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Germany's Enable & Enhance Initiative

What is it about?

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For some time now, the Federal Government's "Enable & Enhance Initiative" has been the subject of German security policy debates. While experts discuss it using the usual acronyms such as E2I, the general public has resorted to speculation. The most prevalent suspicion is that the initiative is an attempt to justify German armaments exports to crisis areas, as it enables the conflict parties to resolve their dispute under their own steam. This reductive view is incorrect. The Enable & Enhance Initiative is instead a complex instrument of preventive security policy.

"Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free" – thus begins the 2003 European Security Strategy. Twelve years later, that sense of optimism has been all but lost. Towards the East, Russia is destabilising the post-Soviet region while in the South, an arc of crisis spans from Morocco to the Caspian Sea. The conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq have displaced millions, many of them towards Europe. The security situation around us is rapidly deteriorating. Fences along the external borders of the EU and patrol boats in the Mediterranean Sea will do just as little to change that as a stricter asylum policy. What happens in our neighbourhood directly affects us, too. Apart from the refugee crisis, the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 are the most recent proof of this. If we cannot export security beyond the external borders of the European Union, we will increasingly import insecurity instead.

Security and stability through enabling and enhancement

This understanding has been gaining ground in Germany for some years now. The Federal Republic is willing to take greater international responsibility and to champion peace and security. The Federal Government has recognised the need to re-examine the existing toolbox of foreign and security policy and to develop effective strategies for exporting security. In this context, Germany has also been pursuing the Enable & Enhance Initiative (E2I) since 2011. The idea is to enable regional actors to provide security and stability in their own neighbourhoods, ranging from crisis prevention to crisis management, post-crisis rehabilitation, and peacebuilding. With the Enable & Enhance Initiative, Germany not least draws conclusions from military interventions of the past and acknowledges that NATO and EU cannot solve all security policy issues on their own. The West needs partners and allies to share responsibilities.

The initiative is based on the assumption that local actors will be better able to sustainably pacify local conflicts than external actors. It is thus geared towards help to self-help, training, and enabling states or organisations that could serve as anchors of stability in fragile regions. Apart from training and educating civilian and military personnel, the German concept also includes the provision of equipment. This may also

include arms exports if necessary and – as the Federal Government always stresses – under strict adherence to the existing framework of export control policy. This dimension of “enhancement” picks up the idea of military training and equipment assistance and takes it further. While equipment aid expressly excludes delivery of weapons and ammunition, equipment provided as part of the Enable & Enhance Initiative may include non-lethal, lethal and dual-use goods.

Enable & Enhance as a multi-level initiative

The Federal Government primarily pursues the Enable & Enhance Initiative on a national and European level, but also internationally in the context of NATO and the G7. At the EU level, Germany introduced the Enable & Enhance Initiative at the European Council meeting of heads of state or government in December 2013 as a way to increase the effectiveness of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Since then, the EU has repeatedly stated its intention to expand its training missions and enable partners to prevent and manage crises. One of the ways it intends to achieve this is through capacity building projects in support of security and development in a flexible geographic context. It thus acknowledges the fact that the sustainability and effectiveness of European training missions have often been hampered by a lack of basic equipment among local partners. This is especially apparent in the EU training missions in Mali (EUTM Mali) and Somalia (EUTM SOM), where African soldiers have to provide the equipment necessary for their training themselves and where vehicles, fuel, protective equipment, weapons and ammunition, even beds and food are lacking every day.

And yet the initiative is only very slowly being implemented. Instead, member states in Brussels quarrel among one another and with both the Commission and the External Action Service (EAS) over what measures and what equipment should or can be financed from the common EU budget. At its core, the contentious issue is from what budgets to finance and what rules to apply to the delivery of military equipment to third states. Time and again, the Commission points towards all EU instruments expressly ruling out decisions on lethal weapons and ammunition. The German Federal Government nevertheless tries hard to push through the implementation of the initiative on a European level and to find ways of funding it.

Leading by example

At the same time, Berlin drew its own conclusions from the blockade in Brussels and introduced a new budget item on a national level with which to support funding of the Enable & Enhance Initiative. Within the EU, Germany thus leads by example, hoping to indirectly push forward the European process. From 2016, the federal budget will provide 100 million Euros under budget heading 60 for projects jointly decided and administered by the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. The item of the Enable & Enhance Initiative is independent of previous budget items, and funds can be used without restrictions on content, geography or time. The Federal Government thus created an extremely flexible instrument that can be used within a very wide framework of action. Funds can be used for crisis prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. In the spirit of a comprehensive approach, measures will be decided across ministries and capabilities. Possible projects might be the support of reforms in the security sector, help in securing borders as well as measures aimed at disarmament and arms control.

The projects funded from this budget may be implemented bilaterally or multilaterally and will be internationally coordinated, with the EU capacity-building initiative described above and the similar NATO Defence Capacity-Building Initiative providing the political framework. Enabling and enhancing measures can also be used at G7 level, mainly for antiterrorism purposes.

The Enable & Enhance Initiative is thus not an isolated measure but should always be rooted in an overarching concept that combines civilian, police, military, and arms control policy components. Reducing it to an armaments export programme for crisis regions, as sometimes happens in the media, is thus a deliberate misinterpretation of the German government's intentions.

