

Report

Security Forum: International Security in the 21st Century

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at the Center for International Security and Governance

Rapporteur: Lea Gernemann



Executive Summary

The Bonn Security Forum revolved around a series of fundamental transformations of the American and international political landscape. Debates at the event suggest that avenues for multilateral cooperation in particular will be limited by resurgent isolationism in the U.S. under President Trump, which may bring grave consequences for international security and the liberal world order. Under these conditions, engagement in the safeguarding of stability and peace across the globe becomes a more pressing task than ever.

Although it is too early for experts to fully assess the repercussions of the Trump presidency, campaign promises indicate that U.S. participation in multilateral endeavors in the domain of security and beyond will become a matter of complex and at times arduous negotiation. European leaders may have to face the challenge of leading cooperative efforts in spite of the internal social and political divides emerging all over the continent.

Violent conflict in the Middle East and Eastern Europe starkly demonstrates the absolute necessity of finding coordinated solutions to crises of global dimension. Forum panelists and debaters deemed this all the more important in light of the political and security challenges posed by a resurgent Russia breaking international norms and disrupting international order.

Considering these developments, the reorientation of German foreign and defense policy towards greater global engagement, expressed most prominently in the 2016 White Paper on German Security, could not be more timely. A successful shift in national strategy, however, will depend on the persistence and effectivity of the various multilateral structures within which Germany operates today. Experts argued that German leaders are thus facing the twofold task of adjusting to increased responsibility in international affairs and upholding the cooperative principles of a liberal, multilateral order.

International Security in the 21st Century

The United States (U.S.) presidential election marks a turning point in U.S. security policy. On November 21, 2016, the Center for International Security and Governance (CISG) in cooperation with the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies of the Johns Hopkins University Washington D.C. (AICGS) hosted the Bonn Security Forum to provide a



CISG Director James D. Bindenagel opening the event. © CISG Bonn.

platform for expert discussion over the future of U.S. foreign and security policy as well as Germany's role in conflict prevention, management and resolution. After a campaign marked by isolationist statements and strong skepticism of Euro-Atlantic security cooperation, Trump's election has sparked uncertainty and anxiety over

the future of U.S. global engagement. How will international responsibility for the resolution of violent conflict in the Middle East and Eastern Europe be shared in the future? And how can global security problems such as energy scarcity, climate change, cyber risks and migration be managed jointly under conditions of growing unilateralism and resurgent nationalism in Europe and the U.S.? Policy practitioners and academic experts discussed these topics and the future of transatlantic relations with a special focus on Germany's role in a day-long forum with high-profile panels.

New Rules, New Order? International Security in the Trump Era

The aftermath of the U.S. Presidential elections is marked by great uncertainty over the future of American foreign policy. While predictions of Trump's conduct of foreign affairs are difficult to formulate at this point in time, participants of the Forum agreed that the new administration will leave a profound impact on the state of international affairs and the position of the U.S. in the world. Both Trump's isolationist leanings as well as his fundamental

questioning of the foreign policy decisions of previous administrations suggest that the coming presidential term will be a time of change in the international political landscape.

The most pressing issue areas identified at the Security Forum as possible future fields of policy change and contestation between the U.S. and its partners in the world include the role of NATO, relations with Russia and the Ukraine crisis, the Iran deal, the progress of international trade liberalization, the fight against climate change and the future of nuclear non-proliferation regimes. While participants stressed that the maintenance of close ties and open communication channels with U.S. leadership should continue to inform the foreign policy of America's Western partners, they also agreed that changes to the U.S. stance on a range of multilateral policies and agreements might render international cooperation significantly more difficult to maintain in the future.

Perhaps the most heavily publicized component of the President-elect's foreign policy plans is his proposal of a rapprochement with Russia. Trump's campaign proposal to unilaterally lift sanctions against Russia even in spite of bipartisan support for a strong stance



Donald Trump © Gage Skidmore 2016

on Russia in Congress is theoretically feasible and could put an end to a unified Western approach towards Russia. While participants of the forum agreed that Trump's pronounced personal interest in closer ties with Russia could lead him to ignore bipartisan resistance in favor of a supposed personal foreign policy success, recent allegations that Russia has leverage over the President-elect and ongoing debates over the role of Russia in the election campaign render an assessment of the likelihood of such a development rather difficult. In any case, such a rapprochement could have a profound impact not only on the strength of the Western response to Russian foreign policy decisions, but also on future developments on the ground in Syria.

