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## FADING SENTIMENTALITY

### GERMAN ASSESSMENTS OF U.S. POWER

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Void of emotion or fanfare, German elites assume that over the next ten years the United States will experience a period of relative decline (militarily and economically) as China, and to a lesser extent India and Brazil, will experience a period of ascendancy. German opinion leaders, however, are not motivated to alter or change their own policies or behaviors on the basis of this assumption of decline. Simply put, they don't really give it all that much thought or attention. American opinion leaders conceptualize in global terms; German as well as European elites conceptualize in terms of process, localized negotiation, and regional dialogue.

Freed from its culture of self-restraint, German policy—both foreign and economic—is taking initial and often erratic steps into a new geostrategic and economic context. No longer clinging to the institutional legs of NATO, the European Union, the United Nations, or the United States as institutional solidarity and transatlantic romanticism fades, German leaders are forging their own policy path, strongly guided by political survival of the elite and shaped by public opinion.

The past few months have seen dramatic reversals of German policy. For the first time, Germany, as a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council, voted in favor of a resolution that called Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories illegal and demanded their immediate halt, a significant change in policy toward Israel. Joined by Russia, China, Brazil, and India, Germany also abstained from UN Security Council Resolution 1973 to protect the Libyan civilian population by all means necessary, and it went so far as to remove its naval assets from the Mediterranean to ensure that it would not be involved in any military action, completely isolating itself from Europe. In late 2010, joined by China, Germany proactively worked against a U.S. initiative introduced at the November 2010 Group of 20 (G-20) summit to “rebalance” export-growth countries. All three decisions go against the very grain of established German policy for the past 60 years.

Why is a strong and reliable American partner becoming increasingly unreliable and difficult in the eyes of its allies and partners? Does this change in part reflect German attitudes toward America's future power and presence? Although recent German decisions can be explained by domestic political forces, such a dramatic change does underscore both an intra-European drift away from greater European integration and a slow disintegration of transatlantic solidarity toward a more insular and nationalistic policy *raison d'être* for Germany. Germany now solicits a high price for its continued support, particularly in support of further European integration. One German commentator has suggested that Germany now places a “price tag on multilateral solutions.” The American foreign and security policy glue that held Europe and the transatlantic community together during the Cold War and immediate post-Cold War eras is no longer an effective adhesive. Today we are bearing witness to the first tentative policy steps by Germany without Europe and the United States.



## A Changed Historical and Political Context

German leaders believe that militarily the United States will continue to be Europe's military default power for the next ten years as Germany grows increasingly reliant on U.S. security guarantees as it reduces its own military expenditures. On critical international economic issues, however, Germany will be more willing to challenge U.S.-led global economic policy prescriptions over the coming years as Germans firmly believe that the United States is headed in the wrong direction by not investing in or focusing on the “correct” policy priorities: energy security, climate change, budget austerity, and regulating financial markets appropriately.

In many ways, how Germany views America's future power and presence and how it views its own evolving global role are intertwined, and each view mutually defines the other. German sentimentality about the United States and Europe is fading quickly as German foreign and economic policy becomes more rational, less ideological, and more self-interested. U.S. sentimentality about Europe is also fading. The transatlantic relationship is no longer the center for many issues of mutual concern, and, therefore, maintaining a sense of common purpose will become increasingly difficult. Perhaps most troubling for the future, German elites are growing increasingly indifferent and ambivalent toward the United States and Europe in general on a variety of strategic topics. Continued German ambivalence toward an increasingly disinterested United States will substantially alter U.S.-German relations, potentially increasing bilateral tensions during the next decade.

This paper will provide an assessment of German elites' views on future U.S. power, presence, and projection; the growing divergence between the United States and Germany on international economic issues; German policy formation toward the emerging powers; and the political

ramifications of long-term German indifference toward the United States (and vice versa). These observations emerged from extensive discussions with a wide range of German opinion leaders, including members of the Bundestag, senior government officials, journalists, and German scholars.

