

Naval Diplomacy in Action: The 2021-2022 Indo-Pacific Deployment of the German Navy Frigate “Bayern”



Imprint

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Edited by Anne Runhaar

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Indo-Pacific Deployment of the Frigate “BAYERN”

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Preface

by Commander Göran Swistek

Preface

Geopolitics is dominating multilateral relations again. After years of perceived cooperative security, the conduct of geopolitics and with it its translation into means of power through geo-strategy and the use of military force is once again shaping the European security environment. For the moment, this has culminated in the Russian invasion of Ukraine since the 24 February 2022. With it, the approach to shape international relations through the conduct of cooperative security has hit its limitations, because it requires at least a minimum of shared values and an interest in cooperation in the pursuit of similar security interests. What applies for the European security environment remains even valid for the Asia and Indo-Pacific region. Cooperative security is doomed to fail, when one actor is not playing by the same rules or takes a fundamental different approach to international relations. Hence, the military as a tool of politics and international relations is getting increasing attention again. This development has also intentionally and unintentionally found its way into German foreign and security policy. The German Navy is a preferred carrier of that change. The year 2021 displays a significant expression of this development. After nearly a decade of absence from the Indo-Pacific Region, the German Frigate “Bayern” sailed the region again.

While the deployment of the warship had no deeper military purpose, the overarching aim was to send a political signal, derived from Political Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific published by the German government in 2020 to articulate the German interest in the region and to highlight its relevance for the international security architecture and order. If geo-strategy determines where a state actor concentrates its diplomatic activities and the projection of its military power, the German Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific display a first step into the direction of formulating geo-strategic interests and aims. Along that line, naval diplomacy has an increased relevance as a tool of foreign and security policy. The functional objective of the German presence in the Indo-Pacific was to emphasize cooperation with like-minded partners in the region and to promote German engagement in local security efforts. Thus, the tour of the frigate “Bayern” illustrates one of the increasingly relevant tasks for the German and European naval forces beyond their home waters, namely, to exercise naval diplomacy as a political instrument. Even the German Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Jan Christian Kaack, pointed out such a task for the German fleet in a recent statement for the US Naval Institute publication Proceedings.

Now, that the deployment has ended and a follow-on deployment for German warships is planned for 2024, reflecting on the tour and the lessons to be drawn from it appears necessary.

The team from the Centre for Maritime Strategy & Security at the Institute for Security Policy Kiel has been following very closely the developments with regards to the deployments and activities of the German Navy. Throughout the last years they have made a great effort together with their partner from the German Maritime Association (DMB) to compile up to date information about the activities and locations of German warships deployed worldwide. With this Special Edition of the Fleet Tracker the journey of the frigate “Bayern” in the Indo-Pacific region will be reflected on once again and the collected experiences are processed and placed within the overall context of the efforts of the German Navy. It highlights the great effort of the entire German Navy to balance the deployment with other significant tasks of national and collective defence in the North-Atlantic region. For that reason, I strongly recommend the report and thank the editors and authors.



Commander Göran Swistek is currently working at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin. He accompanied the deployment of the frigate Bayern from a political perspective.

Mission, Historical & Technical Details



Mission

For the first time in twenty years, the German Navy deployed in the Indo-Pacific Region. In August 2021, the German Frigate “Bayern” embarked on a seven-month, 43.000 nautical miles long journey.

Commander Tilo Kalski and his crew were tasked to assure allies in the region that Germany is committed to maintaining the freedom of navigation and international law. Simultaneously, every country should be made aware that Germany is opposing any efforts to undermine the freedom of the seas. The deployment could also be seen as the beginning of the new defence policy by then- defence minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, building on the Indo-Pacific guidelines from the Foreign Office. The change of government in the 2021 German federal elections and Russia’s attack on Ukraine spoiled some of these efforts going forward.

In order to proof that the German Navy is a reliable partner and can be deployed worldwide, the frigate “Bayern” participated in various exercises and missions along its way. While passing the Gulf of Aden, the vessel supported the European Union Mission to secure waterways and combat piracy, Operation ATALANTA. In the Indo-Pacific the frigate made two port calls in Australia - for the first time since training vessel *Gorch Fock* called to Sydney in 1988. Further along the journey the frigate joined allies such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan in surveillance operations of North Korea and ensuring the UN Embargo against it. This goes to show that the German Navy is an alliance navy, operating under international mandates as the political objective demands.

