

1. Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, abruptly and permanently altered the European security paradigm that had been in place since the end of the Cold War. The assumption that economic interdependence and institutional integration could deter the use of armed force among Powers, known as the doctrine of *Wandel durch Handel* ("change through trade"), proved insufficient in the face of Moscow's willingness to employ military force as a tool of foreign policy².



Illustration 1 Olaf Scholz on February 27, 2022 (Source: Bundestag).

The German response was exceptional both in its speed and its depth. On February 27, 2022, in a historic speech to the Bundestag³, Chancellor Olaf Scholz coined the term *Zeitenwende* ("turning point") and announced a structural shift in Germany's foreign and security policy⁴: the creation of a special €100 billion fund for the Bundeswehr, a

² Olaf Scholz, *Government Statement on Russia's War of Aggression Against Ukraine* (speech to the German Bundestag, February 27, 2022), available at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/975954/2008580/b7348ec7b88380164f7873453c7b6758/25-2-bk-reg-erkl--data.pdf>

³ Olaf Scholz, *We Are Experiencing a Turning Point* (speech to the German Bundestag, February 27, 2022), German Bundestag, available at: <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2022/kw08-sondersitzung-882198>

⁴ A A. Sokolov and S. Protsenko, "Zeitenwende Through the Lens of Olaf Scholz's Government Strategic Documents," *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 2024, available at: <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2024-6-99-224-245>.

commitment to exceed 2% of GDP in defense spending, and a strategic reorientation toward collective and territorial defense within the framework of NATO⁵.

This process reached its most comprehensive doctrinal expression with the publication, in April 2026, of the *Gesamtkonzeption der militärischen Verteidigung*, which integrates the Bundeswehr's first Military Strategy and the Armed Forces Capability Profile (*Fähigkeitsprofil der Bundeswehr*), signed by the Inspector General, General Carsten Breuer. This document not only systematizes the changes accumulated since 2022 but also sets the explicit goal of making the Bundeswehr "the most powerful conventional army in Europe"⁶.

This article addresses three key questions: How has German defense policy evolved since 2022? What doctrinal, organizational, and capability transformations has it undergone? And what are its strategic implications for Europe and NATO?

To answer this question, a systematic review structured according to the PRISMA 2020 criteria is employed, adapted to the qualitative analysis of strategic policy and military doctrine⁷. The relevance of the topic lies in the fact that Germany, as the European Union's largest economy and NATO's leading actor on the continent, exerts a driving influence on the European security architecture. Its transformation is not an isolated national phenomenon, but a determining factor in the new balance of power in Europe.

2. Theoretical Framework

The transformation of German defense policy can be analyzed from various theoretical perspectives. Waltzian neorealism offers a structural explanation: faced with the return of the threat from a revisionist state such as Russia, Germany adjusts its behavior to the imperative of power balancing⁸. However, the magnitude and speed of the change

⁵ F. Miranda Mérida, *Zeitenwende in Perspective: The Transformation of German Defense Policy and Its European Implications* (Master's Thesis, University of Salamanca, 2025), GREDOS Repository.

⁶ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Comprehensive Concept of Military Defense: Military Strategy and Plan for the Armed Forces – Responsibility for Europe*, 2026, available at: <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/6093766/01b1718498c25db9010ea13724d7a37a/dl-gesamtkonzeption-der-militaerischen-download-deu-data.pdf>

⁷ M. J. Page, J. E. McKenzie, P. M. Bossuyt, I. Boutron, T. C. Hoffmann, C. D. Mulrow, and D. Moher, "The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews," *BMJ*, vol. 372, 2021, no. 71, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>

⁸ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

suggest that constructivist variables are also at play, particularly the redefinition of the German state's strategic identity, long shaped by the *Kultur der Zurückhaltung* (culture of restraint) inherited from the postwar period⁹.

