

Germany in the Indo-Pacific: A growing but limited security and defence engagement

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In September 2024, defying warnings from China, two German navy vessels crossed the Taiwan Strait for the first time in 22 years. Three years prior, shortly after Germany had adopted its Indo-Pacific Guidelines in 2020, the German frigate Bayern avoided the passage. The move in 2024 comes at a time when Germany's foreign, security, and defence policy is undergoing dramatic change. This memo analyses whether Germany's security and defence engagement in the Indo-Pacific region has changed since the adoption of its 2020 Indo-Pacific Guideline – and if so, how.

THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION is growing in political and economic importance. As a trading nation, Germany has invested considerable time and resources in developing close bilateral relations with partners in the region. To date, China is the country in the region with which Germany has the most developed relations, not least in the economic sphere. However, in recent years, Germany's close relations with China have reached their limits, owing to several factors, but notably that the international liberal rules-based order, which Germany has long benefitted from, is being challenged. Against this background, Germany has faced the need to reshape its Indo-Pacific engagement. This need has been acknowledged in three pivotal policy documents, the *Indo-Pacific Guidelines* (hereafter IPG) adopted in 2020, the 2023 *National Security Strategy* (NSS), and the 2023 *Strategy on China*.¹

The assumption in this memo is that several factors drive Germany's engagement in the region. These drivers may be external, entailing a push from the United States, European allies, or Indo-Pacific partners, and the German government's desire to show solidarity and reliability. They may also come from within, stemming from the recognition of the need to safeguard Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) to protect Germany's economic interests. The German government also increasingly recognises the connection between Indo-Pacific and European security. However, the memo does not analyse or discuss which drivers are the most important

or how they coincide. Instead, this memo focuses on the manifestation of these drivers, namely, policy and its implementation. The goal is to enhance the understanding of Germany's security and defence engagement in the Indo-Pacific. The memo analyses whether and how this engagement has changed since the adoption of Germany's Indo-Pacific Guidelines in 2020, and concludes with a discussion about the future of the country's engagement.

The findings suggest that, as Germany's engagement was observed to have expanded in two key areas of its security strategy, its approach to the Indo-Pacific has evolved significantly in recent years. The German government appears to be increasingly looking at the region through a security lens, which is a prominent change at the political level. It also seems to have become slightly less risk averse with regard to its actions in the Indo-Pacific.

The analysis entails two approaches. First, the political discourse and domestic debate concerning the policy are analysed. This includes an analysis of the policy documents of concern, the IPG, the NSS, the *Strategy on China*, and the series, *Progress Reports on the Implementation of the IPG*, which is an important signpost in understanding the German government's current Asia (and China) policy.

To provide context, this section of the memo offers a broad analysis of Germany's China policy. It examines the stances of the major centrist political parties,

government representatives (including the chancellor and ministers), and the business community to capture the broader political debate.

Second, the memo analyses implementation in terms of changes in practice, focusing on two central aspects of Germany's security and defence engagement in the Indo-Pacific: its enhanced military engagement (e.g., exercises and multilateral cooperation) and strengthening its partners' resilience (e.g., capacity-building and defence-industrial cooperation). These aspects were chosen because they are highlighted as critical elements in the German government's Indo-Pacific Guidelines. Moreover, they stand out as priority areas based on Germany's practical engagement, rhetoric, and official writings.^a

THE INDO-PACIFIC POLICY

In several of its foreign policy documents since the early 1990s, the German government has argued for the development of economic relations with Asian states, perceiving them as attractive markets. Although the government argued for a diversification of relations with Asian partners, China, however, became the main trade partner in the region.² Since the mid 1990s, the trade between Germany and China has increased more than tenfold. For many years, Germany has been one of China's main sources for foreign direct investment while China has been one of the main export markets for German goods.³

