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Uncivilian Power Germany: Why States Violate their Foreign Policy Master Roles

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the reasons why states occasionally do not adhere to the behavioural expectations as prescribed by their foreign policy master roles. To that end, it proposes four potential drivers for such 'role violations', namely: exogenous pressure, political survival, lack of issue salience and ensuing bureaucratic decision-making, and unclear role demands in ambiguous decision contexts. Empirically, the paper examines the plausibility of those drivers for the case of Germany's abstention in the United Nations Security Council vote on resolution 1973 on Libya. It suggests that in that particular case considerations of political survival made civilian power Germany act out of character.

Introduction

In response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, German chancellor Olaf Scholz declared a *Zeitenwende* (change in times) in German foreign, security and defence policy. While the concept is still lacking in specificity, the country clearly has engaged in behaviours that hitherto would have been hard to fathom. Cases in point are the adoption of a special fund (*Sondervermögen*) for the German armed forces to the amount of 100 billion Euros and the provision of billions worth of arms and military equipment including battle tanks and Patriot air defence missile systems to the war zone in Ukraine. Over time, *Zeitenwende* might eventually pave the way for a fundamental transition in the country's foreign policy master role away from 'civilian power', which places a premium on non-military strategies and instruments and has dominated Germany's external behaviour for decades (e.g. Maull 1990).

Yet not all alterations in a country's foreign policy are potentially as fundamental and far-reaching as a transition from one master role to

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another. More commonly, states experience adjustments that are compatible with its master role. Occasionally, however, states engage in individual, situation-specific foreign policy actions that are in blatant violation of the expectations that would follow from its master role. While not ushering in an eventual role change, such actions significantly veer from established paths of actions as prescribed by a country's master role. Accordingly, this paper asks why a country at certain points engages in behaviours that seem 'out of character' and defy expectations, including those of its closest partners?

To answer this question, this paper draws on role theory, which has seen a renaissance in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and International Relations (IR) scholarship in recent years. Role theory represents an integrative approach to theorising foreign policy and international politics in that it bridges agent-oriented and structurally-focused perspectives (e.g. Thies and Breuning 2012). Crucially for the purpose of this paper, role theory posits that states hold predominant national role conceptions, or master roles, which prescribe certain actions for states while foreclosing others. By implication, a master role leads to specific behavioural patterns and, as a result, predictability in state action. This paper explores instances where the typical behavioural pattern as prescribed by a country's master role is broken, thus when a state acts out of character. The latter is being called 'role violations'. The goal of the paper is to explore possible reasons for such behaviour. To that end, it proposes four potential drivers for role violations: exogenous pressure, political survival, lack of issue salience and ensuing bureaucratic decision-making, and unclear role demands in ambiguous decision contexts.

The plausibility of those drivers is examined for a case of role violation by Germany. As already mentioned, Germany has a well-established, stable, and widely accepted master role, namely that of civilian power (e.g. Brummer and Kießling 2019; Maull 1990). Therefore, the country can be seen as a 'crucial case' where the examined outcome, in form of role violations, is considered least likely (Gerring 2007, 116). More generally speaking, this paper employs a single case-study approach which has been shown as being conducive for theory testing and which also allows generalisations to similar types or classes of empirical cases (George and Bennett 2005, chapter 6).

The specific case under discussion is Germany's decision to abstain in a United Nations Security Council vote on adapting a no-fly-zone over Libya in 2011 – a decision which 'contradict[ed] Germany's commitment as a civilian power to active multilateralism' (Müller 2011, 11) and illustrated that Germany is 'a civilian power without civil courage' (Hacke 2011, 53). The decision, which 'shocked German politics' (Blechschmidt, Braun, and Brössler 2011), clearly came very unexpectedly and was chastised in no uncertain terms, including a 'political failure' (Rühl 2011a) through which 'For the first time in its history, the Federal Republic has thus lifted the

anchor that binds it to the West' (Brössler 2011). One commentator even referred to 'a German suicide' (Fichtner 2011).

This paper explores the reasons for '[t]he dissonance between what was expected of Germany and its actual Libya policy of abstention' (Kurthen 2020, 2) – thus why Germany acted in this particular case as an 'uncivilian power'. The discussion suggests that considerations over political survival were key for Germany's role violation. The empirical discussions of the possible drivers for that role violation are based on a range of primary and secondary sources. The former includes statements of key policy-makers, official governmental documents, and minutes of parliamentary debates. In addition, the discussions draw on media reports as well as on publications by academic researchers and think tanks.

