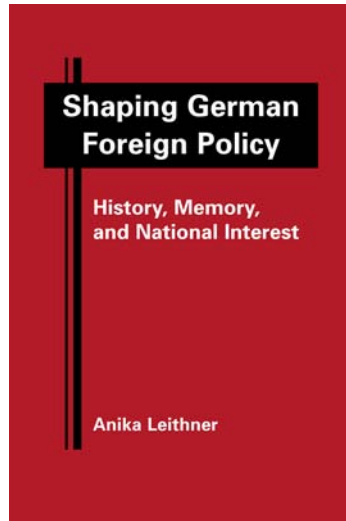


EXCERPTED FROM

Shaping German  
Foreign Policy:  
History, Memory,  
and National Interest

Anika Leithner

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ISBN: 978-1-935049-00-5 hc



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1800 30th Street, Ste. 314  
Boulder, CO 80301  
USA  
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fax 303.444.0824

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# Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xi</i>
1 Introduction: Historical Memory in German Foreign Policy	1
2 Has Germany Crossed the Rubicon? The Case of NATO and Kosovo	21
3 A Trajectory of Change? The Case of Afghanistan	51
4 Defender of Peace and of the United Nations: The Case of Iraq	85
5 Germany's Future in Europe and Beyond	125
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>173</i>

# 1

## Introduction: Historical Memory in German Foreign Policy

*“I often hear foreigners say what they would do if they had Germany’s wealth, its size or its population. I never hear them say what they would do if they had Germany’s past.”<sup>1</sup> – Senior German Diplomat*

It is difficult to think of another country that is as obsessed with its own recent history as Germany is. While “[m]ost countries celebrate the best in their pasts ... Germany unrelentingly promotes its worst.”<sup>2</sup> Even sixty years after the end of World War II, lengthy and almost ritualized debates about the lessons of history and what it means to be German after Hitler take place in abundance, as perhaps most famously evidenced by the so-called *Historikerstreit* (historians’ battle) about the importance of remembrance during the mid-1990s. Books written about the topic are almost guaranteed to become national bestsellers, even those that portray the entire German people as a historically anti-Semitic bunch whose natural inclination to commit mass murder made them perfect candidates to become Hitler’s “willing executioners.” Documentaries about the Holocaust – and the war in general – enjoy some of the highest TV ratings and air on a regular basis on any of the main networks. Films such as *Schindler’s List* were sold out weeks in advance and visits to the movie theater in order to see it became mandatory field trips for most German high schools in 1994. Indeed, history classes in Germany tend to spend a disproportionate amount of time teaching about the events of the World War II and its meaning for present-day Germany. Even German politics remain heavily influenced by the “past that will not pass.”<sup>3</sup>

This book answers the question of how (and how much) the past continues to shape German foreign policy behavior at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unlike traditional approaches, which focus mainly on external, structural factors as explanatory variables, I make a case for history – or more specifically, historical memory – as a central feature in foreign policy analysis. In particular, the complex relationship between historical memory, interests, identity, and foreign policy behavior holds the key to understanding German security decisions today.

I should point out that the view of history I adopt here is based on the notion that all knowledge of history is subjective. This is not to say

that there are no objective historical facts, but rather that the way observers remember those facts and the lessons they draw from them are open to interpretation and re-interpretation. While it may be too far-fetched to think of history in general as “just another discourse,<sup>4</sup>” it seems reasonable to argue that historical memory is indeed largely discursive in nature.

On the basis of this assumption, the main argument in this book is that while German foreign policy is still shaped by the historical memory of World War II, the exact nature of this memory is slowly changing as the lessons of history are being reinterpreted in such a way as to allow German leaders to reconcile the legacy of World War II – which has become so much part of German national identity and has in turn affected the concept of national interest – with the demands of a post-Cold War world. Germany appears to be on the road to normalcy, at least with regard to its views on the practice of foreign policy, but that road is long and change remains incremental rather than abrupt. German foreign policy is following a historical path, and where it has been in the past very much defines where it can go in the future, and how quickly it can get there.

### **The Interaction of Political Thought, Talk, and Action**

Germany has – for obvious reasons – been under intense scrutiny ever since the end of World War II,<sup>5</sup> but following the country’s return to full sovereignty and its re-unification in 1990, a veritable boom of analyses about the future of Germany’s foreign policy occurred. The new Germany was much too large and much too powerful for the rest of the world to ignore.<sup>6</sup> Even as Germans were celebrating on top of the Berlin Wall, speculations began about the consequences these recent developments would have for Germany, Europe, and the entire international community. Most observers expected significant changes to result from Germany’s more powerful position.<sup>7</sup>

At the heart of most debates was the question of how the end of the Cold War would affect German attitudes toward the use of force as a foreign policy tool. Some subscribed to the “normalization” thesis, which suggested that because the nature of the international system “explains the generation of military power in all countries, without regard to their internal societies,”<sup>8</sup> Germany should be expected to pursue a much less reticent foreign policy now that the external constraints of the Cold War had been removed. As a result, the country would begin to focus much more on strategic interests, seize advantage of the new position of power it found itself in vis-à-vis the rest of

