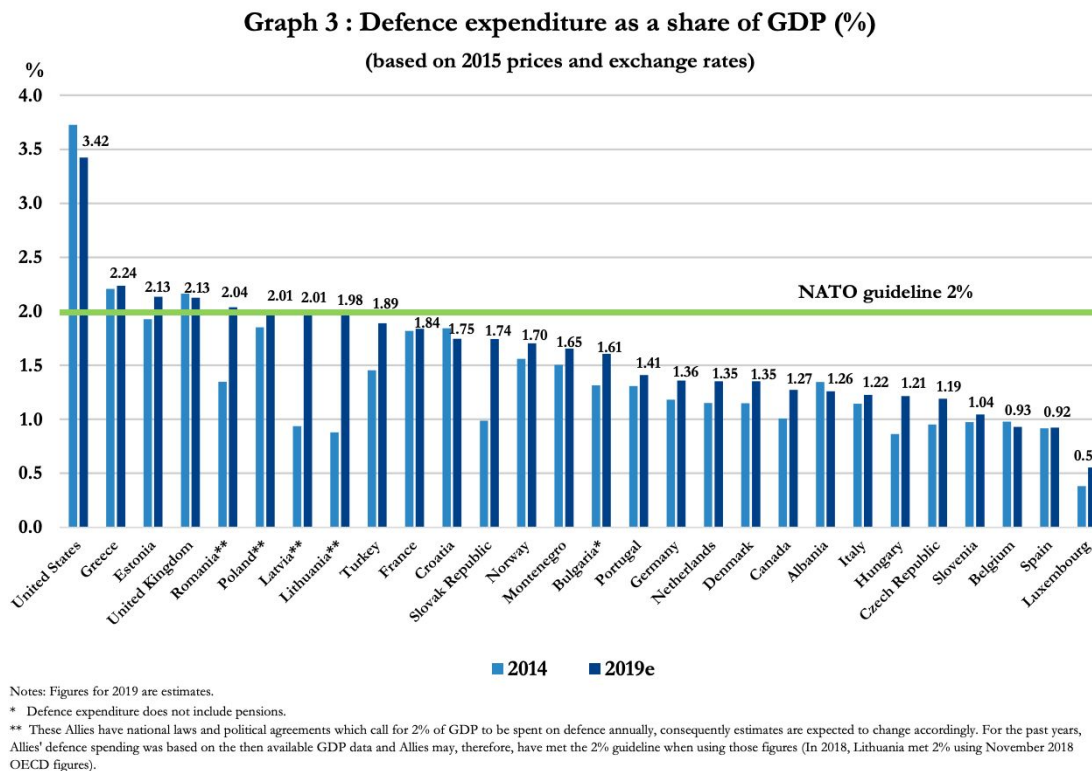


Figure 2: Defense expenditures as a share of GDP.⁴⁸

According to Bolton, Trump misused the word “contribution” to refer to Germany’s defense expenditures. “We face a persistent problem with nomenclature,” he writes. According to Bolton, the “Cardiff commitment is not about ‘contributions’ to NATO, but about aggregate defense spending.” Trump had threatened earlier to lower

⁴⁷ “Trump: Berlin Zahlt Zu Wenig Für Nato,” (Trump: Berlin Doesn’t Pay Enough Towards Nato), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 18, 2018.

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/usa-trump-berlin-zahlt-zu-wenig-fuer-nato-1.3984960>.

⁴⁸ “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2012-2019),” NATO, June 25, 2019, page 3.

https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_PR2019-069-EN.pdf

US contributions to NATO to reflect Germany's share. Whether Trump "simply misused the word 'contribution,' I could never tell," writes Bolton.

But saying he would reduce the US 'contribution' to Germany's level implied the US would drop its defense expenditures from over 4 percent of GDP by some 75 percent, which I don't think he meant.⁴⁹

Trump also turned to Twitter to express his outrage over Germany's low defense spending. On July 11, during the annual NATO summit in Brussels, he wrote,

What good is NATO if Germany is paying Russia billions of dollars for gas and energy? Why are there only 5 out of 29 countries that have met their commitment? The U.S. is paying for Europe's protection, then loses billions on Trade. Must pay 2% of GDP IMMEDIATELY, not by 2025.⁵⁰

The following day, he added,

Presidents have been trying unsuccessfully for years to get Germany and other rich NATO Nations to pay more toward their protection from Russia. They pay only a fraction of their cost. The U.S. pays tens of Billions of Dollars too much to subsidize Europe, and loses Big on Trade!

....On top of it all, Germany just started paying Russia, the country they want protection from, Billions of Dollars for their Energy needs coming out of a new

⁴⁹ Bolton, *The Room Where It Happened*, 135.

⁵⁰ <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1017093020783710209?lang=en>

pipeline from Russia. Not acceptable! All NATO Nations must meet their 2% commitment, and that must ultimately go to 4%!⁵¹

Tensions between Germany and the US escalated even further at the summit. Referring to the Nord Stream 2, a 2,360 kilometer pipeline which would increase the flow of Russian gas to Germany via the Baltic Sea, Trump accused Germany of being “totally controlled by Russia” and complained to Stoltenberg that Germany would be completely dependent on Russia for gas. Indeed, the Nordstream pipeline is controversial: European countries are worried that they will be even more dependent on Russian gas and want to prevent a scenario where gas can be used as political pressure by Russia. Ukraine in particular, as a transit country for gas, fears that it will lose transit fees. However, European countries also suspect that the US simply wants to boost its liquefied gas exports, which may explain their concern over the pipeline.⁵² The project, owned by Russia’s Gazprom PJSC — with Royal Dutch Shell and four other investors including Germany’s Uniper SE and Wintershall AG providing half of the 9.5 billion-euro (\$10.6 billion) cost — would double the capacity of the original Nord Stream which operates on an undersea route and opened in 2011.⁵³ The chairman of the

⁵¹ <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1017290478839050240?lang=en>

⁵² Brössler, Daniel, “Es Kommt Nicht Nur Schlimm, Es Kommt Katastrophal,” (It Won't Just Be Bad, It'll Be a Disaster), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 11, 2018.

