

## Germany as a Nuclear Power?: How Nuclear Taboo Shaped the Discourse on West German Nuclearization

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### 〈Abstract〉

A disinformation campaign by the Adenauer administration in the 1950s has led the public to believe that West Germany has never had any intentions on gaining nuclear capabilities. This interpretation is not accurate, as modern research shows and opens a new area of research to be explored. Modern literature on the topic however has mostly been dealing with the problem of German nuclearization from an historical background. While there has been some research on the topic from an international relations perspective, such research has been conducted mostly from a realist perspective. Although the realist perspective has some merits, it is lacking in explanatory power when it comes to the words and behavior of German policy makers and politicians. Constructivist theory of the ‘nuclear taboo’ offers a good supplementary explanation for inner political dynamics during the 1950s and early 1960s. This research examines debates in the Bundestag related to the nuclearization of West Germany during those periods and takes a closer look at what and how congresspeople discussed West Germany going nuclear. It proves that nuclear taboo embraced by the congresspeople discouraged West Germany’s nuclearization.

\*Keywords: West Germany, Nuclearization, Nuclear Taboo, Constructivism, Cold War

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## I . Introduction

In the wake of the Russian invasion of their neighbor state Ukraine, the German government under the Olaf Scholz administration had to pick up the shards of what had been the foreign policy pursued by the previous administrations. German military has been subject to major changes as chancellor Scholz set out an immediate 100 billion Euro fund to upgrade the Bundeswehr, and to flex the economic muscles that had been built through previous decades.<sup>1)</sup> In addition, Scholz had promised an increase in yearly expenditure on the military to hit the 2% GDP mark, but that proposal has yet to make it through the Bundestag (Schubert 2023).

Throughout the Bundeswehr reform, another issue has arisen, which has hit magazines and tabloids throughout the nation multiple times ever since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. In its latest incarnation, the German public has voiced its opinion on nuclear weapons. There has been a clear increase in voices agreeing with US nuclear weaponry stationed on German soil. Furthermore, there has also been a rise in voices advocating a nuclear arsenal controlled by Germany itself.

This article will pick up the premise of a nuclear Germany. However, the focus will not be on the current events, but rather on the genesis of the nuclear debate in Germany. This discourse emerged in the 1950s, following the successful leadership of Konrad Adenauer in guiding West Germany out of the occupation by the US, France, and Great Britain.

The consensus throughout German academics tends towards a realist point of few, giving power politics the edge above otherwise plausible explanations. Traditionally, the era of German foreign policy under the leadership of Adenauer and Strauss has been examined primarily through a historical lens, with an emphasis on data collection. However, the interpretation of this data has often been overlooked. Despite this, there have been efforts to analyze German nuclear policy within the context

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1) (<https://www.Bmvg.de/de/%20aktuelles/mehr-als-100-milliarden-euro-bundeswehr-sicherheit-5362112>. accessed 10 May 2023)

provided by the field of international relations. This article diverges from previous research at a crucial juncture, as it adopts the theoretical framework of constructivism. In her seminal work, 'Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo', Nina Tannenwald applied the tenets of constructivism to the realm of nuclear weapons. Tannenwald undertook a comprehensive discourse analysis of the decision-making processes within the U.S. government during several historical instances when the use of nuclear weapons could have been justified, yet was ultimately rejected. Through these governmental debates, Tannenwald traced the emergence of a norm, or taboo, associated with nuclear weapons, which significantly influenced decision-makers towards a general policy of non-use. This concept of a nuclear taboo led Tannenwald to challenge the prevailing realist explanation for the non-use of nuclear weapons during the Cold War era (Tannenwald 1999).

This research seeks to broaden the concept of the nuclear taboo, as proposed by Tannenwald, by applying similar parameters to the German context and examining the impact of the stigma associated with nuclear weapons on Germany's decision to acquire nuclear capabilities. Tannenwald's theoretical framework of the nuclear taboo is particularly applicable to the German case, as moral arguments both for and, more significantly, against nuclear armament have dominated the public discourse. This moralistic dialogue is evident in the debates that took place in the German parliament from 1956 to 1961. Social movements such as the 'Fight Against Nuclear Death', the Goettingen Manifesto, and the subsequent Easter Marches have further amplified the norm-based aversion to nuclear weaponry within the political discourse. The objective of this article is to delve into the parliamentary session that took place on March 25th, 1958. This debate signifies the culmination of discussions surrounding nuclear weapons in Germany. As such, this final session in the Bundestag encapsulates the most compelling arguments from both the government and the opposition, providing a robust foundation for this article.

