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From “Wandel durch Handel” to “Zeitenwende”

A study of ruptures and continuities in German
defense and security policy

Bachelor's thesis in European Studies

Supervisor: Carine S. Germond

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Abstract

This article discusses and analyzes ruptures and continuities in German defense and security policy. As the *Zeitenwende* speech, and subsequent turnaround, of German politics have been a widely discussed topic, especially in regard to political approach, defense budget and alteration in economic and military ties, this paper seeks to understand what Germany seeks to bring into the future, why some aspects are altered and some remain, and why Germany is having such difficulties in altering its defense and security policy approach.

The first half of the paper discuss some of Germany's most important economic and military ties. By looking at how *Wandel durch Handel* and *Ostpolitik* shaped Germany's relationship with Eastern Europe and how it balanced its important partnerships with the United States and France, this section seeks to understand the system of security Germany operated within.

The second half of the paper seeks therefore to understand how this system altered following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As the *Zeitenwende* speech was a watershed moment in German history, this section looks at the stated changes to German politics and political approach. By looking at both ruptures and continuities in German defense and security policy, the paper looks at how Germany's staked route for the next decades to come.

As the pre-*Zeitenwende* policies were fundamentally shaped by Germany's experiences in the Cold War, and subsequent governments built upon each other to keep a consistent and reliable foreign policy, one may reason that the policies established in the current moment will shape Germany for years to come.

Sammendrag

Denne teksten diskuterer og analyserer brudd og kontinuiteter i tysk forsvars og sikkerhetspolitikk. Gitt at *Zeitenwende* talen, og den følgende omsettingen av tysk politikk, har vært et aktivt diskusjonstema, især i Tyskland, søker denne teksten å forstå hva Tyskland ønsker å oppnå med sin fremtid. Gitt at bundeskansler Olaf Scholz lovet store endringer til Tysklands økonomiske og militære tilknytninger, forsvarsbudsjett og medlemskap i internasjonale organisasjoner, går denne teksten inn på Tysklands vansker med å endre politikken sin, og hvilken del av politikken sin de ønsker å bevare og hvilken den ønsker å endre.

Den første halvdelen av teksten diskuterer noen av Tysklands viktige økonomiske og militære tilknytninger. Ved å se på hvordan politiske tilnærminger som *Wandel durch Handel* og *Ostpolitik* formet Tysklands forhold med Øst-Europa og hvordan det balanserer dens viktigste partnerskap med USA og Frankrike, ønsker denne seksjonen å forstå systemet som Tyskland opererte innenfor.

Den andre halvdelen av teksten søker å forstå hvordan dette systemet endret seg i følge av Russlands invasjon av Ukraina. Gitt at *Zeitenwende* talen ble et vannskille i tysk historie, ser denne seksjonen på endringene i politikk og politisk tilnærming. Ved å derfor se på brudd og kontinuiteter på tysk forsvars og sikkerhetspolitikk, ønsker denne teksten å se på endringer som vil forme Tysklands politiske fremtid.

Gitt at politikken før *Zeitenwende* talen var fundamentalt formet av Tysklands opplevelser i den kalde krigen, og følgende regjeringer bygde på hverandres politikk for å holde en konsis og pålitelig utenrikspolitikk, kan forstå den nåværende politiske endringen som en grunnstein i senere tysk politikk.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
CEPS	The Center for European Policy Studies
ECSC	The European Coal and Steel Community
EU	The European Union
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
UK	The United Kingdom
UN	The United Nations
UNSC	The United Nations Security Council
US	The United States
USSR	The Union of Socialist Soviet Republic

1 Introduction

On the 24th of February 2022, the world experienced what German chancellor Olaf Scholz would call a *Zeitenwende*, the end of an era, as Russian president Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of its neighbor Ukraine (BBC, 2022). Though it remains relatively unthinkable that the Russian invasion will expand to other nations, especially as the invasion has even failed “[...] basic military functions like planning and executing the movement of supplies” (Burns, 2022), Putin nevertheless broke the “[...] the European security order that had prevailed for almost half a century since the Helsinki Final Act” (Bundesregierung, 2022)¹ as Scholz put it.

Scholz vowed continuity with incumbent chancellor Angela Merkel’s approach of rapprochement and economic interdependence (Gehrke, 2021), an approach built upon the principles of the European security order. These being the respect of self-determinism, non-intrusion in foreign affairs and belief in diplomatic solutions (OSCE, 1975, p. 2), all notions Russia broke with the invasion. As the order was built upon a common agreement, the old order was broken. Three days after the invasion, Scholz addressed the Bundestag in what would be known as the *Zeitenwende* speech, where he established a series of fundamental changes to German defense and security policy and reset to Germany’s policy approach:

“We are living through a watershed era. And that means that the world afterwards will no longer be the same as the world before. The issue at the heart of this is whether power is allowed to prevail over the law. Whether we permit Putin to turn back the clock to the nineteenth century and the age of the great powers. Or whether we have it in us to keep warmongers like Putin in check. That requires strength of our own.” (Bundesregierung, 2022)

Scholz promised an increase to the defense budget, reaffirmed Germany’s commitment to The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), condemned the actions of Russia and underlined their commitment to the Ukrainian cause (Bundesregierung, 2022).

This paper will analyze and discuss continuities and ruptures to German defense and security policy following the *Zeitenwende*, the period of time following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The paper will look into Germany’s peculiar security policy, how it balances it and why certain policy approaches like *Wandel durch Handel* was chosen and continued. As policy can be a relatively loose term, this paper understands security policy to be the policies and systems set in place by a state to “[...] prevent crisis and conflicts” (Bundesregierung, 2016, p. 6) and to ensure the safety of it and its citizens. Though threats to German security comes from conventional forms of crisis and conflicts, like armed warfare, it is important to highlight that security entails a wide array of fields like energy supply and cyberwarfare. Defense policy is therefore defined as the policies and systems set in place to defend the state’s values, citizens, and itself from external and internal forces. This often comes as a result of the use of defensive tools, the Bundeswehr, the German armed forces, being the chief of these. The role of the Bundeswehr being to “[...] be in a

¹ All quotations by German sources have been published and translated by said sources. In-text references and sourcing will use the German names for the sake of convenience.

position to help achieve the strategic priorities of German security policy.”
(Bundesregierung, 2016, p. 88).

