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**The German Security Elite –
Threat Perception and Preferred Responses**

A Survey Report in the Framework of the
EU-GARNET Project “Vertices of Conflict and
Cooperation: Threat Perception into the 21st Century”

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1. Data & Methodology

This paper is an empirical follow-up on Alexander Siedschlag's Study "[Germany – Threatened by the Evil in the World. From a Reluctant Power to an Active Peace Donator?](#)" (April 2005) in the framework of the EU-GARNET project "Vertices of Conflict and Cooperation: Threat Perception into the 21st Century". This study will appear as an article in Emil Kirchner/James Sperling (eds.): *Global Security Governance: Competing Perceptions of Security in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge, 2007.

The purpose of this paper is to extend the documentary analysis provided in this article by an opinion survey. This survey was conducted by our Endowed Centre for Security Studies in order to identify the present perceptions and expectations of the German 'security-elite' with respect to major security threats for their country and major methods to prevent or minimize those threats. The survey was conducted during July 2006 among a total of 40 German parliamentarians, civil servants and experts dealing with security-related policies. The survey participants were identified and consciously selected through an internet-based expert search. The survey itself was conducted under the condition of anonymity.

The graphical analysis¹ and the extended discussion of the survey's outcomes follow three strands: firstly, the perception of threats by the German security elite; secondly, the preferred responses to those threats; and thirdly, the perceived effectiveness of the measures and policies taken as well as the perceived appropriateness of allocated resources. This includes findings on transatlantic relations set in relation to common patterns of behaviour in Germany's foreign and security policy. Finally, we draw conclusions on Germany's "exceptionalism" and possible future developments in German security governance.

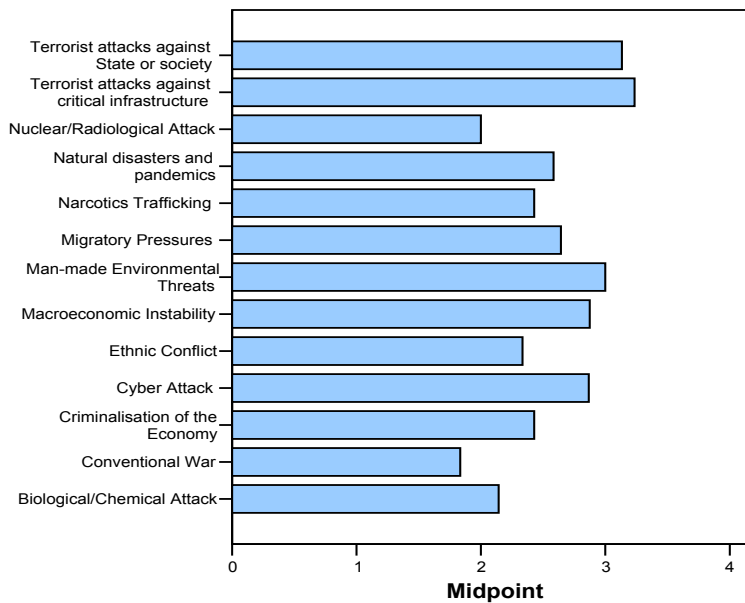
2. Survey Analysis

a. Perception of Threats

Germany's security elite exhibits a wide understanding of security as they assess the present threats as deriving from various sources:

¹ Several items include multiple answer options so that the sum of percentage values in these cases may be larger than 100.

Fig. 1: Five gravest threats present

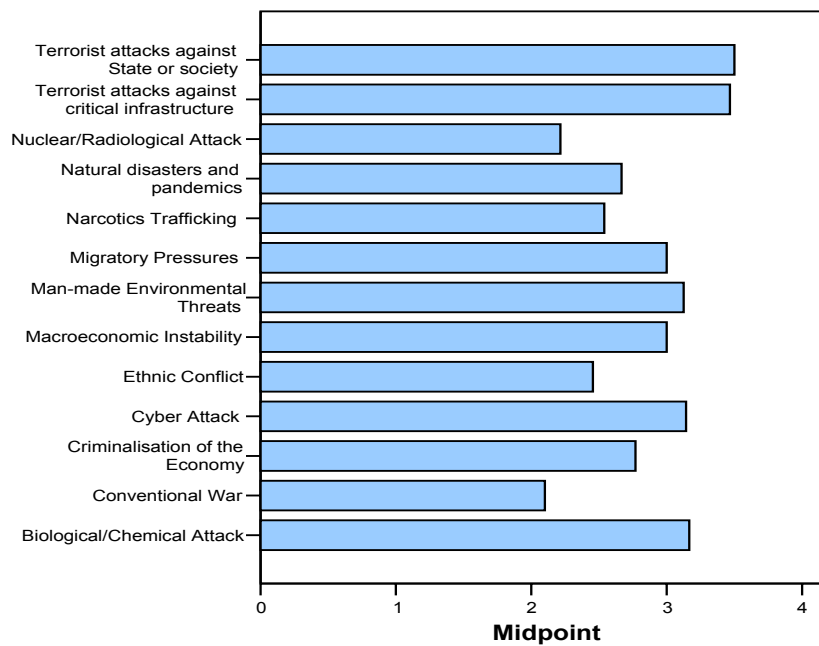


Please choose from the list no more than 5 of the gravest threats facing your country today and rank order them.

Unsurprisingly the threat from terrorist attacks is top-rated, whereas attacks against critical infrastructure are estimated slightly more grave than attacks aimed against state or society directly. Interestingly the risks of man-made environmental threats are nearly top-rated, stressing the strongly perceived ecological component of security, followed by macro-economic instability and cyber attacks. Thus, non-classical sources of threats are top-listed, from societal and ecological security to economic security. This ranking corresponds to a concept based upon a “broad” definition of security, as traditional threats like conventional war or nuclear attacks are weighted quite low. Transnational-crime related threats in contrast, such as narcotics trafficking and criminalisation of the economy, are regarded more alarming than classical war-and-peace issues. Germany’s security experts thus tend to gradually abandon a classical viewpoint of security.

