

**Counterfactual Reasoning in Foreign Policy Analysis: The Cases
of German Non-participation in the Iraq and Libya Interventions
of 2003 and 2011**

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Introduction

The participation of the German armed forces in multilateral military missions is amongst the most prominent and contested issues on the agenda of post-unification German foreign policy. Correspondingly, the decisions of German governments for and against military contributions to such missions have given rise to an exceptionally rich scholarly literature (for recent overviews, see Noetzel/Schreer 2008; Miskimmon 2009; Viehrig 2010a; Saideman/Auerswald 2012; Canan-Sokullu 2012). What is more, the uneven pattern of Germany's involvement in international military interventions has become the focal point of a broader debate on change and continuity in German foreign policy since unification. On the one hand, the reluctance of German decision-makers to commit to the use of military force as well as the arguments put forward to justify international deployments of the Bundeswehr have been seen as confirmation of the civilian power role concept (Harnisch 2001; Maull 2001; Risse 2004) and the continued relevance of the Federal Republic's culture of military restraint (Berger 2002; Longhurst 2004; Malici 2006). On the other hand, post-unification Germany's enhanced role in multilateral military interventions and the increased willingness of German governments to frame their decisions for and against military deployments in terms of national interests are given as evidence for the 'normalisation' of German foreign policy which is being portrayed as evermore power-conscious, assertive and self-confident (Schöllgen 2000; Wagener 2004; Karp 2006; Hellmann *et al.* 2007). Thus, differences in the assessment of Germany's record in contributing to international military missions are very much at the core of current controversies about the overall trajectory of German foreign policy.

This is true, in particular, for the two highest-profile cases of post-unification Germany's non-participation in military interventions of its Western allies, the 2003 Iraq War and the 2011 NATO mission 'Unified Protector' in Libya. If anything, it is less the trend towards a stronger military engagement of the *Bundeswehr* in international missions than the decisions

against giving political and military support for the US-led invasion of Iraq and for imposing a no-fly zone over Libya that has sparked the most intense suspicions of a fundamental re-orientation of German foreign policy. Most notably, Germany's opposition to these two missions raised concerns both in the domestic and in the international arena about a renewed German *Sonderweg* and the reliability of Germany as a partner to the Western alliance. Thus, the collision course of the red-green government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder with the Bush administration over Iraq in summer/autumn 2002 and Germany's outspoken rejection of UN Security Council resolution 1441 triggered an all-time low in post-unification Germany's relations with the US and was criticized for undermining the transatlantic partnership as one of the cornerstones of the Federal Republic's *raison d'état* (Schwarz 2005). Along similar lines, the abstention of the conservative-liberal government under Chancellor Angela Merkel on UN Security Council resolution 1973 in March 2011 which authorized member states to 'take all necessary measures' to protect civilians from the Gaddafi regime in Libya was likened to a 'stab in the back' (Ash 2011) of Germany's allies and marked the first occasion since World War II in which Germany stood against all three of its main Western partners, the US, France and the UK, simultaneously. This unprecedented isolation of Germany on a major security issue was seen to revive 'fears of Germany reverting to a semi-neutral stay-at-home strategy that could undermine the alliance' (Peel 2011), and the former German foreign minister Joschka Fischer was merely one of the most outspoken of many voices in the German debate when he ranked the government stance as 'possibly the biggest foreign policy debacle since the founding of the Federal Republic' (Fischer 2011a: 26).

There can thus be little doubt that Iraq and Libya represent two of the most controversial and consequential issues on Germany's foreign policy agenda since unification. At the same time, there is no scholarly consensus about the main driving forces behind government decisions to oppose military interventions in the two cases against the expectations of some or all of Germany's major Western allies. Rather, analyses of these decisions point to a plethora of different but partly complementary explanations. Thus, the Schröder government's opposition to the Iraq War is variously put down to anti-militarist (Müller 2003; Daalgaard-Nielsen 2003) or anti-American (Berendse 2003; Markovits 2004) sentiments in German political culture; differences in values and threat perceptions on the two sides of the Atlantic (Larres 2003; Nau 2008); the increased self-consciousness of German decision-makers and their emancipation from US leadership (Forsberg 2005); or the reduced dependence of Germany for its security on the transatlantic alliance and a German strategy of soft balancing

towards the US (Walt 2005: 126-132; Dettke 2009). In the case of Libya, the reasons advanced for the Merkel government's policy of abstention include the reduced weight given to considerations of alliance solidarity in the definition of the German national interest (Hellmann 2011a: 20-22; Miskimmon 2012); the changing national role conceptions of German decision-makers (Oppermann 2012); a geopolitical re-orientation of Germany towards the emerging powers (Stephens 2011); or the inexperience of foreign minister Guido Westerwelle and government miscalculations regarding, for example, the position of the Obama administration (Rinke 2011; Miskimmon 2012: 398).

What is noteworthy, moreover, is that many accounts of German decision-making on Iraq and Libya seek to reinforce their causal narrative by implicit or explicit references to the domestic electoral interests of the respective governments. In the case of Iraq, the confrontational approach of the Schröder government is frequently linked to the election campaign in the run-up to the 22 September 2002 general elections (see Hacke 2003; Daalgard-Nielsen 2003; Harnisch 2004; Staack 2004; Buras and Longhurst 2005; Böller 2011; Palm and Schulz 2011). In particular, the red-green coalition's critique of US plans for an attack on Iraq is seen as being at least partly driven by tactical considerations in particular of the Social Democrats to capitalize on wide-spread skepticism in public opinion towards a military intervention in order to catch up in its poll ratings. Thus, the evidence is that the Social Democrats deliberately decided to put opposition to an invasion of Iraq at the forefront of their electoral strategy (Hellmann 2006: 172-173; Staack 2004: 208), and the Iraq issue is judged to have presented Chancellor Schröder with

“the occasion to relaunch his campaign, and above all to woo back his disaffected left-wing and pacifist supporters. [...] [S]uddenly Schroeder was offered an opportunity to make a difference as an international statesman. [...] There was a clear element of political calculation in Schroeder's increasingly critical remarks of the Bush administration's policies, spurred by his political advisers who argued that he could win votes from eastern Germany and the openly anti-American and pacifist PDS party [...] (Walker 2003: 37-38).

Along similar lines, the Merkel government's policy on Libya is regularly put into the context of the electoral interests of the liberal junior partner to the coalition, the FDP, in view of two forthcoming regional elections on 27 March 2011 (Bertram 2011; Hacke 2011: 52; Maull 2011: 112-113; Rinke 2011: 51; Rühl 2011: 565). Given the polling evidence of

widespread public opposition to any German participation in a military intervention in Libya (see Oppermann 2012: 515), the argument put forward essentially is that the liberals in general and foreign minister Guido Westerwelle in particular tried to emulate the successful 2002 electoral strategy of the red-green government and to turn around their domestic political fortunes by adopting a high-profile and outspoken anti-war stance.:

“The abstention on UN1973 was partly an FDP electoral tactic in light of the upcoming state elections in Baden-Württemberg on 27 March 2011. With concerns that the FDP might not pass the 5 per cent threshold, Westerwelle calculated that an abstention would prove helpful” (Miskimmon 2012: 399).

This tendency in the literature to ‘fortify’ causal arguments about Germany’s opposition to the military interventions in Iraq and Libya by bringing in the electoral interests of the respective governments, however, is unsatisfactory in at least two respects. First, the causal weight attached to the ‘electoral politics’ argument is often ambiguous. While electoral incentives do not tend to be presented as sufficient conditions for government policy on the two issues, the extent to which they are seen as necessary conditions generally remains unclear. While the implicit assumption clearly is that German policy on Iraq and Libya would have been different had it not been for the electoral interests of governments, how and to what effect these interests are said to have impacted on decision-making is rarely spelled out. Thus, the ‘electoral politics’ argument simply tends to be put alongside other explanatory factors which are equally hypothesised as having caused the foreign policy decisions in question. This, in turn, leads to accounts of these decisions which are over-determined and in which the causal effects of different factors are impossible to disentangle (see Ragin 2000: 88-119). Second, the plausibility of the ‘electoral politics’ argument solely rests on the congruence between the electoral interests of the Schröder and Merkel governments and the expected electoral repercussions of opposing the Iraq War and mission ‘Unified Protector’. In other words, the assumption is that government policy must have been driven by electoral incentives, simply because these incentives appeared to suggest the policy that the governments have selected. While this argument is inherently unfalsifiable, little effort has been made to show that electoral considerations have indeed played a role in government decision-making.