Trump's repositioning of U.S. foreign policy towards closer ties with Russia is all the more concerning to many European leaders given his simultaneous questioning of the future role of NATO in safeguarding European and international security. His transactional perspective on security policy suggests that European leaders will not only have to

demonstrate their commitment to the Euro-Transatlantic security architecture through greater military engagement, but also to evidence that the benefits of the security alliance lie with the U.S. and the world at large just as much as they lie with Europe. The long-standing call for greater European financial and material contributions to the alliance will eventually have to be met with concrete action.

The future of transatlantic security cooperation

The President-elect's plans to withdraw U.S. backing for multilateral endeavors extend well beyond the security alliance. Trump has called into question U.S. commitment to the Paris climate agreement, outright rejected the Transpacific Partnership and called for a fundamental renegotiation of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Even more disconcertingly, the future of the Iran deal remains similarly uncertain, which fuels concerns over the impact of the Trump administration on long-term stability in the Middle East. By suggesting that Japan and South Korea could acquire nuclear forces in the future, Trump has also signaled lack of commitment to the most fundamental tenets of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. Whether or not Trump will actually act on this wide range of announcements and campaign promises remains to be seen. What appears to be certain, however, is that multilateral consensus-building, a necessary prerequisite for tackling many contemporary security challenges, will become even more complex.



Dr. Daniela Schwarzer, Director of the Research Institute at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP). © CISG

While the various sites of disagreement on matters of international security and cooperation give reason for concern, foreign policy under President-elect Trump will face domestic and international constraints and limitations that will likely limit its transformative effects on international order. The global nature of many modern security challenges necessitates multilateral approaches to foreign policy strategies and thus may eliminate the possibility of a truly isolationist U.S. foreign policy. Trump will also inevitably have to confront resistance to his proposals from political opponents and even members of the Republican party in Congress, civil society actors and from within the civil service apparatus. While it is too early to assess the effects of these potential

limitations, one should bear in mind that central tenets of the Trump campaign may prove unrealizable in practice.

A possible retreat of the U.S. from international cooperative endeavors nevertheless raises questions over leadership in multilateral processes. Such concerns appear all the more exigent in face of the social and political rifts that are emerging all over Europe. Populist

Will the U.S. continue to provide reliable American leadership or will it drift to neo-isolationism?

movements gathering momentum in many European countries exert notable pressure on national governments and may constitute a profound threat to the ability of the European Union (EU) to act as a unitary actor in the international arena, emphasizing national politics of identity and difference and pandering to long-standing sentiments of Euroscepticism. Cleavages across member countries – from a North-South divide on fiscal matters to an East-West divide concerning migration and integration – further impede the EU in its potential for global leadership. On a more optimistic note, participants also noted that recent upswings in support for the EU may be indicative of growing awareness of the repercussions of divisive politics. Nevertheless, the future of the EU as a credible international actor critically depends on the ability of national leaders to demonstrate cohesion and to continue advocating for multilateral solutions to global problems.

Russia and the Ukraine Crisis: European Security under Challenge?

Many current and future challenges to international security stem from the difficulties of finding multilateral solutions to global problems across a wide range of issue areas, many of which are not military in nature. At the same time, the Ukraine Crisis and Russian resurgence in Eastern Europe has reminded analysts and policy-makers that peace and stability in Europe cannot be taken for granted and that military preparedness remains a necessity in international relations. Russian actions in Ukraine constitute a profound challenge to the European security order and highlight the need for close cooperation on crisis management on the European and international level.

