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EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BONN

May 12, 1970

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Ronald I. Spiers, Esquire
Director
Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs
Department of State
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Ron:

The enclosures are the memcons of your discussions here in Bonn with Defense Minister Schmidt and Brigadier General Schulze.

You will be interested to know that Defense Minister Schmidt touched on a number of the same themes he mentioned to you in a conversation he had with the Ambassador May 5th. Schmidt said the psychological factor which would be triggered by potential American troop cuts in Europe was enormous in its importance and should not be underestimated by US officials. In the event that German political leaders became convinced that the US was no longer serious about its desire to defend the Federal Republic - and troop cuts would be an important indicator in this context - the only choice remaining for them would be in effect to cease active participation in the NATO alliance and come to seek its security in the East by coming to terms with the Soviets.

On the nuclear weapons question, Schmidt told the Ambassador that if there are active American plans for using a large number of nuclear weapons on German soil, this would mean the end of the Alliance, as far as the Federal Republic is concerned. Schmidt said that in saying this he was not intending to criticize General Polk and his nuclear concepts, he was warning against a situation which could raise a more fundamental issue: where actual American planning, whether known to US allies or not, did include provision for widespread use of nuclear weapons.

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When the conversation came around to his unfortunate article in the WashingtonPost, just prior to the Brandt visit, Schmidt said that in his talk with Secretary Laird he had said that the Federal Republic would do something about offset. The Ambassador pointed out to him that the fact that we did not press on this issue during the Brandt visit did not mean that we were not considering the subject important or were not interested in it. The Germans should not misunderstand our failure to raise the issue during the Brandt talks which were conceived in a different way as a discussion of more general themes. Schmidt said he understood this point very well.

An additional point of interest came up in a breakfast conversation between Egon Bahr and Martin Hillenbrand on May 9. Bahr told Martin that the special commission which will be established to study the future of conscription for the Bundeswehr will also have in its terms of reference study of the question of how to transform the Bundeswehr to a professional military force backed by a militia, with stress on mobility. As you may recollect, this is a favorite Schmidt concept and is apparently not intended for immediate implementation but rather is intended, as far as we can see, as a long term follow on for a draft reform. Bahr said Duckwitz and Kielmannsegg would among others be members of the commission. Because of unfavorable political effect, including MBFR, a determined effort will be made to keep work of the commission confidential.

I would like to suggest caution in permitting the statements you heard concerning nuclear weapons to serve as a basis for criticism of General Polk. General Polk is, as you know, an extremely talented and respected commander with whom we here at the Embassy have the most cooperative

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and best relations between his forces and the German military and public. There is reason to believe that his theoretical presentations on the use of tactical nuclear weapons have resulted in a request to him from General Goodpastor to use more restraint in briefing German military audiences on these topics because of the adverse effects on discussion of tactical use guidelines in the NPG. We believe that this may result in more restraint and that it would be unwise and unproductive to bring the matter up widely in Washington.

With best wishes,

Russell Fessenden

Russell Fessenden
American Minister

Enclosures:

Two Memcons:

- a) German-American Defense Issues
- b) Defense Topics

Copies to:

Asst Secy Hillenbrand
Mr Sutterlin:EUR/GER

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American Embassy, Bonn

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

April 30, 1970

SUBJECT: German-American Defense Issues

PLACE: SPD Party Headquarters, Bonn

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Helmut Schmidt, FRG Defense Minister
and
Ronald Spiers, Director, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs,
Jonathan Dean, American Embassy, Bonn

COPIES TO: State Dept.: EUR, Mr. Hillenbrand (cc)
Mr. Sutterlin (cc)
PM, Mr. Spiers (cc)
Embassy: Ambassador (cc)
POL, Mr. Gannett (cc)

1. Retention of American Forces in Europe

Schmidt received us in his office in the SPD Party Headquarters in Bonn. He explained that he had to spend one afternoon a week in this office in order to demonstrate to the SPD Party functionaries the fact that he continued to be a member of the SPD Party Vorstand. (For this reason, other SPD Cabinet members followed the same practice.)