Against this background, the objective of the paper is to probe into the difference ‘electoral politics’ has or has not made to German foreign policy on Iraq and Libya. This is relevant,

first, because it contributes to a clearer analysis of the relevant causal drivers behind Germany's opposition to the military interventions. From a political perspective, second, it is crucial for any judgments on the sincerity or otherwise of the two governments in question. In terms of methods, the paper relies on a counterfactual analysis, precisely because a traditional investigation of available documents and the decision-making process in the factual cases is unlikely to yield valid insights on the role of electoral considerations that go beyond establishing the congruence between electoral incentives and government choices. In contrast, the methodological strategy employed in the paper is to construct two counterfactuals in which German foreign policy on Iraq and Libya is not formulated in the context of domestic electoral competition and to trace whether and how this manipulation of the antecedent brings about changes in the consequent, i.e. Germany's approach to the military interventions in Iraq and Libya. The contention is that this strategy makes it possible to isolate the effects of electoral interest on the two governments' decision-making and thus to scrutinise the explanatory power of the 'electoral politics' argument.

The paper will develop its case as follows. The next section will introduce the method of counterfactual reasoning, including different types and purposes of counterfactual arguments. We will then discuss our own counterfactuals in light of established methodological standards for constructing counterfactuals. The subsequent sections will investigate how German foreign policy on Iraq and Libya would likely have unfolded in the counterfactual condition, i.e. in the absence of forthcoming elections. The conclusion will wrap up our argument about the role of electoral politics for Germany's opposition to the military interventions in Iraq and Libya.

Counterfactual Foreign Policy Analysis: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Counterfactuals can be understood as "subjective conditional[s] in which the antecedent is known or supposed for purposes of argument to be false" (Levy 2008: 629). Even though a growing number of historians and IR scholars make use of counterfactuals (for recent examples see Harvey 2011; Lebow 2010; Levy/Goertz 2007a), the method is by no means an established practice yet. To the contrary, it is highly disputed whether counterfactuals can be regarded as valid scientific tools at all. Critics contend that there is no way of systematically doing research about events which did not happen (Fischer 1970: 15-21; Taylor 1954: 513) –

and that counterfactual reasoning is thus a fruitless and unscientific business. Serious scholars should concern themselves with factual evidence and avoid becoming crystal-ball gazers.

Such criticism can be responded to on three grounds. First, the differences between factual and counterfactual worlds are far from being as clear-cut as the critics suggest. Thus, every statement on cause-effect relationships by necessity entails an often implicit counterfactual argument (Lebow 2010: 30-37; Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 5; Harvey 2011: 23-24, 37; Levy 2008: 629). As a consequence, avoiding counterfactuals altogether is hardly a viable option:

“Whenever we make the apparently factual claim that factor X made a critical causal contribution to outcome Y we *simultaneously* make a critical counterfactual claim that, in a logical shadow universe with factor X deleted, outcome Y would not have occurred” (Tetlock et al. 2006: 18).

If, for instance, we think that neo-conservatives in the Bush administration were ultimately responsible for the 2003 Iraq War, we simultaneously assume that a hypothetical Gore administration with a different ideological outlook would have followed another course (see Harvey 2011). Only if we eschew all causal inference and confine ourselves to purely descriptive analysis would we be able to abstain from counterfactual reasoning (Wenzlhuemer 2009: 32; Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 5). Thus, rather than questioning counterfactual thinking per se, we should attend to what can be seen as appropriate standards for judging the quality of specific counterfactual arguments (Fearon 1991: 170).

Second, counterfactuals do not condone ungrounded speculations on alternative courses of history. While it is true that counterfactuals are sometimes used to demonstrate the contingency and non-linearity of the social world (see Lebow 2010), this can still be done in a systematic and inter-subjectively understandable way. So-called *ideographic counterfactuals* (Levy 2008: 631; Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 7) use in-depth case-specific knowledge on the motives, beliefs and constraints of individual actors in an effort to explore, for example, whether the Russian revolution was indeed inevitable after the defeat of the czarist armies in World War I (Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 7). Other types of counterfactuals, however, serve completely different purposes. They might, for instance, reveal unspoken assumptions and hidden value judgments behind political worldviews (Wenzlhuemer 2003: 44-46; Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 13-14). Richard Ned Lebow provides an illustration of this kind of counterfactual argument when he puts the question what the international community would have done in South Sudan if it had been inhabited by a Caucasian rather than black

population (Lebow 2010: 44). Such “*miracle world counterfactuals*” (Lebow 2010: 44) can be valuable without any claim to historical plausibility.

Still another use of counterfactuals relates to the traditional tasks of evaluating and testing general theoretical claims. Pure *thought experiments* may produce “unexpected insights” (Wenzlhuemer 2009: 36) or “reveal hitherto latent logical contradictions and gaps” (Tetlock/Belkin 16: 12-13). *Nomothetic counterfactuals* (Levy 2008: 631; Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 10) specify “observable implications” of general propositions (see King/Keohane/Verba 1994: 28-29, 109-112) and guide the search for “corroborative correlational evidence” (Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 10). As a case in point, the democratic peace thesis logically implies the absence of war in a counterfactual international system that is made up only of democratic states. For this to be valid, in turn, we should expect to find some corroborative evidence in the factual world. For example, the political memoirs of democratic leaders should more often refer to political constraints on war-fighting than their authoritarian counterparts (Tetlock/Belkin 196: 10).

Finally, *ideographic-nomothetic counterfactuals* can be helpful in challenging existing theoretical accounts of specific political events. The analytical aim of both nomothetic and ideographic-nomothetic (Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 10) counterfactuals is *not* to make plausible an alternative history, but they use counterfactual reasoning in order to gain a better understanding of causal relations in the factual world. Thus, Ideographic-nomothetic counterfactuals, in particular, combine the interests of historians and social-scientists. The objective, to paraphrase Harvey (2011: 37), is to reveal flaws in standard accounts of historic events and processes. This is being done by shedding light on empirical evidence that is sidestepped or ignored by conventional approaches (Harvey 2011: 37). In the case of Harvey’s analysis of US policy on Iraq, such evidence comprises, amongst other things, the worldviews of Al Gore and his political advisers which would likely have played a leading role in the foreign policy decision-making of a counterfactual Gore presidency. It is this type of counterfactual reasoning that serves as a methodological starting point for the analysis put forward in this paper.

Moreover, a third response to the critics of counterfactuals would challenge the assumption (see Fisher 1970: 19) that every counterfactual is equally hypothetical. Specifically, the methodological literature suggests a number of criteria for assessing and comparing the quality and usefulness of counterfactual claims (see Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 16-31; Lebow

2010: 54-57; Levy 2008: 632-540).¹ For one thing, antecedents and consequents need to be well specified, i.e. they must meet the criterion of *clarity* (see Levy 2008: 632; Lebow 2010: 54). Second, the connecting principles should contradict neither each other nor the antecedent or consequent of the counterfactual. The criterion of *cotenability* “requires that if the counterfactual assertion had been true [...] nothing else would also have been different in a way that would have materially affected the outcome” (Fearon 1991: 195; see also Goodman 1973: 9-17). An obvious example of a counterfactual that fails to satisfy these requirements is the idea that even in the absence of nuclear weapons the Cuban missile crisis would not have led to a global war. In this scenario, however, the Soviet Union would have been unlikely to deploy armed missiles to Cuba in the first place (Cederman 1996: 252-253). The methodological problem involved here resembles the difficulties in experimental settings or comparative case-studies of holding third variables constant. While “surgical counterfactuals” are certainly unrealistic (Lebow 2010: 50), ripple effects from counterfactual manipulations and other interactions between variables should be made explicit and minimized as much as possible.

Closely related, another widely-used criterion tells us to avoid major interventions in the course of factual history:

“As a general rule, the fewer and more trivial the changes we introduce in history [...] the more plausible the counterfactual becomes” (Lebow 2010: 48).

This ‘*minimum rewrite of history*’ rule (Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 23) is meant to ensure the historical plausibility of the counterfactual. There is, however, no single understanding of the specifics that the rule entails. Thus, some authors call for a historically compelling narrative for the existence of the antecedent (see, for instance, Lebow 2010: 48). Others require that the counterfactual is made up only of events and actions that policymakers indeed considered and referred to in writing (Ferguson 1999: 86). Still another criterion holds that counterfactual arguments should not contradict well-established theoretical and statistical generalizations (Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 25-30). Since there are few such regularities and theoretical generalisations in IR, however, this benchmark appears problematic in our discipline and should not be overemphasized. Last but not least, counterfactuals have been assessed against the principle of *projectability* (Tetlock/Belkin 1996: 30-31), that is they are expected to tease

¹ It should be noted that there are counterfactuals for which these criteria do not apply, because they serve other purposes than theory-testing or explanation. The best case in point is the so-called miracle world counterfactual (see Lebow 2010: 44-46).

out as much as possible observable implications of the connecting principles which can be corroborated by empirical evidence.

