

# **1      *Introduction***

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The motivation to produce this volume is both political and intellectual. During the past several years, debate has raged over the wisdom of NATO's decision in December 1979 to modernize its nuclear forces and simultaneously to negotiate with the Soviet Union in an effort to limit nuclear arms in Europe reciprocally. This debate has focused on two interrelated issues: first, the requirements for deterring aggression in an age of nuclear parity and second, the requirement to reassure Western populations that Western strategy is a lesser threat than Eastern strategy (compare Howard 1983).

A viable security policy requires not only the capability to organize and to maintain the military prerequisites for deterrence and defense, but also a degree of societal acceptance of these measures. That current debates over security policy have assumed such proportions suggests how much the domestic context of security policy has changed in many Western countries. The current policy disputes in fact are about (1) exactly what has changed and (2) the dimensions of that change.

People focus on how best to reconcile the requirement to reassure with the requirement to deter without at all being sure what the requirement for the former is (or the latter, for that matter). In the process, the public becomes the reason or the excuse for almost everything. Mutually exclusive hypotheses about what has happened within Western publics over the past few years are easily developed, with selective use of overabundant data. Public opinion is being used to justify simultaneously demands for change and demands for continuity. The public is both a participant in and an object of current debates. Yet all affirmations about what "the public" believes contrast starkly with the lack of serious, systematic analysis of public opinion on national security issues.

The purpose of this book is to contribute responsibly to the current political debate by providing a more adequate profile of the patterns of popular support and of popular discontent that Western governments must confront in security policy. It seeks to do so first by sober assessment of popular attitudes in the security policy area from all available sources, not just selected sources. It will also seek to clarify the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological problems that are posed for attempts at more accurate description and explanation. The reader will thus, it is

hoped, gain greater insight into what can, and perhaps more importantly, what *cannot* be said about public attitudes on defense and foreign policy and hence also into the political judgments that can (and cannot) be made about the public's role in current Western policy dilemmas.

Recent contradictory assessments about what has been happening in Western publics have each assumed significant changes in public attitudes. One disputed issue concerns the extent to which these putative changes are permanent or transitory. Some, for example, argue that we are witnessing a long overdue "democratization" of defense policy, that popular participation in determining defense priorities is natural and irreversible. The population at large is considered no longer willing to accept certain basic premises that have underlain Western defense efforts over the past thirty years. Accordingly, it is argued, governments must adjust both their policies and the way they make policy in order to take account of the new realities that are here to stay.

Others argue public involvement in national security affairs is not permanently entrenched and that we are witnessing a period of public anxiety about the future unprecedented since the early postwar period, stemming as much from economic as other factors. Feeding this is a profound lack of public confidence in the ability of governments to resolve difficult problems. In any case, security policy decisions are held to involve calculations that cannot always be adequately grasped by populations at large. The problem of recreating a viable consensus is, therefore, considered to be one of governments modifying their rhetoric to correspond more closely to the realities as perceived by populations in order to help reinstall confidence.

People differ just as widely over the second issue: whether this change should be regarded with sympathy or concern. Those who apocalyptically subscribe to the notion that societal acceptance of a viable Western deterrent is diminishing draw the conclusion that internal social evolutions in the Western democracies are eroding the capability of these nations to survive in freedom and security. On the other hand, others rejoice that now, finally, popular unrest and pressure could force governments to abandon their trodden paths of national security policy, to abandon the inhumane dependence on nuclear deterrence, to initiate unilateral arms reduction, or to search for entirely new security arrangements that would no longer rely on the threat or the application of military force.

The very nature of these arguments points to the urgent need for a careful analysis of the "new realities" surrounding national security policy in Western nations. It is in fact surprising that better, more responsible use has not been made of the wealth of public opinion data available. Analysis of the criteria and intensity with which publics evaluate the threats to Western security, on the one hand, and how governments provide for security, on the other, is simply inadequate. Yet this is a precondition for determining how deterrence and reassurance can best be

reconciled with one another, and therefore how best to resolve the public policy problem currently the source of this tremendous political dispute.

This book obviously addresses a complex network of interrelated problems. At the same time its scope is inevitably limited at the operational level. We want to look here at what is going on in the publics of Western nations with respect to their perceptions and attitudes on national security. The only raw material we have is public opinion data. Moreover, these data are one of the vehicles of current political strife, if not products of it. This must be borne in mind throughout the remainder of this book. We can strive hard to deliver nothing but scholarly investigation and interpretation, but we have to be aware that our most important material is also used for quite different purposes, including manipulation and propaganda.

