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European Gestaltungsmacht: Germany's Strategic Culture's Influence on European Strategic Autonomy

MA International Relations

Global Conflict in the Modern Era

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Abstract

This thesis investigates Germany's interpretation of European Strategic Autonomy by looking at its strategic culture. Germany's strategic culture, developed following World War II, emphasizes the importance of multilateralism, military restraint, and upholding the status quo. Using these elements, the thesis will evaluate how the idea of ESA aligns with Germany's strategic culture. This paper uses an interdisciplinary lens to draw upon the disciplines of history, sociology, psychology, political science, and international relations. Along with interviews and a content analysis of primary and secondary sources, the analysis shows that Germany's strategic culture does influence its interpretation of ESA, which effects its ambition on the topic. This is a relevant topic as in September 2021, Germany will elect a new Chancellor, offering the opportunity to transition its security and defense policies.

Keywords: strategic culture, foreign policy analysis, Germany, European Union, security and defense, European Strategic Autonomy

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List of Abbreviations

CSDP Common Security and Defense Policy

EDF European Defense Fund

EEAS European External Action Service

ESA European Strategic Autonomy

EU European Union

FNC Framework Nations Concept

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PESCO Permanent Structured Cooperation

US United States of America

1. Introduction

"The end of history was an American idea, but a German reality, and is now a millennial problem," remarked Bulgarian author, Ivan Krastev, and German scholar, Ulrike Franke, who built upon one another to describe Germany's security and defense policy environment (Franke 2018). While Germany's role in international security and defense can be described as tame since WWII, particularly in relation to their geopolitical position and economic strength, rumbles about having more assertive policies have come in waves. One of the consequences of the unconventional Presidency of Donald Trump in the United States is that it prompted European Union (EU) member states, including Germany, to look inwards at their own policies and capabilities. While Trump's questioning of Europe's responsibility and burden sharing in NATO was nothing new, language was intensified during the Donald Trump presidency (2016-2020).

The most recent rumbling about increased German involvement in international security and defense came in the form of European Strategic Autonomy (ESA). This idea was presented and championed by France, one of Germany's strongest allies. Discussions about this in Europe came to the forefront in November 2019 when French President Emmanuel Macron called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) "brain-dead" and argued that "Europe could defend itself" (The Economist 2019). During the time when Macron's interview was released, there was worry in Germany about the reliability of the United States under President Trump given his harsh statements, such as calling Germany "delinquent" (DW News 2020) and to point out "German neglect and failures" when it comes to its "lack of reliability" and "lack of initiative" (Becker, et al. 2020). While doubts about being able to depend on the United States do exist in Germany, the most important response came from German Chancellor Angela Merkel when she retorted: "Europe cannot defend itself – we are dependent on NATO" (Chazan 2019). This reemphasized the importance that Germany places on NATO as well as on the transatlantic alliance, undermining the aspirations of ESA.

While the Covid-19 pandemic shifted governmental attention towards global health and the economy for most of 2020, the discussion was reignited when German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (AKK) gave an interview to POLITICO stating that, "Illusions of

European strategic autonomy must come to an end: Europeans will not be able to replace America's crucial role as a security provider" (Kramp-Karrenbauer 2020). This was again followed by a retort from President Macron questioning whether the EU had not learned anything from the last four years: "Is the change in the American administration going to see Europeans letting up? We cannot lose the European thread and that strategic autonomy, this strength that Europe can have for itself. It is a matter of conceiving the terms of European sovereignty and strategic autonomy, so that we can have our own say and not become the vassal of this or that power and no longer have a say" (Macron 2020). These Franco-German debates over ESA are indicative of the hesitation seen in Germany when it comes to pursuing a greater role in international security (Vincze 2021).

Because these debates were never resolved, calls for Germany to increase its commitment and responsibility in international security continued – with ESA being a possible solution. Politicians and scholars still struggle to make sense of Germany's security policy and continue to critique Germany's hesitancy with the Polish Foreign Minister even stating, "I fear German power less than I am beginning to fear German inactivity" (Sikorski 2011). Because Germany is arguably the most influential member state in the EU, its buy-in is critical for ESA to be pursued and to be successful. For this reason, it is important to look at how German politicians view ESA and how ambitiously they are willing to adopt this concept. While there are many angles to examine this through, I will examine this through the lens of the strongest determinants of Germany's behavior: its strategic culture.

1.1 Research Question

While European Strategic Autonomy has been introduced as a possible outlet for Germany and its European allies to pursue their security and defense activities, the concept is relatively new and susceptible to adaptation. The definition of ESA and its feasibility are ambiguous. Its implementation and success thereof are ultimately dependent on the buy-in and determination of powerful EU member states. Due to the power Germany holds in the EU, its support is vital for the ESA to succeed.

Owing to the fluidity of the current state of ESA, as well as reinvigorated discussions in Germany about the strategic path for their country in terms of security and defense, German politicians and researchers play a significant role in determining ESA's prospects and its success. This thesis will look at Germany's strategic culture in relation to ESA in a circular logic manner, as depicted in the visual below. The thesis will analyze how Germany's strategic culture helps politicians in Germany define the concept of ESA and how this fits into the notion of Germany's strategic culture either confirming or adapting it.

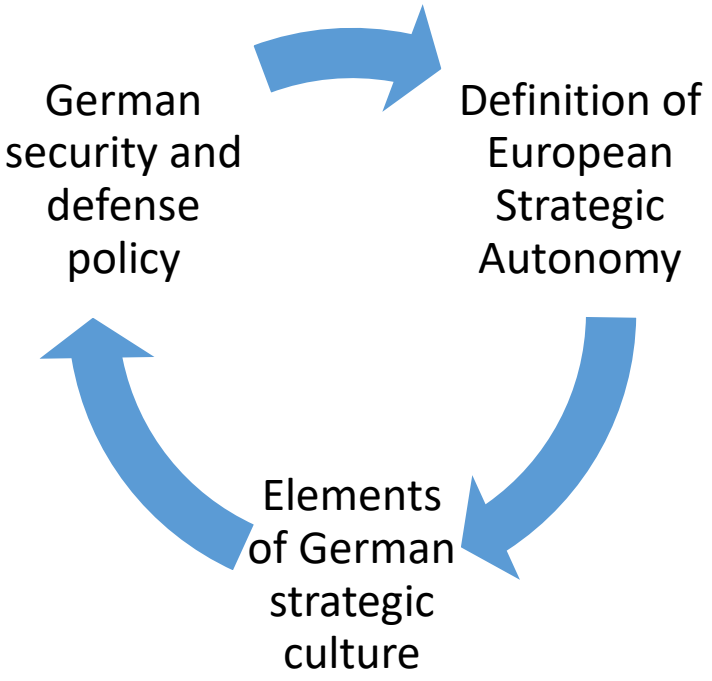

Figure 1

The main question that will be asked in this thesis is: How does Germany's strategic culture shape its interpretation and pursuit of European Strategic Autonomy?

To break this down into more manageable aspects, the following sub-questions will be examined:

- What defines Germany's strategic culture?
- What is the current state of Germany's security and defense policy?
- Is ESA consistent with Germany's strategic culture? How?

1.2 Research Contribution

While a considerable amount of research has been done to understand what ESA is and what the perspectives of each EU member state are on developing this, the level of ambition that the most important political player, Germany, has in pushing for this to happen, has not been sufficiently studied. As concluded in a European Defense Brief, "European Strategic Autonomy should therefore either be dropped as a concept or taken seriously as a political project" (Billon-Galland and Thomson 2018, 1).

Ambition is hard to determine, but strategic culture is a good indicator of how a country perceives its interests and opportunities. Nicole Koenig, Deputy Director at the Jacques Delors Institute at the Hertie School in Berlin and expert on EU foreign and security policy, first connected strategic culture to the ESA. The most recent EU Global Strategy (EUGS) on foreign and security policy establishes the political priorities of EU member states: to "(a) respond to external conflicts and crises, (b) build the capacities of partners and (c) protect the Union and its citizens" (European Union External Action 2016). However, it does not specify regional or functional priorities nor a clear level of ambition" – instead a state's strategic culture shapes and defines this (Koenig 2021, 59). This assessment highlights the need to examine Germany's strategic culture to determine their interpretation of ESA and level of ambition regarding the concept's implementation – filling the gap in existing research.