The joint Western response to the crisis has entailed coordinated efforts to bolster Ukrainian capabilities for institutional change, to enhance transatlantic and European

deterrence and defense capacities vis-à-vis Russia, and to signal strong condemnation of Russian actions in Ukraine through the establishment of a comprehensive sanction regime tied to the full implementation of the Minsk II agreement. The success and future of these efforts, however, depends not only on the progress of domestic change in Ukraine, but also on continuous cooperation between the EU and the U.S. in spite of administrative change and growing Western fatigue with Europe's neighbor to the East.

Speakers at the Security Forum agreed that the stability of Ukraine will critically depend not only on the termination of the conflict in the Donbass, but also on the progress of Ukraine's post-Soviet transition. The effects of Soviet rule prevail through slow and uneven economic development, institutional deficiencies and pervasive corruption on all administrative levels, and at times deeply divisive societal attitudes. The implementation of comprehensive reforms constitutes a necessary step not only towards economic and social development, but also towards greater resilience against Russian influence and aggression. While the Maidan movement shows that highly motivated groups of reformers strive to achieve real political change in Ukraine, substantial parts of the bureaucratic apparatus remain highly resistant to reform. International donors have provided substantial assistance to support reform endeavors, but institutional change and the fight against corruption have begun to emerge as arduous long-term processes. As the threat of Western donor fatigue becomes more urgent under such conditions, the consistent application of political conditionality is likely to be a critical precondition for the continuation of Western assistance.



Ambassador Steven Pifer at the Security Forum. © CISG

The adequacy and effectiveness of the Western response to the Ukraine Crisis continue to be a point of debate. While the international sanction regime may not have induced any concrete changes to Russian policies, it remains an important signal of condemnation and unity. A potential abolishment of U.S. sanctions and rapprochement with Russia under the Trump administration, however, could have detrimental effects on both the credibility of transatlantic relations and, given the volatility of

Ukrainian reform progress and the Western response

Ukrainian reform progress, public support for domestic change and a Western political orientation.

Even if the sanctions remain in place, criticism of the Western response as weak and disjointed will remain. Public rhetoric and concrete policy adjustments of NATO indicate a recognition of Russian policy as a real threat to European stability and the security of all member states, a reaction that surpasses the Western response to the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 by far. As a consequence, one Security Forum participant argued that, given the underlying divergences of interest between member states, the joint reaction of NATO in fact needs to be considered a comparative success of multilateral action. The longevity of this success, however, clearly depends on the policies of the Trump administration and the ability of European leaders to adjust to a security landscape that necessitates greater coordination and engagement.

Germany's Future Role in International Security: The 2016 White Paper

In light of recent tendencies towards nationalism and unilateralism around the globe, the role of Germany in the safeguarding of international security has gained importance. In recent years, German leaders have stressed their commitment to greater German engagement in the protection of international order. The 2014 Munich Security Conference has been identified as a turning point in official statements, marking the beginning of a transition towards a rhetoric of engagement, international responsibility and willingness to lead. The 2016 White Paper on German Security

[*What is Germany's responsibility in international security?*](#)

and the Future of the Bundeswehr constitutes the principle document clarifying the role of Germany and its military as a responsible and engaged actor in the international sphere. Striving to characterize the nature of Germany as a transforming security actor, commentators and debaters at the Security Forum focused on the role and strategy of Germany in the contemporary security environment as it is outlined in official documents, its position vis-à-vis its partners around the globe, and the various challenges that arise from increased German engagement in global security.

The White Paper constitutes a logical extension of the commitments made back in 2014 and serves to clarify the exact role of the German military within Germany's new security strategy. Providing a clear definition of German interests under conditions of a fundamentally transformed security environment, the Paper constitutes a national security strategy unprecedented in German history. While the White Paper contains many familiar pillars of German foreign and defense policy, such as a strong emphasis on alliance solidarity and transatlantic and European cooperation, the acknowledgement of a need for heightened German engagement and the establishment of flexible response mechanisms offers a clear sign of commitment and forms a possible basis for more specific policies. Experts at the Security Forum stressed that the White Paper not only signals Germany's transformed security policy to the international community, but also serves a didactic function domestically, offering an explanation for increased defense spending and global engagement to a population that is historically skeptical of military involvement and the open pursuit of national interests.