The survey also investigated the mid-term predictions of the participating experts and politicians. Asked to rank the five gravest threats Germany will be likely to face in 2010, the answers did not significantly differ from the assessments of the present situation:

Fig. 2: Five gravest threats in 2010



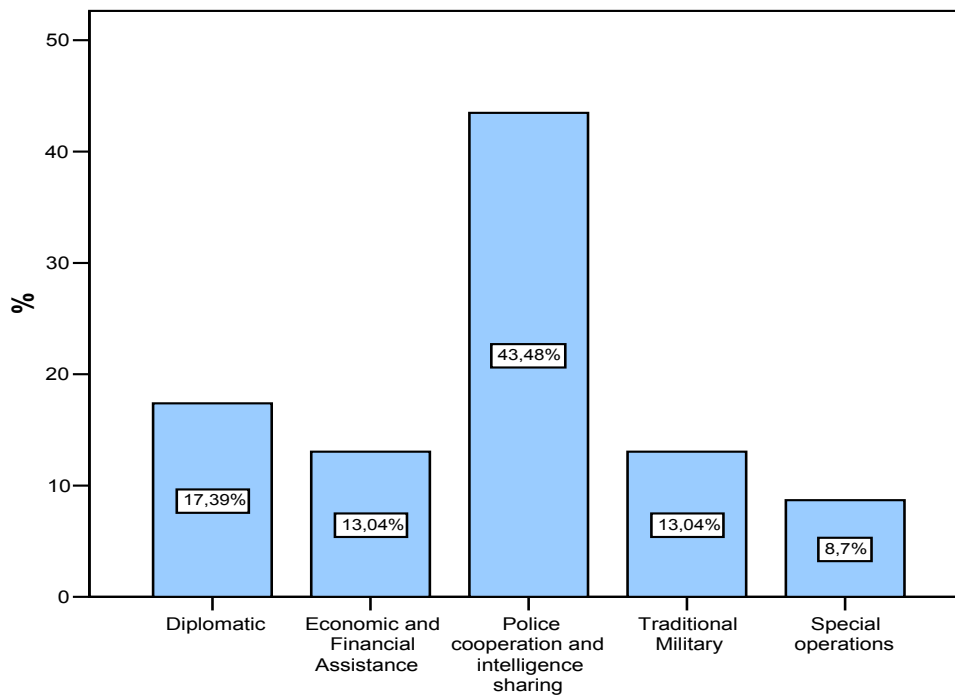
Please choose from the list no more than 5 of the gravest threats facing your country in 2010 and rank order them.

While most of the rankings do not differ much from their pendants in *figure 1*, the threat of biological/chemical attacks is expected to rise. This poses questions about the effectiveness of current measures to counter this kind of threat.

b. Preferred Measures

As mentioned above, the respondents assume the threat of biological/chemical attacks to rise within the next few years. Asked for the proper means to reduce this risk, the overwhelming majority (more than 40%) mention intensified police cooperation and enhanced intelligence sharing. In the perception of the majority of the survey's participants, terrorists from the Broader Middle East are the prime agents of such threats.

Fig. 3: Preferred measures: Biological/chemical attacks



What are the three most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of biological/chemical attacks?

The preferred recommendation (about 30% of the answers) is the use of instruments which rely on soft-power components to the largest extent, with an emphasis on diplomatic efforts and economic/financial assistance. The German security elite obviously do not pin much further hope on the enhancement of multilateral legal frameworks as it was recommended by the Blix Commission in June 2006.² Instead, police- and intelligence-centred measures are preferred, including executive mechanisms to better enforce existing treaty regulations against the use, production and proliferation of biological and chemical weapons.

Asked about the best measures against the threat of conventional military war, 30 percent of the respondents call for diplomatic initiatives. More than 20 percent see traditional military action as appropriate response to the classical threat of war. This data indicate that the perceived best response to this threat category rests on the principle of ‘sticks and carrots’, underpinned with a credible potential of military deterrence. But as “conventional war” was not been ranked as a major threat to Germany (see *figure 1*), the countermeasures proposed by

² Hans Blix: Weapons of Terror – Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms, Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, June 2006, <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/Aussenpolitik/Abruestung/Blix-Bericht-0606.pdf>, 12 September 2006.

the respondents can not be held representative of the overall security policies advocated by Germany's security elite.

Fig. 4: Preferred measures: Conventional war

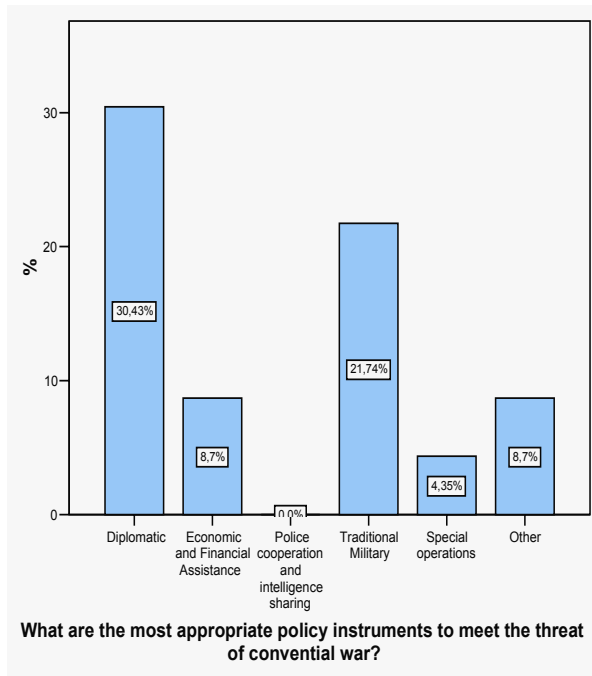
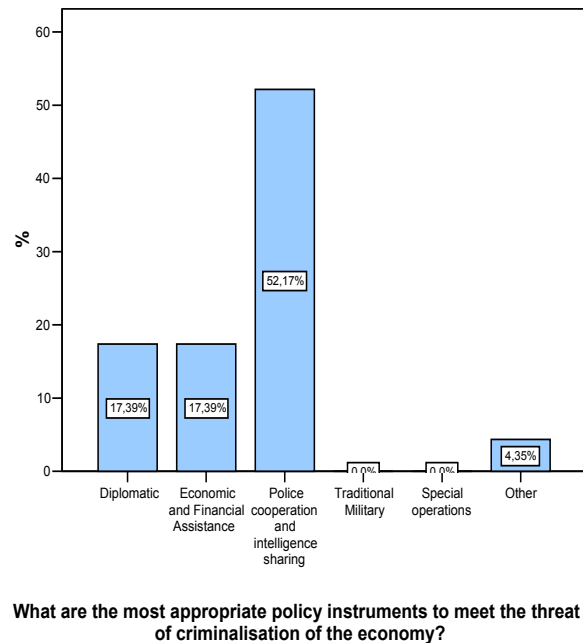


