

Holger H. Mey. *German Security Policy in the 21st Century: Problems, Partners, and Perspectives.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2004. xi + 162 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-663-4.



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Holger H. Mey's book, which was first published in German shortly after the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, explores the factors that may affect Germany's national security environment through the year 2030. The author, a political scientist and president of the Institute for Strategic Analysis in Bonn, says he is engaged in a "mental exercise" (p. 12). This is an apt description of the study because it does not so much spell out a concrete vision of the future as discuss trends and developments that policymakers will need to take into account.

The book's underlying messages, while sound, are not necessarily original. Many had been stated in various guises since at least the 1980s in the old West Germany.[1] These include the ideas that military power continues to play a central role in international relations and is "an integral part" of crisis management, especially because international law is difficult to apply and enforce (p. 5ff); that Germany's political leadership lacks imagination, is not good at thinking about long-term trends, and needs to pay more attention to strategic thinking (pp. ix-x); that a strong NATO and an "international division of labor" between Europeans and Americans on defense issues remain vital for Germany's future (pp. 104, 112); and whether the general trend over the next thirty years is peaceful or threatening, or whether it leads to more or

less European unity in the security field, every European government will need to maintain and strengthen its basic military capacities (e.g. pp. 88-95). Indeed, Mey is most concerned with future German "force planning." He believes that most of the Bundeswehr's planning problems have domestic origins related to the government's unwillingness to fund it properly (pp. 113-114). Likewise, he briefly mentions the need for a more "robust" Federal Security Council to coordinate Germany's response to international crises (pp. 108, 128).

In his second chapter, Mey outlines possible scenarios for European security in 2030 in which two criteria play an important role. The first is whether the European Union will develop towards a "United Regions of Europe" with its own military capacity, or whether it will abandon its more ambitious supranational plans and evolve through multilateral agreements in which national governments retain a high degree of sovereignty. The second is the overall level of international threat, which depends largely on developments in the former Soviet Union, China, and the Middle East. For Mey, a breakdown of the close relationship with Western European countries and especially the United States would be a central source of insecurity for Germany, regardless of the direction the EU evolves. He goes on, in chapter 3, to analyze various global security factors ranging from the

changing nature of warfare to world population and environmental stresses and, in chapter 4, to provide a tour of the world's regions that are important for Germany's defense.

Mey's evaluation, in the fifth chapter, of the risks and challenges facing Germany represents the most original part of his book, especially considering that the bulk of his manuscript had been completed before the attacks on the United States on September 11. Here he stresses that presently Germany does not need to fear conventional ground attacks from other European powers, although there is always some danger that the regional peacekeeping operations it participates in may take a nasty turn. However, "for the foreseeable future, the threat coming from a great distance will be the most likely danger to German territory" (p. 80). Under this rubric, he includes missile strikes from hostile states, use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorists, large scale activity by organized crime, and "strategic information operations," for example an attack against communication systems used by the government or military (p. 80). Mey states quite clearly his belief that "possible direct attacks against Germany include, first of all, the option of strategic terror" (p. 84). By the time the author reaches his conclusion, he has made his case that the Bundeswehr is going to play a vital role in providing for German security in the future. It will have to respond to more varied types of threats as well as to more demands for peacekeeping forces than ever before. It even may need to initiate military action in remote parts of the world in response to a direct attack.

What he does not do well, however, is support his final conclusion "that current plans for the Bundeswehr will not suffice, in terms both of structure and material. They will not suffice, even in the case of wise political self-restraint" (p. 114). The material necessary to make this case was certainly available. Just recently, in May, 2005, the Bundeswehr's General Inspector, General Wolfgang Schneiderhahn, warned that considerably more funds were needed to transform the German military into a modern force that could operate on a global basis within the scope of rapid deployment forces planned by both the EU and NATO.[2] Yet Mey does little to analyze in concrete terms the successes and difficulties experienced by the Bundeswehr in its attempts to reform itself since the end of the Cold War.

There are other ways in which this brief study disappoints as well. It focuses almost entirely on military responses to potential threats. It is true that Mey devotes part of an appendix (pp. 126-129) to the question

of a "broader" definition of security, one not solely fixed on military security alone. He rationally concludes that it is necessary for policy makers to prioritize risks due to the inability to solve all of the possible global threats to Germany's security. However, the study tells us relatively little about how Germany might develop an effective system for responding to threats in the new security environment and for coordinating the actions of all levels of government during them. Moreover, where can Germany be proactive, both at home and abroad, in non-military ways in order to strengthen its security?

Finally, Mey tries not to make any concrete predictions about the future. "The objective of this 'mental exercise,'" he writes, "is to avoid the tendency to simply extrapolate from existing situations and common assumptions" (p. 12). He even cites as a negative example the Club of Rome's "linear trend-extrapolations" from the early 1970s predicting limits to economic growth due to restrictions placed by the environment (p. 2).

Historians certainly will be among the last to question his claim that assumptions about the future are often overtaken by unforeseen events. This open-ended approach is rather unique and does seem well suited as a basis for the type of brainstorming on vital issues that politicians in an ideal world would engage in regularly. Yet it has at least two major drawbacks if one wants to remedy pressing deficiencies in the German military. First, the study almost has to remain on a relatively high level of abstraction in discussing future risk scenarios. Second, the Club of Rome's methodology was by no means foolish in one important sense: its dire predictions helped draw public and governmental attention to environmental problems. If they have not materialized, it is in no small part due to preventative measures taken in the meantime. One suspects that Mey's plea for a strengthened and reformed Bundeswehr would have come across more clearly had he himself been more willing to extrapolate based on the present.

Notes

[1]. A prominent example is Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Die gezähmten Deutschen. Von der Machtbesessenheit zur Machtvergessenheit* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1985).

[2]. Martin Aguera, "Sparen gefährdet Bundeswehr-Umbau; Generalinspekteur Schneiderhan will mehr Geld für Streitkräfte", *Welt am Sonntag*, May 15, 2005, p. 7. See also Stephen S. Szabo and Mary N. Hampton, *Reinventing the German Military*,

AICGS Policy Report 11 (2004), which argues that “the German [Ministry of Defense] is thus confronted with finding the means to modernize its forces for new missions without new money” [p. 11]. The report is available on line at URL: <<http://www.aicgs.org/Publications/PDF/polreport11.pdf>>.

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