In between these multinational operations, it participated in binational exercises such as a live firing exercise with the Singaporean Navy. Besides the daily drills, crew had to ensure increased health measures to stay corona free. In February, the frigate returned safely to its homeport of Wilhelmshaven, on the North Sea. This deployment is intended to be the starting point of biannual deployments to increase presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

This report attempts to summarize the journey using monthly subdivisions. While describing the various missions, the exercises on board cannot be listed in full detail. Furthermore, classified missions can also not be included for obvious reasons. The map attached includes markers for the different exercises, which may differ from the actual precise location. At the end of the report, you will find an outlook to possible future deployments as well as the impact for Germany.

Technical Aspects and History

The frigate “Bayern” (pennant number F 217) is a guided missile frigate of the Brandenburg class. The measurements are as follows: 138,85m long, 16,70m wide, and a depth of 6,2m. The ship was commissioned in 1989 and put into service in 1996 assigned to the 6th Frigate squadron until 2006. After restructuring of the German Navy, the ship was assigned to the 2nd Frigate squadron. Since its commissioning, the frigate has had thirteen commanders. It can hold over 200 crew members on board.

The frigate participated in various missions over the last two decades. Three examples are ATALANTA, UNIFIL and Operation Allied Force. The latter was one of the first larger out of area missions of the German Navy, operating in the Adriatic Sea in 1999. It included the shelling of Yugoslavian units to force a retreat of the forces from the Kosovo territories. The frigate was also once deployed in UNIFIL, United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon, in 2007. The mission goal there to secure the Lebanese national waters and prevent the unauthorized entry of arms into Lebanon. In the following years, the frigate also participated in ATALANTA several times before its Indo-Pacific deployment in 2021. In 2016, she even served as counter-piracy task force flagship to then-Rear Admiral Jan Christian Kaack, who assumed his most recent position as Chief of German Navy in March 2022.

The ship, primarily designed for anti-submarine warfare, is equipped with different technology ranging from armament to climate observation tools. It is capable of anti - aircraft, submarine, and ship warfare, which leads to the possession of different missiles, such as NSSM type guided missiles operated by a VLS Mk41 and RGM-84 Harpoons, as well as Mk46 type torpedoes in addition to its main 76mm Compact battery. Additionally, the ship carries two helicopters of the type *Sea Lynx*.

Furthermore, the ship carries 15 drift buoys, which collect meteorological and oceanographical data. The buoys reinforce the Global Drifter Program, which is a worldwide close network to measure and observe, among other things, the weather and ocean temperature. Throughout the pandemic the network could not be resupplied as usually. The buoys have a service life of roughly two years, and with the pandemic already going on for more than 1.5 years, the resupply by the “Bayern” was very important. The launch happened in the north western Indian Ocean, a normally less frequented route, increasing the overall importance of the mission even more.

Overview of the Journey



August 2021

On August 2, 2021, the frigate left its home port Wilhelmshaven, and began her journey. The departure was attended by then-Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who emphasized the importance of the mission to strengthen alliances and show presence in the region.

The frigate headed directly for the Dover Strait and stopped the first time for a refuelling at the Rota Naval Base in Spain. On August 7, she began its way through the Strait of Gibraltar and resupplied six days afterwards at the NATO port of Souda Bay in Crete, Greece, followed by the first international exercise (PASSEX). Depending on the training partners, these exercises can range from formation sailing to classified trainings like joint anti-submarine exercises. A PASSEX exercise focusses on communication and cooperation between naval vessels and prepares for crisis, normally lasting only a couple of hours. Several PASSEX were conducted over the course of two days and involved different NATO partners.

While training formation and light sailing with the Greek frigate “Hydra”, it also practiced data communication with the Turkish frigate “Gökçeada” at night. On August 19, on the following day, the frigate passed through the Suez Canal. This innocent passage through the national waters of Egypt with the southbound convoy took just over 10 hours, starting in the middle of the night, travelling around 130 nautical miles.

