# Breaking the Taboo of the Iron Cross:

# German Strategic Culture and the War in Ukraine

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# Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of the War in Ukraine in 2022 on Germany's strategic culture. I argue that this event has generated a strategic shock with the potential to trigger a total shift in Germany's deep-rooted strategic culture, utilizing first and third generation definitions of the concept, and applying theories of strategic shock to it which demonstrate how this phenomenon has potential to break strategic cultures at rates much faster than assumed in the initial scholarly work on the subject. This research looks at the era from the Kosovo War up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in order to get a full picture of the endurance of German strategic culture, the allowance of aberrations in strategic culture, and to show how the current situation demonstrates enough of a difference from these previous scenarios and constitutes a deep enough strategic shock to change the nation's strategic culture. I determine that given the international interventions and non-interventions of the past twenty-three years, Germany is shown to have behaved almost exclusively within the parameters of its strategic culture, and only with the outbreak of war in Ukraine has it found a catalyst to change it. Ultimately, I build a case that strategic culture can change at a much faster pace when presented with the right set of strategic shock circumstances.

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# 1 Introduction

If German strategic culture is a metaphorical glove, the War in Ukraine is a hand with six fingers. The reunified Germany's attitude towards military deployments and intervention in conflicts more generally was seen to be breaking the constraints of the Second World War's taboos and convictions in the late 1990s (Longhurst, 2018, 56), and yet the course of events in the past decade have shown that German strategic culture is a much harder shell to break. Indeed, works by Alastair Johnston (1999, 34) and Colin Gray (1999, 52) assert that change in strategic culture is something that occurs slowly, over a long period of time. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, shows the potential of the phenomenon of strategic shock in breaking even the most deeply rooted contemporary strategic cultures- that of Germany. The first year of this war points to being the proverbial watershed moment in changing Germany's long-standing issues with use of force, its armed forces, and conflict involvement. After this full year of war, Germany's shaky and erratic response would seem be the harbinger of drastic change. The question currently developing is whether or not this war will truly prove to be the strategic shock necessary for a change in German strategic culture. This research thus asks: how does the Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 change Germany's strategic culture and explain it's erratic response?

Germany, for all of its timid and multilateral approaches to conflict issues, has created an interesting set of examples to put against the current War in Ukraine. Germany's foreign policy choices in regard to strategic shocks in the first two decades of the twenty-first century offer some consistencies in spite of the variety of scenarios that played out. The consistent pattern of non-use of force and diplomacy over all other options remained firm- even instances such as the involvement in the war against the Islamic State did not yield a direct combat role for Germany

in spite of the direct threat ISIS was seen to pose towards Europe (*Bundeswehreinsatz im Kampf gegen IS-Terror*, Deutscher Bundestag, 2015).

Strategic culture has acted as a metaphorical comfort zone for Germany since reunification, and it has remained very firmly attached to its multilateral approach to conflict and avoidance of German boots, and very often German weapons in general, reaching an active battlefield. None of the twenty-first century's conflicts brought about a notably unique reaction from Germany- until now. Attempts to address the War in Ukraine via a multilateral approach are evident, as will be seen further on. The current War in Ukraine stands out from previous conflicts and interventions in its scale, proximity to both the EU and its direct effect on European economics and energy security. More so than any prior event, this is a true strategic shock.

The driving vehicle for this research is the effect of strategic shock on strategic culture, and making the case that the war playing out now is this shock event necessary to create a watershed moment for German foreign and security policy- a moment of fundamental change. The War in Ukraine checks off all of the boxes in that it is abrupt in its nature, arguably causing severe enough trauma to nullify Germany's existing strategic culture, changing its preconceived core beliefs, and ushering in new policies and practices (Longhurst, 2005, 18). The shock of the War in Ukraine has seemingly done just that- opened the door to policy-making opportunities and given Germany's executive branch "time to shine" (Volker Kronenburg, DW, 2022).

This research utilizes a longitudinal case study approach to the topic of Germany's strategic culture by analyzing the nation's foreign policy actions in the period from the Kosovo intervention up to the first year of the War in Ukraine in 2022-2023, searching for connections and contrasts between them and the modern case of the War in Ukraine while showing a continued endurance of German strategic culture up until then. The premise is based on the

assertion that since the beginning of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, Germany's response has been wrought with dramatic dialogue but followed by delayed and apprehensive military aid and riddled with criticisms from the each and every direction. Germany's deciding role in much of what can and cannot be sent to Ukraine (for example Leopard Main Battle Tanks) has additionally been a hot button topic as well. Overall, Germany's aversion to involvement in ongoing conflicts- a key component of its strategic culture- has become a crucial fixture of the reassessment of its role in NATO, the EU, and the global stage that has been brought about by this war.

# 1 Literature Review and Methodology

## *1.1 Literature Review*

Crucial to understanding German foreign policy in general is the utilization of strategic culture, creating an understanding of where the concept holds true, and where it can be falsified. Alastair Johnston defines strategic culture as a "system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long- lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious."[1] (1995, 46) Johnston's two-part "system of symbols" breaks strategic culture into assumptions about the strategic environment (and in a deeper sense, the role of warfare in general) and about options in dealing with that environment, making the concept largely explanatory to understand state behavior. Ken Booth asserts similarly that strategic culture is the shaping, but not the determining factor in how an actor interacts with its peers in the environment. (2005, 25)

A nations environment is crucial, the United States for example enjoyed conditions of "near total security" due to transoceanic distance from opponents and unchallenged industry (Gray, 1981, 29), and can be contrasted with Germany by Josef Joffe- "What does a nation do with its liberated power in the post-bipolar age when the 40-year-old strategic threat has disappeared that previously posed all the major questions and delivered most of the major answers?" (Joffe quoted in Heurlin, 1996, 261). In the most joyously simple terms, Colin Gray summarized strategic culture fifteen years after initiating the concept, as a reflection of "national

[1] Johnston paraphrases Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as a cultural system in *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 1973.

styles." Paraphrasing his description of American strategic culture, it refers to modes of thought and action with respect to force, derived from perception of the national historical experience, aspiration for self-characterization and from a nation's unique experiences (geography, political philosophy, of civic culture, and "way of life") that characterize citizens of a given nation. Gray's American example describes strategic culture as the realm in which strategy and defense policy choices are made (1981, 22).

*Germany and the Use of Force* from Kenny Longhurst explores the evolution and presence of modern German strategic culture. He studies the 1990s as a time of transition in German strategic culture where "a greater willingness to use armed force emerged" gradually from non-involvement in the First Gulf War to the involvement in Kosovo at the end of the decade (Longhurst, 2018, 56). Longhurst earlier delved into German strategic culture in 2005, finding that notions of credibility and responsibility caused it to play a facilitating role in the shift in German security policy- the same lessons of the past that brought about statements beginning with "responsibility leads us to…" or "history does not permit us to…", are also what brought about the paradigmatic shift in the 1990s which lead to increased out-of-area troop deployments. (Longhurst, 2005, 148) By this analysis the strategic culture itself, in conjunction with the events in the Balkans and East Timor, brought forth a change in Germany's posture. Notable as well in Longhurst's two works is the analysis of the political parties' influence and power in orchestrating change in strategic culture through the 1990s- hinting at the role of elite influence in strategic culture.

Crucial in the realm of strategic culture is the role played by a nations' elites, Pietro Pirani takes on this topic and explores their role in manipulating responses and courses of action- whether the elites' actions are tied to a cultural setting or exogenous to a culture. Lack of further

explanation done here risks, as Pirani points out, opening the door to potentially falsifying strategic culture theories, and reaffirming realist concepts. (Pirani, 2016, 515). Pirani concludes that culture is sustained not by individuals sharing habits, but by independent actors modifying their individual responses as they interact with others, in order to sustain a shared practice." (Pirani, 2016, 518 and Barnes, 2001, 24) This leaves the door open to the idea that a nation's elites can exist outside the bubble of a strategic culture and are free to influence and manipulate this culture. Providing a modern example of this ability is the neoconservative faction in the United States using the response to the 9/11 attacks to steer the nation into invading Iraq (Schmidt and Williams, 2008, 192). This concept of elite influence/manipulation has circulated in literature since Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* in 1957 and echoed by Booth 67 years later. Huntington highlights the professional militarism that gripped the Germanic peoples' strategic and cultural thinking up until the end of the Second World War; Booth asserts that strategic culture is the aggregation of elite attitudes and behaviors. To this specific end date, while war was not something to be glorified, it was undoubtedly inevitable. (Huntington, 1957; Booth, 2005, 25) Running in stark contrast to the "never again" attitude towards warfare in modern Germany, Huntington's work also lays out a good picture of how elites can affect strategic culture.

Elite influence on strategic culture can be linked to challenges nations face, as Sten Rynning's work on the future of European Union strategic culture highlights. Namely, the issue of illegitimacy and disassociation between the elites of the EU and the population will stymie the effectiveness of governments and limit their influence (Rynning, 2003, 491), by this logic one can contend that within a given nation, weak elite influence could fail to bring about effective change in a nation's strategic culture. A very contemporary example of apparent disconnect

between a nation's elites and the population at large is Germany's controversial choices to send Leopard 2 Main Battle Tanks (MTBs) to Ukraine in January 2023. The government decision to send eighteen of the vehicles has met with, as of 25 February 2023, 44% of those polled against the decision and only 41% in favor (DW, 2023), reflecting a disconnect between the nation's decision-making body and the population in general.