## Are America and the West in Relative Decline?

German scholarly articles speak to the relative decline of the United States, but these are not usually original German thinking; most often, collections of American writings discussing America's relative decline are reproduced for German elites' consumption. These scholarly regurgitations usually focus less on America's decline (which is assumed) and more on the emergence of new economic powers like China.<sup>1</sup> Many German elites simply take the relative decline of the United States for granted (although they acknowledge America's absolute power today). There is a dearth of German literature providing analytical commentary on how German policy will adjust to this assumed U.S. decline and little discussion about what would or should happen if the last remaining superpower is limited in executing its power. In general, German elites are uncomfortable with discussing national power concepts, particularly their own. Stefan Kornelius, foreign editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, notes that Germany resembles "a nation in shackles of its own making."<sup>2</sup>

More often than not, European elites tend to lump the United States and Europe together and refer to the West as being in decline. While there is some *schadenfreude* about the "fading of America's unipolar moment,"<sup>3</sup> the European chattering classes begrudgingly acknowledge that Europe too is in decline and shrug with resignation at the thought. What was most striking about several conversations with members of the German Bundestag and foreign policy elite is the lack of emotion and passion surrounding a discussion of U.S. power and its presence in the future. Many referred to their intense ambivalence about a U.S. decline. In fact, one senior German official noted that he was "not unhappy that America's capability to react is diminishing." Therefore, if the relative decline of the United States means that it must pause or rethink the frequency by which it projects (hard) power, all the better. Paradoxically, as German elites strongly assume that the United States is in decline, they also assume that the United States "will fix" global problems in the future. But should the United States be unwilling or unable to use its hard-power projection when and where Germany and more broadly Europe believe it must be deployed to protect a vital European interest (although this would be an exceptional event), it would be a complete and traumatic shock to German elites. As much as German officials and Europeans bitterly complain about the militarization of U.S. foreign policy (and Americans bitterly complain about Europe's demilitarization), Europe certainly assumes that the United States is its ultimate default. Should Germany ever need U.S. power and should Germans formally call upon it, it will be available to them, full stop. As Josef Joffe, coeditor of *Die Zeit*, noted in 2009:

The default power does what others cannot or will not do. It underwrites Europe's security against a resurgent Russia—which is why U.S. troops remain welcome there even 20 years after

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1. Tim Altegör, "Der Verfall amerikanischer Vormacht—Rückkehr einer Debatte, Beiträge in US-Fachzeitschriften seit dem Amtsantritt Obamas," *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Zeitschriftenschau* (July 2010).

2. Constanze Stelzenmüller, "Hands Off Our Shackles, Please: The Debate over German Security Policies," German Marshall Fund of the United States, March 1, 2010.

3. Jonathan Holslag, "Europe in the Age of Fragile Powers," *Europe's World*, October-November 2010.

Moscow's capitulation in the Cold War. It helps the Europeans take care of local malefactors, such as former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.<sup>4</sup>

Why else would Germany and Europe as a whole reduce their own defense spending during the past ten years and continue to do so in the future (other than to maintain critical support to indigenous industry) if they didn't assume that the United States would come to their military rescue?

In a 2009 survey of German foreign policy elites<sup>5</sup> conducted by the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), nearly all those polled believe the United States is a political superpower today (95 percent) and would remain a superpower for the next 20 years (86 percent). Thirty-nine percent polled believed China was a political superpower today, and 76 percent thought that China would be a superpower in 20 years. Introspectively, German elites thought the relative strength of Germany would decrease over the next 20 years in anticipation of a future, stronger European Union (EU) following ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Forty-two percent thought the relative strength of the EU would increase over the next several years.

