

Vortrag von Dr. Robin Christian Howard Niblett: „Internationale Erwartungen an Deutschland“

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Please forgive me, but I will speak in English. Although I speak a bit of German, it is not going to be good enough to be able to tackle this very important topic. So, Dr. von Geyer, thank you very much for that introduction and for this invitation. Minister von der Leyen, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great opportunity, a great pleasure, and an honour, actually, to have the opportunity to share some thoughts with you on this broad topic of international expectations of Germany. I want to do three things, as you set off on your white book consultation. The first is to talk about the world that Germany is in, and the expectations that this is creating, from my perspective. The second is about Germany's status in the world, and here the danger of Volker Perthes and SWP and Chatham House having such good working relationships is that I share a lot of the perceptions that Volker laid out in his remarks. I might come at it from a slightly different angle, but I think you will see some similarities there, which hopefully will help with your white book process. And, third, I will then say some words about the expectations of what Germany's future role will be.

So let me start with the world that Germany is in. I think the world is experiencing three simultaneous sets of pressures right now. The first of these is a result of the remarkable opportunities of globalisation: wealth creation, the rise of a global middle class, accompanied by a global political awakening amongst that middle class, that is creating pressures on governments, whether they be democratic, whether they be authoritarian, to deliver efficient government. And the pressures to deliver efficient government in a globalised world lead to pressures of interdependence. How do we fix things together? That is good.

But the second force, which accompanies globalisation, is the much greater competition for influence. There are winners and there are losers in the process of globalisation. They are jockeying for power, for leverage, and this becomes especially important as Germany thinks about its future. The third force is state fragmentation, which has really become apparent in the last couple of years in particular. This fragmentation is taking place not just in the Middle East. As a Brit who was wondering whether Scotland would still be part of the United Kingdom a few months ago, I am keenly aware that this force

is much more widespread. This could affect Europe just as much in its own particular way.

I think the first two forces, the ones about the globalisation and interdependence and the ones about competition, are the most relevant for this talk about international expectations of Germany. In a way, Germany stands as an example of the power of globalisation. It has rebuilt itself over the last 70 years to become one of the most successful global economies. It has taken advantage of open markets, of the capacity for interdependence, global supply chains, foreign investment. It has taken advantage of a non-mercantilist world in Europe and internationally. But it cannot escape the competitive forces that globalisation has unleashed – pressure from the winners, the losers, whether they be in Europe or in Asia. It cannot escape the fact that we are living in a world where there is a loss of trust between the rising powers and the established powers. The rising powers do not trust the established ones to step aside and give them space to rise. The established powers do not believe that the rising powers will work according to the rules that we have established. All of these forces are weakening international institutions, they are threatening globalisation and they are leading to competition.

What it means is that all countries are looking for support, for external support to help them in this process of promoting their cause and their interests. And if a country is seen as being powerful and successful, and I think Germany fits that category, then everyone wants something from you. Traditional allies, the U.S., Britain, expect Germany's support in this new form of global competition - that Germany will be a good ally. The notion of a 'good ally' carries echoes, though, of a hierarchy of leadership, where those who established the alliance get to lead, while others follow, and this is something that, obviously, Germany has to cope with. But then rising powers, such as China, also expect Germany's accommodation. That Germany will see the world from a Chinese perspective, that it will focus on the economic benefits that both sides are sharing so clearly. That a multi-polar world is a good outcome. That non-intervention in internal affairs is the right approach.

Then you have the declining powers, such as Russia, which expect Germany's sympathy, understanding. We must work together for stability, it suggests. Do not mess around with us, we will not mess around with you. And then we have the non-state actors, who are always looking today to see what values a country works by. These

actos can have the ear of the public and resonance through media, through the diffusion of power, so as to hold politicians to account in ways they were never able to do before. So this is the kind of world Germany is in.

But what sort of country is Germany? And here you are going to hear some phraseology that you also heard from Volker just now. But I want to add a word. I think Germany is not just a “mid-size power”, as Volker said. I believe that Germany is now seen as a mid-sized great power. And I add the word “great” deliberately. It may not be a very popular phrase to use in Germany, but I think the German government needs to confront the expectations concerning its behaviour in international relations and the competition that it is going to experience for its support as a country that is seen not just as mid-sized, which implies perhaps that ability just to lead from the centre. But if you are seen as a mid-sized great power, then it is your leadership sometimes from the front that people also expect.