Europe, inevitably build up its military potential, and simultaneously lose any hesitations it may have had about using force to achieve its goals. As a result, the rest of Europe would either balance against a strong new Germany,<sup>9</sup> possibly leading to the “Balkanization” of Europe and the resurgence of nationalism,<sup>10</sup> or Europe would form an anti-American alliance around a German core.<sup>11</sup> At the very least, Germany would attempt to increase its power, strive for a more unilateral and less antimilitarist foreign policy, and become generally more assertive in international politics.<sup>12</sup>

Since these predictions were derived from the belief that a country’s foreign policy is largely determined by external factors, they naturally posited that a significant change in Germany’s external environment, i.e. the end of the Cold War, would lead to significant changes in its foreign policy behavior. Most of these predictions have not occurred.

At the other end of the spectrum were those who predicted that German foreign policy behavior would not change very much after reunification, arguing that Germany would remain a “tamed power”<sup>13</sup> and continue to pursue the “same policies and patterns of behavior [it] had followed for the past forty years.”<sup>14</sup> Proponents of this “continuity” thesis argued that Germany had learned the lessons of its troubled past and absorbed them into German political culture. These lessons became so entrenched in German ideology that even an abrupt change in external structural factors would not produce any noticeable change in the country’s foreign policy behavior. The legacy of World War II produced a lasting “shift in the principal dimension of German power away from military to economic, the eradication of German militarism.”<sup>15</sup> Essentially the continuity thesis suggests a true transformation of German foreign policy thought and behavior, portraying Germany as a reformed state, which one proponent of the thesis even considered to be the world’s first “post-national state.”<sup>16</sup>

The continuity thesis derives its merit from the fact that German foreign policy initially did appear to remain fairly restrained following reunification. It is also correct in pointing to German political culture, as well as national identity, as factors that influence foreign policy behavior. To argue, however, that Germany is forever transformed and that no change has taken place at all since 1990 is just as wrong as predicting a return to pre-Cold War behavior.

As an alternative, I propose an approach that allows for both: continuity in German foreign policy as a result of the influence of historical memory, but also change as a result of the pressures of a changed external environment. I will show that, following the end of the Cold War, Germans were faced with the difficult task of reconciling the

#### 4 *Shaping German Foreign Policy*

lessons of history – which had become such an important part of national identity – with the demands of a post-Cold War system in which Germany did not have the luxury of hiding under the security umbrella the United States had provided for decades. While the former prescribed continuity in the form of a foreign policy that is guided by the principles of antimilitarism, multilateralism, reliability, and responsibility, the latter suddenly called for a more assertive German foreign and security policy that could not always avoid the use of military force or satisfy the strict definitions of multilateralism. In order to remain functional despite the pull in two different directions, a compromise had to be reached. In the end, a slow, but steady re-interpretation of historical memory – and with it the meaning of the lessons of history – occurred.

At the same time, change can only ever be incremental in nature. While the specific meaning of the lessons of history may be subject to re-interpretation and policies may change as a result thereof, foreign policies can not be created *de novo*, but should rather be expected to follow established patterns. In other words, we should expect path dependent policies, which are only changing slowly.

It is important to understand that this approach rests on the assumption that all the elements that contribute to a country's foreign policy behavior are at least partly socially constructed. I argue that foreign policy behavior is best understood as the result of a complex relationship between the way a country's decision makers think and talk about issues (the Thought-Talk-Action Model). Especially in a democratic setting, policy is usually the result of lengthy debates ("talk") in which politicians present competing positions and interpretations ("thought") that advance different preferred policy options. Only the most convincing frames will create consensus and mobilize alliances that support a particular decision ("action"). In the case of Germany, the many coalition governments produced by a proportional electoral system make political debates even more relevant. Think, for instance, about the coalition between the Social Democrats and the Green Party between 1998 and 2005, which frequently created the need for Chancellor Schröder to actively "sell" a policy that might not otherwise have met the approval of the Greens.

In this model, I assume that we cannot treat a country's foreign policy thought as exogenous. We should not expect policy makers across countries – or even within countries – to hold the same views of the world, to interpret events in the same way, or to have the same interests. Human cognition tends to be much more complex than a mere calculation of cost-benefit and expected utility. Actors, therefore, are not

always rational, as many traditional approaches assume, but should rather be considered cognitive actors,<sup>17</sup> with all the implications this has for the decision making process. Foreign policy cognition in particular “is ‘thick’ with cultural memory, emotion, and morality, and state action requires skillful negotiations that build agreement among diverse constituencies.”<sup>18</sup> In the case of Germany, historical memory in general, and the lessons of history in particular, should be considered cognitive factors that shape decision makers’ thoughts on foreign policy and military intervention, as will be illustrated in more detail below.

