



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

## DPG POLICY BRIEF

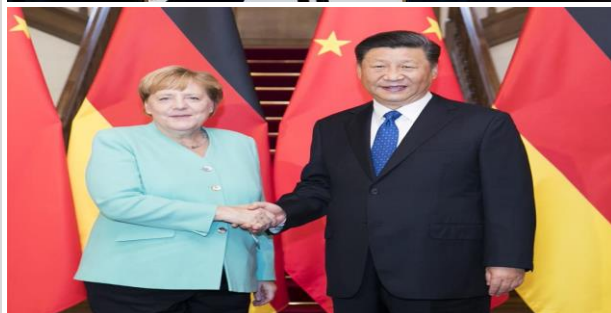
### Germany Expands its Horizons

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### ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

### Cover Photographs:

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Angela Merkel at their meeting in New Delhi, November 1, 2019. Source: Flickr/ MEA photogallery*

*President Donald Trump and Chancellor Angela Merkel meeting on the sidelines of the 2019 G20 Summit in Osaka. Source: The New York Times*

*Chinese President Xi Jinping with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Beijing, September 6, 2019. Source: Xinhua*

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## Germany Expands its Horizons

by  
Nalin Surie

The announcement made by the German Federal Foreign Office on September 1, 2020 of the policy guidelines<sup>1</sup> adopted by the German Government on the Indo-Pacific region is significant. It has been some time in the making and the title itself reflects that the new policy represents an inflection point; a coming of age by Germany in foreign and security policy matters.

No doubt, Germany will, as indicated in several places in the guidelines, try and implement this policy in tandem with the European Union where feasible. It will now become the third of the major European powers to adopt a policy towards the Indo-Pacific after France and the UK, and the second EU country to do so. However, it would seem that where necessary Germany will, in foreign and security policy matters, independently reflect its very substantial economic, scientific, technological and other prowess. It will continue, at the same time, to be a principal driving force in the EU and for European integration. The latter will in fact enhance its ability to play a greater independent role in international affairs. Germany, along with the EU, will then be a pole in the evolving multipolar world.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Angela Merkel at their meeting in New Delhi, November 1, 2019. Source: Flickr/ MEA photogallery

<sup>1</sup> [auswaertiges-amt.de](https://auswaertiges-amt.de) (01.09.2020)



The policy on the Indo-Pacific is described as “Germany-Europe-Asia: shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> century together”<sup>2</sup>. The intention is clearly to harmonise Germany’s policies to the reality of the shifting balance of forces and opportunities from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. The latter need not replace the former but there is undoubtedly need for greater symmetry and Germany intends to be part of making that happen.

The German policy paper recognises that “The Indo-Pacific region is becoming the key to shaping the international order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” and “shifting geopolitical power structures in the Indo-Pacific also have direct impacts on Germany”...“if conflicts in the region adversely affect security and stability there, this has repercussions for Germany, too”. Like for India, the German definition of the region is “the entire region characterised by the Indian Ocean and the Pacific”<sup>3</sup>.

On September 2, 2020 the German Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, spoke on the policy guidelines adopted and stated, inter-alia, that<sup>4</sup>:

- ❖ “The political West also lies in the East...the Indo-Pacific region is a priority of German foreign policy”.
- ❖ Cooperation will cover “areas of multilateralism, climate change mitigation, human rights, rules based free trade, connectivity, the digital transformation and, in particular, security policy”.
- ❖ “The Himalayas and the Malacca Straits may seem a long way away”. But, Germany’s “prosperity and our geopolitical influence in the coming decades” will depend “not least” on working with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region where “more than anywhere else, is where the shape of the international order of tomorrow will be decided”. Germany, he said, wants to help shape that order which should be “based on rules and international cooperation, not on the law of the strong”.
- ❖ Cooperation will be intensified with countries that share Germany’s “democratic and liberal values”. This will also help strengthen the “idea of a multipolar world in which no country has to decide between poles of power”.
- ❖ Stability in the Indo-Pacific is of “vital importance to us (Germany) in economic terms too”.

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> auswaertiges-amt.de (02.09.2020)



The timing of the release of the adoption of the report and the unambiguous messaging is significant, as is the content of Maas' remarks. It is precisely on September 1, 2020 that Maas met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Berlin. The meeting was not a particularly warm event, if official reports are to be believed. Nor for that matter were the EU-China Summits of June and September 2020. The signalling both by Germany and the EU was that Europe wants good relations and enhanced cooperation with China and a decoupling in relations is not in their interest. In both political and economic terms, there are many reasons for enhanced cooperation. But, there are many issues that China needs to address and it has to be a "relationship between equals characterised by mutual respect. The future of Europe must become a more sovereign and more self-confident one"<sup>5</sup>. [ Maas to Wang Yi.]