German elites today are positive about the new international approach of the United States. There was an initial assumption, based on European euphoria regarding President Barack Obama's election, that the new administration would be more "European" in outlook and approach, such as giving more attention to climate change issues and returning to multilateralism. However, there is a growing recognition among German opinion leaders that there is more continuity in U.S. foreign policy than anticipated, and their long-term perspective about future U.S. influence has been dramatically tempered by their close observation of U.S. domestic politics, particularly on climate change policy.

One of the main drivers of growing German pessimism about the relative decline of the United States is the German belief that the United States is simply not investing in the "correct" priorities. The most important topics for German elites in the next five to ten years will be energy security, climate change, and managing the global economy and controlling the financial markets. In comparison, only 27 percent of German elites believe that fighting international terrorism is very important. Germans see climate change policy and energy security—priorities that are dear to them—as being very low on the U.S. priority list. While there is certainly nothing new about differing transatlantic agendas, it has become more difficult to overcome these differences and find common ground, exacerbating a "creeping alienation"<sup>6</sup> between Germany and the United States.

## Implications for U.S. Policy

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the financial and economic crisis, have brought America to the limits of its power. At the same time countries like China and India are gaining influence globally while Brazil and Iran are striving for regional dominance. Obama stretches out his hand (not always successfully) to all of these countries and seeks to expand power

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4. Joseph Joffe, "The Default Power," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 5 (September-October 2009): pp. 21–35.

5. "Trends in German Foreign Policy: Results from the First German Foreign Policy Elite Survey," Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V. and Dimap Group, 2009.

6. Theo Sommer, "The State of the Transatlantic Relationship: U.S.-German Relations" (address before the Charlotte Eric M. Warburg Chapter of the American Council on Germany and the World Affairs Council of Charlotte, July 25, 2008).

through involvement and cooperation. The superpower's new radically pragmatic motto is: give and take.

This policy doesn't take much notice of old alliances, or surviving sentimentalities. Above all the Europeans—for decades, privileged partners and NATO allies—have felt this. They experience the change of climate in Washington as coldness. And they are freezing. Obama may have mobilized new sympathy for the US among European people. However, in the seats of power across the old world there are increasing complaints that the president disdainfully sees Europe only according to how useful it can be.<sup>7</sup>

Although the above quotation may be overly harsh in tone, it captures a growing perception in Germany and throughout Europe that the United States takes its allies and “privileged partners” for granted. German and European elites believe that they have earned a bit more attention and respect than other international partners that do not share the same history and values with the United States and have not accepted a solemn commitment to defend one another. While recognizing they are no longer the new and exciting “it” thing internationally, they don't quite understand why they don't have a small say in how the United States intends to implement its policies in the Middle East, South Asia, and elsewhere, particularly as the United States relies on European development and military assistance to support its objectives. One increasingly hears German leaders complain that they believe Washington's definition of transatlanticism has morphed into American transactionalism with Europe.

True partnership begins with political, economic, and security agendas that align, more or less. During the past decade, U.S. and German interests have not aligned; if anything, the two countries' agendas have become inverted. If, to use the quotation above, the United States is interested only in “give and take,” then that is exactly what is needed to help bring some semblance of agenda realignment to U.S.-German relations. Both sides must be willing to “give” on an agenda item that may not be of strategic importance to one party but is of great concern and interest to the other. Furthermore, a “taking” concept cannot simply be construed by German elites as Americans visiting Berlin with PowerPoint presentations in tow in order to tell Germany how and what it must contribute. Conversely, “taking” cannot be viewed simply as Europeans taking U.S. security guarantees and not giving anything in return. If Afghanistan is on the top of the U.S. agenda, then—Germans say—the second item on the agenda should be climate change. Recent trends suggest that, to attract the interest of senior U.S. officials, Germans have begrudgingly allowed the United States to dictate the agenda. Partnership, however, cannot be sustained if you are discussing only one partner's interests. Over the long term, the other partner simply begins to tune out the conversation.