This paper's main goal is to make a theoretical contribution to the literature by connecting and advancing different aspects and strands of role theory. The examination of role violations speaks to broader discussions in terms of role enactment (here: the 'incorrect' enactment of a role), role demands (i.e. how a lack of clarity in role demands might lead to role violations), and role location (i.e. sustained role violations as a possible trigger for such a process). More specifically, this paper complements the discussion about the sources of domestic contestation over national role conceptions (e.g. Brummer and Thies 2015; Cantir and Kaarbo 2012). Yet rather than highlighting the politics that drives the adoption of a predominant national role conception, it explores the politics that leads to violations from said role conception. It does so by looking into various potential sources for such deviations that either directly relate to roles or alternatively, as suggested by McCourt (2021), are grounded in reasons other than roles but eventually impact a state's role enactment and role performance. In addition, the paper aligns with the recent more empirically-driven discussion concerning 'unusual middle-power activism' (e.g. Grzywacz and Gawrycki 2021; Kutlay and Öniş 2021) which explores expansions of state behaviours within a predominant role. Adding to this discussion on reinterpretations of roles, this paper examines the reasons why states in specific situations act in violation of their master role. Regarding the case, which has been primarily approached from a policy-oriented perspective (e.g. Brockmeier 2013; Hellmann 2011; Müller 2011; Rühl 2011a), the paper contributes to the few theory-oriented discussions (e.g. Bucher 2011; Hansel and Oppermann 2016; Kurthen 2020; Oppermann and Spencer 2016), and the ones using role theory in particular – most notably Harnisch (2015) who approaches Germany's decisions through the lenses of leader and follower roles and Oppermann (2012) who suggests that the case of Libya exemplifies a shift in Germany's national role conception to that of 'normal ally' – by comparatively zooming in on several external and domestic drivers of

said decision that might have led to the violation of Germany's master role in the specific case of Libya.

The remainder of this paper proceeds in four steps. The next section outlines possible drivers for states' role violations. This is followed by a brief discussion of the 'civilian power' role that still represents the foreign policy master role of Germany. After that, the Libyan case is introduced and examined for the reasons that made Germany act out of character. The concluding section summarises the argument and provides suggestions for future research.

Drivers of Role violations

While early role theory research in FPA placed particular emphasis on actors' self-conceptualisation of roles (e.g. Holsti 1970), the relational nature of roles and with it the latter's social embeddedness have come to the fore in the wake of the theory's 'rediscovery' some fifteen years ago. Following Harnisch (2011, 8), roles can be defined as 'social positions (as well as a socially recognised category of actors) that are constituted by ego and alter expectations regarding the purpose of an actor in an organised group'. Yet roles are not only socially constituted but they are also associated with certain behavioural expectations in specific social settings by prescribing some while precluding other types of actions.

Role theory comes with a rich conceptual framework (for an overview, see Harnisch 2011; Thies 2010). Putting roles into practice, which is the focus of this paper, is called *role enactment*. To enact a role, actors must have an understanding about what their role entails. In this respect, *role conceptions* relate to an actor's understanding of one's own role in a social system in relation to actors who occupy other roles. In turn, *role expectations* point to the expectations that third parties hold regarding another actor's behaviour, for example in terms of assuming responsibility or performing certain functions in a given social context. Emphasising the above-mentioned function of roles in terms of prescribing behaviour, *role demands* concern the concrete requirements that emanate from a role with respect to its enactment in a specific situation. Last but not least, integrating the aforementioned aspects, *role location* and ensuing role location processes refer to situations 'where role expectations of the self and other, role demands of the situation, and cues from the audience all come together to produce a role for the actor and set the conditions for its appropriate enactment' (Thies 2012, 29).

The role theory literature has shown that states can have multiple roles at the same time (see already Holsti 1970). However, this is not to say that all roles necessarily carry equal weight. Against this background, more recent scholarship has introduced the distinction between 'master roles' and

'auxiliary roles' (e.g. Thies 2012; Wehner 2015). While master roles refer to a state's status or 'overarching position[] in the international system' (Wehner 2015, 437), the enactment of auxiliary roles contribute to the sustenance of the master role, as has been demonstrated for example with respect to Israeli or Venezuelan foreign policy (Thies 2013; Wehner 2020).