The topic of this paper was chosen on the basis of Europe experiencing the largest shift to its security in decades. The European security order, as was established half a century ago, was shattered by Putin. Europe, having already experienced a decade of internal division and a myriad of difficulties, is currently facing a challenge that presents fundamental changes and unity not seen for decades. Germany, having often been criticized for its wavering commitment to defense and security, is currently experienced what will be referred to as the *Zeitenwende*, the end of an era, and so it is important to analyze and discuss what the *Zeitenwende* is, how fundamental the alteration is, which policies Germany chooses to bring into the future and which it chooses to abandon. This paper will be referring to the moment where Scholz held his famous *Zeitenwende* speech as simply the *Zeitenwende* and will be concerning itself with the period before and after the speech.

This paper is divided into five sections, with section 2.0 establishing a theoretical framework for the paper by defining two theories of international relations. Section 3.0 will discuss German defense and security policy in the years prior to the *Zeitenwende* by using various documents, whilst section 4.0 will be discussing the continuities and ruptures to the policies established prior. Finally, section 5.0 will make concluding remarks.

2 Theoretical Framework

The end of the 2010s was predicted by some to usher in a period of multipolarity and unclear leadership in the world. Though some argued the persistence of the established international order (Ikenberry, 2018, p. 17), others predicted a fundamental and that the “international order ... will be realist if the system is either bipolar or multipolar” (Mearsheimer, 2019, p. 12). In order to understand the international system, political theories are often applied to understand the motivations of actions and changes within said system. This debate, over whether realist or liberal values, is an expression of said appliances to the international system.

Most western democracies operate on the ideas of liberalism, a political theory emphasizing cooperation, interdependence, and the importance of international institutions. In contrast, realism is often adopted by autocratic regimes who understand international relations to be a struggle over finite resources and the balance of power. As these theories are some of the prime motivators for actions within the international system, the subsequent two subsections will define, and contrast said theories for discussing later in the paper. Though the theories are famous for having a multitude of variations, this paper concerns itself with the basics of the theories and how they influence the understanding of the international system.

2.1 Realism

Political theory can be defined as assumptions distilled to their core and organized, formulating “[...] an explanatory proposition, an idea or set of ideas that in some way seeks to impose order or meaning to a phenomenon.” (Heywood, 2015, p. 2).

According to one of realism’s most influential thinkers, Hans J. Morgenthau, realism can be distilled into six core assumptions (Morgenthau, 1948, pp. 3-16):

1. States are the main actors in the international system.
2. The international system is an anarchic self-help system.
3. States act in a rational and self-preserving manner.
4. The international system is a zero-sum game.
5. National interests are the primary motivator behind a state’s behavior.
6. Survival is the ultimate goal of states.

At the core of the theory stands the idea of the distribution of power, i.e., the ability of one to influence and control others against their innate will (Heywood, 2015, pp. 82-84).

Realists pose that the ultimate goal of the state is to ensure its own security and prosperity within the international system. As power is understood to be the only true way a state can ensure its own security, and the threat of other states having power puts one’s own state at risk, realists emphasize the importance of the balancing of power plays in international relations.

2.2 Liberalism

Liberalism is often defined in contrast to realism. Being a theory born from the age of enlightenment, it emphasizes the capabilities of humans to overcome prime desires and to cooperate on grander goals. Liberalism can therefore be distilled into a set of core assumptions (Sørensen, Møller, & Jackson, 2021, pp. 98-100):

1. Human reason can prevail over fear and the lust for power.
2. States are the main actors in the international system.
3. Cooperation is generally positive and can promote peace and stability.
4. International institutions play a vital role in the international system and can promote peace and prosperity.
5. Democracy and human rights will lead to a more cooperative and peaceful system.
6. Free trade promotes economic growth and is mutually beneficial.

Liberalism focuses on the achievability of peace through cooperation and institutions. As will be discussed in detail in later subsections, liberalism promotes the use of international institutions promote peaceful relations and ensure common platforms for interaction. Seeing trade as "positive sum," i.e., a process where both parties gain from the interaction, liberalism promotes cooperation and interdependence as tools to ensure peace and prosperity.

3.0 German defense and security policy prior to 2022

This section will discuss and analyze German defense and security policy prior to the *Zeitenwende*. As though Russo-German relations was tenuous prior to the ascension of Putin, it was under him that Russia became more aggressive and begun to counteract the stated goal of the *Wandel durch Handel* policy.

This section is divided into three subsections. The first establishes Germany's security policies of economic and military ties, the second focuses on Germany's Eastern relations and the background for its relationship with Russia, and the third discusses Germany's most important international relationships in form of its partnership with the US and France.

3.1 Security in the form of military and economic ties

German security mainly revolved around two core pillars: economic and military ties. Though the immense industrial capacity of Germany has been a factor of international relations for almost 150 years, German industrial growth cannot last forever:

"Germany is a medium-sized country, both geographically and demographically. In the future, strong population growth in African and Asian countries as well as our own demographic changes will place Germany under increased pressure. [...] Germany therefore embraces mutual interdependence in the domain of security. This includes functioning alliances, partnerships, and other types of communities [...]"
(Bundesregierung, 2016, p. 23)

Germany seeks to ensure international interdependence as tool to maintain peace and Germany's position within the already established system. This is not to state that Germany intends to isolate or undercut growing economies, but rather to tie said economies into a system which Germany has built its security around. One of Russia's largest transgressions to Germany has therefore been to shake the foundations of this system. Merkel's government stated in a security document that Germany's desires to be:

"[...] an attractive and reliable partner across the entire range of security instruments. This ambition requires a continuous effort as well as the availability of human, material, and thus financial resources. This partnership-based approach is welcomed by the international community." (Bundesregierung, 2016, p. 23).

When therefore discussing Germany's geopolitical position, it is important to highlight the imbalance between German industrial output and consumption of vital resources. As became apparent with the Russian invasion, Germany's overreliance on foreign import of resources has become an Achilles heel. Having lost faith in nuclear power after the Fukushima disaster and closing its last nuclear power plant in 2023 (Alkousaa, 2023), and only being able to "[...] cover five percent of its natural gas demand domestically" (Statista, 2022), Germany fundamentally tied its security to foreign and often unreliable exporters. Though the dependence on foreign imports became a growing concern over the 2010s, German politicians gave the worst-case scenario little regard. An example of this played out in a 2018 United Nations (UN) summit, as then German foreign minister Heiko Maas was observed smirking when warned by US president Donald Trump of Germany's overreliance on Russian fossil fuel import (Noack, 2018).