Schmidt said he understood that Spiers was one of the principal officers working on the current Washington review of American strategic options in Europe and that he had wanted to see him for that reason. Spiers briefly summarized the status of the study, some of the options being considered and the reasons underlying it. He said one disturbing element in the current situation was the flavor of inevitability and acceptance of the inevitable which American observers reported from their contacts with European leaders. British Defense Minister Healey, for example, was pushing this view in an effort to gain increased support for European efforts in defense. We sympathized with his objective but it rested on a distorted presentation of the situation in Washington. No decision had been made to reduce forces after mid-1971 and Spiers did not see evidence that the decision would go in that direction.

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Schmidt said he was keenly aware of the dangers of self-fulfilling prophesies and that he was for that reason deliberately abstaining from public statements predicting American withdrawals. He realized such statements could have most damaging effects. Nonetheless, his own observations of the American scene lead him to believe that important reductions of about 50,000 men would in fact come about within the next couple of years. Spiers asked Schmidt to describe the reasons for this conclusion. Schmidt replied that he accepted as accurate the statement that no decision to reduce had yet been made. He also understood clearly that the State Department opposed such reductions because of its clear understanding of the adverse effect on American interests in Europe. He said he would expect that even if the entire personnel of the State Department should be replaced, any new team would come to the very same conclusion and be thoroughly convinced of it. But the State Department was only one agency among many in the American Government and would probably not have the final word. The Defense Department had already announced a large cut in the over-all strength of the American forces. Figures between 500,000 and 700,000 men were seriously being discussed in Washington. If personnel cuts of these dimensions were carried out, it could not be avoided that they would affect American troop strength in Europe. Second, the dominant trend in the thinking of Secretary Laird and the Administration seemed to be to place emphasis on strategic nuclear weapons. These would continue to cost great sums of money. In a period of continued pressures on the American defense budget, this approach could not result in anything but a reduction of conventional sources including those in Europe.

Schmidt said that if it were in theory possible to spirit away 50,000 men overnight from the American contingent in Europe so that no one would notice their withdrawal, perhaps this reduction would not have really serious effects. But it was obvious that such conditions could not be met. Reductions would be accompanied by enormous publicity. There would be debates in the American Congress and in the Bundestag. The public media would be full of the issue. It would be front-page news in the German press every day for months on end. The impact on public opinion in Europe and Germany would be very strong. It was absolutely erroneous to believe that the European reaction would be to build their forces further. He was absolutely convinced this would not happen. Dennis Healey or anyone else who thought this way was absolutely wrong. The real result of American troop reductions accompanied by intense and protracted publicity would be that each European Government would think of itself and how to protect its own individual interests. Each would react in a different way. It would be interesting to speculate on how Norway and Denmark would react. In the case of Germany, there was no doubt whatever that there would be a trend to what the left wing of the German body politic would call neutralism.

The more conservative part of the spectrum would use harder labels for this phenomenon. But it would in any case take place.

2. Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions

Schmidt then turned to the question of negotiations with the East on balanced force reductions. He said various conflicting attitudes were involved. First, there were the professional military in the NATO alliance. Supporters of this position adopted the absolutely inconsistent view, and had done so since the first mention of the Rapacki Plan in the early 1960's, that even the mention of negotiation about balanced withdrawal was anathema. This group failed to see that they were confronted by a choice between unilateral withdrawal and reductions inflicted on them by their own governments or negotiating for balanced reductions. Second, there was the attitude of other European countries. It was absolutely clear to him, Schmidt said, that unless the NATO Alliance could agree in negotiation on MBFR and perhaps other aspects of the East-West military balance, a strong and in the end irresistible pressure would grow from Oslo to Rome to negotiate with the Soviets on a Conference for European Security. The US had its choice between these two. But in terms of European pressures, it could not exclude both without the most serious consequences within the Alliances. A further factor was the attitude of the German Government. Schmidt said that quite aside from his own personal position there was very strong support in the Cabinet all the way to the top for attempts to negotiate with the Soviets on MBFR and allied issues. American opposition to this project, he felt, would cause serious friction in German-American relations.