1.3 Why is this paper important to the discipline?

The contemporary nature of this topic addresses the requirement of academic relevance within research. Not only does this paper contribute to the field of International Relations, but it also adds to European Union Studies and Foreign Policy Analysis. In order to do this, the paper draws upon ideas from political science, history, psychology, and sociology. By looking at ESA from an interdisciplinary lens, this paper shows that ideas and actions within a single country effect the international or regional order.

By looking at Germany's strategic culture, this paper examines how strategic culture develops within a country. This effects the motivation and decision-making process of a country's government in both domestic and foreign policy. This paper goes beyond a case study because it

examines how actions within a country impact international relations in the EU. While working towards a more comprehensive CSDP in the EU, it is certainly important to examine the relations between member states. However, this paper also shows the importance of the influence of domestic politics and culture on international decisions.

Additionally, ESA is a developing phenomenon, and, as such, has been insufficiently studied. Existing research is theoretically focused on the definition of ESA, what ESA means for NATO. However, this paper will contribute to the academic research on ESA by focusing on Germany's (the EU's wealthiest and largest member state) ambition and goals and how these are in alignment with ESA. This paper comes at the momentous juncture in time at which Germany is provided with the opportunity to change its outlook and foreign policy approach with the September 2021 federal elections.

2. Methodology

This section will discuss the methodological choices employed in this thesis, including the benefits of the chosen methods as well as potential limitations.

2.1 Data Collection

The core methodology will consist of qualitative content analysis, but interviews will also be employed to stay up to date on the current topic of ESA. This paper will be looking at the topic from a "top-down" approach by focusing mainly on the opinion and goals of the German national government through the views of both government officials and policy influencers such as scholars and think tank researchers. The paper will also mention public opinion as it is an important building block of a country's strategic culture.

2.1.1 Source Compilation

This paper will rely on a combination of primary and secondary sources to create a well-rounded view of the topic. The primary sources used include official documents and speeches, such as from the EU and by German politicians, as well as topical websites, reports, and info sheets. Official reports and briefings showcase how the current topic is understood by the relevant parties and how ESA has been addressed on a policy making level. Secondary sources used include interviews with relevant experts, reports, and policy papers from international relations think tanks, political newspaper articles, and security and defense relevant journal articles and books. These documents were mostly read and utilized in their original language, either German or English, to keep the integrity of their meaning.

2.1.2 Interviews

The Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult to interview those at the core of the ESA decision-making in Brussels and Berlin, which is why interviews for this paper were largely conducted with well-informed researchers and scholars. Given obstacles including travel restrictions and expenses, interviews were conducted via phone call, Zoom, and email in lieu of in-person interviews. This approach allowed me to interact with ideas in a non-classified, non-bureaucratic way. Interviews were chosen because they "provide [a] more in-depth understanding of participant's

perceptions, motivations, and emotions" (McCombes 2019), which allowed for interactions with the research as well as an opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

The interview format I used is semi-structured interviews in which pre-determined questions were prepared, but additional questions could be included, and questions could be left out to follow the flow of the interview. This allows for flexibility in the interview to encourage following the ideas, experiences, and emotions of the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews can also help "clarify and illustrate the meaning of findings" (Robson 2002). This means a combination of qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews work together to present and break down facts. The topic of this thesis is current and constantly evolving, and interviews allow for up-to-date opinions and facts that are not yet reflected in policy or reports (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007, 29).

While there are many benefits of choosing interviews as a method of data collection, it is important to keep in mind that interviews can be very biased. To keep interviews impartial and balanced, it was important to "create certain neutrality in the interaction" (Hüttner, Renckstorf and Wester 2001, 548). This was done by interviewing researchers of differing opinions, not asking leading questions, and reserving comments until the end of the interview. Additionally, because interviews were done online, bias was reduced as body-language and connotation were removed from the interviewees' responses.

List of interviewees:

While I initially reached out to a list of fifteen different experts in the field of German American foreign policy and European security and defense policy, the Covid-19 pandemic made it hard to connect with many of the experts as they utilized the opportunity to conduct their own research. However, the experts that I did get a chance to talk with were:

Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook - Executive Director, Future of Diplomacy Project and the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship at Harvard Kennedy School

James D. Bindenagel - University of Bonn, Center for Advanced Security, Strategy and Integration Studies, former US Ambassador to Germany

Dr. Claudia Major - Senior Associate at the International Security Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin (SWP)

Torben Schütz - Research Fellow (Security and Defense) at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)

2.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

The main data analysis tool used in this thesis is qualitative content analysis, which uses communications materials (speeches, articles, reports, interviews, etc) to analyze and make interpretations (Pashakhanlou 2017). Content analysis was chosen as it is a "replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories" (Stemler 2001, 1) and may give thorough insight into a particular situation. As one researcher put it, content analysis "focuses on the interpretation of what has been said, without losing sight of what has actually been said" (Provoost 2020). This is because the documents record what is actually put forward by elites and politicians, while not focusing on hidden meaning and ulterior motives.

It is important to keep in mind that while qualitative content analysis can be done in a way that it can easily be replicated by other researchers, it is possible for qualitative content analysis to become too subjective. This subjectivity can always call into question the validity of the research. Because of the nature of this method, the results can be reductive – sometimes disregarding context and nuance due to the narrow frame of the subject (Luo 2021).

3. Theoretical Framework

It is important to understand the wider importance of how and why a state chooses to pursue security and defense alliances in international relations.

3.1 Relevant Theories

A theoretical framework to understand this thesis is included to create a foundation for study and to link the research to broader knowledge (University of Southern California Library 2021). For this it is important to realize that there are various relevant theories that can be used to explain a state's behavior and decision-making when it comes to security and defense policy.

3.1.1 Realism

The realist approach dominates theory when it comes to explaining state decision-making behavior. Traditional realist and neo-realist scholars such as Waltz, Morgenthau, Mearsheimer argue that decision-making is made at the state level as they have ultimate sovereignty. Applied to international security and decision-making, this theory argues that states will make decisions based on preserving and gaining power to serve their best interest (Goldmann 2013). An important aspect of this approach is that the social factor is not included in decision-making, implying that states with similar foundations (size, economic strength, government type) will act similarly (Stone, Twomey and Lavoy 2005, 1).

Realist scholars expect states to follow "normal state" behavior meaning that they have national interests which they will pursue with maximum effort – even through military means (Staun 2017, 16). Political scientist Hans-Peter Schwarz termed Germany "Europe's central power" in 1994 (Schwarz 1994), suggesting that Germany should also exhibit this normal state behavior. The realist scholars who study Germany's role in the world, Karl Kaiser and Hanns Maull, support this notion and argue that Germany should have returned to a more assertive foreign policy by increasing their military forces after reunification in 1991 (Kaiser, Maull, et al. 1995). These realists also argued that after German reunification and the fall of the Soviet Union, national interests in Germany would dominate as their motivation would be the pursuit of their own security and defense policies leading to the fall of NATO and the EEC (Mearsheimer 1990). This was agreed on by Waltz who argued that Germany would feel too constrained acting solely

through NATO without having the flexibility to make their own decisions (Waltz, 1993, p. 76). This was corroborated by the belief that great power economies have typically become great powers – "whether or not reluctantly" (Waltz, 1993, p. 66). This is in line with the realist belief that rising states have frequently "expanded their external involvement" transitioning them to more global players (Duffield, 1999, p. 768). Of course, we now realize that while many academics and researchers expected Germany to act in this manner, Germany did not drastically change their security and defense actions after reunification to a more individual, assertive policy.