Political discourse becomes an important explanatory variable in this model, because it can show how policy makers collectively “think” about certain issues, how they form interests and decide appropriate policies, and therefore helps explain why they act the way they do. Such a discursive approach can be considered a “transmission belt” by which international impulses are translated into policy. Even if one assumes that political talk is “cheap,” the question remains why politicians talk the way they do. A possible answer is that they conform to audience expectations, which means that even if the politicians themselves do not genuinely believe what they say, they believe that someone wants to hear it, thus expressing what is important to society as a whole.

Talk mediates between thought and action, especially in a group setting – as all democratic decision making processes tend to be – where talk becomes indispensable as a tool for forming a consensus among the individual policy makers, but also as a means for them to justify their decisions to a larger audience. Policy makers “are forced to give reasons (verbal or written) for the way they act in politically binding contexts.”<sup>19</sup> Words therefore do not only reflect thought and action, but also have the power to mold them.

Ultimately, action is the result of both thought and talk, as outlined above.

### *German Foreign Policy Thought: National Interests vs. National Identity*

In further examining the element of foreign policy thought, I assume that both national interests and national identity play an important role in a country’s decision making process, and furthermore, that both should be thought of as “ideas” that are – at least partly – socially constructed.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Germany, the experience of World War II, and how that experience is remembered, has largely shaped the interpretation of German national interests and how they are to be pursued, as well as the interpretation of German national identity.

The idea of “historical memory” as part of a country’s collective memory is generally ascribed to Maurice Halbwachs. He defined it as the embodiment of collective experiences that “is stored and interpreted by social institutions.”<sup>21</sup> As such, historical memory is shared even by generations who have not lived through the initial or formative experiences. Halbwachs suggests that these effects can last up to 100 years after the event that comes to dominate collective memory. The past, it would appear, is ever present in political decision making; it is, perhaps, even more important than present demands and external factors.

Not surprisingly, especially traumatic experiences shape a country’s identity and its politics more than any others and have a tendency to remain part of the collective consciousness for several generations. Robert Jervis once wrote that “the only thing as important for a nation as its revolution is its last major war.”<sup>22</sup> Even though he allows for a certain generational effect to take place over time, he also believes that the “lessons of history can become institutionalized in textbooks, rules, and even language itself.”<sup>23</sup> Examples of such institutionalization of memory in Germany are plenty, ranging from the moral judgment of German actions in history textbooks, to the provisions in the Basic Law regulating the use of force, to the law against *Volksverhetzung* (incitement of the masses) and denying the Holocaust, all the way to the continued insistence on Conscription as a means to firmly anchor the military within German society, even though the practice is becoming increasingly irrational and costly.

In Germany, the last war tends to overwhelm any other aspects of German history that may potentially have come to shape German politics. The reason for that is quite simple: the experiences under the Nazi regime, the utter defeat and occupation in 1945, combined with the intense re-education measures initiated by the Allies have produced a collective memory in which there is little room anything else. “[A]ll discussion of German history seems to begin and end with the Nazis.”<sup>24</sup> Because the experience of World War II has been elevated to such heights in the minds of the German people, and because Germans are more conscious of their own history than most other people, historical memory is perhaps disproportionately powerful in shaping present foreign policy.<sup>25</sup>

One might think of historical memory as a collectively shared frame of reference for behavior. The more unfamiliar a situation is to decision makers, the more important the lessons of history are for providing a type of “compass.” It is easy to see how the unfamiliarity of the post-



Cold War environment at least initially caused German politicians to hold on to historical traditions.

In addition to the notion of historical memory, path dependency is another useful concept in describing the continued prominence of history in German foreign policy. Although the literature on path dependency is mostly concerned with the constraining effects of early choices in economics, it does seem possible to apply some of the same argument to political science. The idea is that “choices formed when an institution is being formed or when a policy is being formulated have a constraining effect into the future.”<sup>26</sup> Because that is the case, one cannot completely understand present choices without knowing the historical path that has led decision makers to this junction. “To capture the critical moments and actions of the particular case also requires an understanding of the constraints that derive from past actions.”<sup>27</sup>

Path dependency does not simply mean that “history matters.” While that is true, it also trivializes the issue and does not provide a focused enough explanation of the causal mechanisms at work. Perhaps a better way to think of this is in terms of Margaret Levi’s tree metaphor: from the same trunk, there are many different branches and smaller branches one might follow when climbing a tree. Although it is possible to go back or to even jump from one branch to another, it is more likely that one will follow the branch one chose in the beginning (unless, of course, that branch dies).<sup>28</sup>

Levi justifies her arguments in terms of rational choice, saying that once a path is chosen, it often becomes too costly to turn around, as “the entrenchment of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice.” In the case of Germany, whose main priority following the disaster of World War II was rehabilitation, a sudden reversal in direction or even “jumping off the tree” would have potentially devastating consequences for German credibility. The rest of the world, and certainly Europe in particular, still keep a wary eye on German behavior, perhaps half-expecting a return to the aggressive militarism that many still seem to associate with Germany. German leaders are very much aware of this and have always tried to remain as transparent and inconspicuous as possible in their foreign policy rhetoric and behavior. As a result, the notion of path dependency makes complete sense, both from a cultural and from a rational point of view.

