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REVIEW: SHIFTING WEST GERMAN ATTITUDES ON UNIFICATION

As the Soviet deadline for a Berlin settlement nears, Chancellor Adenauer faces the increasingly difficult task of reconciling divergent opinions within his own coalition on an over-all German settlement, as well as of meeting opposition demands for a more flexible approach. Also under strong external pressures, Bonn is apparently reconsidering its previous positions on military status, free elections, and reunification. This could lead to discussions on confederation with the East Germans at a four-power conference.

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Changing Attitudes - A series of events climaxed by the Soviet threat to Berlin has caused West German political circles to review their thinking on the problem of German unity. Stimulated by the impact of sputnik and George Kennan's lectures in London on disengagement, this review has produced no sudden or sharp reversals of policies or political positions, but a gradual shift in German opinion is becoming evident.

A principal issue has been the manner in which negotiations with Moscow could be resumed. In early 1958 several members of Chancellor Adenauer's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) began to question the standard Western formula for unification--free elections, formation of an all-German government, and then conclusion of a peace treaty--and to advocate negotiations for a treaty prior to elections.

Their dissatisfaction culminated on 2 July in unanimous passage of a Bundestag resolution calling for Bonn to take the initiative in requesting the four powers to establish a commission on the "German problem." This phrasing was a compromise between "German unification," the wording favored by the Adenauer forces, and "a German peace treaty," the preference of the CDU dissidents and the opposition parties.

Adenauer had originally derived the idea of a four-power commission from a suggestion by Austrian Chancellor Raab, and he had difficulty in preventing a complete break-down in the old formula for unification. In a series of notes exchanged with the four powers on this commission question, Bonn again encountered difficulties from some Bundestag deputies who favored more flexibility. Thus, in its 17 November 1958 note to Moscow, Bonn left open the question of whether the commission would deal only with "unification" or with the "German problem," and it also conceded that both East and West Germany should participate in some manner.

While German opinion on the question was in a state of flux, the USSR issued its 27 November proposal to change the status of Berlin, thus giving a sense of urgency to the problem that had been lacking. On 10 January, Moscow submitted its terms for a German peace treaty--the harshness of which dismayed the West Germans and reduced the opposition to Adenauer. Nevertheless, the opposition continued to press for greater flexibility, and with extreme reluctance Bonn publicly conceded on 21 January that free elections were no



longer the necessary first step, although they were still an essential condition to unification.

Thus, a combination of continued Soviet intransigence, a renewed threat against Berlin, and internal differences within Adenauer's own ranks produced the first significant modification in the unification formula since the founding of the Federal Republic.

Adenauer and His Party - In evolving a policy on German unification over the past decade, Chancellor Adenauer and the majority of his party have given priority to the security interests of the Federal Republic. The emphasis is on security--which Adenauer equates with the presence of American troops--rather than on unification based on his assumption that Moscow is not yet prepared to permit German unification on terms acceptable to the West. The most that can be expected, therefore, is a relaxation of East-West tensions through general controlled disarmament, both nuclear and conventional, which would create the necessary atmosphere for solving the German question.

In effect, Adenauer's position has amounted to a tacit acceptance of the continued division of Germany for an indefinite time. Since no German politician can publicly admit such a position, however, the government's approach has been to convince the German electorate that unification can be accomplished only through a policy of strength, defined as economic, political, and military support of the Western community. Adenauer continues to claim that as the strength of the Western position increases, Moscow will eventually be forced to abandon its designs on Germany and agree to negotiations on unification.

This approach received the broad support of the electorate in the 1957 elections. Consequently, the majority

of the Christian Democratic Union, particularly those elements with Catholic or Rhineland backgrounds, feel that unification is not a burning issue to be solved at all costs. Led by the chancellor, they oppose any new approaches or concessions aimed at defining a united Germany's future military status. In Adenauer's view, such negotiations on Germany's status would undermine Western confidence in Bonn and eventually lead to a withdrawal of American forces.

Adenauer's policy is also supported, but for different reasons, by the "nationalist" element in the CDU, including the military leadership, and by the predominant elements in the Foreign Ministry. This group opposes negotiations on Germany's future status because it feels West Germany is too weak to negotiate with Moscow. It relies on developing German military power to a point where negotiations with the USSR could be held under conditions more favorable to the West Germans; Bonn could then agree to the withdrawal of American troops. The principal advocates of this view are the followers of Defense Minister Strauss. Although it is still small, this group has energy and conviction.

Under constant criticism for inflexibility, Adenauer and the CDU have managed to retain public support for their unification policies, in part by allowing the Bundestag some freedom in passing resolutions calling for German unity, and in part by counterpropaganda such as the widely publicized appeals to the USSR to relax controls and improve conditions in East Germany. Such moves generally meet with enthusiastic public response.