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/trump-nato-gipfel-deutschland-1.4049505>.

⁵³ Shiryayevskaya, Anna and Dina Khrennikova, “Why the World Worries About Russia's Natural Gas Pipeline,” *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2020.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/why-the-world-worries-about-russias-natural-gas-pipeline/2020/06/28/3202ec10-b901-11ea-9a1d-d3db1cbe07ce_story.html.

Shareholders' Committee is Gerhard Schröder, former chancellor of Germany, which only infuriated Trump even further. "Germany — as far as I am concerned — is captive to Russia," said Trump at a press conference at the summit.

In response to Trump's allegations, Merkel later recalled her own experience when East Germany was controlled by the Soviet Union. She was "very happy" that Germany is "united in freedom" and that "we can make our own policies and make independent decisions."⁵⁴ Trump's extreme rhetoric and unusual behavior at the NATO summit — journalists noted that he stood all the way to the side at the group photo — was not well received by Germans. Nevertheless, many reluctantly agreed with his assessment of Germany's defense capabilities. In a *die Zeit* article, Joseph Joffe claims that Trump's nagging ironically overlaps with German interests. Citing countless deficiencies in the Bundeswehr — "the Navy cannot use 100 percent of its submarines, only 90 out of almost 200 Leo 2 tanks are available for use, the Air Force can only launch ten out of 182 Eurofighters" — and the low defense expenditures, Joffe argues that "German national security policy has come to an end."⁵⁵ former German Foreign

⁵⁴ Brössler, Daniel and Stefan Kornelius, "Trump Leistet Sich Eine Unverschämtheit Zu Viel," (Trump Allows Himself One Insolence Too Many), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/nato-gipfel-trump-leistet-sich-eine-unverschaeemtheit-zu-viel-1.4049897>.

⁵⁵ Joffe, Josef, "Trump Sägt an Der Nato. Umso Mehr Muss Berlin Die Bundeswehr Stärken" (Trump Cuts into NATO. Berlin Must Therefore Strengthen the Bundeswehr Even More), *ZEIT*, July 12, 2018. <https://www.zeit.de/2018/29/bundeswehr-ausruestung-etat-nato>.

Minister Joschka Fischer also stresses that Germany ought to spend more on defense. “We are too big and important to skimp on defense,” he told *der Spiegel* in 2018.⁵⁶

In November 2018, *Frankfurter Allgemeine* also reported that 43% of German participants (an 11-point increase since 2017, according to Pew Research Center⁵⁷) in a survey about defense supported raising defense spending, while 40% preferred to maintain the then current level of defense spending. Nevertheless, a majority (55%) wanted Germany to “continue to hold back” engagement in international conflicts (45% supported increased engagement). “There are many reasons why many Germans are still resisting stronger international engagement,” according to *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, including “two lost world wars, the Holocaust,” the subsequent isolationist security policy, and “the role as Europe's economic superpower with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the world.” As for the German-US relationship, a quarter of respondents “worries about the increasingly frosty transatlantic relationship... 73 percent now consider relations between Berlin and Washington to be bad.”⁵⁸

The Proposed Joint European Military

⁵⁶ von Rohr, Schult. “The U.S. President Is Destroying the American World Order’.”

⁵⁷ Poushter, Jacob, and Alexandra Castillo. “Americans, Germans Disagree on Their Relationship.”

⁵⁸ Hemicker, Lorenz. “Mehr Deutsche Für Höhere Verteidigungsausgaben.” (More Germans Support Increasing Defense Spending), *FAZ*, November 7, 2018.

<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/umfrage-mehr-deutsche-fuer-hoehere-verteidigungsausgaben-15905769.html?printPagedArticle=true>.

Efforts to establish a joint European military can be traced back to the early 1950s. The Pleven-Plan, named after former French President René Pleven, led to a proposal titled the European Defense Community (EDC). Endorsed by the United States, the plan called for a joint military force consisting of Germany, Italy, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. After three years of negotiations, the French parliament vetoed the EDC project in 1954.⁵⁹ Over the course of the second half of the 20th century, similar ideas relating to a joint European military were reintroduced by various European political leaders, including former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, former French Prime Minister Alain Juppé, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. All joint EU military operations must be approved by all participating member states; the process is long and bureaucratic, which may explain why a joint European military has not yet been formed.