One explanation for the growing agenda disequilibrium could be attributed to the lack of a strategic culture in Germany. Because postwar Germany has profited so completely from both U.S. protection and the institutional straitjacket of European integration, German elites simply have forgotten how to think strategically and globally. There is no strategic debate in Germany: Germany has not developed a national security strategy, there is very little dialogue among strategic opinion leaders, and there is very little sense of direction or purpose on where Germany and Europe actually stand and should stand in the world.

Following the Iraq War and the near economic collapse around the world, lack of trust in the global stewardship of the United States coupled with growing disbelief in the EU have robbed

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7. Ibid.



even the more sophisticated members of the elite of any concept of identifying and moving toward strategic goals. Although some have argued that Germany does in fact have a strategic community, it is simply not “commensurate with Germany’s weight.”<sup>8</sup> Whether or not a strategic community exists, it is in the U.S. interest to help the Germans invest in the development of a robust, indigenous strategic community (particularly in the security field) by ensuring that German institutions can effectively ponder longer-term issues, challenge official positions, and make innovative policy recommendations. Germany has several excellent think tanks, but their strategic “bench” must be deepened and broadened, and there must be greater dialogue and interplay between current and former government officials, experts, and nongovernmental actors.

Another plausible explanation could be that, owing to the transatlantic difficulties over the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars coupled with the devastating effects of Europe’s political and economic crisis, there is insufficient political appetite or intellectual enthusiasm for greater transatlanticism by London, Paris, Rome, and Madrid. If the traditional engines of Europe (excluding Germany) have lost their economic and political mojo for the foreseeable future, then Poland has slowly begun to acquire some of its own owing to a more stable economic situation, closer ties to Berlin, and improved relations with Moscow. Look to continued Polish policy activism within the EU and NATO to grow over the next several years as Poles implement smarter politics and policies within the EU (with ever-closer positioning to Berlin) while simultaneously seeking greater U.S. security and political accommodation. Should Poland continue to demonstrate economic and political vibrancy and should Warsaw and Berlin identify additional common policy ground, Warsaw’s policy activism may pull the EU and NATO more forcefully to the East with more forward-looking and pragmatic policies toward Russia and the post-Soviet space.

Moreover, the next generation of German and European leaders is not being shaped by the geopolitical and geostrategic imperatives of either the Cold War, the post Cold War, post-9/11 transatlanticism, or European unity. Today European leaders are being profoundly shaped by an existential geoeconomic crisis. Particularly in Germany, but also throughout Europe, European leaders are defining themselves and being judged by public opinion based upon their success or failure in the economic sphere, not in foreign or security policy.

## The Global Economy

Even assuming a return to a truer form of U.S.-German partnership and the development of a strategic community in Germany, the most daunting challenge to the future U.S.-German relationship and the German-European relationship will be overcoming a widening policy gap on the global economy. One could argue that this policy divergence is akin to an economic “Fulda Gap” that places the United States and Europe on opposite sides and thus will have a profound impact on future bilateral and transatlantic relations. In addition to dividing across the Atlantic, this new economic Fulda Gap does not geographically divide Europe West from East; it divides it North from South. The only remaining constant is the centrality of Germany, and only time will tell whether a future economic “iron curtain” will form.

In 20 years, German elites believe the economic power of the United States will ebb (71 percent), and China’s economic power will grow (88 percent). German elites see their own economic power at its zenith today (48 percent) and believe Germany’s power will diminish over the next 20

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8. Stelzenmüller, “Hands Off Our Shackles, Please,” p. 4.

years, with only 12 percent contending that Germany will be an economic powerhouse in 2029.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps as a reflection of their own diminishment, German elites also see the EU's economic weight reduced over that same time period. German elites see the economic rise of India and China at the expense of themselves and of other older powers such as the United States and Japan.

