

1987

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Ulrich Weisser

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### Recommended Citation

Weisser, Ulrich (1987) "The German-American Debate on Security and Strategy," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 40 : No. 3 , Article 5.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol40/iss3/5>

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## The German-American Debate on Security and Strategy

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Captain Ulrich Weisser, Federal German Navy

**D**uring the nearly 40 years that have passed since the formation of the Atlantic alliance, relations between the United States and its European allies have withstood various crises and controversies. Fortunately, most of the differences of opinion have been short-lived, as reason and understanding generally have prevailed on both sides of the Atlantic.

Time and again the fundamental reason for discord and misunderstanding has proved to be insufficient knowledge on the part of both Americans and Europeans in regard to the motives of each other. For example, American ignorance of the diversity and degree of European defense efforts, as well as European ignorance of U.S. efforts to protect the economic and security interests of the free world, are products of this communication gap.

Occasional severe criticism of the Allies' stringent defense budgets, expressed by U.S. Congressmen and media, is felt to be inappropriate. This is particularly galling to the Federal Republic of Germany whose conventional armed forces in Central Europe constitute 50 percent of the land forces, 60 percent of the main battle tanks, a third of the combat aircraft, and 70 percent of the naval forces in the Baltic Sea. Should mobilization be required, the personnel strength of the Federal Armed Forces can be tripled.

In addition to its conventional force and mobilization base, the Federal Republic of Germany is host nation to in excess of 400,000 Allied servicemen. More than 100 major exercises and more than 600,000 military flights make the Federal Republic of Germany the preferred country for military exercises within NATO. No other country has such a concentration of nuclear weapons on its soil. The ruling Federal Government succeeded in enforcing the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles, despite massive internal opposition, in order to maintain the external security of the Federal Republic of Germany and to demonstrate its trustworthiness as an ally.

Against this background, undifferentiated U.S. initiatives such as those launched by Senators Nunn and Roth—requesting not only Denmark and Greece, but also the Federal Republic of Germany, to provide more

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Captain Weisser, former military assistant to German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Chancellor Helmut Kohl, is currently on the faculty of the German General Staff and

conventional forces—appear to be inappropriate, even if such initiatives result from U.S. domestic pressures. On both sides of the Atlantic, the interrelationship between internal policy and foreign policy often is not sufficiently appreciated. As a whole, the U.S. security policy is characterized by a high degree of continuity because it is determined by unalterable objectives, political and geostrategic constants, as well as clearly defined interests. However, in contrast to this continuity there are surprise day-to-day policy maneuvers in which the United States demonstrates a lack of understanding of friends, allies, and political opponents from other continents and cultures.

Former Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt is the prototypical European critic who occasionally appears almost to despair of U.S. foreign and security policies. Rarely has a German politician's security policy been influenced so strongly—above all, his strategic conceptions—by the wealth of ideas from the American strategic community. However, his unsettling experiences in dealing with some of the foreign policy detours of Presidents Carter and Reagan have induced in Schmidt a loss of faith in his ability to calculate and measure U.S. foreign policy.

For example, Chancellor Schmidt's experience with the extremely difficult neutron weapon debate, and the U.S. decision in this matter, was somewhat traumatic. With an unprecedented strong effort, the German Chancellor succeeded in winning agreement from a large majority for the introduction of neutron weapons into the arsenal of theater nuclear weapons in Central Europe. Shortly afterwards, he was dumbfounded when President Carter, following a working prayer breakfast with his adviser, Andrew Young, decided, unilaterally and without prior notice or consultation, not to deploy neutron weapons in Europe. Another source for strain on German-American relations was the controversial discussion on the natural gas pipeline from the Soviet Union to Central Europe. While the Carter and Reagan administrations strongly urged West German withdrawal from this project, and exerted pressure on European NATO nations to apply economic sanctions against the Soviet Union because of the Afghanistan and Poland crises, the simultaneous and contradictory resumption of U.S. wheat shipments to the Soviet Union could not be ignored.

Today, whenever he appears in public, Helmut Schmidt does not hesitate to illuminate his experiences with colorful examples. A recent and most prominent example that illustrates his perceptions was President Reagan's announcement of a Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in his address on 23 March 1983; it came as a complete surprise to the alliance. With his criticism of U.S. foreign policy, the former Federal Chancellor makes himself the spokesman for many Europeans. He accuses the United States of dallying with the self-respect and sovereignty of its allies in an inexcusable way, and lacking concern for those measures and gestures required to maintain working relations with the other superpower.

