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THE GERMANS AND THE NUCLEAR QUESTION

Wolfgang Krieger

FIFTH
ALOIS MERTES MEMORIAL LECTURE
1995

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The lecture is named in honor of one of the most prominent members of the *Christlich-Demokratische Union* during the reconstruction of postwar Germany. It is made possible by a grant from the *Stifterverband für die deutsche Wissenschaft.*

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Preface

NAZI GERMANY DID NOT SUCCEED in building the atomic bomb. The Germany that was simultaneously liberated and conquered was, of course, prohibited from acquiring nuclear weapons. The former Federal Republic renounced the nuclear option in the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968. And the repetition of this renunciation in the Two-Plus-Four Treaty, the diplomatic charter of the united Germany, was probably the most important precondition for the international recognition of German unification. The renunciation of nuclear weapons and the voluntary acceptance of a second-class status in the military field were among the *raison d'être* of the old Federal Republic—and they continue to play the same role for the unified Germany, as long as the hegemonial power of the United States promises nuclear protection within the framework of NATO.

The history of the Germans and the nuclear question, so simple and straightforward in retrospective, was actually much more complex, as Professor Wolfgang Krieger explained in the fifth Alois Mertes Memorial Lecture to a capacity audience in the lecture hall of the German Historical Institute. The nuclear question in particular influenced the history of the Federal Republic to a much larger extent than most of the contemporaries realized. The few politicians who were intensely engaged in this problem during the 1960s and 1970s included Alois Mertes, the man to whose memory these lectures are dedicated.

There is at present hardly a historian in Germany as qualified to talk about "The Germans and the Nuclear Question" as Wolfgang Krieger, who has this year become a professor of history at the University of Marburg. He studied in Munich, Regensburg, London, and Oxford and received his doctorate as well as his *Habilitation* from the University of Munich. Until recently, Professor Krieger was a member of Germany's prestigious think tank, the Stiftung Wissenschaft and Politik in Ebenhausen, which he joined in 1986. In addition, he taught modern history and the history of international relations at the University of the Bundeswehr in Munich from 1980 to 1987 and at the University of Munich from 1987 to 1995. He was

visiting professor at the Bologna Center of The Johns Hopkins University in 1989 and the Dulles Visiting Professor of International Affairs at Princeton University in 1991/92. Professor Krieger has also been the recipient of numerous grants and scholarships: From 1973 to 1975, he was a research fellow of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation; in 1975/76, the Volkswagen Fellow at St. Antony's College in Oxford; in 1983/84, a Kennedy Memorial Fellow at Harvard University. In 1987 he was elected a regular member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London.

Professor Krieger is the author of three books. In 1978, he published *Labour Party und Weimarer Republik* (The Labour Party and the Weimar Republic); in 1987 his highly regarded *General Lucius D. Clay und die amerikanische Deutschlandpolitik* (General Lucius D. Clay and American Policy toward Germany), a second edition of which appeared only one year later; and in 1995 the first German-language biography of one of Germany's most colorful and controversial postwar leaders: *Franz Joseph Strauß. Der barocke Demokrat aus Bayern* (Franz Josef Strauß: The Baroque Democrat from Bavaria). He is co-editor (with Simon Duke) of *U.S. Military Forces in Europe: The Early Years, 1945–1970,* and the author of a great number of scholarly articles in the fields of international relations, military policy, and the history of the Cold War. Moreover, one of his most outstanding contributions to the progress of scholarship has been his involvement with the Nuclear History Project. Wolfgang Krieger was one of the driving forces behind this project, which was founded by Ernest R. May of Harvard University and Uwe Nerlich of the Stiftung Wissenschaft and Politik. As the European Coordinator, he oversees its European working group, which includes members from France, Great Britain, and Germany. With more than one hundred participants from both sides of the Atlantic, bringing together historians, political scientists, and technical experts as well as former diplomats, politicians, and military personnel from many countries, the Nuclear History Project is one of the largest research ventures of the last ten years, one that is truly interdisciplinary in approach and global in scope.

We are pleased to present Professor Krieger's lecture as the fourteenth issue in our series of *Occasional Papers.*

Washington, D. C, November 1995
Detlef Junker

GERMANY'S ROLE IN EUROPE and the politics of nuclear weapons have been two of the defining questions in international relations over the last fifty years. In the narrow sense of the term, the German question concerned the Cold War division of Germany, which was overcome in 1990. In a broader sense, however, there remain a number of ongoing problems. They concern the place of the united Germany in a European Union that is unsure both about its future internal structure and its role as a global actor in the post-Soviet world order. With respect to the latter, it is clear that the members of the European Union are facing a wide range of uncertainties from the new Russia and that global economic competition, particularly with east Asia and the United States, is getting tougher. It is also clear that Germany's role in Europe depends largely on how these two challenges will develop. But neither the Germans nor their partners seem to agree among themselves what conclusions to draw.

Since the European revolutions of 1989–1991, the meaning of nuclear weapons in international relations has also changed. What used to be a range of clear-cut Cold War issues has been replaced by a vaguely defined set of threats for which today hardly anyone is even willing to look for any concrete answers, let alone to provide them. Some people think nuclear weapons have become altogether irrelevant as determining factors in international relations.[1] To them, the nuclear question has largely been reduced to the environmentally safe dismantling of the remaining weapons. At most, such people see a diplomatic problem of assuring compliance to existing nuclear arms reduction treaties and perhaps of making additional

*With some exceptions, references have been limited to publications in English.

