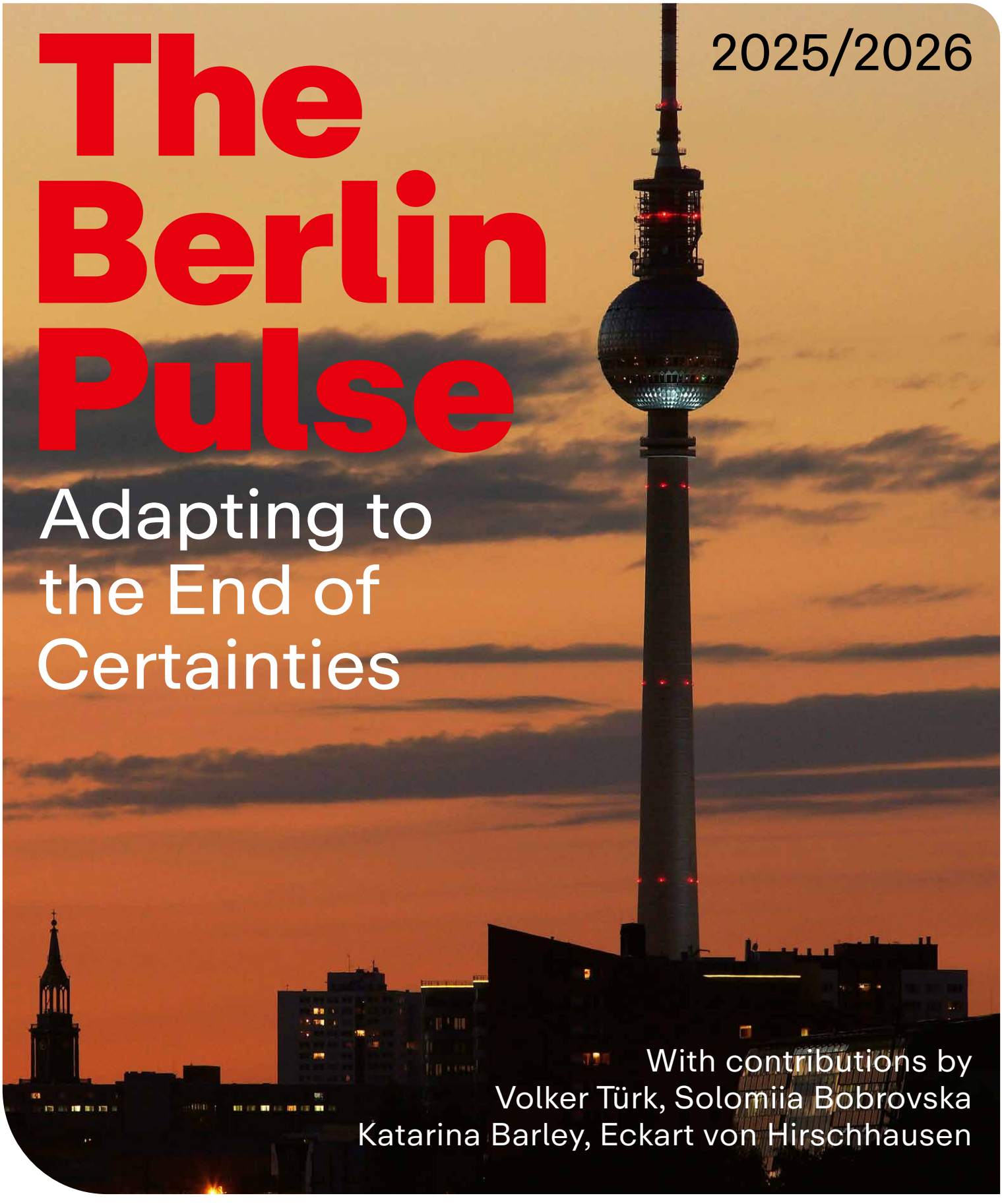
2025/2026

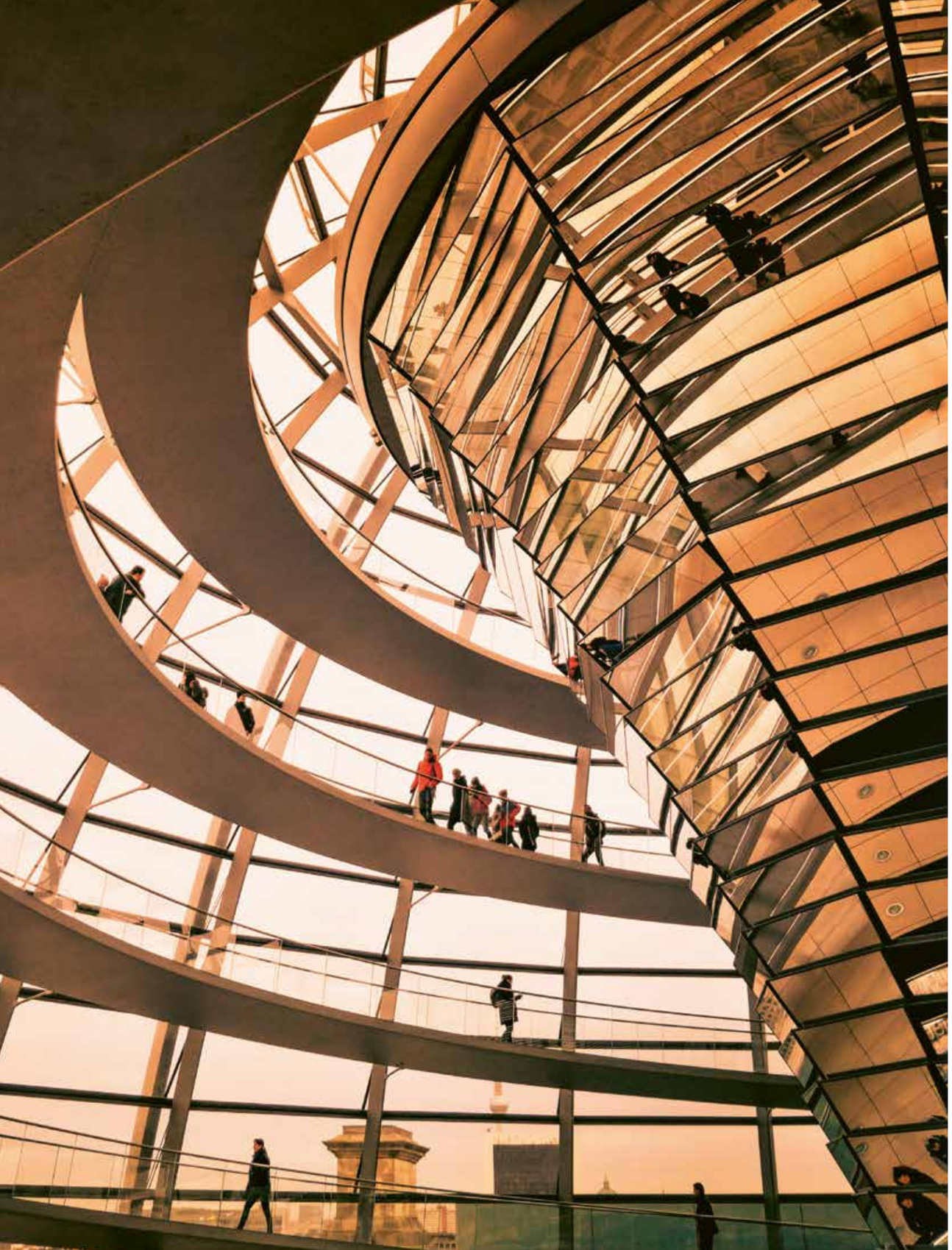
The Berlin Pulse

Adapting to the End of Certainties



With contributions by
Volker Türk, Solomiia Bobrovska
Katarina Barley, Eckart von Hirschhausen

Körber Stiftung



Dear readers,

Welcome to *The Berlin Pulse*!

In this ninth edition, we explore the end of long-held certainties in the German public's attitude towards foreign policy. Thanks to our editorial team – Julia Ganter, Leona Harting and Jonathan Lehrer – we learn that its views are at odds with two important pillars of Germany's foreign policy: relations with the United States and responsibility for Israel's security.

With President Donald Trump in his second term, only 27 per cent of German respondents view relations with Washington positively, while the country's leaders try to deal with an unpopular, less predictable but vital ally. And despite the centrality of relations with Israel to post war-German identity, feelings of responsibility towards Israel have declined. After the Gaza war triggered by Hamas's 7 October 2023 terrorist attacks, only 35 per cent say that Germany holds a special responsibility toward Israel. The government now faces the challenge of upholding the country's commitment to Israel's security while not losing sight of public opinion.

Amid these complex international partnerships and their domestic repercussions, many Germans seek greater autonomy and action. Nearly half of respondents (48 percent) support more engagement in global crises, 72 per cent back plans to almost double defence spending within a decade, and 59 per cent favour providing military aid to Ukraine.

These attitudes stand for the *Zeitenwende*, which we have examined in recent editions of *The Berlin Pulse*. But can Germany strengthen its defence capabilities while maintaining its leading role in civilian crisis management at the same time? In this edition, authors like Rime Allaf, Ana Revenco and Eckart von Hirschhausen urge continued German leadership in environmental protection, support of democracy, Ukraine's reconstruction and combating disinformation.

With the number of conflicts and crises rising dependable rules can be an anchor. This is why UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, Vice President of the European Parliament Katarina Barley, and United Arab Emirates Policy Center President Ebtesam Al-Ketbi urge Germany and Europe to remain committed to defending human rights and to upholding international law.

Looking back on the history of the Federal Republic, the gap between public opinion and official policy is nothing new. But in the current geopolitical context, the question how Germany's government will navigate the relationship between foreign policy principles and a changing public mood arises with renewed urgency. This edition of *The Berlin Pulse* seeks to stimulate reflection and debate on this question.

November 2025

Thomas Paulsen
Chairman of the Executive Board
Körber-Stiftung

The Berlin Pulse Survey 2025/2026

A representative survey on German and US attitudes to foreign policy

Only **27 %** of Germans view relations between Germany and the United States as good.

A likely reason: **65 %** believe that President Donald Trump is not committed to achieving lasting peace in Ukraine.

72 % of Germans support doubling Germany's defence spending.

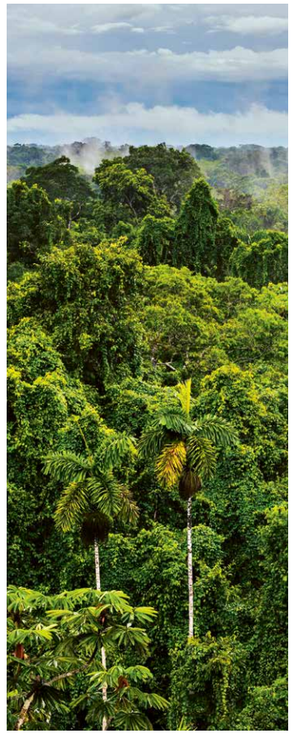
But **61 %** of Germans oppose the idea of Germany assuming a military leadership role in Europe.

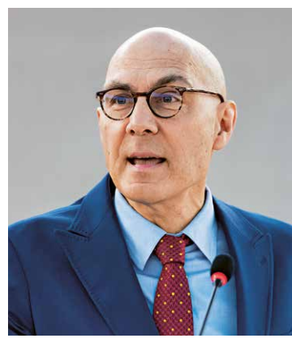
56 % of Germans would back sending troops to Ukraine as part of a European peacekeeping mission.

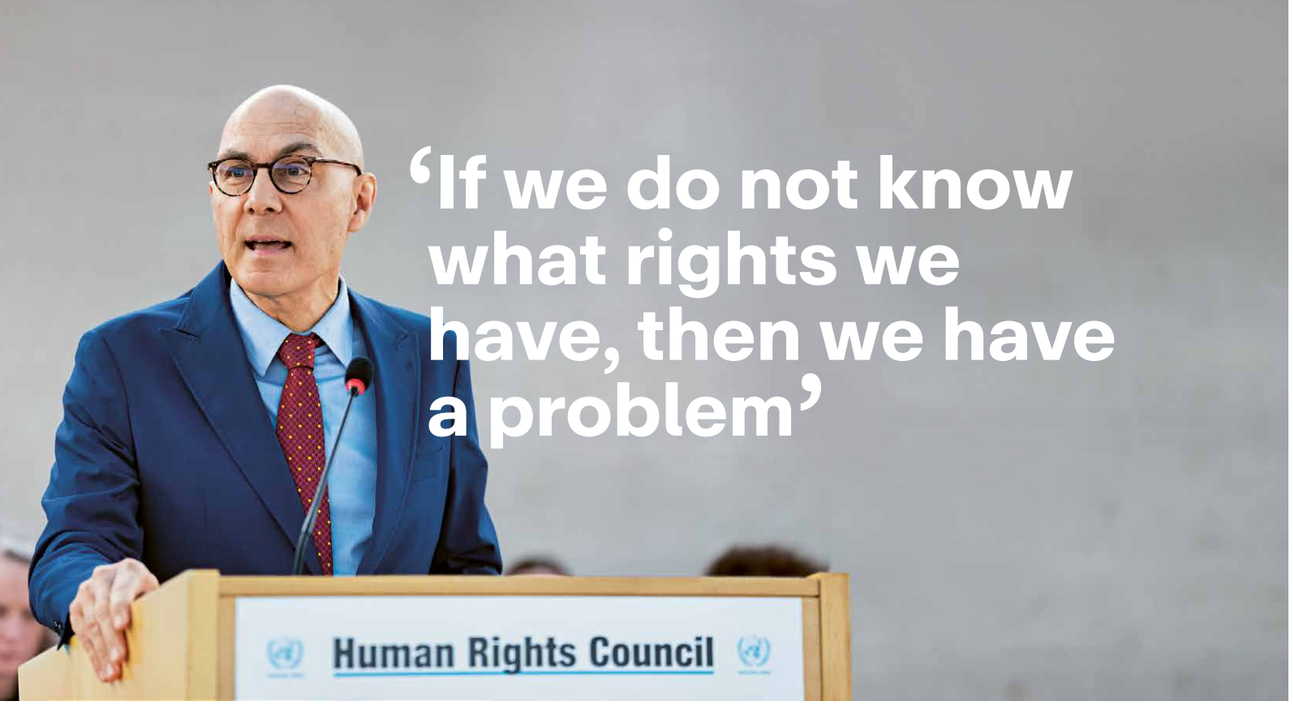
The problem: **76 %** of Germans believe that President Vladimir Putin aims to end the war through military victory.

The conflict in the **Middle East** ranks the **second-most** pressing foreign policy challenge for Germans.

Adapting to the End of Certainties







‘If we do not know what rights we have, then we have a problem’

Volker Türk, UN high commissioner for human rights, examines how the crisis of multilateralism affects those in greatest need.

Körber-Stiftung: Your first trip as UN high commissioner for human rights was to Sudan in 2022. Since April 2023, the country has been at war. Despite your repeated warnings, the stalemate between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia continues. What needs to happen now?
Volker Türk: We need a negotiated political solution. But the two generals – Abdel Fattah al-Burhan of the Sudanese army and Mohammed Hamdan Daglo ‘Hemeti’ of the RSF – are still pursuing a military victory. That is why states with influence over them must apply pressure and push them into talks. Only then can UN Special Envoy Ramtane Lamamra play a real role.

What influence does Germany have?
No direct influence. But Germany has strong ties with countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, both of which are influential in Sudan. These connections need to be used. More broadly, Sudan needs far more visibility. We are talking about eight to nine million displaced people, widespread sexual violence, famine, heavy bombardment with huge impact on the civilian population.

Why is it so hard to draw international attention to Sudan?
The wars in Ukraine and Gaza consume most of the world’s political energy. That leaves little capacity for Sudan. My recent report on the humanitarian crisis in Al-Fasher received wide coverage in Arab media but barely any in the German press. That is a huge problem because the situation is dire.

The situation in the Gaza strip is also dire. Have your appeals to increase pressure on Israel had any impact?
I would have hoped our early warnings were taken more seriously. Already in 2023, we warned of an escalation in the Palestinian territories. Unresolved conflicts erupt sooner or later – as they did on 7 October. That horrific terrorist attack, which must be fully condemned, triggered another terrible spiral of violence, also to be fully condemned. My role is to show how human rights can form part of a solution, but diplomacy has to deliver the political answers.

Should Germany recognize Palestine as a state?
That is a decision each country must make for itself. What matters is that we support a two-state solution. Recognition is ultimately a question of how much pressure a state wants to exert on Israel.

Do you maintain contact with the Israeli government?
No. Israel cut ties with my office in 2020, which I regret deeply. I tried to re-establish dialogue and met Prime Minister Yair Lapid in September 2022, just before I took office. He was open to a new kind of exchange. But when Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power, those efforts ended.

