

7 The INF agreement and public opinion in West Germany

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INTRODUCTION: ALL-PARTISAN POPULAR SUPPORT FOR AN INF AGREEMENT

Public opinion on national security and arms control in the Federal Republic of Germany became severely polarized along partisan lines in the 1980s, especially so over the deployment of new American INF.¹ To a considerable extent this was a consequence of strong disagreement among the political parties on these issues.² Before the INF agreement was signed in Washington in December 1987, its prospect was widely hailed in West Germany, but many reservations about first the zero-option, and later the double-zero-option, were also voiced at home and abroad by German politicians and security experts, notably by conservative circles of the governing Christian Democrats (CDU-CSU).³ This opposition did not, however, lead to a partisan polarization of mass public opinion comparable with that over the two tracks of NATO's dual-track decision of 1979 for two reasons. First, this opposition reflected a split *within* the major governing party, and not a confrontation of government versus opposition parties. Second, this scepticism was directed against accomplishments of arms control, even disarmament, and the experience of this decade has shown that overwhelming majorities of the public at large favour arms control measures over considerations of military security when confronted with such choices.⁴

It is therefore not at all surprising that the zero-option and the double zero-option have enjoyed, and still enjoy, wide and all-partisan support in West German public opinion. On a great variety of national security issues popular attitudes continue to be strongly polarized along partisan sympathies, CDU-CSU voters differing from adherents of the Greens by 50, 60 or more percentage points on questions like military spending, the presence of US troops, or

Table 7.1 The zero option

FGW: It has been proposed that the United States and the Soviet Union jointly abolish their INF (*Mittelstreckenraketen*). Are you in favour of this so-called zero-option, or are you opposed?

USIA: Do you strongly favour, somewhat favour, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose an agreement eliminating all American and Soviet intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe?

May 1987	FGW					USIA	
	Total	CDU-CSU	SPD	FDP	Green	Total	Strongly
In favour	91	87	94	97	99	89	72
Opposed	8	12	6	1	1	9	2
DK, NA	1	1	0	2	0	2	26

FGW: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen Mannheim, Politbarometer-Series; original German question wording translated by the author

USIA: United States Information Agency, Research Memorandum, 20 May 1987

DK, NA: Don't know, no answer

German membership in NATO.⁵ *Vis-à-vis* the INF agreement such polarization is virtually non-existent. In May 1987, when the contours of the accord had become visible, about 90 per cent of West Germans were in favour of the zero-option, most of these (80 per cent) even said they were 'strongly' in favour (table 7.1). Dissent between voters of different parties only ranged from 87 per cent for the zero-option among CDU-CSU voters to 99 per cent among Green voters.

At the same time, all-partisan endorsement of the *double-zero*-option was almost identical with that of the simple zero-option (table 7.2). United States Information Agency (USIA) data from the same month might create the impression that the *double-zero*-option was significantly less popular than the *simple* version including only INF with ranges over 1000 km, but this conclusion is clearly unwarranted. The question asked for USIA is awkward, because by talking about Soviet superiority in INF with ranges below 1000 km and about 'retaining the right to close the gap' it addressed at least two separate issues, and thus might have pushed some respondents into rejecting the second zero-option. That this question is confusing (especially in a telephone survey) is evident from the percentage of refusals. With the straightforward questions of USIA on the simple zero-option and of Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (FGW) on both versions of the zero-option virtually nobody had such problems in responding.

Table 7.2 The double-zero-option

FGW: It has further been proposed that both superpowers also abolish their missiles with shorter ranges. Are you in favour of this so-called double-zero option, or are you opposed?

USIA: As you may know, even after the elimination of all American and Soviet SS-4, SS-20, Pershing II, and Cruise missiles in Europe, the Soviet Union will have hundreds of short-range nuclear missiles, and NATO will have none. Would you prefer that the United States and the Soviet Union agree to ban all shorter-range nuclear missiles, or that NATO retain the right to build some shorter-range nuclear missiles to close the gap with the Soviet Union?

May 1987	FGW					USIA
	Total	CDU-CSU	SPD	FDP	Green	Total
In favour	90	84	95	95	99	73
Opposed	9	15	5	4	1	12
DK, NA	1	1	0	1	0	15

Because of their strength, partisan discrepancies in German mass attitudes on national security have repeatedly been analysed over the past decade.⁶ With respect to the INF agreement this is not exactly thrilling. Because very large portions of the population favour arms control and disarmament as general concepts this treaty is exceedingly popular across party lines. We will therefore now turn to some important clusters of public attitudes that surround this all-partisan support; that is, to perceptions of the general national security environment, to the allocation of praise and credit for the agreement, and to judgements about its consequences and about possible future courses of action for the West. Here we will quickly discover that the effects of earlier partisan disagreements on public opinion have not been suddenly and completely wiped out by this near-universal consensus about the INF treaty itself.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

In this section we will briefly look at perceptions of the East-West military balance, of a Soviet threat, and of the stability of peace in Europe. As to the first perception, it has been shown that the major change of attitudes in West Germany has occurred between the 1960s and the 1970s.⁷ Whereas up to 1970 more people believed the West,

rather than the East, to be superior in military terms, since then this has been reversed, reflecting the large-scale build-up of military forces by the Soviet Union and its ascent to rough nuclear parity. Up to the mid-1980s surveys produced rather stable results, about 40 per cent responding that both sides were equally strong, somewhat over 10 per cent continuing to believe in Western superiority, and almost one-half of samples perceiving Eastern superiority. These judgements appear to have changed in more recent years. While the (low) share of those who see Western superiority has remained the same, perceptions of Eastern superiority have gone down, and those of equal military strength have gone up (table 7.3). For about 15 years the most frequent view always had been one of Eastern superiority; now it is one of parity. Partisan convictions continue to have a strong impact on such judgements: across the political spectrum from CDU-CSU to Green voters, the percentage still perceiving Eastern superiority drops from 41 to 13 per cent.