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Those who wish to deal with Central European security policy, who want to understand the sometimes averse German reactions to U.S. comments on strategy and arms control, and who want to give German-American relations a new quality of mature partnership, must come to appreciate the factors that heavily influence German security policy. I find the primary issues of concern to be:

- the geostrategic situation of the Federal Republic of Germany;
- the fact that the Federal Republic is a nonnuclear power; and
- the German dependency on raw materials and markets in all parts of the world.

First, the Federal Republic of Germany is particularly exposed because of its location at the juncture between two different social systems, and its key geopolitical position in Central Europe. The division of Germany and the isolated location of Berlin further increase Bonn's vulnerability to political and military blackmailing. The strategic contour of the Federal Republic of Germany is characterized by a common north-south border with the Warsaw Pact of more than 1,000 miles, the depth in places being no more than 100 to 200 miles. About 30 percent of the population live in a 60-mile strip along the intra-German border, and this same strip contains 25 percent of the country's industrial capacity. This highly industrialized and densely populated country is extremely vulnerable and could not be easily defended in a conventional war.

The Federal Republic of Germany is not capable of changing this vulnerable geostrategic situation, and it must try to ameliorate the tensions that built the Berlin Wall. Therefore, the Federal Republic of Germany pursues a policy aimed at reducing tensions between East and West, as the sensitive relationship between the two German states is directly related to that between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Elements of this policy include elimination of causes of conflict, confidence-building measures, and arms control and disarmament. Bonn's goal for arms control seeks to diminish the lethal risk of a nuclear war restricted to Central Europe and simultaneously reduce the threat of being surprised and overwhelmed by the superiority of the Warsaw Pact's conventional forces.

The Federal Republic of Germany is well aware that it can pursue such a policy only while enjoying the support of the alliance; without reinforcement, it is incapable of self-defense. As a result, West Germany maintains strategic interrelations with its allies and acts as a buffer for the alliance in Europe, providing its allies with security. Accordingly, seven of these allies provide protection by means of their armed forces which are situated on German soil during peacetime. Thus, *multinationality* is an essential principle of German security. Any aggressor would be at war with eight NATO countries right from the very beginning. The presence of strong U.S. Armed Forces on German soil is an essential contribution to the common defense of common

interests and values and also the visible link between conventional and nuclear deterrence: the nuclear powers of the United States and the Soviet Union directly confront each other in Germany. At the same time, the two world powers are the essential "guarantor powers" for Germany as a whole. This linkage explains why the Federal Republic of Germany reacts with such sensitivity to any signal indicating a U.S. force reduction.

Presence and multinationality are closely related to the German demand for a cohesive *forward defense* near the border. Forward defense for the protection of the German population needs to be conducted in such a way that the collateral damages caused by friendly defensive operations are limited to the greatest extent possible. It is designed to compel the aggressor to discontinue his aggression as far east as possible, and thus terminate the conflict quickly, because Germany cannot afford a long war which would destroy the territory it seeks to preserve.

Damage limitation and rapid termination of conflict are closely connected with nuclear capability. The voluntary renunciation of nuclear weapons by the Federal Republic of Germany implies a particular dependence on the United States inasmuch as the Federal Republic's security is a direct function of the U.S. nuclear guarantee. This dependence implies not only that the Federal Republic of Germany can become the object of far-reaching U.S. decisions, but that both the Germans and Americans also must bear the risks of a nuclear escalation. This problematic interrelationship—the menacing dimension that war in Central Europe would assume if nuclear weapons were employed, coupled with a feeling of dependence for its survival—has caused a growing uneasiness and even distrust towards the United States during the last few years. Not only the Greens but also a large number of SPD party members are of the opinion that the nuclear weapons deployed in the Federal Republic of Germany would turn Central Europe into a nuclear battlefield—against the will of the German people.

However, such fears can be laid to rest in light of the fundamental interrelationship determining the security policy of both the German and the U.S. Governments. As a result of the close relationship between U.S. and German security interests, the Federal Republic of Germany holds the obligation to reduce the nuclear risk by providing robust conventional forces, while the U.S. Government is under the obligation to develop its strategy in such a way that German interests are sufficiently taken into consideration.