Strategic culture, importantly for this essay, must not be thought of as a constraining force, but rather to utilize an explanation from Gray, a sort of box of normalcy for nations to operate in. Gray gives the examples of Britain and the United States; Britain, with a maritime strategic culture, still gravitated towards protracted ground warfare with the British Expeditionary Force in the First World War. The United States, largely with an isolationist strategic culture, found itself projecting its power into the First and Second World Wars, and finally leading a coalition of its own in NATO. Strategic culture "provides context, even when the final choice is all but counter cultural." (Gray, 1999, 59) Thought of in this context, the working definition of strategic culture for this research is that it is a force which can guide and limit state behavior, but is not the be all and end all- allowing for the individual influence of elites as mentioned above, and for the influence of internal and exogenous shocks to the system- up to and including the extent of changing a strategic culture.

For this research, the link between strategic culture and strategic behavior is key. Gray asserts that there is always a link between behavior and culture, regardless of preferences of environment or scenario. For example, if the Russians are operating at sea- outside their traditional zone of operation- they will still behave in ways that are characteristically Russian. (Gray, 1999, 63) But when does behavior signify a change in culture, and how abrupt can change manifest itself? Germany's strategic culture worked for it over the course of centuries, and only

in the last nearly eighty years has it seen an abrupt, rolling changes- in the form of the Second World War's results, the partition, its Cold War strategy, and now the post-Cold War realities. It is hoped that this research will find where the flaws in the EU's "ethical and enlightened" foreign policy exist in respect to Germany (Igumnova, 2011, 261), and where this cultural change visible over the course of the War in Ukraine has its roots.

The vehicle for changing strategic culture is that of external shock theory- among different scholars appearing as strategic shock, or exogenous shock -and will be applied to select events over the course of the last two decades, identifying their respective impacts on German government structure and foreign policy. Pirani utilizes elements of Duffield and Berger's works on strategic culture and defines it as "challenges brought by the international system, through wars, revolutions and economic crises, [that have] such an impact on existing beliefs as to undermine past historical narratives and force the construction of new ones." (Berger, 1998a, pp. 17–8 and Duffield, 1998, p. 23 in Pirani, 2016, 513) A sharp example of the effect of elites and policymakers on strategic culture can be found in the US response to the 9/11 attacks, namely the opportunistic pounce into policymaking by the neoconservatives as a result of that strategic shock. (Schmidt and Williams, 2008, 192) If strategic culture is a process as Olivier Schmitt asserts in a constructivist sense, then external shocks act as fundamental change in this process. While it is generally agreed that shocks are both infrequent and take time, change occurring quickly and in quick succession calls for the study of the decision-making elite- something typically overlooked in the constructivist field (Schmitt, 2012, 61).

The notion of strategic shock is key in John Lantis' examination of strategic culture in the context of the Kosovo War. For him, the scale of the shock must be enough to serve "as a catalyst for consideration of policy options outside the traditional bounds of German strategic

culture" (Lantis, 2002, 38). Moving forward for Lantis, the shock additionally must foster internal challenges (e.g., a nation with aversion to military force and support for democracy having to use military force in *defense* of democracy). This clash of strategic cultural values is a key component to strategic cultural change (Lantis, 2002, 39) and one which will be revisited throughout this research. Changes in the international environment being catalysts of change are brought to the fore in several studies by the RAND Group highlighted by Gray and Contemporary Security Policy Journal as a factor that can facilitate strategic cultural change in a state (Gray, 1981, 22 and Tappe and Doeser, 2021, 464). For nations with a firmly ingrained strategic culture like Germany and Japan, Duffield asserts that any change "from the core principles of their political-military culture is, however, likely only if there is a major shock to the system that persuades the countries' leaders that *their approach to defense and national security has been a failure*" (Duffield, 1996, 23).[2] Coming away from the existing literature, one can appreciate that a strategic shock has the potential to manifest change in a strategic culture if the cocktail of factors in this shock include internal policy challenges, clashing (or failing) values, and significant change in the external security environment.

When comparing the above scholar's works to the case of Germany's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, we find that strategic shock is indeed the variable that has the potential to rapidly and thoroughly change Germany's deeply ingrained and previously unwavering strategic culture. This is not an attempt to undermine the foundational works on strategic culture by Gray and Johnston, but to demonstrate the effect of a powerful enough strategic shock on a strategic culture- namely the manner and speed at which it is thought to change. The literature gap begging to be filled then is that of the relationship between strategic

[2] Emphasis added.

culture and strategic shock, showing that strategic culture, which had been thought to take years to develop and change, can ultimately make significant headway in doing so over the course of just a year.

### *1.2 Methodology*

This thesis utilizes a longitudinal case study approach to researching Germany's contemporary strategic culture and the effect that Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has had on it. This approach is best suited for this research as our constant case (Germany) is looked at over the course of several examples of conflict since 1999 (listed below), analyzing its decision-making process and rationale in each case. This reinforces the overall claim of this thesis, that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has dealt such a strategic shock to German strategic culture that it has been irrevocably changed. Analysis of the prior events shows the enduring power of that strategic culture, why it has not changed in an earlier shock event, and how this culture had solidified itself over the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The War in Ukraine, being a contemporary and developing topic, is still short of much academic literature on the matter. Resources utilized here are contemporary works analyzing German strategic culture, studies of German military capability, relevant news/media articles, and select official discourses in these resources by policy makers in Germany and other relevant nations. The structure of this research takes inspiration from Tannenwald's approach to researching the "Nuclear Taboo" in US defense policy which took on studying several cases of use and non-use in the nuclear era, and Olivier Schmitt's analysis of German participation and non-participation in peacekeeping missions in Africa in 2006 and 2007.

"One of the greatest strengths of case studies is the opportunity to achieve high levels of construct validity," (Bennet, 2004, 34) and for this reason the longitudinal case study approach

has been applied to this particular thesis. Following a definition given by the University of Surrey, each item (in this case, a strategic shock or international intervention case) is analyzed using the same subject (Germany), across the course of six cases (University of Surrey, 2000). The case study approach to this topic is best suited as it allows heuristic identification of variables encountered and examination of causal mechanisms within the cases analyzed, as well as building links between historical explanations and the contemporary case of Germany (Bennett, 2004, 34).

Competing ideas of strategic culture are set aside in this essay and the general ideas of Johnston and Gray are utilized and applied to this case. Both scholars provide a sound foundation to build this case upon, as has been summarized previously. This combined theoretical framework of strategic culture serves as the primary lens through which our cases are analyzed, bearing in mind Longhurst and Lantis's respective conclusions from the Kosovo War. With these works in mind, we can then see how Germany acts within the framework of a powerful strategic culture throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century, and deviates from this culture following the combined impact of the strategic shock of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the response of Germany's allies.

This thesis proceeds with an analysis of Germany's involvement in the Kosovo War (1999), non-involvement in Iraq (2003), Chard (2008) and Libya (2011), the intervention against the Islamic State (ISIS), and initial response to the Ukraine Crisis (2014-15). They have been selected based on their impact on German strategic culture, their ability to showcase why they did not have the power to change that culture (the Kosovo mission), and how the strategic culture endured and makes the abrupt paradigm shift for Germany after the outbreak of war so significant. This span of time has been selected due to the frequency of events throughout this

era, the relative variety in the types of cases (peacekeeping, interventions, counter-terrorist and military aid) and the aspects of Germany's strategic culture that they highlight.

The elite effect, more specifically the individual agency of the policy makers, is extremely interesting in the case of Germany, and provides a solid case study in how they influence, change, and are affected by culture. The track record of German Defense Ministers over the course of the last twenty-five years provides a perfect example of the need to investigate the causal effect between the defense minister position and the nation's strategic culture. Briefly, discourse analysis is applied to the rhetoric of the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the outbreak of war, and remarks by Russian President Vladimir Putin in January 2023. Building off work by Jennifer Milliken, these two speeches are looked at for their interpellations- the effect they are intended to have on their respective domestic and international audiences, and how they frame their respective positions in regard to the War in Ukraine (Milliken, 1999, 239). Official statements, speeches, and interviews with policy makers are dissected for influence of an overreaching culture and evidence of change to their approach to external shocks and challenges.

Germany's deep-rooted strategic culture meeting the external shock of the War in Ukraine is what presents the niche for this research- explaining Germany's predicament as a textbook realist response, constrained by a strategic culture that has left the nation with neither plans nor preparedness to handle this challenge. Schmitt brings in a prophetic quote from a German officer in 2010, who asserted that while Germany had taken steps in normalizing the nation's relationship with the use of force, the process could also go backwards (Schmitt, 2012, 65); now thirteen years later, the preference for civilian means of conflict resolution and a new *Ostpolitik* have succeeded to be the main route of German foreign policy regarding use of force and relations with Russia, respectively.

To the contrary of realist scholarship, Germany fell down the path presented by constructivist scholars, largely staying true to it since reunification. Schmitt attributes this to multilateral structures, deep integration with NATO and inevitably from experiences from the Nazi era. Germany has been averse to unilateral responses, maintained a responsible and predictable security policy, and had great restraint in military matters tied to widespread anti-militarist sentiments. (Schmitt, 2012, 65) These key features of Germany's strategic culture have been paramount in presenting challenges, frustrations, and inconsistencies in responding to the War in Ukraine, and have additionally highlighted internal challenges faced by the Bundeswehr.

The prevailing challenge then, is how to determine if this challenge posed by the War in Ukraine is a harbinger of a change of strategic culture, or just one of the allowed contradictory strategic choices within the context of Germany's traditional culture (Buteux and Gray, 1988, 25 in Gray, 1999, 62). A change in strategic culture is something that can only be determined over the passing of time; for the sake of this research, we will determine that strategic culture can show the signs of a paradigm shift by examining the prior shocks and examples of interventions/non-interventions, dissecting why some were thought to- but did not -bring about a change in strategic culture, and why others show a consistent implementation of the same culture up to 2022. The impact the Second World War and Cold War has had on German strategic culture acts as the long-term influencing factors on German foreign policy, while the previously mentioned case studies serve as the coded, absorbed, and culturally translated (Gray, 1999, 52) events that have preceded the anticipated cultural change at the time of this writing. For our purposes change is shown by shifts in policy that could require long-term commitments, are clear extensions or developments of prior steps towards change, and come in combination with significant alterations in the external environment. Public opinion in Germany is taken into

consideration in the Kosovo War and in Ukraine today, as both examples have seen great public commentary over the German governments action.

