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WEST GERMANY'S ARMY FACING STRUCTURAL REFORMS IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL UPHEAVAL, 1987-1994

Martin RINK (Germany)

“The army is standing there naked” – “Zeitenwende” 2022

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a turning point in the German collective consciousness. Three days later, the speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz in the German Bundestag could already be described as ‘historic’. He stated: “February 24, 2022 marks a turning point in the history of our continent. [...] We are experiencing a turning point [Zeitenwende]. And that means: the world after will no longer be the same as the world before.” The Bundeswehr will need “new, strong capabilities” in the future.⁽¹⁾ And already in the early hours of the Russian attack, Inspector of the Army Alfons Mais published an outspoken post on LinkedIn:

“You wake up in the morning and realise that there is war in Europe. [...] In my 41st year of service in peacetime, I would never have believed that I would have to experience another war. And the Bundeswehr, the army that I am allowed to lead, is more or less empty-handed. [...] We all saw it coming and were unable to get our arguments across, to draw the conclusions from the Crimean annexation and implement them. That doesn’t feel good! I’m annoyed! [...] When, if not now, is the time to leave the Afghanistan mission behind us structurally and materially and to reposition ourselves, otherwise we will not be able to implement our constitutional mandate and our alliance obligations with any prospect of success.”⁽²⁾

1. Regierungserklärung Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz, Deutscher Bundestag, Stenographischer Bericht, 19. Sitzung, Sonntag, 27.02.2022, p. 1350-1355, hier p. 1350 (long quotation), 1352 (2. quotation, 06.03.2023).

2. Alfons Mais, 24.02.2022 <https://www.linkedin.com/posts/alfons-mais-46744b99_du-wachst-morgens-auf-und-stellst-fest-es-activity-6902486582067044353-Rzky> (06.03.2023, my translation).

The expression “turning point in history” – “Zeitenwende” – has since become a popular phrase. The same runs true for the bitter statement of the leading officer of the German army: “The army is empty-handed”; or in a more literal translation: “The army is standing there naked”. And the expression “annoyed” could be understood as “I’m pissed off!”⁽³⁾

How could it happen that a high-ranking officer allowed himself to be carried away by using such clear words in a public post? Were the deficits he complained about a consequence of thirty years of missions abroad by the international community of states and thus the Bundeswehr? Had the Bundeswehr really lost its ability to fight in war? And if so, what differences existed in 2022 compared to that of the late Cold War? The Bundeswehr of the 1980s, once derided as a “peace army”, now appears in a different light. But this is also a matter of perception. Obviously, the motto „turning point“ shaped the government from 2021 to the beginning of 2025 under Chancellor Scholz. And this concept was most clearly represented by his Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, who did not take office until January 2023.⁽⁴⁾ Although it determined the security policy discourse in the three years after February 2022, it remains to be seen how long this word will continue to shape things.

A “turning point” – “Zeitenwende” – was already identified in 2017, namely the “collapse of an international order shaped under the conditions of Western hegemony”, which has now broken down as a result of the “consequences of globalization”.⁽⁵⁾

The perception of the turning point of 2022 led to the revival of a term that had faded into the background since the 1990s. Already the very first sentence of the revised *Defence Policy Guidelines* of November 2023 accentuate this. “War has returned to Europe. [...] We are experiencing a turning point [Zeitenwende].” But this was not the first time in recent history that the current challenges appeared against the backdrop of a now faded threat from the past. Explicitly, the document now demanded “Kriegstüchtigkeit” – “war readiness”.⁽⁶⁾

Ironically, already in the 1990s, the impression was widespread that the army structures, which then focused on national defence, was obsolete. Instead, the *Defence Policy Guidelines* from 1992 advocated missions abroad. Though “combat missions remain the ultima ratio”, the paper stated that “fear and danger to life and limb must not prevent soldiers from fulfilling their duty.” That applied “in peace as well as in war times,

3. Ibid. Key phrases in German: “[D]as Heer, das ich führen darf, steht mehr oder weniger blank da. [...] Das fühlt sich nicht gut an! Ich bin angefressen!”

4. Cv. Ringo Wagner and Hans-Joachim Schaprian, eds., *Operation Zeitenwende – eine Zwischenbilanz. Was Gesellschaft und Bundeswehr leisten müssen*. Magdeburg 2024; Boris Pistorius, *Auswirkungen der Zeitenwende auf die Bundeswehr – eine Zwischenbilanz*, ibid. pp. 18–26.

5. Joachim Krause, *Die neue Zeitenwende in den internationalen Beziehungen – Konsequenzen für deutsche und europäische Politik*. In: *sirius* 2017(1), pp. 3–24, here p. 3.

6. Bundesminister der Verteidigung, ed, *Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien 2023* [Berlin] 2023, p. 7 (cf. p. 9, 27).

to the defence of Germany and its allies and in peace and humanitarian missions of the United Nations.” So while urging for a new kind of missions in potentially dangerous missions abroad, the *Defence Policy Guidelines* drew an image of a somewhat watered-down peacetime army before 1989. Explicitly, it demanded a new kind of “soldierly professionalism” which had to be “based on the real conditions of war, danger and human misery”.⁽⁷⁾

So the question arises: How did the same notions of “readiness for war” change in such a way, that they turned out to mean the exact opposite? When pleading for missions outside Germany and Europe in 1992, this stands in stark contrast to the refocus on the defence of the Western Alliance in Europe exactly thirty years later. In both cases the argument of military capability under “real conditions of war and danger” (1992) or the “war readiness” (2022/23) served to clearly demarcate the actual situation from a past that now appeared less dangerous. This can only be explained by the impact of the political transitions between 1987 and 1994. The impact of the crumbling of the Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989 is most clear. Likewise, the force reductions according to the *Two Plus Four Agreement*,⁽⁸⁾ in which the reunited Germany committed itself to reduce its armed forces to 370.000 soldiers is most obvious. Therefore, this paper will focus on results of the emerging détente in the late 1980s. In this time, an army structure was planned, which allows us to speculate what kind of land forces would have been created in the 1990s if the hoped-for peace dividend had not materialized.

Already in 1990, the journalist and political scientist Lothar Rühl characterized the upheaval he was experiencing as a “turning point” (*Zeitenwende*).⁽⁹⁾ In reference to the contemporary term around 1989, historian Kristina Spohr also spoke of a “Wendezeit” in her book published in 2019. In the very same year, and using the same term, the historian Frank Bösch identified the year of 1979 as a “Zeitenwende”, which “ushered in the word of today”.⁽¹⁰⁾

In the following, an attempt will be made to address this “turning point” (*Wende*) of 1989/90, focusing on the army as the largest branch of the armed forces. In 1987 at the latest, the Army Staff considered the consequences of the global political upheavals. And counter-intuitively, the steps towards nuclear disarmament were coupled with a “revival of operational thinking”. War now appeared to be a real possibility again – but now under conventional auspices. This alone led to a drastic re-planning of the organizational structure of the West German army. However, these plans became obsolete with the

7. *Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien* (cf. note 6), p. 18, no. 53. Cf. Sönke Neitzel, *Deutsche Krieger. Vom Kaiserreich zur Berliner Republik – eine Militärgeschichte*, 2. ed., Berlin 2020, pp. 383-385.

