
East-West Policy

West Germany and France act as strong 'interlocutors for peace'

by Susan Welsh

When West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt comes to Washington for a state visit May 20-23, the main preoccupation of the U.S. administration faction around Secretary of State Alexander Haig will be to prevent Schmidt and President Reagan from meeting alone, without aides, foreign ministers, and the like. This little conspiracy was revealed by a well-placed source who hopes it will work. Haig and Company fear that Schmidt may succeed in drawing Reagan, who has no foreign policy experience, into the policy framework shaped by himself and French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. This is the policy Schmidt has often characterized as Europe's mission as the "superpower for peace": the effort to stabilize East-West relations and turn them into a durable détente through economic and political cooperation, and the implementation of a Western economic policy based on growth—not "Thatcherite" austerity.

Everything that Alexander Haig has done since assuming office has been aimed to prevent this from happening. From his first irresponsible charge that the Soviet Union runs international terrorism, to his latest dismissal of Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev's offer for arms control negotiations as "mere propaganda," Haig has determined to set the United States and the Soviet Union on a course of permanent confrontation. This would mean a head-on clash with France and West Germany too, unless domestic destabilizations run by Haig's friends in the Socialist International succeeded in ousting Schmidt and Giscard from office.

But in the leaders of France and West Germany, Haig confronts skilled and experienced statesmen who are moving to outflank such maneuvers and establish personal rapport with the new U.S. President. Relieved at the demise of the Carter administration, Schmidt and Giscard hope to give Reagan a crash course in foreign policy and economics, bringing the U.S. into their own war-avoidance alliance.

Even before Reagan's inauguration, Schmidt visited the President-elect in Washington, confounding the efforts of Haig and other Reagan aides to keep the meeting short, social, and devoid of substance. Now, as the chancellor's official visit nears, Schmidt has given orders

to his cabinet forbidding any public griping about Reagan's policies—even though many of the President's statements to date are by no means popular in Bonn.

In a radio interview March 8, Schmidt affirmed he would "certainly" urge Reagan to take up Brezhnev's offer for a summit meeting. Speaking the next day, Schmidt stressed that Brezhnev's offer of a moratorium on the deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe should be discussed by the West, even if it is "not just what we would like." Schmidt added that Brezhnev's offer is particularly important "at this time"—an evident reference to the transition underway in Washington.

President Giscard has already put relations with Reagan on a cordial footing through personal transatlantic telephone conversations. In an interview with *Le Figaro Magazine* Feb. 28, Giscard spelled out the role he sees for France as the "interlocutor for peace":

"In the coming months, France could play a major role on the international plane. At present, it is the chosen interlocutor of the two superpowers. . . . France wants to be and must be an interlocutor for peace. I know that when the word peace is used, some people compare it—referring to experiences like the Munich experience—to notions of resignation or national retreat. But it does not mean that. The search for peace consists of studying all possible ways of settling problems before their solution leads to catastrophe. If we need to defend ourselves, we will do so; but first, we must do all we can to explore the other possibilities."

Asked whether it was true that the French people most fear "the Soviet threat to Europe," Giscard frankly denied it. "Their main fear is war and destruction," he said. "If a war breaks out in the world, it will be fought once again in Western Europe where the accumulation and concentration of arms is such that it would be the end of West Europe, a relatively glorious end but the end just the same."

To counter the Franco-German war-avoidance policy, media sources ranging from the *Baltimore Sun* and *New York Times* to the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* have suddenly begun to put out the line that France has become the most Atlanticist of the allies, advocating a

hard line against the Soviets and a cutback in East-West trade, whereas the Federal Republic of Germany is an unreliable ally, "the odd man out," weakened by "neutralist tendencies."

This is a total distortion, as a leading French commentator with close ties to the presidential palace wrote in *Le Figaro* newspaper March 11. Paul-Marie de la Gorce attributed such speculations to "some Atlanticist circles in France," and called them "rather absurd and even a little bit indecent." The fact is, he wrote, that for the first time in postwar history "France is no longer isolated," and the convergence of French and German policies allows for "a functioning European independent foreign policy."

