GERMAN POLITICS AND ALLIANCE UNITY

by

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War is too serious a matter to be left to the generals.

—Georges Clemenceau

Politics is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians.

—Charles de Gaulle

The word "politics" has its roots in the Greek word "polis," which refers to a community of people with similar interests and ambitions. The politics of the NATO alliance has since its conception reflected a transatlantic bargain which endeavored to find a common area of interest upon which all member states could agree. Former US Ambassador to NATO Harlan Cleveland noted this many years ago:

> Each year the mix of NATO defense forces and the character of allied political collaboration change, adjusting to the shifting technology of war and to . . . the tides of domestic politics in each of the 15 NATO countries. But while the bargain changes, the constant is a consensus among the allies that there has to be a bargain.[1]

The striking of this bargain is the creation of a political relationship between the United States and its Western European allies. The basis for this relationship lies in popular support for the alliance's policies within each member state and the perception that the United States, as leader of NATO, is willing to respond if necessary with its strategic forces to halt any aggression by the Warsaw Pact. One of the basic rationales for the decision to deploy new intermediate-range systems in Europe is to enhance that perception, which should in turn assist in the maintenance of support for NATO throughout the member states.

Many experts have begun to question whether the constant that Ambassador Cleveland referred to still exists. The so-called "Gang of Four" (Bundy, Kennan, McNamara, and Smith) commented in their now famous *Foreign Affairs* article on "no first use" that the differing views of the role of nuclear weapons among the alliance members can lead to "destructive recriminations," and when compounded by disagreements on other issues, "the possibilities for trouble among Allies are evident."[2] Though some have argued that NATO has suffered through a number of crises in its 30-year history, the current situation seems to be unique in that the multiple strains seem to reinforce one another. Furthermore, the assumption that the settlement of past quarrels is of itself solace at this moment seems ill-founded, especially if one simply consults history and discovers that alliances are not eternal and that NATO has survived longer than any

alliance since the League of Delos bound the Greek city-states together against the Persian threat in 477 B.C. Implementation of the NATO 1979 decision remains, according to a recent study for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "a crucial test of NATO's political will."[3] Catherine Kelleher, in an article in *International Security*, noted that in the debate on intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) "political expediency and electoral imperatives produced a complex intermingling of good reasons and real reasons for national positions."[4] It is, therefore, in the political arena of the member states that the "battle" for the INF ultimately will be won or lost. The issue is a political one that is affected by internal dynamics in the various states while at the same time affecting those states as an issue of heated discussion.

Since last March's election and the consequent formation of a new West German government, a clearer understanding of the effects of these developments upon INF deployment and long-term unity may be made. As noted by Jeffrey Boutwell in *International Security*, the debate over this issue has been particularly strident in West Germany for several reasons. First, its geographic position in central Europe forces it to reconcile its security relationship with the West with a desire for *Ostpolitik*. Second, the speech by Helmut Schmidt at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in 1977 is seen as providing much of the rationale for the NATO decision in the first place, a fact which placed the German government in a politically vulnerable position. Third, the Bonn government finds itself now being pressured by domestic forces, the United States, and the Soviet Union over how to untangle the INF dilemma. Finally, it can be said that the current INF negotiation between the United States and the Soviet Union is in reality a battle for the "hearts and minds of the citizens of the Federal Republic."[5]

In general there are several points that characterize the political climate between West Germany and the United States. Many argue that Germans have a fundamentally different perception of nuclear weapons than do Americans. Nuclear weapons in Europe must *first* and *always* emphasize deterrence. A staff member of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group once remarked, "We have a commandment here at NATO that should be chiseled into stone in front of the headquarters: *Deterrence works*." Some grudging agreement may be found that nuclear weapons may have utility as an instrument to convey intrawar deterrence or to send "signals of political willpower," but not as a tool to achieve meaningful military results. Thus a natural friction exists between the United States as the "provider" of nuclear deterrence and West Germany as a "user" of deterrence.