8. *Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany*, Moscow, 12.09.1990 <<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/248552/b78f0e9a0ee16ebcf255473724fe15d1/statusliste-de-data.pdf>>.

9. Lothar Rühl, *Zeitenwende in Europa. Der Wandel der Staatenwelt und der Bündnisse*, Stuttgart 1990.

10. Kristina Spohr, *Wendezeit. Die Neuordnung der Welt nach 1989*, Munich 2019 (= *Post Wall, Post Square. Rebuilding the World after 1989*, London 2019); Frank Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979. Als die Welt von heute begann*, 4. ed. Munich 2019.

moment the Berlin Wall crumbled on 9th November 1989. Not even eleven months later, on 3rd October 1990, the German reunification was a reality, unthought of even in late 1989. The *Two Plus Four Agreement*, negotiated in September 1990, essentially contained a major disarmament program – it was the much-vaunted peace dividend. Nevertheless, the subsequent force reductions, up to 1994, were combined with planning for “out of area missions”.

Looking back, however, it seems that some military development trends had not become as obsolete as they had been perceived for almost three decades. It seems, they had simply receded into the background, from which they re-emerged in 2022. A brief look at the armed forces’ organizational design – and in this case the army – reveals the actual differences between the army in the late 1980s and some 40 years later. On the organizational level, the trend complained of by Mais had consisted in optimizing the army for operations outside of Central Europe. This in turn resulted in modularized army units a “concentration on everything” in general. But this process had already been feared almost half a century earlier.

“After the boom” – times of change from the 1970s to 1989

From 1987 on at the latest, the declining importance of tactical nuclear weapons induced a renaissance of operational thinking. This involved a reassessment of weapon systems, such as drones and long-range artillery, as well as air mobility, and war in the information space. However, the aim of this paper cannot be to trace back 40-years of Bundeswehr organizational history since the 1980s. Instead, the aim is to provide a case study of the futility of planning processes when they are overtaken by major events in world politics. Nevertheless, the case study of organizational planning in the years 1987 to 1990 clearly points towards trends that, in light of the events since 2022, appear in a different light: Plans from the final phase of the Cold War proved to be obsolete, only to be replaced in turn by developments that have now, since 2022, fallen victim to obsolescence.

With the benefit of hindsight, already the 1980s and 1970s can be considered as a time of change. In view of the continuous processes of change in the previous decade, it does not matter whether the term “turning point” applies to the following developments: The change of government under Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1st October 1982 had been marked that way, but it also applies to the “Zeitenwende” in world politics that historian Frank Bösch identified for the year 1979.⁽¹¹⁾ In a broader sense, it could be even applied to the onset of the “postmodern” era, when the industrial high modernity came to its end.⁽¹²⁾ Up until recently – possibly until the “Zeitenwende” of 2022 – an

11. Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979* (cf. note 10).

12. Cf. Andreas Reckwitz and Hartmut Rosa, *Spätmoderne in der Krise. Was leistet die Gesellschaftstheorie?* Berlin 2021, pp. 99–128.

important strand of contemporary historical research shed light on the period “after the boom“, which ended the era of high modernity⁽¹³⁾. These political upheavals are linked to military-technical and organizational ones. The 1980s saw a generational change in weapon systems, not only in medium-range missiles and combat aircraft, but also in mine and artillery systems, in tanks and anti-tank weapons with terminal-phase guided ammunition, and in the development of electronic or computer-assisted command & control systems. This transition can be seen as essential because “high technology based on microelectronics was introduced as a determining factor in the war scenario”. This was based on an electronic revolution, which had already been remarked since the early 1980s, long before the “Revolution in Military Affairs” became a new catchword for the transformation by the turn of the millenium.⁽¹⁴⁾ As early as 1980, the futurologist Alvin Toffler emphasized that the digital revolution was equivalent to a “Third Wave” in human history; in the following decade, he put forward his theory of “third-wave wars”. Not only in economic theory, but also and especially in the military, a globalized and digitized information age caused a fundamental transformation of organizational paradigms.⁽¹⁵⁾ So, a “third revolution in the military” was emphasized in the US armed forces as well as in the Soviet ones.⁽¹⁶⁾

From the mid-1980s, still under the impression of the heated debates about the NATO double-track decision on the upgrade of medium-range nuclear weapons, the German army leadership expected a “revival of the army’s operational planning“. This was in line with the requirements of *NATO Commander Central Europe*, a post, which was held by a German general on a rotating basis. Indeed Mikhail Gorbachev, as the new General Secretary of the CPSU from March 11, 1985, did not want to overthrow the system he served for and from which he came. Likewise, the Bundeswehr Army Staff (Führungsstab des Heeres) was far from intending to reduce their capabilities. Although the developments at these very different levels of action went in different directions, the political upheavals, the technological change, the reconventionalization of strategy and armed forces (re)planning were all interconnected. All of this resulted in an overall political and military constellation that was neither foreseeable for politicians nor for military planners.

13. Julia Angster, *Zeitgeschichte zwischen nationaler und globaler Geschichte*, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 2(2024), pp. 288-302, p. 289 (1st quotation), p. 290, 293; Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich 2014, pp. 791-808; Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1990*, Stuttgart 2005, pp. 288-294; Eckart Conze, *Die Suche nach Sicherheit. Eine Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1949 bis in die Gegenwart*, Munich 2009, p. 372, 396-401.

14. *Die Transformation der Streitkräfte im 21. Jahrhundert. Militärische und politische Dimensionen der aktuellen ‚Revolution in Military Affairs‘*, hrsg. von Jan Helmig und Niklas Schörnig, Frankfurt a.M. u.a. 2008.

15. Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and anti-war. Survival at the dawn of 21st century*, Boston 1993; Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*, New York 1980.

16. Oliver Bange, *Sicherheit und Staat. Die Bündnis- und Militärpolitik der DDR im internationalen Kontext 1969 bis 1990*, Berlin 2017, pp. 118-124. Cf. Frank Umbach, *Das rote Bündnis. Entwicklung und Zerfall des Warschauer Paktes 1955 bis 1991*, Berlin 2005, pp. 238-250.