For the foreseeable future, on economic matters German leaders will not acquiesce to an American economic default power. If anything, German elites will fight and challenge the U.S. economic vision of the future as they simultaneously congratulate themselves on the moral certitude that thrifty Swabian housewives have had it right all along. Germans will fight for their disciplined, rules-based vision bilaterally (as they increasingly resent calls and letters from the United States urging them to agree to deals that contradict their global economic vision), within the Group of Eight and, as best they can, within the G-20 format. German economic hubris (some say “moral megalomania”<sup>10</sup>) may alienate Germany's friends in the United States and elsewhere in Europe and perpetuate Germany's own distorted views of its economic rationality. This sentiment was best captured in an editorial in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “. . . Obama's negotiators brazenly rejected all of the ideas that the Europeans had for regulating the financial markets. Germany was castigated as a parasite of the global economy.”<sup>11</sup>

Another complication to the broader European economic agenda is that it can no longer be assumed that Germany will underwrite the economic and political costs of European integration and unity itself. Gone are the days when German leaders took economic decisions (like creation of the euro) in order to give Germany more political space to maneuver within Europe. The last German check in support of European unity may have been written on May 9, 2010, when Germany did the politically unpalatable: it agreed to support a \$1 trillion bailout package for Greece and the euro. Although Europe's economic contagion has now spread to Ireland and is fast encroaching upon Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Belgium, German elites will strongly resist any further subordination of their economic interests and appear to be more than willing to throw away 60 years of political legitimacy if necessary—all done in the name of a stronger, greater Europe in the future.

It is absolutely vital to return Germany and the United States to a shared economic vision. This does not mean creating another Transatlantic Economic Council-like mechanism for technical dialogue. This is about returning to the original spirit of the Group of Seven (G-7) construct where heads of state and government from the “West” quietly went off-site and had a conversation about how “they,” the Western democracies, were going to address the formidable economic challenges of their day. While on occasion you can see some of this type of dialogue occurring at the G-7 finance minister level, it is insufficient. This dialogue must take place at the highest levels of government without the fanfare, showmanship, and agenda distractions that have become the norm of the G-“fill in the blank” summits. Because the global economic conversation has brought so many new and important voices to the table, a unified voice and approach by Western democracies is that much more critical to ensure a consolidated and balanced approach toward the emerging economies, particularly China.

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9. “Trends in German Foreign Policy.”

10. Stelzenmüller, “Hands Off Our Shackles, Please.”

11. Christian Wernicke, “Der Unnahbare; Barack Obama nimmt auf alte Allianzen keine Rücksicht, der US-Präsident kalkuliert lieber kühl,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 25, 2010.

## Germany and the Emerging Powers

Until very recently, Germany's approach to the emerging powers and the non-Western world was based on mutual goals defined by the EU and NATO and multilaterally oriented toward democracy building and conflict prevention, with two exceptions: Israel and Russia. Beginning in 1952, the Federal Republic invested great sums of financial and political capital in Israel—Germany's sole strategic partner outside the Atlantic Alliance—to atone for the wrongs of the Third Reich. As a result, Germany now has a strategic, cultural, and economic position in Israel that is second only to the United States. The other unique German focus has been Russia. Germany and Russia have maintained a highly complex relationship since the eighteenth century. Although German society generally adopts a cautious view of Russian culture and society, political and economic leaders feel a strong need to maintain positive ties owing to deep-seated insecurity about Russia's power and behavior.

With these exceptions, strategically and even economically, the rest of the world has been nearly a blank slate. Neither India nor China has figured in German political calculations until recently. Although Japan is an important trading partner, the complexities of its role and the Asia-Pacific region are generally not understood by most German scholars and leaders. German elites lack both the experience and confidence to adopt an ambitious approach to the emerging world, and, as a result, there is a gap in German knowledge about these new global dynamics. Germany's unexpectedly strong economic performance in 2010 has put the issue even more into focus. German leaders are experiencing—to both their surprise and their increasingly confident delight—their own global economic ascendancy and its accompanied political power. As German elites begin to adjust to the dangers and important opportunities from the burgeoning multipolar global setting, they are discovering new opportunities that they did not know existed and they are finding it difficult to deal with the complexities of a dramatically new situation.