If one asks only for the *conventional* balance, one again gets almost the 'old' responses prevalent for the *overall* correlation of forces from 1970 into the early 1980s; that is, most people perceiving Eastern superiority, and about 40 per cent parity (table 7.4). The results for May 1987 show that the discrepancies between evaluations of the overall and of the conventional balance alone are roughly the same across all partisan groups, about 10 per cent less perceiving conventional than overall parity, and about 10 per cent more seeing Eastern conventional than overall superiority. This implies that at least 10 per cent of total samples primarily have nuclear weapons in mind when they are asked to evaluate the military balance in general. It should further be noted that the stable minority of about one-tenth, which still sees *Western* military superiority, does so almost regardless of whether total or only conventional forces are to be evaluated, and

Table 7.3 The military balance

FGW: Who do you believe is stronger in military terms: the West, the East, or do you think that both sides are equally strong?

	<i>Total</i>			<i>May 1987</i>			
	<i>May 1983</i>	<i>April 1985</i>	<i>May 1987</i>	<i>CDU-CSU</i>	<i>SPD</i>	<i>FDP</i>	<i>Green</i>
West	11	14	11	9	12	9	5
East	47	40	35	41	33	39	13
Equal	42	45	53	49	54	52	60
DK, NA	0	1	1	1	1	0	2

Table 7.4 The conventional military balance

FGW: And if you leave out nuclear weapons, that is if you only consider conventional armaments, who is stronger: the West, the East, or do you think that both sides are equally strong?

May 1987	Total	CDU-CSU	SPD	FDP	Green
West	12	9	13	6	20
East	45	51	43	51	21
Equal	42	39	42	41	59
DK, NA	1	1	2	2	0

that this view is especially frequent among Green voters (20 to 25 per cent).

Not only has the military balance come to be seen more favourably in recent years, but the same is true for perceptions of a Soviet threat in the Federal Republic. Historically, the major decline here has been from the 1950s to the 1960s, but until 1985 usually somewhat more than half of the samples have replied that there is such a threat.⁸ According to USIA data this view has become a minority view in the past 2 years (table 7.5). If undecided respondents are excluded, the share of those registering a Soviet threat has fallen to about 40 per cent. This shift is about the same order of magnitude as the reorientation from perceptions of Eastern military superiority towards those of parity. In the absence of pertinent data one can only speculate about the causes of these changes, but the hypothesis that they have something to do with the image presented by the new Soviet leadership commands high plausibility.⁹ We will turn to this image later.

Popular evaluations in West Germany of the stability of peace in Europe have exhibited even more pronounced short-term fluctuations over the past several years (table 7.6). Comparing 1982 (when concerns were highest due to imminent deployment of INF) with 1987 shows changes that can only be described as dramatic. In 1982 virtually nobody believed that peace had become more secure over the previous year, 39 per cent said there had been no change, but almost 60 per cent said the situation had deteriorated. In 1987 only 16 per cent had this gloomy view, while over 60 per cent replied that there had been no changes, and almost one-quarter of respondents even saw improvements. This evaporation of pessimism in the aggregate was strongest from 1982 to 1984, and then continued at a slower pace. It did not occur simultaneously for all partisan groups, however. CDU-CSU

Table 7.5 Threat perception

USIA: Some people say that the Soviet Union is a threat to the long-term security of Western Europe. Others say that the Soviet Union is not a threat to the long-term security of Western Europe. Which view is closer to your own?

	October 1986	May 1987
USSR is a threat	39	32
USSR is not a threat	53	50
DK, NA	8	18

voters were the first to reassess the international situation. Apart from Green sympathizers, they were the most pessimistic group in 1982. But the change in government boosted their confidence instantaneously. Within one year, from May 1982 to May 1983, an excess of pessimistic judgements of 16 percentage points turned into a surplus of optimistic evaluations of 46 percentage points, which thereafter still continued to climb steadily. Liberal voters followed soon, realizing that the change in government had not led to major shifts in foreign and security policy. Adherents of the opposition Social Democrats Party (SPD) took longer to adjust their images of the international climate, the major improvement coinciding with the revitalization of arms control talks in 1986 and 1987. Green voters most stubbornly held on to the doom and gloom views of the early 1980s about the stability of peace, but even in this group positive or neutral evaluations began to outnumber pessimistic ones in 1986.

Evaluations of the stability of peace are influenced not only by the general climate of international relations and by partisan affiliations, but also quite strongly by single spectacular events that receive wide media attention. A survey from December 1987 (table 7.6) shows that 43 per cent of respondents in the Federal Republic believed that the INF treaty had made peace in Europe more secure, only 6 per cent thought the opposite, and one-half of the sample said the treaty had no effect. There was virtually *no partisan disagreement* on this issue. Similar, but less pronounced results have been reported for the first Reagan-Gorbachev summit in November 1985. The main difference in the public opinion response to both events is that positive effects of this summit on the stability of peace were seen, not surprisingly, by fewer people, and that partisan disagreement over these effects still was quite strong. In fact, voters for the government parties then saw this summit as equally conducive to peace as the later INF accord, but SPD adherents were somewhat sceptical, and Green voters much

Table 7.6 Perceptions of the stability of peace in Europe

FGW: Has peace in Europe become more secure over the last year, less secure, or has nothing changed?

FGW December 1985: In November Reagan and Gorbachev met in Geneva. What do you think: has peace in Europe become secure thereby, less secure, or has nothing changed?

FGW December 1987: Has peace in Europe become more secure due to the INF agreement, less secure, or has nothing changed?

		Total	CDU-CSU	SPD	FDP	Green
May 1982	more secure	3	3	4	2	3
	no change	39	39	43	44	20
	less secure	58	58	53	54	77
	optimism index	-16	-16	-6	-8	-54
May 1983	more secure	6	10	3	2	0
	no change	56	63	52	56	27
	less secure	38	27	45	42	73
	optimism index	24	46	10	16	-46
March 1984	more secure	9	16	5	9	1
	no change	64	71	60	67	36
	less secure	27	13	35	23	63
	optimism index	46	74	30	54	-26
December 1985	more secure	31	41	27	43	12
	no change	62	54	64	57	79
	less secure	7	5	9	0	8
	optimism index	86	90	82	100	84
November 1986	more secure	14	17	10	14	5
	no change	66	69	68	76	54
	less secure	20	14	21	10	41
	optimism index	60	72	58	80	18
May 1987	more secure	23	31	17	19	20
	no change	61	60	64	68	44
	less secure	16	9	19	13	36
	optimism index	68	82	62	74	28
December 1987	more secure	43	44	45	44	43
	no change	51	51	50	56	49
	less secure	6	5	5	0	8
	optimism index	88	90	90	100	84

Optimism index: defined as 'more secure' plus 'no change' percentages minus 'less secure' percentage.

more so. In summary then, public opinion in the Federal Republic on its post-INF national security environment is characterized by a significantly lower recognition of Eastern military superiority and of a Soviet threat, and by increased optimism about the chances to preserve peace in Europe.

