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West German Politics, the INF Treaty, and the Popular Dynamics of Peace

The revolutionary turn in international affairs leading up to the INF Treaty, had a tremendous impact on West German foreign politics. On August 26, 1987, Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl publicly abandoned long-standing and deeply held principles with regard to the role of nuclear weapons in keeping the peace in Europe.¹ In a sensational press briefing, he publicly agreed to the dismantling of West Germany's very own, but rather aged Pershing IA missiles. These weapons systems had been deployed way back during the 1960s. In the mid-1980s, they were rapidly losing their readiness and military utility. Yet they continued to be of political and symbolic value, by making the military of non-nuclear West Germany an integral part of NATO's nuclear deterrent.² Moreover, the Pershing IA, as well as other intermediate nuclear weapons such as the Pershing II and ground-launched Cruise Missiles that had been stationed in the wake of NATO's 1979 Double-Track Decision, had long been seen as a means to ensure that nuclear war (or warfare in general) would not be limited to the territory of the two German states.

The promise of an INF Treaty, which proposed to disband all intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe, thus once again raised a specter that had haunted West German politicians for more than two decades: at all costs they must avoid a scenario in which West Germany could be "decoupled" from the American security guarantee by potentially limiting a nuclear war (or war in general) to central Europe. As conservative critics of Kohl's move were pointing out, a situation might once again emerge, in which the two German states would be devastated by a military conflict that was geographically limited to Europe, while the two superpowers would shield their own territories from the ravages of war. After all, that fear of a "singularization" of West Germany had driven Kohl's

1 That always precarious "consensus" is best described by the strategy of "flexible response," which, since the late 1960s, linked conventional military upgrades with an American willingness to threaten the use of substrategic nuclear weapons. It was established in response to the NATO crisis of the late 1960s, see Helga Haftendorn, *NATO and the Nuclear Revolution: A Crisis of Credibility 1966–67*, Oxford 1996, pp. 389–402; Kori N. Schake, *NATO Strategy and the German-American Relationship*, in: Detlef Junker, Philipp Gassert, Wilfried Mausbach, and David B. Morris (eds.), *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945–1990. A Handbook*, Vol. 1, 1945–1968, Cambridge 2004, pp. 233–239.

2 Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Null-Lösung. Entscheidungsprozesse zu den Mittelstreckenwaffen 1970–1987*, Frankfurt a. M. 1988, p. 19.

predecessor Helmut Schmidt toward what would become the NATO Double-Track Decision. From both Schmidt's point of view and Kohl's, this had become necessary, because Soviet medium-range missiles (such as the SS-20) had been left out of the U.S.–Soviet SALT negotiations, which only covered systems with a range above 5,000 kilometers.³

While it looked as though the Federal Republic was succumbing to international pressures when Kohl grudgingly accepted the retirement of the Pershing IA, the Chancellor was in fact bowing to domestic public opinion as well as to pressure from within his own government, as I will argue in this essay. At home, Kohl faced a potential parliamentary majority that favored radical steps toward disarmament and which was quite in harmony with the majoritarian attitudes of the West German population. The rise of Gorbachev had contributed to an evaporation of the strong anti-Communist sentiments and mostly negative perceptions of the Soviet Union that had long been a hallmark of West German politics.⁴ Only a few years earlier, distrust of Moscow had prevailed among a majority of West Germans. In 1982/83 the country had heatedly discussed the question of whether the NATO Double-Track Decision should be implemented or not. Despite considerable opposition from the Left, the argument put forward by Kohl and the conservative side had carried the day: they claimed that, by introducing the SS-20, the Soviets had clandestinely acquired military predominance in Europe and put West Germany in a difficult strategic spot. As the proponents of *Nachrüstung* had relentlessly argued, the Soviets were out to weaken the trust between Germany and her Western Allies by undermining NATO's doctrine of "flexible response."⁵ While the huge peace movement of the early 1980s had

- 3 See Tim Geiger, *The NATO Double-Track Decision: Genesis and Implementation*, in: Christoph Becker-Schaum, Philipp Gassert, Martin Klimke, Wilfried Mausbach, and Marianne Zapp (eds.), *The Nuclear Crisis: The Arms Race, Cold War Anxiety, and the German Peace Movement of the 1980s*, New York 2016, pp. 52–69, here p. 56; and Oliver Bange, *SS-20 and Pershing II: Weapon Systems and the Dynamization of East–West Relations*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 70–86, here p. 71.
- 4 See Hermann Wentker, *Die Deutschen und Gorbatschow 1987 bis 1989. West- und ostdeutsche Perzeptionen zwischen Kontinuität und Wandel*, in: Hanns Jürgen Küsters (ed.), *Der Zerfall des Sowjetimperiums und Deutschlands Wiedervereinigung*, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2016, pp. 119–149; Tim Matthias Weber, *Zwischen Nachrüstung und Abrüstung. Die Nuklearwaffenpolitik der Christlich–Demokratischen Union Deutschlands zwischen 1977 und 1989*, Baden-Baden 1994, pp. 271–275.
- 5 Christoph Becker-Schaum, Philipp Gassert, Martin Klimke, Wilfried Mausbach, and Marianne Zapp, *Introduction: The Nuclear Crisis, NATO's Double-Track Decision, and the Peace Movement of the 1980s*, in: Becker-Schaum et al. (eds.), *Nuclear Crisis*, pp. 1–36, here p. 3; the German wording is important in this context. While *Nachrüstung* refers to technical "retrofitting", the defenders of the NATO Double-Track Decision used this term to highlight the fact that Western "rearmament" had only come "after" (*nach*) the Soviets had started to deploy the SS-20; the peace movement disputed this temporal order and preferred the term "*Aufrüstung*" (armament).