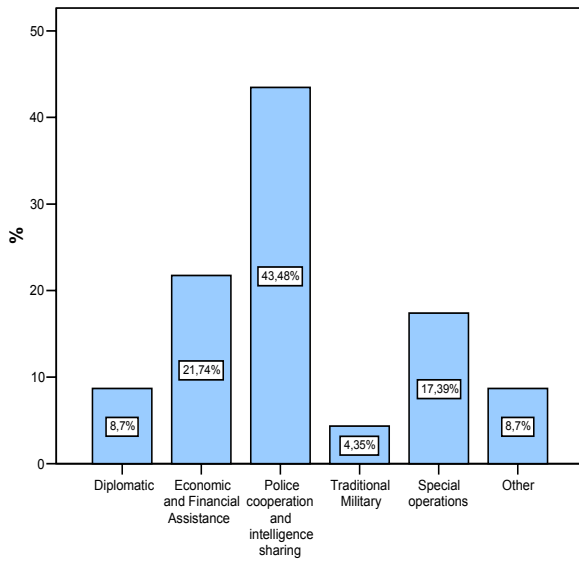
Fig. 5: Preferred measures: Criminalisation of economy



The threat of a criminalisation of the economy is ranked comparatively high by the respondents (*figure 5*). Unsurprisingly the absolute majority again regard enhanced police cooperation and intelligence sharing as the most appropriate policy instrument in order to meet this kind of threat. However, 35 percent of the respondents regard diplomatic efforts and economic/financial assistance as proper measures in order to control international crime.

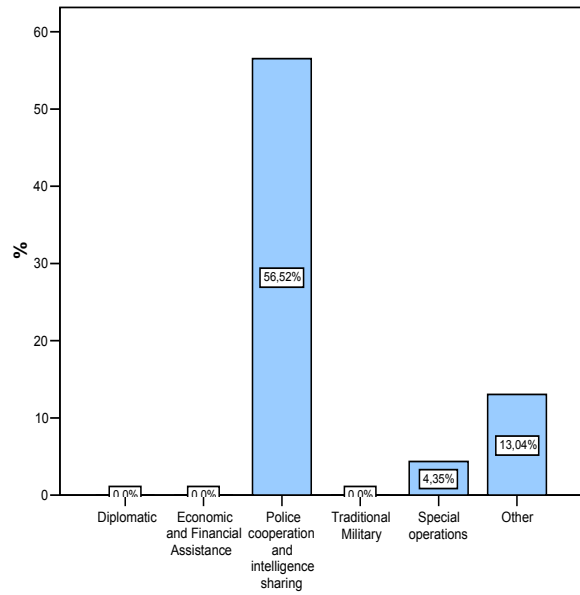
Police cooperation and intelligence sharing are also assessed to be the best policy against several other major threats. The vast majority of the experts interviewed propose the use of these instruments against the threat of cyber attacks. Quite similar are our findings for the threat of narcotic trafficking. More than 40 percent take cooperation in the sectors of police and intelligence to be the most important countermeasure, whereas 21 percent underline the importance of economic and financial assistance, and 17 percent see special operations as an appropriate measure. A large part of the respondents assume that the threat derives from of three different sources: hackers, secret services and terrorists.

Fig. 6: Preferred measures: narcotics trafficking



What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of narcotics trafficking?

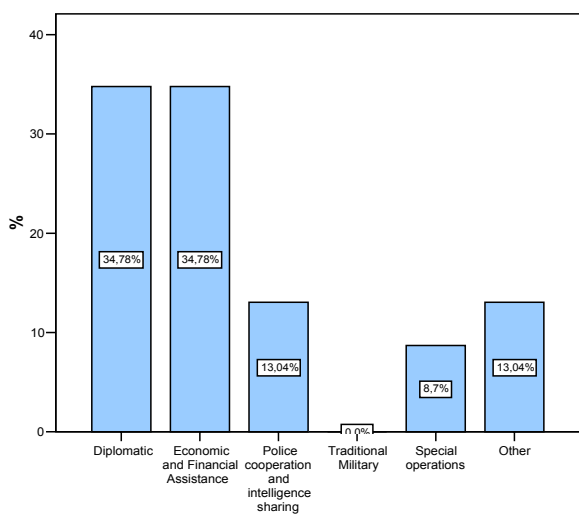
Fig. 7: Preferred measures: Cyber attacks



What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of cyber attacks?

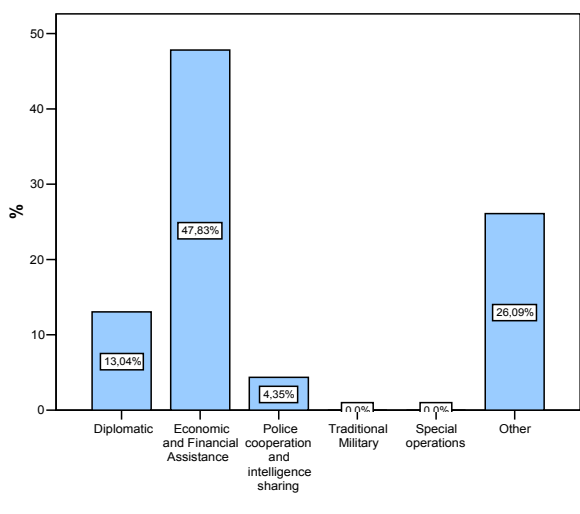
Asked about the most appropriate policy instruments for the management and settlement of ethnic conflicts, the respondents again answer in favour of diplomatic initiatives as well as economic and financial assistance. About 70 percent of all replies fall into these two categories (figure 8). In contrast, the invocation of traditional military concepts is completely absent although robust military interventions are often seen as the last resort in case of ethnic violence and ethnic cleansing.

Fig. 8: Preferred measures: Ethnic conflicts



What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of ethnic conflicts?

Fig. 9: Preferred measures: Macroeconomic instability

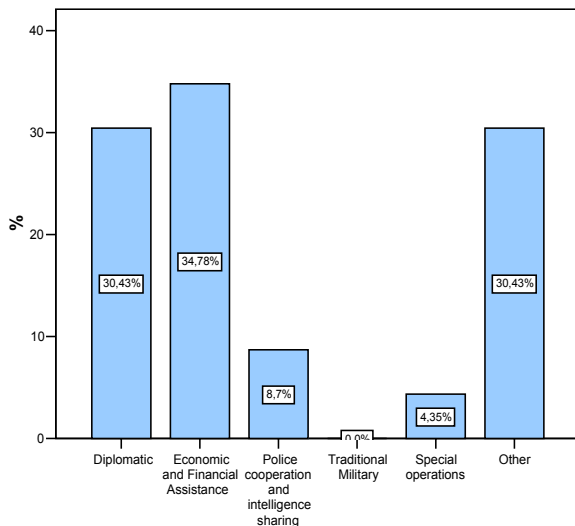


What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of macroeconomic instability?