Next, the frigate sailed through the Bab El Mandeb Strait. She stopped for another refuel and resupply in Djibouti, a port she visited in previous deployments as well. The rest of the month, the frigate participated in the ATALANTA mission. The international mission protects humanitarian goods as well as free waterways and fights piracy. While being involved in this mission, the warship participated in two more PASSEXs. The first exercise on August 26 included formation sailing and reciprocal helicopter landings with the Indian frigate “Trikanth”. Furthermore, the naval infantry of the German Sea Battalion demonstrated their fast-roping skills. In the second exercise, the German vessel trained with the Spanish frigate “Navarra”. This included inter alia training regarding supply at sea as well as confidential data comparison between the ships.

The frigate further operated in the Gulf of Aden. The month ended with a joint military exercise with the Japanese destroyer “Xugiri” on the 29th of August. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force has reached out into the Indian Ocean lately in a marked departure from its territorial focus. At the end of the exercise, the Commanding Officer of the Japanese destroyer surprised the crew with a warm goodbye in German. In between these international exercises, gunnery drills as well as handgun training were conducted. Due to the ongoing Corona-Pandemic, there were also several doctoral check-ups to ensure the safety and health of the crew.

September 2021

In September, the frigate departed from the Gulf of Aden heading for Australia, the first time for a German warship in over thirty years. This month, the crew also successfully completed several educational trainings on board like transferring of personnel by helicopter for medical reasons.

First, F217 replenished at sea with the fleet tanker USNS “John Lenthall“ of the 5th fleet and the aircraft carrier USS “Ronald Reagan”. On the 6th of September, the crew trained another PASSEX exercise, this time with the cruiser USS “Shiloh” and the Pakistan Navy frigate PNS “Alamgir”. This time focussing on air and submarine defence, practicing air defence against F/A - 18 Hornets launched from the American carrier. The multiple days stop in Karachi, Pakistan, started on September 8, which was also a kick off to celebrate the 70th anniversary of German - Pakistani bilateral relations. The ship was greeted by German Consul General Holger Ziegeler. The stay began with a visit at the Mazar-e-Quaid, the national mausoleum and final resting place of Pakistan’s state founder Muhammed Ali Jinnah. Commander Kalski and Consul General Ziegeler paid tribute on behalf of the crew as well as the Federal Republic of Germany and laid down a flower wreath. Furthermore, the crew visited a Pakistani frigate which was welcomed with a return visit to the “Bayern”. On September 10, a delegation of the crew and the CO was welcomed with a reception by Murad Ali Shah, Chief Minister of Sindh Province and German Ambassador Bernhard Schlagheck as well as with another reception at the German Consulate later.

The frigate continued its way to Australia with one stopover and three more PASSEXs, starting with a six-day exercise beginning on the September 13 with the Pakistani frigate “Aslat”. They focused on speedboat defence and formation sailing. Originally, the ship planned to refuel and resupply at the American naval base at Diego Garcia. However, these plans were changed due to the sensitivity of the issue regarding several rulings of the International Court of Justice regarding the legitimacy of the British administration of the islands. The “Bayern” was resupplied at anchor. Continuing the travel, the research buoys were deployed in the Indian Ocean. The next PASSEX exercise involved the Japanese helicopter carrier “Kaga” and frigate “Murasame”, focussing inter alia on over-the-horizon targeting. The final PASSEX exercise before reaching port was conducted on September 27 with an Australian P-8A “Poseidon” maritime patrol aircraft (a model soon to join the German Navy) concentrating on a simulated submarine hunting.

After a quarantine, the frigate reached the Port of Perth on September 28 with the first shore leave since departure. It was the first port visit of a German naval vessel in Australia since more than thirty years, welcomed among others by Acting Mayor of Fremantle, Councillor Andrew Sullivan, the German Ambassador to Australia, Thomas Fitschen, the German Honorary Consul in Perth, Gabriele

Maluga, the German Defence Attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Alois Wagner, and the Commander of the Naval Base HMAS Stirling, Captain Gary Lawton. The following day included PCR tests for the whole crew, a biohazard inspection of the ship as well as VIP visits from Lord Mayor Basil Zempilas and a press conference, starting the formal port visit. Additionally, the sailors participated in submitting their voting ballots for the German federal elections in September. Therefore, the Bundeswehr provided them with a digital voting system while being on deployment.