clearly lost the battle over “Euromissiles”, it had been successful in turning the German public further toward “peace.”⁶

In addition, a dramatic normalization of East–West German–German relations contributed to those rather unprecedented political steps. In 1987, the Cold War between the two German states was finally laid to rest. In the summer of 1987, the impending first visit of the East German State and Party Chief, Erich Honecker, to the West German capital city of Bonn was looming large in German politics.⁷ To complete this highly popular course of German–German détente, Kohl needed to make concessions with regard to disarmament, even though the INF Treaty seemingly violated the very strategic and intellectual base that had formed the core of the West German and transatlantic “security consensus” since the 1960s. Its resurrection had been central to Kohl’s argument during the 1979–1983 *Nachrüstungsdebatte* (“Euromissiles debate”). But as the West German government knew full well, the Soviet Union would not have consented to Honecker’s trip to West Germany if Kohl had held out on the Pershing IA.⁸ Thus Kohl’s dramatic reversal over nuclear weapons on August 26, 1987 not only removed an important obstacle with regard to the conclusion of the INF negotiations in Geneva, but opened the path toward a Honecker visit to Bonn as well.⁹ That visit was popular in West Germany, even though Honecker himself was not. During his discussions with Honecker, Kohl drew attention to the sacrifice of the Pershing IA missiles as an important gesture of West German good will. As Kohl and Honecker agreed, the two German states needed to work together to secure peace in Europe.¹⁰

Even though his more “dovish” stance on nuclear weapons would bring Kohl into conflict with the conservative “steel helmet” faction within his own political camp and the few remaining Cold War “hawks” in West Germany, it endeared him to the liberal wing of his government. Faced with a possible parliamentary majority in favor of a “double zero” option that included the Pershing IA, Kohl sided with the “doves.” Ultimately, however, the “Kohl reversal” was made possible by a “peacenik” public that was more in harmony with the positions of the early 1980s peace movement than with the old Cold War consensus that had still

6 Philipp Gassert, *Arbeit am Konsens im Streit um den Frieden: Die Nuklearkrise der 1980er Jahre als Medium gesellschaftlicher Selbstverständigung*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 52 (2012), pp. 491–516.

7 Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Helmut Kohl. Eine politische Biographie*, Munich 2012, pp. 468 f.; as Schwarz argues, even though Kohl himself remained skeptical with regard to the ultimate outcomes of German–German détente, the strong liberal wing of the CDU was very much in favor of a Honecker visit and a continued rapprochement between the two German states.

8 See the contribution by Hermann Wentker in this volume.

9 See the conversation between Genscher and GDR Foreign Minister Fischer, September 8, 1987, in: *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1987*, ed. by Tim Szatkowski, Tim Geiger, and Jens Hofmann, Berlin 2018, Doc. 247, pp. 1244–1251, here p. 1245.

10 Conversations between Kohl and Honecker, September 7, 1987, in: *AAPD 1987*, Doc. 244 and 245, pp. 1223–1243, here p. 1224.

prevailed five years earlier during the heated debates on the NATO Double-Track Decision. In the end, Kohl's departure from Cold War orthodoxy made sense not only with regard to West Germany's relations to its Allies and to the Soviet bloc but, most importantly, made sense from a domestic political point of view. Like attitudes in most of Western Europe, West German public opinion had seen a decisive turn toward peace since 1985.¹¹ Whether that was due to the "Gorbachev factor," as some scholars like Jeffrey Herf have argued,¹² or was the outcome of a belated "victory" of the peace movement, as for example Lawrence Wittner has proposed, will remain a topic for many future discussions.¹³

1. The Kohl Reversal: The Chancellor's About-Face on Nuclear Weapons in the Summer of 1987

German Chancellors are normally quite reluctant publicly to invoke their constitutional right to set binding policy guidelines on members of their own cabinet (*Richtlinienkompetenz*).¹⁴ On August 26, 1987, Kohl, who only in January of that same year had been re-elected for a second time, and who seemed quite securely enthroned in the Chancellor's office, felt that he needed to do exactly that. Among members of his center-right Christian Union/Liberal Democratic coalition government, the discussion had been spiraling out of control as to whether, under an Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty, West Germany would be allowed to keep its remaining 72 Pershing IA ballistic missiles. The Federal Republic had acquired these weapons during the 1960s. Should there be a war, they could potentially deliver U.S. nuclear warheads to areas controlled by the Warsaw Pact Organization. While the Federal Republic had solemnly renounced the right to own nuclear weapons and had signed the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Pershing IA missiles were an integral and highly symbolic part of NATO's nuclear escalation continuum. They were meant to forestall a "singularization" of non-nuclear Germany within NATO and vis-à-vis

11 Maria Eleonora Guasconi, Public Opinion and the Euromissile Crisis, in: Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, and Bernd Rother (eds.), *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War*, Stanford 2015, pp. 271–289, here p. 286.

12 Jeffrey Herf, *War By Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance, and the Battle of the Euromissiles*, New York 1991, pp. 224–233.

13 Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement 1971 to the Present*, Stanford 2003, pp. 403–404.