Far from curtailing economic ties with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, both France and West Germany are expanding them. The French are calling for an end to the European Community ban on sales of grain to the Soviet Union, and are in fact planning to sell the Soviets 600,000 tons of wheat. West German trade with the Soviet Union increased 10 percent during the past year, with agricultural exports increasing fivefold. Despite pressure from the United States to curtail the scope of the huge deal for construction of a pipeline to supply Soviet natural gas to Western Europe, the West Germans reiterated during the past week that they are as committed as ever to the project. The only problem involved is what interest rates to charge Moscow for loans, since the high interest policy of the U.S. Federal Reserve has pushed up German interest rates above what the Soviet Union is willing to pay.

At the annual international trade fair in Leipzig, East Germany this week, new deals were clinched for the supply of West German coal to East Germany to make up for the losses in coal deliveries from Poland. The head of West Germany's mission to East Germany, Klaus Bölling, met with East German leader Erich Honecker, and the two agreed that relations should be improved, and that relations between the two Germanies should be insulated as much as possible from tensions in global East-West relations.

Defense and arms control

When Schmidt comes to Washington, one of the top agenda items will be U.S. efforts to get West Germany to increase its military budget and to deploy its forces to the Persian Gulf and other areas outside the NATO region. Numerous statements coming from Bonn make it clear what Schmidt will say: 1) deploying West German forces outside NATO is completely out of the question for constitutional reasons, and 2) rising defense expenditures are contingent on the lowering of U.S. interest rates and an improvement in the world economic situation. An official Bonn government spokesman, Lothar Ruehl, said so at an international conference of

the Wehrkunde defense group in Munich on Feb. 22. (see *EIR* March 10).

This view was officially reiterated at a meeting of the West German cabinet on March 11, following the announcement by Defense Minister Hans Apel that the increase in the defense budget would not meet the 3 percent target set by NATO. "Chancellor Schmidt thanked Apel for already successful economizing measures in the sum of 1.3 billion deutschemarks," reported the financial daily *Handelsblatt*. "The cabinet stressed their view that German defense responsibilities could be met, because the big procurement programs such as the Tornado fighter and the Leopard II tank would not be cut. The cabinet concluded that the defense capabilities of the Federal Republic of Germany were premised on its ability to finance defense. Economic stability and growth capability are the preconditions for a new division of labor within NATO."

Schmidt will seek to convince President Reagan that Brezhnev's offer for a moratorium on deployment of "Euromissiles" deserves discussion and negotiation, within the framework of the overall Franco-German war-avoidance strategy. In his radio interview March 8, the chancellor explained why the achievement of a military equilibrium would not be enough. "Even if a military balance is a necessary prerequisite for any peace, that does not mean submission to the will of the other side," he said, "this equilibrium alone does not suffice to safeguard peace. What must be added is the sentiment for peace, the will for peace, the willingness to understand the other side, the willingness to take his interests, his requirements into account, the readiness for compromise."

Asked whether negotiations with Moscow could make it unnecessary to carry out NATO's 1979 decision to deploy new missiles in Europe, Schmidt replied: "I believe that it can still be avoided. . . . I am convinced that these negotiations will materialize. Unfortunately, the offer made by Mr. Brezhnev in this respect in his speech at the party congress does not go far enough. It even lags behind ideas he stated once before in East Berlin on Oct. 6, 1979. At the time, he was ready to withdraw a large part of the Soviet Eurostrategic missiles behind the Urals in addition to the moratorium. Though this would not have meant much, because the range of these weapons is roughly 4,000 kilometers, it would have been a gesture toward removing the pressure exerted on Europe."

Schmidt concluded: "Ronald Reagan told me in a talk shortly after his election and prior to his inauguration in Washington that he is prepared to negotiate with the Soviet Union, in particular on arms limitation. . . . Surely he will not be an easy negotiating partner who can be taken in—thank God, no. By the way, the Russians will not be easy negotiating partners either."