Then, in early March of 2015, former President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker announced his intention to establish a European military. “You don’t establish a European army to deploy it immediately,” he explained. “But it would send Russia a clear message that we take the protection of European values seriously.” Additionally, a joint military force would reaffirm that there will never again be war among the European nations. Acknowledging that Europe’s reputation seemed to have suffered of late, especially on matters relating to foreign policy, Juncker envisioned the European army to be an additional defense force, not a competition to NATO (many

⁵⁹ Victor Gavin, “Power through Europe? The Case of the European Defence Community in France (1950-1954),” *French History* 23, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): pp. 69-87, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crn065>.

international commentators were skeptical of the proposed army's potential, especially within the context of NATO; see below). Juncker's proposal was welcomed by Merkel and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), as well as numerous politicians across the political spectrum. A joint military force would highlight European unity and a shared voice. Additionally, argued Rolf Mützenich of the SPD, if European states have thus far collaborated on matters relating to security and foreign policy, why not expand to defense as well?⁶⁰

In light of Juncker's announcement, *die Zeit* published a piece titled "Der Lange Weg Zu Einer Europäischen Armee" (The Long Way to a European Army), essentially dismissing the notion that a joint military could be accomplished in the near future. Reaching a consensus among European nations would be practically impossible, the author, Steffen Dobbert, argues; besides, the EU's track record of joint military assistance is rather questionable. Dobbert points to Germany's refusal to supply Lithuania with tanks in light of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.⁶¹ By contrast, the United States responded to the Baltic nations' concerns over Russian expansion,⁶² handing over hundreds of tanks and other vehicles to Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia,

⁶⁰ "Merkel Und Steinmeier Befürworten Idee Einer Europa-Armee," (Merkel and Steinmeier Support the Idea of a European Army), *ZEIT*, September 2015.

<https://www.zeit.de/politik/2015-03/europa-armee-frank-walter-steinmeier-spd-zustimmung>.

⁶¹Dobbert, Steffen. "Der Lange Weg Zu Einer Europäischen Armee," (The Long Way to a European Army), *ZEIT*, March 10, 2015,

<https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-03/europaeische-armee-juncker-nato-russland/seite-2>.

⁶² Birnbaum, Michael. "Baltic nations gird for Russian expansion," *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2015.

<https://yulib002.mc.yu.edu:2180/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5G0X-9PX1-JBFW-C4X0-00000-00&context=1516831>.

and stationing some 3000 soldiers in the region. “An attack on one is an attack on all,” Obama said, referring to the US’ military assistance to the Baltic nations. “So if, in such a moment, you ever ask again, ‘Who will come to help?’ you’ll know the answer - the NATO alliance, including the armed forces of the United States of America.”⁶³ Plans were made to hold joint military operations with other soldiers of NATO countries to demonstrate solidarity with the Eastern European nations. This NATO arrangement — in the heart of Europe — “was not a military campaign of the EU,” Dobbert of *die Zeit* stresses. He notes that Poland and Baltic countries supported Ukraine’s efforts against the Russian-backed separatists while EU states such as Austria and Italy remained silent.⁶⁴

Indeed, three years after Juncker’ announced his intentions to establish a joint military force, the European army was still in talks. In Strasbourg, Merkel addressed contemporary uncertainties and reaffirmed her support for a “true European army” in a plenary session in front of the EU parliament. Possibly referring to the US, Merkel said,

The times in which we could rely on others are over. That means that we Europeans ought to take control of our own destiny if we want to survive as a European community.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Dobbert, “Der Lange Weg Zu Einer Europäischen Armee.”

⁶⁵ “Bundeskanzlerin Plädiert Für Europäische Armee,” (The Chancellor Pleads for a European Army), *ZEIT*, November 13, 2018.

<https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2018-11/angela-merkel-eu-parlament-jean-claude-juncker-europa>.

Her speech represented yet another example of the EU's determination to increase dominance on the global stage.

In 2018, a preliminary version of a joint European army came to fruition. The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was signed by 25 EU member states⁶⁶, of which approximately four fifths are also members of NATO. The objective of the program, according to the PESCO website, is to "jointly arrive at a coherent full spectrum of defence capabilities" in order to "enhance the EU's capacity as an international security actor, contribute to the protection of the EU citizens and maximise the effectiveness of defence spending." PESCO is merely one of the pillars of a new system of defense in the European Union, see below for details of the EU's currency joint military program.

⁶⁶ "Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/2315," *Official Journal of the European Union*, December 11, 2017.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017D2315&from=EN>