CREDIT FOR THE INF AGREEMENT AND IMAGES OF THE SUPERPOWERS

Logically, the two questions of which side has made bigger concessions in the INF treaty, and which side has done more to achieve it and deserves more credit, appear to be very similar. But public opinion (not only in the Federal Republic) has a certain tendency not to abide by logical rules. In December 1987 more than 60 per cent of West Germans said that they saw no difference in the concessions both superpowers had made in the treaty, the rest were almost equally divided: 19 per cent saw bigger Soviet, and 17 per cent bigger American, concessions (table 7.7). Whereas the share of those who saw equal concessions was almost the same across all partisan groups, those who recognized unequal concessions from

Table 7.7 Who made more concessions in INF agreement?

FGW: The United States and the Soviet Union have agreed to eliminate all INF (*Mittelstreckenwaffen*). Who has made more concessions in military terms: the United States, the Soviet Union, or do you see no difference?

<i>December 1987</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>CDU-CSU</i>	<i>SPD</i>	<i>FDP</i>	<i>Green</i>
United States	17	22	13	19	7
Soviet Union	19	15	22	23	34
No difference	63	62	64	58	59
DK, NA	1	1	1	0	0

both superpowers were distributed in a characteristic fashion. As one travels across the political spectrum from 'right' to 'left', the Soviet Union was increasingly regarded as having made more concessions. Only among CDU-CSU voters did more people believe that the United States, rather than the Soviet Union, had made the more significant concessions. At the other end, almost five times as many Green voters saw greater Soviet concessions as saw bigger American concessions. This is not the place to argue who is correct. In view of the fact that the Soviet Union has agreed to reduce a far higher

Table 7.8 Credit for INF agreement

FGW: Who has worked more for the disarmament agreement: Reagan, Gorbachev, or both equally?

USIA: Who would you say deserves more credit for the recent progress in the arms control negotiations: President Reagan or Soviet leader Gorbachev?

	FGW December 1987					USIA May 1987
	Total	CDU-CSU	SPD	FDP	Green	Total
Reagan	14	19	10	11	12	9
Gorbachev	28	17	38	29	43	72
Equally	58	64	52	60	45	NO
DK, NA	0	0	0	0	0	19

NO: not offered.

number of INF systems and warheads, whereas the United States has consented to give up completely the *option* of being able to hit the Soviet Union with land-based missiles from Europe, both views can be argued. What matters here, however, is that the judgement on 'concessions' in West German public opinion is quite 'fair', with almost two-thirds perceiving an equal contribution, and the rest about evenly split in the aggregate.

As soon as one asks not about 'concessions' but about the contribution of key actors to the outcome, this 'balanced' judgement of public opinion does not survive (even in the same survey, see table 7.8). Almost 60 per cent said that Reagan and Gorbachev had contributed equally to the agreement, but of those who picked one of these two to deserve more credit, twice as many chose Gorbachev than chose Reagan. Partisan disagreements on this issue were considerable. From CDU-CSU voters to Green voters the view that both deserved equal credit declined from 64 to 45 per cent, Reagan was said to deserve more credit by 19 per cent of CDU-CSU voters, but only by about 10 per cent of all others, and nominations of Gorbachev dropped from 43 per cent among Green sympathizers to 17 per cent among followers of the CDU-CSU.

That comparable USIA data from May 1987 appears to convey a dramatically different message of an *overwhelming* lead by Gorbachev in the popular allocation of credit for progress on arms control can be explained fairly easily. First, the USIA question did not offer the response that both Reagan and Gorbachev deserved *equal* credit, which produced a high share of undecided responses, and, second, at that time the success of arms control negotiations was not yet

assured, so the previous tendency to blame Reagan's uncompromising policies for the lack of progress in arms control still prevailed. It is more important to recognize fully the incompatibility between tables 7.7 and 7.8. Since the question in table 7.8 was asked *immediately preceding* the one in table 7.7, one should expect some kind of transfer effect. The later question yielded results that were more 'balanced' between the superpowers and less polarized along partisan lines. This suggests that the question about which superpower leader deserves more credit for the INF agreement has evoked to a considerable extent a personal 'beauty contest', rather than judgements about the issue itself, where both criticism of Reagan and 'Gorbimania' vary quite strongly across the political spectrum. We will return to this 'beauty contest' shortly.

The conclusion of the INF treaty has significantly changed popular perceptions in West Germany of the superpowers' seriousness about arms control. In 1985 still more people believed in American claims that the United States was striving for arms control than accepted similar Soviet claims (table 7.9). But since 1986 this has been reversed. Green voters and sympathizers of the SPD tended to attribute a high willingness to engage in arms control to the Soviet Union, but were more or less sceptical about American intentions. Even among voters of the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP, the smaller partner in the coalition that has been in power since 1982) this pattern started to prevail, while only adherents of the CDU-CSU continued to trust the United States more than the Soviet Union in this respect. And even in this group the credibility of the Soviet Union increased sharply, from 27 per cent trusting the Soviet commitment to arms control in April 1985 to 53 per cent in March 1987.

