Bundesministerium
der Verteidigung

Speech by
Federal Minister of Defence
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It was four years ago that I stood here for the first time in front of this conference. At the time, the Federal President, the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs and I all expressed the very same message: Germany must assume greater responsibility in the area of foreign and security policy. Back then, in February 2014, we had no idea how soon the overall security situation would put us to the test.

Because shortly after the conference, the situation began to deteriorate rapidly. Many people were also interested how Germany would respond: We took on responsibility. With the Minsk agreements, Germany and France set up an initial political framework aimed at resolving the conflict in Ukraine. We have supported the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in eastern Ukraine. We have strengthened NATO's eastern flank with the new VJTF rapid spearhead force and the Air Policing over the Baltic states. We have shown our commitment to the Enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania from day one. We have strengthened our involvement in the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. We have participated in the fight against ISIL by providing reconnaissance flights, refuelling aircraft, and by equipping and training the Peshmerga. And we have continuously increased our commitment in Mali – especially as part of the MINUSMA UN mission.

We are taking action together with our transatlantic and European partners. Last year, I opened this conference together with my colleague Jim Mattis. Today, I am opening with my colleague from France, Florence Parly. Both cases are an expression of German politics: We want to remain transatlantic – while also becoming more European. We want to enable Europe to also carry more weight in terms of military power. So that Europe can become more independent and self-reliant – ultimately also within NATO. This is our European task for the future.

We have made a start: We have launched the European Defence Union. We have paved the way politically to establish an "Army of Europeans". The Franco-German action plan, the Feuille de Route, and the European Defence Fund are providing a significant boost in this respect. Germany and France are ready to push ahead with the European project together – and we invite all Europeans to move forward together with us.

Establishing capabilities and structures is one thing. The other thing is the common desire to actually make use of this military weight if circumstances so require. President Macron is perfectly right in demanding from us Europeans, in a figurative sense, "(une) Europe, qui protège". We Europeans must be both – capable and politically resolute.

In view of global challenges such as terrorism, poverty and climate change, Europe must now begin to finally build up momentum. Those who are willing must be able to move ahead – without being blocked by other individual nations. In the area of defence, we have already managed to do this with the PESCO. In the area of European foreign policy, we have not been quite so successful yet. When it comes to making controversial decisions, we are blocked by the requirement of unanimity – we actually also need something like a PESCO in foreign policy.

And we need a common strategic culture for Europe. A common European understanding with respect to our interests, our objectives, and our foreign policy instruments. This is the only way for Europe to build up sufficient leverage.

When I speak of more independence and self-reliance, this is not just meant in a purely military context. It may be indispensable for the purposes of deterrence and protection. And the military is making a major contribution towards managing crises and conflicts.

However, there is no such thing as a purely military shortcut leading towards a stable and sustainable peace order. We have gained this experience in Europe over many decades, in the Balkans and Afghanistan, and also nowadays in Mali, Syria and Iraq. However there are also cases where it is necessary for us to initially focus on hard military force. In the fight against the terrorism of ISIL, negotiation attempts would have been futile. The images of attempted genocide against the Yazidis are burned into our memories. ISIL does not negotiate, ISIL decapitates human beings. It was therefore right to forge the coalition against terrorism – our joint action resulted in ISIL suffering military defeat.

In the long run, however, we will only achieving victory in this region if we manage to establish political and social stability. Because it is clear that military interventions cannot prevent the radicalisation of entire generations of young people. Violent extremism primarily thrives where politics and governance have failed. Where poverty, exclusion and marginalization are the order of the day. Where the prospects for the future are so bleak that violence and extremism can seem alluring. That is where we must start if we are serious about taking greater responsibility for our own security.

What we need is a pact for comprehensive security. This approach is also advocated in the new coalition agreement in Germany: we have broken new ground. We have decided that two areas will be prioritised for additional budget funds in the coming four years: defence and development policy – and by this I mean our NATO and ODA obligations. Both areas will be deemed equally important. Thanks to growing economic output, it is foreseeable that this will result in a considerable increase in funding allocated to both areas in real terms.