October 2021

The crew of the frigate started to explore the Australian continent. On October 1, the crew visited the Australian base HMAS “Stirling” and replenishment oiler HMAS “Stalwart” as well as other ships and submarines, which included a joint fire damage control exercise. The day ended with a beach volleyball match between Australia and Germany, from which Germany emerged victorious. On the next day followed a visit to the Deep Light Exhibition, which commemorates the cruiser HMAS “Sydney (II)”. The HMAS “Sydney (II)” was a veteran of many battles. It participated in aerial and naval operations from the Pacific to the Mediterranean. It was ultimately sunk by the German auxiliary cruiser “Kormoran” in 1941. On October 3, the crew celebrated the German Unity Day, which included a reception on board with the Hon. Melissa Price, the Australian Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Technology.

The frigate left port and travelled up to Fremantle where the Captain and the German ambassador Dr. Fitschen left the ship to place a wreath of flower at the State War Memorial. Over the next three days, the Commander met with then Western Australian governor and Fremantle’s Acting Mayor. Travelling further up to Darwin on the northern coast, the crew and exchange sailors paid tribute to the 727 falling sailors in the naval battle between Australian cruiser HMAS “Sydney (II)” and German auxiliary cruiser “Kormoran”. Before reaching Darwin to refuel, the ship had PASSEX exercises with the Australian navy on October 10, focussing on inter alia maritime interdiction operation training. Furthermore, they conducted an in-company-sail with the Australian patrol boat HMAS “Glenelg II”, until October 11 in Darwin.

The time had come for the German frigate “Bayern” to leave Australia again and embark on its long journey to Tokyo, Japan. Four days later, it stopped at Malaka, Palau, to refuel. While travelling to Guam, the Frigate had a PASSEX with the littoral combat ships USS “Jackson” and USS “Tulsa” from the 7th US fleet. A four-day stopover started on October 18 in Guam, where some personnel and material exchanged and the refuelling took place. Additionally, the Sea Lynx helicopters were exchanged to provide the frigate with fresh “flight minutes” to ensure perfect operability of the on-board naval aviation unit. On the 22nd of this month, the frigate headed in direction of Tokyo, Japan. The departure took place with one additional person on board: The Former Parliamentary State Secretary Thomas Silberhorn who had travelled from Germany to Guam to join the Bayern to inform himself about the area of operation and the German contingent as well as to express his gratitude to the crew and awarding them their service medal. On its way to Japan, the frigate participated in another PASSEX with the French Navy, enhancing training procedures between aircrafts and the ship.

November 2021

Travelling further up in the direction of Tokyo, the frigate participated in another PASSEX with the Japanese destroyer JS "Samidare". On the 5th, the vessel arrived in Japan, marking the first visit of a German warship in about twenty years, starting the eight days stay. The stopover aligned with the 160th anniversary of the German - Japanese diplomatic relations.

It was greeted by the Japanese Defence Minister, Nobuo Kishi, Germany's Chief of Defence, General Zorn, and then-Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schönbach. On the 6th, a delegation of the crew, the Chief of Defence and the Chief of Navy participated in a wreath laying ceremony in Yokohama, commemorating fallen soldiers, who died in a ship explosion in 1942. The Chief of Defence visited the frigate the next day, talking with different members of the crew. He expressed his gratitude for the crew's service. At the end of the stay, the German ambassador Dr. v. Goetze invited the crew to a reception on the "Bayern" to celebrate the German - Japanese partnership. In addition to the celebratory visit, the crew received their booster vaccination shortly before the departure.

After leaving Japan, the frigate headed in direction of the East China Sea returning home. There, it participated in the UN Embargo based on UNSC resolution 2397 against North Korea starting on November 19, which marked the first participation in this operation for Germany. The resolution bans coal exports and reduced oil imports, which is being bypassed with illegal transfers on the high seas. The ships conducted surveillance operations, especially detection and documentation of illegal goods and transfers at high sea. At the same time, they aim to hinder the development of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles.

While taking part in the mission for nearly a month, the ship participated in the annual exercise 2021, ANNUALEX 21, from November 22-30, organised by the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Forces (JMSDF) alongside the Australian, Canadian and US navy. The deployment in the annual exercise represents the first big manoeuvre for the "Bayern" in the Indo - Pacific, with over 20 warships and over 9000 crew members involved. This included at least 12 Japanese frigates and destroyers, one Japanese helicopter carrier, at least one Japanese submarine, the US Navy's Carrier Strike Group 1 with one submarine and two fleet tankers, Canadian destroyer HMCS "Winnipeg" and Australian destroyer HMAS "Brisbane" as well as several more aircrafts and helicopters. One of the highlights was a gift exchange between Japan and Germany via helicopter on the 24th of November.

