

Changing observations and descriptions of Germany`s foreign policy.

Outline for a research project

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Abstract

Today, foreign policy analysis rarely questions the fact that foreign policy cultures are in flux, albeit the change might be a very slow one. However, *how* to comprehend and possibly explain these transformation processes in the most accurate way is still among the least tackled puzzles of international relations and foreign policy analysis. Despite the recent emergence of several innovative approaches, the culture of foreign policy has continued to be conceived of as a pool of intersubjectively constituted routinized rules of action, or of socially constructed rules and norms. Yet, the question in what respect the foreign policy culture of a state consists of a set of partial societal discourses, which are intertwined and mutually affecting each other, takes a back seat. Our research project thus aims at reconstructing the *interaction* between 1) public opinion, 2) parliamentary discourse, 3) official government reports, 4) mass media coverage and 5) scientific description of foreign policy culture, in order to make a contribution to answering the question of how to explain possible change of foreign policy culture. By reconstructing the expectations (6) held by the most important international partners of the state examined, we additionally focus on the external influence on the respective foreign policy culture.

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1) Introduction¹

For the last twenty years – at least since unification and the end of the bloc-confrontation – scholars have been discussing whether Germany's foreign policy is thoroughly changing or rather following a path of continuity. Today, a majority of researchers come to agree that change and not continuity has gotten the upper hand concerning this issue (Baumann 2006; Maull 2006; Harnisch/Schieder 2006; Hellmann 2006; Roos 2010). The conviction that foreign policy change can most convincingly be analyzed by focussing on a state's political culture, its norms and rules or identity is enjoying equally strong support (Chay 1990; Katzenstein/Okawara 1993; Kier 1995; Hudson 1995; Kirste/Maull 1996; Berger 1996; Desch 1998; Duffield 1999; Bellers 1999; Weller 2000; Baumann 2005; G. Hellmann et al. 2006; Baumann 2006; Roos 2010). Until very recently however scholars had been voicing criticism on the scarcity of the state of the art in this field (G. Hellmann et al. 2007; Berg-Schlosser 2003; Bellers 1999; Hudson 1997; Jetschke/Liese 1998) By and large the research community also agrees on methodological issues, insofar as most studies use qualitative methods in order to analyze a change of belief systems or the respective foreign policy's universe of meaning.

Our project pursues a new research agenda insofar as it changes the focus of interest: Most researchers conceptualize a foreign policy culture as a more or less monolithic independent variable, treating i) public opinion, ii) parliamentary discourse, iii) official government reports, iv) mass media coverage, v) scientific description of foreign policy and vi) the expectations of the most important international partners as different layers or representations of the very same entity. We would like to turn our attention to these different dimensions of a specific foreign policy culture and thus ask for their interrelationships, thereby understanding them as interacting but nevertheless separable dimensions of a state's foreign policy process.

In particular, Sociology, Communication Studies and Political Sciences offer important insights on the various dimensions that seem to be crucial for change in a country's political culture. On the individual elements of politico-cultural transformations isolated intra-disciplinary debates do exist, but the *interrelation and interaction* of the elements which eventuate change have been neglected.

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Interlinkages such as the *mutual influence* of mass media, elite discourses and the results of public opinion polls have not yet been addressed by academic research in a systematic manner (Berg-Schlosser 2003). Consequently, researchers point to the crucial impact of cultural factors, but do not enquire into the conditions and patterns of change in a foreign policy culture.

Given this theoretically oriented approach, a key domain of foreign policy culture has been chosen as empiric subject, i.e. the societal observations and descriptions of German peace policy since 1998. In the light of the current political debates on the Bundeswehr engagement in Afghanistan, the political and societal relevance of this subject matter is increasing. We therefore hope that our project will result in both a fruitful contribution to the ongoing theoretical discussion in the field of foreign policy analysis and in a presentation of the potentially increasingly controversial development of German foreign policy culture, which is to be reconstructed in empirical density.

