

## PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES FROM 1945 TO THE PRESENT

Conference at the GHI, March 10, 2003. Conveners: Dirk Schumann (GHI) and Georg Schild (GHI/University of Bonn). Participants: Dr. Cathleen Fisher (AICGS), Michael R. Hayse (Richard Stockton College), Gary LaFree (University of Maryland), Ursula Lehmkuhl (Free University Berlin), Alf Lüdtke (Max Planck Institute, Göttingen), Christof Mauch (GHI), Bernd Schäfer (GHI).

Against the background of the looming war with Iraq and growing German-American tensions, this conference brought together scholars from both sides of the Atlantic to discuss the problem of "security." The goal was to explore the term's different meanings—social security, security from crime, and military security—and to analyze the perception of security in the United States and Germany. The conference addressed a number of questions, such as why Americans and Germans have different demands on the social security systems of their countries, under what circumstances they consider themselves safe from crime, and what lies at the heart of the different perceptions of national security concerns. The conference was divided into three panels. In each panel, a German and an American scholar talked about one particular aspect of security in one country.

The conference started with a panel on perceptions of social security. Georg Schild described the historical development of the American "semi-welfare" state since the 1930s and pointed to differences between the German and American welfare states. Whereas the German welfare state is middle-class oriented and accepts large financial redistributions, the U.S. welfare state emphasizes contribution-based programs and anti-poverty measures. Both systems are deeply rooted in national traditions, and both systems face problems in the long term. Inequality has reached such high proportions in the United States that the very social fabric of the country is strained. But the German social welfare state has problems, too, as Michael Hayse pointed out. He agreed that the American and German welfare states were products of distinct historical developments. The West German government gained legitimacy after 1948 in part because it provided social security to its citizens. Today, however, the welfare state has reached enormous proportions, and current taxpayers fear that the state will not be able to support them in the future. The German government has thus far reacted inadequately to this problem.

In the second panel, Alf Lüdtke and Gary LaFree compared the perceptions of security with respect to crime in both countries. Lüdtke em-

phasized the rebuilding of the West German police force against the background of the “criminality of misery” in the early postwar years. The “hunger experience” framed the perception of crime after 1945. This experience subsided in later years and gave way to other perceptions of crime in a pluralistic society. At the same time, the police tried to find their appropriate role between the restoration of masculinity after the lost war and the image of “friend and helper.” Lüdtke and LaFree agreed that the formation of perceptions of crime within a society is a rather complex process. LaFree pointed out that after an immediate postwar period with low crime rates, the United States saw a “crime boom” in the period 1961–1974. In those years, however, there were few public debates about crime. It was only after the crime rate reached a plateau at a relatively high rate that public perception shifted. Politicians such as Senator Barry Goldwater called for stiffer penalties. As a result, the government shifted its crime-fighting resources increasingly from prevention to the “back end approach” of punishment. The 1990s saw a drop in the number of violent crimes largely because of the strong economy and because of high incarceration rates. Lüdtke and LaFree worried that the current trend of wealthy individuals surrounding themselves with private protection, such as gated communities and bodyguards, or “bubble security,” is an unhealthy development because it undermines the security from crime for the average citizen.

The third panel dealt with different interpretations of military security in Germany and the United States after 1945. Ursula Lehmkuhl described how American perceptions of national security evolved after 1945 as a result of the emerging Cold War. She pointed to the importance of the end of the East-West confrontation for American military planning. Currently, America follows contradictory trends. The administration believes that the promotion of American values is important to American security. At the same time, the administration is primarily concerned with a narrowly defined homeland security. Lehmkuhl analyzed U.S. policy on a number of different levels—as ideological confrontation, as a debate between nationalists and internationalists, and as a confrontation between “security” and “liberty.” She deplored the current state of transatlantic relations and considered it hard to repair in the future. Cathleen Fisher, too, emphasized the precarious state of transatlantic relations without, however, trying to predict the future of that relationship. She reminded the audience of the troubled relationship between Germany and the United States since the end of the Second World War. NATO had had serious debates about the introduction of new strategic plans. However, she pointed out that the glue cementing Germany and the United States in the past has disappeared. Europe has turned inward toward completing the process of integration. The European dream of security (against

wars within Europe) has been fulfilled. The American perception of security is global and differs from the European one.

Different perceptions of security vie for attention in Germany and the United States. The final discussion made clear that the German security debate centers around social security, whereas the U.S. debate focuses almost exclusively on the military aspect. Allocations of money every year in each country make the different perceptions obvious. For those concerned with the state of transatlantic relations, there was only hope that after the current crisis subsides, German-American relations can find common ground in the debate about security.

*Georg Schild*