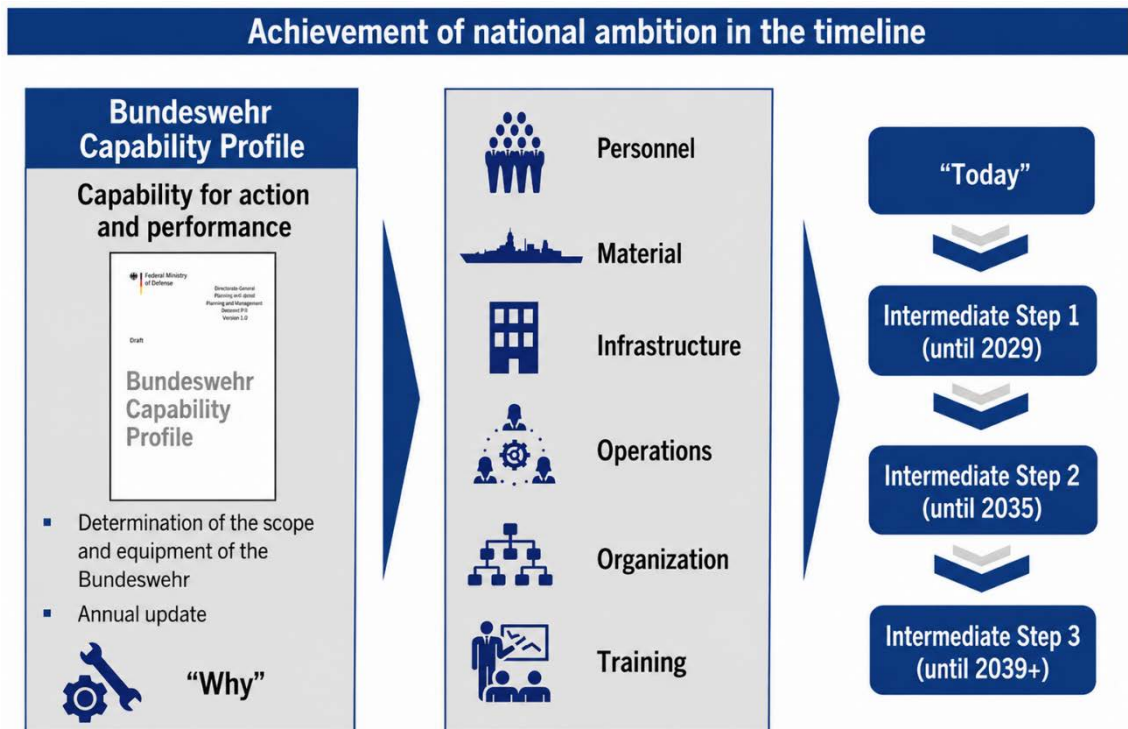


Illustration 2 Capability Profile (Source: Bundeswehr and author).

In this sense, the *Zeitenwende* can be interpreted as a process of "strategic normalization"¹⁰. Germany is beginning to assume the role of a conventional military power that its economic and political weight would have justified for decades, but which historical, constitutional, and cultural constraints had postponed. The relevant question is not whether the change is real, the data confirm it, but whether it is systemic or circumstantial, reversible or structural¹¹.

The *Gesamtkonzeption* of April 2026 tips the balance toward a structural interpretation: for the first time in the history of the Federal Republic, the Armed Forces have their own

⁹ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Defense Policy Guidelines*, 2023, available at: <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/5701724/5ba8d8c460d931164c7b00f49994d41d/verteidigungspolitische-richtlinien-2023-data.pdf>

¹⁰ K. Kamp, "The Zeitenwende at Work: Germany's National Security Strategy," *Survival*, vol. 65, 2023, pp. 73–80, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2218698>.

¹¹ Pierre Mennerat, *La stratégie qui acte le réveil militaire de l'Allemagne*, *Le Grand Continent*, April 22, 2026, available at: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2026/04/22/la-strategie-qui-acte-le-reveil-militaire-de-lallemagne-texte-integral/>

military strategy, a binding capabilities profile, and a three-phase growth plan through 2039.

3. Methodology (PRISMA 2020)

3.1 Methodological Rationale

The PRISMA 2020 methodology (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*) was designed to provide transparency, traceability, and reproducibility in systematic review processes (Page et al., 2021). Although its original application focuses on biomedical and epidemiological studies, its adaptation to strategic policy analysis and security sciences is methodologically relevant, as it allows for the rigorous and auditable structuring of the evidence selection and synthesis process.