Although master roles exist, this is not to suggest that those go unquestioned. Indeed, the literature has pointed to both vertical and horizontal sources of domestic contestation over master roles, or national role conceptions more generally (e.g. Cantir and Kaarbo 2012). While vertical contestation refers to processes that pit the elites against the broader population, horizontal contestation points to processes that unfold on the elite level, for instance as a result of pushback from the political opposition, coalition politics, bureaucratic politics, and struggles among individual leaders as possible drives of contestation (e.g. Brummer and Thies 2015). Next to those domestic sources of contestation, the literature has shown that external actors (states or international organisations) actively try to modify and shape other states' roles (e.g. Thies 2013). Thus, unhappy with a state's current role, external actors seek to cast a state into a different role that is more to their liking (altercasting).

Relatedly, the existence of a master role does not mean that the latter necessarily offers clear-cut and unambiguous prescriptions for state behaviour. Rather, roles can be open to interpretation, thus permitting their modifications and adaptations on the conceptual level and, by implication, also opening up different ways of implementation in terms of actual foreign policy behaviour. In this sense, scholarship on 'middle powers' has shown that such countries have recently engaged in behaviours that hitherto have not been associated with said role conception (e.g. Grzywacz and Gawrycki 2021; Kutlay and Öniş 2021). However, being cognizant of 'conceptual stretching' (Sartori 1970), the question is whether countries' 'unusual' foreign policy behaviours should be considered as indications of more general modifications of a role that might eventually even lead to the adoption of a new role or rather, more limited, merely as situation-specific deviations from a role that is not fundamentally challenged as such.

This paper takes on the latter perspective by exploring possible reasons as to why countries engage in specific situations in behaviours that run counter to their master role ('role violations'). Hence, this paper takes a country's master role as its point of departure. At the same time, it does not assume that master roles determine state action but, more modestly, to prescribe most likely (appropriate) behaviours. What is more, the paper does not consider behaviours that clearly run counter to a master role as indications of modifications or adjustments of said role but rather as violations of it. Accordingly, the paper explores factors that possibly make a country 'act out of character', thus in ways that violate the behavioural expectations

associated with its master role. Such actions do not mean that master roles are inconsequential, thus be dismissed out of hand. Instead, they are indicative of the probabilistic rather than deterministic effect of master roles on state action. At any rate, role violations should trigger widespread political critique from different sources (political parties, media, allies) together with corresponding academic assessments which emphasise that a country has acted in clear deviation of expectations and traditions as enshrined in its master role.

Importantly, the proposed argument is situation-specific. That is, the paper examines possible reasons as to why in specific situations a country deviates from its foreign policy master role that is not fundamentally questioned or outright challenged as such. Whether repeated role violations over time cumulatively trigger a role location process that eventually culminates in the adoption of a new master role is beyond the scope of this paper (e.g. Thies 2012).

The ensuing question concerns the factors that could possibly make a country deviate from its master role in specific situations. The following discussion highlights four such factors together with indicators on how they can be ascertained empirically. Those are: exogenous pressure; political survival; lack of issue salience and bureaucratic decision-making; and unclear role demands in ambiguous decision contexts. While some of those factors are directly related to roles, some others are not about roles per se but ultimately impact a state's role enactment and performance (McCourt 2021).

Exogenous Pressure

External actors can hold role expectations for a state that are not commensurate with the latter's master role. As a result, external actors put pressure on a state to undertake actions that are in accordance with its role expectations for that state while at the same time run counter to the state's predominant role. This external actor could be a state's 'significant other', referring to 'a primary socialising agent … or a specific actor who holds sway over another actor through their material or immaterial resources' (Beneš and Harnisch 2015, 150). While pressure from a significant other to engage in certain behaviours might be relatively more likely to be successful given the strong bonds that exist between the two actors, similar pressures could be exerted from other actors as well. Generally speaking, then, exogenous pressure can be exerted by powerful actors using means of threats or coercion, or it can emanate from less powerful actors that seek to force decision-makers' hands through naming/shaming or persuasion.

Whether external pressure by third actors is part of a sustained effort to altercast another state into a new role or whether it is just a 'one-off' occurrence is of secondary importance for the argument presented here. Key is

that based on a role expectation that is not commensurate with another state's role conception, an external actor is sufficiently powerful in a given situation to make another state engage in behaviours that it otherwise would not undertake since they contradict its master role. Thus, the question is whether in specific cases external actors pressured a state to engage in certain behaviours that ran counter to its master role.

