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Perspectives of German Security Policy

Captain Ulrich Weisser, Federal German Navy

There are critical voices questioning the viability of Nato strategy and in the same breath are demanding success in arms control. Concurrently, doubts are being raised as to whether a security approach confined to the North Atlantic region will suffice in the future, since crises in other parts of the world clearly have repercussions for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). However, the heated debate about these important questions frequently suffers from two shortcomings. First, there is an almost insurmountable barrier in terms of understanding and language between the politicians and experts concerned with the difficult problems of strategy and arms control on one hand, and the public who have to live with the effects of this policy on the other. Second, owing to the preoccupation with highly topical subjects, the goals and precepts of our security policy are easily forgotten.

There are a number of factors that govern and condition German security policy. We are a divided country at the heart of Europe. We have common frontiers with nine other States which provides us with more neighbors than any other country in the world. We live at the dividing line between East and West, and our position and our history imply an obligation. Our situation requires that we not only come to grips with communist societies, both intellectually and politically, but that we also seek understanding and cooperation with them.

The Federal Republic of Germany is a modern industrialized country with the political weight of a medium-sized power, whose voice is heard but whose influence is limited; it is not a nuclear power, nor does it intend to become one. My country is not self-reliant and cannot defend itself on its own, consequently, we need allies and trading partners. Our integration in the world economy requires open markets and unimpeded access to raw materials and energy. We need free and safe sea routes for peaceful trade and for bringing in military reinforcements from overseas.

The FRG has to take account of all these factors in pursuing the goals of its foreign and security policy, which are:

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- peace and freedom
- economic stability, prosperity and social justice
- protection of the natural environment.

The Atlantic Alliance affords the FRG peace and freedom as well as protection against external threats. The basis for security is a functioning military balance between East and West. For many years the discussion of the military balance was confined to comparing the number of weapons possessed by Nato and the Warsaw Pact. Today the emphasis is less on quantifiable military capabilities than on questions of the political, strategic and moral viability of the respective security concept. For instance, the effectiveness of the principle of deterrence is increasingly called into question and its moral legitimacy queried.

These doubts are focused on nuclear weapons in particular. The spectrum of opinions ranges from undiminished faith in the peacekeeping potential of deterrence, as practiced by the Atlantic Alliance, to rejection of the principle of deterrence. For example by American bishops, who, in view of the immoral effects of a universally destructive weapon, regard the mere threat to use such a weapon as immoral.

This diversity of opinion is not a sign of weakness but a testimony to our peoples grappling with security as it affects our very existence. It is a basic characteristic of free Western democracies that the widespread public debate is provided with an abundance of information. Yet, this does not make it any easier to understand such complex problems as nuclear strategy and deterrence. Precisely for this reason three fundamental points must be made quite clear.

First: A nuclear and a conventional war can only be prevented if the military forces are capable of responding to an attack and of engaging in conventional and nuclear defense.

Second: Waging war under present-day conditions cannot mean "winning" it. Even in a conventional war it will be less and less possible to speak of victors and vanquished because the effects of conventional weapons alone are so devastating that there can only be vanquished parties to a war.

Third: Given that the goal of deterrence is to prevent a war, in the event of this deterrence failing, one of the major aims is to end war and restore peace quickly.

From these three concepts we can derive the following. Deterrence means exerting an influence on the will of a potential aggressor, making him opt for peace when choosing between war and peace. If the risk is incalculably high and unacceptably great damage is anticipated, deterrence is effective and the decision will be taken in favor of peace. The risk and anticipated damage are

dependent on the defensive capability of the forces of the country or alliance that is attacked. The will and capacity for defense must be materially visible to the potential aggressor, otherwise, the risk for him would be quantifiable as worth taking and deterrence would fail. In short, deterrence is a peace-preserving principle, which is militarily sensible and morally justified.

The strategy of flexible response which has been valid since 1967 envisages three types of response in order to counter any form of aggression appropriately:

Direct Defense. Nato uses the same means as the aggressor employs in launching his attack—for instance, purely conventional defense against a conventional attack. As a result, the aggression fails or the aggressor is confronted with the burden of having to opt for escalation.

