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Germany's stance on the Libyan crisis as a function of German internal policy

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The German government's stance on Libya, namely abstaining from the vote on the UN Security Council's resolution, and the decision that the Bundeswehr will not take part in the international intervention are linked primarily to its internal policy. The strategy devised by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle (FDP) and Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) assumed that this stance would bring support to the government coalition parties before important local elections. The government also hoped that this strategy would be fully backed by both coalition and opposition parties. This assumption turned out to be a miscalculation. The decision was criticised by both coalition and opposition parties and provoked a heated debate on its impact on Germany's position in NATO, the EU and the UN. This discussion has shown that 'anti-military' rhetoric is no longer a guarantee of automatic support among the political elite in Germany. Nevertheless, the government's stance on this issue is unlikely to change fundamentally.

The policy Germany has adopted towards the Libyan crisis will adversely affect its image in the EU and NATO. It also provides additional arguments to opponents of Germany's permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Furthermore, from the British and the French perspective, it undermines the sense of developing the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.

Germany in opposition to most Western states

On 17 March Germany abstained from voting on resolution 1973 at the UN Security Council which authorised member states to use any necessary means to protect civilians in Libya, with the exception of any form of occupation of Libyan territory, and established a no-fly zone over Libya. When the resolution was adopted, the German government announced that the Bundeswehr would not participate in the international military intervention in Libya. Germany had already made very cautious statements regarding the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya and had warned about the possible consequences of a military intervention. However, when the conditions set by the German government had been met – intervention requested by the Libyan opposition, consent from the Arab League to the establishment of the no-fly zone, and a compromise inside the UN Security Council – it seemed that Germany would back the resolution. Germany's surprising decision to abstain from voting put this country in opposition to other EU member states, which are both permanent and non-permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United Kingdom,

France and Portugal), and the USA, which voted for the resolution. Germany behaved in a similar way to China and Russia (and also Brazil and India), which also abstained from voting. Germany gave as the motivation for its decision its objection to the resolution's provisions establishing the no-fly zone and at the same time backed the provisions imposing stricter sanctions on Gaddafi's regime.
Germany's decision to abstain from voting was linked primarily to its internal policy. It seems that the government coalition counted on a repeat of the scenario of the election campaign from 2002 in a way. Back then, the SPD/Green Party coalition led by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who opposed the international intervention in Iraq, won the parliamentary elections owing to its anti-military and anti-American rhetoric. Now Guido Westerwelle and Chancellor Merkel, by emphasising their objection and scepticism about the military intervention in Libya, wanted to increase the levels of support for their parties before the upcoming federal state elections, especially in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate which are due to be held on 27 March. It cannot be ruled out that the German government took this decision also in order to protect Germany's image and position in the Arab world. Since it is uncertain how the Libyan crisis will develop and end, this calculation may be well-grounded.

The lack of consensus at home

However, the strategy Chancellor Merkel's government has adopted is unlikely to bring them success at home. A heated discussion on the government's isolationist approach has started in Germany, and the conclusions this discussion has led to so far show a lack of understanding of the government's decision to abstain from voting at the UN Security Council, to take a stance different from the USA and almost all other EU member states and also – albeit to a lesser extent – to refrain from military engagement. Critical opinions have been expressed not only by the opposition but also by the governing Christian Democrats and the FDP. Before the vote, Philipp Missfelder, the CDU's spokesman for foreign policy and member of the parliamentary commission in charge of foreign affairs, appealed to the government to back the resolution and declare German military engagement as part of its implementation. Elmar Brok (CDU), a member of the European Parliament, said Germany should become involved even if the UN Security Council had not passed the resolution. The opposition is also divided. While Frank Walter Steinmeier, the leader of the SPD parliamentary group, is supporting the government's stance, the SPD's parliamentary group spokesman in charge of foreign policy, Rolf Mützenich for example, is critical about it. A similar divide can be seen inside the Green Party. Only the Left Party, which is not treated as a serious partner in the area of foreign policy, has unconditionally supported the government's stance, which is however not being interpreted as to the government's advantage. German analytical institutes (SWP) in their comments have also stated that Germany and the European Union should help remove Gaddafi from power in Libya, employing diplomatic, financial and even military means.
The government is being reproached first of all for the consequences the German stance; in the opinion of its critics may cause Germany to become isolated in the EU and NATO in the area of foreign and security policy.

What next? German moves on the international scene

Although Germany is upholding its official stance, which is sceptical about the international military intervention, it has made no objections to the US using its bases on German territory for tasks related to the implementation of resolution 1973. However, Germany has not announced any clear stance regarding NATO taking charge of the military operation in Libya. It seems that Germany might grant consent on some conditions (for example, if government premises are not bombarded) to **NATO** taking over responsibility for the establishment of the no-fly zone. It is difficult to predict whether Germany will accept the proposal that NATO infrastructure should be used, however without NATO assuming political responsibility, which the USA, France and the United Kingdom have put forward. Germany will not take an active part in a NATO-led operation, if any is launched. Germany has already withdrawn its navy units from NATO command in Operation Active Endeavour on the Mediterranean Sea, which could have been engaged in the operation in Libya. To demonstrate its 'responsibility as an ally', Germany will slightly increase its engagement in Afghanistan. It will agree to the participation of three hundred Bundeswehr soldiers in NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force's (AWACS) operation in Afghanistan. This force has been in charge of flight security in this area since mid January. Germany had not agreed to the participation of its soldiers, who make up one third of this unit, in this operation before. This decision has been presented as a "desire to lift some burden off the shoulders of its NATO allies" who would like to use part of NATO AWACS force in the operation in Libya for electronic surveillance purposes or as an airspace control centre. **Within the EU,** Germany has been advocating the imposition of political and economic sanctions on Gaddafi's regime. It also supports extending sanctions to a full embargo on oil and gas exports from Libya, which is a continuing source of revenue to Gaddafi's regime. Germany has been also been advocating sanctions to companies operating in the Libyan oil and gas sector. It is counting on the European Council to start a discussion and to take a decision regarding the above issues on 24–25 March.

Conclusions

Germany's stance has been motivated primarily by internal politics. However, the government is unlikely to change its strategy significantly despite the strong criticism it has provoked. The heated discussion on this issue in Germany however proves that a change is taking place in the mindset of the German elite, and that the model of a 'civilian' power, unwilling to use military force, is being gradually relinquished. The German strategy on Libya can be also interpreted as a manifestation of one of the trends emerging in its foreign policy, according to which the EU and NATO are treated as means for the implementation of German policy and not organisations as part of which Germany is taking care of its interests. The German reaction to the crisis in Libya: the lack of a decision to assume political responsibility and the refusal to participate in the international (*de facto* Western states') intervention, may indicate that Germany is taking greater care of its image and position for example in the Arab world than of a coherent policy of the Western states as part of the European Union, NATO and the UN.

Whatever the reasons behind this German policy, such behaviour as an EU member state has impinged again on the development of the European foreign and security policy. Germany's approach has shown that the EU may not count on Germany in developing a common EU stance on key issues in foreign and security policy. The German stance, especially from the point of view of France and the United Kingdom, has called into question the sense of developing the European Common Security and Defence Policy.

Since Germany abstained from the vote at the UN Security Council, it may find it more difficult to obtain permanent membership in the Security Council. The decision on the reform and composition of the UN Security Council depends on the consent of all its permanent members. In the eyes of Germany's Western partners and permanent members of the Council (primarily the USA), the German stance is another proof (after the anti-American approach taken by Germany as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2003–2004) that Germany is not an ally which can be relied upon and as such one which should be supported in its aspirations to permanent membership of the Council.