14 Everhard Holtmann, Die Richtlinienkompetenz des Bundeskanzlers—kein Phantom?, in: Erhard Hoffmann and Werner J. Patzelt (eds.), *Führen Regierungen tatsächlich? Zur Praxis gouvernementalen Handelns*, Wiesbaden 2008, pp. 73–84; from a historical point of view Philipp Gassert, *Bildung und Management von Koalitionen. Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in historischer Perspektive*, in: Philipp Gassert and Hans Jörg Hennecke (eds.), *Koalitionen in der Bundesrepublik. Bildung, Management und Krisen von Adenauer bis Merkel*, Paderborn 2017, pp. 11–28, here p. 23.

the Soviet Union, as well as prevent a “decoupling” of Germany from the U.S. nuclear guarantee.¹⁵

In his August 26 press conference, the Chancellor announced, in a somewhat circumventive and technical way, that West Germany would take its Pershing IA down, *if* a deal by the Soviet Union and the United States would meet certain criteria. First, the two superpowers had to agree on, and ratify, an INF Treaty that abolished all medium-range nuclear missiles worldwide. Second, they needed to agree on a “satisfactory” verification regime. Thirdly, they needed to stay within their agreed timetable.¹⁶ Kohl’s strong conditional wording displayed a lingering distrust of the superpowers in general and the Soviet Union in particular. That was why he was linking his offer to the ratification and successful implementation of an INF Treaty—a line which he could not hold either. Yet in essence, he had very publicly “turned” on nuclear deterrence. As Kohl’s Christian Socialist Union (CSU) coalition partner and arch-rival within the Christian-Conservative camp, the baroque Bavarian Premier and CSU Party Chief, Franz Josef Strauß, later railed in his memoirs, the Chancellor’s step was “totally irresponsible” and “totally unjustified.”¹⁷

Strauß was right that Kohl’s public statement amounted to a 180-degree turn-around. It had been only three months since Kohl, speaking for the same West German government, had very confidently announced in the Bundestag that the Federal Government was in accord with its Western Allies that the German Pershing IA missiles had “never been part” of the Geneva INF negotiations and that they could therefore not be included in a Soviet–American “zero solution.”¹⁸ Moreover, as Defense Minister Manfred Wörner had argued in early June, the Pershing IA would remain the only land-based NATO nuclear system that would not strike on German soil alone and could be used as a “negotiating chip” for

15 On the fear of “decoupling” as the perennial nightmare of West German politicians, which had also motivated Helmut Schmidt, when he called for a NATO reaction to the SS-20, see William Burr, *A Question of Confidence: Theater Nuclear Forces, US Policy toward Germany, and the Origins of the Euromissile Crisis, 1975–1976*, in: Nuti et al. (eds.), *Euromissile Crisis*, pp. 123–138.

16 Chancen für die Menschen in Deutschland und für Abrüstung und Rüstungskontrolle, Erklärungen des Bundeskanzlers, Bulletin der Bundesregierung 80/1987, https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Bulletin/1980-1989/1987/80-87_Kohl_2.html.

17 Franz Josef Strauß, *Die Erinnerungen*, Berlin 1989, p. 552; for further detail see Tim Geiger’s contribution to this volume.

18 See Kohl’s speech in the Bundestag on June 4, 1987 in: *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages, Stenographische Berichte*, 11th Legislative Period, 16th Session, p. 926. See also his second inaugural speech March 18, 1987, after the new government had been formed. Here, Kohl affirmed that there was “no alternative to the strategy of flexible response”, *ibid.*, 4. Sitzung, p. 67; for a detailed, step-by-step treatment of Kohl’s reversal see Risse-Kappen, *Null-Lösung*, pp. 150–170; Karl-Rudolf Korte, *Deutschlandpolitik in Helmut Kohls Kanzlerschaft. Regierungsstil und Entscheidungen 1982–1989*, Stuttgart 1998, p. 328, and the contribution by Tim Geiger in this volume.

future negotiations on short-range missiles striking below 500 kilometers.¹⁹ That expectation had soon turned out to be quite erroneous. In early August 1987, Soviet Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze very pointedly asked how it could be that the Federal Republic was interloping in Soviet–American negotiations, thereby threatening the successful conclusion of a historic disarmament treaty. If the superpowers agreed to eliminate a whole class of nuclear weapons—those striking within the 500 to 5,000 km range—the Pershing IA, with a range of 720 km, would have to go to as well.²⁰

Thus, on the surface, it looked as though Kohl was mostly giving in to international pressures, along with the more dovish members within his own Christian Democratic Union (CDU) as well as the Free Democrat (FDP) “Liberals,” led by Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. The Pershing IA missiles were increasingly outdated and needed modernization.²¹ While military experts were quite clear on that point, officials in Kohl’s government, including several high-ranking members of his Party, were prevaricating. Many were not as much concerned about international resistance to Germany’s modernization plans as about German public opinion. Indeed, during the summer of 1987, the Reagan Administration had even pressured West Germany to go ahead with modernization, as had been decided on by NATO way back in 1983.²² Even France, which was not usually too keen on a nuclear Germany, shared some of the concerns of the West German government that the INF Treaty would leave the Federal Republic in a vulnerable position.²³

Yet, though internationally there seems initially to have been some room for maneuver, Kohl had West German public opinion against his position; and that was more important. While ostensibly he was bowing “to international pressures,” he was in fact giving in to the prevailing sentiment of the German population as well as of a majority of deputies in the Federal Parliament. In early May 1987, Kohl’s Liberal coalition partner had been very publicly sliding in the direction of the Social Democrats and the Green Party by opposing plans to modernize the Pershing IA. Ever since Helmut Schmidt had “discovered” the “missile gap” in 1977, the debate had been complicated by the confusing way in which the various categories of nuclear weapons were defined. This structured not only the Geneva negotiations between the superpowers, but also the nuclear weapons debate in

19 Herausforderungen der Zukunft: Rede des Bundesministers der Verteidigung auf der Kommandeurstagung der Bundeswehr in Oldenburg, Bulletin der Bundesregierung No. 55 (June 6, 1987), https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Bulletin/1980-1989/1987/55-87_Woerner.html.