> Proposition 1: Exogenous pressure resulting from incommensurate role expectations makes states engage in behaviours that are not in accordance with their master role.

Political Survival

States might also deviate from their master role on specific occasions because decision-makers' short-term domestic political calculations run counter and ultimately override the behavioural prescription offered by the predominant role conception. Deliberate decisions driven by political expediency to violate one's master role are likely to incur all kinds of costs, ranging from psychological (cognitive dissonance) to social (e.g. blaming and shaming by partners that have been let down) to material (e.g. political or economic repercussions) ones. As a result, such decisions should be rare and arguably occur only when the political survival of leaders is at stake. In turn, challenges to political survival can emanate from a host of different sources, including bad opinion polls close to an election, intra-party competition, threats from coalition partners to terminate cooperation, or threats of external military intervention (e.g. Mintz 2004). Irrespective of the specific nature of the threat to political survival, the key point is that a leader considers undertaking actions that deviate from the expectations of his or her country's master role as a viable solution to counter challenges to surviving in office. Instances of the aforementioned challenges to a leader's survival in specific cases would thus lend empirical support to this factor.

> Proposition 2: Threats to political survival make leaders engage in behaviours that are not in accordance with their country's master role.

Lack of Issue Salience and Bureaucratic Decision-Making

Contrary to the aforementioned deliberate decision on part of decisions makers to deviate from their country's master role for political reasons, such outcomes might also be brought about inadvertently, at least when seen from the perspective of political leaders. Certain issues might simply not be considered relevant enough for high-level decision-makers to pay attention to. Thus, the salience of an issue, understood as 'the relative importance and significance that an actor ascribes to a given issue on the political

agenda' (Oppermann 2014, 26), is considered low by key decision-makers, which is why they refrain from addressing it. In such instances, bureaucratic actors should become the key drivers of policy.

Indeed, public policy scholarship suggests that most decisions are handled by experts on the sub-system level rather than by political leaders on the macro-political level (e.g. Baumgartner, Jones, and Mortensen 2017). In turn, the bureaucratic politics literature has shown that decisions taken on the administrative level are driven more often than not by bureaucrats' narrow organisational interests pertaining to competencies or finances rather than with an eye on the country's broader interests (e.g. Allison and Zelikow 1999). Thus, when political leaders do not pay attention to low-salience issues (which might not even have been brought to their attention in the first place), bureaucratic actors can determine foreign policy decisions, which in turn are more closely aligned with bureaucrats' narrow organisational interests than with the country's master role. Empirically, the salience of an issue could be ascertained for example based on opinion polls or media content analysis (Oppermann 2014, 27). In turn, whether bureaucratic actors take over decision-making on low-salience issues could be assessed based on the level of key decision-makers' engagement with the issue as indicated for example by the volume and frequency of their verbal statements on the subject together with media reporting on the role of individual bureaucrats in shaping decisions.

> Proposition 3: Low issue salience in combination with bureaucratic decision-making could result in behaviours that are not in accordance with their country's master role.

Unclear Role Demands in Ambiguous Decision Contexts

Specific characteristics of the policy challenge that decision-makers have to address can be another reason for essentially inadvertent deviations from a country's master role. That is, when leaders face highly ambiguous decision environments, they might resort to cognitive schemata to reduce complexity based on the use of heuristics or mental shortcuts (e.g. Khong 1992).

In this sense, master roles could be conceptualised as another type of cognitive schema that render possible the use of mental shortcuts by decision-makers to make sense of highly ambiguous situations. Thus, decision-makers seek to infer from the predominant role conception a specific type of behaviour in order to cope with certain situations. However, due to the specific nature of the decision context, it might well be that no clear-cut behavioural prescriptions can be inferred from the master role in the first place. Resulting from this lack of clarity in terms of role demands, it remains open as to what kind of behaviour is actually called for in a specific situation, hence is in accordance with the master

role. At the same time, leaders have to respond and take some decision – and might end up selecting an option that runs counter to their country's master role when implemented. In so doing, they would not in a strict, and certainly not deliberate, sense act out of their country's master role but would nonetheless end up with a decision that, when performed, turns out to undermine that role. Empirically, the question is whether in a specific situation a master role does or does not offer clear behavioural guidance in terms of how to respond to the policy challenge at hand.

