



# Metis

## Study

### Total Defence

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# Summary

**N**ew security challenges require concepts of total defence for the robustness, resilience and, ultimately, survival of modern societies. New types of warfare as well as the implications of climate change make a fundamental reform of total

defence in Germany inevitable. This study discusses the existing concept, identifies deficits and provides recommendations for action to sustainably strengthen Germany's warfighting and resilience capabilities.

## Hybrid threats as the new normal

The lines between internal and external security, between war and peace, are becoming increasingly blurred. Germany faces numerous security challenges that include both conventional military threats and newer hybrid types of warfare.<sup>1</sup> On top of this, there are overarching global challenges such as climate change and its security implications.<sup>2</sup>

Conventional threats in Europe have once again become virulent as a result of the Russian war against Ukraine, requiring an increase in capabilities in the area of national and collective defence. These not only include the capability to operate as a logistic hub for Allies and our own capability to deploy units on Alliance territory, but also the capability to provide these units with appropriate equipment, long-term material support, sufficient personnel strength and reserves to ensure their sustainability. The concept of warfighting capability is aimed in particular at providing these capabilities.

The term "hybrid threats" is used when asymmetric warfare is employed away from an acute source of conflict. Such threats form a permanent and latent state of conflict below the threshold of war. Hybrid approaches are part of the fourth generation of warfare (decentralised use of

force), which aims at subverting an adversary's psychological ability to conduct warfare, such as by using public pressure to force the hands of political decision-makers or by undermining societies and chipping away at trust in democratic structures and processes. Economic losses caused by sanction regimes against Russia, tariffs or disruptions of supply chains are used to influence social positions from the outside. The civilian population, public opinion and decision-makers are thus considered strategic priorities. By combining these approaches with fifth-generation warfare (non-kinetic warfare) – which primarily relies on social engineering, dissemination of disinformation, cyberattacks, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and autonomous systems – adversaries try to weaken modern societies by paralysing state structures and undermining their resilience and response capability.

The implications of climate change also come into play, as they lead to more extreme and frequent natural disasters and their destructive consequences. They threaten national security and the functionality of state structures in such a way that actors using hybrid methods may take advantage of climatic vulnerabilities. A future German total defence strategy, coupling readiness to defend against conventional conflicts with resilience to hybrid threats and the implications of climate change, must be based on this new normal and measure up to it. We must think along the lines of not only warfighting capability but also "resilience capability" if we are to be able to respond to today's challenges in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

<sup>1</sup> See "New hybrid threats", Metis Study No. 26 (July 2021); see "Trends and developments in hybrid threats", Metis Study No. 35 (June 2023).

<sup>2</sup> See "Scenarios: Effects of climate change on Bundeswehr missions", Metis Study No. 33 (March 2023); see "Scenarios for the effects of climate change on security policy in Germany", Metis Study No. 36 (July 2023).



### Total defence in Germany today

The concept of total defence in Germany is based on the 1989 Outline Directives for Total Defence. These directives are Germany's attempt to pursue a comprehensive approach that includes both military and civilian aspects to ensure national security and resilience to various threats. The protection of German citizens is considered a comprehensive interministerial task. While the Bundeswehr Concept takes care of the military aspects, the Civil Defence Concept deals with civilian preventive security. During times of peace, the federal states and municipalities are responsible for disaster control and crisis prevention. The federal government has the power of direction and supports and promotes the exchange of information. A national situation picture for civil protection is compiled in the Joint Information and Situation Centre of the German federal government and the federal states. As a member of NATO, Germany thus closely complies with Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Crisis prevention as a civilian task primarily comprises securing

the continuity of government functions, a robust energy supply, food and water resources, and resilient communication and transport systems. The federal states are supported by homeland security. Homeland security also comprises whole-of-government security provision tasks in times that do not constitute a state of defence. These tasks include national territorial tasks such as the protection of foreign forces as part of Host Nation Support (HNS) and the provision of subsidiary support through interdepartmental assistance in the event of a crisis. And so, during times of peace, the federal states are responsible for implementing the overall concept of civil defence as defined by the federal government, which may have the Bundeswehr support the federal states in their homeland security tasks. Meanwhile, in case of war, the federal government, through the Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance as the lead agency, is responsible for the protection of the population in the sense of civil defence, i.e. non-military measures to protect the population in the event of war.