Observations and descriptions of German peace policy

While epistemological debates never took center stage in Political Science, they tend to attract specific attention in International Relations (cf. Mayer 2005). However, until very recently Foreign Policy Analysis has largely remained untouched by this epistemological discussion. Sociology (one of the players in the interdisciplinary game of researching political culture) on the other hand even has its own branch of theory that consequently reflects the discipline's epistemological position. The basic proposition is that academics and science themselves are part of the society. This assumption consequently refutes any attempts to uphold a clear separation of object and subject of sociology and thus also of the sociology of international relations. Following this line of argumentation the science of society is but one of various societal self-descriptions (cf. Nassehi 2001). Consequently Niklas Luhman named his theory of society based on operant constructivism "Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft" (Luhmann 1998, could be translated as "The society of society").

Transferring these propositions to the realm of foreign policy means that for example scientific descriptions and analyses (mainly of political science origin) have to be conceived as system-specific descriptions of societal action and as descriptions specific to the subsystem of academia which thus constitutes a societal self-description of this action. Other subsystems, above all mass media and the political system, also produce their system-specific descriptions of foreign policy.

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Based on system-specific ways of observations, these descriptions of foreign policy differ, compete (to a certain degree) and engage in the resulting interpretive conflicts.

It is in these discursive battles that foreign policy culture evolves and transforms. This project looks at processes of transformation in order to identify decisive factors within these complex processes of change. With regard to these research questions, societal observations of foreign policy which differ in their corresponding “way” of observation are discerned as follows:

A government (1) is mainly occupied with the (democratic) legitimacy of its policies and thus describes its foreign policy correspondingly. The way members of Parliament (2), and in particular those of oppositional parties, describe a state’s foreign policy is shaped by their intent to limit the government's room for manoeuvre in foreign policy decision making. The mass media (3) on the other hand operate according to completely different rules: this subsystem’s observations and descriptions are defined by the logic of novelty, conflict and prominence. In yet another subsystem, opinion research institutes assess the attitudes on foreign policy and construct the so called “public opinion” (4), based on poll results referring to only selected instances of foreign policy. This subsystem-specific societal observation and description again notably differs from the aforementioned constructs by science, government, parliament and the media (cf. Weller 2000:173 et seq.). For the sake of completeness it shall be noted explicitly that also science (5) has to be included into those societal subsystems that have developed in the wake of the functional differentiation of society and that have molded system-specific ways of observation producing discernable descriptions of foreign policy (as other things).

Following this perspective from the Sociology of IR, foreign policy culture can be subdivided into five dimensions, which are related to the above mentioned subsystems. Due to their different ways of observation the five dimensions are conceptualized as different societal descriptions of German foreign policy. Similar distinctions can be found in sociological studies conceptualizing the political system in terms of the theory of societal differentiation (e.g. Luhmann 2000, Nassehi 2003, K.-U. Hellmann 2005). These studies employ a center-periphery differentiation in order to understand and to map those processes which create demands on decision making. Societal communication at the center of political decision making constitutes a political culture that on the one hand results in exigencies for decision-making while on the other hand limiting the space for political action. The production of collectively binding decisions (which is the function of the political subsystem) is

predated by the political communication in a social space which, according to K.-U.Hellmann, consists of five areas: the political audience, public opinion, political parties, the parliamentary system and political administration (K.-U. Hellmann 2005:36).

The analysis of the different areas of communication or dimensions of foreign policy culture does not focus on the issues and alternatives of political decisions. Instead we want to know *how* the space of possibilities for foreign policy is constituted. We thus move away from issues and decisions and turn to the conceptions of and the demands on national action in the international system as they are societally communicated in the five dimensions of foreign policy culture. Although state borders do not constitute borders to communication (considering we are talking about *world* society here) this discourse essentially remains a national one, in which descriptions of the own state and its political decisions regarding international action are discussed. These national descriptions of national foreign policy are at the same time communicated in the context of world society. Thus, this international discourse on German foreign policy will be included as the sixth dimension of our analysis.