Risks and limitations

Whether security and stability can be exported to fragile regions using the Enable & Enhance Initiative depends largely on whether those chosen to work with by the West turn out to be partners in the true sense of the word. The initiative can only be successful if the supporters' interests align with the interests of those receiving the support, and if close cooperation is possible in the long term. This is a risky undertaking in troubled areas with weak state structures, as today's friend can, through a change in government or a violent revolution, become tomorrow's well-trained and -equipped enemy. Mali is a prime example of this. Until the military coup of 2012, the country was regarded as an African "model democracy" and received considerable international funding. Then it had to be freed from the hands of Islamists in a military operation. Almost overnight, Mali – the success story it once was – became a weak state with ongoing fighting in the north and a constant threat of Islamist attacks.

In choosing a recipient state for enabling and enhancing measures, the federal ministries involved must pay close attention to make sure that the well-trained and -equipped partner does not turn out to be a Trojan horse. This is also important for the credibility of the initiative as well as for its acceptance within society. Both would suffer immensely if efforts to enable and enhance were to strengthen the power of a dictatorial regime – for example if armed forces were to use their new capabilities to violently suppress domestic protests and shoot peaceful protesters with German-made assault rifles.

The fact remains that there cannot be a 100-percent guarantee that a chosen state will remain stable and like-minded in the long term. But it would be wrong to conclude that it is best to not even try to commit oneself in security policy. Failure to act is just as open to moral criticism. Rather, policy makers must work to minimise the risk of abuse as much as possible. This is especially true with regard to the question of whether regulations on the end use of military equipment are likely to be adhered to. Those providing this support should not just rely on the stated intent of receiving states but should establish their own mechanism for controlling the use of the equipment provided. Good risk management requires a thorough knowledge of the area, especially the local security architecture and the interests of actors involved. This requires close communication between civilian and military actors, which draws especially on local experience. Lessons learned on operations in Afghanistan should be incorporated, too.

Of course, the Enable & Enhance Initiative can and should only be one instrument in the toolbox of German foreign and security policy. Above all, the increased national and international focus on implementing the concept must not serve as an excuse for remaining on the sidelines of more robust interventions. In the past, Germany has, owing to its "culture of restraint", often been accused of engaging in a policy of noble gestures. One such case was the intervention in Mali in 2012. Regarding the division of responsibilities between France (active military intervention in the conflict in order to stop the further advance of Islamist groups) and Germany (subsequent "enhancing" of African soldiers by training them), the Federal Republic was often accused of not making a substantial enough contribution and leaving the dirty work to others.

This is not to say that Germany should contribute forces to each and every future robust military operation of its allies. The Federal Government often had valid reasons not to. But the mantra of "no military solution" cannot lead the Enable & Enhance Initiative to success. The reality of operations in international crises has often shown that training missions require a secure and stable operational environment, which does not just materialise out of nowhere. Furthermore, even preventive measures to enable and enhance

can fail and the well-trained and equipped partners may face a crisis that they cannot manage alone. Anyone who in such a situation hides behind security policy by proxy clearly uses the Enable & Enhance Initiative as a fig leaf. The Federal Government seems to have come to the same conclusion – in October 2015, it announced an expansion of the German commitment in Mali as part of the much more robust MINUSMA Mission in Mali's disputed north.

Timely, extensive and sustainable

For the Enable & Enhance Initiative to make an effective contribution to stabilising crisis regions, dependable partners must be “enhanced” as soon, as extensively, and as sustainably as possible. Given the potential risks, the strength of the initiative lies especially in crisis prevention. Measures for reforming and strengthening the security sector of a thoroughly vetted partner is less risky and more likely to succeed than ad-hoc arms shipments to unpredictable actors in escalating crises. The Enable & Enhance Initiative can prevent states from being destabilised in the first place. Against the backdrop of the advance of the so-called Islamic State and the increasing breakdown of state structures in the entire region, the decision made by Germany's Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence to create regional focal points through projects in Tunisia and Jordan was entirely justified.

We will, however, not be able to export security by providing training and equipment for armed forces alone. Successfully enabling and enhancing forces requires more than a few instructors handing out ballistic vests as part of a temporary mission. What is needed is a long-term commitment, aimed at enabling security forces to, once trained, pass on what they have learned so that the initiative eventually sustains itself. That is why the Enable & Enhance Initiative is not a low-cost security policy that requires no sustainability, no funds and no unpalatable consequences. It should rather be seen as a part and an expression of an extensive commitment. Only if it is incorporated into measures of civilian crisis prevention and development cooperation, robustly secured if necessary, and becomes a long-term sustainable commitment of local civilian and military actors, can the initiative become a success.

Conclusion

The Enable & Enhance Initiative of the Federal Government opens up an entirely new spectrum of options for German security policy with which possible new conflicts in developing countries can rather be prevented or managed than to wait for their fallout to make its way to Europe. It is also a consequence of the Western policy of intervention of recent decades, which has not managed to stabilise troubled regions in the long term. It should not be misunderstood as a low-cost security policy. Its consistent implication requires extensive and sustainable international commitment. This implementation also carries risks that must be minimised.

If implemented early, extensively, and sustainably as part of an overarching concept, the Enable & Enhance Initiative can be a substantial contribution to the stabilisation of crisis areas. It is, however, not a cure-all nor applicable to every situation. Its effectiveness is limited, not least due to its limited funding. As but one of many instruments in the toolbox of German security policy, it is neither an armaments export programme for crisis areas nor an expression of an increasing militarisation of German security policy. Rather, it should be understood as part of a comprehensive and responsible approach to security policy. It is to be hoped that this will be reflected in first tangible projects of 2016.

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