For me, as the German Federal Minister of Defence, this is a far-reaching decision. Because it means we can continue the turn around in the Bundeswehr: We will increase the Bundeswehr's personnel strength. We will continue to invest and modernise. And we want to pursue an ambitious digitalization strategy within the Bundeswehr.

With these commitments, Germany has agreed on a binding "pact for comprehensive security" in hard currency for the first time. Germany stands by its commitments made to the United Nations. And Germany stands by its NATO commitments. Because we are convinced that you can't have one without the other: security and development.
After a hard-fought battle to drive ISIL out of a city, we can only win the hearts and minds of the people by ensuring that water, electricity and jobs are quickly restored. At the same time, aid workers need to know that they are not alone and defenceless – that military personnel are at their side. The aid worker and the soldier need one another.

This idea is in fact the basis of our transatlantic partnership. At the darkest hour in German history, after the Allies' military victory over Nazi Germany, America did not turn its back on us, and instead gave us the Marshall Plan. It did so because it understood its own need for security in the long term. And the same is true today.

Since Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the United States has once again been increasing its military presence in Europe. Our colleague Jim Mattis can take credit for this. We Europeans are most grateful for this sign of solidarity. America is globally committed to pursuing security and freedom – for itself and for us.

I say this as a representative of a country that is still falling short of its target to spend 2 percent of economic output on defence – something the United States has long since been doing. But the basic idea of joined-up effort, embodied by the Marshall Plan and NATO, is absolutely right. Security and development, joined together, create lasting stability.

It concerns us, therefore, to see some of our partners continue to roll back spending on diplomacy, international aid, and the United Nations. Do our views really differ so greatly on the importance of combining defence, diplomacy, and aid when it comes to our security? And especially on the importance of the United Nations? As friends and partners we need to talk frankly about this. And this conference is the perfect place to do so.

Germany wants to strengthen the United Nations. In the coming years, we are willing to make an even greater contribution to solving the many tasks faced by the UN. It is important to us to raise the understanding of this comprehensive approach to security. Security and work, security and climate change, security and health, security and human rights, – these key factors go hand in hand. If my neighbour is doing well, I am more likely to do well myself.

The United Nations may be far from perfect, but it is our framework for global security. The reforms proposed by Secretary-General Guterres seek to strengthen the UN in exactly that role. As the protector of a rule-based global order the UN must

be strengthened, not limited in its options. The UN needs to be reformed – yes, but not weakened.

We may not like every resolution, every decision the UN makes. And: it's true that vetoes by the UN Security Council can be frustrating – but let us not forget: We are the United Nations. The UN is only as strong as we make it. We have all learned some tough lessons from the refugee crisis. We must strengthen organisations like the Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Children's Fund (UNICEF), in order to break the cycle of hopelessness and desperation leading to radicalisation and violence.

Moreover, discussions over the last few months have shown that transatlantic burden sharing cannot consist of a model under which some are responsible for the sharp end of the stick – while others deal with humanitarian measures and reconstruction. No, all of us are responsible for both aspects. And this must become a guiding principle on both sides of the Atlantic. If it does, our transatlantic partnership will retain its strategic strength. One thing is clear: We Europeans must make huge efforts if we are to meet this self-imposed demand. But our American friends, too, have a heavy obligation – which goes beyond military matters alone.

Consider this: What use is it to a family in Mosul to be freed from terror – if then they will only starve? What use is it to help a farmer in Mali to install an irrigation system – only for him to be slaughtered by Al-Qaeda? What use is it to the young woman in Afghanistan to finish her law degree – if she will only despair at the wall of corruption? What will be the consequences of the fact that the average age in Niger is 14, while in Europe it is 43, and in the United States 38?

We can imagine what our children will be faced with in the future, and we sense the responsibility we bear now to ensure that their tasks will not be insurmountable. If Germany, as a stable democracy, does not hide behind its past but accepts that its military must fight for freedom. If countries see international aid not just as an optional extra but as something they can't afford not to give.

In other words, when security and development are no longer seen as separate entities. But when soldiers, police, teachers, doctors, and lawyers plan and work together. When national self-interest is not the winner, but the cooperative world order – only then will our children perhaps say to us: You used your time well.