

Clearing Up The Neutron Bomb Controversy

Does West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt support the "neutron weapon," or does he oppose it? For months now, such august journals as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, along with related European papers, have been playing a crude game with

WEST GERMANY

this question. They portray the debate as a grand battle between the "doves" and the "hawks" within the West German political scene, with the poor Chancellor caught in the middle, leaning first in one direction and then in the other. Simplistic accounts of the Soviet position on this weapon have done little to clarify the matter.

"What Sort of Weapon?"

With a series of important NATO consultations scheduled for May, the time has come to be frank about this celebrated "neutron weapon." Contrary to almost all Western accounts, the weapon is neither a "tactical" nor a "defensive" weapon, but is intrinsically only useful if used offensively. It would have no value in minimizing blast damage to home territory, since in the event of a comprehensive Soviet attack such territory would have been thoroughly "paved" beforehand by Warsaw Pact mid-range weapons. It would also be relatively useless as an antitank weapon provided that Soviet tank divisions advanced in dispersed formation. Therefore, its only conceivable use would be against selected targets within Warsaw Pact territory.

Hence, Soviet military thinking correctly perceives the stationing of the neutron weapon in Western Europe — especially West Germany — as a unilateral war provocation, violating NATO's self-description as a purely "defensive" alliance and altering the strategic balance in Central Europe for the worse.

It is well known that U.S. Defense Secretary Harold Brown and his associates want the West German government — as the most important NATO ally — to actively support the production of the weapon and its eventual stationing on its territory. In the Soviet perception, any such West German support would signify a significant shift throughout the West in favor of any number of Kissinger-style "cabinet warfare" scenarios, and the end of all serious East-West detente efforts.

There are political forces within West Germany who are misguidedly advocating just this course for West Germany and the Alliance. Since approximately late January, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU),

have unanimously clamored for the "N-bomb," claiming that it will act as some sort of "balance" against Warsaw Pact tank forces.

British Undertones

They are doing so not out of some patriotic link to the United States, but because, on this question, they are effectively under the control of the Margaret Thatcher wing of the British Conservative Party, itself run by the London Institute for International and Strategic Studies (IISS). This was clearly demonstrated by the heavy British representation at the CDU's military strategy convention in Kiel early February. It can also be seen from a comparison of IISS policies with statements from IISS member Manfred Wörner, the CDU's spokesman on military affairs.

Any remaining doubt was dispersed when the CDU and CSU held a joint conference on "Germany policy" Feb. 23. Both parties agreed that West Germany should work toward creating an international crisis around the provocative question of "German reunification," a question which in both U.S. and Soviet eyes is a dead letter. The CDU's "Germany policy" spokesman, Manfred Abelein, recommended that "economic sanctions" be instituted against East Germany over such issues as "human rights," and that West Germany's alliance with the U.S. should *not* be a major consideration in such moves. "The status quo interests of the world powers," he said, "also certain status quo interests in the Western sphere, are not ours. It is perhaps unpleasant to say this, but that is the way it is, unfortunately."

The CSU's parallel policy against the U.S. was much more crude and direct: "The German Reich still exists."

The momentum built around this conference was such that the small Free Democratic Party, the other partner in the ruling government coalition with Schmidt's Social Democratic Party, also declared itself in favor of the stationing of the neutron weapon, thereby going against Bonn's official "wait and see" policy. For the next few days, Bonn was full of rumors about a split between SPD and FDP, after which the FDP would form a new government with the CDU-CSU opposition. This "minicrisis" subsided, however, when the FDP once again altered its policy in the direction of Schmidt's own, reportedly as the result of pressure from Foreign Minister and FDP Chairman Hans-Dietrich Genscher.

Schmidt Clarifies the Issue

The incident prompted government spokesman Klaus Bölling to partially clarify the West German government's attitude. Bölling called for exhaustive

negotiations towards arms control, which would move towards a situation where the "neutron bomb" would be "negotiated out of existence." As for the actual decision to produce the bomb, this was completely up to the United States Administration, after which the question of its stationing could be the subject of joint Allied negotiation.

The Bölling statement was reported by the *Washington Post* Feb. 24 under the deliberately misleading headline: "Bonn Asks Negotiations With Soviets On Limitation of Neutron Warheads," giving the impression that Schmidt was proposing "tit-for-tat" bargaining against some item of Soviet equipment, rather than a comprehensive push on all aspects of arms limitation.

This misrepresentation of West German policy by the East Coast press reached a climax March 5, when both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* reported that "ties with Bonn have weakened" over both defense and monetary policy. This time, the *New York Times* quoted a U.S. Administration official as saying that Schmidt last year "had become suspicious of American willingness to make concessions in strategic arms negotiations with the Soviet Union," implying that Schmidt is not really willing to negotiate with the Soviets.

Schmidt, however, had already managed to convince President Carter to clamp down on this "confrontation" propaganda (largely circulated by National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal), and had begun a series of intensive telephone discussions with Carter, primarily on the dollar situation but also on "other topics." The Chancellor got the ball rolling for this through a major speech delivered March 3 to the Hamburg-based Far East Society, in which — at long last — Schmidt's position on the neutron weapon is set forth with no trace of ambiguity. Said Schmidt:

"A visible U.S. presence in Europe, including the presence here in our country, is more than a consideration of power relationships or a factor maintaining the balance; this U.S. presence is at the same time a commitment based on conviction. It is a commitment that we — equally convinced of the stakes and just as conscious thereof — are doing all within our power to try to strengthen."

"Concert" Policies

Schmidt's disdainful reference to "power relation-

ships" and "maintaining the balance" is a scarcely veiled attack on the "concert" policies instituted by the British over the last century and continued by Henry Kissinger. It is such policies which motivated Brzezinski and Blumenthal to threaten a staged "break" with West Germany in order to blackmail Schmidt into reflating the West German economy and stationing the neutron bomb there.

At the same time, Schmidt is "equally convinced of the stakes and just as conscious" of his commitment to NATO as an institution. "Our country is a member of NATO, an alliance designed for collective defense only. In view of the nuclear threat that we all face, we rely on the U.S., as the leading nuclear power of the alliance, for necessary protection and for the appropriate manufacturing decisions."

Various commentators, including Adalbert Weinsten of the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* have interpreted this last passage as implicit support for the neutron bomb. Such commentators miss the point. To be sure, if there is no progress in arms limitation talks and related detente efforts over the next two years, then Schmidt will have to accept the neutron bomb into Europe if the U.S. insists, no matter what the consequences.

Schmidt's commitment to the Western Alliance, however, is to the living alliance, and not its dead structure. For Schmidt, the content of this alliance is economic recovery linked with reasonable arms reduction negotiations with the Warsaw Pact: "The latent danger of conflicts and wars can be prevented if armament control and disarmament are successful."

Slow Learners

But some people never learn. The *Washington Post* recently revealed a new State Department proposal to halt work on the neutron bomb if the Soviet Union withdraws its SS20 midrange missile from the European theater. After the predictable negative Soviet response, the *Christian Science Monitor* has rumored that the "West German military" would much rather like to trade the neutron bomb for an (equally unacceptable) reduction in Soviet tank forces.

It is up to clear-headed officials within the Carter Administration to strengthen the U.S. alliance with Schmidt, in order to halt a new rash of such dangerous publicity games.

— John Sigerson