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The Persistent Legacy

Germany's Place in the Nuclear Order

By Andreas Lutsch
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Christian F. Ostermann, Leopoldo Nuti and Evan Pikulski, Series Editors

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The Persistent Legacy

Germany's Place in the Nuclear Order

By Andreas Lutsch¹

Germany's non-nuclear status always constituted a significant part of the US-led nuclear order. During the early Cold War, the mere notion of a West Germany armed with nuclear weapons triggered widespread fears. These fears catalyzed a common interest in precluding a nuclear Germany that transcended the Cold War's national and ideological boundaries. They stimulated international non-proliferation policy, especially during the 1960s. In order to retrieve vast parts of its sovereignty and security through membership in the Western European Union and NATO in 1955, West Germany had to fulfill a significant precondition: declare not to produce atomic, biological, and chemical weapons on German soil. This obligation implied the continuation of the Federal Republic of Germany's fundamental dependence on the US-backed security framework, intensifying "sovereign" West Germany's wish to establish some form of co-determination about its fate in case of emergency. In the atomic age, this desire touched the nuclear part of security policy. While it ultimately posed an unsolvable problem, this desire was managed by conceding West Germany a certain voice in NATO's nuclear defense affairs while keeping German control of nuclear weapons out of the question.

The process of integrating Germany into the nuclear sphere of security policy was soon limited by the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968. After years of politico-diplomatic tug-of-war, heated debates in the FRG, and discussions at the interstate level, Bonn finally signed the NPT in 1969, and the treaty came into force for the FRG in 1975. But despite her legal status, the Federal Republic of Germany has never been an ordinary non-nuclear weapons state, even after accession to the NPT.² On the contrary, West Germany remained confronted with the massive military threat of the Warsaw Pact, served as the main host for American nuclear

¹ **Andreas Lutsch** is a PhD candidate in modern history at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany, and an assistant professor at the Julius Maximilian University of Würzburg, Germany. For their helpful suggestions and critiques, the author would like to thank Wolfgang Altenburg, Christian F. Ostermann, Leopoldo Nuti, Timothy McDonnell, Evan Pikulski, and Joseph Pilat.

² Erwin Häckel, "Die nuklearpolitische Interessenlage Deutschlands", *Internationale Politik* 50, 10 (1996), pp. 3–8.

weapons in Europe, contributed to NATO's deterrence capability by supplying nuclear capable delivery vehicles, and took part in nuclear consultation and planning in NATO since the 1960s, where Bonn gained an important position as one of the countries most affected by and concerned with a potential war in Central Europe. In an overall sense, the FRG's status and position mirrored the ambiguity of the nuclear order. This order was shaped during the Cold War and its key structures endure.

This paper focuses on the historical dimensions of the FRG's ambiguous position as a non-nuclear weapons state (NNWS). The paper starts with a brief review of how re-unified Germany tried to reshape its position in the nuclear order in the 21st century amidst rumbling in Berlin about altering Germany's nuclear role in NATO. By advocating for the removal of US nuclear weapons from Germany, Berlin challenged one of the fundamental structures of NATO. These recent developments cannot be understood properly without reflecting on their deeper historical origins. Thus, this paper highlights key aspects of the history of the Euro-Atlantic nuclear order during the 1960s, especially the making of the NPT regime and its relationship to and long-term implications for NATO in its nuclear dimension. The FRG is an exemplary case that demonstrates why historical analysis on the basis of selected declassified files can make a contribution to our broader understanding of international security and add nuance to the contemporary policy discourse.

Leaving nuclear legacies behind?

Since the end of the Cold War, the number of American substrategic nuclear weapons deployed in Western Europe decreased dramatically.³ In conjunction with the development of American-Russian strategic arms control, the importance of nuclear weapons in maintaining

³ There is no standard definition of the term "substrategic nuclear weapons." Sometimes they were referred to as "non-strategic nuclear weapons," "tactical nuclear weapons," or "theater nuclear forces (TNF)." The use of the term "substrategic nuclear weapons" can be noted in recent years and applies to all nuclear weapons "except for those that are for use on strategic delivery vehicles as defined by the New START Treaty": George Perkovich/ Malcolm Chalmers/ Steven Pifer/ Paul Schulte/ Jaclyn Tandler, *Looking beyond the Chicago Summit. Nuclear Weapons in Europe and the Future of NATO*. Washington DC 2012, p. 4.

Euro-Atlantic security has been significantly reduced since the late 1980s.⁴ According to estimates, approximately 160-200 American substrategic nuclear weapons remained in Western Europe in 2012. These stocks consisted of two types of the B61 gravity bomb, designated for use by “dual capable” aircraft.⁵ About 16–20 B61s are believed to be deployed in Germany at the Büchel air base for delivery by the German Luftwaffe’s Tornado IDS aircraft, where they remain under US custody.⁶ These weapons are part of the legacy of a Cold War arrangement called “nuclear-sharing,” whereby European allies make delivery vehicles available for American nuclear weapons under NATO command.⁷ Although most publicly available analyses discount the B61’s military relevance, caution is advisable. Relevant military rationales are publicly unknown. Given that the ongoing life extension program of the B61 appears to go hand in hand with an increase of the bomb’s effectiveness,⁸ it is unclear whether the weapon is relevant with regards to the Middle East and whether it could be perceived as a residual response-in-kind-weapon vis-à-vis Russian sub-strategic nuclear weapons.⁹

⁴ This is related to the development of NATO-strategy in the post-Cold War era. Accordingly, the current strategic concept of NATO adopted in 2010 states that “the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote”: http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat_Concept_web_en.pdf (7/12/2012).