The events from the summit in Reykjavik to the signing of the INF agreement have affected public opinion in the Federal Republic on the superpowers' position *vis-à-vis* arms control in two important respects. First, overall trust in their seriousness has gone up by almost 20 percentage points from November 1986 to December 1987. Second, partisan polarization on this issue has been reduced. Over this year, the percentage of CDU-CSU voters trusting Soviet arms control efforts has grown by 27 points, that of SPD-voters believing in American seriousness has gone up by 23 points, and even among Green sympathizers this latter proportion has risen by 31 percentage points. When the INF treaty was finally signed, majorities of almost *all* partisan groups believed in the seriousness of *both* superpowers about further arms control. The shares of those believing in the American commitment among Green (45 per cent) and SPD voters (49 per cent) no longer fell far short of the 50 per cent

Table 7.9 Seriousness of United States and Soviet Union about disarmament

FGW April 1985 and October 1985: In Geneva the United States and the Soviet Union are negotiating about disarmament. Both superpowers stress again and again that they want to disarm. Do you believe that the United States wants to disarm, or don't you believe that? Do you believe that the Soviet Union wants to disarm, or don't you believe that?

FGW November 1986: The United States and the Soviet Union have been negotiating about disarmament for some time now. Both superpowers stress again and again that they want to disarm . . .

FGW March 1987: The United States and the Soviet Union have recently made new disarmament proposals. Both superpowers stress again and again that they want to disarm . . .

FGW December 1987: Meanwhile there is talk about further disarmament proposals. Do you believe that the United States wants to continue to disarm, or don't you believe that? Do you believe that the Soviet Union wants to continue to disarm, or don't you believe that?

	Total	CDU-CSU	SPD	FDP	Green
April 1985					
USA wants disarmament	35	49	26	47	19
USSR wants disarmament	26	27	27	40	23
USA-USSR	9	22	-1	7	-4
October 1985					
USA wants disarmament	31	40	22	51	29
USSR wants disarmament	25	23	23	26	40
USA-USSR	6	17	-1	25	-11
November 1986					
USA wants disarmament	35	47	26	32	14
USSR wants disarmament	40	36	58	57	43
USA-USSR	-5	11	-32	-25	-29
March 1987					
USA wants disarmament	45	60	37	58	15
USSR wants disarmament	52	53	53	69	60
USA-USSR	-7	7	-16	-11	-45
December 1987					
USA wants disarmament	53	63	49	57	45
USSR wants disarmament	59	63	61	53	72
USA-USSR	-6	0	-12	4	-27
April 1985					
Both want disarmament	21	25	19	32	17
USA alone wants it	13	24	8	15	3
USSR alone wants it	5	2	9	8	6
Both don't want it	59	49	64	45	73

October 1985					
Both want disarmament	19	22	16	26	23
USA alone wants it	11	18	6	24	6
USSR alone wants it	5	2	7	0	17
Both don't want it	64	58	71	49	54
November 1986					
Both want disarmament	24	30	21	20	14
USA alone wants it	10	17	5	12	0
USSR alone wants it	16	6	21	23	43
Both don't want it	49	46	52	45	43
March 1987					
Both want disarmament	37	46	33	51	15
USA alone wants it	8	14	4	7	0
USSR alone wants it	15	6	20	17	45
Both don't want it	39	33	43	24	40
December 1987					
Both want disarmament	46	53	45	46	39
USA alone wants it	7	10	4	11	5
USSR alone wants it	13	10	16	7	33
Both don't want it	34	27	35	36	23

mark. In contrast, in 1985 *no* majority of *any* partisan constituency had trusted the earnestness of *either* superpower. Then the majority view, held by about 60 per cent of samples, still was that both did not seriously desire arms control. Even about one-half of the voters of the government parties shared this opinion.

Now the opinion that both superpowers are serious has become the most frequent one in *all* partisan groups. Partisan polarization still lingers on, however, in the extent to which this view is dominant (only 39 per cent among Green, but 53 per cent among CDU-CSU voters), and in the direction of trust if only one superpower is accepted as being serious. Even though the image of the United States among Green voters has improved dramatically, one-third of them still think that the Soviet Union alone can be trusted in its pledges for future arms control. That scepticism about the arms control policies of the United States has not completely been wiped out by the INF accord is also evident when one considers how widespread the notion was that in the INF negotiations the United States did not take European interests into account, a view that was held by over 70 per cent in late 1986, and still by about 50 per cent in May 1987 (see table 7.10).

Returning now to the 'beauty contest' referred to earlier, we see that not only was the praise given to the superpowers for the accomplishment of the INF treaty influenced by evaluations of their respective leaders, but the popular images of these leaders have themselves been affected by this agreement. President Reagan has

Table 7.10 West European interests in INF negotiations

USIA: How much do you think the United States is protecting European interests during its current negotiations with the Soviet Union on eliminating intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe: a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all?

	<i>Great deal</i>	<i>Fair amount</i>	<i>Not very much</i>	<i>None at all</i>	<i>DK, NA</i>
November 1986	3	13	44	32	8
May 1987	9	25	40	9	18

clearly benefited most (table 7.11). Gorbachev's image as 'a man one can trust' improved, too, due to the INF treaty (especially so among CDU-CSU voters), so that in December 1987 he was evaluated much the same by adherents of all parties. But Reagan, who in spring 1987 still clearly had trailed behind Gorbachev in being regarded as a trustworthy person, almost closed this gap by the end of that year. He rose in esteem across the board, among voters of government and opposition parties alike. Even almost one-third of Green voters now thought that he could be trusted, compared with less than 10 per cent just a few months before.

Nevertheless attitudes towards Reagan continued to be more polarized along partisan lines than those towards Gorbachev. Whereas evaluations of the latter as trustworthy just ranged from 60 to 68 per cent (FDP voters vs Green voters), Reagan received this label from about three-quarters of government voters, somewhat less than half of SPD voters, and 31 per cent of Green voters. One has to recall, however, that this range of judgements on Reagan used to be even

Table 7.11 Trustworthiness of Reagan and Gorbachev

FGW: What do you think: Is Ronald Reagan a man one can trust? Is Mikhail Gorbachev a man one can trust?