[1] E.g., John Muller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Patrick J. Garrity, "The Depreciation of Nuclear Weapons in International Politics: Possibilities, Limits, Uncertainties," in *Journal of Strategic Studies* 14/4 (Dec. 1991).

agreements in the same direction. The recent indefinite prolongation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) may have encouraged such thinking. But there are those who disagree with a narrowly focused environmental and arms control perspective. They believe there is a continued need to think of nuclear weapons as political instruments and to consider military-strategic responses to their very existence.[2]

In this paper, I will only deal with a small number of issues from the German and the nuclear contexts. My chief concern will be to show how, during the Cold War, these two contexts were interrelated in a variety of ways, some of them more visible than others. To do this I shall address three main questions: How did the unfolding of the nuclear age affect Germany's international position at different stages of the Cold War? How did West German political leaders seek to deal with the issues arising from the nuclear arms race between the superpowers—a race which, to a considerable extent, took place on German soil and with direct reference to the superpower struggle over Germany? And how did the German public view nuclear weapons issues?

Those among you who knew the late Alois Mertes or who at least followed his career, heard some of his speeches, and read his

[2] For a guide to these debates, see Michael J. Mazarr, "Virtual Nuclear Arsenals," in *Survival* 37/3 (Autumn 1995). Obviously, the series of French nuclear tests, begun in August 1995, reflects such a set of beliefs. The other four "official" nuclear powers besides France maintain their arsenals for the same reason. Strictly speaking, however, they are breaking two promises they made to the world. The first one is in the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in which the signatories promised that nuclear weapons would be abolished as swiftly as possible. Thus, abolishment was the treaty's ultimate goal, not any fictitious distinction between states who somehow deserve to own nuclear weapons and others who do not. The second promise was made in the course of the discussions about the ethical grounds upon which Western democracies, whose politics are essentially guided by Judeo-Christian and human rights values, may own, let alone use, weapons of mass destruction. The justification given during the Cold War was that nuclear ownership was permissible as long as a massive threat existed from the Soviet dictatorship, given both its brutal nature and its vast arsenal of nuclear weapons. (See below for references to the INF debates of the 1970s and 1980s.) Surprisingly, these promises have not been claimed since the advent of liberal democracy in Eastern Europe and Russia. Neither the Christian churches nor what has remained of the peace movement raised the issue in a major way.

writings will know that this is a subject which occupied his mind more than almost any other. He may not have considered himself a systematic thinker on nuclear weapons strategy; at any rate, not in the sense in which Helmut Schmidt or Franz Josef Strauß did. But Mertes was keenly aware of the gradually changing contexts in which nuclear weapons figured with respect to the division of Germany—from the days of the Korean War to the strategic arms control agreements of the 1970s (SALT I and SALT II) and beyond.

This is evident very clearly in his posthumously published study "Russia, Germany and the West," which he completed during an extended stay at the Harvard Center for International Affairs in April 1969.[3] In this study Mertes analyzed how, in his view, Moscow's rise to the status of a nuclear superpower progressively reduced the options for a European settlement that would include German unification; how this fundamental shift in the international power equation made the United States more and more willing to accommodate Soviet interests in Europe; and how, as a result of both these developments, the West German public became more and more willing to postpone ad infinitum, or even to abandon, the goal of German unity.

Mertes singled out the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, which had just been signed, as proof of these three interrelated trends. To him that treaty was primarily a means of freezing Germany into an inferior international status. While Britain and France had national options of nuclear deterrence, Germany would be exposed increasingly to Soviet blackmail because the American nuclear umbrella was weakening or even in the process of withdrawal. Thus Mertes, along with most German conservatives at the time, expected that the NPT would in no way contribute to detente. Instead it would foreclose any option of further European integration, because, in his eyes, European integration could only progress if security policy became a key element in it.

Even in his last public speech, given on June 13, 1985, Mertes addressed the issues connecting nuclear security policy with the larger questions of Germany and Europe vis-à-vis the Soviet threat.

[3] Alois Mertes, *Der Primat des Politischen. Reden und Aufsätze.* Ed. by Günter Buchstab (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1994), 1–61. This edition also contains a short biography of Alois Mertes written by his son, Michael Mertes.

At that time, he was *Staatsminister* in the Bonn Foreign Office and dealt with, among other things, the still-hot INF debates and the many issues that the deployment of medium-range nuclear missiles in Germany had raised.

Regardless of how we see his analysis in retrospect, I think it is quite obvious that Alois Mertes and many other foreign policy leaders in Bonn at the time viewed nuclear weapons primarily as political weapons with very dangerous implications for the declared overriding goal of West German foreign policy throughout the era: namely, a reunited Germany with equal status as a medium-size power in Western Europe.

Mertes and many like-minded people at the time feared a gradual shift of positions at three levels: At the top level, the Western powers would back off step by step from their obligation to support German unification—an obligation they had accepted in the 1954 Paris treaties, when West Germany became sovereign and a member of NATO. At a second level, the German public would gradually accept arms control as an overriding priority and thereby more or less openly give up German unity as a political goal. At the third level, Mertes feared that the nuclear question, dressed up primarily as a need for arms control and for accommodation to Soviet interests, would increasingly permit the Soviets to reshape European affairs generally, not just the German question. This is why he and many other German conservatives were deeply skeptical about the Helsinki Agreement of 1975. After that agreement had been signed, Mertes and his fellow conservatives pointed to the human rights clauses as a litmus test for Soviet sincerity with regard to détente—a test, by the way, which they expected Moscow to fail. Consequently, there would eventually be a need to return to nuclear weapons issues in terms of the political structure of Europe, albeit on terms less favorable to the West.