With these criteria in mind, what would be methodologically sound counterfactual manipulations which can help us investigate the explanatory power of ‘electoral politics’ arguments for German non-participation in the 2003 Iraq War and in the 2011 enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya? Recall that the purpose of our exercise in counterfactual reasoning is to probe into the causal weight of electoral incentives in government decision-making on these two issues and, in particular, to assess whether the domestic context of electoral competition can be seen as a necessary condition for the decisions of the two governments not to support the military missions in question. We therefore decided to construct a *non-necessary condition counterfactual* (Levy 2008: 632), which is a subtype of the ideographic-nomothetic category. If anything, this has the methodological advantage that it is much more straightforward to employ counterfactual analyses to test necessary condition claims rather than probabilistic arguments or notions of equifinality (Goertz/Levy 2007b: 16).

In line with our research objectives, the paper considers four counterfactual claims which start out from a similar antecedent but which differ in terms of their consequent: whereas the counterfactuals all imagine a decision-making process that did not take place in the shadow of upcoming elections, they hypothesise opposite outcomes of decision-making:

Counterfactual 1a: If there had not been an upcoming election, the Schröder government would have supported and joined the US military intervention in Iraq.

Counterfactual 1b: If there had not been an upcoming election, the Schröder government would still have opposed the US military intervention in Iraq.

Counterfactual 2a: If there had not been an upcoming election, the Merkel government would have voted in favour of Resolution 1973 and would have participated in mission ‘Unified Protector’ in Libya.

Counterfactual 2b: If there had not been an upcoming election, the Merkel government would still have abstained from the vote on Resolution 1973 and would not have participated in mission ‘Unified Protector’ in Libya.

Given this set-up, how useful is our non-necessary condition counterfactual and how does it score on the criteria discussed above? As regards the demand for clarity, we contend that the antecedents and consequents are indeed unambiguously defined. Second, we are confident

that the counterfactual meets the criteria of cotenability. The antecedent, that is the absence of elections, is unlikely to cause significant ripple effects since it is difficult to imagine how a different electoral calendar could have affected the international agenda or the constellation of inter-state interests. Also, it is important to note that our antecedent does not rely on bringing forward the September 2002 general elections or the March 2011 regional elections which could have affected the composition or strength of the German government at the time of decision-making. Rather, it only imagines decision-making contexts on Iraq and Libya without imminent elections and leaves all other parameters of the German domestic context untouched.

Potentially more problematic is the performance of our counterfactual if it is judged against the minimal rewrite of history rule. Good counterfactuals, argue both Richard New Lebow (2010: 48) and Jack S. Levy (2008: 634), have to rest on compelling mechanisms which might have brought them into being. We partly disagree with this requirement, however, because we would challenge the notion that such a rigid reading of the rule should apply to nomothetic and nomothetic-ideosyncratic counterfactuals. More specifically, there appears to be no valid reason for asking our analysis to sketch out a plausible historical process towards a different election calendar in Germany, since our objective is not to call attention to a possible alternative course of history, but rather to single out the causal influence of electoral politics on the *factual* course of history. At the same time, the historical plausibility of our counterfactual certainly is (and needs to be) stronger than that of a miracle counterfactual, since there is no systematic reason which would have made it unthinkable that the elections to the German Bundestag or the state parliaments of Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate had been scheduled differently. In terms of Lebow's example for a miracle world counterfactual (Lebow 2010: 44), in contrast, to imagine Western Sudan as being inhabited by Caucasians would indeed be a highly implausible aberration from the course of factual history. In short, because our counterfactual has purely explanatory purposes and is not meant to demonstrate the contingency of events, it should not be required to make a compelling case for an alternative historical pathway towards its antecedent. Rather it is sufficient that the counterfactual only introduces changes which are not made impossible by systematic historical facts.

Moreover, in order to ensure that our counterfactual is co-tenable with established theories and that it meets the criterion of projectability, we need to specify theoretically plausible

influences on decision-making which are not connected to electoral considerations. Also, we have to indicate observable implications of these influences that can be corroborated or disproved by empirical data. In view of established accounts of post-unification German foreign policy and different theoretical perspectives on Foreign Policy Analysis, three factors appear to be particularly relevant in this regard:

- (1) Beliefs and worldviews of high-ranking decision-makers.
- (2) Intraparty and coalition politics.
- (3) International repercussions of the decisions and their evaluation by decision-makers.

More specifically, the significance of these potential drivers of German foreign policy comes from the following considerations: (1) If the decision-makers responsible for Germany's approach to Iraq and Libya had previously expressed scepticism about the appropriateness of military intervention under comparable circumstances (except for the electoral politics context) and if the arguments put forward resemble the justifications given for German non-participation in the cases under study, there will be reason to believe that the latter reflect genuine beliefs and concerns and are not just exercises of rhetorical window-dressing. (2) Intraparty and coalition politics are relevant inasmuch as they reflect restrictions on Germany's participation in international military missions which may have been influential before and during the decision-making processes and which are again not directly linked to immediate electoral concerns. For example, if significant factions of the ruling parties had opposed the use of military force under circumstances that were similar to our cases and if there is evidence that they continue to hold these positions at the time of decision-making on Iraq and Libya, intraparty and coalition politics would emerge as a plausible driving force behind German non-participation. (3) Finally, another possible explanation for German decision-making on the two cases under study rests on the anticipated international consequences of the decisions in question. While there is evidence for the reputational costs Germany suffered from its decisions not to support the military missions in Iraq and Libya, in particular with respect to Germany's standing as a reliable member of the Western alliance, these costs may either have been misjudged and underestimated or generally dismissed as being of little relevance for German foreign policy by decision-makers. Evidence to this effect would undermine the case that German governments have willingly accepted serious international consequences of their actions in order to realise electoral gains and thus reduce the causal weight to be attached to the electoral politics argument. Our contention, therefore,

is that the analysis of our “*non-necessary condition counterfactual*” (Levy 2008: 632) can clarify the explanatory power of electoral incentives for the Schröder and Merkel governments’ decisions not to participate in the Iraq War and in the military enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya respectively. In particular, empirical evidence of the sort outlined above would help in assessing whether or not the ‘electoral politics’ argument can be construed as a necessary condition in explaining the two cases of German non-participation in international military missions. It is the purpose of the following counterfactual case studies to present and assess such evidence.

Germany and the 2003 Iraq War

Even those who do not subscribe to an electoral-politics explanation of German nonparticipation in the 2003 Iraq War would have to acknowledge that, given the public salience of the issue and the unambiguousness of public opinion, there were strong domestic incentives for any German government to not support US Iraq policy (see Viehrig 2010b; Jung 2003: 26). The case for an electoral-politics explanation is even stronger when we take into account the electoral prospects of the SPD-Green party coalition at the beginning of 2002. Both parties suffered from the widespread perception that the economic policy performance of the governing coalition was modest at best. Whereas the percentage of likely SPD-voters dropped below 40% in early 2002 the Green party even had to fear that it would not pass the 5% hurdle and, thus, not re-enter the German parliament (Jung 2003: 23-25). As a consequence members of the governing coalition were ready to embrace any new issue that promised to improve their electoral chances. In June 2002 the SPD party board finally decided to place the opposition to the looming Iraq war at the centre of the SPD election campaign (Hellmann 2006: 172-173). This agenda-setting effort appeared to have finally paid off as it coincided with a considerable upswing in public opinion polls immediately before the elections (Jung 2003: 25).

This does, however, not prove that public opinion had a causal influence on foreign policy making. What if German decision-makers, while voicing their opposition to a military solution to the Iraq crisis, were just expressing pre-determined individual preferences? What if they had long before settled on a non-intervention course in order to keep their political parties and parliamentary fractions satisfied with their leadership? In light of the multitude of such factors it is conceivable that Germany had opposed US policy even in a counterfactual

world with elections being absent. It is this possibility that we will explore in the remainder of this chapter. First, we will focus on the attitudes of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and foreign minister Joschka Fischer vis-à-vis the use of military force particularly in the framework of counter-proliferation efforts. Second, the influence of coalition and party politics enters the picture. Specifically we will take a look at the evolution of noninterventionist factions inside the SPD and the Green party. Third, we will try to ascertain the perception of international costs by asking how much importance was attributed to the issue of alliance solidarity before and during the decision-making process on Iraq.