German participation in NATO, United Nations (UN) and EU missions has in fact increased noticeably since 2014. While German leaders typically preferred to avoid military action in the



Lieutenant Colonel Martin Lammert at the Security Forum.
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past, most recently and perhaps most controversially in the Libyan crisis of 2011, recent decisions to, for example, join the fight against the Islamic State, deploy troops to Mali or pledge substantial forces to NATO's Eastern flank indicate a paradigm shift in German defense and security policy. Slight increases to the defense budget and continuous military reform efforts also point to a real transformation of the role of Germany in international security. Simultaneously, public acceptance of this transformation also appears to

be on the rise, a development that experts attributed to a heightened sense of threat rooted in the refugee crisis, the rise of the Islamic State and the Donbass conflict, among others.

Although the White Paper constitutes a comprehensive update of German security policy, some commentators pointed out that the document may already be on the verge of obsolescence due to recent crises of the multilateral security order. Weakened European cohesion and a fundamental challenge to the future of NATO indicate that Germany may not be able to continue relying on cooperative structures in its design of a flexible security policy. Even if the U.S. does not withdraw into isolationism, Trump's campaign and his policy plans have already begun to transform the position and reputation of the U.S. in the international community, forcing German leaders to adjust to a profound change in one of its most important security partnerships. Germany alone will not be able to compensate for the possible decline of the U.S. as a global leader. In fact, as elections in Germany and France are approaching quickly, even the stability of the core of European cooperation remains uncertain. Given the rise of nationalist movements across Europe and the United Kingdom's impending withdrawal from the EU, the maintenance of a pro-European political agenda in Germany and France could be of central importance for the feasibility of a security policy emphasizing multilateral engagement.

The 2016 White Paper: Pathway for the future or outdated on arrival?

Experts also noted that Germany will inevitably be faced with the downsides of leadership. Greater engagement means greater visibility of German actions, higher expectations and a need for higher international accountability. Leaders may also have to confront the sobering insight that a transformation of German security policy may not have a substantial impact on ongoing conflicts and security problems around the globe. Stagnating conflicts in Eastern Ukraine, Northern Africa and the Middle East point to a profound crisis of multilateral cooperation that is likely to persist in spite of German aspirations towards greater engagement and international responsibility.

Germany and the Future of Multilateral Security Order in Europe and Beyond

Given the multitude of challenges facing the international community, identifying the real opportunities and limits of greater German engagement in joint security endeavors is a crucial task for policy makers and security experts today. The domestic reorientation towards greater engagement, changing partnerships and shifting international dynamics all impact



Security Forum panellists and participants. © CISG

on Germany's future role in the pursuit of national and global security. How Germany will position itself within this changing security landscape will depend not only on domestic capacities for adaptation, but also on the ability of policy-makers worldwide to support and build multilateral structures in spite of growing nationalist tendencies.

Current global security challenges hold significant ramifications for the development of the European Security and Defense Policy. While greater European engagement in joint security endeavors appears inevitable, it remains unclear how this engagement will materialize. Several commentators at the Security Forum pointed out that possible European defense structures could and should not serve to replace transatlantic security cooperation, but rather help to establish Europe as a better partner within existing structures. While it might be more cost-efficient to focus on multilateral rather than national defense structures, the purpose of such structures would have to be clearly defined and negotiated under conditions of diverging interests between EU member states. Germany could face a complex set of leadership and unification tasks in this context.

Germany and the future of the European security structure

The impact of recent changes to the international political landscape on Germany's role in the world may not be limited to matters of military, economic and political engagement, but also extend to the spheres of morality and identity. Some media outlets have suggested that German leaders are increasingly isolated in their adherence to liberal values, heralding Chancellor Merkel as the 'new leader of the free world'. To a certain extent, similar concerns were voiced at the Security Forum. The Trump election campaign and

administration are likely to have long-term negative effects on the reputation of the U.S. as a moral authority in the international arena. As with other issue areas, Germany will not be able to counteract this effect on its own, but only as part of a coordinated network of like-minded states. As one participant pointed out, the task for Germany is not so much to be a singular role model, but rather to seek out commonalities with its allies and hold together the EU as a liberal community.

