



MARKUS C. KERBER

## **Committed to Leadership in Continental Europe?**

*On German strategic deficits and how to overcome them*

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine, foreseeable since the end of 2021, caught Germany on the wrong foot. This consequence arose from not only the specific misjudgement of Putin by the German party establishment, but also Germany's wider indisposition in the geopolitical arena. Since the economic miracle which began in the 1950s, the second German republic was firmly convinced that it could exhaust its ambition solely by increasing the gross national product. On 22 February 2022, it was brought to the realisation that, in order to secure prosperity and freedom, one must be able to distinguish between friend and foe. What led to a foreign policy fiasco and triggered a hasty policy announcement by the Chancellor in the Bundestag has its deeper causes in the Germans' refusal to accept real-world politics; that is, in their unwillingness to see the world as a space fissured by hostility.

Instead, the unholy alliance of the Federation of German Industries (BDI) – dominated by conservative CDU representatives, together with pacifist Greens who are hostile to the Bundeswehr (armed forces) - and a foreign policy reduced to humanitarian intervention, politically neutralized Germany. The German party oligarchy believed itself to be surrounded only by friends. Although the Ukrainian war is cruellest for those directly affected, the shock is also salutary for the Germans and their party politicians. For the latter, it could become a day of reckoning. The Moscow connections of Schröder, Gabriel, Steinmeier and Merkel have shown how naïve and dangerous their stance towards Russia was.

Germany's abrupt arrival at a strategic crossroads, raises the urgent question of how the nation should position herself in the future. What should be the role of the Bundeswehr? How should violence in politics be dealt with? What should be the objectives of the national armaments industry?

These are questions that politicians can no longer avoid. At present, the political elite has no independent compass, instead merely reacting to public opinion and to the wishes of Ukraine and NATO. The Greens have promptly demonstrated their opportunism and are demanding the use of German battle tanks against Russia. This demand is all the more problematic because it is being made by party politicians who are not familiar with the drawbacks of battle tanks, such as limited offensive power combined with high escalation potential.

The following lines attempt to provide orientation in order to anchor the search for a strategy for Germany where it belongs according to Egon Bahr: in the definition of German interests.

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