It should however be underlined how severely the Russian invasion shocked the international community. Germany, believing that a large-scale European war was unthinkable (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1912), put faith in the longevity of the European security order established at the height of the Cold War. This security order, signed and agreed upon by all then-existing European nations (except Albania and Andorra), the US and Canada was made in an effort to improve détente between East and West (OSCE, 1975, p. 2). Though not a legally binding document, it proved the basis for the understanding of security within Europe and established the agreement of territorial integrity, condemnation of threats of force and obstruction of sovereignty, and the maintenance of international law. In essence, the Helsinki Accords desired outcome was to mitigate tension and has been one of the main drivers behind European reluctance towards involvement in foreign conflicts.

3.2 Ostpolitik and Wandel durch Handel

Wandel durch Handel, in the words of German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, is „ [...] the idea that trade and economic partnerships with autocratic regimes would sway them toward Democracy” (Auswärtiges Amt, 2022). The policy, having been one of Germany’s core policies in its foreign policy approach, was under heavy scrutiny even prior to the Russo-Ukrainian war. As opposed to the majority of its allies, Germany focused on an active engagement with Russia. In praxis, entailing active trading and interaction with Russia with the end goal of interdependence between Russia and Europe at large.

This subsection will focus on two of Germany’s core policies in its relationship with Russia and why Germany continued the approach despite its seeming ineffectiveness.

Wandel durch Handel

Wandel durch Handel is a policy fundamentally rooted in liberal theory. As classical liberalist Charles Montesquieu stated, “wherever the ways of man are gentle there is commerce; and wherever there is commerce, there the ways of men are gentle” (Maneschi, 1998, p. 29). In more recent formulations of this general idea, what is known as the “Capitalist Peace Theory,” there is Thomas Friedman’s *Golden Arches Theory*, which:

“[...] stipulates that when a country reaches a certain level of economic development, when it has a middle class big enough to support a McDonald's, it becomes a McDonald's country, and people in McDonald's countries don't like to fight wars; they like to wait in line for burgers.” (Friedman, 1996)

Though intended as a humorous rephrase of capitalist peace theory, Friedman essentially states that nations with sufficient economies and a large enough middle-class population would not be inclined to wage war on other nations. By being preoccupied and satisfied with domestic life, these middle-class citizens would not be easily swayed to bear arms.

This is what Germany desired to establish within Russia, a middle-class more interested in maintaining an interdependent and peaceful, rather than a hostile and dangerous, relationship with Europe. To achieve this change, German politicians thought that through free trade of goods and services, a core pillar of the European Union (EU), democratization and European values would be naturally exported to Russia (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1901).

Wandel durch Handel was faced with heavy criticism even prior to the war. Director of research at the Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Steven Blockmans, stated that it was a “relatively easy policy to pursue after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Germany and the EU were economically strong and had the (soft) power to help other countries democratize”, but that since the financial crisis Germany has used *Wandel durch Handel* mostly “[...] as a fig leaf to continue trading with dictators” (Moens, 2022).

Ostpolitik

Wandel durch Handel has its origins in Cold War Russo-German and German-German relations. Given that one of the chief geopolitical goals of West-Germany was the reunification of Germany, chancellor Willy Brandt sought to end decades of silence with the Eastern Bloc in the early 1970s. *Ostpolitik*, eastern policy, was Brandt’s controversial policy approach to break the silence through trade and recognition of the East. Brandt based this approach on calls of earlier politicians, notably Brandt’s secretary of state Egon Bahr, who proposed a policy of change through rapprochement, “*Wandel durch Annäherung*” (NATO, 2023). Bernhard Blumenau states that though the United States (US) boasted of their superpower status, it was arguably Germany who had the largest influence over Soviet politicians, as their trade programs help enrich both nations (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1906).

The origins of *Wandel durch Handel* is therefore found in *Ostpolitik*, as the affect seen on Soviet politics led German politicians to believe further and more radical change was possible. The influence Germany garnered also led it perceive itself as the mediator between the West and the East, a position heavily influenced by the perception of Germany as Central, rather than Western or Eastern, European (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1906).

The end goal of *Ostpolitik*, tying the East into an interdependency with Europe and denying it the means to wage war, was not completely baseless. The European Coals and Steel Community (ECSC), the institution that would eventually evolve into the EU, was founded on the principle that tying European economies together would “[...] make war between historic rivals France and Germany ‘not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible’” (EU, 2020). Though *Ostpolitik* and *Wandel durch Handel* lacked the institutional framework that ensured the success of the ECSC, Germany hoped that interdependence with the USSR and its successor states would naturally result in the same relationship as it did with the West.

These ambitions and beliefs became entrenched in German politics. This bipartisan understanding is exemplified through Scholz, a social democrat who vowed continuity with the foreign policy approach of incumbent conservative chancellor Merkel (Gehrke, 2021). Though these policies were proven to be relatively ineffective with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, as Russia only seemed to become aggressively autocratic under Putin, Blumenau notes how the harsh German reactions were underlined by the intentions to “[...] find a modus vivendi with Moscow that would eventually allow a return to a co-operative pan European security order.” (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1907).

Continuation in spite of critique

As the policies become increasingly entrenched in German politics, German politicians looked to past accomplishments and honors for validation in face of criticism. Despite disapproval from allies in the Cold War, Germany was reunited, and Brandt earned the

Nobel Peace Prize in 1971 for *Ostpolitik*. Then foreign minister, and current federal president Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated a 2008 speech that:

"What this policy in fact achieved – as is now recognized also by those who criticized it at the time – was to make peace in Europe, despite the difficulties, a degree more secure. For the democracy movements in Eastern Europe it created new possibilities, new scope for action. It was a key factor, too, in finally ending the confrontation between the two blocs" (Auswärtiges Amt, 2008).

