

W. Germans wary of Moscow's carrot and stick tactics

Soviet gains in Bonn depend on whether US seen as serious in arms talks

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Bonn

Moscow's mixed appeal and threat to Western Europe to choose between its American alliance and détente finds only a wary response so far in the linchpin country of West Germany.

Moscow's further prospects for winning greater sympathy here in the 1983 "year of the missile" will depend largely on domestic West German politics and on whether the United States is perceived to be serious in arms-control negotiations.

The Soviet combination of carrot and stick was formulated most explicitly by Tass on Dec. 25. Western European states, the official Soviet news agency warned, must decide between détente and following the US along "its fatal path of confrontation." Western Europe thus faces "an extremely important alternative, perhaps the most important in its entire history," Tass declared, echoing a shift in Soviet public relations in recent weeks toward greater implicit stress on the stick.

Pravda's commentary followed a common Western response with different national emphases to Soviet party chief Yuri Andropov's pre-Christmas speech on European-theater intermediate range nuclear weapons.

In that speech Andropov offered to reduce Soviet European-theater missile numbers (though not warheads) by several hundred to match British and French numbers — if NATO would waive planned US deployments in Europe. Washington, London, and Paris immediately replied that this offer was unacceptable — but was worth studying for elements of flexibility.

Reversing this order, Bonn immediately replied that the Soviet offer was worth studying for elements of flexibility — but was unacceptable as it was. Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher added pointedly that a positive aspect of the new Kremlin position was its implicit admission — for the first time — that the Soviet Union already possesses a large Euromissile superiority over NATO.

Moscow seems to have few hopes of dissuading Bonn's three-month-old conservative government from going ahead with the NATO deployments due to begin at the end of next year if there is no Soviet-American Euromissile arms-control agreement before then. The government repeatedly asserts that the West German portion of these deployments will proceed in the absence of arms control — and that arms-control talks could then continue after the initial installations. Soviet spokesmen vigorously contest the last point and threaten to break off the negotiations as

soon as Western deployments begin.

The Soviet Union apparently hopes that its carrot and stick will have a greater impact on the West German opposition and public than on the government — especially during the campaign for the planned March 6 general election here. To this end the Soviets are emphasizing to Western European audiences the quick US rejection of the Andropov offer, portraying this as proof of American bad faith.

This Soviet analysis finds a ready ear among the West German anti-nuclear movement and the left wing of the opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD), which take for granted American bad faith in arms control. The more uncertain question will be the eventual judgment by centrist Social Democrats and the broader West German public.

Here the Soviets must perform a delicate balancing act. They are beginning to brandish their European nuclear superiority in a new way in warning Western Europe of unspecified consequences if NATO deployments proceed. But at the same time they are continuing to portray themselves as the real peace lovers as against a reckless American nuclear superpower. The new threats could backfire and induce a perception of need for greater NATO defense, some observers here suggest — unless Washington makes it easy for Moscow by playing the ogre with an uncompromising negotiating position.

In this rather fluid competition to win West German "hearts and minds," the SPD has not yet made up its collective mind.

Foreign Minister Genscher, who broke up his Liberal Party's coalition with the SPD last fall over domestic issues, now accuses the SPD of abandoning the former common position of all the parties on Euromissiles.

Allied diplomats here consider Genscher's view an exaggeration — but they note, as one diplomat phrased it, "You sure get the feeling from talking to various people in the party that they are positioning themselves to espouse a moratorium or something at the [January] party conference." A nuclear moratorium would presume a European nuclear balance rather than the Soviet superiority that both Western official policy and now — implicitly — Andropov's official policy assume exists.

So far the SPD — in agreement with the conservatives — has been avoiding making NATO missiles a central issue in the imminent campaign. SPD presidium member Hans-Jürgen Wischniewski has given a warning signal in regretting the American, British, and French "premature rejection" of the Andropov offer. But SPD chancellor candidate Hans-Jochen Vogel has expressed no strong opinions of his own on nuclear weapons and arms control.