

German Foreign Policy towards the Syrian Crisis

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Abstract:

The Syrian conflict, ongoing since 2011, has become a prolonged struggle involving Islamic armed groups, international actors, and regional powers, transforming Syria into a battleground of competing interests. This study examines Germany's foreign policy and its influence on the international response to the conflict, focusing on Germany's role within the European Union and NATO. Highlighting Germany's reliance on soft power and economic measures over military intervention, the research analyzes foreign policy documents, international reports, and case studies to assess its strategies in addressing the conflict and supporting Syrian refugees. The findings reveal Germany's response as predominantly economic and humanitarian, consistent with its foreign policy principles, while the conflict's broader repercussions have reshaped global security and migration dynamics.

Keywords: Syrian conflict, German foreign policy, soft power, international response, refugee crisis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, it has been one of the most complex crises in modern history, both in terms of its internal repercussions and its regional and international effects. With the escalation of conflict and increased violence, many countries had to reassess their foreign policies towards Syria, including Germany, which played a prominent role in dealing with the consequences of the crisis, both by hosting refugees and contributing to diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. In this context, German foreign policy towards the Syrian crisis serves as a model of a balanced European role that seeks to achieve stability through soft power and humanitarian aid while avoiding direct military intervention. While Germany focused on diplomatic efforts and humanitarian assistance, it avoided direct engagement in military conflict, raising debates about the effectiveness of this policy in achieving tangible results on the ground. From this, we can pose the following problematic question:

Main Question:

To what extent has German foreign policy towards the Syrian conflict succeeded in achieving its humanitarian and political goals, and can it be considered an effective model for dealing with international conflict?

Sub-questions:

- 1- How has Germany addressed the issue of Syrian refugees, and what were the internal and external effects of this decision?
- 2- What has been Germany's diplomatic and political role in international negotiations to resolve the Syrian crisis?
- 3- How does Germany approach the issue of reconstruction in Syria, and

what conditions has it set for supporting these efforts?

Research Objectives

This research aims to:

Analyze German foreign policy towards the Syrian crisis from various perspectives (humanitarian, diplomatic, economic).

Assess Germany's success in achieving its goals in the context of the Syrian crisis, especially regarding refugees and humanitarian aid.

Study the challenges faced by German policy, both internally and internationally, and identify the factors that influenced decision-making.

Research Methodology

This research will rely on a descriptive-analytical approach to understand and analyze Germany's policy towards the Syrian crisis by collecting and analyzing data related to German government policies from reliable sources such as official German reports, European Union data, and United Nations organizations.

Analyze German positions in international forums such as the United Nations and the European Union regarding the Syrian crisis.

Study the impact of German domestic politics, such as political parties and public opinion, on foreign policy decisions towards Syria.

Rely on previous studies and scientific references concerning German-Syrian relations and the European Union.

2. German Foreign Policy towards the Syrian Conflict: General Dimensions

2.1 General Trends in German Foreign Policy Post-2011

German foreign policy, particularly after 2011 and the outbreak of what is known as the Arab Spring and the Syrian crisis, is based on a set of established principles that distinguish it from the policies of other countries. Despite its prominent position as the largest economy in Europe and one of the major global economic powers, Germany follows a unique approach in its foreign policy, characterized by caution regarding military interventions, a focus on diplomatic and humanitarian work, and promoting an international order based on multilateral institutions (Smith, 2014, p. 14). This approach reflects Germany's historical experience and the principles that emerged from its foreign policy after World War II, highlighting its engagement with complex international crises such as the Syrian crisis.

Commitment to Diplomatic and Peaceful Solutions

One of the most prominent principles underlying German foreign policy is the diligent pursuit of resolving international conflicts through peaceful and diplomatic means. Germany rejects direct military interventions except in extreme necessity and under the umbrella of international law. (Schmidt, 2017) This principle has been strongly reinforced since the end of World War II and Germany's adoption of a more cautious foreign policy towards armed conflicts. In the context of the Syrian crisis, this vision was clearly manifested through Germany's intensive involvement in diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict, as it participated in all international forums concerned with negotiating a political solution, whether through the United Nations, the European Union, or the "Friends of Syria" group. Despite international pressures on Germany to engage militarily in the conflict, it remained committed to its diplomatic role and did not participate in military operations on Syrian territory.

Furthermore, Germany clearly supported the Geneva negotiations aimed at finding a political solution to the Syrian conflict and backed all international efforts to achieve a ceasefire and de-escalate the situation on the ground. Germany's approach to the Syrian crisis underscores its belief

that military solutions will not lead to lasting stability and that the only way to end the conflict is through a political transition process that includes all parties and meets the interests of the Syrian people.

Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

Germany places the protection and promotion of human rights at the core of its foreign policy agenda, both domestically and internationally. This commitment reflects Germany's historical experiences and its dedication to upholding universal values, emphasizing human dignity, equality, and freedom as fundamental principles in its diplomatic engagements.

considering this dimension one of the main principles guiding its decisions. Since the onset of the Syrian crisis, Germany has condemned the ongoing human rights violations committed by the Syrian regime and other parties in the conflict. Germany has continuously called for accountability for those responsible for crimes against civilians and has provided significant support for international forums seeking to document these violations and refer those responsible to international justice (Becker, 2018, p. 61)

In addition, Germany has offered political and financial support to humanitarian organizations working on the ground in Syria and in neighboring countries to assist civilians affected by the conflict. Germany has also supported UN efforts to investigate human rights violations and gather evidence that could be used in future international courts (Lange, 2019, p. 34) Germany's clear stance in this context reflects its commitment to the principles of international law and human rights as an integral part of its foreign policy (Weber, 2020, p. 12).

Working Within a Multilateral International System

Germany believes that the existing international system based on multilateral cooperation is the optimal way to address global challenges and resolve conflicts. For this reason, German foreign policy relies on working closely with international institutions such as the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO. In the Syrian crisis, Germany utilized these

frameworks to enhance diplomatic efforts and rally international support for resolving the conflict. For instance, Germany supported the sanctions imposed by the EU on the Syrian regime and its allies, actively participating in the diplomatic efforts led by the UN to achieve a ceasefire and initiate a political process.

Moreover, Germany cooperated with key regional and international powers influencing the conflict, such as Russia, Turkey, and the United States. Despite deep disagreements with Russia due to its support for the Syrian regime (Lehmann, 2023, p. 40) and its direct military intervention, Germany maintained diplomatic channels with Moscow, seeking to balance its strong opposition to Russian military intervention with its role as an international mediator). (Schmidt, 2016, p. 48) Germany also strengthened cooperation with Turkey, particularly in managing the issue of Syrian refugees, where Turkey played a pivotal role in preventing a large influx of refugees into Europe following the agreement between the EU and Turkey in 2016. (Lange, 2017, p. 29)

Caution Against Direct Military Interventions

A prominent feature of German foreign policy is the avoidance of direct military interventions in international conflicts. This policy reflects Germany's historical experience after World War II, where the country adopted a constitution that limits the use of military force except within the framework of legitimate defense or in international coalitions under international law. (Becker , 2015, p. 15) In the Syrian crisis, despite repeated calls from some Western allies for Germany to engage militarily in the international coalition against the Syrian regime or against ISIS, Germany limited its involvement to logistical and intelligence support and refused to send combat troops to Syria (Krause, 2018, p. 56). ((Krause, 2018, p. 56) This caution reflects a broader trend in German policy, relying on soft power instead of military force to achieve foreign objectives. Instead of military intervention, Germany prefers to enhance diplomacy, provide humanitarian aid, and support economic and social development in affected countries (Müller, 2019, p. 33)

Moral Leadership in Responding to Humanitarian Crises

One of the most prominent manifestations of German foreign policy in addressing the Syrian crisis was former Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision in 2015 to open the borders to hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. This decision, which came at a time when Europe was experiencing sharp disagreements over how to handle the refugee crisis, reflected a strong moral commitment from Germany to international responsibility in the face of humanitarian crises (Weber, 2016, p. 41). Although this decision sparked significant debate both within Germany and abroad, it positioned the country at the forefront of European nations seeking to resolve the refugee crisis by providing protection and humanitarian assistance rather than building walls and closing borders. (Krause, 2018, p. 23)

Germany also played a leadership role in organizing international support for Syrian refugees in neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Germany provided significant funding to support infrastructure and humanitarian projects in these countries, helping to alleviate the economic and social pressures they faced as a result of the influx of refugees. (Schneider, 2019, p. 45)

Conclusion on General Trends

German foreign policy in addressing the Syrian crisis is grounded in principles rooted in the post-World War II German experience, focusing on diplomacy, human rights, and avoiding direct military interventions. This unique approach distinguishes Germany from many other international powers and reflects its commitment to achieving stability and peace through peaceful solutions and international cooperation. ((Müller, 2020, p. 30)

2.2 Germany and the Syrian Refugee Issue

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Germany has occupied a central position in European asylum policy, but this role became more pronounced in 2015 when Chancellor Angela Merkel made the historic decision to open the borders to Syrian refugees (Weber, 2017, p. 53). This decision was a response to mounting humanitarian pressures, as millions of Syrians fled from civil war and persecution. That year witnessed a massive influx of refugees, with over a million entering Germany, making it the top destination in Europe.