With *Ostpolitik* being seen as vital steps in German reunification and ending the Cold War, Brandt's foreign policy approach became intrinsic to German eastern relations. With Russia continually contradicting Steinmeier's argument of the policies creating a more secure Europe, Germany was perceived as being naïve. With the invasion of Ukraine finally proving Germany's ineffectiveness in maintaining peace, democratizing Russia, and making Europe more secure, the policies have essentially died. Finally admitting defeat, Steinmeier stated in a 2022 interview: "It is very sad, but we failed in many ways. We failed to build a Common European House [...] we failed to integrate Russia into a European security system, we failed to [...] help Russia onto a path towards democracy and human rights." (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1908).

According to Blumenau, the core of the issue lies in Germany's liberal worldview. Believing trade with Russia to be positive-sum, Germany exposed itself to exploitation (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1907). Germany's insistence on enforcing a capitalist peace through a series of self-endangering policies, despite continued proof of its ineffectiveness, has become one of Germany's largest foreign policy blunders.

3.3 A balance act between Germany's two largest partners.

German defense and security policy has, since the beginning of the Cold War, been reliant on two major partners: the US and France. This subsection will discuss how German defense and security policy is shaped by its commitments to the US and France.

The United States

Perhaps the most important attribute the US brings to Europe is its sheer size. Being the largest member of NATO (BBC, 2021), the US is the de facto leader of the alliance and has been the chief agenda setter since its creation in 1949. NATO, having been created in the wake of the 1948 Soviet led coup d'état in Czechoslovakia, proved a vital insurance for the smaller and still vulnerable states of Europe. Many nations, especially those who wished to remain unaligned prior to the coup, attempted a policy of neutrality, but abandoned it in favor US protection (Rye, 2019, p. 44). Couple this with vital American industry, trade and the Marshall Plan, and Western Europe has been traditionally bound to the US.

Being one of the main fronts of the Cold War, it was paramount for the US to build a strong and loyal Germany as a border against the USSR. Though first secretary-general Hastings Ismay famously stated that the goal of NATO was to keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down (Joffe, 2009), NATO itself states the importance of a strong military presence in West-Germany was to hinder a North and South Korea situation (NATO, 2023). This is also not to state the obvious of Germany being one of the main players and on opposing side of Western Europe, in both world wars. As Germany desired to gain as

much autonomy, and as friendly relations as possible, with the rest of the alliance as possible, it became important to foster good relations between a reliable Germany and the rest of Europe. Germany and the US became therefore strong partners in the Cold War.

Josef Joffe states that most Europeans want to keep the US in the alliance, not only due to its sheer size and ability to function as a counterweight, but also to be the decided leader of NATO and Europe (Joffe, 2009). Joffe states that though Russia has not been a continuous and active threat, especially following the fall of the USSR, the NATO needs the US, because "If the US doesn't lead, nobody follows" (Joffe, 2009).

An understated crucial factor the US brings to Europe is its nuclear arsenal. Though both France and the United Kingdom (UK) have nuclear weapons, the sheer nuclear arsenal disparity with Russia cannot be understated (ICAN, 2023). Couple this with internal bickering and the aforementioned inability to lead, the US is the natural leader even within purely European affairs. A relevant example here being the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, where European nations condemned atrocities within the war-torn states, but was "[...] not ready to use force to back up its policy" (Heuven, 1993, p. 52). It was only with US intervention that hostilities ended, a fact that US president Bill Clinton was awarded Kosovo's Order of Freedom for in 2019 (Begisholli, 2019).

When Merkel therefore announced in 2017 speech that she lacked trust in the US and the UK, and that Europe must "[...] take fate into its own hands." (Henley, 2017), it came as a break from decades of policies closely linked to the US. Despite differences, the US and Germany had always seen their partnership as vital:

"While [Germany] saw itself as a champion of rapprochement with post-Soviet Russia and east European states, Germany's basic orientation and self-perception was that of a western nation. Even Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's falling-out with US President George W. Bush over the Iraq War in 2003 did not change Germany's basic commitment to the West." (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1900)

It is therefore important to contextualize US rhetoric. Then president Donald Trump argued for rapid militarization of NATO-members, argued for weaker US ties to NATO, and even threatened that the US "would 'go its own way' if military spending from other NATO countries did not rise" (Barnes & Cooper, 2019). This protectionist rhetoric, creating distrust in the effectiveness in international institutions, explains Merkel's position and statement of why the "[...] times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over." (Henley, 2017).

Franco-German Partnership

Though purely military speaking the US is the largest and most important guarantor, Germany looks to other partnerships within Europe to further its defense and security agenda. With the shaken trust in NATO prior to the war, and some members openly discussing leaving NATO, Germany deepened its cooperation and involvement with its most important partner France.

"There is no other partner Germany has closer ties with than France. We are each other's most important partners and allies." (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023)

This bilateral framework, initiated by the Elysée treaty of 1963, and reaffirmed by the Aachen Treaty of 2019 (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023), extends beyond Franco-German economic ties, reaching into other avenues of both governments like education, military, and private industry. As the partnership goes so far as to formalize regular meetings between both governments and important private actors, some have named unique interdependence an “embedded bilateralism” (Germond, 2022, p. 491).

Whilst the US actively withdrew from multilateral agreements, notably the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Agreement (Hathaway, 2020), France and Germany actively engaged in expanding interdependence. Being key supporters of platforms like the Weimar Triangle, France and Germany champion institutions and platform for ease of cooperation within Europe.

Franco-German relations does experience strain. When French president Emmanuel Macron called for further European strategic autonomy and the creation of a European army, Merkel stated her support and described it as a “a good complement to NATO” (Baume & Herszenhorn, 2018). However, Merkel was forced into a compromising position when Macron stated in an interview with the Economist that “we are currently experiencing the brain death of NATO” (The Economist, 2019). As Germany is reliant on both its French and American partnership for the optimal functioning of its security, Germany found itself continually balancing its relationship with occasionally less than amicable partners.