For this research, strategic shock is conceptualized as an *external* event with the potential to generate a profound *internal* effect. The crucial word here is *potential* since as Gray points out, a shock can be catastrophic, yet not always generate a profound change of strategic culture, as was the case for the Soviet Union in the 20th century- internal turmoil and the biggest land war in history did not change the overall strategic culture of the nation, as self-destructive as that culture may have been (Gray, 1999, 66). In the strategic shock cases examined here, each is an undeniable shock to the international system to varying extents, Germany of course included, and the manner in which the nation reacts and manages the event serves as the main point of analysis for identifying the endurance of Germany's strategic culture, and additionally looks at changes and reaction in the international environment when applicable.

The following sections explore the foundations of Germany's strategic culture, with ties back to the Second World War and the legacy of Cold War *Ostpolitik*. From there, research continues into exploring our cases beginning with Kosovo, providing an example of Germany's reactions to strategic shock and showing the *potential* for change in this type of volatile security scenario. From there I move to three cases examining Germany's avoidance of taking part in military excursion and involving in conflicts abroad, before examining its role in operations against ISIS. These examples display how Germany's strategic culture developed, and the type of actions allowed and forbidden within its comfort zone of security policy. Lastly, I examine the first year of the Ukraine War and how this case breaks Germany's rigid strategic culture, and challenges some of the theoretical assumptions revolving around the theory.

# 2 Historical Context

History had not been particularly kind to Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. By the end of the Second World War, centuries of Prussian military culture had been comprehensively terminated and a host of hostile neighbors had suddenly simplified itself. No longer was Germany the feared military power of the past- its teeth had been pulled, and by the time it had manifested into the Federal Republic, it was engrained into NATO and suddenly lacked the need for the kind of strategic mindset that had defined its history. This situation also came with the *stunde null*- "total physical, moral and psychological devastation and trauma" that characterized the conclusion of the war and the conditions immediately following it. While Longhurst calls it a contested term, this is clearly what became of the German military and the foreign policy attitude of Germany. The images of the past were removed great care was taken by the victors and by the Germans, viewing the steps as legitimate in order to move past this chapter of their history. (Longhurst, 2004, 26). In a short space of time, Germany had shifted into an anti-militaristic power and would develop the multilateral-based foreign policy that has come to characterize it today.

This can largely be attributed to the lethal blow the catastrophic defeat dealt to Germany's nationalist and militarist ideologies- disillusionment had become rampant, and the efficacy of such a culture had seemingly left for good (Berger, 1996, 9). Berger's assessment of Germany and Japan post-World War Two offers insight into the formation of the ideologies that guided the nations through the Cold War and into today:

Not only did occupation forces demobilize and dismantle the vast German and Japanese war machines, but they also worked hard to impress upon the German and Japanese people that theirs had been a moral as well as a military defeat. The political and military leaders of the wartime regimes were

put on trial for war crimes; books and passages in school texts deemed to be militaristic were expunged from the curriculum; and the German and Japanese populations were bombarded with antimilitary propaganda that was almost as fierce as the wartime propaganda that preceded it (Berger, 1996, 10).

This is additionally supplemented by the fact that post-war Germany had developed as a nation deeply in fear of the Soviet Union, a problem it sought to solve by deeply integrating with NATO, the Western European Union, and the European community in general. Additionally, as Berger continues, existed the very recent memory of how the *Reichswehr* brought about the demise of the Weimar Republic, leading Germany to make specific choices to avoid creating a gathering point of right-wing ideologies by implementing compulsory military service and implementing democratic ethos into the fledgling *Bundeswehr* (Berger, 1996, 11). These decisions are crucial, and while they can be seen to represent the anxious attitude towards rebuilding a German military, traditional Cold War fears, and a very poignant memory of the National Socialist era, they remained engrained in modern German strategic and political culture.

Throughout most of its history, Germany has had a very constant security environment- or, more appropriately, a lack of security. From beyond even the rule of Bismarck and even Frederick the Great, Germany's security environment that was made up of competing powers necessitated action- kurz und vives, or short and lively conflicts that could be fought and managed with limited resources (Palmer, 1986, 58). Beyond the Old Regime and into the modern world, Germany found itself again living in a hostile neighborhood, and from the conclusion of the Second World War to the conclusion of the Cold War, still retained a very visible and threatening opponent next door. These variables- a state's threats and geography combined with its capabilities- act as some of the constraining factors of foreign policy in general (Johnston, 1995, 35). The unipolar moment of the 1990s brought about a drastic change for the first time in

Germany's history- amicable relationships with its neighbors- and left scholars debating the nation's direction in the strategic community.

German strategic culture had been for much of its history bound to its geography in a negative sense- while the United States enjoyed geographic isolation and safety, Germany had to contend with opponents directly at its borders, and its strategic culture reflected this. This 'bad neighborhood' even predated modern Germany. For example, the Prussian Officers' Corps up to the end of the Second World War was highly combat focused compared to an American counterpart focused on management (Gray, 1981, 31, 26). Even in the context of the Cold War, by the time the Bundeswehr had been established, there still existed a clearly defined enemy with largely clearly defined threats to manage. With the removal of the Soviet threat the Bundeswehr, in addition to the task of merging two armies, became an *Armee ohne Feindbild*- an army without a clear opponent (Longhurst, 2018, 55).

Through the course of the Cold War, this nation developed with that visible and present enemy, and into a tool of NATO- a powerful fighting force, but one that was fully married to the alliance (Longhurst, 2004, 38). Commitment to NATO was a pervasive factor in German strategic thinking. Longhurst goes on to cite several security policy standpoints in West Germany which echo Berger's assessment of post-war Germany, four of which are key points of German foreign policy today, directly affecting current events, and are as follows:

- an aversion to singularity, unilateralism, and leadership in security matters; a predilection to multilateral solutions and to conceive and promote interests through these;
- a preference for non-confrontational defense and deterrence, and an opposition to war-fighting strategies, while emphasizing the broader political role of armed forces;
- an aspiration both to pursue a responsible, calculable and accountable security policy, and wherever possible to 'make amends' for previous wrongdoings;
- a determination to pursue compromise and build consensus on both domestic and international security policy decision-making levels (Longhurst, 2004, 47).

These factors above can be seen directly manifesting themselves in Germany's role in the Kosovo War as overseen in the next section and extend through to the modern case study of Ukraine today. Of particular interest is the third point, the idea of a need to 'make amends' for the past. This building on the idea of Germany's guilt factor is crucial, as it provides the source of the taboos associated with not only the Bundeswehr operations abroad, but importantly Germany's position of avoiding supplying arms to active conflicts- a trend which met its end in the War in Ukraine, but not without difficulty and the proverbial baby steps (Deutsche Welte, 2022).

The facts of the National Socialist era, the Holocaust, and the sheer volume of the war of annihilation that occurred between Germany and Russia has left an appropriately lasting impact on the relationship between the two modern countries. Positions that can be seen as aggressive are largely avoided- multilateralism is once again the card of choice. In a 2008 interview, Green Party Russia expert Marieluise Beck framed it simply that Germany's historical guilt towards Russia necessitated a "markedly restrained" policy. This is supplemented, of course, by energy reliance on Russia which Germany developed. Additionally crucial, as Chivvis and Rid continue, was the confidence in the moral superiority of German foreign policy, and the "generally cooperative" approach of Soviet leaders to Germany's reunification (Chivvis & Rid, 2009, 115).

This guilt factor is also decisively paired to a sort of neo-*Ostpolitik*, a post-Cold War approach to German dealings with Russia that echoes the same policies of that era. Willy Brandt's approach to German-Russian relations in the 1970s created favorable relations with the Soviet Union (the same favorable relations that allowed peaceful reunification), but the continuation of this foreign policy approach is a perfect example of Germany's confidence in it's multilateral foreign policy, and even more importantly one of the manifesters of today's crisis.

*Ostpolitik* continued, and Germany stepped into a role of the broker between Russia and the West. By 2006, the threat of Russia using Europe's dependency on Russian gas as foreign policy blackmail began to loom ever clearer, yet *Ostpolitik* persisted, and it is this ever tightening of economies that proved to be the Achilles heel of this approach (Blumenau, 1906, 2022). What had worked for Cold War Germany (and in a greater sense, Europe) built a deservedly profound legacy, one that has ultimately backfired.

Going forward, history continues to act as a guiding and restraining force on German foreign policy. While such historically significant and up until 2022 prominent foreign policy tools of *Ostpolitik* have come to an end, the effort of diplomacy would persist- Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech on 27 February 2022 implicitly said so.[3] An "Ice Age" of relations between the two nations has set in, and left a hollowed out diplomatic channel devastated by "disappointment and distrust" (Blumenau, 1908, 2022). The first challenge for Germany now a year into the war is it's sudden limitation of multilateralism- what had worked before is now "unthinkable" (Blumenau, 1908, 2022). Moving forward, the impact of stepping away from such foreign policy constants such as multilateralism and non-confrontational approaches become evident, as does the false starts in real change in strategic culture. A picture emerges of Germany playing in the context of the first and third generations of strategic culture- its historically and culturally rooted notions about the ends and means of war and use of force acting as a limiting factor its strategic choices (Johnston, 1995, 43).

