



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

Germany

I think you will find the attached note by a member of the Policy Unit covers familiar ground.

The two main points are:

- The Germans are susceptible to a Soviet charm offensive. One is bound to worry about Kohl's forthcoming visit to Moscow.

- under Genscher's meligen influence, we have to expect further difficulties over modernization of NATO's nuclear weapons.

CDP  
30/9.

GERMAN ATTITUDES ON DEFENCE

I spent a fascinating three days in West Germany last week at the invitation of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

A recurring theme in talks with politicians and Government officials was the 'Gorbachev Phenomenon' and its implications for Germany.

The main points to emerge were:

- Gorbachev has had a profound effect on German public opinion;
- Security issues continue to provoke intense political debate to a far greater degree than has been the case in Britain following the General Election.
- A combination of these factors accounts for the West German Government's desire to soft-pedal on difficult defence decisions.

Public Opinion

The impression I received that many Germans are predisposed to look favourably upon Mr Gorbachev is borne out by opinion research. A review in May of opinion poll research into the relative perceptions of the USA and USSR found that:

- 77 per cent of West Germans believe that Gorbachev's reforms mark a real change for the better in the attitude of the Soviet Union;



- Twice as many Germans felt the Soviet Union was doing more to reduce the arms race than the United States;
- 24 per cent of West Germans trusted Mr Gorbachev more to reduce East - West tensions; 16 per cent trusted Mr Reagan more. (A full table of the results is attached in the Annex).

These findings show that while West German attitudes are significantly more favourable towards the Soviet Union than those in France, they are in some respects less favourable than British attitudes. This does not appear to fit with practical experience.

I found that whereas "defence" has largely died for the moment as an issue in Britain, it is still very much alive in West Germany. Two examples illustrate the point:

- the whole issue of nuclear modernisation and the "third-zero" option for nuclear arms reductions has aroused intense political debate in West Germany to an extent that has not been matched in Britain;
- Germans are far more concerned about the consequences of basing military equipment in their country. The recent disaster at the Ramstein US air base has intensified concern. The Green Party is peddling the line: "why with such an accommodating man in Mr Gorbachev in the Kremlin, do we need all this military hardware on our soil?". The CDU fear the electoral repercussions of this in such key Laender as Rhineland Palatinate and Rhineland-Hess. The West German Defence Minister has tried to defuse the issue by announcing a unilateral cut in the amount of low flying undertaken by the West German air force.



What is the explanation for these contradictory findings?

The short answer is that while British and West German attitudes towards Gorbachev's Russia might be similar, German feelings are more intense. It matters more to them.

First, they are conscious of their status as the potential battlefield in any war;

Second, they have far greater cultural and economic ties with the Eastern bloc than any other Western European country.

Third, the continuing existence of the Berlin Wall and a fortified East German border are a tangible reminders for West Germans of how far the Gorbachev reforms still have to go. For Britons these symbols are more remote.

*That should make them keen to have effective defence*

#### Government Attitudes

It is against this background that the German Government is developing its policy. In conversations with officials, I gained the following impressions of the West German Government's thinking.

1. A shared perception of Soviet aims. The West Germans appear to share our view that Mr Gorbachev's primary foreign policy objectives are:
  - to de-couple Western Europe from the United States;
  - to de-nuclearise Europe.
2. A wish to broaden the Soviet-German bilateral relationship. The view was expressed that at present Soviet-German relations are determined by German attitudes to arms control. Chancellor Kohl's visit to



Moscow is seen as an opportunity to develop initiatives in other fields such as trade. This is not only seen as an opportunity for German industry, but as a means of underpinning the political and economic reforms within the Soviet bloc. The desire to achieve tangible successes in these fields may, therefore, make the West German Government more susceptible to Soviet overtures in the arms control field.

3. A heavy emphasis on the development of a Comprehensive Concept. West German officials appeared to place less emphasis on short-range nuclear weapons and their modernisation than might have been expected. Their primary concern was that NATO should not be wrong-footed because each member responds differently to any Soviet arms control proposals. The Germans have, therefore, invested a great deal of capital in the development of an effective Comprehensive Concept which firmly establishes NATO's security needs and identifies its priorities for arms control.

They take the view that a decision to modernise Lance need not be taken now. Their attitude is why take a decision before the US Presidential election - with all the political controversy that would involve - when a new US administration might undercut it. Their own intention is to finalise their version of the concept this year and to table it once the US election result is known. They foresee a trade-off: a successor for Lance with enhanced capability offset by less nuclear artillery.

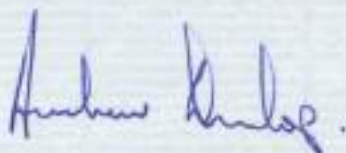
4. Burdensharing. The West Germans appear to share the British Government's concern about isolationist tendencies in the United States and are keen to head them off. They accept that Europe must do, and be seen to do, more for its own defence. But they offered



little encouragement to believe that this would involve a significantly greater financial contribution from West Germany. The German defence budget currently represents 3.1% of its GDP (compared with Britain's 4.7%).<sup>NS</sup> And this year there is a negative real ~~growth~~<sup>reduction</sup> in their defence budget. Their interpretation of burden-sharing is, therefore, almost entirely political. They see their own role in the burden-sharing debate as being the catalyst that will draw France closer to NATO, and thus improve her contribution to the joint defence of Europe short of re-integration into NATO's military structure.

### Conclusion

West Germany remains vulnerable to the Gorbachev-style propaganda offensive. The problems of managing a coalition Government exacerbate this situation. My overall impression was that the more they can present difficult defence decisions as having been taken collectively by NATO, and less as decisions by the West German Government, the easier they will find it to sell to their public opinion. Above all they fear singularisation.



ANDREW DUNLOP

Annex

Q. Whom do you trust more to reduce tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States - President Reagan or Mr Gorbachev?

A.	<u>UK</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>West Germany</u>
Ronald Reagan	19%	23%	16%
Mikhail Gorbachev	39%	16%	24%
No difference	30%	43%	42%
Don't know	11%	18%	18%

Q. Who is doing the most to reduce the arms race?

A.	<u>UK</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>West Germany</u>
United States	13%	17%	13%
Soviet Union	38%	17%	28%
Both equally	34%	53%	58%
Don't know	15%	13%	2%

Q. Are the reforms being instituted in the Soviet Union a real change for the better?

A.	<u>UK</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>West Germany</u>
Real change	83%	34%	77%
Not a real change	7%	29%	21%
Don't know	10%	38%	1%

(Source: Philip Sabine, Kings College, London, May 1988)