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German Elites Emphasize NATO's Importance

Many Back Greater EU Security Role, but Few Want an Independent Force

The European push for a Rapid Reaction Force and U.S. plans for a national missile defense program have created new twists in the ongoing debate over NATO's role in European security. While French President Chirac has been quoted as saying the European rapid reaction force must be "independent of NATO," German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer has argued for the continued importance of a strong role for the U.S. in Europe. German elites share their government's support for an EU-led force – but one operating within the NATO alliance.

KEY FINDINGS

- A majority favor Europe taking on a strengthened role in NATO.
- Elites in Germany strongly back NATO membership and say the Alliance is "still essential."
- Elites favor using NATO troops for peacekeeping, regional stability and fighting terrorism, but oppose sending troops on new missions including stopping the drug trade and protecting human rights.

- More than age or occupation, elites' security preferences tend to reflect political party preferences.

Preference for Greater EU Security Role

Majorities of the German elite (64%) and the public (53% in May 2000) agree that the European Union "should make the most important decisions about the security of Europe in the future." A quarter (25%) of elites prefer NATO to have this role (as does 30% of the overall public).

Elites are also in favor of a greater European role in the Alliance. More than half (58%) of German elites agree "now that the Cold War is over, the U.S. should have a reduced role in NATO and the role of Europe should be strengthened," a view shared by just a quarter (27%) of the general public (Figure 1, next page). Conversely, the overall public (57%) is more inclined than elites (40%) to say "that the U.S. and Europe should keep the same security relationship in NATO that they now have."

Majority Back European Defense Force

Reflecting this view, a wide majority (84%; 46% *strongly*) of German elites support "the development of a common European defense

This report is based on data from telephone interviews with a sample of 500 adults age 18 and older in Germany conducted December 8-22, 2000. Elite respondents were drawn from target groups including politicians, business leaders, educators, the media, the cultural elite and religious leaders. TNS Emnid in Bielefeld conducted the interviews for the Office of Research.

force.” A May 2000 survey also finds a majority (57%) of the German public is in favor, although one-fifth are unsure (Figure 2).

Among the elites who favor a European defense force, most (83%) envision a defense force that operates “in conjunction with NATO.” Relatively few in this group picture a European defense force that would either “replace” (10%) or “operate separately from NATO” (6%). Likewise, defense force supporters among the wider German public also prefer a European force that works in conjunction with NATO (74%; 16% separate, 6% replace NATO).

Views toward the United States affect attitudes on this issue. Those who are positive toward the U.S. are more favorable toward NATO taking the most important decisions, whereas those lacking confidence in the U.S. tend to prefer giving a greater role to the EU. However, there is no such relation between levels of confidence in the European Union and views on either the U.S.-Europe balance in NATO or the general preference for the EU to take the lead in security decisions.

Paying for Defense Responsibilities and a Euro-Force Complicates the Picture

But when costs become a factor, fewer favor a greater role in Europe, including a defense force. In general, more than half (57%) of German elites say that their country should “sustain...its current level of funding for national defense during the next five years” (24% prefer to “increase,” 18% to “cut” this funding).

Among those who think the transatlantic security relationship should be changed to allow a greater European and reduced American role, two-thirds or more of both elites and the public who prefer a greater European role still favor this policy even “if this meant that European NATO members, including Germany, would have to spend more money on defense.” But in total, the proportion of German elites who favor an increased European role in NATO even if it means greater spending (41%) is about equal to the number who prefer the relationship to remain as is (40%).

German elites are also divided between those who support (46%) and oppose (51%) increased defense spending specifically for a common European defense force developed within NATO. However, eight in ten (79%) oppose increasing defense expenditures to pay for a European defense force developed independently of NATO; one in five (19%) would support more spending for this purpose.