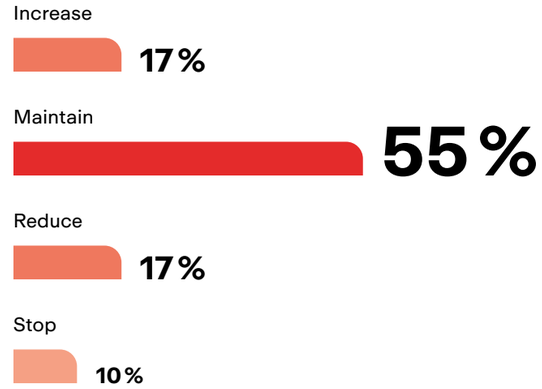
You have said we must prepare for a weakening of multilateralism. Is that inevitable?
Multilateralism is in its deepest crisis in decades. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the sense in the Global South of being abandoned during COVID-19, the Gaza war and accusations of double standards have all contributed. But in recent weeks I have also seen renewed support: many states in Latin America, Asia and Africa now recognize that a breakdown of the international system would pose serious risks for them.

Speaking of double standards: was it a mistake for Chancellor Friedrich Merz to say Germany would find ‘ways and means’ to prevent a possible arrest of Netanyahu?
Let me put it this way: if you sign up to international obligations, you have to honour them.

Are there countries that do not apply double standards?
Ireland, Spain and Norway, for example, have been consistent on Ukraine and Gaza. With others, it is more complicated. The real problem is when governments decry double standards but refuse to acknowledge their own blind spots.

What does Washington’s waning interest in international institutions mean for your work?
It hurts financially and politically. This year, we are losing about a quarter of our already limited budget. That means our fact-finding missions, which are essential to documenting abuses and delivering justice, can only be done with half the resources. Victims of human rights violations will be left without redress. And politically the change is obvious: have you noticed how the US State Department’s latest human rights report looks different than in the past?

The United States is withdrawing its financial support for international institutions like the United Nations. In response, should Germany increase, maintain, reduce, or stop its own contributions?



Yes, the United States seems to be reshaping the concept of human rights through an ‘America First’ lens.
Exactly. Russia and China have done this for a while, but now the United States does so as well. I fear it misleads the public. Human rights need to be explained in a way that makes people understand they serve their own interests.

How did you first become engaged with human rights?
I was born 20 years after the Second World War. Human rights issues were deeply formative for me. I believe they need to be taught in schools more seriously. Human rights set limits on arbitrary power and they inspire action in the search for a better world. If we do not know what rights we have, then we have a problem. ↖

The interview was conducted on 1 September 2025 by Julia Ganter and Jonathan Lehrer.

Volker Türk
is the high commissioner for human rights at the United Nations.

Out of the Rubble

Reconstruction in times of war? Risky, but crucial. An appeal to Germany by Ukrainian parliamentarian Solomiia Bobrovska.

Discussions about Ukraine's reconstruction often sound optimistic, because it is effectively the easiest topic concerning Russia's war against the country. But the reality is much more complicated. As long as the front line remains unstable, rebuilding will be limited and risky. Nevertheless, we should not delay planning and preparing for reconstruction – and Germany has all the means to play a decisive role in areas where its expertise is most relevant.

One concrete area for German support is the construction of modern, reliable shelters against missile and artillery attacks. In many Ukrainian cities, existing shelters are outdated, insufficient or simply absent. Germany has long-standing expertise in high-quality, resilient construction, which could be applied directly to Ukraine's needs. Proper shelters would not only protect lives during attacks but also enable schools, hospitals and workplaces to function even under constant threat.

Millions of Ukrainians without permanent housing

Housing is another urgent issue. Research by the Kyiv School of Economics shows that internally displaced persons (IDPs) officially account for around 12 per cent of the population: over 4.6 million people. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there were 3.6 to 3.8 million as of early 2025. Most of them remain without permanent homes or without housing. This means that they cannot settle, find work or rebuild their lives. German assistance in building affordable, energy-efficient housing could help displaced families regain stability and begin contributing to local economies.

But recovery will not succeed if it focuses only on infrastructure. Veterans returning from the front face difficulties when it comes to psychological support, social reintegration and employment. Germany's experience with rehabilitation programs could help Ukraine develop systematic solutions. IDPs and veterans need more than housing; they require access to healthcare, education and work opportunities. Without this, there is a risk of deepening social inequality and instability.

Reconstruction is not a short-term project

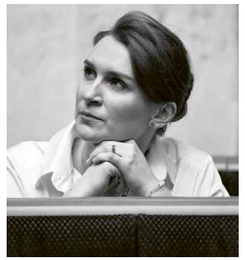
Economic recovery will depend on creating jobs and strengthening production inside Ukraine. A practical step is joint defence production with German companies. Today, when German-made military equipment used in Ukraine breaks down, it is often repaired abroad. Localizing maintenance and production in the country, as Rheinmetall has begun to test, would make repairs faster and cheaper, while creating local employment. For German companies, it also means lower labour costs and shorter supply chains.

Reconstruction is not a short-term project. It will take years, and progress will remain fragile as long as the war continues. But preparation cannot wait. Germany can contribute in practical ways: building shelters, supporting housing for displaced people, helping veterans reintegrate and expanding localized production.

For Ukraine, these steps would provide not just immediate relief but also the basis for long-term resilience. And for Germany and Europe, supporting Ukraine's recovery is not an act of generosity, but a strategic investment in their national security and defence. ↖

59 % of Germans think Germany should give military aid to Ukraine.

56 % of Germans support sending troops to Ukraine as part of a European peacekeeping mission if a ceasefire is reached.



Solomiia Bobrovska is a member of Ukraine's parliament.

Close the Window of Russian Influence

Pro-Russian content is flooding social media in Moldova. Ana Revenco explains how Europe can help stop it.

Moldova is experiencing an information war. It is an information war between two worlds, pro-European and pro-Russian parties, which are much more sharply defined than in the West. They represent not just pro and anti-EU choices, but two existential directions, two visions of life.

And as there are two clearly defined worlds, the disinformation from Russia is also devoid of nuances. It is raw, direct and ordinary. Russian-coordinated influencers from all walks of life – politicians, journalists, businesspeople – operate with simplified narratives, without subtleties, targeting primal emotions.

While anti-EU policymakers in Western Europe do not have a clear point of reference for how society should look, in Moldova, Russia is an example that is close by and is present in many people's minds. This is mostly the case with the older generation, but there is also a young electorate that is paradoxically attracted to a vision that is not anchored in modernity.

Pro-Russian vote anchored in a nostalgia

Although the elderly have experienced the harmful Russian regime, their pro-Russian vote is anchored in a nostalgia. Russian disinformation has transformed this past, which was full of deprivation, into something desirable. That shows that the years of Soviet domination have left deep traces on our society. And it is precisely this focal point that is the target of the Russian disinformation apparatus.

It is difficult to understand for the Western reader, the loneliness and harshness of the of Moldova's trench warfare without EU help. To the same extent, we should not underestimate the impact of the expertise and financial aid offered by the EU. Moldova's definitive break from Russia's sphere of influence dependents on the degree of EU involvement. The major progress recorded in this respect is due to the strategic and consistent approach of decision-makers in Brussels.

On the one hand, there is the concrete component. This involves strengthening the EU through an expansion that involves the economic, political and territorial dimension. But, equally important, we also have the symbolic component. Given that we are talking about a major ideological conflict across the West between destructive autocratic nationalism and democracies that prioritize interconnection and strategic cooperation, the EU's role in consolidating Moldova as a part of a community of states with pro-liberty governments and open societies carries significant weight.

Not possible to counter Russian disinformation without the EU

Symbolically, this means validating the liberal model in an area contested by autocrats. The more coherent support Brussels provides in terms of energy, infrastructure, culture and institutional procedures, the more the window of Russian influence closes. In Moldova, the EU presence is not only technical but also defines the strategic direction of the state and that of its citizens. Because the information war affects Moldova more than others, as our society is a few steps behind in terms of economic development and democratic experience.

54% of Germans are concerned about Russia trying to influence public opinion in Germany.

Countering Russian disinformation in Moldova would not be possible without the EU's contribution. This collaboration is already having substantial effects. Financial support, expertise and information exchange help both the authorities, but also the media, civil society and academia to act efficiently in debunking Russian influence and investigating disinformation networks.

To achieve this objective, which we have already partially operationalized, a Moldova-EU communication structure can be created to oversee and inform this systemic and systematized approach to strategic communication on a regional level.

Need of a proactive approach to strategic communication

However, this approach could be significantly improved by positioning strategic communication at the center of actions to combat foreign information manipulation and interferences (FIMI). Taking a proactive approach to strategic communications instead of reactive debunking and exposure approaches would bring structural and long-term benefits.

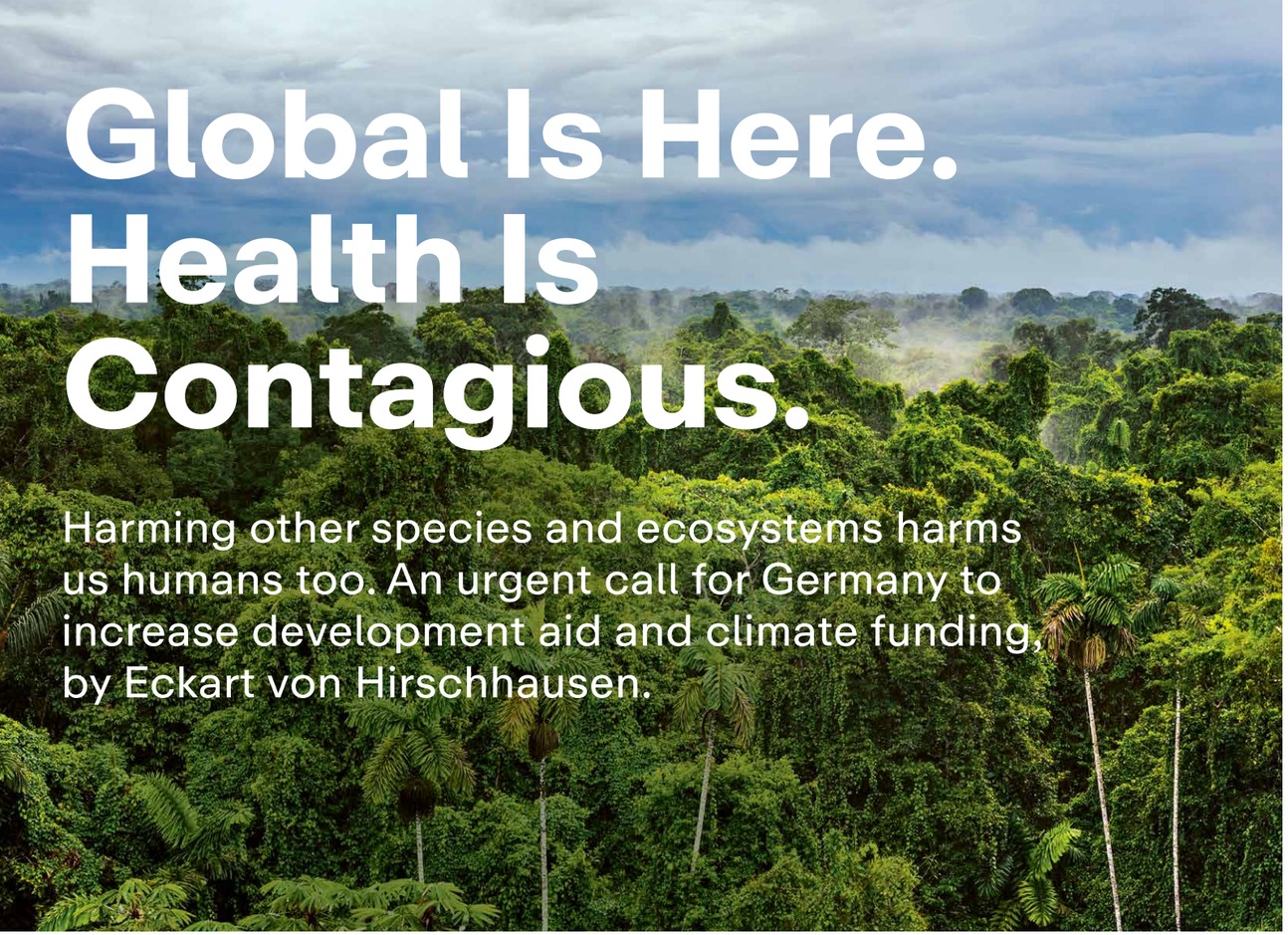
Strategic communication involves taking control of the narratives circulating in the public space, replacing Russian disinformation with factual themes and realities that build beliefs, attitudes and opinions which are pro-democracy, pro-freedom and pro-cooperation within the enlarged EU framework.

This common Moldova-EU hub could coordinate not only FIMI monitoring and rapid data exchange, but also the anticipated response to it. It could also coordinate integrated campaigns and knowledge building programs for the media and the NGO sectors, as well as programs and policies for societal and institutional resilience.

Moldova is more than just a new candidate for EU enlargement. Moldova is the litmus test of the EU's capacity to protect liberal democracy in a state where the tentacles of Russia are still firmly embedded in society in continuous transition. And it is a test of the EU's capacity to act as a geopolitical pole. This involves investments, economic integration and institutional anchoring.

The most important advice we can offer to the West that it must start thinking in terms of war. Even if it is an information war, grasping the gravity of the situation changes your entire mindset, giving you the determination to take immediate action. If you are not in 'war mode', you wont be prepared for the next battle, which will certainly come. ↖

Ana Revenco
is Moldovan politician and director of the center for strategic communications and combating disinformation.



Global Is Here. Health Is Contagious.

Harming other species and ecosystems harms us humans too. An urgent call for Germany to increase development aid and climate funding, by Eckart von Hirschhausen.

As a doctor and science journalist, I used to think that ‘global health’ meant ‘somewhere else’. Not here in Europe; not in Germany. I thought exotic diseases and viruses only mattered when you travelled far away. But the COVID-19 pandemic proved me wrong. We do not have to fly to pathogens anymore – they fly to us. Global is here, and health is contagious! A virus does not need a visa to cross borders.

This is a year when many of us hesitate to even watch the news. We spend billions on new weapons designed to kill people more efficiently. At the same time we do have the weapons to save lifes at low costs, to win the fight against Tuberculosis, HIV, Malaria and starvation, and we are tolerating cuts to development and humanitarian aid. In domestic legal terms this would be a failure to render assistance. It is like being at the scene of a car accident with a first-aid kit in the trunk and looking away, hoping someone else will help.

European countries are cutting development aid. Where is the outrage?

We already were on the right track. Child mortality was dropping fast; vaccination programmes were working; and perhaps the single most transformative health intervention – educating girls – was making progress. All this is now being undone by arbitrary budget cuts. The result is more hunger, more displacement and more casualties. According to *The Lancet*, these cuts could lead to 14 million additional deaths by 2030, including 4.5 million children under the age of five years. These are avoidable deaths.

Where is the outrage? The real scandal is that there is none. Because of all the ‘flooding the zone with shit’, hardly anyone notices that not only the United States but also European countries are slashing their development budgets, walking away from a minimal consensus of solidarity and support.

48 % of Germans believe that Germany should engage more strongly on international crises.

Germany is a case in point. By reducing the budget of the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the country’s official development assistance fell below the 0.7 % of GDP target in 2024. And even a government led by a Christian Democratic party no longer commits to reaching this minimum. All this at a time when the world spends US $2.7 trillion on military armament.

Development aid is investment, not charity

Make no mistake: we are at war. Not only with each other but also with the basic needs for a good life on planet earth. We defend man-made borders with all our might, yet those borders will become meaningless if we fail to defend the planetary boundaries with highest priority. We cannot negotiate with the laws of nature. Physics does not make ‘deals’. Healthy people can only exist on a healthy Earth. Fullstop. Health does not begin with innovation, artificial intelligence or personalized supplements. It begins with air we can breathe, water we can drink, plants we can eat, tolerable temperatures and peaceful coexistence. All of that is at risk right now.

An exporting country like Germany depends on good relationships with other countries and on global stability. Thus, development cooperation is not charity. It is an investment that benefits donor countries too, securing jobs and reducing crises. Research from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy shows that every 1 dollar spent in crisis prevention saves 24 dollars in crisis response. Investments in education and health measurably reduce irregular migration. The lesson is obvious: less populist penny-pinching, more long-term vision and political foresight.

