Mohsen Zamani
University of Tehran
PhD in Political Geography
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6210-2305
zamani_m@ut.ac.ir

Germany's Role in NATO and European Security Policy: Opportunities and Challenges

Abstract

Germany, as Europe's largest economy and a central actor on the continent, plays a pivotal role in European security and military policies. Its membership in NATO and active participation in shaping and implementing European security strategies have created significant opportunities for regional stability, while simultaneously presenting a range of domestic and international challenges. This article adopts a qualitative-analytical approach to examine the multifaceted role of Germany within NATO and European security policy, highlighting both the opportunities and limitations inherent in its position. The study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding Germany's security and political interactions.

Historically, in the aftermath of World War II and during the period of national division, Germany faced legal constraints and public sensitivity regarding military affairs. These factors initially led the country to adopt a cautious and pacifist approach to foreign and security policy, emphasizing multilateral cooperation and active engagement with international organizations. With the establishment of NATO and the evolving role of Europe within the global security architecture, Germany gradually expanded its military and diplomatic capacities, emerging as a key player in continental decision-making processes. This shift reflects the country's adaptation to changing geopolitical realities and global security demands.

Germany's role in NATO is particularly notable in areas such as collective commitments, participation in peacekeeping operations, and the development of European defense cooperation. The country has sought to balance its national interests with collective obligations, leveraging limited military capacities while maintaining a credible contribution to the alliance. Consequently, Germany's security policy is characterized by a combination of constrained military power, active diplomacy, and multilateral engagement, which collectively enhance European stability without escalating direct military tensions.

Keywords: *Germany, NATO, European Security, Diplomacy, Soft Power, Geopolitics*

Möhsün Zamani
Tehran Universiteti
siyasi coğrafiya üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6210-2305
zamani_m@ut.ac.ir

Almaniyanın NATO və Avropa təhlükəsizlik siyasətində rolu: imkanlar və çağırışlar

Xülasə

Almaniya Avropanın ən böyük iqtisadiyyatı və qitənin mərkəzi aktoru kimi Avropanın təhlükəsizlik və hərbi siyasətində mühüm rol oynayır. Onun NATO-ya üzvlüyü və Avropa təhlükəsizlik strategiyalarının formalaşdırılmasında və həyata keçirilməsində fəal iştirakı regional sabitlik üçün əhəmiyyətli imkanlar yaratmış, eyni zamanda, bir sıra daxili və beynəlxalq çağırışlar

təqdim etmişdir. Bu məqalə Almaniyanın NATO və Avropa təhlükəsizlik siyasətində çoxşaxəli rolunu araşdırmaq üçün keyfiyyət-analitik yanaşmanı qəbul edir, onun mövqeyinə xas olan həm imkanları, həm də məhdudiyyətləri vurğulayır. Tədqiqat Almaniyanın təhlükəsizlik və siyasi qarşılıqlı əlaqələrini başa düşmək üçün hərtərəfli çərçivə təmin etmək məqsədi daşıyır.

Tarixən, İkinci Dünya Müharibəsindən sonra və milli bölünmə dövründə Almaniya hərbi işlərlə bağlı hüquqi məhdudiyyətlər və ictimai həssaslıqla üzləşdi. Bu amillər ilkin olaraq ölkəni xarici və təhlükəsizlik siyasətinə ehtiyatlı və pasifist yanaşmaya sövq etdi, beynəlxalq təşkilatlarla çoxtərəfli əməkdaşlığa və aktiv fəaliyyətə önəm verdi. NATO-nun yaradılması və Avropanın qlobal təhlükəsizlik arxitekturası çərçivəsində inkişaf edən rolu ilə Almaniya tədricən öz hərbi və diplomatik imkanlarını genişləndirdi və qitə miqyasında qərarların qəbulu proseslərində əsas oyunçu kimi çıxış etdi. Bu dəyişiklik ölkənin dəyişən geosiyasi reallıqlara və qlobal təhlükəsizlik tələblərinə uyğunlaşmasını əks etdirir.

Almaniyanın NATO-dakı rolu kollektiv öhdəliklər, sülhməramlı əməliyyatlarda iştirak və Avropa müdafiə əməkdaşlığının inkişafı kimi sahələrdə xüsusilə diqqətəlayiqdir. Ölkə öz milli maraqlarını kollektiv öhdəliklərlə balanslaşdırmağa, məhdud hərbi imkanlardan istifadə etməklə alyansa etibarlı töhfə verməyə çalışıb. Nəticə etibarilə, Almaniyanın təhlükəsizlik siyasəti məhdud hərbi güc, aktiv diplomatiya və çoxtərəfli qarşılıqlı əlaqə ilə xarakterizə olunur ki, bu da birbaşa hərbi gərginliyi artırmadan Avropanın sabitliyini kollektiv şəkildə gücləndirir.

Açar sözlər: Almaniya, NATO, Avropa təhlükəsizliyi, diplomatiya, yumşaq güc, geosiyasət

Introduction

Germany, as Europe's largest economy and a central actor in continental and global politics, occupies a pivotal position within NATO and the broader European security architecture. Its foreign and security policy has historically been shaped by a combination of domestic constraints, historical experiences, and the evolving international environment. The legacy of World War II, followed by the division and eventual reunification of the country, has instilled a cautious, multilateralist approach to security matters, emphasizing diplomacy, collective defense, and adherence to international norms (Paterson, 2012; Maull, 2013). This historical context continues to influence Germany's strategic behavior, balancing national interests with commitments to NATO and European security frameworks.