⁵ Hans M. Kristensen, *Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons*, Federation of American Scientists Special Report No. 3 (May 2012): p. 43 and pp. 14–16. See: www.fas.org/docs/Non_Strategic_Nuclear_Weapons.pdf (6/12/2012). The yield of the B61-variants deployed in Europe can apparently be varied in stages (“dial a yield”): the yield of the B61-3 bomb ranges from 0.3 to 170 KT while the yield of the B61-4 model ranges from 0.3 to 50 KT.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 18. In large part substrategic American nuclear weapons seemed to be deployed in Southern Europe: 60 to 70 B61s in Turkey, 60 to 70 in Italy, 10 to 20 in Belgium and 10 to 20 in the Netherlands: *ibidem*, p. 25.

⁷ In December 1957, the NATO Council agreed to establish nuclear sharing in NATO on the basis of a NATO nuclear stockpile consisting of US nuclear weapons assigned to NATO command. Nuclear sharing arrangements were implemented by bilateral agreements between the United States and certain allies. They were called Programs of Cooperation (PoC). In the West German case, making available delivery systems did not imply that the FRG had any say about their use. If SACEUR/CINCEUR ordered the use of US nuclear weapons to be delivered by German delivery systems, the German government would neither have the right nor the means to withhold German delivery vehicles: telegram v. Etdorf, 5/18/1960, PA AA [Political Archives of the Foreign Office, Berlin], B 150 (separately provided to the author). Only in 1968 President Lyndon B. Johnson granted the right not to order a “selective release of nuclear weapons for use by German armed forces” if the Federal German Chancellor objected to it, see: letter from Johnson to Kiesinger, 9/9/1968, FRUS 1964–1968, XV, doc. 286. This so called exchange of letters-agreement between the US President and the Federal Chancellor remained in force after changes of government on either side of the Atlantic. Thus, only since 1968 the term “dual key system” applied with regards to German delivery vehicles. But generally this term is “misleading,” see Michael Legge, *Theater Nuclear Weapons and the NATO Strategy of Flexible Response*, Santa Monica, CA (1983): p. 11. A “dual key system” in a political sense never existed in the West German case, that is a formal German “veto-right” against the use of US nuclear weapons—for example—on German soil or from West German territory, see for example chancellor Schmidt’s remarks to Foreign Minister Genscher, US President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger in 1975, MemCon 7/15/1975, www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553508.pdf (3/14/2014).

⁸ Hans M. Kristensen, *The B61 Life-Extension Program: Increasing NATO. Nuclear Capability and Precision Low-Yield Strikes*. Federation of the American Scientists Issue Brief (June 2011): http://fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/publications1/IssueBrief_B61-12.pdf (12/3/2013).

⁹ On background: David S. Yost, “Strategic Stability in Europe. Risks with Low Numbers of US and Russian Nuclear Weapons,” *Nonproliferation Review* 20, 2 (2012), pp. 205–245, here: p. 231. On the enduring relevance of selective nuclear options to

In 2009, a significant change came about in the FRG's governmental policy. Through a coalition agreement in October 2009,¹⁰ the government composed of Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and liberals (FDP) voiced its will that the small remainder of American substrategic nuclear weapons stationed in Germany should be dismantled entirely, without mandatory reciprocal arms reduction by the Russia. Notably, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Guido Westerwelle (FDP) pleaded this desire in public.¹¹ This movement must be seen against the background of a gradual evolution of Germany's position towards NATO nuclear arrangements since the late 1990s.¹² However, Berlin's new policy of 2009 did not imply an interest in changing the basic structure of the transatlantic security architecture, i.e. American extended deterrence through NATO, which has been nuclear by definition since the early days of the Cold War.¹³ Berlin had no intention to remove the deep water anchor of Germany's *Westbindung*.¹⁴ Rather, it tried to stimulate a political process to redesign the existing "NATO model"¹⁵ of extended deterrence. Given a phase-out of US nuclear weapons in Germany, Berlin's hand in NATO's nuclear sharing framework would run out. This outcome may also be seen against the background of the looming retirement of the Tornado IDS—Germany's dual-capable aircraft.¹⁶ Furthermore, in the context of a lingering crisis of the NPT regime,¹⁷ such a step of unilateral

manage the credibility of US extended deterrence in a situation of mutual assured destruction: Elbridge Colby, "The United States and Discriminate Nuclear Options in the Cold War," in: Jeffrey Larsen/ Kerry M. Kartchner (Eds.), *On Limited Nuclear War in the 21st Century*. Stanford 2014, Ch. 3; Elbridge Colby, "Defining Strategic Stability," in: Elbridge Colby/ Michael S. Gerson (Eds.), *Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations*. Carlisle PA 2013, pp. 47–84; Robert Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy*. Ithaca/ London 1984, pp. 167–170.

¹⁰ https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Ministerium/koalitionsvertrag.pdf?__blob=publicationFile (4/5/2010).

¹¹ Horst Bacia, "Atomwaffenfrei", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5/6/2010.

¹² Giorgio Franceschini/ Harald Müller, "Germany," in: Paolo Foradori (Ed.), *Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Euro-Atlantic Security. The Future of NATO*. London/ New York 2013, pp. 44–60.

¹³ David S. Yost, "Assurance and US Extended Deterrence," *International Affairs* 85 (2009), pp. 755–780, esp. pp. 773–775.

¹⁴ Kundnani's thesis that "the *Westbindung* no longer appears to be a strategic necessity" in 21st century Germany is debatable: Hans Kundnani, "Leaving the West Behind. Germany looks East," *Foreign Affairs* 94,1, pp. 108–116: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142492/hans-kundnani/leaving-the-west-behind> (2/9/2015)

¹⁵ Brad Roberts, *Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia*. Visiting Scholars Paper 1. National Institute for Defense Studies, Tokio 2013, p. 28: "In this model, the nuclear forces of NATO's three nuclear armed members (the United States, United Kingdom, and France) provide the "ultimate guarantee" of the security of NATO allies, while a sub-group of other NATO allies participate in the alliance's unique sharing arrangements, whereby the United States forward deploys nuclear bombs and together with these other countries operates dual capable aircraft. Moreover, nuclear roles and responsibilities within the alliance are coordinated by the defense ministers (...)"