Germany is not a permanent member of the UN Security Council, it is not a recognised UN power, but despite this, I think it is as much a mid-sized great power as France or Britain, as these European neighbours consider themselves to be. And why is this? Really, because power in international relations today is not just about statistics, it is not about seats in international institutions, it is about influence. International influence. In Germany’s case, the statistics carry their own story. Germany’s military capabilities, which will be a big focus of your study, while less than in some other European countries, still puts it in the top ten countries spending on defence, despite being under 1,5 percent of GDP. Germany could do more. Germany could be higher in that list, or at least could retain its position in that list as other countries like China, India, Brazil and others pick up their spending. Germany is the world’s fourth largest economy, the largest in Europe. But more importantly, it is structurally strong. In a country like China, number two in the world economy, I would not want to be sitting in Beijing trying to work out how to get China through its middle income trap. Will it face a great depression? Germany, on the other hand, has recently been through its difficult economic period, responding not least with the important reforms undertaken in 2000/2005. Germany is the world’s second or third largest exporter, depending on how you measure the latest figures. It has the global brands to meet the growing demand in the world right now. Yes, it faces some risks; Germany’s manufacturing Mittelstand model could face increasing competition. But right now, it is in a strong position. And Germany has great soft power assets, those assets of attraction rather than coercion, from being the third

largest donor of foreign aid to, as recent papers have pointed out, being -- which was a surprise to me actually -- the world's second largest attracter of net immigration right now. In a globalised world, it is a country where, its economic success gives it a great power status. Germany's GDP per capita, its a manufacturing prowess, its corporate brands, its SME's - small and medium-sized enterprises, are all by-words for success across the world. So, on a statistical front, mid-sized maybe. But you are up at the top and you are strong in this competitive but interdependent world.

And Germany's influence is increasingly visible. Ultimately, influence is not just a matter of assets. It is a matter of relative power. How those assets stack up against other countries. And whether a country has the will power to use its assets. And, in these relative terms, Germany is undoubtedly one of, I could even say, Europe's leading state. I think France has weakened economically in relative terms. Britain, for all of its good economic figures today, is still grappling with developing a sustainable economic model that will make this growth a little less up and down. And its defence spending is declining. It is searching for its own role, not least within Europe, but also more broadly. And moreover, I think in today's globalised world, military power is not one of the key determinants of international influence. Economic power offers its own sources of influence.

When you think of Germany, it has led the response to the Eurozone crisis, as you all know. Its dominant size the health of its domestic economy within Europe means that the Euro's credibility, internally or externally, whether as a reserve currency or a trading currency, is determined by the extent to which the Euro is backed by Berlin. So that key global currency, in a way, relies upon not just your economic success, but your political decisions. Germany's views are going to be absolutely central. They are central to EU trade policy, and the EU, once again, is one of the principal actors in international trade negotiations - the world's largest single market. Germany has clearly, and I believe this is the view from London or from Washington, coalesced the response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. And I am one of the people who believe that Europe actually has acted strongly in its response to Russia's actions, and that has been largely thanks to German leadership.

Germany does also contribute to conflict management. In key areas, Kosovo, training forces to Afghanistan, it is not a by-stander. But also, I think, German influence is derived from what it has chosen not to do as much as from what it has chosen to do.

Not being involved in Iraq, in terms of the invasion, having taken a somewhat backseat role in the more interventionist aspects of the Afghanistan operation, having chosen not to participate in the Libya military operation, with hindsight now seem wise decisions. And electorates, at least in other countries, think of it that way. The fact that Germany has been selective in its international engagement has also allowed the country to retain an important aspect of national cohesion, and that national cohesion is something that has fragmented in the United States, in the United Kingdom, and in other countries. To my mind, the rise of populist parties in Europe is not just a factor of the global financial crisis, it is also a factor of the loss of confidence that populations have had in their governments because they have failed to read what Iraq and Afghanistan would mean. The rise of populist movements we see throughout Europe, north and south, are a source of worry, and the relative lack of their emergence in Germany reminds one that Germany has still the capacity to mobilise political consensus around its public opinion, if it chooses to act.

So, to turn to the third part of my remarks, where do international expectations fit into all of this? I think Germany's mid-sized great power status is not a matter of choice. You do not get to choose what you are. It is a matter of how others perceive you, and based on how they think you can influence their lives and their fates. The question is, I suppose, whose expectations does Germany try to satisfy? Clearly, the decisions of any national government will be based initially on that country's national interests and its values. But that is kind of a core axiom, you could say, it is almost a tautology. For the purpose of this presentation, the most important point is to know that Germany will not be able to satisfy everyone, given their competing interests. And if Germany does try to, it will suffer the worst fate of all, which is to be charged with hypocrisy. Nothing can be more damaging to a country than to be charged with hypocrisy. A lot of America's potential power is limited because of accusations that it applies double standards. In one place it intervenes, in another, it does not. In one place it offers democracy-support, in another it does not.