Membership in NATO since 1955 has provided Germany with both a platform and a set of obligations that have defined its security and defense policies. Within the alliance, Germany has consistently sought to reconcile the principles of collective defense with domestic limitations and public opinion, which traditionally favors restraint in military engagements (Kundnani, 2015). The Bundeswehr, Germany's armed forces, has therefore often operated under constraints that emphasize peacekeeping, stabilization missions, and collective operations rather than independent offensive capabilities (Müller, 2020). Consequently, Germany's role in NATO is characterized by a nuanced balance between effective contribution and cautious engagement, reflecting both strategic necessity and domestic political realities.

The reunification of Germany in 1990 marked a significant shift in its foreign and security policy. As a unified state, Germany gained greater political and economic capacity to contribute to European security, but it also faced heightened expectations from both European partners and NATO allies (Bulmer & Paterson, 2018). The country's commitment to European integration and leadership in EU defense and security matters has been a defining feature of its policy since then. Germany has increasingly emphasized multilateral approaches, participating in joint European defense initiatives and collaborative security operations, while promoting stability and conflict prevention across the continent (Hoffmann, 2017). This approach has enabled Germany to exercise influence within Europe without contravening domestic norms against militarism and unilateral military action.

Germany's role in European security is further complicated by economic interdependencies and energy considerations. Its reliance on international trade and energy imports, particularly natural gas, has historically influenced its approach to regional security crises and geopolitical tensions

(Eckersley, 2019). The balance between ensuring energy security, sustaining economic growth, and fulfilling NATO obligations requires a careful calibration of policy tools, combining diplomacy, negotiation, and selective military engagement. The crisis in Ukraine and rising tensions with Russia have highlighted both the opportunities and constraints inherent in Germany's security posture, as policymakers navigate the interplay between collective defense responsibilities and domestic economic and political priorities (Risse, 2020).

Beyond Europe, Germany's engagement in global security governance reflects its broader commitment to multilateralism. Participation in NATO operations outside Europe, contributions to UN peacekeeping missions, and involvement in international conflict resolution initiatives illustrate Germany's dual strategy: leveraging alliance membership to project influence while adhering to norms of limited military engagement (Karnitschnig, 2019). This dual strategy enhances Germany's credibility as a responsible security actor, reinforcing its capacity to shape European and global security agendas. However, it also exposes the country to pressures arising from differing expectations of allies, the complexity of multinational operations, and domestic debates over the proper scope of military involvement (Paterson, 2012).

Scholarly analyses emphasize that Germany's security policy is not solely determined by its military capacity, but is equally shaped by soft power, diplomacy, and normative leadership. By promoting human rights, rule of law, and conflict resolution within NATO and the EU, Germany exerts influence beyond conventional military means (Kundnani, 2015). This combination of hard and soft power reflects an understanding of contemporary security challenges that extend beyond traditional interstate conflicts, encompassing hybrid threats, cyber risks, and transnational crises. Germany's approach thus represents a modern model of security policy, integrating defense, diplomacy, and normative influence in a complex and interconnected international system (Bulmer & Paterson, 2018).

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Domestic political constraints, including public skepticism toward military engagement and legal limitations on the Bundeswehr's operations, impose limits on Germany's strategic options. Additionally, geopolitical competition, shifts in U.S. foreign policy, and the emergence of new global powers require ongoing adaptation of Germany's security strategy. Balancing national interests, alliance commitments, and regional stability in this dynamic environment remains a central concern for policymakers, highlighting the need for flexible, adaptive, and forward-looking security policies (Maull, 2013; Hoffmann, 2017).

In summary, Germany's role in NATO and European security policy exemplifies the interplay between historical experience, domestic constraints, and international obligations. Its cautious yet proactive engagement illustrates a strategic balance that leverages multilateral cooperation, normative influence, and selective military involvement. By analyzing Germany's historical trajectory, institutional frameworks, and contemporary challenges, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of its contributions, limitations, and opportunities within NATO and the broader European security landscape. Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for assessing Germany's current position, but also for predicting future developments in European and global security arrangements.

Research

This study adopts a qualitative-analytical approach to examine Germany's role in NATO and European security policy. Data were collected through a comprehensive review of academic literature, policy reports, official NATO and EU documents, and historical records. The research applies a comparative and interpretive framework to identify opportunities, challenges, and strategic patterns in Germany's security behavior, emphasizing both domestic constraints and multilateral interactions in shaping policy decisions.

Theoretical Framework: The study of international relations (IR) provides essential analytical frameworks for understanding state behavior, security policies, and multilateral interactions. Classical IR theories, such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism, offer distinct perspectives on state motives and strategies within the international system. Realism, particularly its offensive and defensive strands, emphasizes the centrality of power, security dilemmas, and the anarchic nature of

the international system. Realist scholars argue that states primarily act to maximize security and relative power in a competitive environment (Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1979). In the context of Germany, realism provides insights into its engagement with NATO as a mechanism to ensure collective security while managing domestic limitations and national capabilities.

In contrast, liberalism highlights the importance of international institutions, interdependence, and cooperative mechanisms in mitigating conflict. Liberal theorists assert that states benefit from multilateral organization membership, adherence to international norms, and promotion of cooperative agreements, which reduce the likelihood of conflict and enhance collective security (Keohane & Nye, 2001). For Germany, active participation in NATO and the European Union not only provides a platform for influencing European security policies but also demonstrates its commitment to multilateralism and norms-based diplomacy.

Constructivism, as a more recent IR theory, emphasizes the role of norms, identities, and social beliefs in shaping state behavior. From this perspective, Germany, as a state with a distinct historical identity, has designed its foreign policy with an emphasis on pacifism, respect for human rights, and multilateral engagement, shaped by its experiences in World War II and the division of the country (Wendt, 1999). Constructivism explains that Germany's actions in NATO and the EU are not solely driven by material interests but are also influenced by national identity and internationally accepted norms.

