9 Germany and Austria, 1953–1955

NEUTRALISING GERMANY?

The North Korean attack in the summer of 1950 shocked Europe. It was widely feared that the Russians might encourage similar adventures in other parts of the world and that Europe in particular was threatened. As a result, the countries of Western Europe moved closer together. Several concrete steps were taken towards integration: the European Coal and Steel Community was set up, and negotiations began on the establishment of a European Defence Community. Western Germany was to be included in all these organisations.

Such developments were not in the Russian interest. The Soviets have at all times preferred a weak and divided Europe to a strong and united one. They especially did not want to see Western Germany become part of a militarily united Europe. To forestall such a possibility they made various attempts to divide the Europeans. From 1952 to 1955 their favourite strategy was to suggest German unification and neutralisation.¹

Four major efforts can be identified: (i) in 1952, a number of diplomatic notes were dispatched to the three Western Allies; (ii) in early 1954, the question was raised at the Berlin Conference of Foreign Ministers; (iii) in the summer of the same year unification and neutralisation were propagated while the French National Assembly was debating the EDC treaty; (iv) a further attempt was made in 1955 when the West German Bundestag was debating the Paris Accords, making the Federal Republic a full member of NATO.

There is a possibility that the Russians raised the question of neutralisation once more at the Geneva summit of 1955, but so far there is no documentary evidence for this. It would be rather surprising if they had done so, however, because by that time the question of German unification had become academic: once the Federal Republic was in the Western military camp there was little likelihood that it could be dislodged.

Let us now turn first to the four notes sent in the spring and

J. M. Gabriel, The American Conception of Neutrality after 1941
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summer of 1952. They are dated 10 March, 9 April, 24 May and 23 August; all were addressed to the three Western Powers jointly. Their content is roughly similar: all dealt with German unification in a very aggressive tone. The Russians kept denouncing ‘Fascist’ military circles in Washington and Bonn for attempting to remilitarise Germany under the guise of a European Defence Community. The notes were also aimed specifically at the negotiations then going on in Bonn between the Federal Republic and the Western Allies on ‘contractual matters’. The purpose of the talks was to move the Federal Republic further along the road towards full sovereignty and eventual membership in either EDC or NATO. 3

Some of the notes contained precise proposals for a treaty with Germany. One of the clauses obligated the future state not to enter into ‘any kind of coalition or military alliance directed against any power which took part with its armed forces in war against Germany’, 4 and one of the provisions also called for the creation of a German army. The Russians thus aimed at armed neutrality although they avoided the term itself. Not so the Department of State; in commenting on the Russian notes Dean Acheson mentions neutrality regularly. The following passage from a memorandum to the US High Commissioner in Germany is typical:

Sov Govt seeks to create impression that it offers Ger an independent ‘neutral’ position. But one of two things wld result. Either Eastern Ger wld continue to be occupied by Sov troops as at present, which wld permit neither independence nor freedom nor neutrality, or else all troops wld be withdrawn by all powers, leaving Sov troops poised on Oder-Neisse line and Western troops holding an uncertain bridgehead in Fr or US troops even withdrawn from Europe altogether. Such a vacuum wld invite aggression and domination from the East and wld permit neither independence nor neutrality. As long as Sov Union holds its present view on world situation, neutrality for Ger is impossible.

These lines show that Washington saw the notes as clearly aiming at neutralisation, and they also indicate that the United States government was opposed to it. In internal memos the opposition was justified mostly on military grounds: neutralisation would weaken the Western position while strengthening