Critics might argue that this theory is flawed, because it does not allow for change to happen. If history really is so important, how does change in a country’s behavior occur? If, for instance, the experience of World War II is such a formative one in German foreign policy thought

and behavior, and if it indeed has become institutionalized, should we not expect the same thought and behavior to continue indefinitely?

This criticism is valid, if one treats historical memory as fixed, making it too deterministic by far. Although the past is undeniably constraining current German foreign policy, it would be utopian to assume that this will be the case forever. Instead, historical memory – as well as national identity and national interests – should be treated as discourses rather than fixed variables. Because historical memory is discursive in nature, it can very well change, although there are definite limits to how much and how quickly it can do so. Not just any alternative interpretation of the past is possible once a dominant narrative has developed. In Germany, for instance, the dominant narrative of historical memory has been so inextricably linked to the concepts of *Wiedergutmachung* (atonement), *Verantwortungspolitik* (responsible politics), and a complete rejection of aggressive militarism and fascist ideology for so long, that it simply is not possible to adopt a new dominant narrative that is too far removed from the current narrative without great costs to Germany's credibility in Europe and the world. Instead, any change has to be incremental.

Certain aspects of a country's historical memory are perhaps more open to reinterpretation than others, depending on how deeply they have been internalized by society. Germans pride themselves on having learned the lessons of history and therefore being unlikely to repeat past mistakes. That is the single most important element of German historical memory. Derived from that are the general lessons Germany learned from the experience of World War II: responsibility, reliability, multilateralism, predictability, and antimilitarism. All of these have become intrinsic components of Germany's self-understanding as a history-conscious nation and have impacted every aspect of German life, though none more than the practice of foreign policy.

I argue that at this point in time, these general lessons – with the exception of strict antimilitarism, which will be explained later – are currently not open for reinterpretation as they are too intrinsically linked to German national identity. So what do Germans do when they find themselves in an international environment that consistently challenges these lessons? Well, the general lessons might not be open for debate, but the specific meaning of these lessons are. Most of them are fairly abstract in the first place and therefore potentially open to interpretation, if the need should arise. For instance, “responsibility” could be defined in a number of ways. The general lesson of needing to practice a “responsible” foreign policy can remain intact, while the specific interpretation of what it means to be responsible can change.

In the end, change depends on the existence of pressure upon the dominant discourse. I argue that during the Cold War, the dominant narratives were mostly unchallenged, because there was no external pressure upon Germans to reconsider these lessons. This explains why following the end of the Cold War and German reunification no immediate reinterpretation of the dominant discourse on historical memory occurred, resulting in continuity of German politics rather than change. When the pressure from the new international environment increased over the years a reinterpretation of historical memory finally became unavoidable.

Despite the importance of historical memory, it is utopian to think that this prevents German politicians from placing the pursuit of national interests at the top of their foreign policy agenda. According to my model, national interests and historical memory both shape foreign policy thought as well as each other. Both are at least partly socially constructed and should therefore not be treated as given. To claim that all states have the same interests, as positivist theories of international relations tend to do, does not do justice to the complexity of political realities. A country does not pursue interests because of exogenous factors, such as its geography or its power position in the international system, alone; it is just as important to examine how the national interest is defined in public and elite discourse, and how it may be constrained by historical memory.

Interestingly, German politicians are notoriously reluctant to talk about national interests. Throughout the Cold War and during most of the 1990s, German foreign policy was justified mostly in terms of responsibility, the lessons of history, and humanitarian interests, as opposed to national interests. Germans almost seemed afraid to even hint at an interest-based foreign policy.<sup>29</sup> This is a direct result of the experience of World War II, which still looms over policy makers' heads. Talk about German interests is invariably linked to past ambitions, making it nearly impossible to talk about them without resurrecting the ghosts (and fears) of the past. That is why a German Chancellor, if (s)he speaks of interests at all, "needs to explain matters that other leaders do not need to explain: what is a legitimate German national interest abroad? When should German forces become engaged abroad?"<sup>30</sup>

The legacy of World War II has significantly shaped the kinds of interests German leaders feel they are allowed to pursue, where they can pursue them, and the manner in which they can pursue them. With regard to the former, it is undeniable that Germany's foreign policy ambitions have been curtailed as a result of the war. The mere thought

of territorial expansion – the *Drang nach Osten* (the urge to expand eastward), which had so long dominated German foreign policy – was taboo in postwar Germany, as was the use of military force. During the last sixty years, foreign policy makers have preferred to keep a low profile beyond the immediate defense of national and alliance territory, wishing above all to go largely unnoticed. Germany at its most ambitious has striven to be a *Mitführungsmacht* (co-leading power), rather than a *Führungsmacht* (leading power).

