The momentum of change. Germany and the use of force II: from Afghanistan to Iraq

Germany’s engagement in Kosovo in a combat capacity appeared to have shifted the parameters of German security policy and perspectives on the use of force, apparently to ‘solidify the new consensus’ over foreign and security policy. Indeed, Kosovo did seem to confirm that the trajectory of change already apparent in the 1990s was leading to a normalising of Germany’s relationship with the use of force. However, in the light of events between 2001 and 2003 such conclusions appeared to be somewhat premature and the extent of the new security policy consensus exaggerated. Certainly, Schröder’s declared ‘unconditional solidarity’ with the United States in the immediate wake of September 11 2001 and the subsequent deployment of Bundeswehr soldiers to Afghanistan in the context of Operation Enduring Freedom were firm expressions of Germany’s commitment to having a role in international security and accepting the utility of armed force. However, the subsequent transatlantic spats and divisions within Europe over US policy towards Iraq revealed, in a very vivid way, the limits to and peculiarities of Germany’s approach to the use of force.

This chapter continues the analysis of the evolution of German security policy, with a focus on the role of the armed forces between 2000 and 2003. This time-frame takes in Germany’s leadership role in Macedonia, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, as well as the US-led war on terror as its enlargement to include Iraq. German security policy during this time exhibited traits of both old and new thinking; furthermore it was characterised by an interplay of short-term domestic political goals with more entrenched long-standing beliefs and values about the use of force and role of multilateralism. As a consequence, the 2000–3 period brought to the fore the fragility and complexity of the elite-level political consensus and extent of public...
support which had grown up around and sanctioned the enlargement of the Bundeswehr’s role during the previous decade.

Commencing with an examination of Germany’s role in Macedonia, the chapter moves on to discuss Germany’s response and conduct in the wake of September 11 2001, framed by Schröder’s notion of ‘unlimited solidarity’. The deployment of a sizeable Bundeswehr contingent to Afghanistan, made possible only through a Vertrauensfrage (vote of confidence) in the Bundestag, was a further indicator of the intricacy of the German perspective on the use of force. Analysis then turns to the widening focus of Bush’s war on terror to include Iraq and the German response to it, which, from the very beginning, ruled out the possibility of the Bundeswehr’s involvement in any ‘military adventure’. The fall-out from Iraq for Germany’s international relations following Donald Rumsfeld’s relegation of Germany to ‘Old Europe’ brings the chapter to a close. Throughout, attention will be paid to the ‘domestics’ of German security policy-making as a means of substantiating the claim that a new and robust consensus on the use of force remained elusive and how policy in the early part of the twenty-first century was formulated on the back of an incomplete and complicated national consensus.

Leadership in Macedonia

Beginning in 2001 the Bundeswehr began what became a series of deployments in Macedonia when in March ethnic Albanians clashed with the army and police of Macedonia. Against the backdrop of the wars of succession in the former Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s, Germany responded swiftly to the possible eruption of violent conflict. After the EU and NATO had brokered a ceasefire and established a framework for the resolution of the conflict, Germany pledged troops to the NATO-led force tasked with weapons’ collecting and safeguarding UN and OSCE observers who were in place to monitor political reforms. Schröder’s resolute commitment to German intervention in Macedonia, which was called for in the name of NATO solidarity as well as to prevent a second Kosovo, was not fully supported within the governing coalition. Swathes of SPD and Green members of Parliament questioned the proposed deployment, as too much of an emphasis, it was claimed, was being placed on the use of military force, which they did not see as the best way to stabilise the region. Furthermore, the
CDU contended that it would support the operation only if the Bundeswehr was awarded more resources to carry out the mission effectively. Eventually, Germany’s participation was secured only through the support of the opposition parties, and the Bundestag approved the deployment by 497 votes to 130 on 29 August 2001.

Operation 'Essential Harvest' was widely regarded as a success, though its initial one-month duration was viewed as having been too short. The proposed successor mission, ‘Amber Fox’, was to be a full UN mission (Essential Harvest had been only ‘praised’ by the UN). In the new mission, Germany was to play a leading role, supplying as many as 600 soldiers. The proposal met with broad Bundestag approval, opposition coming only from the PDS and five members of the CDU.² The mission was again viewed as a great success and a tribute to the Bundeswehr’s leading role; reforms in Macedonia, however, did not move as swiftly as hoped, so that Germany’s participation in the region was extended a number of times.

On the surface the Bundeswehr’s deployment in Macedonia may seem to have confirmed the continuation of the post-Kosovo trajectory of change, involving a closer acquaintance with the use of force; nevertheless, as noted above, the proposal to deploy led to animated debate in the Bundestag, reminiscent of debates in the mid-1990s, and the decision to deploy had been far from consensual. Political parties were initially divided internally on the issue, especially the Greens and the SPD, while the CDU linked its support to a call for more defence spending. The CDU also called for the rule relating to the parliamentary majority required to sanction Bundeswehr deployments to be abandoned, as a means of empowering the executive’s decision-making capacity, making Germany more responsive at times of international crisis. The case of Macedonia and the domestic debate demonstrate very clearly that, despite Kosovo, no clear-cut consensus on the Bundeswehr’s role had been reached and that the use of force remained highly contested.