The role of nuclear weapons is clearly defined by NATO's strategy, but that of chemical weapons is somewhat diffused. For example, the United States has formally renounced the first use of chemical weapons, but will take such action suitable to its national interests against any state employing such weapons. The Federal Republic of Germany's policy on the use of chemical weapons is more narrow, as in its judgment, chemical weapons can only be

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used as a reprisal measure in accordance with international law, i.e., their release must be restricted to specific areas and specific times and is legitimate only *during* an enemy attack. Since West Germany is most vulnerable to a chemical weapons attack, it would prefer that the United States assume the response by countering such an assault with long-range nuclear weapons. So far, the United States refuses to consider nuclear escalation as a response to a localized and temporary chemical attack. Given these German concerns which govern the relatively large consensus between the German political parties on the chemical arms issue, it is easy to understand the attendant German interest in withdrawing old stocks of chemical weapons from their soil.

Quite a different dimension of German vulnerability stems from the country's dependence on raw materials and markets in all parts of the world. One-third of the German gross national product and 25 percent of all employment are secured and supported by exports. Consequently, threats to security jeopardize imports of raw material and exports of goods critical to the social and economic stability of the Federal Republic of Germany. Apart from its active and quite substantial foreign aid policy, the Federal Republic of Germany places its confidence primarily with the United States for protection of its economic interests outside the bounds of NATO. Accordingly, there is a twofold German dependence on the United States, i.e., dependence on its nuclear power and its global maritime power. But, this dual need is related to a strategic constellation which has fundamentally changed: German security policy is presently oriented towards the most dangerous case, a large-scale aggression by the Warsaw Pact; it is not prepared for the most probable case—a conflict beginning in a strategic key region of the Third World and subsequently spreading to Europe.

**G**enerally speaking, the current debate on strategy can be focused on two key issues—the asymmetry between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and the tension between NATO's regional strategy and U.S. global strategy.

Since NATO's founding, geography has dictated different levels of risk for NATO-Europe and North America. Besides the threats of short-range and intermediate-range Soviet nuclear forces, the European NATO countries face the potential threat of superior conventional Warsaw Pact forces. There is no such multiple threat for the United States. The primary security concern for the United States is protection of the North American Continent from Soviet strategic intercontinental weapons. Granted, the United States must consider the global effects of the Soviet intervention capability, but from an American point of view, the greatest risk lies in being forced into a nuclear

confrontation with the Soviet Union because of the existing conventional force disparity. In the event of a conflict, the implication is that the United States would have to balance the risk to its very existence with the common security of its allies and all of the dangers involved. While on the other side of the coin, regionally limited conventional war and/or nuclear war in the Central European theater—in the course of which the superpowers spare each other—would represent the greatest risk for Europeans and, in particular, the Germans.

Therefore, the first key issue arising for better relations in the alliance is changing strategic conditions and how, in light of the military balance of forces and the strategies applied by both sides, can a “community of risk” between the United States and NATO-Europe be achieved; a community of risk that protects the security interests fairly on both sides of the Atlantic. In other words, how can we maintain the political strategic unity of North America, the North Atlantic, and NATO-Europe in the future. The second key issue refers to the interrelationship of security policy developments both inside and outside the confines of NATO. Here, Americans and Europeans view things differently. Two examples: first, all segments of the world are included in the political and strategic developments of U.S. foreign and security policies, while the Europeans confine themselves to a regional approach; second, the United States sees the East-West relations in a global political and strategic context, while the Europeans are primarily concerned with Europe.

Again and again, the globally oriented U.S. political and strategic concerns conflict with the regional perspective of its European allies. The U.S. media, Congress, and successive U.S. administrations have shown less and less understanding of the fact that most Europeans simply refuse to take notice of strategic developments occurring outside NATO territory, not to mention their inability to initiate any corrective measures.

As a personal observation, I can appreciate the difficulty that U.S. critics of NATO Allies in Europe face when trying to understand that there cannot and should not be uniform political reactions to Soviet expansion in Southwest Asia (occupation of Afghanistan), or in Southeast Asia, in Africa and in Central America. From an American perspective, the Europeans tend to place responsibility for world-political crisis management on the United States and would endeavor to avoid any European military engagement outside Europe. Understandably, this attitude is difficult for Americans to comprehend—they accept it, but with their teeth grinding. If then, U.S. crisis management is harshly criticized in Europe, the impact on harmony within the Atlantic alliance remains inevitable.

One cannot fail to notice that the increasingly critical attitude of Americans towards their European allies has received an added impetus in the wake of military action conducted in April 1986 against Libya. U.S.

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intervention in Libya has made evident the dissimilarities between Washington and NATO-Europe in their political thinking, decisionmaking and action. Both sides of the Atlantic are without consensus regarding the criteria by which military power can be employed. The intervention in Libya made the Europeans aware of the fact that Americans act when they consider it to be imperative for political, moral, or strategic reasons. They do not adhere to the slogan "peace at any price." The refusal of most European allies to follow the United States along this path has left the impression that NATO-Europe has made peace at any price its leading principle and might no longer be willing to defend freedom and democracy. Critics of U.S. politics do not regard military means as an approved instrument to combat the causes of terrorism. This view is stimulated by their desire to avoid involvement, against their will, in conflicts outside NATO territory, resulting from risky U.S. foreign policy.