The following section examines the period from 1999 to events occurring in parallel with the initial Ukraine Crisis. The analysis of German strategic culture here focuses on response to

[3] Schulz's 27 February speech explicitly states a "turning point" in Russo-German relations, as well as further word choice and language that highlights the significance of this event. (*Bundestag*, 2022)

examples of strategic shock and select cases to display the perseverance and gradual development of Germany's strategic culture through this period. The 1999 intervention in Kosovo now presents the first case study of reunified Germany dealing with an exogenous shock, its political impact, and hypotheses as to why it did not generate a real change in strategic culture.

# 3 Enduring Strategic Culture

## *3.1 Kosovo and The False Start: German Participation in Operation Allied Force*

The Kosovo War acts as the first case analyzed since it serves as an example of a significant strategic shock and includes rhetoric that mirrors the Ukraine War in 2022/2023. John Lantis's *The Moral Imperative of Force* analyzes continuity and change in German strategic culture in this era, and makes the claim that the Kosovo intervention suggests that "evolution of strategic culture may be more abrupt, less difficult, and more prevalent" than previously thought in International Relations scholarship (Lantis, 2002, 40). Kosovo is the first time that the reunified Germany faced the dilemma of a nation with "interpretive codes to defend democracy and an aversion to use of military force" suddenly facing a situation that demanded just that (Lantis, 2002, 39). However, instead of being the catalyst for long-term change in German strategic culture, the Kosovo example instead acts as a brief aberration in the continuity of traditional post-1989 German strategic culture.

One of the factors that can perhaps explain why Germany did not see a continued push towards change is the fact that in this example the dual-track approach was available- Germany remained committed to the NATO mission even in the face of domestic backlash, yet also pressed forwards 'intensive diplomatic efforts' aimed at preventing the use of military force (Longhurst, 2018, 72 and Lantis, 2002, 34). In 2022, the same cannot be said for German-Russian relations. This is admitted in Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech, and by German President Frank-Walther Steinmeier in *ZDF-Morgenmagazin* (Blumenau, 2022, 1908).[4] In essence, the

[4]Steinmeier's quote in *Der Bundesindependent*, translated by Blumenau: "It is very sad but we failed in many ways. We failed to build a Common European House ... we failed to integrate Russia into a European security system, we failed to ... help Russia onto a path towards democracy and human rights." 'Der Bundespräsident: interview mit dem ZDF-Morgenmagazin', 2022.

Kosovo War, despite breaking new ground as the first out of area use of German troops since the Second World War, still saw success of the German "business model" to quote Tobias Bunde's term for German foreign policy (Bunde, 2022, 524), lacked the more lasting implications and commitments of today's war, and was followed by continued German reluctance as will be analyzed further. The Kosovo War additionally saw the German public vocally and at times violently oppose Germany's participation in the mission, whereas Germany's commitment to Ukraine today has not seen equally widespread opposition, due in some part to Scholz's seizing of the opportunity to implement changes before opposition coalitions could materialize properly (Blumenau, 2022, 1898). A distinct example of this is the lack of anything like the Green Party conference at Bielefield in May 1999- there has been no large-scale protests nor paint bombs.

Kosovo serves as an indicator that strategic culture is a vulnerable concept, clearly susceptible to change in the event of strategic shocks, and additionally backs up Gray's assertion that the occasional contradiction of a strategic culture is permissible (Gray, 1999, 62). Gray is likely also correct in his assertion that a strategic culture is not deserving of being called a culture at all if it can change year by year, however a shock event the as in Kosovo in 1999 and Ukraine in 2022 have the potential to initiate change at a faster pace (Gray, 1999, 52). Kosovo is an aberration in Germany's strategic culture- Germany saw a moment of reconsideration regarding the efficacy of military force, one of Johnston's key characteristics to change in strategic culture (Johnston, 1995, 30), as well as brief changes in Germany's interpretation of its security environment.

In this example however, while shocking and deserving of action due to war crimes and blatant human rights violations that draw parallels to Russian atrocities in Ukraine, this episode in the Balkans is simply not large enough in scale nor has long-term effects sufficient to have

brought a change to such a refined and internalized culture. Former Yugoslavia did not hold the same international clout, economic power, and ability to materialize such a threat that Russia does today. The next section demonstrates a consistent pattern of German behavior within the confines of its strategic culture.

### *3.2 Opting Out: Non-Involvement in Iraq and Beyond*

The United States' invasion of Iraq in March 2003 is perhaps the most notable case of Germany's strategic culture reverting to a status-quo after the Kosovo episode and a small commitment to the coalition in Afghanistan, and persisting with its foreign policy based on multilateralism and avoidance of confrontation and war-fighting decisions. On top of this the post-Kosovo era shows Germany retaining its backseat in foreign security matters, and pursuing diplomacy as far as possible. Schroeder's concerns are summarized in his speech at the NATO summit in Prague, 2002, as he cited political costs, territorial integrity of Iraq, and concerns for democracy within Iraq (Dettke, 2009, 164). In this sense, one can see the same concerns that brought Germany *into* the Kosovo War are quite similar to the reasons that kept Germany *out* of Iraq; cultural values prevented taking part in this mission in a similar way to how they morally forced Germany into Kosovo (Lantis, 2002, 111).

Further proof of the action in Kosovo as a mere deviation from the overall culture becomes evident by this halfway point in the first decade of the 2000s and end of the Schroder government. "After the well-documented relaxation of reservations toward the use of force under the Schröder governments (1998–2005), an era of "backsliding" followed due to growing skepticism about the mission in Afghanistan" (2019, 55, 119). Germany's "culture of restraint" still reigned supreme; and a 2004 work by Sebastian Harnisch highlights the fact that *had* all other diplomatic means been exhausted and a UN mandate existed in support of it, Germany

could have been a part of this military adventure into Iraq (Harnisch, 2004, 30). However, this back-against-the-wall scenario never materialized, therefore Germany's strategic cultural preferences did not permit this exercise outside of its comfort zone. Writing shortly after Germany said "no" to joining the coalition invading Iraq, Harnisch correctly anticipated the potential of Germany's strategic culture in guiding it into further collision courses with its allies and partners (Harnisch, 2004, 3).

Beyond Iraq, Germany's refusal to involve itself in UN operations in Chad serves several poignant examples of Germany's strategic culture guiding decisions and action, as well as flexing itself against the wishes of allies in Europe. That Germany did not let itself be the only nation to block the operation in Chad signals its hesitancy to take a leading role in matters at the time and according to one German diplomat, "it is not how Germany plays by the EU rules" (Schmitt, 2012, 74). Germany refused participation yet would not take action *against* it for the sake of its relationship with the EU, specifically France (Schmitt, 2012, 76). It is perhaps most important to note that within the German diplomatic and military camp, the use of military troops was deemed to "not fit with the German strategic culture." Schmitt brings in several interview quotes affirming this, one stressing that "going against our strategic culture could have huge political costs," while another brings up the fact that Germany did "not have the same relationship with the use of military force as other Western countries" (Schmitt, 2012, 75). In this instance, Germany can be seen both pursuing compromise and avoiding unilateralism in its acceptance of the Chad operations taking place, yet still maintaining opposition to war-fighting potential, and avoiding participation and use of force- all key pillars of its strategic culture.

Germany's strategic culture can be seen to have solidified by the 2010s firstly by looking at the Libyan intervention in 2011- and interestingly, Germany indirectly holds a unique type of

leadership position in its abstention from committing warplanes to the no-fly zone over Libya. Once again, Germany can be seen to have prioritized "all kinds" of civilian measures as well as sanctions but did not find military intervention to be the necessary response. Unlike in 2002 when committing forces to Afghanistan, or in Kosovo, this crisis was not seen to pose a threat to international peace and security (Berenskoetter, Collins, 2011, 1). Germany had not fallen into the dilemma of a nation opposed to military force, but a proponent of democracy as had been the case in those cases. In the international neighborhood, conditions had allowed for Germany to settle into a localized and territorial defense preference as the Franco-British alliance had taken the lead on expeditionary warfare- it was against Germany's strategic culture, and its allies appeared keen to shoulder that responsibility (Miskimmon, 2012, 400). A 2012 article in *German Politics* cites the continued political culture causing constraint on use of "aggressive military force" and Germany resisting change and adaptation due to its inclusion in NATO and the CDSP (Miskimmon, 2012, 293). Borrowing terminology from Gray, Germany, through its "strategic cultural lens" simply made and exercised choices that fit into it's strategic comfort zone and made sense based on its previous experiences since reunification (Gray, 1999, 67).

It is clear that Germany's military adventures from Kosovo onward have either occurred within the "comfort zone" of its strategic culture or merely been brief deviations from that overall culture. The timeline from 1999 to 2012 shows that Germany's strategic culture continued to develop and reaffirm its commitment to staying out of the international realm in regard to use of force, only doing so when all other means are exhausted, and avoidance of taking the leading role on security issues.

These events, specifically Kosovo, come with a certain 'shock' value, yet none have served to manifest meaningful change, even as the Kosovo mission teased the potential for what

effect a real strategic shock with the right ingredients can have on a nation's strategic culture. The reasons behind the failure of these cases to cause a break in culture, let alone begin a shift towards one, comes down to the simple fact that each of these cases existed within Germany's strategic "comfort zone" of operating. Instead, this strategic culture continued to develop and engrain within itself, reaffirming the same ideas laid out post-World War Two. In these examples Germany was able to avoid leadership positions, only used force in Kosovo when all other means were exhausted (and continued to play multilateralism) and opt out of missions it deemed outside of its strategic culture. This, for our purposes, is the "measurable effect on strategic choice" that strategic culture has, constraining the behavior of Germany as a strategic actor (Johnston, 38, 1999).