	<b>Total defence</b> (1989 Outline Directives for Total Defence)	
<b>Component</b>	<b>Military</b>	<b>Civilian</b>
<b>Competent ministry</b>	Federal Ministry of Defence	Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community
<b>Capstone document</b>	Bundeswehr Concept (2018)	Civil Defence Concept (2016)
<b>Peacetime</b>	Homeland security tasks Subsidiary assistance(interdepartmental assistance) Host Nation Support	Crisis prevention Federal state crisis management (may request interdepartmental assistance from the federal government)
<b>Competent authority in peacetime</b>	National territorial commander (Bundeswehr Homeland Defence Command)	Federal states (with possible interdepartmental assistance from the federal government)
<b>State of defence</b>	National territorial defence	Civil defence
<b>Competent authority in a state of defence</b>	National territorial commander (Bundeswehr Homeland Defence Command)	Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance – has recourse to federal states' disaster control facilities
<b>Execution</b>	Regional territorial command, homeland security companies / regiments	Federal state authorities and organisations with security tasks, Federal Agency for Technical Relief, general administration
<b>Task</b>	National and collective defence (including transition of homeland security regiments to national territorial defence)	Maintain functioning of the state and government Civil defence (self-protection, warning the public, protective shelters, health protection, preparation and enforcement of stay-put policy, disaster control, protection of cultural property) Ensuring national emergency preparedness and providing the armed forces with necessary goods and services Supporting the armed forces in maintaining their defence capability and freedom of operation
<b>International component</b>	Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Article 42 (7) of the Treaty on European Union	Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty European Union Civil Protection Mechanism

Table 1 Overview total defence in Germany





In the latter case, the Bundeswehr's previous homeland security tasks will then be converted into national territorial defence tasks. What is lacking in the Basic Law, however, is a provision for cases in which Germany is no longer at peace but not yet at war. Hybrid threats fall into an obvious regulatory gap.

In the event of war, Germany focuses on collective defence as laid down in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. The Bundeswehr is responsible for national and collective defence and participates in international operations. This also includes participation in EU defence initiatives and EU missions. Officially, military and civilian defence are therefore organisationally independent of one another, but they are inextricably linked as elements of the concept of total defence (see Table 1).

To reflect technological developments, the Federal Office for Information Security is tasked with protecting government networks and critical infrastructure and with advising the private sector on cyber threats and security measures. Germany is also involved in international efforts to combat cybercrime and to improve resilience in the cyber sector. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the Federal Criminal Police Office are in charge of antiterrorism and internal security. These agencies work to prevent terrorist attacks, combat extremism and ensure the security of public space and critical infrastructure. The current concept thus assumes that the civilian pillar of total defence at the level of the federal states is always first to be exposed to a crisis situation. The federal government is involved in crisis prevention in both the military and the civilian sectors. It is only when a warlike situation has been declared that the federal government will also take on the lead role in the civilian sector.

### Deficiencies of total defence in Germany

The fundamental conceptual weakness of the current approach to total defence is that, in light of the security-political new normal described above, it seems outdated and parts of it are a relic of the Cold War era. The overarching outline directive, which holds the newer Bundeswehr Concept and the Civil Defence Concept together in conceptual terms, is intended to deal with conventional conflicts or natural disasters. Moreover, the prevailing assumption is that war and peace, the civilian and military spheres, will continue to be clearly distinguishable – a misconception in the age of hybrid warfare. Given that it dates back to 1989, the Outline Directive lacks references to more recent strategic concepts of NATO, to the role and legal framework of EU institutions and to coordination with them in case of transnational crisis situations. Current threats, such as those against critical infrastructure, and recent technological developments and their implications, such as in the cyber sector, are naturally not addressed by the Outline Directive at all. Private actors such as operators of systemically important services and critical infrastructure

(e.g. telecommunications, transport, energy) are only considered incidentally. Any involvement of the Federal Office for Information Security, for example, can only be indirectly inferred as the federal government's contribution, but its exact role and responsibility are not firmly established. Although some of these recent developments and challenges are addressed in the Bundeswehr Concept (2018) and the Civil Defence Concept (2016), they are not conceptually anchored in the Outline Directive.

Another fundamental weakness of the existing total defence concept is that, in hybrid or non-kinetic threat situations, differentiating between peace and wartime, determining one or the other and the associated responsibilities is virtually impossible. In this world of latent and overlapping threats consisting of hybrid wars and climate change, as outlined at the beginning, the carefree days of peace that would allow civilian actors at federal-state level to handle crisis management on their own (except in cases of natural disasters limited in terms of location and duration) are over. The comprehensive expertise, personnel, material and information that would be required at the level of the federal states in order to counter hybrid threats are also often lacking. It is thus practically inevitable that federal states will turn to the federal government for interdepartmental assistance. Given the current personnel and budget situation of both the federal government and the federal states, the intended functions of the individual elements of crisis prevention, civil defence, civil protection and homeland security are already pushed to their limits. The COVID-19 pandemic and flood disasters such as the one in Ahrweiler in 2021 show that the Bundeswehr's homeland security tasks have already become a basis for planning instead of a complementary support service. In the event of multiple large-scale emergency situations or war, the current approach is limited in its resilience and sustainability.