*If that is
the choice
why should
Soviet negotiate?*

Schmidt said the attitude of the American Government on this subject was unclear to him. He had had private conversations with Secretary Rogers and Under Secretary Richardson and had participated in two sessions in the White House in which both the Secretary and Under Secretary had expressed their views. On all of these occasions, the Secretary and Under Secretary had expressed themselves clearly in favor of negotiation with the East on MBFR. But the attitude of other senior American officials was apparently less favorable. In his private bilateral conversations with Secretary Laird the latter had shown himself very reluctant to express an opinion on this subject. Schmidt said he had the opinion that Secretary Laird was conserving his political capital to deal with other problems and was purposely avoiding involvement on this one.

Henry Kissinger told him that this was a subject on which the US Government had not yet completed its homework and the background studies necessary to provide adequate basis for a reasoned decision. Ambassador Ellsworth had made some very negative remarks about the

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subject in a recent NAC meeting which added to the confusion. As for the British, their military were apparently taking the same negative position as the US military. Healey's position was ambiguous although he had a general disposition to support the concept of negotiating on disarmament issues and he probably could be brought around to support MBFR.

3. German White Paper

Schmidt said his White Paper on defense would be discussed by the Cabinet this week and would be published by the twenty-fifth of May at the latest. He said the subject in it which would be of most interest to the US would be his treatment of the draft. Schmidt said his essential aim was to retain the draft in operation in Germany. In order to do this, it was necessary, he felt, to keep ahead of and to try to control the adverse development of German public opinion on this subject. Last year alone 20,000 young German potential conscriptees reported that they had been conscientious objectors and had been excused on this ground alone. Given the general temper of the German public, the entire draft system would not stand up against public criticism and risked being swept away within the next two or three years unless reforms were made which would effectively counter public opinion. The same problem had come up in the US and in France. Debre was obviously an opponent of dropping the draft or unilateral disarmament measures, but was having to take these pressures into account, as was the Dutch Government.

Schmidt said his White Paper would contain five potential models for reform of the draft. He would propose the convocation of an independent commission to study these proposals, to add proposals of its own, and to prepare recommendations for reform which would be put into effect in 1971. His aim in these proposals was in each case the same, to increase the equity of the draft and therefore its support by German public opinion by increasing the number of young people in the conscription age group who actually served in the armed forces to as high a percentage as possible, if possible up to 85 or 90 per cent of the age group, and in this way to reduce the present inequity of conscription service which was the driving force behind negative public opinion. One of the specific factors which the Commission for reform of the draft system would be obliged to take into consideration was the effect of possible changes in the German system on the Alliance. Schmidt said that the White Paper would contain a long German formulation on defense posture and military strategy which he believed would be in conformity with American thinking in most respects.

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4. Rising Defense Costs

Schmidt said he was faced by a number of major problems which would be treated only in general terms in the White Paper. The principle of these was the continued demand of the armed forces for increasingly expensive equipment in a period of general rising costs and a shortage of the skilled manpower needed to operate and maintain such equipment. Schmidt said with evident sincerity that he had the highest respect for his predecessor, Defense Minister Gerhard Schroeder. But the latter had not done what he should have done and compared the costs of various projects for major equipment purchases with the projected FRG defense budget for coming years. Schmidt said he had already cancelled one of these projects, the Main Battle Tank, with mutual agreement with the US. The American authorities concerned had known that he would have had to cancel the project unilaterally within a period of four weeks if the decision to cancel had not been reached on a basis of mutual agreement. There were four other similar major projects on which he would have to decide in the relatively near future. These were: the MRCA, frigates for the German navy, air mobility helicopters for the German army, and the so-called fla-panzer, or anti-aircraft tank to accompany ground forces in combat and give them anti-aircraft protection. Schmidt said he intended to make the decisions on these large purchase programs in July while he was on leave, taking the papers with him and inviting small groups of experts to visit him for consideration of each project. Each of these projects was enormously expensive. He could not and would not agree to each program in its present form. He said it was reasonable to expect that he would finally decide to buy a certain amount of each but in a mix which he had not yet made up his mind on. He said the MRCA was an enormously expensive project and he still had made no decision on it. As regards the air mobility helicopter project, Schmidt commented, with some force, that there were very good interconnections between the American armed forces and the German armed forces and that doctrinal disputes between the branches of the American armed services were rapidly reflected in similar disputes between the German Air Force and Army.