The question of where Germany can pursue its interests was until recently very limited: Any area in which soldiers of the Wehrmacht had been engaged during World War II remained off-limits, no matter the situation. When the international community was discussing a peacekeeping operation in the former Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s, former Chancellor Helmut Kohl refused to consider committing German troops to such an endeavor, arguing that Germany simply could not send its military into a region where German soldiers had committed such atrocities sixty years earlier. Relations with Eastern Europe in general remain affected by the memories of World War II. For instance, no German leader has thus far felt comfortable enough to bring up the matter of the Sudeten Germans, who were expelled from their homes by Czechoslovakia in 1945 and have received neither compensation for their property nor a formal apology (whereas the German government has continuously offered both in large quantities).

The aspect of German national interests that has been affected the most by the legacy of World War II is the means by which they can be pursued. Before 1945, territorial expansion and military force were considered appropriate means to achieving security and influence; after 1945, diplomatic and economic means were all that was left to German leaders, effectively turning Germany into a civilian power.<sup>31</sup> In addition, unilateralism was no longer an option, while predictability and transparency became indispensable.

While its ambitions may have been curbed, Germany's national interests at their most basic level have not changed: as the land of the middle – sharing borders with nine other countries – security and influence continue to be of the utmost importance. Because of its geographic location, Germany has always had to look East and West – and occasionally North and South – in its foreign policy. Unlike the United States and Great Britain, Germany has never had the luxury of retreating into isolationism, but rather had to “play the game of foreign policy” at all times. Even after 1945, the new German leaders almost immediately began to play both sides once again, or at least attempted to keep their options open. Although ultimately the *Westpolitik* (Western

politics) took precedence, Germany insisted on having an *Ostpolitik* (Eastern politics) as well throughout the Cold War, often to the dismay of the United States, which feared potential Soviet influences.

Even though Europe has been exceedingly peaceful since the end of World War II, and is well advanced on the road to integration, Germany still cannot help but be aware of the goings-on around it. In fact, one might argue that even though European integration was conceived of as an insurance against German ambitions, it has simultaneously contributed a great deal to alleviating German fears that originated from its vulnerable geographic location. Stability on the continent is very much in Germany's interest, both from a political and from an economical point of view, as is the achievement of as much influence within the European Union as possible.

The end of the Cold War has changed the perception of German interests, because it has turned Germany from a country that was passively benefiting from European security – mainly provided by the United States as a result of its desire to contain the Soviet Union – into one of the guarantors of security on the continent. At least, that is the role that many see for the reunified Germany. Even the staunchest defenders of the German-American friendship and the American-European alliance would have to admit that the end of the Cold War has also reduced America's strategic interest in Europe, which is why the U.S. security umbrella which had been so generously provided for decades can no longer be taken for granted. While it is undeniable that the United States still has some interest in Europe as a strategic location for its military bases, it is equally undeniable that this is not considered to be a matter of American national security any longer. In fact, Donald Rumsfeld's 2003 comments about a potential move of U.S. bases to the "new Europe," following the disagreement between Germany, France, and America over the war against Iraq, have made the point quite clearly.<sup>32</sup> In addition, every post-Cold War U.S. president has repeatedly called for greater burden-sharing and for greater European responsibility in areas that are considered to be Europe's problem. As one of the largest and richest countries in the European Union, Germany is naturally expected to take on a leadership role.

In short, the post-Cold War environment has effectively put pressure on the definition of German national interest, and is challenging some of the lessons of history that have become part of the country's national identity, which Germans have held so dearly for decades. In particular, Germany's preference for strict antimilitarism is not feasible any longer, given the demands placed on its foreign policy by the changed external environment. During the Cold War, the lessons of history were largely

commensurable with the external environment; interests and identity were largely commensurable, as they were both based on the same goal: to allow German rehabilitation and a return to the international community as a fully sovereign and unified state. Other interests were either prohibited or, as in the case of German security, were largely taken care of by others.

*German Foreign Policy Talk:  
The Social Construction of Discourse*

*We should not ask what the words mean,  
as though they contained secrets,  
but what they are doing,  
as though they embodied actions.*<sup>33</sup>

As outlined above, the elements of foreign policy thought – historical memory and national interest – are considered to be largely socially constructed. It follows that scholars of foreign policy decision making should pay close attention to political discourse as the means by which the meanings of these elements are negotiated and re-negotiated. Such an approach, of course, is derived from the fundamental assumption that humans use language to inscribe meaning into the world. “[D]iscursive phenomena [are] more than reflections of knowledge and power; as manifestations of society’s ongoing activity of asserting its identity, its discourses serve a constitutive function.”<sup>34</sup> It is through discourse that humans define their reality and themselves.

Indeed, there is an “increasingly accepted equation between ‘discursive practices’ and political practices”<sup>35</sup> as well. Because “political problems are socially constructed, whether or not a situation is perceived as a political problem depends on the narrative in which it is discussed.”<sup>36</sup> Politicians in their talk construct a vision of the world which can constitute identity, structure deliberation, and constrain action.<sup>37</sup>

Political discourse becomes especially important in democratic decision making settings. Given the likelihood of competing positions and interpretations in any political debate involving a great number of decision makers, one might think of discourse as a means for creating consensus and for mobilizing coalitions, for establishing a common position which ultimately becomes the basis for action.