The focal point of this development was an army structure that was planned with great intensity between 1987 and 1990. It took into account both nuclear détente and the still persisting conventional threat by the Soviet Union. The result was a new model army – but on paper only. If implemented, it would have comprised a force structure, which already in the 1990s contained astonishing parallels to actual force requirements for the war in Ukraine 30 years later: modern combat vehicles, combat helicopters, but also drones and networked operations. Counterintuitive to the hopes of the public and politicians, the prospect of a nuclear weapons reduction raised hopes in the army to gain more importance in the future, evidenced by the *Operational Guidelines*.⁽¹⁷⁾ As early as 21 September, 1987, West German Minister of Defence Manfred Wörner approved the outlines of a new army structure according to this concept.⁽¹⁸⁾ And in November 1988, the responsible Head of Staff Department III in the West German MOD pleaded for a “revival of classical operational thinking, as we can derive it from the history of war”.⁽¹⁹⁾

Given the declining importance of nuclear deterrence – at least among military planners in West Germany and NATO – it is arguable whether the Cold War could have turned into a hot war as the threshold for escalation fell. A variant of this question might be, however, whether these supposed “new wars” that characterized the 1990s in the Global South were even made possible through precisely the same effect.⁽²⁰⁾ As deterrence lost its grim face towards friend (the people of one’s own country) and foe (the friendly face of the new ruler Gorbachev), the possibility increased that security threats could turn into “hot wars”.

In apparent contrast to this revival of the operational idea, other events emerged on the larger political level. From mid-1987, two Bundeswehr officers visited maneuvers in the GDR and officers from the east German Army (Nationale Volksarmee, NVA) visited the Bundeswehr for the first time. Factually, the state visit of GDR State Council Chairman Erich Honecker to Bonn on 7th/8th September 1987 actually meant mutual recognition between both German states. However, cautious explorations by Bundeswehr officers who tried to initiate German-German talks on the military level were stopped already inside the bureaucratic machinery of the Federal Chancellery.⁽²¹⁾

17. German Federal Archives, Military Archives Department (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Abteilung Militärarchiv, BAArch), BH 8-5/ 195, Insp Heer, *Operative Leitlinie. Leitlinie für die operative Führung von Landstreitkräften in Mitteleuropa*, 20.08.1987. Printed also in: *Dokumente zur deutschen Militärgeschichte 1945–1990*, ed by Christoph Nübel, Berlin 2019, pp. 777–788. Pointing to the continuities in German operational thinking: Gerhard P. Groß, *Mythos und Wirklichkeit. Geschichte des operativen Denkens im deutschen Heer von Moltke d.Ä. bis Heusinger*, Paderborn u.a. 2012, Paderborn 2012, pp. 310, 316 f.

18. BAArch, BH 1/ 27 316, Fü S VI 3, *Planungskonferenz 1/88, Stellungnahme Generalinspekteur zu den Strukturvorstellungen* (draft), [23.] Februar 1988.

19. BAArch, BH 1/ 21 072, Fü H III, *Der Landkrieg der Zukunft aus operativer Sicht. Vortragsmanuskript für Führungskreis [Heer] am 15.11.1988*, p. 1.

20. Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 3. ed. Cambridge 2012, p 29 f., 153.

21. BAArch B 136/ 27 054, *Beobachtung der Gruppe der Sowjetischen Truppen in Deutschland (GSTD) und der Nationalen Volksarmee (NVA) vom 28. bis 30.07. gemäß KVAE-Dokument/ Gespräche mit NVA-Offizieren*, 04.08.1987 (draft);

The time of détente – a “revival of operative thinking since 1987”

The document entitled *Operational Guidelines for the Operational Command of Land Forces in Central Europe* was issued on August 20, 1987.⁽²²⁾ The paper comprised “principles for the operational command of land forces in Central Europe and in Schleswig-Holstein in perspective of the German Army”. It began with the statement that “a shift in emphasis between nuclear and conventional components” must occur in order to counter the enemy’s “attack based on a comprehensive operational idea” with an operational idea of its own. The demand for “joint operations [land/air warfare] [...] in conjunction with the armed forces” within the alliance [NATO] and with territorial forces” reflected a maxim that had long been valid. However, the future “growing importance of the third dimension for reconnaissance, combat, air defence and electronic warfare planning” was seen as essential. For this, the level of integration of the air force and army should be lowered from the army group/ air fleet level to the corps.⁽²³⁾

The ideas on operational planning that were further developed in November 1988 already bore the spirit of a new structure. The “fundamental difference” between the existing army and that of the “beginning of the 21st century” was sharply accentuated. The previous tactically-minded focus on forward defence along the Iron Curtain was to be overcome by an operational concept. So, the *Operational Guidelines* proclaimed the solution as “gaining operational capabilities of the army” and the “transition from the two-dimensional duel situation to the three-dimensional battle space.” This included “indirect fire, blocking and air mechanization.” The increasing depth of combat in the future would require equipment investments in the capabilities of “command & control and reconnaissance,” of “fire and blocking,” of “air mobility” and of “operational support.” The paper, drafted by Lieutenant Colonel (and later Major General) Christian Trull, offered a promising view of the future: at the “start of the reorganization,” by 1994, the procurement of CL 289 reconnaissance drones and Wiesel airborne anti-tank vehicles would be completed. Then the armored troops would also be fully equipped with *Leopard 2* main battle tanks. A completely new-style *G 11* caseless standard rifle was on its way, as were modern *AT-2* mines for the engineer troops, and search-fuze ammunition for the artillery. By 1998, the switch to the *Autoko II* command & control system was completed, the small target-locating drone for the artillery and first new *Panther* tank destroyer had been procured, as well as a new-type reconnaissance vehicle. At this point, new *Marder 2* infantry fighting vehicles were also on the way to the Panzergrenadier units. Pre-production models of a new main battle tank *Panzerkampfwagen 2000* were already

02.09.1987 (final).

22. BArch, BH 8-5/ 195, Inspekteur des Heeres, *Operative Leitlinie. Leitlinie für die operative Führung von Landstreitkräften in Mitteleuropa*, 20.08.1987. Cf. *Dokumente zur deutschen Militärgeschichte* (cf. note 17), pp. 777-788. Concerning the war scenarios (Kriegsbild): Florian Reichenberger, *Der gedachte Krieg. Vom Wandel der Kriegsbilder der Bundeswehr*, Munich 2018, pp. 408-411.

