The Changing Status of German Reunification in Western Diplomacy, 1955-1966

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V. REMARKS ON THE PRESENT JUNCTURE

The American reaction to French policy reflected a continued concern with Germany, too, albeit in a much more familiar manner. Loyally, the United States refrained from blunt talk about the concessions a settlement would require and soft-pedaled without formally abandoning the search for allied nuclear sharing. But for all practical purposes its policy on reunification had become geared almost solely to the little steps and long time necessary for a strategy of "environmental improvement" in East-West relations. The real though muted concern of American and British policy-makers was that de Gaulle's unilateralist example was premature and would set the West Germans off on their own to the East. While acknowledging the need for a more active Eastern policy, someday, the Anglo-American powers fell back on the incontestable principle that a strong and united West was the precondition for a successful policy of détente. In fact, their interest in maintaining traditional NATO solidarity stemmed from an overriding desire to keep West Germany stable and predictable. At a minimum it was assumed that the Federal Republic had become adjusted to the split and that the alliance continued to serve her more fundamental interests by providing military security. At a maximum, the unsolved issues surrounding Germany were recalled, and the necessity of keeping them in view as part of the longer range movement toward détente was underlined. The status quo was declared unsatisfactory, as
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always, but there was no compulsion to insist on a broad rethinking of Western strategy as de Gaulle had done, no impetus to reopen debate with the Soviet Union on the basis of older arguments. The hard-won stability that followed the Berlin and Cuban confrontations became the measure of the acceptable as well as the possible in the European stalemate.

De Gaulle, too, valued the alliance in part as a constraint on Germany, but, significantly, his government placed particular insistence on the preservation of the juridical principle of four-power responsibility for a final settlement embodied in the Paris agreements of 1954. This made West Germany's position toward French diplomacy fundamentally ambivalent. De Gaulle's willingness to keep the reunification issue alive in talks with the Communist bloc was welcome, while the wider implications of his NATO and European policies for the security of the Federal Republic and the adequacy of a final solution were a source of great controversy and apprehension.

The Erhard government attempted to compensate for the disappearance of a common Western diplomacy on reunification with renewed reminders and suggestions of its own. On the time and place of a settlement, Bonn continued to argue against the consignment of reunification to the glacial movements of history, conceding that while unity would not come about as the result of a single summit, it nonetheless would have to emerge from a series of multilateral conferences at which the interrelated political, economic, and military issues were treated together. In its last major initiative, the peace note of the spring of 1966, Erhard's administration endeavored to maintain a focus of constructive atten-
tion on the unsolved problems in Central Europe by endorsing compromise formulas for nonaggression pacts, progress toward a nuclear free zone, and exchanges of military observers with Warsaw Treaty powers. All of these were Eastern bloc ideas which until then had been considered unacceptable in their proposed form, but had never been answered with counterproposals.

As always, Bonn hesitated to spell out major concessions in the military realm before political agreements were reached, on the grounds that these would be construed by friends and enemies alike as currently applicable restrictions. The basic political constraints on such initiatives also remained: the continued refusal to recognize East Germany and to abandon the legal principle that Germany's current borders were only provisional, pending regulation at a final peace conference. But within the limits thus maintained, there was greater flexibility and concreteness in spelling out acceptable measures for disarmament and security arrangements, even prior to political agreements. This tendency was especially marked because the practice of endorsing the current Western package had become less satisfactory; first with the relative decline of American interest in Europe, thereafter with the growing divergence of French policy from previously accepted Western designs and procedures. Increasingly, West Germany had to speak and act for itself in foreign affairs, and the failure of Chancellor Erhard to rise quickly and competently enough to the necessity contributed heavily to the fall of his government in late 1966.

The Kiesinger-Brandt coalition which emerged is as much a sign of the continuing deadlock in German foreign and domestic policy as it is the result of a
clear reaction to the situation of confused *immobilisme* over which Erhard presided. The inconsistencies and contradictions that plague the Federal Republic’s actions in the three main areas of West European, East European, and Atlantic policy will not be cleanly resolved on the basis of an unequivocal national mandate for change. Opinion remains unsettled, and Germany's unalterable position as the "land in the middle" admits of no simple solutions. There exists rather only a common desire among politicians and populace for a more vigorous and differentiated German policy in all directions—toward America, toward France, toward the great complex of problems confronting any attempts to influence Moscow and East Europe—in pursuit of the still proclaimed goal of achieving national unity. The mending of Franco-German relations and the candid airing of problems with the United States show definite shifts of emphasis, as do the attempts to establish diplomatic relations with Moscow’s allies.

This radical revision of the Hallstein doctrine is a departure from past policy of major political significance. While clearly an admission that the self-denying ordinance has come to cost German policy in East Europe far more than it returns, it announces at the same time Bonn’s active entry into the renascent diplomatic arena. Increasingly, since Schroeder became foreign minister, the Federal Republic had shown an intensified awareness of the need for a more dynamic and conciliatory Eastern policy in order to prepare the ground for possible reunification much in the way that Bonn’s rehabilitation within the Western political community had been achieved. Under the Kiesinger-Brandt coalition, this broad rationale remains, while the politi-
cal environment has become even more conducive to ventures in the East with the elaboration of American and particularly French formulas for the revitalization of bilateral ties with the Communist bloc. Hopefully for Germany, it is easier now than in the past to justify such actions at home and to legitimize them abroad.