Besides the international exercises, the crew conducted several education exercises like man over-board and fire combat training.

December 2021

After three weeks at sea, the ship arrived in Busan, South Korea, on December 2nd, with a four-day stopover. On the 4th, the German Ambassador, Michael Reiffenstuel, and Commander Tilo Kalski participated in a wreath laying ceremony at the United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Korea. This tribute was paid to all fallen soldiers of every nation. The crew used the stopover as an opportunity for a cultural exchange. Next, the ship headed in the direction of Singapore. On the 9th of December, the frigate “Bayern” had its first RAS manoeuvre (Replenishment at Sea) at night since 2015.

The involvement in the UN Embargo mission ended on December 14. To create some Christmas feelings, the crew decorated part of the ship. While closing in on Singapore, the frigate had another RAS manoeuvre with the replenishment oiler USNS “Yukon”, part of the 7th US Fleet, which was the fourth time the fleet provided fuel to the frigate “Bayern”. Four days before Christmas Eve, the frigate arrived in Singapore for a two-week stopover. Ambassador Riedel and Vice Admiral Kay Schönbach (who would resign from his post just a month later) along with Rear Admiral Saw Shi Tat greeted the ship. Part of the crew stayed on the ship during Christmas and New Year’s, while the other part of the crew flew home to celebrate with their families.

January 2022

On January 2nd, the crew started to return from home. The frigate left Singapore on the 6th sailing up to Vietnam in 4,5 hours, reaching Ho Chi Minh City on the same day. The stopover took three days. The “Bayern” was welcomed by the German ambassador Guido Hildner, representatives of the Consulate General and a small delegation of military and civil servants of Vietnam. After entering the harbour, a delegation of the “Bayern” was invited to the People’s committees to talk about the Indo-Pacific region.

Leaving on January 9, the frigate conducted three more exercises before reaching Sri Lanka. This started with a PASSEX with the Vietnamese People’s Navy concentrating on formation sailing and stationing exercise. Leading up to a PUBEX, publication exercise, with the Singaporean Navy on the 11th of January, focussing on decoding and decryption. Followed by another PASSEX on the next day with the Royal Malaysian Navy. This time the frigate trained with six other ships and one Super Lynx from the Royal Malaysian Navy. At the end of the exercise, the navies exchanged gifts. Three days later, the frigate travelled in the Arabian sea, stopping in Colombo, Sri Lanka from January 15-18. The warship was welcomed by the German embassy and the Sri Lanka Navy military band. On the following day, German ambassador Holger Seubert and the ships CO along with German and Sri Lankan navy staff, laid down a flower wreath, paying tribute to the fallen servicemen from World War I and II. On the same day, a media appointment took place on board. The next day included a reception on board with several ambassadors, admirals, generals and the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Peiris as well as Foreign Secretary Colombage. The reception included a traditional dance on board. Leaving the port, the frigate had another PASSEX with Sri Lanka frigate “Sarayula”, which also marked the first German Sri Lankan PASSEX collaboration.

The ship reached Mumbai, India on January 21 and departed on January 24. The vessel was welcomed by the German ambassador Walter Johannes Lindner as well as the Indian Navy, followed by a press appointment with the German ambassador the next day. The halt concluded with a PASSEX exchange with the Indian frigate INS “Visakhapatnam”, where another gift exchange happened. On the 25th of January, the frigate held another manoeuvre with the Indian Navy, while starting its participation in the ATALANTA mission. Two days later, the frigate stopped in Salala Oman for refuelling and nutritional replenishment. The month ended with another PASSEX with the Japanese Destroyer “Yudachi”. The focus laid on stationing exercises as well as cross deck operations, RAS approaches and communication through flag signals. In between these exercises, the crew had several emergency trainings on board. Furthermore, the crew trained an Emergency Low Visibility Approach (ELSA) exercise as well as replenishment at night.

February 2022

Travelling from Oman to Wilhelmshaven, the crew had a fast-roping exercise on the ship's flight deck on February 2. Two days later the ship crossed the Suez Canal once again, this time taking around nine hours.

