Since the start of his first administration, US President Barack Obama has repeated a simple mantra concerning other countries: “With power comes responsibility.” France has demonstrated repeatedly that it understands and accepts this responsibility; Germany may now be following suit.

Several weeks ago, German President Joachim Gauck’s opening address to the 50th annual Munich Security Conference reflected on the Federal Republic’s evolution over those five decades, a period that gave rise to “a good Germany, the best we have ever known.” And, because Germany benefits more than most countries from the current open, value-based international order, it has, Gauck said, a greater responsibility to defend and extend that order.

Gauck’s speech reflected the thinking in an important new report, entitled *New Power, New Responsibility*, released by the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. The report – the product of several months of debate within the German foreign-policy and security community – identifies Germany’s current values and interests as a commitment to “human dignity, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and to an international order that is based on universal norms.” As Gauck proclaimed, Germany’s “overriding strategic objective” must be the “preservation and continued adaptation” of this order.

To achieve this objective, Germany must become a “shaping power,” a state with the ability to solve problems and resolve conflicts affecting all or part of the international community. The traditional determinants of states’ power relative to other states – geography, demography, economic heft, and military might, coupled with the availability of resources and technological proficiency – remain important; but they are often insufficient to confer actual influence in international politics. A shaping power builds relationships and invests in institutions that allow it to work well with others and to create and mobilize “coalitions and networks of like-minded states.”

As a shaping power with an enormous stake in preserving and extending the openness of the international system, Germany has a special responsibility to help integrate new global powers into that system. Here is where things get interesting.

Germany has long sought a seat on the United Nations Security Council, making common cause with Japan, Brazil, and India. But *New Power, New Responsibility* suggests a different path, arguing for the reform of the Security Council in a way that would merge the French and British seats into a permanent European seat in a “slightly enlarged circle of permanent members,” while also ensuring European representation among the non-permanent members.

Under this scenario, Germany would play a role in global peace and security through the European seat, as well as serving as a periodic rotating member. Moreover, Germany recognizes the need to consolidate Europe’s voting power and reduce the number of European seats in other
global institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, to make room for emerging powers.

This renewed commitment to a strong and united Europe is the second pillar of a twenty-first-century German foreign policy. *New Power, New Responsibility* calls for “deepening” the European Union through measures that would include democratizing EU financial decision-making by directly engaging national parliamentarians and exchanging tighter European fiscal constraints on member governments’ budgets for a European banking union, a eurozone budget, and Eurobonds.

In foreign and security policy, *New Power, New Responsibility* proposes strengthening the role of the EU High Representative and the role of the European Action Service. Current EU High Representative Catherine Ashton continues to prove the worth of EU foreign-policy institutions by, for example, brokering a remarkable peace between Serbia and Kosovo and playing a key role in nuclear negotiations with Iran.

The third surprise concerns the use of force. Gauck told Germans in no uncertain terms that they had to be willing to use force, at least as a last resort, and reproached those of his fellow citizens “who use Germany’s guilt for its past as a shield for laziness or a desire to disengage from the world.”

More controversially, Gauck proclaimed the need for Security Council authorization of any use of force, but also hinted at a Kosovo precedent for possible military intervention in Syria. As he put it, when the international community confronts a clear case for the use of force to protect a population from its own government, but the Security Council is divided, “the relationship between legality and legitimacy will continue to be awkward.”

The participants in the deliberations that resulted in *New Power, New Responsibility* split on this question. Some argued for an absolute requirement of Security Council authorization, while others recognized an imperative to contemplate humanitarian intervention without such authorization in “very narrowly defined exceptional cases.”

US Secretary of State John Kerry also spoke at the Munich Security Conference. But, by not referring to Gauck’s speech, he missed an opportunity to underline the success of one of Obama’s key foreign-policy tenets: as the US steps back from its role as global policeman and focuses more on diplomacy than force, other countries must step up.

Even more important, Kerry and Obama would do well to think hard about a key lesson embedded in Gauck’s speech and the report behind it. Countries that want to retain power in a changing global order must learn to share it, which requires accepting and embracing the contours of a new world.

The Obama administration should think hard about Security Council reform. It should signal a real willingness to replace an order that reflects the world of 1945 with one that reflects the world of 2015. That means supporting a greater global role for all powers that understand and accept real responsibility for maintaining global peace and security.