¹⁶ According to publicly known information, the Tornado IDS will be replaced in the near future by the Eurofighter, which will have to receive the necessary technical equipment to take over the nuclear role of the Tornado: Kristensen, *Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons*, p. 18.

¹⁷ The NPT regime is often pictured as being in deep crisis due to a set of reasons. Besides the controversial debate, whether the NPT ultimately serves to maintain strategic stability or to achieve disarmament and the goal of global zero, a significant aspect of

disarmament was understood as a means to send a positive signal regarding the progress of the international arms control process with the aim of global zero.¹⁸ But it was highly questionable whether this argument was sound. The realities of the “Second Nuclear Age,”¹⁹ including a multi-polar global nuclear order with peculiar regional dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region and in the Middle East, would remain basically unaffected by a certain diminution of the nuclear factor in NATO.

In 2009 the question of NATO’s nuclear posture posed a central issue to the alliance. The low number of American nuclear weapons in Europe and ongoing debates over deterrence and arms control in view of the NPT regime raised questions about the political/symbolic significance of remaining US nuclear weapons assigned to Allied Command Europe. In this context, Berlin called for a denuclearized Germany. Yet by motioning for the removal of these weapons, Berlin touched upon a crucial question of nuclear policy with far-ranging meaning for the entire alliance. This endeavor also led to criticism—sometimes with sharp words—in Germany and elsewhere. According to critics, Germany wanted to enjoy the nuclear protection offered by the United States, but lacked the political resolve necessary to share the associated risks, burdens, and costs.²⁰ In a speech that could be understood as a criticism of Germany’s disposition, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton even warned not to take any “precipitous move” which would “undermine the deterrence capability” of the alliance.²¹ Others claimed that Berlin prejudged an alliance question without proper advance clearance by alliance partners, who felt that the physical presence of American nuclear weapons in Europe still presented a warranty

the debate concerns the relationship between NATO and the NPT: Joseph F. Pilat/ David S. Yost (Eds.), *NATO and the Future of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime*. Rome 2007; Michael Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons. Principles, Problems, Prospects*. Oxford/ New York 2009, pp. 78–87.

¹⁸ Franceschini/ Müller, Germany.

¹⁹ Paul Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age. Strategy, Danger, and the New Power Politics* (New York: 2012), Ch. 1–3.

²⁰ Franklin Miller/ George Robertson/ Kori Schake, *Germany opens the Pandora’s Box*. Centre for European Reform. Briefing note. London 2010; for a riposte that this kind of criticism was based “on outdated perceptions” because Russia is seen as “a potential aggressor and not as a strategic partner”: Wolfgang Ischinger/ Ulrich Weisser, “NATO and the Nuclear Umbrella,” *The New York Times*, 2/16/2010; for pros and cons in the German debate on “global zero” and the future of nuclear sharing see: Reinhard Meier-Walser (Ed.), *Eine Welt ohne Atomwaffen? “Global Zero” - Realisierungschancen einer Vision*. Munich 2010; on background: James W. Davis/ Ursula Jasper, “Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons as a “Trojan Horse”: Explaining Germany’s Ambivalent Attitude,” *European Security* 23, 1 (2014), 15–30.

²¹ Speech by Secretary Clinton at the NATO Strategic Concept Seminar, 2/22/2010 at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Washington, DC: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/02/137118.htm> (3/14/2014).

for the robustness of deterrence and for the cohesion of the Atlantic security framework.²²

In the end, the US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) of April 2010 and its appraisal of NATO's "nuclear acquis"²³ displayed the official US view that NATO was still a "nuclear alliance."²⁴ For the time being, this position was codified at the NATO level through the adoption of the *Deterrence and Defense Posture Review* (DDPR) report during the May 2012 NATO summit in Chicago. The DDPR report was accepted by all 28 NATO nations. It constituted a new consensus about the role of nuclear weapons in NATO. For the time being, the allies agreed that forward-deployed US nuclear weapons in Western Europe were a necessary tool for maintaining the credibility of US extended deterrence. Any shift towards an increased reliance on strategic US systems accompanied by a thinning out of theater-based nuclear components was linked to successful arms control with Russia on substrategic nuclear weapons.²⁵

This view was endorsed by Germany with a staunch preference for denuclearization in the wake of successful arms control talks.²⁶ Even at that time, theater nuclear arms control appeared to have few prospects. Almost two years after the adoption of the DDPR report the chances of engaging in arms control talks on theater nuclear weapons were at their lowest point since the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty discussions in the 1980s— given the profound impact of the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine on the relations between NATO and Russia. In this context, the nuclear basis of the Article 5 commitment in NATO was

²² David S. Yost, *The Future of NATO's Nuclear Deterrent. The New Strategic Concept and the 2010 NPT review Conference. A Workshop Report*. Rome 2010; Michael Paul, *Neustart 2.0 zur Abrüstung substrategischer Nuklearwaffen? Verhandlungsansätze und -modelle*. Berlin 2011, p. 23.

²³ Michael Rühle, "NATO's Future Nuclear Dimension: Managing Expectations for the Strategic Concept Debate," *Strategic Insights* 8 (2009): <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA519704> (7/12/2012).

²⁴ Kristensen, *Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons*, p. 34.

²⁵ Mirroring the complexity of the picture of different positions within the Alliance, the DDPR report states on the one hand that "as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance" (9), while the existing "nuclear weapons force posture currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defense posture" (8). On the other hand, the report declares that NATO is resolved "to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons in accordance with the goals of the Non-Proliferation Treaty" (24); "NATO is prepared to consider further reducing its requirement for non-strategic nuclear weapons assigned to the Alliance in the context of reciprocal steps by Russia" and in light of the greater Russian stockpile of non-strategic nuclear weapons (26): www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm?mode=pressrelease (7/12/2012). Karl-Heinz Kamp, "NATO: eine nukleare Allianz. Die US-Atomwaffen bleiben in Europa," *Internationale Politik* 67, 5 (2012), pp. 98–101.