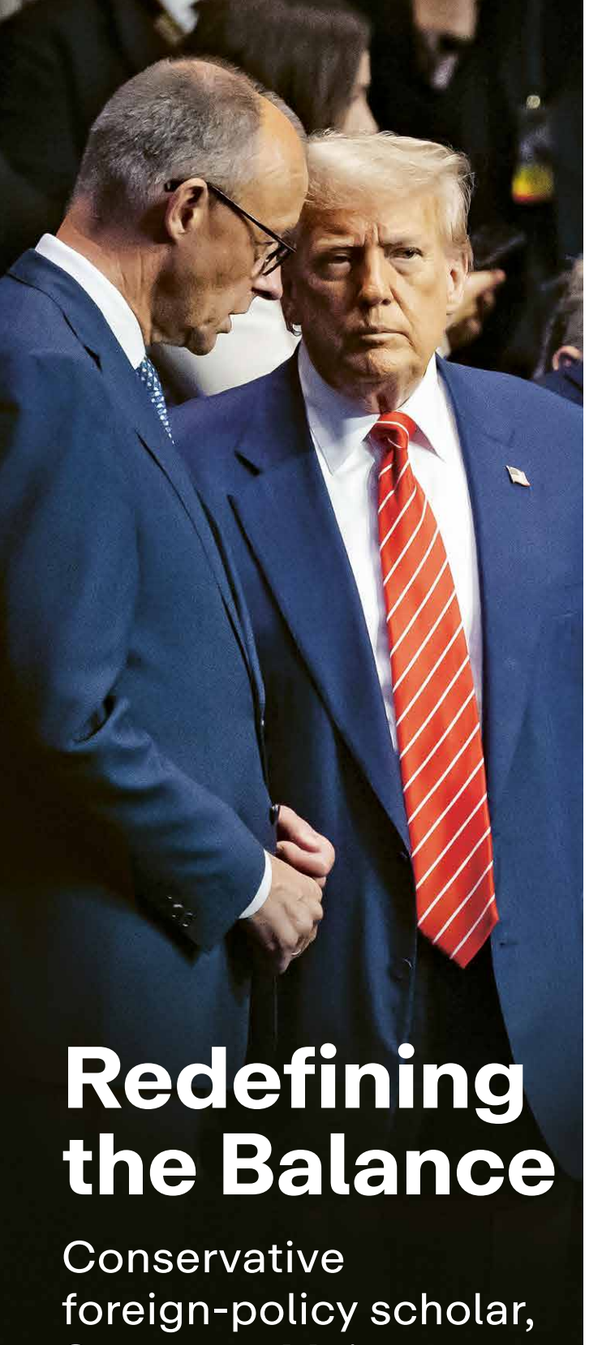
Extreme weather and biodiversity loss. Doing nothing costs most

Does fighting poverty and stopping pathogens at the source make us poorer? No; quite the opposite. I am a strong advocate for ‘One Health’ and ‘Planetary Health’. That is why I founded the Healthy Planet – Healthy People Foundation in 2020 in Berlin: to put protecting our life-support systems first. We seem to have forgotten that we cannot destroy other species and ecosystems without harming ourselves. As a doctor, and as a Christian, I see it as self-evident that helping people comes first. That means not destroying biodiverse rainforests just to funnel calories into cattle, and then cattle into overweight consumers. This is not a cliché; it is reality. As Paul McCartney says: Less meat, less heat. Imagine! There is enough food for everyone. The ‘planetary health diet’ is the healthiest option for humans and our one and only Mother Earth.

What we need now is binding commitments from Germany and from Europe on development cooperation and climate protection. We must strengthen global health systems and embrace a ‘One Health’ strategy that recognizes the interdependence of humans, animals and ecosystems. The greatest threats according to the world risk report of the coming decade – extreme weather, biodiversity collapse, ecological tipping points – are already upon us. The most expensive option is to do nothing.

Specifically, together with over 30 other foundations, I am now reminding the German government to ‘stay the course!’ Germany has signed the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Protocol on biodiversity. We promised with the Sustainable Development Goals, to contribute to the peaceful, socially and ecologically sustainable development of the global community. These cornerstones of German policy are not up for debate. Keeping one's promises and preserving creation is literally ‘conservative’, isn’t it? ↖

Eckart von Hirschhausen
is a doctor, science journalist and founder of the NGO ‘Gesunde Erde – Gesunde Menschen’ (Healthy Planet – Healthy People)
→ www.stiftung-gegm.de



Redefining the Balance

Conservative foreign-policy scholar, Sumantra Maitra explains why America needs Germany more than Brussels.

A more autonomous and independent Europe is not a threat to American interests; it is a necessity. From a US perspective, the question is not if Europe should be independent but how. The ideal is a peaceful Europe, culturally and economically tied to the United States, and broadly aligned on grand-strategic matters, but one that also shares the strategic burden more equitably. America's real special relationship, however, has not been with any abstract idea such as 'Europe' or artificial constructs such as the European Union; it has always been with Germany. A smooth German-American relation has been the real prize of *Pax Americana*.

Germany is the US's anchor in Europe

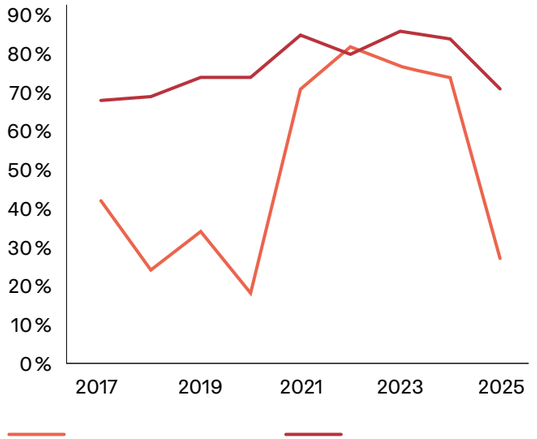
A Europeanized Germany is the continent's economic engine and primary manufacturing hub, and it hosts the largest US military bases. It remains the key country where both the population and the elite are overwhelmingly pro-American, despite occasional unease over who governs in America. Germany is the prime military real estate in the centre of Europe, capable of enabling extended nuclear deterrence across the entire continent.

Until recently, this had been the de facto reality for at least half a century. It is important to remember that Britain and France were reluctant about German re-unification, and that the United States ultimately pushed it through, understanding that, as Hans Morgenthau wrote, whoever controls all of Germany with its 'natural endowment' may become invincible in a war. The dynamic persists: America needs Germany to have a coherent European grand strategy, while Germany can rely only on it in extremis. Any other aspiring hegemon, such as China and Russia, would spell disaster for the continent. Both Germans and Americans understand that.

A relationship not without friction

Naturally, this crucial relationship is not without friction. Americans resent sanctimonious lecturing about human rights, given that US hard power provides the ultimate deterrence. Germans are often frustrated with American unilateralism (as with the invasion of Iraq in 2003), deception (as with the National Security Agency spying scandal in 2013) and contradictory demands (since 2016). Cultural differences, stemming from history, with regard to issues ranging from free speech, euthanasia and public displays of Christianity to civilian nuclear energy also persist. Both sides would do well to understand each other's perspectives instead of trying to shape each other's internal politics.

How would you rate the current relations between Germany and the United States?



A German-American duopoly will aid the US rebalancing in Europe. As it recedes to an 'offshore balancer' position, Washington should encourage more German spending, research and forward-positioned hardware, while also propping up German leadership in conventional deterrence. This model does not sideline other key allies like France or Poland. Instead, these countries would maintain bilateral relations with the United States and continue to be part of NATO, but with Germany prioritized as the central US partner. This allows for a flexible web of defence cooperation: agile, national-led 'mini-ententes' – for example, with Germany deploying brigades in Lithuania or French ships patrolling the Aegean Sea – are preferable to cumbersome EU-wide structures. Strategic independence with regard to defence procurement and manufacturing are key to a healthy burden sharing, all under the US nuclear umbrella. Performative geopolitical signalling should be avoided. The German navy, for example, is best positioned to patrol the Baltic and the Mediterranean Seas rather than the South China Sea. A lone German frigate near Taiwan will not change the balance of power there, but its loss in a war would be an enormous blow to NATO prestige.

Sceptical of Europe's bureaucratic consolidation

A more effective and autonomous Europe requires a new framework with a 'dormant NATO': a stronger, more efficient alliance, not a dead one. Under this model, the United States would not retrench from Europe but would transition to an offshore balancing role, backstopping the continent's security with its nuclear umbrella and formidable naval resources. European powers, particularly the affluent Western European states, would assume primary responsibility for conventional logistics, armour and infantry. This re-prioritization would free up US resources, foster European self-reliance, check nuclear proliferation and help temper nationalistic urges on the continent.

An autonomous Europe, broadly aligned with the United States, is therefore welcome. A Europe consolidated into a single entity as a trade or military rival is not. Naturally, Washington seeks to de-institutionalize the continent's recent drift towards bureaucratic consolidation, and to align it with historic Euro-American norms, culturally (for example, regarding free speech) and materially (for example, with burden shifting in defence). That does not mean total US military retrenchment from the continent that gave birth to the United States. Sanctimony from either side should be avoided; a blunt reassessment of strategic priorities helps true friends and allies to understand each other better and adjust in time. ↖

Sumantra Maitra
is a senior fellow at the Center for Renewing America, and an advisor to the Republican-led Congressional Greenland Caucus.

‘I believe we could be tougher’

Right-wing politicians in European Parliament and Trump in the White House: Katarina Barley speaks about her work as parliamentarian and her experiences with ‘shitstorms’.

Körber-Stiftung: In September, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen began her State of the Union address by saying that ‘Europe is in a fight’. What went through your mind at that moment?
Katarina Barley: My first thought was: That is the kind of thing politicians say under pressure. It is a common way of trying to close ranks internally.

Is that not legitimate?
Of course, it is legitimate, and it is also accurate. Despite all the criticism we may have of her policies, I must acknowledge that we are indeed in a very precarious situation, in which we, as the European Union, must act together. Many are just waiting for us to fall apart from within.

But is not the EU divided on most issues?
Of course we have different opinions and interests in Europe, and that is how it should be. After all, 27 states are acting together here. But we usually manage very well in most policy fields.

Where does it get difficult?
In foreign policy, opinions differ more often. The 27 member states have very different historical backgrounds and international ties, for example to Israel or the Palestinian territories. But did you notice that the European Parliament recently adopted a resolution on Gaza with a very large majority? We negotiated for a very long time, but in the end almost everyone – from the left to the conservatives – voted in favour. That is truly remarkable.

Europe played no role in the negotiations for the release of the Israeli hostages. What role do you see for Europe in view of possible peace talks on the horizon?
The European Union is a major donor of humanitarian aid in Gaza. It is a key priority that essential services in Gaza can be guaranteed and humanitarian needs are met. The reconstruction of Gaza has to happen in a bottom-up manner, the EU can provide both: coordination and financial support.

How do you assess Germany’s role and that of its chancellor?
We are very credible partners in the region. Therefore I expect Germany to live up to our historical responsibility on both sides. That means, on the one hand, as explicit friends of the Israeli state, who also dare to be critical when necessary. On the other hand, we must also protect and do justice to the Palestinians in this unprecedented horror they have been experiencing.

Let’s look at Brussels. In the 2024 European Parliament elections, right-wing and far-right parties together won about 24 per cent of the seats. How does that affect day-to-day work in the parliament?
Among democrats, it is normal to be loud and outspoken with one another. But when the far right joins in, boundaries are crossed very quickly. For example, there is a Romanian member of parliament who regularly holds up a crucifix and calls for exorcisms. When COVID-19 is discussed, she holds up a body bag. We also have seen that at 8 pm, when we are still debating in plenary, a member of parliament tells the female staff that they should be at home with their children.

Who do you consider to be on the far right in the parliament and what does that mean for cooperation with the conservatives?
Unlike in Germany, there are different interpretations of the term ‘far right’ and ‘cooperation’. In the European Parliament, Patriots for Europe and Europe of Sovereign Nations are far right. The conservative European People’s Party Group (EPP), for example, sees the European Conservatives and Reformists’ Giorgia Meloni as a possible partner; for us in the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, she is outside the spectrum. The European People’s Party sometimes seeks majorities with the far right when we do not make concessions. They leave the platform of democratic parties regularly to form majorities also with the far right. This is undermining the democratic consensus in the Parliament.

In your role as one of the parliament’s vice-presidents, you recently rejected a motion from right-wing parties to hold a minute of silence for the assassinated US right-wing activist Charlie Kirk. The motion had already been rejected internally beforehand. Afterwards, you explained on Instagram what had happened. Is that your strategy for dealing with ‘shitstorms’?
Exactly. Perhaps one should have included a sequence showing what happened after that. They simply stood up, banged on their desks and shouted. It was a hell of a noise.

73 % of Germans assess Europe’s approach to assert its economic interests vis-a-vis the United States as too cautious.

How do you deal with that?
I used to be a judge. You learn not to take such things personally and to be fair. This even applies to people whose opinions I fundamentally do not share. If their motion had had merit, I would have granted their request.

Beyond that, I stopped reading the comments on social media a long time ago.

Let's talk about transatlantic relations. Currently, it seems that European politicians are trying to keep President Donald Trump and his people happy with nice texts and flattery. Do you think that is the right tactic?
Every fibre of my being resists that. But I would not want to be in the shoes of those who have to negotiate with him. I have the impression that Trump reacts to strength. That is why I believe we could be tougher. For example, in the tariff negotiations: We should have insisted on a stand-still clause that says: 'This is our deal, and there will be no further changes'. That was not achieved, and it is really problematic. And we saw the consequences: Two weeks after the deal was concluded, Trump suddenly doubled automobile tariffs from 25 to 50 per cent – with no warning, no reason.

To what extent do you see Germany's economic stagnation as a threat to the European Union's ability to act?
We are a strong Union with a strong industrial backbone and skilled workers. This crisis can also be a chance to step up where we have to get better, for example in energy cooperation or with a capital markets Union. Fortunately, there is now more willingness to engage from countries with which trade negotiations have long been difficult – for example, with India, Mexico, Canada or Australia.

The EU-Mercosur free trade agreement is supposed to be concluded this year. However, some member states, including Poland, France and Italy, still have objections. Will it still go through?
It has to go through. Of course, I also have points of criticism. But a trade agreement can never be such that only one side benefits. You also have to concede to the other side. In the end, it comes down to internal compensation mechanisms and boosting trade with other partners.

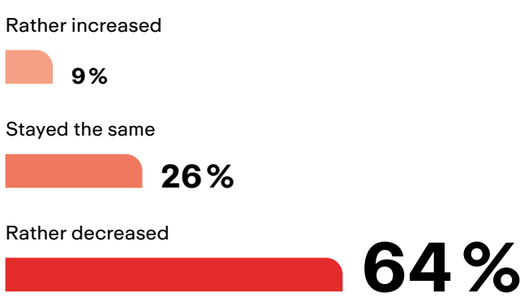
If the European Union were an orchestra, which instrument would Germany be?
I have never been asked that question before. Spontaneously, the cello came to my mind. It is always there. It is calming and solid. It has an underlying melody and plays the solo only when appropriate. ↖

The interview was conducted on 14 September 2025 by Leona Harting and Jonathan Lehrer and updated in October 2025.

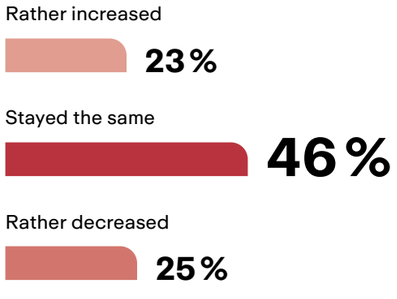
Katarina Barley
is member and vice-president of the European Parliament.

Has the European Union's influence in the world in recent years … ?

German respondents:



US respondents:



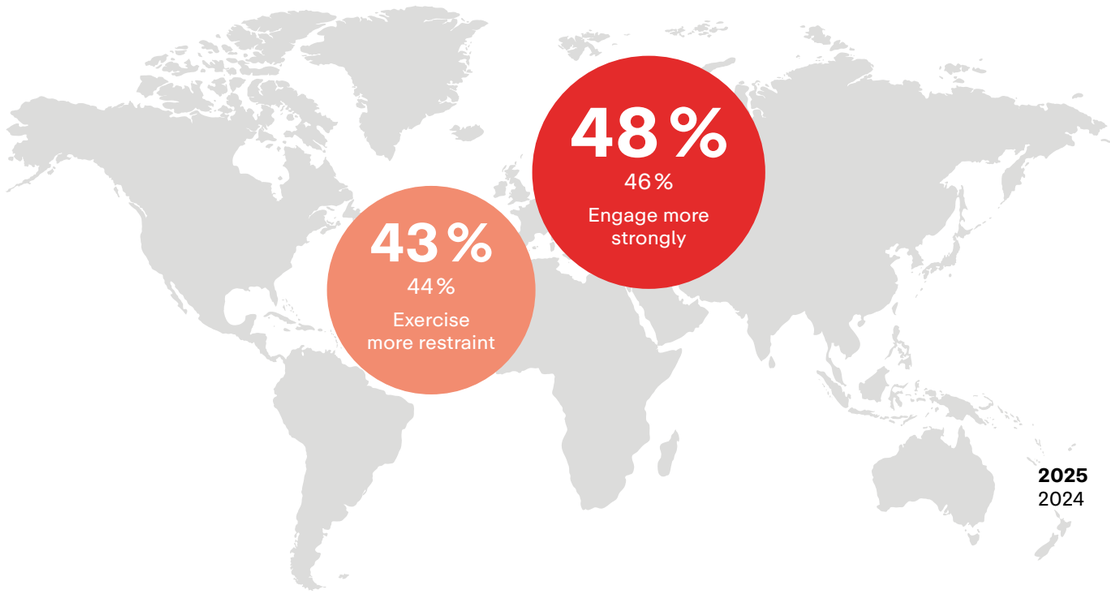
The Berlin Pulse Survey 2025/2026

A representative survey on German attitudes to foreign policy commissioned by Körber-Stiftung

All US results by Pew Research Center
September 2025

Split priorities

Should Germany engage more strongly on international crises or exercise more restraint?