While Germany was undertaking a leading role in Macedonia, international attention shifted to the US with the dramatic events of September 11 2001. One of the many effects of that day was the emergence of a fundamental difference between US and German perspectives regarding the use of force and how best to combat the sources of global terrorism. The transformation that US foreign policy underwent after (and arguably even before) September 11 brought into focus the peculiarities and continuities present within German security thinking. The
next section discusses at some length the evolution of US perspectives on the use of force within the changing context of transatlantic relations.

The changing contours of transatlantic relations

The change in German security thinking at the beginning of the twenty-first century took place within an already evolving context of transatlantic relations. Developments on both sides of the Atlantic in the field of foreign and security policy were setting out quite different European and American agendas and perspectives on the use of force in international politics in the 1990s. Two processes stand out here as illustrative of the nature of this evolution: the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP); and the emergence of a neo-conservative strand in US foreign policy thinking.

Efforts at emboldening the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy with a military dimension had been largely ineffectual until the end of the 1990s, when the project was given a greater impetus by the war in Kosovo together with a renewed Franco-British commitment to the project. The events of 1999 compelled EU member states to create a viable military component to empower their collective external role and voice in the world. While disputes arose regarding the extent of the ESDP’s potential autonomy and its relationship to NATO, many of these issues were resolved over time, and by September 11 the EU seemed to be on course to fulfil its security policy ambitions.

In Germany, meanwhile, although it appeared that Berlin had been getting to grips with the use of force, as seen in the resolution of the out-of-area debate by the mid-1990s and the subsequent deployment in Kosovo, the change in leadership from Kohl to Schröder in 1998 witnessed a more domestically focused German foreign policy, as seen in the new chancellor’s initial apparent lack of interest in foreign affairs. Soon after the Federal election there appeared to be a predilection for preserving Germany’s interests, especially in the context of the EU. Furthermore, there were quite substantial anti-military elements on the left of the SPD, now in government, which, combined with the presence of the Green Party, with Joschka Fischer as the newly appointed foreign minister, suggested that the former security policy trajectory pursued by the CDU–CSU might be aborted. Although the Greens had gone some way in the 1990s in modifying their position on the use of force **vis à vis** civil war in the former Yugoslavia, at its
grassroots pacifism remained a central tenet of the party’s ideology. Given these factors, the Red–Green coalition was not exactly poised to continue along the route proposed by the previous CDU-led Government. In short, Germany’s security policy seemed set to become far more introverted and conditional. Although it was the Red–Green coalition that in 1999 had sanctioned the Bundeswehr’s Kosovo deployment, one with an overtly combative character, the decision to deploy was accompanied by a strong humanitarian rationale, thus enabling the Government to shore up domestic and parliamentary support.

Change was also afoot across the Atlantic with the emergence of new foreign policy thinking, which in its essence cut across the grain of the EU’s (and Germany’s) overtly multilateralist approach to security issues. The neo-conservative narrative, as Elizabeth Pond calls it, was already in gestation in the 1990s, but it was not until September 11 2001 that it gained the currency to move more centrally into mainstream US security thinking. The core elements of this body of thought drew on a strong belief in US supremacy and espoused the use of pre-emptive military action and *ad hoc* coalitions. Undercurrents of change in this direction were evident in Charles Krauthammer’s 1990 *Foreign Affairs* article ‘The Unipolar Movement’, Paul Wolfowitz’s 1992 draft defence policy guidelines, which espoused the merits of pre-emptive military strikes and in Robert Kagan and William Kristol’s calls for a ‘neo-Reaganite foreign policy’, notions which were to later inform Bush’s strategy for the war on terror.

The core tenets of this foreign policy thinking did not, however, figure prominently in the pre-September 11 period of the new Bush administration. As Pond notes, given that the Bush presidential campaign had barely touched on foreign policy issues and that the new president appeared to be quite unfamiliar with international affairs, there was a widespread assumption that he would ‘govern from the middle’ and opt for continuity, especially in transatlantic relations. The terrorist attacks on the US on September 11 provided a powerful source of justification, indeed self-righteousness, for those who had sought to revise US thinking and espoused the merits of pre-emptive military strikes. Thus over the course of the subsequent twelve months Bush’s foreign and security policy came to be imbued with clear traits of neo-conservative thinking which were ultimately codified in a new US national security strategy in 2002 and subsequently applied to Baghdad in 2003. This policy was also underpinned by a powerful intellectual discourse which extolled the virtues of US supremacy and, crucially,
the vast divergences between American thinking about power and the use of force and that of Europe, with its preference for 'soft power'. In this vein, Robert Kagan argued in 2002 that Europeans and Americans did not share a common view of the world, expressed in the phrase ‘Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus’. Kagan’s take on European and US differences resounded in US foreign policy circles and helped bolster the new foreign policy paradigm, or ‘big idea’ underpinning US foreign policy. Moreover, such thinking contributed to US–European divergence and discord in the foreign policy sphere which, disguised to an extent by the solidarity exhibited straight after September 11, became increasingly marked in early 2002.