Both France and Germany hold considerable power and influence outside of NATO. Foregoing the obvious mention of the EU, where the Franco-German partnership has to diminish their influence to not scare weaker nations like the Visegrád group (Germond, 2022, p. 504), France and Germany build off each other’s peculiar strengths and positions. Germany states that a way it can make a large difference to European defense is through the improvement of the Europe’s general defense industry, an industry which it describes as being “[...] traditionally limited [by] defense budgets and international competition” (Bundesregierung, 2016, p. 74). France on the other hand holds a permanent seat and veto right on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a position it has used to historically further European and Franco-German interests. As Scholz stated in the *Zeitenwende* speech:

"Our embassies around the world have worked with France in recent days to advocate for the United Nations Security Council to call this Russian aggression what it is: a flagrant breach of international law. And they have done so quite successfully, considering the result of the Security Council session in New York."
(Bundesregierung, 2022)

When Scholz stated that Europe must be on forefront of new technology, he again pointed to the importance of Europe and France’s role within this field: “[...] we will keep pace with new technology. This is why it is so important to me, for example, that we build the next generation of combat aircraft and tanks here in Europe together with European partners, and particularly France. These projects are our utmost priority.” (Bundesregierung, 2022)

At times, this partnership influences Germany to apply policies and advocate actions counter to its own interests and values. When the EU proposed to borrow funds to itself in order to establish a recovery fund from the Covid-19 pandemic, Germany crossed a self-imposed red line by essentially advocating for Eurobonds. "Unlike a decade ago, Germany is prepared to make much more robust steps to back up the EU's cohesion and recovery." (Eberle & Miskimmon, 2020, p. 141).

4 German defense and security policy after the *Zeitenwende*

Zeitenwende, in the context of this paper, is the time following Scholz' speech. Though the words are more political jargon than a specific policy or process, it has come to be known as the period Germany is currently in. *Zeitenwende*, if anything, can be understood as Germany's attempt at changing the course of their approach to defense and security policy.

Initial reactions were mostly positive, with some even announcing an incredible "revolution in German security policy" and that one "[...] could be forgiven for feeling whiplash" due to the change in speed of Berlin policymaking (Besch & Brockmeier, 2022). An understandable position when considering the promises of sweeping changes and billion-euro course adjustments.

Though Scholz promised lofty changes to German politics in the coming years, most notably an increase to military budget and reaction to breach of international law, these plans have come under much scrutiny and criticism. Some have labeled the change as lacking "drive, focus, and strategy" (Major & Mölling, 2023), notably in regard to the acquisition of new military equipment and the spending of the promised 100-billion-Euro one-off sum and increase in the defense budget. Others have questioned the actual German willingness to change, stating a lack of "willingness to face a new and challenging era" (Schmies, 2022).

This section will be divided into three subsections. The first will discuss Scholz' *Zeitenwende* speech and its five main points, the second will discuss ruptures to German defense and security policy following the *Zeitenwende*, whilst the third will discuss continuities. Though there are countless points of contention and policies discussable, this paper will discuss some of the larger ruptures and continuities experienced since the *Zeitenwende*.

4.1 The five main points of the *Zeitenwende* speech

Following three days of relative silence from the German government, chancellor Scholz addressed the entire Bundestag in a special session. German politics, which up until recently had been relatively unified in regard to eastern relations and *Ostpolitik*, had to stake out a new course. Aside from condemning the Russian invasion and giving full support to Ukraine, Scholz stated what he perceived to be the "[...] five courses of actions that [Germany] must take" (Bundesregierung, 2022).

The first course of action is to "[...] support Ukraine in this desperate situation" (Bundesregierung, 2022). Scholz states that though Germany has supported Ukraine in the prior stage of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Germany must now directly send military equipment and support Ukraine's side in the war. As Germany have held a long-standing tradition of not sending military equipment to places in conflict or brewing for conflict, a fact maintained and criticized by many prior to the war (Herszenhorn, Bayer, & Burchard, 2022), this presents a clear break from form.

The second course of action "[...] is to divert Putin from the path of war." (Bundesregierung, 2022). Scholz states that Germany, together with other EU-member's heads of state, Germany will pass a package of sanctions unlike anything before, with the end-goal of diminishing Russia's ability to wage war and push Putin towards an armistice:

"We are cutting Russian banks and state businesses off from financing. We are preventing the export of cutting-edge technology to Russia. And we are targeting the oligarchs and their investment in the EU." (Bundesregierung, 2022)

The third course of action is "[...] preventing Putin's war from spilling over into other countries in Europe. That means that we will stand unconditionally by our collective defense obligation within NATO" (Bundesregierung, 2022). In addition to reaffirming Germany's commitment to NATO, Germany confirms bolstered support for Central and Eastern European allies and sends additional military equipment to both Ukraine and NATO allies.

The fourth course of action is to "[...] invest much more in the security of our country" (Bundesregierung, 2022). Scholz highlights how both the inadequacy of the Bundeswehr, and the energy sector puts German security at risks and announces changes to be made in both sections.

Regarding the Bundeswehr, he promised to uphold the NATO requirement of a defense budget equal to 2% of the national GDP and a 100-billion-Euro one-off sum to the Bundeswehr, whilst imploring the parliament to amend this increase into the German constitution. Scholz continued by stating the outdated state of the Bundeswehr and the need for it to modernize. Noting Germany's lack of resilience to future threats, like hybrid and cyber warfare, Scholz implored a further increase into pan-European technological development and highlighted the aforementioned importance of France in this field (Bundesregierung, 2022).

In addition to increasing the security of Germany militarily, Scholz aims to "[...] guarantee a secure energy supply for [Germany]" (Bundesregierung, 2022). As has been previously discussed in this paper, Germany's dependence has proven itself a point of contention and danger national security. Though Scholz states that Germany is aiming to be carbon neutral within 2045, he aims at "building up a reserve of coal and gas" in the meantime.

The fifth course of action is a change in diplomacy:

"Putin's war marks a turning point – and that goes for our foreign policy, too. As much diplomacy as possible, without being naïve – that is what we will continue to strive for. But not being naïve also means not talking simply for the sake of talking." (Bundesregierung, 2022)

Scholz essentially declares the end of the old *Ostpolitik*, *Wandel durch Handel*, and the idea that democratization can be exported to Russia through trade and diplomacy. Though he clearly states that "we will not refuse talks with Russia [...] anything else, I believe, would be irresponsible" (Bundesregierung, 2022), he emphasizes that Germany will back up their values with actions.

