

**October 20, 1965**

**US Embassy to West Germany, Memorandum,  
'German Attitudes on Nuclear Defense Questions'**

**Citation:**

"US Embassy to West Germany, Memorandum, 'German Attitudes on Nuclear Defense Questions'", October 20, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, NARA, RG 59, Bureau of European Affairs, NATO and Atlantic Politico-Military Affairs. Records Relating to NATO, 1959-1966, box 6, Def 12 Nuclear NATO 1963-1965. Contributed to NPIHP by Bill Burr. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/177779>

**Summary:**

In this memorandum, an unnamed official at the U.S. Embassy in Bonn analyzed various West German nuclear and non-nuclear alternatives in the event of failure of the proposals for collective nuclear defense arrangements. An independent nuclear capability was ruled out as an alternative because "no responsible political leader in Germany of any party, any known private group, or any discernible body of German opinion ... considers it desirable."

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan

DECLASSIFIED	
Authority	NND 989733
By	NARA Date 6/28/11

This document consists of 4 pages.  
Copy no. 9 of 10 copies. Series A.

SECRET

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: German Attitudes on Nuclear Defense Questions

REF: Bonn Telegram 1019

In the reference telegram we described the various German attitudes on participation in Alliance nuclear defense, ranging from the view that no increased German role was needed, to the possible desire which the Germans might some day develop for national control of nuclear weapons. The purpose of the present memorandum is to treat this last extreme in more detail.

It is frequently stated (the Germans themselves, of course, repudiate strongly such an explanation) that the primary objective of the MLF is to prevent Germany from seeking a national nuclear capability. I do not agree that this is the primary problem. In the first place, it is generally agreed that there is no responsible political leader in Germany of any party, any known private group, or any discernible body of German opinion, that considers it desirable for the Germans to have an independent nuclear capability. This is derived, I believe, from a clear understanding of the practicalities of the situation, which are as follows:

1. No nation which possesses nuclear weapons, or is likely to possess them in the future, would under foreseeable circumstances provide Germany nuclear weapons for a national force.
2. The Germans committed themselves to the Western European Union in Protocol No. II Modifying and Completing the Brussels Treaty, not only not to manufacture ABC weapons, but to international inspection to assure compliance.
3. The Germans are sophisticated enough to know that a primitive nuclear weapon, such as that the Chinese presumably have, would not serve any useful purpose. It would merely attract to them all of the disadvantages of having a nuclear capability without the advantages. The Germans, in order to acquire a fully developed advanced nuclear weapons system, would first have to make an overt start both in acquiring weapons-grade nuclear materials (although recent developments may make this easier), the technology required for the nuclear weapon itself, and an effective missile delivery system. They now have none of these. Since our intelligence activities and those of the Soviets (who have an estimated 20,000 operatives in Germany), as well as those of other nations, are directed with great intensity toward discerning any such move, any covert development program initiated would certainly become known.
4. Even with its present wealth and prosperity, it is questionable whether a democratic German government, in the light of the present inflationary pressures, shortages in land, labor and construction facilities, could

mobilize

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority

NND 989733

By

NARA Date

6/28/11

SECRET

- 2 -

mobilize the necessary popular support to build a nuclear weapons system within any reasonable length of time. The French effort, which has been a very great burden to the French economy, has been staged over nine years, starting in 1956, and still has not produced a modern force. Even if Germany could create some type of nuclear weapon, it could never be a first-class one -- probably always inferior to both the English and French who have had such a head start, and in no way comparable to that of the Soviets and the U.S.

5. The Germans fully understand what the reaction of other countries would be if Germany began the development of a national nuclear capability. It could be done only at great cost to the friendly relations the FRG has sought consistently to establish in Western Europe. It would be generally concluded that the "bad" Germans were back in the saddle. The Soviet Union, along with the Eastern European countries would, I believe, before they saw this accomplished, make it the occasion for every type of threat and sanction possible -- perhaps even to sabotage or war.

6. The Germans must realize that this act, if undertaken without our consent, would also invalidate the basis of U.S. security guarantees for Germany, and could lead to removal of U.S. forces from Germany. We could never permit our troops to remain here as a hostage to a German government adventurous in the nuclear field. Since Germany could never hope to attain either a conventional or a nuclear force commensurate with that of the Soviets, she would at best gain a second-rate nuclear force at the risk of giving up the protection of the greatest nuclear power -- at a time when she will have goaded her traditional enemy to the point of war.

7. There is, moreover, no way in which it could be shown that the acquisition of a national nuclear capability could lead to the expectation which represents the principal unstable element in the German situation -- the reunification of Germany. It is not believed that the German people, in their current prosperous situation within West Germany, would support such risks as would be imposed by the foregoing.

In seeking to clarify this point, I do not wish to give the impression that there is no need to provide a greater role for Germany in nuclear defense. I think there are very compelling reasons to do so. A failure to respond to German concerns on this issue will pose a serious obstacle to German-American cooperation across the whole range of issues on which we will need German support in the coming months and years. It would, in all probability, also lead in time to compensating moves by the Germans disadvantageous to us in various and unpredictable ways -- both within and without the nuclear arena.

A. NUCLEAR

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority

NND 989733

By

NARA Date

6/28/11

SECRET

- 3 -

**A. NUCLEAR**

For example, if we do not find a solution to the problem within the Alliance on the basis of existing proposals, I believe the FRG will seek alternative nuclear arrangements -- other than a national nuclear force. Several theoretical (though not necessarily practical) possibilities exist:

1. A bilateral German-U.S. nuclear arrangement in the strategic range -- going beyond current cooperation in the tactical range -- is not considered feasible for well-known reasons.
2. A similar bilateral approach to Britain is not believed to be politically feasible, no matter what government is in power there, in the light of well-known British political attitudes and the importance the British attach to British-U.S. relations.
3. A possible alternative that Germany has, I believe, would be to seek some bilateral nuclear assistance from France, perhaps along the lines of Germany's present relationship with the U.S. This would, of course, entail a change in policy by de Gaulle, who is against any further German nuclear involvement, however, he or some successor government could change this policy. Germany could help the French pay their enormous nuclear bill -- while admitting the dominance of France over Germany. As a maximum, the French might some day be willing, for a price, to station weapons in Germany under French control and/or to permit some German participation in the planning and targeting of nuclear weapons in France.
4. A fourth alternative -- presently seemingly impossible also because of de Gaulle -- would be a multilateral European approach involving both England and France, for the creation of a European nuclear force, in which Germany could participate as an equal.
5. A fifth alternative would be some modification of existing proposals which would still preserve (a) active American participation, and (b) a "hardware" component.

**B. NON-NUCLEAR**

I will not at this time attempt to examine in detail the whole range of possible non-nuclear moves that the Germans might make in the event there is a failure to provide for them a greater role in nuclear defense. However, this could assume a variety of forms. It could lead to a development of German nationalism -- to a more insistent and belligerent attitude of Germany in its relations with other nations and in world councils. It could, on the other hand, result in an independent and introspective approach to German problems, or to the seeking of general solutions through a bilateral political relationship with France. Alternatively, it could possibly lead

to a

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED	
Authority	NND 989733
By	NARA Date 6/28/11

SECRET

- 4 -

to a turn to the East, even at the expense of neutralism. Although it is not possible now to foresee with precision which course Germany would take in the long run - - nor need we necessarily expect the worst -- any one or combination of the above moves would pose serious problems for American security and diplomacy.

American Embassy, Bonn  
October 20, 1965.

SECRET