As Germany confronts this new global reality, simultaneously it is confronted by a new and disturbing reality with its EU and U.S. partners. The ongoing European economic crisis has demonstrated to many Germans that they cannot count on European structures to protect their global economic position. Germany finds itself in the uncomfortable position of currently having neither a European economic peer nor an obvious internal ally. A continued absence of U.S. guidance and strategic interest in Europe has created a sense of drift and even abandonment at the exact moment when Germany most needs strategic guidance to navigate this new global terrain. As a result, Germany's efforts to deal with the emerging powers will be shaped and defined by its continued uncertainty regarding the efficacy of its two core relationships.

Amid this uncertainty, what can be observed is the formulation of an insular, bifurcated German foreign-policy-making process: maximizing trade and economic relations while simultaneously encasing the economic relationship with strong cultural, educational, and political ties. Although Germany's historical experience mandates that its economic relations will be tempered and balanced by a values- and normative-based framework to varying degrees, Germany's persistent economic diplomacy will form the basis of its long-term relationship with emerging powers, be it with Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, or even within the EU. German leaders will make deliberate, methodical, agreement-based changes to their foreign policy to accommodate and protect their export-fueled economic growth in the coming years. Germany will be a steady partner that often disappoints its friends with its unwillingness (or perhaps inability) to take the initiative on important problems.



Germany will agree with the U.S. values-based approach to global challenges and will not seek to challenge the global leadership of the United States; if anything, Germany benefits economically from the U.S. security umbrella. Irrespective of U.S. views, desires, or wishes, German policy will seek to accentuate the economic positives of its relations with emerging powers while it makes the necessary cultural, historical, or political concessions and adjustments in order to address negative bilateral attributes. When required, German diplomacy will demonstrate limited flexibility in multilateral settings, such as in the EU and the G-20, as it pursues its national economic interests, attempts to avoid isolation, and, most important, enforces its *pacta sunt servanda* mantra.

Germany's policy priorities for the emerging economies speak for themselves:

- Turkey: German exports to Turkey in 2010 totaled \$14 billion.<sup>12</sup> Germany was Turkey's main trade partner for exports in 2010, purchasing \$990 million worth of goods,<sup>13</sup> and was Turkey's principal export destination at 9.6 percent of all exports (in 2009) and second principal import source at 10 percent (in 2009).<sup>14</sup> Turkey is the largest buyer of German arms exports, accounting for 14 percent of arms shipped abroad.<sup>15</sup>
- Iran: Exports from Germany to Iran increased 11.6 percent to \$3.6 billion in a time span of roughly eight months, from January through August 2010. In 2009, German export values to Iran totaled \$5.3 billion. German imports from Iran doubled to \$765 million against the figure for the first eight months of 2009.<sup>16</sup>
- Russia: Exports from Germany to Russia in 2009 were \$29 billion.<sup>17</sup>
- China: German exports to China in 2009 were \$53 billion.<sup>18</sup>
- EU: Nearly two-thirds of all German imports and exports originate or remain within the EU, with France topping the export list in 2009 with \$116 billion.<sup>19</sup>

One example of Germany's policy approach can be found in its approach to an emerging Turkey:

**Bifurcation.** Germany seeks to enhance its trade relationship with Turkey and solidify its long-standing cultural, energy security, and educational ties (for example, opening universities and encouraging energy trade) in the name of a "privileged partnership" with Turkey.

***Pacta sunt servanda.*** Germany agreed in 2005 to begin the formal negotiating process for Turkey's EU accession, and, in turn, Turkey promised the EU that it would fulfill its commitment to the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement by opening port access to Cyprus. Turkey has

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12. "Foreign Trade: Ranking of Germany's Trading partners in Foreign Trade," Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden, December 16, 2010.

13. "Press Release: Foreign Trade Statistics, January 2011," no. 40, Turkish Statistical Institute, Prime Ministry Under-Secretariat of Customs, February 28, 2011.