German Elite Says NATO is “Still Essential”

Despite the end of the Cold War a decade ago, NATO is still seen to be relevant to today’s world. Three-

Figure 1: Germans on U.S. and European Role in NATO

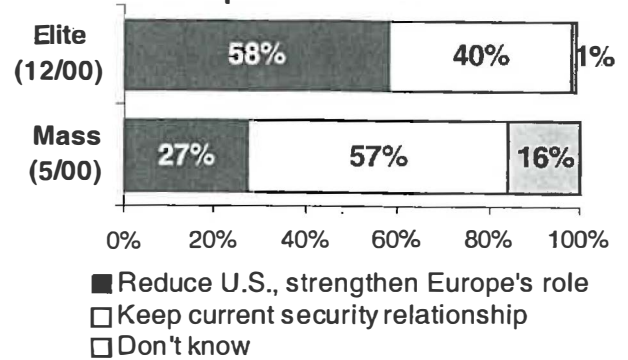
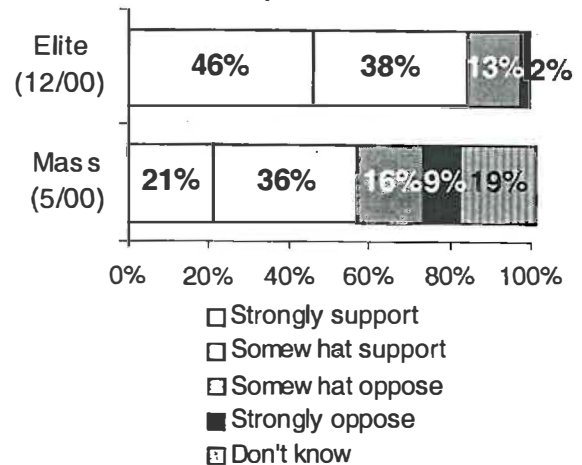


Figure 2: Development of a Common European Defense Force



quarters (77%) of German elites say that “NATO is still essential to our country’s security” (22% no longer essential). This is similar to findings among the overall public in September 2000 (72% essential, 24% not). In part, support for NATO exists because Germans still see potential threats. By a narrow six-to-four margin, German elites are more likely to agree (57%) than disagree (41%) that “since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world has become much safer.”

Elites Firmly Back NATO Membership

Elite opinion in Germany is solidly in favor of NATO membership – even more intensely than the German public at large (Table 1). Six in ten German elites (as compared to four in ten of the overall public) “strongly support” NATO membership.

In addition, three-quarters (73%) of German elites (compared to 56% of the general public in May 2000) express confidence in NATO to deal with European affairs. Higher confidence among elites may be due to greater awareness. While similar percentages of the elite (25%) and public (30%) lack confidence, the public is more likely to say they don’t know (15%, compared to 1% of elites).

	Mass (9/00)	Elites (12/00)
Strongly support	37%	62%
Somewhat support	46	29
Somewhat oppose	12	6
Strongly oppose	3	1
DK/NA	2	–

Elites Open to NATO Taking on New Missions

German elites are open to using NATO troops to pursue new security missions. Majorities favor using NATO forces for peacekeeping missions in countries bordering NATO (87%), strengthening regional security (71%), preventing other countries from developing weapons of mass destruction (64%) and combating international terrorism (59%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Use of NATO Forces

“NATO was established to provide security for Western Europe against a Soviet threat. In the absence of a Soviet threat, would you support or oppose using NATO forces, including German troops, in each of the following situations:”

	Support	Oppose	Don't know
To provide peacekeeping in countries bordering NATO members, such as Bosnia	87%	13	1
To strengthen security in a particular region, such as the Mediterranean	71%	25	4
To stop the development of weapons of mass destruction capabilities in other countries	64%	30	6
To combat international terrorism	59%	38	3
To defend Western interests in Europe	51%	40	9
To combat international drug trafficking	44%	54	2
To defend human rights in non-NATO countries	39%	55	5
To defend Western interests outside of Europe, such as in the Persian Gulf	33%	61	6

Elites are more divided on using NATO forces for such purposes as defending Western interests within Europe (51% support, 40% oppose). Half or more oppose using NATO soldiers for other missions such as combating international drug trafficking, defending human rights in non-NATO countries, and

defending “Western interests” in regions outside of Europe. The relatively weaker support for defending interests within Europe or in other regions may stem from an economic undertone to the concept of “interests.” Those who support using NATO troops to pursue Western interests are also more favorable toward globalization and are more likely to vote for center-right parties; those against these uses of NATO forces tend to hold opposite views.