Conclusion

While the 2016 Security Forum was hosted on the occasion of the U.S. Presidential elections, panel talks and debates showed clearly that Western leaders are facing turmoil from multiple crises across the globe. New conflicts and threats have emerged in Europe and beyond, highlighting the need for military preparedness and effective security alliances. At the same time, non-traditional security issues such as climate change continue to pose a profound challenge to multilateral cooperation frameworks, requiring global engagement despite at times divergent interests. The Trump administration is unlikely to continue the policies of its predecessors in the domain of international relations and security, calling into question in particular the degree of international responsibility and commitment to multilateral solutions that have informed previous foreign and security strategies. The U.S., however, is not alone in its experience of voter backlash against established political platforms and rising isolationism; similar political rifts have emerged across Europe, straining domestic and international cohesion.

While the Security Forum left no doubt that these political developments will render international negotiation and cooperation even more difficult in the years to come, participants also emphasized the necessity and ongoing feasibility of a multilateral international order. Individual states, including Germany, will have to shoulder greater responsibility under ever more demanding conditions. This engagement will not only be more effective in coordination with others – its success will critically depend on the ability of policy-makers and governments to maintain open channels of communication and share responsibility.

The Center for International Security and Governance



Ambassador Prof. James D. Bindenagel, Henry-Kissinger-Professor © CISG

Founded in 2014 at the University of Bonn through funds by the German Federal Foreign Office and Ministry of Defense, the Center for International Security and Governance (CISG) seeks to promote research and education on international security. Its work contributes to national security discourse through a strategic approach and provides analyses and advice for political processes, particularly in the domains of international law and transatlantic relations. Ambassador Prof. James D. Bindenagel, Henry-Kissinger-Professor, has been appointed the first Director of the CISG.

The American Institute for Contemporary German Studies



Dr. Jackson Janes © AICGS

The American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (AICGS) is a nonprofit policy institute affiliated with Johns Hopkins University. Focused on German-American relations, AICGS examines and interprets the policy challenges confronting leadership circles in the German and U.S. constituencies it serves. Dr. Jackson Janes is the President of the AICGS at the Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC, where he has been affiliated since 1989.

List of Participants

**Ambassador Prof. James D.
Bindenagel**

Center for International Security and Governance

Dr. Joseph Braml

German Council on Foreign Relations

Dr. Sybille Reinke de Buitrago

*Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy,
Hamburg University*

Roman Goncharenko

Deutsche Welle

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Matthias Herdegen

*Institute for International Law and Center for
International Security and Governance, Bonn University*

**Ambassador Dr. Hans-Dieter
Heumann**

Associated Director of the CISG

Jeffrey M. Hovenier

U.S. Embassy Berlin

Dr. Sabine Hübner-Monien

University of Bonn

Dr. Jackson Janes

American Institute for Contemporary German Studies

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Karl Kaiser

*John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard
University*

Dr. Karl-Heinz Kamp

German Federal Academy for Security Policy

Consul General Michael R. Keller

U.S. Consulate General Düsseldorf

Anna Maria Kellner

Friedrich Ebert Foundation

David J. Kramer

McCain Institute

Prof. Dr. Joachim Krause

Institute for Security Policy, Kiel University

Prof. Dr. Ludger Kühnhardt

Center for European Integration Studies

Martin Lammert

German Federal Ministry of Defense

Mustafa Nayyem

Ukrainian Parliament

Oliver Owcza

German Foreign Office

Ambassador Steven Pifer

*Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative at
Brookings*

Ambassador Dr. Klaus Scharioth

Mercator Fellowship on International Affairs

Ambassador Volker Schlegel

DGAP Forum NRW

Dr. Ulrich Schlie

Andrássy University Budapest

Dr. rer. pol. Daniela Schwarzer

German Council on Foreign Relations

Constanze Stelzenmüller

Center for the United States and Europe at Brookings

PD Dr. Maximilian Terhalle

University of Winchester

Daniel P. Vajdich

Atlantic Council

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