Another issue is economic security. Especially macro-economic crises have the power to shatter the political order of states and even of world regions. German security experts and politicians regard economic and financial assistance as best measures to counteract such threats. Many respondents specified their expectations in a way that linked macro-economic instability to overheating Asian economy in combination with a crisis on international capital markets. These threats are mainly attributed to non-state actors, such as private finance companies.

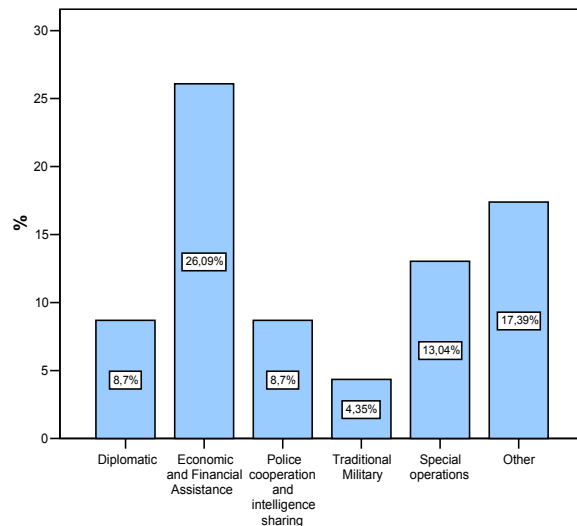
The survey also addressed issues of ecological security, for instance environmental threats and potential natural disasters. Our findings for both topics are quite comparable, referring to a high interdependency across various sectors (see *figure 10* and *figure 11*). Especially man-made environmental threats need to be tackled in many different fields. Economic and financial assistance as well as diplomatic efforts are seen as the most important components of a preventive strategy, whereas more than 30 percent of the interviewed answered in favour of other measures. A considerable number of the respondents see these threats' locus of origin in Asia, especially in India and China, but also in the United States of America. Transnational business cooperations are expected to amplify the risk of man-made environmental threats.

Fig. 10: Preferred measures: Environm. threats



What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of man-made environmental threats?

Fig. 11: Natural disasters/pandemics



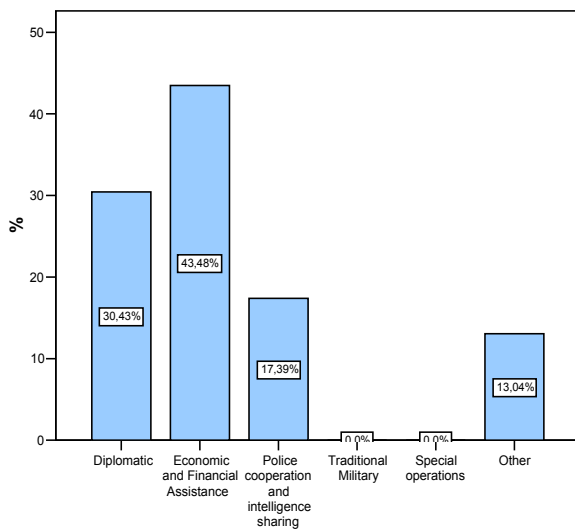
What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of natural disasters and pandemics?

However, the survey's outcomes in the case of threats of natural disasters and pandemics differ from the above mentioned outcomes in the case of man-made environmental threats. The results show a uniform distribution with economic and financial assistance as focal point.

About 13 percent of the experts deem special operations an appropriate measure against this kind of threat. Some respondents mentioned the hectic and confusion about the bird flu as pre-type of a pandemic threat. Therefore increased trans-border cooperation is advocated by many of the German security experts and politicians.

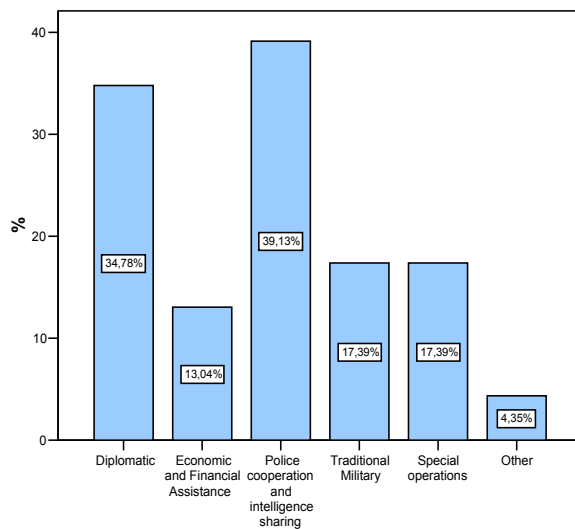
Migratory pressures are also perceived as a possible source of insecurity and threat for Germany. Once again, diplomatic efforts and most notably economic and financial assistance make up for a good portion of the answers (almost 75%) on how to tackle the problem. Police cooperation and intelligence sharing are also considered integral parts of political measures by 17 percent of the interviewed German security exponents. The respondents in unison identify poverty and conflicts in Africa as the main causes for migratory pressures.

Fig. 12: Preferred measures: Migratory pressures



What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of migratory pressures?

Fig. 13: Preferred measures: Nuclear attacks

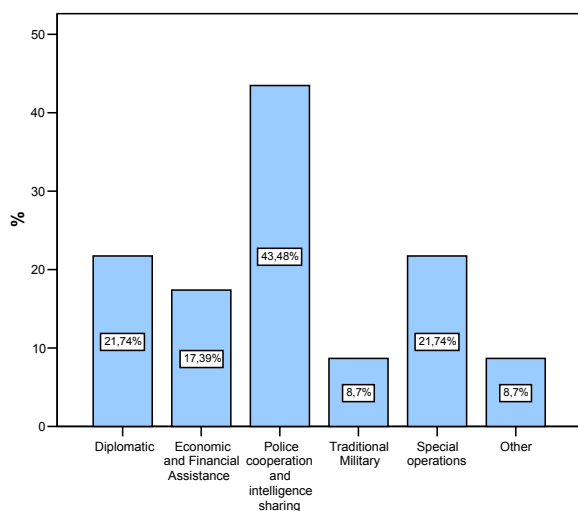


What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of nuclear/radiological attacks?