Deliberate Escalation. An attack is to be repulsed by changing the quality of the defensive operations through the use of nuclear weapons or by expanding the regional scope of the conflict. The objective is to make the aggressor understand, through the selective use of nuclear weapons, that the prospects of success are not in proportion to the risk he incurs. Moreover, he is to be struck where he is most vulnerable. In the context of deliberate escalation the term “first use of nuclear weapons” comes to mind. In the public debate, it is stated time and again that Nato should forgo this option. In dealing with this issue at its summit meeting in Bonn on 10 June 1982, the Atlantic Alliance stated that none of its weapons will ever be used except in response to attack. There exists no good and compelling reason to separately forgo one element of the spectrum of deterrence. Furthermore, formal renunciation would completely eliminate the risk for the Soviet Union of having to reckon with the use of nuclear weapons by Nato.

Apart from direct defense and deliberate escalation there is a:

General Nuclear Response. The threat of this response is Nato’s strongest deterrent and takes into consideration the use of Nato’s most powerful military response. It is directed mainly against the nuclear strategic potential of the aggressor as well as his economic and social existence.

With these three types of response constituting our strategy the aim is to ensure that the type, scope and timing of the response is not calculable for the aggressor; he must reckon with the conflict being expanded and escalated—an inestimable risk for him. In other words, this high risk of incalculable and inevitable unacceptable damage is meant to make the potential adversary opt for peace when choosing between war or peace.

In the pursuit of this strategy Nato requires certain military means—intercontinental strategic weapons, intermediate and short-range nuclear systems, and conventional forces.

These three categories make up the Nato Triad. The three elements of the Triad complement each other but *cannot* replace one another. The deterrent effect of the Triad is dependent on each element being credible and on all

three elements being linked to one another through escalation. The Triad is designed as it must be, to afford Nato wide and flexible scope for action.

The second strike capability of the two superpowers—their capacity for assured nuclear destruction—is based on intercontinental missiles stored in bunkers, long-range ballistic missiles that can be launched from nuclear submarines, and long-range manned bombers.

These nuclear strategic potentials of the United States and the Soviet Union are more or less evenly balanced. Advantages in one potential are offset by advantages elsewhere in the other. In the triad of the American systems, submarine-launched missiles are the most numerous; the Soviet Union relies more on heavy ground-launched missiles, whose precise accuracy makes the American land-based missiles vulnerable. The modernization program initiated by President Reagan in 1981 is designed to close this “window of vulnerability,” as the President calls it, and at the same time seeks to maintain a balance with Soviet nuclear arms. This balance has evolved in the last two decades, during the period in which the United States deliberately relinquished its superiority in strategic nuclear weapons.

In the early 1960s the United States possessed over 7,000 strategic nuclear weapons, and the Soviet Union less than 500. Under those circumstances the Soviet Union could attack neither military nor civilian targets in America by nuclear means because the Soviet arsenal of nuclear weapons was numerically insufficient and technically inefficient. A Soviet attack on American bomber and missile bases would have necessitated use of a large part of the small arsenal, without at all diminishing the American capability for a nuclear response. An attack on cities in the United States would have entailed for the Soviet Union the full force of a counterstrike with an armory several times superior. At that time the United States was in a position, by virtue of its strategic nuclear superiority, to make any Soviet attack become an unacceptably high risk for the Soviet Union and hence it could successfully deter such an attack.

During the 1970s the Soviet Union enhanced its strategic arsenal both quantitatively and qualitatively and gained equality with the United States. For the Soviet Union this parity with the other superpower has become the decisive political attribute of its own position as a superpower. Strategic nuclear inferiority is today regarded by the United States and the Soviet Union as tantamount to relinquishing one's superpower status. For the two sides, intercontinental nuclear weapons are the last refuge and in paradox, could be their doom, for their use virtually precludes their survival. In view of this development, it was in the joint interest of the superpowers to preserve the strategic nuclear parity and at the same time curb the nuclear arms race, possibly even securing a stable nuclear stalemate at a lower level.

In the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, these efforts led to an initial success in 1972 in the shape of the SALT I Treaty in which long-range strategic offensive weapons were limited to a specific number. At the same time, the two sides agreed not to take any action which would affect the second strike capability of either side. In 1974 President Ford and General Secretary Brezhnev agreed that in the SALT II Treaty the number of ground and sea-launched intercontinental missiles and of heavy bombers should not exceed a total of 2,400 and that not more than 1,320 of the launchers should be equipped with multiple warheads. At the same time they agreed to aim for a substantial reduction in strategic nuclear weapons in a third round of negotiations. The Geneva Strategic Arms Reduction Talks, known as START, were to serve as the means to achieve this goal.