President Donald Trump and Chancellor Angela Merkel meeting on the sidelines of the 2019 G20 Summit in Osaka. Source: The New York Times

After the September 14, 2020 summit between the EU leaders and Xi Jinping, Chancellor Merkel (EU rotating presidency), EU Council President Michel and Commission President von der Leyen issued a joint press release entitled "EU-China Leaders Meeting: Upholding EU values and interests at the highest level". This includes references to their grave concerns over the situation in Hong Kong, serious concerns about the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities and the escalating tensions in the South China Sea. The EU also, however, confirmed its readiness to continue to discuss the Strategic Agenda for

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<sup>5</sup> auswaertiges-amt.de (01.09.2020)





Cooperation 2025 subject to significant progress being made in the negotiations on the Comprehensive Investment Agreement between the EU and China<sup>6</sup>.

In effect, Chinese bad behaviour is not without cost and Germany needs to drive the agenda especially in view of its very close economic coupling with China. It will want to decouple gradually and rationally while retaining its markets in China but prevent, for instance, stealing of technology and ensuring its companies have a level playing field in China. But by announcing an Indo-Pacific strategy, which Beijing generically sees as being an attempt to contain China, the signalling is robust.

It is well acknowledged that Germany has been and continues to be a principal driver not only of European integration but also of helping the EU create an independent identity. Yet, it cannot but be frustrating, at the very least, for the most important country in Europe and its biggest and highly productive economy to have to constantly play second fiddle in geo-political matters. That Germany is still not a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, while France and the UK are, cannot but rankle. It was a matter of time only before Germany would have liked to be recognised not only for its size, power and capabilities but also as a responsible member of the world community, anchored firmly in an essentially values driven democratic political system. There is no contradiction between the latter and Germany's continued commitment to further European integration and the strengthening of a multipolar world. Germany's recently announced policy on the Indo-Pacific is a manifestation of this effort.

In Chancellor Merkel, Germany has a long standing, internationally respected, successful and consensus favouring leader to allow it (Germany) to transition from its hitherto effective but low key role in international relations to developing an independent posture in the international geo-political and geo-strategic space. This has been a process accelerated by the policies in particular followed by the United States (US) under President Trump, the Brexit process and other developments.

The US under President Trump has been particularly mixed, for instance, in its signalling of commitment to NATO, supportive of Brexit and actions of countries like Poland within the EU and the consequent weakening of European unity, on trade with the EU, on Germany's relations with Russia while keeping open its own options on that country, announcing the withdrawal of

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<sup>6</sup> consilium.europa.eu ( 14 September 2020)



US troops from Germany and showing little, if any, warmth in relations with Chancellor Merkel.

In her speech to the European Parliament on November 13, 2018<sup>7</sup>, Mrs. Merkel noted that “the likelihood that interests can be asserted at global level by a single actor is steadily decreasing”. This required Europe to be united and tolerant. This requires European “solidarity” across the board. This extends also to European foreign and security policy. She said, “It’s simply true that the times when we could fully rely on others have ended”. And went on to call, inter-alia, for the EU “to work on the vision of one day establishing a proper European army”. The latter, she clarified “could be an effective complement to NATO”.

The European Common Defense and Security Policy is in a process of evolution and will no doubt have a German stamp along with that of France. In the latter context, the Aachen Treaty of January 2019 between Germany and France is particularly pertinent.

Brexit is perhaps another issue which weighed in, in favour of Germany seeking a greater role for itself. Looking in from the outside, it would appear that Germany made considerable effort to keep the UK within the European Union, but without having to compromise on the basic principles of greater European integration contained in the various treaties agreed to among the member states. Germany was perhaps genuinely sorry, for a variety of historical and other reasons, to let Britain go. It allowed it to go in good grace but recognised that this must also require it to pursue its own and European security interests in a qualitatively different manner. Brexit and the US attitude require the EU and Germany to look at new options to secure their security, economic, technological and other interests. Old collaborations will need to be reviewed and new ones entered into with other growing parts of the world. As one of the world’s largest exporting countries, Germany can ill afford to not look to fresher pastures. The latter is particularly relevant in the context of the changing, now more ‘systemic rivalry’ relationship with China.