But Germany is going to have to choose, and I think this choice is not abstract, it is not devoid of norms. To paraphrase, if I may, John F. Kennedy, Germany has to decide not what the world expects from it, but what Germany expects from the world. Germany has benefitted more than most from a rules-based stable world order, and the priority for Germany, therefore, and the expectation, is that it will uphold a liberal rules based order that sustains not just its success, but the success of its partners and the opportunities

offered to other citizens around the world from that opportunity that it has benefitted from. Free-riding, an important term, free-riding on this order, not contributing to its preservation at a time of great risk and international competition could undermine the very order that Germany has benefitted from as have its partners.

I think the expectation that Germany should set itself is that Germany should live up to the responsibilities that come with its position, and that Germany be willing to pay for costs that come with that choice. So three broad areas, quickly, where this will apply. The first, I suppose, is economic, that Germany must remain and be a strategic anchor for Europe, and therefore for the global economy. This is not a cost free choice, and I think German citizens must be aware of it, if they are not already. Germany must be a champion of the very open markets it has benefitted from. This will be a tough call, when the proposed trans-Atlantic trade and investment partnership has such strong public opposition in Germany as well as in other countries. At a political level, obviously it has got to play a constructive role in the G20, UN, in those intractable problems that, if they get worse, will affect Germany as much as any other country. But I think it needs to balance in particular its near-term economic interests with the stability of Europe. And this is where, as I said earlier, I have been impressed personally and I think that other countries are, that leading and sharing the costs of sanctions against Russia have been a demonstration of the kind of leadership that one hoped to see from Germany. It means also carrying the costs of Europe's energy security, not simply security of car exporters or others. Europe's energy security is going to be an absolutely central element for its future prosperity as well as security, and Germany is going to be pivotal in that role. It means understanding the political risks, though, also beyond Europe, of the contradictions that its close economic relationship with China can mean, and will mean, in the future.

At a military level, Germany is not, as I said earlier, a member of the UN Security Council, a permanent member. So I do not think it needs to expect, and it is not expected to carry the same level of responsibility for global security; in Asia, for example. But Germany is expected, and should expect itself, to help deliver security in Europe. And that security in Europe cannot be taken for granted. The NATO Readiness Action Plan, the resilience of Germany's own armed forces, which Minister von der Leyen referred to in her remarks, these are not just about deployability, as important as deployability can be, these are about cyber resilience, it is about professionalism. Professionalism in the bureaucracy as well as in the armed forces.

So let me conclude here and leave time for conversation. This is all easier said than done. The great thing about working in a policy institute is that I can say things like this, I do not have to do them. And I am fully aware, as everyone in this room is, that domestic opinion in Germany is highly sceptical about Germany playing a proactive role, and about thinking of itself maybe as a mid-sized power, never mind a mid-sized great power. I do not think most Germans see themselves as citizens of that kind of a country. But I think German leaders will be more able to carry their public in meeting the country's responsibilities if they are consistent in their messages about the inescapability of Germany's shared responsibility to meet the dangers of today's interdependent world. Secondly, if they incorporate the lessons of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, about the exercise of power. And here, again, I think I am picking up something of what Volker said: I think preventive engagement, or punitive engagement, is likely to be more effective than conflict or post-conflict intervention. The value of being in there early, thinking about how to use sanctions, that aspect of sending messages early rather than finding yourself trying to wrap up the mess later from a military standpoint, is probably one of the lessons of the last couple of decades.

Leading by example is essential. Germany should not just be a country that takes from the global system, but one that understands the importance of contributing to its stability and ensuring that Europe remains strong and resilient. I am a Brit, but I am a believer that Europe is one of the forces for good in international affairs. It is a country that has taken a gamble with its form of political organisation from nation states to what my colleague at CSIS Simon Serfaty called member states. It is a bold move, it is a difficult move, but it is one that I think means that we are willing to uphold the rule of law and understand its benefits more than most other countries. So, in conclusion, I suppose I personally expect this generation of Germans to carry their share of responsibility for Europe's security just as others did in the past, and that Germany will uphold the order that it has benefitted from.