FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY 27.02.2024 | Ralf Stegner

# The opposite of security

## In the face of increasing geopolitical risks, Europe must realign its defence policy. However, a European nuclear bomb would be a mistake

There is a unanimous perception that today, we face a security threat situation that differs from what was foreseeable in the early 2000s. At the moment, Russia under the Putin regime – but not the Russian people – is the greatest threat to peace and security in Germany and the rules-based international order. We have to address this challenge, and given Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine since 2022, it is justified to also reconsider and rethink fundamental German security and defence policy issues today and, partly, address them differently from how we would have three years ago. This concerns the military equipment of the Federal Army within a European security architecture and embedded in the Transatlantic Alliance, as well.

However, in this context, there are some who create the impression that the Cold War doctrines – garnished with a little cyber capability and drones – are suddenly relevant again, and they even bring into play the prospect of a German nuclear bomb or, put somewhat more carefully, the nuclear arming of Europe.

But the world is very different today, and a revival of the nuclear arms race is just the opposite of what we need for a more peaceful world. The historical, ethical and international law reasons why Germany is not a nuclear power remain valid. A German rearmament debate in the style of Franz Josef Strauß in the 1950s only serves the arms industry and its conservative allies, who seek to bypass the regular budget and at last fill the order books of *Rheinmetall and Co*., without all the historical ballast.

## 'Destroyer of worlds'

The latest debate was prompted by a remark made by convicted financial fraudster and former US President Donald Trump, who, in his typical rude manner, again voiced second thoughts about the US government's loyalty to the Alliance under his leadership. But discussing nuclear

armament in Europe at this point in time, before Trump is even an official presidential candidate and not a single vote has been cast, is grossly negligent, ignores the resilience of American democracy and does ill justice to just how serious the topic of so-called nuclear deterrence and the absolute destructive potential of nuclear weapons really is.

It seems appropriate that the film biography of J. Robert Oppenheimer should have brought home the moral dilemma of these terrible weapons to such a large audience. The Hindu quote that Oppenheimer, having developed this weapon, recalls remains noteworthy: 'Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.'

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Even though the only employment of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki occurred nearly 80 years ago, the global dimension of the nuclear destruction potential needs to be borne in mind whenever one contributes to the debate. Despite the nuclear arsenal having been reduced since the heyday of the Cold War, the existing nuclear warheads are still sufficient to wipe out humanity several times. All this shows that a few European nuclear weapons more, which is what some are calling for so irresponsibly, would have many completely unforeseeable consequences. They would certainly not contribute to European security.

The current foreign and security policy debate, which many would like to turn into a rearmament debate, unfortunately shows that a realistic and value-based position aimed at linking the good equipment of our parliamentary army and the strong support of our allies in Ukraine with a focus on diplomatic initiatives towards timely peace in Europe is regularly ridiculed and vilified as being divorced from the real world and even 'putinophile'. Above all, conservative, as well as some purportedly liberal forces, seek to take advantage of the polarising foreign policy debate to at last make the neoliberal dream of simultaneous welfare cuts ('the black zero', i.e. not going into the red), tax breaks for the high earners ('competitiveness') and a huge rise in the defence budget ('being prepared for war') come true outside the regular budget.

Here, it is worth emphasising that we bear the responsibility as members of the Transatlantic Alliance, as part of the European security architecture and towards the German Federal Army soldiers to more independently care for our security and, observing high standards, adequately and comprehensively equip the army as befits its mission. The

first special assets were justified given the dramatic situation in Ukraine and the acute need for action in the German army. However, each further Euro going into the defence budget has to be decided on in the regular budgetary procedure by the budget legislator, the German Federal Parliament.

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Suddenly forgetting altogether about budgetary discipline when it comes to cruise missiles, consultancy agreements on digitalising the Federal Army or even the 'European Bomb', while railway lines and schools are falling into disrepair, the last municipal swimming pool has to close and, owing to the 'difficult economic situation', employees are urged to display restraint in collective bargaining simply cannot be explained to citizens and poses a threat to democracy in the long run. This is all the more true given the enormous challenges we face regarding climate change. And it clearly shows what any serious debate over Germany's future defence capability in a revitalised European security architecture has to start off with: the end of the German debt ceiling — of this fiscal policy madness and German 'special way' which is rightfully discredited in expert circles.

While the US is spending hundreds of billions on modernising its infrastructure, German politics is getting lost in party-political pussyfooting and clinging to failed fiscal policy instruments, which prevent both necessary investment into our future and adequate financing of German and European security. The mixture of an even greater arms build-up, welfare cuts and tax breaks for the wealthy and the major corporations with a simultaneous orthodox interpretation of the German balanced budget amendment would be a toxic cocktail for the democratic parties and an energy drink for the right-wing radicals. If we seek to ensure acceptance of the ability to defend the nation and the Alliance, we must never play off internal and external security against social security in our democracy.



**Ralf Stegner**
Bordesholm

Ralf Stegner is a member of the German Bundestag and the Foreign Affairs Committee, a member of the Parliamentary Control Committee and disarmament policy spokesperson for the Social Democratic Party of Germany parliamentary group.