20 Die Sowjets unter Risiko halten, *Der Spiegel*, No. 33 (August 10, 1987), pp. 19–21, here p. 20.

21 Memo by Adamek, May 20, 1987, in: AAPD 1987, Doc. 145, pp. 726–728.

22 Telegram by Ambassador van Well, Washington, July 16, 1987, in: AAPD 1987, Doc. 214, p. 1071–1077.

23 Consultations of the German and French Foreign and Defense Secretaries, May 21, 1987, in: AAPD 1987, Doc. 146, pp. 728–735, here p. 734; see the contribution by Christian Wenkel to this volume.

Germany. While experts talked about “long-range intermediate nuclear forces” (LRINF) with a 1,000 to 5,000-kilometer range and “short-range intermediate nuclear forces” (SRINF) with a 150 to 1,000-kilometer range, the “double zero” and the Geneva negotiations addressed those above 500 kilometers, which would include the Pershing IA.

Therefore, Kohl’s about-face on the Pershing IA was the domestically expedient thing to do. Always the pragmatic centrist politician, Kohl knew that he was in a comfortable position to override the conservative “Cold Warrior” wing of his Party and his government. These included Strauß and the CSU, as well as Defense Minister and future NATO General Secretary Manfred Wörner and the so-called “steel helmet” group within the CDU, led by the powerful chief whip of the Christian Democratic *Bundestag* group, Alfred Dregger. Of course, the Pershing IA had been stationed way back in the 1960s and thus long predated the 1979 NATO Double-Track Decision, to which Kohl had once tied his political future and which would now be voided by the 1987 INF Treaty. Yet Kohl realized that West Germany could not win a fight over a nuclear delivery system whose warheads it did not even own, and whose limited range made it even less popular among West Germans. After all, these outdated weapons would hit only targets either within Germany or in its immediate neighborhood.

2. A Dovish Domestic Context, West German Public Opinion and the “Gorbachev Factor”

While at first glance Kohl’s willingness to give up the Pershing IA looks surprising, it made a lot of sense from a domestic point of view. In 1982/83 he had first formed a new government (replacing the “father” of the NATO Double-Track Decision, Helmut Schmidt, as Chancellor) and then, in early 1983, he had secured an electoral victory by promising not to give in to the “pressures of the street” but loyally to implement the NATO Double-Track Decision.²⁴ Even though the world had moved toward *détente* since Reagan’s much-discussed 1984 “reversal”²⁵ and Gorbachev’s rise to power in 1985, the military fundamentals with regard to the Soviet side were still the same as four years earlier. As has been explained above, by now accepting that the Pershing IA would be covered by the “double zero solution” of the INF Treaty, Kohl was violating one of the basic premises of West German security policy, held since the 1960s: that a situation must at all costs be avoided in which Germany could potentially be isolated and singularized behind a “nuclear firewall.” Even though Gorbachev sounded very different in comparison to his successors, in 1987 no one could safely predict that East–West tensions would not return. After all, it had twice happened during earlier phases

24 Geiger, NATO Double-Track Decision, p. 65.

25 See the contributions by Beth Fischer and Ronald Granieri in this volume.

of the Cold War and no one in his or her right mind imagined the collapse of the Soviet Empire within four years.²⁶

Members of the conservative faction within Kohl's government were time and again pointing this out. Within the logic of deterrence, West Germany and her Western European Allies would still face a conventionally superior Soviet Union if they accepted an INF Treaty with no further guarantees and a successful conclusion of the Vienna negotiations on conventional weapons in Europe (MBFR). The latter had been dragging on without success since 1973, and no one in 1987 expected them to lead to any meaningful result.²⁷ At least on paper, the Soviets still held a huge conventional (and chemical) military advantage in Europe. NATO could not deter it adequately, at least not within the prevailing doctrine of "flexible response" that had been invented in 1967 to steer NATO strategy away from immediate all-out nuclear war. After an INF Treaty, West Germany would be much more dependent on a U.S. nuclear guarantee that rested on strategic weapons stationed at sea or in the United States and not on weapons stationed in Western Europe. Thus, within the logic of a gradual response to a military threat from the East, West Germany would face a return to the uncertain times of the 1970s before the NATO Double-Track Decision.

A compounding problem for the conservative "hawks" was that the strategic debate had all the trappings of an "expert discourse" that went against common sense. The intricacies of NATO nuclear strategy were lost on most parts of the general public, who either did not appreciate or did not understand the reasoning behind "flexible response." The 1967 core NATO idea of "flexible response" had always been a hard sell, and not just because it had introduced a European level of nuclear escalation instead of intercontinental nuclear exchanges. Even though it was supposed to strengthen NATO's deterrence capabilities, ultimately, as the Potsdam military historian Oliver Bange has argued, it replaced "a strategy for preventing war [...] by one for waging it."²⁸ Of course, that change of strategy, which had come with the 1967 Harmel Report, was supposed to make NATO's willingness to deter an enemy more credible by giving the American President more options. While "flexible response" may have made deterrence more credible as the Soviet Union saw it, from the peace movement's point of view that strategic reasoning was a load of nonsense. According to those in the peace movement, war would become more likely, because the threshold for using nuclear weapons would be lowered. This last perspective was now carrying the day in West Germany.

26 After the 1955 "Cold War Respite," East-West tensions had returned with a vengeance during the Berlin and Cuban Crises of the late 1950s and early 1960s. During the 1970s, détente had turned out to be short-lived, as was very vividly present in the minds of the decision-makers of 1987.