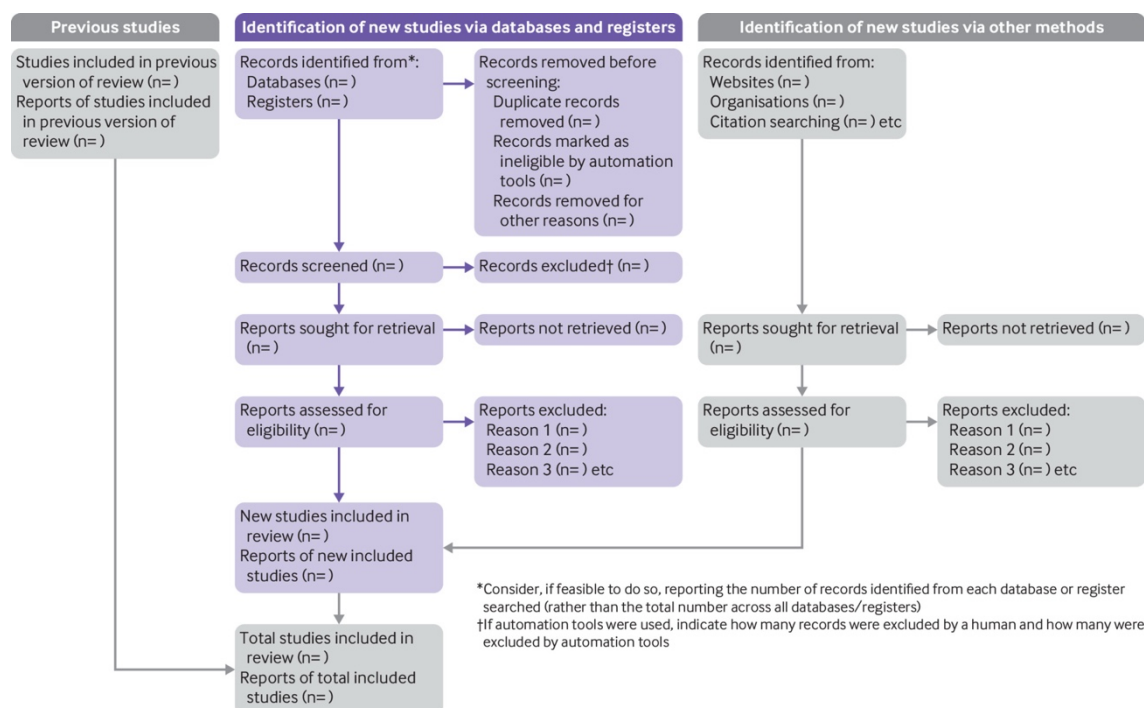


Illustration 3 PRISMA 2020 diagram (Source: Page et al.).

In the present study, PRISMA is used as a methodological framework for a qualitative strategic policy review, with particular emphasis on: (a) the systematic identification of relevant documents; (b) the application of explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria; (c) the traceability of the selection process; and (d) the structured synthesis of the findings.

3.2 Search Strategy

Three types of sources were consulted: official documents from the German Federal Government (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, Bundeswehr, Generalinspekteur der Bundeswehr), academic literature (indexed journals on defense, geopolitics, and international relations), and strategic analyses from specialized research centers (IISS, SWP, RAND, Real Instituto Elcano, IEEE). The time frame covers the period 2022–2026. The keywords used included: "Zeitenwende Bundeswehr," "German defense policy 2022," "NATO Germany military reform," "Gesamtkonzeption militärische Verteidigung," and "Single Set of Forces Bundeswehr."

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Documents were included that: (a) directly address German defense policy for the 2022–2026 period; (b) originate from institutional, academic, or strategic analysis sources with identifiable backing; (c) address the NATO, doctrinal, or capabilities dimensions. Unsubstantiated opinions, sources without institutional backing, materials prior to 2022 with no current connection to the process under analysis, and documents of a purely propagandistic nature were excluded.

3.4 Adapted PRISMA Process

As a complementary support to the literature identification process within the PRISMA 2020 framework, the artificial intelligence-based academic search tool Consensus¹² was used. This tool was used exclusively for exploratory purposes, with all sources verified through direct access to the original documents.

The process was structured in four phases: (1) Identification: locating relevant literature through systematic searches in academic databases and institutional repositories; (2) Screening: elimination of duplicates and materials that do not meet the relevance threshold; (3) Eligibility: content analysis of the preselected documents according to the established criteria; (4) Inclusion: final selection of the analytical corpus. The most relevant primary source is the *Gesamtkonzeption der militärischen Verteidigung*¹³, which constitutes the highest-level strategic document available to the public.

¹² Consensus (Consensus NLP, Inc.), an AI-based academic search tool, available at: <https://consensus.app>

¹³ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *op. cit.*, p.1.

4. Results

4.1 Doctrinal Shift: From the Expeditionary Model to Collective Defense

The doctrinal shift is the most visible and significant of all those identified. During the two decades following 2001, the Bundeswehr oriented the development of its capabilities, its material investments, and its institutional culture toward stabilization and crisis management operations outside the NATO area, such as Afghanistan, the Balkans, the Horn of Africa, or Mali¹⁴. The resulting model was a moderately sized expeditionary force, optimized for coalition operations and for reconstruction tasks, training local forces, and prolonged presence in low-intensity theaters.

The *Zeitenwende* explicitly and deliberately reverses this orientation. The 2026 *Gesamtkonzeption* unambiguously establishes that the Bundeswehr's "core mission" (*Kernauftrag*) of the Bundeswehr is territorial and collective defense (*Landes-und Bündnisverteidigung*), and that other missions, such as crisis management, defense diplomacy, or domestic support, are secondary and subordinate to that mandate. This hierarchy of missions had not been formulated so explicitly in previous German strategic documents¹⁵.

The doctrinal shift is also evident in the conception of the adversary and the theater of operations. While the expeditionary model was designed to confront non-state actors in a context of technological asymmetry favorable to the West, the new paradigm envisions a state adversary with comparable or even superior capabilities in some domains, with a willingness to escalate and the capacity to directly threaten Alliance territory. This implies a profound transformation in force design, training requirements, and doctrine of employment¹⁶.