A coherent approach from priorities to impact

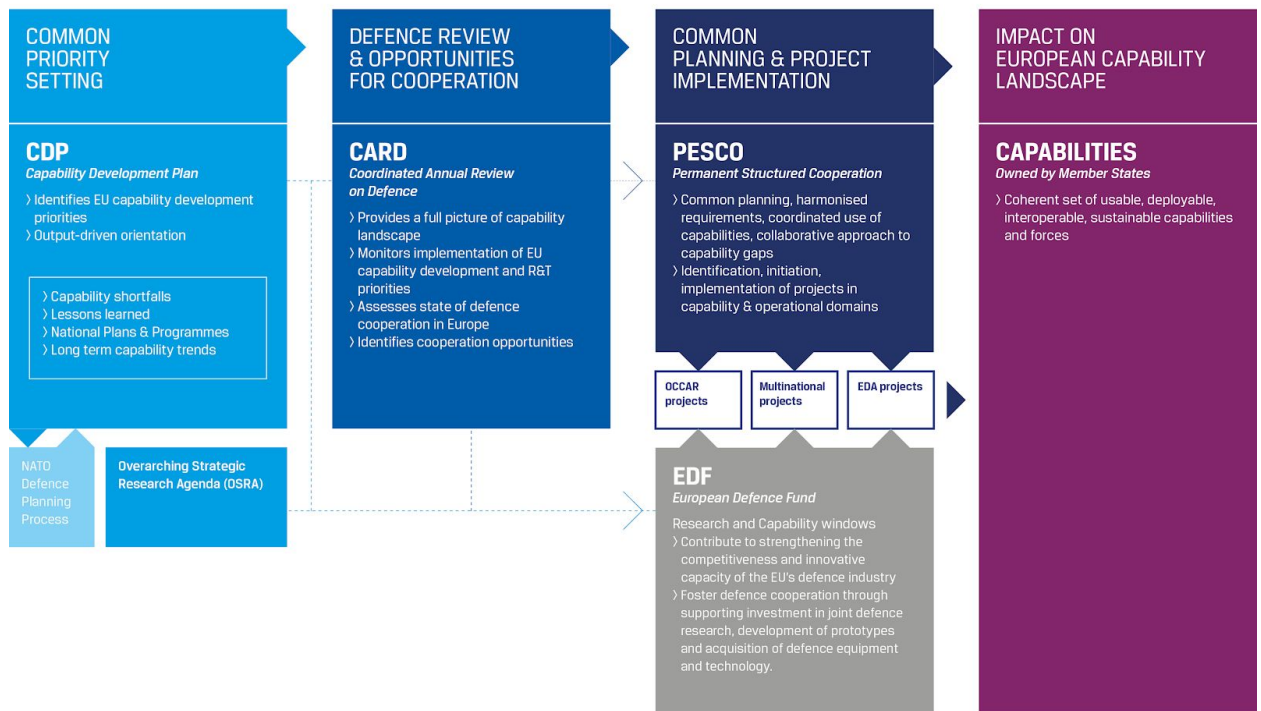


Figure 3: A coherent approach from priorities to impact.⁶⁷

The EU's efforts to develop joint military capabilities was not welcomed warmly by Trump. On the day he touched down in Paris in November 2018 to attend a commemoration marking 100 years since World War I, Trump tweeted,

President Macron of France has just suggested that Europe build its own military in order to protect itself from the U.S., China and Russia. Very insulting, but

⁶⁷ "A coherent approach from priorities to impact," European Defense Agency.

https://www.eda.europa.eu/images/default-source/images/coherence-defence-initiatives_rgb6094b23fa4d264cfa776ff000087ef0f.jpg

perhaps Europe should first pay its fair share of NATO, which the U.S. subsidizes greatly!

This was in response to a statement Macron made in an interview with Europe 1 Radio. Referring to Trump's announcement that the US would withdraw from a nuclear weapons agreement with Russia, he said,

When I see President Trump announcing that he's quitting a major disarmament treaty which was formed after the 1980s euro-missile crisis that hit Europe, who is the main victim? Europe and its security.

Emphasizing that Europe ought to protect itself with respect to China, Russia, and "even the United States of America," Macron concluded that "[w]e need a Europe which defends itself better alone, without just depending on the United States, in a more sovereign manner."⁶⁸ Trump interpreted these words as a direct threat and considered Macron's attitude double-standard-like. If Macron is so determined to strengthen Europe's defense capabilities, why not contribute more to NATO? A TIME article noted the "fierce nationalism of U.S. President Donald Trump on one side, and the passionate globalism of his host, French President Emmanuel Macron, on the other" at the ceremony in Paris. Arguing that "Europe remains heavily dependent on the U.S.

⁶⁸ Morin, Rebecca. "Trump Calls Macron's Comments on Building a European Army to Defend against US 'Insulting'," *POLITICO*, November 9, 2018.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-calls-macrons-comments-on-building-a-european-army-to-defend-against-u-s-insulting/>.

for its security,” and that European states have cut military budgets for years, the author concludes that a joint European army is “likely to lose.”⁶⁹

A formal Washington response to the proposed European army transpired in the spring of 2019. According to the *Financial Times*, Ellen Lord, US under secretary of defense, and Andrea Thompson, under secretary of state sent a letter to Federica Mogherini, a top EU diplomat, threatening “retaliation” if the Europeans implemented rules that would “restrict the involvement of US companies in pan-European military projects.” Washington, according to the *Financial Times*, was “deeply concerned” that approval of the rules for the European Defence Fund and PESCO would “produce duplication, non-interoperable military systems, diversion of scarce defence resources and unnecessary competition between Nato and the EU.” To Europeans, the American response to the development of joint military forces seemed almost hypocritical. For years, Trump had demanded that Europe — and especially Germany — boost their military capabilities. To Europeans, the new defense projects were a proper and positive implementation of Trump’s demands. Ursula von der Leyen, then Germany’s defence minister and currently president of the European Commission, argued that Europeans “are doing what our American friends have been demanding we do for years. Our task now is to convince our allies that Nato will only profit from the efforts to create a European Defence Union.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Walt, Vivienne. “Why Macron’s Dream of a Europe-Wide Army Is Likely to Fail,” *Time*, November 12, 2018. <https://time.com/5451852/european-army-emmanuel-macron-trump/>.

⁷⁰ Peel, Michael, and Guy Chazan. “US Warns against European Joint Military Project.” *Financial Times*, May 14, 2019. <https://www.ft.com/content/ad16ce08-763b-11e9-bbad-7c18c0ea0201>.

According to a 2017 Eurobarometer survey, 55% of EU respondents were either “totally in favor” or “somewhat in favor” of the establishment of a EU army. Among them, Germans were in line with the EU average — 55% of German respondents supported the establishment of an EU army.⁷¹

US Sanctions Over Nord Stream 2

In December 2019, Trump approved plans to sanction European contractors involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline running from Russia to Germany, which had reached over 90% completion at the time. *Die Zeit* noted that Democrats and Republicans seemed to agree on this particular issue; the sanctions were an attempt to “prevent the completion of the project,” thereby conveying a strong “bipartisan message” to Russia, as Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen, who introduced legislation to expand the sanctions, put it.⁷² However, Germans viewed the sanctions primarily as a threat to their energy policy and sovereignty. According to *die Zeit*, the sanctions would “not affect Russia as much, but primarily European companies and German energy interests.”⁷³

⁷¹ “Designing Europe's Future: Security and Defence.” PublicOpinion - European Commission, June 2017. <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/search/defence/surveyKy/2173>.

