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Research Memorandum
INR-36, September 28, 1963

To : The Acting Secretary
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes
Subject : Rapallo?

Historical Note:

Ironically, what actually happened at Rapallo in 1922 has little relevance to the connotations that the name has acquired. Two weak and defeated powers, Germany and Russia, got together, arranged for the normalization of their diplomatic relations, and agreed to a moderate economic and political interchange.

Symbolically, of course, it sent a shiver through the rest of Europe. The Treaty of Rapallo, as the first major independent move of a defeated Germany, looked forward to Russian aid to German military training, and was emblematic of the antagonism to French interwar domination of the continent that ended in the catastrophes of 1938 and 1939.

In this symbolic sense, then, Rapallo may be taken as denoting that radical reversal of Atlantic relationships that would result if West Germany were to seek its security by cooperating with Russia instead of continuing its dependence on the US. It is this concept of Rapallo that we examine here.

I. Motives of German Policy

For the purposes of this study, the multiple concerns that shape German foreign policy may be reduced to three: the Germans seek security and the ability to resist Russian encroachment, international status, and reunification with East Germany. The present strength and pattern of these forces are analyzed below, as a preliminary to a consideration of how conceivable shifts in their relative importance might lead to changes in policy in the future.

A. Security

The present cornerstone of German policy formulation is confidence in the ability and the will of the United States to defend the Federal Republic against the only power it fears: Russia. Every device that may strengthen the US involvement in Germany is welcomed -- the Atlantic community, NATO, the MLF; the arrangement does not matter so long as the substance remains firm. By the same token, however, the Germans are alarmed by any development that seems to portend in any degree a withdrawal by the US from its

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commitment. The test-ban agreement was so interpreted. Up to a point, however, the resulting expressions of concern only confirm the intensity with which the Germans cherish the US connection, which was not remotely affected by the excitement over the test ban.

The US connection has some marked secondary advantages for the Germans. For one thing, the US protector is conveniently distant; while this circumstance may slightly increase the danger of US disengagement, it also relieves the Germans of the constant pressure that a contiguous super-power would exert on them. Furthermore, the US has shown so strong an interest in building up the FRG economically, militarily, and diplomatically that the FRG must realize that it has weighty bargaining power with the US because of the increment of power it can contribute in the Cold War, and even because of the indulgence which the US customarily shows toward the sensitivities of its allies and dependents.

In contrast, the Germans regard the Russians as both ominous and abhorrent. The Germans look upon their human and social characteristics as generally crude, and consider that the political system which they practice and propagate would mean the end of their good life. In addition, the USSR is a cold, calculating, predatory power, and those who cannot deal with it on equal terms of force must expect to be ruthlessly exploited and humiliated by it. Experience to date gives the Germans no confidence that the Russians would mollify their harshness and lower their demands in any attempt to foster better relations between the FRG and the USSR. It is only because of the contribution of US nuclear might and the integration of the FRG into the West European power complex that the Germans are today free of Russian domination.

B. Status

German pressure to recover international status has achieved remarkable success, and the outlook is excellent for many future successes. Adenauer has led the FRG to a more than respectable position in the councils of the West, and Erhard, his successor, is credited with the economic revitalization that has everywhere been touted as miraculous. German trade and finance have spread to cover the free world.

All this, as the Germans are quick to recognize, has been accomplished without the expenditure of excessively large funds upon the military trappings of great power status. Indeed, the fact that enjoyment of a nuclear umbrella came practically free for several years contributed to the speed and strength of the FRG's economic growth. The Germans are in general well satisfied with their achievement and with their prospects for asserting themselves further economically and politically.

Adenauer, in concluding the Franco-German Treaty, may have sought no more than a slender second string to his bow; he may have hoped to gain stature by making Germany a bridge between his other allies and a more and more remote de Gaulle. The action could possibly, however, have opened the way to a prospect of independent Franco-German nuclear partnership. Instead,

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the treaty has now been pressed into the mold of nuclear defense through the existing US (and NATO) commitment.

C. Reunification

Pressure for the West Germans to be reunited with the GDR is the result not only of the dynamics of the present political situation but of the powerful force of tradition. The closely knit German state and people, however sharply severed at the end of World War II, inevitably seek to become an entity again. Hence reunification is a word of power in the FRG, and its force is intensified by the oppressions and deprivations that the East Germans suffer. The issue further gains dramatic edge from the effort to keep West Berlin free. According to all historical expectation, the question of reunification should be an overriding theme in FRG political life.

In fact, however, while all segments of the German people talk for reunification, none is prepared to take direct action for it. Political leaders wrap themselves hopefully in this issue, only to be occasionally derided by some leaders of opinion for getting out of touch with the "real" mood of the people, which they represent as a willingness to go on living with reality (non-reunification) under a make-believe goal of unification. Others maintain that ultimate unification is a reality, but that it can be achieved only gradually and by evolution. In short, the ancient ethos of German nationalism finds itself measured by the realities of the Cold War and the potentials of hot war, and the result is a greater receptivity to compromise and pragmatic formulas than the pure ideology of reunification can ever admit. The West Germans recognize that the key to reunification with the GDR hangs from the Russian belt, and they are well aware of the cost of wrenching that key loose. For the present, at least, they are not prepared to pay that price.

II. Can This Pattern of Motives Change?

The very mention of Rapallo suggests concern whether the force of the factors discussed above might alter to produce a profound revision of German policy. The combinations, complexities, and shadings of events in Germany and outside that might contribute to such an alteration are dismayingly numerous. We feel, however, that ruthless simplification, like that which governed identification of the motives themselves, will permit us to reach a sufficient answer.