		<i>Total</i>	<i>CDU-CSU</i>	<i>SPD</i>	<i>FDP</i>	<i>Green</i>
March 1987	Reagan	45	61	35	52	9
	Gorbachev	60	58	67	67	60
May 1987	Reagan	44	63	35	50	6
	Gorbachev	52	50	58	46	60
December 1987	Reagan	60	78	48	70	31
	Gorbachev	63	65	67	60	68

much wider some years, or in fact only some months, earlier. Even though this hardly can have been a motivating factor, President Reagan's quest to make in into the history books as the 'President of peace' has paid off in terms of the 'beauty contest' against Gorbachev in West German public opinion. There can be little doubt that President Reagan entered this contest as a 'lame duck', and that Gorbachev enjoyed a clear head start. This is not only evident from the data in tables 7.8 and 7.11, but also if one considers the rather optimistic expectations in West Germany about the future course of Soviet-German relations associated with Gorbachev's ascent to office (see table 7.12). Considering his initial disadvantage, the extent to which Reagan caught up is quite remarkable.

ATTITUDES ON CONSEQUENCES OF THE INF TREATY

We already have described several consequences of the INF treaty for West German public opinion. Peace in Europe has come to be seen as more secure, trust in the superpowers' seriousness about arms control has increased, President Reagan's image has improved, and partisan polarization of these attitudes has gone down. We will now turn to analysing some attitudes on the immediate impact of this agreement on the security of the West and of the Federal Republic.

First we have to recognize, however, that the level of pertinent information and knowledge that respondents command is a crucial issue in assessing public opinion on national security and arms control matters. Unfortunately there are not many results available on what and how much the mass public in the Federal Republic knows about the various versions of the zero-option and their military implications. The one question that has been asked does demonstrate, however, that there are indeed good reasons why, for questions about the

Table 7.12 Relations with the Soviet Union under Gorbachev

FGW: What do you believe: will relations between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union improve under Gorbachev, will they deteriorate, or will there be no change?

<i>May 1986</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>CDU-CSU</i>	<i>SPD</i>	<i>FDP</i>	<i>Green</i>
Improve	36	34	39	35	51
No change	56	60	54	50	39
Deteriorate	7	6	7	15	8
DK, NA	1	0	0	0	2

consequences of the zero-option many respondents will wind up saying that nothing would change, and why answers about what it will do to the military balance, to the stability of peace in Europe, to Western security, or to American commitments, etc., are not always congruent, but will appear to be affected by the 'flavour' of the questions. In May 1987, USIA asked whether, after the elimination of all American INF, the United States would still have other nuclear weapons left in Europe (table 7.13). To this question exactly one-half of respondents replied that they did not know, 13 per cent said that after the double-zero-option there would be no such weapons left. Only 37 per cent gave the correct answer; that is, almost two-thirds revealed their judgements about the implications of the INF agreement on the military balance, on Western security and the NATO alliance without being aware of American nuclear artillery, nuclear gravity bombs, and missiles with ranges below 500 km still deployed in Europe, an arsenal well in excess of 4,000 warheads.

It is evident that against this background of information the military consequences of the zero-option are really very hard to assess, so that many people simply have to avoid committing themselves (i.e. have to give in-between answers), or can be easily influenced by question wording and the information supplied to them during the interview. Two more points deserve to be mentioned in this context. First, if one should be tempted to regard 37 per cent awareness of residual American nuclear weapons in Europe as quite remarkably high (as one could in light of available evidence about even lower levels of knowledge¹⁰), one should realize that random guessing among those who do not simply say that they don't know would already be expected to produce a result of 25 per cent 'awareness'. The actual finding is only 12 percentage points higher. Second, the 90 per cent support for the double-zero-option can by no means be interpreted as a sweeping endorsement of the 'denuclearization' of Europe, because only 13 per cent believe that this would be the consequence. The overwhelming majority either cannot describe its impact on the nuclear balance in

Table 7.13 Remaining American nuclear weapons in Europe

USIA: So far as you know, if all American intermediate-range missiles in Europe are eliminated, will the United States have any other nuclear weapons stationed in Western Europe with which to defend its allies?

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>DK, NA</i>
May 1987	37	13	50

Europe or claims to be aware of the residual Western nuclear systems on the continent.

Bearing these reservations in mind, comparing table 7.14 with table 7.3 reveals a somewhat surprising pattern of beliefs about the effects of the double-zero-option. Since under the terms of the treaty the Soviet Union will dismantle about four times as many nuclear warheads in Europe as will the United States, one could expect perceptions of Eastern military superiority to decline and those of Western superiority to increase, but this is not the case. In the aggregate, about as many people said that the East would be superior after the double-zero-option as had said it before, somewhat *fewer* respondents than before felt that the West would be superior, and the proportion of those believing that both sides would be equally strong was somewhat higher. Hence, the overall expectation was that as a consequence of the double-zero-option the military balance would shift somewhat in favour of the East. Whereas these changes were only marginal for adherents of all the 'established' parties, the most significant shifts in opinion occurred among Green voters. In May 1987, 25 per cent of them thought the West to be superior, and in December 1987 only 10 per cent said that it would be stronger after the double-zero-option; over the same time those perceiving Eastern superiority increased from 13 to 23 per cent, and those perceiving equal military strength from 60 to 67 per cent. Perceptions of implications of the INF agreement for the military balance thus were strongest among Green voters, among whom it has served to dispel illusions about alleged Western superiority. As a consequence, Green voters have become more similar to the rest of samples than they were before. They still are more prone to detect parity than others, and less likely to regard the East as stronger, but previous notions about Western superiority have dissolved to a significant degree.

Green voters also clearly set themselves apart from the rest of the electorate in terms of whether or not they regard the military balance resulting from the double-zero-option as threatening. There was a strong all-partisan consensus among those who thought that *parity* would prevail after the double-zero-option and that this would *not* be threatening; about 80 per cent of those predicting parity believed this. Green voters were characteristically different from others if they expected either Western or Eastern superiority to result from the INF treaty. Among adherents of the 'established' parties, most of those who predicted *Western superiority* did *not* think that this would constitute a threat: 90 per cent of FDP voters and over 80

Table 7.14 The military balance after elimination of INF

FGW: After the INF have been eliminated, who is stronger then in military terms: the West, the East, or do you think that both sides are equally strong then? And do you feel threatened by this?