4.2 Ruptures in German policy following the *Zeitenwende*.

Though Scholz garnered praise for promises of change and stated intent, with the Society for German Language naming *Zeitenwende* the word of the year (Deutsche Welle, 2022), the attempts at changes have failed to live up to expectations. Some have criticized Germany's lack of "willingness to face a new and challenging era" (Schmies, 2022) whilst

other points to Germany missing “drive, focus and strategy” (Major & Mölling, 2023) amidst a change in times.

This subsection will focus on ruptures to German defense and security policy after the *Zeitenwende*, why some of the declared changes have not occurred and why Germany finds it so difficult to change.

From *Ostpolitik* to *Zeitenwende*

Perhaps the largest change the Russo-Ukrainian war brought to German politics was a change in attitude. As previously discussed, German politics have held steadfast to the notion of Germany acting as a mediator between Eastern and Western Europe. Through its approach to Russo-German relations, Germany thought it could democratize and integrate Russia into the European process, thereby denying Russia the possibility to wage interstate war in Europe.

Post-1945, Germany held a strong focus on backing a legalistic, rather than a military, foreign policy approach (Hanrieder, 1989, p. 325). With Scholz’ aforementioned support of both NATO allies and Ukraine, the *Zeitenwende* marks a historic departure from a long held German policy of not sending military equipment to conflict-prone areas.

Scholz stated in his third, fourth and fifth point how Germany would increase its military capacity, change its diplomatic approach, and leave old *Ostpolitik* in the past. Though he clearly states that he will “not refuse talks with Russia” (Bundesregierung, 2022), he acknowledges the futility of furthering a policy not able to properly punish transgressions of international law.

Germany’s response to the war stands in contrast to its response to older conflicts, like the Yugoslav wars, and proves a shift in German standings. As with the Covid-19 response being devised multilaterally and going against German norm, the Russo-Ukrainian war marks a strong deviation from established policy and norms.

The Bundeswehr

For the first time in decades, German politicians perceives a large-scale European war as a possibility (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1912). Scholz’ largest shift domestically is therefore the modernization and expansion of the Bundeswehr. Having promised significant increase to the defense budget and a 100-billion-euro one-off sum to help the initial change, Scholz Germany envisioned to quickly be protected by “a powerful, cutting-edge, progressive Bundeswehr that can be relied upon” (Bundesregierung, 2022).

This modernization effort has faced widespread scrutiny in the months that followed. Regarding the promised increase to the defense budget, the budget actually saw a decline of 300 million euro compared to the year prior (Reuters, 2023). Though most likely a side-effect of the massive one-off sum, the Bundeswehr is likely to not reach NATO budget requirements within 2024 as previously hoped for. In addition, the defense minister is currently lobbying for an increase of 10 billion euro to be amended to the defense budget, as it is currently a total of 20 billion euro under NATO requirements (Reuters, 2023).

As the Bundeswehr has been undersupplied for years and currently providing the Ukrainian army with military equipment, it is surprising to see the one-off sum not include funds to resupply the ammunition storage of the Bundeswehr (Reuters, 2023). According to some damning reports from December 2022, the Bundeswehr only has the capacity for two intense days of fighting, when NATO mandates a minimum of 30 days (Knight, 2022). In addition to equipment shortages, it became known that not a single Puma tank was in operational condition. To quote CDU parliamentary group leader Johann Wadephul: "It is a nightmare [...] the Puma is supposed to be a main weapon system of the German army. And if the Puma is not operational, then the army is not operational" (Knight, 2022).

During a Berlin press conference, secretary general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, avoided allusions to the mounting criticism towards Germany's combat readiness and funding issues. He instead simply noted how "we need a strong and a ready Bundeswehr; this matters for Germany's security, it matters for Europe's security, and it matters for global security" (Deutsche Welle, 2022).

In response to mounting critique, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, head of the Bundestag defense committee, stated in an interview that "[...] in the 16 years the CDU had occupied the Defense Ministry under Angela Merkel, 'nothing at all' had been done to modernize the army" (Knight, 2023). Strack-Zimmermann noted that spending 100 billion euro takes time, and that new orders for fighters, helicopters, and a digitalization drive to modernize the Bundeswehr was under way, with an expected delivery time of 2026 for the first fighter jets.

In an article by Ben Knight for *Deutsche Welle*, defense specialist Rafael Loss stated that economic forces, like inflation and interest, will eat substantially away at the 100-billion-euro loan the longer Germany wait to spend it, with a worst-case scenario prediction of a 30-50 billion loss (Knight, What happened to the German military's €100 billion fund?, 2023). Loss thinks this is due to the Cold War creating an environment of the Bundeswehr settling "[...] into a culture in which speed was not a priority. 'There was a risk aversion to doing anything wrong and spending maybe a little bit too much money on things to get them through the procurement pipeline faster.'" (Knight, What happened to the German military's €100 billion fund?, 2023). Knight ends the article however by stating the enormity of the Bundeswehr and its bureaucracy, and how the *Zeitenwende* is not only aiming at spending more on the military but overturning and fundamentally altering the attitude and the role of the military. He states that this is simply too large of a task to be done in one year (Knight, 2023).

Involvement in conflict-prone areas

Stoltenberg noted however in the aforementioned press conference that Germany has put considerable effort into sending financial, humanitarian, and military aid to Ukraine (Deutsche Welle, 2022). Whilst Germany is no stranger to sending humanitarian and financial aid to nations in peril or war, having recently sent 50 million euro to Syria in Earthquake relief (Deutsche Welle, 2023), its support to Ukraine is unprecedented. Having taken in appx. 1.06 million refugees, as of April 2023, (Statista, 2023) and sent appx. 14.2 billion Euro, as of March 2023, (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023), it is difficult to argue against Germany's commitment to the war.

The war also marks the historic departure of Germany sending military equipment to nations at war. Germany has been a long-standing opposer of sending military equipment to nations in conflict, having refused to send defensive equipment prior to the invasion and hindering its European allies from sending German produced equipment to Ukraine (Herszenhorn, Bayer, & Burchard, 2022). The invasion became a turning point in German relations to war and peace. In an article by the federal foreign office, Germany loudly proclaims its support for Ukraine "for as long as it takes" (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023). Looking over the wording used in the article, it becomes clear that old rhetoric, where weapon export is seen as "fueling conflict rather than reducing conflict" (Hill, 2022), has been replaced by rhetoric like: "Germany is the largest contributor to the refinancing fund of the European Peace Facility (EPF) [...] these funds are to be made available between 2022 and 2026, to support the delivery of military equipment from the EU." (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023).