²⁶ See the coalition agreement of the CDU/CSU and SPD, November 2013: http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Anlagen/2013-12-17-koalitionsvertrag.pdf?__blob=publicationFile (12/12/2014).

reemphasized. Moreover, Russia increasingly used its nuclear power “for communication and bargaining”²⁷ by displaying its arsenal in provocative maneuvers.²⁸

When examining NATO’s history in the context of Germany’s desire for denuclearization prior to the Ukraine crisis, several noteworthy observations on the nuclear order become evident. While the development of the NATO nuclear framework was largely a response to satisfy the European NATO allies’ (particularly West Germany’s) security and “equality” concerns, these same structures also worked to ensure broader political integration and cohesion within the alliance. As soon as the nuclear framework in NATO was established, other nations besides the FRG worked to tighten them. This framework would endure for half a century and help to confirm “NATO Nuclear Solidarity.”²⁹ While the FRG gradually increased its political and economic power during the mid-20th century, its influence in nuclear policy remained always restricted. At the same time, the FRG’s commitment to NATO as a nuclear alliance during the Cold War strengthened NATO’s nuclear framework to such a degree that it became apparent before the Ukraine-crisis that it could not to be easily changed. Thus, the FRG’s own decades-long commitment to maintaining NATO’s nuclear framework constrained the FRG’s ability to foster changes in the 21st century. Even before the Ukraine crisis re-illuminated NATO’s core nuclear function, Germany had to learn the lesson that there is no easy escape from the nuclear legacies of the Cold War and their profound impact on contemporary international security.

Nuclear order and the German role in the 1960s

NATO’s role as a nuclear alliance constituted a central piece in the Cold War’s nuclear order. As such, its concrete configuration gradually evolved through a complex policy process which was

²⁷ Bracken, *Second Nuclear Age*, p. 61.

²⁸ Zachary Keck, “Russia’s Nuclear Forces Begin Their Largest Drill Ever” *National Interest* (2/13/2015): <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/russia%E2%80%99s-nuclear-forces-begin-their-largest-drill-ever-12245> (2/13/2015); Elbridge Colby, *Nuclear Weapons in the Third Offset Strategy: Avoiding a Nuclear Blind Spot in the Pentagon’s New Initiative*. Center for a New American Security (30 Jan. 2015): <http://www.cnas.org/avoiding-nuclear-blindspot-offset-strategy> (1/30/2015); Oliver Meier, *Die nukleare Dimension der Ukraine-Krise*. SWP-Aktuell (Oct. 2014): http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2014A66_mro.pdf (10/31/2014).

²⁹ Bruno Tertrais, *Nuclear Policies in Europe*. London 1999, p. 12; Yost, Assurance, pp. 779–780.

paralleled for years by the negotiation and implementation of the NPT during the 1960s. This paper asserts that these processes contributed to the gradual stabilization of the nuclear order—but only at the price of an ambiguous relationship between the NPT and the notion of “NATO as a nuclear alliance.” It explores the controversial relationship between Germany and NATO nuclear sharing, and the compatibility of this arrangement with the NPT.

NATO represented the institutional framework for US extended deterrence to Western Europe. Two obstacles complicated the management of extended deterrence. First, the Soviet Union had to be deterred by a credible demonstration that the costs of aggression would outweigh any possible gains or, as Bonn emphasized,³⁰ would be unbearable in any case. Second, extended deterrence had to be credible in the eyes of US protégés, i.e. the NATO allies. Basically, the United States had to demonstrate resolve in peacetime to defend Allied territory with the necessary means.³¹ These requirements led to specific policies intended to manage confidence and credibility within NATO—a task which proved to be one of the most complex issues in Alliance politics. Yet the irreversible changes made by the Sputnik shock of 1957, changes in NATO strategy in the 1960s, and the advent of strategic parity between the superpowers in the early 1970s made managing this confidence difficult.³² Therefore NATO—spurred by the pressure of its non-nuclear members and especially by the FRG—institutionalized sophisticated instruments and structures to satisfy and reassure its non-nuclear members by allowing them a certain influence in the execution, formulation, and planning of NATO’s nuclear strategy while simultaneously accepting the US “empire by invitation” and the hierarchy in NATO between nuclear weapons states (NWS) and NNWS.³³

³⁰ For an early account of this view, which had been the result of the West German interest as a front line state and which constituted a linchpin of German strategic thinking, see the following note of the section for politico-military affairs of the German Ministry of Defense: Nuclear History Program (NHP), doc. 159: note Fü B III, 7/21/1965.

³¹ Cf. the classical by Michael Howard, “Reassurance and Deterrence. Western Defense in the 1980s,” *Foreign Affairs* 61 (1982), pp. 309–324. See also: Thérèse Delpeche, *Nuclear Deterrence in the 21st Century. Lessons from the Cold War for a New Era of Strategic Piracy*. Santa Monica, CA 2012, pp. 28–34.

³² Francis J. Gavin, “Wrestling with Parity. The Nuclear Revolution Revisited,” in: Niall Ferguson/ Charles S. Maier/ Erez Manela/ Daniel J. Sargent (Eds.), *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective*. Cambridge/ London 2010, pp. 189–204; David N. Schwartz, *NATO’s Nuclear Dilemmas*. Washington DC 1983; Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (Ed.), *Perspectives on Extended Deterrence*. Paris 2010.

³³ Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945. From “Empire” by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*. Oxford 2003.

Nuclear arrangements in NATO moderated the United States' political, military, and technological hegemony, making it more tolerable for the non-nuclear partners. It eased the indissoluble tension between nuclear "haves" and "have-nots" in NATO and increased the credibility of US extended deterrence. From the US point of view, nuclear arrangements appeared as useful instruments for averting the spread of nuclear weapons amongst NATO allies. They also banished fears that West Germany would acquire nuclear weapons capability, notwithstanding the central question whether such fears were actually well-founded, exaggerated, or mistaken.