Like the governments of its European partners in Nato, the Federal Government welcomed the fact that the two superpowers were willing to conclude an arms control agreement. The following points were advanced as the decisive political advantages of such an agreement:

- It would put an end to the strategic nuclear arms race.
- It would give recognition to parity of these weapons as an important element of political stability and thus strengthen the international security situation. At the same time, however, the Europeans realized that strategic nuclear parity between the two superpowers is a double-edged sword for Western Europe.
 - For the United States and the Soviet Union, consolidated and even codified parity in intercontinental nuclear weapons means stable deterrence—neither side stood to gain anything, but both sides would *lose everything* if they were to make use of these weapons.
 - For the European members of Nato, this parity means primarily that the United States has relinquished its strategic nuclear superiority and the advantages it provided.

For we Germans, as a nation without a nuclear deterrent of its own, this loss marks the most important development of the last two decades as there is no longer anything to offset the Warsaw Pact's superiority in conventional weapons. The disadvantages due to geographical asymmetry are now all the more emphasized. What is meant by this?

North America and Western Europe are a political and strategic unity separated by over 6,000 km of Atlantic Ocean. Owing to Western Europe's weakness in conventional forces, vital logistic support and reinforcements from the United States have to be brought on long and hazardous sea routes to Europe. The Warsaw Pact, on the other hand, is a single mass of land. The Soviet Union has not only the advantage of overland routes but can also reinforce its forces in Central Europe over short distances of 600 km or less within a brief space of time. As long as the United States enjoyed strategic

nuclear superiority, this asymmetry and the Warsaw Pact's conventional superiority were not overly important since the Americans, and hence the entire Alliance, benefited by the offsetting advantages of strategic nuclear superiority. However, in the present period of parity there is no superiority left to compensate for this deficiency.

The effects of parity on the conventional balance are not the only consequence. In addition, there is nothing to compensate for the Soviet SS-20 intermediate-range missiles, a rapidly expanding potential not covered by any arms limitation agreement. These missiles are mobile, have a long range, can be reloaded and are equipped with three warheads each.

Western Europe's security situation thus differs fundamentally from that of the United States. The United States is not threatened by either conventional weapons or intermediate-range nuclear missiles. The missile threat to the American continent is offset by corresponding American weapons. Meanwhile, Western Europe is threatened by the Warsaw Pact's superiority in conventional weapons, by the increasing nuclear potential for blackmail on account of Soviet intermediate-range missiles, and finally by Soviet intercontinental missiles which can be used against the United States or against Europe. The Nato two-track decision of December 1979 is designed to remedy this situation. The Soviet Union is faced with the choice of either accepting the same dual nuclear threat as Western Europe—the threat posed by intercontinental and intermediate-range missiles—or of renouncing the category of Eurostrategic weapons together with Nato.

Why then were the Geneva INF talks so difficult? The answer is quite simple. The Soviet Union does not want to grant Western Europe the same security as it is willing to allow the United States and itself. It regards Pershing missiles deployed in Germany, which can reach Soviet territory in about 10 minutes and for which there is no defense, as a new strategic threat to itself; at the same time, the Soviet Union does not accept the fact that Western Europe objects to living with a similar threat, that posed by the SS-20 missiles. These divergent concepts of security and stability are what prevented the Geneva talks from being successful. Furthermore, the subject matter of the talks is difficult and complex—let me cite two examples. First, the two sides must take account of the different conditions and constellations of their alliances, and their respective geographical location. Next, the two sides are trying to prevent the intermediate-range potential from being undermined while enhancing both the long and short-range potentials.

The public debate on the two-track decision touched the central nerve of the peoples of Europe. Even those who were not acquainted with the above discussion would have comprehended by intuition that fundamental issues of our security are involved. The question is whether Western Europe's security is to be of a lower quality than that of the superpowers; the question is whether the Alliance resists the pressure of the Soviet Union, which does

not want to allow the balance to be redressed. Furthermore, the question is whether additional nuclear weapons afford additional security. There is growing doubt as to whether the inconceivable destructive power of these weapons is at all morally justified and whether deterrence and the principle of maintaining a capacity for mutual destruction can safeguard peace in the long run.

In this context I should like to quote from a policy statement of the Federal Chancellor, Dr. Helmut Kohl, made to the Bundestag on 4 May 1983:

“We cannot overnight eliminate nuclear weapons from the face of the earth. Unilateral renunciation of such weapons would not in the least reduce the nuclear threat directed towards us, but only increase the danger of war. There is only one way out of this dilemma: We must drastically reduce the number of nuclear weapons on both sides, those which threaten our existence and those which we are now forced to maintain for the sake of our security....