⁷² “USA wollen fast fertige Ostsee-Pipeline mit Sanktionen stoppen,” (USA Want to Halt Nearly Completed Baltic Sea Pipeline with Sanctions), *ZEIT*, December 12, 2019. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2019-12/nord-stream-2-usa-repraesentantenhaus-sanktionen-deutschland-russland>

⁷³ Ibid.

Although the sanctions appear to primarily affect Gazprom, the owner of the Nord Stream 2 project and a partially state-owned Russian corporation, they may be detrimental to numerous European investors as well. European giants Uniper, Wintershall Dea, Engie, OMV, and the Royal Dutch Shell are covering half of the cost of the 9.5 billion euro project. "However," wrote *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, they will only "see income once the gas flows."⁷⁴ Indeed, the Swiss-based Allseas contractor, which specializes in pipelay and subsea construction, suspended operations on the Nord Stream 2 project in the wake of American sanctions.

Süddeutsche Zeitung reported that then-Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz called the sanctions a "serious interference in the internal affairs of Germany and Europe and its own sovereignty." Nevertheless, Scholz said that it was "very unlikely" that sanctions would prevent the completion of the construction of the pipeline.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, former US Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell tweeted his support for the policy, calling the US position "pro-Europe."⁷⁶ *Die Zeit* correspondent Michael Thumann countered

⁷⁴ Bauchmüller, Michael, Silke Bigalke, Daniel Brössler, and Valentin Dornis. "Wer Am Ende in Die Röhre Gucken Könnte." (Who May Be the One to Lose Out in the End), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 13, 2019. <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/ostsee-pipeline-wer-am-ende-in-die-roehre-gucken-koennte-1.4720492>.

⁷⁵ Gammelin, Cerstin. "Berlin beharrt auf Ostsee-Pipeline" (Berlin Insists on the Baltic Sea Pipeline), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 23, 2019. <https://yulib002.mc.yu.edu:2180/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5XTB-C0T1-DXX2-P35F-00000-00&context=1516831>.

⁷⁶ <https://twitter.com/richardgrenell/status/1208307557468647424?lang=en>

Grenell's statement, arguing that the sanctions would "split the EU and isolate Germany."⁷⁷

Tensions between Berlin and Washington, D.C. escalated even further in June 2020, when Republican Senators Ted Cruz, Tom Cotton, and Ron Johnson sent a letter to Mukran Port, located in Sassnitz, Germany, threatening "crushing legal and economic sanctions" unless the port ceases to provide goods and services to the Nord Stream 2 project. The senators wrote,

The U.S. government knows that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is near completion and considers it a grave threat to European energy security and American national security. Investments in and support of the pipeline moreover introduce risks to the hygiene of the U.S. financial system and reputational risks to all companies involved in related transactions, including any American companies. The administration and Congress, and both parties, are united in their commitment to ensure that the pipeline remains uncompleted and those threats are never realized.

Concluding their letter, Cruz, Cotton, and Johnson warned that the port would destroy its "future financial viability" unless it ceases its support for the pipeline project.⁷⁸ The letter, particularly its strong language, sparked outrage among German

⁷⁷ Thumann, Michael. "Bloß Keine Absprachen." (No More Agreements), *ZEIT*, December 26, 2019.

<https://www.zeit.de/2020/01/nord-stream-2-ostsee-pipeline-europa-energiepolitik>.

⁷⁸<https://www.cruz.senate.gov/files/documents/Letters/2020.08.05%20Final%20Mukran%20Port%20Letter.pdf>

leaders. “This is absolutely outrageous — both in terms of tone and content,” Niels Annen, minister of state at the German Federal Foreign Office, told the ZDF. Annen acknowledged that one may oppose the political implications of the pipeline, however, such sentiment could not possibly justify “threatening one of your most important friends and allies with sanctions” and “using that language.”⁷⁹ Similarly, Christian Pegel, energy minister of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the northern state in which Mukran Port is located, called the letter “blackmail” and condemned the letter for its “Wild West” attitude.⁸⁰

According to reports from NDR and ZDF, among others, the factory in Mukran has ceased operations related to the pipeline (specifically, completing the construction of steel pipes). Two Russian ships docked in the area will be completing the assignment instead, per these reports.⁸¹

The Nord Stream 2 dispute, along with its economic and political ramifications, reflects the fundamental clash in attitudes of German and American leadership. As *Politico* reported, “Merkel refused to even engage with critics of the project,” maintaining that the pipeline was a “‘business project,’ suggesting that political

⁷⁹ “Annen: US-Drohung ‘Absolute Unverschämtheit.’” (Annen: The US Threat Is an “Absolute Insolence”), *ZDF*, August 7, 2020.

<https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/wirtschaft/usa-sanktionen-sassnitz-nord-stream-2-100.html>.

⁸⁰ “Nord Stream 2: Kritik an Drohbrief Von US-Senatoren” (Nord Stream 2: Criticism on the Threatening Letter from US Senators), *NDR*, August 7, 2020.