Finally, discourse can reconcile realities with incommensurable beliefs and values.<sup>38</sup> In the German case, discourse helps to reconcile the

lessons of history with the demands of the new political reality the end of the Cold War has created.

### *Foreign Policy Action: Military Interventions*

In theory, the model put forth here could be used to analyze any type of foreign policy action. In this book, however, I am exclusively interested in military intervention for two reasons: the question of military interventions is the single most sensitive foreign policy topic in Germany, and it is the area that has been affected the most by the legacy of World War II. In order to understand the significance of historical memory for Germany's ability to participate in such military operations abroad, I examine the three most recent cases in which Germans were called upon to do so: (1) the NATO-led airstrikes in Kosovo in 1999, in which Germany actively participated; (2) the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, in which Germany also participated, though much more hesitantly than in Kosovo; (3) the war against Iraq in 2003, in which Germany refused to participate.

In the years between the end of the Cold War and the Kosovo intervention, German behavior with regard to military interventions had been characterized more by continuity than change. Table 1.1 summarizes Germany's participation in military operations between 1987 and 1998, showing that although there has been an increase in both the quality and quantity of German contributions, one can certainly not call German foreign policy during that time period aggressive or even a return to normalcy. In 1987, Germany's culture of reticence was challenged directly for the first time since 1945<sup>39</sup> when the United States requested military assistance from its European allies following a few skirmishes with Iran in the Persian Gulf. The German government was asked to contribute several ships for the protection of Kuwaiti oil tankers, but denied the request on the basis of constitutional restrictions. Instead, decision makers approved the deployment of a number of ships to the Mediterranean, as long as they remained within NATO territory. In 1989, Germany contributed to an international police force in Namibia under the auspices of the United Nations, but support was limited to non-combat units.

In 1987, Germany's culture of reticence was challenged directly for the first time since 1945<sup>40</sup> when the United States requested military assistance from its European allies following a few skirmishes with Iran in the Persian Gulf. The German government was asked to contribute several ships for the protection of Kuwaiti oil tankers, but denied the request on the basis of constitutional restrictions. Instead, decision makers

**Table 1.1: German Military Participation between 1987 and 1998**

	Conflict/Military Operation	Scope of German Participation
1987	Persian Gulf, Escort of Kuwaiti ships; US skirmishes with Iran; mine sweeping	Logistical support only; German ships to Mediterranean, but not to Gulf region
1989	Namibia Peacekeeping operation (UNTAG)	Contribution to international police force
1990-1991	Gulf War	Financial and logistical support only; dispatch of 200 soldiers and 18 fighter jets to Turkey as part of a NATO contingent
1992	Cambodia, Peacekeeping operation (UNAMIC)	Medical troops
1991-1996	Adriatic, Monitoring of embargo against FRY (Operation Sharp Guard)	Naval forces ("no combat operation")
1993-1994	Somalia (UNOSOM II)	Supply and transport units
1993-1995	Bosnia-Herzegovina (UNPROFOR)	Logistical support only (airlifts to Sarajevo)
1993-1995	Bosnia-Herzegovina, Monitoring of no-fly zone; NATO airstrikes against FRY	Airforce personnel as part of AWACS unit; no participation in NATO airstrikes
1994	Georgia (UNOMIG)	10 German medical officers and military observers as part of UN peacekeeping force
1995-1996	Bosnia-Herzegovina (IFOR)	Some 3,000 non-combat ground troops, stationed in Croatia
1996	Bosnia-Herzegovina (SFOR)	Some 3,000 ground troops (including combat troops), stationed in Bosnia-Herzegovina
1998	Iraq, US-led air raids	Offer to grant US the use of military bases in Germany; no participation in attacks

Source: *Baumann and Hellmann (2001)*.

makers approved the deployment of a number of ships to the Mediterranean, as long as they remained within NATO territory. In 1989, Germany contributed to an international police force in Namibia



under the auspices of the United Nations, but support was limited to non-combat units.

After reunification, many expected a significant change in Germany's attitude toward participation in international military operations. The first test came quickly in the form of the United States' request for military assistance in the 1991 war against Iraq. German decision makers – highly unprepared for this challenge, both materially and emotionally – denied that request, pointing once again to the German constitution, which contained a clause against the use of the German military in out-of-area missions. Although some representatives of the Christian Democrats (CDU) declared that it was time to move past antimilitarism, the German government (also run by the CDU) limited its support to what had come to be known as “checkbook diplomacy:” Contributing more than \$12 billion to the war, but not sending any troops. In addition, Germany provided logistical support and dispatched 18 fighter jets to Turkey as part of a NATO contingent. Back home, public opinion was highly critical of the war effort, leading to numerous demonstrations under the motto “No blood for oil!” It was mainly public opinion that prevented policy makers from sending even a token force to appease the United States and to ward off accusations of free-riding.