Both Joschka Fischer and Gerhard Schröder had taken pacifist positions during the early stages of their political careers respectively. Schröder, for instance, opposed the policies of SPD-Chancellor Schmidt when, in the early 1980s, he disagreed with NATO's double-track decision and possible deployments of new medium-range ballistic missiles in Europe. Fischer was an outspoken critic of the 1991 Gulf War. During the 1990s however he felt increasingly inclined to see military interventions as an option of last resort and, in 1995, he even argued in favour of militarily protected safe havens in Bosnia (Fischer 1995). After Fischer and Schröder became Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor in 1998 they still preferred a foreign and security policy of predominantly non-military means. Yet by joining the NATO operations against Serbia in 1999 they committed Bundeswehr troops to a warfighting mission for the first time in the history of the Federal Republic. What is more, the Kosovo war was waged without an explicit UN mandate and allegedly violated international law.

Justifying the German contribution to the NATO operations Schröder and Fischer, first and foremost, referred to the human suffering of the Albanian civilian population in Kosovo: "It would have been cynical and irresponsible if we kept doing nothing in the face of this humanitarian catastrophe" Schröder said in the German Bundestag (Schröder 1999a: 2571). "We cannot accept this policy of violence is gaining the upper hand in Europe" Fischer argued (Fischer 1999a: 2584). Similar humanitarian reasons however played only a marginal role in the debates that preceded the Iraq War. Rather the issue was framed as a necessary counterterrorism and counter-proliferation effort by the US government (Viehrig 2010b). It is therefore hard to imagine how Fischers' and Schröder's decision-making on Iraq under counterfactual conditions (with electoral incentives being absent) could have been informed by the same reasoning. The geographic proximity of Kosovo further limits the comparability of both cases. In 1999 Joschka Fischer felt obligated to preserve a basic level of political

stability on the European continent. “This war is a part of Europe and has to be ended by Europeans” he demanded (Fischer 1999a: 2584). The decision of whether or not commit troops in defence of the civilian population, he argued, boiled down to the question of “what kind of Europe do we want to live in?” (Fischer 1999b: 2639). It was European and German history that mattered from Schröder’s perspective too: “We can make good some of our historical guilt in that region by helping to prevent new murder” (Schröder 1999b: 1526). A few weeks later and with a view on Germany’s international reputation Schröder added that “given our history we cannot leave any doubt on our reliability and firmness [...] Germany cannot and will not go alone” (Schröder 1999c: 2622).

Fischer, in his efforts to legitimize the involvement of German troops in a NATO peacekeeping mission in Macedonia 2001, again referred primarily to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country (Fischer 2001a: 18177-18179). Just a few weeks later the Bundestag had to decide on *Operation Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan. This time the issue of alliance, and particularly transatlantic solidarity figured prominently in the justifications of a German participation: “Our willingness to provide for security also with military means if need be is a strong confirmation of our international alliances and partnerships” Schröder declared (Schröder 2001a: 18682). Fischer reminded that “9/11 has been an attack on our most important ally. It therefore goes without saying that we will show solidarity to the fullest extent possible” (Fischer 2001a: 18693). A German abstention, he added, would also weaken the international position of Europe (Fischer 2001b: 19296). But Germany’s engagement, according to Fischer, would also be a matter of defending basic democratic values and human rights against Al Qaida extremists (Fischer 2001a: 18693). The political circumstances again were quite different from the international situation surrounding the Iraq case and our counterfactual. Few doubted that Al-Qaida operatives, which had been trained on Afghan soil, were responsible for the 9/11 attacks after Osama bin Laden had personally claimed responsibility on a video tape. Also the legitimacy of the intervention in Afghanistan was undisputed. This was certainly not the case with Iraq. Nor was there any reliable evidence of organizational ties between the secular Iraqi regime and Al Qaida.

There is in the final analysis no single case of German participation in a military intervention prior to 2003 that allows us to anticipate the position Chancellor Schröder and foreign minister Fischer would have taken in our counterfactual. All we can say is that Schröder and Fischer under some circumstances, particularly when there was a compelling need to halt

massive atrocities or to prevent further terror attacks on their own country or an important ally, were prepared to contribute to coalition warfare even without an UN mandate. Both criteria did not apply to the 2003 Iraq war. But there is other evidence which can be useful for our counterfactual argument. In 1998 and again in 2001 American and British forces undertook aerial bombing campaigns against Iraqi facilities respectively. It is not only the target region that is identical with the factual and counterfactual in our analysis. In both instances the declared aim of the operations, which were conducted without the consent of the UN Security Council, was to destroy parts of a covert WMD programme that the Iraqi regime allegedly pursued. Hence except for the intensity of the military operations (which were purely airborne) there is a stunning similarity in terms of the conflict parties and the issues involved.

To the surprise of many neither the Chancellor nor the foreign minister publicly doubted the legitimacy of *Operation Desert Fox* in 1998. While Fischer remarked that “it is very important to bring these attacks to an end as soon as possible” (quoted in: Tageszeitung, 1998a) he also thought they were unavoidable and that Saddam Hussein alone was to blame for the situation. The Iraqi regime, Fischer reminded, was obliged to dispense with all WMD programmes and to comply with all UN-resolutions (quoted in: Tageszeitung 1998b). There was no question of Germany’s solidarity with its British and American allies according to Chancellor Schröder (quoted in: Tageszeitung 1998b). In February 2001, at the time of the second bombing campaign, Fischer was due to meet the new secretary of state Colin Powell in Washington DC. “It is not for us to criticize the United States” he reportedly declared. The German government shared US concerns in respect of the Gulf region being a “grave security risk” (quoted in: Hamburger Abendblatt 2001a). We are not concerned at all about the attacks “even though we are certainly moved by the events” Schröder had remarked two days earlier (quoted in: Schwäbische Zeitung 2001). The foreign minister and the Chancellor completely agreed with each other in the assessment of the crisis according to press secretary Uwe-Karsten Heye (Hamburger Abendblatt 2001a). Just like in 1998 there were rumours that Schröder was upset about the fact that he had not been informed by the British or the Americans before the start of the military operations (Tageszeitung 1998a; Spiegel 2001). But in public government officials denied this story as well as any substantive transatlantic disagreement on Iraq. To be sure there is some evidence that hints at Fischer’s uneasiness with the situation in both cases. During a session of the foreign affairs committee of the German Bundestag in 1998 he reportedly acknowledged that *Operation Desert Fox* would

massively complicate peacekeeping efforts of the United Nations (Spiegel 1998: 117). In Washington in 2001 he emphasized the need of a political solution and expressed his conviction that “conflicts of such kind cannot be solved by military means”. But at the same time he felt assured that what he had heard from Powell “was leading in the right direction” (Agence France Press 2001).

Both episodes are important because they resemble the Iraq crisis more closely than other military interventions in the early years of the Red-Green coalition. Fischer and Schröder in both instances refrained from opposing a military intervention against Iraq that was solely based on alleged WMD programme activity and did occur without an UN mandate.² In light of such evidence it is uncertain whether under counterfactual conditions (with national elections being absent) they would have personally opposed a military operation against Iraq in 2002.

If electoral concerns would not matter and individual worldviews and political preferences of the German leadership would not necessarily foreclose a supportive stance towards the Iraq intervention what else might have stopped Germany from an endorsement of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*? The evidence that most convincingly supports the assumption that Germany would have opposed US Iraq policy even if the schedule of elections had been different is related to intraparty and coalition politics. While the Green party from the very beginning of its political life was committed to a pacifist foreign policy a strong faction of left-wing Social Democrats had been holding similar views throughout the 1990s. On various occasions both Green Party parliamentarians and the SPD had voted against German contributions to UN peacekeeping missions. Under these premises it was hardly surprising that the new Red-Green government, once it was formed in 1998, had to overcome considerable scepticism towards any deployments of German troops, not to mention war-fighting missions such as Kosovo. In the case of NATO’s airborne operations against Serbia the Green party had to hold an emergency party conference where the party leadership narrowly succeeded in getting a majority vote in their favour. Even the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in Macedonia 2001 was opposed by prominent dissidents in the Green party (Buntenbach et al. 2001a: 18224-18225) and also by 19 parliamentarians of the SPD (Friese et al. 2001: 18226-

² Fairness requires us to say that the German Government in 2003 had more reason to doubt the evidence of ongoing Iraqi WMD programmes than in 1998 or 2001. An important piece of ‘evidence’ brought forward by the US in 2003 actually came from an Iraqi defector whom German intelligence services had interviewed but found unreliable.