1.Realism and German Security Policy. Realism provides a critical lens for analyzing Germany's security policy. Offensive realism suggests that states in an anarchic system seek to maximize power and ensure survival by increasing military capacity and competing with other actors (Mearsheimer, 2001). However, Germany, due to domestic constraints, historical sensitivities toward militarism, and public opinion, has pursued a different path, relying more on collective security and participation in international organizations. NATO serves as the central platform for Germany to balance security needs with internal limitations while maintaining an influential role in European security governance.

Defensive realism emphasizes collective security and avoidance of direct military confrontation. From this standpoint, Germany limits independent military capabilities and focuses on peacekeeping, stabilization missions, and multilateral cooperation. This approach demonstrates that, despite its economic and military potential, Germany adopts a cautious security strategy grounded in cooperation and risk management.

2.Liberalism and Multilateral Institutions. From a liberal perspective, NATO and the European Union serve as institutions that reduce mistrust and coordinate security among states. Germany leverages these institutions to advance national interests, manage crises, and promote European stability through collective decision-making (Keohane & Nye, 2001). Economic diplomacy, defense cooperation, and participation in joint missions illustrate Germany's liberal strategy, which relies on structural interactions and effective collaboration with other states.

Liberalism also highlights the significance of economic and political interdependence, especially in energy and trade. Germany's security and foreign policies are consistently aligned with the goal of maintaining long-term cooperation with European partners and fulfilling NATO commitments. This alignment between national interests and international obligations exemplifies Germany's policy approach from a liberal perspective.

3.Constructivism and the Role of Norms. Constructivism emphasizes that Germany's foreign policy is shaped not only by power calculations but also by identity, history, and accepted norms (Wendt, 1999). Post-World War II Germany adopted a pacifist and multilateralist identity, which has strongly influenced its security and defense policies. Public sensitivity to militarism and a focus on human rights and international law have led Germany to prioritize diplomatic tools, soft power, and multilateral engagement over unilateral military action.

From the constructivist perspective, NATO and the EU function not only as operational platforms but also as arenas for reproducing norms and reinforcing Germany's European identity. Multilateral cooperation and interaction with European allies reflect the link between national identity, international norms, and strategic security behavior. This theoretical framework explains how Germany can increase its influence in Europe and globally while maintaining normative legitimacy.

4.German Security Policy Instruments. The theoretical analysis indicates that Germany employs three primary instruments to implement its security policy:

Multilateral Diplomacy: Active participation in NATO, the EU, and other international organizations to manage crises and develop joint security policies.

Soft Power: Political influence, public diplomacy, scientific cooperation, and promotion of legal and humanitarian norms at the European and global levels.

Limited but Modern Military Capability: Engagement in collective and peacekeeping operations within domestic and historical constraints.

These instruments demonstrate that Germany's security policy is a multilayered and flexible approach, balancing domestic limitations, collective commitments, and global threats.

5.Linking Theory and Practice. Integrating realism, liberalism, and constructivism provides a comprehensive framework for understanding Germany's security behavior in NATO and Europe. Realism explains why Germany relies on NATO for security, liberalism clarifies the importance of institutions and multilateral cooperation, and constructivism illustrates how behavior is influenced by identity, history, and norms. This theoretical combination helps analyze Germany's opportunities, constraints, and strategic patterns in a complex European security environment.

Findings. The past decade has been a decisive period for Germany's security and defense policy within the framework of NATO and a united Europe. Since 2014, following the Ukraine crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea, Europe's geopolitical landscape underwent fundamental changes, and the collective security of the European Union faced diverse threats (Risse, 2020). These developments placed additional pressure on Germany, as Europe's largest economy and a key pillar of NATO, to redefine its role while fulfilling its international commitments within the constraints of domestic limitations and historical sensitivities (Kundnani, 2015).

Within this context, this study qualitatively examines Germany's behavior in the European security arena and analyzes its main opportunities and challenges. The findings indicate that Germany, by adopting a multilayered approach based on diplomacy, multilateral cooperation, soft power, and limited military engagement, has been able to maintain its position within Europe's collective security framework.

NATO Developments and Germany's Role. One of the most significant events impacting Germany's security policy in the past decade was the Ukraine crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. This event not only transformed Europe's security order but also compelled NATO member states, particularly Germany, to reassess their commitments to collective defense and deterrence in Eastern Europe. The post-crisis developments demonstrated that Europe's security environment had undergone profound geopolitical changes, with emerging threats including hybrid and cyber challenges, testing the collective response capacity of both the European Union and NATO (Maull, 2013). Germany, as Europe's largest economy and a central pillar of NATO, was thus confronted with the need to redefine its regional security role and manage complex crises while taking into account domestic constraints and historical sensitivities (Kundnani, 2015).

In response to the Ukraine crisis, Germany adopted a multilayered strategy that encompassed increased military participation, active diplomacy, and strengthened cooperation with European partners. The first component of this approach involved enhanced participation in multinational military exercises. Germany deployed forces to Eastern European countries, including Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia, and actively participated in NATO drills, thereby reinforcing its deterrent role. These measures not only enhanced collective defense capabilities but also strengthened strategic trust among European allies. Participation in these exercises, particularly combined land and air operations, highlighted Germany's commitment to collective security and its military flexibility (Müller, 2020).

The second pillar of Germany's strategy emphasized diplomacy and the avoidance of direct confrontation with Russia. Due to historical limitations, public sensitivity, and past wartime experiences, Germany refrained from pursuing an independent offensive military posture. Instead, it prioritized negotiations, proactive diplomacy, and economic sanctions. Leveraging economic and diplomatic measures alongside NATO's collective mechanisms allowed Germany to maintain a

balance of power while preventing direct military escalation (Paterson, 2012). This approach illustrates the intersection of defensive realism and multilateral diplomacy, enabling Germany to safeguard Europe's collective security while respecting internal and historical constraints.