23. BArch, BH 8-5/ 195, Insp Heer, *Operative Leitlinie*, 20.08.1987, pp. 8-13.

undergoing new testing. The Army Aviation's existing helicopters were now capable of night combat and new *PAH 2* (Panzerabwehrhubschrauber) anti-tank helicopters were about to be delivered. By this time, the artillery would then be equipped with *Mars* rocket launchers, the *Panzerhaubitze 2000* self-propelled howitzer, and radar-based guidance systems. Further, the army's air defence had been strengthened significantly.⁽²⁴⁾

However, there had to be cuts: Until 1993, a loss of combat power had to be tolerated as a result of the austerity measures. Five armoured infantry brigades had to be reclassified as grenadier brigades. Further, a number of home defence brigades had to be disbanded. This could only be "compensated to a limited extent" by an organisational merger of the previously separate army aviation and paratrooper units. In the period after that, until 1998, however, there would be a "significant improvement". Thus, a concept arose that combined a "system network", consisting of closely connected "reconnaissance, command & control and fire". The "real leap in quality" would only take place in the third phase up to 2003. The *Panzerkampfwagen 2000* main battle tank and the new *Marder 2* infantry fighting vehicle were planned to be available now. By then, the new generation anti-tank helicopters were equipped with a new type of guided missiles, providing the army with an "operational dimension of air mobility". However, all of this only applied under one condition: "The battle for the resource of money must then be fought in the political sphere at all levels."

There is no doubt that the army planners were striving to fill the gap that until recently the German Air Force, alongside its allies, fulfilled with nuclear weapons: Until the beginning of détente and thus nuclear disarmament, it was the Air Force mission to maintain credible nuclear strike capability. As the assets for that task vanished, the Army planners seized the opportunity. They strived to use conventional weapon systems that had been enhanced with high-tech components. The "revived" operational thinking was thus also linked to the struggle for resources and personnel strength. And while the the Army planners agreed that parts of the airspace should be taken away from its sister branch in order to use *Army* aircraft and reconnaissance equipment (such as drones), there were clear differences of opinion within the land forces regarding the concept of air mobility. Both affected interfaces that challenged traditional organizational boundaries of the Bundeswehr branches *Heer* and *Luftwaffe*. Indeed, this was nothing new: Already in the 1950s and early 1960s, the branches of the (planned) West German armed forces had struggled bitterly about their respective roles.⁽²⁵⁾ But in the 1980s, a long-lasting technological structural change had reached its breakthrough. Whereas, during the mid-20th century, the tank had been made possible by the combination of a combustion engine with armoured protection and weapon effectiveness in *one* weapon

24. BAArch, BH 1/ 21 072, FÜH VI 2, *Der Landkrieg der Zukunft in Mitteleuropa*, 14.11.1988, pp. 8-10.

25. Martin Rink, *The Service Staffs' Struggle over Structure. The Bundeswehr's internal Debates on adopting NATO Doctrine 1950-1963*. In: *Rearming Germany*. Ed by James C. Corum, Amsterdam 2011, pp. 221-251.

system, now new technology allowed to outsource these three properties into different subsystems – within a “system of systems”.

At the end of February 1988, the Inspector of the Army Henning von Ondarza gave an overview of the armament plans that were to form the basis of the new structure. At the same time, he showed the main weapon systems that his branch of the armed forces had at its disposal at the end of the Cold War. At that time, the Bundeswehr had 2,287 *Leopard 1* and 2,050 *Leopard 2* main battle tanks, including the weapon systems stored in the military technical inventory. For the coming decade, the first officer of the West German army promised a “technical leap in quality” with the development of the *Panzerkampfwagen 2000*, a completely new designed main battle tank. The *Marder* infantry fighting vehicle, of which there were 2,100 examples, could no longer be considered a “fully-fledged infantry fighting vehicle”. So a completely new *Marder 2* had to be developed for the *Panzergrenadier* troops. In addition to the 4,305 outdated *MTW M 113*, which existed in numerous variants, the army had 1,056 modern *Fuchs* infantry fighting vehicles. In addition to the 411 *Luchs* armoured reconnaissance vehicles, 470 new reconnaissance vehicles were to be procured for the new brigades’ armoured reconnaissance forces. The tank destroyers (*Panzerjäger*) were to receive 436 new *Panther* tank destroyers, which would then be equipped with a twelve-metre-high elevable platform for anti-tank and anti-helicopter missiles. The airborne troops were to also strengthen their anti-tank capabilities with 343 *Wiesel* weapon carriers. The artillery was to keep its 586 *M 109* self-propelled tank howitzers, while from 1997 onwards, 570 self-propelled howitzers of the new *Panzerhaubitze 2000* replaced outdated systems.⁽²⁶⁾

Despite these claims for the future, the existing stock of weapons systems was impressive. In total, in 1988, the German Army had 8,157 armored vehicles at its disposal. The hard core of them comprised 5,233 main battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles. Including the defence stocks, that latter number even rose to 6,437. An overall assessment by the Inspector General outlined the planned inventory of armored vehicles for 1990 at 9,300. Despite all complaints, this number would have increased to 10,000 vehicles in the *Army Structure 2000*.⁽²⁷⁾

However, the actually impressive inventory of main weapon systems still appeared inadequate. The structural planning developed under Ondarza promised “a different army” for the 1990s. In the year before the fall of the Wall, the West German army planned a change in direction that implied a thorough re-haul of almost every weapons category in order to increase combat power. However, this implied drastic cuts, which in turn required fundamental organizational replanning. In May 1988, the Inspector of the Army issued instructions to plan a new structure: *Army Structure 2000*. Like the

26. BAArch, BH 1/ 27 316, Fü H, *Planung für die gepanzerten Fahrzeuge*, 18.02.1988, pp. 4-13 (quotations p. 13).

27. BAArch, BH 1/ 27 316, Fü S VI 3, *Stellungnahme Generalinspekteur zu den Planungen für gepanzerte Fahrzeuge in der Heeresstruktur 2000*, 13.02.1988.

Bundeswehr's planning as a whole, it was based on the motto "push, stretch, cut". And it was not wrongly assumed that "the importance of cutting will increase."⁽²⁸⁾

A structure that never was – "Heeresstruktur 2000", 1987-1989

The planned *Army Structure 2000* (*Heeresstruktur 2000*) not only bore the magical millennium in its name, but it also still reflected the high value of armoured combat. However, the forces suitable for this purpose had to be reduced so much that they did not meet anymore the requirements to equip the eleven armoured divisions that existed until that time. Indeed, the new structure switched the focus from tank-heavy units to air mobility: through organizationally combined paratroopers, an airborne anti-tank defence system and combat helicopters, the army was to be capable of "air mechanization." This question gave rise to bitter controversy in the army's command staff: the dispute between the supporters of the traditional armored organizational concepts and those of air mobility escalated between the end of October and mid-November 1989. The departments responsible for organizational issues skillfully, and with a high degree of aggressiveness, fended off the last attempt to save the former dominance of the armored troops in the future structure.