18227). In the case of the parliamentary vote on *Enduring Freedom* Chancellor Schröder coupled the issue with a vote of confidence (*Vertrauensfrage*). It was only by this exceptional move that he felt able to coerce Green party and Social Democratic dissidents into following his policy (Schröder 2007: 178-180). Eventually only four members of the Green Party and none of the Social Democrats voted against the governmental draft under these circumstances (Deutscher Bundestag 2010). But still there were heated debates inside both governing parties. The *Berliner Aufruf*, a position paper of seven parliamentarians of the Green Party called the intervention “politically wrong”, “irresponsible on humanitarian grounds” and “useless for the specific purpose of fighting terrorism”. A German contribution to such an effort “must be avoided” (Buntenbach et al. 2001b). A few days after the vote a group of 16 SPD-parliamentarians called the Afghanistan mission wrong and reaffirmed its principled opposition to any more out-of-area missions (quoted in: Welt 2001). In light of all that intraparty anger it became quite clear at this point that the parliamentarians were unlikely to bear another deployment of German troops in the near future (Hennen 2008: 203).

The evidence so far shows that almost every military endeavour wherein German troops were supposed to participate posed risks to the continuation of the Red-Green coalition government. Likewise the political endorsement of allied war-fighting faced deep scepticism particularly in the parliamentary fraction of the Green party. Thus, Angelica Beer, the Green party’s parliamentary spokeswoman on defence policy issues, criticized US and British operations against Iraq in 1998 as “disproportionate” and, thus, illegal (quoted in: Tageszeitung 1998a). Party spokeswoman Gunda Röstel and Antje Radcke issued a statement in which they emphasized the lack of a UN-mandate. As a consequence the attacks were “highly regrettable and concerning in respect of international law. We therefore want the United States to end the attacks as soon as possible” (quoted in: Tageszeitung 1998b). Kerstin Mueller and Rezzo Schlauch, who jointly shared the parliamentary fraction of the Green Party, said the attacks were “not legitimized by international law in any conceivable way” and feared that “the United Nations will become sidelined in the future“ (quoted in: Tageszeitung 1998b).

Even more domestic trouble was caused by the accommodative attitude displayed by the foreign minister in Washington during his 2001 visit. This time he was personally attacked by his fellow party members. There is “astonishment, alienation, and outrage” among rank and file party members about the position of the foreign minister remarked Jürgen Trittin, the

minister for the environment at that time (quoted in: Spiegel 2001). Antje Radcke observed “reservations and a lack of understanding” among Green party members. “I personally had hoped that Fischer would have spoken more clearly with the American counterparts on the issue of the bombings” (quoted in: Welt 2001b). The air attacks were unlawful according to Angelika Beer. The parliamentary fraction of the Green party would therefore keep criticizing the operations and consequently there was “automatically a disagreement” between party and foreign minister (quoted in: Spiegel 2001). Senior party figures nevertheless struggled to prevent a permanent rift between Fischer and his party. “There is no reason to distance ourselves from Joschka Fischer” said Claudia Roth, designated party chairwoman, “but we have to talk about foreign policy principles” (quoted in: Spiegel 2001). “There is no intraparty rebellion” said Rezzo Schlauch, the chairman of the parliamentary fraction of the Green Party (quoted in: Agence France Press 2001). In a similar vein Angelika Beer declared that the Green Party was “one hundred percent” on Fischer’s side (quoted in: Hamburger Abendblatt 2001b). Chancellor Schröder for his part fully backed his foreign minister. “They completely agree with each other on the issue and on their assessment of the visit to Washington” the press secretary was eager to explain (quoted in: Agence France Press 2001).

Neither the 1998 nor the 2001 episode did threaten the stability of the coalition. But they certainly represent warning calls that clarified the limits of domestically acceptable foreign policy actions. Perhaps further damage was only avoided because of the short time period of the military operations in each case. Due to the fact that the German government decided to not join the US in its Iraq policy very early in 2002 it is impossible to prove whether the Green party and leftwing Social Democrats would have deterred Fischer and Schröder from siding with the US if they had been tempted to do so. But there is some evidence that members of the governing parties would not have accepted a pro-interventionist policy. Leading representatives of the Green Party already in October 2001 warned against a military intervention in Iraq (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2001). In Mai 2002 a party congress requested the government to abstain from any political or logistical support of a future US operation (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2002). Already in March 2002 Andrea Nahles, a leading figure of leftwing SPD parliamentarians, had publicly refused to support a German contribution even to an UN-mandated intervention. At the same time Chancellor Schröder had still left this option open (Hennen 2008: 203). If we take into account both these early voices and the long list of painful foreign policy controversies that preceded the Iraq crisis it

seems highly probable that had a Red-Green government supported an intervention it would have met strong domestic resistance. It is unclear if the Chancellor would have dared to call for another confidence vote in that situation. And if he did there is more than a slim chance that he might have lost it. Hence we conclude that coalition politics would likely work as a strong restriction on the political options of the Red-Green government in our counterfactual scenario.

Last but not least there is the question of the importance German decision makers attributed to the issue of alliance solidarity. Did they underestimate the political costs of disagreeing with the US and abstaining from the Iraq intervention? If yes the causal influence of electoral incentives did not have to be as strong as to be able to overrule other important interests. In the aforementioned cases we have seen that Fischer and Schröder oftentimes considered reputational aspects important. The Chancellor even risked his political future while calling for a confidence vote on the Afghanistan mission in the German Bundestag. On the other hand Germany, since its reunification, had already shown signs of a new confidence and self-reliance in foreign affairs. These signs became particularly visible in the framework of European Union politics wherein Schröder vehemently insisted on limits of Germany's financial contributions (Berliner Zeitung 1998). But the new approach certainly also informed Germany's stance on transatlantic relations both before and after 9/11. Thus, in the same speech in which Schröder expressed "unlimited solidarity" with the US he was eager to clarify some preconditions for German military cooperation. By taking considerable risks the country, he argued, would earn a right to be informed and to be consulted on US decision making. And, already with a view beyond Afghanistan, Germany would not join the US in irresponsible "adventures" (Schröder 2001b: 18392). Of course, these reservations became much stronger in 2002. "The international coalition against terrorism certainly will not serve as a pretext for doing whatever against whomever – particular not unilaterally" foreign minister Fischer remarked in an interview in February 2002. "Allies are not satellites" he added (Fischer 2002).

Such statements have often been interpreted as evidence of a progressing normalization tendency in German foreign policy (Schöllgen 2000; Wagener 2004; Karp 2006; Hellmann *et al.* 2007). We see this tendency as an important precondition of a German non-participation in our counterfactual. Still it is hard to overlook the many efforts that German decision-makers undertook to prevent a lasting transatlantic feud: These efforts ranged from the

approval of over-flight, the protection of Turkish territory by Patriot-air-defence-systems, the continued deployment of NBC-reconnaissance vehicles in Kuwait to intelligence sharing. Back at the end of 2002, in the run-up to the war, Fischer had even tried to anticipate whether the German public and his own party would accept a German yes-vote in the UN Security Council (Fischer 2011b: 193-196). But his refusal to exclude such an option in a newspaper interview caused an outcry in the national media and among his fellow party members (see Spiegel 2002a; 2002b). Even though it was unsuccessful the effort shows that German decision makers were well aware of the reputational risk of their opposition and the long-term effects of self-induced isolation. It is for the same reason that Fischer and Schröder almost desperately sought to have French President Jacques Chirac on their side. Also they tried to reach at least some common ground with their other European counterparts. The fact that the German leadership knowingly run the risk of considerable reputational costs in the first place logically implies the existence of strong incentives for diverging from the policies of the US and important European allies. These factors would also have to be present in our counterfactual if we expect Germany to stay on the same foreign policy course.

Our analysis did first focus on Fischer's and Schröder's individual attitudes towards military intervention. This evidence alone hardly enables us to predict whether or not they would have opposed the Iraq war in a counterfactual scenario with electoral incentives being absent. At least in two instances they supported the use of force against Iraqi facilities despite there was neither a UN mandate nor reliable proof of a covert WMD programme. Hence, they might have done so also in 2002 had it not been for the upcoming elections. We think it is much more reasonable to believe that coalition politics and considerations of intra-party leadership would have deterred the government from supporting the Iraq intervention. Particularly in the Green Party but also among many left-wing Social Democrats there was a growing frustration about an apparently never-ending series of Bundeswehr missions. It is hard to imagine these groups to stomach another high-intensity out-of area engagement particularly if it was not mandated by the UN. It is also improbable that Chancellor Schröder would have dared to call for another confidence vote and to survive that vote a second time. Therefore we conclude that even if the electoral calendar would have been different the resistance inside the governing parties had sufficed to prevent Germany's participation. Finally, our analysis sheds light on the attention that decision-makers devoted to the issue of alliance solidarity. On the one hand there are signs of a formerly unknown self-reliance and confidence of German foreign policy after reunification and particularly in the late 1990s. If it had not been

for these tendencies it is very unlikely that Germany would have ever dared to oppose the policies of the US. On the other hand we do not think that German decision-makers underestimated the international costs of non-participation in the Iraq case. There were simply too many conciliatory efforts. In the final analysis we therefore conclude that Germany would still have opposed US Iraq policy under counterfactual condition.