4.2 Identification of the Threat: Russia as a Structural Factor

The *Gesamtkonzeption* identifies Russia as "the greatest immediate threat to peace and security in Germany and the Euro-Atlantic area for the foreseeable future." This formulation is notable for its clarity, in contrast to the traditional ambiguity of German

¹⁴ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2026* (London: Routledge, 2026), available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003778974-3>.

¹⁵ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, pp. 12-17.

diplomatic language on security matters. The document states that Russia “is creating the conditions for a war against NATO countries” and is already conducting “hybrid operations against Alliance member states, including Germany”¹⁷.

The threat analysis is structured around two dimensions. The first is the conventional threat: Russia is rearming at a sustained pace, has demonstrated in Ukraine its capability and willingness to use armed force on a large scale, and has adapted its military doctrine to high-intensity conflict scenarios against NATO forces¹⁸¹⁹. The second is the hybrid threat: sabotage of critical infrastructure, cyberattacks, espionage, disinformation campaigns, and influence operations that operate below the threshold of armed conflict but erode social cohesion and the state’s capacity to respond.

The convergence of both dimensions constitutes what the document calls a “comprehensive state threat” (*gesamtstaatliche Bedrohung*): Russia threatens not only the territorial integrity of the allies, but also the institutional, economic, and social fabric of European democracies²⁰. This conceptualization broadens the spectrum of defense beyond the strictly military realm and demands a response from the state as a whole (*gesamtstaatliche Handlungsfähigkeit*).

Moscow’s revisionist policy aims to reverse the post-1989 European security order and create the conditions for an expansion of its sphere of influence that would affect, first and foremost, the Baltic states and the former members of the Warsaw Pact. Russia’s strategic objective, according to the *Gesamtkonzeption*, is to weaken the Alliance’s cohesion and strategically decouple the United States from Europe, which would lead to the weakening of NATO as a collective security mechanism.

4.3 The New Concept of War: The German Kriegsbild

One of the most innovative elements of the *Gesamtkonzeption* is its *Kriegsbild* (“image of war”), which describes the emerging operational environment and the trends that will

¹⁷ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 13.

¹⁸ NATO, *Strategic Concept 2022* (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2022).

¹⁹ A. Sokolov, “Russia in German Strategic Documents: ‘Zeitenwende’ Era,” *World Economy and International Relations*, 2024, available at: <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2024-68-10-70-79>.

²⁰ A. Myronchuk, “Germany’s National Security Strategy in the Conditions of the Russian Wide-Scale Invasion in Ukraine”, *European Historical Studies*, 2024, available at: <https://doi.org/10.17721/2524-048x.2024.28.8>.

shape armed conflicts in the short and medium term. This analysis forms the basis from which the Bundeswehr's capability requirements are derived.

The *Kriegsbild* identifies six structural trends²¹.

The first is the blurring of conflict boundaries (*Entgrenzung des Krieges*): the distinction between front and rear, civilian and military, peace and war, is deliberately blurred. The adversary will attack German society as a whole. Civilian infrastructure, communication systems, energy networks, and public opinion become targets just as legitimate, from the adversary's perspective, as military installations.

The second is multi-temporal warfare (*multi-temporaler Krieg*): future conflicts will simultaneously combine means and procedures from the past, present, and future. Alongside high-tech systems, such as quantum computing or advanced robotics, mass-produced, low-cost drones and conventional artillery will be employed. The speed of innovation and adaptation will be decisive.

The third is the transparent battlefield (*transparentes Gefechtsfeld*): data becomes a central operational resource. Artificial intelligence amplifies human cognitive capabilities, and the global availability of interconnected sensors makes real-time tactical concealment virtually impossible. Information superiority, even if limited in time and space, becomes the decisive factor in gaining the initiative.

The fourth is the capability for remote action (*Wirkung auf Abstand*): long-range precision systems eliminate safe spaces in the rear. There is no longer a fully protected logistical refuge against this type of threat.

The fifth is automation and autonomization (*Automatisierung und Autonomisierung*): unmanned systems and artificial intelligence increase operational speed and reduce direct human intervention, while generating new vulnerabilities, especially in the cognitive dimension of conflict.

The sixth is efficient mass (*effiziente Masse*): the mass production of simple, low-cost systems generates significant quantitative advantages. The adversary will combine high-

²¹ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, pp. 15-16.

tech systems with mass-produced assets. The economics of conflict thus regains central strategic relevance.