Asked about preferred measures against the threat of nuclear/radiological attacks, the respondents estimate the whole range of instruments to be of importance. First of all police cooperation and intelligence sharing are once again perceived to be the major policy instrument for minimising the risks of such threats, but also diplomacy is highly-weighted, with an approval rate of 34 percent. Moreover, hard-power measures reflected in the categories traditional military and special operations have a considerable weight. These outcomes illustrate the present difficulties in the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, as the German security experts differ about how to effectively deal with this issue.

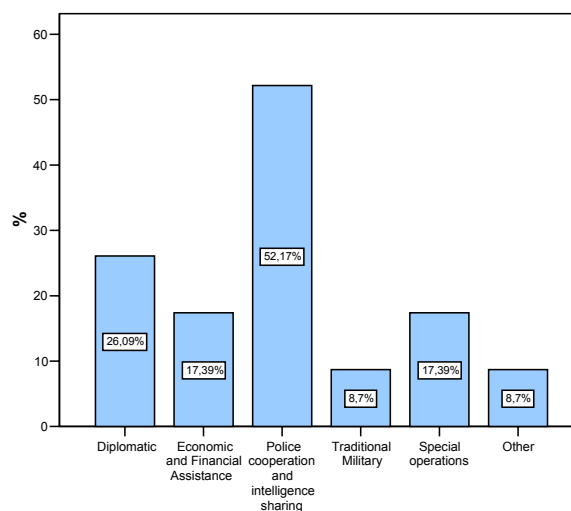
The survey also delved the elite's assessment about the best policy instruments to face the most powerful threat of the present: terrorism. As mentioned above (*figure 1*), the respondents perceive attacks on critical infrastructure as the main threat to Germany. 52 percent take enhanced police cooperation and intelligence sharing to be the most important policy instruments. But also diplomatic efforts (26%) and economic and financial assistance (17%) as well as special operations (17%) are advocated. The recently failed terrorist attacks on commuter trains in Dortmund and Koblenz underline the massive threat of terrorist assaults on critical infrastructure in Germany. The strong approval of enhanced police cooperation and intelligence sharing reflects the growing demand in the elite for more coordination between different agencies in the domestic security sector. At the moment Germany faces intensive public debates about the proper response to terrorism, with the main focus on possible limitations on civil rights through enhanced authorization of police forces and interagency cooperation.

Fig. 14: Preferred measures: Terrorist attack on state or society



What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of terrorist attacks against state or society?

Fig. 15: Preferred measures: Terrorist attack on critical Infrastructure

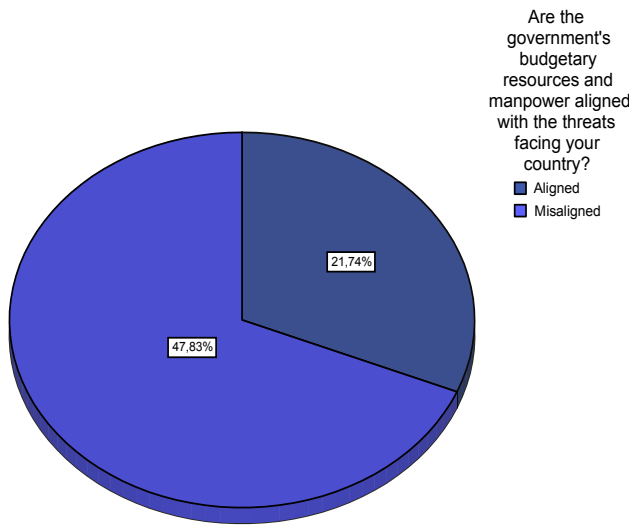


What are the most appropriate policy instruments to meet the threat of terrorist attacks against critical infrastructure?

Asked about appropriate measures against terrorist attacks on state or society, the respondents once more mainly emphasize the importance of police cooperation and intelligence sharing. They also rank diplomacy, economic assistance and special operations considerably high. This illustrates the strong interdependence between external and internal security regarding the terrorist threat: Without appropriate foreign policy measures and political arrangements on an international level, increased internal police cooperation will not be successful, and vice versa.

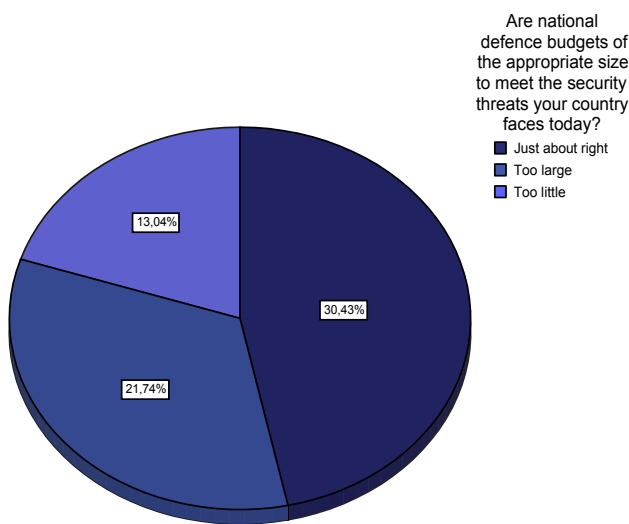
c. Resource Allocation

Fig. 16: Budgetary resources



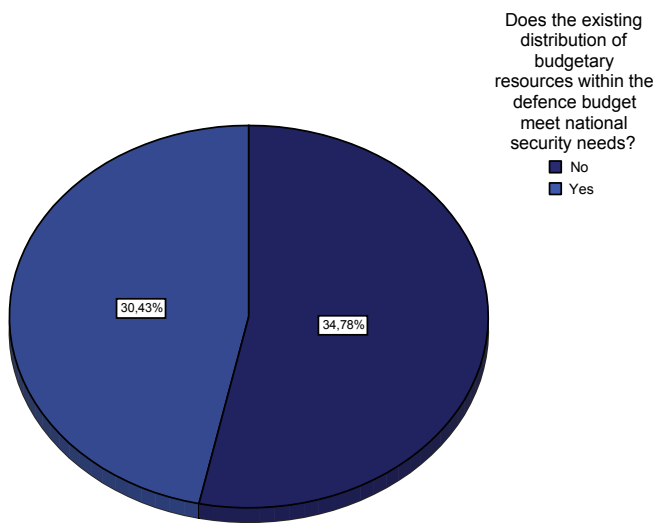
The survey also included questions about the appropriateness of the resources allocated to minimise the above-mentioned threats. The first pie chart shows considerable dissatisfaction (47%) with the budgetary resources and manpower devoted to security matters: A significant part of the German security experts and politicians see a strong misalignment in the use of available resources.