27 In 1989 they were replaced by the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) negotiations, which would then lead to huge cuts in conventional armaments, see the contribution by Tim Geiger in this volume.

28 Bange, SS-20 and Pershing II, p. 71.

Spurred on by popular culture, people had always imagined what would happen “if deterrence fail[ed].”²⁹ Most did not conceive of nuclear weapons as political weapons that had kept the peace in Europe since the late 1940s. But they did understand, and full well, that any systems that were meant to strike within 1,000 kilometers, would devastate Central Europe including all of Germany—East and West. The popular saying “*Je kürzer die Raketen, desto toter die Deutschen* (literally, “the shorter the missiles, the deader the Germans”) made it difficult to overcome resistance to any idea of nuclear modernization within a context in which the superpowers were moving toward détente. Only four years earlier, people had overwhelmingly accepted the stationing of new nuclear systems in the wake of the NATO Double-Track Decision. That decision, however, had been pushed through against the backdrop of renewed East–West tension and because the perception had taken hold among a majority of West Germans that the Soviets had been using foul play in accelerating their armaments programs in the 1970s. By 1987, those fears were gone. Since the first 1985 Geneva meeting between Gorbachev and Reagan and the astounding 1986 Reykjavik Summit, superpower relations had taken a revolutionary turn for the better. Thus, world politics seemed to be on a new trajectory toward peace.³⁰

That new spirit of détente swiftly caught on with the West German public.³¹ It undercut any efforts Kohl and the conservative “Cold Warriors” tried to make to hang on to the Pershing IA as a nuclear insurance of last resort. Even before a single nuclear warhead had been removed, Gorbachev’s disarmament proposals and “charming” initiatives had had a marked impact on West German public opinion. Many Germans, not just those on the Left, were enchanted by the new CPSU General Secretary, who held out a carrot for overcoming Cold War enmity once and for all.³² In his 1987 book, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, Gorbachev explained not only how he saw the future of Russia, but how he thought that the “new thinking” was appropriate for Europe and the world, too. His line that “Europe is our common home” was well received in Germany. It evoked images of a common European heritage in a continent that has had its “fair share of wars and tears.”³³ Despite the brutal German invasion

29 See for example Jerome F. Shapiro, *Atomic Bomb Cinema. The Apocalyptic Imagination on Film*, London 2002; Bernd Greiner, Christian Th. Müller, and Dierk Walter (eds.), *Angst im Kalten Krieg*, Hamburg 2009; Philipp Gassert, *Popularität der Apokalypse. Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der Nuklearangst seit 1945*, in: Johannes Piepenbrink (ed.), *Das Ende des Atomzeitalters*, Bonn 2012, pp. 126–141.

30 For a classic contemporary treatment, see the still superb volume by Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition. American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*, Washington, D.C. 1994, pp. 300–325.

31 See Herf, *War by other Means*, pp. 218 f.

32 Wentker, *Die Deutschen und Gorbatschow*, pp. 120–124.

33 “Der Kontinent hat an Kriegen und Tränen mehr als genug gehabt.” I am quoting from the second German edition, Michail Gorbatschow, *Perestroika. Die zweite russische Revolution. Eine neue Politik für Europa und die Welt*, Munich 1989, p. 253.

of the Soviet Union during World War II, Gorbachev seemed to stretch out a hand to Germans as well as others. Moreover, he implicitly admitted Soviet guilt for the past, when he pointedly explained his concept in a speech in Prague.³⁴

Even though Gorbachev did not mention the United States and Canada as partners in that new “European home” and thus, in the conservatives’ view, was employing the old Soviet trick of dividing the West, the left-liberal German press urged Germany’s politicians to take Gorbachev at his word.³⁵ The Social Democrats welcomed Gorbachev’s initiatives very warmly. In 1988, the main intellectual architect of the Social Democratic *Ostpolitik* of the 1970s, Willy Brandt’s erstwhile foreign policy advisor Egon Bahr, called for a “common security” in Europe, even if that left the Americans out in the cold. Shortly after the signing of the INF Treaty, he envisioned a new European order, in which Soviet and American forces would be withdrawn from Central Europe.³⁶ What is interesting, though, especially in the light of more recent developments, is that some conservative circles outside the traditional Christian Democrat “Cold Warrior” orbit wistfully hoped for a day in which Russia would “move back into a European home” too. As the conservative CDU member of the European Parliament, Otmar Franz put it in 1987: the “European Home” included Russia, to which, six years later, he added the thought that, after the end of the Cold War, a Europe that included Russia would be competing in a triadic economic world order, in which North America and East Asia would form the antagonists of Europe.³⁷

Those skeptical of Gorbachev’s political initiatives were increasingly on the defense in West Germany. Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher was one of the early converts. The Liberals had gained votes in the January 1987 Federal elections, whereas the Christian Democratic Parties had suffered considerable losses. While the two partners were still negotiating the outlines of a new coalition government, the Foreign Minister gave a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos on February 1, 1987, in which he laid out his program for the coming years. He urged Germany’s European Allies, and by implication his future coalition partners as well, to take Gorbachev seriously: “If there is a chance today that, after forty years of confrontation, relations between East and West might have reached a turning point, it would be a mistake of historic proportions if the West were to pass on this chance, merely because it could not get over a mindset that always assumed the worst with regard to the Soviet Union.” And Genscher added: “We are prepared to take the promise of the common European home up and build this home together with the Soviet Union.” He concluded

34 Ibid.

35 Wentker, *Die Deutschen und Gorbatschow*, p. 123.

36 Egon Bahr, *Zum Europäischen Frieden: Eine Antwort an Gorbatschow*, Berlin 1988, p. 91; see Andreas Vogtmeier, *Egon Bahr und die deutsche Frage. Zur Entwicklung der sozialdemokratischen Ost- und Deutschlandpolitik vom Kriegsende bis zur Vereinigung*, Bonn 1996.