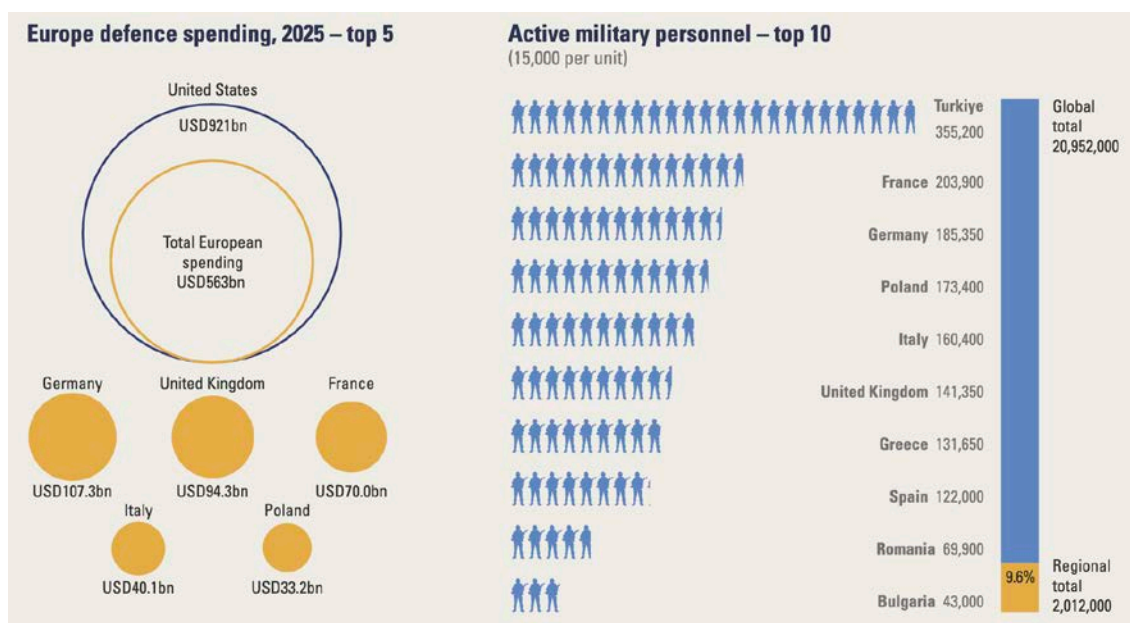


Illustration 4 Europe defense spending (Source: The Military Balance, 2026).

4.4 Reconfiguration of the Military Instrument: the Single Set of Forces

The Bundeswehr's organizational response to the new strategic environment is structured around the concept of the Single Set of Forces (SSoF): a single force structure capable of executing all missions, from collective defense to crisis management or domestic support, without duplication or compartmentalization. This principle represents a departure from the previous model, in which "Article 5" forces and "expeditionary" forces tended to develop as separate categories²².

The *Fähigkeitsprofil der Bundeswehr*, an integral part of the *Gesamtkonzeption*, establishes the concrete plan for building this SSoF through six priority national capabilities²³:

First capability: long-range action and air defense across all ranges. The Bundeswehr will develop *Deep Precision Strike* and *territoriale Flugkörperabwehr* capabilities, including extended-area missile defense. These capabilities are identified as being of "strategic military importance" for deterrence and defense within the framework of the Alliance.

²² Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 25.

²³ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, pp. 15-16.

Second capability: information superiority and increased information velocity. Offensive and defensive capabilities across all domains, including cyberspace and outer space, will be developed with the support of artificial intelligence to gain and maintain information superiority over the adversary.

Third capability: digitalization and interoperability. Germany will assume a leadership role in NATO's transition toward an *MDO-Enabled Alliance*. This requires a cloud-based technology platform and resilient, redundant communication systems (*Digital Backbone*), while preserving digital sovereignty.

Fourth capability: national command capability. The autonomous planning and conduct of operations at the operational level, including Multi-Domain Operations and Deep Precision Strike, must be ensured at the national level, with interministerial coordination mechanisms for comprehensive state action.

Fifth capability: Germany as a base of operations (*Operationsbasis Deutschland*). German territory, national airspace, and data and communications networks must be maintained as a functional operational base. This integrates internal and external defense in a systemic manner.

Sixth capability: national risk and crisis foresight, and support for permanent tasks. Military capabilities for these missions must be appropriately scaled, in interministerial coordination.

4.5 Three-phase growth plan (2026–2039)

The *Gesamtkonzeption* establishes for the first time a three-phase growth plan, with distinct time horizons and priorities:

- Phase 1 (through 2029): Maximizing defense capability and resilience. The objective is to increase the operational readiness of current forces as quickly as possible. To this end, existing resources are redirected, structures are adjusted, and measures with the greatest immediate impact are prioritized.
- Phase 2 (2029-2035): Structured growth for the new European role. The Bundeswehr will achieve the necessary capability to fully assume its new European leadership role within the NATO framework, being able to deter and, if necessary, defend alongside allies.

- Phase 3 (2035-2039+): Technological superiority and consolidation of leadership. The ultimate goal is to develop Europe's most technologically advanced armed forces through the systematic integration of next-generation technologies.