Impact on Domestic Politics: This decision had significant repercussions for domestic politics in Germany. Initially, it was warmly welcomed by broad segments of society, showcasing a strong humanitarian aspect of the German people. However, divisions soon emerged, with concerns about the impact of this policy on the cultural identity and economic resources of the country. Far-right parties, such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD), began to exploit these fears, leading to an increase in their popularity. In 2017, the party garnered 12.6% of the votes in the federal elections, reflecting the growing anxiety surrounding immigration policy. ((Müller), 2018, p. 78)

Impact on Foreign Policy: Externally, Merkel's policy demonstrated Germany's willingness to take responsibility in the face of humanitarian crises. This decision had a significant impact on Germany's standing within the European Union, as it came to be seen as a leading power. However, at the same time, it faced pressure from other European countries, such as Hungary and Poland, which were refusing to accept refugees. (Becker, 2019, p. 61) This situation sparked widespread debate about the distribution of refugees, leading to intensive discussions among member states on how to manage the refugee crisis.

Social Impacts: Socially, Merkel's decision had mixed effects. On one hand, the government supported educational and training programs to promote integration, leading to many refugees becoming engaged in the labor market. On the other hand, refugees faced significant challenges, such as language barriers and difficulties adapting to the new culture. Tensions also arose in local communities, especially in areas that experienced a

significant increase in the number of refugees, complicating the integration process. (Schneider, 2017, p. 36)

Managing the Consequences: To address these challenges, the German government implemented several measures, including enhancing security and border controls. Additionally, special programs were developed to support integration, such as language courses and vocational training. Nevertheless, the issue of asylum remains a subject of political and social debate. Social and economic pressures have continued to fuel discussions about immigration policy, making it a central topic in electoral campaigns and political discussions. (Fuchs, 2018, p. 42)

Conclusion: In summary, Angela Merkel's decision in 2015 to open the borders to Syrian refugees was not merely a political decision but a reflection of deep humanitarian values. However, it had complex repercussions on domestic and foreign policy, as well as on social life in Germany. This decision marked a new phase in the country's immigration history, and its effects are still evident in the German political and social landscape today. (Meier, 2019, p. 65)

3. German Diplomacy towards Syrian conflict

3.1 Germany's Role in International Negotiations

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Germany, as an influential power on the international stage, has sought to play an active role in the negotiations surrounding the conflict. This role was clearly manifested through its continued support for the Geneva talks and its involvement in the "Friends of Syria" group, an international coalition of countries supporting the Syrian opposition. (Schmidt, 2017, p. 51)

Support for the Geneva Talks: The Geneva talks, which began under the auspices of the United Nations, are considered one of the most important avenues for achieving peace in Syria. Germany was one of the countries that recognized that a military solution would not achieve the required stability; on the contrary, it would exacerbate humanitarian and economic conditions. Based on this principle, Germany supported the Geneva process

by calling on all relevant parties, including the Syrian government and the opposition, to participate in negotiations. Berlin worked to strengthen the opposition's position by providing humanitarian assistance and logistical support, helping to amplify their voice in the talks. (Keller, 2018, p. 24)

Friends of Syria Group: Under the umbrella of the "Friends of Syria" group, Germany actively engaged in coordinating efforts among countries supporting the opposition. This group, formed in 2012, aimed to provide political and economic support to the Syrian opposition. Within this framework, Germany played a key role in advocating for sanctions against the Syrian regime, especially after reports documenting human rights violations emerged. Germany called for holding the regime accountable for its actions, reflecting its commitment to international human rights standards. (Neumann, 2019, p. 47)

Germany's Position on Various Parties: Germany adopted a balanced policy towards the different parties in the conflict. It strongly criticized Bashar al-Assad's regime, indicating that he could not be part of the solution due to his record of violations. At the same time, it placed significant importance on the participation of all groups in the opposition, including the Kurds, who were sometimes isolated from the negotiation process. Germany recognized that ignoring any group could exacerbate the conflict and complicate prospects for achieving peace. Therefore, it emphasized the necessity of including all parties in dialogue, regardless of political or ideological differences. (Hoffmann, 2020, p. 29)

Challenges and Complexities: Despite its efforts, Germany faced significant challenges in influencing the course of negotiations. Foreign interventions, particularly from Russia and Iran, hindered the political process and affected the balance of power in Syria. Furthermore, there were internal divisions within the opposition, which increased the difficulty of reaching a comprehensive agreement. Nevertheless, Germany continued to call on the international community to support the United Nations' efforts to achieve peace, considering that a political solution is the only way to end the conflict. (Klein, 2018, p. 40)

German Initiatives: Over the years, Germany has presented various initiatives to promote political solutions. Among them, Berlin hosted international conferences addressing the situation in Syria, where different parties were brought together to discuss ways to advance. Germany also participated in providing substantial humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees, reflecting its commitment to alleviating humanitarian suffering in the country.