So, an angry petition of a Panzer Brigade commander to the Inspector of the Army in early 1988 stated: "The *Army Structure 2000* is no longer the originally intended evolutionary development of the *Army Structure 4*. It is revolutionary radical." His superior, the corps commander and later Army Inspector himself, Helge Hansen, commented: "Indeed!" Their next level superior, Henning von Ondarza, who was addressed, tried to calm things down. He admitted that „the structure must be tailored to the given financial framework." "Unfortunately", the future structure could therefore be "less needs-oriented than finance-oriented". He criticised "its weakness in anti-tank defence and its future weakness in striking power" as the "core problem of the German army".⁽²⁹⁾

The new concept was particularly centered around the new *PAH 2* anti-tank helicopter. The helicopter-supported large units planned on paper were to be capable of combined arms combat "from the air and in the air" in all three types of combat: defence, delay and attack. The paratroopers remained a problem child, as air mobile infantry units were not believed to be able to hold their own in demanding combat against the enemy's armored forces. Nevertheless, the paper already provided for commando operations. Instead of the previous airborne divisions, two airmobile divisions and a mixed airmobile brigade were now planned. The "principle of task organization" - which later became the guiding principle in the contingents of foreign missions – was to apply here.⁽³⁰⁾ This

28. BArch, BH 1/ 27 319, Fü S VI 4, Sitzung des MFR am 28.06.1988, 23.06.1988.

29. BArch, BH 1/ 27 316, Fü H, Die Planung für die gepanzerten Fahrzeuge in der Heeresstruktur 2000. Vortrag Insp Heer, Planungskonferenz 1/88, 23.02.1988, 18.02.1988, p. 3 (first quotation), p. 13 (2nd quotation), 15 (3rd and 4th quotations).

30. BArch, BH 1/ 18 944, Insp H, Zusammengefaßte Darstellung der Zielvorstellungen zur Luftbeweglichkeit, 31.03.1988, p. 12 (1st quotation), p.17 (2nd quotation).

contrasted with the principle of armoured brigades, which had been implemented for over a quarter of a century and in which the basic structure largely corresponded to the operational structure.

However, the conditions for the plans from January 1989 had already become obsolete in March. With the decision not to extend the period of conscription to 18 months as decided three years previously, Chancellor Helmut Kohl was apparently aiming to avoid a dispute with the coalition partner FDP under the disarmament-minded Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. In the last days of his short term in office (from May 19, 1988 to April 20, 1989), Defence Minister Rupert Scholz announced that the extension of conscription from 15 to 18 months would not begin on 1st June, 1989, but in July 1992.⁽³¹⁾ A central determinant for planning the new structure was obsolete.

The planning status in April 1989 still showed 42 brigades: 17 *Panzer brigades*, 10 *Panzerergrenadier* (armored infantry) *brigades*, 5 *Grenadier brigades*, 1 *Mountain brigade*, 2 *Airborne brigades*, 2 *PAH* (anti-tank helicopter) *brigades*, and 1 mixed *Airmobile brigade*. There were also 3 light infantry brigades and 1 *Franco-German Brigade*. The logistical tasks and elements were to be combined at division level and in form of joint army logistics brigades, but were to be eliminated at the corps level. Where possible, the commercial sector was to be called upon to carry out these tasks, "even in times of crisis and war".⁽³²⁾ In the future, resource-saving efficiency would take precedence over suitability for deployment. The "interlocking" of field and territorial armies would now be ranked on a broad scale of levels of presence. However, the planners' desire for planning security could be considered fulfilled in the summer of 1989, as the *Army Structure 2000* was now presented to the public in the press. However, this plan was soon outdated. In July 1989, a future strength of 400,000 active soldiers was assumed for the period from 1996 onwards, instead of the previous 456,000 soldiers.

The planners were now faced with a dilemma: the number of twelve divisions promised to NATO could hardly be maintained with this level of personnel. The existing internal structures were therefore reviewed. This meant nothing less than a fundamental questioning of all previous ideas about the West German armed forces' structures. The question now was whether the division or the brigade could be reduced to a role of a pure command staff or whether an entire command level would be eliminated. The first planning alternative considered savings by staggering the levels of presence of the units. The second approach was revolutionary, however. It envisaged the complete abolition

31. Reiner Pommerin, *Die Wehrpflicht Legitimes Kind der Demokratie oder überholter Ballast in der Einsatzarmee?* In: Klaus-Jürgen Bremm, Hans-Hubertus Mack and Martin Rink, eds., *Entschieden für Frieden – 50 Jahre Bundeswehr 1955 bis 2005*, Berlin 2005, pp. 299-312, p. 305; Manfred Engelhardt, *Paßt das alles noch zusammen? Bundeswehrplanung und Verhandlungen über Konventionelle Streitkräfte in Europa*. In: Information für die Truppe/ IFDT 8(1989), pp 52-63, p. 55. Cf. *Ohne Fortüne*. in: Der Spiegel 17(1989), p. 20 f.; <<https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13495290.html>> (03.07.2020); Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 11/4436 *Änderung des Wehrpflichtgesetzes*, Bonn 26.04.1989, <<http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btd/11/044/1104436.pdf>> (letzter Abruf am 20.07.2020).

32. BArch, BH 1/ 19 727, Fü H VI 3, *Vortrag vor Führungskreis 17.05.89*, p. VI 6.

of the brigade level in favor of regiments. The brigades that the West German Army had developed since 1959 – based on the experience of the Second World War – and which it presented to the other NATO partners with great pride, formed the core of the previous organizational understanding.

This thought experiment promised savings of 3,000 officers and 8,000 enlisted men, as well as the equivalent of at least 4 mechanized brigades of conventional design; and this with an apparent increase in the possible number of divisions from 12 to 17, i.e. by a factor of 1.4.⁽³³⁾ This approach also showed the organizational price that the brigade structure had demanded compared to the regimental structures of the World Wars: The NATO-requirement to maintain twelve-division had resulted in challenging force structures of the West German Army. The very concept of the mixed brigade demanded a high level of effort in terms of command & control, of combat support and of logistics. This structure ensured flexibility, as tactically and organizationally mixed units could operate independently on a relatively low level. But there was a price to pay for modernity: Forces fit for combined arms combat with armoured weapon systems required a highly complex structure. The counterexample was the third option to create 3 airmobile divisions, consisting partly on relatively inexpensive airborne troops.⁽³⁴⁾

But one thing was very clear even at the eve of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Given the need to save money, the “old Bundeswehr” was no longer able to maintain its concept. Army planners therefore explored the possibility of disbanding some of the 12 divisions at NATO. Therefore, army planners examined the possibility, which had been strictly ruled out previously: to disband some of its twelve divisions. In addition, the personnel experts in the Army’s command staff also warned at the beginning of October 1989: “The fight for qualified personnel on the labor market is getting tougher.”⁽³⁵⁾ According to this, the records of the Inspector of the Army already highlighted a trend that actually occurred in the 1990s: a drastic reduction in personnel.