December 1987	Total	CDU-CSU	SPD	FDP	Green
West	6	6	8	1	10
East	37	41	33	39	23
Equal	57	53	59	60	67
Threatened	28	23	28	19	32
Not threatened	72	77	72	81	68
West, threatened	1(22)	1(17)	2(18)	0(10)	7(66)
West, not threatened	5(78)	5(83)	7(82)	1(90)	3(34)
East, threatened	14(39)	15(37)	13(39)	7(19)	15(67)
East, not threatened	22(61)	26(63)	20(61)	32(81)	7(33)
Equal, threatened	12(21)	7(13)	14(23)	12(20)	10(15)
Equal, not threatened	45(79)	46(87)	45(77)	47(80)	57(85)

Figures in parentheses in the lower part of this table are percentages of those who feel threatened or not, given their evaluation of the military balance. For example, 6 per cent of all respondents believed the West to be superior after elimination of INF, and 22 per cent of these said this would be threatening (i.e. 1 per cent of the total sample), while 78 per cent of these (i.e. 5 per cent of the total sample) said this would not be threatening.

per cent of voters for the major two parties shared this view. Out of the Green voters who expected Western superiority, two-thirds said this would constitute a threat. Adherents of the 'established' parties again were quite optimistic, even if they expected *Eastern superiority*: 81 per cent of FDP voters and almost two-thirds of voters for the CDU-CSU and SPD believed that this would *not* constitute a threat. However, two-thirds of the Green voters who saw the INF treaty leading to Eastern superiority called this threatening, the same share as did so for Western superiority. This is probably due to the fact that Green sympathizers generally have the lowest confidence in the effectiveness of deterrence, and are most strongly opposed to any side acquiring military superiority. In summary, data collected with the prospect of the double-zero-option in people's minds shows that Green voters have become much more ready to perceive considering any remaining imbalances as threatening, regardless of whose favour they are in. In view of the sometimes low numbers of cases these results should be interpreted with some caution, however.

The data in table 7.14 seems to indicate a certain insecurity on the part of the mass public about how to evaluate the military and strategic consequences of the INF agreement. Such insecurity is even more evident when one examines opinions on which side would benefit

Table 7.15 Who benefits from elimination of INF?

USIA: Who do you think benefits the most in a military sense from the elimination of American and Soviet intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe? Would you say the Western alliance gets the most military benefit, or the Soviet Union and its allies benefit the most?

	<i>Western alliance</i>	<i>Soviet Union and allies</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>DK, NA</i>
May 1987	16	29	40	15

'Both' not offered, but volunteered by respondents.

more in military terms from the elimination of INF on both sides, a question which is similar to the one about the resulting military balance, but not quite identical (table 7.15). People might see very unequal benefits, but still retain their judgement about the military balance, even if this judgement might be that the side which benefits more continues to be inferior. Fifteen per cent of respondents in May 1987 could not say which side would have greater advantages from the elimination of INF, and fully 40 per cent *volunteered* the option that the military benefits to both sides were *equal*, a most unusual indication of insecurity. Only 45 per cent recorded an opinion, of which somewhat over one-third said the West would benefit more. There are at least two explanations why in spite of the highly publicized unequal numbers of INF to be eliminated almost two-thirds believed the *Soviet Union* would benefit more. First, this could reflect exposure to the arguments of the opponents of the zero-option about the loss of an important military option for the West, about decoupling and singularization of the threat to the Federal Republic. Second, it could have something to do with a lack of pertinent information required to make this judgement. We have already seen that the second explanation has to be taken very seriously.

Table 7.16 Effect of the elimination of INF on Western security

USIA: If the United States and the Soviet Union eventually agree to eliminate all of their intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe so that Western countries rely more on non-nuclear conventional forces, do you think the security of Western Europe will be enhanced, remain about the same, or will it be diminished?

	<i>Enhance security</i>	<i>Remain same</i>	<i>Diminish security</i>	<i>DK, NA</i>
May 1987	25	43	22	10

Table 7.17 Effect of the elimination of INF on the American commitment

FGW: Assuming the double-zero-option will go into effect, will this reduce or increase the willingness of the United States to defend Europe in case of emergency (*im Ernstfall*), or will there be no change?

USIA: Some people say that the elimination of US intermediate-range missiles now in Western Europe will mean that the United States is less committed to the defence of Western Europe. Others say that the United States will be just as committed to the defence of Western Europe. Which view is closer to your own, or haven't you heard enough to say?

May 1985	FGW					USIA
	Total	CDU-CSU	SPD	FDP	Green	Total
Reduce	26	27	26	22	20	10
Increase	9	11	8	10	9	NO
No change	64	61	65	67	70	65
DK, NA	1	1	1	1	1	25

NO: not offered.

Similar insecurity about the military implications of the INF treaty can be observed regarding its effects on Western security. In table 7.6 a sizeable all-partisan consensus observed that it would make peace in Europe more stable. But if people are explicitly reminded that it could imply increased Western reliance on conventional armaments, these judgements become less optimistic (table 7.16). The percentages of those who were undecided or thought that nothing would change are roughly the same in both tables (about 50 per cent). But whereas 43 per cent thought that the agreement would increase the stability of peace, and only 6 per cent believed it would be diminished, only 25

Table 7.18 Necessity of nuclear weapons

USIA: Would you say that nuclear weapons are necessary in order to defend the Federal Republic adequately or should we rely on conventional – that is non-nuclear – forces for the defence of our country (Germany)?

	Nuclear weapons necessary	Rely on conventional	DK, NA
June 1986	30	51	19
January 1987	28	58	14
May 1987	24	55	22

per cent said that Western security would be enhanced, and 22 per cent claimed the opposite, if they were reminded of the growing need to rely on conventional forces. Both a high popularity of in-between responses and greater scepticism about the military consequences of the double-zero-option also were discernible when people were asked to evaluate the future American commitment to the defence of Western Europe (table 7.17). Such questions yielded virtually no partisan disagreements at all. About two-thirds of respondents said the American commitment would remain unchanged, 10 per cent believed it would be enhanced, but one out of four respondents claimed that it would be reduced due to the double-zero-option.