With this brief sketch, I have tried to give a few indications of how central nuclear weapons policies were to the German question since the 1950s. But we cannot gain a deeper understanding of these issues unless we step back into the early years of the Second World War, when German scientists were actually among the first to develop nuclear weapons and to comprehend their wider political significance. As we know, they failed. The first nuclear weapons were

eventually produced by the Anglo-American Manhattan Project.[4] But there were at least two ways in which the Manhattan Project was directly related to Germany. First of all, some of the key scientists who worked on the Allied bomb either were of German origin or had received their training in Germany. And, second, the Anglo-American bomb was developed in an effort to beat the concurrent "Uranium Project," which was known to exist in Nazi Germany.[5]

Yet, in hindsight, the notion of an Allied nuclear arms race against Germany needs to be qualified. For, in April 1945, when the Allies had definitive proof that there was no Nazi atomic bomb, and when it was clear that Germany was utterly defeated, the Manhattan Project did not yet have an atomic bomb, either. Indeed, as early as

[4] The first official account was Henry DeWolf Smyth, *Atomic Energy for Military Purposes: The Official Report on the Development of the Atomic Bomb under the Auspices of the United States Government, 1940–1945* (repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1976; originally published by Princeton Univ. Press in Sept. 1945). The British contribution is described in Margaret Gowing, *Britain and Atomic Energy, 1939–1945* (London: Macmillan, 1964); and Margaret Gowing (with Lorna Arnold), *Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy, 1945–1952* (London: Macmillan, 1974). The history of the United States Atomic Energy Commission so far runs to three volumes: Richard G. Hewlett/Oscar E. Peterson, *The New World, 1939–1946* (University Park, Penn.: Penn. State Univ. Press, 1962); Richard G. Hewlett/Francis Duncan, *Atomic Shield, 1947–1952* (University Park, Penn.: Penn. State Univ. Press, 1969); and Richard G. Hewlett/Jack M. Holl, *Atoms for Peace and War, 1953–1961* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1989). The early story of the bomb is told in great detail by Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986). For early U.S. nuclear weapons policies, see Samuel R. Williamson, Jr./Steven L. Rearden, *The Origins of U.S. Nuclear Strategy, 1945–1953* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993); and David A. Rosenberg, "The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945–1960," in: *International Security* 7 (1983). Many key documents are reproduced in Robert C. Williams/Philip L. Cantelon (eds.), *The American Atom: A Documentary History of Nuclear Policies from the Discovery of Fission to the Present, 1939–1984* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press, 1984). The widest range of nuclear issues is covered by Bertrand Goldschmidt, *The Atomic Complex: A Worldwide Political History of Nuclear Energy* (LaGrange Part, Ill.: American Nuclear Society, 1982; originally published in French in 1980).

[5] R. V. Jones, *Most Secret War: British Scientific Intelligence, 1939–1945* (London: Hamilton, 1978), 593ff.

August 1944 General Leslie Groves, the military chief of the Manhattan Project, had doubted that any bombs would be ready before the end of the war in Europe.[6] Thus, the first nuclear test on July 18, 1945, and the two nuclear weapons used against Japan a few weeks later were not directly linked to the Allied war against Nazi Germany. Certainly the Allies had early intelligence information suggesting that the German bomb project was small-scale and unpromising.[7] Under the circumstances at the time, it probably would have been difficult for Allied political and military leaders to stop their search for the atomic bomb prematurely. Still, they might have brought the Manhattan Project to a halt in April 1945. At any rate, an atomic bomb built to be used only against Germany would not have been used against Japan.

This point is significant with respect to later German definitions of nuclear weapons as singularly immoral military weapons. Curiously, it is the German nuclear bomb project from which the notion originated that nuclear weapons expressed a blatant act of immorality on the part of the Americans. For this reason, the German project is of long-term interest to our subject for its psychological rather than its scientific outcomes.

As it happened, practically all the physicists who led civilian nuclear research in postwar Germany had been involved in the wartime project. And, paradoxical as it may seem, their leadership was at least in part based on the myth that, during the war, those German scientists had in fact never wished or even tried to build a nuclear weapon. One of them, Carl-Friedrich von Weizsäcker, said on August 6, 1945, when he first heard about the bombing of Hiroshima: "It is dreadful of the Americans to have done this. I mean it is lunatic."[8] He attributed an inferior moral quality to the

[6] Vincent C. Jones, *Manhattan: The Army and the Atomic Bomb* (= United States Army in World War Two, Special Studies) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), 509.

[7] R. V. Jones, *Reflections on Intelligence* (London: Heinemann, 1989) reveals the identity of the key German figure who kept the Allies informed of German nuclear research. Thus it provides an essential correction to the educated guess made in Arnold Kramish, *The Griffin* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986).

[8] I used the German edition by Dieter Hoffmann (ed.), *Operation Epsilon—Die Farm-Hall-Protokolle oder Die Angst der Alliierten vor der deutschen Atombombe* (Berlin, 1993), 148. For the English text, see *Operation Epsilon: The*

Americans while, at the same time, he maintained that the German scientists working on the Uranium Project never actually intended to build a bomb.[9]

Those remarks were recently published as part of the so-called Farm Hall transcripts, named for the country house near Cambridge, England, where the German nuclear scientists were detained for six months after the end of the war. While it is not entirely clear for what reasons those transcripts were held secret by British authorities until three years ago, there can be little doubt that it was the German scientists who benefitted. In frank conversation with each other, but secretly monitored by British intelligence officers, their prime concern was not moral outrage but anger and disbelief with regard to the Allied success where the Germans, supposedly the world's leaders in nuclear physics, had failed.

Indeed Werner Heisenberg, Otto Hahn, and von Weizsäcker initially refused to believe the news of an Allied nuclear weapon. Heisenberg thought it might be "some chemical thing," as he called it, perhaps a "high-pressure bomb," but certainly nothing to do with uranium. Walter Gerlach, the administrative chief of the German project, had a mental breakdown and mad outbursts about the German scientific defeat. He even considered suicide analogous to the code of honor that a defeated general might adhere to.