3.1.2 Liberal Intergovernmentalism

An alternative to the realist explanation is the collective action model through liberal intergovernmentalism. This approach was coined by Andrew Moravcsik, who uses liberal theory to explain European integration as a "strategic bargaining game" between different countries (Moravcsik 1993, 481). Neo-liberal intergovernmentalists argue that states defer their security and defense needs to international regimes because some states have common interests and by combining efforts, individual states shoulder less responsibility (Keohane, 1988, p. 386) (Baldwin 1993, 367). Following the liberal theory, once these institutions are created, states have solid interests to keep them strong and to follow the rules and norms expected of them (Byrne 2013, 7). An important aspect of this theory is that domestic politics are considered important as well. Moravcsik explains that "[n]ational interests emerge through domestic political conflict as societal groups compete for political influence, national and transnational coalitions form and new policy alternatives are recognized by governments" (Moravcsik 1993, 481). So, while liberal intergovernmentalists also believe states are "rational choice" actors, they believe that states may all have different rational choices based on internal politics (Schimmelfennig 2020, 77).

While the theory above can relate to some aspects of Germany's policy decisions, such as economic integration and commitment to the EU, their sluggishness to integrate further on defense issues is difficult to answer using the liberal intergovernmentalist model. This is further recognized because these scholars believe the decisions made by elites in a state are not done using "a set of ideologically derived core convictions" and are often made to promote interests of core state powers such as companies and businesses (Freudlsperger and Jachtenfuchs 2021).

To include the collective action model in this thesis as an explanatory tool, it is important that a state views themselves as partaking in an alliance, which Olson and Zeckhauser call "institutions that provide the common public good of collective defense" (Olson and Zeckhauser 1966, 278). Through these alliances, many scholars argue the more powerful states share a higher burden compared to smaller states and due to this, middle powers (such as Germany) contribute less than they receive which negatively affects the alliance's collective defense (Sandler and Hartley 1995, 45). If this were applied to Germany's situation in the EU, it would be beneficial for Germany to put more resources and attention into common defense so that the whole union would benefit.

3.1.3 Constructivism

As Germany's security and defense policies failed to align with the realist expectations and were not entirely explained by the liberal intergovernmentalist approach, alternative theories were sought to explain this behavior. In critiquing the rationalist approach common in international security studies, many scholars have brought the idea of culture and society into the argument about state behavior. The incorporation of culture into scholarly research in international security was first pursued in the 1990s by Lapid in *The Return of Culture and identity in IR Theory* (Lapid 1996). The argument is that while the rationalist approach takes into account others' choices and behaviors to make the best decision, and liberal intergovernmentalists account for domestic considerations, proponents of this new school of thought argue decisions are made through "a historically imposed inertia on choice (which) makes strategy less responsive to specific contingencies" (Johnston 1995, 34). Because constructivism sees the world as socially formed, security threats and reactions to these depend on "societal" and "relational" ideas of states (Hurd 2009, 299). An illustration of this concept is best described by Alexander Wendt arguing that "500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons" (Wendt 1995, 73). In this scenario, interests are prioritized based on socially constructed alliances and threat perceptions.

Some scholars argue that they can trace arguments about culture and politics back to the ancient times of Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War (Uz Zaman 2009, 70). The transition towards increased reliance on culture to explain decision-making came at the end of the Cold War as

scholars sought to understand decisions by the USSR and the USA that they could not explain using existing theories. Many scholars argue that culture is an important aspect of decision-making and state-behavior in international relations and that it should not be used "as an explanation of last resort" (Hudson 1997, 2). Joseph Nye is an additional scholar of soft power and emphasizes that a country can promote culture to secure influence in international relations (Nye Jr 1996, 21).

3.1.4 Strategic Culture Theory

As a branch of constructivism, strategic culture theory provides a framework that looks at the culture and values of a country to explain the states' actions and decisions. Building on the ideas discussed above, an important aspect of culture is the "social culture", which sociologist Raymond Williams defines as "a pattern of behavior that permeates state and public institutions, dictating mass social behavior" (Williams 1994, 56). Outside of the discipline of international relations, the school of thoughts such as "ethnoscience, componential analysis, and cognitive anthropology" all study how culture guides behavior (Geertz 1973, 11). Using the Geertz' study of anthropology, social culture can make up strategic culture by "establishing long lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs" (Johnston 1995, 45). This means that strategic culture enables a state to interpret the current environment as well as offers it acceptable means to react to that environment.

In a conference organized by the Center for Contemporary Conflict, scholars from multiple disciplinary fields debated comparative strategic culture by coming to the conclusion that anthropology, sociology, and psychology are part of strategic culture (Stone, Twomey and Lavoy 2005, 15). This is further corroborated by another group of political science comparativists that studied Max Weber, who argue that while there are many definitions of culture – and this disagreement seems to dominate the debate – the focus should be on the idea that culture "shapes a repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action'" (Swidler 1986, 273). In this thesis, I acknowledge that cultures form in diverse ways and elements that make up culture vary, but that strategic cultures exist and that it shapes decisions. I also use Johnston's argument that most scholars believe culture consists of

"shared assumptions and decision rules that impose a degree of order" (Johnston 1995, 45). An implication of strategic culture being ingrained into many different layers of society and politics in a state is that this strategic culture is slow to change. In his book about political culture and national identity, Thomas Berger argues "'information that reinforces existing images and beliefs is readily assimilated', whereas information which is inconsistent with the prevailing worldview tends to be 'ignored, rejected or distorted to make them compatible with prevailing cognitive structures'" (Berger 1998, 24).

To take this further, some scholars developed the concept to argue that strategic culture is not solely relevant at the state level, but that it permeates all levels of society such as in the military and in the public (Fitzgerald 2016, 33). Because of this, scholars argue that this strategic culture "dictates the standard of socially accepted state behavior as a response to threats" (Katzenstein 1996, 5). Two other political scientists, Almond and Verba, related a society's political system to their beliefs and assert that the state and its people hold "views about morality and the utility of force, commitment to values, and attitudes towards the role a country takes in global politics" (Lantis 2002, 90).

While the aforementioned disciplines focus on the individual, Gray focuses on how a state's national historical experience affects their strategies and policies (Stone, Twomey and Lavoy 2005, 18). The state's ideas can be influenced through a funnel process in which public debate and discourse tries to make sense of Germany's role in the world but is then filtered and streamlined all the way up to the highest level of the state after refinement by bureaucrats and politicians (Staun 2017, 7). Although Snyder wrote about the Soviet nuclear weapon strategy, he found that through the socialization process, "beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns…. have achieved a state of semi-permanence that places them on the level of 'cultural' rather than mere policy" (Snyder, 1977, p. 8).

3.2 Relevant Concepts

Now that I discussed relevant theories that could be employed to explain Germany's security and defense policy and determined that constructivism, specifically strategic culture theory, to be the most supporting of Germany's actions, it is important to define two important concepts for this

thesis: strategic culture and European Strategic Autonomy (ESA). This is an essential step in the research that must be done before reviewing existing relevant literature on the topics as it is important to conceptualize terms in order to guide the research that is to come.

3.2.1 Strategic Culture

Although the theory section gave a brief overview of strategic culture theory and how it relates to constructivism, strategic culture will be defined and explored deeper here. The most straightforward definition of strategic culture is "the set of beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, norms, world views and patterns of habitual behavior held by strategic decision-makers regarding the political objectives of war, and the best way to achieve it" (Biava, Drent and Herd 2011, 1228), which was defined by scholars researching the EU. According to constructivist researchers, some factors that make up this strategic culture are "historic, political, structural, technologic, defense organizational, and geographical" (Gray 1999) (Lantis and Howlett 2011, 86).