> Proposition 4: In highly ambiguous decision contexts role demands are unclear which is why leaders inadvertently engage in behaviours that are not in accordance with their country's master role.

Germany as Civilian Power

In role-theoretical terms, Germany is typically referred to as *Zivilmacht* or 'civilian power' (Brummer and Kießling 2019; Maull 1990). That role contains several guiding principles (see Kirste and Maull 1996, 300–303). For starters, civilian powers place emphasis on regional and global institution-building and multilateral cooperation in conjunction with a rules- and norms-based international system and the legalisation of international relations more broadly. Further, regarding the normative underpinning of international affairs, freedom, democracy, human rights, and a market economy are considered crucial. In addition, civilian powers seek to promote social balance and justice at the global level. Finally, while not being pacifist, civilian powers are highly sceptical concerning the use of military force as a tool of statecraft, which, if used as last resort, must be mandated by the United Nations (UN).

To suggest that the civilian power role is still predominant is not to say that the role has remained uncontested, including in the academic debate. Other role conceptions ascribed to Germany since unification include 'central power' (Schwarz 1994), 'trading state' (Staack 2000), 'reluctant hegemon' (Paterson 2011), or 'normal power' (Brummer and Oppermann 2016). Similarly, there has been empirically-driven critique in the sense that Germany no longer behaves like a civilian power, not least with respect to Germany's participation in *Operation Allied Force* (i.e. a NATO-led military intervention against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) in 1999.[1] Lastly, there has been a normative debate over the continued appropriateness of the civilian power role given changes in the international environment. Indeed, contestation processes have occurred on both the parliamentary level (Mello 2019) and the governmental level (Oppermann 2019).

However, there are good reasons to contend that the civilian power role can still be considered Germany's master role. For starters, empirical

studies lend support to the role. Indeed, 'even' examinations of contestation processes over the civilian power role highlight its continued relevance. In this sense, Oppermann (2019, 289) finds that intra-governmental contestation over the civilian power role was primarily about disagreements over which aspects of the role should be emphasised rather than about jettison the role in favour of a different role. Similarly, core tenets of the civilian power role continue to be reflected in public opinion. For example, in 2020 a clear majority of Germans supported their country's engagements in international crises and conflicts and supported German contributions in this regard through international institutions like NATO or the EU. In terms of the modalities of engagement, emphasis was placed on diplomatic negotiations and development aid while combat operations of the German armed forces received least support (Graf 2021, 6–10), which is indicative of a civilian power's reluctance to force.

Overall, the civilian power role, which was originally conceived with an eye on German foreign policy during the Cold War (Maull 1990), has proven to be remarkably durable over time. Even though *Zeitenwende* might eventually pave the way for the adoption of a new master role in the future, it is fair to assume that when the Libyan decision was taken in the early 2010s the civilian power role was Germany's master role. The following section explores possible reasons why Germany nonetheless deviated from it.

Germany Acting Out of Character: The Case of Libya 2011

Germany's Decision to Abstain From UNSC Resolution 1973

In the early months of what became known as the 'Arab spring', Libya descended into civil war. Trying to secure his regime against the uprising, the country's then-ruler, Muammar Gaddafi, waged war against its own people, ushering in the spectre of genocide. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) swiftly addressed those developments. For example, on 26 February 2011 the UNSC adopted resolution 1970 in which it demanded from the Libyan regime to immediately stop its attacks against civilians and in which adopted for example an arms embargo and an asset freeze. Since the Libyan regime did not heed its call, the UNSC adopted resolution 1973 on 17 March 2011. Acting under Chapter VII of the UN charter, the UNSC decided to establish a no-fly zone over Libya to help protecting civilians from attack, among other things. The implementation of this task was taken over by NATO, which established Operation Unified Protector to that end.

Germany's behaviour in this context points to a clear-cut deviation from its foreign policy master role. This does not necessarily refer to the fact that

the country refused to contribute militarily to the NATO operation. Indeed, over the years Germany's track record with respect to military operations led by NATO (or respectively the EU or the UN for the matter) had been rather inconsistent (e.g. Brummer 2009). While the country contributed significantly to some operations (e.g. ISAF and Resolute Support in Afghanistan), it merely made token contributions to others, if any (e.g. Ocean Shield off the Horn of Africa).