2) Culture and German foreign policy

German Foreign Policy after 1949 and in particular its peace-orientation has always been explained with reference to Germany's political culture, which has mainly been defined by the responsibility for the two World Wars. However, soon after the fall of the Berlin wall and the unification of the two German states the potential for change of this culturally anchored and peace-oriented foreign policy became a major issue and was heavily debated (Krauthammer 1990/91; Bredow/Jäger 1991; Maull 1992; Layne 1993; Krasner 1993; Waltz 1993; Berger 1996; Duffield 1999). In the wake of this debate, many experts stated that a considerable shift had already been noticeable since the unification. These instances of change have been observed with regards to Germany's self-perception as an actor in world politics and in particular concerning the renunciation of military means in foreign policy (G. Hellmann et al. 2008; Roos 2010).

At the same time as change in Germany's self-perception appeared on the horizon of the academic debate, the concept of political culture found its way into IR. This so called „cultural turn“ in the social sciences is closely tied to the „constructivist turn“ (Checkel 1998) in IR. Constructivist

theorizing foreign policy analysis of a politico-cultural orientation and qualitative research methods form a nexus due to their common orientation towards norms as motives of foreign policy action and the constructedness of realities and social structures (cf. Boekle et al. 2001). Risse (2007) pretty much sums up the common tenor of all these works when stating that traditional foreign policy analysis lacks any reference to culturally constructed meanings and identity constructions.

According to Duffield, Pradetto and Maull (Duffield 1999; Pradetto 2006; Maull 1992, 2006), German foreign policy identity can best be described with terms such as “civilian power“, „multilateralism“ and „orientation towards Europe“. In their view, the persistence of foreign policy identity in the context of radically changing political conditions after 1990 can only be explained with referral to cultural factors.

Rittberger (2003) and the case studies in the volume edited by Rittberger/Peters (2001) argue along the same lines: constructivist approaches are much more apt than neorealist and liberal-utilitarian ones to explain Germany's security, foreign and economic policies, as well as its refusal to join the Iraq War and the willingness to concede sovereignty in favor of European Integration. The concept of Germany as a „civilian power“ (Zivilmacht) serves as a common point of reference to most of these studies (Maull 2001, Maull 1997, Harnisch/Maull 2001).

Berger (1996) puts the emphasis on anti-militarism as the defining feature of Germany's foreign policy culture. For German foreign policy, the end of the bloc-confrontation meant a radical expansion of room for political action. At the backdrop of this increase in possibilities and options it is again only with reference to cultural factors that the country's troop reduction and efforts at disarmament can be explained. In particular, Berger's conception of formation and change of political culture can be of value here: compromises that originally were judged as precarious – such as Germany's membership in the NATO or the concept of the „Staatsbürger in Uniform“ (citizen in uniform) – became solidified through institutionalisation and through the success of the policies in question. As a result of this substantiation, a new, relatively stable political culture has materialized, which then also becomes visible in the results of opinion polls.

While the aforementioned publications emphasize the *continuity* of German foreign policy orientation and culture, there has been ample evidence of a change in this very foreign policy culture. Schwelling (2007) for example attributes the changes in foreign policy since 1990 to the

decreasing influence of the memory of the Nazi-past, the internationalisation of collective memory (for example through the „Europeanization of the Holocaust“), and eventually the proceeding disappearance of the last surviving witnesses. In his book „Kriegsdiskurse“, Schwab-Trapp (2002) traces the changes in political culture that ensued when discourses were increasingly „freed“ from the taboo on war.

His discourse analytical studies (Schwab-Trapp 2002; 2007; 2008) make an important methodological contribution to the field as does G. Hellman et al.'s application of the method of vocabulary analysis which allows to trace incremental changes of German foreign policy discourse (G. Hellmann et al. 2008). In the same vein Wagner's text analysis comparing the construction of identity and foreign policy in several European countries (2002; 2005; 2006) needs to be taken into account, alongside Florack's discourse-analytical study of 2005. Baumann's (2006) work on the changing meaning of German multilateralism and Roos' (2010) reconstruction of the development of Germany's foreign policy since unification as a process of de-idealization and disillusionment, are both based on Strauss' Grounded Theory approach and thus offer methodological suggestions, too. While building on Schwab-Trapp's earlier research regarding his method, Florack (2005) understands the changes that occurred after 1990 not as a rupture in political culture, but rather as a slow movement towards the establishment of a new consensus in security policy. This new consensus prioritizes the norm of solidarity within NATO over other norms such as non-violence. Furthermore, the narrative of German identity has changed and the division of public opinion (and thus political culture) in East and West Germany finds its institutional expression in the cleavage between (the former) PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism; now relabeled Linkspartei/Party of the Left) and the four parties that had their origin in the old Federal Republic of Germany.