Followed by a PASSEX with the corvette FGS "Braunschweig", which was part of UNIFIL mission off Lebanon, on the 5th. The exercise included a cross deck operation, a boarding exercise, "fleet ballet" (great for official photos) as well as an RAS approach. The next day, the frigate arrived in Haifa, Israel, the last formal port visit on the journey, with one extra person. German Chief of Defence General Zorn flew in to arrive together with the frigate. The highlight of the stopover was a VIP Dinner on board with Ambassador Susanne Wasum-Rainer. Besides the ambassador and the general, the Israeli Defence Forces Chief of the Staff, Lieutenant General Aviv Kohavi, and Chief of the Israelian Navy, Admiral David Salama, were guests.

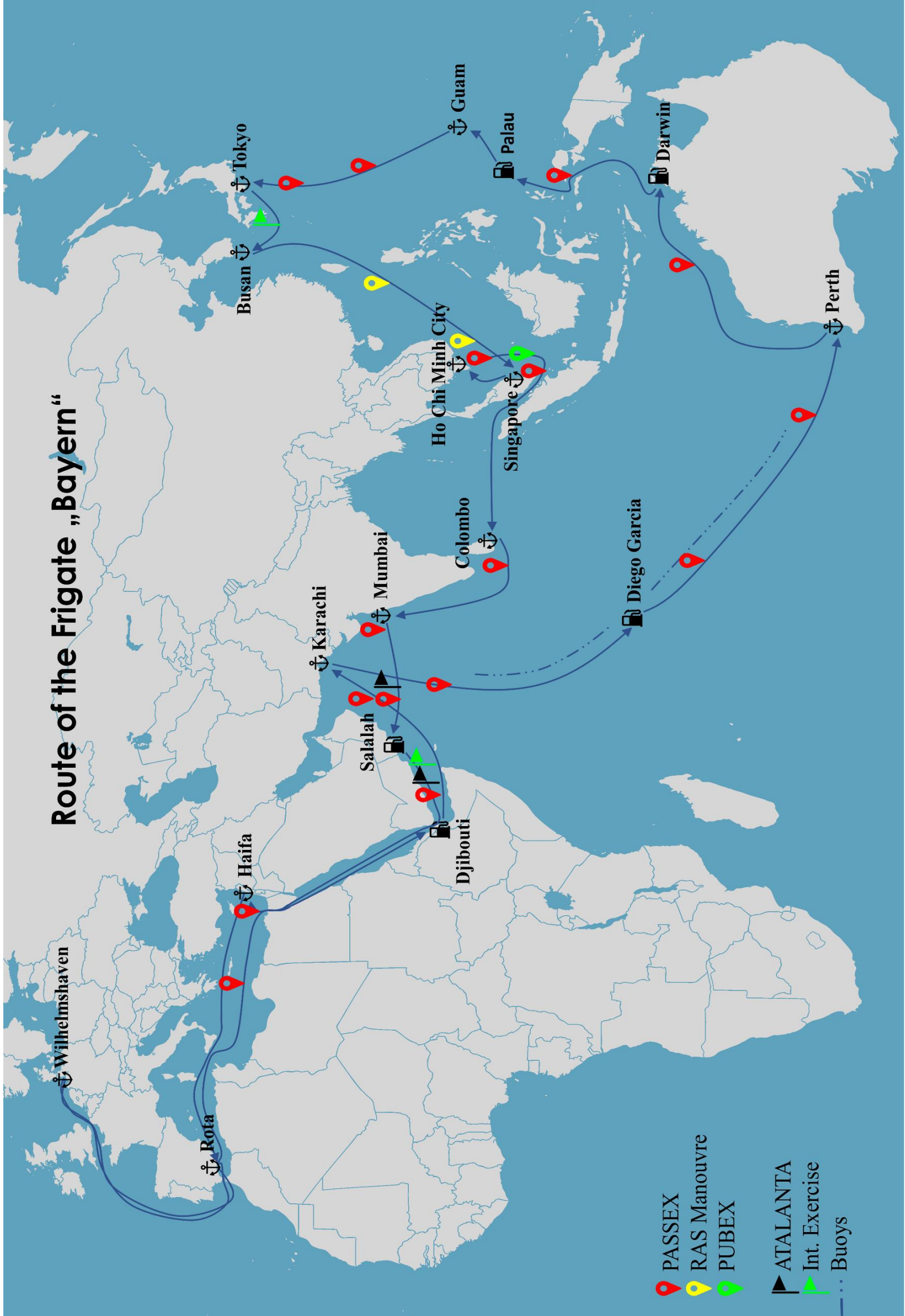
The frigate left the port on February 9, crossing the Mediterranean. The next day the frigate had a PHOTEX, photo exercise, with the Israeli corvette INS "Atzmaut", which has just been delivered to Israel by the German shipbuilding company TKMS in Kiel. On the 11th, the frigate crossed the Strait of Messina, a passage between the Tyrrhenian Sea in the north and the Ionian Sea, still part of the Mediterranean. After many flight hours, the helicopters had to be inspected on 13 February. The following day, the frigate stopped for the last time on the Rota naval base in Spain to refuel, before heading straight to its home port.

