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## The Role of *Innere Führung* in German Civil-Military Relations

### *Strategic Insights*, Volume V, Issue 4 (April 2006)

by [Maj. Petra McGregor, USAF](#)

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### Introduction

Germany celebrates two important 50-year anniversaries in the year 2005. On May 9, 1955, the Federal Republic of Germany became the 15th member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), signaling that the country was ready to be considered an equal partner in the common defense of the Western Alliance. November 12, 1955 is the founding day of the German Bundeswehr when the first 101 members of Germany's new armed forces received their letters of appointment from the new Minister of Defense Theodor Blank in an old vehicle warehouse in Bonn.

This paper describes the important role that the concept of "Innere Führung"<sup>[1]</sup> has had, and continues to have, in the armed forces of Germany. It will first give a brief account of events and circumstances that preceded the inception of the post-World War II German armed forces. The paper then will outline the idea and underlying philosophy of Innere Führung in the context of civil-military relations theory by examining the importance of values and legitimacy as it relates to its distinguishing feature of the "citizen in uniform." It will chart the objectives of Innere Führung and their application on both the institutional and the individual level in order to address the proper balance between the functions of the armed forces on one hand and the values of society as a whole on the other. The paper will conclude that this 50-year-old concept is still valid today, that its dynamic characteristics have allowed it to respond appropriately to developments in civil society, and that it may well serve as a model for emerging democracies facing the challenges of civil-military tensions.

### The Road to Rearmament

While the Bundeswehr can look back on a successful 50 year history, the road to German rearmament and the founding of its current armed forces was not an easy one. In 1949, the western part of Germany had adopted a new constitution (Basic Law) that did not contain any provision for the creation of armed forces. With the deepening of the East-West conflict however, the military contribution of Germany to maintaining freedom in the West was soon seen as crucial. The United States and Britain urged Germany to reestablish armed forces while some of Germany's neighbors looked with anxiety at the possibility of a rearmed Germany. With the memories of the role of the Wehrmacht in the atrocities of the Nazi regime still fresh, even the

majority of the German public had great misgivings over the role of the military as an institution and questioned the need for an army in general.

Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was determined to firmly anchor Germany within the Western Alliance and, when the European Council approved the participation of a West-German contingent within a European Army in August 1950, he ordered an expert commission to prepare the framework for future German armed forces.[2] Former Wehrmacht officers met at the "Eifelkloster Himmerod" in early October 1950 and the "Himmeroder Denkschrift" would become the blueprint for Germany's contribution to the defense of Western Europe. Later that month, Adenauer appointed Theodor Blank as the "Commissioner for Questions with Regard to the Strengthening of Allied Troops" and established the "Amt Blank" which became the forerunner of the German Ministry of Defense. However, not until after the German Bundestag had adopted the first amendment to the Basic Law, establishing Germany's military sovereignty on February 26, 1954, would the Amt Blank make public the first concrete plans for a German Bundeswehr.[3]

When, in late August of 1954, the French national assembly rejected the European Defense Community, plans were made to integrate any national German armed forces into existing NATO forces.[4] In commemoration of the 200th birthday of Prussian army reformer General Gerhard von Scharnhorst,[5] November 12, 1955 was chosen to present the first 101 volunteers with their appointments to the new armed forces. Ten years after the unconditional surrender in World War II that led to the complete disarmament of the country, Germany was once again building up military forces. The first defense addendum also incorporated compulsory military service into the Basic Law. Just a few months after the first conscripts reported to their barracks on April 1, 1957, the first mechanized infantry corps and a minesweeper squadron were placed under the supreme command of NATO.[6]

Gwyn Harries-Jenkins notes that "armies are not merely part of the administrative bureaucracy. Their claim to a monopoly of arms gives them special status which enables them to symbolize, as well as make effective, the distinctive identity of the state." [7] In saying this, she echoes Samuel E. Finer who states that "...no other national institution so symbolizes independence, sovereignty, or equality with other peoples as a country's armed forces. The first thing a nation creates is a national army." [8] Thus, post-World War II Germany's journey to independence, sovereignty, and equality seemed complete with the creation of the German Bundeswehr in November 1955. However, the formal creation of the Bundeswehr was only the start of a continuing process of making the armed forces an integral part of society and state.

