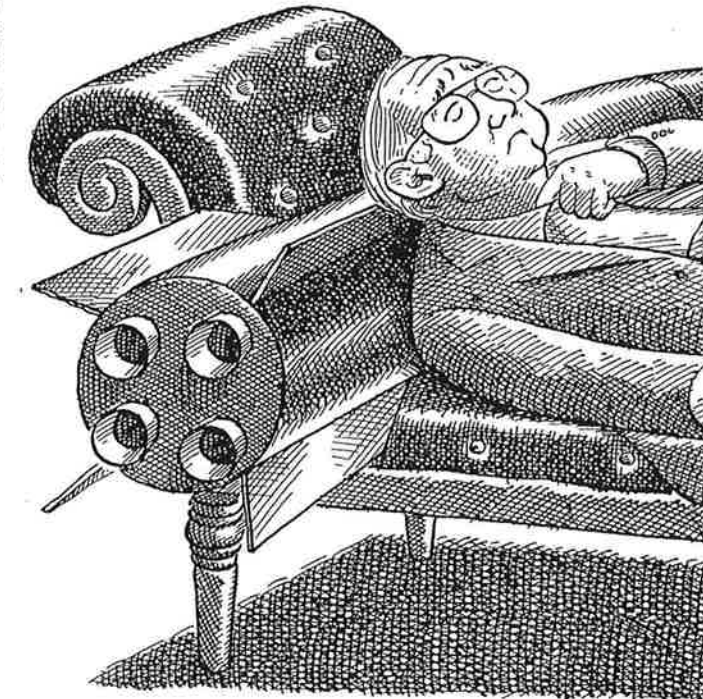


Germany's sin

There is a psychiatric motif to the criticism of West Germany which is appearing in the Western press these days. *The Wall Street Journal* bemoans German "self pity" and "disarmament paranoia"; the *New Republic* discourses on Nato's "Angst-ridden marriage"; while Richard Perle, the former American Assistant Secretary of Defence, has diagnosed a bad case of "schizophrenia" in Bonn. Everybody is hoping that the encounter session in Brussels next week, otherwise known as the Nato summit, will both reassure and restrain the West Germans, who stand accused of terminal anti-nuclearism. Mrs Thatcher has been pressing hard for this summit — and for a resounding collective "no" to all further nuclear disarmament in Europe. Even the French will be there — in part to counter Mrs Thatcher's claim to European leadership, in part to develop an answer to the classic question: "Whither Germany?"

West German anxieties are summed up in the tidy little phrase: "The shorter the ranges, the deader the Germans", and in the term "singularization". Those ominous "ranges" refer to the nuclear weapons that will remain in Europe once the Pershings and SS-20s are eliminated in line with the December INF treaty. With the intermediate-range weapons gone, thousands of short-range systems are said to hold a terrible and "singular" fate for the Germans because these are destined to explode on their territory only.

These are echoes of the early 1980s, when the arrival of Pershing II and cruise missiles triggered the first wave of anxiety. At this time the German left chose to depict the Pershings as a heinous plot that would turn the Federal Republic into the "shooting gallery of the superpowers". Now, it is the German right in Chancellor Kohl's party who are waving the banner of "singularization". Germany is once again portrayed as a "singular" venue and



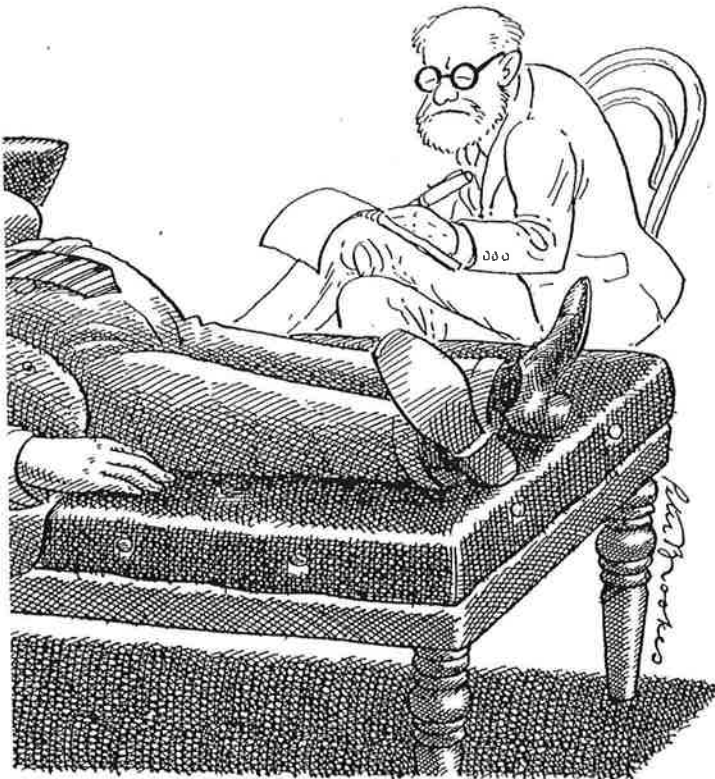
potential victim of nuclear war in Europe, but this time because the longer-range missiles are leaving, not arriving. It does not bespeak sound German self-confidence that when missiles go in, it is a conspiracy; when they go out, it is abandonment.