The "Bayern" returned to Wilhelmshaven on the 18th of February after around 43.000 nautical miles. The crew was welcomed by friends and family. The Parliamentary State Secretary Siemtje Möller, Deputy Chief of Defence Lieutenant General Markus Laubenthal, and the Commander Operating Forces, Rear Admiral Jürgen zur Mühlen, were flown on board to arrive together with the crew.

While travelling the last sea miles, the crew had several other education exercises, which included training with on board munition and a crash deck exercise to conclude an intense deployment.

This review was compiled by Anne Runhaar.

Route of the Frigate „Bayern“



Future Developments



Beyond the “Bayern”: Opportunities for Future German Indo-Pacific Deployments

When the German Navy frigate FGS “Bayern” departed for its much-lauded trip to the Indo-Pacific on a sunny 3 August 2021, the chancellor’s name was Angela Merkel (of the Christian Democratic Union). Her foreign minister was a certain Heiko Maas, a Social Democrat whose department had come up with “Indo-Pacific Guidelines” in September 2020. The situation on NATO’s eastern front amounted to much of an instable but somewhat frozen conflict, with Russia about to build up forces on Ukraine’s Northern and Western borders. The German Navy’s new Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schönbach, had just passed his 100-day mark in office, coupled with ambitious policies and statements of global aspiration worthy of the surface warfare officer community that he belonged to.

Fast forward to 19 February 2022, when FGS “Bayern” was welcomed back to rainy Wilhelmshaven on a very different meteorologically and politically setting: Russia’s assault against Ukraine was just about to start. The chancellor was now Social Democrat Olaf Scholz, whose foreign minister Annalena Baerbock (Green Party) was an erstwhile rival for chancellorship. The German Navy leadership, meanwhile, tried to contain the fallout of the demission of Vice Admiral Schönbach, whose unfortunate remarks at an Indian think tank – in the context of the “Bayern’s” deployment, no less – cost him his job. In essence, the frigate that bears the name of Germany’s most southern state returned to its homeport in a vastly different environment. If anything, much if not all political focus is now centered on the Russian war in Ukraine and NATO’s reaction to it. Vice Admiral Jan Kaack, Schönbach’s former deputy, now his successor and whose operational careers spanned both, the fast-patrol boat community of the Baltic Sea as well as frigates, has repeatedly stated the desired focus on the German Navy on the Baltic Sea region. Here, the *Deutsche Marine* remains the 500-pound gorilla in terms of ship numbers and fleet size. Against this background, what does the future hold for Indo-Pacific deployments?

The Policy Guidelines remain in effect until replaced – and should be filled with life!

At time of writing this piece, there is no indication that foreign minister Maas’ Indo-Pacific guidelines will be replaced or vastly modified, although the eagerly awaited, first-ever German National Security Strategy (due in 2023) as a capstone document will doubtlessly supersede them and be a key future point of departure for policy initiatives in the region. The military, meanwhile, has plans to continue periodical deployments to the far side of the world. As such, the *Luftwaffe* will be tasked to showing

the flag there soon with a deployment of Eurofighters to Australia. The German Navy, meanwhile, is drafting plans for the next naval deployment into the region, not unlike the 2021/22 “Bayern” trip, for the 2023/24 timeframe. Medium-range planning is certainly influenced by a myriad of factors, not least the development on the Eastern front and the Northern flank and the naval demands there, but viable opportunities for platforms do exist in the form of the four new *Baden-Württemberg*-class frigates (F125). It is highly likely that the remaining frigates and large combat support ships of the German Navy will be in significant demand in the Baltic Sea, the North Sea, and the Norwegian Sea. In addition, this overworked, small and overextended German Navy must urgently develop reserves, which amounts to nothing less than squaring the circle amidst ongoing operations and deep challenges to readiness.