A different approach to strategic political developments, on both regional and global levels, is reflected in quite a special way in the role of nuclear and naval forces. Since the Soviet Union has risen to the status of nuclear world power and at the same time to naval world power, any Soviet expansive or aggressive action, in the U.S. perspective, has global implications. As a consequence of this recognition, the United States understands that its relationship with the competing superpower—compounded by possession of such weaponry by both factions—forcibly demands a worldwide applicable and working strategy. In other words, the differing European and American East-West security assessments—a regional versus global approach—weigh heavily in each country's defense policy. The NATO-Europe notion that a regional strategy is sufficient for a regional Soviet threat differs with the U.S. conviction that what NATO-Europe sees as a regional threat often requires a global strategy.

Behaving consistently, when dealing with this problem, the United States has tried to enlist its European allies to support its global strategic concept. NATO-European countries see the leading Atlantic power as trying to fulfill two expectations. Their interpretation is that, on the one hand, the U.S. expectation for Europe is to increase direct and indirect contributions to the protection of common interests because U.S. forces are under a great strain to meet global obligations; on the other hand, the states of NATO-Europe are expected to make dramatic additional contributions to conventional defense in order to decrease the nuclear risk to the United States.

The European interpretation of strategy, subscribed to by the Federal Republic of Germany, rests on the premise that the first-use threat of nuclear weapons continues to be the core of the deterrence doctrine. Only if the Soviet Union is uncertain as to whether NATO will respond with nuclear weapons in an early phase of the conflict will it show restrictive behavior in



its risk calculation before, and also after, the outbreak of hostilities. The U.S. understanding of strategy, on the other hand, regards nuclear weapons, more and more, as weapons of last resort. Its aim is to raise the nuclear threshold as high as possible so as to avoid uncontrolled escalation which, eventually, would engulf U.S. territory. Though conceptional differences remain, both sides of the Atlantic recognize the need to strengthen the conventional component of NATO's strategy. Here the NATO partners permit themselves to be influenced by the United States, though not necessarily by the same motives.

The critical interrelationship between the nuclear and the conventional component of strategy is also reflected in the Strategic Defense Initiative. The United States has three obvious reasons for pursuing SDI: it wants and must reduce the vulnerability of its nuclear strategic systems and at the same time strengthen the backbone of NATO's nuclear strategic deterrence; it wants to reduce its risk as a nuclear guarantor power, resulting from the disparity of conventional forces in Europe; and over the long term, it wants to exchange a nuclear strategy of deterrence for a system of mutually assured survivability.

Washington seeks political support from its allies for the SDI program, not only because it wants to develop a common alliance strategy, but also, in order to strengthen its position in negotiations with the Soviet Union. It wants to be the spokesman for a cohesive Western camp. Yet NATO-Europe sees risks in SDI and wants to ensure that their American allies consider their doubts and concerns.

Specifically, the Federal Republic of Germany sees SDI impacting on three basic principles of German politics:

- As a nonnuclear power, the very existence of the Federal Republic relies on a visible and functioning tie to the nuclear strategic deterrence. This can be provided only by the United States. If the political unity of the alliance were to decay, zones of differing security interests would develop, and European security interests would be decoupled from those of the United States. The Federal Republic would then have cause to fear for its continued security.

- Bonn must avoid involvement in any increased tensions between East and West in Central Europe caused by an SDI controversy between the superpowers. West Germany would be in the vortex of these tensions and such a development would have adverse consequences for the relationship between the two German states.

- The Federal Republic has one of the world's leading industrial economies; however, it suffers from a lack of raw materials. Therefore, it is indispensable that it maintain its leadership in terms of technological progress to continue functioning as a market leader in the world economy.

For the first time, the European allies of the United States—this applies both to the European nuclear and nonnuclear powers of the alliance—are

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confronted with the danger of being decoupled from the United States *strategically and technologically* if their political management is not effective. Such is the basis for the German-American SDI agreement concluded on 27 March 1986. The agreement satisfies the basic premises for German approval. It provides for a fair partnership, a technological two-way street, and it ensures that German companies, having obtained SDI orders, do not simply supply results against payment but are allowed to utilize technological knowledge gained in connection with SDI for their own purposes. Finally, this agreement formalizes the political support of West Germany for SDI.

