

# CURRENT TRENDS IN GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

*A Farewell to Old Ideals?*

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Siegmar Schmidt, Gunther Hellmann and Reinhard Wolf, eds., *Handbuch zur deutschen Außenpolitik* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2007)

Thomas Jäger, Alexander Höse and Kai Oppermann, eds., *Deutsche Außenpolitik. Sicherheit, Wohlfahrt, Institutionen und Normen* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2007)

Gunther Hellmann, *Deutsche Außenpolitik. Eine Einführung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006)

Wilfried von Bredow, *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Eine Einführung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006)

International politics had quite an eventful year in 1975. The last American soldier left Saigon, bringing the Vietnam War to an end after sixteen years of fighting. General Francisco Franco died, starting the process that released Spain from thirty-six years of dictatorship. Moreover, the European Council had its inaugural meeting, Margaret Thatcher became the first woman to lead the British Conservative Party, and, to cap it all off, German political scientists produced a handbook on the Federal Republic's foreign policy for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

Despite all of the changes in the international system and domestic politics since the mid 1970s, the German international relations community has not published a new handbook capturing this monumental transformation. Over the course of the last two years, however, this dearth of up-to-date scholarship finally has been addressed. In light of this, I attempt to fulfill



three tasks in this review essay. First, I provide a succinct discussion of the new *Handbook on Germany's Foreign Policy*, which with almost a thousand pages and no less than sixty-five individual entries will be the field's most important reference work for the coming years. Second, I offer a brief overview of three other recent books that lie in the penumbra of this major publication. Taken together, these volumes nicely represent the field's state of the art. Finally, I put these works into the context of Germany's latest foreign policy challenges, as well as recent university reforms.

By editing the compendium, Siegmur Schmidt, Gunther Hellmann, and Reinhard Wolf have closed a persistent gap in the literature. "Quick orientation within a large and hardly manageable field" (15) is the book's underlying aim. In order to achieve this, it is structured into eight main chapters, each of which covers a particular area of research, such as international organizations. This systematic rather than chronological approach ensures easy access to the topic and is a real strength of this reference work. The advantages of such structure are revealed, for example, in the chapter on policy areas (*Politikfelder*). Eleven sub-sections endow the reader with useful overviews of the many aspects of German foreign policy, spanning classical topics, such as security or the economy, to comparably remote issues, including cultural and educational policy. Indeed, no facet is missing, nor is there any doubt about the expertise of the authors whom the editors assembled. The same can be said about the chapter on institutions and domestic actors, which even encloses a piece on the impact of scientific policy advice. Rüdiger Wolfrum's twelve pages on constitutional law and foreign policy—also located in this chapter—should be highlighted as one of the book's best moments. Wolfrum elucidates the reciprocal dynamics between German constitutional and international law with regard to the European Union.

Of course, a volume of such vast extent is prone to include some nuisances and even plain mistakes. For instance, Angela Stent's examination of German-Russian relations is sometimes erroneous. In an effort to equip her assertions with historical depth, she speaks of "Bismarck's expansionist goals" (437) after 1871—a point that does not even qualify as a research myth. Questionable also are the editors' decisions on what states and regions to include in the correspondingly titled chapters. Needless to say, all of the usual suspects, like France, the U.S., and Poland have made it on the list. Little geopolitical punditry experience is needed, however, to pose the question whether relations with any Southern European country are of importance to Germany—the same goes for the Scandinavian and Baltic nations—all completely absent. Moreover, the Caucasus also should have

received more attention, even if it was only events in 2008 that brought it forcefully onto the German agenda. In other words, a wider scope or, at the least, a clear explanation of the editors' selection rationale would have been desirable. Finally, the opening chapter, which presents different explanatory concepts, is rather problematic, leaving the reader to wonder about the justification for including this quadruple examination.