These views on the potential use of NATO forces align with German elites’ foreign policy priorities. From a list of current issues, German elites most often say that “preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction” (79%) should be a “high priority” for Germany’s long-range foreign policy goals. Relatively fewer elites place top priority on other possibilities such as combating the international drug trade (67%), combating international terrorism (60%), promoting human rights in other countries (60%) or promoting German businesses abroad (54%).

Party Preference Divides Views on NATO

Supporters of the four parties most popular among the German elite¹ share a broad support for NATO membership, although supporters of the center-right Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) are more strongly in favor than are center-left supporters of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Green Party. Left-wing elites are also more likely than those on the right to lack confidence in NATO and say it is no longer essential.

But the real differences lie in questions over the relative role of Europe and the United States in security matters. SPD and Green Party supporters prefer both

increasing Europe’s role in NATO and having the EU make the most important security decisions in the future. CDU-CSU and FDP supporters prefer to keep U.S.-European relations in NATO as they are, but divide more closely over whether NATO or the EU should take the lead in security-related decisions.

Other factors have a more limited impact on attitudes toward NATO. For instance, those over age 65 tend to be generally more pro-NATO than others. More men than women express more confidence in NATO and consider the Alliance “essential,” but men are also more likely than women to volunteer institutions other than NATO or the EU as their preference for ensuring European security.

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	Greens	SPD	CDU-CSU	FDP
Support membership	83%	93%	98%	100%
Oppose membership	17	6	3	–
NATO essential	70%	77%	91%	86%
No longer essential	27	22	9	14
Confidence in NATO	60%	73%	87%	87%
Lack of confidence	38	26	12	11
Increase Europe’s role	68%	69%	39%	41%
Keep relations as is	27	31	60	58
Future decisionmaker:				
NATO	5%	18%	43%	36%
EU	82	72	48	56

¹ In this sample, 35% would support the SPD, 23% the CDU-CSU, 13% the FDP and 12% the Green Party “if the parliamentary election were held tomorrow.”

Methodology

This report is based on data from telephone interviews conducted December 8-22, 2000 with a sample of 500 elite adults age 18 and older in Germany. The research firm Emnid, based in Bielefeld, conducted the interviews for the Office of Research.

Survey questions were prepared by the Office of Research. The questionnaire was translated by the contractor and reviewed by Office of Research staff.

While any definition of “elite” is somewhat arbitrary, the construction of the sample used in this survey is designed to ensure representation across a broad spectrum of decision makers and opinion leaders in Germany as well as comparability across a set of cross-European surveys conducted simultaneously. The sample composition included: **political elite** (members of national and local government, leaders of political parties), **politicians** (central and local: ministries, state agencies, committees and councils), **private sector business leaders** (large and medium-sized firms), **state sector business leaders** (including banks, utilities, agriculture, trade and tourism), **educators** (university heads, professors, researchers and administrators), **media elite** (owners, publishers, editors, journalists and broadcasters), **cultural elites** (artists, writers, intellectuals and curators) and **religious leaders**. The gender composition of the sample is 87 percent men, 13 percent women.

This sample was compiled by randomly selecting individuals from sources including: a database of all national and local members of parliament, a list of all government administrative departments at the national and local level, the Hoppenstedt Business Data base, a database of all German educators (*Hochschuellehverzeichnis vom Deutschen Hochschulverband*), and a list of all print and broadcast media.

As a rule of thumb, 19 times out of 20, results from samples of this size will differ by no more than about plus or minus 6 percentage points if the same type of survey were to be conducted repeatedly. The practical difficulties of conducting a survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the results.

For further information, please contact the analyst.