Germany's policy towards China has traditionally been strongly driven by business interests, in particular those of certain large corporations. Moreover, the hallmark of Germany's China policy has been the assumption that intensified trade relations would eventually lead to political change in China.⁴ Against this background, China is today one of Germany's main trading partners and one of the top export markets for its goods. Meanwhile, German economic exchange with other states in the region constitutes only a fraction

of its trade with China. In 2022, Germany's export to China was greater than that of its combined exports to the following nine countries in the Indo-Pacific region: South Korea, Japan, India, Australia, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand.⁵

In recent years, however, Germany's close relations with China have reached their limits and the country has faced a need to reshape its Indo-Pacific engagement. It has also faced pressure from its partners and allies to address the region's deteriorating security situation. In 2020, it acknowledged these demands by adopting the IPG, which for the first time prioritised the region's security challenges while recognising its importance as a hub for global commodity flows. The IPG outlined Germany's aspiration to deepen its engagement, including intensified cooperation in security and defence policy with organisations and states that share its interests in the region.^b

Although the IPG introduced a new focus on the region's security challenges, the Merkel-led government at the time continued to adopt a cautious and rather cooperative approach toward China.⁶ This stance was primarily driven by business interests and Germany's extensive trade relations with China, as outlined above.

This cautious approach was reflected both in Germany's official writings and its early practical engagement. The IPG's language on China was vague, with no mention of China as a revisionist power that is coercing its neighbours, militarising the South China Sea, and seeking to undermine the rules-based international order.⁷ The IPG mentioned neither Taiwan nor the Taiwan Strait.

As for Germany's practical engagement, its cautious approach was visible during its first deployment to the Indo-Pacific in 2021–2022. For instance, the frigate *Bayern* travelled anti-clockwise instead of clockwise through the Pacific, which made it impossible for it to conclude a passing exercise with the UK's carrier strike group, CSG21. Moreover, the government requested a port visit in Shanghai before entering the South China

a Germany's security and defence engagement in the Indo-Pacific also includes other areas, such as expanded defence cooperation with partners in the region, cyber security, stabilisation, and strengthening bilateral relations. This memo does not analyse progress within these areas.

b For a comprehensive overview of all security policy aspects of the IPG, see Göran Swistek, *Quadratur des Kreises im Indo-Pazifik. Sicherheitspolitische Umsetzung der Indo-Pazifik-Leitlinien*, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 29 March 2021, 2.; for an overview of the partners that Germany prioritises in the region, see Felix Heiduk, *Germany's Value-based Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific*, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, March 2024.

Sea, which Beijing ultimately neglected. This gave the impression that Germany had asked China for permission.⁸ In the end, the frigate cancelled its planned crossing of the Taiwan Strait.

To conclude, the German government at the time appears to have lacked the political will both to label China as a revisionist power in its official writings and to engage in activities in the Indo-Pacific that could be perceived as provocative to China.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF CHINA

Following the federal elections in 2021, a coalition government led by Olaf Scholz succeeded Angela Merkel's government.^c Two of the parties in the new government - the Greens and Liberals - had highlighted the need for a tougher stance on China in the run-up to the federal elections. In the government's coalition agreement, the parties committed to devising Germany's first-ever China strategy while also highlighting the importance of the Indo-Pacific region.⁹

Important to note is that these two parties picked up sentiments that had been moving in Germany for almost a decade, especially since Xi Jinping assumed power in China in 2012 as the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. Since then, growing sensitivity to Chinese actors has been observed within German society, as well as among political and business circles.¹⁰

Within the business sphere, German companies have increasingly struggled with squaring economic opportunity in China with political risks.¹¹ In 2019, the Federation of German Industries (BDI) published a paper that labelled China as a "systemic competitor," even before the European Commission did so.¹² Notwithstanding this, German Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in China remain high and trade is still extensive.¹³ Germany's Chancellor Scholz continuously urges China to promote equal business opportunities and end unfair competition practices.¹⁴ Also within the political sphere, the differences in values and systems between China and Germany have become a frequent topic of debate in the German Parliament in recent years.¹⁵ The human rights violations in Xinjiang also became a commonly present

topic in politics following the publication of the China Cables in 2019, after which some parties increased their focus on the human rights situation in China.¹⁶