As highlighted in recent debates about the future of NATO's nuclear posture in the 21st century, NATO seemed to appear as a "framework for nuclear nonproliferation," whose configuration was balanced during the 1960s in the context of cooperation and conflict between the allies and the construction of the NPT regime.³⁴ However, caution is advised with such a reading. Generally, the relationship between positive security assurances like alliances and non-proliferation is extraordinary complex.³⁵ Regarding NATO, several factors mitigate the nonproliferation utility of the alliance. First, non-proliferation was not an overt goal but rather an "implicit and barely mentioned function" of NATO.³⁶ Second, an alliance backed by a credible security guarantee should not be perceived as a "panacea for non-proliferation," but instead it should be assumed "that its presence decreases the chances of a country going nuclear, conversely that its absence increases such chances."³⁷ Third, NATO's primary function should not be construed as a pillar of non-proliferation policy but as a geopolitical one serving to secure the United States' and its Western European allies' position and security.³⁸

In fact, it is questionable whether NATO—backed by the US nuclear umbrella—functioned as a non-proliferation tool in the case of West Germany during the Cold War. Approaching this

³⁴ Oliver Bange, "NATO as a Framework for Nuclear Nonproliferation: The West German Case, 1954–2008," *International Journal*, 64 (2009), pp. 361–382.

³⁵ Jeffrey W. Knopf (Ed.), *Security Assurances and Nuclear Nonproliferation*. Stanford 2012.

³⁶ Karl-Heinz Kamp, *NATO's Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Beyond "Yes" or "No"*. Rome 2010, p. 6.

³⁷ Bruno Tertrais, "The Future of Extended Deterrence. A Brainstorming Paper," in: Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (Ed.), *Perspectives on Extended Deterrence*. Paris 2010, pp. 7–14, quotation: p. 9.

³⁸ For a comparable, though normative argument see: Elbridge Colby, "Choose Geopolitics Over Nonproliferation," *The National Interest* (Feb. 2014) <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/choose-geopolitics-over-nonproliferation-9969> (4/30/2014).

question presupposes an interpretation of West German nuclear ambitions. Even though hypotheses to the contrary are still influential today and notwithstanding the fact that such accounts lack an unequivocal empirical basis, new historical research shows that Bonn had neither the intention nor the interest to “go nuclear.”³⁹ In contrast to the picture drawn by revisionist historiography, West German governments pursued a *limited nuclear revisionism* only.⁴⁰ West German leaders shared the analysis that it would be suicidal to attempt an escape from the power realities of the Cold War and the nuclear dilemma posed by the Soviet threat, West Germany's total dependence on the United States, and its inability to protect itself through domestic nuclear means. Successive West German governments recognized that the US nuclear umbrella and collective defense offered by NATO were indispensable to balance the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. The benefits of this security architecture dramatically outweighed any temptation to follow Britain and France in developing a national nuclear program, despite the US nuclear umbrella's inherent lack of credibility and the FRG's exposed position as a potential battleground on the periphery of NATO. Although the status quo was unsatisfactory with regards to the division of Germany and West Germany's position in the nuclear order, Bonn recognized that this could be changed only incrementally. More importantly, this revision was to unfold only within the existing transatlantic security framework, but *not* in the sense that Germany tacitly intended to pave the way for explicit acceptance as a NWS at a later stage.

Bonn was committed to achieving incremental enhancements to Germany's position and influence within NATO without becoming an atomic power. This was no end in itself. These efforts were part of an overall strategy to fortify the FRG's ties to the West. The FRG's accession to the NPT in 1969/1975 codified its status as a NNWS, but the NPT did not create that status. Nor did the treaty avert an otherwise impending German nuclear program: the treaty was not a

³⁹ Gene Gerzhoy, “Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany's Nuclear Ambitions,” *International Security*, 39, 4 (2015), pp. 91–129; Nuno P. Monteiro/ Alexandre Debs, “The Strategic Logic of Nuclear Proliferation,” *International Security* 39, 2 (2014), pp. 7–51; Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963*. Princeton 1999; Matthias Küntzel, *Bonn and the Bomb. German Politics and the Nuclear Option*. London 1995; Harald Müller, “German National Identity and WMD Nonproliferation,” *The Nonproliferation Review*, 10, 2 (2003), pp. 1–20.

⁴⁰ Andreas Lutsch, PhD dissertation “Westbindung or Balance of Power. The Federal Republic of Germany's Nuclear Policy between the NPT and NATO's Dual Track Decision (1962–1979).” Mainz 2014.

necessary check to prevent Germany from going nuclear. Especially under the conditions of the NPT, the critical condition to keep non-nuclear West Germany bound to the West was to embed it in a calculable security structure, i.e. NATO backed by US extended deterrence. Within this framework, Germany's *limited nuclear revisionism* could be satisfied by considering Bonn's views and interests in order to ensure that the German leadership would regard this security structure as acceptable and credible.⁴¹

West Germany and Nuclear Sharing in the mid-Cold War

The establishment of nuclear arrangements in NATO began with the question of nuclear strategy, a topic which had originally been the exclusive domain of the United States and Great Britain. The non-nuclear European allies became militarily involved in the execution of nuclear deterrence in 1957, when NATO's constituent heads of government agreed to "nuclearize" the alliance by introducing dual-capable delivery systems into the alliance's armed forces and rapidly expanding the Theater Nuclear Forces (TNF) stockpile.⁴² The Army and the Air Force of the German Bundeswehr were involved in this arrangement in practical terms.⁴³ However, as soon as the Kennedy administration assumed power in 1961, American attitude towards nuclear sharing with non-nuclear allies began to shift and US military strategy moved towards "flexible response." While this change had little initial impact on massive retaliation oriented military planning, the American nuclear weapons deployed in Europe were to be commanded centrally. Furthermore, conventional elements of the armed forces of the non-nuclear allies were supposed to be considerably expanded.⁴⁴

Consequently, the Pentagon demanded throughout the 1960s that West Germany reallocate

⁴¹ Lutsch, *Westbindung or Balance of Power*.

⁴² Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 95–200.