<https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/Nord-Stream-2-Kritik-an-Drohbrief-dreier-US-Senatoren,nordstream408.html>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

intervention would be inappropriate.” Citing previous Russian violations of international law, such as the hacking of the Bundestag or the assassination of a Chechnyan rebel in Berlin, and the subsequent silence from German authorities, the author argues that German officialdom has maintained its defensive stance once again with regard to the pipeline. While German officials have succeeded in turning “Nord Stream 2 into a debate about Trump,” the author argues, it is important to note that Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee for president, too, has expressed his disdain for the project, calling it a “bad project” for Europe in 2016.⁸²

Outrage over US interference in German affairs seemed to have united German parties; anti-Trump rhetoric allowed them to dodge the fundamental question surrounding the political implications of the Nord Stream 2 project. While this approach seemed effective for German leadership, not all Germans supported it. In an article titled “Verzockt” (Gambled Away), *Die Zeit* notes that leaders of all major political parties in Germany expressed concern over American sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 project. Nevertheless, the author writes, “the opponents of the pipeline always had the better arguments on their side.” Gas consumption in Europe has not increased, and why depend on Russia “while sanctions are being imposed on Russia for annexing

⁸² Karnitschnig, Matthew. “Germany Blames Trump in Pursuit of Nord Stream 2 Pipeline.” *POLITICO*, August 12, 2020.

https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-plays-trump-card-in-pursuit-of-russian-nord-stream-2-pipeline-dream/?utm_source=POLITICO.EU.

Crimea and destabilizing Ukraine?" Why is Germany choosing to cooperate with Russia, the author asks, instead of listening to the concerns of Baltic nations?⁸³

German coverage on Nord Stream 2 sanctions mostly focused on the questionable rhetoric of American leaders, as well as their alleged interference in German affairs. Few articles addressed the political implications of German dependence on Russian gas or countered American arguments against the pipeline. As in countless other German-US relationship issues, German commentators were mostly troubled by the manner with which American leaders dealt with German affairs, not necessarily the arguments or policies themselves.

The Plan to Withdraw US Troops from Germany

In June 2020, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Trump had directed the Pentagon to remove thousands of troops from Germany. The removal order would reduce the US military presence in Germany by 9,500 from the 34,000 service members who were stationed there at the time (the only country hosting more US troops than Germany is Japan)⁸⁴. Furthermore, Trump ordered to cap the number of American troops in Germany at any one time at 25,000; currently, troop levels can rise up to

⁸³Posener, Alan. "Verzockt," (Gambled Away), *ZEIT*, August 5, 2020.

<https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2020-08/nord-stream-2-us-sanktionen-deutsche-politiker-patriotismus-pipeline/komplettansicht>.

⁸⁴Krüger, Paul-Anton. "US-Armee in Deutschland - Kalte Kosten-Nutzen-Rechnung" (Us Army in Germany - Cold Cost-Benefit Analysis), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 12, 2019.

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/us-truppen-deutschland-grenell-abzug-1.4559036>.

52,000, depending on training exercises and unit rotations.⁸⁵ The German government was not formally informed of Trump's plans to withdraw US soldiers from German soil prior to the publication of the Wall Street article.

The decision is widely considered a move of retaliation for Germany's low defense expenditures. Trump first toyed with the idea to withdraw US troops from military bases stationed in Germany during the NATO summit in 2018. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* already noted in 2019 that Richard Grenell, who served as US Ambassador to Germany at the time, criticized Germany for focusing on domestic issues while American taxpayers bear the brunt of supporting US soldiers stationed in Germany.⁸⁶ According to *Politico*, Trump accused Germany of being "delinquent in their payments to NATO." Hence, Trump said, "we are putting the number down to 25,000 soldiers."⁸⁷ Contrary to Trump's statements, Germany does not *owe* payments to NATO, an error Bolton elaborates on in his book.

American journalists and scholars criticized Trump's decision for dismissing the significant role of US troops in Germany in matters of national security. Germany is host to some of the US military's most important strategic bases. The Africa Command as well as the European Command are located in Stuttgart, Ramstein Air Base (which

⁸⁵ Gordon, Michael R., and Gordon Lubold. "Trump to Pull Thousands of U.S. Troops From Germany." *The Wall Street Journal*, June 5, 2020.

https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-directs-u-s-troop-reduction-in-germany-11591375651?mod=politics_lead_pos5.

⁸⁶ Krüger. "US-Armee in Deutschland - Kalte Kosten-Nutzen-Rechnung."

⁸⁷ Cohen, Max. "Trump Confirms He Wants to Pull Thousands of U.S. Troops from Germany."

POLITICO, June 15, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/15/trump-germany-military-320560>.

oversees drone operations in Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere) is headquartered in Rhineland-Palatinate, and the largest Army Ammunition Depot outside of the US is based in Miesau — these facilities are all vital to US national security. Furthermore, the US is currently building a new medical center in Weilerbach, at the cost of \$990 million.

Wichtigste US-Stützpunkte in Deutschland

● Armee ● Luftwaffe ● Kommandoeinrichtung ● Depot ● Krankenhaus ● Übungsplatz

- 1 **Dülmen**
- 2 **Spangdahlem** Luftwaffenstützpunkt
- 3 **Baumholder**
- 4 **Miesau** Munitionsdepot
- 5 **Landstuhl** Militärkrankenhaus
- 6 **Ramstein** Luftwaffenstützpunkt
- 7 **Wiesbaden-Erbenheim**
- 8 **Griesheim**
- 9 **Mannheim**
- 10 **Germersheim**
- 11 **Böblingen**
Hauptquartier Marineinfanterie
- 12 **Stuttgart** Hauptquartier Europa-Kommando und Afrika-Kommando
- 13 **Illesheim**
- 14 **Ansbach**
- 15 **Grafenwöhr**
- 16 **Vilseck**
- 17 **Hohenfels**



Figure 4: A 2019 *Süddeutsche Zeitung* illustration of the US' most important army, Air Force, command center, depot, medical, and training area facilities in Germany.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Krüger. "US-Armee in Deutschland - Kalte Kosten-Nutzen-Rechnung."