5. US Tactical and Nuclear Weapons in Europe

In response to a question from Spiers as to German views on this subject, Schmidt said the situation was that probably the present number of tactical nuclear weapons was not all needed in Europe but that they could not be pulled out without important negative political consequences. Schmidt said that disposal of the sites and the custodial units meant that little or any saving would be possible through cutdown of numbers of nuclear missiles stored in Germany. Schmidt said that he was absolutely opposed to the concept of pre-placing ADM's, pre-chambering of ADM's or any related projects. He said he simply would not have them in Germany. He said that if the German public should ever become aware of certain American

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military attitudes on this subject there would be a major public controversy. He said he had the highest respect for General Polk and considered him a good friend. But in this one regard, he did not agree with him. Referring to the concept of the US as an affluent society, Schmidt said that General Polk was apparently living with a concept of "nuclear affluence." Schmidt said he did not agree with concepts of easy spending or easy use of these resources just because they were at hand.

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American Embassy, Bonn

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

April 30, 1970

SUBJECT: Defense Topics

PLACE: FRG Defense Ministry, Bonn

PARTICIPANTS: Brigadier General Franz-Joseph Schulze,
Chief, Military Plans and Policies, Defense Ministry
and
Mr. Ronald I. Spiers, Director, Bureau of
Political-Military Affairs, US Department of State
Mr. Jonathan Dean, American Embassy, Bonn
Mr. Frederic Spotts, American Embassy, Bonn

COPIES TO: State Dept.: Mr. Hillenbrand (cc)
Mr. Sutterlin (cc)
Embassy: POL, Mr. Dean (cc)
POL, Mr. Gannett (cc)

Nuclear Issues

Mr. Spiers initiated the conversation by asking General Schulze about German views on nuclear strategy, specifically with reference to numbers and types of weapons, the work of the Nuclear Planning Group and nuclear tactics.

General Schulze, noting that the number of targets and number of nuclear weapons are known, remarked that the issues yet to be decided concern the type of weapons and the circumstances for their use. The NPG has prepared 23 studies on ADM's and these will be presented at the Venice meeting of the DPC¹⁴ in May. But he did not think it would be possible to find an ADM concept, involving pre-chambering of the weapon, that would be acceptable to any German government whatever its political make-up. This would be true even in the case of weapons that were smaller and cleaner and that could be under remote control. From a purely military point of view, ADM's could be useful in heavily wooded areas such as the Harz mountains, where to blow over large trees would be a great impediment to enemy movement. But this is politically out of the question in Germany.

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Regarding the NPG, Schulze stated that, if there is any group that is important for and keeps NATO together, that group is the NPG. The Germans had originally viewed the NPG as a sort of American gift, replacing the MLF. But it was soon clear that the NPG operated as an invaluable "mutual learning process" benefiting all participants. The group's greatest line of progress was in the development of political guidelines for tactical use. Schulze commented that he had been amazed how quickly the NPG had gone on to the next step -- to the role of theater strike forces in ACE. This is an even more important topic than the political guidelines. If a measure of agreement could be reached here, this would be a real achievement.

Schulze went on to express grave apprehension regarding General Polk's apparent concept of nuclear tactics. This concept carried the connotation that what was at the back of its author's mind was restricting the nuclear response to the European area and using Europe as a battlefield, with the US and USSR as sanctuaries. Such an idea is quite dangerous. If US defense policy actually posited a war with nuclear exchange confined to Europe, the NATO Alliance would not make any sense for its European members and Europe would have to get out of the Alliance.