Still, in the atomic age all should realize the political nature of such systems, as graphically described by Admiral Gorshkov, chief of the Soviet Navy:

> to demonstrate vividly the economics and military power of a country . . . to show readiness for decisive actions . . . to surprise probable enemies with the perfection of the equipment being exhibited, to affect their morale, to intimidate them right up to the outbreak of war, and to suggest to them in advance the hopelessness of fighting . . . (this in many cases has permitted the achievement of political goals without resorting to military operations).[6]

The utility of such forces, therefore, is not confined to their destructive power in

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combat. Before the commencement of hostilities their power lies in the "ability they give to their possessor to threaten to use them, rather than showing an ability to put the threat into effect."[7] This should be more obvious to Europeans (especially the West Germans) than to Americans. Any perceived or actual military superiority on the part of the Soviet Union (particularly with respect to nuclear weapons) "can be exploited to put political pressure on Western Europe."[8]

Even with these facts in mind, polls have shown that despite President Reagan's arms control initiatives, opposition to INF increased in the last year. In one poll in the Federal Republic of Germany, opposition exceeded 75 percent,[9] though the vast majority of Germans supported continued membership in NATO. That poll, commissioned by the ZDF television channel, further showed that 61 percent of the Christian Democrats and 71 percent of the Free Democrats, whose parties constitute the governing coalition, opposed the deployment. Demonstrations during the spring and summer underscored, however, the depth of concern in Germany and elsewhere over this issue.

Against this background, the German people went to the polls on 6 March and delivered a resounding victory to Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his Christian Democratic Union party. The conservatives garnered 48.8 percent of the vote for 244 seats in the *Bundestag*, the greatest margin they had achieved since 1957, when they held their only clear majority (50.2 percent). Their coalition partners, the Free Democrats, made a rather dramatic comeback in the last month of the campaign to gain 6.9 percent and 34 seats, insuring the coalition majority. The Social Democrats (SPD) fell to their worst election defeat in more than 20 years with only 38.2 percent of the vote. Last, the Green Alternative List, the new militant party of environmentalists and anti-nuclear activists, achieved the necessary five percent (5.6 percent and 27 seats) to be seated in the *Bundestag*.

The Reagan Administration had barely hidden its anxiety over this election, fearing that a failure on the part of the CDU might doom the nuclear force modernization. Many in Washington were quick to point to the Kohl victory as a clear mandate on the part of the German people in support of INF. As one Administration spokesman put it, "The West is saved!"[10] Others were much more cautious, noting as did one State Department official, "The biggest danger for us is too much optimism, the idea that Kohl can come through with the family jewels—that's not the case."[11] Indeed, a decisive margin of Kohl's support (according to one sample) voted for him *despite* his position on INF, not because of it.[12]

Most voters seemed to ignore the effort on the part of the SPD to make INF the central issue of the campaign. Unemployment, which had reached 10.4 percent or 2.5 million, old-age pension security, budget deficits, and inflation were of much more importance in determining the ultimate election outcome. In fact, 2 million traditional Social Democrats, many of them factory workers, deserted their party and voted for Chancellor Kohl's Christian Democrats. The CDU was particularly aided by some last-minute good economic news that seemed to portend the start of a recovery. Two days before the election the Economics Ministry reported that industrial orders were up 6.5 percent in December. This news followed other indicators: the balance of payments had attained a surplus in 1982 for the first time in three years, inflation was down, and metal workers had agreed to a low, four-percent wage hike.[13]

The Conservative-FDP coalition was returned in a much improved position in comparison to the government it had formed in October and exceeded the projections of many polls. Strains exist, however, between the CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union, or CSU. Franz Josef Strauss, the CSU party leader, has taken great pains to show his disdain for Mr. Genscher, chairman of the Free Democratic Party, as the coalition foreign minister and also for some of the positions taken by Chancellor Kohl since he assumed office. This was demonstrated during the late spring

over the impending visit to the Federal Republic by Mr. Honnecker, head of the East German government, which was complicated by the death of two West German tourists while in the hands of East German authorities. (The visit was subsequently canceled.) The CSU is still the most important of Mr. Kohl's two partners; it holds five ministerial positions in the government. The CSU has clearly shown its desire to move the country more to the right and into a closer relationship with the United States. This is illustrated by its proposed new laws to curb demonstrations and its complaints about efforts to expand relationships with East Germany.

Even though Mr. Kohl is certainly more "pro-Western" than his SPD adversary, Mr. Vogel, this should not be interpreted to mean that he will be amenable in all areas of German-US concern. There will continue to be increasing pressure on the Chancellor to disagree on issues when doing so is clearly in Germany's interests. American demands for West Germany to make economic concessions could result in damage to the apparent consensus in the area of security. Mr. Kohl will surely be encouraged to push for a solution to the arms control impasse that seems to exist now between the United States and the Soviet Union. Any peace advocate would have to admire a chancellor who reduced the chance of nuclear war. As a politician, the Chancellor obviously is concerned when more than 75 percent of the electorate oppose a plan that his government is advocating.