The continuity and stopping power of German strategic culture becomes evident in these three examples given and adds to the significance of Germany's paradigm shift in 2022. The last aspect we look at of the pre-Ukraine War era of German foreign policy is the response to the threat posed by the Islamic State (ISIS).

### *3.3 A Spear Without a Tip: Germany and Operation Counter Daesh*

Germany's response to the Islamic State's attacks in Tunisia, Turkey, Lebanon, Russia and Paris fell into its "comfort zone" of strategic options, as quoted from the *Bundestag* in 2015:

> [T]he terrorist organization poses a global threat to peace and security far beyond the areas it currently controls in Syria and Iraq represent. With the attacks in Paris, ISIS attacked France and Europe's free system of values directly (*Deutscher Bundestag*, 2015).

While the terrorist attacks constitute a shock, this particular example does not suffice to trigger a change in Germany's strategic culture. Referring to two of the pillars Germany's strategic culture by Longhurst in the Historical Context section of this thesis, Germany's actions here are "responsible, calculable, and accountable" while also coming about in consensus with

its strategic partners. The role undertaken by German troops was non-combative, instead undergoing duties of aerial reconnaissance and refueling as opposed to war-fighting action (*Deutscher Bundestag*, 2015), again in line with its overall strategic culture and ideas about how to use its military. However, in an example of how sensitive Germany's relationship with the use of it's military continued to be at this stage, the parliamentary debates on 2nd December 2015 proved volatile, questioning whether use of military force is permissible against a non-state actor (Peters, 2015, 2).

It is worth now briefly highlighting political culture's relation to strategic culture, Johnston states that the political culture- a "mindset"- is a factor limiting actors' attention to their full range of options (Elkins and Simeon, 1974, 126 in Johnston, 1995, 45). Applying this to Germany, it is evident that in this case German political culture experienced variations and disagreement among the parliament, as different policymakers saw different ranges of acceptable options. By this example it is shown that even in situations that seem to logically dictate acceptable use of the *Bundeswehr* abroad according to their strategic culture, within the parliament the interpretations of strategic culture and exactly what permitted its use were varied. Although participating in the efforts against ISIS, Germany remained aversive to true use of force to reach its goals, and showed inconsistencies within the parliament as to the type of threat and necessary response to it.

Gray states that the stamp of the "basic molds" of a strategic culture is evident in the way an actor's behavior is adapted to uncharacteristic roles it undertakes (Gray, 1999, 59). Looking at Longhurst's four points of strategic culture mentioned previously, we can see that all of the behavior fits within those parameters. Germany did not necessarily need to adapt to any of these situations save for Kosovo, yet even in this case, the controversial German military involvement-

an aberration in that strategic culture- *still* technically fit in with German values which permit use of force and Germany still exercised multilateralism throughout. The German officer interviewed by Schmitt in 2010 has largely proven to be correct that German strategic culture could slide *backwards*, away from normalization (Schmitt, 2012, 65), as any normalization in the 2010 era had stagnated at best, or reversed in the worst-case scenario. It is 2022's outbreak of War in Ukraine that sees the elements of culture displayed previously be broken away from, as we see Germany break the confines of Longhurst's four points of its strategic culture laid out in the Historical Context section.

The final chapter explores the sales and transfer of weapons to nations at war; therefore, it has not played a part in the analysis of German strategic culture so far. In the following section we see similar circumstances that draw parallels to Kosovo, yet with a much wider scope and implications, and push Germany into an era of change and adaptation.

# 4 The *Zeitenwende*- War in Ukraine

"We are living through a watershed era. And that means that the world afterwards will no longer be the same as the world before. The issue at the heart of this is whether power is allowed to prevail over the law. Whether we permit Putin to turn back the clock to the nineteenth century and the age of the great powers. Or whether we have it in us to keep warmongers like Putin in check. That requires strength of our own…

In view of the watershed that Putin's aggression entails, our standard is this: what is needed to secure peace in Europe will be done. Germany will contribute its share to these efforts in a spirit of solidarity. But stating that loud and clear today is not enough. To make it possible, the Bundeswehr needs new, strong capabilities…" (Olaf Scholz, speech to Bundestag, 27/2/2022)

Specters of today's full-scale war in Ukraine first manifested in the 2014 Ukraine Crisis, and Germany's role then appears to be today's dilemma in its infancy. "The crisis [had] illustrated the strength of Germany's foreign policy: its skilled use of economic power and diplomacy. [But also] demonstrated Berlin's weakness: the lack of a military dimension to German power" and importantly proved to be the first time Germany stepped into such a leadership role in Europe since the Second World War (Speck, 2015), breaking one of the key molds of its strategic culture.[5] This prelude to the greater war also saw the familiar string of criticisms towards Germany- not taking an aggressive enough stance and continuing to over rely on negotiations and that tradition of Ostpolitik (Kundnani, 2015). Yet ultimately, this is the beginning of the interesting shift for today's Germany- this is the point of assuming the leadership role in Europe and being *pro*active as opposed to *re*active in its foreign policy, yet still pushing forward multilaterally. Crucially, in 2014 Germany continued to be able to communicate with Moscow, as Merkel "had Russian President Vladimir Putin's ear" and was

[5] See historical context section, first bullet point.

able to exercise the modern Ostpolitik (Pond, 2015), a factor that quickly evaporated for Germany foreign policy today.

### *4.1 Changing Leaders*

The first factor at play worth analyzing here is changes as a result of Berlin's shift in leadership from Merkel- over a decade's worth of consistent leadership and foreign policy- to Olaf Schulz, preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine by mere months. Gray quotes the claim that "domestic changes that lead to changes in political ideas may be far more important influences on international behavior than changes in the international distribution of military capabilities" (Muller, 1993, 48 in Gray, 1999, 58). This is worth bearing in mind, as in this first example we are given not only a domestic change in political ideas, but also a momentous change in the military activities and capabilities in the strategic neighborhood.

The change of leadership in this case can act as the independent variable in Johnston's sense, guiding a specific set of tendencies to kick in under new government leadership- for our purposes, these tendencies and the range of choices available is one unique to the new government (Johnston, 1995, 53). For example, while Germany under Merkel had pledged to increase its defense spending to 2% GDP by 2024, this percentage had only shifted from 1.2% to 1.3% by 2021 (World Bank. 2022). Scholz's government has shown a more serious increase in this by the fact that 2022 ushered in a 1.5% defense spending budget and Scholz being quoted stating that Germany would be putting 2% GDP into defense spending "from now on" (Deutsche Welt, 2023). Defense spending data and comparing rhetoric acting as one factor, Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech acts as our second indicator of a cultural shift at the leadership level.

If taking Scholz's word seriously, and when levied against the consistently modest defense spending of the Merkel era, Scholz's speech on 27 February 2022 acts as our second

leadership-level indicator of a change in strategic culture. Scholz's speech single handedly "ended ongoing, lengthy debates that haunted German politics for years or decades" (Blumenau, 2022, 1898). The taboos of the nearly three-quarters of a century that had been the pronounced and guiding force in German strategic culture have seemingly met a symbolic end in Scholz's new discourse- building up the Bundeswehr's military capabilities specifically, stepping away from it's aversion to war-fighting capabilities (Policy Statement by Olaf Scholz, 2022). On top of this a symbolic break in the culture of compromise and consensus on security policy- Scholz's call for 100 billion euro in funding to the armed forces came as a "shock" even within his own party, though one that tellingly found widespread support (Deutsche Welt, 2022). If strategic culture, as laid out by Duffield, "delineates and limits" the range of available policy options (Duffield, 1998, 14 in Longhurst, 2005, 16), Scholz's rhetoric and immediate decisions had fractured that culture. However, the follow up to this discourse- strong words and pledges to take action- are followed by hesitation and apprehensions to follow through on these words, showing the resistance of Germany's strategic culture to the developing change.

### *4.2 Arms Exports and Resistance to Change*

Historically, Germany has evaded arms shipments into ongoing conflict zones. For example, in 2018 the nation terminated arms sales to Saudi Arabia, citing its involvement in the ongoing civil war in Yemen (Deutsche Welt, 2018); 2019 saw a ban on arms sales to Turkey based on its operations against the Kurds (Deutsche Welt, 2019). In 2014, despite being pushed into a position of leadership and initiative taking (partly due to the United States *not* taking the driver's seat here), Germany refused to send arms to the conflict and defended the decision at the Munich Security Conference in February 2015 (Reuters, 2015). Jumping to 2022, within days of

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Germany had greenlit the sales of arms to Ukraine (Deutsche Welte, 2022).

Notably, in the 2015-15 Ukraine crisis, German behavior followed the parameters of its strategic culture, remaining in its 'comfort zone' in spite of criticisms; the public opinions in Germany at the time reflected this up to the weeks preceding Russia's attack (ZDF, 2022). These parameters for state behavior are set by the public, particularly in parliamentary democracies such as Germany (Lantis, 2002, 38). This initial crisis in 2014-15 saw no inclination of cultural changes, therefore no notable public backlash (Centre for Eastern Studies, 2015). In 2022, one can see these parameters of public opinion begin to shift in favor of arms shipments to Ukraine- however not without challenges and setbacks (Deutsche Welte, 2022). Measuring the rhetoric previously only goes so far- three months after the *Zeitenwende* speech seemingly ushered in the new era of change, constraints were still highly evident. The chairwoman of the Parliamentary Defense Committee is quoted in April 2022 stating "We still need to push the chancellery" in regard to heavy weapons shipments (Deutsche Welte, 2022). Emphasizing Duffield's claims from 1996, Germany begins to appear to be a nation which had realized the failures in its security policies following the strategic shock, and was now in the initial stages of correcting this (Duffield, 1996, 23).