This brief consideration of the changing context of transatlantic relations would seem to indicate that even without the events of September 11 quite substantial differences relating to the use of force were already in place within the Atlantic community. The ramifications of these changes had particularly strong effects upon US–German relations. Differences between Washington’s and Berlin’s positions on a range of international questions had seen a marked change in tone in bilateral relations well before autumn 2001. The extent of the Bush administration’s willingness to forgo multilateralism, as seen in the proposed National Missile Defence (NMD) system, the US refusal to ratify the Kyoto Treaty and the International Criminal Court, was already of profound concern for Berlin.

**September 11 and Germany’s ‘unconditional solidarity’**

Germany’s initial response to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC, on September 11 2001 was a pledge of unlimited solidarity with the US, a response which contrasted sharply with that of Bonn’s position during the Gulf War of 1991. The chancellor was also quick to claim that Germany was obliged to participate with military means in order to secure stability in the world. Schröder’s early declaration of solidarity was subsequently backed at home by firm cross-party support, except for that of the PDS. Berlin’s solidarity also extended to its full support for the US’s invocation of NATO’s (article 5) collective defence mechanism. Unlimited solidarity did not, however, translate into unconditional support for an immediate US military response to the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks. Crucially, at both elite and societal levels reticence on the use of force and fear of US unilateralism
pervaded the German debate. Subsequently, Schröder’s pledge of solidarity, coupled with domestic restraint, led to protracted problems on the home front, as well as to altercation with the US.

Germany’s reserved stance on a war in Afghanistan focused on the fear that the US would over-react and respond unilaterally, which could lead to an uncontrolled escalation of conflict in the wider Middle East. Consequently, Germany pursued its traditional preferences for a multilateral approach explicitly aimed at tackling the roots of terrorism via political as well as military means, as was evident in both Schröder’s and Fischer’s international diplomacy shortly after September 11. In this early phase Germany had an important role in the consolidation of an international alliance against terrorism, Fischer in particular working to forge a common EU diplomatic response to the attacks on the US and seeking also to embolden the UN. Illustrative of the German approach was Berlin’s facilitating of the UN-sponsored conference in Bonn in late November on the construction of a post-Taliban regime for Afghanistan, a process in which both Fischer and Schröder invested considerable personal credibility and which led to the Bonn accords and subsequently to the establishment of an interim Government in Afghanistan.

The attacks of September 11 also prompted great concern within Germany regarding its internal security, when it transpired that a number of the hijackers had resided and been educated at universities in the Federal Republic. Moreover, intelligence suggested that Germany was home to over 30,000 members or supporters of militant Islamist organisations, some having links to Al Qaida. Given such revelations, interior minister Otto Schilly introduced two ‘security packages’, approved by the Bundestag in December 2001, aimed at clamping down on the operations of such groups. Additional measures were introduced by Finance Minister Eichel which focused on undermining the financing of these groups by establishing new measures to scrutinize unusual patterns of cash-flow in bank accounts.9

The call to arms

The US waited until early October to commence its war in Afghanistan. The US strategy, despite the invocation of NATO’s article 5, reflected a strong US desire to lead the military campaign and to forge a ‘coalition of the willing’. It was in this context that Schröder’s pledge of solidarity with the US was tested, when in November President Bush
made a formal request for a German military contribution. At this point, the unlimited solidarity pledged and consistently reaffirmed by the chancellor, together with his statement of 11 October pledging a military contribution to the war in Afghanistan, met with staunch domestic opposition. Schröder was thus caught in his own rhetoric, while aside from the PDS no party would openly condemn the US’s right to pursue the perpetrators of September 11 at the same time there was no great enthusiasm, generally or among the Red–Green coalition itself, to have German troops engaged in what was seen as an undesirable and risky military campaign. Consequently, the chancellor had to have recourse to the full range of possible tactics if he was to fulfil his pledge to the US.