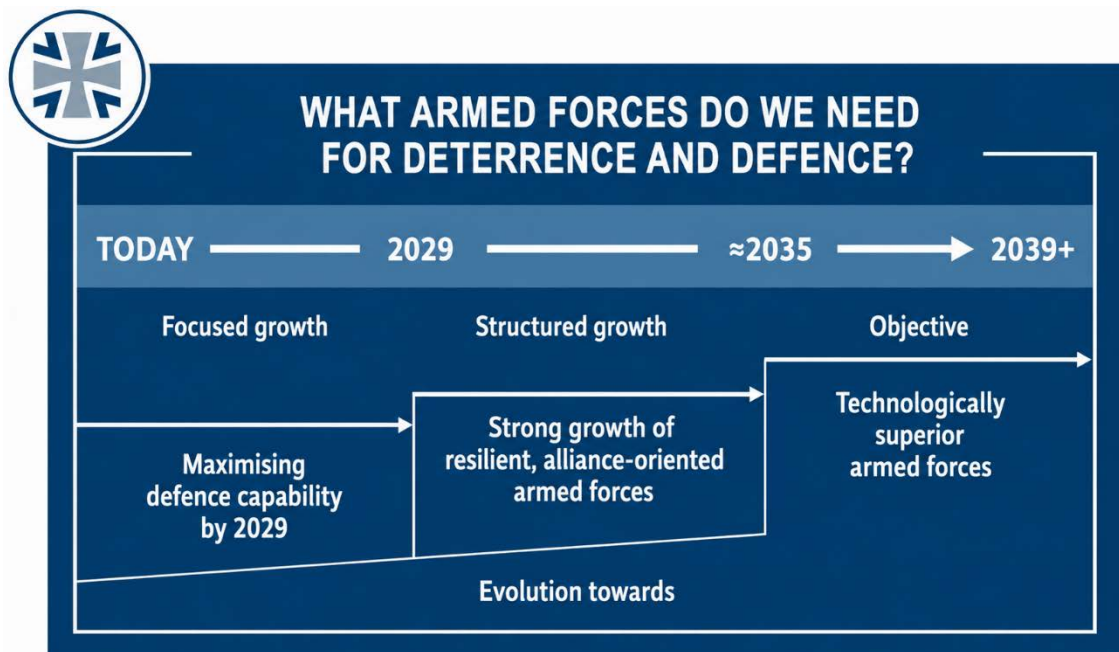


Illustration 5 Force Goal (Source: Bundeswehr and author).

The personnel goal is explicit: at least 460,000 military personnel, active and in reserve, for the SSoF by 2035, compared to the current approximately 185,000 active-duty personnel. The reserve becomes an integral part of the forces, fully equipped. The structures typical of a "peacetime army" are being abandoned in favor of a model aimed at maximizing defensive capability²⁴.

4.6 Increase in Resources and the "Sondervermögen"

The announcement of the special fund of 100 billion euros (*Sondervermögen*) in 2022 marked the beginning of the budgetary transformation. Even more significant is the commitment to maintain defense spending above 2% of GDP on a structural basis and, according to data for 2025–2026, to reach 3.5% of GDP. Germany has become one of the countries with the largest defense budgets in Europe and NATO in absolute terms.

These resources fund the modernization of the Leopard tank fleet and the acquisition of the new Leopard 2A8; the introduction of the F-35 fighter-bomber to replace the Tornado;

²⁴ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 29.

the reinforcement of air defense through the Arrow 3 platform and the MEADS system; the digitization of the command-and-control structure; and the increase in ammunition reserves and logistical supplies, which are considered critically low.

4.7 The New Strategic Role: From Civilian Power to European Military Power

The *Gesamtkonzeption* formalizes a shift in strategic role that would have been unimaginable just a decade ago. Germany explicitly acknowledges that, as Europe's largest economy and a significant ally without its own nuclear forces, it bears "a special responsibility" in the areas of *Reassurance* (reassuring allies), *Deterrence* (detering Russia), and *Defense* (defending NATO).

The decision to permanently deploy the *Brigade Litauen*, a full combat brigade, in Lithuania is described as "a historically unprecedented assumption of responsibility for Europe"²⁵. This deployment, which marks the first permanent stationing of German combat forces outside Germany since the postwar period, constitutes a major political signal to the Alliance's eastern allies, who for years have called for a greater German military presence on the eastern flank.

The *Gesamtkonzeption* also identifies the United States' strategic reorientation toward the Indo-Pacific as a structural factor requiring greater European military autonomy. The explicit reference to the 2026 U.S. *National Defense Strategy*, which calls for greater efforts from European allies, positions Germany as the actor called upon to assume the role of "supporting power" (*Anlehnungspartner*) for its European neighbors, a function that until now has largely been performed by Washington²⁶.