At the end of October 1989, the redesigned *Army Structure 2000* cleared its final planning hurdles. This radical change for the Army was overshadowed by even more fundamental events. Simultaneously, the Hungarian border to Austria was opened, so that East German refugees fled to the West; in the cities of the GDR, mass demonstrations eroded the legitimacy of the regime. And with the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989, the security policy framework that had formed the basis of West German Army planners, disappeared altogether. The new operational concept and the *Army Structure 2000* had been approved just a few days before the fall of the Berlin Wall in order to maintain the canonical twelve-division goal. By now, all of this was openly questioned.

33. BAArch, BH 1/ 24 710, Fü H VI 3, *Weiterentwicklung der Heeresstruktur 2000*, 11.08.1989, p. C 1 f.

34. BAArch, BH 1/ 24 710, Fü H VI 3, *Weiterentwicklung der Heeresstruktur 2000*, 11.08.1989, p. C 2-C4, p. D 1-D 2 (quotations p. C 3).

35. BAArch, BH 1/ 24 710, Fü H I 1, *Vorlagenotiz LVU InspH*, 03.10.1989 (1st quotation); ebd., Fü H I 1, *Beitrag Bewertung HStr 2000. Führungskreis* 03.10.1989, 02.10.1989 (2nd quotation).

At the end of November 1989, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Inspector of the Army Ondarza tried to calm his obviously unsettled officer corps. He stressed that forty year old structures all of the sudden had become obsolete: After all, it was “wrong to simply project outdated images of confrontation into the future”. But nevertheless, “[d]efense capability is and remains the basis for peacekeeping and [...] an important prerequisite for concrete disarmament steps.” At the same time, however, he appealed to the tank spirit so widespread in his service branch. Thus, he drew a line from the Bundeswehr founding fathers through the existing structure into the future. And with reference to World War II Panzer general Colonel General Günter Guderian, he even extended the line of tradition concerning combat leadership and organization of armored forces back to the Wehrmacht.⁽³⁶⁾

At the same time, on 17th November 1989, the briefing to the Cabinet made it clear that after the conclusion of the *Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe*, the Warsaw Pact troops would no longer have the capacity for a large-scale invasion on short notice. Despite the upheaval in Eastern and Central Europe and the Vienna arms control negotiations, there was “no alternative in the foreseeable future” to the strategy of flexible response and integrated forward defence.⁽³⁷⁾ It was not until 6th December 1989 that the Federal Government approved the *Army Structure 2000* in its – supposedly – final form. The field army was to have 17 tank brigades, 9 armored infantry brigades, 1 infantry brigade, and 1 mountain brigade. In addition, 4 airborne brigades, 2 combat helicopter brigades, and 1 mixed airmobile brigade were added as a new feature. In the Territorial Army, the Franco-German Brigade signaled solidarity with the Western neighbor. The trend towards the centralization of combat support troops, but above all of logistics and command elements, pointed to a more frugal future of the 1990s, as did the plan to staff 50 to 70 percent of the units with reservists. Planning of the structure was to begin in the new year of 1990, and stationing decisions were to be made the following year. The reorganization was to take place between 1993 and 1996.⁽³⁸⁾

However, at the end of 1989 there was real concern about the legitimacy of the Bundeswehr as such. The (still) West German armed forces were “not only being questioned by some circles in our society, but were being actively and sharply criticized in word and writing as politically outdated.” Ondarza concluded with ambivalent words: On the one hand, he warned: “Stay on course.” On the other hand, he repeated his sentence: “We are witnesses to how old structures are breaking down.”⁽³⁹⁾

36. BArch, BH 8-5/ 195, Insp Heer, *Jahrestreffen gepanzerte Kampftruppen*, 17.11.1989, p. 3 (1st quotation), 4 (2nd quotation), 6 (3rd long quotation).

37. BArch, BH 1/ 24 712, Fü S VI 2 an Chef Bundeskanzleramt, *Grundzüge der Bundeswehrplanung für die 90er Jahre und Eckdaten der künftigen Streitkräftestruktur*, 27.11.1989, *ibid.*, Unterrichtung des Kabinetts über Grundzüge der Bundeswehrplanung für die 90er Jahre und die Eckdaten der künftigen Streitkräftestruktur durch den Bundesminister der Verteidigung, 27.11.1989, p. 4 (1st quotation), p. 5 (2nd quotation).

38. BArch, BH 1/ 24 712, Fernschreiben InspH an Verteiler Heer, *Neue Struktur des Heeres*, 06.12.1989.

39. BArch, BH 8-5/ 195, InspHeer, *Rundbrief*, 20.12.1989, p. 8 (1st and 2nd quotations), p. 6 (3rd and 4th quotations), 9 (5

“Wende“ – The Fall of the Wall, German unity and force reductions

After a phase of conceptual uncertainty, in the very beginning of the year 1990, the *Army Structure 2000* materialised – but on paper only. Intensively planned from mid-1988 to mid-1990, it became obsolete when German unity became apparent in March 1990 with the People’s Chamber elections in the – now truly democratic – German Democratic Republic. The *Army Structure 2000* which indirectly had been planned as a tribute to nuclear détente fell victim to the “turning point“ of November 1989. The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 was an unforeseeable stroke of luck in German history. This ended the Cold War and with it the nightmare of nuclear war. But for the GDR it meant the collapse of the legitimacy of its government, especially its armed forces. The parliamentary elections (Volkskammer) in March 1990 could ultimately only be interpreted as the people’s decision for German unity. Nevertheless, under the new cabinet member Rainer Eppelmann, who symptomatically held the post of Minister of *Disarmament* and Defence, there were ideas for a solution of two armies within one state.⁽⁴⁰⁾ For the east German armed forces, the NVA, it was a futile struggle: it was an “army without a future“.⁽⁴¹⁾

Until September of this year, the *Two Plus Four* negotiations resulted in concessions that ultimately linked international approval of the realization of German unity to substantial troop reductions. The personnel limit of 370,000 men for the Bundeswehr armed forces, which was anchored in international law in this treaty, paved the way for approval of German unity. Protection against any German aspirations for power was simultaneously guaranteed by the fact that the country would remain in the Western security system. In view of the presence of Soviet, and later Russian troops, on German soil until 1994, Germany had refrained from having NATO-integrated forces in East Germany up to this point. Nevertheless, perceptions of threats continued.⁽⁴²⁾

Until the conclusion of the *Two Plus Four* negotiations, the existence of the East German army remained an open question. However, in both East and West Germany and on the international level, the primacy of politics was compelling. So, during the nine months between November 1989 and September 1990, the military leadership in both German states only remained an object of developments. In the political discourse, however, the question of the role and organization of the armed forces remained a central point on the road to German unity. This explains the apparent paradox that the

th and 6th quotations).

40. Theodor Hoffmann, *Das letzte Kommando. Ein Minister erinnert sich*, Berlin 1993, p. 225-230.

41. Hans Ehlert and Hans-Joachim Beth, eds. *Armee ohne Zukunft. Das Ende der NVA und die deutsche Einheit. Zeitzeugenberichte und Dokumente*, Berlin 2002.