In the last years, certain political decisions in German foreign policy, particularly concerning Germany's military engagement beyond alliance borders, for example in Afghanistan, have stirred up considerable debate about the accurate interpretation of these policies. Our research project aims at contributing to that ongoing debate by reconstructing the different patterns of justification and critique regarding the military engagement as shown in each of the six dimensions of foreign policy culture.

3) Change and variety in societal descriptions of foreign policy

Societies know many kinds of descriptions of their politics that apparently have different functions and serve different aims. At the same time all of these descriptions form part of political culture and (want to) influence the development of this political culture. Cultural-Sociologist Schwab-Trapp for example has identified an essential transformation of the political culture of war in Germany following the country's unification. Analyzing parliamentary debates and commentaries of German quality newspapers he is able to show that “the taboo on war which has characterized German political culture since WW II/1945 is lifted in the discourses on the Gulf War and the War on Yugoslavia” (Schwab-Trapp 2002:11; translation by the authors).

If we look at opinion polls on the other side a different picture can be drawn that contrasts the assumption of a strong, unambiguous tendency as identified by Schwab-Trapp: Only about one third of Germans agrees with the statement that under certain circumstances war has to be waged in order to realize justice². In Great Britain 69% of respondents agreed with this statement, in the USA those in support numbered 82%. The recent war on Iraq in particular has again raised German rejection of military instruments as a means to conflict management and has thus contributed to Germany's self-perception as a particularly peaceful society. The refusal of the German government to side with the US' belligerent strategy against Saddam Hussein found broad support in opinion polls and fitted well with the self-image of a peaceful country that has (or at least presumes that it has) learnt its lessons from the own bellicose past.³ In the fall of 2003, when the potential involvement of UN and NATO in political processes regarding Iraq was debated, an opinion poll showed that 71% rejected the deployment of German troops in Iraq, even if the operation were conducted under the auspices of the UN.⁴

The level of agreement and the interpretation and evaluation of German peace policy are contested not only in political debates and public opinion, but also in scientific descriptions of German

² The exact wording of the statement in German was „Unter Umständen muss Krieg geführt werden, um Gerechtigkeit zu erlangen“ [Under certain circumstances, war must be waged in order to attain justice], cf. Transatlantic Trends 2004. Similar tendencies could be shown in other opinion polls on foreign policy attitudes.

³ A provision of the German Basic Law (Grundgesetz) may serve as an example: Its article 26 (1) declares all „[a]cts tending to and undertaken with intent to disturb the peaceful relations between nations“ to be unconstitutional (cf. Deutscher Bundestag, Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, official translation: <https://www.btg-bestellservice.de/pdf/80201000.pdf>).

⁴ Cf. Deutschland-Trend, September 2003:1.

foreign policy. The ongoing, mainly Political Science, debate about the appropriateness of the “civil power” concept as a description for German foreign policy is but one example.⁵ These scientific discourses on the foreign policy identity of Germany are not simply responses to change in foreign policy, but they also support or inhibit this transformation. Consequently further research needs to be done on the critical (self-)reflection of the role of science in the process of transformation of German foreign policy culture

Considering these different societal descriptions of German foreign policy we should not forget the tremendous influence of the mass media (Weller 2002) – also on the various societal descriptions that are produced in other subsystems. Due to their agenda-setting power and their prominence in providing interpretations of events, they heavily influence awareness, knowledge, understanding and societal descriptions – particularly with regards to issues of foreign policy and peace policy.⁶ Our hypothesis is: To a large extent the various societal descriptions of German foreign policy rest on the information and interpretation provided by the mass media – the latter consequently being one of the main subjects of our inquiry. The interaction with the media is most obvious in the case of opinion poll results. But also the content of the political debates is largely defined by the topics that the mass media put to the fore and by the information that they provide on the respective issues. This again has repercussions also in the field of science, as scientific descriptions of foreign policy mainly represent theoretical reflections of those issues that have been promoted to become central events of international politics by the mass media.