However, in order to further conceptualize strategic culture in connection with Germany, I will use the definition of strategic culture put forward by Longhurst as she defined it in a similar context in her book 1996 "Germany and the use of force". The author draws upon different researchers who have studied the strategic culture of Germany specifically in order to produce an overarching definition. One of the contributors she draws upon, Peter Katzenstein, in his book *The Culture of National Security,* identifies "cultural-institutional" and "national identity" as the two determinants of national security policy making (Katzenstein, 1996,5). He even argues that Germany (along with Japan) was the influence behind the increased implementation of cultural elements into security studies. Thomas Berger, who also studied German strategic culture, states that the strategic culture of a country will only change after traumatic situations that change fundamental values (Berger 1998, 16). Combining all these ideas into a concept, this paper will work with the following definition for strategic culture:

> *A distinctive body of beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding the use of force, held by a collective, which is persistent over time, formed through that collective's experiences and history.*

- (Longhurst 2004, 17)

3.2.2 European Strategic Autonomy

The idea of "European strategic autonomy" was first officially mentioned in the European Union as part of the 2016 strategic report titled "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy". In it, the EU stated one of its priorities as "An appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy" (European Union External Action 2016, 9). While the EU does not define these two terms in the report, the EEAS argues that pursuing strategic autonomy will strengthen Europe's capabilities on "defense, cyber, counterterrorism, energy and strategic communications" (European Union External Action 2016, 9). While this is never elaborated on in detail in the report, it is clear that the EU seeks to live up to its international commitments of collective defense as well as take on more responsibility (European Union External Action 2016, 10).

While ESA is a broad concept rhetorically debated by leaders to showcase ambition and commitment, some attempts have been made to define it. The International Centre for Defense and Security in Estonia (an international think-tank which was commissioned by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Germany to gather a range of European leaders' views on ESA) defines ESA as "the ability of European states to set their own priorities and make their own decisions in matters of foreign policy, security and defense, and have the means to implement these decisions alone, or with partners if they so choose" (Järvenpää, Major and Sakkov 2020, 1). This international group of scholars stresses that ESA should remain focused on capabilities of security and defense and not be hindered and confused with controversial ideas such as a "European Army" (Järvenpää, Major and Sakkov 2020, 1). The conclusion they draw after having conversations with EU and NATO officials is that the real goal of ESA should be to increase military capabilities as this is the only way towards "a credible EU foreign and security policy" (Järvenpää, Major and Sakkov 2020, 3). It is important to keep in mind that many scholars, including those mentioned before, perceive that this path towards ESA is motivated by feelings of "necessity" and "not choice" (Järvenpää, Major and Sakkov 2020, 6).

An alternative definition of ESA is offered by scholars at Clingendael in the Netherlands, who break down the ESA into three essential parts:

1. European = EU Member States and non-EU European NATO states
2. Strategic = Protecting long-term security and defense needs
3. Autonomy = the ability to make a state's own decisions and to act on one's own whenever necessary (Zandee, et al. 2020, 8)

This is different from the previous definition of ESA because it includes protecting long term interests and needs. However, both definitions are vague on when this would come into effect as "whenever necessary" and "if they choose" is left up to a wide variety of interpretation. To take these definitions further, Daniel Fiott, Security and Defense Editor at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), argues that ESA is "the freedom to conduct missions and operations autonomously rather than the freedom from dependencies on the hegemon" (Fiott 2018, 2). This places more emphasis on the autonomy aspect of the phrase as it offers an alternative to relying on a larger, more powerful state for their security and defense needs.

To explain the different facets of strategic autonomy, the Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri) which published a policy paper about the future of German-French defense cooperation, offered three different dimensions. These three dimensions are: political (capacity to take security policy decisions), operational (capacity and capability to plan and conduct operations), and industrial (capacity to develop and create capabilities) (Kempin, Kunz and Schmitt 2017). This paper will focus on the political dimension as this is the first step towards ESA and also relates to the political decisions that a state must take.

The fact that there has been no agreed upon universal definition for ESA speaks to the fact that Europeans are either not all on the same page about the definition or that they are not yet willing to commit themselves to a definition. This confusion is also well known to the EU as their first Coordinated Annual Review on Defense (CARD) summarized that "there is an uneven understanding of the concept of strategic autonomy within the EU" (European Defense Agency 2020, 2). This gap leaves an opportunity for involved parties to define their own standards and

terms. This research paper will attempt to work towards a definition of ESA using Germany's strategic culture.

4. Literature Review

Now that important foundational elements about theory have been established, this literature review will examine the various components of Germany's strategic culture, as well as the topic of European Strategic Autonomy. These two aspects are important for being able to answer the research question about how ESA fits into Germany's strategic culture.

4.1 German Strategic Culture

To narrow down the research, I will look at how researchers have attempted to define and understand the components that make up Germany's strategic culture. This strategic culture is important to look at because many Germans feel like they are not normal, meaning they "do not have the same rights, obligations, and maneuvering space" (Techau 2011, 74) compared to other countries because it is commonplace "not to talk about strategy" (Techau 2011, 67). This cultural foundation is reflected in the foreign policy decisions the country makes (or does not make) in security and defense situations.

4.1.1 German Foreign Policy Foundation

Much of Germany's current foreign policy foundation can be traced back to the aftermath of WWII. In response to the devastating Nazi regime, war, and defeat chapter of German history, a strategic culture of foreign policy focusing on peace and upholding the status quo was endorsed. Researchers have argued that there are many facets to Germany's strategic culture, such as: "delegitimization of the use of force, redundancy of militarism, and exhaustion of statism and nationalism (Longhurst 2004, 46), as well as "skepticism about the use of military force, preference for multilateralism, being perceived as a reliable partner, and aversion to leadership" (Duffield, 1998, p. 5). However, two main common threads are consistent in most scholarly work: "never alone" (multilateralism) and "never again" (military restraint) (Maull 2014). It has, however, proved challenging for Germany to balance its role as a global power, given its geopolitical position and its economic power, with its reluctance to lead. Meiers phrases this as German politicians needing to decide whether to prioritize "the country's 'reflexive commitment to institution building' or to the 'ingrained' beliefs and convictions of Germany's culture of restraint'" (Meiers 2005).

4.1.2 German Multilateralism

The first cornerstone of German foreign policy is "never alone", otherwise known as a commitment to multilateralism. Many scholars have written about how this developed in the aftermath of WWII and remains just as important today. Multilateralism has been a core value of German foreign policy since Germany had to 'regain international trust and respectability' (Longhurst and Miskimmon 2007) after it had been lost during the Nazi period. A closer look at the official German Federal Ministry of Defense 2016 White Paper corroborates the policy of multilateralism by claiming that the "close, reliable and long-term cooperation with allies and partners as well as with regional organizations forms the core of our security policy" (German Federal Ministry of Defense 2016). A key example of Germany's multilateral foreign policy is its participation in international organizations and collective defense arrangements, which Müller argues is shown through the reliance that Germany entrusts its security and defense to NATO and its allies (Müller 2003).

4.1.3 German Military Restraint

Another defining characteristic of German identity after WWII, reflected in German foreign policy, is the importance of military caution and restraint, or as Maull calls it, the policy of "never again" (Maull 2014). The importance of this trait has been written about by many different scholars, but no one states it as clearly as Katzenstein in *Tamed Power* that the country's "pacifistic military security policy" is deeply rooted in its "national identity of post war Germany" (Katzenstein 2018). Researchers, such as Techau, argue that this is visible in the rhetoric used in official documents or by politicians in Germany, as terms such as "strategy", "war", and "geopolitics" are not common and are replaced by other, more passive words (Techau 2011, 75).

Not only is this military restraint culture found in decision makers, but domestic opinion largely supports this value as well. The "Stunde Null", which Longhurst refers to as the state of trauma and devastation of immediate post WWII Germany (Longhurst 2004) is still reflected in official German defense papers, speeches, and parliamentary debates, which mention phrases such as "weights of the pasts" or "lessons of German history" (Longhurst 2004). This cautious attitude manifested itself in German foreign policy law as the German constitution prohibits military aggression and requires parliamentary approval (Maull 1990).