Schulze said the impression had arisen at the London NPG meeting that the German Government was against the use of nuclear weapons. This was not the case and the Germans had done their best to correct the misconception. In the German view, any nuclear exchange in Europe would not have to be limited to demonstrative purposes with the objective of engaging the two super powers at an early stage if the aggression is not terminated. If a war began and had to be fought, it should be fought seriously with all the weapons available. Schulze indicated that, in view of German political sensitivities on the subject of nuclear warfare, the best solution was perhaps to provide commanders with the tactical nuclear weapons they need and to leave the decision to them in actual combat. The important thing then was to provide the commander with a wide enough range and number of nuclear weapons to place him in a position to make choices in accordance with the actual situation.

If the NPG does follow-on studies these should provide some general standards. But there can be no answer to the question how many nuclear weapons should be used and for how long. Employment would be entirely different in Norway than in the Ruhr. In Germany itself, use would vary in the Bavarian mountains from that in heavily populated areas. There is no way of defining the appropriate number and use of weapons for the whole NATO area.

With respect to nuclear stockpiles in Europe, Schulze stated that the nuclear mix is more important than the number of weapons. But no one in the German Government wants more or fewer weapons. The present range of warheads was needed and was justified by the need to give commanders the choice. Any reduction in the stockpile, he emphasized, could be mistaken by the Russians -- and Europeans -- as a nuclear disengagement. Replacing one weapon system by another would be acceptable providing the basic number and range of choices were left intact. Adjustments could be made in the total kilotonnage while the number of weapons stayed the same or even increased slightly.

Army Reorganization

In response to Mr. Spiers' question about the reorganization of the Bundeswehr begun late last year, Schulze remarked that the remaining question of importance is whether the army should have an air mobile brigade or an air mobile capacity at the corps level. It is doubtful, in any case, whether an air mobile division would be established and the probable change would be in favor of some air mobility at the corps level. The principal change involved in the reorganization was the creation of rifle brigades for employment in the mountainous terrain of Hesse and Bavaria and the shift of armor from these to other areas. This did not mark a change of concept. Indeed, the concept of forward defense was perhaps even more important in view of the reduction in the original German force level. It is sometimes said, Schulze observed, that the Bundeswehr should emphasize its defensive character. What such persons have in mind as "offensive" are the Leopards and the Starfighters. Helmut Schmidt had expressed astonishment after becoming Defense Minister at the number of the Army's tanks. In response Schulze had pointed out to Schmidt that APC's and tank destroyers had been included in the count and that there was nothing offensive about the Army's equipment. For one thing the German Army is better equipped with anti-tank weapons than any other in the world; it has twice as many as the normal Soviet division. For another, the best anti-tank weapon is the tank. Schmidt had seen the point and agreed that the army's tanks are not in themselves an offensive weapon system.

US Strategic Review

Schulze said President Nixon's statement in his February report to Congress that the US should undertake a strategic review had caused some disquiet in the German Government. Germany would be opposed to any change in the present NATO strategic concept. Mr. Spiers

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responded that the US had not prepared any strategic studies since 1961 and that some review was necessary. The review now under way will probably result in a reaffirmation of the general lines of existing strategy. He pointed out that no decision had been taken on US troop levels in Europe and that there was absolutely no inevitability with regard to such an outcome. Schulze said he was very relieved to hear this view. He commented that it would be useful for General de Maiziere and General Wheeler to have an exchange of views on this topic at the next round of bilateral staff talks.

Brosio Study

In the German view, Schulze commented, the Brosio study should confine itself to a few specific topics. Such topics as nuclear strategy and air defense. With respect to the former topic, for instance, the Germans had the impression that the British incline toward giving up forward defense. To the Germans this is a prerequisite to the Federal Republic's defense contribution. It is, moreover, a sound military concept for the West to plan on trading space for forces. Regarding the air defense topic it would be useful to see whether it is still valid. Of course, a further reduction of US forces would bring about the collapse of the whole thing.

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