## Innere Führung

The role of the modern German military in society and German civil-military relations as a whole cannot be understood without appreciation for the concept of Innere Führung. It is a concept that permeates all areas of military life, designed to shape militarily efficient, democratically controlled, and socially integrated armed forces. Innere Führung has governed civil-military relations in Germany for the past 50 years. In *The Soldier and the State*, Samuel P. Huntington defines civil-military relations as "the principal institutional component of military security policy" that is designed to "enhance the safety of the nation's social, economic, and political institutions against threats arising from other independent states." [9] Huntington stresses the need for proper balance between social values and military function to effectively respond to societal imperatives (social forces and ideologies) on one hand and functional imperatives (security threats) on the other.

Military institutions which reflect only social values may be incapable of performing effectively their military function. On the other hand, it may be impossible to contain within society military institutions shaped purely by functional imperatives. The interaction of these two forces is the nub of the problem of civil-military relations.[10]

Therefore, civil-military relations describe the relationship of a nation's armed forces with the state and society as a whole with the primary objective to "maximize military security at the least sacrifice of other social values."[\[11\]](#)

"The basic assumption of the founding fathers of the Bundeswehr and of the concept of Innere Führung was that the democratic idea and military necessity can be harmonized with each other."[\[12\]](#) To that end, they had to develop a framework that would "transfer the basic principles of a democratic state governed by the rule of law to military forces which were to be operational and efficient in accomplishing their tasks."[\[13\]](#) Since the inception of the Bundeswehr, Innere Führung has aimed to achieve and maintain the proper balance of functional effectiveness on one hand and society's democratic values on the other. To that end, Innere Führung pursues four objectives that are addressed at both the institutional level and the individual level:

1. integration,
2. legitimacy,
3. motivation, and
4. an internal order that treats soldiers like human beings.[\[14\]](#)

### **Innere Führung at the Institutional Level**

At the institutional level, the focus of Innere Führung is on "integrating the armed forces as a conscription army, a parliamentary army, and an alliance army into the political system."[\[15\]](#) This integration is imperative to achieve legitimacy. Jacques Van Doorn cites Talcott Parsons when he says that "institutions or formal organizations are part of a wider social system in which their role has to be legitimized. [Legitimacy only exists] if the value system of the organization or institution is recognized within the framework of the generalized values of the superordinate system."[\[16\]](#) Van Doorn also points out that while "armed forces may be regarded primarily as the institution that legitimately uses physical force, ...many of the problems bearing upon the legitimacy of the armed forces derive from doubts and criticism of their monopoly of force and military force in general."[\[17\]](#) According to Harries-Jenkins, the military in a democracy is "legitimate only in so far that as its existence and its use of power has been agreed to by society as a whole. The central core is consent...and the individual has not merely a right but a duty to challenge the actions of the state."[\[18\]](#)

Innere Führung achieves this integration by applying fundamental democratic principles and a system of checks and balances to the management of the armed forces with the aim to dispel any worries that the Bundeswehr could ever become a "state within a state." The concept not only supports military effectiveness but constitutes the cornerstone of civil-military relations in a democratic society that ensures civilian control over the military. The idea of the "citizen in uniform" in a conscription army, the guarantee of parliamentary control over armed forces operations, and the commitment of national forces to the common defense of a lasting Alliance with similar values contribute immensely to the legitimacy of the institution. Public support for the Bundeswehr and its missions and tasks has steadily climbed over the years.[\[19\]](#) In recent polls, 83% of German citizens have proclaimed a positive view of the Bundeswehr, and more than two thirds of the population support conscription.[\[20\]](#)