4.1.4 German Security and Defense Policy Mindset

Through analysis of existing research of German foreign policy values and their political culture on topics of security and defense, it is clear that multilateralism and military restraint are the two key tenets deeply instilled. What is most interesting about these two tenets is that they are sometimes positioned in opposition to one another. This is exaggerated in instances of alliances where Germany is committed to the interests and goals of their allies, but fears getting involved in military quagmires.

Because of these two values, German politicians are hesitant and reluctant to update their security and defense policies. To avoid disruption and tough conversations, Germans would rather keep the status quo. This has been another recurring theme in German politics with the two best representations of this coming from Chancellors Helmut Schmidt and Konrad Adenauer. Chancellor Schmidt would often remark "people who have visions should go see a doctor" (Franke 2018) when asked about future plans for the country. A similar value was put forward by Chancellor Adenauer in his election campaign when he chose the slogan "No experiments" (Brechenmacher 2017) urging the public not to stray from the "tried and tested". Staying true to German values, using this slogan, Adenauer was the only candidate to win an outright majority in the Bundestag (Brechenmacher 2017). In a paper published by the Atlantik Bruecke in 2020, a high-level group of German and American academics and strategic advisors urged Germany to "have ambition" and take more action (Becker, et al. 2020). They argue that Germany has "often overlooked (Washington's) roles as a guarantor of European unity and peace" (Becker, et al. 2020) to which no other European country has benefited from as much as Germany. With these hesitations, it remains to be seen whether both fundamental principles can be realized through European Strategic Autonomy.

4.2 European Strategic Autonomy

Having previously explored the definition of ESA, it is important to now look at possible implications for Germany and its global security and defense position. To structure this section of the research, I will present possible positive and negative implications of Germany pursuing European Strategic Autonomy from Germany's perspective. This will help to identify potential

impacts and repercussions pursuing ESA can have and how this aligns with Germany's strategic culture.

4.2.21Positive Impacts

The most obvious argument in favor of Germany actively pursuing ESA is increased military strength and capabilities. This provides an extra layer of security for a state and takes away the questioning about whether they would be able to defend themselves if they are attacked. Increased capabilities will allow for EU member states to take on a larger role in their own security and defense needs, loosening their sole reliance on the United States in NATO. For Germany and other European member states, it could benefit them to bolster their security and defense capabilities in case the United States reneges on their NATO commitments (while unlikely, not impossible). Another advantage of supporting ESA is the role that Germany and fellow EU member states would have in shaping global ideas and agendas. If the EU could be free to advocate more powerfully with their own rules in the global order, they may push for a more normative world order (Järvenpää, Major and Sakkov 2020, 9). This is something that could appeal to Germany as they are well known for opposing the Iraq War in 2002 and abstaining from military intervention in Libya in 2011 (Weiland and Nelles 2011), both of which differed from the actions of other members of their alliance. From the transatlantic perspective, increased burden sharing and responsibility is the most significant result of ESA. With increased responsibility, EU member states can demonstrate that they "value the enormous contribution that the US makes" and that they are a "community of wealthy, mature democracies, [which have] a duty to bolster [their] own contribution" (Järvenpää, Major and Sakkov 2020, 8). While not necessarily having to commit to the 2% goal, it would be a step in the right direction to show that Germany respects their allies and that they are doing their part in the alliance.

4.2.2Negative Impacts or Obstacles

The largest overarching argument against ESA is that ESA is not clearly defined and agreed upon by member states which creates ambiguity and confusion. Scholars who study ESA write that there are many open questions about "how high the level of ambition for ESA is, and what policy fields it covers; to which, if any, institutional framework it belongs; and how it relates to existing commitments?" (Järvenpää, Major and Sakkov 2020, 9). As described in the introduction of this

thesis, this played out most publicly in the words of German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and French President Emmanuel Macron. Another important obstacle is the feasibility and likelihood that this is approved in the EU. With all EU member states needing to agree and having to get their domestic opinion on board, will countries be willing and able to provide additional funding for this venture? From a transatlantic perspective, a significant argument against ESA is that it could signal a major move away from the United States – especially as the word "autonomy" is mentioned in the phrase. While the US has supported and defended Europe since after WWII, it might seem as though the Europeans are unappreciative of this fact and if followed through, the US may be more inclined to shift towards Asia. Scholars argue that pursuing the ESA too aggressively could "risk offending the US unnecessarily" (Järvenpää, Major and Sakkov 2020, 9). Along these lines, there is also the concern that building up stronger military systems and defense resources, could "produce duplication, non-interoperable military systems" between NATO and the EU (Chazan and Peel 2019). From the view of the United States, perpetuated by the Trump Administration, there was fear that a stronger European security and defense initiative would close off European markets to American companies as they would instead focus on building up the European Defense Fund (EDF) which makes it harder for third-country firms to get access to sensitive information or own intellectual property funded by the EU (Besch and Scazzieri 2020, 6).

5. Analysis

5.1 Current discourse and opinions in Germany on security and defense

It must first be said that any study of German security and defense policy is tough to untangle as the rhetoric used in speeches is not consistently supported by actions, something that I will touch upon in this section. Claudia Major calls this contradiction Germany acting as "a Sleeping Beauty" (Major 2021, Interview) because Germany's weak coalition government has not made security and defense a priority and because Germans do not perceive any immediate military threats and instead consider migration and the economy as bigger issues to focus on. So, while politicians may sometimes pay lip service to security and defense, it does not remain an important policy agenda item (Ploquin 2019). To look at Germany's current position in international security and defense, keeping in mind their strategic culture, it is essential to look at this from both the government level as well as from the domestic level.

5.1.1 German Government Actions

While many politicians and experts around the globe (and some in Germany) believe that Germany is not doing enough militarily when it comes to security and defense, German politicians are proud of the steps that they have taken in the last few years – starting with the aforementioned 2014 Munich Security conference speeches.

One of the most recent and impactful waves questioning Germany's security and defense policy came in recent years from 2014-2017, in which German politicians alluded to increased involvement and responsibility of Germany in international security. The 2014 Munich Security Conference offered hope of a new strategic vision for Germany, declaring to the world that Germany was willing and ready to take on more global responsibility in security and defense. One after another, President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier, and Federal Minister of Defense Ursula von der Leyen, gave speeches urging Germany to take a more active role in international affairs. Gauck argued "Germany must be ready to do more to guarantee the security – even sometimes necessary to send in the troops" (Gauck 2014). This was furthered by Steinmeier who argued "Germany must be ready for earlier, more decisive and more substantive engagement in the foreign and security policy sphere" (Steinmeier 2014). Finally, von der Leyen

stated “Indifference is not an option for Germany” (von der Leyen 2014). These ambitious proclamations by Germany’s top politicians stirred up a public debate about Germany’s role in the world and how active Germany should be in security and defense. It seemed like Germany’s top politicians (bar Chancellor Angela Merkel) recognized their role in the world and were ready to take political action to support this. Debates about Germany’s responsibility in international security intensified with the publication of the “White Paper on German security policy and the future of the Bundeswehr” in 2016 which argued that Germany should contribute more to international security – also militarily (Keohane 2016, p. 1). The main strategic points of inflection in the paper were that the government would like “a more flexible interpretation of the law to be able to act if necessary” (German Federal Ministry of Defense 2016, 108) and that they consider the Bundeswehr “a security tool” instead of solely a defense force (German Federal Ministry of Defense 2016, 88). This was a significant policy shift as concrete ideas were put forward on how Germany could prepare themselves to be more involved.