Some of the younger people, among them Siegfried Bagge and Kurt Diebner, were more candid about what they had done and what their goals had been. They openly admitted that they had wanted to build the bomb and that they had thought it could be done in about two years. But that objective was never acknowledged by the group in public. Instead, Heisenberg and Gerlach, on behalf of the entire group, drafted a memorandum which stated that, by the end of 1941, it had become clear that the technical facilities were not available in Germany to construct a uranium bomb before the war's end. Therefore, as the memorandum claimed, the project

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Farm Hall Transcripts, introd. by Sir Charles Frank (Bristol/Philadelphia: Institute of Physics Pub., 1993).

[9] Based on interviews with some of the physicists of the Uranverein, the first dissemination of their viewpoint was provided in Robert Jungk, *Heller als tausend Sonnen. Das Schicksal der Atomforscher* (Berne: Scherz, 1956; Reinbek b. Hamburg: RoRoRo, 1964); English edition: *Brighter than a Thousand Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists* (London: Gollancz, 1958).

was limited to building a "uranium machine" only, that is, a nuclear reactor, not a military weapon.

Only once in their conversations did the question come up as to why the Nazis had not committed to the Uranium Project resources on the scale of the V-1 and V-2 rocket enterprises.[10] That question is far from easy to answer, because, for over three years, after Otto Hahn and Liese Meitner discovered nuclear fission in December 1938, the Nazi authorities were keenly interested in its technical and military potential.[11] Already in April 1939, a high-level research group was formed for this purpose by the Reich Science Council (*Reichsforschungsrat*). A few months later, the *Heereswaffenamt* (or Army Ordnance Department) took charge of the Uranium Project. It held a conference in Berlin on September 16, 1939, in which the feasibility of an atomic bomb was explicitly discussed, and it brought Heisenberg, the nuclear theorist, on board as the project's intellectual leader. In December 1939 Heisenberg reported that a uranium bomb was indeed possible and that, in his view, using enriched Uranium 235 was the preferred way to go. For controlled nuclear fission, either heavy water or pure coal would be needed as moderators.

In February 1942 the German Uranium Society (Uranverein) held a big gathering in Berlin, to which it invited representatives from the Nazi party, from government departments and business firms. Again the atomic bomb was described to the Nazi leadership as essentially doable. But the scientists failed to explain how it could be constructed quickly. (The definition of quickly was, of course, that the bomb could be used before the end of the war.) For that reason and no other, the Nazi leadership decided to give priority to other weapons developments and to pursue nuclear research only as a hedge against scientific surprises.

Thus, a set of critical decisions was made, or rather not made, in the spring of 1942. At that time the German effort was still close in timing to the Anglo-American effort, which had received compara-

[10] Hoffmann, *Operation Epsilon*, 153.

[11] Mark Walker, *German National Socialism and the Quest for Nuclear Power, 1939–1949* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989); Thomas Powers, *Heisenberg's War. The Secret History of the German Bomb* (New York: Knopf, 1993). From the notes and the bibliography, it appears that Powers did not use any German source materials or secondary works.

tively little political support in its early stages. From then on, however, the two chronologies began to diverge sharply. In December 1942, Enrico Fermi's Chicago reactor produced the first self-sustained nuclear reaction, while the comparable German reactor narrowly missed that stage two-and-a-half years later, in April 1945, because of a shortage of uranium and other materials.

The prime reason for the comparative failure of the German Uranium Project seems to have been the sheer arrogance with which the Germans looked down on scientists elsewhere. They simply could not imagine that nuclear scientific work superior to their own could be done anywhere else in the world. This arrogance comes out quite clearly in the Farm Hall transcripts.

There is also strong evidence that the myth deliberately spread by von Weizsäcker, Heisenberg, and others—the myth of a Nazi atomic bomb intentionally prevented by those scientists—was created in a collective act of the group and that this was done for the purpose of protecting each other's career prospects. It bonded the Uranium Project scientists together because they had failed collectively rather than individually. And it was this group cohesion that brought those scientists to prominence in postwar Germany and which made it possible for them to engage in West Germany's large civilian nuclear power research and development efforts.

Incidentally, the West German government's trust in those scientists, its fascination with the mystique of nuclear energy, was so great that, for more than two decades, the vast amounts of public funds that went into nuclear research left little room for research in other high-tech areas, such as computer sciences and biochemistry. Like few other countries, West Germany, or at least its scientific and political elites, became spellbound by the transcendental promise of nuclear energy.

What might be called von Weizsäcker's myth, because he among the group employed the most convincing phraseology to establish that myth, later fed the German peace and Green movements. It contributed to their moral arrogance that Germany somehow had never dirtied its hands in the nuclear arms race and that there was a particular ethical quality in ignoring the practical political and military implications of nuclear weapons. The intellectual and political struggle with the existence of nuclear weapons was viewed by them as blatant evidence of American imperialism or aggressiveness. Here, too, lies one of the roots of anti-Americanism in Germany.

To complete the picture it must be added that, eventually, the environmental movement refused to accept the innocence of civilian nuclear power as well. It dethroned the gods of nuclear research. In other words, the moral distinction between military and civilian nuclear energy, which the ex-Uranverein scientists had propagated so piously, lost most of its attraction. As a result, Germany's high standards in nuclear reactor technology and its high hopes for turning that technology into an export success story were sorely disappointed.