Diplomacy, appeasement, and rapprochement with Russia has therefore been directly exchanged for arms export, condemnation of transgressions and in vast increase in military spending.

4.3 Continuities in German policy following the *Zeitenwende*.

Whilst the media often focused on the deviations and reforms of the *Zeitenwende*, most notably the military spending, little attention is given to continuations in German policy. Germany, being infamous for its bureaucracy and notable for its tradition-heavy foreign policy approach, is naturally not inclined to quickly disregard certain policies. This subsection looks therefore at continuations in German defense and security policy following the *Zeitenwende*.

Sanctions

Sanctioning is one of the most common forms of punishment dealt by governments in opposition to states, organizations or individuals deemed to have committed transgressions. Germany is no stranger to the use of sanctions, as their largely legalistic driven foreign policy usually refrained from the use of military to enforce their political agenda.

Scholz directly acknowledged his intentions with sanctioning Russia in the second point of his *Zeitenwende* speech, where he noted that the aim of sanction was "[...] to divert Putin from the path of war" (Bundesregierung, 2022). Though arguments for the use of economic sanctions are varied, in this context it is clear that Germany and the EU's intention is to use their vast economic influence to directly affect the Russian war capability.

Germany had after all imposed sanctions on Russia, alongside the rest of the EU prior to the invasion of Ukraine. As the Russo-Ukrainian war started with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Germany gave up its position as mediator and positioned itself against Russia. Though appraised for their strong position against Russia after decades of *Ostpolitik*, Kai Oppermann notes how this action was guided by the "belief that Russia would have to be reintegrated into the European security architecture after the conflict had been resolved" (Oppermann, 2019).

Though the intention of sanctioning Russia is clear, sanctions is not void of criticism. In a UN report by Matthias Neuenkirch and Florian Neumeier, UN sanctions have been proven to "decrease the target state's GDP growth rate by 2.3-3.5 percentage points" (Neunkirch &

Neumeier, 2015), putting in question the humanitarian cost sanctions have on a target. As citizens of an autocratic regime are often the ones to bear the impact of such sanctions, and unable to induce regime change, sanctions come with heavy humanitarian costs.

Others question the effectiveness of sanctions in achieving its goal, to which British diplomat Jeremy Greenstock states that there simply is “nothing else between words and military action if you want to bring pressure upon a government” (Marcus, 2010). Nicholas Burns, a senior diplomat of the Bush administration, stated the ineffectiveness of sanctions and that “many countries are effectively ignoring them or, like China, undercutting them” (Marcus, 2010).

What is then the intention behind Germany maintaining its sanctions? Scholz stated that “Russian stocks have lost over thirty percent of their value. This shows that our sanctions are working” (Bundesregierung, 2022), showing Germany’s clear intention of hurting the Russian economy and by extension its ability to continue the war. Germany seems to use its relationship with Russia to limit its capability to wage war, as though the policies of integrating Russia into the greater Europe failed, Germany can still make use of its economic ties to the East.

International cooperation

Being literally written into article 23 of the constitution, a core pillar of German foreign policy is its membership in various international institutions and partnerships. As discussed in subsection 3.3, Germany is heavily involved and reliant on international organizations and alliances for its security. Though both Sweden and Finland would prove good allies for NATO, as their militaries have been training with NATO allies for years, Germany risks alienating other allies through ardent support of NATO expansion (Burchard, 2022). To Germany however, the expansion of an institution it relies on for security is important, and as experienced with Ukraine, necessary to ensure the security and validity of said expansion’s mission. If either of the neutral Nordic nations were to stand alone, Germany could not be sure of its independence or security, and therefore states that either can “count on [Germany’s] support” (Burchard, 2022).

Though a natural deviation from Germany’s old defense policy, the increased support and reaffirmation of commitments to NATO remains an ever-important part of German defense and security policy. As has been discussed previously, Germany’s liberal worldview dictates the security gained and importance inherit in large institutional frameworks like the EU or NATO.

In relation to France and Europe at large, Germany’s commitment seems, at least in rhetoric, stronger than before. Scholz used the word “Europe” a total of 22 times in the *Zeitenwende* speech and placed heavy emphasis on the importance of European cooperation and Franco-German relations as an example of where to go on projects like the Eurofighter.

4.4 Rhetoric vs. Actions

One of the greatest criticisms Germany have received in the time since the outbreak of the war is its commitment to actual change. Knight notes the impossibility of turning a nation the size of Germany around in a single year, whilst others problematize the extent to which Germany is willing to change its actual policies.

Perhaps the most damning evidence and criticism towards the German government is the general disconnect between rhetoric and action. Though Scholz notes the importance of sanctions and its effectiveness in the *Zeitenwende* speech, new reports show the increased slowdown of German asset freezing and sanctioning. Parliament member Christian Goerke stated that “since December, only 200 million euros in oligarch assets have been frozen, and for half a year, just one billion. Not a single oligarch has reported his assets since December” (Reuters, 2023). Per German law, targets of EU sanctions are required to declare their assets immediately.

Though there exist arguments for and against the lack of military spending in regard to the 100-billion-euro one-off sum, another fact of the matter remains in that the defense minister has to lobby for the promised defense budget. Lying at around 50 billion Euro, and going down 300 million euro in 2023, the budget is still not at the NATO mandated 75-billion-euro budget it promised. Germany, therefore, seems to struggle to maintain its lofty ambitions and promises of adaption.

5 Conclusion

The *Zeitenwende*, per the name, was initially devised as a political turning point. Germany, having faced criticism for its defense and security policy approach for years, was in the end forced to reevaluate its policies. Despite the media initially labeling the *Zeitenwende* a “revolution in German security policy” (Besch & Brockmeier, 2022), and later criticized it for lacking “drive, focus, and strategy” (Major & Mölling, 2023), the *Zeitenwende* was intended as a course correction and revision of political approach.

