STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

# Why does Germany wants to build Europe's strongest Army?

International Relations

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## Background

Germany is undertaking a significant military surge with the stated aim of building Europe's strongest army, a dramatic shift from its post-World War II defense posture. This ambition is driven by a confluence of geopolitical changes and security concerns, primarily stemming from Russia's aggression in Ukraine and a re-evaluation of European security.

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## Key factors explaining Berlin's military transformation include

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1. **Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and Geopolitical Shifts**: The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 served as a watershed moment, fundamentally altering Germany's perception of security in Europe. This act of aggression shattered the long-standing "Wandel durch Handel" (change through trade) principle, which had guided Germany's engagement with Russia. German intelligence warnings suggest Russia could be capable of attacking a NATO country by 2029, further fueling the urgency for a stronger defense.
2. **The "Zeitenwende" Policy:** In response to the changed security landscape, Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a "Zeitenwende" (turning point) in German foreign and security policy. This policy signifies a commitment to significantly bolster the Bundeswehr (German armed forces) and assume a more proactive role in defending Europe and safeguarding the liberal international order.
3. **Increased Defense Spending:** Germany has pledged substantial financial commitments to its military. It plans to spend €108 billion (approximately $125 billion) on defense this year, more than doubling its 2021 budget, and intends to allocate 3.5% of its GDP to military spending by 2030, reaching NATO's increased spending target of 3.5% of GDP by 2029. This surge includes a €100 billion special fund for the armed forces.
4. **Diminished Trust in U.S. Security Guarantees:** There is a growing concern in Germany and across Europe regarding the long-term commitment of the United States as Europe's primary security guarantor,

particularly under certain political leaderships. This has spurred a desire for greater European strategic independence and a more robust European defense posture.

5. **Personnel Expansion and Potential Conscription:** To achieve its goal, Germany aims to significantly increase its active-duty personnel to 260,000 by 2035 and double its reserve force to 200,000, approaching its Cold War-era strength. While currently voluntary, legislation has been passed that allows the government to reintroduce compulsory military service if recruitment targets are not met. Mandatory questionnaires for 18-year-old men to assess their fitness for potential service have already begun.
6. **Modernization and Procurement:** The increased budget is being used for essential resources, including vehicles, protective equipment, and satellite reconnaissance systems, with a focus on equipping the Bundeswehr quickly and efficiently, often with commercially available solutions. There is also a stronger emphasis on national and European defense procurement. This military surge represents a historic departure from Germany's decades-long policy of military restraint and underinvestment, aiming to create a powerful conventional force and contribute to a stronger European defense architecture.

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