The coalition's other participant, the Free Democrats, was also successful in the election. Though it did not achieve the 10.6 percent that it had attained in 1980, many analysts believe that figure was artificially high and reflected a large degree of voter dislike for the CDU/CSU chancellor candidate in that election, Mr. Strauss. Indeed, during the 1983 election much of the FDP's success in the final months of the campaign was due to the frequently made suggestion that if the FDP did not gain the necessary five percent to be a full participant in the coalition, Mr. Kohl would be forced to give the foreign minister's portfolio to Mr. Strauss as head of the CSU (a possibility that many people found particularly distasteful). Thus, though the SPD made every effort to label the members of the FDP as "traitors" for their disruption of the Schmidt government in October 1982, that seemed to have little effect on the electorate. Though the FDP has endorsed the government's position on deployment of INF, they have made one additional requirement that could lead to future problems. The FDP stated as part of their campaign platform that they wanted the designated stationing sites of nuclear missiles made public and the communities involved consulted.[14] This would obviously expand the debate even more while giving those who oppose deployment additional information to organize demonstrations and protests.

The primary question with respect to the Social Democratic Party is, Where do they go now? The SPD may moderate to some degree, since it would seem that few voters are to be gained by moving more to the left. Union-connected party leaders appeared to be eclipsed during the campaign by so-called left-wing theoreticians led by former Chancellor Willy Brandt. Brandt believed that a new majority could be formed by reaching out to countercultural groups, the so-called peace movement, and disaffected young people. The election seems to have repudiated that idea, at least for the time being. The principal party leaders now—Rau, Ehmke, Vogel, and others—are not extreme leftists by any means and, furthermore, the nature of the German system, with its requirement for fairly frequent state elections, precludes adopting radical positions.

Still, as the party in opposition the SPD can only benefit to the degree that it opposes the government and shows that its policies are better. With respect to questions of security, a part of the SPD is hostile to the decision to employ new American intermediate-range missiles and hostile even to NATO itself. At a rally in Duisburg during the spring demonstrations, Oskar Lafontaine, SPD chairman in the Saarland and a member of the executive committee, urged Bonn to leave

NATO.[15] Even Karsten Voigt, the party's security spokesman, commented, "We could come to a situation in which we reject stationing."[16] It is not at all unlikely that the Social Democrats could adopt a party position during their November congress that calls for a moratorium on the deployment of new Pershing IIs and GLCMs as long as negotiations are underway at Geneva. The party's executive committee reaffirmed its intention to decide the party's stance on the issue at that special convention to be held in November. A regional convention in the Middle Rhine district decided in May to oppose the deployment plans and has called for the SPD leadership to do likewise "with all its resources"—not excluding the possibility of resistance.[17] The Young Socialists, the official SPD junior organization, has also called for the party to voice a "clear no" to the stationing of additional missiles on West German soil.

The dilemma of the SPD leadership is to reassert control over those portions of their party that defected during the election without becoming increasingly polarized. Questions of security and the German-US relationship will be very important especially to the extreme left of the party and will be an area in which they will attempt to disassociate themselves from the Kohl government's policies. On those issues that involve the United States, the SPD will make every effort to depict itself as the party of national interest while characterizing the Conservatives as the party of American interests. As Karsten Voigt put it, "In office under Schmidt we had to compromise with the Americans. Now there is no such need. For the first time in twenty years, Social Democrats can oppose the US on a major security issue."[18]

The most obvious change that resulted from the March elections was the inclusion of the Green party in the *Bundestag* for the first time. The Greens campaigned on a slogan of "loyal not to East or West but to Ourselves," and were adamant in their opposition to the impending deployment of INF. Rainer Trompert, who was elected as a Green representative from Hamburg, said his party had a "mandate to oppose INF deployment in this year of decision."[19]

In many ways, however, the Greens may portend even more fundamental changes to the German political system than mere opposition to this one issue. A metaphor for this nontraditional perception of the workings of West German pluralism is typified in their dress and conduct in the *Bundestag*. The Greens seem bent on adopting the "politics of the street" in an effort to oppose INF. Petra Kelly, a member of the Green party leadership, announced at a press conference shortly after the election that the Greens would use hunger strikes, boycotts, silent marches, and demonstrations to oppose the NATO decision.[20] The party advocates a so-called "transparent government" and an "indiscreet democracy" which has caused concern in some quarters due to their refusal to respect the confidentiality of parliamentary committees. This is particularly worrisome since they will have seats on the defense and foreign affairs committees. Their presence in the *Bundestag* can only facilitate the broad expression of their views, since all *Bundestag* debates are televised, and they have already shown themselves willing to demonstrate even on the floor of the legislature.

