



# The "reorganization" of the Bundeswehr. State of affairs from the perspective of military sociology

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Published on 20/05/2019

Expériences alliées

**This progress report on the far-reaching reorganization of the Bundeswehr, published in this issue of the Cahiers with the kind permission of Dr. Heiko Biehl, is written from an original and, for us, unusual angle, that of sociology. What are the reactions of the German soldier? How are the ideas of the German citizen changing in the face of the arrival of a professionalized army? The author thus completes the vision of General (2S) de Langlois on the future of the Franco-German couple in terms of defence, presented in this same issue.**

The history of the Bundeswehr is a history of reform. This has been even more so since the turnaround of 1989-1991. During the Cold War, the Bundeswehr was conceived exclusively as a defensive army and was established, structured, armed and trained for the defence of the homeland together with its NATO partners. Operations outside the NATO area, or even outside Central Europe, were not planned. As everyone knows, this was not just a gradual evolution but rather a real turnaround. The Bundeswehr has been taking part in international missions for 20 years. Its soldiers, men and women, are deployed in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Sudan, the Indian Ocean and near the Lebanese coast. As a result, the armed forces have had to undergo far-reaching transformation. Reforms have followed reforms for twenty years now. The current reform, initiated by Defence Minister zu Guttenberg, systematised and implemented by his successor de Maizière, is known as "reorganisation" (Neuausrichtung). Two aspects differentiate the "reorganisation" from the reforms carried out so far and therefore deserve special attention: On the one hand, conscription has been abandoned and the Bundeswehr has been transformed into a professional army; on the other hand, the reorganization is bringing about major changes in the structures and processes of the Bundeswehr that have prevailed up to now.

## Transformation of the Ministry of Defense and Force Structure

The Bundeswehr has undergone fundamental changes since the 1990s. However, no

reform has taken place to such an extent as the "reorganization" of the structure and modes of action of the Bundeswehr, which has brought about such fundamental changes. This applies first and foremost to the transformation of the Ministry: the Chiefs of Staff of the Land Army, Air Force, Navy, Support (Streitkräftebasis) and Health Services have been detached from the Ministry and together with their subordinate offices and services form newly established commands. Other offices and competencies of the Ministry of Defence have been considerably modified. The "reorganization" has resulted in significant changes for many military units and services. According to a social science survey (Richter2012), the vast majority of soldiers as well as male and female civilian employees are directly affected by the "reorganization": their services are being restructured, relocated or even dissolved. Only 16% of Bundeswehr personnel are not affected. It is hardly surprising that these enormous changes are having an impact on the morale of the troops. Polls show a gloomy mood among Bundeswehr personnel (Richter2012). Although a majority of soldiers, both men and women, recognise the need for reforms, they are critical of the decisions that have been taken. In particular, they criticise the lack of coherence and logic with which the "reorganisation" is being pursued, as well as the lack of clarity of the objectives pursued. As a result, most members of the Bundeswehr are prepared to accept the "reorganization" with more disadvantages than advantages. The political leadership and the military command therefore still have a great deal of communication work to do in order to overcome the scepticism of the soldiers towards "reorganization".

### **The end of conscription and the transition of the Bundeswehr to a professional army**

In Germany, military service has outlived its political and security *raison d'être* for twenty years. Although the Bundeswehr has evolved into a projecting army, politicians and the armed forces have long remained committed to military service, which is the typical form of recruitment for a defensive army, whereas intervention armed forces mostly rely on volunteers. It was the former rising star of politics, *zu Guttenberg*, who first dared to end military service and overcome the doubts that the Bundeswehr, as a professional army, would be unable to recruit sufficient numbers of qualified young men and women to serve in the armed forces. Initial experiences with the recruitment of volunteers have been entirely positive. In addition, many young people are interested in a military career. Despite all the alarmist predictions that the Bundeswehr has already taken the path of a disadvantaged youth army, the educational level of the applicants is surprisingly high. However, the Bundeswehr can by no means rely on this favourable interim assessment. The positive economic situation in Germany, which leads to a sustained high demand for manpower and trainees, as well as the partly dramatic demographic development, will make it more difficult to recruit qualified candidates in the future. The Bundeswehr is increasingly in competition with other companies and has to prove itself attractive.

However, the end of conscription does not only affect the issue of recruitment. It also represents a significant break in civil-military relations. In view of the historical experience of the Germans with the armed force of the empire (Reichswehr) which evolved under the Weimar Republic into an "El In view of the historical experience of the Germans with the Reichswehr, which under the Weimar Republic developed into a "state within a state", military service was regarded by many as a guarantee that the armed forces were firmly anchored in society. The relationship between the army and the population will undoubtedly change rapidly. This is also due to external operations that have replaced manoeuvres and exercises on the national territory, the reduction in the size of the forces (from half a million in the past to around 185,000 soldiers) and the closure of military sites and bases. As the experiences of our American, British and French partners have shown, the end of conscription does not necessarily lead to a distancing of armies from society. In

fact, the surveys available so far even paint a very positive picture: The Bundeswehr enjoys a very good reputation in society in all social categories (Wagner/Biehl 2013). Its reputation is on a par with the armies of other European states, e.g. France. Germans are more critical of interventions involving the use of military force. A majority of German citizens have thus for several years been rejecting the ISAF operation - as is also the case in many European countries.

### **After the elections: How can the Bundeswehr go further?**

Reorganization" will not be the last reform of the Bundeswehr. In the security policy debate, there is already talk of a future volume of 140,000 soldiers, which would mean further cuts, further cuts and further closures. It is true that the steps already taken or to be taken are painful, but their extent alone will not determine the future of the German armed forces. The future role and tasks of the Bundeswehr will be far more decisive. In view of the mixed results in the Balkans and, even more so, in Afghanistan, some observers are already seeing the emergence of a post-interventionist era. The reluctance of Germans to intervene, similar to that of other European peoples, is well known. But what is the Bundeswehr's *raison d'être* in the future? Will emerging deployments for stabilisation, military observation or disaster relief operations be sufficient to justify the annual tax revenue of more than 30 billion euros? Politicians and armed forces alike are called upon to develop a realistic, timely and internationally accepted Bundeswehr Target Contract. The future of the German Armed Forces will not only be determined by structural, organizational and procedural details, but also by their security policy mission and their relationship to society.

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<b>Release date</b>	01/06/2018

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