On 6 November 2001 Schröder announced, in response to the US request, that 3,900 Bundeswehr troops would be made available for the campaign against terror. To rally support around this contribution of troops, proponents pointed to Germany’s international responsibility, its role as a transatlantic partner and the general credibility of German foreign policy; they pointed also to UN resolution 1368, passed after September 11, condemning terrorism and recognising the right of nations to self-defence. Those opposed to the deployment pressed for continued restraint, urging that multilateralism was important and that vital political and social measures needed to be integrated into Operation ‘Enduring Freedom’ if it were to properly address the sources of global terrorism. While the Cabinet approved Schröder’s plan for the Bundeswehr’s deployment, which also met with broad approval from the CDU, the CSU and the FDP, support was far from forthcoming from substantial elements of the governing coalition, with both SPD and Green members of Parliament arguing vociferously against the chancellor’s designs, for the reasons mentioned above. Consequently, the stability of the coalition was under stress. In the case of the Bundeswehr’s deployment in Macedonia, Schröder had been content to allow the Bill to run on the back of support from the opposition parties; in this instance, however, given the gravity of the issues and his own weak domestic position, Schröder saw it as crucial to get the backing of his own coalition. The chancellor subsequently decided to tie the issue of a Bundeswehr deployment to a vote of confidence in his Government. The Vertrauensfrage had been used only three times in the Federal Republic’s history, and in this instance Schröder used it to ask those disagreeing with his policy to either support him or to let the Government fall.
The Vertrauensfrage

On Friday 16 November the Bundestag debated whether Germany should make available 3,900 Bundeswehr troops to participate in the war in Afghanistan and whether the SPD–Green coalition should remain in government. On these two issues Bundestag members were permitted a single vote.

In his opening statement Schröder explained why the Vertrauensfrage was being used, together with the reasons why Germany should send troops to Afghanistan. The Vertrauensfrage was legitimate, Schröder posited, as the deployment issue was one of fundamental importance. Broad support was required, as Germany needed to show both at the international as well as the domestic level that the governing coalition was willing and able to back the deployment. On the second point, Schröder stressed that German foreign and security policy should be seen as consistent and in line with multilateralism, that it was important for Germany to be seen as a reliable ally, able and willing to make contributions to international security alongside allies and partners. Schröder also emphasised that the Bundeswehr deployment was part of a broad effort to bring peace to Afghanistan and that in this sense it was not a war of aggression. The chancellor made it clear that the military campaign was only one element of the wider political and humanitarian effort to rebuild Afghanistan and reinstate civil society. Throwing his weight behind the chancellor, soon-to-be defence minister Peter Struck argued that should Germany renge on the deployment all chances would be lost for it to have a stake in the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The Bundestag debate which followed illustrated the various strands of thinking apparent in German politics on the use of force. Speaking firmly against the war, the PDS saw that a military campaign in Afghanistan was not the most appropriate means of tackling international terrorism; moreover, such an undertaking could spark a new divide between the Islamic world and the West. Since the CDU and the CSU supported the deployment, criticism was instead levied directly at the coalition’s inability to govern. Aside from noting the damage inflicted on Germany’s international reputation and relations with the US by Schröder’s recent dalliances, the CDU pointed to the disastrous record of economic under-achievement since 1998. In a similar vein, the CSU charged the chancellor with incompetence and naïvety in the field of international politics.
Although support for the chancellor was eventually forthcoming, Schröder was berated from all sides for linking the deployment issue to a vote of confidence. The CDU accused Schröder of playing politics with an issue which, while they fully supported, should not have been attached to a vote of confidence in his Government. Stalwart pacifists in the Green Party, meanwhile, as well as many SPD parliamentarians were affronted that they should be forced to forgo their fundamental principles and support going to war in order to save the Government. In the end the confidence vote was supported by 336 to 326 votes. Of the 8 Greens who had opposed the sending of troops, in a symbolic move 4 voted with the Government and 4 against, in demonstrating both their allegiance to the Red–Green coalition and their sustained opposition to the war and Germany’s contribution to it. No doubt Schröder was helped in his endeavours by an improving situation on the ground in Afghanistan: by the time of the Vertrauensfrage the Northern Alliance was holding Kabul, many Taliban strongholds were weakening, and it appeared that war might not a prolonged undertaking – all factors which would have encouraged both the Greens and the SDU to run with the chancellor.

The Red–Green coalition was thus saved and Germany committed 3,900 troops to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The contours and the substance of the Vertrauensfrage demonstrated, however, important factors that were to shape German security policy behaviour over the coming year. Crucially, although the leadership was able to garner support from within its Red–Green ranks, the loyalty of 16 November was highly conditional, thus demonstrating that the coalition remained far from united regarding the US-led war on terror and Germany’s role within it. Crucially, over seventy members of Parliament who had supported the motion added to their vote a written explanation, mainly to qualify that they had substantial doubts about the military deployment, but voted ‘yes’ in order to keep the coalition in power.

Extending the war on terror

The rather delicate domestic setting of Germany’s contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom was to evolve further during the next half year, taking German thinking even farther away from that of the US about extending the scope and intensity of its war against terror. The German discourse remained focused on the need to address the
underlying social and economic sources of terrorism and to do so without relying on a purely military approach. What emerged around this time in Germany was a clearer articulation of the essence of Berlin’s security thinking, as seen in the notion of a ‘New Era of Engagement’, a comprehensive strategy aimed at closing the poverty gap, re-engaging in a new North–South dialogue and intercultural exchange between the West and the Muslim world.

