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THE SECURITY POLICY OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

by

JUERGEN DEGNER

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is composed of 16 sovereign nations. Its solidarity rests upon joint political interests, the security needs of 16 countries, and historical and cultural ties. The members of NATO adopted a common policy: the policy of security and detente. But that does not mean that all the various interests of the countries are completely harmonized. There are many different views, fears, and misunderstandings within the Alliance; for example, there have been disagreements in the discussions concerning nuclear policy and strategy, or the role of trade with Eastern Europe and its political implications.¹

The German government states that the security requirements of the various nations may differ and that each country may react to certain problems from case to case in the light of national interests.² To understand these reactions and to contribute to necessary solutions in a spirit of partnership within NATO, it is necessary to know more about the individual factors that influence the respective security policies. The underlying policy of the Federal Republic of Germany is thereby determined primarily by conditions that differ decisively from those of the other NATO members.

This article will discuss these unique factors and show some areas of German security policy that are as they are only

because of these conditions. It is not my main purpose to show current trends, but to improve background knowledge which allows a better understanding of these trends.

FIVE UNIQUE FACTORS

Internal History. At the end of World War II, Germany had suffered the greatest defeat in its history. A quarter of German homes were destroyed or damaged. Millions of Germans were taken captive, made homeless, or put to flight. A quarter of the former *Reich* east of Oder and Neisse, which had been inhabited by Germans for many centuries and had been economically important, came under Polish or Soviet administration. Four million Germans had fled from the Soviet army out of these territories, and more than five million others were expelled by force, along with 3.5 million Sudeten Germans who lived in Czechoslovakia. Thus some 13 million Germans were on the move. More than three million died, increasing the total number of German dead as a result of the war to eight million people.³ Severance of the territories and expulsion from them were generally felt in Germany to be unjust. Because of the German experience in World War II, a large part of the German population today believes that regardless of who wins the next war, the German people

will lose; and having been losers in both World Wars, they are fearful of not surviving a third conflict.⁴

The German Question. The part of Germany that was not annexed was divided. The result today is that the German people are living, against their will, in two states, each with a different order of society. Although the Basis-of-Relations Treaty of 1972 has provided the prerequisites for step-by-step expansion of mutual cooperation, the relations between "the two German states on German soil" are still far from normal. The border barriers erected by the German Democratic Republic have lost none of their horror. People trying to get from the GDR to the West are still shot.

The differences between the two states over the national question are immense. The FRG continues to maintain that Germans in both the East and West form one nation. There are good reasons for this view. Almost 40 percent of the inhabitants of the Federal Republic have relatives or acquaintances in the GDR. The inhabitants of both parts of Germany continue to feel like members of this one nation, linked by a common language, history, and heritage which cannot simply be wiped away overnight. The FRG does not consider the GDR a foreign country in terms of international law. Reunification, in peace, within a larger European context, remains a priority of the FRG.⁵

The Berlin Problem. After World War II the *Reich* capital, Berlin, was put under the joint administration of the four victorious powers. Each of them occupied a sector of Berlin, and all four sectors formed an island, as it were, in the middle of the GDR. The joint four-power administration of Berlin proved as impossible as that of Germany as a whole. The city was politically and administratively split in 1948. East Berlin was declared the capital of the GDR despite the entire city's four-power status. As time went by, the eastern sector was increasingly integrated into the GDR system.

The Western powers retained supreme governmental authority for themselves. West Berlin did not become a *Land* (State) of the Federal Republic. But the Western allies

permitted West Berlin's integration into the legal, economic, fiscal, monetary, and social systems of the FRG. Through the "Four Power Agreement" of 3 September 1971, these regulations were confirmed. The agreement did not have any important consequences other than reassurance of the status quo in terms of international law. It was signed by the Soviet Union, but the improvements achieved are frequently overshadowed by Eastern European protest against its full application. In particular, there are still differences regarding the ties between West Berlin and the Federation. Though West Berlin is highly vulnerable because of its geographic isolation, FRG policy has made its political freedom one of the vital objectives of FRG security policy.⁶ A worsening of the status of West Berlin would create a sharp decrease in public support for any FRG government.