The search for increased influence and respectability in East Europe remains for the moment subordinated to past theses of reunification policy. It is unlikely that Bonn will be prepared to grant immediately and directly the three conditions that the Eastern bloc countries would set ideally as the price for the resumption of diplomatic relations—a West German recognition of East Germany, acceptance of the Oder-Neisse line, and renunciation of nuclear weapons. In the establishment of ties with Rumania, all of these issues were avoided; subsequent negotiations will of course become progressively difficult as Budapest, Prague, and then Warsaw are approached. With each prospective partner, the issues will have to be dealt with in a different fashion.

One requirement of the new Eastern policy clearly understood in Bonn is the need for more conclusive declarations on the legal invalidity of the Munich agreement and more convincing political disavowals of any claim to repossession of the Oder-Neisse territories. Officials in Bonn are also considering various new interim relationships with East Germany, as well as unorthodox models of a finally acceptable settlement. Here, however, less probability of an early consensus exists. The Kiesinger-Brandt government is more committed than either of its predecessors to actually defining and pursuing a policy based on the principle, first enunciated by Ade-
nauer in 1958, that concern for the freedom of the seventeen million East Germans must take precedence over efforts to regain the nation's juridical unity. This statement of the problem permits speculation of real political relevance on a possible "Austrian" solution to the entire German question, or even a "Yugoslavian" status for East Germany, to name only two alternatives. Germany under the new government is undertaking on its own to reconsider and reshape its policies and relationships in all facets of foreign policy. While the outcome of a more independent, flexible, and imaginative West German diplomacy cannot be foreseen, major changes will certainly occur in the approach to reunification, where Bonn's actions have for so long been predicated on the existence of commonly accepted theses and priorities, jointly pursued or at least defended, by the Western allies. The minimal aim of the new government is to achieve more scope for political maneuver in the quest for unity without abandoning the several legal positions concerning the necessity and nature of a final settlement. To date, the policy changes represent only a procedural departure from the course adopted in the early years of the Federal Republic's membership in NATO. In time, however, they may become more than primarily tactical and defensive adjustments, to the degree that the high promise of the original Western design for overcoming the cold war in Europe becomes less convincing. No longer is there a Western orthodoxy. Major initiatives by Kennedy and de Gaulle to restructure the Atlantic relationship for altered circumstances have been but symptoms of the need for new directions, not well-laid paths or even commonly acknowledged signposts.
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No NATO country can now avoid what has been a chronic controversy for Bonn; namely, whether the pursuit of security and encouragement of economic and political unity in Western Europe are incompatible with a reconciliation embracing the entire continent. West Germany's acute and specific dilemmas—America or France, security or reunification, ideological cohesion or national unity—have always expressed in miniature the latent inconsistencies embedded in Western actions since the war.

Too frequently the choices facing the West are stated in so broad and bland a manner that the answers seem self-evident: It is proposed that the alliance transfer its concern from the military realm to the political, in order to become an agent for détente rather than deterrence; that the Germans concede that NATO does not guarantee reunification, and begin to plan in terms of long-term changes in inter-bloc relations rather than maintain the fiction of a final grand peace conference. When one abandons prescription by platitude and attempts to formulate more sharply what the execution of such advice might entail, the alternatives assume the character of hard dilemmas. An alliance for détente might require a demonstrative decrease of American power and influence in European affairs, following, if not preceding, a significant increase in military cooperation on the continent itself. This has heretofore been considered acceptable only if a united Europe were in existence, or, given its absence, if Franco-British cooperation formed the nuclear cornerstone. Such are the actual security concerns, however, that Germany, and not Britain, is most in need of France as a partner in future defense arrangements, and the French have notoriously little...
confidence in Britain's readiness to help replace the American guarantee. The deadlock is as much a political as a technical one.

Similarly, for Germany to become more realistic about the necessity for a gradual approach to East-West relations is usually taken to mean that Bonn should assume diplomatic relations with Eastern Europe, while progressively expanding technical contacts with East Germany until a degree of liberalization resulted that would make political recognition palatable. Yet a concomitant of this process might be a period of intense political competition as the two systems sought, in the manner of political parties, to win the populace over on the issues under debate. It must be underlined that even if the questions of the Oder-Neisse line and access to nuclear weapons were clarified beforehand by West Germany in the way desired by the majority of governments and commentators in East and West alike, the German problem would not simply disappear in a mass of cultural exchanges, diplomatic discourse, and trade. The Soviet Union, the Eastern European states, and the two German regimes are well aware that the ultimate source of conflict is over the constitution of the German body politic itself. The ceaseless tirades from the East against Bonn's border claims and nuclear aspirations serve also as first lines of defense for the Ulbricht regime. The bloc countries could not conceivably be indifferent to the example and outcome of renewed competition between the Eastern and Western systems on German soil, no matter how carefully circumscribed that competition might be in terms of the territorial extent and weaponry of the possibly emergent political unit. The Russian and East German decision to cancel the
speaker exchange demonstrated this, while the epi­sode showed conversely the zest for a real political contest present in the Federal Republic. The expan­sion of East-West contacts that seems so desirable and stabilizing in the abstract would spell not the end but the onset of an era of competitive political coexistence in Europe.

The problems associated with Germany's con­tinuing partition reflect in essence those of the partitioned European continent. As West German pol­icy questions the relevance of the reunification settlement proposed in 1955, and the adequacy of the 1954 Paris agreements as the framework for efforts aimed at reunification, it mirrors the transi­tional state of all Western thought and action con­cerning the future of East-West relations.