Between 1992 and 1996, Germany participated in several United Nations missions, but continued its policy of not deploying combat troops. In 1991-92, German medical personnel assisted United Nations peacekeeping troops in Cambodia. Between 1992 and 1996, German naval forces took part in the monitoring of an embargo against Yugoslavia in the Adriatic. The government took special care to declare that this was not a combat operation. In Somalia in 1993-94, German supply and transport units joined the United Nations troops of UNOSOM II.

In 1994, the German Constitutional Court ruled that nothing in the Basic Law prohibited the deployment of German combat troops in out-of-area missions. From a legal point of view, all obstacles to an active German military participation abroad had been removed with this ruling. However, German leaders continued to approve only non-combat missions, such as the deployment of 10 (!) medical officers and military observers as part of a United Nations peacekeeping force in Georgia. Between 1993 and 1995, Germans offered logistical support for United Nations troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of UNPROFOR, and deployed air-force personnel for the monitoring of a no-fly zone in the same area. There was no German participation in the NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia.

The first serious commitment to a military mission abroad after reunification came in the form of 3,000 German troops deployed as part of the NATO-led force policing the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995 in the Balkans (IFOR). The German contingent consisted mainly of logistical and transport units, and was stationed in Croatia, well away from the actual problem zone. Nevertheless, this mission represented a major step on the way to a more engaged foreign policy. Only a year later, the German government approved the deployment of combat troops for the first time in connection with the IFOR follow-up mission SFOR. These troops were regularly stationed in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It seemed as though this operation would herald a new era in German foreign policy making. Six years after reunification, Germans finally seemed to have shed their reluctance to use military force. Despite this progress, however, it soon became clear that Germany still had a long way to go before it could be considered a “normal” nation. In 1998, the government granted the United States the use of some of its military bases for the U.S.-led air raids against Iraq, but once again refused to participate actively.

German military participation abroad certainly increased between 1987 and 1998. However, it would be exaggerated to speak of an extremely active, or even aggressive, foreign policy. In most cases, German involvement was restricted to logistical and medical support, and virtually all such decisions were accompanied by heated political debates about the morality of the mission. Overall, the time period preceding the first case analyzed in this book was characterized more by continuity than change.

### **Research Methodology: Taking a Linguistic Approach to Decision Making**

As outlined above, my theoretical model is based on the assumption that political discourse is an important explanatory variable for a country’s foreign policy behavior, which is why I have adopted discourse analysis as my primary method of inquiry. Political debates “leave a long trail of communication,” a “detailed conversational map that reveals important dimensions of political reasoning that often goes unnoticed by traditional analysis.”<sup>41</sup> I have drawn such a conversational map – or a rhetorical map – that offers insights into the kind of reasoning German politicians employ when they talk about foreign policy and the use of military force, and how their way of talking is connected to the outcome of the decision making process.

My data consists of transcripts of Bundestag debates. The Bundestag is the lower chamber of the German parliament and is the locus of foreign policy decision making. For each case – Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq – I monitored all Bundestag debates for approximately eight months before and four months after each event, but only included those debates that actually address the issue in my analysis.

For Kosovo, I selected a total of eight debates, beginning on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1998, and ending on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1999. For Afghanistan, I selected eight debates as well, beginning on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and ending on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2001. For Iraq, I chose three debates, taking place in February and March of 2003.

### Organization of the Book

The next chapter, Chapter 2, presents a case study of the Bundestag debates that accompanied the German decision to participate in the NATO-led airstrikes against the Serbs in Kosovo in 1999. Chapter 3 analyzes the second empirical case, the debates leading up to the German participation in the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. Chapter 4 examines the debates that accompanied Germany's decision not to participate in the war against Iraq in 2003. Finally, the concluding chapter (5) presents a summary of the findings, a comparison across the three cases, and implications for the future of German foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially as regards the role of historical memory as an influential variable in the decision making process.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in: Heneghan, Tom (2000). *Unchained Eagle: Germany after the Wall*. Financial Times Prentice Hall, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Kulish, Nicholas (2008). "Germany Confronts Holocaust Legacy Anew," *New York Times*, January 29 2008.

<sup>3</sup> This phrase is part of a quote by historian Ernst Nolte about Germany's obsession with the past: "Between Myth and Revisionism? The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s," in: Erich Nolte and Michael Stürmer (1987), eds., *Historikerstreit*. Munich: Piper.

<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Evans (1999). *In Defense of History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> At least there appears to be the "persistent German perception that the eyes of the world are continuously upon them." Atina Grossmann (2000). "The "Goldhagen Effect:" Memory, Repetition, and Responsibility in the New Germany," in: Geoff Eley, ed., *The "Goldhagen" Effect: History, Memory,*

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*Nazism – Facing the German Past*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, p. 110.