14. "Country Fact Sheet: Turkey," Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, compiled by the Market Information and Research Section, December 2009.

15. Nancy Isenson, "Germany Doubles Arms Exports," Deutsche Welle, March 15, 2010.

16. Iran Energy Project, "Iran-Germany Trade Prospering," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Washington, D.C., November 3, 2010.

17. "Foreign Trade: Ranking of Germany's Trading partners in Foreign Trade," Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden, December 16, 2010.

18. Ibid.

19. Germany Trade and Investment, Market Research, Federal Statistical Office, 2010.

not fulfilled its promise, but Germany has kept its commitment by not blocking the opening of any of Turkey's accession chapters (as have other EU members).

**Avoid isolation.** Thus far, German leaders have managed with some success to avoid both overly positive (on the part of the United Kingdom) and negative (France) rhetoric vis-à-vis Turkish EU membership, while underscoring Germany's long-standing cultural ties and vigorously solidifying its economic ties with Turkey, which is opening new markets in the Middle East and Central Asia.

A similar pattern can be discerned in Germany's approach to Iran: Germany strongly believes that Iran must fulfill its obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency and the international community regarding its nuclear activities and respect human rights. German economic relations with Iran continue on the basis of long-standing economic, historic, and cultural ties despite repeated rounds of international sanctions.

A coherent and future German policy or strategy has yet to be formed for two regional powers: China and the EU. For now, German-Sino economic agendas are aligned on the shared need to maintain robust export growth. Because Germany does not share historic or cultural ties with China as it does with Turkey and Iran, it is struggling to identify an appropriate adjustment strategy to better balance its strong economic relationship and human rights dialogue. Germany therefore lurches between an economics-based or a human rights- and values-based relationship with China. Therefore, U.S. efforts to rebalance Germany away from its export-led growth strategy will only tip the German scales in favor of its economic relationship with China and away from its values-based framework.

Finally and seemingly counterintuitively, Germany has yet to formulate an effective EU strategy in the post-sovereign-debt-crisis era that comports to its preferred economic vision and articulates the emergence of its own national interests in Europe distinct from its past communitarian approach. How can Germany force Europe to be shaped in Germany's economic image without harming its own largest export market and damaging the German banking system in the process? Moreover, because Germans do not have an organic cultural affinity with southern or Mediterranean Europe, they are unable to form a balancing strategy between their economic interests and their cultural ties as they try to address the eurozone crisis. These two contradictory policy prescriptions have stymied Berlin's EU policy formulation and, in turn, have stymied the EU's future vision and role. Formed or not, what is clear is that sustained German economic strength and rapid internal political dynamism will largely shape future European political trends, and Germany's eventual response to Europe's sovereign debt crisis will profoundly shape the continent, with unknown consequences, for the next three to five years.

## Conclusion

The analysis of how Germans perceive America's future power in all of its manifestations boils down to a central question that Germans themselves cannot answer: Where do Western, like-minded democracies fit into the global vision of the United States? Or do they fit at all? In its rush to address the strategic conundrum of having enormous power but feeling less and less regionally influential and more challenged, the United States has not yet formed a definitive answer to this central question of where values-based alliances enter into the new multipolar equation. At a time when Germany and Europe urgently seek U.S. strategic guidance, the United States is silent or

reverts to comforting, albeit increasingly hollow, Cold War rhetoric about the transatlantic relationship being a “cornerstone” of international relations.

If the United States cannot answer this question, or if it is unwilling to articulate its vision of how like-minded countries can effectively join forces, Germany most certainly cannot. While it waits for Washington to answer or perhaps grows indifferent to its eventual response, Germany will continue to more assertively and unilaterally position itself on a variety of topics—be it financial regulation, austerity, relations with China, or eliminating U.S. nuclear weapons from its soil—thus causing significant disharmony in the U.S.-German relationship for years to come.