A third critical area of international relations on which Germany, under Merkel, has shown a commitment to international principles is that of international immigration. Merkel’s decision to let in a huge number of refugees/migrants from Syria etc. in 2014-15 cost her dearly in terms of domestic political support but shamed others who easily mouth principles but are loath to implement lectures they give on adherence to humanitarian principles. It is the latter approach that has for instance provided some sustenance to leaders like President Erdogan of Turkey. The leadership that Merkel then provided is now

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<sup>7</sup> bundesregierung.de ( 13 November 2018, Strasbourg)





universally recognised and its positive spin-offs for Germany domestically are also better recognised.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the global economic tsunami it has unleashed is another factor that weighs in on Germany seeking a greater geo-economic role in the years ahead. By any account, Germany has handled the Covid-19 crisis relatively well. Its public health system, and systematic approach towards handling the crisis, has performed creditably and is an example that is worthy of emulation. Equally important, the German economic engine remains strong though like all other major economies it has taken a serious short term hit. A huge Euro 750 billion package was announced to prevent hardship to different sectors, support employment and reduce the financial shock caused by the pandemic. It remains to be seen how well the economy can cope with a second wave of infections when the fiscal space for fresh incentives maybe limited. Revival of growth in principal German markets including China will help. At the same time, Germany will now need to aggressively seek and develop new markets, especially in the larger emerging market economies, several of which are in the Indo-Pacific.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, January 11, 2020. Source: Euractiv

The Berlin-Moscow axis is an old one though its salience and significance have varied from time to time, depending on the historical period under reference. Under Chancellor Merkel, the relationship seems to have been more than



workman like given the importance of the need, in the post-Cold War era, to keep conversations and projects going, problems under discussion and prevent surprises from becoming crises. It is perhaps in this spirit that Germany had, in spite of opposition from the US and some east European nations, gone ahead with the Nord Stream-II Gas Project. However, the alleged poisoning in Russia, by Russian agents using the nerve agent Novichok, of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his treatment in Germany, has, according to press reports, evidently angered Mrs. Merkel enough to agree to threaten to stop that Project. Foreign Minister Maas issued a statement on this issue on September 3, 2020<sup>8</sup> condemning the attack and demanding that Russia fully investigate the matter and bring the perpetrators to justice. He warned that Germany will decide on reactions also “based on how Russia now behaves”. This is a clear signal that Germany will not allow even Russia to cross certain red lines.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel delivering her remarks at the Munich Security Conference, February 16, 2019. Source: Newtr.tv

German interest in international security policy and the need to influence it is not new. An effective means of being able to influence the agenda has been the Munich Security Conference that has been held in that city annually since 1963. The organisers, justifiably perhaps, describe it as “the world’s leading forum for debating international security policy”<sup>9</sup>. Participants range from heads of

<sup>8</sup> auswaertiges-amt.de (03.09.2020)

<sup>9</sup> Securityconference.org-Munich Security Report 2020



state/government to ministers, political personalities, academia, analysts, media, civil society etc. This high level, ostensibly non-governmental, annual conference undoubtedly provides food for thought to policy makers in Berlin (earlier, Bonn).

The background document for the February 2020 edition of the Munich Security Conference is entitled “Westlessness”<sup>10</sup>! That one word is more eloquent on the current state of geo-politics than many descriptive sentences. Part of the objective of the 2020 conference was for “revising the Western project in particular”. It quotes Merkel as saying on May 30, 2019 that “The West is not a closed entity - it’s an open system...is worth continuing to fight for... however, it does not go unchallenged and it is up to us to show that this system can create prosperity, ideally for all members of a society... We need to face up to this rivalry between systems”<sup>11</sup>.



Chinese President Xi Jinping with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Beijing, September 6, 2019. Source: Xinhua

By joining up with the value base Indo-Pacific, Germany has signalled its coming out as an independent geo-political entity while also promoting a European Indo-Pacific strategy.

The German strategy paper on the Indo-Pacific is a very detailed document and requires a separate analysis of its content. There are many references to

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*



cooperation with India in the Indo-Pacific context, ranging from UN Security Council reform, climate protection issues, a desire to join the International Solar Alliance, green energy corridors, digital transformation, innovation, S&T collaboration, ASEAN centrality, the East Asia Summit process, IORA, bio diversity issues, UNPKOs, Asia security dialogue mechanism, a comprehensive EU-India trade agreement, Indian students in Germany etc. There are substantive segments on connectivity, rule of law and rules-based order in trade and investment, to name a few.

India cannot but welcome the decision of Germany to announce and embrace an Indo-Pacific strategy. This will strengthen democratic convergence, values and respect for and adherence to international law in the fastest growing part of the world; help enhance peace and prosperity; strengthen connectivity and the common fight against challenges to the global commons; and reorder the symmetry between the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific.

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