<sup>6</sup> Reunification added five new states to Germany's territory, which amounted to a 33% increase; its population went from around 60 million people – comparable to France and Britain – to over 80 million; simultaneously, Germany's economic and military strength increased significantly as well. Cf. Volker Rittberger, ed., (2000). *German Foreign Policy since Unification: Theories and Case Studies*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, p. 58-61.

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Staack (2000). *Handelsstaat Deutschland: Deutsche Außenpolitik in einem neuen internationalen System*. Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh, p. 23; and Gunther Hellmann (1998). "Die prekäre Macht: Deutschland an der Schwelle zum 21. Jahrhundert," in: Wolf-Dieter Eberwein und Karl Kaiser, eds., *Deutschlands neue Außenpolitik, Vol. 4: Institutionen und Ressourcen*. Munich: Oldenbourg, p. 256.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Peter Rosen (1995). "Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Spring), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Matthias Zimmer (1997). *Germany: Phoenix in Trouble?* Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: University of Alberta Press; Thomas F. Banchoff (1999). *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945-1995*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

<sup>10</sup> John Mearsheimer (1990). "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer), pp. 5-56.

<sup>11</sup> Zimmer (1997); John G. Ikenberry, ed., (2002). *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>12</sup> John S. Duffield (1998). *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy after Unification*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; Roberta Haar (2001). *Nation States as Schizophrenics: Germany and Japan as Post-Cold War Actors*. Westport, CT: Praeger; Michael Stürmer (1992). *Die Grenzen der Macht*. Berlin: Siedler Verlag, p. 247.

<sup>13</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, (1997). *Tamed Power: Germany in Europe*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas U. Berger (1998). *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 167.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas F. Banchoff (1999). *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945-1995*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Glees (1996). *Reinventing Germany: German Political Development since 1945*. Dulles, VA: Berg.

<sup>17</sup> See Jerel A. Rosati (2001). "The Power of Human Cognition in the Study of World Politics," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Autumn), pp. 45-75.

<sup>18</sup> Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman, eds., (1996). *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Henrik Larsen (1997). *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis*. New York, NY: Routledge, p. 13.

- <sup>20</sup> cf. Alexander Wendt (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- <sup>21</sup> Maurice Halbwachs (1992). *On Collective Memory*, trans., ed., and intro. Lewis A. Coser, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, p. 24.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert Jervis (1976). *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 266.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 267.
- <sup>24</sup> Steven Ozment (2004). *A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, p. 6.
- <sup>25</sup> Yacoov Vertzberger argued that “the importance of historical heritage in shaping cognition and perception increases in proportion to the historical consciousness of a society” (in: *ibid.* 1990. *The World in Their Minds*, pp. 265-266.)
- <sup>26</sup> Ian Greener (2005). “The Potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies,” *Politics*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 62-72, at p. 62; see also Hall and Taylor (1996), Koelble (1995), and Peters (2001).
- <sup>27</sup> Margaret Levi (1997). “A Model, a Method, and a Map: Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis,” in: Mark I. Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, eds., *Comparative Politics; Rationality, Culture, and Structure*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 19-42, at p. 28.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> To be sure, this pertains mostly to the realm of security and defense policy. In the realm of economics, German leaders have generally been much less self-conscious in talking about German interests and in pursuing them aggressively.
- <sup>30</sup> W. R. Smyser (1999). *From Yalta to Berlin*, p. 415.
- <sup>31</sup> Cf. Sebastian Harnisch and Hanns M. Maull (2001). *Germany as a Civilian Power? The Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic*. New York, NY: Palgrave.
- <sup>32</sup> See Ian Fischer (2003). “U.S. Eyes a Willing Romania As a New Comrade in Arms,” *New York Times*, July 16th, 2003.
- <sup>33</sup> Denis Donoghue, *The Sovereign Ghost: Studies in Imagination*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. p. 54.
- <sup>34</sup> Gerard Hauser (1999). *Vernacular Voices*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, p. 113.
- <sup>35</sup> Corcoran (1990). “Language and Politics,” in: David L. Swanson and Dan Nimmo, *New Directions in Political Communication: A Resource Book*; Cameron (1985); Edelman (1988); Thomas Diez (1999) *Die EU lesen: Diskursive Knotenpunkte in der britischen Europadebatte*, Opladen: Leske & Budrich; Jacob Torfing (1999) *New theories of discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek*, Oxford: Blackwell;
- <sup>36</sup> Maarten A. Hajer, “Discourse coalitions and the Institutionalisation of Practice. The case of acid rain in Britain,” in: J. Forester and F. Fischer, eds., *The Argumentative Turn in Policy and Planning*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 44
- <sup>37</sup> Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman, eds., (1996). *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, p. 24.
- <sup>38</sup> Gerard Hauser (1999). *Vernacular Voices*, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Between the years of 1945 and 1987, not a single German soldier was deployed in a combat mission.

<sup>40</sup> Between the years of 1945 and 1987, not a single German soldier was deployed in a combat mission.

<sup>41</sup> Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman, eds., (1996), p. 371.