

Schrödinger's Nukes: The Opacity of American Nuclear Weapons in Germany

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The Federal Republic of Germany is no longer the binary entity that once served either the United States or the USSR in the Cold War. Yet vestiges of this turbulent past cling to the unified state in the form of NATO—but more specifically American—tactical nuclear weapons stationed on German soil. Despite the conclusion of the Cold War, these weapons have evaded German law prohibiting weapons of mass destruction as well as eluded the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) under the auspices of claimed NATO security needs. NATO's posture remains much as it was during the height of tension, even in the wake of immense change. To explain and challenge these realities, this qualitative study, backed by a constructivist perspective, demonstrates the significance of the early Cold War developments that shaped modern policy, then questions whether enough evidence exists today that both state and non-state actors reject the status quo. Finally, I will end by summing up Germany's modern dilemma within the NATO alliance.

Part I: The Historical Evolution of German Nuclear Policy

Germany's path to its current non-proliferation policy stance and its efforts towards a Europe without nuclear weapons was not in any way linear; much conflict manifested itself on both sides of the Iron Curtain. One challenge was whether American nuclear weapons should be stationed in West Germany to counter perceived Soviet aggression, particularly the alleged stationing of Soviet warheads in the new East German state. The Soviet Union proposed in 1957 the Rapacki Plan, which called for the complete conventional and nuclear weapon-free zone encompassing all of Germany. The West German Defense Minister Franz Josef Strauss decried the proposal as "'Ridiculous... [that said plan would mean] US troops would be withdrawn to the triangle west of Rhine", (Department of State, hereafter DOS, memo 32H). Strauss fumed over the prospect of a militarily irrelevant West German state and took his case to the U.S. government.

In a conversation with the American ambassador, Strauss reiterated, "any arrangements towards establishment of a neutralized or semi-neutralized Germany would eventually lead to Soviet domination of the entire country" (Department of State memo 32H).¹ Strauss' apprehension was not without grounds. The GDR (German Democratic Republic) stood as a direct and competing threat to German reunification and allowed for the possibility of the two German states being pitted against one another in war. West German leadership wholly rejected the Soviet proposal. In the words of Chancellor Adenauer: "The Soviet plan would place West Germany in a permanently inferior military position as compared to

other NATO members” and defeat any prospect of safety from the Soviet conventional forces (DOS Intelligence Report #7644).

US President Dwight Eisenhower detailed in a letter to General Secretary Khrushchev in March of 1960 that the United States had no plans to station nuclear weapons in Germany, stating: “it is our policy to avoid the widening of the circle of nuclear powers” in Europe per the U.S. Atomic Energy Act of 1954, which prohibited the distribution of American warheads to other states (DOS Telegram, Eisenhower).

This statement was technically true in that Eisenhower promised not to help Germany get its own weapon, as U.S. forces retained control over the weapons themselves. However, the U.S. was entertaining West German designs on building its own nuclear weapon. “The Chancellor [Adenauer] referred to the proposal that research on nuclear weapons be done by France, Germany, and Italy” in 1957 in a conversation with John Foster Dulles (DOS Telegram, Dulles to Amb. Bruce). This program’s goal was to jointly manufacture nuclear weapons between the three states, so as to stream line the production of the warheads. Additionally, two years prior to Eisenhower’s letter to Gen. Sec. Khrushchev, Sec. of State Dulles had communicated with German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer on the specifics of deploying American warheads in Germany. Adenauer confirmed to Dulles in 1957 that debate in Bonn was well underway, and that the Bundestag would yield the desired result: permission to deploy nuclear weapons (DOS Telegram, Dulles to Ambassador Bruce). Without question, Dulles’ aim was “to secure soonest German acquiescence in allowing NATO stockpiles in Germany... for achievement of German atomic capability” (DOS outgoing Telegram 10686).

Adenauer was not without his doubts. As Dulles noted in a 1957 memo to Eisenhower, “he fears that we will drift into a position in which we will be unable to deal with any difficulty except by resort

to nuclear weapons”, which was a logical conclusion when compared to the recent proclaimed strategy of heavier reliance on nuclear weapons—as opposed to conventional forces-- from the United Kingdom and the United States (DOS memorandum for the President, Dulles pg 1). Adenauer simply did not want his country defended with nuclear weapons and nothing else.