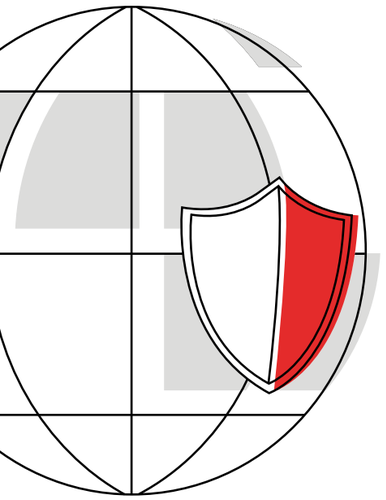


Of those who favour more engagement:
Should Germany become more strongly engaged militarily, diplomatically or financially?

72 % Diplomatically
17 % Militarily
7 % Financially

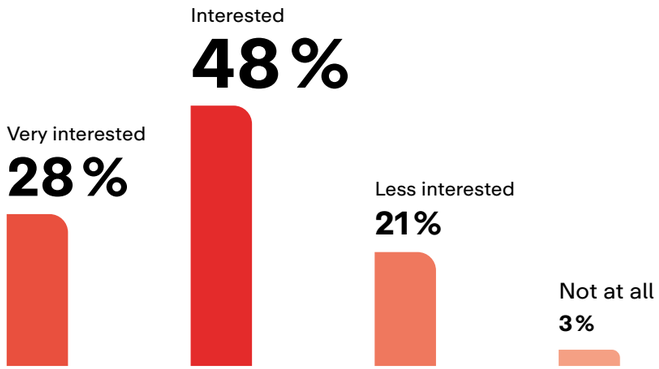
2025: spontaneously: none of the above 7 %, don't know 1 % | 2025: spontaneously: none of the above 3 %

Compare with results from 2024/25



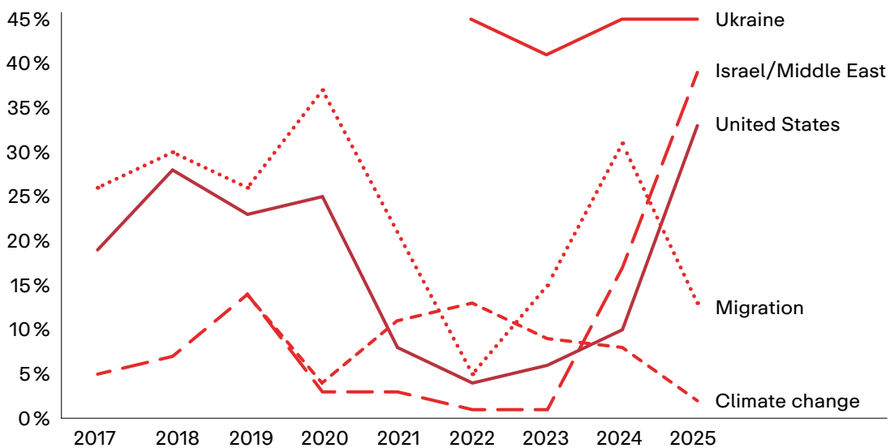
Foreign policy matters

How interested are you in foreign and security policy?



Biggest challanges: Ukraine and Middle East

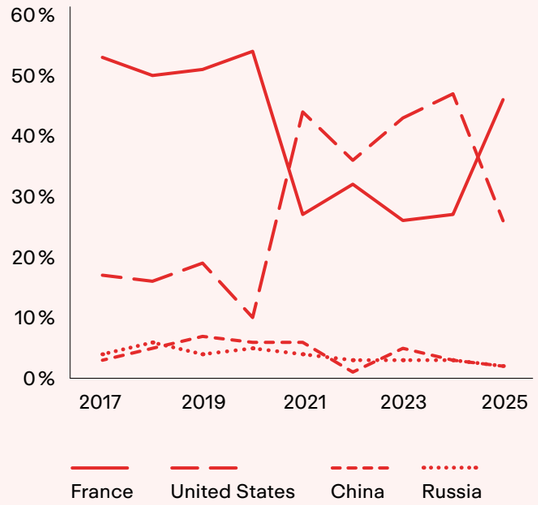
What are the greatest challenges currently facing German foreign policy?



2025: don’t know 7 %, no answer 1 %

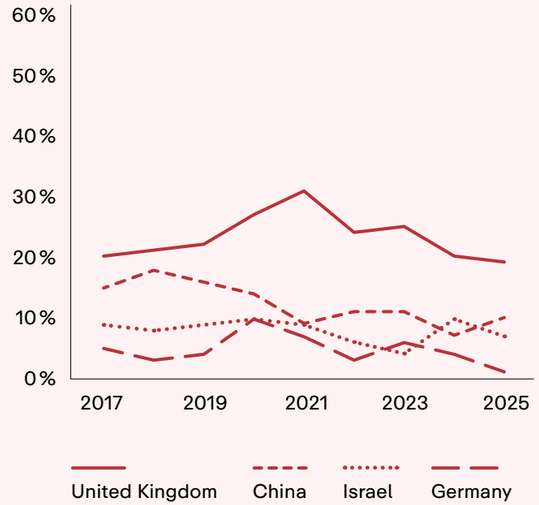
Fading US role

German respondents:
Which country is currently the most important partner for Germany?



German respondents, 2025: don’t know 15 %, no answer 1 %

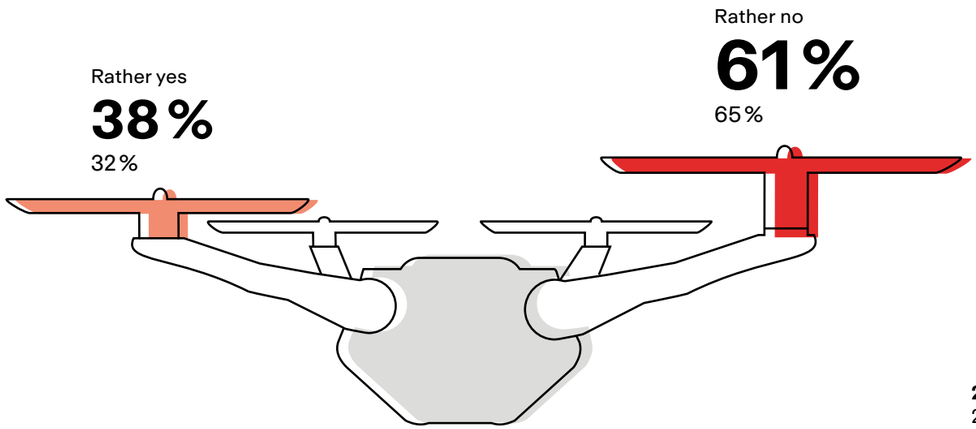
US respondents:
Which country is currently the most important partner for the United States?



US respondents, 2025: don’t know/no answer 36 %

No military leadership

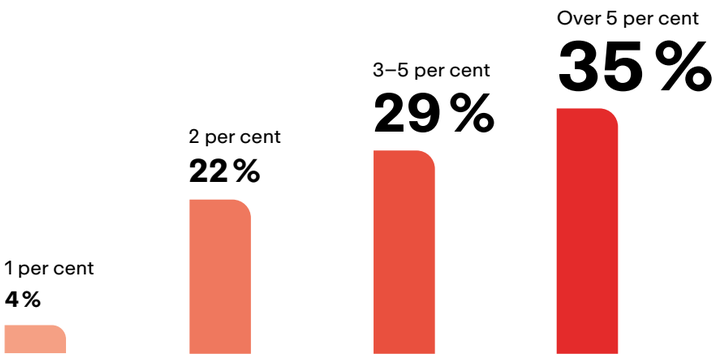
Should Germany play a military leadership role in Europe?



2025: don’t know 1 %

Overestimated power

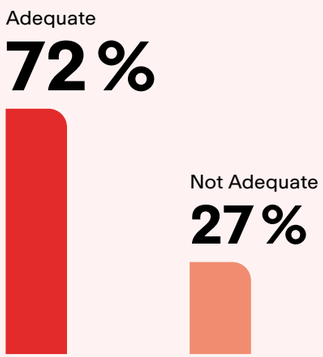
How much of its GDP do you think Germany spends on defence?
German respondents estimated:



2025: don’t know/no answer 9 %

Backing stronger defence

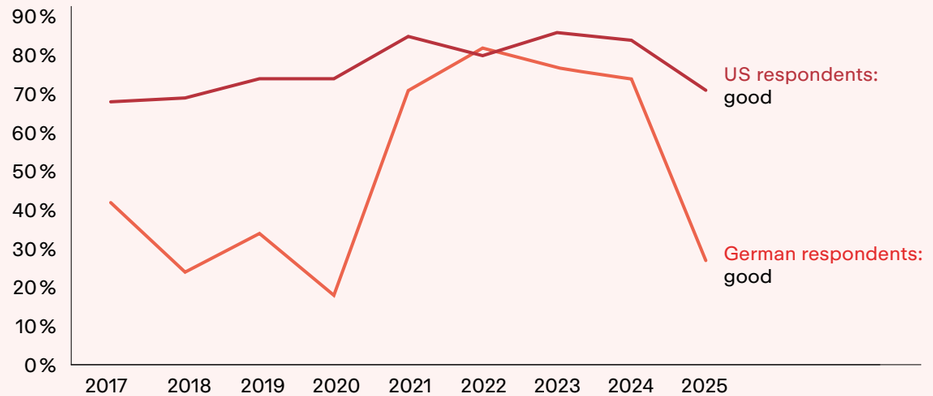
Germany plans to double defence spending over the next ten years.
Is this target …



2025: don’t know 1%

Transatlantic drift

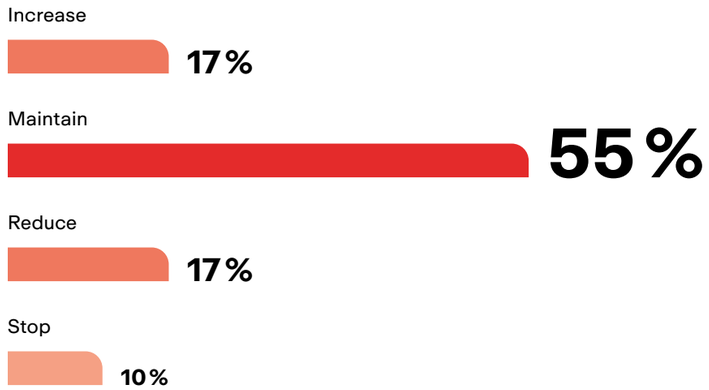
How would you rate the current relations between
Germany and the United States?



German respondents, 2025: bad 73 %, don’t know 1% | US respondents, 2025: bad 24 %, don’t know/no answer 5 %

Germany refuses to step in

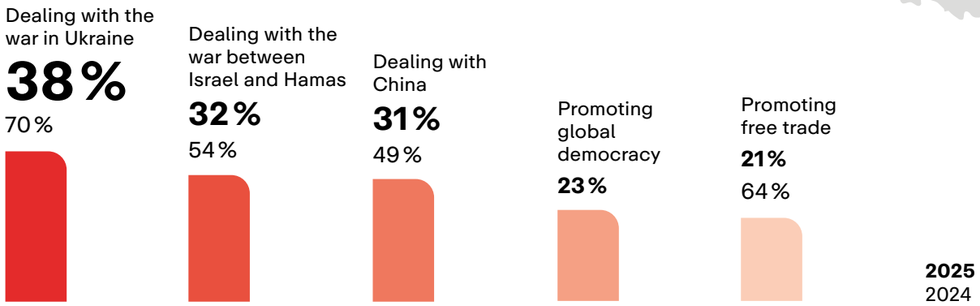
The United States is withdrawing its financial support for international institutions like the United Nations. In response, should Germany increase, maintain, reduce, or stop its own contributions?



2025: don’t know 1%

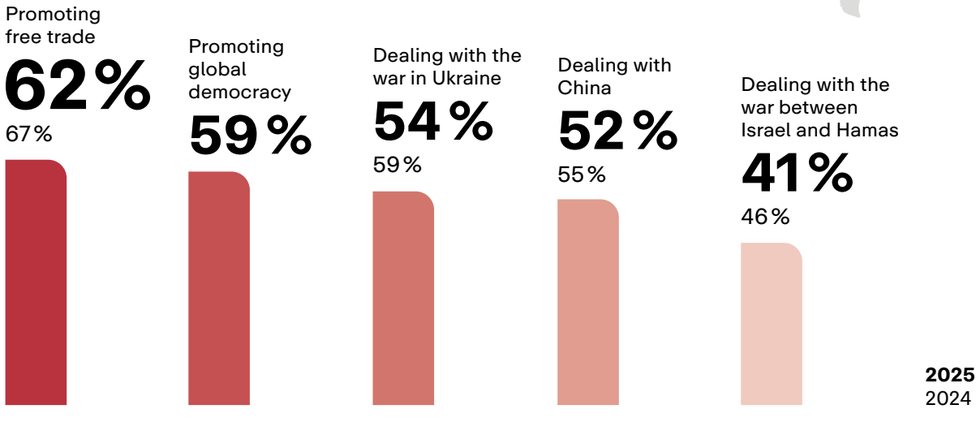
Less transatlantic alignment

German respondents:
Do you see the United States as a partner on these issues?



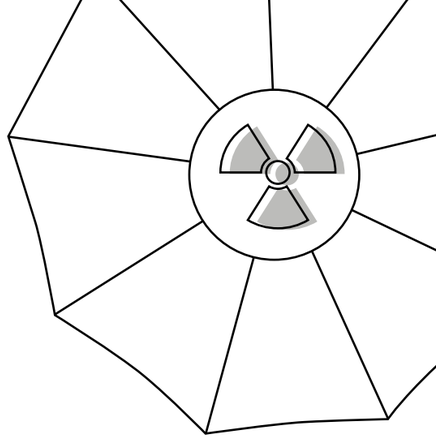
German respondents, 2025: answer ‘neither’ ranged from 1 to 3 per cent for all issues, ‘don’t know’ ranged from 1 to 3 per cent for all issues

US respondents:
Do you see Germany as a partner on these issues?

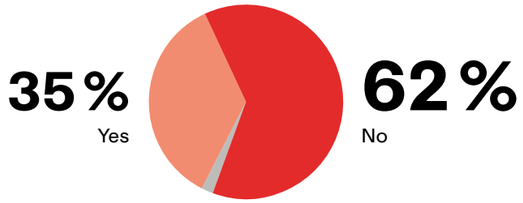


US respondents, 2025: answer ‘don’t know/no answer’ ranged from 9 to 10 per cent for all issues

Nuclear Europe

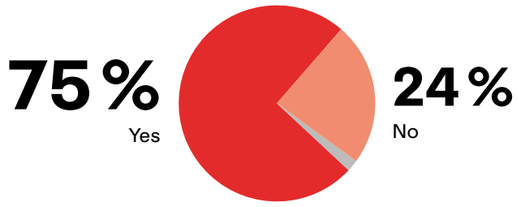


Can Germany still rely on the US nuclear umbrella for its security?



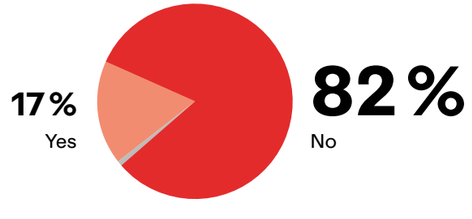
2025: don’t know 2 %

Should Germany seek a nuclear umbrella from France and the United Kingdom?

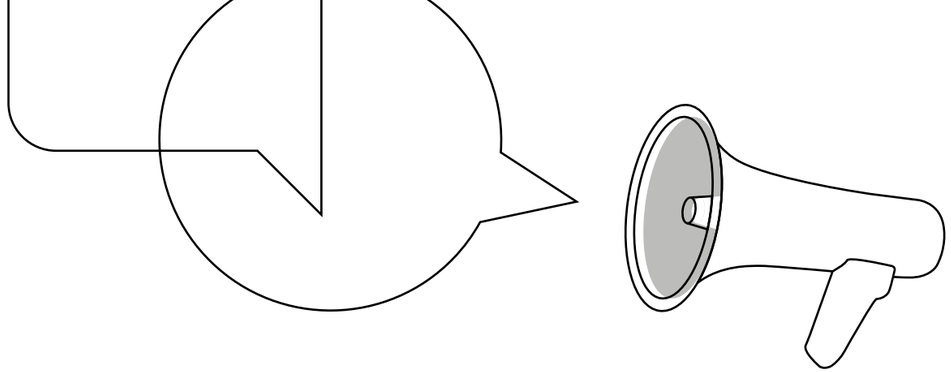


2025: don’t know 2 %

Should Germany acquire its own nuclear weapons in the future?



2025: don’t know 1 %



Free speech?