While these two instances ignited a conversation in Germany about their role in the world, the conversation never came to a conclusion with concrete results. Researchers from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs argue these events were simply the beginning of the debate not the result and were “not intended to be strategy” (Kaim and Linnenkamp 2016, 1). However, this does not mean that Germany hasn’t taken some concrete steps on the European level to increase their commitment to international security and defense. While observing the measurable contributions Germany has made over the last few years, it is evident that there has been improved integration and involvement. Germany can be regarded as a “net contributor” to global security as the country currently boasts over 183,907 active-duty military personnel with 2,842 actively deployed on mission (Bundeswehr - Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2021). This is coupled with a military expenditure of 52.8 billion USD, a number that has increased over the decade, surpassing France as the seventh best-funded military (Lopes da Silva, Tian and Marksteiner 2021, 2). While Germany has significantly increased its defense expenditures since the determined speeches by its high-ranking politicians in 2014 (an increase of 35%) (NATO 2021, 6). Defense expenditure increases in Germany are made on a year-to-year basis which makes long term planning for the Bundeswehr and international partners to plan

accordingly – which is particularly essential in the armament industry where projects take many years to complete (Schütz 2021, Interview).

So, while Germany has both rhetorically and, to some degree, actively taken a step towards a more involved security and defense policy, it still faces obstacles domestically as well as politically when it comes to committing itself at a European level.

5.1.2 Public Opinion

As mentioned before, while analyzing Germany's government position on security and defense is important, it is key to consider the country's strategic culture. An important aspect of strategic culture theory is that public opinion is in line with the government's policies, showcasing domestically shared beliefs. However, this is not to say that public opinion is not made up of diverse and dissenting opinions, so to streamline this analysis, I will use the assistance of existing survey data from the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) who conducted an EU-wide evaluation of ESA. The ECFR conducted a survey to examine foreign policy views of millennials to see how they compare to official German government policies. Results of this survey indicated that German youth align with "stereotypical" German values of military caution and a preference for multilateralism (Franke 2018). While they do support increased German involvement in global affairs, they believe this should not entail military engagement and should not be linked to increased defense spending (Franke 2018).

A comprehensive foreign policy poll conducted in 2018 by the Koerber Stiftung found that 55% of citizens called for more restraint in international crises and a less aggressive German foreign policy (Körber-Stiftung 2018). This information is supported in a 2020 Pew Research survey that compared American and German domestic public opinion on foreign policy. This survey found that 60% of Germans said that they should not get involved in a military conflict if Russia attacks a fellow NATO ally (compared to only 29% of Americans) and only 47% agreed that military force was sometimes necessary to maintain world order (compared to 78% of Americans) (Poushter and Mordecai 2020).

This lack of public support derives from long-standing strategic culture in the country, as well as public mistrust of the German armed forces. This enduring mistrust comes from "a lack of

understanding" as well as the inherent value that "liberal interventionism" should be the main tasks of standing militaries (Major and Mölling 2021). Public opinion in Germany makes it difficult for German politicians to pursue ambitious defense policies and to commit too many resources to this task. Domestically, Germans are generally skeptical about the "input factors of armed forces: personnel, equipment, and capital and output factors such as offensive capabilities" (Schütz 2021, Interview).

5.2 German Perception of European Strategic Autonomy

Now that the current state of German security and defense has been presented and analyzed, a discussion about ESA from the perspective of Germany will be presented. This section will use what has been learned about Germany's strategic culture and the present status of their policies to infer how Germany interprets ESA. To break down Germany's perception of ESA, the concept will be broken down into two elements: "European" and "Strategic Autonomy".

5.2.1 European

The "European" component of the ESA debate is an important aspect for Germany as it ties the debate to multilateralism and allied commitments.

Figure 2

Figure 2 (Franke and Varma 2019) shows that Germans believe greater solidarity is not needed to move towards strategic autonomy. Germany believes that existing institutions and agreements already provide a good starting point for strategic autonomy. On the European level, this is consistent with the argument presented before that Germans are largely satisfied with the existing status quo. It is also important to note that Germany allocates security and defense

strategic autonomy in the realm of EU responsibility and not that of NATO like some of the other states.

While some might argue the EU has tended to act more intergovernmentally on defense policy versus on other policy areas, it is still the predominant idea that increased integration at the EU level in this pillar is both feasible and worthwhile (Schütz 2021, Interview). This comes from the glimpses of progress seen after Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2014 with increased EU commitment on the topic such as: launch of a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defense Fund in 2017 (Drent and Zandee 2018, 5,7). This, combined with the experience after the 2008 fiscal crisis when 30% of military budgets were cut across the EU without coordination, indicated that EU integration is vital to increase military capabilities (Schütz 2021, Interview). Additionally, while not the most vital reason, but still worth mentioning – the German defense industry would have an interest in accessing European markets through modernization programs (Schütz 2021, Interview). While this has already been incentivized through the Framework Nation Concept partner, the export driven economy of Germany would certainly benefit from simplified procurement processes (Schütz 2021, Interview).

How does this all tie together for Germany's interpretation of the role of the EU in ESA? German politicians mostly view ESA as being possible within the existing security and defense framework of the EU and recognize it as being a viable option. Additionally, following the German strategic culture's value of multilateralism, pursuing this within the EU institutionalized framework would be aligned with their values and goals – and could even be beneficial to pursue vs. carrying out on the state level. Because debates about security and defense are controversial and taboo in Germany, "uploading" these conversations to the EU level is a way for German politicians to limit the domestic debate and ease some of the pressure (Schütz 2021, Interview). Schütz argues that this "europeanization" of the discourse qualifies German politicians to make the conversation more palatable to the public as it is "easier to defend an increase in defense spending at the EU level" (Schütz 2021, Interview).

5.2.2 Strategic Autonomy

The second component, "strategic autonomy", is the more controversial and ambitious term as it is indeterminate. This is understood in the interview given by AKK in 2020 (as mentioned in the introduction) when she writes "the idea of strategic autonomy for Europe goes too far if it is taken to mean that we could guarantee security, stability and prosperity in Europe without NATO and without the US" (Vincze 2021). So if this is not what Germany interprets ESA to mean, what could they support instead?

Torben Schütz believes that Germany 's strategic culture shapes the German government's

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interpretation and understanding of ESA by pursuing "inclusion over performance" as well as "connections with non-EU partners over tightly defined autonomy" (Schütz 2021, Interview). The current debates in Germany surrounding European Strategic Autonomy reflect debates about the broader topic of security and defense. In order to analyze Germany's understanding of "strategic autonomy", the following table is helpful to breakdown the various strategic cultural components and questions that need to be evaluated (Koenig 2021, 58):

Strategic autonomy...	Key cultural / strategic dimension	Divides among EU member states
...from?	Mode of international cooperation	Europeanism vs. Atlanticism vs. Euro-Atlanticism Allied vs. non-aligned
...for?	Geographic or functional threat perceptions	East vs. South Regional vs. Global Conventional. vs. newer threats Military vs. civilian threats
...to?	Attitudes towards the use of force	Activism vs. restraint Interventionism vs. pacificism Military vs. civilian instruments

Source: The author's compilation based on Howorth (2002) and Meyer (2005).[128]

Table 1

Using Table 1 and taking into consideration the pillars and values that make up Germany's strategic culture as well as the conversations with relevant researchers, an assumption about the understanding of German politicians' interpretation of ESA can be construed.

…From?: Germany's strategic culture values both Europeanism and Atlanticism as they prefer to conduct foreign policy multilaterally and through alliances. For this reason, German politicians will not subscribe to a definition of ESA that separates itself from NATO and the United States. A worthy representative of this opinion is a quote by Kramp-Karrenbauer in a 2020 speech: Germany should "become more European while staying transatlantic" (Kramp-Karrenbauer 2020). Because of this, Germany's definition of ESA would emphasize existing collective security commitments and would see this arrangement as being supplementary.

