

Germany's Test in

By JOSEF JOFFE

MUNICH—For years, the West Germans have been lucky. Nobody has been depositing bombs in Munich's downtown post offices, as happened routinely in Paris last fall. Skyjackers have not lately been traveling on Lufthansa. They tend to prefer other airlines. Nor did Lebanese terror gangs develop a liking for German hostages; in their war against the West, they have targeted Americans and Frenchmen above all.

No more. Last week, in the final stretch of this nation's election campaign, two West German businessmen were kidnapped in Beirut. Rudolf Cordes is the Mideast representative of the chemical giant Hoechst, Alfred Schmidt a senior technician for Siemens. When it happened, everybody here knew immediately that greater things were at stake than merely a fast million in tax-free cash for some Beirut-based "entrepreneurs."

For a few days earlier, West German authorities had acquired a far more valuable property: Mohammed Ali Hamadei, who apparently played a major role in the TWA hijacking drama of June 1985. Caught at Frankfurt airport with nine kilos of high explosives, Mr. Hamadei was almost immediately claimed by the U.S. government for extradition. It is a safe bet, however, that the Lebanese will not have to face an American jury anytime soon.

Democracy's Dilemma

Unfortunately, Mr. Hamadei's terrorist friends in the Levant are also eager to have him back, and so Bonn is now exactly where Paris, Washington and Rome have been before. West Germany's is the dilemma of all democracies as they try to mount a defense against Terror International.

Governments always start out by intoning high-minded principle. In Bonn's case, the line was laid down by former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt 12 years ago, when the country found itself at war with the terrorist group the Red Army Faction: The state will not cave in to blackmail. Yet in his instance, behind an astonishingly tight news blackout, the maneuvering has already begun. Negotiations with unspecified

"Shi'ite groups" were launched with the help of unknown "third parties." And the United States, eager to lay its hands on somebody after so many terrorists have slipped through the net, will definitely have to wait as a classic opening gambit unfolds in Bonn.

Squeezed between principle and *realpolitik*, the Kohl government—old and new—is playing for time and keeping all options open. As Bonn has made clear to the U.S., the extradition proceedings must follow due

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process; hence, they can't be rushed. First the government must relay the U.S. request to the Superior Court in Frankfurt. Then the judges must weigh the evidence against Mr. Hamadei and decide who has a better claim on the suspect: a German prosecutor or an American district attorney. If the court finds in favor of America, Mr. Hamadei still doesn't take the first plane to Washington. Instead he's dumped back in Mr. Kohl's lap. Mr. Kohl is the ultimate arbiter of Mr. Hamadei's fate.

Terrorists, however, are altogether familiar with the time-gaining ploy, and thus, they simply upped the ante by grabbing Alfred Schmidt two days after they had taken Mr. Cordes. (At last count, there were still some 200 Germans left in Lebanon.) Nor is this all. If Hisbollah, Islamic Jihad and others run out of hostages in Beirut, they can always carry the war into West German territory. Remember the far-flung Abdallah Clan operating out of Syrian-controlled Lebanon? Trying to spring one of their own from French jail last fall, the Abdallahs drove home their request with a bombing campaign that left 10 Parisians dead. And the Federal Republic, one of the West's more open societies, offers a more convenient battleground than France.

What can Bonn do? While the Kohl government remains mute, commentators in Germany have begun to hawk the easiest

War Against Terror

answer. They point to Italy which eased Abul Abbas, the mastermind of the Achille Lauro hijacking, out of the country before Washington could even submit an extradition request. They note that the tough-talking Jacques Chirac, the French premier, dispatched his emissaries to Damascus and Tehran where some generous French favors were traded for peace in Paris. And then there is the American "model": While the U.S. president denounced Ayatollah Khomeini as terrorism Number 1, the

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president's men provided the Iranian forces with sophisticated weapons.

Will Bonn take a similar route? In the past, West German governments have been both tough and pliant. When a "commando" of the Red Army Faction captures the West German Embassy in Stockholm in 1975, Chancellor Schmidt gave the green light to the Swedes to take the building by force. Two years later, German special forces, the GSG-9, flew thousands of kilometers to Mogadishu, Somalia, to storm a Lufthansa plane hijacked by German and Palestinian terrorists.

But Bonn has been more discrete in the 1980s. As the main war against terrorism shifted from the domestic to the international stage, the government has been less direct. Whether on Libya or Syria, Mr. Kohl and his foreign minister have been hesitant to point the finger at Messrs. Assad and Gadhafi, let alone impose painful sanctions.

One reason for the new discretion may be that the abundant links between German terrorists and their comrades in the Middle East were largely severed. Another reason is that lately the U.S., France, Britain, Italy and Greece have lately been carrying the brunt of the attacks. Although the heirs of the Baader-Meinhof gang are still murderously active, contemporary terrorism is far more clearly an affair of states, the usual

suspects being Iran, Syria and Libya. To tangle with those is a more risky and costly business, especially in the case of Iran, which happens to be a good customer of German exports.

When the dust of the elections has settled, the West Germans may well ask: Why should we be more principled than the others? To move out of harm's way, the authorities would charge Mr. Hamadei with passport forgery and possession of explosives, give him a quick trial, hand out a term that more or less matches the time spent in investigative custody, and put him on a Middle East-bound plane.

The West has failed itself too often in the war against international terrorism to make for shiny examples of determination. To be sure, the British ruptured diplomatic relations with Syria in the aftermath of the attempted El Al bombing, and the U.S. Navy went after Colonel Gadhafi last spring. But in general, Western governments have ignored Benjamin Franklin's classic injunction to hang together, preferring to hang separately.

Ominous Pattern

Unfortunately, the recent events betray a pattern too ominous to ignore. Although each incident breeds the temptation to go it alone and wiggle out, Western Europe as a whole might soon be the target. While Mr. Hamadei was caught in Frankfurt, another Lebanese, Bashir Al-Khodr, was arrested trying to smuggle a similar quantity of explosives through the controls at Milan's airport. Western intelligence services believe that more such "emissaries" may already be en route for the purpose of building a Shi'ite terrorist infrastructure in West Europe. Virtually all of West Europe's major states are involved in the Iran-Iraq War, as suppliers and financiers. A Shi'ite network would come in quite handy as a means of not-so-gentle persuasion against those who think that Iraq must not lose against Ayatollah Khomeini's "human waves." If so, the West has a problem vastly larger than the question of who extradites whom, and when.

*Mr. Joffe is columnist and foreign editor
of the Sueddeutsche Zeitung.*