The framework for overseas basing was established in 1943 in order to project American power during peacetime and allow the US military to engage in attacks far away from US soil. Trump's decision to withdraw US troops from Germany, therefore, "betrays a lack of understanding about US force posture in Europe," writes Michael John Williams, director of the International relations Program at New York University, in *Foreign Policy*. Williams argues that,

U.S. bases in Europe support U.S. national security first and foremost. Without them U.S. force projection would be difficult, some operations would be impossible, and stability in Europe would be questionable.⁸⁹

This sentiment seems to be shared by the American public as well. According to the Pew Research Center, Americans "see their country's military bases in Germany as much more important to the security of their country than Germans do." 85% of American respondents to a 2019 survey consider the military bases "important to the U.S.'s security interests," and "nearly six-in-ten see them as very important," according to the Pew Research Center report. Germans, however, are more divided on this particular issue. "While about half of Germans see U.S. military bases as important for their country's national security, 45% disagree."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Williams, Michael John. "The United States Needs German Bases More Than Germany Does." *Foreign Policy*, June 9, 2020.

https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/09/germany-troops-withdrawal-nato-trump/?_ga=2.257109707.1527744519.1595952914-1101943386.1595952914.

⁹⁰Pew Research Center, "Americans and Germans Differ in Their Views of Each Other and the World," March, 2020. <https://bit.ly/34zM8ph>.

Both Democratic and Republican lawmakers also value American military presence in Germany. In June, 22 House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Republicans sent a letter to Trump arguing that reducing and capping the number of US troops in Germany would “significantly damage U.S. national security” and “strengthen the position of Russia to our detriment.” Russian presence on the European continent seemed to greatly trouble the letter’s signatories. They wrote,

In Europe, the threats posed by Russia have not lessened, and we believe that signs of a weakened U.S. commitment to NATO will encourage further Russian aggression and opportunism. In addition, the overall limit on troops would prevent us from conducting the exercises that are necessary for the training and readiness of our forces and those of our allies. The troop limit would also significantly reduce the number of U.S. forces that can flow through Germany for deployment to bases around the world, causing serious logistical challenges.⁹¹

To German officials, however, Russia was not the main concern. Instead, German politics and media focused on the symbolic significance of the US military’s presence on German soil and its role in transatlantic relations. In July, the governors of Bavaria, Hesse, Baden-Wuerttemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate — the states in which the largest number of troops are stationed — sent out an official letter to 13 senators and congressmen, including Mitt Romney and Chris Coons, urging them to prevent Trump

⁹¹Thornby, Mac. Letter to President Donald Trump, June 9, 2020.

<https://republicans-armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/US%20Troops%20Withdrawal%20from%20Germany.pdf>

from carrying out the withdrawal. “For decades, Americans and Germans have worked together to build and develop these unique and highly capable structures,” the governors wrote, referring to the military facilities in Germany. “They provide the necessary foundation for a partnership-based contribution to peace in Europe and the world, to which we all share a common commitment.”⁹²

While many viewed Trump’s announcement to withdraw American troops from Germany as part of his strategy to pressure Germany to raise defense expenditures, others, including *die Zeit*,⁹³ speculated that his move was in fact a response to Merkel’s rejection of his invitation to the 46th G7 summit. The summit was initially scheduled to take place on June 10, 2020 at Camp David, but Trump announced in March that it would be replaced by a video conference in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. On May 20, however, when the number of total confirmed coronavirus cases in the US reached 1,559 million⁹⁴, Trump tweeted,

Now that our Country is “Transitioning back to Greatness”, I am considering rescheduling the G-7, on the same or similar date, in Washington, D.C., at the

⁹² Associated Press. “German Governors Urge Congress to Stop Troop Withdrawal Plan.” *The New York Times*, July 20, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2020/07/20/world/europe/ap-eu-germany-us-military.html>.

⁹³ “Ehemaliger Botschafter Bezweifelt Abzug Von US-Truppen” (The Former Ambassador's Doubts in the Us Troop Withdrawal), *ZEIT*, June 8, 2020.

https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2020-06/us-militaer-truppenabzug-donald-trump-john-kornblum?utm_source=twitter_zonaudev_int.

⁹⁴ COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU).

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

legendary Camp David. The other members are also beginning their COMEBACK. It would be a great sign to all - normalization!

Despite Trump's insistence on maintaining "normalization," Merkel declined his invitation to the 46th G7 summit, citing the "the overall pandemic situation." According to *Politico*,

Merkel's refusal to attend the summit in person risks scuppering Trump's attempts to present the gathering as a landmark moment drawing a line under the lockdowns and travel bans imposed to fight the coronavirus pandemic.⁹⁵

After Macron and Johnson (who had contracted the coronavirus in April⁹⁶) told Trump that they would prefer an in-person G7 summit over a video conference, the event was postponed until at least September. In July, *Spiegel* revealed that Trump invited Finance Minister Olaf Scholz and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas to Washington, D.C. after Merkel canceled her partaking in the G7 summit; both Scholz and Heiko declined.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Karnitschnig, Matthew, David M. Herszenhorn, Jacopo Barigazzi, and Andrew Gray. "Merkel Rebuffs Trump Invitation to G7 Summit." *POLITICO*, June 2, 2020.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-rebuffs-donald-trump-invitation-to-g7-summit/>.

