

*"If the Americans won't talk peace, we Germans won't take the missiles"*

## Battleground of the Alliance

BY JULIAN CRANDALL HOLLICK

"Be afraid. Nuclear death threatens us all!" So read the banners unfurled at this June's biennial assembly of the German Protestant Churches in Hamburg. In Frankfurt a businessman was adamant. "The best days are behind us. Now the Americans will drag us into a nuclear war. And all for what?"

Fear is abroad in West Germany, fear of what may happen if American medium-range rockets are installed on West German soil to counter the threat from the Soviet SS-20. Opposition to the proposed deployment has emerged as the one issue that may crystallize the disparate strands of unease and discontent within the country into something much more powerful—something that could, if unchecked, not only hasten the collapse of the ruling coalition of Social and Free Democrats, but rock the foundations of the Atlantic Alliance until it collapses.

In a debate in the Bundestag at the end of May, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt warned: "Whoever . . . calls [the stationing of U.S. Cruise and Pershing missiles] into question calls the Alliance itself into question." If West Germany refuses to take its share of these missiles, other NATO countries—notably Holland and Belgium—will undoubtedly follow suit, thus destroying the Alliance's nuclear credibility and, in the process, its *raison d'être*.

Opposition to the proposed deployment has spread so fast this year that, last May, Schmidt threatened to resign if his own party congress, meeting next April, refuses to endorse the government's decision to accept some of the missiles. Polls commissioned by German magazines and for the U.S. International Communications Agency suggest that two-thirds of all Germans, irrespective of political allegiance, are opposed to the missiles. At least one such poll, in *Der Spiegel*, suggests that a plurality of Germans favor a loosening of bilateral ties between the United States and the Federal Republic. The announcement in August that the U.S. has started production of the neutron bomb will probably exacerbate such sentiments.

The German public is both frightened and confused, not knowing whom to believe. American hard-line

rhetoric has given Soviet propagandists a field day, suggesting that the United States has abandoned arms control, is intent on radically altering the European strategic balance, and is preparing to wage a limited nuclear war at Europe's expense.

A very good case can be made for deploying the Cruise and Pershing II missiles, but "it has largely gone by default," says Dieter Böhrl, deputy political editor of the Hamburg weekly *Die Zeit*. The U.S. withdrew its large Thor missiles from Western Europe in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis, and for more than a decade the theater nuclear balance has been maintained by NATO (and French) air and sea-launched missiles. In the late 1970s, however, the Soviet Union began to replace its aging short-range tactical nuclear weapons in Central Europe with the SS-20, which is mobile, far more accurate, and has a greater range.

The Europeans started to worry when the Carter administration, as part of the SALT II talks, seemed prepared to accept limitations on the proposed deployment of Cruise missiles in Western Europe. In a speech at the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London on October 28, 1977, Schmidt obliquely accused Washington of preparing to sacrifice Europe's security needs to suit its own strategic ends. In doing so, Schmidt was merely echoing perennial European doubts about the automaticity of the American defense commitment first raised by Charles de Gaulle.

Stung by the criticism, the United States rushed to offer Cruise and Pershing II missiles to counter the SS-20. But American eagerness to deploy the new missiles ran into unexpectedly stiff opposition within Europe from those committed to preserving détente and Europe from any deterioration in the global Superpower relationship. In an effort to blunt this criticism, NATO finally adopted a dual-track strategy of simultaneous negotiations toward a reduction in arms while proceeding with production and deployment of the new missiles. Negotiations were also tied to the broader SALT framework, for how could European theater arms reductions be negotiated in a vacuum? This strategy was considered indispensable to securing acceptance from Holland and Belgium. The Germans, remembering the neutron bomb fiasco of 1977, added a condition of their own: They would take their share of the 572 missiles only if at least one other continental country agreed to

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do likewise. Two years after the NATO decision, both Holland and Belgium have put off the decision indefinitely because of the strength of their respective peace movements; only Italy and Britain remain committed unequivocally to accepting the missiles.