However, what clearly was out of the ordinary in the Libyan case was the fact that on the political level, Germany refrained from siding with its traditional allies, as was indicated by its voting behaviour in the UNSC. In 2011, Germany was a non-permanent member of the UNSC, thus had to cast a vote on resolution 1973. Contrary to both case-specific expectations and the country's past foreign policy behaviour more broadly (e.g. Brockmeier 2013, 63), Germany did not side with its key transatlantic and European allies in form of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France who all voted in favour of the resolution. Instead, Germany abstained in the vote, as did China, Russia, India, and Brazil. Thus, the country found itself in rather unusual company.

Germany's behaviour must be seen as running counter to its master role. As outlined above, a norms-based international order with a strong emphasis on the upholding of human rights, freedom, and justice represent core tenets of the country's civilian power role. The same holds for supporting multilateralism through acting in concert with other states in international organisations. All of those aspects were at stake in Libya. Accordingly, by refraining from actively supporting measures to protect civilians not only on the military level by not participating in the NATO operation but already a step prior on the political level through its abstention in the UNSC vote on the creation of such an operation in the first place, Germany clearly acted out of character.

As result, highly critical comments abounded. A former foreign minister of Germany called the decision a 'farce' and a 'scandalous mistake' for which he felt 'shame' (Fischer 2011). Similarly, a former minister for economic cooperation and development considered the decision 'a disgrace' (Deutscher Bundestag 2011a, 11145). Even former chancellor Helmut Kohl weighed in, leaving little doubt about his concern and consternation with the decision, suggesting that 'We need to make it clear again and recognisable to others where we stand and where we want to go, that we know where we belong, that we have values and principles that apply beyond the day' (Kohl 2011).

Pundits as well as newspaper commentators from different sides of the political spectrum were just as critical. They called Germany's behaviour 'irresponsible' (Seibel 2011) and 'a moral and political mistake' (Müller 2011, 1), leaving behind a 'pile of shards' (Sattar 2011a). In addition,

Germany's refusal to side with its key partners was considered 'an unmistakable political distancing from the main allies' (Rühl 2011a, 567). Instead, Germany sided with 'false friends' (Sattar 2011b) or with 'dictators and autocrats' (Brössler 2011). As result, the country was 'isolated from its NATO allies and EU partners' (Müller 2011, 8).[2] The discussion now turns to the possible drivers that might have led to Germany's decision.

Exogenous Pressure

As already indicated by some of the previous critiques, Germany was by no means pressured by third parties in general, let alone by its significant others, to veer from its master role in the Libyan case. Indeed, its key allies, namely the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, all voted in favour of UNSC resolution 1973, and they clearly expected Germany to do the same. That Germany did not live to those expectations was accordingly met with incomprehension (e.g. Müller 2011, 10). It therefore did not come as surprise that during the following months Germany's main allies put pressure on the country to reverse its decision and contribute at least indirectly to the military operation (Rühl 2011a, 568). Overall, then, the case does not lend support for the idea that powerful third parties made Germany engage in behaviours that were not in accordance with its master role.

Political Survival

In contrast, threats to political survival played a key role for Germany's behaviour in the Libyan case. Back in 2011, a centre-right government was in power. Led by Chancellor Angela Merkel, the coalition brought together the conservative CDU/CSU as the senior party and the liberal FDP as the junior (i.e. much smaller when measured in terms of parliamentary seats) coalition partner. In early 2011, the FDP faced dire electoral prospects on the national level, with polls placing the party close to or even below the five-per cent threshold that needs to be cleared in order to be represented in parliament (e.g. ARD/infratest dimap 2013). Furthermore, key elections at the state level were coming up at that time as well, most importantly in Baden-Wuerttemberg which had traditionally been one of the core states for the Liberals. Also here, the polls were anything but promising for the FDP (e.g. Wahlrecht.de n.d.).