37 Ottmar Franz, *Europa und Russland—Das europäische Haus*, in: Ottmar Franz (ed.), *Europa und Russland. Das europäische Haus?* Göttingen 1993, pp. 1–8, here p. 7.

quite emphatically: "Our motto can only be: Let's take Gorbachev seriously, let's take him at his word."³⁸

Within the government, the dividing line was thus not between the Liberals and the two Christian Union Parties, but rather between members of the conservative wing of the CDU with its Bavarian sister Party the CSU on the one side, and the more moderate Christian Democrats and Liberals on the other. As Genscher gleefully pointed out in his memoirs, his speech received mixed responses among Christian Democrats. At the same time, however, his call "to take Gorbachev at his word" led to positive responses from the German public and from leading left-center journalists like the influential editor of the Hamburg newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, Rudolf Augstein.³⁹ As moderate members of the CDU/CSU group, such as the foreign expert Volker Rühle, pointed out time and again, the Christian Democrats had lost votes to the Liberals, because Strauß's Cold Warmongering had sown doubts among the population as to whether the Bonn government was really on a trajectory toward disarmament and détente in Europe. That Genscher was seen as the one major politician who was constantly "talking about peace, while the Union parties are portrayed as warmongers" was not a winning strategy—as Kohl's foreign policy advisor Horst Teltschik highlighted.⁴⁰

In retrospect, it is hard to understand why the Union parties were so divided about this point. Giving away the outdated 72 Pershing IA missiles, which anyway would have needed urgent modernization or replacement to stay fit for service beyond 1992, looked like a rather small price to pay. But the conservatives were not yet willing to pay this price, even though the German public was smitten by the very idea that Cold War enmity could be overcome in Europe. "German Angst" was gone; Gorbymania reigned supreme. This was shown in opinion surveys. Whereas in September 1983, 53 per cent of those polled expressed fear and felt anxious because of "threats from the East," in September 1987, 63 per cent of the respondents did not think that Germany was facing such a threat at all. In May 1987, only 18 per cent of those polled thought that nuclear weapons were still necessary to deter the Soviets, while 57 per cent thought that conventional weapons could easily do the trick and have the same effect of keeping the Soviets and their allies at bay.⁴¹

While Strauß continued to play the Cold Warrior, most German politicians seemed happy to go with the flow of public opinion and enjoy the new mood. In the run-up to the Federal elections of January 1987, many, including Chancellor Kohl, had campaigned on promises to take more initiatives toward disarmament, with 60 per cent of the population now being in favor of totally abolishing

38 Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Nehmen wir Gorbatschow ernst, nehmen wir ihn beim Wort*, in: Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Unterwegs zur Einheit. Reden und Dokumente aus bewegter Zeit*, Berlin 1991, pp. 137–150, here p. 146 f., 150.

39 Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, Berlin 1995, pp. 527–530.

40 Ganz Wunderbar, in: *Der Spiegel* 7/1987, February 9, 1987, pp. 23 f.

41 See the various public opinion surveys quoted in Weber, *Nachrüstung und Abrüstung*, p. 272–274.

intermediate-range nuclear weapons—a very dramatic shift from how opinion stood in the fall of 1983. Even among supporters of the CDU/CSU, 47 per cent were in favor of a “zero option.”⁴² Yet while the Christian Democrats were in favor of a “zero option”, holding out against a “double zero solution” that would cover all SRINF including the Pershing IA carried increasingly higher political costs. The issue became one of the major points in the following state elections in Kohl’s home state of Rhineland-Palatinate, as well as in Hamburg, where the Christian Democrats were once again suffering major losses.⁴³ With electoral results coming out in April and May, Kohl was finally convinced that he needed to move on the armament question.⁴⁴

Given the prevailing sentiments of the German population and a growing enthusiasm for disarmament and détente in Europe, those who were critical of a “double zero option” were at a loss to get their point across. Since the two superpowers were moving in the direction of abolishing all intermediate-range nuclear missiles with a scope beyond 500 kilometers, the argument that was put forward by Strauß, Wörner, Dregger and the other remaining Cold War hawks, that a removal of a whole class of nuclear weapons would leave Germany in a dangerous strategic spot, sounded less and less convincing. Strauß had lost the battle for the office of Foreign Minister in Kohl’s new government. Now, he saw himself increasingly sidelined and out of sync with public opinion. In his memoirs, he reflects upon the public mood in Germany, which he thought was inimical to a “sober and realistic weapons and disarmament discussion.” Strauß was enraged by the fact that, among many intellectuals as well as large chunks of the public, the “superstition” could not be overcome that “disarmament alone can secure the peace.” As was common practice at the time, he invoked the negative example of pre-World War II “appeasement,” pointing out that British and French efforts to contain Hitler by accepting some of his demands had opened a path not “toward the heaven of peace, but toward the hell of war.”⁴⁵

How quickly the West German discourse on nuclear weapons had shifted toward the “peace camp,” became abundantly clear during a Bundestag debate in early May 1987. Now the “dovish” side counted a majority of the Bundestag deputies and even included several representatives from the Christian Democrat camp.⁴⁶ While Kohl reiterated the position that NATO did not consider the Pershing IA to be part of the Geneva negotiations, the Chief of the Free Democratic group, Wolfgang Mischnik, welcomed a “double zero solution” for his Party. He indicated that such a step might also include the Pershing IA, if the Western Alliance clarified its position and if the Americans made it clear that NATO’s defense

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 275. See also the contribution of Tim Geiger in this volume.