Opposition to the missiles has been prompted and fueled in part by a skillfully orchestrated and sustained Soviet peace offensive that has played on growing European fears of a new cold war. Mr. Brezhnev's initial reaction to the December, 1979, NATO decision was one of mock astonishment that anyone could consider the SS-20 or Backfire bomber a threat. When this soft-talking approach failed, Brezhnev turned to threats: No negotiations and a new arms race unless NATO backed down. This spring the Kremlin, sensing a potential rift between Europeans committed to détente and the new American administration, changed its tack yet again. The new Soviet peace offensive, aimed at West Germany, offers negotiations if actual deployment does not take place.

Just what they would talk about is less clear. The sweet reasonableness of this latest Soviet proposal, welcomed uncritically by former Chancellor Willy Brandt when he visited Brezhnev at the beginning of July, blinds many people to its dangers. The Russians are proposing to freeze nuclear forces at existing levels. As there are already more than two hundred SS-20s deployed in Eastern Europe, such a freeze would leave the Warsaw Pact with a three-to-one nuclear superiority. The Soviet Union has never accepted the Western notion that the SS-20 should be withdrawn if NATO agrees not to deploy the Cruise and Pershing missiles. But pacifists and anti-Americans in Western Europe, not to mention the plain blurr-eyed, will seize on any offer to start talks. Like the Helsinki Review Conference in Madrid, such negotiations could run on indefinitely, to the West's disadvantage.

### **"COUNT US OUT"**

Détente has real and tangible meaning for many Germans. For some it has meant family reunion: Over 300,000 ethnic Germans have been allowed to emigrate from Eastern Europe since 1972. There are still three million waiting to leave. For industrialists it has meant important markets. In 1980, German exports to the Soviet Union totaled \$4.4 billion, roughly five times that of the U.S. Détente has become a fact of life for the young, who take NATO for granted. As Willy Brandt said earlier this year: "Young people today belong to a new generation that is free from the burden of the past." The cold war is regarded as an anachronism.

The events of 1980—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the turmoil in Iran, uncertainties in neighboring Poland, confusion and contradiction in Washington—all produced a deep pessimism and fear that détente would be sacrificed to renewed Superpower rivalry. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the German foreign minister, accurately reflected the public mood when he declared himself "ready to defend détente tooth and nail." Schmidt compared the situation to that in Europe on the eve of World War I.

The arrival of a new hard-line administration in Washington, openly skeptical of arms control, con-

temptuous of détente, and convinced that U.S. defense is falling behind the Soviet Union, has scared many Germans. "Why does Reagan want America to be number one? Why does Haig say there are more important things than peace?" asked one young couple in a small town near Stuttgart. For them and many other Germans, détente had meant that the United States accepted parity with the Soviet Union. It comes as an unwelcome and dangerous shock to discover that this is no longer so.

Many Germans either don't believe or don't want to believe in the existence of a Soviet threat to Western Europe. In an open letter to Schmidt last year, the novelist Gunther Grass claimed, "Nobody is attacking us, nobody is threatening us.... We Germans must use every possible means to save the peace." Dr. Erhard Eppler, a former minister and the darling of the Social Democrats (SPD) left wing, calls the search for peace "a moral imperative." Milan Horacek, a leader of the ecological "Green" party in Frankfurt, argues that "if the Russians enjoy true military superiority, as the Americans claim, they would already have attacked us. The fact that they haven't disproves the American thesis."

Others go a step further and suggest that it is the United States which is a destabilizing factor, because the new missiles could hit Russian cities with less than six minutes' warning, thus forcing the Soviets to consider a first-strike scenario. "It is the United States, not the Soviet Union, that is a threat to peace," said a prominent SPD member of the Bundestag at a peace rally in Frankfurt last May. Alfred Mechttersheimer, a maverick Christian Democrat (CDU) peace researcher at Munich's Max Planck Institute, likewise fears that the Russians will be provoked into launching a preventive first strike against West Germany. Mechttersheimer has compared the proposed missile deployment to the Cuban missile crisis—as something the Russians cannot reasonably be expected to tolerate.