A simple example may serve to illustrate the need for a more serious and detached perspective toward these data. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen in Mannheim has in recent months regularly asked respondents in its monthly surveys how they felt about deploying new nuclear weapons in the Federal Republic vs. continuing negotiations in Geneva. In May and June of 1983, the percentages of respondents rejecting new nuclear missiles were almost identical; in July this figure was slightly higher, but within limits explicable by sampling fluctuations.

The May and June figures were reported by the second German television network (for whom these surveys were taken), but the slightly higher July figure was not reported on the premise that it was not really news. The July figure became known to the German peace movement, who then held a press conference, expounding on the rise of rejection of new nuclear weapons in the Federal Republic and denouncing the second TV network for "suppressing" this information. As a consequence, the July figure (which conveyed no other political message than published data from previous months) was assigned even greater importance by the peace movement. It was televised and broadcast widely both inside and outside Germany, and all those who thought they had anything to gain spread the news that something dramatic and quite unprecedented had happened within West German public opinion on the issue of missile deployment. This example clearly demonstrates that a considerable clarification of our knowledge and analytical tools is necessary.

Our ability to convey to decision makers a clearer notion of the context and constraints within which they have to operate is limited by two considerations. First, this volume almost exclusively deals with mass attitudes. The formation of opinion within groups of "opinion leaders"; their organization and activities, their interaction with political parties, social groups, the media, and with mass opinion will not be investigated systematically. For decision makers the knowledge that their policies are supported by a "silent majority" offers little consolation if resistance of minorities is based upon intensely held attitudes, well organized and

publicized, and echoed by key social groups, political parties, and the media. Consensus on a particular national security policy has much to do with mass attitudes, but it is not an exclusively quantitative concept.

Second, the intellectual side of our problem prevents us from giving definitive answers to what mass attitudes on defense currently really look like, at least beyond a certain level of generality. We frequently encounter more problems than answers, and upon close scrutiny apparently certain and stable results of mass opinion on national security and defense can dissolve into speculation and guesswork. Mass opinions on national security and defense in many ways prove to be extremely diffuse and intangible.

The media today carry regularly the most recent survey data on nuclear weapons, arms control negotiations, and the Atlantic Alliance. However, this abundance of *current* data is an additional part of the problem we face, as it stands in stark contrast to the lack of earlier data. In the sixties and seventies national security was largely uncontroversial; there was little public interest and involvement. Therefore, there was little incentive to include appropriate questions in opinion surveys. In many cases we simply do not know whether the mass attitudes reported now are any different from those of earlier years. Some of the attitudes or contradictions in attitudes that we find and that worry or delight us today may actually not be new at all, but in earlier times we did not know about these attitudes, and we did not want to know about them for lack of political relevance.

For the same set of reasons there also has been little serious social-psychological and political science research on the origins, formation, structure, and dynamics of defense-related mass opinion. One could even go further and say that there is rather little research on foreign-policy-related mass attitudes in general, as the accepted notion has long been that foreign affairs and international relations are issue areas that are very remote for the average citizen (Rosenau 1961, 35; Hughes 1978, 23). For all practical purposes, the "public" attentive to and knowledgeable on foreign affairs for many years has been conceived of as a rather limited "elite public."

Many of those actively involved in the current political debates surrounding defense policy believe that this has changed dramatically. Yet it remains probable that sizeable segments of populations still have rather little interest in and information about this issue area and rate it rather low in personal importance. Under these conditions, reactive measurement as applied in public opinion polls can lead to very undesirable results. Current polls investigate surprisingly detailed aspects of national security attitudes. It is entirely conceivable that sizeable shares of samples are required to indicate perceptions or evaluations of matters on which they have almost no information at all, and about which they have never before been required to form an opinion or even think. Of course, they could refuse to reply or say that they "don't know." But perhaps they choose not

to do this, in order, for example, not to appear ignorant or to please the interviewer.

Applying reactive measurement in such situations invariably provokes a certain number of "non-attitudes" (Converse 1970). Respondents may choose randomly from the alternatives they are being offered, they may reply on the basis of what they think is socially desirable or acceptable, responses may reflect attitude dimensions that are very different from the ones that are to be ascertained (and that are evoked by the particular question format used), and there can be sizeable effects of survey techniques. One could almost say that, with issue areas in which respondents know and care little, the person who designs the questions to a considerable extent determines the outcome of the poll. This is, of course, what makes this field so accessible to skillful manipulation.