42. BAArch, BH 1/ 14 725, I. Korps G 3 an KG I. Korps [Naumann], 12.06. 1991, *Erste Überlegungen zum operativ-taktischen Konzept der 90er Jahre*, Anlage: *Politische Rahmenbedingungen*. The results of the forthcoming study of Martin Reese promise important insights into this aspect.

Bundeswehr's planning for the *Army Structure 2000* continued undeterred until mid-1990, even though its basis had become obsolete.

It was not until nine months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and six weeks after the economic and monetary union had been effectively achieved, that the maximum number of personnel for the Bundeswehr was set. This figure was a compromise reached at the highest political level between various positions within German politics; at the same time, the army strengths of France and Poland, each 300,000 men, were seen as reference point. This size was considered by the Bundeswehr planners to be the operational minimum.⁽⁴³⁾ In the London Declaration of July 1990, the NATO states reaffirmed their commitment to German unity, provided that Germany remained integrated into the European Community and "the Atlantic Alliance of Free Democracies". The internationally confirmed demand for deeper integration had to affect the structure of all alliance forces. One week after this NATO declaration, on July 15/16, 1990, Chancellor Kohl and a delegation traveled to meet Gorbachev in Moscow and then to Arkhys in the North Caucasus. The Soviet head of state now raised no more objections against full NATO membership, provided that the East German accession area remained free of NATO-integrated German forces for the duration of the Soviet troops' stationing. The upper limit of the German armed forces was now definitely set at 370,000 soldiers. Internally, while respecting this policy, the German Army continued to plan the structure, which now dispensed the once considerable – nuclear capable – rocket artillery.⁽⁴⁴⁾

The integration of the remaining NVA assets into the Bundeswehr – its extensive material stocks, the mostly dilapidated properties and the personnel of initially just under 50,000 officers and non-commissioned officers, of whom 18,000 soldiers were taken on by the end of 1991 and just under 11,000 remained until 1993 – cannot be described in detail here.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Although the NVA, contrary to what its personnel had hoped for until the very end, had no chance as an independent organization. Although its elements were only taken over under the conditions of the Federal Republic after the reunification, the Bundeswehr built its new structures in East Germany on the basic structures of the former National People's Army.

For the next three decades, the external image of the Bundeswehr was shaped by continuous force reductions. In view of the costs of German reunification, these reductions ultimately went far beyond the extent stipulated in the *Two Plus Four Agreement*. Indeed, what followed was a veritable carousel of army structures: The *Army Structure 2000* was planned from 1986/87 onwards and then significantly replanned in mid-1989 – exactly

43. Gunnar Digutsch, *Das Ende der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Aufbau der Bundeswehr in den neuen Ländern*, Frankfurt 2004, p. 136 f.; Kai Diekmann and Ralf Georg Reuth, *Helmut Kohl. Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, Berlin p. 412 f.; Stoltenberg, *Erklärung der Bundesregierung. Die Bundeswehr in den neunziger Jahren*, 08.12.1989, p. 1191.

44. Fü S III 1, *Vorlage für den BMVg*, 13.09.1990. In: *Dokumente zur deutschen Militärgeschichte* (cf. note 17), pp. 880-882.

45. Nina Leonhard, *Integration und Gedächtnis. NVA-Offiziere im vereinigten Deutschland*, München 2016, pp. 126-132; Winfried Heinemann, *Die DDR und ihr Militär*, Munich 2011, pp. 58-62.

at the same time as the fall of the Berlin Wall. The all-time high of 360,000 active soldiers and 14 divisions reached in October 1990 only had a limited duration, as the reduction in the size of the Bundeswehr had already been contractually agreed. As part of the reorganization to *Army Structure 5*, the reduction to eight divisions took place between 1992 and 1997. At the same time, *Army Structure 5 (N)* was planned – with the addition of “N” for “adjustment” (1993–1994/97). Linguistically, the following decades were marked by constant innovation with reference to “new” or “future”. From 1994 onwards, the reorganization took place to the successor structure *New Army for New Missions* (*Neues Heer für Neue Aufgaben*, 1994/97–1999) with 6 divisions plus the equivalent *Airmobile Forces Command* (*Kommando Luftbewegliche Kräfte*). Four years later, within the *Army of the Future* (*Heer der Zukunft*, 2000–2003/06) the branch shrank to 5 divisions. Just three years later, the *New Army* (*Neues Heer*, 2003/06–2010) maintained the same number of divisions, but comprised further personnel reductions. Characteristically, during this continual change, parallel structures remained at the unit level. So, the official website of the German Army, until its relaunch in 2020/21, displayed more than one start and end years for all structures between 1990 and 2011. Only one constant remained: the semantics of the “new”. Rhetorically, this emphasis on constant organizational change implied a demarcation from the supposedly “rigid, bipolar East-West conflict”.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The extent to which the rapid succession of army structures between 1990 and 2011 represents an exceptional case or rather a normality – which is always noted with astonishment – can only be determined by comparing it with previous change processes.⁽⁴⁷⁾ However, the criticism by those affected of previous, repeated reorganization remained equally constant. In this sense, the alleged quote from the Roman officer Gaius Petronius was still circulating in 2011: “We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganized. [...] I was to learn later in life that, perhaps because we are so good at organizing, we tend [...] to meet any new situation by reorganizing; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization.”⁽⁴⁸⁾ Only the structure created in 2011, after the abolition of general conscription in 2010, was

46. *Gemeinsame Sicherheit und Zukunft der Bundeswehr. Bericht der Kommission an die Bundesregierung*, Berlin 23. Mai 2000, p. 16.

47. Martin Rink, *Strukturen brausen um die Wette. Zur Organisation des deutschen Heeres*. In: Helmut R. Hammerich, Dieter Kollmer, Martin Rink, Rudolf Schlaffer and Michael Poppe, *Das Heer 1950 bis 1970. Konzeption, Organisation, Aufstellung*, München 2006, pp. 353–483; Martin Rink, *Effizienz oder Flexibilität? Zugänge zu einer Organisationsgeschichte des deutschen Heeres vor und nach 1990*. In: Bernhard Chiari, ed., *Auftrag Auslandseinsatz. Neueste Militärgeschichte an der Schnittstelle von Geschichtswissenschaft, Politik, Öffentlichkeit und Streitkräften*, Freiburg, Wien, Berlin 2012, pp. 125–138.