While judgments on the extent and appropriateness of change in German foreign policy culture vary widely, there is consensus that some form of change has taken place. Until today it remains unclear though *how* this change evolves, what drives and what hinders it, in what dimensions it is initially promoted and where it is only reproduced. All these questions, however, deserve the attention of the researcher – not only in order to inform political judgment, but also to advance the political scientist's understanding of continuity and change of German foreign policy. It is these questions that drive our research interest and that lead us to gather data from all six dimensions of foreign policy culture. During the collection of data, particular attention will be paid to those phases that can be identified as temporally close to central decisions of foreign policy.

⁵ As an example cf. respective special issues of the German journals *Internationale Politik* (Vol. 9/2003), *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (Vol. 11/2004) and *WeltTrends* (Vol. 40/2003).

⁶ „Whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media“ (Luhmann 2000b: 1).

The period covered by our investigation starts with the year 1998 whose events often serve as evidence of change in German foreign policy culture. In two regards this year can be viewed as turning point of German foreign policy: Not only did the coalition of the Green Party and the SPD come into power, Germany at the same time joined the preparations of the NATO war on Yugoslavia.

4) Theoretical-methodical approach

This project builds on the theoretical development in humanities, cultural and social sciences which is often labeled as „cultural turn“ (Reckwitz 1999). For a scientific understanding of societal change, it is of central importance to conceive the world as a structure of collective action that is constantly reproduced and transformed by human actors (Dewey 1954; Franke/Roos 2010). A reference to the never ending debate on the agent-structure relation and their mutually constitutive quality (Archer 1996; Giddens 1984; Bhaskar 1993) reveals that the sociality of human-beings constantly (re)produces incrementally changing constructions of reality (Berger/Luckmann 2007) and fabricates political descriptions of the world, objectives and strategies of action tied to them. Against this background, the central societal descriptions of German foreign policy and its legitimizing bases have to be understood as the common expression of the country's foreign policy culture that forms the frame for Germany's self-perception and self-description as a peace-loving and peace-promoting country. The key societal descriptions reflecting German foreign policy culture are as follows:

- results of opinion polls on foreign policy issues
- key parliamentary debates on German peace policy
- official governmental descriptions of German peace policy
- mass media coverage of long-lasting decisions for German peace policy
- scientific descriptions of German peace policy/foreign policy.

The analysis will consider world societal representations of German foreign policy as a sixth dimension: The expectations expressed by the governments of important partner countries will be included as well as their reactions to pivotal foreign policy decisions. We assume that this external dimension constitutes a relevant factor of influence for change in foreign policy culture.

5) Work Program

The first step of this research project will reconstruct German foreign policy culture at two given points of time on all five (national) dimensions. For the current moment (2010) and the year 1998, the discourse will be analyzed with questions like: What is considered an important international challenge to German foreign policy? Which primary goal is ascribed to foreign policy? What means are considered appropriate and effective for achieving the objective of foreign policy? Which norms, values and markers of identity are employed to justify the goals and strategies? Regarding all these questions: Does the use of terms and structure of arguments differ across the various dimensions? Which terms and arguments are preponderant in the individual dimensions? Differences shall be identified, not only across dimensions but also between the two points of time.

In this first step of the research program, the sixth dimension is to be assessed as well, independently of the aforementioned five dimensions, by means of qualitative analysis, drawing on selected contributions of foreign actors. The objective is to determine which demands and expectations these external actors put on German foreign policy and how they react to German descriptions of foreign policy. Here, we are particularly interested in the expectations on Germany as a foreign policy actor because the German discourse often relates to the presumed expectations of external actors.

