

Germany between East and West

edited by

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Germany between East and West

The future of a divided Germany goes to the heart of East–West relations and European security. No analysis of American or Soviet foreign policy or the future of Western Europe can ignore Germany. This book examines the contemporary role of Germany in international politics, and shows how the ‘German question’ will continue to affect East–West relations and the politics of the Western alliance in the future. The contributors address such crucial questions as the existence, or otherwise, of a West German ‘secret agenda’ in its relations with the East; they ask whether the GDR is becoming increasingly distanced from strict Soviet foreign-policy interests; whether anybody, save West Germany, is really interested in changing the central European *status quo*; and where, indeed, the continued West German commitment to eventual unification is actually leading.

Germany between East and West concludes that the nature of the ‘German question’ has changed, and traces the reasons for this in the politics of both the GDR and West Germany; the latter will, however, retain a special sense of responsibility for peace and security in Europe, and a special practical responsibility for the well-being of the East Germans. The German problem is certainly not dead, but, as this volume shows, it now raises questions far removed from those faced by previous generations.

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I INTRODUCTION

1 The German question in the 1980s

EDWINA MORETON

As West Germany's president, Richard von Weizsäcker, put it recently: 'Experience teaches us that a question does not cease to exist simply because nobody has an answer to it' (*Die Zeit*, 30.ix.83). The question he had in mind is the subject of this book: the question of Germany's future.

Traditionally, in postwar thinking, that question has concerned when and how the division of Germany might be overcome. Reunification has been seen as inevitable in the long term by those who worry that Europe can never be stable while Germans are kept divided – and as an inevitable hazard by those who worry more about how such a reunited Germany would fit among its smaller neighbours in Europe. Yet, looking ahead to the 1990s, the contributions to this book suggest that the issue to worry governments and strategists is no longer that of Germany's reunification as such. Rather like the smile of the Cheshire cat, traces of this issue remain, but its substance has changed. The new question about Germany is threefold: first, what role will West Germany try to play in East–West relations and to what extent can East Germany also be a player; second, how might changes in the security framework in Europe affect the relationship both of East Germany with its allies in the Warsaw Pact and of West Germany with its allies in Nato; and, third, how in the long run will the acceptance of the other state in divided Germany affect the Federal Republic's image of itself and indeed its political credibility? Tracing the threads that lead to this conclusion about the different nature of the contemporary German question is the task of this introductory chapter.

It has become almost a platitude to point out that, as the two German states – the Federal Republic in the West, the German Democratic Republic in the East – reach the end of their fourth decade as separate states, the postwar division of Germany has already endured three times as long as Hitler's supposed Thousand-Year Reich. For many West Europeans, who know and accept West Germany as a normal country, and a full and equal member of the Western alliance, that is already a sufficient

practical answer to the question about Germany's future. To those not old enough to remember the division and the years of acute East–West tension over Germany and Berlin that followed, not only is West Germany a normal-looking West European country; its division is normal too. Even many young West Germans increasingly view East Germany as *Ausland* (a foreign country). So why is the 'German question' suddenly back on the political agenda of the 1980s?

One obvious answer is that it is still in Germany, that the European, and indeed the global balance, is decided. A more simple answer is that the Germans themselves have put the question there. As East–West detente elsewhere took a long walk in the Hindu Kush, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, West Germany struggled harder than most European countries to keep alive its spirit in Europe. When martial law finally brought an end to the Solidarity challenge in Poland in December 1981, the then West German chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, was visiting his East German counterpart, Erich Honecker, in East Germany. Although West Germans had done their part in sending food parcels, medical supplies and aid to the Poles, the two German leaders seemed determined to insulate their newly evolving political relationship from the deep chill that settled on relations between the superpowers. Although all of Western Europe at the time may have seemed to the Americans irritatingly reluctant to fall in with sanctions on the Soviet Union and the Polish regime, West Germany came in for the most flak.

The reason owes as much to the things West Germany cannot change about its political situation as to those it can: committed by its constitution to work for German reunification, West Germany has been the only power involved in the German question that is not prepared to accept the status quo in Europe. But if West Germany is to resolve the question of partition on its own terms – meaning by encouraging East Germany to overcome the division between the two states and ultimately reunite with West Germany – then it is East Germany's protective power and chief ally, the Soviet Union, that holds the key. Thus, other Europeans may differ with the United States on East–West issues, but only West Germany is so uniquely vulnerable to Soviet pressure and encouragement. That vulnerability, whether future West German governments succumb to it or not, is what makes West Germany's allies nervous from time to time about the future of Germany.