How free do people in **Germany** feel to express their opinions, even if these are unpopular? (German respondents):

Extremly free/Very free **59 %**

Not too free/Not at all free **40 %**

How free do people in **Germany** feel to express their opinions, even if these are unpopular? (US respondents):

Extremly free/Very free **33 %**

Somewhat free **28 %**

Not too free/Not at all free **15 %**

US respondents, 2025: Not sure 22 %, don't know/no answer 3 %

How free do people in the **United States** feel to express their opinions, even if these are unpopular? (German respondents):

Extremly free/Very free **35 %**

Not too free/Not at all free **61 %**

How free do people in the **United States** feel to express their opinions, even if these are unpopular? (US respondents):

Extremly free/Very free **45 %**

Somewhat free **24 %**

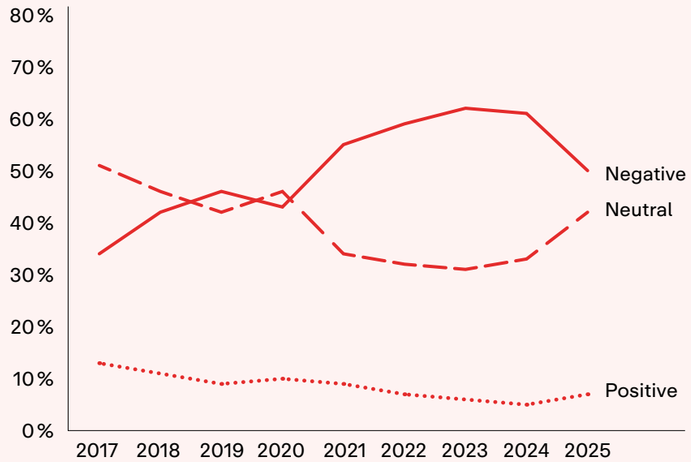
Not too free/Not at all free **23 %**

German respondents, 2025: don't know 4 %

US respondents, 2025: Not sure 6 %, don't know/no answer 2 %

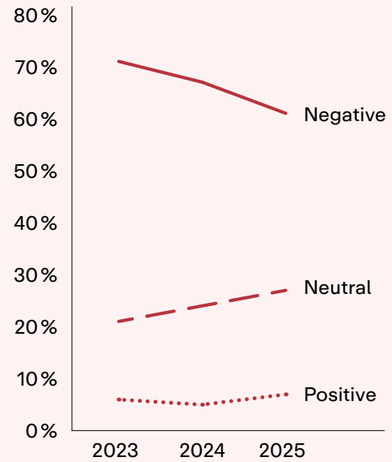
Softening stance on China

German respondents:
How do you see China's rising influence?



German respondents, 2025: don't know 1 %

US respondents:
How do you see China's rising influence?



US, 2025: don't know/no answer 5 %

China's economy seen as a threat

Do the following countries represent a major, a minor or no threat to Germany's economy? (German respondents):

China

59 %	**31 %**	**9 %**
56 %	34 %	9 %
Major threat	Minor threat	No threat

United States

38 %	**48 %**	**14 %**
17 %	52 %	29 %
Major threat	Minor threat	No threat

Does China represent a major, a minor or no threat to the American economy? (US respondents):

China

66 %	**21 %**	**9 %**
67 %	20 %	8 %
Major threat	Minor threat	No threat

2025
2024

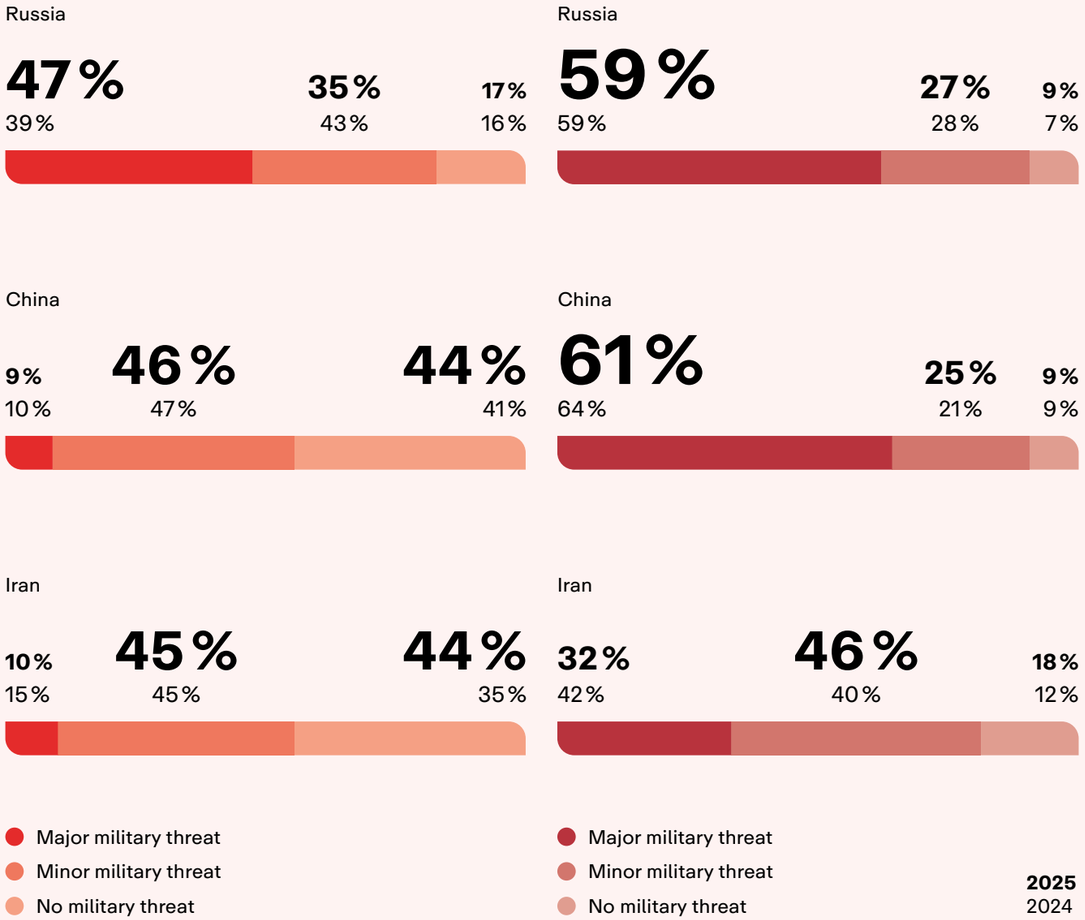
German and US respondents, 2025: 'don't know/no answer' ranged from 1 to 4 per cent for all issues

Russia seen as a threat

Do the following countries represent a military threat to…?

…Germany's security? (German respondents):

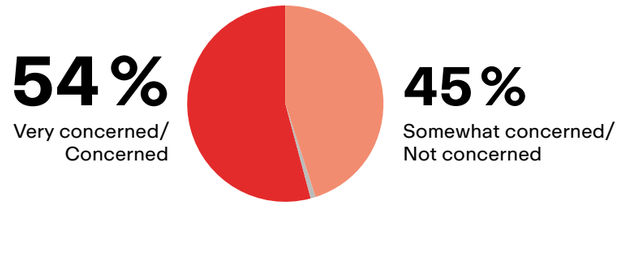
…security in the United States? (US respondents):

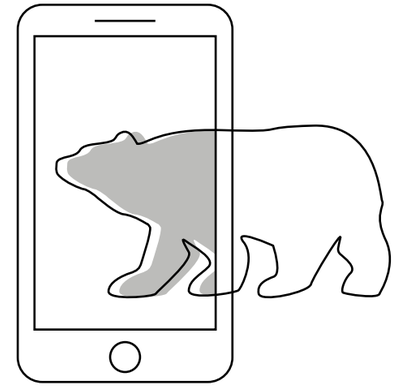


German and US respondents: 'don't know/no answer' ranged from 1 to 5 per cent for all issues

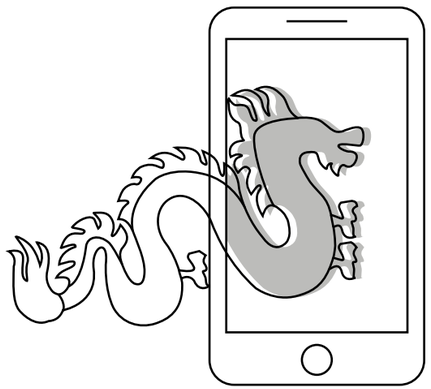
Russia's influence sparks concern

How concerned are you about Russia trying to influence public opinion in Germany?





2025: don't know 1%



No panic about China's influence

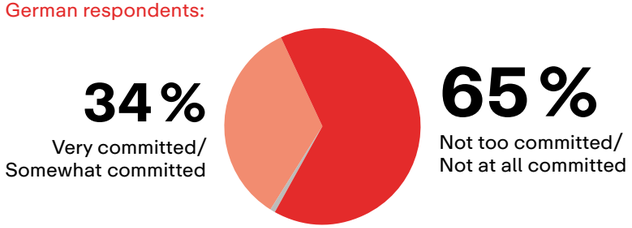
How concerned are you about China trying to influence public opinion in Germany?

2025: don't know 1%

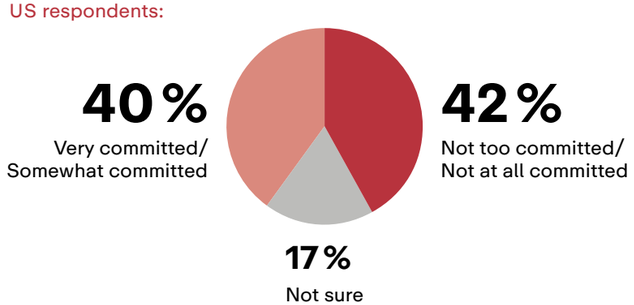
Trump is no peacemaker

How committed do you think is President Donald Trump to finding a lasting peace between Russia and Ukraine?

German respondents:



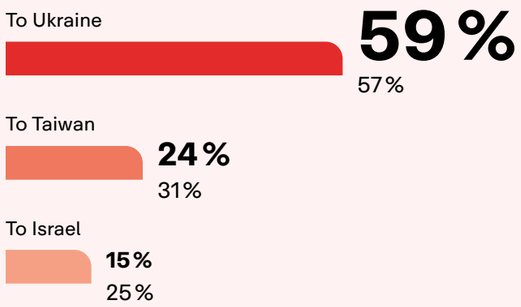
US respondents:



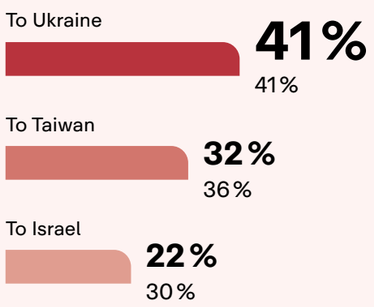
German respondents, 2025: don't know 1 % | US respondents: Not sure 17 %, don't know/no answer 1 %

Support for Ukraine

German respondents:
Germany should provide military assistance ...



US respondents:
The United States should provide military assistance ...

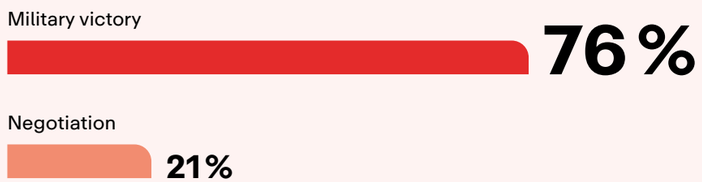


2025
2024

German respondents: 'don't know' ranged from 1 to 4 per cent for all issues | US respondents: 'not sure' ranged from 28 to 36 per cent for all issues; 'don't know/no answer' ranged from 3 to 4 per cent for all issues

No trust in Putin

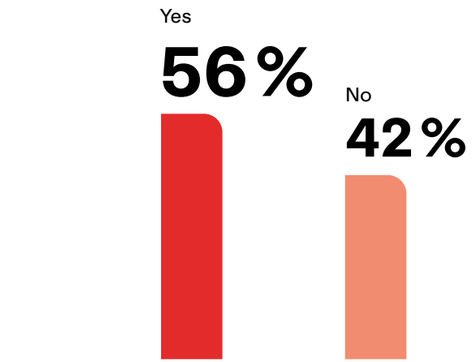
Does President Vladimir Putin want to end the war through negotiation or pursue a military victory?

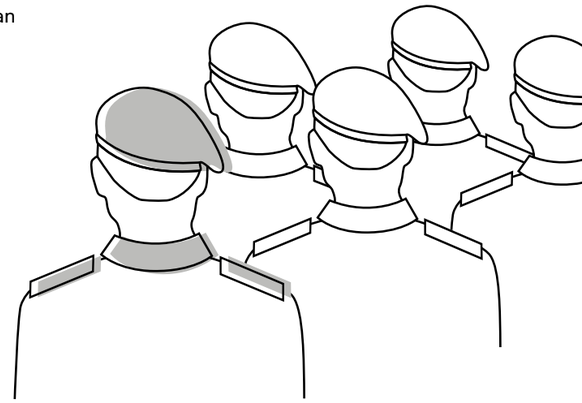


2025: don't know 3 %, no answer 1 %

Yes to peacekeepers in Ukraine

Should Germany send troops to Ukraine as part of a European peacekeeping mission if a ceasefire is reached?

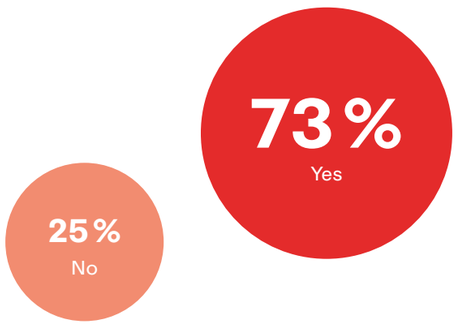




2025: don't know 2 %

Diplomatic pressure please

Should Germany increase diplomatic pressure on Israel to end the war in Gaza?



2025: don’t know 2 %

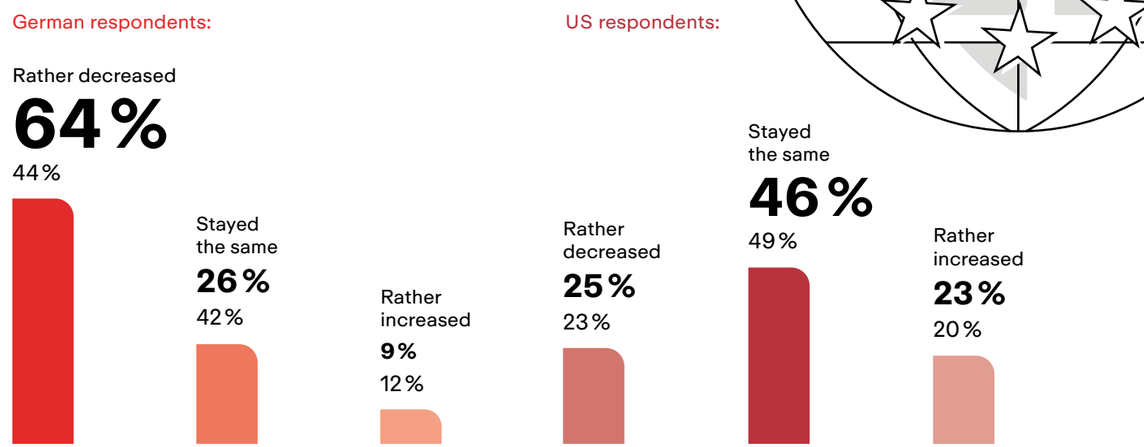
Rethinking relations to Israel?

Does Germany bear a special historical and moral responsibility for Israel’s security as a result of the Holocaust?

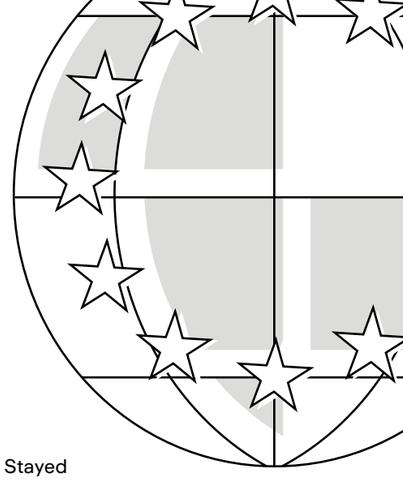
2025: don’t know 1 %, no answer 1 %

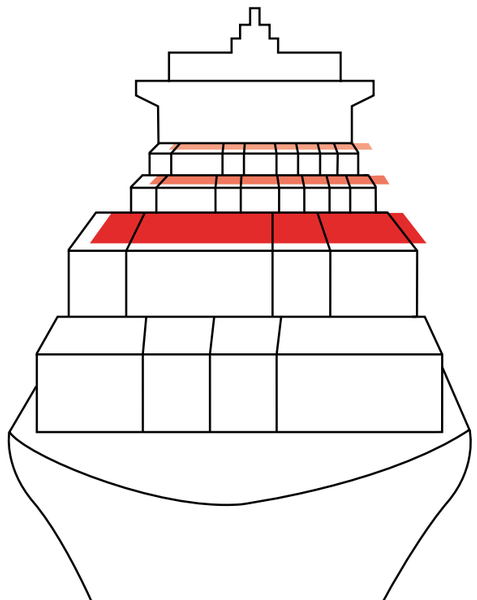
Loss of European influence

Has the European Union’s influence in the world in recent years … ?