This is likely the change with the greatest geopolitical reach in the entire *Zeitenwende*²⁷: Germany is positioning itself as a net provider of security for Europe.

5. Discusión

5.1 Nature of the change: reform or systemic transformation?

²⁵ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 19.

²⁶ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 20.

²⁷ B. Giegerich y B. Schreer, "Zeitenwende One Year On", *Survival*, vol. 65, 2023, pp. 37–42, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2193095>.

A cursory reading might present the *Zeitenwende* as a reactive response to an external event, the invasion of Ukraine²⁸, that could be reversed once the conflict stabilizes or is resolved. A systemic analysis of the available documentary corpus refutes this interpretation. The indicators point in the opposite direction.

First, the 2026 *Gesamtkonzeption* is not an emergency document: it is a strategy with a time horizon extending to 2039, featuring structured phases, quantitative personnel and capability objectives, and a funding model anchored in structural decisions²⁹. These elements are characteristic of a lasting institutional transformation, not of a temporary adaptation.

Second, the doctrinal shift is presented as structurally irreversible: the abandonment of the expeditionary model and the adoption of the *Kernauftrag* of territorial defense are not presented as temporary adjustments, but as the Bundeswehr's new strategic identity.

Third, the magnitude of the change is comparable to, and in some respects exceeds, the two major milestones in the history of postwar German defense: the creation of the Bundeswehr and its integration into NATO in 1955, and the reunification of 1990 with the absorption of the *Nationale Volksarmee*³⁰. The first *Militärstrategie* in the history of the Federal Republic constitutes, in and of itself, an institutional event of the first order.

5.2 Multi-Domain Operations as a Unifying Concept

The concept of *Multi-Domain Operations* (MDO) has become the central pillar of German doctrinal transformation. Its adoption, in close coordination with NATO allies, particularly with the *U.S. Army Multi-Domain Task Force*, implies that the Bundeswehr will design its forces to operate in an integrated and synchronized manner across the land, air, maritime, cyber, space, and electromagnetic domains.

The uniqueness of the German approach lies in the integration of the MDO concept with its own *Kriegsbild*: multi-temporal warfare requires that MDO forces be capable of operating with heterogeneous combinations of systems, from low-cost drones to fifth-

²⁸ T. Bunde, "Lessons (to be) learned? Germany's *Zeitenwende* and European security after the Russian invasion of Ukraine", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 43, 2022, pp. 516–530, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.2092820>.

²⁹ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 27.

³⁰ D. Ljung, *From Beginning to Ende: Situating the Zeitenwende. An Ideal-Type Analysis of German Strategic Culture 1994–2023* (Trabajo Fin de Máster, Master's Programme in War and Defence, 2024), available at: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1961289/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

generation platforms, while adapting to very short innovation cycles. Adaptability (*Adaptionsfähigkeit*) is just as relevant as technological superiority at any given moment.

The Bundeswehr must accelerate innovations, incorporate them, and rapidly apply them to its own conduct of war. New capabilities must also provide an advantage in the war of the future. The Bundeswehr must be faster than the enemy in the interplay between adaptation and, above all, innovation.

The document states that the use of artificial intelligence is “essential” (*zwingend*) for managing the complexity and volume of data on the transparent battlefield, and that the reliability and integrity of data, as well as its processing, are “vital” for military decision-making³¹.

5.3 The One-Theatre-Approach

The *Gesamtkonzeption* introduces the concept of the *One-Theatre-Approach* (OTA) as the Bundeswehr’s cognitive and planning framework. This principle establishes that Germany must think and act across all geostrategic spaces simultaneously, continuously assessing the connections, side effects, and chains of consequences between theaters³².

The OTA has concrete implications: the Bundeswehr cannot be conceived of as an exclusively European actor. Its naval fleet operates in the Indo-Pacific, its participation in stabilization missions in sub-Saharan Africa influences the Alliance’s southern flank, and its cyber capabilities have global reach. This holistic approach requires a command-and-control structure capable of simultaneously managing multiple theaters and domains.

5.4 Strategic Implications for Europe

The German transformation has direct consequences for the European security architecture in three dimensions.

At the bilateral and multilateral levels, Germany becomes the “reference partner” (*Anlehnungspartner*) for its European allies, especially those with smaller sizes and military capabilities. Countries such as the Baltic states, Poland, the Czech Republic, and

³¹ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 16.

³² Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 23.

the Netherlands strengthen their security by having a more influential ally that assumes a more active leadership role³³.

In terms of European strategic autonomy, the *Gesamtkonzeption* acknowledges that NATO "must become more European to remain transatlantic." This principle, formulated in Berlin, aligns with the European Union's strategic autonomy agenda and positions Germany as a bridge between the Atlanticist and European approaches to collective defense³⁴.