48. André Wüstner, *Wir spüren so viel Unruhe*, in: *Die Welt*, 19.08. 2011 <<https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article13552512/Wir-spüren-so-viel-Unruhe-wie-seit-20-Jahren-nicht.html>> (letzter Zugriff 06.04.2023). As early as October 1989, the Commanding General of the II Corps, Lieutenant General Gerd Verstl, tried to persuade Gaius Petronius, BArch, BH 1 / 27 710. The false borrowing from Titus Petronius Arbiter, the author of the *Satyricon*, is probably based on the US writer and World War officer Charles Ogburn in his account of Merrill’s Marauders in Harper’s Magazine in 1957. Cf.: <<https://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/11/12/reorganizing/>>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlton_Ogburn> (letzter Zugriff 06.04.2023).

destined to last longer. Since then, the German Army has consisted of just 3 divisions. Only since the “turning point” of 2022, a new structure is about to be introduced. This also will comprise three divisions, but now geared towards national and alliance defence in Europe.

Modularization, missions abroad and “focus on everything”?

The constant replanning of the replanning was in fact partly a reaction to the ‘organizational fashions’ typical of the time. In some cases, however, it was actually a matter of very new organizational paradigms. Most of the time, however, these were developed by drawing on much older basic ideas. The Bundeswehr as an overall organization, as well as its still largest branch, the Army, are clearly a highly *temporary* organization. This is precisely what a look at the Army structure that was never realized reveals: the *Army Structure 2000*.

In the previous section, it was described how the Bundeswehr transformed from a classic national defence army at the end of the Cold War. The focus of the presentation was on the first phase from 1987 to 1989. It remains to be seen whether the concept of a new army structure and the planned weapons systems would have met the requirements of national defence in the 21st century, which the Ukraine war is conveying. The second phase of the “turnaround” of 1989/90, which is usually the focus of the accounts, concerned the reduction of the Bundeswehr as the price for German unity; however, recent archive studies have shown that a Russian threat was still perceived during the 1990s.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Research on this is also still ongoing. The third phase from 1991 to 1994 is usually perceived as the beginning of foreign missions. The tasks multiplied to such an extent that the solution was sought in highly modularized military organizational elements. The 1992 *Defence Policy Guidelines* already conjured up a wide range of future tasks for the armed forces. While the term “deployment” referred to the main task of national defence up until then, the word “Einsatz” (“deployment”) changed rapidly by 1994: The defence policy guidelines issued shortly afterwards, at the end of November 1992, emphasized that in addition to safeguarding against any residual risks in Europe, the Bundeswehr’s task profile was determined by “flexible crisis and conflict management in the expanded geographical environment.” This also included “peace missions and humanitarian operations.”⁽⁵⁰⁾

For the next three decades, the term “deployment” (“Einsatz”) referred to the Bundeswehr’s foreign missions. The foreword by Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his Defence Minister Volker Rühe to the 1994 *White Paper (Weißbuch)* already emphasized

49. Bastian Matteo Scianna, *Sonderzug nach Moskau. Geschichte der deutschen Russlandpolitik seit 1990*, Munich 2024.

50. Bundesminister der Verteidigung, ed., *Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien für den Geschäftsbereich des Bundesministers der Verteidigung (VPR)*, Bonn 26.11.1992, p. 4, no. 10.

participation in “international peace missions”.⁽⁵¹⁾ Repeatedly, and in many different ways, this document, published three months before the Federal Constitutional Court’s decision, referred to peacekeeping, humanitarian or simply to “foreign missions.” The range of tasks varied between humanitarian operations and combat missions.⁽⁵²⁾

In addition, there was the creation of military units such as Special Operations Forces. The organizational design of this unit, established between 1996 and 2000, contrasted in almost every regard to the “typical” West German Armoured Brigade. While some planners eagerly demanded to create these forces, they still seemed exotic to some other planners in the mid-1990s: When in June 1995, the planning department had drafted a paper named *Blueprint for Army Special Forces* (Zielvorstellungen Spezialkräfte), these plans faced furious criticism. One comment of the neighbouring staff departments read: “These objectives for Army Special Forces come very close to a catalog offer from department 007. Greetings from James Bond! One asks rightly the question as to whether we are slightly mistaken here. [...]he range of assignments for the special forces should range from anti-guerrilla warfare to combating weapons of mass destruction. There seem to be no limits to fantasy.”⁽⁵³⁾

Nevertheless, it must be made clear that the Bundeswehr has changed fundamentally in the era of foreign missions from August 1991, the Operation UNSCOM/ “Kurdish Aid” in the wake of the Gulf War in Iraq, to August 2022, the end of the Afghanistan mission. After the paradigm of modular deployment for foreign missions had determined the structural development of the German Army for almost a quarter of a century, voices in favor of structures for national and alliance defence increased. Even before the turning point of 2022 proclaimed by the Federal Chancellor, Hans-Peter Bartels and Rainer L. Glatz – the former *Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces of the German Bundestag* (Wehrbeauftragter des Deutschen Bundestages) and the former *Commander of the Operations Command* (Einsatzführungskommando) – criticized the structures created in 2011 and in the two decades before. This concerned the lack of sufficient divisional troops: sufficient reconnaissance, command, combat support and logistics forces. At the same time, they criticized the previous “toolbox mentality” geared towards the provision of operational contingents.⁽⁵⁴⁾

The characteristic, but also the problem, of contemporary history is ultimately its temporality. The vocabulary of “turning point” and “war readiness” indeed have

51. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, ed., *Weißbuch 1994. Zur Sicherheit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und zur Lage und Zukunft der Bundeswehr*, Bonn 1994, p. VIII (preface Helmut Kohl), p. IX (preface Volker Rühe), p. IX, 05.04.1995.

52. *Weißbuch 1994* (cf. note 51), p. 34, 45, 60 f., 67–69, 72, 112, 137, 139, 148.

53. BAArch, BH 1/ 28 625, FÜ H III I 2, *Zielvorstellung Spezialkräfte des Heeres*, 13.06., 1995.

54. Hans-Peter Bartels and Rainer L. Glatz, *Der Status quo ist unhaltbar. Zentralisierung, Stabslastigkeit und Mangelwirtschaft lähmen die Bundeswehr*, in: *Die Bundeswehr* 11(2020), pp. 21–24; Hans-Peter Bartels, *Organische Großverbände für die Verteidigung Europas. Eine Einordnung der aktuellen Bundeswehr-Reform*, in: *Europäische Sicherheit&Technik* 06(2021), S. 21–24.

dominated the political discourse from 2022/23, but it remains uncertain to what extent the upcoming changes of government in Germany and the USA in 2025 will also influence the discourse in security politics. Neither this paper nor history in general can speculate on this. In any case, history can help to debunk myths shaped by political narratives when they rely on history as an argument. This also applies to the processes of designing and redesigning operational guidelines and troop structures: In a constant process of developing and redesigning their concepts, politicians and military planners tended to ignore the continuities of the subject matter they were dealing with. And indeed military organization is a very grateful subject for research into the long continuities and “turning points” of military concepts. Both reflect the discourse and thought cycles of the military and politics in general.

Author's short CV

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