

Mr. Kohl's First Allegiance Isn't to the Alliance: Europe

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Mr. Kohl's First Allegiance Isn't to the Alliance

Fall is coming to Europe, bringing with it shorter days, longer peace marches and the prospect of more bruised feelings between the U.S. and the West German governments. Perhaps it's time to ask why another quarrel within one of the closest alliances is as predictable as the falling leaves of the season.

One possible reason is that the U.S. has allowed Chancellor Helmut Kohl's conservatism and his country's dependence on

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U.S. defenses to obscure West German concerns. A closer scrutiny of Mr. Kohl as opposition leader might have shown that on foreign policy and trade issues, the Christian Democrats were unlikely to differ markedly from the Social Democrats.

It might have prepared the U.S. for modifications in Mr. Kohl's response to new Soviet arms-control proposals, and his renewed emphasis on relations between the two Germanys, detente and East-West economic ties. Instead the U.S. seems prepared to reject the substance of Mr. Kohl's statements on these issues or dismiss them as mere diplomatic ruminations.

This self-defeating approach toward one of the most vital allies seems due in part to the Reagan administration's belief that Mr. Kohl's conservative coalition is more on "our side" than its predecessor, and that the U.S. can cash in on this. By presuming a confluence of interests based on a political party identity, the U.S. has set itself up for disappointment and strains in its relationship with Germany. The West German conservatives and most of the public believe that they are on "our side." But they are also concerned by the U.S. failure to appreciate their primary problems and goals.

The current confusion between U.S. and German policy makers stems from Mr. Kohl's statements since his Moscow mini-

summit in July. Mr. Kohl apparently found Yuri Andropov more personable than anticipated and hopes to build on this interaction in the future. The U.S. doesn't need another West German leader telling it how to talk to the Soviets about Europe. But the real source of U.S.-German tension is the inability of the U.S. to accept the bottom line in U.S.-German relations: These are two separate countries with national interests that do not uniformly conform.

Ultimately Mr. Kohl is an elected politician whose constituency is German, not American. His power base is the party of Konrad Adenauer, the traditional party of reunification. It is also the party of the financiers and industrialists aimed at improving Germany's trade position with the East bloc. It is a European party that must understand and accommodate the interests of its immediate neighbors if West Germany is to remain a regional leader. Finally, the primary focus of Mr. Kohl's party is the protection of Germany.

While Mr. Kohl reaffirmed his commitment to the Atlantic Alliance in July, upon his return from Moscow he began urging increased U.S. flexibility in arms-control talks and resuscitated previously abandoned proposals, like the "walk in the woods" formula that would establish an intermediate-range missile balance in Europe and obviate the Pershing deployment. Furthermore, Mr. Kohl has raised the issue of East-West German relations in several contexts, directing his concern equally at the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

American leaders have reassured us that the chancellor's politesse toward the Soviets in no way alters the agreed-upon course of cooperation on trade and security between the U.S. and West Germany. Some have even suggested that his autumn initiative does not really differ from his previous policy statements. This last perception is correct.

At least a year before his coalition's victory, Mr. Kohl indicated his intention to maintain the framework of almost 17 years of consistency in West German policies toward the Soviet Union and East bloc. As

opposition leader, Mr. Kohl often decried the tactics with which Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt pursued their *Ostpolitik* and *Realpolitik*. However, he recognized that their foreign-policy programs were publicly perceived as German-oriented. Mr. Kohl emphasized that in light of the overall acceptance of these SPD policies, particularly those toward East Germany, he would not attempt dramatic, unpopular changes if he became chancellor.

So the Reagan administration's sigh of relief upon Mr. Schmidt's ouster in 1982 may have been a little premature. While U.S. officials were busy celebrating the return of German conservatives, Mr. Kohl was busy reinstating Mr. Schmidt's foreign and economic ministers. The former, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, had supported SALT II. The latter, Otto Lambsdorff, had bitterly insisted the Soviet gas pipeline was a German economic matter in which the U.S. should stop trying to interfere.

Mr. Kohl went on to appoint a finance minister, Gerhard Stoltenberg, who didn't believe in economic sanctions (such as those against the Polish regime) and whose approach to strategic trade with the East was simply that of a good banker wanting his money's worth.

Mr. Kohl didn't stop there. Not only did he maintain continuity with SPD policies by his cabinet choices, but he began to echo the former chancellor as well. Within a month, he was calling for increased emphasis on arms control and detente in European security policies (the same detente President Reagan thought he had buried in an unmarked grave was alive on the Continent). This year Mr. Kohl suggested an interim arms-control agreement prior to the Pershing deployment. And, while packing for Moscow, he extended a \$400 million no-strings loan to East Germany as a sign of good faith in the future of inter-German relations. More than a few in the U.S. administration have begun to sound like James Cagney as the Captain telling Mister Roberts, "You s-s-s-stabbed me in the back."

The U.S. needs to recognize that West Germany has developed its own interests along its own lines, and any German party will incorporate these into its platforms. On a general level, these interests coincide with the U.S. But on a more specific level, the U.S. tends to lose sight of its ally's goals. It has ignored West Germany's position in Europe and its determination not to be the next battlefield. The U.S. doesn't appreciate the changes in Germany's definition of, or how it differentiates between, Soviet capabilities and intentions. We can't understand how Germany can condemn Soviet behavior in Poland, Afghanistan or Sakhalin Island and still dissociate it from an immediate threat to Western Europe.

Most important, we have written off West Germany's calls for reunification, which is mandated by its constitution, and then failed to realize how it is achieving a de facto end to the division through economic or political programs. Whenever the U.S. has missed or dismissed the sense of urgency driving German concerns, it has also missed the subtle manner in which Germany goes about developing its own policies to meet its goals.

Instead of grumbling about how much Mr. Kohl may begin to resemble Mr. Schmidt this fall, we should recognize that Mr. Kohl's agenda must separate German priorities if necessary from East-West struggles. Any West German government completely reconciled to all U.S. policies almost certainly would squander the support of its own people and in the long run weaken the Atlantic Alliance. If the U.S. could develop a more accurate perception of German interests as seen from Bonn, it could begin to build a more effective relationship in support of U.S. policies.

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