The third component focused on strengthening cooperation with France and other European partners. Germany leveraged EU and NATO mechanisms to enhance coordination in collective operations, crisis management, and strategic decision-making. These collaborations laid the groundwork for Europe's soft leadership and regional security shaping. Joint defense projects with France, development of EU rapid reaction forces, and participation in European security policy-making exemplify this strategy (Bulmer & Paterson, 2018). These initiatives demonstrate that Germany, through institutionally guided diplomacy and multilateral cooperation, has maintained its influence in Europe's collective security architecture and emerged as an effective actor within NATO and the EU.

Analysis of these strategies indicates that Germany's security policy in the past decade has been based on a balance between hard power, diplomacy, and collective commitments. Despite possessing economic strength and limited military capacity, Germany has successfully implemented a defensive realist strategy that considers historical sensitivities and domestic constraints while maintaining an influential role in NATO and Europe. This behavioral model underscores Germany's strategic adaptability and flexibility in addressing emerging threats and geopolitical shifts.

Moreover, Germany's increased military participation in Eastern Europe and NATO exercises contributed to building strategic trust among European allies, which in turn facilitated coordinated collective responses to external threats. This approach demonstrates that Germany has effectively leveraged multilateral mechanisms and institutional cooperation to enhance its impact on Europe's collective security, rather than relying solely on independent military power.

Simultaneously, the emphasis on diplomacy and avoidance of direct confrontation with Russia reflects the reality that Germany frames its foreign and security policies within its historical experience and national identity. Historical lessons, public sensitivity toward militarism, and democratic values have led Germany to favor non-aggressive measures, preventive diplomacy, and collective crisis management (Paterson, 2012). These characteristics make Germany a successful example of a state that can preserve collective security while avoiding direct military conflict with major powers.

Finally, strengthened cooperation with France and other European partners has enabled Germany to act as a leading player in Europe's security policies. These collaborations have not only enhanced military and deterrence capabilities but also contributed to political and diplomatic resilience in Europe. Utilizing EU and NATO mechanisms to coordinate collective operations, strategic decision-making, and development of joint security policies represents a clear example of Germany's soft, institutionally guided leadership (Bulmer & Paterson, 2018).

Overall, an analysis of Germany's actions from 2014 to 2025 demonstrates that its security policy has been based on a defensive-realist approach, active diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation. Germany has successfully balanced domestic limitations, historical sensitivities, and geopolitical pressures while consolidating its position in Europe's collective security architecture and maintaining opportunities for soft leadership and strategic influence at both regional and NATO levels.

Diplomatic Security and European Cooperation

In the past decade, Germany's security diplomacy in Europe has been anchored on three key pillars, reflecting a multilayered, institutionally guided, and flexible approach to collective security. These pillars include strengthening the European Union as an independent security actor, active participation in multilateral institutions, and building consensus in response to geopolitical threats.

1. Strengthening the European Union as an Independent Security Actor. Over the past decade, Germany has played a pivotal role in enhancing the EU's capacity as an independent security actor. Since 2014, following the Ukraine crisis, the need for an autonomous European defense and security capability, particularly against Russian threats, became evident. Germany, by supporting the establishment of EU Rapid Response Forces and strengthening joint security institutions, sought to increase Europe's self-reliance in collective security matters (Hoffmann, 2017).

These measures have not only enhanced European deterrence capabilities but also allowed Germany to leverage collective EU capacities for crisis management without relying solely on independent military tools. For instance, Germany's participation in EU rapid reaction programs and development of joint command-and-control structures demonstrates its commitment to a structured, institutionally grounded European security framework. Such efforts enhance both physical security across the continent and trust among member states, fostering political and defense convergence within the EU.

2. Participation in the European Council and Multilateral Institutions. The second pillar of Germany's security diplomacy is active engagement in European and international multilateral institutions. Germany has utilized its diplomatic capacities to play a key role in shaping collective security policies and managing regional crises (Karnitschnig, 2019). Through active involvement in the European Council, NATO, and EU security working groups, Germany has influenced critical decision-making and strengthened coordination among allies.

Leveraging multilateral frameworks allows Germany to exert influence over collective policies without engaging in direct military confrontation. Participation in these institutions has also enabled Germany to take a leading role in managing non-military crises, such as cyber threats, migration, and energy security. This institutionally guided and diplomatic approach reflects Germany's adoption of liberal principles in international relations, emphasizing the importance of institutions, multilateral cooperation, and interdependence.

3. Building Consensus Against Geopolitical Threats. The third pillar has focused on creating consensus among European states in response to geopolitical threats. Eastern European crises, cyber threats, and escalating economic tensions highlighted the need for extensive coordination at the European level. Germany, through diplomatic leadership and fostering dialogue among allies, sought to provide effective collective responses to these challenges.

For example, after the Ukraine crisis, Germany collaborated with France and other European partners to implement coordinated economic and diplomatic sanctions against Russia while maintaining security negotiations to mitigate the risk of military escalation. These efforts demonstrate Germany's ability to balance soft power, diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation, maintaining its leadership role without provoking direct confrontation with major powers.

Beyond military threats, cybersecurity and economic challenges required collective responses as well. Germany developed coordinated cybersecurity initiatives across the EU and worked with European institutions to manage economic crises, reinforcing its leadership in shaping coordinated and effective responses. These measures illustrate how Germany has leveraged its diplomatic and institutionally grounded power to strengthen regional security while upholding its collective commitments within NATO and the EU.