Fig. 17: Defence budget



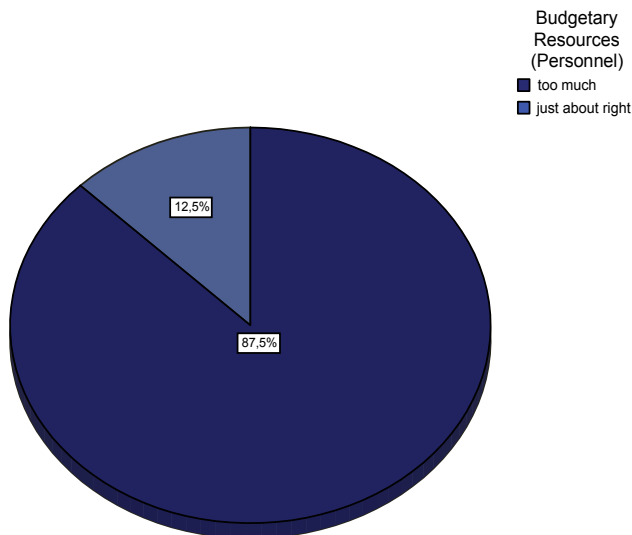
Asked about the appropriateness of the German defence budget, the respondents show mixed views. While 30 percent are satisfied with the current defence spending, more than 21 percent think the expenditures are too high. In combination with *figure 16*, one could assume that the majority of the survey's participants propose a redistribution of the allocated resources.

Fig. 18: Distribution within defence budget



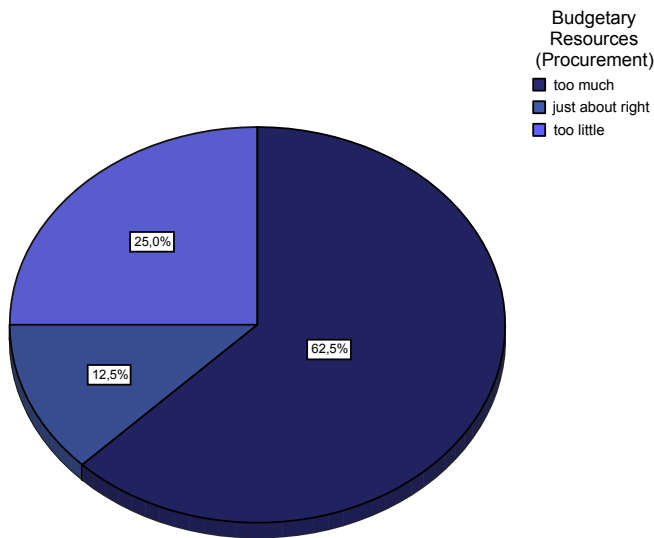
No clear statement can be derived from the answers on the advisability of resource distribution within the defence budget. The replies are split into three almost equal shares: one third approve the current distribution, one third reject it and one third are no-response, which could be a result of insufficient transparency concerning the allocation of resources.

Fig. 19: Budgetary resources: Personnel



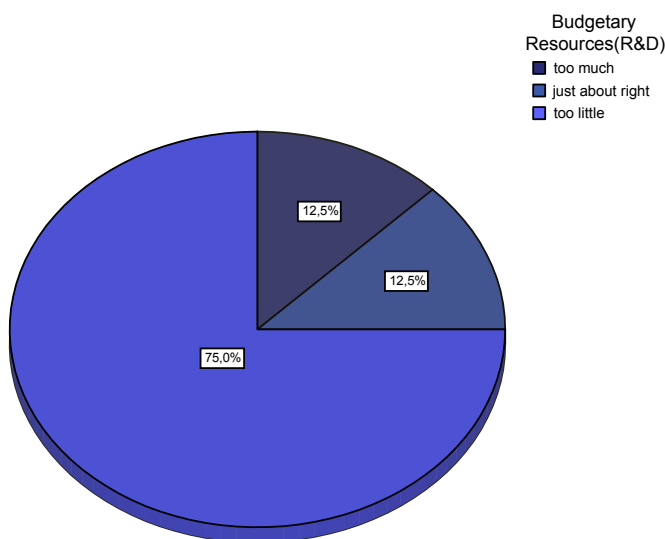
Asked about the appropriateness of the quantity of public-sector personnel concerned with security related issues, the views are quite convergent. Most of the respondents assume that there is too much personnel involved. Thus, a considerable part of the overall dissatisfaction with the distribution of budgetary resources (*figure 16*) could result from a staffing level regarded as exaggeratedly high. Nearly 90 percent state that too much staff is occupied with security-related issues.

Fig. 20: Budgetary resources: Procurement



The procurement of German security, according to the replies of the interviewed members of the German security elite, is also exaggerated. More than 60 percent of the respondents feel that the budget spending on procurement is too high.

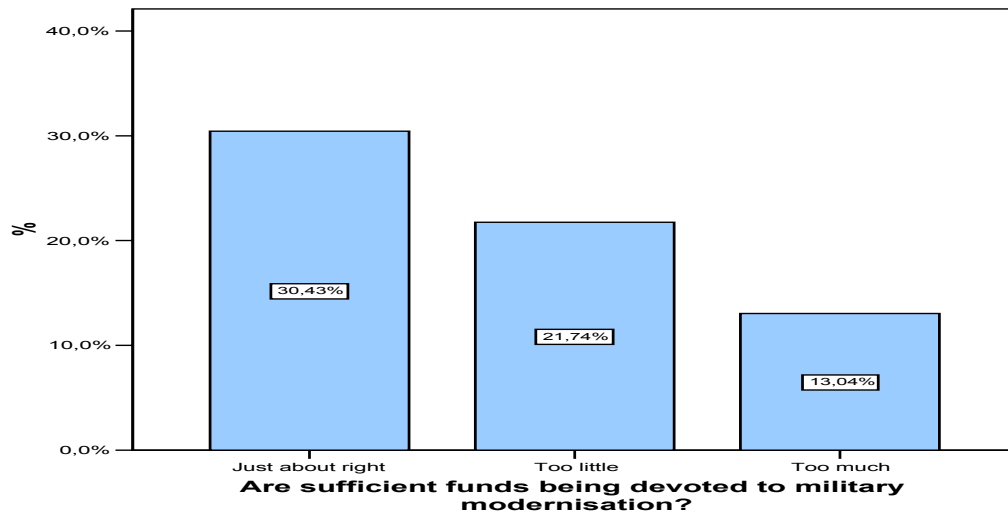
Fig. 21: Budgetary resources: R&D



In contrast to the above-mentioned questions about resource-allocation, the issue of German security-related research and development is seen as a major shortcoming in budgetary spending. 75 percent of the respondents argue for a better funding of these measures. Hence, research and development is clearly seen as a very important part of budget planning. The survey's outcomes appear to reflect the ongoing transition of the German security