Is this sheer paranoia, or is it a case of "though this be madness, yet there is method in't"? Singularization is a myth, and a dangerous one. West Germany is not a "singular" target for the Warsaw Pact's nuclear weapons. At the very top of the escalation ladder, the Soviet Union has begun to deploy the SS-24 missile — a handy replacement for the proscribed SS-20. It carries 10 warheads and has a variable range, so that it can hit Brussels just as well as Boston. On the next rung down, the Soviet Union has deployed plenty of Backfire and Fencer bombers which can devastate Western Europe. And there are lots of worthwhile targets be-

yond angst-ridden Germany. Britain, for instance, hosts 160 American F-111 bombers, as well as US missile submarines in Holy Loch. France has its *force de dissuasion* which the Russians would hardly ignore in a war against the West. On the southern periphery — in Greece and Turkey — Nato's nuclear-capable aircraft make for "time-urgent" targets, and so do such bases in Italy and Holland.

In short, if the Germans die, so will everybody else, including 300,000 American, British and French troops, plus their dependants on West Germany soil. So why the curious talk about "singularization"? There is a real anxiety there, but also an implicit political agenda. The anxiety is as old as the Alliance itself. Given the curse of geography, no Nato member is as vulnerable as the Federal Republic; given the curse of history, no country is

gular condition



more dependent on allies. Unlike the rest, the Federal Republic cannot count on a well-defended glacis to the East; it is the glacis for Western Europe.

Nor can Bonn seek safety in an independent deterrent, having forsworn nuclear weapons as the price of Nato membership in 1954. So whether missiles go in or out, they remind the West Germans of their "singular" role: as potentially the most powerful nation in Europe that must regularly defer to others in matters of security, the very core of national sovereignty.

And there is an agenda, too. Domestically, the Kohl government no longer has the stomach to go through with yet another nuclear modernization. The Allies have insisted on increasing the reach of Nato's 110-kilometre Lance, which ought to blunt the "shorter the ranges, the deader the Germans" fear. But the country has a bad case of the nuclear jitters, from power

plants to weapons, and it isn't just the left that would like to see all nuclear weapons go.

Diplomatically, the West Germans are still smarting from the punishment meted out to them by Moscow for deploying Pershing *et al.* Shunned and vilified for five years, they are just beginning to enjoy the fruits of the new détente, and are loath to jeopardize it with new nuclear weapons. There is probably no other country in the West as enamoured of Mr Gorbachov as the Federal Republic where, according to a recent poll, less than a quarter of the population now believes in a Russian threat.

Hence the pressure for ever-more disarmament. If, as the singularization myth has it, Germany already labours under a unique nuclear burden, then Bonn must not be made to shoulder any additional weight. But this insistence has backfired. The Germans are now truly "singularized", standing isolated

within the Alliance. Nobody in the West wants a third "zero solution" (removal of short-range systems like Lance) and everybody insists the ball is in the Soviet court. It is Moscow's turn to remove the reason why Nato went nuclear in the first place: by reducing its intolerable superiority in conventional and short-range nuclear weapons.

Will Mrs Thatcher's pet project, the special Nato summit next week, get the Germans on board again? Unwilling to offend either Russians, Americans or his domestic opponents, Kohl will play for time and say "not now" to modernization as well as to "triple-zero". He will not insist on immediate short-range nuclear talks, but he won't let the Alliance get away with postponing the next nuclear round *sine die*. And none of his allies will want to put the squeeze on a country as unsettled as is West Germany today.

And so the summit will issue a communiqué that satisfies and offends nobody. Indeed, this is virtually a foregone conclusion, given Kohl's trip to Washington last weekend, which neatly preempted the Brussels summit. In exchange for holding back German pressures for "triple zero", Mr Kohl received American assurances that nuclear modernization would remain on the back burner for now.

This would not be a bad compromise if it was not for Gorbachov. He now has the West Germans exactly where Moscow has always wanted them. Uncertain about its vocation and protection, West Germany is too strong to be left alone and too weak to go it alone. This spells diplomatic opportunities for the Russians that they have dared only dream about in the past 40 years.

The author is foreign editor of the Süddeutsche Zeitung. His book, Limited Partnership: Europe, the United States and the Burdens of Alliance, has just been published by Ballinger.