4. Overall Analysis and Implications. Analysis of these three pillars shows that Germany's security diplomacy in 2014–2025 has been based on several key principles:

Focus on institutions and multilateral cooperation: Utilizing EU and NATO mechanisms to manage crises and implement collective decision-making.

Soft leadership and active diplomacy: Prioritizing diplomacy and institutionally guided strategies over direct military confrontation to influence European security.

Balance between domestic interests and collective security: Safeguarding historical sensitivities and internal constraints while fulfilling an effective role in regional security.

This approach demonstrates that Germany has successfully consolidated its position within Europe's collective security architecture and emerged as a key actor in EU and NATO security policy. Germany's security diplomacy, combining soft power, multilateral collaboration, and institutional engagement, exemplifies the practical application of liberal principles in international relations, effectively guiding the development of collective European security.

Tools of Power and Domestic Policies of Germany. Over the past decade, Germany has utilized three main tools to implement its security policy: limited but modern military power, soft power and public diplomacy, and multilateral, institutionally guided diplomacy. These tools reflect Germany's

multilayered and flexible approach in addressing security threats and geopolitical challenges in Europe, balancing domestic constraints, collective commitments, and external pressures.

1. Limited but Modern Military Power. Despite its economic capacity and potential military capabilities, Germany has adopted a limited but modern approach to hard power over the past decade. This strategy focuses on participation in NATO missions, peacekeeping operations, and joint exercises, without creating an independent offensive capability (Müller, 2020). Such a policy is designed to maintain collective security and strengthen deterrence within the framework of international agreements and multilateral institutions.

Germany's involvement in NATO rapid reaction forces, joint military exercises in Eastern Europe, and UN peacekeeping operations exemplify this targeted and constrained strategy. These actions not only demonstrate Germany's commitment to Europe's collective security but also strengthen trust among allies and enhance collective defense capabilities.

Furthermore, Germany has emphasized cooperation and coordination with other European countries and NATO members rather than pursuing independent military power. This approach has allowed Germany to remain an effective security actor in Europe while avoiding direct confrontation with major powers and respecting domestic political constraints.

2. Soft Power and Public Diplomacy. The second pillar of Germany's tools of power is soft power and public diplomacy. Germany has promoted human rights norms, international law, and scientific and cultural cooperation to enhance its influence both at the European and global levels (Kundnani, 2015). Utilizing soft power enables Germany to advance its security objectives without relying solely on military instruments.

Notable examples of Germany's soft power include supporting joint educational initiatives with other European countries, establishing cultural and scientific exchange programs, and participating in international organizations to promote human rights and rule of law. These actions enhance Germany's diplomatic credibility and influence, fostering convergence and cooperation among European partners.

Soft power has also allowed Germany to take a leading role in non-military domains, such as cybersecurity, energy security, and migration management. Especially in contexts where the use of hard power is limited, soft power has significantly contributed to the effectiveness of Germany's foreign and security policy and reinforced its position within Europe and NATO.

3. Multilateral and Institutionally Guided Diplomacy. The third pillar is multilateral, institutionally guided diplomacy, which enables Germany to leverage NATO and EU structures for coordination and collective responses to crises. This approach involves active participation in multilateral institutions, involvement in security decision-making, and management of regional crises.

By utilizing NATO and EU mechanisms, Germany has strengthened coordination among allies and ensured effective collective responses to geopolitical threats. For instance, Germany's management of the Ukraine crisis and coordinated European responses to cyber and economic threats exemplify the use of multilateral diplomacy.

This institutionally grounded and multilateral approach reflects Germany's commitment to cooperation and interdependence in international relations. Complementing limited military power and soft power instruments, it plays a crucial role in maintaining collective security and stability in Europe.

4. Overall Analysis and Implications. Analysis of these three primary tools demonstrates that Germany's security policy has followed a multilayered and balanced approach. The combination of limited military power, soft power, and institutionally guided diplomacy has enabled Germany to implement its NATO and EU commitments while respecting domestic constraints and historical sensitivities.

This multilayered model shows that Germany has successfully balanced geopolitical pressures, domestic limitations, and international obligations, consolidating its role as a key actor in European security. The German approach exemplifies the practical application of liberal institutionalism in

international relations, highlighting the importance of cooperation, institutions, and interdependence in collective European security.

By utilizing these three tools, Germany has demonstrated strategic flexibility and adaptability in responding to crises and emerging threats. This combination has also allowed Germany to maintain soft leadership and strategic influence while strengthening Europe's collective security and solidifying its position within NATO and the EU.

Ultimately, Germany's security policy over the past decade illustrates that by combining limited military power, soft power, and multilateral, institutionally guided diplomacy, it has established a balanced and effective model for regional and collective security. This approach can serve as a valuable example for other countries facing domestic constraints and historical sensitivities, demonstrating that a diversified toolkit of power—integrating military, diplomatic, and soft power instruments—can effectively safeguard security and stability in complex geopolitical contexts.

Domestic and International Challenges of Germany's Security Policy

Analysis of the findings indicates that Germany's security policy in the past decade has faced a range of domestic and international challenges. These challenges have not only influenced strategic decision-making and policy implementation but have also affected Germany's interactions with European and global partners. The most prominent of these challenges include public opinion pressure and historical sensitivity toward militarization, economic and energy dependence, and geopolitical threats arising from shifts in U.S. foreign policy.

1. Public Opinion Pressure and Historical Sensitivity Toward Militarization. One of the most significant domestic challenges is Germany's historical and social sensitivity toward militarization. Germany's 20th-century history, particularly the experience of World War II, has made public opinion and policymakers extremely cautious regarding any independent and offensive military actions (Maull, 2013). These domestic legal and social constraints have led Germany to focus its security policy on defensive approaches, limited participation in international military operations, and strengthening institutionally guided frameworks, without developing an independent offensive military capability.