The introduction of the 1968 Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons changed the dialogue of the situation drastically. At first glance, the West German leadership was appalled by the notion of establishing a codified world order of Nuclear-Weapons states and Non-Nuclear Weapons states. Defense Minister Strauss painted the proposal as “‘a new Versailles of cosmic dimension’ that would exclude Germany from a prestigious circle of states” (Davis and Jasper 4). Beyond the initial shock, however, was the opportunity for Germany to use its proposed nuclear weapons program as political leverage. Chancellor Kurt Kiesinger persuaded the United States to trade one program for another; if the U.S. promised unequivocally to provide West Germany with a nuclear umbrella, Kiesinger vowed to shut down their own weapons ambitions (Davis and Jasper 18) The United States embraced this idea rather quickly, as it allowed the opportunity to “emphasize the seriousness of America’s commitment and to deter enemy aggression” away from any ally of the US (Davis and Jasper 18). This agreement doubly reassured the West German government, for in effect, the United States was promising to risk its own populace in the event of Soviet attack.

Part II: Modern German regard for the American Weapons

Let’s start by examining the role of the Military in resisting the retention of American nuclear weapons. In 2000, the Bundeswehr was modernized to confront the 21st century, as outlined in the state document *Die Neuausrichtung der Bundeswehr* [The Realignment of the Bundeswehr]. This text offers forty-five thickly worded pages

about the structure, purpose, and mission of the revamped German military. Out of the 5,840 words in the document, “nuclear” does appear once (or even a variant of the word).² This powerful omission by the German military demonstrates how deep their repudiation of American warheads runs, despite Germany possessing 150 warheads at the time the document was published (Meier 30).

As an even more obvious step towards complete rejection of the nuclear weapons, the German military is phasing out the old Tornado fighter-bomber from its Luftwaffe. The Tornado was the only military aircraft the country possessed as a nuclear weapon delivery system, and it is to be replaced by the new Eurofighter, which lacks the capability to deliver nuclear weapons (Dempsey). Defense Minister Westerwelle commented on this new transition from nuclear-capable aircraft to non-nuclear-capable aircraft by saying that it’s time “for a country free of nuclear weapons” (Dempsey). . Social-Democratic Party Parliamentarian Hans-Peter Bartels stated in 2012 that not only were the Tornado fighter-bombers to be shelved, the entire Büchel air base—where the U.S. nuclear weapons are currently stored—was designated to be closed down. “The Federal Government is finally orienting its planning so that in the future the so-called special-weapons use will no longer be among the tasks of the Bundeswehr” Bartels added (BBC Worldwide Limited).

A truly emblematic example of German unity on this topic can be seen in the various policy statements made by the governments that are voted into power each election cycle. I utilized three specific *Koalitionsvereinbarungen* , which are published after the ascension of each newly formed government, as evidence to illustrate my point. The three *Koalitionsverträge* that offer the most information

² Translation note: ‘Nuclear weapon’ in German translates to “Kernwaffen”, “Atomwaffen” or even “Wasserstoffbombe”. All of which are variants of the same thing and were not to be found.

related to nuclear weapons are policy statements of the 1998 SPD-Green Party coalition, the 2009 CDU-CSU-FDP coalition, and the currently governing 2013 CSU-CDU-SPD grand coalition. As an interesting trend, coalition governments in the Bundestag have shifted from the Left to the Right, yet the message against the use and deployment of American bombs has remained stable.

Both in the 1998 and the 2013, the German government expresses its unending support for disarmament of all types of weaponry in the EU. In 1998, “the controlled disarmament of atomic weapons of mass destruction remains one of the most important missions/tasks of global peace-keeping” (Koalitionsvereinbarung: SPD, die Grünen, 1998, Section 6). They continued to promise in the 1998 *Koalitionsvertrag* in Section 6 to adhere more closely with the NPT, so as to demonstrate full compliance with the non-proliferation regime. In 2013, a similar message is given: “Disarmament and Arms-control politics are a significant element of German foreign and security policy, which aligns perfectly with the coalition from 1998, even though this more recent policy statement was written by Angela Merkel’s conservative coalition.