Early 2002 saw an entrenching of Germany’s reluctance to extend its participation in America’s anti-terror campaign. Afghanistan was one thing, but the notion of pre-emptive strikes against other states – now part of the Bush administration’s political rhetoric – clashed head-on with German perspectives and reasoning. The increasing belligerence of US policy, its identification of ‘rogue states’ and its articulation of the ‘axis of evil’, which included Iran, Iraq and North Korea, fanned flames of mistrust and disbelief over US policy already existing in the Federal Republic, as well as elsewhere in Europe.

The annual Munich Security Seminar in February 2002 became a platform for both Americans and Europeans to air their views over the international situation. Unsurprisingly, the war of words in Munich led to a firming-up of the contrasting European and US perspectives on how to proceed with the war on terror. Paul Wolfowitz berated the Europeans for their lack of military prowess and confirmed that the US would, in the future, feel quite free to pick and choose its allies and partners, warning that NATO states should no longer consider themselves to occupy positions of privilege. In a similar line of argument Senator John McCain trumpeted the US’s right of unilateralism, stating his belief that the US already held a mandate for military action against terrorism worldwide. Focusing on Iraq, McCain argued:

> A day of reckoning is approaching. Not simply for Saddam Hussein, but for all members of the Atlantic Community, whose governments face the choice of ending the threat we face every day from this rogue regime or carrying on as if such behaviour, in the wake of September 11th, were somehow still tolerable.

While the US delegates ‘bought home’ the message to the Europeans, and in doing so clearly spelt out their agenda for Iraq, German Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping stated that there were no plans afoot for an invasion (of Iraq) and, furthermore, that it would be naïve to believe that Europe would support such military action.
Iraq – a step too far

Bush’s identification of Iraq as a rogue state and part of the ‘axis of evil’, with links to Al Quaida, led the US administration to view it as the next battleground in its war on terror. The US held that Baghdad was in direct violation of the 1991 peace agreement and UN Security Council resolutions, and reasoned that the best way of addressing this situation was to bring about ‘regime change’. Unsurprisingly, this conclusion and the strategy of pre-emption that it implied collided with current thinking in a number of – mostly – West European capitals, especially Berlin and Paris.

The German response to the US’s expansion of the war against terror to include Iraq was always going to be less than unenthusiastic. As argued earlier, the ‘domestics’ of the Macedonia deployment, the fragility of elite support for the deployment to Afghanistan, combined with the overwhelmingly negative reception in Germany of US neo-conservative foreign policy thinking with its preference for pre-emption and unilateralism, were vital indicators of Schröder’s inflexible policy on Iraq. Indeed, opposition to US foreign policy objectives could arguably be observed even in the days after September 11 2001: Germany’s ‘unlimited solidarity’ was coupled to a commitment by Schröder that Germany would not participate in ‘adventures’ and that if it were to come to the aid of its allies Germany would have to be fully consulted prior to the initiation of any military force. In other words, the chancellor had already laid down his ‘red-lines’ for consultation and a preference for restraint back in September 2001.

Towards the end of the summer of 2002 the question of Iraq moved to centre-stage. The heightening rhetoric in the US, which was pointing to a military strike in the near future, strengthened Schröder’s resolve to give the situation and diplomatic means more time, and, crucially, to have the UN, not the US, rule on how much longer the weapons’ inspectors should remain in Iraq. Denouncing the US’s ‘military adventurism’, Schröder also maintained that a US-led war in Iraq to oust Saddam Hussein would detract from the war against terrorism and endanger the West’s relations with the Islamic world. It was in this context that the notion of a Deutsches Weg, ‘a German way’, was articulated by the chancellor in describing a specifically German approach to international affairs, and also to demonstrate to the US that it would be Berlin’s objectives and priorities that would determine the German stance on Iraq. Schröder’s critics berated the idea of ‘a
German way’, arguing that it sent out confusing messages to Germany’s allies, suggesting a return to some dangerous new Sonderweg, out of kilter with the Federal Republic’s foreign policy tradition.

The transatlantic discussion, such as it was, about extending the scope of the war on terror and the use of force to Iraq was cut somewhat short when, on 26 August 2002, US Vice-President Dick Cheney called for preventive military action to oust the regime of Saddam Hussein, an announcement allegedly not communicated to Germany in advance.16 Thus a wide-ranging debate was eclipsed, America’s resolve to use force in Iraq, unless Saddam Hussein left the country, intensified and Europe’s divisions over the issue hardened, with Germany’s position drifting even farther from that of the US.

**War and the Federal election**

During the course of the SPD–Green Government’s term in office, Schröder was transformed from a chancellor with little apparent interest in foreign policy and an election agenda in 1998 front-loaded with domestic reform issues to a leader who in 2002 mobilised anti-war sentiment to successfully win a second term in office.