In analyzing the Green's ability to be a growing force in German politics, one must remember that the party is very fragmented. They appeared on the verge of attaining the necessary five percent in the 1980 elections only to fall victim to their own internal strife shortly before the actual election. They were ousted in the most recent election in Schleswig-Holstein due in part to the formation of a new "Democratic Green List" by a disillusioned group. They have also suffered setbacks in several state elections. Even their vote-count in the March general elections was smaller than the polls had predicted in January and February—in part due to their inability to achieve any consensus on economic issues. They were further embarrassed to discover that their eldest elected representative (who was scheduled to give the traditional opening speech of the *Bundestag* session) had been a member of the Nazi SA in

the 1930s that had brutally persecuted German socialists (he subsequently resigned). Thus, though the Greens are an important and highly vocal group bent on changing the policies and character of the West German government, their potential for success can only be measured in the degree to which they can mobilize other groups that continue to feel disenfranchised by the current parties. This ability is in turn dependent on the ability of the Green leadership to maintain internal cohesion and become a true alternative on all issues.

Any cursory examination of the German political scene will reveal growing indications that the shift in German politics is not just the cyclical swing back to the right after many years of SPD government. Instead it is "a splitting apart under a strange polarization effect which could badly upset the political system."[21] Some argue that it is a split between generations. Statistics show that 50.2 percent of all West Germans perceive a Soviet threat, while only 29.6 percent of those born since World War II fear the Russians. Furthermore, though a majority of the population oppose INF deployment, those who do support it are overwhelmingly from the "senior generation."[22] The problem of the so-called "successor generation" in West Germany was seen in another poll that showed that 64 percent of the 18-24 year olds polled blamed international tension on the US military buildup, compared with 41 percent of those in the middle-age category and 25 percent of those 65 or older.[23] Thus opposition to the United States was much more common with those groups that did *not* remember the Marshall Plan, Berlin Airlift, the building of the Berlin Wall, etc. The *Bundestag*, taking note of this problem, established a commission to analyze the youth situation. Its report states that the problem is not so much a matter of young versus old but rather "a problem of the whole society and the results of a widespread crisis concerning the meaning and purpose of life."[24] It may occur that the INF decision will serve as a weathervane to a fundamental shifting of political values in the Federal Republic.

Barring a negotiated settlement in Geneva, the deployment of INF over the next several years hinges on the political climate between the United States and its Western European allies and the internal political dynamics of each state. US leadership and support for governments that favor the NATO policy are critical in the success or failure of this effort and continued Western consensus on security. American credibility abroad still suffers from the events of the 1970s, predominantly Watergate and the Vietnam War. It is damaged even further by misguided policies that betray a lack of understanding and empathy. These policy errors threaten America's greatest strategic asset—its allies and the unity of the Western World. According to a recent study on Europe,

> The challenge for American policy makers who want to ensure the future of the alliance is to adopt policies which respond to today's security problems and which have sufficient credibility to attract the support of future generations of Europeans . . . . If American policy should be seen as equating anti-nuclear sentiment with anti-Americanism or neutralism, some of these Europeans might decide that their anti-nuclear position is inconsistent with their other attitudes toward the alliance. On the other hand, other Europeans may decide that the United States, by defining anti-nuclear attitudes as anti-American, has dismissed their concerns and is no longer taking European interests into account.[25]

In a larger sense, it may show an insensitivity or lack of understanding of European states and the changing character of their societies. Careless rhetoric and an inability to perceive the linkages that exist between issues threaten the security consensus that is the bedrock of NATO. Thus disagreement over short-term policy when coupled with the changing nature of societies may endanger longer-term unity.

In West Germany the Kohl government confronts a whole host of problems such as the potential bankruptcy of the welfare state, shortages in housing and employment for the

young, millions of foreign workers whose jobs are disappearing, increasingly antiquated industries, the highest per capita imports of food and energy of any major industrial country, and a security situation that remains a source of insecurity to many Germans. The attempt to solve many of these problems may bring the Federal Republic into conflict with the United States and some of its NATO allies, but solutions will continue to be demanded. The society (as previously noted) is changing. Some observers argue that opposition to INF, in the minds of many of its critics, serves to salve the injured West German psyche for World War II. Jane Kramer, writing about the German peace movement in *The New Yorker*, notes:

> For young Germans, and for some Germans who were young during the war, the idea that their country has a mission in a damned world is a kind of redemption. They have no history to attach to with any pride, and it is intoxicating for them now to think of themselves as victims of a madness other than their own. This is why there is an almost expiatory fervor to so much of the new pacifist politics.[26]