This greater nervousness could be seen during the debate in Europe over the deployment of new American missiles to counter the build-up of Soviet SS–20 missiles aimed at Western Europe. Anti-nuclear movements were active in several West European countries in an attempt to stop deployment, but the greatest worry was again about the West German

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reaction. In the event, West Germans voted in sufficient numbers in 1983 for the centre-right coalition led by Helmut Kohl to ensure that deployment would go ahead. Under similar circumstances in Britain, once the missile argument had been won, the issue slipped quickly down the political agenda. Although the government's triumph at the ballot box in West Germany in March 1983 was in the circumstances just as resounding, as far as West Germany's allies were concerned, there were still doubts about West Germans' commitment to Nato policy, doubts magnified by the importance of West Germany as Nato's cornerstone on the European mainland. Somehow it seemed that whether the missiles were deployed in Germany or not, West Germany could not win.

West Germany's chief opposition party since 1982, the Social Democrats, also helped perpetuate the issue of Germany's future by voting to oppose deployment of the new Nato missiles in West Germany. That ended the consensus on defence and security policy that had been a cornerstone of West Germany's political stability since the 1950s. The SPD then opened a new phase of party-political Ost- and Deutschlandpolitik with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Since Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats seemed to have managed to keep up reasonably good relations with East Germany, a policy which the Social Democrats had always seen as their own ever since Willy Brandt's 'new Ostpolitik' of the early 1970s, those Social Democrats closest to Brandt now embarked on Ostpolitik, mark two. Framework agreements in 1985 with the East German communist party, the SED, for a chemical weapons-free zone, were followed by similar talks on a nuclear weapons-free zone. Czechoslovakia and Poland were also to be brought into the scheme. Criticism from the West German government that this amounted to an alternative foreign policy and was a deliberate attempt to undermine the government were shrugged off by the Social Democrats, most of whom seemed happy enough after the depression of their fall from power to have found at least one distinctive policy to pursue.

East Germany has done its bit, too, to keep alive fears about a 'secret agenda' in West Germany's relations with the East. Having at first threatened West Germany with a range of tough responses, including an 'ice age' in German-German relations if deployment went ahead, Honecker eventually settled for a damage-limiting strategy and seemed ready to preserve the special German relationship, despite the missile deployment. Was he acting on his own initiative, to preserve a relationship with West Germany that he too found useful, if only in the hard currency it brought to East Germany? Was he beginning to pull away a little from Soviet apron strings and pursue his own Westpolitik? Or was he simply acting out a role assigned by Moscow to cultivate West Germany and make it harder for any

West German government to uphold a similar controversial Nato decision in the future? In other words, was it West Germany that was influencing East Germany to stand up for its own interests, or the other way around?

Where Germany fits

Some Social Democrats in West Germany go so far as to say that West Germany ought to recognize East Germany as a fully sovereign and independent state, although this is disavowed by the party's leadership and would mean contravening the moral foundation of West Germany's Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*). Aside from any emotional tie in West Germany to someday–somehow reunification, such a move would have enormous consequences for the four powers – the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and France – who still have responsibilities for 'Germany as a whole', since no peace treaty with Germany was ever signed after the war. And, as we shall see below, it would also have profound consequences for Berlin, which is still formally under four-power administration and whose western part is marooned deep inside East German territory. But would full recognition of East Germany by West Germany answer the question once and for all about Germany's future?

The trouble is that accepting the division of Germany into two separate states does not answer the questions about what role the two Germanies should play in East–West relations, what ought to be the political relationship between them, and how their inevitably 'special' relationship in the heart of Europe will affect the interests of their allies. The German 'question', put in those terms, is bound to remain a sensitive issue in East–West relations. The division of Europe runs through Germany. As not just the military, but also the political and ideological front line in Europe, the division of Germany has been a cornerstone of the postwar political structure in Europe. From a Soviet point of view, and from a Western one, any change in the political loyalties of either part of Germany would radically alter the balance of power, not just in Europe, but around the globe. Indeed, in many respects although East and West have railed against division at various times, it has solved a fundamental nineteenth-century security dilemma for Germany's neighbours in the second half of the twentieth century: what to do about German power in the heart of Europe. Hence the importance that the future of Germany, or the two Germanies, holds for both superpowers, and hence the sensitivity with which both have reacted recently to any signs, imaginary or real, that German–German relations are developing beyond their control.