As long as comprehensive disarmament does not render military means of securing peace superfluous, we remain dependent on the valid and proven Alliance strategy of defence and deterrence.”

In their pastoral letter of 28 April 1983, German Catholic bishops said the following on this subject: “Under the present conditions, deterrence based on equilibrium can still be regarded as morally acceptable—of course not as an end in itself, but as a stage along the path of progressive disarmament.”

The bishops gave a decisive piece of advice to all those who are perturbed at the destructive force of nuclear weapons and do not see the point of military service when they stated: “A soldier serving the cause of safeguarding peace must withstand the strain of arming himself on the instructions of the State, preparing himself for battle and learning to do things which he hopes he will never have to carry out because he wants nothing more strongly than to preserve peace without the use of force and to resolve conflicts through negotiation.”

Even in the face of this debate, which is indeed necessary and conducted in a very serious manner, one must have the courage to put the overall problems into perspective.

In the discussion of the military potentials of Nato and the Warsaw Pact, both the fearful and those toying with fear frequently ignore a fundamental consideration—nowhere else in the world is there a more stable region than in Europe. The East-West security system functions within these regional limits for two simple reasons: First, the Soviet Union knows that Nato will never attack the Warsaw Pact; and, secondly, the Soviet Union knows that any attack on the Atlantic Alliance will culminate in a Third World War, whose outcome it cannot predetermine. Thus, today we may be prepared for the most dangerous conflict, but not for the most probable one.

There is a greater probability today of a crisis in the Middle East, southern Africa or the Caribbean region quickly leading to an open conflict between the superpowers. This is especially true when any of these regions becomes unstable owing to a power vacuum, ethnic rivalry or social tension, and vital interests of the two superpowers or their respective allies are simultaneously affected. On 4 May 1983 Dr. Kohl said the following before the German Bundestag: "Everyone knows that our vital interests go beyond the limits of Nato territory. Critical developments in other parts of the world affect us as well. Accordingly, we need and we practice solidarity and close co-ordination with our allies who assume worldwide responsibility."

Dr. Kohl's remarks lead to the obvious conclusion that future FRG policy will have to perform a difficult dual function. It must preserve the freedom, security and strategic unity of Western Europe, the Atlantic and North America; it must ensure that the political and military balance between East and West is maintained. Also, the members of the Atlantic Alliance must defend their interests worldwide and above all ensure that critical regions in the Third World are stabilized. This is to be achieved by a preventive policy of aid afforded in a spirit of partnership so as to secure greater economic and social stability. In our security calculations, we must therefore take account both the most dangerous and the most probable case; in other words, East-West and North-South policies must be complementary from the point of view of security as well.

Allow me to sum up this essay by making ten essential points:

1. German foreign and security policy is committed to peace in freedom and the principles of democracy, rule of law and social justice.

2. Our history and our geographical position, our dependence in the economic and security spheres, but also our weight as a trading partner and ally—all these factors—do not make our security policy in Europe, in the Alliance and in the world any easier.

3. The Atlantic Alliance has afforded us peace and security for over 30 years now. Its strategy and concept of deterrence and defense have stood the test and remain valid in the 1980s.

4. Functioning deterrence requires an adequate potential of conventional land, air and sea forces, which must be closely linked to the nuclear deterrent.

5. We cannot forgo nuclear weapons as long as the other side possesses them and does not let up in its efforts to expand its conventional superiority.

6. For the time being we must live with weapons of mass destruction and thus with the tension caused by their vast destructive potential, on the one hand, and their peacekeeping effect on the other.

7. The accumulation of increasingly efficient military potentials in East and West and ever rising military expenditures, render to disarmament and

arms control a crisis of urgency not only to the alliances in East and West, but also to the Third World.

8. The East and the West are at the historical crossroads where they must choose between success in disarmament or further nuclear arms. A successful outcome is contingent on the two sides acknowledging each other's security needs.

9. However justified it is to question our security policy, gloomy fear and doubts that offer no alternatives are of little use. Pacifists and radicals promise us peace, but they neglect the values we want to preserve and the realities of this world.

10. German security policy, which keeps idealism and realism in equilibrium, which is equally capable of defense as of dialogue, and which defends our vital interests in the world by relying on the vitality and strength of the Alliance, will continue to ensure peace in freedom in the 1980s.