However, the German support of SDI cannot rely solely on a broad internal consensus. On the contrary, the extremely heated and controversial SDI debate has made it clear that the consensus lost on NATO's double-track decision will not be regained in favor of the basic issues of security policy for some time to come. The SDI debate has shown that coalition government and opposition are divided on the contents and reliability of NATO's strategy, the interrelationship of strategy and arms control, the degree of opening towards the East, and the future organization of German-American relations.

Recent opinion polls confirmed again that two-thirds of the German population look upon the Western defense alliance as the only instrument for preservation of peace and consider the Federal Government's peace policy successful. However, one must remember that about 20 percent of the Germans in this Republic prefer a neutralized Europe. Besides being alarming, such neutralistic trends find agreement in the opposition parties and support from anti-American elements of radical wings.

Recently, Federal Chancellor Dr. Kohl outlined his position on German-American relations as follows: "The North Atlantic Alliance, and our friendship and partnership with the United States, are the foundations of German security policy. A strong and united Alliance alone is able to secure peace in freedom. The Alliance guarantees our independence. It serves peace in Europe and in the world and continues to be the basis of a real policy of détente. Good and trusting relations with the United States, based on the ties of partnership, continue to remain vital for us Germans in the future as well. . . . Any form of anti-Americanism is an initial step towards a neutralization of Central Europe and hence the Federal Republic of Germany. Anti-Americanism is most certainly the virus or germ of a dissolution of the Alliance."

**A**s a continuing observer of the German-American debate on issues of security and strategy, my impression is that it has gained a new quality. The problems to be solved generally fit into one of two groupings. On the one hand there is the question of the future character of German-American relations; while on the other, there is the question of whether the objectives and contents of a strategy equally meet American and German

interests. The growing differences in U.S. and German opinions on these questions strongly suggest that discussions on future concepts of strategy should be resumed as soon as possible.

Required is an intensive transatlantic dialogue on the contents of strategy, accompanied by domestic discussion. We cannot allow a situation to develop whereby we are to live with a strategy which meets with alliance consent but does not meet with the people's consent. This demands our politicians be forthright and candid. It is essential to make clear to the citizenry that we cannot withdraw overnight from nuclear energy nor from nuclear deterrence. The bitter truth is that nuclear weapons have become a "necessity," and will remain so until we find an alternative to *Pax Atomica*.

Developments in European security are likely to pose significant burdens on the Federal Republic of Germany in the next few years. Bonn will face pressure not only to contribute an "adequate" share for the increase of NATO's conventional potential but to lend support necessary to ensure its vital interests are protected outside NATO territory. As usual, this will require a fair balance between means and ends. While the North Atlantic alliance and the European community remain the two essential fields of action for our security policy, it will become increasingly urgent to supplement the European and Atlantic dimensions of our security policy with one that is global.

We will best be able to adapt German-American relations to current conditions, and at the same time keep our friendship with America alive, if we Germans are ready to apply, with reason, the following four principles.

- North America and Western Europe are committed to the same values—democracy, rule of law, protection of the individual, and the right of self-determination of nations. German interests demand that these values be supported.

- The commitment of the Federal Republic of Germany to the West is irrevocable. This is precisely the reason why the Germans expect all of their partners in the alliance to support the German people's claim to the right of self-determination. This was stressed by President Reagan last August when he called for the removal of the European division as a historical goal for U.S. foreign policy.

- German respect and integrity require that its nation be accepted and treated as an equal ally and, quite naturally, its allies expect reciprocity and common sense in German management of regional security matters. However, to expect the West German people to march to a "different drummer," without previous consultation, is inconsistent with their understanding of sovereignty.

- It must be evident to opponents and friends alike, that the Germans are ready to make sacrifices if the values we cherish are threatened. For this purpose, it is necessary for us to reach an agreement with our European and

U.S. allies on the question of a moral, political and strategic framework by which military means can or should be employed.

I believe that these four principles provide a perspective of German-American relations as recognized in Washington today. Recently Richard Burt, U.S. Ambassador in Bonn, delivered a speech on this subject that described the concept of a "mature partnership." He said, "Both countries recognize that they must intensify their endeavors to understand the other nation's society and claims. . . . Better than ever before we are capable of developing the new type of relations which I call 'mature partnership.' It is a new type of partnership different from that existing in the fifties. It is a more balanced partnership where rights and duties are more evenly distributed on both sides."

The nature of this perspective contributes to a sound and solid basis for the friendship between our two countries, a friendship which has already achieved so much for our people.