A. Security: Nuclear

Could a frustrated reaction, resulting from the denial of an independent nuclear force, drive the West Germans into seeking accommodation with the USSR? Clearly, if their frustration arose out of the problem of achieving international nuclear status, they would gain nothing, for they would hardly expect that in any accommodation with the USSR they would be allowed nuclear power.

Nor, if their frustration were related to security problems, could they delude themselves into supposing that they could unaided generate an

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adequate deterrent. Not even in combination with France could they expect to do so. At the same time, it is possible that the Germans might consider that they could join with France and still continue to benefit from the nuclear umbrella that the US would feel compelled to hold over them. Whether or not a development of this sort would be essentially harmful to US interests, there would be no question of a deal with the Soviets, and speculation is therefore beyond the scope of this paper.

In either case, German security would still depend on the US nuclear umbrella, and the FRG would have to avoid affronting the US. Hence, it does not appear that nuclear frustration is likely to lead to a Rapallo.

B. Security: General

If the Germans should come to feel that through slackened will, relative decline in military power, or for other reasons, the US no longer served as a secure protector for them, then they might well consider seriously bargaining an accommodation with the Russians. Without this sense of failing support, however, we do not see that the other motivations of German foreign policy, as presented above, are likely to change and therefore to divert the course of German policy in the foreseeable future. A genuine suspicion that the Germans were being left exposed would, however, be compounded by the other motivations, and might then be expected to lead to the Germans' making some sort of peace with Moscow.

The criterion by which the Germans will judge the degree of their security is the extent of US involvement, the main evidences of which will be military. US negotiations with the Russians, even if they seem to put off indefinitely any hope of reunification, will probably not set in train a psychological sequence leading to a Rapallo. On the other hand, what might seem comparatively minor changes in US military dispositions might well do so.

C. Reunification

If we assume, as a further test of the Rapallo pattern, that Moscow were to offer East Germany to the FRG, we should have to make the additional assumption that the Russians would attach to the offer some condition that would modify Germany's connection with the West. What might such a condition be? We suggest two possibilities, to define the spectrum of variations on this theme:

(1) The Russians might require complete neutralization of Germany, detachment from all Western commitments, and -- secondarily -- some provision for continuing a distinctive regime in East Germany. In this case, the FRG would be exchanging the assurance of the Western commitment for the hazard of Russian restraint. It might be that the Germans would calculate that the West might still try to deter or prevent any subsequent Russian

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aggression. Nevertheless, the FRG would be shifting to a relatively far less assured security than it now enjoys. We doubt that the Germans' view of the Russians will, in the calculable future, change sufficiently to allow them to accept so great an increase in risk to their nation.

It is conceivable that the Germans would consider Moscow to have been so softened up -- for example, by fear of a growing threat from China, or even by fear that the FRG itself, for one reason or another, might trigger a major confrontation -- that the Russians would become relatively trustworthy. Any modification in Russian attitudes on this scale would imply so fundamental a change in the entire international situation as to lift the issue out of the context of this paper.

(2) The Russians might require neutralization, but under joint guarantee with the US. In effect, Germany would withdraw from the Western defense complex but remain under US protection. In this situation, the US would have a veto power and would undertake the guarantee only if it felt that the new arrangement would be in its own interest. Conceivably, German pressure might move the US against its own better judgment; conceivably, the situation would be premised on a softening of the USSR so significant as to change all the issues; certainly, grave questions would be raised about the criteria that in the US view would justify intervention. By and large, however, in a contingency of this sort the US would retain a voice, and therefore, by definition, Rapallo does not come into the question.

III. Conclusion

We believe that the likelihood of a modern Rapallo is small for the reasons given above. Rather, as a practical matter, the Germans are likely to adopt the most flexible attitudes to avoid compromising Western support and losing their influence in Western councils.

Should US-Soviet discussions proceed to the point of preliminary understanding on the general outlines of a proposal to settle the whole complex of German-Berlin problems, it need not be expected that the proposal would be rejected out of hand by the FRG. Very likely the Federal Republic would seek to exhaust all available means of consultation within the Western alliance to combat any elements it found unpalatable. The influence of West Germany within the alliance, and particularly its bilateral influence with the US, seems sufficiently well established to guarantee a full hearing for its objections, perhaps even to the point of implying what would amount to a German veto on anything that approaches the heart of FRG interests. Still, we suggest that the West Germans, if faced with a package proposal, might wish to test its elements not only separately but as a whole, being prepared to swallow one or another unpalatable aspect of the proposal if the settlement in its entirety guaranteed some substantial progress toward ameliorating the present situation and remained compatible with security and a remote prospect of reunification. Instead of bolting the corral, the West Germans might in such

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circumstances reveal a talent for bargaining, in line with the formula not long ago widely current among politicians and journalists in the FRG: "No concessions without counter-concessions."

In effect, discussion of a détente is likely to exert a centripetal rather than a centrifugal force on the FRG. As with the interallied debate on the strategy and control of nuclear weapons, an increased sense of German participation and commitment would probably result, rather than a sense of alienation from the alliance. Above all, the trend would reflect that element of West German policy which comes closest to the heart of the matter, namely the continuing need to rely on the US as ally and protector. Fundamentally, the West Germans are interested in accommodating the US, not the USSR. Both speculative consideration of alternatives which fall within the concept of Rapallo, and the possibilities of far more modest measures of so-called normalization or rapprochement with the USSR -- which by themselves need not involve the central issue of a German settlement -- are likely to be judged in the FRG by the test of how consistent they are with the vital pro-US trend of West German policy.

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