I will now skip a few years and continue with the mid-1950s, when West Germany was allowed to pursue civilian nuclear research and development on a large scale and when American nuclear weapons began to be deployed on German soil. Back in the mid-1950s, the question arose whether West Germany would be permitted to develop nuclear weapons or at least, in one form or another, to have its finger on the "nuclear trigger," as the saying went at the time.[12] To this day, that has been a controversial issue in the history of the Federal Republic.

If we are to understand this controversy, we must look back at what NATO nuclear strategy was like in those days. Under the strategy, which was publicly termed one of deterrence by threatening "massive retaliation," the Soviet Union was to be confronted with an early American nuclear response for which no conditions were specified regarding the point in time or the dimension of such a response. Theoretically, for example, even a minor military attack along the inner-German border or on West Berlin could provoke an American nuclear response. (Whether in reality this was American policy or was actually likely to happen in a crisis need not concern us here.) By this logic, West Germany as a non-nuclear NATO member would not have had much say and, in fact, had practically no advance knowledge about when, where, and on what scale a NATO nuclear strike would occur.

With the fast-growing number of short-range or battlefield nuclear weapons arriving on West German territory since 1954, it was even more obvious that such nuclear strikes would occur on German soil and on a massive scale. Absurd as it seemed, the un-

[12] E.g., this argument is made in Matthias Küntzel, *Bonn und die Bombe, Deutsche Atomwaffenpolitik von Adenauer bis Brandt* (Frankfurt/M: Campus Verlag, 1992). An American edition was published in 1995.

specified and massive nature of that nuclear threat was understood to constitute the best hope that such a war would never occur. When, however, the advent of the H-bomb threatened to turn any nuclear war into a global disaster—no matter where the bombs actually fell—and when the Soviets began to acquire a long-range nuclear capability, it seemed more and more likely that each and every nuclear war would do incalculable damage to the territory of the United States. Consequently, American political leaders could be expected to become a lot more reluctant to use nuclear weapons except in circumstances where a Soviet attack had every sign of leading straight to World War III. In other words, German leaders could assume that American nuclear deterrence would become less convincing as the risk for the American homeland was on the increase.

Whether or not NATO might win such a war with the Soviet Union, it seemed likely that Germany east and west of the Elbe would become a nuclear battlefield and would be largely wiped out. To the government of Konrad Adenauer, one way to reduce that risk was to get a seat at the table where NATO nuclear strategy was actually made and to be included in the emerging NATO policy of "nuclear sharing."[13] That policy was offered by the Eisenhower administration, partly in an effort to prevent the British and the French from becoming nuclear powers, no longer under the tutelage of Washington. In part, the reason was also to spread nuclear weapons along the European front more densely and to close the "soft spots" manned by forces other than American. Perhaps there was even the idea that, in this manner, the Americans could eventually back off from the need for a seamless, permanent, American frontline all along the iron curtain. Since some of those "soft spots" were manned by the new West German *Bundeswehr*, it seemed only logical that American short-range nuclear weapons would also be shared with the West Germans.[14]

[13] For a comparative perspective on the impact of American nuclear weapons policies in other West European countries, see Simon Duke/Wolfgang Krieger (eds.), *U.S. Military Forces in Europe: The Early Years, 1945–1970* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

[14] Useful books in English on this immensely complex story include *McGeorge Bundy, Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988; repr. New York: Vintage Books,

In early 1957 such ideas began to meet with strong resistance in the German public. Nevertheless, the Adenauer government pursued its course and won a massive election victory in September 1957. Three months later, NATO formally approved that policy and, in April 1958, Bonn's defense minister, Franz Josef Strauß, went to Washington to order the first nuclear launchers.

About a year before that NATO decision, France made a most secret and most surprising offer to the West Germans.[15] Its aim was the joint development and production of nuclear warheads. The political implications of this proposal might very well have been to create a European nuclear force under French leadership. Legally this would have been possible, despite the fact that in 1954 Bonn had renounced any intention of producing nuclear weapons. That undertaking only referred to weapons built on German soil. Back in those days, at least a substantial portion of the leadership in both France and Germany seems to have thought that a European nuclear force might be the answer to the feared waning of the American nuclear umbrella.

Here we return to our previous question: Did Bonn wish to have its own nuclear weapons? That issue was certainly on the minds of the Kremlin bosses. It was also on the minds of people in Germany and elsewhere who did not wish to see the nation responsible for the Holocaust possess the means to create a nuclear holocaust. But the circumstances in the 1950s and 1960s make it quite clear that the

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1990, paperback), chap. 8; Catherine M. Kelleher, *Germany and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1975); Hans Speier, *German Rearmament and the Atomic War: The Views of German Military and Political Leaders* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1957). For a general guide to postwar German foreign policy, see Wolfram Hanrieder, *Germany, America, Europe: Forty Years of German Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1989). A series of new studies of German nuclear weapons policies, each of them based on archival sources and interviews, has been published jointly by the Nuclear History Program and the Stiftung Wissenschaft and Politik in Ebenhausen, Germany, at Nomos Publishers, Baden-Baden, since 1992. So far works by Johannes Steinhoff and Reiner Pommerin, Christoph Hoppe, Peter Fischer, and Helga Haftendorn have appeared. Others are in preparation.

[15] Cf. Georges-Henri Soutou, "Les accords de 1957–1958: vers une communauté stratégique et nucléaire entre la France, l'Allemagne er I'Italie," in Maurice Vaïsse (ed.), *La France et l'atôme. Études d'histoire nucléaire* (Brussels: Bruylant, 1994).

West Germans never aimed at and never could have aimed at an *independent* nuclear arsenal, even in the restricted sense in which the British and French arsenals could be termed "independent." The only option might have been West German nuclear forces *by consent of the NATO membership.* This is what the French offer of 1957 implied, and this is where American nuclear sharing might have led if pursued further.