45 Strauß, *Erinnerungen*, p. 514.

46 See *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages, Stenographische Berichte*, 11th Legislative Period, 10th Session, May 7, 1987, p. 558, <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btp/11/11010.pdf>.

strategy would not be undermined by such a move.⁴⁷ There may have been a lot of “ifs,” but the direction in which the Liberals were heading was obvious. As the Green Party deputy, “peace researcher” and retired Lieutenant Colonel of the Federal Army, Alfred Mechttersheimer, pointedly noted during that same Bundestag debate, the conservative “hawks” were now facing a majority of Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals in favor of a “double zero solution”, without any “Pershing IA reservation.” At no other time than in 1983 would a nuclear modernization platform have gained a parliamentary majority.⁴⁸

The straw that finally broke the camel’s back was the increasing unwillingness of the Western Allies to accept what they thought was an inconsequential position being held by the Federal Government, along with the subsequent question of modernizing the Pershing IA.⁴⁹ That modernization was impending, if the Germans were holding on to the missiles. In the beginning, France and Britain had supported the German position on the Pershing IA, because they did not want their own independent nuclear deterrents to be part of a deal between the superpowers. But in the summer of 1987, perspectives within NATO were shifting, since it had emerged that a deal with the Soviets could come to nothing if NATO held on to Germany’s Pershing IA. As the nuclear warheads of the Pershing IA were in the sole control of the United States, it was inconceivable, in the eyes of the public, that they should be left out from a Soviet–American deal—whereas British and French nuclear weapons were not owned or controlled by the U.S., even though the British also depended on U.S. launch systems. The West German government had no choice other than to accept that it would not press for a modernization of the Pershing IA missiles if an INF Treaty could be signed. It also accepted that they would be removed.⁵⁰ Even though the U.S. government had long supported the West German position on the Pershing IA, the American side was relieved to learn that Kohl had given up this “artificial impediment.” The renunciation would force the Soviets to move beyond rhetoric and “bring substance” to an INF Treaty.⁵¹

3. A Late Triumph for the Dying Peace Movement?

One of the ironies of the second half of the 1980s is the slow death of the peace movement. This came during a period in which the political spectrum in Germany was itself moving toward “peace.” Years of talk about “peace,” “disarmament,” and “making peace with ever fewer weapons,” a slogan that had been pioneered by the CDU, had moved the emphasis of West German political culture in the

47 *Ibid.*, p. 545 f.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 558.

49 See Risse-Kappen, *Nulllösung*, pp. 162 f.; Wirsching, *Abschied vom Provisorium*, pp. 568 f.

50 Kohl’s press conference of August 26, 1987; see Tim Geiger’s contribution in this volume.

51 Gesandter Paschke, Washington, to Foreign Office, in: AAPD 1987, Doc. 235, pp. 1191 f.

direction of the peace movement's core positions. The geopolitical shifts coming with Gorbachev's ascent to power and Reagan's "zero option" stances, as well as the "political springs" in most of Eastern Europe, rapidly narrowed the discursive space for hawkish positions. The conservative "Cold War" camp was therefore rapidly losing its erstwhile hegemony in the nuclear weapons debate. They could not rely on anti-Communist fears as they had successfully done during the early 1980s, even though the peace movement itself was now going through a period of prolonged weakness. An indicator of the peace movement's falling attraction was the dwindling number of people attending the annual Easter marches. In 1987, the march drew far fewer participants than marches four or five years earlier.⁵²

In the summer of 1987, it briefly looked as if the peace movement could stage a comeback. As members of the two Christian Union parties were heatedly debating whether they should resist the tendency toward a "double zero" option that included the Pershing IA, movement activists once again felt invigorated. Plans were being discussed for the fall of 1987 to organize marches and large blockades of the Pershing IA depots in Geilenkirchen (North Rhine-Westphalia) and Landsberg am Lech (Bavaria).⁵³ If Kohl, Strauß, and the "Cold Warriors" dug in their heels, preventing a successful conclusion to the Geneva INF talks, activists expected to draw huge crowds for large-scale protest demonstrations once again. As a circular letter among peace movement members put it in early August 1987: "It would be totally intolerable, if the historic chance of a first step toward disarmament were to be jeopardized by the German government. The failure of the Geneva negotiations would be a fiasco."⁵⁴

The clash did not come. Kohl did not do the peace movement the favor they were expecting. When he abandoned his resistance to a "double zero" solution that included the Pershing IA, he pulled the rug from underneath the peace movement activists. While it is impossible to attribute dramatic policy shifts to a single cause, and even more difficult to measure the impact of protest movements on decision-making, the very idea that West Germany would go through another "hot autumn" made Kohl and many members of his political party think twice. Moreover, Kohl did not want to risk damaging the relationship with Genscher and the Free Democrats. As Kohl summarized in his memoirs: "By moving over to Hans-Dietrich Genscher's foreign policy line, I possibly avoided a serious row within the coalition. In turn, I accepted a grave quarrel within the Union parties." Kohl could pay that price, because he knew full well that public opinion was on

52 Rüdiger Schmitt, Was bewegt die Friedensbewegung? Zum sicherheitspolitischen Protest der achtziger Jahre, in: *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 18/1 (1987), pp. 110–136.