External History. Since World War II a fear of Germany's aggressive attitude has had an effect in both Eastern and Western Europe. This fear grew considerably when German rearmament was discussed.⁷ Some believe that certain NATO members agreed to a German military contribution only because it gave them an opportunity not to increase their armed forces to the level necessary to counter the existing threat.⁸ Though the cooperation of the FRG has overcome most of the negative attitudes in Western Europe, special attention will still be paid to German behavior in the future.⁹ The economic growth

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of the FRG has increased that fear, especially when it is connected with the idea of the reunification of Germany.¹⁰ The importance of this external factor should not be overestimated, but discussion of this problem in foreign publications shows that the factor must be taken into account by each German government.¹¹ It should be stressed again that the factor reflects East European as well as West European attitudes.¹² The FRG therefore has to be "keenly aware of neighbors' attitudes: suspicion in the East and ambivalence in the West."¹³

Geostrategy. The Federal Republic of Germany lies at the very core of Central Europe on the borderline between East and West. It is long and narrow, extending 500 miles from north to south and having an average depth of less than 150 miles. The size is roughly 96,000 square miles. In comparison with the United States it is about the size of Virginia and North Carolina combined. The FRG is inhabited by some 61 million people, 643 persons to the square mile, making it one of the most densely inhabited countries in Europe. The length of the border with Warsaw Pact countries (the GDR and Czechoslovakia) is over 1000 miles.

If the Warsaw Pact launched either a conventional or a nuclear attack, the FRG is the most probable battleground. An attack of either type has the potential to destroy everything the FRG wants to protect. Even minor territorial gains of the enemy would have severe consequences for the FRG: 30 percent of its population and 25 percent of its industrial resources are within 60 miles of the eastern border. The strategic position of the FRG has also led to the placing on German soil of the highest concentration of troops and nuclear warheads within NATO territory. Besides the German *Bundeswehr* of 450,000, there are 392,000 allied servicemen and 325,000 dependents living in the Federal Republic of Germany (Americans, who number 450,000 servicemen and dependents, constitute the majority). No other Western country has such a concentration of military installations in such a confined space.

To accommodate its allies, the German government places 131,866 dwelling units at

the disposal of allied servicemen's families, 89,797 of them free of charge. Overhead, nowhere is there denser air traffic than above the Federal Republic of Germany. There are four million flights every year, of which 580,000 are military. Of these, 110,000 flights are made by low-flying aircraft. Over two-thirds of West German airspace is open to low-level flying. And remember, this is all in an area the size of Virginia and North Carolina combined. These considerations have a psychological effect on public opinion and the government, thereby affecting security policy.¹⁴

INFLUENCE ON SECURITY POLICY

These five factors are responsible for specific aspects of the FRG's national security policy. Germany's firm adherence to NATO is a precondition of the implementation of this policy. This is true for Social Democratic Party (SPD) governments (see White Paper 1979) as well as for Christian Democratic Union (CDU) governments (see White Paper 1983). And even today the SPD makes clear its support for NATO. Party leader Brandt said that one had to differentiate between decisions of the party conventions and actual government practice and pointed out that the SPD had, during its time in office, met its obligations toward NATO more than many other parties.¹⁵

The national security policy of the FRG is based on that of NATO, which was agreed upon in 1967 in the Harmel Report. Under this agreement NATO has two main functions. The first "is to maintain adequate military strength and political solidarity to deter aggression and other forms of pressure and to defend the territory of member countries." The second function is defined as that of pursuing "the search for progress towards a more stable relationship in which the underlying political issues can be solved. Military security and a policy of detente are not contradictory but complementary."¹⁶

In light of the present situation in Europe, the FRG sees a policy of detente as an integral part of a perceptive security policy.¹⁷ So it has become the initiator and

the driving force behind detente within Europe.¹⁸ The German *Ostpolitik* was connected with detente and security policy. From a German point of view this policy "has preserved peace; reduced the risk of military confrontation in Europe; initiated family visits; stabilized the always potentially volatile situation in Berlin; promoted increased trade; developed cultural contacts; and generally created a climate of relaxed tension in Europe."¹⁹ For Germany it would be politically unwise and morally unacceptable to abandon all that has been accomplished through detente.