CDU Opposition to Adenauer - Adenauer is being seriously challenged for the first time in the field of foreign affairs, heretofore his exclusive domain, by an influential CDU minority led by Bundestag President Eugen Gerstenmaier.

This group, which includes many Protestants and Berliners, is apparently motivated by the fear the division of Germany is becoming permanent. Its members therefore insist that Bonn cannot stand on the old formula but must begin negotiating at once with Moscow on a peace treaty defining Germany's future status.

While there is no general agreement that Moscow is seriously interested in German unification, these CDU dissidents believe public opinion no longer supports Western proposals which Moscow cannot "reasonably" be expected to accept. In contrast to the opposition parties, the CDU dissidents would not offer any concession on Germany's status in advance of negotiations, and there is no broad agreement on the extent of final concessions which could be offered.

The CDU dissidents have no effective leadership as yet, although included in the group are such prominent politicians as Ernst Lemmer, minister of all-German affairs; Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, minister president of Baden-Wuerttemberg; and Johann Gradl, deputy chairman of the Bundestag's All-German Affairs Committee.

Adenauer has effectively held this group in check by alternating small concessions with the imposition of strict party discipline. The significance of the dissident elements

could greatly increase, however, if Adenauer leaves the scene, if a peaceful solution of the Berlin problem seems impossible, or if disunity develops among the Western Allies. Adenauer, rather than be forced into peace treaty negotiations, may even ultimately concede some de facto working arrangements to permit the West to deal with the East German regime on the Berlin access question.

Opposition Parties - The attitude of the Social Democratic party (SPD) has become definitely softer on the unification question. While it has always differed radically from the government in its willingness to negotiate on the future status of a united Germany and to offer advance concessions to Moscow, these concessions have grown more extensive. In effect, the SPD has accepted more and more of Moscow's preconditions for unification. It would renounce nuclear weapons, maintain conventional armaments at a minimum level, accept a nuclear-free zone, and consider troop withdrawals--all in advance of any Soviet commitment to permit unification. However, not all the party, particularly the Berlin branch, agrees with the party leadership's foreign policies.

The SPD would even accept a status of armed neutrality in return for unification. It argues that Moscow has a justifiable fear of a rearmed, united Germany, a fear which must be satisfied through a new European security arrangement. Under the SPD plan, both the United States and the Soviet Union would guarantee a united Germany against aggression.

The SPD is limited in its ability to influence government policy, but it has played a key role in influencing semiofficial thinking on unification. It accepts each new Moscow proposal as a "basis for discussion" and modifies it or incorporates it in its own stand in a more palatable form, thus removing the original "made in Moscow" label. Under such opposition pressure, some elements in the government have begun to favor "tactical countermoves." One such tactical shift often is followed by another, and the new approach eventually becomes frozen as a part of semiofficial government thinking. This was the process on the question of negotiating a peace treaty prior to free elections.

Prospects - Although every West German party insists that free elections take place at some point in the unification process, Moscow's adamant refusal to consider them has led to a gradual softening on this question in all parties. The alternative--some form of merger or confederation--is still rejected by most political leaders, but the idea of confederation "in principle" is receiving increasing attention.

Some of the CDU dissidents, a part of the SPD, and several Foreign Ministry officials apparently feel that some form of confederation could be accepted as an interim solution, provided unification could be achieved "at the end of the rainbow." They argue that in any such merger Bonn would predominate because of its economic and military strength and that, if the Russians withdraw, the Ulbricht regime could easily be absorbed. Many politicians advocating confederation would also interject free elections between the confederation stage and unification.

No political party or prominent political leader has thus far publicly favored confederation, although the SPD has moved much closer to the idea in the past year. Bonn also has hinted that bilateral negotiations with East Germany are possible in the event of a foreign ministers' conference. Such talks would probably include some discussion of a confederation.

Since the CDU is firmly in control of the government until at least 1961, the process of retaining or modifying Bonn's policies on unification will be fought out within the party itself. One European political observer has noted that the shifts in German thinking on unification have occurred at a time when West Germany was not lacking in firm leadership, political stability, or economic prosperity. Moreover, there has been no mounting public pressure for more activity on unification. Should any of these conditions change, the possibility of further shifts would become more likely, particularly in the direction of accepting more of Moscow's conditions.

The fact that attitudes are changing, even though Moscow has not offered the slightest sign of concession, indicates that during East-West negotiations, when Moscow for bargaining purposes might hold out some slight hope of compromise, further pressures will probably develop in West Germany for new approaches to unification--particularly to confederation schemes.