To assess this possibility, one must take into account that no one was able to promise in those days the open-ended, large-scale U.S. force deployments in Europe that we came to see. Had the Soviet Union pursued its own nuclear-sharing policies among its communist allies—for which Sino-Soviet nuclear cooperation could have been a beginning—the situation would also have been very different from what it eventually became.[16] In other words, it might very well have been in the interest of the Western Europeans to see West Germany acquire nuclear weapons. In the end, neither happened, because a coalition of three nuclear weapons states was formed which terminated the idea of a nuclear West Germany. These states were the original signatories of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty: the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Each had its own reasons for opposing a nuclear West Germany.[17]

What were these reasons? In the United States, the Kennedy administration was particularly concerned with the lack of central control of U.S. nuclear weapons. It also disliked a NATO in which more and more members might have their own nuclear weapons. In an acute international crisis, those allies might draw the United

[16] The most comprehensive, up-to-date history of early Soviet nuclear weapons is now David Holloway's *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939–1956* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1995); new research findings are reported in the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, ed. by James G. Hershberg for the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.

[17] Uwe Nerlich, "The Federal Republic of Germany: Constraining the Inactive," in Robert M. Lawrence/Joel Larus (eds.), *Nuclear Proliferation: Phase II* (Lawrence, Kan.: Kansas Univ. Press, 1974); more general accounts are found in Glenn T. Seaborg, *Stemming the Tide: Arms Control in the Johnson Years* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1987); Jennifer Sims, *Ikarus Restrained: An Intellectual History of Nuclear Arms Control, 1945–1960* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1990).

States into a nuclear war. It would be the Balkan scenario of 1914 replayed in the nuclear age.

Of course, Washington knew it could not simply cancel the existing nuclear-sharing arrangements. Indeed they seemed useful in controlling Britain, which already had nuclear weapons at that time, and France, which held its first nuclear test in 1960. But nuclear proliferation could still be stopped at Germany's front door. In terms of strategy, Washington's main interest was now to raise the nuclear threshold, in other words, to consider nuclear employment for fewer contingencies, at a later stage after war had broken out and with a gradual buildup of strikes so as to leave ample opportunities for an early termination of the war by negotiation. It was the 1958–1962 Berlin crisis, or rather the contingency planning during the crisis, that brought this point home both to American planners and to German leaders.

Britain's prime reasons for favoring the NPT was to prevent France from establishing its own special relationship with Washington. This is why London sabotaged any kind of European NATO nuclear force, such as might have developed from the Franco-German approach of 1957 or from the American proposal for a NATO-European Multilateral Force (MLF) equipped with American nuclear weapons. In London it was feared that any such formation would force British nuclear weapons into such a European construct and on equal footing with the French, too. If Germany were a junior partner to France in nuclear matters, the Western European balance would tip in favor of Paris, given the close cooperation that Bonn and Paris had established through European economic integration since the early 1950s and in the 1963 Elysée Treaty.

The Soviet motives for signing the NPT seem obvious, but they are in fact not so clear. Moscow had, of course, been highly sensitive and always ready to exploit politically the rearmament of West Germany. The Warsaw Pact was founded in 1955 in response to the *Bundeswehr* rather than to NATO. And it is conceivable that Nikita Khrushchev was seeking to halt the nuclearization of NATO, and particularly of West Germany, when he offered the Rapacki Plan for a nuclear-free central Europe in 1957 and 1958 and when he issued

his ultimatum on Berlin in November 1958.[18] But his policy during the Berlin crisis was more complex and quite confused. As my Russian colleague Vladislav Zubok has concluded from newly declassified Soviet sources: "Khrushchev's ultimatum was ninety percent improvisation."[19] More or less quietly, he shifted his emphasis and gave less priority to actually solving the German territorial issues, including the four-power administration of Berlin.

Khrushchev needed to impress his opponents at home, which was perhaps his main motive for initiating his hazardous policy of deploying nuclear weapons in Cuba in mid-1962. Beyond that, he was deeply concerned with the economic backwardness of East Germany vis-à-vis the economic miracle in western Germany. That weakness, combined with the growing dissatisfaction with Soviet communism in Poland and elsewhere, would increase Moscow's difficulties in controlling Eastern Europe. A non-nuclear central Europe, which would eventually necessitate the withdrawal of Soviet nuclear forces, would clearly weaken the Soviet position, both militarily and politically. Therefore, the Berlin Wall seemed a more effective answer to the crisis in East Germany than what might evolve from yet another round of international negotiations for a German peace treaty. Soviet nuclear weapons deployed in eastern Germany were the strongest possible reason for massive forward deployments of Soviet forces, which in turn were indispensable for keeping east central Europe under the close control of Moscow.

As a result of the NPT, West Germany was forced to abandon even the distant option of acquiring its own nuclear weapons. Worst of all, it had to renounce such an option and thereby accept a permanently inferior international status under British-American pressure and with Moscow's signature. France's departure from the military structures of NATO, announced in 1966, had made a European multilateral nuclear force even more unlikely than it had always

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[18] Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), chap. 5: "The Berlin Crisis." A book of essays on the second Berlin crisis, edited by Wolfgang Krieger and David Rosenberg, is forthcoming from the University of North Carolina Press.

[19] Vladislav M. Zubok, "Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis (1958–1962)" (= Cold War International History Project Working Paper, Woodrow Wilson Center, No. 6.) (Washington, D.C., May 1993).

been. Thus, Bonn now became totally dependent on the United States's nuclear umbrella.

Today, with the benefit of hindsight, we know that from the 1970s onwards nuclear weapons became much less powerful political instruments than had been assumed. Therefore, West Germany's signature of the NPT in 1970, under the new government of Willy Brandt, proved much less harmful to Germany's international standing than had been feared by conservative foreign policy makers like Alois Mertes, Konrad Adenauer, Franz Josef Strauß, and others.