The term "parliamentary army" is often used when German troops are committed to operations abroad, as Bundestag members must approve each and every deployment by a simple majority. Since the mid-nineties, when a Federal Court ruling deemed out-of-area deployment of German armed forces compatible with the Basic Law,[\[21\]](#) Bundeswehr operations abroad and its actions as an alliance army within the framework of mutual collective security, have become common practice.[\[22\]](#) The population supports international commitments of the Bundeswehr under United Nations and NATO mandates, with 81% in favor of peacekeeping operations.[\[23\]](#) Additional instruments of parliamentary oversight, designed to oversee the inner structure of the armed

forces, are the Budget and Defense Committee and the Petitions Committee within the Bundestag, as well as the “Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.”[24] The commissioner’s mandate is to act as ombudsman for the military in order to “safeguard basic rights and to assist the Bundestag in exercising parliamentary control over the armed forces.”[25] If one defines legitimacy, as Van Doorn does, as “...the capacity of a social or political system to develop and maintain a general belief that the existing social order and its main solutions are generally appropriate,”[26] then Innere Führung has accomplished its objectives of integration and legitimization of the armed forces by providing insight and understanding, as well as the necessary level of consent on the institutional level. Innere Führung can thus be considered as the effective representation of the “public image” of the Bundeswehr in Germany.

## Innere Führung at the Individual Level

Since the inception of the German Bundeswehr, Innere Führung has been credited with making considerable contributions to the integration of the soldiers into democratic society at the individual level as well. According to Van Doorn,

The concept of the citizen soldier links the armed forces and society in a different way. Whereas the military professional is an expert, serving the nation as a specialist, the citizen soldier is an active member of the political community, who puts his efforts at the service of the community because his political rights include the right to bear arms. In this case, the way in which armed forces are related to society is defined and controlled by the societal environment.[27]

By treating Innere Führung as a vehicle to guarantee soldiers basic individual rights and to apply constitutional principles to the internal order of the military, the concept has evolved to a leadership philosophy that ties professional ethics to the values of democracy, one that provides a “factual and moral connection between the armed forces and society at large.”[28] Innere Führung takes the German code of values and legal system as the basis for internal discipline within the armed forces and increases efficiency and professionalism in the Bundeswehr.”[29]

In this context, the interpretation of Innere Führung as “leadership and civic education” becomes especially applicable. The concept of “citizen in uniform” portrays the members of the armed forces as free individuals, as responsible citizens, and as professional soldiers.[30] The internal order of the armed forces requires the respect for soldiers’ individual dignity, basic human rights, and the rule of law. The assumption is that only a responsible citizen will act out of his own free will and out of the responsibility he feels toward his community, and that the soldier recognizes that the values of the community have to be defended even at the risk of his own life.

Civic education as part of Innere Führung is designed to help “citizens in uniform” realize “the purpose and necessity of their military service for the sake of peace and freedom.”[31] Innere Führung places high expectations on military leaders. It stresses that the basic order of the state is worth protecting and defending and aims to clarify the soldier’s role in the state and society. Civic education emphasizes the legal, political, and ethical justification of the mission of the Bundeswehr and the obligation placed on citizens to render military service. Civic education therefore encompasses leadership doctrine, the soldier’s self-image, mission and tasks, moral-ethical standards, organization of military duty, routine training, operational readiness, and command and control. Civic education also entails encouraging soldiers to actively exercise their civic rights, such as active and passive voting and even running for political office at all levels of government. As military operations involving the Bundeswehr are, as a matter of principle, conducted in the multinational environment, special emphasis is also given to needed social and intercultural skills, as well as foreign language training to facilitate multinational interoperability at all levels of command.

One area of special note is the cultivation of tradition that takes into account the historical, at times negative, developments in the history of the German armed forces. Skeptics maintain that even today the German armed forces have an ambivalent connection to the heritage of the Reichswehr and the Wehrmacht, and some charge that the Bundeswehr has not done enough to distance itself from its less venerable traditions.[32] Innere Führung stresses that officers and NCOs alike must have an understanding of political events and must be able to place history in the proper context.

