

## Disinformation on NATO alert status

Reports which circulated widely in the West German press during the second week in November, alleging a reduced alert status for NATO nuclear missiles, have turned out to be the product of a disinformation campaign aimed to further the "decoupling" of the Western alliance.

The reports, which originated with a high-level source in the Bonn defense ministry, claimed that NATO's Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) status had been changed, so that instead of requiring as little as three minutes to launch, it would take up to nine hours.

The disinformation line was put out by the same newspapers that had recently endorsed parliamentarian Bernard Friedmann's proposal for the reunification of Germany (see p. 37). Commentator Rüdiger Moniac wrote an article in *Die Welt* on Nov. 10, titled "NATO Changes Alarm Plan for Nuclear Units; Extremely High Readiness Not Required." "NATO has changed the alarm procedures for their nuclear units stationed in Western Europe," he claimed, "and essentially reduced their readiness status. In the future, no nuclear weapons of ranges between 2,500 and 500 kilometers will be kept in the so-called 'QRA' readiness. . . . Informed circles in the alliance say that this form of alarm readiness corresponds neither to the political nor the military realities of NATO countries in Western Europe in their relationship to the Warsaw Pact. . . . This also goes for the Pershing IIa, maintained by the German Air Force, as well as Pershing II of the American Army, and the cruise missiles in England, Holland, Belgium, and Italy. For the nuclear-capable aircraft in certain NATO air forces in Western Europe, the alarm readiness has also been reduced, and indeed such that the launchers are now to be deployable within nine hours."

Then on Nov. 18, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* carried the following brief report: "The 100-hectare missile base at Bodelsberg near Kempten (Oberallgau District), where the nuclear warheads for the Pershing I are stationed, has been closed by the military. These were 150 soldiers of the U.S. armed forces and the Bundeswehr. The removal followed in the context of the altered readiness status by NATO for the longer-range nuclear medium-range systems, said a spokesman of the Rocket Unit 1 in Landsberg on Monday. According to this spokesman, NATO no longer thinks it is necessary to maintain the QRA status for all missile positions. This

measure serves to stress the defensive character of NATO armed forces, said Colonel Dieter Reindl, commander of the missile Geschwader 1. The base at Bodelsberg is still in operation for training and exercise purposes."

A NATO spokesman, asked to comment on these reports, stressed, "It is standing alliance policy never to make any statements about the alert status of our forces, certainly not our nuclear forces. . . . If I were you, I would look for the politician who wants to hang his hat on this one, and you know you ought to look for him in Bonn, because we aren't getting this press flap from any place except West Germany."

The politician widely believed to be responsible for the disinformation "leak" is the Free Democratic Party-linked State Secretary in the defense ministry, Lothar Ruelh.

"The missile alert status is not abandoned, but only modified," commented a spokesman of the Bonn defense ministry. He explained that the decision to change the status means that the standing alert on the missile-launching site is no longer necessary, because of NATO's early-warning capabilities (AWACS, for example), which leave time for evaluation. A Warsaw Pact surprise attack on NATO is not possible under these conditions.

Whether this was discussed at the NATO Nuclear Planning Group meeting at Gleneagles, Scotland, Oct. 13-14, the official was unable to confirm.

The spokesman also explained that the manpower previously mobilized "around the clock" at the missile launchers is kept in a "rear alert position," and can be mobilized in a "relatively short period of time." How much time is required, he would not say, but admitted that "initial news reports that the manpower would be abandoned were not accurate and were corrected in a press release issued by our ministry."

### 'A political disaster'

A senior German military expert characterized the publication of the report as highly detrimental politically. It hit amid the "post-Reykjavik" discussion of a U.S. nuclear disengagement from Western Europe, in a situation where there is a growing clamor from U.S. figures like Henry Kissinger and Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) for a U.S. troop withdrawal, and from European "decouplers" for an accommodation with Moscow. What most strengthens the hand of the European advocates of such a "New Yalta" deal, is any suggestion that the U.S./NATO nuclear umbrella over Western Europe no longer functions.

As *EIR*'s source explained, "The point is that people are reading this politically as a signal to expect a purely conventional attack, countered with a purely conventional defense. . . . If I have QRA, as a political-doctrinal measure, that means that I say I am no longer going to force the enemy to go nuclear. The Russians can forego starting the nuclear exchange. . . . It is not clear whether a signal effect politically was intended, or whether it was a leak. In practice, it means close to nothing; but as a signal, it is a disaster."