Thomas Risse and Michael Staack contribute pieces that explain the foreign policy of the "Berlin Republic" through both an identity theory and an economic model. While these authors provide rather objective descriptions and interesting insights, the contributions by Rainer Baumann and Hanns Maull are not free of partisan zeal. Particularly off-putting is Hanns Maull commenting on his own trademark approach by writing on "Germany as a civilian power" (73-84), whereas the competing concept of "Germany as Europe's central power" (62-72) is introduced by Rainer Baumann, who is one of the biggest critics of this perspective. Unsurprisingly, the reader learns a great deal about the "limits" (70) of the latter, while the continued analytical and normative usefulness of Maull's perspective remains uncriticized and unchallenged. Seen from any angle, a certain bias is undeniable. Yet, apart from such necessary criticism, the editors are to be complimented on their achievement. They have published an indispensable resource, full of comprehensive and up-to-date information on Germany's current foreign policy environment.

German international relations scholars also are scrutinizing the Federal Republic's international performance much more vigorously compared to previous decades. The volume edited by Thomas Jäger, Alexander Höse, and Kai Oppermann exemplifies this new examination. The Cologne-based editors have grouped essays around the principle features of security, welfare, institutions, and norms. Although, or perhaps because, the book has a less ambitious scope, its theoretical coherence is striking. The first two contributions, framed by the neorealist paradigm, are particularly impressive, outlining international and domestic constraints on the nation's external behavior. A hierarchy of international constraints becomes visible with polarity topping the list, while new domestic constraints largely stem from an increase of actors over the last decades. For the international observer, this might seem pretty unspectacular, but in the German context, this is nothing less than stunning, given the endemic neglect with which German political scientists long have treated this export of American international relations theorizing. The volume's final chapter is as remarkable as its opening one. Here, the editors managed to bring together a fascinating group of experienced, conservative scholars.

These authors focus on decisive topics—whether Germany should adopt a more transatlantic or European strategy and what the foreign policy priority list of a unified Germany on the brink of its third decade should be. The quarrel among this group, which includes prominent scholars such as Hans-Peter Schwarz, points to the many unanswered questions concerning Germany's international role. Nevertheless, the underlying perception of change is shared by all contributors. Summarizing the current situation, “the catalog of requests und expectations that other states and non-state actors have towards Germany has changed thoroughly. Also, Germany's interests have altered” (628).

Indeed, different and changing priorities are at the core of two other recent monographs on German foreign policy. Here, however, the arrangement and composition of these books is not as much a result of a change in the national interest, but rather a shift in the individual scholar's concerns. Simply put, German political science students wanted something different, and Gunther Hellmann and Wilfried von Bredow have given it to them. Both of these distinguished scholars offer something absolutely spectacular, breaking with tradition by writing a useful and accessible textbook. Gunther Hellmann begins his text by bringing together theory and history in his introduction. He deals with this subject systematically, starting with reflections on scientific definitions and the historical development of foreign policy in general. After a brief institutional section on “who makes German foreign policy?” (42-58), three important periods in the nation's international relations are examined through the application of three different theoretical frameworks. With great deliberation, the book manages to involve the reader in discovering diverse propositions, instead of simply pointing out more than one perspective. For instance, the “realist” foreign policy of imperial Germany is contrasted neatly with the Federal Republic's policy of “interdependence.” The role of individual leaders and the bureaucratic analysis of decision making are highlighted in various aspects of German foreign policy over the course of the next chapters. So, for example, the impact of a changing chancellorship becomes understandable. Toward the end of the book, political culture, national identity, as well as discourse analysis are covered, and the book finishes with a speculative outlook. Political forecasting is always a fairly adventurous endeavor, but is nevertheless necessary and helpful, especially here where Hellmann carefully outlines different future scenarios—and concludes with thought-provoking historical parallels between the two post-unification Germanys of the 1890s and 1990s, capturing brilliantly today's chances and opportunities. Overall, this introductory text is

outstanding in its logical structure and willingness to make undergraduate life a little easier. If Hellmann had not so meticulously avoided humor and pointed remarks, and had included some exercises, there would be barely anything to criticize.

