THE CHANGING STATUS OF GERMAN REUNIFICATION IN WESTERN DIPLOMACY 1955–1966

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since 1954 the Federal Republic of Germany has explicitly declared itself dependent on allied support for the achievement of both security and national reunification. In treaties and in actions, Bonn has consistently sought the defense of West Germany only within the framework of NATO, reunification only within the framework of broader Western policies toward the Communist bloc. All the countries of postwar Europe have, in varying degrees, questioned and compromised the ideal of national sovereignty. But the Federal Republic's decision to rely on external powers and institutions transcending national borders has been unique, both in its extent and in its formality.

A recent paper by Uwe Nerlich traces the implications for German foreign policy of this dependence in the realm of security. Within the limits of certain formal restrictions mainly related to atomic weapons, and subject to more general allied suspicion of its intentions, the Bonn government has encountered a series of difficulties in pursuing a policy of full integration in a military alliance increasingly reliant on nuclear weapons in a period of rapidly shifting strategic doctrine. But, since Bonn considered full participation in NATO defense vital to its security, it was unwilling to forego the policy of integration, even when this conflicted with the goal of

1 Uwe Nerlich, "Die nuklearen Dilemmas der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," Europa Archiv, 10 September 1965, p. 637-52.
reassuring its new partners of Germany's peaceful intentions. Moreover, because the Paris agreements formally granted Germany a role as a fully equal partner in Western defense in return for a crucial West German military contribution, Bonn considered the policy of integration a just, as well as a necessary, fulfillment of a bargain.

Comparable problems have beset German policy concerning reunification. Here, too, there are contractual commitments between the Federal Republic and its allies that reflect overlapping interests. West Germany's task has been to maintain the solemn allied commitment to seek its national unity at times when the allies were following other, perhaps contradictory, goals in East-West relations. Allied support was considered indispensable, but it might be lost if German efforts to equate reunification with the political purpose of the NATO alliance were too insistent, restrictive, or demanding. As in the area of defense policy, however, Bonn saw no hope in a unilateral course, and the chronic strains accompanying the pursuit of unity within an allied framework had to be faced. Although the bargain of the 1954 agreements was the basis for all West German policy, caution had to be exercised so that efforts to hold the allies to that bargain did not become counterproductive.

The achievement of German unity was for the Federal Republic a prime national goal. For the other allies it was at best only an indirect facet of the national interest. Drawing upon all possible means to maintain the necessary diplomatic and military backing in pursuit of its goal, Bonn was prone to stress an identity of interests in reunification that disregarded the disparities inherent in
separate national concerns. Periods of difficult re-
adjustment to new allied policies were accordingly
frequent, during which the measure of success gradu-
ally came to be not whether Western interests were
identical, but whether they could be viewed as com-
patible. So great were Germany’s military vulnera-
bility and diplomatic insecurity, however, that a de-
termined adherence to policies and arrangements
deriving from days of relatively high cohesion in the
alliance was more characteristic of Bonn’s policy
than that of other allies, who came to question the
pertinence of NATO to their basic concerns.

This paper will review the course of NATO pol-
cy on German reunification from the perspective of
West German preferences and Bonn’s endeavors to
have them respected in the diplomatic efforts of the
major allies. Central to the debate among the main
partners in the alliance has been the question of what
place German reunification should have in a final
European settlement. Related questions concern the
nature of disarmament and new security commit-
tments to accompany a settlement, and the priority
to be accorded among the several problem areas,
political, military, and institutional, in the search for
East-West agreements. The issues, then, are a defi-
nition of the ideal elements of a more stable Euro-
pean order, and the proper sequence for implement-
ing a détente.