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine evidently shocked certain segments of the German political sphere, whose Russia policy had long been guided by the idea of 'change through rapprochement' (*Wandel durch Annäherung*) and later 'change through trade' (*Wandel durch Handel*). In 2022, Germany faced an energy crisis caused by Russia's first reducing and then discontinuing the gas supply to Germany through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline. This spurred a widespread shift in Germany's perspective on the political risks associated with trade relations. This risk awareness has also become central to Germany's China debate, with both politicians and institutions increasingly vocal in highlighting China-related risks. There is also a broad consensus that risks should be better analysed and addressed.¹⁷ In fact, political debates surrounding China policy have shifted from the fringes to the centre of German politics. All four major political parties at the core of the spectrum share a similar analysis of China's development and the challenges it poses, though they differ slightly regarding the policy options for addressing these issues moving forward.¹⁸

In 2022–2023, the government adopted a *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and a *Strategy on China*.¹⁹ The NSS laid out a policy of "Integrated Security" and defined Germany's national interests, some of which will likely continue to guide its engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Notably, the interests in upholding free-trade routes, ensuring a sustainable supply of goods, and maintaining a close and trusting partnership with the United States will remain highly relevant.²⁰

The *Strategy on China* places major emphasis on "de-risking" economic relations with China. Importantly, it contains a strong and outspoken analysis of China's trajectory under Xi Jinping and a clear message on human rights, citing all of the grave human rights violations that China has committed in recent years.²¹ Moreover, the strategy mentions the importance of the Taiwan Strait for peace and stability in the region, which contrasts with the lack of language on Taiwan.²²

c The new coalition government consisted of the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD), the Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*), and the Liberals FDP (*Freie Demokratische Partei*, FDP).

Although this is a significant step, Germany still refrains from taking a strong position on Taiwan and instead reiterates support for international law and condemns any potential violation of the status quo.²³ In general, the strategies, in particular the *Strategy on China*, seem to have brought about new impetus for the debate surrounding Germany's Indo-Pacific engagement.

Notably, China's support of Russia, particularly the latter's war against Ukraine, has reinforced critical views of China within certain parts of the German government. In 2024, segments of the German government have become more outspoken about the region than before. This is particularly evident in the positions of defence minister Boris Pistorius and foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, both of whom increasingly state that the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific are interconnected with those in Europe.²⁴ Moreover, the defence and foreign ministers were reportedly the primary advocates for a German frigate to navigate through the Taiwan Strait in 2024, despite opposition from the chancellery.²⁵ Ultimately, the government decided to proceed with the navigation through the Taiwan Strait in September 2024.

The decision to navigate through the Taiwan Strait indicates that there is likely more coherence within the government regarding Germany's engagement in the region. The NSS and the *Strategy on China* seem to offer a more defined basis for action and the implementation of the IPG. However, Germany is operating within a context of limited resources for security and defence overall and the opposition have called for clearer priorities.²⁶ The government has responded to this call by pinpointing key priorities needed to protect Germany's interests in the region.²⁷ One of these priority areas, namely "expanding security cooperation, promoting resilience," is analysed in the next section.

ENGAGEMENT AREAS WITH VISIBLE CHANGE

This section analyses two central aspects of Germany's security and defence engagement in the Indo-Pacific, namely enhanced military engagement and strengthening partners' resilience. These two have been selected because the IPG highlights them as crucial elements of the German government's security and defence

engagement. They have also been specifically identified in the latest iteration of the *Progress Report on the Implementation of the IPG* as key priorities needed to protect Germany's interests in the region.²⁸

Enhanced military engagement

One central aspect of Germany's security and defence engagement is the so-called "Security policy contribution to the international order." In its Defence Policy Guidelines adopted in 2023, Germany reiterates the importance of the Armed Forces (*Bundeswehr*) in preserving the international rules-based order. It identifies joint exercises with partners in the Indo-Pacific region as an important tool needed to preserve and strengthen that rules-based order.²⁹

Exercise participation

Germany has openly signalled its intention to participate regularly in US-led exercises and a will to intensify other types of defence cooperation with American forces.³⁰ In the summer of 2024, Defence Minister Pistorius announced that Germany would permanently station a liaison officer at the US Indo-Pacific Command on Hawaii (USINDOPACOM). This will undoubtedly facilitate Germany's coordination of its activities in the region with those of the US and other partners.