Against this background, the FDP under the leadership of Guido Westerwelle, who, crucially, was also Germany's foreign minister at that time, could have decided to enhance its electoral prospects by playing to the general hesitancy on part of German society when it comes to seeing their country engage in world affairs, especially through the military. In

this sense a poll from 2010 showed that almost half of the population (46 per cent) were of the opinion that Germany should focus primarily on addressing its own (domestic) challenges (45 per cent favoured an active stance in international politics) (SOWI 2011, 87). Similarly, more than half of Germans rejected the country's contribution to the NATO-led ISAF operation, which was by far the largest operation abroad of the *Bundeswehr* at that time (SOWI 2011, 39), which points to a general scepticism towards military deployments.[3]

Indeed, keeping Germany out of a military operation in Libya was perceived by the Liberals as a promising way forward to enhance the party's electoral prospects (e.g. Rühl 2011a, 2011b, 565; Hacke 2011, 53; Fichtner 2011; Miskimmon 2012, 399). In this sense, Maull (2012, 35) suggested with respect to the FDP that 'The positioning of German foreign policy on the Libya issue and Germany's abstention from voting in the UN Security Council corresponded to this search for profile, which could count on a broad response from the parties and the public'. Such domestic political impetus on part of the Liberals was similarly flagged by members of parliament, who hailed not only from the political opposition but also from the CDU, thus the FDP's coalition partner (e.g. Deutscher Bundestag 2011a, 11140; Blechschmidt, Braun, and Brössler 2011).[4]

Importantly, by holding the foreign ministry, the junior coalition partner FDP was also structurally in a position to exert outsized influence on Germany's decision (Oppermann and Brummer 2014, 563). Westerwelle even used his position in an effort to organise a sufficient number of abstentions against the UNSC resolution so that the latter, and with it a military intervention, would have never seen the light of day (Sattar 2011b). When this failed, Westerwelle reportedly contemplated voting against the UNSC resolution, with Chancellor Merkel convincing him to settle for an abstention instead (Rühl 2011b; Sattar 2011a).

As a result, the empirical evidence suggests that Germany's decision was not driven by strategic interests but rather primarily by domestic political concerns. As Rühl (2011a, 595) put it:

> With his refusal, which was ultimately shared by the Chancellor and, nolens volens, also by the Minister of Defence, the Foreign Minister did not serve German foreign policy and alliance loyalty, but rather electoral domestic politics, especially the left-liberal milieu, pacifism and neutralism in the country against the allies.

In a similar vein, Maull (2012, 36) argues that 'The move away from the traditional guidelines of German foreign policy was therefore primarily for reasons of domestic coalition management'.

At the same time, the chancellor was similarly sceptical from the outset regarding a military intervention in Libya in general, let alone a German

participation in such endeavour (Sattar 2011a). Merkel maintained her position also after Germany's abstention in the UNSC, not least since she considered the success chances of an intervention limited and the risk of military escalation high (e.g. Blechschmidt, Braun, and Brössler 2011). Against this background, a newspaper commentator called Germany's Libya decision in fact a 'chancellor's decision' (Bannas 2011). Hoffmann (2011) even suggests that Merkel was quite successful in letting Westerwelle take the brunt of the blame for a course of action that she favoured as much as her foreign minister did. Arguably also for her electoral prospects were an important factor, most importantly with respect to the 2013 federal elections and her preference for continuing the coalition with the Liberals after those elections.

Thus, concerns of electoral prospects and ultimately political survival drove both Westerwelle in his effort to not get Germany involved in Libya and Merkel in her lack of resolve to reign in her junior coalition partner. Somewhat ironically, neither side accomplished their goals. The Liberals fared badly not only in the Baden-Wuerttemberg state elections where they saw their share of votes cut in half but even more so during the next federal elections when they dropped out of the Bundestag altogether. As result, Merkel lost her preferred coalition partner and had to settle with another grand coalition government with the Social Democrats.

Issue Salience and Bureaucratic Decision-Making

The Libyan decision clearly was a salient one. This not only concerns the intensive debate that unfolded in the German media following the decision but was already the case the weeks prior to the UNSC decision of 17 March. A keyword search for 'Deutschland Libyen Sicherheitsrat' (Germany Libya Security Council) for the time period of 01–17 March 2011 in Germany's two leading quality newspapers from the centre-right and the centre-left, namely the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, leads to 21 and 19 hits respectively.[5] Thus, there has been virtually daily reporting on the issue in the run-up to the decision, which suggests that it was a prominent one. In a similar vein, Bucher et al. (2013, 533) refer to a 'comprehensive' debate over Libya that unfolded in Germany in the weeks prior to the adoption of resolution 1973 by the UNSC.

Accordingly, it fair to assume that the Libyan decision ranked high on the German decision makers' agenda. Many of the latter, including Foreign Minister Westerwelle, were frequently quoted in the aforementioned articles, thus obviously did engage with the topic. Overall, then, the evidence suggests that the decision was by no means relegated to the bureaucratic level but taken on the political level by key members of the country's foreign policy executive.