Weakened by a poor economic record and facing a strong challenge from the CDU–CSU led by Edmund Stoiber, Schröder seemed certain to lose the forthcoming Federal election in September 2002. Seizing the initiative and responding to the widespread domestic reticence towards US policy and anti-war sentiment in the country as well as within the governing coalition, the chancellor affirmed his opposition to a war with Iraq, even were there to be a UN mandate, and pledged to keep Germany out of any conflict. On September 22 the Red–Green coalition secured a victory, albeit the slimmest in the Federal Republic’s history. Schröder’s electoral success was not, however, celebrated across the Atlantic. With reverberations still fresh in the air from the German justice minister’s likening of Bush’s foreign policy endeavours to those of Adolf Hitler, US Secretary for Defence Donald Rumsfeld claimed that the chancellor had poisoned US–German relations. Moreover, at a NATO defence ministers’ meeting in Warsaw held shortly after the German election, Rumsfeld refused to meet with his counterpart Peter Struck.

The resolute stance taken by Schröder in September 2002 left little room for any adaptation or modification and, importantly, lost Germany any real leverage that might still have been possible to pressure
Bush into pursuing a more restrained approach towards Iraq. Moreover, the effect was to isolate Berlin, nullifying any influence it might have exerted on other European partners. In this way, Germany actively contributed to the EU’s inability to present a common voice, and in this context it became apparent, shortly after the election of September 2002, that Schröder’s strategy had perhaps been a step too far. The German press was already decrying him for damaging American–German relations and after a direct intervention by the US ambassador to Germany objecting to the anti-Americanism pervading the Government, the chancellor set about trying to pull Germany out of its self-inflicted isolation.

A temporary semblance of normality to relations was reached when Bush and Schröder declared their mutual intention to get back to ‘business as usual’. Berlin was keen to throw off the anti-American label while seeking to reaffirm that still more time was needed to find a diplomatic solution to Iraq and that Germany would not participate in any military adventure. At the same time, the Germans were keen to prove their value as allies, able and willing to pull their weight in international security. Defence Minister Struck announced in November that, together with The Netherlands, Germany would take joint-leadership of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, emphasising that Germany was now a substantial contributor to international peacekeeping missions, with over 10,000 Bundeswehr troops currently deployed overseas. Despite these overtures, a standoff over Iraq was clearly visible on the horizon, with Germany standing alongside France.

**Europe divided**

By Spring 2003 European perspectives on the US’s Iraq strategy had become polarised between ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’. On 20 January Germany and France initiated a debate about terrorism, including the issue of Iraq, in the UN security council, a move which, according to Elizabeth Pond, left Colin Powell feeling ambushed and led directly to a hardening of his rhetoric, especially as the Franco-German manoeuvre, later confirmed by the French foreign minister, had essentially put the break on a second UN resolution.

The Franco-German initiative unleashed a wave of indignation across both Eastern and Western Europe. The substance of the emerging
intra-European discord revolved around the question of ‘who speaks for Europe?’.

While the Franco-German proposal at the UN claimed to be speaking in Europe’s name, contrary voices proposed a different European discourse, one which appeared in the form of a letter (on behalf of ‘the Eight’) on 30 January 2003 in the Wall Street Journal. Published under the header ‘Europe and America must stand united’, the letter was signed by the leaders of Spain, Portugal, Italy, the UK, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Denmark, and testified to the central importance of transatlantic solidarity after September 11 and the enduring underlying value of the relationship.

The letter was essentially an overt signal of support for US policy towards Iraq. In quick succession an even bolder declaration of kinship and support for the use of force vis à vis Iraq came in a similar letter from ‘the Vilnius Ten’ group of Central and South-East European states.

This profound lack of consensus in Europe revealed a number of things. Not only did it pose serious doubts about the EU’s capacity to construct a coherent foreign and security policy, but it demonstrated the relative demise of the Franco-German dynamo in an EU of twenty-five members and with it the notion that this very special bilateral relationship could continue to set the EU’s foreign policy priorities and agenda.

Maintaining that their position was more representative of the European perspective – since even within those countries that had signed the letter of the Eight domestic opposition to a war was extremely strong – Berlin and Paris continued to claim the moral ‘European’ high ground. However, with the subsequent letter of support from the ‘Vilnius Ten’, also endorsing a US war on Iraq, the idea that the Franco-German perspective was still truly representative of an enlarged EU was clearly swept away. Intra-European acrimony was further exacerbated by President Chirac’s lambasting of Central European states for their behaviour and for having ‘missed a good opportunity to shut up’. But Chirac took it a step further, revealing innate French fears that the forthcoming enlargement of the EU would bring in Central European ‘trojan horses’, more Atlanticist than European in their preferences, in his castigation of Warsaw et al. by threatening that France would not ratify their entry to the European Union.