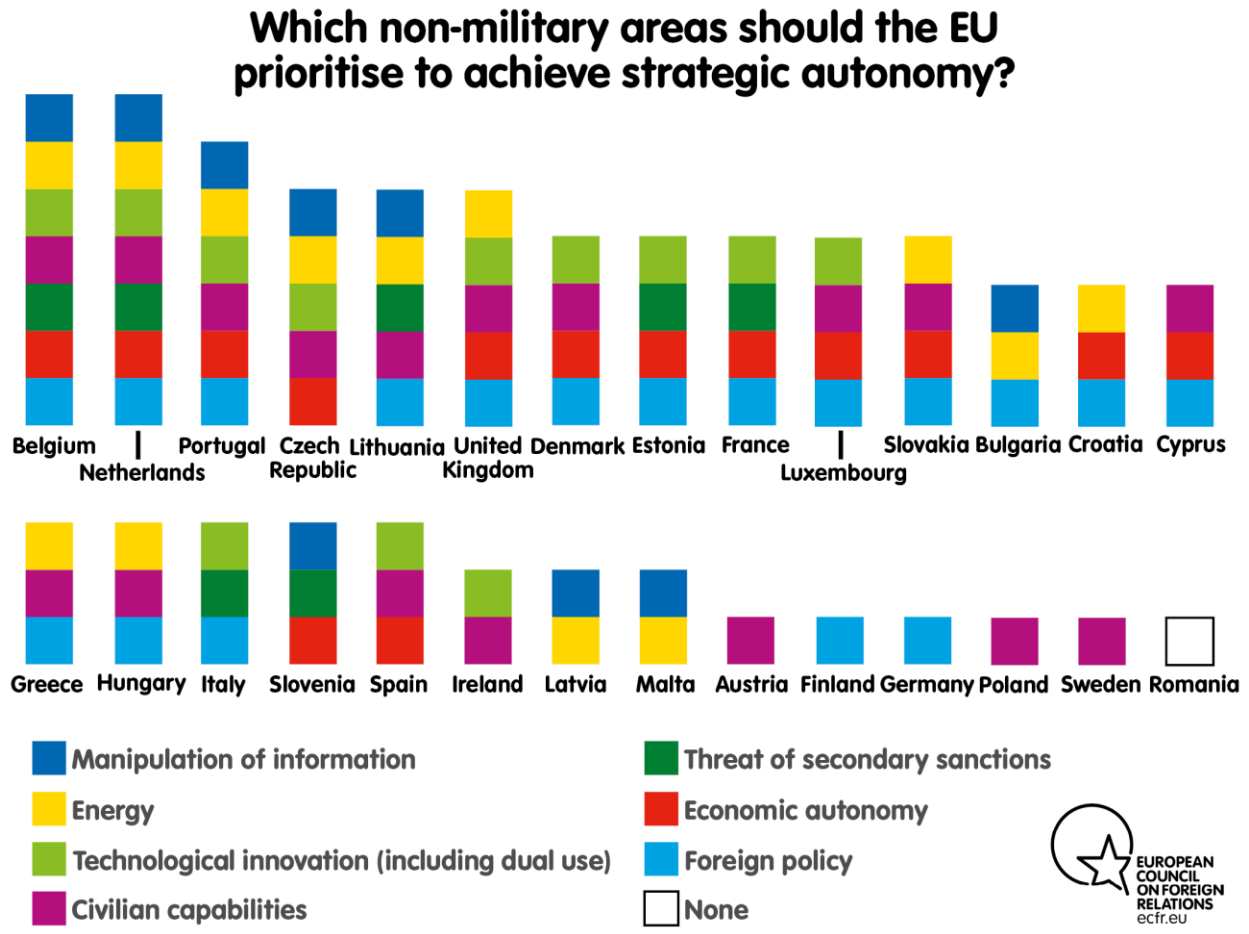

Figure 3

…For?: This is perhaps the most difficult component to answer about Germany's perception of ESA because they do not have defined strategic cultural norms on this aspect, as mentioned before, because the politicians have not been keen on creating visions and plans for the future. Figure 3 (Franke and Varma 2019) highlights that Germans believe foreign policy should be integrated at the EU level for ESA to be successful. This is likely because Germans fear that without a comprehensive foreign policy, different threat perceptions, relationships among member states and external countries, etc. would increase the likelihood that Germany is pulled into a quagmire it does not support – simply because of their allies. This is also supported by Figure 4 (Franke and Varma 2019):

Figure 4

To follow their strategic culture of military restraint, Germany would be in favor of an ESA definition that would allow countries to have decision-making authority versus information autonomy or autonomy of action. This would allow for flexibility in terms of political will – also giving more power to public opinion as countries can make decisions based on domestic preferences.

…To?: Since Germany's strategic culture is rooted in military restraint and liberal interventionism, the main goal of German politicians' pursuit of ESA would not be to increase their defense capabilities and to increase spending on security defense to participate in more missions and be involved in more conflict. Figure 5 (Franke and Varma 2019) makes it clear that Germany would not be in favor of using ESA for collective security or for first-entry missions. However, an alternative option could be to use capability building as a mechanism to showcase commitment and burden sharing to existing allies.

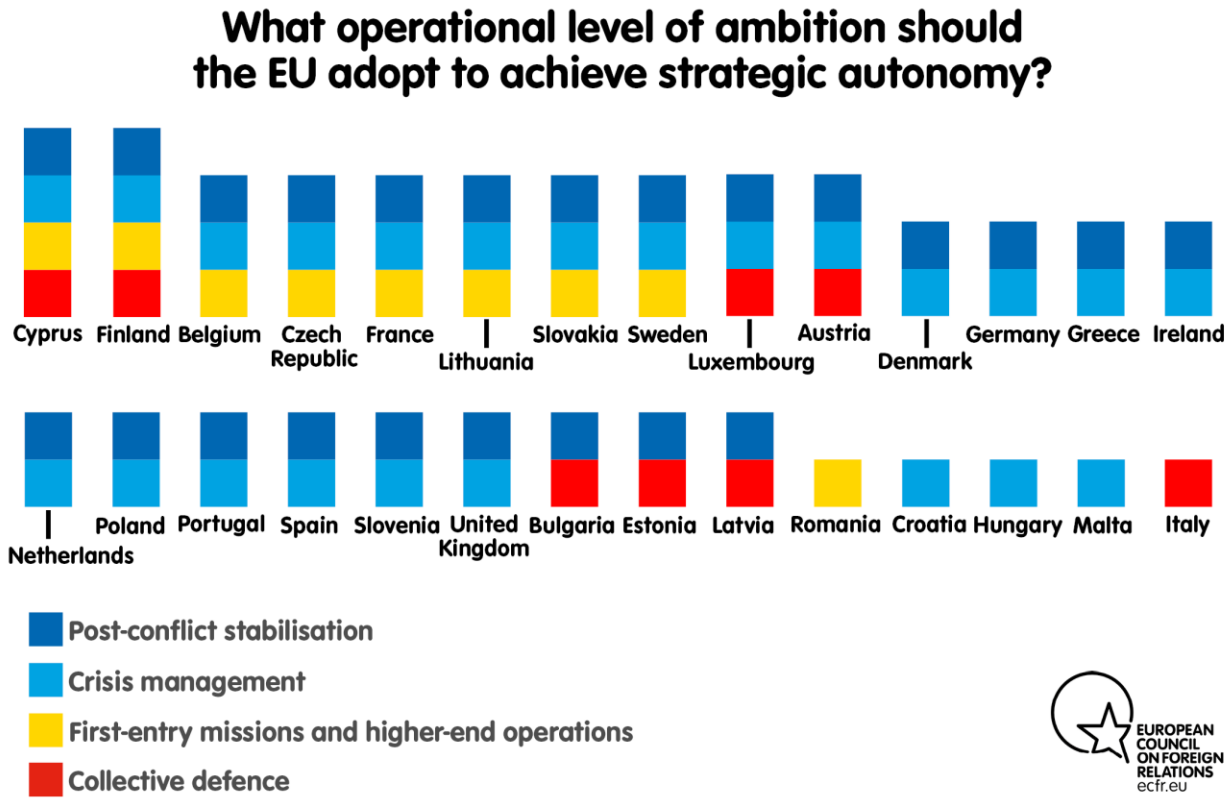

Figure 5

5.2.3 Additional considerations

There are some considerations that are important to the conversation that do not fit into the two components of ESA. According to all of the researchers that I spoke to, German politicians are too focused on the transatlantic relationship when it comes to defining ESA (Major 2021, Interview) (Schütz 2021, Interview) (Bindenagel 2021, Interview) (Clüver-Ashbrook 2021, Interview). They argue that German politicians frame the concept in binary terms: either the EU is autonomous from the United States and NATO, or it is not. A more serious discussion about