As a central support service for crisis prevention and interdepartmental assistance, homeland security is dependent on the personnel strength of the reserve and suffers from a shortage of personnel and new recruits, just like the Bundeswehr as a whole. This shortage of personnel will be exacerbated when, in a state of defence, homeland security contingents are transferred to national territorial defence and then have to take on both homeland security and defence tasks at the same time. Similar shortages of personnel, capabilities and material are also present at federal-state level. Most federal states lack heavy operational equipment, for example, and this deficit must often be compensated by the Bundeswehr's reserve capacities. There is also a need for improvement when it comes to the common operational picture at the Joint Information and Situation Centre of the federal government and the federal states. Information exchange in and via the Centre continues to occur on a case-by-case basis rather than being institutionalised and remains voluntary.



Its primary purpose is the exchange of information between the federal government and the federal states at the strategic level. Data that could be shared with the command and control information (C2I) systems of the civilian and military response forces involved at the operational level are only sporadically available. Because there also are a number of different C2I systems in use, mutually agreed standards for information exchange among civilian authorities and between civilian and military response forces are lacking. Information security obstacles often prevent the consolidation and coordination of information as well. Civilian actors also often do not have the simulation systems required to train for different crisis situations, employ damage models obtained by predictive analysis and use these results to help them make decisions.

These deficits are partly due to conceptual and legal frameworks, slow transformation processes, shortages of personnel and resources, and a lack of a security culture. Future challenges require an unbiased discussion on reforming the structure, equipment and organisation, personnel recruitment, training, and implementation of modern total defence. The results of such a whole-of-society process must be transparently introduced into parliamentary decision-making and social discourse to improve Germany's resilience and, in an emergency, its warfighting capability.

### Food for thought

The following proposals for increasing Germany's resilience and warfighting capability are intended as productive provocation. Firstly, they are not backed by a parliamentary or societal majority. This means that, secondly, the necessary financial means, estimated at 10 to 15 billion per year, are not available. They would, thirdly, also have to be reviewed in terms of their compliance with applicable laws. Fourthly, they even exceed much of what can be found in international comparison and in partner nations.

In other words: The following ideas outline ideal solutions to optimally prepare for anticipated security challenges and climate-induced disasters that Europe and Germany will be facing in the coming decades. These ideas are suited to raising awareness of the reforms that would foreseeably be necessary to manage major regular crises in 10 to 20 years.

A wide-ranging social discourse that examines the pros and cons, defines targets and generates democratic social support for an eventual transformation process is vital in determining whether ideas from this study can and should be put into practice at all – and if so, how.

It is important to consider that a lack of preparation as we advance towards a climate crisis or, at worst, even a large-scale war in Europe will come at a much greater cost. Financial concerns thus cannot be the final argument when it comes to total defence – the key question is rather one of political and social will, foresight and the realisation that prevention is always better than damage control.

It should also be noted that the reintroduction of conscription in Sweden as well as existing models such as those in Israel and Finland show that democratic nations can successfully ensure increased resilience and warfighting capability in modern societies. The following section describes the key points of a possible major reform of total defence, divided by subject areas.

### Total defence concept

A new Total defence strategy must prepare Germany for current and future challenges. It is therefore necessary to revise the outline directives, to clarify, by law if necessary, the responsibilities and capabilities of the federal government and the federal states and to strengthen international components and integration. Integration of the German total defence strategy into a future European total defence strategy is also expedient because of international interdependence and the transnational character of hybrid threats.

- Substantial update of the Outline Directives for Total Defence
- Expansion to include hybrid threats, implications of climate change, critical infrastructure, and cyber and information security
- Integration into existing international mechanisms of the EU and NATO
- Integration into a future total defence strategy of the EU

### Civil conscription and civilian reserve

Introducing civil conscription for a comprehensive, twelve-month general service duty for all school leavers can sustainably counter the personnel shortages of the Bundeswehr, fire services, the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), hospitals and nursing services as well as charitable, environmental and social institutions. This civil conscription should also include EU citizens resident in Germany. It also creates a personnel basis for military and civilian reserves and strengthens Germany's resilience capability like no other measure. Selection and induction offices must be gradually reintroduced to muster conscripts alongside civilian institutions. Conscripts can choose between military service and civilian service. These options can be presented to young people approaching conscription age by youth officers of the Bundeswehr, the fire services, the Federal Agency for Technical Relief and social services in the context of extracurricular information events.

