Undeniably, economic ‘globalisation’ has many beneficiaries; Germany has gained more than most. This essay will argue, that Henry Kissinger’s statement was pertinent when Germany’s politicians looked at the world through a lens of geo-strategic Realpolitik, based exclusively on military might; yet, the significance of Kissinger’s statement has since been rendered redundant, through the formation of the political and economic supra-national institutions designed to benefit members through international trade and security.

Germany’s political leaders prior to 1945, assumed that, due to Germany’s size - demographic, economic and, more importantly, military - it must take a principal role the leading geo-political arena, Europe (Glees, 1996: 254). Of course, at the time, this was a divided continent, save a few often empty treaties, and it is well documented how this affected not only this continent, but every offer continent during the 20th Century. Kissinger’s words embody an era of realist international relations, a time when many - particularly Germany – were “conceived of power purely, or certainly mainly, in military terms: soldiers and battles and the relationships between the two” (Kettenacker, 1997: 240). Furthermore, Kissinger’s pitying words sum up an epoch when it seemed almost conceivable that a country could “go it alone”.

Fortunately, discourse vis-à-vis Germany’s international relations have moved on significantly over the last few decades. Janusz Reiter, the former Polish ambassador to Germany, and the director of the Centre for International Relations, declared that “[t]he Germany in NATO and the EU is a Germany neither too big nor too small for Europe” (The Polish voice, 2003). Illuminatingly, Germany’s former chancellor,
Gerhard Schröder, along with other EU leaders, heavily criticised the US for failing to agree with the terms of the Kyoto Protocol. What marked Germany out from other EU Member States is that Schröder “[p]ublicly disagreed” with George W. Bush on the issue when he visited the USA in 2001 (O’Dochartaigh, 2004: 214). A recent article in The Economist infers that Germany looks at ease when acting on the global stage, owing largely to its position as the “world’s top exporter of goods” (2008: 45-46). Significantly, this inference was drawn from a study by the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, which suggested the possibility of a political “clash” between Germany and the USA over relations with Iran. This was a “clash”, The Economist argues, that Germany would prefer to avoid, not due to a lack in confidence, but because it now regards its self as playing an “honest-broker role” in global affairs. A Germany with enough political confidence to stand against the USA’s economic might would have been inconceivable only two decades ago. Likewise, a recent article in The Guardian, championing the necessity of a European economic package to counter the current global financial downturn, cited José Manuel Barroso, arguing that “it would be “unthinkable” to devise a European economic plan without the continent’s largest economy” (2008: 11). Yet, ironically, it does not appear “unthinkable” to fail to invite Chancellor Angela Merkel to the meeting (Spiegel, 2008). Nonetheless, the language used by Barroso is indicative of the contemporary language used to describe Germany’s central economic position in Europe. Furthermore, Germany’s present-day leverage does not begin and end with political and economic power. In 1993, German peacekeeping troops were deployed in Bosnia and Somalia to support the United Nations, an organisation which, in a sense, goes against the trend, as Germany is not yet able to take a leading role due to the lack of a permanent seat in the Security Council (O’Dochartaigh, 2004: 213).
Moreover, Germany currently has troop deployments in Lebanon, Bosnia and Sudan, as well as making up “the third largest contingent of troops in Afghanistan” (The Economist, 2008); a situation which would have been unforeseeable in the early post war period. However, it must be noted that we are still unlikely to see unilateral military action by Germany for years to come (O’Dochartaigh, 2004: 249).

So what has brought about this change? What is it that renders Kissinger’s statement redundant? In part, the answer to these questions is summed up in Reiter’s previously cited comments. The EU’s genesis lies in the European Coal and Steel Community, set-up to supervise Germany after the Second World War (Schöllgen, 1994: 42), yet it has benefitted Germany as well as restricting it. The overarching apparatuses of supra-national organisations, including the EU, NATO, and to a lesser extent the UN, gave Germany numerous spheres in which its influence flourished, ostensibly without a return of so-called ‘German arrogance’. Most significantly, Germany is a competent and influential actor within the EU; with the largest economy, and the largest number of votes in the European Council. Furthermore, the EU, according to the CIA World Factbook (2008), has over-taken the USA as the world’s leading economy, ensuring that Germany, as the greatest Member State, is able to spread its political reach globally. Germany’s diplomatic accomplishments, such as the handling its reunification process after the toppling of the Berlin Wall (Hämäläinen, 1994: 238), and its involvement in the break-up of Yugoslavia and other Balkan states (O’Dochartaigh, 2004), indicate that since 1990, Germany has assumed a political role more befitting of its economic strength. As a result, it can no longer be viewed as an “economic giant and political dwarf” (Parkes, cited in O’Dochartaigh, 2004: 212).
In conclusion, arguments apropos Germany’s behaviour on the international stage ongoing. Nevertheless, it appears that contemporary economic and political commentators have a less pitying tone towards Germany than Kissinger; a clear indication that Germany no longer represents the “square peg in the round hole”, like once alleged. Germany has since moved away from notions of *Realpolitik* and taken advantage of the global political and economic spheres generated by the organisations originally designed to constrain it; so much so that one can see “Germany, as the economic locomotive of the European [Union]” (Habermas, Cited in Pensky, 1994: 143), and a proactive world actor, without needing to be afraid of its every movement. As a positive consequence of economic ‘globalisation’, Germany appears neither too big, nor too small, and equilibrium has been found. Seemingly, fulfilling the words of Emanuel Geibel: “Es mag am deutschen Wesen einmal noch die Welt genesen – Germany will one day benefit the world” (Glees, 1996: 279).
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