Germany continues to believe that detente contributes to greater security to the extent that it reduces the causes of tensions and makes credible the renunciation of force or the threat of force as an instrument of policy. Therefore the FRG tries to convince its allies, especially the United States, that the dialogue with the other side should not be interrupted even in times of international crisis. The United States, however, has a different point of view, as shown in a US congressional staff study.²⁰ Germany believes that a realistic detente will avert a return to the "cold war." The results of its efforts in the past have encouraged Germany to go on in this direction: "It was indeed the Federal Republic which had done much to provide for the possibility of transition from a condition of crisis to the subsequent period of potential dialogue."²¹

In the framework of detente, trade between East and West has become an important factor. It has an effect in that each side is bound to show an immediate interest in the economic progress of the other, and this registers in the consciousness of the people. The role of trade and its susceptibility for use as a political instrument to influence Soviet behavior is another area of disagreement between the FRG and the United States.²² The FRG regards economic relations between the West and the East as an important and stabilizing element of the West-East relationship. In the interest of Western security, unacceptable dependencies must be avoided and militarily relevant goods and technologies must not be supplied. Germany does not

believe that trade, in particular, can be used effectively as an instrument of coercion because economic ties between East and West have a long-term aim: to preserve the chances for change and political reform in the Eastern bloc.²³

Arms control and disarmament is another important aspect of the FRG's detente policy influenced by the five factors. The long-term goals of Germany and the United States do not differ.²⁴ In the short term, the FRG is more convinced than other nations that NATO should continue to pursue arms control as a primary objective, despite the negative effects on negotiations caused by the Soviet Union. Indeed, it could be said that the earlier talks between the United States and the USSR on Theater Nuclear Forces and the future Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) were the result of Germany's efforts. Germany believes that arms control is also useful for reducing the fear of war that exists because of huge arms buildups.

The FRG knows that the West-East relationship has suffered setbacks. Real detente between West and East depends on respect for human rights, recognition of the national independence of all countries, and compliance with the rule of international law. Real detente needs trust. Pressure on Poland and the occupation of Afghanistan are contradictory to these requirements. Like the Soviet arms buildup and the attempts to make unilateral power gains in other parts of the world, they show that the Soviet Union is still prepared to use force and threats in the pursuit of her political objectives. The actual hazard to European security lies in the Soviet preparedness to use military force, be it directly or indirectly. But the FRG also knows that in spite of the existing differences between systems, constructive relations between West and East are feasible and important. Contacts and cooperation are apt to make the division of Europe and the division of Germany more tolerable to the people concerned and to make peace more secure. Hence, for the security policy of the West, there is no change in what the Atlantic Alliance agreed upon in the Harmel Report.

This policy has always been most successful when pursued on the lines of the Harmel recommendation, when actions intended to bring about the relaxation of tension have been supported by an assured defense capability.

DEFENSE POLICY

The primary function of NATO is military security. This area too is influenced by the uniqueness of the German security policy. On the basis of the Harmel Report, NATO military strategy was set forth in the NATO document MC 14/3 (6 January 1968). This flexible-response strategy is to preserve peace by a credible deterrence and, should deterrence fail, to preserve or restore the integrity of the NATO area by employing such forces as may be necessary within the concept of forward defense. This demands a balanced structure of conventional, theater nuclear, and strategic nuclear weapons. The three components of this defense complement one another, and no one component can replace any other. The deterrent effect of the combination depends upon the escalatory linkage of all three components.