There are three acknowledged lines of tradition within the German armed forces that have shaped today's Bundeswehr and the soldier's self-image.[33] The first line is the era of military reform in the early 19th century, predominantly marked by Prussian army reformer Scharnhorst who is seen as the founder of the concept "citizen in uniform." Second, while the Wehrmacht during the Nazi rule itself cannot constitute a tradition for the German armed forces, it is nevertheless appropriate to give due respect to those who fought honorably and those who tried to end the atrocities and a senseless war. The third line of tradition represents the Bundeswehr since its inception in 1955, an army integrated into a democratic society, fundamentally different both in terms of its purpose and its internal structure.

A true challenge for the concept of Innere Führung presented itself in 1990 when the Bundeswehr absorbed the armed forces of the former East Germany, the Nationale Volksarmee (NVA), after the reunification of Germany. Seen as the army of the Communist party and an instrument of a dictatorship in the East and West alike, the integration of Communist-indoctrinated armed forces into the Bundeswehr seemed an insurmountable task. Yet, the ability of senior officers and common soldiers alike to work with each other, the commitment to the principles of Innere Führung in the West, and the ability to abandon, without regrets, the traditions of the NVA in the East and instead embrace democratic ideals, ensured the successful integration of a number of former NVA soldiers into the Bundeswehr.[34]

On the individual level, the concept of Innere Führung has managed, even in times of crisis and turmoil, to successfully combine the image of "citizen in uniform" with an effective internal order of the military, thus ensuring the operational readiness of the German armed forces.

## **Innere Führung—An Example to Follow**

In 1957, Samuel P. Huntington was rather skeptical about the future of the German civil-military relations. He saw the idea to "create a democratic army, an ideologically motivated force embodying subjective rather than objective civilian control" as "a reaction against the professionalism of the past and the product of the false identification of that professionalism with Hitler." [35] Huntington foresaw "the permanent embroilment of the German military in politics" that would "reduce the fighting effectiveness of the new army." [36] Instead, 50 years of German civil-military relations based on Innere Führung have proven that this dynamic concept has been able to respond to developments in civil society by integrating the military into state and society, regardless of ruling government party. Innere Führung has successfully dealt with civil-military tensions and continues to provide the proper balance between military necessity and social values by linking the armed forces and society at large. It has taken the German code of values and legal system as the basis for internal discipline within the armed forces and has increased efficiency and professionalism in the Bundeswehr. As a new democracy in the early 1950s, Germany was able to take this concept and build its armed forces on the principles of civilian control of the military, democratic values, and the rule of law.

Today, this concept is one example of western civil-military relations that is emulated by the emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO Partnership for Peace programs and institutions such as the National Defense University in Washington D.C., the Marshall Center in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and the Center for Civil-

Military Relations at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California have educated government officials of these countries, both civilian and military, in civil-military relations principles.

As a leadership philosophy that harmonizes military requirements and constraints with democratic values and the rights and responsibilities of the individual, Innere Führung represents an excellent example of a western civil-military relations concept.

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1. The literal translation of "Innere Führung" is "inner leadership." The more commonly used translation is "leadership and civic education." However, the complexity of the concept does not allow for a simple definition or accurate translation. Innere Führung is better understood as a leadership philosophy that ties professional ethics to the values of democracy and thus presents the corporate culture of the German armed forces.
2. Martin Grosch, "[Erste Schritte: Das 'Amt Blank' und die Wiederbewaffnung](#)," *IFDT: Information fuer die Truppe*.
3. "[Introduction of Service](#)," *German Ministry of Defense*, Berlin, March 17, 2004.
4. *Ibid.*
5. General Gerhard von Scharnhorst (1755-1813), Chief of the Prussian General Staff and Minister of War, is, along with General August Gneisenau, credited with transforming the Prussian army from a professional long-service army into a people's army based on universal service. His view that every citizen is at the same time a defender of his country has had a decisive influence on the image of "citizen in uniform."
6. "Introduction to Service."
7. Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, "Legitimacy and the Problem of Order," in Gwyn Harries-Jenkins & Jacques van Doorn, eds., *The Military and the Problem of Legitimacy*, (London, UK: Sage Publications, 1976), 41.
8. Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, 3rd ed. (New Brunswick, NY: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 33.
9. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 1.
10. *Ibid.*, 2.
11. *Ibid.*, 2.