⁹⁶ "Coronavirus: Boris Johnson Says 'It Could Have Gone Either Way'." *BBC*, April 12, 2020.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-52262012>.

⁹⁷ Gebauer, Matthias, and Christoph Schult. "G7-Gipfel: Maas Und Scholz Wollen Nicht Zu Trump." (Maas and Scholz Won't Visit Trump), *DER SPIEGEL*, July 9, 2020.

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/g7-gipfel-europaeer-geben-donald-trump-einen-korb-a-c41887e1-ae7-471d-baf6-a0e00dc5c1fa>.

An aide to Democratic Presidential Candidate Joe Biden told *Reuters* in July 2020 that if elected president, Biden would reverse Trump's decision to withdraw US troops from Germany.⁹⁸ "It is quite possible that it won't be that bad in the end," wrote Konstantin von Hammerstein in *der Spiegel*. However, he argues, Biden's plans to reverse Trump's decision may give Germans a false sense of security. Referring to low German defense expenditures, he adds, "No US president, even if his name is Joe Biden, will let the Germans get away with neglecting their alliance obligations in the long term."⁹⁹

Conclusion

An examination of German media coverage and surveys suggests that German attitudes towards the US worsened during Trump's presidency. The decline in German attitudes towards the US and the weakening of German-US relations emerged as a result of two related factors. First, German and American leadership differed greatly in their approaches towards foreign policy and multilateralism. Second, Trump's rhetoric and mode of communicating relating to foreign policy provoked German politicians.

⁹⁸ Ax, Joseph, and Trevor Hunnicutt. "Exclusive: Biden to Review Trump Decision to Cut Troops in Germany If Elected." *Reuters*, July 9, 2020.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-biden-germany-exclusive/exclusive-biden-to-review-trump-decision-to-cut-troops-in-germany-if-elected-idUSKBN24A293>.

⁹⁹ von Hammerstein, Konstantin. "US-Truppenabzug Aus Deutschland: Trumps Rache an Merkel" (US Troop Withdrawal from Germany: Trump's Revenge on Merkel), *DER SPIEGEL*, July 29, 2020.

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/us-truppenabzug-donald-trumps-rache-an-angela-merkel-a-cd7e7b47-8420-4fcf-b7fb-fe87ef34e10b>.

These factors became apparent while examining numerous critical junctures and issues that were addressed during Trump's presidency; the US' withdrawal from the Iran Deal, German defense expenditures, NATO meetings, the proposed joint European military force, Nord Stream 2 and American sanctions on Germany, and Trump's decision to withdraw American troops from Germany.

Despite the mixed feeling towards the Iran Deal among the German public, German politicians and diplomats viewed the deal as a representation of the potential of international diplomacy. When Trump announced that he would withdraw from the deal, German leaders were outraged over the "brutal manner"¹⁰⁰ with which he backed out, and attempted to save the deal, to no avail. On multiple occasions, Trump turned to Twitter to express his dissatisfaction regarding German policies, including low defense expenditures of Germany and other NATO members and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. German leaders viewed Trump's demands as an infringement on their sovereignty. Furthermore, Trump's rhetoric at the NATO summit — he accused Germany of being "totally controlled by" and "captive to" Russia — led to further tensions between the two countries. When European officials were in the midst of discussing a joint European military force, Trump tweeted that the idea was "insulting," and US officials threatened "retaliation." German officials were not formally informed about Trump's order to the Pentagon to withdraw 9,500 troops from Germany; they learned about this development from a Wall Street Journal article. Furthermore, the German government was outraged when Republican Senators Ted

¹⁰⁰ "Trump Strikes a Deep Blow to Trans-Atlantic Ties," *DER SPIEGEL International*.

Cruz, Tom Cotton, and Ron Johnson threatened the Mukran Port with sanctions for their involvement in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Notably, German politicians directly addressed the strongly-worded language of the letter, arguing that its tone and content were unfitting for correspondence among allies.

According to numerous surveys, Germans are divided on many of the issues that provoked Trump, including the Iran Deal and the proposed joint European military force. Nevertheless, it was the manner with which American leaders dealt with German affairs that troubled Germans, not merely the disputes over policies. According to German reports, the German-US relationship was strained under Obama as well, but surveys suggest that this did not overwhelmingly influence German sentiment towards the president and the US. Despite the NSA surveillance affair and Obama's handling of the refugee crisis, most Germans had "positive memories of Barack Obama" in 2016, according to *die Welt*.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, German officials did not share the urgency regarding Russian power in Europe with their American counterparts. Time and again, Trump and members of the American government cited the threat coming from Russia as the reason for their demands with respect to defense expenditures and Nord Stream 2. Nevertheless, Germans continued to view these demands as interference in internal matters, and very few articles addressed the political implications of German-Russian cooperation on the pipeline.

¹⁰¹ "Umfrage: Diesen US-Präsidenten Würden Die Deutschen Wählen," *Die Welt*.

As the November 2020 presidential election approaches, various issues, including the future of American troops in Germany and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, as well as their potential consequences for German-US relations, remain unclear. Whether the future American president is a Democrat or a Republican, he will have to address many self-inflicted wounds in the German-US alliance.

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