As Michael Stürmer (Chapter 2) points out in his look back at how the

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German question has evolved since World War II, the contemporary German question is very much bound up with the power politics of the age. There is no way to isolate Germany from the ideological and political clash between East and West. Germany's division was not the cause of the East–West split, but it symbolizes it. Thus, Stürmer sees the initial postwar German question in two parts: Who controls Germany? And where do Germans find their identity?

For all practical purposes West Germany seems securely anchored in the Western alliance. The Western powers, although in some respects still controlling powers in Germany, are seen much more these days as guarantee powers, and especially guarantors of the future of West Berlin. East Germany, for its part, has no option but to stick to its alliance, too. So who controls Germany would not seem to be a live issue for the present. Where do Germans find their identity? This would also not seem to be a difficult question to answer, at least for West Germans. Even among those unhappy with the continuing tensions of the East–West division, there seems to be little attraction in the alternative 'identity' in the East. If, as Stürmer insists, the preoccupation with German nationhood has really come to mean concern for human rights, rather than a hankering after particular territory or attraction to a common language, then West Germany is already a nation to which many East Germans aspire. As Hermann Rudolph (Chapter 10) points out in his look at society in divided Germany, the flow of refugees between the two Germanies ever since the war has been exclusively westwards.

Yet West Germans more than any other West Europeans keep the debate about the future open. It came to the surface quite strongly in the wake of the Afghan and Polish crises of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and also during the debate over missile deployments in Western Europe. Evidently some issues affect West Germany more acutely than some of its neighbours. Is it possible then, despite West Germany's apparently secure base in the West, that events will conspire to reformulate the German question in the 1980s and 1990s? If so, this future German question could, depending on what form it took, once again shake the foundations of the European security. Or it could be one less fundamental to European security than the four-power struggle for Germany in the early postwar years, but one that none the less causes concern among West Germany's Western allies and affects West–West relations instead. Richard von Weizsäcker was entirely correct in what at the time was seen as a highly controversial statement about the German question, quoted at the start of this chapter. The pressure for some sort of change is inherent in any unresolved question. So what are the future prospects for change in Germany?

The four-power framework

In formal legal terms, the framework of the German question has not changed since the wartime allies fell out over Germany's future in 1945–7. Since the peace treaty envisaged at Potsdam was never signed with Germany after the war, the four powers still retain rights and responsibilities for 'Germany as a whole', despite the creation in 1949 of two separate German states. Berlin is still formally under four-power administration, even though the city has been divided for its German residents since at least the time in 1961 when the East German government built the Berlin wall. For there to be any legal movement towards German reunification, federation, association, or whatever, there would have to be a conspiracy of huge international proportions, in which most or all of the four powers took part. The chances, however, look slim.

The Soviet attitude would be crucial. As mentioned above, the Soviet Union holds the key to a resolution of the German question on West German terms. If Germany's division is to be overcome, whether physically and politically, or somehow socially and culturally, the Soviet Union, as East Germany's protecting power, would have to agree. But there seems little likelihood that the Russians would oblige. There are two schools of thought about Soviet foreign policy in general, and its policy towards Germany in particular. One believes that the Soviet Union is a revisionist power, bent on changing the political map of Europe and, above all, the allegiance of West Germany to the Western alliance. The other school sees the Soviet Union as a status quo power, happy to use Europe's division to its own purposes where it can to undermine the cohesion of the West, but also happy to settle for a divided Europe, in which Germany can no longer pose a challenge to Soviet security. Unfortunately, neither school offers much hope for reunification on West German terms.

In either case, the Soviet Union is bound to find that its most promising point of leverage is West Germany's reluctance formally to accept the status quo in divided Germany. And whether the Soviet Union chooses to pursue its objectives with carrots or sticks, West Germany is bound to be made to feel uncomfortable. Gerhard Wettig (Chapter 3) argues that the Soviet Union is very much working to undermine West German security and its alliance with the United States. Just as the Soviet Union holds the key to reunification, so West Germany is viewed in Moscow as the key to Europe. The long-term goal, therefore, is American withdrawal from Europe, leaving the way open for the region to fall under Soviet political influence. In the short term, what leverage that can be brought to bear will be used to destabilize West Germany and cause dissension in the West. Wettig argues that the Soviet Union has long given up any support for the

idea of reunification; on the contrary, it prefers to deal with two Germanies, although would be delighted to see the Western one turn neutral.