⁴³ Bruno Thoß, *NATO-Strategie und nationale Verteidigungsplanung. Planung und Aufbau der Bundeswehr unter den Bedingungen einer massiven atomaren Vergeltungsstrategie*. Munich 2006; Helmut R. Hammerich et al., *Das Heer 1950 bis 1970. Konzeption, Organisation, Aufstellung*. Munich 2006; Bernd Lemke et al., *Die Luftwaffe 1950 bis 1970. Konzeption, Aufbau, Integration*. Munich 2006.

⁴⁴ Francis J. Gavin, "The Myth of Flexible Response: United States Strategy in Europe during the 1960s," *The International History Review* 23 (2001), pp. 847–875. William Burr, "The Nixon Administration, the "Horror Strategy," and the Search for Limited Nuclear Options, 1969–1972: Prelude to the Schlesinger Doctrine," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7, 3 (2005), pp. 34–78.

its recently introduced and vulnerable F-104G Starfighter fighter-bombers from nuclear to conventional missions, while simultaneously assigning the Luftwaffe's Pershing missiles to nuclear roles.⁴⁵ The American pressure for this change peaked with a speech by the US Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, in July 1966 at a meeting of the NATO defense ministers.⁴⁶ The persistent US requests provoked harsh opposition in Bonn. They were perceived as an American attempt to partially denuclearize the German armed forces and interrupt NATO's escalation capabilities, perhaps in order to be able to wage a geographically limited nuclear war. Furthermore, partially denuclearizing national air forces in Central Europe would widen an existing gap in the medium and longer-range spectrum of nuclear escalation options under NATO command, all against the backdrop of Washington's controversial refusal to deploy medium-range ballistic missiles in Western Europe and adjacent seas.⁴⁷ Due to Bonn's insistence, the United States and Germany compromised that, for the time being, the German F-104G squadrons would remain predominantly reserved for nuclear missions.⁴⁸

Nuclear sharing also kept its political significance within the FRG, not least because it had been accepted by the social-liberal coalition since 1969 despite opposition from the Free Democratic Party (FDP).⁴⁹ On the NATO-level, the principle of non-nuclear weapons states' contribution to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's strike plan was later endorsed by special political guidelines that substantiated the strategy of flexible response.⁵⁰ These guidelines were based on an American-German Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) study which was

⁴⁵ Note from Werz, Aug. 1966, Künftige Aufgabe der deutschen Luftstreitkräfte, PA AA, B 150, vol. 81. See also: Dieter Krüger, "Schlachtfeld Bundesrepublik? Europa, die deutsche Luftwaffe und der Strategiewechsel der NATO 1958 bis 1968," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56 (2008), pp. 171–226.

⁴⁶ Note from Werz, 8/5/1966, PA AA, B 150, vol. 81.

⁴⁷ See: report from Fü B III 8 (5/30/1964) on a foreign office-ministry of defense-colloquium on 27–28 April 1964, PA AA, B 130, vol. 994A; letter from Fü B III 1 to Scheske, 12/19/1964, PA AA, B 130, vol. 994A; note from Diehl, 8/17/1966, AAPD [Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik] 1966, II, doc. 262; SACEUR Lemnitzer's remark to Secretary of Defense, Kai-U. von Hassel in Fürstenfeldbrück, 8/22/1966, military diary von Hassel, ACDP [Archives for Christian-Democratic Politics, St. Augustin, Germany], I-157-228/1.

⁴⁸ NHP-Doc. 175: note from Fü S III, 9/20/1966.

⁴⁹ Report by the leader of the FDP and designated Foreign Minister, Walter Scheel, on 10/3/1969 to the FDP executive board about the negotiations with the SPD regarding the social-liberal coalition, Archiv des Liberalismus [archives of the German liberal movement, Gummersbach, Germany], FDP-Bundesvorstand, 154.

⁵⁰ During the 7th Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) ministerial session in Venice on 8/9 June 1970 SACEUR Andrew J. Goodpaster reported that his former strike-plans (Scheduled Strike Program (SSP) and Regional Priority Program (RPP)) were replaced by a so called General Strike Plan (GSP). The GSP represented NATO's contribution in case of the "General Nuclear Response" according to the MC 14/3-strategy: telex from Grewe 6/10/1970, AAPD 1970, II, doc. 260.

agreed upon in October 1970 and titled “Concept for the Role of Theatre Nuclear Strike Forces in ACE” [Allied Command Europe].⁵¹ During the 1980s, German F-104Gs were replaced by the Tornado multi-role combat aircraft, some of which continue to be designated for nuclear missions. Furthermore, what applied to the German Luftwaffe applied in an overall sense to the entire Bundeswehr—transcending persons and legislative sessions, nuclear sharing was regarded by successive German administrations as an adequate and necessary contribution to NATO’s nuclear deterrent. Thus, Bonn particularly contributed to the solidification of this element within the broader framework of “nuclear NATO.”

Compatibility through ambivalence rather than the “NATO-NPT Contradiction”⁵²

The political value of nuclear sharing was further boosted throughout the 1960s in the context of NPT negotiations and the treaty’s implementation. There was an influential perception within the German administration that arms control might jeopardize the hard-fought negotiations for Germany’s part in NATO nuclear sharing. In the lengthy negotiations surrounding the NPT, key German officials perceived that the nuclear sharing arrangement was insufficiently protected in legal terms. Especially during the early negotiations, the NPT was regarded as a Soviet instrument to disrupt NATO. This diagnosis appeared substantiated by Soviet behavior—the first Soviet NPT draft from 24 September 1965 included a ban on existing nuclear sharing arrangements and described them as tantamount to proliferation.