This historical sensitivity has also influenced Germany's security and diplomatic communications. Decisions regarding military deployments in Eastern Europe or participation in NATO exercises are carefully assessed to manage domestic reactions and political repercussions. As a result, Germany continuously strives to balance its international commitments with internal constraints, ensuring that social and political legitimacy is maintained.

2. Economic and Energy Dependence. The second major challenge relates to Germany's economic and energy dependence on other countries, particularly Russia. Due to its need for energy imports and significant trade relations with European neighbors, Germany's security decisions have faced constraints (Eckersley, 2019). This dependence means that any security or military policy that could threaten economic interests must be carefully evaluated.

For instance, the imposition of economic sanctions against Russia following the Ukraine crisis created substantial political and economic pressure on Germany and highlighted the need for balanced and coordinated policies within the European Union. Germany was compelled to reconcile support for Europe's collective security with the protection of its energy and economic interests. Such economic limitations have also influenced Germany's military capabilities and soft power initiatives, necessitating a multilayered and institutionally guided approach to crisis management.

3. Geopolitical Threats and Shifts in U.S. Foreign Policy. The third challenge concerns geopolitical threats and changes in U.S. foreign policy in Europe. The United States' reduced direct engagement in European security, coupled with Washington's strategic pivot toward the Asia-Pacific region, has placed additional pressure on Germany to assume a leadership role and strengthen deterrence in Europe (Risse, 2020).

This shift in the global balance of power affects not only military security but also cybersecurity, energy security, and economic and migration-related crises. Germany must simultaneously maintain collective security, foster coordination among allies, and manage domestic pressures. This

underscores that Germany's security policy in the past decade is shaped not only by internal factors but also by complex interactions with the international environment and global geopolitical changes.

4. Overall Analysis and Implications. Analysis of these three key challenges demonstrates that Germany's security policy in 2014–2025 is built upon a precise balance between national interests, domestic constraints, and international obligations. By combining limited military power, soft power, and institutionally guided diplomacy, Germany has been able to respond to both domestic and international pressures while maintaining an effective role in Europe's collective security.

Domestic and international challenges have also directly influenced Germany's ability to exercise soft leadership, build consensus among allies, and manage regional crises. Historical sensitivities and public opinion pressures, along with economic and energy dependencies, have created both limitations and opportunities for Germany's security policy.

From a strategic perspective, these challenges illustrate that Germany must maintain flexibility, adaptability, and coordination with European institutions and allies while executing an active leadership role. Germany's successful navigation of these challenges provides a model for other European countries facing similar domestic constraints and international pressures.

Ultimately, this analysis emphasizes that Germany's security policy over the past decade is a complex, multilayered process, in which limited military power, soft power, and institutionally guided diplomacy are combined to address domestic and international challenges and ensure Europe's collective security. This model demonstrates that integrating multiple instruments of power is essential for effectively safeguarding security and stability in a complex and evolving geopolitical environment.

Opportunities for Germany's Security Policy. Despite numerous domestic and international challenges, the past decade has also presented significant opportunities for Germany in the field of security policy. These opportunities stem from Germany's geopolitical position, institutional capacities, diplomatic capabilities, and soft power instruments, allowing the country to strengthen its role in Europe's collective security, exercise soft leadership, and develop a flexible and sustainable security policy.

1. European Leadership and Strengthening Institutions. One of the most significant opportunities for Germany is its leadership role in Europe and the strengthening of the European Union as an independent security actor. In light of the United States' reduced direct engagement in European security and increasing threats in Eastern Europe, Germany is uniquely positioned to enhance EU institutional mechanisms and exercise soft leadership (Bulmer & Paterson, 2018).

Germany has supported the establishment of EU rapid reaction forces, reinforced joint security institutions, and actively participated in multilateral bodies, utilizing institutionally guided and collective power as a primary tool for European security. These actions not only enhance European cohesion but also build trust among regional allies, providing a foundation for Germany's soft leadership and strategic influence.

By strengthening institutions, Germany can increase its role in collective security decision-making within the EU and offer coordinated policies for regional security. This institution-based approach allows Germany to exert indirect and sustainable influence in security matters while managing domestic constraints and sensitivities.

2. Expanding Diplomatic Influence and Soft Power. A second major opportunity is the expansion of Germany's diplomatic influence and soft power. The use of diplomacy, dialogue, multilateral cooperation, and consensus-building among allies has allowed Germany to exert non-military influence in collective security. Soft power has enabled Germany to achieve long-term impact in cultural, educational, scientific, and political domains (Kundnani, 2015).

Notable examples include supporting academic and cultural exchange programs with other European countries, active participation in international organizations, and developing regional and transregional cooperation networks. These instruments have strengthened Germany's diplomatic credibility and soft leadership role in Europe's collective security.

Soft power has also allowed Germany to play an effective role in non-military domains such as cybersecurity, energy security, migration management, and climate-related challenges. Particularly

when the use of hard power is limited, these soft power initiatives have enabled Germany to maintain an active and influential role without triggering direct military confrontation.

3. Developing a Flexible and Norm-Based Security Policy. The third key opportunity is the development of a flexible and norm-based security policy that balances domestic constraints, international obligations, and emerging threats. By combining limited military power, soft power, and institutionally guided diplomacy, Germany has been able to implement a balanced, resilient, and effective approach to address complex geopolitical challenges.

This flexible policy enables Germany to maintain effective interaction with European allies and NATO while managing internal sensitivities and constraints. By adopting a norm-based approach, Germany can consolidate its role as a defender of human rights, international law, and collective cooperation, while offering a stable and predictable security policy.

