

National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), Tokyo  
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# The German Nuclear Question, 1955-1975

## A Reassessment

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**1.** The meanings of the German Nuclear Question changed profoundly between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s. One way to illustrate this is to highlight how sharply concerns of top U.S. policy makers with the German Nuclear Question shifted: This question was gradually seen less through the *initially* predominating lens of how to inhibit a West German policy of ‘going nuclear’ and more and more through the *finally* prevalent lens of how to inhibit geopolitical change, detrimental to Western and U.S. interests, abetted by German feelings of insecurity.

2. I seek to promote a ‘post-revisionist’ understanding of West German nuclear ambitions and policy, make the case for an explanatory framework which I call *limited nuclear revisionism*, and my research yields two specific insights:
  - a. The Non-Proliferation Treaty had no non-proliferation effect with regards to West Germany.
  - b. The German Nuclear Question was not ‘solved’ when the country acceded to the NPT.

**3.** The stance of the Federal Republic of Germany toward emerging NPT regime shifted in far-reaching manner: Initially West Germany was opposed against the NPT concept, but not against non-proliferation policy. In the end, West Germany welcomed the NPT as a means to promote the détente process and create a more stable nuclear world order.

- Initially, meaning of German Nuclear Question straightforward:  
Will ‘nuclear capable’ West Germany remain a non-nuclear state?
- Proliferation pressure → hypothetical scenario of Germany seeking nuclear weapons on basis of indigenous nuclear program; relevant particularly during ‘Adenauer era’ (1949-1963)

Chancellor Konrad Adenauer with Emperor Hirohito and Empress Nagako of Japan, Imperial Palace, Tokyo, 3 May 1960.



Initially, U.S./Western preoccupation with seeking to inhibit German ‚drive‘ towards nuclear weapons

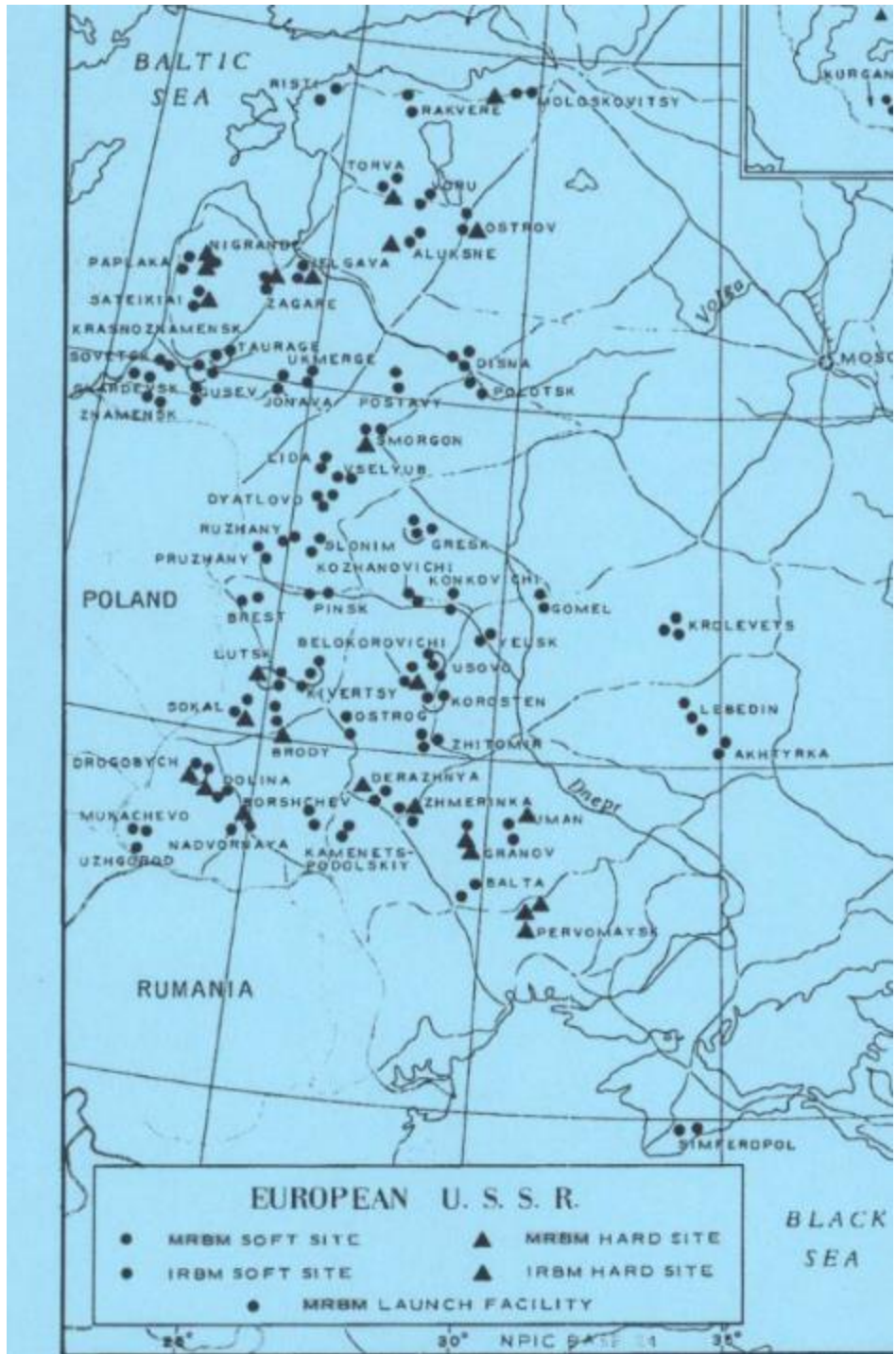
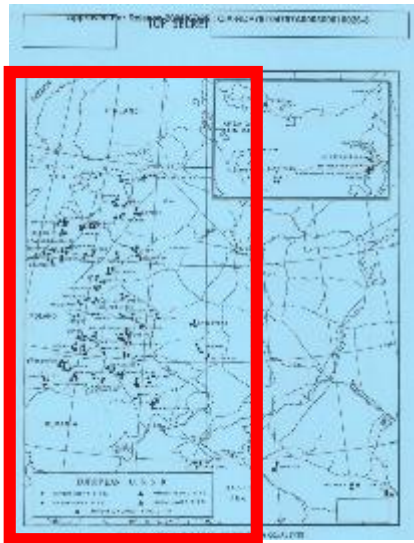
→ In Nixon years, in contrast, major preoccupation with seeking to inhibit geopolitical change abetted by German feelings of insecurity while FRG seeks to overcome division of Germany