Germany and NATO's Military Intervention in Libya

Electoral politics explanations for Germany's abstention on UN Security Council Resolution 1973 on 17 March 2011 and its non-participation in the NATO mission 'Unified Protector' tend to focus on the electoral incentives of the junior partner to Angela Merkel's coalition government, the FDP, in the run-up to regional elections in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate which were scheduled just 10 days after the UN Security Council vote on Libya. Given the FDP's extremely poor showing in opinion polls and the unpopularity of its foreign minister Guido Westerwelle, then also still party chairman and vice-chancellor, these elections and the question of whether the liberals would succeed in crossing the five per cent hurdle necessary to re-enter the two state parliaments were seen as crucial for the political prospects of the FDP and of Westerwelle personally as well as for the overall stability of the coalition government. What is more, Guido Westerwelle is credited with having been a leading force in predetermining the coalition's approach to Libya and he is seen as having used the authority of his office to shape Germany's policy of abstention and non-participation as a tactical electoral ploy to resuscitate his and his party's political fortunes (see Maull 2012: 35-36; Miskimmon 2012: 395-396; Rühl 2011: 564-566). Accordingly, the following assessment of the likely trajectory of government decision-making in the absence of imminent elections puts an emphasis on the relevant foreign policy beliefs of Westerwelle and the positions of other leading representatives of the FDP. Furthermore, the analysis will look into the influence of coalition politics and the expected international repercussions of government policy on decision-making in the counterfactual condition.

Beginning with the foreign policy beliefs of Guido Westerwelle, the starting point is that his position as foreign minister, vice-chancellor and leader of the junior coalition partner would have made him as central to government decision-making in the counterfactual as in the factual. Moreover, there are at least three types of empirical evidence which jointly provide a

good indication of the position Westerwelle would likely have taken on Libya if it had not been for immediate electoral incentives. On all three counts, the data suggests that the German foreign minister would not have steered a significantly different course in the counterfactual scenario. This is even more so since many of Westerwelle's views have been closely mirrored by other prominent voices within the FDP and are rooted in long-standing official party policy.

The first piece of evidence relates to Westerwelle's position on the Arab Spring more broadly which he has articulated in response to the developments in Tunisia and Egypt in January and February 2011. Most notably, this position reveals a deep scepticism regarding outside intervention into the popular uprisings in the Arab world. While the foreign minister left no doubt that the German government "stands unconditionally at the side and on the side of democracy – be it in Tunisia, be it in Egypt" (Westerwelle 2011a: 9768), he was also adamant that the uprisings were ultimately a matter of the Egyptian and Tunisian people and that any impression had to be avoided that they were "an affair of the West, an affair of foreign governments" (Westerwelle 2011b: 9964). Whereas Westerwelle took the lead in drawing up a plan for "swift and targeted economic support" for democracy in the Middle East (quoted in: Times 2011: 8), he insisted that the sovereignty of Arab societies to take matters into their own hands must not be put into question: "We want to help, not to patronise" (Westerwelle 2011b: 9964). Perhaps most pointedly, the foreign minister has expressed his attachment to the principle of non-intervention into the internal affairs of the Arab countries with regard to Egypt at a time when it was still in the balance whether the Mubarak regime would indeed fall:

"Who will govern the Egyptian people is not our business, but it is the business of the Egyptian people itself" (Westerwelle 2011b: 9963).³

It was precisely this determination of Westerwelle not to become involved in the question of President Mubarak's resignation which earned him a rebuke from a leading member of the largest German opposition party, the SPD, who invoked the "responsibility to protect" in order to challenge the notion that the fate of the Egyptian uprising can be shrugged off as an internal affair (Wieczorek-Zeul 2011: 9974). Although a military intervention in Egypt or Tunisia was clearly never on the cards, Guido Westerwelle's well-documented preference for

³ The foreign minister essentially took the same position in response to the news of violent clashes between government and opposition in Bahrain in March 2011: "A solution must be sought within the country itself" (Westerwelle 2011c: 10815).

Western non-interference in the Arab Spring, which he expressed in the absence of any discernible domestic electoral incentives, suggest that he would have been equally – if not more – reluctant to support any military mission to help the Libyan rebels in toppling the Gaddafi regime under the counterfactual condition.

Second, the long-standing views of Guido Westerwelle and the FDP on the use of military force in general further add to the expectation that the foreign minister would have been no less sceptical about a German contribution to mission ‘Unified Protector’ in the counterfactual. These views are marked, in particular, by a strong attachment to the Federal Republic’s traditional “culture of restraint” (Baumann and Hellmann 2001: 62-63) in military affairs and, closely related, by the conviction that military force can only ever be legitimate as a means of last resort. For example, Westerwelle spelled out these guiding principles of his foreign policy in a high-profile keynote address little more than one year into his term in office:

“Germany will continue to advocate a culture of restraint with regard to the use of military force. It is always a weapon of last resort” (Westerwelle 2010).

What is more, Westerwelle’s beliefs reflect the FDP’s long-established line that “the use of military means can only be the *ultima ratio*” (FDP 2009: 67) which the party cherishes as part of the legacy of its highly regarded former foreign minister and current honorary chairman, Hans-Dietrich Genscher. This line has also been at the heart of the FDP’s criticism from the opposition benches of the 2005-2009 CDU/SPD grand coalition under Angela Merkel, which Westerwelle invoked at several occasions already early on in the legislative period and in the absence of any immediate electoral incentives. Most notably, he repeatedly accused the coalition of pursuing a “Militärangebotspolitik” (quoted in: Frankfurter Rundschau 2006: 6), i.e. a policy of prematurely offering German contributions to international military missions. As a case in point, Westerwelle criticised the CDU’s defence minister at the time, Franz Josef Jung, for carelessly abandoning the ‘culture of restraint’ when he appeared to suggest in November 2006 that Germany would stand ready to deploy the Bundeswehr to Darfur should this become necessary (Welt 2006a: 4). More generally, Westerwelle took issue with what he perceived as a trend towards a less restrained approach to military options in the German foreign policy discourse:

“It is wrong that, by now, the deployment of German armed forces is discussed already at the beginning of many foreign policy debates. The military is the last, not

the obvious solution. [...] The deployment of German soldiers must always remain the exception [...]. In my view, Germany's power and influence in the world depend on humanitarian credibility and economic strength – and not on military presence” (Westerwelle 2006a: 5).

As regards the case of Libya, therefore, the foreign minister's opposition to any German involvement in a military enforcement of a no-fly zone is consistent with his and his party's well-documented scepticism towards foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr. In particular, Westerwelle's insistence that the use of military force should only ever be considered as a last resource finds its echo in one of the key reasons given by the foreign minister for Germany's opposition to mission 'Unified Protector', which was that a tightening of economic sanctions would have been a viable and not yet fully exhausted alternative to military means (Westerwelle 2011d: 11137). This argument should thus not be dismissed as an attempt to dress up electoral considerations, but would likely have been equally influential in shaping government decision-making in the counterfactual.

The third strand of evidence, moreover, links back to the opposition of Guido Westerwelle and the FDP to Germany's participation in specific international military operations under the Merkel-led grand coalition. In particular, the FDP went against the government decisions to contribute to EUFOR RD Congo, an EU mission to assist the UN in providing a secure environment for the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and to lead the maritime efforts of UNIFIL at preventing arms smuggling into Lebanon.⁴ These decisions were taken in May and September 2006 respectively and did not stand in the context of imminent federal or regional elections. Although the missions in Congo, Lebanon and Libya are obviously very different in a number of important respects, including their political objectives, military intensity, historical context and institutional framework, they still have in common that they called for decisions of the German government on whether or not to take part in multilateral and UN-mandated military interventions which arguably did not implicate any essential or immediate German security interests.