In support of this argument is the fact that the Soviet Union, in its dealings with its Germany, still insists on its four-power rights and responsibilities. As Wettig points out, this is both a way of maintaining a legal foothold in all of Germany, and a way of keeping ultimate control of GDR foreign policy. At times this tight rein has caused friction in GDR–Soviet relations. The Soviet Union seems ready to tolerate the development of German–German relations only when it feels in control of the process. On the other hand, if the Soviet Union really is bent on undermining West Germany, why not make some gesture towards reunification of the kind a West German government could not refuse?

But can the Soviet Union offer anything that would tempt West Germany without, in the process, seriously undermining the stability of the regime in East Germany? Just as West Germany forms the bedrock of the Western political and economic alliance, so East Germany has become increasingly important to the Soviet Union, as both ideologically reliable and economically successful, especially since the all-but-collapse of Poland in 1980–1. In the modern world, the Soviet Union should have much less to fear from a reunited Germany than sometimes appears. All the same, the process of achieving reunification would be fraught with risks that the Soviet Union has as yet shown no sign of taking. For the foreseeable future the Soviet Union's revisionist bark may be worse than its bite, at least until it can see a way of achieving its long-term objectives in Western Europe, without putting at risk its control of Eastern Europe.

Whatever its future intentions towards Germany, so long as the German question remains officially open, the Soviet Union will have at times considerable scope for mischief-making in East–West relations. Yet West Germany is today more valuable to the Soviet Union as a potential lever inside Nato than it would be outside. To put the relationship the other way around, when it comes to looking to the Soviet Union to help solve the German question, West Germany's weight in the East in future will be no greater than its weight in the West. As Renata Fritsch-Bourmazel (Chapter 5) points out, 'Rapallo' – meaning the option of a secret deal with the Soviet Union behind the backs of the Western powers – is no longer available to West Germany. The distribution of power between the two countries has shifted too far: by throwing itself on Soviet mercy, today's West Germany would simply risk being swallowed up. An appreciation of this limits both West Germany's likely response to future Soviet initiatives in Germany and also the effort the Soviet Union can sensibly put into using its West German lever to good effect.

While the German question remains open, the other three powers have as much interest in maintaining the four-power framework around Germany as does the Soviet Union, but for different reasons. Indeed, one of the most remarkable shifts in postwar European politics has been the shift in the role of the three Western powers from that of occupiers to that of guarantors and defenders, both of West Berlin and of West Germany's contention that the German question remains open. Had the four-power framework for Germany not existed at the end of the war, then West Germany would have had to invent it. It is the structure which upholds the unanswered German question. The question has been kept open by West German wish, and allied consent. As William Griffith (Chapter 4) points out, at the time in the 1950s when the alliance between the Western powers and the newly formed West Germany was being crafted, it was perhaps a lucky coincidence that Adenauer's immediate ambitions for Germany happened to fit neatly into the aims of the wider Western alliance. The alliance, and West Germany's part in it, was forged, and could only be forged, as the tension between East and West mounted.

The allies as guarantors and defenders were very much to the fore in the two major Berlin crises, in 1948–9 and 1958–61. Yet, though it forms part of the historical fabric which has strengthened the Western alliance, the second of the two Berlin crises did reveal differences both among the Western allies, and between them and West Germany. In many ways the Ostpolitik of successive West German governments from the 1960s onwards was a reaction to the realization in 1961 that, although the Western allies were prepared to defend the divided status quo in Germany – such as access to Berlin and West Berlin's continued viability as a free city – they were not prepared to be tough in defence of West Germany's maximum demand for a change in the situation in East Germany. Instead, the Western allies have tended to underline the strand of realism in West German thinking that recognizes that national unification of Germany can only come about as a result of the healing of the division of Europe – not in reverse order.

In fact, behind the facade of Western unity erected at intervals in the postwar period to fend off unwelcome challenges from the East, there is moral support in public but no great enthusiasm for what West Germany still says it ultimately wants: German reunification under Western auspices. Of the three Western powers, Britain and France probably have the deepest reservations. As neighbours of Germany in Europe, neither seems keen to advance the day when a reunited Germany would again constitute an economic and political weight at the heart of Europe. (A lack of enthusiasm which finds a deafening echo among Germany's smaller neighbours in the East.) Although, as Michael Kaser (Chapter 9) shows, today the sum of the economic weight of the two separate Germanies is