One policy maker who failed to understand this and whose misjudgment was to have grave consequences was Leonid Brezhnev. During the INF crisis, which started with Helmut Schmidt's insistence on Western countermeasures to the Soviet SS-20 nuclear missile buildup, Brezhnev and his advisers tried to drive a wedge between West Germany and its Western allies. His hope seems to have been that the German body politic would be incapable of bearing the strain of such countermeasures; that it would refuse to accept NATO medium-range missile deployments on German soil. As will be recalled, in December of 1979 NATO decided on such deployments, but it did so with two reservations: It offered to cancel those deployments or to scale them down if an equitable settlement could be found with Moscow; and it left a period of four years before deployments would begin.

To a considerable degree NATO's decision was tailored to the needs of the weakening government of Helmut Schmidt, which faced a general election the following year. It was also a dangerous precedent in as much as it gave the Soviets a de facto voice in Western military policy. Now Moscow could intimidate the West German public by giving the impression that NATO rather than the Soviet Union was stepping up the mad nuclear arms race.

Indeed the Schmidt government eventually collapsed under the strain, at least in part because Schmidt stuck to NATO's deployment decision, which many in his party rejected. In the March 1983 general elections Schmidt's successor as SPD leader, Hans-Jochen Vogel, refused to commit himself to any INF deployments even if the Soviets did not back down. But his conservative opponent Helmut Kohl stood by the INF decision and, together with his liberal coalition partners, won by a surprisingly wide margin. In fact Kohl's own party drew the highest percentage ever (48.8 percent), excepting only Adenauer's absolute majority (50.2 percent) in 1957.

Kohl's victory was remarkable in view of the fact that the actual idea of deploying medium-range nuclear missiles in Germany was quite unpopular, even with many conservative voters. But, in a sense, the 1983 elections only confirmed an earlier pattern regarding defense issues. In 1953 Adenauer had won a decisive victory, although his policy of German rearmament was probably rejected by a majority of West Germans. In 1957 he won an even bigger victory despite his outspoken support of the highly unpopular policy of "nuclear sharing"—that is, of equipping certain *Bundeswehr* units with nuclear-capable launchers for which American forces in Germany would store the related nuclear warheads. In 1983 the same pattern repeated itself.

If Brezhnev did not overturn the fundamentals of Bonn's foreign and security policies, he certainly defeated the SPD. The political damage done to Helmut Schmidt's wing of the SPD, and thus to the party at the federal level, was so great that it has not found its way back to the federal government since. Not all of this can be attributed to the stormy INF debates back in the early 1980s, but it is perhaps fair to say that Schmidt's view of a "realist" foreign and defense policy has remained a minority position among the SPD ever since then. Strong evidence was provided by the SPD's position during the Gulf War of 1990–1991 and during the current war in the former Yugoslavia.

Thus, in the early 1980s, the nuclear question, for the last time so far, was to have a decisive impact on German politics. The eventual INF deployments, which started in December 1983, proved Kohl's political stamina and his party's determination to defeat the Brezhnev strategy of neutralizing West Germany. But Kohl did not return to pre-detente policies, as many of his conservative supporters had hoped. In fact he, more than Willy Brandt or Helmut Schmidt before him, instrumentalized detente for his goal of keeping the German question open. In other words, he separated NATO nuclear weapons policies from the anti-detente stance previously taken by most German conservatives. Quite openly, Kohl stayed clear of the tough anti-Moscow course of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. This was an important watershed in the history of West Germany. It was under Kohl rather than under his Social Democratic predecessors that German *Ostpolitik* reached its peak, symbolized by the state visit of East German leader Erich Honecker in West Germany in September 1987.

In a way, one could even speak of a German alliance between Kohl and Honecker against the Brezhnev strategy. Half a year before those INF deployments took place, Kohl's conservative rival Franz Josef Strauß arranged a loan agreement of one billion German marks for Honecker's regime, which was badly needed to prevent East Germany's economic collapse. The INF episode had created new common ground between the two German states. As Honecker told Strauß in July 1983: "The people in the GDR and in Czechoslovakia are the victims [of the INF crisis]; they must accept short-range Soviet missiles which they don't even want. "[20]

What was surprising about this remark was not only that it came from Honecker but that it was taken as a statement of sincere concern by Strauß and of course by Kohl, on whose behalf Strauß was pursuing this rapprochement. The eventual result was a deepening of the relationship between the two Germanies in ways that previously had seemed inconceivable to most German conservatives and which amounted to a defeat for the Brezhnev strategy. The fears raised over the INF issue by the Soviet propaganda offensive and, not least of all, by a large section of the West German media were increasingly shared by many people in East Germany. Their fears were reinforced by what they saw on West German television day in and day out. It seems therefore likely that Soviet propaganda, as fed to the East Germans by Western TV, helped to prepare the vast peaceful protest movement in East Germany that was to arise in 1989.

Finally, let me at least mention another way of approaching the subject "The Germans and the Nuclear Question." One could very well read the story ex negativo; one could ask how the Federal Republic differs from those Western democracies that became nuclear weapons states. Three sets of comparisons come to mind that show how nuclear weapons affected Britain, France, and the United States in ways that are absent in the German case.

The first would be governmental institutions. To a considerable extent, the American government can be called "an artifact of the

[20] The quote is taken from the posthumously published *Erinnerungen* by Franz Josef Strauß. 4th ed. (Berlin: Siedler, 1989, paperback), 543.

