

## Event Report:

# Crossing the Red Line? The Merkel Government and the Afghanistan Test

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Speaker: Franz-Josef Meiers, DAAD/AICGS Fellow

- He did case studies to research the transformation of the German Armed Forces, the diplomatic solution to the Iran nuclear question and Germany's role in the ISAF mission through the strategic culture prism: the key determinant for Germany's role is to be found at the domestic level > culture of restraint
- Germany's policy behavior differs from the behavior of its allies even if it is confronted with the same situation/circumstances > "sonderbare Sonderwege"
- Germany's national caveats are perceived as a lack of commitment to meet the demands of allies and share the burden in Afghanistan
- The Merkel government demands to keep the division of labor in Afghanistan untouched and uses the same lines of arguments as in the past: 700 civilian projects are implemented by Germany in Northern Afghanistan and we would put them at risk if we expanded the mission to the South (zero sum game); the progress in the civilian sector is more important for the security than other military missions and the partners should follow Germany's lead; Germany provides already the third largest troop contingent (3,500) and took over the leading role in Northern Afghanistan only 2 years ago > other countries were fully aware of the greater risk in the South when the division of labor was made
- Meiers expects that the Merkel government is prepared to enhance the German contribution to 4,000-5,000 troops after the mandate will expire in October 2008 but the surge will not take place because of pressure from allies
- Germany has a comprehensive security approach and ISAF is only part of a broader mission; interconnected security; security as a precondition for crisis prevention and conflict resolution
- Germany promotes a strict separation of ISAF and OEF; that became visible when Germany approved sending the Tornado jets for surveillance: "help avoiding collateral damage"
- German public perceives the mission of the Bundeswehr as "armed development work" and "peace keeping as a social work, not war"; there is a strong resistance against the German military engagement: 4 out of 5 reject the dispatch of the

- Tornados, 3 out of 4 oppose Germany taking over the Quick Reaction Force, 6 out of 7 don't want to see German troops engaging in combat missions
- Many in Germany's public believe that the German interest is best served by staying out of Afghanistan> isolationist approach; that is the major lesson of the engagement
  - The resistance within the German government against a renewal of the mission can be found in both governing parties (illustration: 69 SPD parliamentarians who voted against it and a CSU member – state secretary in the Defense Ministry – who speaks about an exit strategy of German forces within 5 years)> the resistance will only grow if the allies will push the German government any further
  - Germany would also be ill advised to accept demands from allies because the Bundeswehr is ill equipped for combat missions
  - Merkel faces a domestic dilemma in the upcoming federal elections: will the opposition or the SPD paint her as a “pro war chancellor” again? > keeping the course is a clever move for the government but Merkel's reluctance to campaign for the Afghanistan mission is out of line with Germany's claim to promote itself as a reliable partner; mismatch between own expectations for Germany's role in the world and treatment of partners
  - Germany's peculiarities: preference for peace-keeping, reluctance to engage German forces, Germany has only “armed development workers that do no harm”, missions have a humanitarian objective, national caveats> Germany's foreign policy is made in Berlin, not Washington or Brussels
  - Germany's multilateral approach and the culture of restraint do not complement each other anymore in a post 9/11 world; today you need to act and not only talk
  - List of recommendations for Berlin: emphasize the dilemma in the structure of the alliances and explain Germany's culture of restraint to partners; emphasize Germany's contribution to ISAF, its reconstruction efforts and training of security forces; encourage the government and explain to the public why the investment in Afghanistan is indispensable (what is at risk and what is at stake?) instead of debating only about additional troops; remind Berlin of the imbalance with regards to the numbers of police trainers (180 in Kosovo, 120 in Afghanistan); set up a bipartisan commission to research if Germany's caveats are still in place and appropriate and let the commission make recommendations to the parliament and also with regards to enlightening the public discussion; send 1.500 more troops and follow the French example...

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