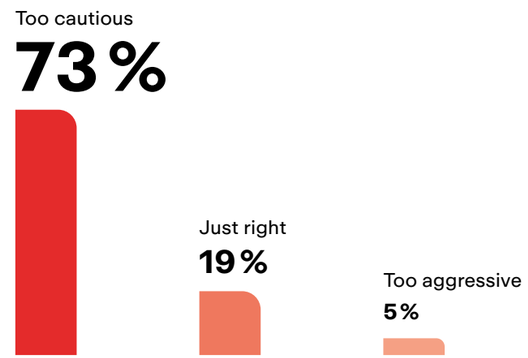
German respondents: don’t know 1 % | US respondents: don’t know/no answer 6 %





Cautious Europe

How do you assess Europe’s approach to asserting its economic interests vis-à-vis the United States?



2025: don’t know 3 %

Strategic hesitation

German Foreign Minister Wadephul announced that Germany will focus its foreign policy more on security, national interests, and the economy than in the past. Do you agree with this approach?

Yes, I agree with his approach.

41 %

No, Germany should prioritize promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

55 %

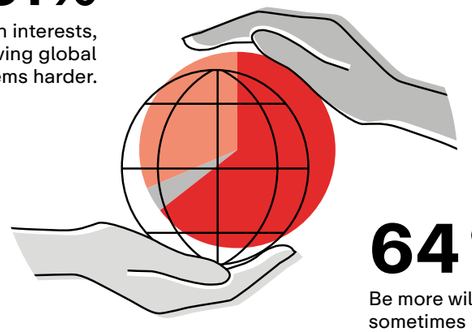
2025: don’t know 3 %, no answer 1 %

Open to compromise

How should Germany act when addressing global problems with other countries?

31 %

Primarily insist on its own interests, even if this makes solving global problems harder.



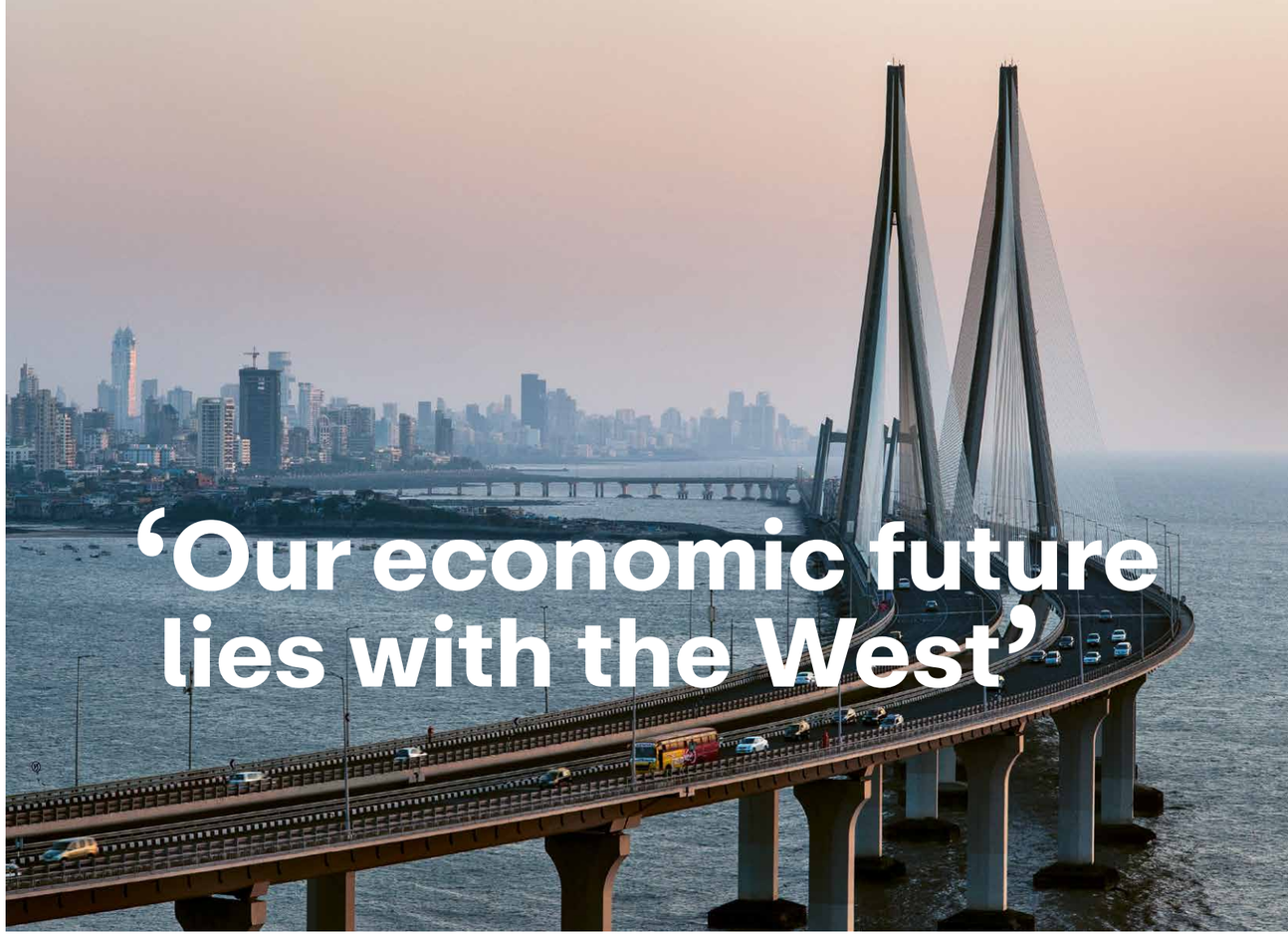
64 %

Be more willing to compromise and sometimes put its own interests aside.

2025: don’t know 1 %, spontaneously: none of the above 3 %

The survey for Germany was commissioned by Körber-Stiftung and carried out by forsa Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen mbH, 15 – 26 September, 2025. Computer-Assisted Telephone interviews were conducted with a representative random sample of 1,503 participants (Margin of error: +/- 2.5 per cent for unit values). German data and results available at www.theberlinpulse.org.

The survey for the United States was conducted by Ipsos for Pew Research Center in September 2025. Online interviews were conducted with a representative random sample of 1,015 participants, 19 – 26 September, 2025 (Margin of error: +/- 3.1 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level).



‘Our economic future lies with the West’

Even amid US tariffs, India must deepen ties with the West and pursue tough reforms to sustain its growth, says economist Surjit Bhalla.

Körber-Stiftung: For centuries, India and China had similar levels of income per capita. Today, China is far ahead, but India has been catching up since major economic reforms in 1991. Are these good times for India?
Surjit Bhalla: We made huge progress after the 1991 reforms. A series of continuous reforms followed until 2017, when the Goods and Services Tax …

A tax that has replaced many indirect taxes.
… and banking reforms were introduced. However, there have been no major economic reforms since then. Still, we have enjoyed a very steady growth rate since 1991. India’s annual GDP growth rate has averaged somewhere in the range 6–6.5 per cent. The government feels very comfortable.

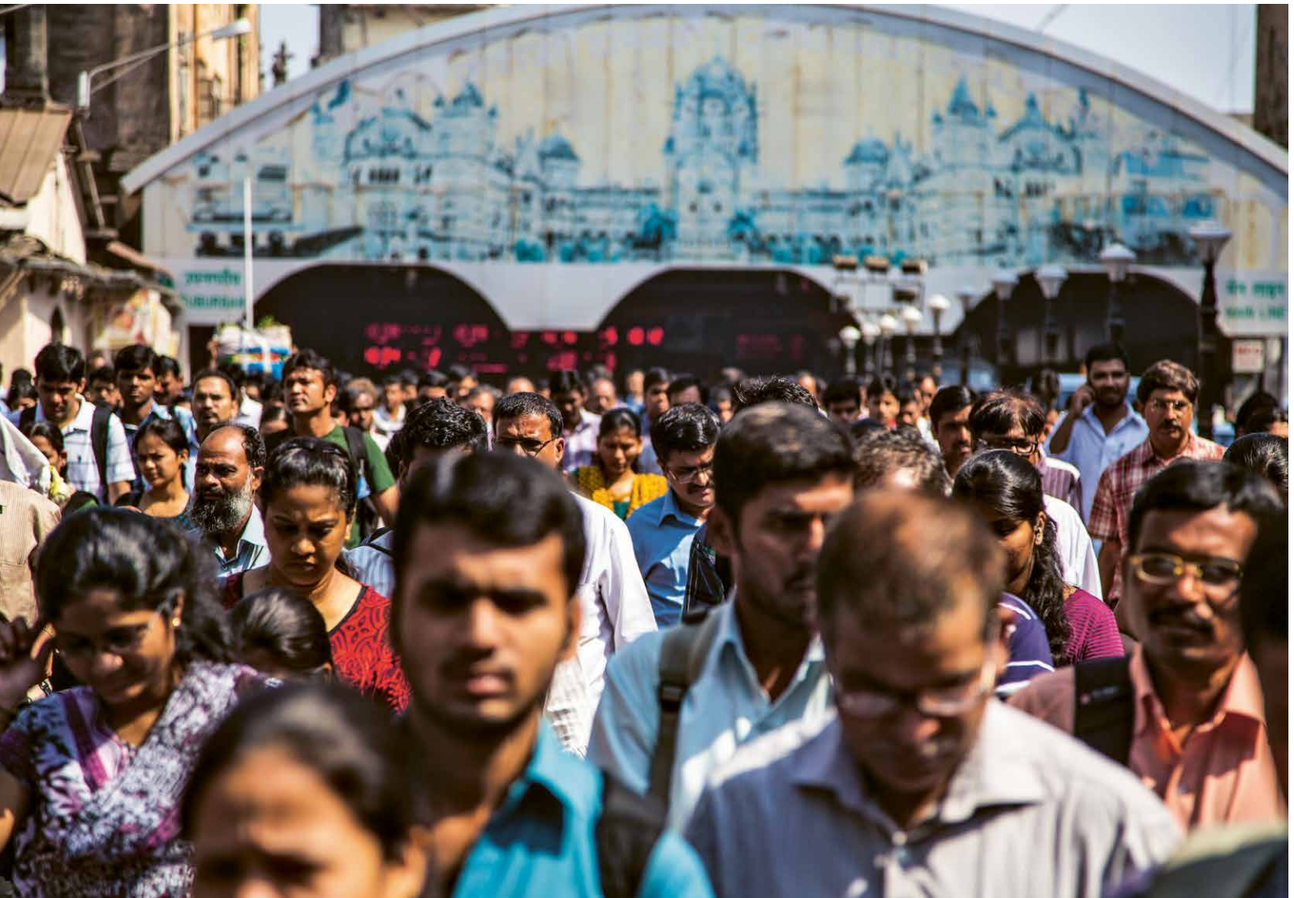
This sounds good.
No, the policymakers and authorities are too comfortable with the status quo. The farmers, the bureaucrats and the politicians are all happy to keep things as they are. ‘Don’t rock the boat’ seems to be the mantra. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants India to reach the status of developed country by 2047 but it does not look like we will make it.

Why?
Because there are no tensions, nor direct push for growth. Look, the prime minister made a very ambitious and positive announcement. We all welcomed it. It gives us a meaningful target to strive toward. However, we need a growth rate of around 8 per cent per annum for the next 22 years. Currently, we are averaging 6.2 or 6.3 per cent.

What is your view on the free trade agreement between India and the EU, which is expected to be finalized this year?
The free trade agreement with the EU is well on its way. It has not been derailed but rather put on hold, I believe, until we resolve matters with President Donald Trump. Nevertheless, I am optimistic about India's relationship with the EU. The problem is that foreign investors are not flocking here. Net foreign direct investments (FDI) have fallen to less than 1 per cent for the last several years. The average has been around 2-2.5 per cent of GDP. But we need FDI to bring in technology and development – to be major growth stimulants.

How do you view economic relations between Germany and India?
Our trade relations with the EU and Germany can show a substantial improvement if India reduces tariffs and non-tariff barriers. India can offer labour – skilled and semi-skilled – and Germany can offer technology via FDI, industrial development and manufacturing expertise. The world recognizes the value of German technology and expertise.

You already mentioned President Trump, who has introduced tariffs of 50 per cent on Indian goods. Will this become a long-term problem for India?
No matter how much we engage with China and Russia, if US tariffs of 30 or 50 percent stay, we are doomed. And that is just tariffs on goods. Bear in mind that this is before the US starts imposing tariffs on services – which will not happen post a good trade deal.



That sounds very pessimistic.
There is also a good side to it. Trump's tariffs have provided us with an opportunity to act, as we did in 1991. We can now implement significant economic reforms that will benefit India. This would allow us to accelerate our growth to a sustainable 7.5 or 8 per cent, enabling us to achieve our dream of becoming a developed country by 2047.

You call for reforms in the agricultural sector. What kind of reforms you propose?
The problem is that the farmers cannot decide. The government sets the price. Farmers cannot sell their products to whomever they want. They cannot sell their land to anyone they want.

A good beginning can be made by reintroducing the farm laws which were introduced and withdrawn in 2021-22. These laws allowed for free movement and sales of farm goods to buyers the farmers want to sell to. Also trade in farmland, which is heavily restricted at present, as well as production of genetically modified organisms. In the not-so-distant future – and a start can be made now – India should do away with the minimum support price system for each crop. Also, reduction in farm subsidies for water and electricity. The list is long – but some start is necessary. Farm reforms have been due for over 50 years.

Given the US tariffs, could China and Russia be alternative markets for Indian goods? At the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting in Tianjin in September, Prime Minister Modi got on well with Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping.
I can see the attraction of India for China. It is a huge, developing and improving market. But what are we going to sell to China that we weren't selling before? Total goods exports to China are worth about US $ 20 billion while exports to Russia are worth US $ 4 billion. Exports to the United States are worth four times that. Our economic future lies with the West, not with Russia or China or North Korea.

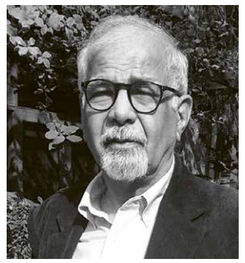
How do you look at the rapprochement between India and China from a political lens?
I am viewing this as a sideshow. It is fun to watch. But I think we will ultimately revert to our original pro-West bias. For now, Trump's extreme actions have benefited us. We have gained negotiating leverage by seeming to be closer to Russia and China to disrupt Trump's negotiations. But in the end, I am convinced that the West, Europe and India have one set of beliefs, as does the United States. China and Russia have radically different beliefs.

64 % of Germans believe Germany should compromise on its own interests for global issues.

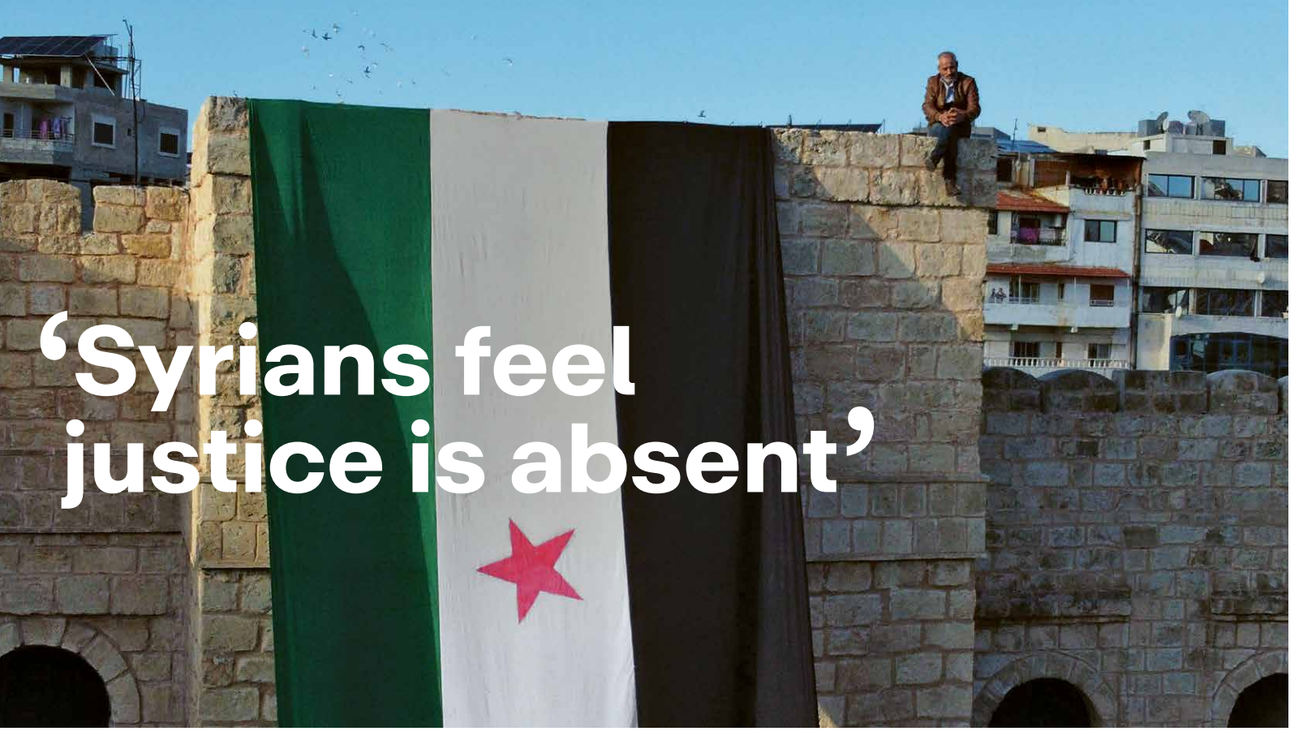
But economically India seems to follow China's path?
Many people mistakenly assume that India and China are similar, but the reality is quite different. China is not a market economy. Most of the world, including India, has a market-based system, even if imperfect. The main exceptions are China, North Korea and Russia. Of these, Russia and North Korea are not productive, but China is. This is precisely why Indian industrialists view China as the greater threat. When Trump's tariffs were introduced, they told me: 'We can compete with US tariffs, but we cannot compete with Chinese dumping'.