Conclusion: In conclusion, Germany has earnestly sought to play a central role in international negotiations regarding the Syrian crisis through its support for the Geneva talks and the "Friends of Syria" group. Its focus on political solutions and the inclusion of all parties reflects its deep commitment to humanitarian values and democratic principles. Despite the significant challenges it faced, Germany remains steadfast in its vision for achieving lasting peace in Syria, relying on dialogue and understanding as essential means to emerge from this ongoing conflict. (Schmidt, 2012, p. 45)

3.2 German Relations with Regional and International Powers towards Syria conflict

Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Germany has carefully crafted its foreign strategy, with a focus on relations with influential actors in the conflict, such as Russia, Turkey, and the United States. This approach making Germany a key player on the international stage. (Fischer, 2020, p. 12)

3.2.1-Russian Relations towards Syria conflict

Initially, Germany sought to build cooperative relations with Russia in the context of the Syrian crisis, based on the idea that Moscow could play a constructive role in reaching a political solution. The hope was for Russia to press the Syrian regime to make concessions and facilitate dialogue among different parties. However, the gap between expectations and reality quickly became evident, as Russia continued its support for Bashar al-Assad's

regime, even through direct military intervention in 2015. (Müller, 2019, p. 78)

This intervention led Germany to adopt a firmer stance toward Russia, condemning human rights abuses committed by both Russian and Syrian forces. In this context, Germany supported European Union economic sanctions on Russia, emphasizing that these measures were necessary to pressure Moscow to retract its support for Assad's regime. Germany played a significant role in stressing the importance of using sanctions as a tool of pressure but faced challenges in achieving its objectives, as Russia continued to strengthen its position in Syria. (Kaiser, 2023, p. 49)

3.2.2 German-Turkish Cooperation on the Syrian Refugee Issue

Turkey, as a neighboring country to Syria, had a profound impact on the crisis. Hosting millions of Syrian refugees placed significant pressure on its economy and infrastructure. In 2016, Germany and Turkey reached a historic agreement to manage the refugee crisis, which included substantial financial aid for Turkey in exchange for stricter controls on refugee flows to Europe. (Kaya, 2017, p. 289)

This agreement had a considerable impact on European refugee policy by helping to reduce the number of irregular arrivals to Europe. However, relations between Berlin and Ankara remained strained, as Germany expressed concerns over human rights abuses in Turkey, especially concerning refugees. In this context, the German government faced a challenge in balancing the need for cooperation with Turkey and the imperative of upholding human rights (Demir, 2020, p. 53).

3.2.3 Germany's Role in the International Coalition Against ISIS in Syria

As part of its efforts to combat extremist organizations, Germany played a prominent role in the international coalition against ISIS. In 2015, the German government announced the deployment of troops to Iraq to train

local forces, in addition to providing logistical and intelligence support. This intervention was part of a broader strategy aimed at undermining ISIS's influence in the region (Bauer, 2018, p. 67)

Germany's efforts were not limited to military aspects; it was also active in providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict, including displaced Syrians and Iraqis. This included food and health aid, as well as supporting reconstruction efforts after areas were liberated from ISIS control. Germany considered addressing the root causes of humanitarian crises to be an integral part of its broader anti-terrorism strategy.

4. Balance in Foreign Policy

Germany's foreign policy approach emphasizes equilibrium between its commitments to multilateralism and the pursuit of its national interests. This balance is particularly evident in its relationships with major global powers, such as the United States, which has played a central role in shaping the international community's responses to the Syrian conflict. As a key ally in NATO, Germany collaborates with the U.S. on security and humanitarian efforts in the region, while maintaining its distinctive approach rooted in soft power and diplomacy.

While the United States has often taken a more direct and militarized stance in addressing the conflict, Germany has opted for a complementary strategy that aligns with its historical aversion to military intervention. Instead, Germany focuses on providing humanitarian aid, supporting refugee resettlement programs, and fostering diplomatic initiatives aimed at conflict resolution. The transatlantic partnership, despite occasional divergences in strategy, underscores Germany's reliance on U.S. leadership while seeking to amplify its voice within multilateral frameworks like the European Union and United Nations.