Chancellor Willy Brandt with President Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry A. Kissinger



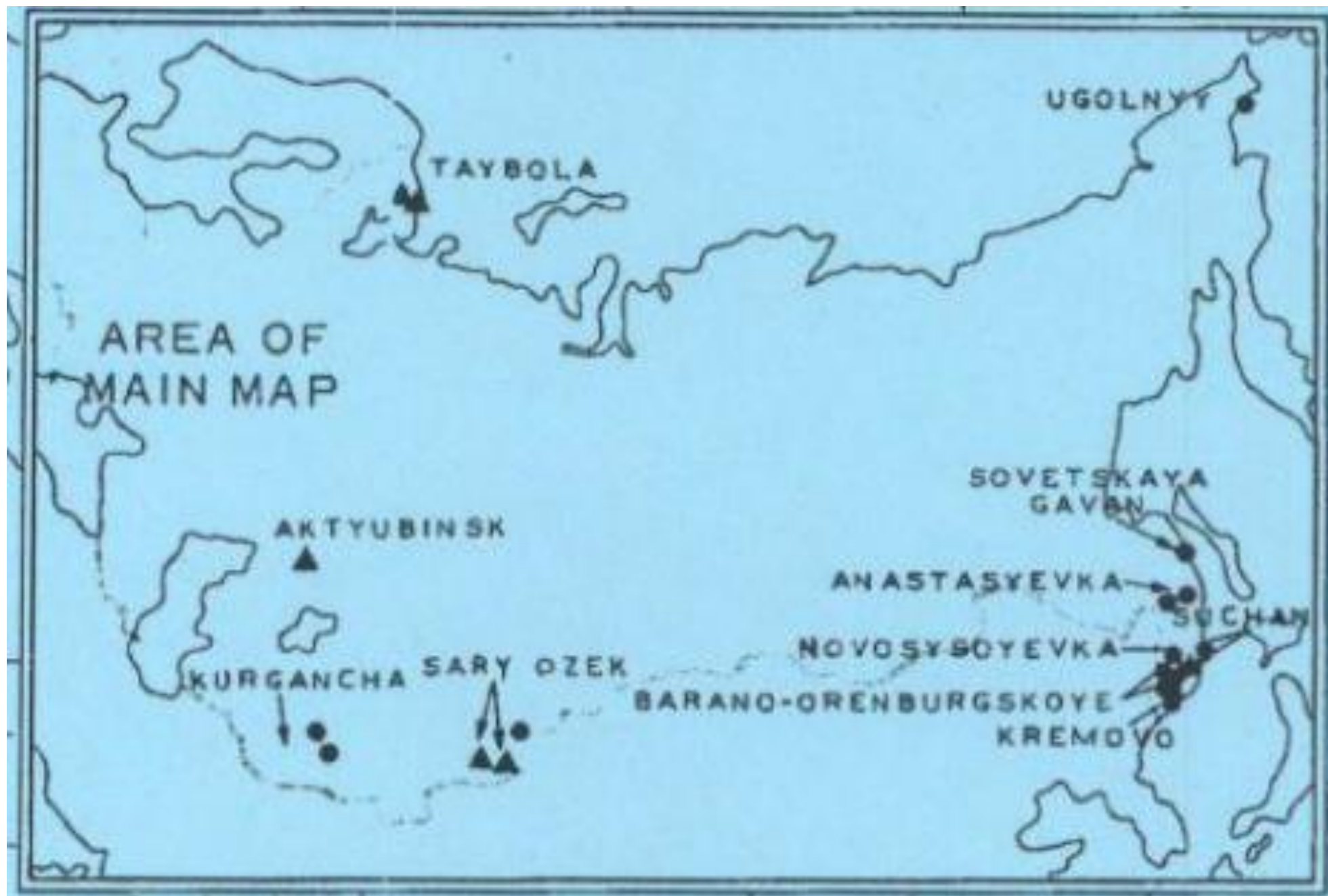
- ‘Orthodox’ vs. ‘revisionist’/’alarmist’ accounts
- ‘Post-revisionist’ understanding
- Explanatory concept of limited nuclear revisionism