Unsurprisingly, the Franco-German move at the UN at the end of January and the subsequent acrimony in Europe prompted a set of responses from Washington. As noted above, even Colin Powell, previously a voice of reason within the US administration, now seemed
set on going to war, not least because by this time America had built up a sizeable military presence in the Gulf. Moreover, the American’s believed that, despite its rhetoric, France would come on board at the eleventh hour and support the use of force without the need for a second UN resolution. These events also prompted Donald Rumsfeld to articulate the notion of an ‘old’ and a ‘new’ Europe, denouncing both Germany and France as ‘Old Europe’ and praising ‘New Europe’, including Central European states, for supporting the US stance on Iraq.24

Europe’s fractured perspectives on Iraq had the effect of empowering the US administration’s resolve to go to war. As Washington observed, ‘France and Germany do not speak for Europe’, while the ‘majority of Europe’s democracies’ backed a war to oust the regime of Saddam Hussein.25 Rumsfeld et al.’s lambasting of Germany and France did not abate, Germany being singled out as lacking gratitude for America’s role in rescuing the country from Nazism in 1945 and in bringing about unification in 1990. Furthermore, given Berlin’s clear refusal to honour its NATO commitments, questions were posed as to whether the US should relocate its troops away from Germany to East-Central Europe after the war. Typically, Rumsfeld went a step further than most and grouped Germany together with ‘those states’, such as Cuba and Libya, not helping the US.26

Germany’s behaviour during February and March remained grounded by the desire to avoid a military conflict. To that end Germany, together with France and Russia, pressed for an open-ended extension of the UN weapons’ inspectors’ remit in Iraq and, at the same time, in the context of NATO discussions refused to support the formal authorisation of advance military planning, instigated by the US, to help Turkey defend itself in the event of war. While Schröder was quick to assure Turkey that if push came to shove Germany would indeed come to Turkey’s aid, the chancellor was resolute in his opposition to such a move, and with France and Belgium argued that NATO should not pre-empt any decision by the UN Security Council on a second resolution and that by implementing such plans NATO would be locked into an intractable ‘logic of war’.27 The rift over Turkey prompted commentators on both sides of the Atlantic to decry the death of multilateral security institutions. While the Bush administration placed the blame firmly on those European states, but particularly France and Germany, for their profound lack of support and of undermining NATO by failing to fulfil their alliance obligations, Germany
saw that it was America’s drive, no matter the cost, to invade Iraq and its consistent disregard for consultation that had actually undermined multilateralism.

From mid-February until the beginning of the invasion little ground was made up between the two camps. Although the German Government shifted its position somewhat by identifying with the EU’s stance on the use of force as a last resort, a move which met with the strong approval of the CDU–CSU, Schröder was quick to deny that he had done a U-turn. The chancellor’s pledge to reject German participation in any war and his refusal to sign up to a UN resolution that permitted one remained set in stone. Interestingly, it was around this time that the CDU and the CSU appeared to be departing from Stoiber’s previous dictum, not dissimilar to Schröder’s, that Germany should not participate in any military adventures. After chiding Schröder for the damage inflicted on German–American relations, the leader of the CDU, Angela Merkel, declared that military invention should be supported if peaceful attempts to disarm Iraq failed and, furthermore, that German participation would be possible in such action ‘in accordance with our means’.

Germany, alongside Russia and France continued to pursue the UN route and on 5 March issued a joint statement that they would not let through a resolution authorising the use of force, a move which had little effect in holding back the impetus towards war, as two days later the US and the UK issued Iraq with a deadline. On 16 March a pre-war council was held between the US, the UK and Spain, and two days later it became evident that the US was to give up its pursuit of a second UN resolution. The invasion of Iraq commenced on 19 March, the task force being overwhelmingly American and British.

Speaking in early April, Schröder defended the stance he had so resolutely taken over the previous six months, reaffirming that Germany would not take part in the war and arguing that there had been an alternative, ‘but we were not able to prevent the war unfolding’. The chancellor went on to argue that the Iraq crisis presented an opportunity for Europe to improve its collective mechanisms and policies in the field of security. Schröder also confirmed that Germany would meet its alliance obligations, and to that end Germany sent Fuchs NBC reconnaissance vehicles to Kuwait (under the auspices of ‘Enduring Freedom’), permitted allied forces to use Germany for their staging areas, provided 3,500 additional Bundeswehr soldiers to guard US military installations in Germany, and sent Patriot missile defence
systems to Israel and Turkey. Schröder also used the opportunity to pursue the agenda for the post-war Iraq and, in particular, stressed the central role that must be played by the UN in constructing a new political and economic order.\(^5\)