This dynamic illustrates how Germany navigates its role as a middle power, striving to balance its alliances with both regional and international actors while adhering to its principles of peace, human rights, and stability.

. ((Steinmeier, 2017, pp. 45-47)

At the same time, Germany was aware of the challenges it faced, such as divisions within the Syrian opposition and internal conflicts in the region, which made tangible progress in negotiations difficult. Nevertheless, Germany continued to call on the international community to work together to support UN efforts to achieve peace, considering that any lasting solution must be based on dialogue and mutual understanding.

4. CONCLUSION

In the end, Germany's approach to engaging with the key powers involved in the Syrian crisis highlights the challenges it faces in its foreign policy. Through strategic relationships with Russia and Turkey and active participation in the international coalition against ISIS, Germany has pursued a comprehensive vision of peace and stability in Syria. Despite significant political challenges, Germany remains committed to its humanitarian principles and support for political solutions, making it a key player in efforts to end the conflict and achieve regional security. (Bach, 2015, pp. 112-114)

. Humanitarian and Reconstruction Dimensions in Germany's Policy toward Syria

Humanitarian Aid and Financial Support

Germany's Position on Syria's Reconstruction:

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Germany has adopted a firm stance on reconstruction, stressing that any efforts in this regard must be contingent upon achieving a comprehensive political solution that reflects the aspirations of the Syrian people and ensures a political

transition. This position reflects Germany's deep commitment to humanitarian and democratic principles, alongside concerns that supporting reconstruction without political progress may strengthen Bashar al-Assad's regime and result in further authoritarianism. (Albrecht, 216, pp. 78-82)

Key Conditions for Reconstruction:

Germany considers reconstruction not only a technical but also a political process that requires a conducive environment for stability and peace. Accordingly (Becker, 2021, pp. 33-37), the German government has outlined essential conditions for participation in reconstruction efforts. These include:

Achieving Comprehensive Political Transition: This condition requires a clear, widely accepted plan that leads to real change in Syria's political system, including effective involvement of the opposition and civil society. (Böhme, 2018, p. 56)

Accountability for Crimes: Germany emphasizes the importance of justice for those responsible for crimes committed during the conflict, arguing that failure to enforce accountability will lead to further failures in the future. Therefore, reconstruction efforts must include clear mechanisms for accountability. (Kühn, 2019, p. 32)

Civil Society Engagement: The reconstruction process must include the views and needs of local communities, not solely the government. Engaging civil society organizations is fundamental to ensuring that development projects address the needs of the Syrian people and lay democratic foundations.

Impact on Negotiations: Germany's position on reconstruction greatly influences the course of international negotiations concerning the Syrian crisis. This stance strengthens the pressure on the Syrian government and its allies, such as Russia and Iran, to accept a more inclusive political process.

In this context, German officials urge the international community to adopt a coordinated approach that ensures no support is offered to Assad's regime without genuine political progress. ((Weber, 2021, p. 95)

Challenges to Germany's Position:

Despite Germany's firm stance, it faces significant challenges. For instance, other countries, like Russia and Turkey, are seeking faster reconstruction and aid efforts, leading to tensions with Germany. These countries view reconstruction as a factor for strengthening stability, regardless of the status of political resolution. However, Germany insists that such efforts will not yield sustainable results and that any support must be tied to essential political reforms.

Advocating for International Commitment: Additionally, Germany highlights the need for greater international commitment to addressing humanitarian and political challenges in Syria. Berlin urges other nations to avoid repeating past mistakes where support was given without achieving political progress. Historical experiences show that such strategies often exacerbate crises and worsen people's suffering ((Hofmann, 2019, p. 23)

Conclusion

Germany's approach to the Syrian crisis reflects its commitment to upholding human rights and promoting stability through diplomatic and humanitarian means, rather than military intervention. By linking reconstruction efforts to a comprehensive political solution, Germany underscores the importance of accountability, inclusivity, and transparency in addressing the root causes of the conflict. This stance highlights its dedication to fostering long-term peace and ensuring the rights of all Syrians are safeguarded.

However, Germany's position faces challenges from competing international actors advocating for rapid reconstruction without preconditions. By insisting on tying reconstruction to political reform,

Germany reinforces its strategic and ethical values, urging the international community to align aid efforts with sustainable progress. This policy not only cements Germany's role as a key actor in shaping Syria's future but also serves as a model for addressing complex humanitarian and political crises on the global stage.

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