*West Germany was a **protégé and umbrella state** within the frameworks of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence and NATO. It was **discontent** with the status quo. West Germany sought to achieve **incremental enhancements to its position and influence** within the nuclear order – but **on a limited scale**: without changing its alliance with the U.S. and other Western Powers in the framework of NATO and without becoming an atomic power, even though it sought to hold the option of becoming a nuclear power open until its accession to the NPT. In its **declaratory policy** it referred to, and thus also sheltered behind, its legal status as a non-nuclear power.*



„Guided Missiles and Astronautics Intelligence Committee. Report, March 1968“ (NARA, College Park MD, CIA Records Search Tool)





Verbatim Record

Presentation on MRBMs to NATO Council, 10 June 1960

General Norstad's Introduction

Cutout of p. 21 of a Verbatim Record of a SHAPE-presentation to the North Atlantic Council on 10 June 1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene KS, Norstad, Lauris: Papers, 1930-1987, Box 89, MRBM-1960 thru 30 June (1) [decl. 2006]

continues to be a requirement. I must also, I think in all fairness, state that this is something that must be done. This is not a matter of a choice as to whether our defence chooses to have these weapons or does not have the choice. You either have this or you have no defence in the time period. So please pass that back to your Government. This is not an optional affair, you have either this or you have no defence and that means you have no NATO within a matter of a relatively few years I will not risk saying that this will be 63, 64 or 65 but it is certainly within the relatively near future. So this does not offer a choice; perhaps you have a choice as to how you meet the requirement.. Where its produced, whether its bilateral, there is great flexibility there: there may be great flexibility as to which of these many gadgets or variations of these gadgets might best meet this requirement by 67 or 68, that all may be subject to discussion. But not whether this requirement will be met; you either meet it or you have no defence. This is, I believe, if I may again say so, a matter of most vital importance to the Alliance, but within the Alliance perhaps particularly important to the European side of the Alliance. This is something that I would think all the countries would consider with the greatest seriousness. ]

AUSWÄRTIGES AMT  
B o n n

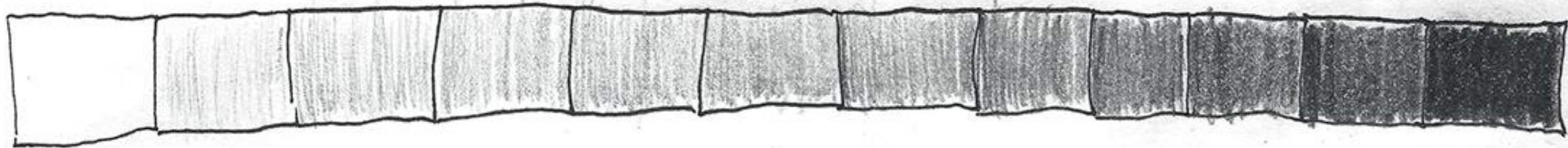
Geheim

Betr.: Deutsches Memorandum über Verteidigungsfragen -

The United States Government should undertake to grant or order the release of the nuclear explosives allocated to NATO in Europa if  
namely to meet the existing and the future planning goals  
(1) the government of the country attacked so requests, and  
(2) this request is supported by SACEUR.

Cutout of page 7, German Memorandum on Defense Questions, attachment to: letter v. Walther to Auswärtiges Amt, Politisches Archiv AA, Berlin, B 130, Vol. 1997A [decl. 2015].

Graustufen



The stance of the Federal Republic toward the emerging NPT regime shifted in far-reaching manner between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s: Initially West Germany was opposed against the NPT concept, but not against non-proliferation policy. In the end, West Germany welcomed the NPT as a means to promote the détente process and create a more stable nuclear world order.

Three phases: (I) 1961-1966, (II) 1966-1969, (III), 1969-1975

German Question and German Nuclear Question linked

Accession to NPT: 28 Nov. 1969 signing, 2 May 1975 completed ratif.

Thank you very much for your attention