A flexible security policy also allows Germany to respond to emerging threats and shifts in the geopolitical environment with speed and precision. For instance, the Ukraine crisis, cyber threats, and changes in U.S. foreign policy required coordinated and collective responses. Germany's flexible and institutionally grounded approach has enabled it to leverage its geopolitical position and safeguard Europe's collective security effectively.

4. Overall Analysis and Implications. Analysis of these opportunities demonstrates that the combination of European leadership, soft power, and a flexible security policy provides Germany with significant strategic advantages. These opportunities allow Germany not only to play an active and effective role in Europe's collective security but also to enhance its international standing and long-term influence.

From a strategic perspective, these opportunities indicate that Germany can use its institutional capacities, diplomatic tools, and soft power to implement a balanced and effective policy that addresses both domestic and international challenges while consolidating its soft leadership role. In this way, Germany has successfully converted geopolitical and institutional opportunities into actionable strategic tools.

Ultimately, the past decade demonstrates that Germany, through the intelligent management of these opportunities, has strengthened Europe's collective security, solidified its soft leadership, and implemented a resilient and flexible security policy. This experience provides a successful model for other European countries and international actors in combining limited military power, institutionally guided diplomacy, and soft power to ensure regional stability and security.

Results and Discussion. The past decade has been a decisive period for Germany's security and defense policy within NATO and Europe's collective security framework. Since 2014, following the Ukraine crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea, Europe's geopolitical landscape has undergone profound changes, exposing the European Union's collective security to a wide range of threats. These developments placed considerable pressure on Germany, as Europe's largest economy and a central pillar of NATO, to redefine its role and, while respecting domestic constraints and historical sensitivities, fulfill its international commitments. The Ukraine crisis highlighted the need for NATO member states, particularly Germany, to reassess their collective defense obligations and strengthen deterrence in Eastern Europe. In response, Germany increased participation in multinational military exercises and deployed forces to Eastern European countries, reinforcing its deterrent role. Concurrently, German policy emphasized diplomacy and avoiding direct confrontation with Russia, utilizing diplomatic tools, multilateral negotiations, and economic sanctions to prevent military escalation. Germany also strengthened cooperation with France and other European partners, enhancing coordination in collective operations and strategic decision-making, thereby fostering soft leadership in Europe and shaping regional security.

Despite external pressures, domestic constraints posed significant challenges for Germany. Historical and social sensitivities toward militarization, coupled with legal and societal limitations, prevented Germany from developing an independent offensive military capability. Consequently, Germany's security policies have focused on defensive tools, limited participation in international military operations, and institutionally guided diplomacy. These historical sensitivities have shaped

decision-making processes and diplomatic communications, requiring careful management of public opinion and political legitimacy.

Economic and energy dependence further constrained Germany's security policy. Reliance on energy imports from Russia and extensive trade with other European countries limited the scope of security decisions, as any military or sanctioning actions that could threaten economic interests needed careful consideration. The Ukraine crisis exemplified this challenge, as economic sanctions imposed pressure both domestically and internationally, highlighting the need for coordination within the European Union and the delicate balance between collective security and national interests.

At the international level, shifts in U.S. foreign policy and reduced American engagement in European security exerted additional pressure on Germany to assume a leadership role and reinforce deterrence within NATO and Europe. These shifts, combined with emerging threats such as cybersecurity risks, energy insecurity, and economic volatility, necessitated a flexible and institutionally grounded policy capable of responding effectively to evolving challenges. Germany employed institutionally guided diplomacy, multilateral engagement, and consensus-building among allies to provide collective responses to these threats while simultaneously managing domestic constraints and historical sensitivities.

Despite these challenges, the past decade also presented significant opportunities for Germany. Its geopolitical position, institutional capacity, and diplomatic capabilities allowed the country to exercise soft leadership and enhance its influence in Europe's collective security. By strengthening the European Union as an independent security actor, supporting rapid reaction forces, and reinforcing joint security institutions, Germany has increased its impact on strategic decision-making and collective operations. These measures have bolstered European cohesion, enhanced trust among allies, and provided a foundation for Germany's long-term soft leadership and strategic influence.

The use of diplomatic tools and soft power, including cultural, educational, scientific, and political cooperation, enabled Germany to exert non-military influence in collective security and regional crisis management. Soft power allowed Germany to maintain an active and influential role without provoking direct military confrontation, particularly in contexts where hard power was limited.

Additionally, the development of a flexible and norm-based security policy presented another important opportunity. By combining limited military capabilities, institutionally guided diplomacy, and soft power, Germany managed to balance domestic constraints, international obligations, and emerging threats, thereby implementing a sustainable, effective, and predictable security policy. This flexible approach allowed Germany to respond swiftly and accurately to changes in the geopolitical environment while consolidating its role as a defender of human rights, international law, and collective cooperation.

Analysis of these findings indicates that Germany's security policy over the past decade has been built upon a multilayered approach combining institution-based strategies, active diplomacy, and soft power. This approach has enabled Germany to effectively fulfill its international commitments, manage domestic sensitivities and historical constraints, and maintain a central role in Europe's collective security. The combination of opportunities and challenges demonstrates that Germany has successfully consolidated its position as a key pillar of NATO and a central actor in European security, balancing national interests, domestic limitations, and international obligations through a careful integration of multiple power instruments.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that, despite numerous constraints and threats, the past decade has provided Germany with a historic opportunity to leverage soft leadership, institutionally guided diplomacy, and flexible security policies to strengthen its role in NATO and Europe's collective security. Germany's experience illustrates that success in security policy depends on the ability to coordinate multiple instruments of power, manage domestic sensitivities, and respond effectively to international challenges, offering a practical model for other European countries and international actors facing complex and evolving security environments.

