Review

Germany and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons

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Germany and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons
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When in 1950, in connection with the Korean War and the Cold War in general, first plans for West Germany's rearmament were launched, there was considerable international discussion about the justification of such changes. Germany herself had one of the most severe internal cleavages between the governing majority and a very important oppositional minority. This cleavage was hardly equalled by the public dissent about the new Ostpolitik. But the question of nuclear armament—the proposal to renounce Germany's 1954 accords by which she promised never to become a major nuclear power (see Protocols, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954)—did not raise a comparable degree of public interest. So why a book on the topic?

Professor Kelleher has very good reasons to publish this enlarged version of her doctoral dissertation, although it covers mainly the period until 1966, a point at which politics and attitudes concerning German participation in nuclear arms changed considerably. Her study is not only a diligent, meticulous, and, at the same time, analytical reconstruction of the whole discussion and decision process, but also a case study on what politicians can do with an issue if they want to.

The pledge not to manufacture nuclear weapons was one of the fees for Germany's entrance to NATO, and one of the returns was the American guarantee of West Germany's security. Professor Kelleher shows in detail how this policy changed slowly with more and more public demands for German access to, or codetermination over, nuclear weapons.

Here begin some doubts, though, about the range of Professor Kelleher's sources. And this is a question about the limits of empirical

political science, about the limits of social sciences as such. Professor Kelleher prepared her book on a strictly empirical basis. A lot of written material, such as official publications, private document collections (mostly unpublished before), and extensive and intensive evaluations of press accounts as well as 115 informant interviews with politicians, military officers, public officials and journalists provide relatively hard data for her analysis. Her interpretation of these data under substantial topics and not in chronological sequence, her clear, chapter-wise separation of presentation of facts on the one side and commentary on the other are distinctly confined to the material. In addition to this, Ms. Kelleher shows an overwhelmingly intimate knowledge of many details about personal elements in German politics, etc. So she can avoid all speculation (e.g., p. 289).

But can it be done without any speculation, especially in the case of an old fox like Konrad Adenauer, who knew well what to say and what to think? Can one really conclude from press and Bundestag reports that "nuclear weapons" were "the catchword of the most bitter of the post-war national debates" in Germany (p. 1), if eyewitnesses confirm that the professional lobby for and civic protest against nuclear weapons in the fifties and sixties were much weaker than the lobby for and protest against purely civilian nuclear power plants in the seventies? Can one really rely so much upon the official *façon de parler*, which stresses arguments on political equality, strategic necessity, etc. (see pp. 18, 41, 47, 83, 93, 141, 186), but which does not stress so much the fact that the dissent about nuclear arms and rearmament was, to a large extent, not a dissent about goals, but merely about instruments and preferences. The Christian Democrats wanted West Germany's security and all Germany's reunification mainly through the American military and political connection; the Social Democrats wanted reunification and security mainly through international political means. Can one really treat quotations from Adenauer and Strauss in the same way? When Strauss as Minister of Defense asked for nuclear equality out of strategic and other military reasons, he may have really meant that. But Adenauer, as the most civilian chancellor Germany ever had, may have hidden his political goals behind a merely tactical rhetoric. When he saw his concept endangered by changes in U.S. foreign and military policy, he began to play the nuclear card not mainly to become a nuclear power, but to be able still to pursue his old goals.

German attitudes to nuclear weapons seem to be but a reflection of the international, mainly United States, practice in military and security

politics. This reflection, however, is to some extent governed by internal facts. Certainly, there are some radicalists among German political and military leaders who regard participation in nuclear warfare as a matter of self-respect, as some quotes (see p. 56) clearly show. But Ms. Kelleher found herself that German wishes for nuclear arms came from politicians, not from the military (p. 58, 59); General Panitzki, then head of the Command Staff, was even extremely critical of nuclear arms because an attempt to make limited tactical use of them would inevitably lead to a general nuclear war (p. 80). Her whole book gives evidence about the many facets in a complicated system of checks and balances between half a dozen national defense policies (on p. 110 she sees herself a possible connection between denuclearization and reunification) and their multi-level analysis in national and international contexts. It is this general view which makes the book a case study in general politics rather than a mere record of a past project of specific politics.

The last chapter, obviously added just before publication, offers "a look forward." It gives an almost completely different picture of the scene. Different general political approaches, different military doctrines, and different circumstances of military technology have created new attitudes toward nuclear participation in Germany and in NATO. One may spin Catherine Kelleher's thread even a little more forward: may a combination of a reassessment of the U.S. support policy (now after South Vietnam and Taiwan—maybe in the near future after South Korea, Israel, etc.); of recent theories on probable wars in Europe as only conventional wars with just some incidental nuclear dash;¹ and of the new nonproliferation problems,² which make a first atomic strike in South Africa, Israel, or India more likely than in West Germany—may all these aspects not lead to a further change in the politics of (nuclear) armament?

It would certainly not be scientific to engage in such speculations, and Catherine Kelleher remains, without compromise, on sound scientific ground. So she has to refrain from all reinterpretation of the 1954–66 data on German nuclear politics in the light of the period after 1966. One has sometimes the suspicion that there must be something more to explain reality—something that is not in the documents. This is the fate of all empirical research, though, and Kelleher's book is a masterpiece of such research.

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Notes

1. Sir John Hackett, *The Third World War* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1978).
2. Helga Haftendorn, "Die Krise des Internationalen Nuklearsystems," in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 5/1979, pp. 3–27.