German politics have been steeped in traditional thinking for years, being guided by old principles established in the Cold War and molded by the European security order established in the Helsinki Accords. Germany, therefore valuing the position of law over power in international relations, opted for policies like *Ostpolitik* and *Wandel durch Handel*. These policies, built on liberal theory and formed by Germany’s perceived position of an East-West mediator in Central Europe, were held aloft by self-validating rhetoric and past accomplishments. As these theories and approaches were given time and space to fester, the transgressions of Russia never truly went too far as Germany desired to “[...] find a modus vivendi with Moscow that eventually would allow a return to co-operative pan-European security order” (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1907).

The *Zeitenwende* can therefore be seen as a reset of German politics; a reevaluation of where Germany finds itself and build anew a defense and security policy built on the current reality, rather than one built upon a bygone security order. Policies built therefore upon the old system, like *Wandel durch Handel*, were to be replaced with approaches reflecting more concurrent realities. A notable example in this department being Germany’s relation to arms export, where Scholz denied the export of arms to Ukraine in January 2022 on the basis of reducing bloodshed, the Federal Foreign Office writes on its website that: “Germany is the largest contributor to the refinancing fund of the European Peace Facility (EPF) [...] these funds are to be made available between 2022 and 2026, to support the delivery of military equipment from the EU.” (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023). Germany’s understanding of peace has gone from reducing a defender’s arms, to arming the defender against the transgressor of peace.

Perhaps the largest point of contention and change in German defense and security policy has been the massive increase in military spending. Though the 2016 German White Paper notes the importance of a combat ready and modern Bundeswehr (Bundesregierung, 2016, p. 98), current reports indicate otherwise. With scandals around the lack of funding, inability to use the 100-billion-Euro one-off sum and poor condition of military equipment, questions around actual change and revitalization have come as a natural consequence. Defenders of Scholz will note the nature of the *Zeitenwende*, being a reevaluation and large-scale turnover of one of the largest bureaucracies in the world. The main argument here being therefore, that a year simply is not enough to end decades of a certain policy.

However, some policies have been deliberately maintained. Though policies like *Wandel durch Handel* have been laid to rest as a consequence of a reevaluation process, certain core beliefs and policies derived from that have not. Liberal values of cooperation, the strive for international law and institutional frameworks have, if anything, only strengthened with the invasion of Ukraine. Some political commentators have argued that the end of American

hegemony would usher in a realist international order “if the system is either bipolar or multipolar” (Mearsheimer, 2019, p. 12) where liberal values would be disregarded in favor of old power politics. The Russo-Ukrainian war stands therefore as a clear proof otherwise, as membership applications for NATO has increased as billions of Euros have been spent on the Ukrainian war-effort.

The *Zeitenwende* is therefore not a complete deviation of German politics, but rather a reevaluation. Germany, standing before a European crisis not seen for decades, have reevaluated what policies to bring into this watershed era. Old policies, like *Wandel durch Handel*, have been left in the past in favor of newer policies shaped by a more current understanding of the security situation in Europe.

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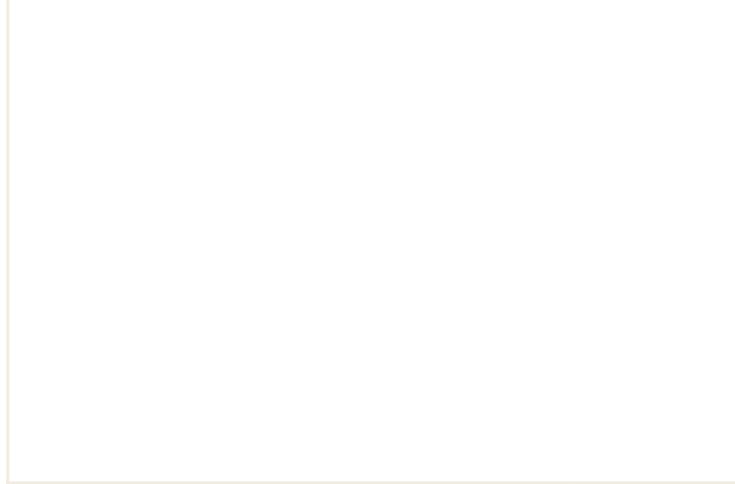
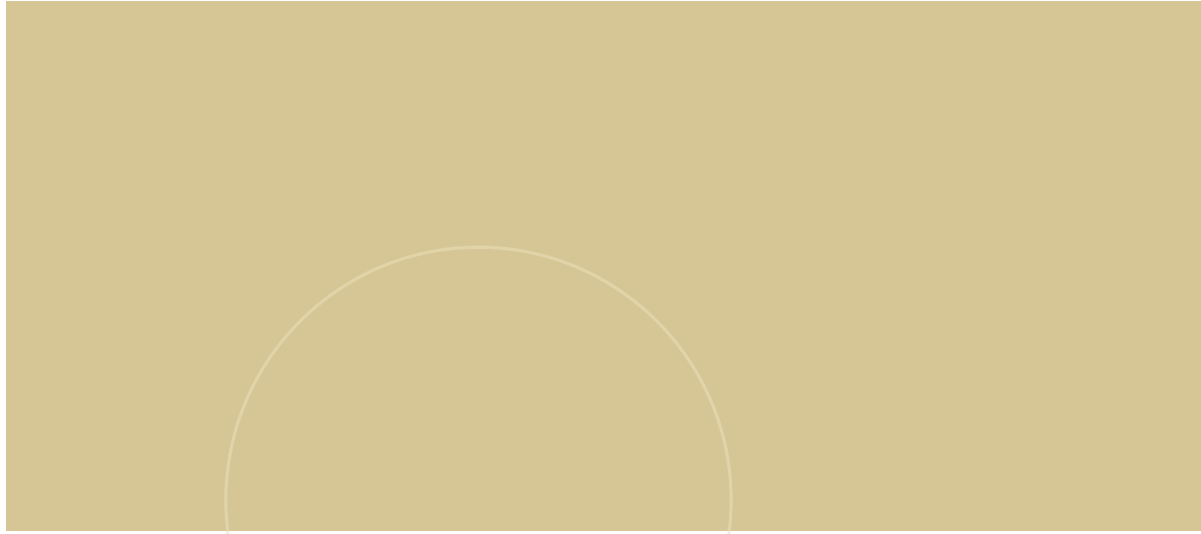
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