In the end, the version of the NPT signed on 1 July 1968 remained vague. This reflected the results of mutually-acceptable language that developed during the secret American-Soviet NPT negotiations of autumn 1966. From a German perspective, the phrasing of Article II of the

⁵¹ During NATO NPG proceedings, allied defense ministers adopted this concept in Ottawa on 29–30 October, 1970: telex from Schulze, 10/31/1970, AAPD 1970, III, doc. 504. The German Minister of Defense, Helmut Schmidt, informed Chancellor Willy Brandt that the concept “assigned a role to the appropriate strike-units (dual capable aircraft) that allowed their maximum utilization in a conventional conflict or during a conventional phase of a conflict,” see: letter Schmidt to Brandt, 11/3/1970, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie [archives of the German social democratic movement, Bonn Germany], 1/HSAA009055; see also: Desmond Ball, *Targeting for Strategic Deterrence*. Adelphi Paper 185, London 1983, pp.15.

⁵² Ernie Regehr, *Rebuilding Confidence in the NPT. Resolving the NATO-NPT Contradiction*. Waterloo 2005; see NATO’s opposing view: NATO’s Positions Regarding Nuclear Non-Proliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament and Related Issues (10/22/2009): http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_topics/20091022_NATO_Position_on_nuclear_nonproliferation-eng.pdf (1/25/2015).

NPT (regarding the indirect transfer of control) and the deliberate lack of a legal definition of the term “control” in the treaty caused concern. Ambassador Swidbert Schnippenkötter, the representative for disarmament and arms control of the federal government, summed it up in a note to the German Minister of Finance, Franz Josef Strauß, who was witnessed to have castigated the NPT as a “Versailles [treaty] of cosmic proportions,”⁵³ in which ambiguity was a virtue and “the political fundament of the treaty.”⁵⁴

While the NPT was intended to address only what would be prohibited under the treaty, the United States tabled separate interpretations regarding the treaty in NATO which, in large part, were made public during the later US-NPT ratification process.⁵⁵ These interpretations aimed to clarify what would still be permitted after accepting the NPT-obligations.⁵⁶ The interpretations asserted that the physical presence of American forces and nuclear weapons in non-nuclear weapons states like Germany was not prohibited. According to these interpretations, all existing nuclear arrangements in NATO and any NATO non-nuclear weapon state’s participation therein would not be prohibited and would thus be consistent with the NPT stipulations—among them nuclear sharing.

However, even though the American interpretations mirrored the tacit political compromise between the United States and the Soviet Union and gained political weight through

⁵³ *Der Spiegel* 9/1967, 2/20/1967, p. 25.

⁵⁴ Note from Schnippenkötter, 7/12/1968, ACSP [archives for Christian-social politics, Munich, Germany], bequest Franz Josef Strauß - Büro BMF/ 566. Or, as Walt Rostow frankly remarked to the emissary of Chancellor Kiesinger, Rainer Barzel, on 23 Feb. 1968, MemCon, FRUS 1964–1968, vol. XV, doc. 248, p. 635–636: “Surely the Soviets tried in the first phase of the NPT talks to bring about the destruction of NATO, to do away with the McNamara committee and the double-key system. We made clear to them that we would have none of that. We agreed in the second phase, about September 1966, after the Rusk-Gromyko talk, that the treaty would narrowly concern what was required to avoid nuclear proliferation. What it didn’t forbid was not forbidden. That is not just our understanding, that is the Soviet’s as well. They know that they cannot raise the double-key question or the question of nuclear consultation.” See also: Ralph Dietl, “European Nuclear Decision Making? The United States, Nuclear Non Proliferation and the “European Option”, 1967–1972,” *Historische Mitteilungen der Ranke-Gesellschaft* 24 (2011), pp. 43–89.

⁵⁵ The first session of the North Atlantic Council on the confidential American-Soviet NPT “draft” took place on 2/1/1967, see Grewe to the foreign ministry, AAPD 1967, I, doc. 42. Only in secret NATO consultations the United States had presented its interpretation of the treaty term “control”. This interpretation was not made public during the US ratification process and US officials made clear to their German counterparts that the US “control”-formula might be disclosed in confidential hearings in committees of the German Bundestag, but not in public plenary debates of the German parliament, record of the German-American talks about the NPT in Washington, 29–31 Oct. 1969, PAAA, B 150, vol. 161.

⁵⁶ Cf. Dean Rusk’s statement during the Senate Hearings of the NPT on 10 July 1968: *Non-Proliferation Treaty. Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. Ninetieth Congress. Second Session on Executive H, 90th Congress, second Session, Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Part 2. July 10, 11, 12, and 17, 1968.* Washington DC 1968, p. 42. On further declarations by Secretary Clark Clifford und Secretary Rusk on 5/10/1968 during the NATO ministerial meeting in Reykjavik and by President Johnson on the occasion of the signing of the NPT on 1 July 1968: note from Sahn, 8/12/1968, PAAA, B 150, vol. 130.

the process of their disclosure, German officials remained skeptical. The interpretations constituted only a legal opinion that remained outside the treaty corpus (in contrast to other provisions of special interest to non-nuclear weapons states). The interpretations neither bound all NPT signatories, nor did they receive a public confirmation (but also no objection) by the Soviet Union. Therefore, Germany pressured US representatives at every opportunity to reiterate and thus politically fortify the US NPT interpretations, even though the United States and the USSR were in political understanding since their bilateral negotiations of 1966.

The official sources overflow with evidence referring to this pressure. They bear witness to the growing annoyance of US officials who struggled with the redundancy and ceaselessness of the German-American NPT consultations about the substance and interpretation of the NPT. However, understanding this process as a never ending legalistic exercise motivated by an overanxious German desire for reassurance would be misguided. Such an interpretation obstructs the fact that in the given circumstances, this process displayed the categorical German willingness to maintain cardinal interests involved through the NPT regulations. These interests included all aspects relating to security and to the configuration of US extended deterrence, including nuclear sharing. The ambiguous relationship between nuclear sharing arrangements and the NPT appeared as unsatisfactory to a significant part of the German foreign and security policy establishment.