Two major items put on the NATO agenda by the double-zero-option are improvements of its conventional posture and modernization and/or numerical increase of the residual INF, that is, with ranges below 500 km. Available public opinion data shows that there is very little enthusiasm in the Federal Republic about any attempts to redress the effects of the INF treaty by military means, conventional or nuclear. In a very superficial view one could be tempted to conclude that the rejection of nuclear weapons should have led to growing acceptance of a conventional-emphasis defence for NATO. It is true that the share of those who believe that nuclear weapons are necessary for the defence of the Federal Republic had declined somewhat, and that the percentage of those who think one should rely on conventional forces alone has grown. In the spring of 1987, 24 per cent held the first view, 55 per cent the second, with 22 per cent undecided (table 7.18).

However, this question is about *defence* and not about *deterrence*. This distribution of opinions, therefore, does not reflect a widespread unwillingness to accept nuclear weapons as a keystone of deterrence, but it reiterates the well-known fact that support for having nuclear weapons in a deterrent role goes down substantially if their usability for Western defence is stressed. The more than 50 per cent who said that one should rely on conventional forces for the defence of the Federal Republic therefore should not be confused with adherents of 'conventional deterrence'; they just do not want to see nuclear weapons *used* in the defence of West Germany, one of the major reasons being that some of these weapons (or those of the other side) would be used 'at home'. Moreover, only one out of four of those who would want to rely on conventional weapons for defence would be willing to accept significant increases of the defence budget of the Federal Republic in order to make this reliance feasible (table 7.19). A conventional-emphasis defence with all its implications thus

received very little support, only 14 per cent being willing to rely on conventional forces for the defence of the Federal Republic *and* to spend more for that goal. Trying to justify increased defence spending and/or upgrading of conventional forces by the need to remedy some aspects of the double-zero-option will not meet with majority popular approval in West Germany.

Table 7.19 Attitudes towards spending on conventional weapons

USIA: Some people say that it would cost a great deal more to deter an attack by conventional weapons than by relying on nuclear weapons. Would you support or oppose a significant increase in the defence budget of the Federal Republic if that would allow us to do without nuclear weapons?

	<i>Support</i>	<i>Oppose</i>	<i>DK, NA</i>
May 1987	26(14)	57(31)	17(10)

Only asked of those who in table 7.18 opted for reliance on conventional weapons. Numbers in parentheses are percentages of the total sample.

The public opinion response to the proposed expansion and modernization of SRINF is equally predictable. Still in the context of the *simple* zero-option, in May 1987 USIA asked whether respondents would, after the ban on LRINF, oppose or support deployment of new Western INF below the 1000 km range threshold to offset the Soviet superiority existing there (table 7.20). Seventeen per cent were undecided, 60 per cent opposed, and only 23 per cent were ready to accept such a new round of *Nachrüstung*, even though they had explicitly been reminded of Western inferiority in these weapon systems. Even without recent pertinent data it is safe to say that now, after the ratification of the INF treaty containing the *double-zero-option*, popular opposition to installing new SRINF with ranges below 500 km is even significantly stronger. The attempts by the West German government to avoid any binding commitment of NATO to SRINF modernization before the 1990 federal elections indicate that it is well aware of this public mood and takes it very seriously.

Two final results on the aftermath of the INF agreement relate to compliance and verification. Even though this accord has brought sizeable numbers of West Germans to accept the sincerity of the superpowers' commitment to arms control, doubts about their willingness to abide by its provisions still are widespread. In May 1987, about 40 per cent said about either superpower that they believed it would observe such an agreement, while about half of those interviewed

Table 7.20 Attitudes on new SRINF

USIA: If NATO retains the right to match the number of Soviet shorter-range nuclear missiles, would you support or oppose the deployment by NATO of some shorter-range nuclear missiles?

	<i>Support</i>	<i>Oppose</i>	<i>DK, NA</i>
May 1987	23	60	17

expressed scepticism over both sides' compliance, and 10 per cent did not have an opinion (table 7.21). At the same time, readiness to accept on-site inspection of US bases in the Federal Republic as part of an INF verification regime was very high, three out of four respondents supporting such measures, and 13 per cent each opposed or undecided (table 7.22).

CONCLUSIONS

The INF treaty has been quite an experience for allied national security decision makers and experts, but also for Western publics. Five major conclusions can be drawn from the reflections of this agreement in West German public opinion. First, and most trivially, this recent accomplishment of arms control not surprisingly has modified many people's perceptions of the country's national security environment towards more confident and optimistic evaluations of the military balance, the menace from the East, and the solidity of peace in Europe.

Second, very broad segments of the public, even after the events from December 1979 to December 1987 and all the media attention and reporting they received, still feel uncomfortable and ill at ease

Table 7.21 Beliefs about compliance with INF agreement

USIA: How much confidence do you have that the Soviet Union (United States) would observe an agreement eliminating all of its intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe: a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all?

	<i>Great deal</i>	<i>Fair amount</i>	<i>Not very much</i>	<i>None at all</i>	<i>DK, NA</i>
May 1987					
Soviet Union	13	28	27	12	10
United States	7	32	45	8	8

Table 7.22 Acceptance of on-site inspection in the Federal Republic of Germany

USIA: During the negotiations, the United States and the Soviet Union have been talking about the need for verifying that the intermediate-range nuclear missiles have in fact been removed or destroyed. Would you support on-site inspection even if that meant Soviet inspectors would be allowed into US military bases in the Federal Republic? or would you oppose on-site inspection?

	<i>Support</i>	<i>Oppose</i>	<i>DK, NA</i>
May 1987	74	13	13

with these issues and lack even elementary pertinent knowledge.