Surveys conducted in Europe over the last two years have consistently shown that strong opposition to the deployment is considerably and consistently higher than any indication of anti-Americanism, neutralism, or pacifism.[27] This suggests that there are many pro-American, pro-NATO, pro-defense Europeans who nonetheless oppose the new systems. This divergence may be due to a critical error by alliance policymakers over the last 20 years. The assumption was made that discussions of nuclear strategy, deterrence, technology, etc., were far too sophisticated for the common man. If so, this ignores the basic point that support for policies in a democratic society starts at the lowest level—the voter. It may have been forgotten that "in a democracy, policy on questions of peace and war requires constantly renewed legitimization."[28] This failure to discuss security issues publicly may have been an acceptable course until the early 1970s, as prior to that the electorate seemed less apt to be galvanized by such issues. In West Germany, however, demonstrations long ago overtook hiking as a feature of German life. Last year, for example, there were 5300 demonstrations, four times as many as in 1970.[29]

To respond to this problem, one German parliamentarian stated that the need for public information was far "more important than GLCM or Pershing II missiles since the people don't believe that the Soviets pose a threat to them."[30] A poll taken in October of 1981 reinforces this point by noting that opposition by the European public to INF deployment dropped by 10 to 20 percentage points when information was provided about the Soviet INF lead and when deployment was linked to arms reduction talks.[31] Many believe that the situation in West Germany today is similar to that in the early 1950s, during the first heated, often polemical debates over rearmament and the entry of the Federal Republic into NATO. The Chief of Press Relations of the Adenauer government at that time reported to the Cabinet that according to a public opinion poll, fully 80 percent of the West German populace opposed rearmament. The story has it that Adenauer's quick response to this news came in characteristic simplicity: "So, what are you fellows doing to change that?"[32] Adenauer gave no thought to shifting policies that he firmly believed were essential in order to accommodate ostensible drifts in public opinion. Instead he galvanized his resources of leadership and the assets of government to the task of turning public opinion around. Efforts like this will be necessary if this policy is to be successful in the long term. The attitudes of many of the German people and others in the alliance must be changed *and* sustained over this period. The result of this modernization must be a demonstration of convergence of opinion and not a deepening wedge that continues to divide the alliance over time.

The efforts that have been made, such as the publication of *Soviet Military Power* and *NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Force Com-*

parisons, have been useful but normally have not received the widespread circulation that is required. Too often they have been available only to the already informed, which may have resulted in their being nothing more than "preaching to the choir." Furthermore, due to the nature of the product (particularly *Soviet Military Power*) they were *very* skeptically received. The attempt to portray the Soviets as ten feet tall without any serious analysis of their weaknesses, or of Western strengths, made the Reagan Administration look foolish in many circles. President Reagan in a recent speech noted that we should not be embarrassed by efforts at political consciousness-raising, as it is "not cultural imperialism. It is providing the means for genuine self-determination and protection for diversity."[33] Though this is obviously valid, cause for concern still exists. The long-term efforts by the US Information Agency to double youth exchanges and the work by Ambassador Dailey to increase popular support for INF in Europe could be construed as American meddling in domestic German politics. Such campaigns might be better accomplished as a coordinated alliance program to avoid this type of criticism. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the USIA program has resulted in a "turf battle" with the State Department over where the overall center of power will be.[34] The Administration is seeking only $1.5 million for this effort.[35] This is a modest sum for this mission and especially so since in the past decade spending for Fulbright exchanges has been reduced by 40 percent in real terms and the International Visitors program, which at one time brought an estimated 33 current heads of state and 378 cabinet ministers from 92 countries to the United States in their formative years, has also been hit by budget reductions.[36]

Experts at NATO headquarters also seem aware that "the gap in understanding between NATO governments and their publics is great, is increasing, and certainly ought to be diminished." The alliance's information budget, however, is only about $2 million annually, and most officials agree that there is apparently "no machinery to allow the questions" of the respective electorates to be asked.[37]

The results of the German election, though certainly favorable, are not cause for boundless optimism about INF deployment and long-term unity. The elections suggest that problems exist that will demand attention and understanding by the alliance. It is safe to say that the Federal Republic is headed for an increasingly polarized debate over nuclear issues. Furthermore, it is likely that violent demonstrations may result as the modernization actually begins and continues over the next several years.

To be successful in implementing the deployment decision and maintaining cohesiveness, NATO must provide both security and a "sense of security" to its members. If the alliance should fail in its deployment effort, some critics fear that in time, "current trends might even carry to the point where some Allies will choose neutrality over continued membership in the Alliance."[38] It is important to recall that the only real purpose that nuclear weapons have is in their non-use; consequently, this deployment is for the battle that they should *prevent* from occurring. The battle for ideas, however, is a requirement for this deployment as well as alliance continuity, and it is one that happens every day.

NOTES

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