The first step allows us to describe and to identify differences across the distinctive dimensions and between the two points of time within the individual dimensions. Building on this capacity, in a second step we ask when and in which dimension *new terms*, reasoning, arguments, which distinguish the political culture in 2010 from that of 1998, have appeared for the first time. (This will later allow us to identify the „infection“ of other dimensions with certain terms.) Our search for the birthplace of new terms is structured by the hypothesis that new terms, arguments and reasoning are most likely to appear in the discourse in temporal proximity to pivotal political decisions. If societal descriptions that appear to be characteristic for the foreign policy culture at the point t_x can already be found in the descriptions on one or more dimensions at the point t_{x-1} , our analysis needs to figure out whether the same term, reasoning or argument had already been present at an earlier point t_{x-2} in one of the other dimensions.

The interaction and relations between the six dimensions are in the focus of step three of our research project. Methodologically, this is done by ascribing the elaborated differing self descriptions to certain temporal phases. If we speak of change in foreign policy culture this implies a difference of societal descriptions of point t_x and t_{x-1} . If we want to trace the influences and cross-fertilization between the various dimensions that eventually lead to the larger image of „change in political culture“, we need to identify the origin of new discursive elements. This is done by looking at the descriptions that are considered vital elements of political culture at the point t_x , in order to then go back and see in which of these selected dimensions new patterns of argument have emerged first t_{x-1} . In order to re-construct not only the emergence of new terms, but also their spreading and establishment as formative elements of political culture, we also need to trace the processes of adaption that might accompany the emergence of a new term or argumentative figure.

For this step of analysis, terms (to be identified by lexical/vocabulary analysis) play a role as much as interpretative structures and patterns of reasoning and argumentation. The relevance of a culturalist analysis of German foreign policy can be highlighted by a brief reference to the recent debates on the war in Afghanistan: for about one year the public debate on the deployment of German troops in Afghanistan has attracted rising attention. Can or even should the ongoing operation be termed „war“? Or is it more appropriate to speak of a “peace-keeping operation”? Shall we name the situation on the ground as „war-like circumstances“ and do we call the affected „injured“ or “wounded”, „fallen“ or „dead“? These discursive differences do not only have consequences for symbolic policies, constitutional, legal and insurance issues. They also reveal a considerable insecurity on behalf of the German political actors as for the essential questions of war and peace. Moreover, this battle waged on words also points to a cleavage between the majority of public opinion (as measured in the polls) and political elites, and to an intra-elite conflict whose winner hopes to gain a certain authority over defining the „right“ interpretation of the situation.

Step two of our analysis identifies when (point of time, t_{x-1} and where (in which dimensions) new elements of the foreign policy culture are introduced into the discourse. Before assessing whether there is influence and cross-fertilization and, if yes, which patterns define the process of change of foreign policy culture, the potential of external developments to be responsible for culture change needs to be explored. The sixth dimension comes into play here: Do perceivable transformations in the international environment or modifications of the expectations expressed by Germany's closest

international partners predate transformations in foreign policy culture? To identify potential external influences in temporal proximity to new emerging terms seems of considerable importance, as Germany since 1949 at large has been perceived as an actor particularly responsive and adaptive to external demands.

In the last step of our research program, the overall change in foreign policy culture in the past twelve years is broken down into six steps of change, differentiated along the six dimensions. These steps of transformation then are subject to a comparison: Can certain patterns of change be identified? Does the development of new forms of societal self-descriptions follow certain discursive paths? Does the discursive establishment of new societal descriptions follow certain patterns? This means concretely: Are new terms (that constitute one of the characteristics of German foreign policy in 2010, but not in 1998) more likely to emerge in one dimension than in the other ones? Which subsystem is most likely to pick up new ideas from other dimensions and adapt as one of the first? Are there temporal patterns for processes of change? Which role do external impulses, constructed as „expectations“, have? And to which extent can the results be generalized, given that only one particular political culture, that of German foreign policy, has been analyzed over a period of twelve years in six dimensions?

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