Conscripts should be paid at least €800 a month for their service and this period should count towards their pension entitlement. If they go on to train in a profession that relates to the work they performed as a conscript, their year of service should count as the first year of training. Co-financing with private sector workplaces should be considered.



People who have served their year in a civilian institution may seamlessly transition to regular employment with that institution if both parties are interested. Voluntary membership in a civilian reserve unit should also be offered as an alternative. Those who acquire particularly systemically important skills for their post-service career can volunteer for the hidden reserve (specialists) once they have completed their professional or academic training. This hidden reserve could also be opened up to residents from other NATO countries. To support the gradual transformation process, the maximum age for reservists should be increased from 65 to 70 for administrative tasks and training support.

- Introduction of civil conscription for a twelve-month period of general service duty for all school leavers aged 18 or older
- Option to choose between military service and civilian service
- Voluntary transition of civilian service conscripts to civilian reserves
- Declared transition of civilian service conscripts to hidden reserves
- Extension of civil conscription to EU citizens resident in Germany
- Opening up of the hidden reserve to citizens of other NATO countries resident in Germany

#### **Reform of homeland security through establishment of a National Guard**

Civil conscription should accomplish two objectives for the military sector. Firstly, to recruit from the pool of service conscripts a significant proportion of temporary-career volunteers and career service members (responsibility of the Bundeswehr careers centres) for national and collective defence, international crisis management and training missions. Secondly, to generate personnel for the National Guard, which will replace the current concept of homeland defence (responsibility of the selection and induction offices), not least for the purpose of compatibility with internationally recognised nomenclature. This personnel will serve a range of purposes, including subsidiary assistance in the event of domestic disasters as well as protection of critical infrastructure, crisis prevention and national defence in a state of defence. This new National Guard, which is to be developed from the current homeland security concept, also serves as a general reserve for the Bundeswehr. It is necessary to establish close local cooperation with civilian authorities, emergency and rescue services, and private sector industrial security services so the National Guard can perform its tasks. Separating the National Guard from the professional army takes some of the pressure off the latter

and allows it to focus on national and collective defence, international crisis management and training.

- Voluntary transition of military conscripts to the military reserve
- Establishment of a National Guard (evolving from homeland security), separation from professional army
- Selection and induction offices responsible for mustering, reserves and National Guard
- Bundeswehr careers centres focus on temporary-career volunteers and career service members
- Separation of the roles of the professional army (national and collective defence) and the National Guard (interdepartmental assistance)
- Local coordination of National Guard with civilian authorities and systemically important private-sector actors
- National Guard as general reserve

#### **National exchange of information**

For total defence to function in a federal framework, the national exchange of information must be institutionalised. To this end, a national command and control (C2) system should be established, which must include monitoring, simulation and exercise components, predictive analysis capability, and decision-making support for crisis prevention and mission support. This German C2 system should then be made available to all civilian, private-sector and military actors and agencies, for example under the direction of the German Joint Information and Situation Centre or the Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance. Existing C2 systems must be integrated through technical harmonisation. For reasons of information security, such a German C2 system should initially only be used to provide and exchange unclassified data and information. Integration of sensor data (such as satellite and drone data) on a case-by-case basis, digital requests for interdepartmental assistance, and blue force tracking (to provide unit location information) are essential for decision-making support in the event of a crisis. Such a German C2 system could also be Germany's contribution to information exchange within the European framework. Crisis prevention, disaster control, national and collective defence, civil defence and civil emergency management require a lot of personnel and represent a permanent prevention process, which is why they must be implemented through whole-of society and whole-of-government efforts.

- Provision of a national command and control system (German C2 system)



- Definition of technical standards and harmonisation with existing monitoring and C2 systems at federal-state level and with emergency and rescue services
- Establishing permanent monitoring based on a common operation picture at the Joint Information and Situation Centre
- Implementing a digital procedure for requesting interdepartmental assistance
- Expanding civil-military cooperation on the management of hybrid risks and natural disasters
- Using military simulation systems for crisis management exercises with civilian actors through scenario-based capability development and resilience analysis
- Establishing recurring digital civil-military exercises complementary to live crisis management exercises
- Establishing civil-military blue force tracking for decision-making support
- Providing information to operational vehicles throughout Germany and using them as possible sensors



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