Thus, solid as Hellmann's book is, it might be a bit unattractive to the contemporary university freshman's taste. By contrast, Wilfried von Bredow probably has delivered the easiest (and rather grandfatherly) read on German foreign policy in decades—a model textbook. Besides its comprehensibility, the monograph is didactically sound, including a questionnaire for a revision of the book's central arguments, an annotated bibliography, and a helpful chronology. Unfortunately, the grouping of the content is suboptimal. Von Bredow both starts with recent issues like Germany's quest for a permanent seat in the security council of the United Nations and finishes with "current problems and challenges" (225). In between, several aspects of foreign policy are treated, but the order of the chapters is not self-explanatory. Above all, a rather lengthy section on the foreign policy of the Soviet-style German Democratic Republic (GDR) should have been dropped. Apart from the breathtaking extent of surveillance by the massive secret police system and the historically unique idea of bricking in its own people, the GDR is a strong contender for the least memorable episode in German history—in foreign policy terms, there is absolutely no doubt about it.

These two textbooks represent one side of a twofold farewell to old ideals, achieving this primarily by just being what they are—since the mere idea of a textbook is revolutionary. For decades, if not centuries, the German university system stood firm whenever the complete neglect of the average student's needs seemed at risk. Today, von Bredow and Hellmann emphasize their students' interests, feedback, and input when they elaborate on the guiding principles of their books. This is startling, because the notion of undergraduate education had been anathema to regular academics. Of course, there is an obvious structural reason behind the emergence of such accessible textbooks. The Bologna process, Europe's effort to create more comparable and compatible university degrees, is well under way in Germany. Over the last couple of years, universities have switched to an Anglo-Saxon-style system, with the B.A. and M.A. becoming the standard degrees. There are already countless bookshelves filled with literature on this topic and this is not the place to add to it substantially. One common finding is that a departure from "Humboldt's ideals"—unity of teaching and research, academic freedom and academic self-government—which have shaped humanities in Germany since the beginning of

the nineteenth century, is out of the question. The recent textbooks on German foreign policy reveal this perfectly. The curricula have become more and more streamlined and, to some extent, the old and probably outdated doctrine of academic freedom is under siege.

Interestingly, the same conclusion applies to the deployment of German troops in Afghanistan. As Bologna symbolizes the farewell to cherished educational principles, Afghanistan stands for a gradual shift in the realm of political ideals. Germany's military engagement in the Central Asian country as part of a multinational coalition seems to have provoked some sort of a strategic discourse for the first time in the postwar period. In fact, the meticulously cultivated foreign policy language of pre-unification times is changing rather rapidly. Even if there are only small indications, all four of the books reviewed here echo these developments. Within the *Handbook on German Foreign Policy* the majority of authors generally praises the civilian legacy of the Federal Republic and seems to regard it as a unique tradition worthy of defense. On the other hand, the articles in the volume edited by Thomas Jäger underscore "how difficult adequate answers" (84) are to find in the current environment. Accordingly, the concluding article contains a warning about "a highly visible disposition towards a kind of German isolationism" (620).

Thus, although these books show that there is still a relative lack of groundbreaking answers to the questions of the twenty-first century, at least German foreign policy analysts are starting to ask the right questions. Of course, this has to be seen in the light of a political reality where everyday discussion centers on existential issues such as a decimal place alteration of the health care tax. For the foreign policy discussions, the German political elite has developed an opaque sign language, cherishing tacit approval instead of transparent discussion. As a result, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, one of Germany's most important dailies, desperately, but nevertheless rightly so, called out for a "Mister Afghanistan," who could bring some remedy to the communicative disaster.<sup>2</sup> It is understandable or at least explicable why German politicians so doggedly picture the deployment of troops as a boy scout-like volunteer mission. Public opinion on this matter, however, oscillates between obscurantism and grave mistake. In short, political leadership is in great demand. In 1993, Andrei Markovits and others edited a volume under the title *From Bundesrepublik to Deutschland*.<sup>3</sup> Back then, it seemed a little early for this diagnosis, but if one looks at the foreign policy titles reviewed in this essay, this is exactly what is happening.

## Notes

1. Hans-Peter Schwarz, ed. *Handbuch zur deutschen Außenpolitik* (Munich, 1975).
2. Peter Blechschmidt, “Gesucht: Mister Afghanistan,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 16 October 2008.
3. Michael G. Huelshoff, Andrei S. Markovits, and Simon Reich, eds., *From Bundesrepublik to Deutschland: German Politics after Unification* (Ann Arbor, 1993).