53 Cf. Wolfgang Hölscher and Paul Kraatz (eds.), *Die Grünen im Bundestag. Sitzungsprotokolle und Anlagen 1987–1990*, Vol. 1, Düsseldorf 2015, Doc. 21, p. 113, and Doc. 22, p. 118.

54 Circular letter: Für einen sofortigen, ersatzlosen und endgültigen Abzug aller Pershing-Raketen. Aufruf zur täglichen gewaltfreien Blockade der Stationierungsorte der Pershing IA- Atomraketen, S. 2, in: *Archiv Aktiv, Bestand GMA KZU 10*, quoted in the dissertation by Richard Rohrmoser, *Sicherheitspolitik von unten. Gewaltfreie Proteste gegen nukleare Mittelstreckenraketen in Mutlangen 1983–1987*, Mannheim 2019.

his and Genscher's side and that he would be rewarded by a Honecker visit. He also thought that his willingness to move on the Pershing IA had impressed Gorbachev, who up until that point had tended to show Kohl the cold shoulder.⁵⁵

It is not too far-fetched, then, to argue that the early 1980s peace movement had had a marked impact on the political culture of West Germany. While it had failed to prevent the German government from going ahead with the Double-Track Decision in 1983, with Kohl relentlessly campaigning for the stationing of Pershing II and nuclear-armed Cruise Missiles, the population seems to have opened up to the peace movement's original goals and ideas as East–West tensions began to abate during the second half of the 1980s. This created a larger discursive space for the “peace camp.” If public opinion surveys are any guide at all, most people in West Germany still thought that the Green Party was too radical.⁵⁶ Yet most had moved beyond the old Cold War (“Harmel”) consensus. The old nightmare of West German foreign policy elites, that the Federal Republic could be “singularized” and decoupled from an American nuclear guarantee (which had provided the core argument for the NATO Double-Track Treaty), no longer found much resonance among the West German population.⁵⁷

4. Conclusion

Although the peace movement had lost the “1983 war over the Euromissiles,” it had now won the “peace” by pushing Kohl toward a “double zero” solution that included Germany's outdated Pershing IA. Though many activists had been disappointed by the turn of events in 1983 and large-scale peace demonstrations were a thing of the past, some members of the peace movement had turned their disappointment into a political resource of democratic resilience.⁵⁸ Despite his qualified 1987 re-election success, Kohl was faced with an informal coalition of parliamentary deputies who had decisively moved in the direction of the peace camp.

Many now favored getting rid of the Pershing IA because perceptions of Europe's overall political situation had changed dramatically within a relatively short period. By the second half of the 1980s, Cold War fears and anti-Communism were largely gone; Germans were open to bigger disarmament steps. It seems that, after some initial hesitation, even the Chancellor was happy

55 Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*, Munich 2005, pp. 550 f.; on the initial difficulties between Kohl and Gorbachev see Schwarz, Kohl, pp. 451–461.

56 Silke Mende, *Nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn. Eine Geschichte der Gründungsgrünen*, Munich 2011, pp. 483–485.

57 See Risse-Kappen, *Null-Lösung*, p. 164; it is quite remarkable that the participants in the debates in the Bundestag in early May 1987, frequently invoked public opinion polls, when making the point that times had changed. This included Genscher and the FDP.

58 Bernhard Gotto, *Enttäuschung als Politikressource. Zur Kohäsion der westdeutschen Friedensbewegung in den 1980er Jahren*, in: *VfZ* 62 (2014), pp. 1–33.

to play along. By aligning himself with Genscher and the Liberals as well as the more moderate members of the CDU, Kohl could keep his Bavarian archrival, Franz Josef Strauß, at bay. At the same time, he could undercut potential internal opposition from the more dovish members of his own Party, who were rallying against the Cold War hard-liners too.⁵⁹

While it created difficulties and fractures within Kohl's Christian Democrat-led coalition government, the INF Treaty was very much in sync with the feelings of a majority of West Germans—or rather those people who responded to public opinion surveys. It concluded the “move toward peace” and the acceptance of the status quo in Europe that had begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is obvious from the fact, that in the summer of 1987, Kohl was getting ready for an unprecedented visit by the East German Chief of State and Party, Erich Honecker. Though Kohl repeatedly stressed that West Germany had not given up on its ultimate goal of reunifying the two German states, the very fact that Honecker had been invited to visit amounted to a ratification of the status quo in Europe and Germany. It was just another step in mentally accepting that “the other German state” existed.

The same logic applies to the INF Treaty. While in hindsight, this Treaty may look like an opening gambit in the overcoming of the East–West division of Europe, blazing the way for the fall of the Wall, such a “post-Cold War” perspective was not held at all widely among contemporaries—at least, not in Germany. When, on June 12, 1987, U. S. President Reagan challenged Gorbachev to “tear down this wall,” it looked like a public relations stunt which willfully ignored the political basics in Europe. Many West Germans saw Reagan's speech as oratory mostly aimed at domestic U. S. consumption and as an almost comic return to a Cold War rhetoric that now belonged to the past.⁶⁰ It did not easily square with the same President's revolutionary work toward disarmament in Geneva. The INF Treaty thus seemed like one more piece of ratification, ultimately consolidating the same old European order that had been established by the victorious powers with the 1945 Potsdam Treaty.

59 The Southwestern CDU, under the leadership of the Baden-Württemberg State Premier Lothar Späth, who tried to replace Kohl in 1988/89, had called for a “double zero” solution on May 24, 1987, see Risse-Kappen, *Null-Lösung*, p. 166.

60 Jens Schöne, *Ronald Reagan in Berlin: Der Präsident, die Staatssicherheit und die geteilte Stadt*, Berlin 2017, pp. 44–45.