12. "[Innere Führung—The Concept](#)," German Ministry of Defense, Berlin, December 30, 2004. Also see applicable field manuals such as "Zentrale Dienstvorschrift—Innere Führung (ZDv 10/1)," German Ministry of Defense, Bonn, February 16, 1993.
13. *Ibid.*
14. "[Innere Führung](#)," German Ministry of Defense, Berlin, December 30, 2004.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Talcott Parsons, *Structure and Process in Modern Societies* (Free Press of Glencoe, Ill., 1960), 20 ff., quoted in Jacques van Doorn, "The Military and the Crisis of Legitimacy," in Gwyn Harries-Jenkins and Jacques van Doorn, eds., *The Military and the Problem of Legitimacy* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 1976), 21.
17. Van Doorn, "The Military and the Crisis of Legitimacy," *Op. Cit.*, 31.
18. Harries-Jenkins, *Op. Cit.*, 43.
19. Bernhard Fleckenstein, "Germany: Forerunner of a Postnational Military?" in Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams, and David R. Segal, eds., *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2000) 88-89.
20. [Umfrage](#), Institut TNS Emnid, 2003 and 2004.
21. On July 12, 1994, the Federal Constitutional Court, referring to Art. 24 of the Basic Law, ruled that Germany may take part in armed operations in the framework of systems of mutual collective security, subject to approval by the Bundestag by a simple majority vote for each and every operation.
22. "[Parliamentary Army](#)," German Ministry of Defense, Berlin, June 14, 2004, available at <http://www.bmvg.de>. For the principles of German Security Policy outlining the emphasis to act within global and regional institutions, see the "Defense Policy Guidelines" (German Ministry of Defense, Berlin, May 21, 2003).
23. [Umfrage](#), Institut TNS Emnid, 2003 and 2004.
24. The position of "Wehrbeauftragter der Bundeswehr" was created in 1956 as one of the new constitutional provisions relating to the armed forces under Art. 45b of the Basic Law. The commissioner publishes an annual report on the state of the armed forces. For the historical development see "[Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces](#)," Deutscher Bundestag, Berlin.
25. "Wehrbeauftragter der Bundeswehr."
26. Van Doorn, "The Military and the Crisis of Legitimacy," *Op. Cit.*, 20.
27. Jaques van Doorn, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Civil-Military Relations," in Michel L. Martin and Ellen S. McCrate, eds., *The Military, Militarism, and the Polity: Essays in Honor of Morris Janowitz* (New York, NY: MacMillan Inc., 1984) 37.
28. Van Doorn, *Op. Cit.*, 37.

29. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Weissbuch zur Sicherheit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und zur Lage der Bundeswehr* (German Ministry of Defense, 1994), 136.
30. "Innere Führung—The Concept."
31. "[Civic Education and Tradition](#)," German Ministry of Defense, Berlin, December 30, 2004.
32. Manfred Messerschmidt, "[Soldat, Buerger, Kaempfer](#)," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 June 2005. For a more comprehensive treatise of the tradition of the Bundeswehr see Donald Abenheim, "Image of the Wehrmacht in Federal German Society and in the Tradition of the Bundeswehr," *Occasional Paper No. 3* (Monterey, CA: The Center for Civil-Military Relations, Naval Postgraduate School, 1999).
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36. *Ibid.*

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