Hence, the German government publicly pointed out at several junctures over the course of Germany's signing and ratification of the NPT that Bonn regarded German security as being ensured by US extended deterrence even after the FRG's accession to the NPT.⁵⁷ As Minister of Defense Helmut Schmidt phrased it after the social democrats and liberals formed a new government in 1969, it was of "decisive importance that the nuclear arrangements within NATO will not be obstructed and that NATO defense in this field will remain to be completely

⁵⁷ Declaration by the German government on the occasion of the signing of the NPT on 11/28/1969; note by the German government regarding the signing of the NPT on 11/28/1969, *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, no. 145, 11/29/1969. Bonn 1969, pp. 1233–1235.

effective.”⁵⁸

Nuclear sharing constituted only one part of the nuclear arrangement that enabled non-nuclear weapons states to participate in the execution, formulation and planning of NATO strategy. Compared to nuclear sharing, the involvement of non-nuclear allies in the field of nuclear consultation became even more important since the mid-1960s. The confidential consultations of the NATO NPG appear to have been a crucial instrument for balancing different views and interests surrounding the implementation of NATO-strategy, modernization issues and the enactment of nuclear arms control.⁵⁹ From the outset, NPG discussions were characterized by “unusual intimacy in dealing frankly with mutual doubts and common problems.”⁶⁰ Already in the early 1970s, the combination of all existing nuclear arrangements—and particularly the exclusivity of the NPG—gave rise to a perception that West Germany was “fully satisfied” with its position in the nuclear order and its ability to articulate views on nuclear matters. However, Bonn was not disposed to acquiesce to another degradation of its position in nuclear matters—more so than ever due to the codification of the FRG’s status within NATO and its status as a non-nuclear weapons state according to the NPT.⁶¹

Conclusion

Germany’s attempt between 2009 and the adoption of the DDPR report in 2012 to achieve the denuclearization of Germany and shed the Luftwaffe’s participation in US nuclear sharing was unsuccessful. Berlin had attempted to remove an important nuclear element from NATO’s deterrence posture, without altering the alliance’s basic security architecture—or its backing by US extended deterrence. In the end, the DDPR report consolidated the nuclear status quo for the time being, including forward deployment of US nuclear weapons in Western Europe and

⁵⁸ Speech by Minister of Defense, Helmut Schmidt, at the Western European Union assembly, 12/10/1969, *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, no. 152, 12/12/1969. Bonn 1969, pp. 1289–1292, quote: p. 1291.

⁵⁹ Research on nuclear consultation in NATO on the basis of declassified files remains a desideratum. There are some older accounts: Paul Buteux, *The Politics of Nuclear Consultation in NATO. 1965–1980*. Cambridge/ New York 1983; Ivo H. Daalder, *The Nature and Practice of Flexible Response. NATO Strategy and Theater Nuclear Forces since 1967*. New York 1991.

⁶⁰ Telex from Cleveland to Clifford, 4/11/1968, The Nuclear Planning Group 1 of 3, NARA [National Archives and Records Administration, College Park] RG 59, box 1597, DEF 12 NATO (4/1/68).

⁶¹ Cash, US Embassy Bonn, to Rogers, 12/19/1972, NARA, RG 59, box 1658, DEF 12 NATO (9/1/72).

German participation in nuclear arrangements. In contrast to these recent efforts, Germany's nuclear policy during the Cold War was marked by strong efforts to welcome and maintain US nuclear weapons on German soil and to supply adequate delivery vehicles for these weapons. Against the background of the emerging NPT regime, Germany even applied strong and successful counter pressure against US efforts to reallocate the Luftwaffe's F-104 force from nuclear to conventional missions.

NATO's nuclear arrangements, like nuclear sharing, never contradicted arms control within the scope of the NPT regime. In fact, the NPT regime shielded the existing extended deterrence arrangements in NATO if only at the price of a certain ambiguity. Ambiguity between the institutions of "nuclear NATO" and the NPT, which essentially reinforced one another, functioned to stabilize the overall nuclear order. To this end, West Germany leaned on the United States to reinforce the legality of NATO nuclear sharing and Washington consequently declared the American legal interpretation of the NPT again and again.

In the mid-Cold War, West Germany's efforts significantly fortified the integrity of NATO's nuclear arrangements and the German Luftwaffe's participation in nuclear sharing. Curiously, this legacy and nuclear inheritance ultimately restrained Germany's scope of action in the post-Cold War era. As Germany attempted a limited revision of NATO's nuclear structure with regards to its own territory, it became apparent through the DDPR process that these nuclear structures were still entrenched in NATO and its 28 states. Even before the external shock of the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the Ukraine crisis in 2014, it had become clear that the 21st century's enlarged NATO community continued to perceive the central components of its Cold War nuclear inheritance,⁶² especially the "NATO model," as an indispensable part of credible US extended deterrence. Clearly, the legacies of the nuclear past have not vanished.

Germany's nuclear history has the potential to illuminate problems, puzzles, and unintended consequences surrounding today's changing global nuclear order. Studying nuclear history on the basis of declassified sources prompts several policy relevant questions: Is a

⁶² Roberts, *Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia*, p. 28.

transatlantic security architecture that abandons NATO's fundamental nuclear nature possible in light of historical experiences? Can US extended *nuclear* deterrence regarding NATO be reduced to conventional deterrence, if this structure is to be preserved at all? To what extent and on what terms is a remodeling of NATO's nuclear structures—including its material components in Western Europe—possible, and what would the consequences for deterrence and reassurance be? What does Germany's contemporary ambivalence bode for the future of nuclear sharing, US extended deterrence, and NATO as a whole? And to what extent are assessments of these issues affected by strategic surprise—which may entail external shocks such as 2014's events in Ukraine that severely strained the relationship between NATO and Russia?



NPIHP is a global network of individuals and institutions engaged in the study of international nuclear history through archival documents, oral history interviews and other empirical sources. Recognizing that today's toughest nuclear challenges have deep roots in the past, NPIHP seeks to transcend the East vs. West paradigm to assemble an integrated international history of nuclear proliferation. NPIHP's research aims to fill in the blank and blurry pages of nuclear history in order to contribute to robust scholarship and effective policy decisions.

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