What role does demography play?
A very important role, especially in comparative terms, and especially vis-à-vis China. An aging population diminishes productivity and growth; a relatively young population enhances growth. That is the major contrast between the developed world (plus China) – and India. ↖

The interview was conducted on 2 September 2025 by Leona Harting and Jonathan Lehrer.



Surjit Bhalla
is an Indian economist, author and columnist.



‘Syrians feel justice is absent’

The fall of Assad has not healed Syria. Syrian Rime Allaf speaks about the lack of water, electricity, education and accountability for past atrocities.

Körber-Stiftung: **Is the fall of Assad at the hands of the Sunni Islamist political organization and paramilitary group Hayat Tahrir al Sham the end result of the Arab Spring, or the opposite?**
Rime Allaf: The Arab Spring died before Assad fell when the world left Syrians with no other choice but the regime and its backers. Every attempt by the democratic opposition and the Free Syrian Army to secure real assistance was ignored; that pushed many Syrians towards the only groups still able to fight: Islamists and jihadis. That is why they succeeded where others failed – and why many Syrians resent 14 years of international inaction, including by the United Nations.

In April, you wrote an article about the mix of hope and fear that followed Assad’s fall. What do the Syrians you speak to feel now: optimism or frustration with the new authorities?
A bit of both. To be honest, most Syrians care firstly about their basic needs. When will we get electricity, water and housing? How can I feed my children? These issues are rarely discussed in the media, which tends to focus on political conflicts such as with Kurdish groups, or with the southern province of Suwayda. These are not daily concerns for the 90 per cent of Syrians still struggling to rebuild their lives and country.

Is Ahmed Al-Sharaa, the new interim president, the right person to solve these issues?
Many believe in his intent and see his change in recent years. Coming after 54 years of Assadism, I think he now wants to be a national leader rather than the Jihadist he was 20 years ago.

He shaped his leadership style while running Idlib but governing all of Syria is different. One of his mistakes is trying to do everything himself – there is no prime minister and only a few trusted advisers, which is not sustainable.

Under Assad’s rule, people were abducted, tortured and oppressed. This leaves scars on the soul of society. Can Al-Sharaa heal them?
He probably wants to do so, but the expected transitional justice process has been a big disappointment so far. It seems he fears sparking a new conflict with regime remnants backed by Iran, which lost the most with Assad’s fall. This is partly why he made deals with powerful Assad-era figures. The consequence is that Syrians feel justice is absent, but without it, peace and reconciliation, as seen in countries like Germany, are impossible.

Germany and the EU invested in supporting Syrian civil society to promote democratic values. What role are these organizations playing now?
Germany and Europe funded groups like The Day After, whose board I have served on since its founding to promote democracy, equality, and justice. But funding dried up around COVID-19 and Assad’s slow rehabilitation, forcing many programs to stop. Now, with the regime gone, some funding has returned, and we have reopened an office in Damascus. The worst thing Europe could do now is abandon those still working toward a democratic transition.

55 % of Germans say that Germany’s foreign policy should prioritize democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

Talking about democratic transitions. How do you view the elections held in October?
Syria’s last genuinely democratic parliament was dissolved in 1963. Now, 210 members are either appointed or selected, so it is misleading to call these elections futile and to ask for what is currently impossible. The new parliament will pass laws, giving some structure to the governing system and connecting local officials to the central government. They may also address citizens’ priorities, but without a constitution and real elections, they cannot be representative decision-makers.

For all those years, Syria has been rather isolated due to the rule of Assad. How did you obtain your information?
As a Syrian writer and researcher with 25 years of experience at home and abroad, I have built expertise through frequent travels, my diplomatic family ties, and a broad network across Syrian society. I have spoken with regime insiders, members of the new authorities, and people from diverse social and economic backgrounds – from public employees struggling daily to the ‘Velvet Society,’ the wealthy elite that thrived under Assad.

Immediately after the fall of Assad, politicians in Europe started to pressure Syrians refugees to return to Syria. Do these Syrians even want to return?
Some do but do not have a serious option to do so. Others have integrated and are not considering going back in current circumstances. It is hard to uproot a family settled in Berlin or Vienna and send them to a devastated town with no infrastructure. The either-or choice – permanent return or permanent stay – will not work. Syria needs a mix of young, educated people and experienced professionals familiar with its old institutions. People should be able to keep ties to both their homeland and host country, and it is in Europe’s interest to support those considering return or contributing to Syria’s reconstruction.

With that in mind, do you have a concrete idea for how Germany and Syria could cooperate?
Germany’s expertise could greatly benefit both sides. For example, a company like Siemens could help rebuild and train workers in one small area, coordinating with the Syrian government to bring European experts together with Syrian professionals from the diaspora to train locals and restore essential services and management systems. Having rebuilt after war themselves, Germany and France understand the process well and could offer incentives for Syrians to return. ↖

The interview was conducted on 19 September 2025 by Leona Harting and Jonathan Lehrer and updated in October 2025.

Rime Allaf
is a Syrian-born political analyst, writer and communication strategist.

Peace in Process

The Abraham Accords opened doors – but lasting peace requires Palestinian inclusion, says Ebtesam Al-Ketbi.

The 2020 Abraham Accords marked a historic shift by bringing about the normalization of relations between Israel and Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates. This ended decades of Arab consensus on isolating Israel due to its occupation of Palestinian territories in East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank. The accords opened the door to direct flights, the opening of embassies and high-level visits. They also reshaped regional diplomacy and stimulated trade, tourism and technological cooperation, particularly between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. However, their lasting legacy will depend on their ability to advance Palestinian political rights and to foster genuine stability and cooperation among the countries of the region.

In the three years following their signing, the Abraham Accords offered a framework for cooperation across the Middle East, the Gulf, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. They were considered a success for US foreign policy. The United States' military moving Israel from its European Command to its Central Command highlighted the transformational nature of the accords and consolidated Israel's integration into the region. At their inception, Israel viewed the accords as a tool to counter Iranian influence and, in some respects, they succeeded in bringing Washington's allies in the region together under a shared security umbrella.

Fears of a cold peace

Prior to the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023 and the ensuing Gaza war, the Abraham Accords were increasingly reshaping the region's geopolitical landscape. Today, however, the war and the rising regional instability caused by Israel's military actions present major challenges to their continued success.

There is growing concern that the region may drift toward a 'cold peace' characterized by limited public support and growing disappointment with the accords.

For example, Saudi Arabia's inclusion in the Abraham Accords has been delayed due to the regional instability and unresolved Palestinian concerns. Recent destabilizing events, such as the Israeli airstrike in Doha in September, may complicate US efforts to expand the accords to additional Gulf states.

While geopolitics has a significant impact on the future of the Abraham Accords at the expense of geoeconomics, projects such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (whose core objective is to integrate Israel into regional infrastructure and trade networks, and which is slowed down due to the war), offer incentives to revitalize and potentially expand the accords.

Germany has a crucial role in advancing opportunities for peace

Today, Europe has become more supportive of the two-state solution and advancing a political resolution between Israelis and Palestinians. Many European states want an end to the Israeli occupation, and ensure the success of all phases of the agreement to end the war in Gaza without procrastination by any party.

Germany has a key role in fostering new opportunities for peace, support the Gaza agreement, perhaps taking part in implementing some of its articles in cooperation with the European and regional partners, rejecting the rhetoric of extremism, hatred and violence. It is now called upon to advance a political approach that recognizes that ending the suffering of Palestinian citizens in Gaza and the West Bank and creating a political horizon for resolving the conflict are fully compatible with its steadfast support for Israel.

Ultimately, peace and prosperity serve the long-term interests of the Israeli people and of Germany. The principles of cooperation, coexistence and de-escalation embodied in the Abraham Accords align closely with German diplomacy, which has consistently advocated the consolidation of these values across the Middle East.

From the United Arab Emirates' perspective, a central challenge lies in engaging the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian society in a renewed peace process that would end the occupation, halt the construction of settlements and prevent Israel from violating the sovereignty of other states such as Qatar and Syria.

The Palestinian question cannot be ignored

These goals were already difficult to achieve before 7 October 2023 and became even more so after it and Israel's war on Gaza. Now that the war in Gaza has stopped with broad international and regional support, reconstruction will be at the forefront of issues. The United Arab Emirates has indicated that its financial and political support for Gaza's reconstruction will be contingent on a viable plan endorsed by the United States. This moment presents an opportunity to adopt a more pragmatic and nuanced political approach. The Palestinian question cannot be disregarded due to its centrality. The United Arab Emirates' economic and development initiatives can only be effective in a context of regional peace and de-escalation.

According to UAE Minister of State Lana Nusseibeh, the 7 October attack and Israel's response in Gaza have significantly heightened

the risk of extremism and instability in the region. The key lesson from the Gaza war, which has stopped after two years, is that excessive force does not lead to lasting peace or resolution of issues. Instead, a renewed commitment to diplomacy, moderation, tolerance and rejection of hatred is essential. At the time of writing, there is anticipation that the agreement put forward by the United States will make a significant positive difference toward de-escalation and reaching a political roadmap to end the war.

From the perspective of the United Arab Emirates, the war has inflicted considerable damage on the Abraham Accords, shifting the focus back to the unresolved Palestinian issues. With the conclusion of the war, there is a greater opportunity to address numerous challenging issues, leading to a positive outcome in terms of reviving and broadening the Abraham Accords. The Palestinian people deserve an independent and secure state, and there is no alternative to this goal despite the challenges. ↖

Ebtesam Al-Ketbi
is the president of the Emirates Policy Center.

When Israel Became Just Another State

The Gaza war and the 7 October attacks will not destroy the Abraham Accords, nor the normalization between Israel and several Arab states, says Shiri Fein-Grossman.

Five years ago, the Middle East looked very different. Israel had no diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, or Morocco. Qatar was still being boycotted by several Arab states. Saudi-Iranian relations had ruptured. Above all, a Shi'ite 'Axis of Resistance' threatened regional stability, stretching from Tehran through the Assad regime in Damascus to Hezbollah-dominated Lebanon.

Then the Abraham Accords in 2020, changed the face of the Middle East. They established full diplomatic relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and Kosovo, building on earlier peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, which were also brokered with strong US support.

Hamas's 7 October attack targeted Israel and the Abraham Accords' regional vision

Yet the durability of this new regional order was soon tested. Hamas's 7 October massacre was not only an assault on Israel but also on the regional development paradigm that came from the Abraham Accords. The attacks were widely seen as an attempt to block the imminent normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Wars in Gaza, Lebanon and Yemen, as well as and tensions with Iran, slowed diplomacy, stalled trade growth and curtailed official visits. Bahrain and Jordan recalled their ambassadors and other ties were downgraded. Yet none of the Abraham Accords states severed relations with Israel. Trade with the United Arab Emirates even edged upward. By maintaining ties, these countries blunted wider diplomatic erosion and positioned themselves as key channels for humanitarian aid to Gaza. The Abraham Accords have passed the stress test.

The Abraham Accords will likely hold.

Looking back, the Abraham Accords were the first in a wave of diplomatic rapprochements that reshaped the Middle East. They also crystallized a deeper strategic divide, embodying the paradigm of development in direct opposition to the paradigm of ideology. The first paradigm focuses on national and regional development with human advancement and partnerships at the centre – using a pragmatic approach to build influence, foster integration and position the Middle East as one of the most consequential arenas in global affairs. The other paradigm pursues regional expansion through the export of ideology and the creation of economic dependence, with the aim of building large, centralized spheres of control. Achieving that goal, relies on proxy militias and the perpetration of atrocities in the name of holy war.

Looking to the future, I think that even if the war in Gaza escalates, the Abraham Accords are unlikely to unravel, as none of the current signatories appear willing to sever ties with Israel. Especially since Israel has no intention of resettling Gaza, a move that is opposed by most Israelis and is widely seen as the only thing that would cause such a rupture. A more uncertain question is whether Saudi Arabia will further normalize its relations with Israel. This depends on the war ending and progress being made towards a framework for a Palestinian state – conditions that Riyadh sees as a minimum necessity. Given these requirements and the lack of urgency on the Saudi side, prospects for normalization remain slim in the near term.

Israel became one state among many

The aftermath of 7 October exposed the limits of the geo-economic premise but also demonstrated its resilience. The future of the Abraham Accords will depend on whether regional players continue to see value in insulating political and economic ties from conflict. If they do, the accords may not only survive this turbulent period but also serve as the foundation for further normalization agreements.

The accords' true significance lies less in ceremonies or trade volumes than in making Israel's presence in the region unexceptional. For decades, Arab political culture treated Israel as uniquely illegitimate, using the Palestinian cause to justify rejectionism. The accords marked a break: Israel became one state among many in a pragmatic, post-ideological diplomacy that can accommodate ties with Iran, Turkey, China, and the United States at the same time.

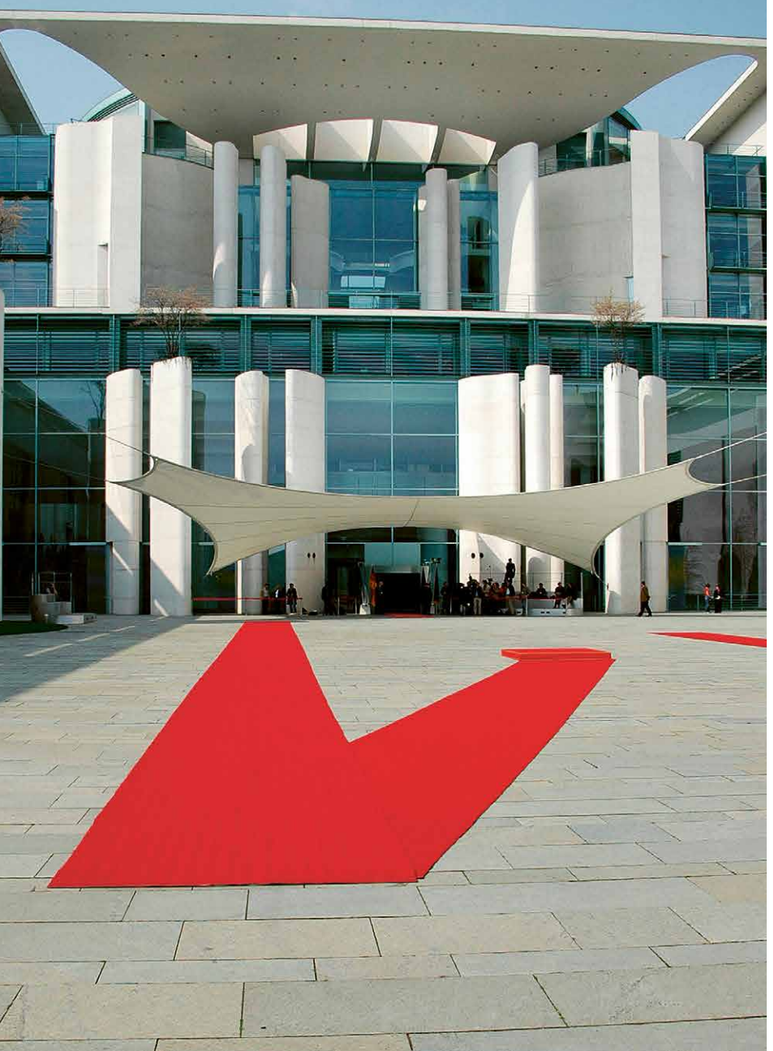
Germany must support Israel's right to self-defence

In this context, Germany has a critical role as a guardian of international norms at a time when the very justification for a Jewish state is increasingly questioned. Rooted in its historical responsibility and its raison d'état commitment to Israel's existence, Germany must reject terrorism while standing up for Israel's right to self-defence within the framework of the laws of armed conflict. At the same time, Germany should act as a bridge-builder, urging all sides to uphold human rights, not only in relation to Israel but across the Middle East, especially in places like Syria where minority rights are systematically trampled. By linking this commitment to the Abraham Accords' pragmatic promise of regional development and integration, Germany can encourage Israel and its Arab partners to deepen cooperation. ↖

Shiri Fein-Grossman
is the chief executive officer of the Israel-Africa Relations Institute.