2013 offered the boldest language yet. The grand coalition proposed: “Successful disarmament-talks would bring into being the prerequisite for a departure of the tactical nuclear weapons stationed in Germany and in Europe. (Koalitionsvertrag CDU, CSU, SPD 2013, pg 170). This statement differs from that of 1998 and 2009 in that demands not only the removal of the weapons, but offers a device—i.e, a summit—to discuss such an action. Furthermore, the 2013 statement demands not only the NATO weapons be removed from Germany, but all of the EU.

An exhaustive list of legal documents also provides consistently concrete language regarding nuclear weapons ownership. As codified by the German Law of the Land, under Section 7: Federal Legislation, Article 73, subsection 14, the Federal legislature alone is

empowered to draft legislation with regards to nuclear weapons, yet for "production of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes" only (Grundgesetz 59). The federal government also signed Germany as a party to the *Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE)*, which held hard and solid limits on conventional, national militaries for any country that became a party, which included Russia. The War Weapons Control Act of 2002 was enacted under Gerhard Schroeder, which holds under part III, section 17 "Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons", Germany cannot take part in any nuclear weapons manufacturing or exchange any goods in an attempt to obtain a nuclear weapon.

. Section 16 of the Act, however, stipulates that Germany may receive a nuclear weapon from a NATO member state as part of NATO agreements. Interestingly, in 2008, Angel Merkel was greatly surprised by an offer from French President Nicholas Sarkozy that he'd be willing to open talks towards sharing the French arsenal of nuclear weapons with Germany (Überraschender Vorstoß: Spiegel Online). That Steinmeier and Merkel did not utilize this escape clause to accept French weapons illustrates their resolve to maintain Germany's established anti-nuclear policy. This reaffirms the thesis that nuclear policy developed under the left-wing rule in the late 1990's is still affirmed by the current conservative government, further exhibiting Germany's consistent stance.

. As a personal example, Gregor Gysi, a leader of Germany's *Die Linke*, went on the offensive in March of 2014. In a speech to the Bundestag as well as Angela Merkel, Gysi confidentially proclaimed that:

„The new nuclear weapons illustrate; we need not only the old but new nuclear weapons, and the main point is, if an American nuclear weapon were launched from Germany, the answer/retaliation would hit us, not the USA“

Whereas Kiesinger in the late 1960's was relieved to couple the fates of the American and German people on the basis that the US promised a full nuclear retaliation in defense of German soil, the opposite is now true. Nuclear deterrence provided by the NATO nukes was intended to discourage a conventional attack from the USSR or the GDR. Today, neither of these two threats exist, and (In the words of the 2011 Defense Policy Guidelines of the German Defense Ministry) "since a direct, conventional attack on German territory has become unlikely, the previous personnel strength that was exclusively reserved for such an event is no longer needed". With no immediate conventional threat, Germany no longer needs the US to risk its populations' safety. The weapons now serve primarily as an instrument of American military policy.

Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

American foreign policy dominated Germany in the past, but Germany rejects its former status as a junior partner in its own security. Within the context of the Cold War, surrendering portions of its national sovereignty had a level of logic, as the West Germans could not have possibly protected themselves alone. However, once the Cold War ended, the Russians withdrew their forces from Eastern Europe, yet the United States declined providing parity. "If you remove the weapons, the whole equation between Europe and the U.S. could change," commented Professor Joachim Krause from Christian Albrecht University in Kiel (Demsey). Given the already confused state of the NATO alliance, Germany must announce a strong, unilateral and public stance informing the United States that the weapons will be removed. As a Belgium representative stated in 2005, "In NATO everybody is waiting for everybody else' to take the initiative on the question of NATO nuclear sharing", which just highlights the sentiment that runs across Europe (Meier).

If these bombs are truly one of the only pieces that hold the NATO alliance together, then what does that say about the integrity

of the alliance? I end by posing the question: what is Germany's modern role in an alliance founded on the philosophy, as NATO's first Sec. Gen, Britain's Lord Ismay, lauded "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down" (Schorr).

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