This defensive system provides for three types of military response should deterrence fail:

- Direct defense: that is, to defeat the enemy on the level at which he chooses to fight, a concept that does not preclude the use of nuclear weapons.

- Deliberate escalation: that is, to stop an attack by selective use of nuclear weapons to raise the risk level for the aggressor to the final limit.

- General nuclear response: that is, the ultimate sanction and the overall deterrent to the strategy of flexible response.²⁵

Deterrence: The last thing that Germany could want is to fight a war on its soil. But the German people know that the FRG would be a battlefield if a war broke out, whether conducted with conventional or nuclear weapons. And they know that such a combat would end with the destruction of what needs to be defended. It is true that a German planner "has the unenviable position of

seeing a West European conflict resulting in either defeat or a Pyrrhic victory."²⁶ That is why for the FRG the primary objective of flexible response is to avoid war through deterrence. No other NATO country will put more emphasis on the importance of deterrence.²⁷ Germany always will look first at the deterrent value and second at the defense value of appropriate measures. The United States, however, puts more stress on the military aspect of strategy and is not always satisfied with the emphasis that Germany and some other European countries put on the nonmilitary element of strategy.²⁸ Accordingly, the German government is encouraged when a US Secretary of Defense states that "NATO's primary objective is to deter Warsaw Pact aggression and, if necessary, to defend against attack."²⁹

The Conventional Pillar: But deterrence for the FRG is credible only if the effectiveness of all three components of the NATO defense is maintained. The assumption sometimes made that the European nations and especially the FRG "have only limited interest in conventional forces"³⁰ is not valid for the FRG. In discussing the modernization of Theater Nuclear Forces, the German government made a clear statement: "Nuclear weapons are no compensation for conventional weakness. In view of the strength of the Warsaw Pact, we also need strong conventional forces."³¹

The facts support that statement. The new Army Structure 4 strengthens the conventional capability and provides additional firepower, tanks, and forces for defense. While the preceding army structure provided for 33 brigades, the new structure has 36. The high level of forces on hand in all brigades is in keeping with the requirements of quick reaction to enemy attack. The brigades will have four maneuver battalions with three companies each, thus increasing the overall number of maneuver companies by three. The German home defense forces also will be improved. The organizational structure and equipment of six home defense brigades will be adapted to that of armored infantry brigades. Peacetime manning levels will be between 85 and 52 percent of wartime

organization. Not only will the new structure improve their organization and equipment required for executing their mission in the rear combat zone, it will also enable them to reinforce NATO formations employed in forward defense operations.

The *Bundeswehr* provides 50 percent of the NATO land forces in Central Europe, 50 percent of the ground-based air defense, and 30 percent of all combat aircraft. For the sea defense of the Northern Flank, the *Bundeswehr* provides about a third of all the European naval forces available, including in the Baltic 70 percent of the NATO naval forces and 100 percent of its naval air forces.

In the framework of Wartime Host Nation Support, the FRG will provide roughly 90,000 additional soldiers in wartime to receive and assist in the deployment of six reinforcing US divisions. The costs for the FRG will amount to 500 million *Deutschmarks* for initial investment and 50 million *Deutschmarks* in annual operational costs.³² That provides an increase in deterrence as well as in conventional defense capability.

Germany's view concerning conventional forces can be summed as follows: They should not be so strong as to make conventional war in Europe militarily more likely; but they should be strong enough to show a potential aggressor that he cannot rapidly or easily overrun the defense positions, and strong enough to raise the nuclear threshold.