What is most revealing, in this regard, is that the arguments which the FDP invoked against a German contribution to EUFOR RD Congo (see Brummer 2013; Schmitt 2012) closely

⁴ In 2007, the FDP also argued against a German participation in operation EUFOR Chad/RCA, an EU military mission in Chad and the Central African Republic which took place in 2008 and 2009. This mission, however, was hardly discussed in Germany at all, not the least because the grand coalition made it clear early on that there would be no German military contribution to it (Schmitt 2012: 72-76).

mirror some of main concerns raised by foreign minister Westerwelle about a military intervention in Libya. Three points, in particular, stand out.⁵ One, the FDP in both cases justified its position in terms of the risks involved for the German armed forces. Just as Westerwelle emphasised the “incalculable dangers to life and limb of our soldiers” (Westerwelle 2006b: 6) in the debate about the operation in Congo, he warned about the “risks of a lengthy mission” (quoted in: Deutsche Welle 2011) for the German troops in the case of Libya. Two, the FDP pointed towards the threats of military escalation inherent in both interventions. In the case of EUFOR RD Congo, the FDP criticised the “ambiguities” of the mandate and the lack of an “overall political concept” which were said to hold the danger of unforeseen spatial and temporal extensions of the mission (Homburger 2006: 3105). A few weeks into the operation, Westerwelle felt vindicated in his warnings that the intervention would become a higher-intensity combat mission than expected by the government (Westerwelle 2006c: 4505-4506). Along similar lines, one of the core arguments of the foreign minister against German participation in “Unified Protector” precisely was that a military intervention to enforce a no-fly zone could prove a “slippery slope” (Westerwelle 2011c: 10816) towards the deployment of ground troops which would make the Bundeswehr “a party in a civil war” (ibid. 10815). Three, the FDP substantiated its opposition to the two military interventions by questioning their prospects of success. As regards the Congo, the liberals “doubted the sustainability of the effects” (Hoyer 2006a: 3239) of the mission. In the words of Guido Westerwelle:

“It is inconceivable that a country which is bigger than Western Europe can be stabilised with 500 German troops and maybe another 1000 soldiers from other European countries” (Westerwelle 2006b: 6).

With respect to mission ‘Unified Protector’, in turn, the foreign minister expressed doubts that a no-fly zone can be effective “in a country like Libya [...] which is approximately four times bigger than the Federal Republic of Germany” and raised the possibility that the intervention may “weaken rather than strengthen the democratic movements across North Africa” (Westerwelle 2011c: 10815).

⁵ In addition, the FDP linked its rejection of EUFOR RD Congo to its general concern with using military force only as the *ultima ratio*: “Perhaps we have already become too accustomed, in critical situations, to resort to the instrument of Bundeswehr deployments when it comes to supporting peacekeeping missions across the globe. However, what appears to disappear from view occasionally, is that deployments of the armed forces, in particular of the German armed forces, can only always be the very last means” (Hoyer 2006a: 3238).

Moving on to Germany's contribution to UNIFIL off the Lebanese coast, the domestic debate about this mission was set apart from the debates about other military interventions by the exceptionally prominent role of different interpretations of the lessons to be learned from German history (Martinson 2012: 401-403). Correspondingly, the FDP and Guido Westerwelle also explained their opposition against the government decision to participate in the operation primarily in historical terms:

“I personally have very fundamental historical objections to a deployment of German soldiers to the Middle East. [...] [We] should keep to the reasons of state which have so far been accepted in Germany: no German armed forces in the Middle East” (Westerwelle 2006c: 4506).

At the same time, the FDP complemented its case against Germany's contribution to UNIFIL with concerns about a possible military escalation of the intervention, which fits into and reinforces the party's pattern of argument in the cases of the Congo and Libya. Thus, the FDP objected to the “ambiguity of the [United Nations] mandate” (Westerwelle 2006c: 4506) and the lack of a clear “political concept” (Gerhardt 2006: 4825) which were seen to leave crucial questions on the practical implementation of the mission open and which would therefore hold the danger that the Bundeswehr ever more drawn into the conflict as “a kind of war party” (Westerwelle 2006c: 4506). For the FDP, UNIFIL was an “even bigger military adventure” (Niebel 2006: 5) than EUFOR RD Congo, a participation in which would risk being counterproductive in that it may undermine Germany's political contributions to a resolution of the conflict (Hoyer 2006b: 4802).

All things considered, therefore, the evidence on Guido Westerwelle's beliefs on the Arab Spring, the use of military force in international politics as well as his arguments against German participation in specific multilateral missions during the 2005-2009 grand coalition suggest that the foreign minister would have essentially taken the same line against operation ‘Unified Protector’ in the counterfactual as he indeed did in the factual. Since these beliefs of Westerwelle reflect long-standing party policy and have been shared by the broader leadership of the FDP, the intraparty balance of opinion further reinforces the expectation that the junior coalition partner would also have pressed for a policy of non-participation in the case of Libya if it had not been for the upcoming regional elections.

As regards coalition politics, moreover, there is nothing to suggest that the senior coalition party, the CDU, would have challenged its junior partner's position on Libya any more in the

counterfactual than in the factual. Thus, we would expect the same extent of intra-coalition consensus against German support for mission ‘Unified Protector’ under both conditions (see Rinke 2011: 51-52). At least three points can be made in support of this contention. First, Chancellor Merkel’s preoccupation with managing the Eurozone crisis and the government’s nuclear policy turn-around after the Fukushima disaster would have made her no less prepared to leave the lead over decision-making on Libya to the foreign office and to Guido Westerwelle in the absence of forthcoming regional elections. In fact, it is difficult to see why Merkel should have run the risk of further undermining the stability of the coalition by going against her junior partner on an issue which was not her top priority and which was within the jurisdiction of the foreign minister.

Second, the policy of non-participation on Libya fits into the broader thrust of reforms of the Bundeswehr which both coalition partners had agreed to already in their 2009 coalition treaty. These reforms were driven, more than anything, by the imperatives of budgetary consolidation and imply a scaled-down ambition for the Bundeswehr in ‘out-of-area’ missions as well as a renewed focus of the German armed forces on multilateral territorial defence (Miskimmon 2012: 400). Along these lines, the two coalition partners share a long-standing concern with avoiding an overload of the Bundeswehr, in particular given Germany’s ongoing military engagement in Afghanistan. Most recently, the point has been invoked by the CDU’s defence minister, Thomas de Maizière, to explain Germany’s rather small-scale support for France’s UN-backed military intervention in Mali (De Maizière 2013).⁶ Again, this concern should have been as relevant for government decision-making on Libya in the counterfactual as in the factual.

Third, it is important to reiterate that the ‘electoral politics’ explanation of Germany’s policy on Libya focuses on the electoral incentives of the FDP, not the CDU. On the narrow terms of testing this hypothesis, the counterfactual manipulation of taking electoral incentives out of the equation should thus leave the position of the CDU and of Angela Merkel unaffected. All this suggests that key representatives of the senior coalition partner, most notably Chancellor Merkel and defence minister de Maizière, would also have shared Westerwelle’s objections against mission ‘Unified Protector’ if it had not been for any regional elections.

⁶ The then-defence minister of the CDU, Franz Josef Jung, already warned about the risk of overstressing the capabilities of the Bundeswehr in the context of the debate about EUFOR RD Congo (see Schmitt 2012: 67). The FDP, then in opposition, also bolstered its case against a German contribution to that mission by making a similar case: “[T]he capacities of the Bundeswehr are fully exhausted” (Niebel 2006: 5).

Thus, Angela Merkel's assessment of possible measures against the Gaddafi regime should have been no less valid in the counterfactual:

“I am sceptical towards a military intervention, however. As Chancellor, I cannot lead us into a mission with highly uncertain prospects” (Merkel 2011).

Finally, a comprehensive analysis of Germany's likely approach to a military intervention in Libya under the counterfactual condition needs to consider the government's assessment of the possible consequences of German non-participation on the international level. This is important, in particular, because the 'electoral politics' account of the Merkel government's policy often rests on the view that decision-makers traded off significant international costs, most notably regarding Germany's standing with its Western allies, against hoped-for electoral benefits. Absent the promise of electoral gains, therefore, this implies that the anticipated international repercussions of its policy should have made the German government more inclined towards contributing to the intervention in the counterfactual. However, two observations appear to contradict this corollary of arguments stressing the role of electoral incentives in government decision-making.

First, there is some evidence that the German government did not initially expect significant international costs from its non-participation in the intervention and that international incentives should thus not have exerted a clear-cut pull towards a German contribution to the mission in the counterfactual. In particular, the reluctance of the US to unequivocally come out in favour of the intervention as well as apparent pointers to the effect that France and the UK would not be overly critical if Germany did not support Resolution 1973 and stood apart from its military implementation should have diluted the perceived pressure on the German government to take a more positive stance on the issue in the counterfactual as much as in the factual (see Miskimmon 2012: 398). Given that more than half of NATO member states, including Poland and other EU countries, did not make a military contribution to the intervention either, moreover, the Merkel government arguably had some reason for thinking that it was not isolated on Libya (Sperling, forthcoming; Deutsche Welle 2011). Indeed, there was some discussion in public discourse during the early days of 'Unified Protector' about the UK and France being increasingly isolated on this issue within NATO (Guardian 2011).

