



Position Statement

ON THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

Recommendations of the Advisory Board to the Federal Government
for Civilian Crisis Prevention and Peacebuilding

Berlin, July 2023

On 14 June 2023, the Federal Government published the first-ever German National Security Strategy. In the view of the Advisory Board, the launch of this Strategy represents an important step towards increasing the strategic capability of Germany's foreign and security policy. The Advisory Board expressly welcomes the comprehensive understanding of security and the primacy of crisis prevention on which the National Security Strategy is based. The concept of integrated security is also the right way to address the wide range of threats and the complex nature of today's security order. Nevertheless in many areas it remains unclear how the Federal Government will be able to fulfil its crisis-prevention mandate in concrete terms in the future – not least in terms of budget allocation.

The National Security Strategy attaches great importance to status analysis, i. e. to describing the security situation. For example, "today's Russia" is described as "for now the most significant threat to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area", while China is characterised as a "partner, competitor and systemic rival" [...] "in an age of increasing multipolarity". Moreover, "humanity's central task in this century" is defined as "fighting the climate crisis and dealing with its consequences". In principle, the Strategy thus expresses a heightened threat perception that the Advisory Board can endorse. However, whether the "Zeitenwende" in security policy triggered by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has led to a change in worldview needs to be examined in greater detail. The Strategy did not develop a vision for the future of the European Peace Order, nor did it define concrete steps towards it. Moreover, the Strategy should have mentioned the Eastern European partners, especially Germany's neighbour Poland, despite the current political differences, as the most important partners for Germany alongside France and the United States.

Although the primacy of preventing crises is stated in principle in the National Security Strategy (p. 40), the Advisory Board has the impression that the Strategy does not define how this primacy is to be put into practice. It would have been desirable to refer to the planned goals of the Coalition Agreement with more precision. The security environment should also be taken into account in the forthcoming revision of the Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace.

Overall, the National Security Strategy lacks clear definitions of the goals and objectives to be achieved by this strategic document. It needs concrete proposals for implementation, greater commitment, and conclusions on institutional arrangements. Although the Federal Government emphasises that the National Security Strategy is intended as an "umbrella document" that leaves the precise design to other strategy documents, it lacks a definition of the next steps, mechanisms and instruments. As a result, there is no framework for adapting processes in individual ministries. Although government representatives have described the National Security Strategy as the starting point for a process of strategic change, it is still unclear which shape this will take and what structural consequences the publication will have. For example, little space is given to partnerships with civil-society organisations in fragile contexts that serve to reduce the causes of conflict and preserve livelihoods in the long term.

The Strategy announces that budget resources will be prioritised, but does not prioritise specific areas: "A strong Bundeswehr, effective diplomacy and dedicated development cooperation in various forms are equally vital for our security." In the area of sustainability, no concrete steps to safeguard our livelihoods are mentioned. The future handling of specific climate-related crises and approaches to prevention are not elaborated. The instruments and characteristics of the integrated approach remain vague, and the existing exemplary formats (inter-ministerial planning, coordination, evaluations, budget lines) are not mentioned.

The National Security Strategy would have benefited from more self-reflective elements. As a rule, the perspective is directed from Germany outward – the other way around is not considered. In view of Germany's self-stated desire to deal with partners all over the world on an equal footing, not only is

there a lack of appropriate emphasis on Germany's own values and interests, there is also a lack of commitment to dialogue with difficult partners, which is particularly important in the area of foreign and development policy. The urgent need to address Germany's colonial legacy is left out. However, while the focus on the "primacy of prevention crises" is to be welcomed in principle, it is important to consider the possible negative effects of international crisis engagement.

The National Security Strategy includes crisis-management instruments such as humanitarian aid and development cooperation as building blocks of robustness. The Strategy also helps to join up development cooperation and peacebuilding, although the former continues to be understood here as a flanking element of peacebuilding. The concept of integrated peace engagement is subsumed inappropriately and only incidentally under international crisis management. It is not given the necessary weight as a central component of the National Security Strategy and as a counterpart to the concept of Integrated Security. The Federal Government's directional Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace are mentioned only in passing, which in the Advisory Board's view does not do justice to the importance of crisis prevention and response capabilities.

Finally, the Advisory Board expresses its regret that it was only involved to a limited extent in creating up the National Security Strategy. In this regard, the drafting process of the Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace published in 2017 could have served as an example of successful cooperation with non-state actors and civil society in particular, which will be crucial to the implementation and effectiveness of the Strategy.

On this basis, the Advisory Board makes the following recommendations:

The Federal Government should inform the public without delay of the processes currently underway in the individual ministries to implement the Strategy, as well as on how existing or future documents such as the Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace, its sectoral strategies, the Guidelines on Feminist Foreign and Feminist Development Policy and the Strategy for Foreign Climate Policy will be affected by the National Security Strategy.

In view of the tight budget situation, the National Security Strategy speaks of the need to set priorities, without defining these priorities more precisely. On the contrary, it tends to emphasise the equal status of German resources in international crisis management. Planned budget cuts, especially in the areas of humanitarian aid, crisis prevention, peacebuilding and development cooperation, are not consistent with this. The Federal Government should take action here so as not to undermine the credibility and relevance of the National Security Strategy.

The forthcoming revision of the Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace should reflect the analysis of the National Security Strategy and take into account the changed security-policy realities. At the same time, the Federal Government should underpin the aspirations stated in the National Security Strategy with quantitative and verifiable goals. This binding quantitative underpinning required for the actual implementation of the National Security Strategy should be provided by defining key goals in the area of civilian crisis prevention, which is still pending and provided for in the coalition agreement. For example, the welcomed increase in the number of police personnel involved in international crisis-prevention missions requires a binding definition of significantly higher deployment figures than hitherto in order to be able to implement the postulated primacy of crisis prevention in an effective and binding manner.

In addition to its concept of Integrated Security, the Federal Government should spell out how its Integrated Peace Engagement will be structured. Special attention should be paid to peace potential in society and to the support of civil society. Furthermore, in addition to the Federal Foreign Office's strategic approaches, greater consideration must be given to the instruments and approaches of conflict transformation and peacebuilding in development cooperation.

We need a foreign, security and development policy that addresses the root causes of crises. Climate impacts, racism, profound socio-economic inequalities and the legacy of colonialism all have a massive impact on people's livelihoods. However, many of the approaches mentioned in the National Security Strategy remain too vague to address these root causes in a sustainable and strategic way. To this end, a continuous critical dialogue with societal actors abroad is essential and must be better funded and staffed. This is the only way to credibly strengthen partnerships in the long term.

In the context of the announced expansion of its contributions to strengthening civil society, the Federal Government should make its funding conditions more flexible in view of the often very difficult and constantly changing parameters abroad and examine ways to simplify its funding procedures.

The Advisory Board to the German Government for Civilian Crisis Prevention and Peacebuilding

The Advisory Board brings together civil society and academic expertise on crisis prevention and peacebuilding and advises the German government on these topics. It is appointed for four years and comprises 20 experts from academia, foundations and civil society organisations. It supports the implementation of the Guidelines “Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace” adopted by the German government in 2017. The Advisory Board fosters constant exchange between the Federal Government and civil society. It publishes positions on overarching strategic questions. In addition, it develops contributions on pertinent issues. Further information on the Advisory Board, as well as its publications, can be found at: <https://beirat-zivile-krisenpraevention.org>

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