It must be emphasized at this point that this embodies absolutely no value judgment about the public itself. The judgment being made concerns our methodological limitations in understanding public opinion on national security issues. In the chapters that follow there will be many instances in which the authors attempt to determine the extent to which the data they have gathered includes such nonattitudes. This is in no way meant to imply that "attitudes" should exist. Highly structured opinions, especially in response to detailed questions, will only exist on issues close enough to individual experience or interest, and national security policy falls into this category for only a limited number of people.

In order to get a complete and reliable grasp on the mainstream of public opinion on national security in various Western countries, we would really need to be able to draw on an established body of knowledge about how foreign policy attitudes in general and national security attitudes in particular are formed, how stable they are, to what influences they respond, what their basic dimensions are, and so on. This kind of research, at least any comprehensive work, is simply not available and it is certainly too much, in one volume, to develop and empirically test such a theory *and* to present an inventory of available findings, as is the purpose of this volume.

Such a theory probably would have to start from a classification of the substance that national security attitudes comprise, such as overall goals, derived instruments and strategies; facts (past, present, and future), and actors. Attitudes in these substantively delineated fields then would have to be differentiated further according to the familiar distinction of cognitive vs. affective vs. behavioral components (Rosenberg and Hovland 1960), and the relationship of the "salience" (Hartley and Hartley 1952) or "personal importance" dimension with these other three components would have to be clarified. Starting from this kind of conceptual inventory of the issue area to be investigated ultimately should lead to more precise notions than we have now of what aspects of national security mass opinions can be surveyed with what instruments with a reasonable degree

of validity; what aspects are most susceptible to instrument effects; what components are most likely colored by what other attitude dimensions; and so forth. Such extensive theoretical and conceptual clarification of the mental structures we are dealing with here could ultimately lead to a series of empirically testable propositions which currently are not yet available.

Perhaps a small example would serve to clarify this. Imagine a survey question asking under what conditions different countries would be most likely to start a "nuclear" war (a question aiming at perceptions of hypothetical futures). It is entirely conceivable that this expectation of *circumstances* is almost completely determined by stereotypes and evaluations of foreign countries. What we would like to know is people's expectations about future possibilities for nuclear war, but what we actually may be measuring is what nations they like and dislike. Cognitions may be structured by affectively determined attitudes. In the field of mass foreign policy and national security attitudes, problems like this have almost never been seriously dealt with in the professional literature, all abundance of timely polling data notwithstanding.

The chapters on public opinion on national security that follow in this volume all attempt as seriously as possible to go beyond simple description of the available data to characterize important developments in the individual nations. We try hard to ascertain not only what the relevant data look like, but also what can and cannot be concluded from them. We try hard not to take the data at face value, but to produce some meaningful interpretations of the dimensions of attitudes that may be underneath the surface of the multitude of individual findings that are being presented. But, as should be obvious from the above, there are severe limits to the extent to which this book can perform a coherent and comparative critical evaluation of the available data base. Because the general theoretical and methodological inventory required to perform such a task in the field of mass attitudes related to national security is not yet available, the range of conclusions that can be drawn from the data presented in the subsequent chapters sometimes is very wide. Quite certainly, there are segments of public opinion on national security in which the interpretations of the authors represented in this volume differ widely, some deciding that their data measure what they are supposed to measure and that meaningful political conclusions can be drawn, although others would maintain that we cannot really be sure what the same set of data is measuring. This implies, of course, that there are aspects of the whole problem about which we and the authors on the individual countries would agree that prescriptions for policy should not be made at all, or only with the utmost care in view of the low confidence we can put in one particular interpretation of one particular set of data.

This volume comprises contributions from several different countries: first, the United States; second, Britain, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands as Western European partners to the Atlantic Alliance that have been designated for the deployment of new American Intermediate Range

Nuclear Forces (INF); third, France as another major European member of NATO, but with a special position not only in terms of its membership in the Alliance but also in terms of its attitude toward INF deployment and of the absence of the antinuclear protest pervading all the other Western European countries that are treated in this volume; and finally, Norway as one of the smaller countries within the Alliance that borders on the Soviet Union but is not scheduled to receive INF. Even though this is probably a relevant sample of the member nations of NATO for the purpose of this book, its final composition, of course, also has something to do with the availability of authors who were capable and willing to prepare extensive and original contributions.