What the ship?

Ship availability is but one factor that governs the future of a German Indo-Pacific presence. Chancellor Scholz’ ambitious defense spending will, if anything, take the remainder of the decade to be fully effective. Hardware dreams are ill-fated for the time being, for much of the funding will have to go into munitions, equipment, and other run-dry basic commodities of a hollow and shallow force before a new ship or aircraft is put to sea. \$105bn will certainly not buy a new strategic culture. In the meantime, the old naval truism – ‘quantity has a quality of its own’ – remains in effect. So, rather than thinking in ship deployments, the Deutsche Marine should accept *Luftwaffe* deployments to the Indo-Pacific as part of a larger maritime, joint effects-based approach (not least because the *Luftwaffe*, in theory, is responsible for naval air warfare after the dissolution of the *Marinefliegergeschwader 2* in 2005). To move beyond that, the German Navy needs to get creative, especially in off-years where no military assets are available to be deployed. The Navy Command, the Ministry of Defense and the Foreign Office ought to push for track II diplomacy and German soft power assets to be present in the region and aligned with broader maritime objectives. This could include formalized exchanges of academics and military officers to Australia, Japan, India, South Korea and Indonesia, to name but a few examples. The German government should also generously fund a multi-year conference series hosted by think tanks to bring together stakeholders from Germany and the Indo-Pacific, both in the region and in Germany. A research publication series, multimedia efforts and public diplomacy ought to be commissioned and widened, respectively. In lieu of gray warships, there could also be efforts to show the flag on different platforms in the future, perhaps with the recently renovated sail training ship “Gorch Fock”, oceanography and research vessels insofar they are federally owned, maritime patrol aircraft, or even a deployment of one of the new Federal Police offshore patrol vessels of the *Potsdam*-class to the Indian Ocean. In addition, German representatives should serve as observers or participants embarked in all major maritime

exercises in the region, from Malabar in the Indian Ocean to Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) to UNITAS in Latin America. After all, Australia – one of the anchor nations and closest Western allies in the Pacific – is scheduled to participate in the 2023 Baltic Operations naval exercise. If Indo-Pacific nations venture into the Baltic Sea, shouldn't the German effort be reciprocal?

Remember the counter-coast!

This leads to the third important prospect. The current view from Germany towards the Indo-Pacific resembles a man standing on the top of a mountain as a sentry. What's closer is more important, what's farther away seems negligible. Nothing could be further from an effective outlook at the Indo-Pacific where some of the most demanding issues – such as the rise of China – aren't yet geographically close, but politically pressing. By the same token, German political and military planners would be served well to remember the classic naval strategic concept of *Gegenküste*, or counter coast. From central Europe, the counter coast of the Indo-Pacific is North America (with Canada and the United States as two NATO allies), Latin America and the vast Pacific coastal states of South America. These countries present a vast opportunity to interact through established and new diplomatic avenues of cooperation. From a personal perspective: The author of this essay was invited to Peru in October 2021 as a keynote speaker for the Peruvian Navy's bicentennial. In a room full of 200 flag officers and a few civilians, little governed the conversations with the humble writer more than the sole German frigate that was plowing the Indian Ocean. Clearly, there was interest and appreciation of the political-diplomatic naval presence of a venerable warship. Incidentally, Peru operates the largest South American submarine flotilla; all boats were built in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s. Together with other South American navies, there is a process underway that seeks to modernize South American surface and subsurface fleets. Berlin would be well-served to utilize this demand and, though perhaps a bit counterintuitively, understand its South American defense policy as directly contributing to the objectives of its Indo-Pacific guidelines.

As always, predictions are hard, in particular about the future. However, the strategic importance of a naval mindset and the diplomatic, constabulary and military opportunities of seapower remain an excellent point of departure to craft policy – if Berlin and Rostock find the foresight and the political and financial capital to do so.



Dr. Sebastian Bruns is Senior Researcher at the ISPK's Center for Maritime Strategy and Security (CMSS), to which he served as the founding director 2016-2021. He has just returned from a year abroad, serving as the inaugural John McCain-Fulbright Distinguished Visiting Professor at the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

Based on Sources from:

- German Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- German Navy Fleet Tracker
- German Federal Ministry of Defence
- Official Twitter Account frigate Bayern

For further Information on the GNFT