The left wing of the SPD (the "Jusos"), the Young Democrats of the Free Democratic party (FDP), and many of the more radical elements in the peace movement fear that the U.S. has abandoned deterrence and accepted as inevitable a war in Europe. They accuse the United States of seeking to protect its own territory at Europe's expense. "You want to save us by destroying us," claims Mechttersheimer. The physicist Karl Bechert, the grand old man of the West German antinuclear movement, caustically calls Americans "our good friends who will see to it that we are destroyed." Karl-Heinz Hansen, the black sheep of the SPD, goes one step further, accusing Washington of preparing to win a limited nuclear war to bolster the sagging fortunes of the military-industrial complex. As proof he cites articles in such American journals as *Foreign Policy* that suggest a nuclear war is "winnable." The decision to produce the neutron bomb, announced on the anniversary of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has merely reinforced these suspicions.

Although Schmidt can probably carry his party in the Bundestag on this issue, most of the powerful regional party federations have come out four square against deployment and in favor of negotiations without any preconditions. Few seem to believe that the

new American administration is really interested in arms control, a skepticism again reinforced by the neutron bomb decision. As Dr. Eppler commented: "This will finally open the eyes of Europeans to the madness of Reagan's policies. If the Americans don't want to talk, then we won't take the missiles." If next April's party congress rejects deployment, Schmidt presumably will carry out his threat to resign.

The "Jusos" at their annual conference this past summer were unequivocally in favor of unilateral disarmament and against accepting the missiles. Their chairman, Willi Piecyk, accused Schmidt of "having shrunk the Social Democratic peace policy down to the size of a cowboy hat." The "Greens" have gone one step further, advocating a nuclear-free Europe from the Baltic to Portugal, relying on a people's militia to resist an eventual Soviet attack.

Opposition is by no means limited to "classic pacifist" and/or "fellow-traveler" circles. Foreign Minister Genscher received an unpleasant shock in May when a third of the delegates to the FDP congress voted against deployment. Even the CDU has cause to be worried. Polls show that almost two-thirds of their supporters have doubts about accepting the missiles.

Protest has spread beyond the politically active to the powerful Protestant churches, even to local chambers of commerce. In June more than seventy thousand delegates to the Protestant "Kirchentagen" in Hamburg staged a mass street rally against deployment. The demonstration, which included eighty-nine-year-old Pastor Martin Niemoeller, was the largest peace rally held in West Germany since 1957.

"We have been strongly influenced by our experience under the Third Reich, by the sense that the churches did not do enough when the Nazis were coming to power," explained the conference chairman. "We feel that we have a responsibility now to eliminate nuclear weapons before they eliminate us."

Much of this general opposition is based on memories of past destruction. For the middle aged, war has a very real meaning. "We have been rebuilding this country for thirty-five years," one Munich businessman told me. "No one wants to go back....If there was a

choice between giving the Russians more influence here and even a limited war, we would opt for the Russians."

This mood is best summed up perhaps in the words of a popular song of the 1930s that one can now hear sung at peace rallies: "Never, never do we want to carry weapons. Never, never do we want war again. Let the Big Shots fight among themselves, but count us out...."

## THE TALKS

Is there a possible compromise? The distinguished physicist Karl-Friedrich von Weizsaecker believes that deployment will be acceptable only if the missiles are placed at sea. Von Weizsaecker, writing in *Die Zeit* in June, quotes Schmidt himself from a book published in 1961: "Land-based missiles can be put in Alaska, Labrador or the Near East, but under no circumstances in densely populated areas. There, they are formal targets for the enemy's nuclear rockets." However, sea-based missiles are also considerably less accurate.

After much prodding from Bonn, the United States finally committed itself to open talks with the Soviet Union before the end of this year. Schmidt tried to get the date advanced to September and failed. As one senior Foreign Office official told me in Bonn: "It is absolutely essential for us, for domestic reasons, that talks begin as soon as possible. We simply cannot afford to leave the role of the apostle of peace to Brezhnev. We have good arguments ourselves." The unexpressed fear is that even if talks do open before Christmas, there may not be sufficient tangible progress to check the pacifist opposition within the SPD. And the announcement that the United States had begun production of the neutron bomb could not have come at a worse moment for Schmidt. It lends new credibility to the peace movement, fuels anti-Americanism, undercuts Schmidt's authority, and raises anew the whole question of Washington's true intentions. A betting man would have to lay no more than even odds that the West Germans will accept the American missiles. If they do not, the Atlantic Alliance undoubtedly will face its most serious crisis. [WV]

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