The differences among the seven nations investigated in the chapters that follow make the task of producing a truly comparative volume very difficult indeed. An attempt was made to assure a certain minimum of comparability by asking all authors to structure their contributions around four specific themes that clearly overlap, but with each representing one core element in public perceptions of Western security and security requirements. These four major analytical axes and the basic justification of each are as follows:

1. Images of the Soviet Union

The Soviet Union is constantly referred to as a threat, but we have a limited understanding of the different concepts that exist of the Soviet Union in the populations of the nations of the Alliance. Such an understanding requires further exploration of the different bases for evaluating the Soviet adversary, especially the relationship of military, economic, and political factors. Do we continue to have two profoundly different views of the Soviet Union existing side by side in the West? To what extent are attitudes toward Western defense policies a function of specific perceptions of the Soviet Union?

2. Images of security

The traditional boundaries between concepts of security, i.e. national, personal, economic, and so on, seem to have eroded. The problems of security as perceived by populations at large seem to be as much internal as external, as much economic as military. What in fact are populations most concerned about? Is military power, for instance, seen primarily to be a source of insecurity rather than security? To what extent, especially during prolonged periods of economic constraint, does defense policy risk becoming the prisoner of more immediate security concerns as perceived by populations?

3. Images of deterrence

The growth of organized protest against nuclear weapons makes it imperative that popular perceptions of Western strategy be better analyzed. To what extent is the way the West provides itself with security truly considered more threatening than the Eastern bloc? What is the true extent of nuclear protest, and to what extent is it a

symbol or surrogate for other frustrations and fears? Is a shift toward greater reliance on conventional forces likely to diminish the strength of protest or simply to alter its focus?

#### 4. Images of allies

Currently, on both sides of the Atlantic, allies are frequently considered more a liability than an asset. There is a curious popular unwillingness to listen and to give credence to security problems as perceived by one's allies. The extent and the wellsprings of this mutual rejectionism need considerable exploration. Is it, for example, more the role of the United States than nuclear weapons as such that is at the roots of current European protest? Does popular opinion in the United States really reflect the often mentioned growing frustration with European positions on foreign policy issues? How much support do alternative arrangements to provide for security command?

By surrendering to these four general themes we have been able to concentrate each country "profile" on describing and analyzing related sets of attitudes, even though there are obvious constraints to the comparative approach. The problems of this present world affect our seven countries in quite different ways. Historically and culturally there is wide variance between them. Because of particular national contexts and experiences problems that are being surveyed in one country in a particular fashion are polled from a quite different angle in another nation. Therefore, even though a great deal of the substance that is being investigated in opinion polls in these seven countries is identical, question wording and the specific stimuli with which respondents are presented vary widely, so that the resulting data are not directly comparable in any strict sense. There also are big differences between the nations in the extent to which comparable data from earlier years or even complete time series ranging over ten, twenty, or thirty years could be found. Public opinion polls do not, of course, have the same traditions in all these nations. Finally, because of the prominent role of governments and official agencies in commissioning public opinion polls on measures of national security and defense, the accessibility of data is not the same in all countries. Some publish freely or at least supply almost all material to researchers upon request. Others pursue more restrictive policies. In spite of their common structure, the subsequent chapters thus exhibit considerable variance in terms of substance, and of style and extent of their treatment of particular aspects of our overall problem.

This introduction should have made the reader aware that the authors of this book have confronted a difficult task. In view of the complexity of the problems and of the scarcity of available theoretical or comparative empirical research the reader should be warned against expecting too much from this one volume. Its contributions set out to describe what mass public opinion on national security matters looks like in some



important member nations of the Atlantic Alliance and how this has developed over the past several years. In that sense, the volume should also serve as an easily accessible cross-national data base, as a kind of "handbook" of defense-related public opinion in these seven countries. In addition, there will be some preliminary critical evaluation of what can and what cannot be concluded from these data.

Those seeking proof of dramatic shifts in popular attitudes on security policy, shifts that undermine the premises on which Western policies have been based, will not find it in the chapters that follow. Likewise, those who would believe that nothing of any significance has happened and that we can carry on "business as usual" will not find much comfort in this book. The reality, to the extent the research presented here has been able to bring it into sharper relief, lies somewhere in between.

This is not a study of elites, of opinion leaders, of peace movements. This is not a study of mass-elite, elitemedias, and other interactions that shape the process of political communication and the formation of political will. It is not a study of ongoing political battles in these countries, attempting to forecast possible outcomes or possible changes in policy. It is an inventory of mass opinions on national security in the nations of the Atlantic Alliance, something until now unavailable despite all of the regular assertions on what the public thinks. Under these circumstances, even a study with such limited aspirations should prove valuable in our current political debates over how best to provide for peace and security.

## References

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