In terms of deterrence, the combination of reinforced conventional forces, Deep Precision Strike capabilities, long-range missile defense, and participation in NATO's nuclear deterrence through nuclear sharing makes Germany a full-spectrum deterrent actor, something unprecedented in its postwar history³⁵.

5.5 Implications for NATO and the Transatlantic Relationship

The *Gesamtkonzeption* realistically addresses the tension between NATO's European commitment and the U.S. strategic reorientation. The explicit reference to Washington's 2026 *National Defense Strategy*, which demands greater efforts from European allies, constitutes an official acknowledgment that burden sharing is undergoing a structural shift³⁶.

Germany responds to this challenge with a proposal for leadership, not retreat. Assuming greater conventional responsibility in Europe, developing autonomous force projection capabilities, that is, without relying entirely on U.S. transport and logistics assets, and strengthening cohesion between the eastern flank, the northern flank, and Western Europe. This is Berlin's position in shaping the new transatlantic balance.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

This analysis has limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. First, the full versions of the *Militärstrategie* and the *Fähigkeitsprofil* are classified as state

³³ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 20.

³⁴ B. Lippert, *With, Without, Against Washington: Redefining Europe's Relations With the United States* (SWP Research Paper 2026/RP 05, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 27 de marzo de 2026), available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2026RP05_With_Without_Washington.pdf

³⁵ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 31.

³⁶ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, p. 20.

secrets (*GEHEIM*), which prevents access to force planning details by Branch: Army, Luftwaffe, Navy, special forces, and support. The analysis is based on the public excerpt, which by definition omits sensitive information.

Second, the transformation process is ongoing. The objectives set for 2029, 2035, and 2039 are plans, not fait accompli. The ability to execute depends on domestic factors, such as sustained political will, industrial capacity, and personnel availability, the evolution of which is uncertain.

Third, the analysis focuses on Germany as the primary actor, without systematically addressing synergies and frictions with other allies or the internal dynamics within NATO that shape the process.

6. Conclusiones

The systematic review presented in this article, based on PRISMA 2020 and using the 2026 *Gesamtkonzeption der militärischen Verteidigung* as its primary doctrinal source, allows for the following conclusions:

The *Zeitenwende* constitutes a systemic transformation of German defense policy, not an incremental reform. The change simultaneously affects doctrine, force structure, capability priorities, the funding model, and the state's strategic identity. Its depth and time horizon place it on par with the major milestones in the history of the Bundeswehr.

The most significant strategic document of this transformation is the first *Militärstrategie* in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, signed in April 2026, which sets the explicit goal of making the Bundeswehr "the most powerful conventional army in Europe" through a three-phase plan extending to 2039. This objective, publicly declared by Defense Minister Boris Pistorius³⁷ and Inspector General Carsten Breuer, marks a point of no return in Germany's "strategic normalization."

The concept of war underlying this transformation, articulated in the *Kriegsbild* of the *Gesamtkonzeption*, integrates the most significant trends in contemporary armed conflict:

³⁷ Boris Pistorius, *Deutschland geht voran - als Schrittmacher unter den europäischen Nationen* (discurso, 7 de noviembre de 2025), Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, available at: <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/6039384/0555d3e535488b55a4f5e7c8d6e61882/rede-minister-im-wortlaut-data.pdf>

battlefield transparency, multi-temporal warfare, efficient mass, autonomy, and *Multi-Domain Operations*. The Bundeswehr is designed for this environment, not for the counterinsurgency wars that dominated the Western defense agenda during the 21st century.

Germany's new strategic role, as Europe's leading conventional military power, a *Anlehnungspartner* to its allies, a net provider of security on the eastern flank, and a catalyst for NATO cohesion in the face of U.S. strategic reorientation, represents the greatest shift in Germany's strategic position since reunification, with far-reaching implications for the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

The transformation also has a human and institutional dimension that the document itself explicitly highlights. Both Minister Pistorius and Inspector General Breuer agree that "strategies and capability components alone do not constitute a defense capability," and that "what matters most are the people who act when necessary". This recognition, which runs throughout the document, reflects a deliberate commitment to placing the human factor back at the center of the armed forces model, in the face of the technological temptation to reduce warfare to autonomous systems and high-cost platforms.

The transformation also has a far-reaching demographic and social dimension that the document itself implicitly acknowledges. The goal of reaching 460,000 military personnel by 2035, along with the reintroduction of a modernized form of compulsory military service starting in 2026 and the 20% increase in enlistment applications recorded at the beginning of that year, reveals that the reconstruction of the Bundeswehr is not merely a matter of budget or doctrine, but a deliberate commitment to partially remilitarize German society as a structural prerequisite for the country's new strategic role.

In analytical terms, Germany has completed the transition from a "civilian power" to a "military power under reconstruction" and is on track to become the leading conventional military power in continental Europe.

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