sector. While overall funding is seen to be adequate, the internal distribution is perceived as unsatisfactory. The strong German commitment to the European Defense Agency (EDA) underlines the awareness of the ongoing importance of research and development.

Fig. 22: Funding of military modernisation

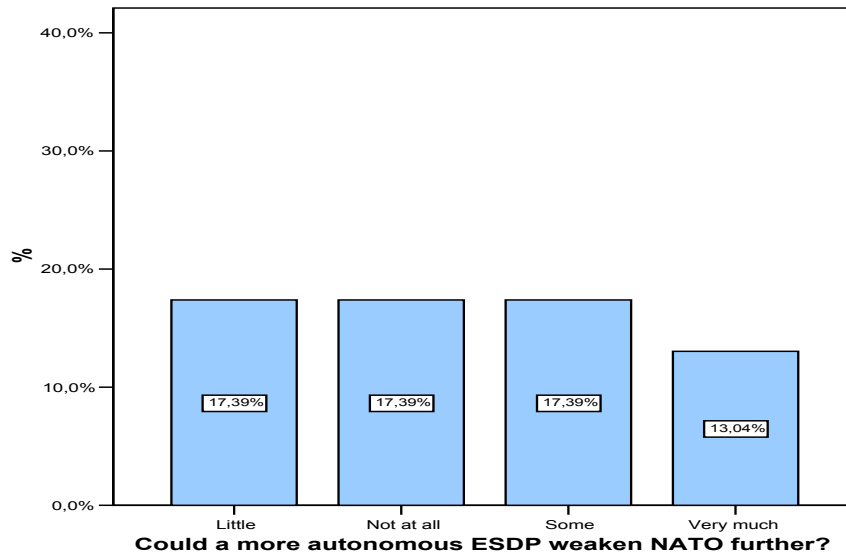


The modernisation of the *Bundeswehr* has been a major German defence issue since the end of the Cold War. Asked about the sufficient funding of the army's modernisation, one third of the responders stated agreement with the current spending. Another 22 percent call for more funds, while 13 percent see too much money directed into the upgrade of the *Bundeswehr*.

d. Transatlantic Relations

A major part of the survey was dedicated to the state of transatlantic relations, with a view to reveal the effects triggered by a stronger European integration in the realm of security and defence. Therefore, the respondents were asked to answer the question if a stronger ESDP weakens NATO. All four answer categories were chosen equally here: Further European security and defence integration is not taken to be a zero-sum game regarding transatlantic relations.

Fig. 23: ESDP and NATO



We found no unitary views regarding the effects of a weak NATO on the US commitment to European security (figure 24). One third of the respondents see such a development as an eventuality, while only 13 percent rule out such a causal relationship. More than 20 percent assume a clearly positive relation between NATO's strength and US commitment.

Fig. 24: US commitment and weak NATO

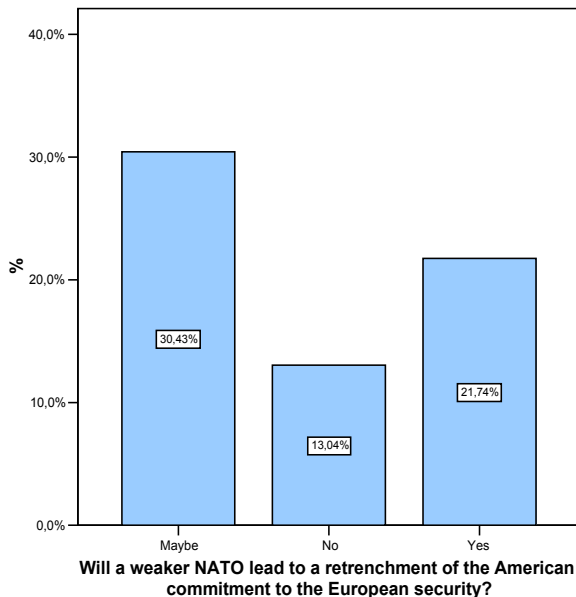
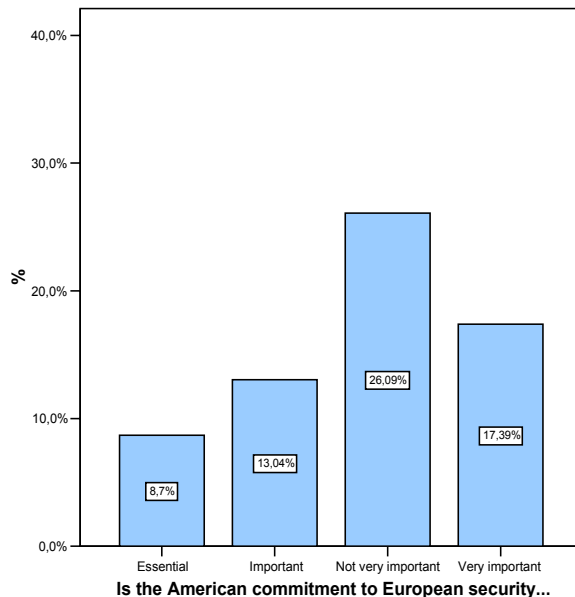


Fig. 25: Importance of US-commitment



A major scale for evaluating transatlantic relations is the perceived importance of US commitment to European security. Figure 25 reiterates the mixed picture: 26 percent of the respondents think that the US commitment is not very important. This could be taken as a

signal towards enhanced European autonomy in terms of security and defence. However, summed-up 39 percent consider the US commitment essential, important or very important.

e. German policy patterns

The last part of the survey is about the perceived policy style of Germany in security issues. Asked for the pattern that best describes German security policies, the respondents have a clear preference for multilateral engagement.