The Nuclear Pillar: This leads to another German view of defense: "NATO cannot do without nuclear weapons."³³ Defense based exclusively on conventional forces would limit an aggressor's risk and facilitate its calculation. The availability of the full spectrum enables NATO to escalate gradually without allowing the aggressor to predict when and by what means NATO will respond to the attack. This makes the risk to the aggressor incalculable. So NATO needs nuclear weapons. But again, to Germany nuclear weapons are primarily for deterring war rather than for fighting war. The FRG has stated,

NATO holds nuclear weapons ready for deterrence and defense not because it intends to conduct a nuclear war, but because it is determined to prevent any war whatsoever. The destructive power of nuclear weapons, which is incalculable in the last analysis, is intended to deter others from still comprehending war as an instrument of politics.³⁴

Consequently, the FRG must support the first use of nuclear weapons to assure credible deterrence and defense. But in Germany's view an initial use of nuclear weapons is not intended so much to bring about a military decision as to achieve political effect. Consequently, Germans are very sensitive when former officials of the United States call for a renunciation of the first use of nuclear weapons.³⁵ The immediate rejection of this position by the Secretary of State shows Germany that the official point of view is different.³⁶ Ruediger Moniac summed up the German position when he wrote, "It must never happen that the balance here [in Europe] is built only on conventional defense forces. Central Europeans must be more worried about such a prospect than about the idea of using nuclear weapons."³⁷ Germany's security is also based on nuclear weapons. The FRG's serious assessment of the balanced deterrent structure shows in its leadership role in the NATO dual decision on Theater Nuclear Forces.

Forward Defense: Conventional as well as nuclear forces are necessary to make Forward Defense credible as an essential element of NATO strategy. The FRG defines Forward Defense as "a coherent defense conducted close to the intra-German border with the aim of losing as little ground as possible and confining damage to a minimum. For the FRG there can be no alternative to forward defense."³⁸ Remember: the Federal Republic of Germany cannot afford to lose any territory or to offer any possibility that the Soviets could conduct a quick, limited offensive (almost without opposition) to grab territory and then

propose peace. There might be many better military methods for the defense of Germany, but they would all involve the surrender of territory (like the idea of area defense). No German government would be able to sell such a concept to its population.

The peacetime stationing on German territory of six allied forces and their integrated command structure is one fundamental precondition for this credible Forward Defense. As a result, Germany has been very sensitive to discussions of shifts in US doctrine and plans.³⁹ The present discussions of nuclear strategy and possible reduction of US troops in Europe alarm the German people.⁴⁰ German officials have made it clear that such measures will endanger deterrence as well as Forward Defense.⁴¹ It is useful in this respect to hear the official US point of view: "In order to insure deterrence against this formidable threat, NATO's military strategy calls for a strong forward defense effort."⁴² These words are necessary because of the importance of that matter for the Federal Republic. In the future too, Forward Defense will be the only strategy which can insure that the Federal Republic of Germany will remain a Western power.⁴³

CONCLUSION

The FRG's security policy, like that of other nations, is of course determined by numerous other factors and conditions. Economic interdependency, the gap between South and North, internal economic and social problems, and a growing financial burden are only some of them. These conditions can all be influenced, they are negotiable, and they depend on the particular government. The difficulties that arise from them can and must be settled in a manner in keeping with the character of a voluntary association of sovereign states.

The "five factors," however, create unique conditions for the FRG's security policy, which therefore differs fundamentally from that of other NATO countries. As shown, these factors are relatively independent of any particular time or any

particular government. Because they restrict or extend, but in every case influence, the security policy of the Federal Republic, and all governments as well—independent of whether they stand to the "left" or "right" of center—all other members of the Alliance will feel their effect.

It is obvious that the conditions mentioned cannot be overcome in a short period of time. So it is necessary for the other nations to take them into account as unchangeable facts and to show a greater and more concerted understanding of the particular difficulties and complexities of the FRG's position. To show such an understanding of this unique situation is to understand Alliance policy better. Further, a better understanding of the unique situation of the Federal Republic of Germany will increase its will and ability to meet the challenges of the future, together with its allies, and to play its role as "an influential power with a considerable stake in the stability of the world system."⁴⁴

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