In recent years, Germany has expanded its deployments and participation in exercises within the Indo-Pacific region. While the early activities of the *Bundeswehr* in the region were mainly conducted by the Navy, other branches began contributing in 2022. That year marked the Air Force's first deployment to the region, known as *Rapid Pacific 2022*. The Air Force also participated in various other activities, including the *Kakadu* and *Pitch Black* exercises in Australia, as well as visits to Japan, South Korea, and combined exercises with the Singaporean Air Force. In 2023, the contributions expanded further, with the participation of elements from the German Army in the major international exercise *Talisman Sabre* in Australia. Soldiers from the Navy's Sea Battalion, the naval infantry of the *Bundeswehr*, joined the Army elements, which were from the German Airborne Brigade of the Army's Rapid Forces.³¹

In 2024, the *Bundeswehr* concluded the largest and most complex of its annual deployments to the region thus far. The German Navy and Air Force participated in a wide range of bilateral and multinational exercises, including the US-led *Rim of the Pacific* (RIMPAC), *Pacific Skies 24*, *Arctic Defender*, *Nippon Skies* with Japan, *Pitch Black* in Australia, and *Tarang Shakti 1* with India.³² The German naval contingent consisted of one frigate (type 125) accompanied by a replenishment ship and Sea Lynx helicopters. The Air Force conducted exercises in low-level flying, defensive and offensive counter-air operations and air-to-air refuelling, amongst other activities. The air force contingent consisted of 20 fighter aircraft (eight Eurofighters and 12 Tornados), four transport aircraft (A400M) and four Multi Role Tanker Transports (A330).³³

It is clear that the scale of Germany's exercise participation has increased, particularly in 2024. This is especially true for the Air Force, which appears to set aside significant resources for this activity in the region. The Navy's contributions, on the other hand, remain quite low and stable, which is symptomatic of its limited capabilities.³⁴ Its contribution appears more symbolic. Regarding the discussion on competing resources, it is important to note that the Army elements that have participated thus far stem from the Rapid Forces,³⁵ which is not the same forces that are heavily invested in building up Germany's contributions to NATO's eastern flank.³⁶

Multilateral cooperation

As part of its security policy contribution to the rules-based international order, Germany, through its armed forces, also has invested in multilateral cooperation for international law enforcement and is continuing to do so.

This includes the monitoring of UN sanctions on North Korea. This task has been assigned to the German Navy, together with partners, during its deployments of its vessels to the region, both in 2021–2022 and 2024.³⁷ It is doubtful whether the frigate deployed in 2021 brought any benefit and actual monitoring support.^d Nevertheless, it is clear that the German government is

prioritising its contributions to this UN-mandated mission. Since June 2024, Germany has created a liaison officer post for the Enforcement Coordination Cell (ECC) in Japan, which is the destination where the information on suspicious activities and violations of the UN sanctions is forwarded.³⁸ This move will undoubtedly facilitate information exchange and coordination with other navies represented at the ECC, including those from the US, Japan, France, South Korea, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.³⁹

Apart from the liaison officer at the ECC, Germany already has such a post at the Information Fusion Center (IFC) in Singapore, which is an important forum for information-sharing on regional maritime-domain awareness. In August 2024, Germany also joined the US-led United Nations Command (UNC) in South Korea, becoming the 18th nation in a group that supports policing along the fortified border with North Korea.⁴⁰

Strengthening partners' resilience

Another central aspect of Germany's security and defence engagement is its contribution to "strengthen the security policy resilience of partners." In its 2023 Defence Policy Guidelines, the German government recognises a greater role for Indo-Pacific partners in international defence-industrial cooperation as an increasingly important tool to protect the rules-based order.⁴¹

Enhancing military capabilities

One of Germany's instruments to strengthen partners' resilience is the Enable and Enhance Initiative (*Ertüchtigungsinitiative*), which is aimed at strengthening partners both through training and education of civil and military personnel, and through the provision of equipment. Since 2023, the Indo-Pacific has been a new partner region of this initiative.⁴² This opens up for new possibilities to initiate projects with various partners in the region.