Third, popular evaluations of the superpowers do not follow irreversible trends. In the early 1980s, many observers were worried about an alleged growth of anti-Americanism in West Germany, and about images of the Soviet Union becoming more positive than those of the United States. The spread of 'Gorbimania', though not restricted to within the Federal Republic, has exacerbated such concerns. After the INF agreement we have to recognize that evaluations of the United States, and even of President Reagan, greatly recovered, once it credibly demonstrated that arms control was still on its agenda. Much of the deterioration of the public's judgements about the United States and its policies in the earlier 1980s can now be seen even more clearly as a direct consequence of the way American national security policy was 'marketed' in those years, mainly for internal consumption. The reversal of rhetoric, if not of policy, has been rewarded by a reversal in the trend of West German public opinion towards its most important ally.¹¹

The fourth observation we can make is that the polarization of public opinion on national security and arms control along party lines decreased in the context of the INF treaty, probably for three reasons. Arms control enjoys so widespread mass sympathies that it does not serve as an object of partisan strife. Even those who were opposed to some aspects of the accord had good reasons to speak softly, in order not to be openly identified as hostile to this achievement. Furthermore, disagreements mainly occurred not between but *within* parties, notably the CDU-CSU, and even there strange conversions took place, which prevented opposition from crystallizing. With many exponents of the CDU in favour of the zero-option from the outset – and even the late Franz-Josef Strauss turned full swing from the view that it would undermine the basic

rationale of NATO to his pronouncement of trust in the Soviet commitment to arms control – smaller parts of the public than before could simply and conventionally toe the party line. Party lines had become a lot less well-defined and confrontational with the prospect of this treaty. Also, most partisan national security and arms control experts and spokesmen from all political camps had been proven completely wrong anyway over these years. Those who wanted to strike an INF deal at every slightest sign of Eastern ‘concessions’ were wrong; those who suspected that the United States would never be ready to negotiate INF away in order to be able to restrict nuclear war to Europe were wrong; those who held that these weapons were indispensable for strategic ‘coupling’ found that the primary ally came to think otherwise; those who wanted zero-option proposals only to serve as a pacifier for the peace movement had to witness both superpowers agreeing upon them; and those who believed arms control could only be negotiated with the Soviet Union from a position of strength had to realize that the other side had become willing to give up its superiority in INF, and that this had at least as much to do with its internal political development as with Western staunchness.¹²

Finally, fifth, and most importantly, the INF experience confirmed what students of public opinion on national security issues have been reiterating for quite some time. There is no basic incompatibility between preparations for military defence and national security concerns on the one side, and democratic public opinion on the other, but one of the constraints imposed by public opinion in West Germany is that it takes the two pillars defined in the Harmel Report of 1967 equally seriously: *détente* and a sufficient capacity for deterrence and defence.¹³ A national security policy that neglects the *détente* and arms control components will in these days invariably be confronted with public indifference, scepticism, or even antagonism. The INF treaty was so widely welcomed by an all-partisan public opinion consensus in the Federal Republic because it proved that this second pillar is viable, and is actively and with a will to compromise being pursued by the West. This recognition is extremely important for legitimizing the other pillar, and with it the Western alliance, which could not for ever enjoy its presently still high levels of support if it restricted itself exclusively to providing military security. The INF treaty thus has provided the public in West Germany with some reassurance about NATO policies and the common defence though large portions of this reassurance have been missing for a long time. The surest way to erode it again very rapidly would be to devise and implement military countermeasures which attempt

to revoke unilaterally the concessions the West has made in this agreement,¹⁴ rather than to continue with and broaden the scope of serious attempts to press on with East–West arms control, both conventional and nuclear.

NOTES

- 1 See Rattinger, Hans (1985) 'The Federal Republic of Germany: Much ado about (almost) nothing', in Gregory Flynn and Hans Rattinger (eds) *The Public and Atlantic Defense*, Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, pp. 101–74; Rattinger, Hans and Heinlein, Petra (1986) *Sicherheitspolitik in der oeffentlichen Meinung: Umfrageergebnisse fuer die Bundesrepublik Deutschland bis zum 'Heissen Herbst' 1983*, Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Autoren-Verlag, ch. 4, 5.
- 2 See Rattinger, Hans (1987) 'Change versus continuity in West German public attitudes on national security and nuclear weapons in the early 1980s', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51:495–521; Rattinger, Hans (1989) 'The Bundeswehr and public opinion', in Stephen S. Szabo (ed.) *The Bundeswehr and Western Security*, London: Macmillan.
- 3 For brief summaries of these positions in the German debate see, for example, Charles, Daniel (1987) 'NATO looks for arms controls loopholes', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist* 43:7–12; Dean, Jonathan (1987) 'The INF agreement: Pluses and minuses for Western security', *Arms Control Today* 17:3–10; Gordon, Michael R. (1987) 'INF: A hollow victory', *Foreign Policy* 68:159–79; see also the chapter by Thomas Risse-Kappen in this volume.
- 4 Even though the number of studies of public attitudes on security issues in West Germany has grown considerably over the last decade (besides the author's own work cited in other notes see especially Stephen F. Szabo's copious writings, e.g. 'The Federal Republic of Germany: Public opinion and Defense', in Catherine M. Kelleher and Gale A. Mattox (eds) *Evolving European Defense Policies*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, pp. 185–202; or 'West German public attitudes on arms control', in Cathleen Fisher and B. Blechman (eds) *The Silent Partner: West Germany and Arms Control*, Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, pp. 195–230), there still is no comprehensive assessment of the impact of such attitudes on national security decision making and policy in the Federal Republic. One of the few attempts to evaluate the role of public opinion on policy making in this field is Schweigler, Gebhard (1983) *West German Foreign Policy: the Domestic Consensus*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- 5 See Rattinger, Hans (1988) 'Development and structure of West German public opinion on security issues in the 1980s', paper presented to the *Annual Meeting of the International Security Studies Section of the International Studies Association*, Rosslyn, Virginia, 3–5 November.
- 6 See the literature cited in notes 2 and 4.
- 7 See Rattinger and Heinlein op. cit., Table 4.
- 8 See Rattinger and Heinlein op. cit., Table 6.
- 9 For some evidence see Rattinger, 'Development and structure of West German public opinion', op. cit.

- 10 See Rattinger, 'Change versus continuity, op. cit., Table 3.
- 11 See Joffe, Josef (1987) 'Peace and populism: Why the European anti-nuclear movement failed', *International Security* 11:3-40.
- 12 See the chapter by Thomas Risse-Kappen in this volume.
- 13 See Flynn, Gregory and Rattinger, Hans 'The public and Atlantic defense' in Flynn and Rattinger, op. cit., 365-88.
- 14 For a discussion of NATO's arms control options against the background of European politics see De Santis, Hugh (1988) 'Europe after INF: The political-military landscape of Europe', *Washington Quarterly* 11:29-44.