It is this resistance, or hesitance, to change that is one of the key factors now in 2022 showing us that real change in Germany's strategic culture is a process playing out over the course of this first year of war. One may write off a knee-jerk reaction to a shock as a mere aberration in an otherwise rigid culture- as could be done with the *Zeitenwende* speech. In this vein, it is worth noting that a full year after this speech, the term taken on by political commentaries in Germany has become the Zeitlupenwende- the "slow motion change" (Carnegie

Europe, 2023). However, it is this hesitant decision making and frustrating of allies while the war increased in scale that is very close- if not a textbook example- of Johnston's assertions on changing culture: "If strategic culture itself changes, it does so slowly, lagging behind changes in "objective" conditions" (Johnston, 1995, 34). Germany, in addition to being an economic leader, had found itself in another leadership position regarding security matters- something it had historically sought to avoid doing in previous conflicts, yet now was the controlling party in decisive arms shipments into an active combat zone, on top of reassessing its own military. Mounting international pressure in this context is very likely one of the driving factors in pushing Germany towards a strategic cultural change at a more rapid pace than Johnston or Gray could have anticipated at the time of their writing. It is worth echoing Lantis's claim from earlier in this thesis, that change can be more prevalent and abrupt than previously thought, as the year since Russia's invasion largely affirms this (Lantis, 2002, 40).

Until the end of January 2023, Germany's position had remained hesitant to commit to significant arms shipments- namely fighter jets (which, as of this writing, has not been approved), and sending Leopard MBTs, an approval which would grant *all* other nations which had previously purchased and deployed the Leopard to send theirs to Ukraine as well. Nearly a full year of absorbing, coding and translating the experiences of this new war has followed Gray's pattern for a nation gradually changing their culture, albeit at a much faster rate than in normal circumstance. This does not refute his assertion that changing culture by the year or decade renders the term "unduly dignified" to describe the phenomena at play (in this case, security policy), but rather serves to reinforce the rapidity with which such a strategic shock can generate change (Gray, 1999, 52).

### *4.3 Changes in the Neighborhood and Long-Term Commitments*

One of the most telling aspects of the change in strategic culture for Germany is the new environment in Europe in general. Prior to the strategic shock of the War in Ukraine, Germany had neglected earlier changes in the international environment to its own peril and against recommendations of analysts in Germany proper (Bunde, 2022, 521). While obviously a significant and extremely important actor in the scope of this war, Germany remains just that- an *actor*. The large-scale support for Ukraine throughout the first year of war, while bolstering that nation's defense capabilities, has also shed light on the fact that the Europe itself is far behind the proverbial eight ball in its own defense capabilities- for example, German sales of military implements and vehicles had actually *decreased* in 2015 due to a decrease in production, just after the height of the initial Ukraine Crisis (Roehl, Bardt and Engels, 2023, 19). Within Europe, the need for cooperation and procurement has been highlighted in the wake of the War in Ukraine, as no single European country "has on its own a comprehensive portfolio of defense production capabilities," including Germany despite its broad-based defense industry (Roehl, Bardt and Engels, 2023, 15). With these necessities for the future of the European Union's Common Defense and Security Policy, Germany is put (with its EU partners) on a trajectory towards long-lasting strategic preferences and a reassessing of the armed forces capabilities and purposes, signaling changes in strategic culture in line with Johnston's definition (Johnston, 1995 46).

Long-term commitments are evident beyond strictly the military and defense industry realm. Within a year of war, Germany has, via Economic and Climate Action Minister Robert Habeck, largely and abruptly cut itself off from Russian gas (BBC, 2022). This move towards energy independence necessitates further EU integration and demands a more active leadership

role for Germany, one which necessitates a much less hesitant security policy, as the European strategic neighborhood has shown that there is no longer any room for old taboos and post-1989 schools of thought to hinder responsiveness. Tobias Bunde's June 2022 study of the *Zeitenwende* and shift in German policy illustrates how quickly the specter of change materialized within Germany- and how it's environment and neighbors largely gave Germany no choice in the matter. External pressure has raised to the extent that Germany cannot withstand international pressures to adapt to the changing security environment; the extent of the heated debate over sending heavy weapons to Ukraine demonstrates the momentum of change in Germany. "Not long ago, such a decision would have been seen as almost inconceivable for a country that was reluctant to offer weapons at all and instead decided to send helmets" (Bunde, 2022, 525).

Further expansion of NATO, a clear vision of Russia as a security threat (2/3 of the population views Russia as such) (Bunde, 2022, 524), and ever-mounting external pressures largely force this change in strategic culture upon Germany. One may make the claim that the greater strategic shock to Germany has not been the explosion of a conventional war in Europe for the first time in roughly eighty years, but rather the attitudes of it's neighbors and allies forcing change upon it. For example, this strategic shock strikes deeper than perhaps immediately evident when one considers that the commitment of the United States is not guaranteed. This would serve to make Germany- with its top-tier economy and promised 2% GDP defense spending- the backbone of the European Defense Community *and* the third largest military spender in the world (Bunde, 2022, 525). This is not to say change will increase in it's pace- circumstance prevents that. In spite of the urgency pressed upon Germany within the last year, change will have to take it's time in many aspects, particularly in regard to the Bundeswehr itself, with a severe deficit of spare parts, ammunition, and equipment. None of these problems

can be fixed with mandatory service, as it is skilled and specialized personnel that it is lacking and must replenish (Roehl, Bardt, and Engels, 2023, 20). Again, we find credence in Gray's assertions regarding how cultures can change (see above reference), as even though the international community and many within Germany would enjoy an overnight change in their defense capability and unhesitant approach to the war, changes in strategic culture move slowly by their very nature. The strategic shock has provided an impetus for change and accelerated it in many aspects, but thirty-two years of post-Cold War thinking and the results of gradual backsliding in capability make this kind of change a slow and gradual process.

### *4.4 Taboos Present; Taboos Overcome*

The final factor at play defeating the status-quo strategic culture in Germany is the overcoming of the Second World War's legacy as a roadblock to German foreign policy choices and military decisions. Germany has, in the last year, gradually stepped out of the "comfort zone" created by the Second World War's legacy and which has been employed by Putin from the beginning of the conflict. "Eighty years on, we are facing German tanks again" claimed Putin in a speech commemorating the eightieth anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad (BBC News, 2023). Historically, as has been covered previously, Germany's war crimes against Russia and the toll that the war took- over twenty million Russian dead (Chivvis and Rid, 2009, 115)- have been one of the guiding factors in its approach to politics with Russia; today, those facts are rhetorical factors used to justify Russia's "special operation" and activate that part of Germany's strategic culture that has limited its options when dealing with Russia.

This use and overuse of rhetoric meant to conjure up images of the Second World War in both Russian and German populations play directly into Johnston's notions of symbolism in strategic culture. Strategic context can be described and "axiomatically accepted" through use of

idioms and phrases, this is exactly the tactic seen in use by Putin, as certain key words and phrases (Johnston gives the word 'Munich' for example) can immediately be attributed to certain emotions and ideas (Johnston, 1995, 52). Despite this repeated claim from the Kremlin that Nazism is a major factor in its justification for war, Germany has been able to continue rolling forwards in its direct military aid to Ukraine and strengthening its position in Europe. Contrasting Putin's use of old taboos and collective memories of World War Two is Olaf Scholz's playing on Germany's collective memory within the *Zeitenwende* speech nearly a year prior to Putin's above comments- "As democrats, as Europeans, we stand by [Ukraine's] side – on the right side of history!" (*Bundestag, 2022*). Both leaders activated collective memory tied to Germany's strategic culture- Scholz in an effort to rally change, and Putin in effort to justify his nation's effort and play on the same taboos and attitudes which we have seen keeping Germany within the parameters of its strategic culture. That Germany's strategic culture can be exploited both from abroad on and domestically serves as tangible evidence that strategic culture in this case is not only an extremely obvious and tangible concept, but also one that is malleable and vulnerable to change. At this stage in 2023, that shows convincing indications that it is well underway.

# 5 Conclusion: The Glove with Six Fingers

It is clear that when contrasted with the prior twenty-two years (1999-2021), this window of time from February 2022 to February 2023 has seen a vast shift in Germany's place in Europe, its place in the security community, and changes in its posture towards Russia and its relationship with use of force and conflict intervention. It is still true, despite this strategic shock and the *Zeitenwende* that has shaken Germany, that "Germans cannot help to be Germans" and their behavior throughout this change will remain characteristically German (Gray, 1999, 55). As has been shown in the analysis of Germany's response to the War in Ukraine, the traditional features of their strategic culture still play a part- it does not change overnight, and some aspects of this change lag behind others. However, indications beyond the period of the first year of war which we have focused in on and into spring of 2023 continue to show change manifesting itself in a particularly German way.

This research has acknowledged Gray's assertions that strategic cultural change is a lengthy process, and needs to be one in order to really call a nation's behavior and characteristics a culture; however, it has also given credence to Lantis's claims that in certain cases this change can occur at a much faster rate. We have seen that in the event of strategic shock, that an actor's strategic culture can (or rather, is forced to) adapt as needed in a changing international environment. Calling back to the German officer quoted by Schmitt in 2010 (Schmitt, 2012, 65), this thesis has seen that Germany's strategic culture had indeed slid backwards from normalization since that interview, as evident by the resistance to interventions in Libya and military aid to Ukraine in 2014/2015, and the internal disputing in the *Bundestag* over how to respond to ISIS. This simple fact makes the abruptness in Germany's reaction over the course of

2022 and first months of 2023 all the more interesting and serves as a direct challenge to some of the basic ideas of strategic culture.