Conclusion

The past decade has been a decisive period for Germany's security and defense policy within NATO and Europe's collective security framework. Regional and global developments, including the Ukraine crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, fundamentally altered Europe's geopolitical environment and exposed the European Union's collective security to diverse threats. These developments placed significant pressure on Germany, as Europe's largest economy and a central pillar of NATO, to redefine its role and, while respecting domestic constraints and historical sensitivities, fulfill its international obligations effectively. The findings of this study indicate that Germany over the past decade has adopted a multilayered and balanced approach, successfully managing the interplay between domestic limitations, international commitments, and geopolitical changes, thereby consolidating its role in Europe's collective security.

Germany reinforced its deterrent role by increasing participation in multinational military exercises and deploying forces to Eastern European countries. Simultaneously, the country emphasized diplomacy and the avoidance of direct confrontation with Russia, employing diplomatic instruments, multilateral negotiations, and economic sanctions to prevent military escalation. Germany also strengthened cooperation with France and other European partners, enhancing coordination in collective operations and strategic decision-making, thereby fostering soft leadership in Europe and shaping regional security frameworks.

Despite external pressures, domestic limitations and historical sensitivities posed significant challenges. Public apprehension regarding militarization, combined with legal and social restrictions, prevented Germany from developing an independent offensive military capability. Consequently, German security policy has focused on defensive tools, limited participation in international military operations, and institutionally guided diplomacy. These domestic constraints necessitated careful management of public opinion and political legitimacy, requiring Germany to balance internal sensitivities with its international obligations. Economic and energy dependence on Russia and other European countries further limited security decision-making, as any military or sanctioning measures potentially affecting energy or trade relations required careful assessment and coordination with the European Union and allied states. The Ukraine crisis exemplified these constraints, demonstrating the need for Germany to balance collective commitments, regional security, and national interests.

At the international level, shifts in U.S. foreign policy and reduced American engagement in European security imposed additional pressure on Germany to assume a more active leadership role within NATO and the EU. This shift in the balance of global power, coupled with emerging threats such as cybersecurity risks, energy insecurity, and economic volatility, necessitated a flexible, institutionally grounded, and multilateral approach. The findings indicate that Germany has successfully employed institutionally guided diplomacy, dialogue, and coordination among allies to provide effective collective responses while simultaneously managing domestic sensitivities and historical constraints.

Strategically, significant opportunities emerged for Germany during this period. Its geopolitical position, institutional capacity, and diplomatic tools have enabled it to exercise soft leadership and increase influence in Europe's collective security. By strengthening the European Union as an independent security actor, supporting the development of rapid reaction forces, and reinforcing joint security institutions, Germany has enhanced its role in strategic decision-making and collective operations. These measures have bolstered European cohesion, strengthened trust among allies, and created the foundation for Germany's long-term soft leadership and strategic influence in collective security matters.

The deployment of diplomatic tools and soft power, including scientific, cultural, and political cooperation, has enabled Germany to exert non-military influence in collective security and regional crisis management. Soft power has proven particularly important in non-military domains such as cybersecurity, energy security, migration management, and climate-related challenges, allowing Germany to maintain an active and influential role without provoking direct military confrontation.

The development of a flexible, norm-based security policy has provided another key opportunity. By combining limited military capabilities, institutionally guided diplomacy, and soft power, Germany has successfully balanced domestic constraints, international obligations, and emerging threats, implementing a sustainable, effective, and predictable security strategy. This flexible approach has allowed Germany to respond rapidly and accurately to shifts in the geopolitical environment while consolidating its role as a defender of human rights, international law, and collective cooperation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Germany's security policy over the past decade has been built on a multilayered, balanced, and institutionally guided approach. Germany has effectively fulfilled its international commitments, managed domestic constraints and historical sensitivities, and maintained a central role in Europe's collective security. The combination of challenges and opportunities indicates that Germany's success in security matters has depended on its ability to coordinate multiple instruments of power, manage domestic sensitivities, and respond effectively to international challenges.

Despite numerous constraints and threats, the past decade has provided Germany with a historic opportunity to leverage soft leadership, institutionally guided diplomacy, and flexible security strategies to strengthen its role in NATO and Europe's collective security. Germany's experience demonstrates that successful security policy requires balancing national interests, domestic limitations, and international obligations, and the country has managed to achieve this balance effectively.

Ultimately, the findings underscore that Germany's experience can serve as a practical model for other European countries and international actors facing complex and evolving security environments. The German case illustrates the importance of integrating multiple power instruments, maintaining flexibility, and emphasizing institutionally guided cooperation to achieve sustainable and collective security outcomes. By balancing defensive capabilities, diplomatic engagement, and soft power, Germany has consolidated its position as a key NATO member and central actor in European security, providing a replicable example of how medium and large powers can navigate the intricate interplay of domestic constraints, regional obligations, and international challenges.

The analysis also emphasizes that Germany's success has not only relied on military or economic capacities but equally on its ability to leverage normative influence, multilateral mechanisms, and diplomatic networks. The German approach demonstrates that a state can effectively shape regional security by combining limited military action with strong soft power and institutional engagement. By doing so, Germany has reinforced European security, enhanced its strategic credibility, and contributed to the stability of the transatlantic security order.

In conclusion, the past decade has illustrated that Germany, despite historical sensitivities, domestic constraints, and evolving geopolitical threats, has successfully transformed challenges into opportunities, establishing itself as a central and reliable actor in NATO and European security. Its experience provides a comprehensive example of how soft leadership, flexible and norm-based policies, and multilateral coordination can be effectively integrated to secure collective defense, uphold international norms, and promote stability in a complex and rapidly changing security environment.

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