Germany's National Security Council

Updating Germany's Security Architecture



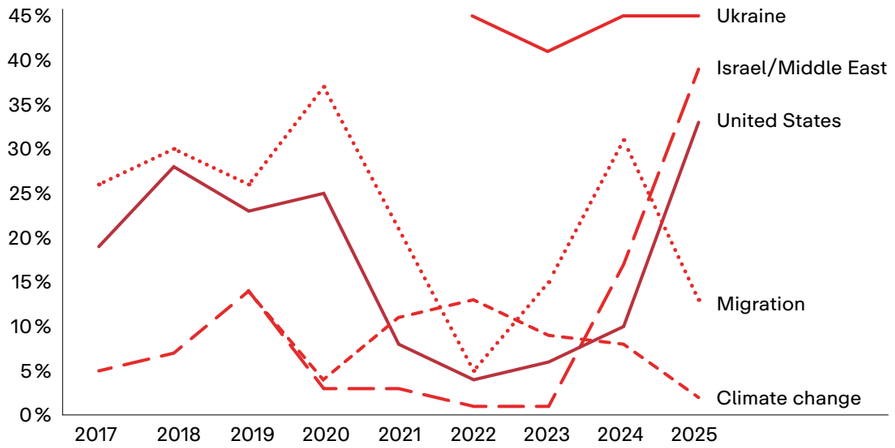
For decades, Germany's security-policy community has debated the necessity and purpose of creating a National Security Council (NSC). The pros and cons have been extensively discussed. Proponents of such a body argue that security policy does not stop at the boundaries of individual ministerial responsibilities, and therefore that an integrated political approach is required for managing acute crises and long-term challenges. Critics argue that the specifications of Germany's political system, particularly the principle of ministerial responsibility (Ressortprinzip), are incompatible with the approach of an integrated political decision-making mechanism.

In this discussion, it is occasionally overlooked that every existing NSC is sui generis as it reflects the political system in which it is embedded. Accordingly, the more than 60 NSCs worldwide differ in their objectives, composition and working principles. While looking at examples from other countries can be instructive for shaping Germany's security architecture, that does not necessarily compel us to follow a pre-structured path. The NSC within Germany's political system should not be equated with an instrument of a presidential system, as in the case of, for example, the United States.

Whole-of-government approach

The coalition partners in the government that took office earlier this year decided to establish an NSC that is intended to create added value within the specific framework of Germany's political system. Based on this, it was decided in August 27, 2025 – less than four months after the new government came into office – consensually

What are the greatest challenges currently facing German foreign policy?



decided to establish a Cabinet Committee 'National Security Council', and its rules of procedure were set. The NSC consists of ten members from security-relevant ministries and is chaired by the chancellor. It task profile was further clarified in the cabinet decision specifying that it will primarily address topics at the intersection of internal, external, economic and digital security. This whole-of-government approach aims to close a gap in Germany's security architecture by focusing on security in its broader conception.

Three key tasks

The NSC will focus on three major tasks. First, it will consolidate the available information and knowledge of the government. Political decisions will be based on integrated situational reports that reflect the entire depth and range of the government's expertise. The NSC can make final decisions unless a decision by the entire government is required under the Basic Law or a federal law.

Second, the NSC will perform strategic foresight and planning to identify medium- and long-term threats, and it will develop options for political action. Accordingly, the NSC will update the National Security Strategy.

Third, the NSC will contribute to systematically strengthening the state's resilience, especially against hybrid threats. This includes conducting crisis simulations and security policy exercises at the cabinet level.

A working unit has been established in the Chancellery, which prepares the meetings of the NSC and is responsible for the follow-up on NSC political decisions with the responsible government ministries and agencies.

Close international coordination

The NSC is not a continuation of the former Federal Security Council but a completely new body. Its working method includes new features, such as the inclusion of representatives from the federal states and close consultations with the NSCs of Germany's allies around the world. Although the meetings of the NSC are classified, it can publish its decisions on a case-by-case basis. In this way, the government's ability to act in security policy can be demonstrated to the public.

The success of the NSC will be proven by its concrete work and the added value it brings to Germany's security architecture. It is not a panacea for every security policy deficit. However, it is a significant institutional update for the security architecture and it can become an important factor in managing crises and long-term challenges. ↖

Jacob Schrot
is the head of the National Security Council Office in the Federal Chancellery of Germany.

Too Important

To Ignore

Despite its strategic value, Türkiye remains on the margins of European defence – a mistake, according to Murat Yeşiltaş.

The war in Ukraine has illustrated how threatening conventional warfare is and that Europe has ignored this fact. European countries have realized that their defence infrastructure and military readiness are inadequate. The weakening of American security commitments in President Donald Trump's second term has further strengthened the idea of 'independent defence' in Europe. Europe now has to choose between two paths: strengthening NATO or building up an autonomous defence architecture.

The EU has launched strategic programmes to boost its defence capabilities and gain strategic autonomy. However, these initiatives exclude Türkiye. In particular, the SAFE program does not fully integrate the country's strategic technology and defence projects. This is because the EU remains hesitant about including NATO members that are not also EU members. This approach can be seen in the White Paper on European Defence published by the European Commission earlier this year.

Europe's strategic contradictions

This is a strategic contradiction. While Europe is trying to enhance its security, it is excluding countries that could contribute to this goal, like Türkiye. The country's military capacity, advances in defence technologies and regional influence can strengthen Europe's vision, yet it seems that some European actors feel threatened by that.

Türkiye has repeatedly proven its military is ready to fight in the field. Its ability to conduct simultaneous operations across a wide area stretching from Iraq to Libya and from Nagorno-Karabakh to Somalia makes it a leading NATO country in terms of crisis management. With the second-largest land forces in the alliance, Türkiye secures its eastern and southern flanks. Ankara also contributes to European and NATO security through its multidimensional diplomacy in the Ukraine war, its crisis management in the Middle East and its strategic openings in different parts of Africa.

Türkiye is not only a buffer zone

Türkiye maintains balance in the Black Sea through the Montreux regime, which limits Russia and Ukraine's military activities there. It manages threats originating from Iran and Syria, such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party and other terrorist organizations in the Middle East, and it pursues a security policy in Africa that supports peace and focuses on humanitarian aid while serving its strategic interests. All of this makes Türkiye not only a buffer for European security but also an active security producer in NATO.

72% of Germans think that doubling defence spending over the next ten years is adequate.

At the same time, Türkiye is providing security in the production field with its defence-industrial breakthroughs. One example is the strategic partnership between the Turkish company Baykar and the Italian company Leonardo, which deepens defence integration. This collaboration could help to close Europe's growing gap in unmanned aerial vehicles. Thanks to their cost-effectiveness, fast delivery times and technical superiority, Turkish field-tested drone technologies offer many European countries an alternative source of supply.

In another significant development, Türkiye has decided to buy Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jets. Allowing it to purchase this platform – produced by Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom – should be seen not only as a defence-procurement agreement but also as a strategic step toward rebuilding mutual trust in European-Turkish security relations. This decision strengthens the country's integration with the Western bloc and expands the scale of Europe's defence industry.

While there is institutional resistance to Türkiye across Europe, some countries pursue strategic cooperation with it. The United Kingdom's involvement in the production of engines for the KAAN fighter jet, Spain's contribution to the TCG Anadolu assault ship project, and Italy's cooperation on the ATAK helicopter demonstrate how dynamic bilateral defence relations are.

NATO Summit in Ankara 2026

The NATO summit to be held in Ankara in 2026 offers an important opportunity to establish Türkiye's multidimensional contributions to security. The country will make more visible its claim to strengthen NATO's southern and eastern flanks at the summit. It will also have the chance to integrate its defence production power, military capacity and regional strategic vision into NATO's collective defence approach.

The summit will be a turning point that will clarify not only Türkiye's security orientation but also Europe's. Will European countries prefer an approach that strengthens NATO or will they insist on an autonomy model that excludes Türkiye? The country is of decisive importance for both paths.

Türkiye is too important an actor to be pushed outside the European security architecture. Its military capabilities, production power, technological innovation and strategic location are indispensable for Europe and NATO. Any model that excludes it weakens Europe's security; any step that deepens the strategic partnership with it increases Europe's resilience to crises. ↖

Murat Yeşiltaş
is professor and director of foreign policy research at the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) in Türkiye.

Face-Off in Strategic Waters

European navies challenge China's maritime claims in the Indo-Pacific. Yves-Heng Lim explains the aims and risks.

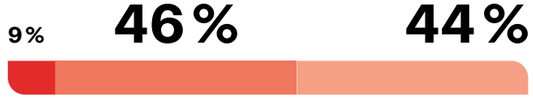
In September 2024, Germany's frigate *Baden-Württemberg* and supply ship *Frankfurt am Main* sailed from South Korea to the Philippines, through the Taiwan Strait. Part of Indo-Pacific Deployment 2024, it was the first time German navy ships had done so in more than two decades. This attracted a terse response from the spokesperson of China's Foreign Ministry who warned that Beijing 'opposes attempts to undermine China's territorial sovereignty and security in the name of freedom of navigation'. The *Global Times,* less diplomatically, accused Berlin of having lost 'common sense and rationality'. Chinese ships that shadowed the German ones 'acted in a safe and professional manner', Rear Admiral Axel Schulz reported, 'although they have let us know that we are not really welcome'.

Europe ramps up naval presence in the Indo-Pacific amid regional tensions

Germany's 2024 deployment in the Indo-Pacific was not an isolated initiative. A broader pattern has emerged that involves several European countries attempting to expand their footprint in a region where the rules-based order is showing significant cracks. Among the most significant European deployments over the past two years were those of three carrier strike groups: Italy's *Cavour* (2024), France's *Charles de Gaulle* (2025), and Britain's *HMS Prince of Wales* (2025). Other countries have also been present, albeit in a somewhat a less visible way. For example, Dutch warships have participated in the enforcement of United Nations sanctions against North Korea and transited through the Taiwan Strait, and Norwegian and Spanish ships joined *HMS Prince of Wales* in its deployment.

Does China represent a military threat to…?

…Germany's security? (German respondents):



…security in the United States? (US respondents):

- Major military threat
- Minor military threat
- No military threat

China warns Europe over South China Sea

China considers the increased presence of European navies in its maritime backyard to be an unwelcome development, and it has made its discontent clear. Part of the response has been diplomatic, for instance with the transit of Britain's *HMS Spey* through the Taiwan Strait this year eliciting a bitter comment by the spokesperson of the People's Liberation Army Navy. But China's opposition to the European presence has also occasionally been more assertive. The *Charles de Gaulle* encountered 30 to 40 Chinese ships as well as an unknown number of maritime militia vessels as it sailed through the South China Sea. A Dutch warship operating in the East China Sea was harassed by Chinese military aircraft.

Part of China's reaction is clearly linked to its extensive interpretation of its rights and interests in the region. For instance, it continues to claim historical rights over about 90 per cent of the South China Sea, despite the 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration that declared its 'nine-dash line' to be without merits. Beijing also considers the Taiwan question to be a domestic matter and in recent years has ramped up military pressure against the island, including through the conduct of major exercises. The commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Samuel Paparo, recently argued that these were 'not exercises [but] rehearsals'. The presence of European forces around Taiwan sends a clear dual message that challenges the legitimacy and legality of China's claims and indicates that further destabilization of the region might not go unopposed.

Europe may rethink its Indo-Pacific deployments

European deployments also present China with a broader challenge. Beijing has long harboured deep suspicions about NATO's intentions and now views Europe's presence as part of a NATO- and US-led agenda to expand the alliance's footprint in the Indo-Pacific at China's expense. In June, responding to NATO General Secretary Mark Rutte's concerns about the country's support for Russia and military modernization, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of Defence warned that Beijing 'firmly opposes NATO using China as an excuse to expand eastward into the Asia-Pacific'.

To date, European countries have remained firm in their efforts to preserve what remains of the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. But significant challenges are on the horizon. First, it is not clear how they would respond if China were to adopt the more openly coercive tactics it has used against, for example, US or Australian ships and aircraft. Multi-national deployments might provide part of the response as they tend to inherently strengthen Europe's hand, but any hardening of Beijing's response would undoubtedly test Europe's resolve to maintain a presence. European countries also face a more fundamental challenge. Their operations in the Indo-Pacific remain premised on the preservation of the rules-based order and the assumption of a convergence of views with the United States. With a White House keen to disparage its traditional allies and more inclined to rewrite the rules than to uphold them, European countries may need to recalculate the costs and benefits of deployments in the Indo-Pacific. ↖

Yves-Heng Lim
is senior lecturer in security studies at the School of International Studies, Discipline of Security Studies, Macquarie University.

Berlin Foreign Policy Forum 2025

Berlin’s leading conference on Germany’s role in the world

Previous speakers include:
Boris Pistorius,
Maia Sandu,
Olaf Scholz,
Mirjana Spoljaric Egger,
Jens Stoltenberg,
and Ursula von der Leyen.

Over the past year, German foreign policy has entered a new phase of reflection and repositioning. In the wake of shifting global alliances and only a few months after the federal elections, key questions of Germany’s international role, strategic partnerships, and European responsibility are at the forefront of political debate. With transatlantic relations evolving and global power dynamics in flux, Germany faces the challenge of defining its leadership in a more fragmented and competitive world order.

Since 2011, the Berlin Forum has established itself as Germany’s leading annual foreign policy gathering, bringing together national and international decision-makers to discuss Europe’s strategic priorities and global responsibilities in times of uncertainty and change.

Körber-Stiftung
Social development needs dialogue and understanding. Through our operational projects, in our networks and in conjunction with partners, we take on current social challenges in the areas of activities comprising ‘Knowledge for Tomorrow’, ‘International Dialogue’, ‘Vibrant Civil Society’, and ‘Cultural Impulses for Hamburg’. Inaugurated in 1959 by the entrepreneur Kurt A. Körber, we conduct our own national and international projects and events. In particular, we feel a special bond to the city of Hamburg. We also maintain an office in Berlin.

International Dialogue
Conflicts arise in situations that are fraught with misunderstandings and lack debate. Moreover, such conflicts are often grounded in the past. This is why we champion international dialogue and foster more profound understandings of history. We address political decision-makers, civil society representatives and emerging leaders from the younger generations. Our geographic focus is on Europe, its eastern neighbours, the Middle East, and Asia, especially China. We strengthen discussions about history at the local level in a manner that stretches beyond national borders and encourage people to share their experiences of cultures of remembrance. Our foreign- and security-policy formats provide safe spaces for confidential talks built on trust. However, we also employ formats that involve the public, such as publications, competitions and networks, to provide impulses to the debate about common European values and inspire the further development of international cooperation.

Imprint
‘The Berlin Pulse’ representative survey carried out by forsa Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen mbH for Körber-Stiftung, September 2025
Publisher: Körber-Stiftung, Hamburg
Responsible in accordance with German press law: Dr. Thomas Paulsen, Körber-Stiftung, Kehrwieder 12, 20457 Hamburg
Executive Director International Affairs: Nora Müller
Conceptualization, analysis and editing: Julia Ganter, Jonathan Lehrer, Leona Harting, Nicolas Bouchet
Design and production: GROOTHUIS.DE
Litho: Frische Grafik, frische-grafik.de
Print: oeding print GmbH, oeding-print.de

© Körber-Stiftung 2025

Image and copyright:
U1, outside front cover: Ralf K. Lang; U2, inside front cover: Akin Cakiner/Unsplash.com; p. 1: Körber-Stiftung/Claudia Höhne; p. 4: UN Photo/Jean Marc Ferré; p. 6: Husaruk Vitalii; p. 7: private; p. 8: Ungureanu Vadim; p. 9: private; p. 10: robertharding; p. 11: dpapicture-alliance_1; p. 12: ANP; p. 13: Center for Renewing America; p. 14: Martin Bertrand; p. 33: Don Campbell; p. 34: Marcia Chambers; p. 35: private; p. 36: CTK; p. 37: Chatham House/Wikimedia Commons; p. 38: ZUMA Press Inc.; p. 39: ZUMA Press Inc., private; p. 40: American Photo Archive; p. 41: private; p. 42: Standard licenses, Individual; p. 44: Lee Keuneke, p. 45: private; p. 46: APFootage; p. 47: private; p. 48: Körber-Stiftung/David Ausserhofer

Körber-Stiftung
Berlin Office
Pariser Platz 4a
10117 Berlin
Germany

Phone +49 30 206 267 - 60
E-mail ip@koerber-stiftung.de
koerber-stiftung.de/en
LinkedIn: Körber-Stiftung IP
Bluesky: koerber-ip.bsky.social

theberlinpulse.org