**Conclusion: Iraq and its aftermath**

The period after the war in Kosovo saw German security policy diverge sharply with many of the expectations of Berlin's allies and partners about how German attitudes to the use of force had been largely 'normalised'. Over the course of the previous decade Germany had come to say 'yes' fairly routinely regarding Bundeswehr deployments; thus by issuing an uncompromising 'no' on Iraq, Germany's behaviour seemed almost like a reversal of the previous policy trajectory. A close inspection of events shows that it was primarily the 'domestics' of German security policy that were diametrically opposed to US strategy on Iraq, and it was these that obviated Germany's support. Already in Macedonia, and then more strikingly over Afghanistan, domestic weariness at both elite and societal levels about the necessity of a German deployment had set in. However, whereas a strong case for the use of force, as in both of these examples, could be coupled with policy initiatives for post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation with strong humanitarian elements – all factors important to the capture of German domestic support – in the case of Iraq this was not possible. Schröder's room for domestic manoeuvre over Iraq was fairly limited, and the task confronting him, of somehow defining a role for Germany in the war on terror and ensuring that this was compatible with a fragile domestic consensus, was not easy. The final result, though inflexible and at odds with Germany's professed multilateralism and transatlantic solidarity, transpired since the US' perception of the threat posed by Iraq and the best means for dealing with it contrasted sharply with that of Berlin.

In the aftermath of Iraq German security policy came to be focused on three interrelated matters: the re-building of relations between Germany and the US; the construction of a viable ESDP; and the reform of the Bundeswehr.

Already by the end of April 2003 US–German relations were improving, although, despite a series of high-level meetings, it remained unclear whether the relationship would resume 'normality' in the full
sense. Despite Schröder’s claim that the relationship was ‘vital’ and Fischer’s declaration that the ‘United States is a totally decisive factor for peace and stability in the world’, adding that he believed that ‘Europe would never be militarily strong enough to guard its own security’, a former US ambassador to Germany saw that Schröder’s dispute with the US over Iraq ‘was an opening shot of a new disloyal, confused and weak Germany’. While Germany remains committed to the ESDP, towards the end of 2003 foreign policy pundits were pointing to a possible ‘swing back’, albeit of limited extent, in Germany’s security policy perspectives and, importantly, a return to Atlanticism, though its relationship with the US would be more one of equals than it had been prior to 2001.

The fractured European perspectives on the use of force which transpired over the course of 2002–3 had important ramifications for the EU’s ambitions as a security actor and crucially for the relationship between NATO and a future ESDP. Prior to September 11 2001, EU states had made moderate progress towards their commitment to produce a collective military capacity, but Iraq had the effect of potentially turning the ESDP into a mini-project of France, Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany as a vehicle to rival NATO with its own ‘autonomous’ planning staff. Over the course of 2003 such fears largely died down, not least because Germany largely back-tracked from France’s goal of an exclusive ‘defence union’. When Britain became a contributor to the debate over a separate planning staff, the German position was aligned more with that of the UK, which was that any EU planning staff should be located within NATO.

The ESDP was given further shape and form through the drafting of an EU security strategy paper by Javier Solana in mid-2003. The objective of the paper, to be accepted by the European Council at the end of year, was to set out the substance and priorities of the ESDP. Much of the document was not new, since it referred to the importance of international law, multilateralism and the variety of ‘soft’ power tools already available to the union. What was innovative about the document was an articulation of the need, in extraordinary cases, for pre-emptive military action. Unsurprisingly, it was this particular dimension of the draft paper that the Germans sought to water down.

An issue that had been gaining in clarity since 1999, though one which was brought into sharper relief by the war in Iraq, concerned the deficiencies in the Bundeswehr’s post-1990 reform programme. The war on terror focused attention on the military prowess of the
US and in turn the manifold ways in which Europe’s collective military capacities paled in comparison. In this context, the rather unhurried pace of the Bundeswehr’s modernisation became a point of concern for both domestic and external audiences. It is to this issue that I turn in chapter 5.

Notes

2 Five Greens and two Social Democrats withheld their votes.
5 Ibid., p. 8.
7 Pond (2004), p. 3.
8 Passing 611 out of 666 possible votes.
11 Subsequently Germany made a broad contribution to the military conflict in the form of Fuchs armoured reconnaissance vehicles; an airborne medical evacuation unit, special forces, transport units and a naval contingent.
14 Ibid.
See 'Who Speaks for Europe?' The Economist, 8 February 2003.
Slovakia also signed up to this letter, but on the day after it was published.
See 'Who Speaks for Europe?'
'Is Poland America’s Donkey or Could it Become NATO’s Horse? The Economist, 10 May 2003.
For more on East-Central Europe's support for the US policy on Iraq, see Marcin Zaborowski and Kerry Longhurst (2003) 'America’s Protégé in the East? The Emergence of Poland as a Regional Leader', International Affairs, vol. 79, no. 5 (October), pp. 1009–28.
See 'The Tune Changes – a Bit', The Economist, 22 February 2003, p. 43.
'A Fractured Alliance', The Economist, 15 February 2003.
The Tune Changes – a Bit’, p. 43.
Ibid.
Policy statement by Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder on the international situation and on the results of the European Council, Brussels, 3 April 2003; available online: www.bundesregierung.de.
'We're Not Children!' The Economist, 17 May 2003, p. 38.
See 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', available online: www.eu.int.