ESA could be seen as stemming from reactions to the Donald Trump presidency in the United States, which Germans viewed as undermining transatlantic trust and reliability. Major argues that while events in the US may have facilitated and ignited these debates, German discourse on ESA should focus on strategic goals and capabilities and less on how the US will view this initiative (Major 2021, Interview). To understand why the German conversation about ESA centers so heavily around the US and NATO, it is important to consult Germany's strategic culture. Because German security and defense values center around multilateralism, it has historically (since the end of WWII) relied on the US for its security needs – eliminating the need for it to develop separate, autonomous capacities. Aligning with this value, German politicians view pivoting away from this status quo as an attack on the NATO alliance as it somehow limits the importance trusted to the US. This would explain why the Minister of Defense would use such direct language to portray German commitment to the US. However, because Germany's strategic culture is developed on different layers of society, the statement by AKK could be considered as a response to German public opinion (Franke 2020). Whether German politicians use this debate to hinder serious progress on the topic or whether their commitment to the transatlantic alliance and multilateralism is the reason is still to be seen.

The conversation about ESA does not need to be as black and white in order for it to be successful. As argued by German foreign policy researchers such as Schütz and Major, Germany's understanding of autonomy should be viewed on a scale with various stages of autonomy instead of being viewed in a binary manner of being either autonomous or not (Schütz 2021, Interview) (Major 2021, Interview). If a scale with varying degrees of autonomy is used to view Germany's position on the matter, Germany's politicians would most likely place themselves on the more open side of the scale. With this non-stagnant, flexible interpretation of autonomy, Germany's interpretation of strategic autonomy would include "being able to define one's priorities, to be an actor of one's own will without being subject to others, to enact one's own rules without being subjected to those of others" and should not be interpreted as independence (Major 2021, Interview). This is also consistent with their strategic culture as they would be flexible to pursue varying degrees of political ambition as well as commitment to military capabilities through this approach.

5.3 What does this mean for Germany and their strategic culture?

Jana Puglierin of the German Council on Foreign Relations observes about Germany's security and defense policy: "the more things change, the more they stay the same" (Puglierin 2018). Staying consistent with theories on strategic culture, the inability of German debates to provide concrete strategic visions and policy solutions on ESA showcase the unwillingness of German politicians to break away from the status quo. Another reason Germany's strategic culture has been slow to change since the 1950s, is the stability that has defined the German government since the end of WWII. During this time, the CDU and SPD (two largest, centrist parties) have controlled the federal government, with three CDU Chancellors (Konrad Adenauer, Helmut Kohl, and Angela Merkel) each ruling for over 14 years (Franke 2018). While keeping the government and ideology steady, this consistency has left little room for serious debates and policy pivots in German security and defense policy.

Germany's strategic culture of military restraint and multilateralism is unlikely to change unless politicians are prepared to tackle tough questions about "Germany's responsibility", security, as well as policies to improve their defense capabilities. Dr. Puglierin actually argues that Germany should refrain from using terms such as a "supportive power" (Anlehnungsmacht) and "shaping power" (Gestaltungsmacht) when describing their role in global security and defense until they can concretely answer when and how they are willing to use their military capabilities(Puglierin 2018). This is also known by some researchers as "the German Problem", where Germany plays the reluctant leader as it cannot reconcile the differences between its national interest and its constitutional commitment to Europe (Bindenagel 2020). Ambassador Bindenagel argues this German leadership comes with "the responsibility for such a prosperous and secure country to take the political initiative and make the necessary economy[sic] sacrifices" (Bindenagel 2020). This tests German strategic culture because it must satisfy the military restraint valued domestically but must also uphold its commitment to multilateralism in the EU. However, another significant impact of Germany's handling of ESA shows that while the existing research presented in the literature review cautioned of the contradictory and opposing nature of military restraint and multilateralism due to the possibility of Germany being drawn into undesired conflicts, ESA could show the interplay of these two pillars being mutually reinforcing. Pursuing

ESA with a broad definition and operationalizing multilateralism can be understood as an expression of military restraint by bringing in and binding a multitude of EU and non-EU partners to Europe's security so that each country's individual burden is reduced (Schütz 2021, Interview). As long as Europe and the EU have a positive connotation to them in Germany, "national discourse on security and defense topics will favor a European approach" (Schütz 2021, Interview) to avoid the uncomfortable conversation about national military ambitions in Germany.

5.4 A German Strategic Culture Definition of European Strategic Culture

A definition of ESA will be presented that synthesizes all the research and analysis together and aligns it with German strategic culture, drawing parallels to their current policies on security and defense. This definition should serve as the starting point for scholars and politicians to examine their preferences, goals, and capabilities so that they can make progress on ESA.

A possible definition of ESA could be:

"an approach that utilizes nation-state capabilities and policies, with an emphasis on crisis-management and peacekeeping, to increase decision-making autonomy in security and defense issues when NATO is predisposed".

This implies that cooperation with NATO is still preferred, but that the EU security efforts will not be rendered obsolete if the EU fails to cooperate with NATO.

6. Conclusion

To bring attention back to the original research question – how does Germany's strategic culture shape its interpretation and pursuit of European Strategic Autonomy? –, this conclusion will summarize the main inferences drawn as well as describe further research opportunities to expand upon this thesis.

Germany's security and defense policy, which was developed in the aftermath of WWII when Germany wanted to make amends for their actions and rebuild trust in the international community, was not changed significantly after reunification. While this was unexpected by some scholars, strategic culture theorists and constructivists argue that can be explained by an ingrained strategic culture of values and norms – most notably military restraint and multilateralism. This strategic culture, observed at the governmental level and the public opinion level, shapes the security and defense policy decisions that German politicians take. The specific concept of ESA was looked at in this thesis as a possible expression of Germany's security and defense policies as it is a current discussion among EU member states.

The thesis explored the various components that make up European Strategic Autonomy and examined how Germany's strategic culture shaped its understanding of these concepts. This was done by using a combination of values and norms seen consistently over time in Germany as well as looking at current government policy and public opinion as a lens to evaluate how these elements can be seen in the debate about ESA in Germany. While the debate needs to be further explored, this thesis shows that ESA can indeed be consistent with Germany's strategic culture as it has the ability to be interpreted to include both multilateralism and military restraint. In the end, Germany is particularly good at using rhetoric of commitment, but ESA is not about words, it is about power and action.

Realizing that ESA can be evaluated and understood within the framework of Germany's strategic culture is especially important recognizing that a shift in power is likely to come with the federal elections in September 2021 as the 16-year chancellorship of Angela Merkel is set to come to an end. While it is not yet clear who will replace her or from what political party they will come from, a valuable point in strategic culture theory is that this should not affect Germany's overall policies

too drastically. This thesis, among other pieces of current research, continues to show that changes in Germany's security and defense policy will not happen unless German politicians and its population are willing to have uncomfortable conversations about their role in the world, when they are willing to use military force, and how committed they are to EU defense integration. Perhaps this will not come unless a large or traumatic event such as a war, the continued rise of powerful states, or the reclusion of the United States occurs.

This thesis should serve as a starting point for research into strategic culture and ESA. To take this research further and to take another step towards ESA, it would be beneficial to examine the strategic culture of other member states as well as the EU in order to view how that aligns with ESA. This could serve as another step towards possible convergence on a shared definition. Additionally, while this thesis emphasized more of the cultural norms and values that make up Germany's strategic culture, the scholars that I interviewed were concerned that examining the "strategic" component may be useful in Germany's ESA debate. My research could be strengthened by examining how Germany could benefit from strategic foresight to guide the debate in Germany in an informed manner focusing on "future scenarios, implications, action plans, global trends" (Bindenagel 2020), since this paper discovered this was an underdeveloped aspect of German policy.

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