Cold War," as Ernest May put it.[21] The huge nuclear energy sector, much of the vast intelligence apparatus, and the heightened role of the American president as the sole person authorized to order nuclear warfare can be seen as evidence of this phenomenon. Or, to mention another case, the role of the French president in foreign and defense policies would not be anywhere near as prominent vis-à-vis his prime minister and his cabinet without the exclusive presidential command over France's nuclear forces. Samy Cohen analyzed this role in a book entitled *La monarchie nucléaire.*[22]

Quite obviously, the German chancellor has no such powers. He does not even have the full command authority over the *Bundeswehr.* And, if the constitution were to give him such authority, he would not be able to exercise it because Germany is so fully integrated into NATO that it does not even have a national general staff.

My second comparison concerns the relationship between government, armed forces, scientific research (including universities), and industry. In nuclear weapons states vast sums of government money are poured into research and high-tech industries for the purpose of developing nuclear warheads, delivery vehicles, command and control systems, spying technologies, and so on. By not being a nuclear weapons state, Germany no doubt saved a lot of money, but it also then lagged behind in certain high-tech fields that have highly profitable civilian-commercial applications. The computer sciences are perhaps the most important among them.

My third comparison concerns a field that is of close personal interest to me and presumably to many people in this audience. I am talking about the academic study of international relations. In Britain and France, but most obviously in the United States, the debates on nuclear strategy produced a whole new class of social scientists, also of historians of international relations, who gathered in think tanks as well as in university departments. Two generations, many of the best and the brightest on both sides of the Atlantic—from Thomas Schelling, Henry Kissinger, and Albert Wohlstetter, to Michael Howard and Alistair Buchan, Raymond Aron, and André Glucksmann—wrote and spoke on those issues. Many of their

[21] Ernest R. May, "The American Government as an Artifact of the Cold War," in *Diplomatic History* (Spring 1992).

[22] Samy Cohen, *La monarchie nucléaire* (Paris: Hachette, 1986).

writings have become classics of the entire discipline of international relations, not just in their home countries but literally worldwide. By contrast, international relations is a proportionally small field in Germany which, in so many ways, feeds eagerly on the latest fashion of the American community.

Since I am not close enough to retirement, I shall refrain from making any judgement about the academic study of international relations in Germany and its relative importance internationally. But there can be little doubt that its size, simply measured in numbers of researchers and in output, leaves a great deal to be desired. This deficit is sorely felt in the post-Soviet era in which Germany is facing so many new international challenges.

My complaint is not a roundabout way of saying that Germany should have had nuclear weapons. It is also quite obvious that, in the cases of Britain and France, their colonial traditions have had as much or more to do with the larger and livelier communities in international relations studies. But I think a case can be made to suggest that Germany's non-nuclear status allowed the academic community and the country as a whole to think less hard about the fundamental questions of war and peace in the nuclear age. To an extent, the relative strength of the German peace movement can be explained by the relative weakness of what in political science parlance is called the "realist school" of the study of international relations.

It must be added, however, that the deeper causes lie not in academic politics as such. They are to be found in the altogether different outlook on international power politics that the postwar Germans have cultivated as a result of their collective experiences during two world wars. These experiences have also led them to distrust their political leaders when it comes to the fundamental questions of war and peace. And nuclear weapons are, of course, just a shorthand for those very questions.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, in the history of the Federal Republic, the nuclear question was perhaps the only large foreign policy issue on which there was always a wide gap between elite views and popular views. In all other cases where such a gap existed initially, it was closed with the passage of time. I have mentioned German rearmament, but European integration and the close, if unequal, cooperation with the United States are further examples. Each of them was widely unpopular initially, and each won over-

whelming support later on. In each case, elite views eventually found a wide popular consensus. Even the long-term stationing of some 400,000 American and other foreign troops in West Germany came to enjoy popular support to the tune of some 60 to 70 percent or more. But the same was never true of nuclear weapons or of the policies dealing with them. To gauge the singularity of the German position on this issue, one needs only to compare the wide domestic consensus that nuclear weapons policies enjoyed at most times in Britain, in France, and in the United States.

This peculiar German way of looking at power politics, especially with regard to nuclear weapons, may yet become a significant factor if certain predictions, indeed certain policy recommendations, become reality. Right after German unification, a number of analysts began to argue that Germany will or should have nuclear weapons in the future.[23] I am not aware that any German authors or politicians of any significance have recommended such a policy, but there is at least a small school of thought here in the United States that has made this case. It goes without saying that at the international level such a course of action would have to overcome formidable obstacles, particularly the NPT and the German promise made in the Two-plus-Four Treaty of 1990 to renounce any and all ABC weapons.

I think that, in the light of what I have said about the Germans and the nuclear question, two things are quite clear: First, Germany will never seek to become a nuclear power out of its own free will. Indeed the governing elites are quite glad to forget about nuclear weapons. And they are fully aware that there is no chance of winning public support for a German nuclear arsenal. This was apparent when the ABC clause in the Two-plus-Four Treaty did not produce a single frown among the German public, although it is a commitment based on wholesale, unexplained optimism with respect both to scientific development and to human nature.

[23] E.g., John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," in *International Security* 15/1 (1991); cf. also the debate between Mearsheimer and Steven E. Miller over "The Case for/Against a Ukrainian Nuclear Deterrent," in *Foreign Affairs* 72/3 (Summer 1993); for a more theoretical exchange of views, see Scott D. Sagan/Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Norton, 1995).

From this follows my second and final point: If it should ever come to German possession of nuclear weapons, it would only be imaginable in the wake of a most drastic reversal of Russia's political development and only at the massive urging of Germany's neighbors east and west. Of course, none of these things are desirable or likely. I only mention them to express my conviction that the relationship between the Germans and nuclear weapons will remain special as far as anyone can see into the future.