In the last few years, Germany has already initiated some projects aimed at strengthening the capabilities of its partners' security forces. Examples include pilot

^d For more information about the doubts concerning the frigate's contribution to the UN-mandated mission in 2021, see Alexandra Sakaki and Göran Swistek, Return from the Choppy Waters of the Indo-Pacific. Implications of the Deployment of the Frigate Bayern, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, March 2022, 3.

Table 1. Transfers of major conventional arms from Germany to Australia, New Zealand, India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and the Philippines. 2015–2023.

Recipient	Weapon description	Nr delivered	Year(s) of delivery
Australia	Armoured personnel carriers (Boxer)	13	2022
	Infantry fighting vehicle (Boxer)	25	2022
	Light helicopter (EC135)	15	2015; 2016; 2017
India	Light transport aircraft (Do-228)	1	2023
	Light transport aircraft (Do-228)	14	2015; 2016; 2017; 2019; 2020
	Maritime patrol aircraft (Do-228MP)	8	2015; 2016
	Maritime patrol aircraft (Do-228MP)	9	2019; 2020; 2021
Indonesia	Armoured engineer vehicle (PiPz-1)	3	2016
	Armoured bridgelayer (BrPz-1 Biber)	3	2015; 2016
	Armoured recovery vehicle (BPz-2)	2	2015
	Armoured recovery vehicle (Buffel)	3	2016
	Infantry fighting vehicle (Marder-1A3)	6	2015
	Mine countermeasures ship (MHV-60)	2	2023
	Tank (Leopard-2A4)	61	2016; 2017
	Tank (Leopard-2A4)	14	2015
Japan	Light helicopter (EC135)	2	2015
Singapore	Submarine (Type-218)	2	2023
	Tank (Leopard-2A4)	45	2016; 2017; 2018; 2019
South Korea	ASM (Taurus KEPD-350)	177	2016; 2017
	ASM (Taurus KEPD-350)	90	2019; 2020
	Submarine (Type-214)	5	2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020

Remark: Other equipment, not included in the table, includes ship engines, vehicle engines, SRAAM, air/sea search radar, ASW sonar, submarine sonar, anti-tank missiles, turbofan engines, and air-search radar.

Source: Table is author's own. Based on data from Arms Transfer Database (c) SIPRI. Data generated on 16 August 2024. <https://armstransfers.sipri.org/ArmsTransfer/CSVResult>.

projects with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam to develop military capabilities in the areas of military engineering and UN peacekeeping training, among others. Another example is the support provided to the coastguards of the Philippines and Malaysia, which includes the provision and training in the use of reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).⁴³ Notwithstanding these projects, the scale of the provided equipment is still limited. This can be illustrated by the fact that Germany thus far donated only two UAVs (Trinity F90+) to the Philippines, an island state with more

than 8,000 islands. Early 2024, the German government announced the donation of four additional UAVs of the same type.⁴⁴

The provision of equipment within the sphere of the Enable and Enhance Initiative can, if necessary, be achieved with the support of arms exports. The government had earlier emphasised that such support should occur in strict compliance with the existing export-control policy framework.⁴⁵

Germany already has substantial arms trade with countries in the Indo-Pacific region. For example, South

Korea was the second-largest receiver of German arms exports between 2018 and 2022.⁴⁶ Exports of heavy weaponry to several countries in the region include submarines (type 214/218), air-launched cruise missiles (Taurus KEPD-350), and main battle tanks (Leopard 2A4); see Table 1. According to Germany's existing export-control policy framework, the export of arms to certain countries, for example India, needs to be approved by the Federal Security Council (*Bundessicherheitsrat*), in which all important ministries are represented and each contract is decided on individually.⁴⁷