Role Demands in Ambiguous Decision Contexts

Lastly, there is little support for the idea that Germany acted out of character in the Libyan case as result of unclear role demands stemming from an ambiguous decision context. Indeed, Foreign Minister Westerwelle did not mince his words when discussing the situation in Libya and what was at stake there. For example, in a plenary debate in the Bundestag on 16 March 2011, thus a day before the vote in the UNSC, he described the situation in dire words, referring to 'Gaddafi's advancing troops, of bloody violence and of fallen cities in eastern Libya' (Deutscher Bundestag 2011b, 10815). The foreign minister was similarly unequivocal when it came to the implications of his diagnosis. With respect to Gaddafi, he opined that 'a dictator is waging war against his own people. In the face of this crime, the international community agrees: the dictator must go' (Deutscher Bundestag 2011b, 10815). In turn, for Germany Westerwelle stated that 'As democrats we stand alongside democrats … Our country is built on the values of freedom. It is these values of freedom that millions of people in northern Africa and the Arab world are now calling for. As the Federal Republic of Germany, we will support these peoples in this' (Deutscher Bundestag 2011b, 10814).

The developments in Libya represented an unequivocal challenge to virtually everything that Germany's civilian power role stands for and seeks to protect. This ranged from protecting innocent individuals on the ground in Libya to the workings of the international system. This, in turn, suggests that stepping up against such a challenge was the clear and unambiguous response from Germany resulting from its master role, as the foreign minister himself acknowledged in his statements.

Conclusion

After Germany had decided to abstain in the UNSC vote on resolution 1973 on Libya, surprise or outright consternation about its behaviour followed. The latter included the country's key Western partners in form of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France – all of whom voted in favour of the UNSC resolution and played key roles in the subsequent NATO operation. Germany's refusal to act in concert with all of its major allies came out of the blue when judged against the country's predominant national role conception of civilian power, which would have suggested a German contribution in a multilateral effort to uphold international norms in support of the protection of civilians.

This paper uses the German decision on Libya to explore possible reasons as to why states act 'out of character'. It proposes four potential and analytically distinct drivers for role violations pertaining to: exogenous pressure,

concerns over political survival, a lack of issue salience and ensuing bureaucratic decision-making, and unclear role demands in ambiguous decision contexts. The application of those drivers to Germany's Libya decision suggests that in that particular case considerations of political survival were front and centre in accounting for the country's deviation from its master role. In turn, there was little support for the other three potential drivers.

In conclusion, the discussion suggests several avenues for future research. For starters, in order to systematically explore the generalisability of this paper's findings, the theoretical expectations should be tested against additional cases Further, one could expand the list of possible drivers for role violation. One hook could be role dissonance, which arises for example when a master role and an auxiliary role are incompatible in the sense that the execution of the latter undermines the former (Breuning and Pechenina 2020). Finally, additional research seems in order to explore whether the critique of domestic actors was driven by the perceived dissonance between German actions and the country's civilian power role or whether external actors consider Germany's master role in their dealings with and expectations for Germany in the first place.

Notes

1. While OAF represented a challenge to the civilian power role of Germany in that it was not mandated by the UN Security Council, it was in accordance with the other key elements of said role, such as acting jointly with the country's key partners through a multilateral institution and pursuing normative ends in international politics. Also, the use of force is not beyond civilian powers but can happen as a means of last resort, which turns Germany's participation in OAF into arguably an extreme case of enacting the civilian power role.
2. For different interpretations which highlight possible upsides of Germany's abstention, see for example Hellmann (2011) who suggests that Germany's reputation among other (Western) great powers actually benefited from its decision since it made the country just as 'unpredictable' as its peers, or Sandschneider (2012, 4) who argues that the decision illustrates Germany's readiness of going its 'own ways' at least every now and then.
3. The poll also asked for support for two other operations, namely KFOR and EUFOR. Both were seen positively by 61 per cent of the respondents each, though support had declined over the years quite considerably (in case of KFOR from 75 per cent in 2005).
4. For a more critical perspective on the role of upcoming state elections, see for example Hansel and Oppermann (2016).
5. On just 'Libyen' (Libya), there were 283 (FAZ) and 208 (SZ) hits respectively in the same time period.

Disclosure Statement

About the Author

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