Germany is still very much within the time of *Zeitenwende*, and more academic works analyzing this period of German and European history are inevitably forthcoming, as well as further insight into Germany's decision-making process over this year. Special attention should be paid to the behavior of the parliament and chancellery- Volker Kronenburg's claims to *Deutsche Welte* regarding the potential this era has for significant moves by Scholz (*Deutsche Welte*, 2022), and the way the neoconservative faction took advantage of the post-9/11 attitude in the US (Schmidt and Williams, 2008, 192) serve as ample evidence of the decision making power policy makers can work with in response to shocks. Continued analysis can help to illustrate how far-reaching strategic shocks can be to a nations behavior and status-quo, and determine the long-term effects of this and similar strategic shocks, a topic which is as of yet under researched (Boyla and Lang, 2021, 6).

The argument at the time of this thesis has shown that as of 2023, events have given us enough indications to prove that Germany has begun a period of change at a dramatic level and a dramatic pace, breaking out of its strategic comfort zone and proving to be a highly interesting and important case study in the scholarship analyzing strategic culture as a concept. This has also suggested that a nation's strategic culture can be a very malleable and vulnerable concept- domestic changes in the realm of policy choices and decision making and changes in the international neighborhood have a direct effect on a nation's behavior. Germany, holding so high a position in policy, the economy, and leadership in the European Union should continue to find itself maneuvering through tense internal debates over its military and involvement in war, and find itself very frequently on the proverbial chopping block of criticisms, demands to do more,

and of course commentary alluding to it's history in the World Wars. However, the issues we have highlighted that *can* create a dilemma in Germany's culture- the confrontation of aversion to war-fighting strategy with the moral obligation defend democracies and human rights, and the changing of the international neighborhood forcing Germany to take on a more proactive and leading role in the EU- do not appear to be going away in the near-term, and these shocks have served as a sort of wake-up call to not just Germany's, but Europe's vulnerabilities as a whole. This thesis has been written at a time of great potential for changes in the world order, and unlike twenty-four years ago going into the Kosovo War, it likely comes down to the sheer *scale* of the War in Ukraine -the nations involved, the geoeconomic implications, the human cost, etc.- which will likely not allow for a return to the status-quo and will not permit Germany to take a backseat in international affairs going forward.

# 6 Appendix

## *6.1 Full text of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's 27 February 2022 speech to the Bundestag:*

Madam President,

Distinguished colleagues,

Fellow citizens,

The twenty-fourth of February 2022 marks a watershed in the history of our continent.

With the attack on Ukraine, the Russian President Putin has started a war of aggression in cold blood.

For one reason alone: the freedom of the Ukrainian people calls his own oppressive regime into question.

That is inhumane.

It is a violation of international law.

There is nothing and nobody that can justify it.

The terrible images from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and Mariupol show Putin's utter lack of scruples.

The appalling injustice, the pain of the Ukrainian people – they affect us all very deeply.

I know exactly what issues many people across the country have been discussing at their dinner tables in recent days.

What concerns are weighing on them – in light of the terrible news from the war zones.

Many of us still remember our parents' or grandparents' tales of war. And for younger people it is almost inconceivable – war in Europe.

Many of them are giving voice to their horror – across the country, including just outside in front of the Reichstag.

We are living through a watershed era.

And that means that the world afterwards will no longer be the same as the world before.

The issue at the heart of this is whether power is allowed to prevail over the law. Whether we permit Putin to turn back the clock to the nineteenth century and the age of the great powers.

Or whether we have it in us to keep warmongers like Putin in check.

That requires strength of our own.

Yes, we fully intend to secure our freedom, our democracy and our prosperity.

And I am very grateful to you, Madam President, for allowing me to use today's special session to share with you what the Federal Government has in mind.

I also thank the heads of all democratic parliamentary groups in this House for supporting this session.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the attack on Ukraine, Putin is not just seeking to wipe an independent country off the map.

He is demolishing the European security order that had prevailed for almost half a century since the Helsinki Final Act.

He is also isolating himself from the entire international community.

Our embassies around the world have worked with France in recent days to advocate for the United Nations Security Council to call this Russian aggression what it is: a flagrant breach of international law.

And they have done so quite successfully, considering the result of the Security Council session in New York.

The consultations showed that we are by no means alone in our commitment to peace.

We will continue to uphold it, with all of our might.

I am very grateful to Foreign Minister Baerbock for what she has achieved in this regard.

It was only by resorting to the use of its veto that Moscow – which is, after all, a permanent member of the Security Council – was able to prevent itself from being censured.

What a disgrace!

President Putin always talks about indivisible security. But what he really seeks now is to divide the continent into the familiar old spheres of influence through armed force.

This has consequences for security in Europe.

Yes, in the long term security in Europe cannot be achieved in opposition to Russia.

But for the foreseeable future, Putin is jeopardising this security.

That is why I say very clearly that we accept the challenge that now faces us – with clear-headed resolve.

There are five courses of action that we must take:

Firstly, we must support Ukraine in this desperate situation.

We have already provided significant support in recent weeks, months and years.

But with the attack on Ukraine, we have entered a new era.

In Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and Mariupol, people are not just defending their homeland.

They are fighting for freedom and their democracy.

For values that we share with them.

As democrats, as Europeans, we stand by their side – on the right side of history!

With his attack on Ukraine on Thursday, President Putin has created a new reality. This new reality requires an unequivocal response.

We have given one.

As you know, we decided yesterday that Germany will supply Ukraine with weapons for the country's defence.

No other response to Putin's aggression was possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The second course of action that we must take is to divert Putin from the path of war.

This war is a catastrophe for Ukraine. However, it will prove to be a catastrophe for Russia, too.

Together with the Heads of State and Government of the EU, we have passed a package of sanctions on an unprecedented scale.

We are cutting Russian banks and state businesses off from financing.

We are preventing the export of cutting-edge technology to Russia.

And we are targeting the oligarchs and their investments in the EU.

In addition to this, there are the punitive measures against Putin and individuals close to him as well as restrictions on the granting of visas to Russian officials.

And we are excluding major Russian banks from the banking communication network Swift. We reached an agreement on this yesterday with the Heads of State and Government of the democracies with the strongest economies and of the EU.

We must not be under any illusions – Putin will not change course overnight.

But the Russian leadership will very soon see what a high price it will pay.

In the last week alone, Russian stocks lost over thirty percent of their value.

This shows that our sanctions are working.

And we have not ruled out further sanctions – nothing is off the table.

Our guiding principle remains the question of what will have the greatest impact on those responsible.

The individuals this is about.

And not the Russian people.

Because Putin, not the Russian people, has decided to start this war.

And so it must be clearly stated that this war is Putin's war!

It is important to me to specify this. Because reconciliation between Germans and Russians after the Second World War is – and remains – an important chapter of our shared history.

And I know how difficult it is for the many people in our country who were born in Ukraine or Russia to bear the current situation.

We will not, therefore, allow this conflict between Putin and the free world to lead to the reopening of old wounds and to new outbreaks of hostility.

And there is something else that we should not forget – in many Russian cities in recent days, ordinary people have protested against Putin's war, have run the risk of being arrested and punished.

That requires great courage and true bravery!

Today, Germany stands with the Ukrainian people. Our thoughts and our sympathy go out today to the victims of the Russian war of aggression.

And, equally, we stand with all those in Russia who are boldly defying Putin's regime and opposing his war against Ukraine. We know that there are many of them.

My message to them all is: Don't give up! I am quite sure that freedom, tolerance and human rights will prevail in Russia, too.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The third major challenge lies in preventing Putin's war from spilling over into other countries in Europe.

That means that we will stand unconditionally by our collective defence obligation within NATO.

I have said the same to our allies in Central and Eastern Europe who are worried about their security.

President Putin should not underestimate our resolve to defend every square metre of NATO territory together with our allies!

We are absolutely serious about this. When we welcome a country into NATO, we commit to defending that country as a partner and ally. Just as we would defend ourselves!

The Bundeswehr has already bolstered its support for our eastern allies – and will continue to do so.

I thank the Federal Defence Minister for this important gesture!

We have deployed additional troops in Lithuania, where we lead the NATO battlegroup.

We have extended and enhanced our participation in air policing in Romania.

We want to contribute to the establishment of a new NATO unit in Slovakia.

Our navy is helping to secure the North Sea and the Baltic as well as the Mediterranean with additional vessels.

And we are also prepared to contribute to the defence of our allies' air space in Eastern Europe using anti-aircraft missiles.

Our soldiers have often had only a brief time to prepare for these deployments in recent days.

My message to them, and I am sure you agree, is: Thank you!

Thank you for your valuable service – in particular at this time!

Ladies and gentlemen,

In view of the watershed that Putin's aggression entails, our standard is this: what is needed to secure peace in Europe will be done.

Germany will contribute its share to these efforts in a spirit of solidarity.

But stating that loud and clear today is not enough. To make it possible, the Bundeswehr needs new, strong capabilities.

And that is the fourth point that I want to address, ladies and gentlemen.

Anyone who reads Putin's historicising essays, who has watched his televised declaration of war on Ukraine, or who has recently – as I have done – held hours of direct talks with him, can no longer have any doubt that Putin wants to build a Russian empire.

He wants to fundamentally redefine the status quo within Europe in line with his own vision. And he has no qualms about using military force to do so.

We can see that today in Ukraine.

We must therefore ask ourselves: What capabilities does Putin's Russia possess?

And what capabilities do we need in order to counter this threat – today and in the future?

It is clear that we must invest much more in the security of our country. In order to protect our freedom and our democracy.