Second, the broader trajectory of an increasingly self-confident foreign policy of post-unification Germany (Hellmann *et al.* 2007) would suggest that concerns with its reputation

in the Western alliance were not uppermost on the Merkel government's list of priorities.⁷ In what has been described as being part of the 'normalisation' of German foreign policy (Oppermann 2012: 506-507), government decisions on the use of military force are increasingly framed in terms of explicit national interests and have become altogether less driven by a preoccupation with meeting the expectations of the Federal Republic's partners than has traditionally been the case. The implication for the counterfactual, therefore, is that possible anticipated repercussions of the policy on Libya for Germany's standing in the alliance, very much like in the factual, would not have carried very much weight with decision-makers and would therefore not have exerted strong pressure towards German participation in the military intervention (see Hellmann 2011a).

Most notably, this changed mindset of German foreign policy decision-makers has long been evident for foreign minister Westerwelle and the FDP more broadly. Thus, Guido Westerwelle already in the debate about EUFOR RD Congo left no doubt that in his view decisions on Germany's participation in military missions must not be overly subservient to the wishes of its international partners:

“Paris calls, Berlin follows – commitments to foreign deployments [of the Bundeswehr] must not follow this pattern” (Westerwelle, quoted in: Welt 2006b: 1).

Rather, the FDP has insisted, for example in the UNIFIL debate, that German contributions to military missions must follow, in the words of the party's general secretary at the time, “our own political interests” (Niebel 2006: 5). The very point that there were no German interests involved, moreover, was also a key argument put forward by the grand coalition under Angela Merkel against offering German troops for EUFOR Chad/RCA (Schmitt 2012: 74-75). The current coalition government, in turn, has explicitly laid down the principle that foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr must always be justifiable in terms of German security interests in its Defence Policy Guidelines which were published two month after the decision not to participate in mission ‘Unified Protector’:

“Military operations have far-reaching political consequences. In each individual case, there must be a clear answer to the question of whether German interests and the

⁷ This is not to say, however, that the coalition was indifferent to the possible loss of international prestige in consequence of its stance on Libya. It is only that the government did not let the anticipation of such costs drive its policy on the intervention. Rather, it made an effort to make good for any damage to its international reputation by offering up to 300 more troops for AWACS reconnaissance flights over Afghanistan in order to reduce the burden on NATO-partners who are engaged in Libya and to send “a political signal of alliance solidarity” (De Maizièrè 2011: 11182).

related fulfilment of international responsibility require and justify an operation and what the consequences of non-action would be” (German Ministry of Defence 2011: 4).

By the same token, the Merkel government has put a strong emphasis on the German national interest in explaining its policy of non-participation on Libya. Comparing Afghanistan and Libya, Chancellor Merkel, for example, has argued that while the Bundeswehr involvement in Afghanistan contributes to German security, the same could not be said for Libya (Merkel 2011). If anything, defence minister de Maizière was even more explicit in making the same point:

“The international community says: [in Libya] can be intervened. And we reserve the right, in the German interest, to say: we will not be involved this time. [...] We are not convinced of this military operation” (quoted in: Handelsblatt 2011).

The evidence, therefore, is that the interest-based justification of government policy on Libya in the factual is very much in line with similar policy statements of key decision-makers in different contexts and reflects a broader trend in post-unification German foreign policy. This would suggest, in turn, that the case made by the government against the intervention in Libya was not only an electoral ploy but would also have figured in the counterfactual.

In summary, the counterfactual analysis suggests that the Merkel government would have pursued essentially the same policy of non-participation on mission ‘Unified Protector’ even if it had not been for any immediate electoral incentives. Foreign minister Westerwelle’s prominent role in coalition decision-making on this issue and his long-standing foreign policy beliefs, which have been shared by other key representatives of the FDP, would have strongly pushed government policy in this direction and there would not have been serious challenges to such a course on the level of coalition politics or as regards the anticipated international costs of the policy.

It is important to note, however, that this finding does not in itself speak to the much debated – and at times recommended – option of voting in favour of Resolution 1973 in the Security Council without participating in the military implementation of the resolution (see Bertram 2011). The government rejected this option primarily on the grounds that it was said to be inconsistent and unsustainable. Specifically, both the Chancellor and the foreign minister argued that endorsing the resolution at the UN would have put Germany under increasing international pressure to offer a military contribution as well, ultimately making the policy of

non-participation in the intervention impossible to uphold (Rühl 2011: 565-566; Westerwelle 2011e: 2).

Although it has to be acknowledged that the evidence in this regard is sketchy, the above analysis still gives at least two reasons to expect that the government would also have refrained from trying to decouple its vote in the Security Council from the question of a military contribution to 'Unified Protector' in the counterfactual.⁸ First, such a policy appears out of sync with the notion of an increased self-confidence of German foreign policy which would have left the Merkel government as predisposed to making a vocal case against the political rationale behind Resolution 1973 instead of quietly acquiescing in it under the counterfactual condition as it was in the factual (Miskimmon 2012: 395). Second, the government's calculation of the international repercussions of its policy would in neither of the two scenarios have strongly pushed decision-makers towards voting in favour of Resolution 1973. Rather, the coalition proceeded on the assumption that an abstention only had serious consequences for its reputation within the Alliance, if Germany would thereby bring down the resolution. Had this been the case, however, the evidence is that the Merkel government would have voted with its allies regardless of the forthcoming regional elections (Rinke 2011: 52).

Conclusion

The decisions of the Schröder and Merkel governments not to participate in the 2003 Iraq War or in the 2011 military intervention in Libya certainly rank amongst the most consequential and controversial landmarks in post-unification German foreign policy. What is contested about these decisions, in particular, are the motives and driving forces behind them. While scholars have provided many different accounts of what made the two governments oppose military action in Iraq and Libya, one very prominent argument is that decision-making was shaped by the electoral incentives of governments to play to the gallery of an anti-interventionist public opinion in the face of forthcoming elections. The way this argument is generally put, however, is deeply problematic because it tends to be ambiguous

⁸ This expectation is further reinforced by the experience of the Schröder government on Iraq (see above). In this case, the possibility of voting for Resolution 1441 in the UN Security Council while ruling out any military involvement in the intervention was briefly hinted at by foreign minister Joschka Fischer, but met with such a hostile domestic response that it was quickly discarded (see Fischer 2011b: 193-196).

about the specific causal weight attached to electoral incentives and because it rests on simply establishing congruence between such incentives and government policy.

Given this state of the debate, the present paper has set out to ascertain the role of electoral considerations for government decision-making in the two cases and thus to scrutinise 'electoral politics' explanations of German non-participation in the international military interventions in Iraq and Libya. However, such explanations are inherently difficult to test or falsify using traditional case study methods. At the same time, these accounts implicitly rest on the assumption that government policy would have been different had decision-making not taken place in the context of imminent elections. Making this assumption explicit and testing it in a counterfactual analysis has therefore been judged a promising methodological tool to tease out the extent to which electoral considerations have indeed made a difference to Germany's approach to Iraq and Libya.

Specifically, the paper has constructed non-necessary condition counterfactuals in which decision-making on whether or not to contribute to the two military missions did not take place in the context of imminent elections. Given this counterfactual condition, the research strategy has then been to investigate how different possible explanatory factors in the theoretical toolbox of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) on different levels of analysis would have played out in the absence of electoral incentives. In particular, the paper has looked at three factors that figure prominently in the debate about Germany's foreign policy since unification: the beliefs of decision-makers; intraparty and coalition politics; and the anticipated international repercussions of government decisions.

In both cases under study, the main finding of this counterfactual analysis is that German foreign policy would not have been significantly different if governments had not made their decisions in the shadow of forthcoming elections. As for Iraq, the pressures of intraparty and coalition politics, in particular, would still have pushed the red-green government under Chancellor Schröder towards opposing the US-led intervention. Neither the beliefs of key decision-makers nor government concerns with the damage of non-participation to Germany's international reputation would have been powerful and unambiguous drivers of a different course of action. In the case of Libya, it was above all the beliefs and influence of foreign minister Guido Westerwelle and the position of the junior coalition partner more broadly which would also have suggested a German policy of abstention on Resolution 1973 and of non-participation in mission 'Unified Protector' in the counterfactual. The dynamics

of coalition politics as well as the Merkel government's assessment of the international consequences of its policy further reinforce this expectation.

In the final analysis, therefore, our counterfactuals lead us to conclude that electoral incentives did not have a meaningful causal influence on the decisions of German governments to oppose the Iraq War and the military intervention in Libya. 'Electoral politics' explanations of these two cases of German non-participation in international military missions are thus ultimately unconvincing. More generally, the paper suggests that counterfactuals open up a promising route in FPA towards assessing the relative weight of single explanatory variables in the multi-factorial explanations of foreign policy decision-making which are one of the hallmarks of the discipline (Hudson 2007: 6).

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