Given the current rhetoric concerning a planned easing of German arms-export controls, it is likely that arms trade with other countries in the region, in particular India, will increase. In 2023 and 2024, Defence Minister Pistorius declared an easing of the German arms-exports policy and that Germany is in the process of changing its export-control regulations, with a conclusion expected by the end of 2024.⁴⁸ Pistorius has earlier stated that the German government should support arms deals with India and Indonesia.⁴⁹ In the last few years, the German government has enhanced the efforts to deepen arms cooperation with India.⁵⁰ An easing of the export control regulations would undoubtedly allow the German government to provide military equipment to an increasing number of partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

Improving defence-industrial cooperation

Germany is also cooperating with the US and other allies and partners to strengthen the defence-industrial resilience of the region. It is one of a total of 13 partners and allies that are part of the recently inaugurated multilateral forum Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience (PIPIR).⁵¹ The initiative builds on the Statement of Principles for Indo-Pacific Defense Industrial Base Collaboration that the US Secretary of Defence under the Biden administration, Lloyd Austin, endorsed at the 2024 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.⁵² Importantly, when announcing Germany's endorsement of Austin's Statement of Principles in the summer of 2024, Pistorius highlighted that one dimension of Germany's Pacific partnerships was "guided by a shared vision and a common understanding of mutual obligation."⁵³ This indicates that the German government is eager to demonstrate solidarity and reliability towards the United

States and other regional partners, mirroring the support both the US and Indo-Pacific allies have demonstrated in supporting Ukraine.

One pivotal objective of PIPIR is to strengthen the collective ability to produce and sustain capabilities in the Indo-Pacific. It aims to facilitate collaboration in the defence-industrial base, reducing impediments to production, establishing new sustainment hubs, and addressing supply-chain constraints.⁵⁴ Moreover, it plans to address common acquisition and sustainment issues such as co-development, co-production, and co-sustainment.⁵⁵

The PIPIR forum has some similarities to the forum supporting the larger Ukraine Defence Contact Group (UDCG) established to bolster Ukraine's defence. As with the forum supporting the UDCG in Europe, National Armaments Directors (NAD) and participating nations' equivalents to the US Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment are expected to drive action within PIPIR.⁵⁶ During these meetings [in Europe], the NADs have been tasked to translate higher-level political guidance into actionable measures, such as identifying and delivering solutions and securing appropriate contracts for Ukraine in critical capability areas.⁵⁷

The fact that the German government is involved in this type of format indicates that it perceives Europe's security as connected to that of the Indo-Pacific. This may suggest a belief that the outcome of the war in Ukraine would be decisive for China's actions in the Indo-Pacific. Germany's involvement in PIPIR signals that the government is keen to demonstrate reliability and solidarity should a contingency arise.

CONCLUSION

Germany's Indo-Pacific policy has been in place since 2020, but in the early years of its implementation, the government's policy towards China worked as somewhat of a dampening factor for enhanced security engagement. The findings of this memo suggest that Germany's Indo-Pacific engagement has evolved significantly in recent years, as increased activity has been observed in two vital areas of its security engagement.

The German government appears to be increasingly looking at the region through a security lens, which is a prominent change at the political level. The present

findings moreover suggest that Germany has become slightly less risk-averse with regard to its actions in the Indo-Pacific. The German government's decision to sail through the Taiwan Strait during its Indo-Pacific Deployment of 2024 proves this point. It indicates that the German government is now more willing to send political signals to China than was previously the case. As much as this is a sign of transatlantic solidarity, it also indicates its commitment to protecting its own national interests in the region, among them free and open trade routes at sea.

Overall, the findings suggest that the government has refined its policy toward the Indo-Pacific. Notably, it has identified key priorities for protecting Germany's interests in the region and is actively adjusting its tools to address these priorities. One key priority is "expanding security cooperation, promoting resilience." The two areas analysed in this memo, that is, enhanced military engagement and efforts to strengthen the security resilience of partners, are important for fulfilling this priority. This memo finds that adjustments within these areas are already underway, with Germany expanding its tools for engagement. This is illustrated in three examples.