When asked for the governmental orientation towards the definition of security, the answers also portray a clear picture. Nearly 70 percent of the respondents consider the government's conception of security "broad" or "very broad".

Fig. 26: Patterns of state interaction

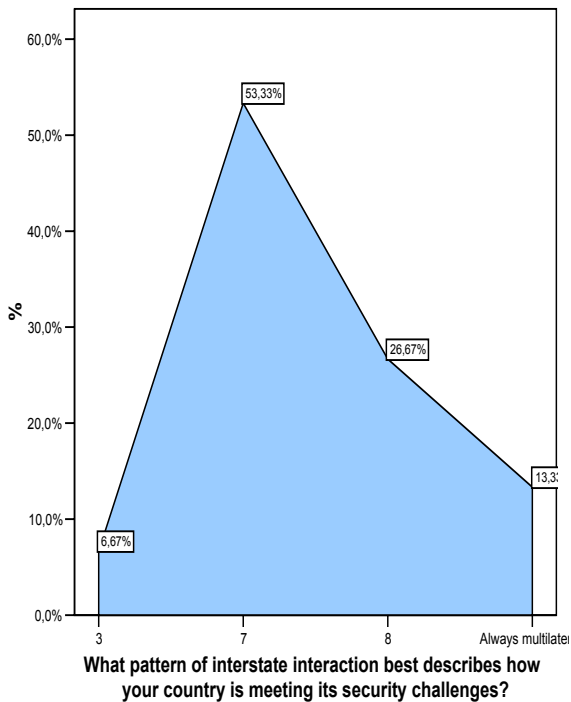
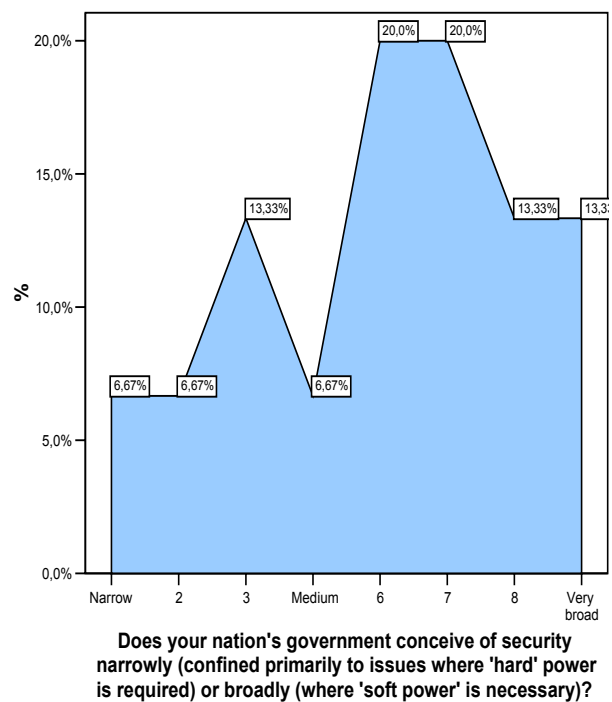


Fig. 27: Security conception



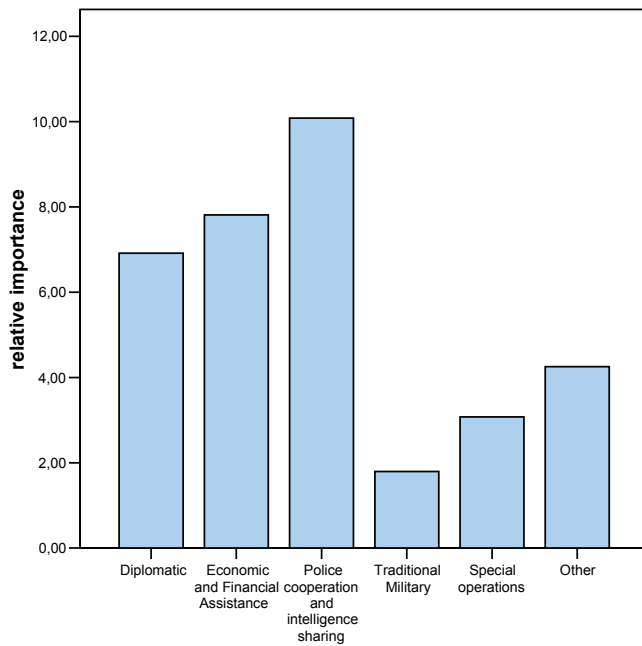
3. Conclusion

Although the measures taken to ensure public safety are undeniably linked to the changes after 11 September, they are in the case of Germany at the same time deeply rooted in an about half-century of experience in the necessity of handling security-related issues on a national as well as on a global scale, including the use of a wide range of policy instruments. The German security debate in the 1990ies had mainly been affected by the gradual reduction of border controls on the basis of the *Schengen* agreement, putting organized crime as a main issue on the security agenda. On the verge of the 21st century, however, terrorism as the primary threat appears in a de-individualized form and is perceived as a rooted rather in the current global constellation. As a consequence, the necessity of understanding security as a concept as well as the adequate use of policy instruments in its favour needs to be comprehensive and heavily depends on the assessment of the current situation by opinion leaders.

From our analysis, we conclude that first of all, the German security elite define security in a considerably broad sense. Therefore, any potential risk could be interpreted as a threat to national security. This position contradicts the classical German reluctance towards international engagement. Germany is still trying to find an adequate balance between its deeply-rooted exceptionalism (some would say anti-militarism) and the claims imposed by international partners to fulfil its responsibilities. Moreover, the country is still stuck in a large-scale security sector reform. This includes the budgetary redistribution of resources as well as the search for new reaction patterns conforming at one time to the historical German self-perception and to the new threats setting.

In consequence, soft-power, “Friedenspolitik”-related instruments like financial aid, foreign aid and development initiatives, diplomacy and enhanced police cooperation are regarded the most adequate instruments for amending the security environment (*figure 28*).

Fig. 28: Relative importance of policy instruments



Traditionally, Germany has tended to act multilaterally, in most cases in coordination with the major EU partners and the US, and it continues to see itself in the role of a coordinating balancer in the European political landscape. At the same time, German foreign and security policy has been losing much of its exceptionalism. Germany's security elite, after all, appear to only have started to render itself conscious of the country's growing responsibility for matching its appreciation of the new international threat scenery with readjusted assessments about appropriate choices of instruments as well as self-perception-based role-models.