This is a major national undertaking.

The goal is a powerful, cutting-edge, progressive Bundeswehr that can be relied upon to protect us.

At the Munich Security Conference a week ago I said that we need aeroplanes that fly, ships that can set out to sea and soldiers who are optimally equipped for their missions.

That is what is important.

And it is quite certainly something that a country of our size and our significance within Europe should be able to achieve.

But we should be under no illusions. Better equipment, modern technology, more personnel – all of this costs a lot of money.

We will therefore set up a special fund for the Bundeswehr. And I am deeply grateful to Federal Finance Minister Lindner for his support on this!

The 2022 federal budget will provide a one-off sum of 100 billion euro for the fund. We will use this money for necessary investments and armament projects.

We will now – year after year – invest more than two percent of our gross domestic product in our defence.

And I now appeal to all parliamentary groups within the German Bundestag: We must secure this special fund in our Basic Law!

There is one thing that I would like to add. We have set this goal not only because we have made a promise to our friends and allies to increase our defence expenditure to two percent of our economic output by 2024.

We are also doing this for us, for our own security.

In the awareness that the Bundeswehr alone does not have the means to contain all future threats.

We therefore need strong development cooperation.

We will therefore strengthen our resilience – in terms of technology and as a society – for example against cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns, against attacks on our critical infrastructure and channels of communication.

And we will keep pace with new technology.

This is why it is so important to me, for example, that we build the next generation of combat aircraft and tanks here in Europe together with European partners, and particularly France. These projects are our utmost priority.

Until the aircraft are operational, we will continue to develop the Eurofighter together.

Another encouraging development is that the contracts for the Eurodrone were finally signed this week.

We are also pushing ahead on the purchase of the armed Heron drone from Israel.

And with regard to nuclear sharing, we will procure a modern replacement for the outdated Tornado jets in good time.

The Eurofighter is set to be equipped with electronic warfare capabilities.

The F-35 fighter jet has the potential to be used as a carrier aircraft.

And finally, ladies and gentlemen, we will do more to guarantee a secure energy supply for our country.

The Federal Government has already initiated one important measure to address this.

And we will change course in order to eliminate our dependence on imports from individual energy suppliers.

After all, the events of recent days and weeks have shown us that responsible, forward-looking energy policy is not just crucial for our economy and our climate.

It is also crucial for our security.

This means that the faster we make progress with the development of renewable energies, the better.

And we are on the right track. We are an industrialised country aiming to become carbon-neutral by 2045!

With this goal on the horizon, we will have to take major decisions.

For example, on building up a reserve of coal and gas.

We have decided to increase the amount of natural gas in storage via long-term options to two billion cubic metres. Furthermore, we will acquire additional natural gas on the world markets – in consultation with the EU.

And finally, we have made the decision to rapidly build two LNG terminals in Brunsbüttel and Wilhelmshaven.

I would like to expressly thank Federal Economics Minister Habeck for his efforts to facilitate this!

Our current short-term needs can dovetail with what is already needed long-term for the transformation to succeed.

An LNG terminal that today receives gas can tomorrow be used to import green hydrogen.

And amidst all this, we will of course not lose sight of the high energy prices.

They have now been driven up yet further by Putin's war.

This week we have therefore agreed on a relief package, which includes lifting the surcharge under the Renewable Energy Sources Act by the end of this year, as well as an increase in the commuter tax allowance, a heating subsidy for low earners, subsidies for families and tax relief measures.

The Federal Government will act swiftly to set these in motion.

Our message is clear. We will not leave individuals and businesses to face this situation alone.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This watershed does not just affect our country. It affects all of Europe.

And this, too, is both a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge consists in strengthening the sovereignty of the European Union sustainably and permanently.

The opportunity lies in preserving the united front that we have demonstrated in recent days in agreeing the sanctions package.

For Germany and for all of the EU's other member states, that means not simply asking what they can extract in Brussels for their own country.

But asking: What is the best decision for our Union?

Europe is our framework for action.

Only when we understand that will we prevail over the challenges of our time.

And that brings me to my fifth and final point. Putin's war marks a turning point – and that goes for our foreign policy, too.

As much diplomacy as possible, without being naive – that is what we will continue to strive for.

But not being naive also means not talking simply for the sake of talking.

True dialogue requires a willingness to engage – on both sides.

That is lacking on Putin's side, quite clearly – and not just in recent days and weeks.

What does this mean for the future?

We will not refuse talks with Russia.

Even in this extreme situation, it is the job of diplomacy to keep channels of communication open.

Anything else, I believe, would be irresponsible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We know what we stand for – not least given our own history.

We stand for peace in Europe.

We will never accept the use of force as a political instrument.

We will always advocate the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

And we will not rest until peace in Europe is secured.

And we are not alone in this – we are joined by our friends and partners in Europe and worldwide.

Our greatest strength is our alliances!

It is to them that we owe the great fortune our country has enjoyed for over thirty years:

Living in a unified country, in prosperity and at peace with our neighbours.

If we want the last thirty years to be more than a historical exception, then we must do everything we can to maintain the cohesion of the European Union, the strength of NATO, to forge even closer relations with our friends, our partners and all those who share our convictions worldwide.

I am utterly confident that we can succeed in this. Because rarely have we and our partners been so resolved and so united.

What unites us at this time is that we know the strength of free democracies.

We know that when something finds a broad consensus among politicians and the public, it will endure – even in this watershed moment and beyond.

And so I thank you and all parliamentary groups in this House who have unequivocally condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine for what it is: an absolutely unjustifiable attack on an independent country, on the peaceful order in Europe and the world.

Today's motion for a resolution expresses that very clearly.

I thank everyone who has taken a stance against Putin's war – and who has gathered here in Berlin and elsewhere for peaceful demonstrations.

And I thank everyone who stands with us at this time for a free and open, fair and peaceful Europe.

We will defend it.

Thank you very much!

### *6.2 Full text of Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2 February 2023 speech at Volgograd:*

*President of Russia Vladimir Putin*: Dear veterans and friends,

Today, we are celebrating one of the most important, fateful dates in the history of our country and the world. Exactly 80 years ago, here on the banks of the great Russian Volga River, the hated, cruel enemy was stopped and sent into irreversible retreat, bringing to a conclusion the long, arduous, fierce battle for Stalingrad.

This was not merely a battle for a city – the very existence of a tormented but unvanquished country was at stake, as was the outcome of not only the Great Patriotic War but of World War II as a whole. Every

person in the trenches and on the home front felt and understood this. And so, as it has happened repeatedly in our history, we united in the decisive battle and won.

The Battle of Stalingrad justifiably went down in history as a turning point in the Great Patriotic War. In addition to defeating the largest Wehrmacht group and its satellites, the will of the entire Hitler coalition was broken. The European vassals and accomplices of Nazi Germany, many of which fought at Stalingrad, representing practically all countries of subjugated Europe, began feverishly looking for ways to flee, to evade responsibility and shift the blame onto their former masters. Everyone realised what the Soviet people knew from the start – the Nazi plans to destroy our country and Nazi ideas about global domination were doomed to fail.

For 200 days at Stalingrad, two armies fought to the death amid the ruins of this legendary city. The army that proved stronger of will prevailed. The fierce resistance of our soldiers and their commanders, exceeding what is humanly possible, can only be understood and explained by their loyalty to the Motherland, their firm, absolute belief that the truth was on our side. The willingness to go beyond for the sake of the Motherland and the truth, to do the impossible, has always been and remains in the blood, in the character of our multi-ethnic people. This is what defeated Nazism.

Stalingrad has forever become a symbol of the invincibility of our people, of the very power of life. This city, its suburbs and nearby villages had to be rebuilt from the ground up, as hardly a tree or intact building was left standing in the city by February 1943.

The exceptional endurance and self-sacrifice of the defenders and residents of Stalingrad still move us to the core, evoking feelings of the deepest gratitude and respect. It is our moral duty – primarily to the victorious soldiers – to faithfully honour the memory of this feat, to pass it down the generations, and not to let anyone devalue or distort the role of the Battle of Stalingrad in the victory over Nazism and in liberating the entire world from this monstrous evil.

Now we are seeing that unfortunately, the ideology of Nazism – this time in its modern guise – is again creating direct threats to our national security, and we are, time and again, forced to resist the aggression of the collective West.

However incredible, it is a fact – we are again being threatened with German Leopard tanks with crosses on board. There is again a plan to fight Russia on Ukrainian land using Hitler's successors, the Banderites.

We know that despite the efforts of official bodies and the corrupt propaganda of the unfriendly Western elites, we have many friends all over the world, including the Americas, North America, and Europe.

However, those that are dragging European countries, including Germany, into a new war with Russia, and especially those that are irresponsibly talking about it as a fait accompli, those who are hoping to defeat Russia on the battlefield, apparently fail to understand that a modern war against Russia will be a completely different war for them. We do not send our tanks to their borders but we have what to respond with, and it is not limited to the use of armour. Everyone must realise this.

Obviously, those who are threatening us do not understand a simple truth: all our people, we all grew up and absorbed the traditions of our people at our mothers' knee – generations of winners who built our country with hard work, sweat and blood, and passed it on to us as a legacy.

The fortitude of the defenders of Stalingrad is the most important moral and ethical guideline for the Russian Army, for all of us. Our soldiers and officers are loyal to this. The continuity of generations,

values, traditions is what distinguishes Russia, makes us strong and self-confident, makes us believe in our rightness and in our victory.

I warmly congratulate everyone here, all defenders of the Motherland today, all Russians, and compatriots abroad on the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Battle of Stalingrad.

Happy anniversary to you. Happy celebrations of the triumph of life and justice.

Thank you for your attention.

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