First, the annual deployments of the *Bundeswehr* to the region have turned larger and more complex, with more branches involved in exercises. Germany has created new posts for liaison officers to facilitate exchange with allies and partners, notably at the USINDOPACOM in Hawaii and the ECC in Japan. Despite large commitments to NATO on the European continent, coupled with limited capabilities, the German government has prioritised the expansion of the participation of force elements from the *Bundeswehr* in continuous and regular military exercises in the region. Setting aside resources for a secondary task of the *Bundeswehr*, in a milieu of limited capabilities, demonstrates political investment.

Second, Germany is adapting its available means in order to strengthen the civil and military capabilities of its partners. The German government has created new projects aimed at strengthening capabilities or training its partners' security forces. It is also in the process of changing its arms-export policy to facilitate arms trade with certain countries in the region. Therefore, in the upcoming years, Germany is likely to further expand its means to strengthen its partners' [military] capabilities.

Third, Germany is involved in the US's newly inaugurated multilateral forum, PIPIR, intended to strengthen cooperation around defence-industrial base issues regarding the Indo-Pacific region. Germany's involvement in this forum undoubtedly indicates it has advanced politically in terms of its willingness to show common resolve with partners and allies concerning the region.

LOOKING AHEAD

The findings of this memo indeed suggest that the German government is currently demonstrating an impetus toward a political commitment to the Indo-Pacific region. However, in order to understand Germany's future engagement in the region, it is crucial to contemplate what may be feasible rather than what the government might desire to pursue. The German government is indeed politically committed to enhancing its military engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, but the country faces several constraints in its ability to do so.

The first constraint concerns capabilities. As the key security policy initiatives of the IPG are of maritime nature, the implementation falls on the German Navy. The German Navy, being the smallest branch of the *Bundeswehr*, has the most visible bottlenecks of all the branches. Despite having a limited number of units, the German Navy also operates at an extensive range and maintains numerous commitments. It continuously provides units to NATO, the EU, and the UN.⁵⁸ Due to substantial shortfalls in personnel and materiel, the Navy has previously been temporarily forced to suspend deployment of its units to Standing NATO Maritime Groups.⁵⁹ A continuous presence in the Indo-Pacific is not guaranteed and would only be feasible if the navy reprioritises its other assignments, potentially setting aside other missions or mission-like obligations.⁶⁰

The second constraint concerns economic dependencies. Germany still has extensive trade relations with China, creating significant economic dependencies that could pose challenges if a contingency were to emerge. In such a situation, the cost-risk calculation of the German government could change, potentially altering priorities. Hence, a potential gap between feasible options and ideal aspirations might emerge. Looking

ahead, Berlin's diversification and de-risking of its economic relations with Beijing will be of utmost importance in avoiding such a situation.

Despite these potential constraints, however, there are some aspects that suggest that the German government is unlikely to reverse its current course. First, Germany has increasingly institutionalised parts of its engagement, for instance, through the creation of new liaison officers and the provision of equipment that requires both training and maintenance. Second, one can assume that the political costs of *leaving us* initiatives, such as PIPIR, or stopping to send political signals towards China, would likely be perceived as high and thus bear the risk of damaging Germany's relations with the United States.

In 2025, the context for Germany's Indo-Pacific engagement could change quite substantially. Should the new US administration, for example demand that European allies further focus their capabilities on Europe, instead of the Indo-Pacific, the priorities of the German government could change. Nevertheless, the United States is not the only driving force behind Germany's engagement in the region. The push for more engagement will likely continue to come from other sources, such as Indo-Pacific partners, other European allies, or even from within, out of a will to protect Germany's economic interests in the region. Although all parties at the centre of the political spectrum agree with the current course of action, the government that emerges from Germany's federal elections in February 2025 will need to take these considerations into account. ■

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Endnotes

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