

Germany in a Vacuum 11/20/65

• Less than two weeks before the visit of Chancellor Erhard, the Administration remains in a muddle of indecision about German requests for a larger voice in Allied nuclear defense. This is perhaps the toughest of all issues affecting the alliance, tougher even than the reorganization of NATO itself. Some officials here continue to advocate an internationally owned nuclear force in which Germany would have a part. Others want expanded nuclear consultations in NATO. Still others would talk but defer action. A final group would in effect tell the Germans to put their nuclear ambitions back in the bottle.

The result is to leave the initiative to the Germans themselves. Dr. Erhard has reaffirmed the wish for equality in Western defense but has again denied any interest in national control of nuclear weapons. There is reason to believe, however, that German authorities now look beyond consultation to a share in some tangible "hardware" under international ownership. The Administration will have to know pretty clearly how far it is prepared to go when more specific German proposals are presented.

What is the basic Western concern? French President de Gaulle and perhaps others want to avoid any nuclear voice for Germany. But the effort to confine the most populous nation in Western Europe to a secondary role is inconsistent with an alliance of equals, especially when the separate French and British nuclear deterrents are portrayed as emblems of big-power status. German nationalism is not now a danger, but it could be if the idea of enforced discrimination became ingrained.

Surely the realistic objective should be to meet the issue before it becomes a demand for a national nuclear program—to afford Germany a share in nuclear arrangements under international control with as little provocation to the Russians as possible. Essentially this is a political, not military, problem. Germany already is defended by enormous American tactical nuclear power on her soil under a double-key system. But many responsible Germans feel that they do not have an adequate say in their own defense.

Other things being equal, it would be preferable to meet the demands through NATO by giving a nuclear committee a voice in the use of American weapons related to the defense of Europe. Perhaps the select committee proposed by Secretary McNamara is not selective enough, but the idea would be worth pursuing in the fashion suggested by Representative Holifield—particularly if the United States were willing to yield some sovereignty.

But some sort of assurance to Germany is pecu-

liarily pressing, and conceivably such arrangements would be too late. That is the rationale for some sort of allied nuclear force. Part of the provocation of a new strategic force might be avoided if the United States would sell or transfer some existing weapons to a new international entity.

It is difficult to have any conclusive answer. Merely because the Germans are restive does not mean that their wishes must be met in every particular, especially by arrangements that would disrupt the remainder of the alliance. But one thing very plain is that the issue will not go away by avoiding it, as some persons counsel both here and in Europe; instead, it is likely to become worse. Germany had better be taken seriously before Germany becomes a serious problem.