

## A Strengthening Germany

by **Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

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September's general elections in Germany saw the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), led by Chancellor Angela Merkel, remain in power. The CDU formed a conservative coalition with the Free Democratic Party (FDP) led by Guido Westerwelle, but without a doubt, the Chancellor's party will be at the helm, particularly in the area of foreign policy. With amicable German-American relations over the last several decades, it would seem that they would continue to be "steady as she goes" into the foreseeable future. However, the signs are that rough seas are ahead.

Westerwelle, the next Foreign Minister, may indeed want to craft a pro-American foreign policy. His own views fit very nicely with American aims. For instance, the FDP campaigned on staying committed to the Afghan War. Like U.S. President Barack Obama, Westerwelle wants to pressure both Russia and China on human-rights issues and also desires the removal of nuclear warheads from Germany. On the questions of Iran and Israel-Palestine, he supports the current American approach of engagement and dialogue.

However, Germany has its own self-interests that will surely trump any altruistic desire to remain a staunch junior partner of America, no matter how enthusiastic both Germans in general and the government are about Obama himself. Having broken free of its Cold War restraints, Germany is beginning to use its considerable weight in Europe and elsewhere to proclaim that her presence will be felt on the world stage.

Berlin's initial unilateral action has been seen in the energy sector. Most of Germany's energy—in the forms of oil and natural gas—comes from Russia, making its industry reliant on Moscow's whim. During past winters, Russia has used its power to threaten to shut down its westward pipelines as a cudgel to force price concessions on Europe, and Germany does not want to be manipulated again.

One of the new government's policies concerns its aging nuclear power plants. The plan is to extend the life of the current reactors and to begin construction on new ones, thereby reducing the country's dependence on Russian energy. Further, to offset Moscow's displeasure in losing the German market, Berlin wants to invest in Russian ventures and to build oil and gas lines through Germany and/or the nearby Baltic Sea to become a conduit of Russian energy to other European nations. As a bonus, Germany would earn revenue by charging transit fees to recipient countries.

In Europe, Germany is undoubtedly the dominant state in terms of geography, population, and economic strength on the continent—with only France as a distant rival—and it is using its heft to push its objectives in the European Union. In tandem with France, Germany is the main force behind the retry of ratifying the Lisbon Treaty and subsequently the selection of an EU president and foreign minister. Once those things are a *fait accompli*, Berlin's agenda—moderated only by an often-compliant France and a currently weakened Britain—will effectively be Europe's agenda. With the combined economies of the EU states behind it, Germany's voice will have to be taken seriously in Washington, Moscow, and Beijing.

In addition, Germany recently crossed another boundary line that divorces it from its post-World-War-II passivity. Just this spring, German military forces took part in a two-week offensive in

northern Afghanistan, for the first time using heavy weapons and armored vehicles in firefights in an effort to repulse the Taliban from the region. Germany's 4,300 troops are now the third-largest national contingent in Afghanistan, trailing only the U.S. and Britain. It is likely that additional troops, perhaps as many as 2,000, will be sent to the region when the U.S. military's Afghan surge finally takes place.

And it is not just the German government that is becoming more confident. On May 23, 2009, Germans celebrated the Federal Republic's 60th anniversary with an outburst of German pride, waving thousands of black, red, and yellow flags, a practice once frowned upon as too nationalistic—too Nazi or neo-Nazi. In addition, the University of Stuttgart published a study earlier this year, reporting that 75 percent of respondents were proud to be German "despite the country's history," which was twice as many as responded positively to a similar question in 2001. As the older generation and its guilt continue to wane, the German people feel increasingly patriotic and unhampered by the nation's aggressive past.

As an analyst wrote in Stratfor's September 29, 2009, Geopolitical Diary, "The Return of Germany":

Germany is awake. It is thinking for itself. It has its own policy preferences, its own energy preferences and its own security preferences. It already is showing signs of developing autonomy in foreign policy and energy matters, and it is very likely only a matter of time before it starts developing autonomy in security matters.

This isn't your father's (or even your grandfather's) Germany. This is your great-grandfather's Germany.

The church of God has long identified Germany with the Bible's fierce Assyrians—"the rod of My anger" (Isaiah 10:5), sent to punish the idolatrous Israelites for their ungodliness. In verse 7, God remarks on the Assyrian character in a way that seems to fit Germany historically: ". . . it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off not a few nations." The nations of Europe have long feared German dominance on the continent for just this reason, having seen the horrific destruction caused by two German-instigated World Wars. To be sure, even in this time of peaceful relations among Western nations, there are many Europeans nervously wondering what Berlin will do next.