The subsequent section will present a literature review, providing a

succinct summary of pertinent works and their connection to this research. Following this, the paper will pivot towards establishing the theoretical foundation. Once this groundwork is laid, the next phase will involve a concise overview of the historical context encompassing the time-frame under study. Of particular significance will be the post-World War II era, Germany's occupation by the victorious powers, and the Cold War from a German vantage point. Building on this historical foundation, the article will delve into the pertinent data gleaned from the Bundestag debate on March 25th. This data will be examined within the framework of the nuclear taboo and its impact on German decision-making during the Adenauer era. After presenting and interpreting the data, the concluding chapter will encapsulate the findings, culminating with a brief projection of the implications that the nuclear taboo has had on Germany's nuclear policy and its public perception.

## 2. Previous Research Efforts

The body of literature examining West Germany's nuclear policy during the early stages of the Cold War is somewhat sparse. The majority of published papers tend to merely skim the surface of the topic for historical context, concentrate predominantly on chronicling historical events, or adopt a realist perspective.

Firstly, let us consider the papers and books that only briefly delve into the topic of a nuclear-armed West Germany. Given that West German foreign policy is almost synonymous with its nuclear policy, the book 'Germany, Japan, and Their U.S. Alliance Dilemma: Reluctant Warriors' published in 2020 inevitably touches upon Adenauer's nuclear policy. However, the book's primary objective is different, as the authors Sakaki, Maull, Lukner, Krauss, and Berger (2020) analyze German and Japanese foreign policy culture in relation to the U.S., within their context as allies. In terms of the Adenauer era of German foreign policy, the book provides

a broad overview, particularly of German foreign policy's connection to its military. The authors address the topic of West Germany's dependence on U.S. security guarantees during the Cold War, attributing to Germany a lack of resources to defend itself from foreign threats such as the Soviet Union.

While the book offers a general overview of the early stages of the Cold War, many of its interpretations of this period's politics in the German context conflict with historical reviews in other works. For instance, some sources suggest U.S. coercion of West Germany into expanding their military under Adenauer, or rearmament for the higher purpose of defending the West and possibly Christianity from Communism. When it comes to rearmament, other sources depict Adenauer as advocating for a German military to assert sovereignty and power towards potential threats, and even more so towards allies. He argued that Germany would never be taken seriously within any alliance without the military might to back up its claims.

However, 'Reluctant Warriors' provides a compelling illustration of how governments were able to shape and manipulate public sentiment to align with their respective policies. For instance, the authors cite public opinion polls on German rearmament. While there was strong opposition to rearmament in 1949, with over 60 percent of the public against the policy, the onset of the Korean War in 1950 saw a shift in public sentiment. The popularity of rearmament increased, with opposition dwindling to 43 percent (Sakaki et al. 2020).

A paper more closely related to the topic of this article is 'Cold War, Apocalypse and Peaceful Atoms' by Holger Nehring, published in *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* in 2004. Nehring draws a comparison between the anti-nuclear energy movements in West Germany and Britain from 1955 to 1964, focusing on the perception of risks associated with nuclear energy. Early in the paper, Nehring establishes a strong link between the anti-nuclear weapons and anti-nuclear energy movements, noting that 'many of the parameters of the environmental discourse, particularly its apocalyptic vocabulary, originated

in the debates about nuclear weapons in the late 1950s and early 1960s.’ (Nehring 2004). As other authors like Michael Knoll have also noted, Nehring emphasizes that security issues were a dominant theme in both domestic and foreign policy. However, Nehring contends that unlike their British counterparts, the German public did not voice concerns about nuclear weapons in protests. The strong anti-communist stance in Germany deterred the public from questioning policies directly linked to security against the communist bloc. Furthermore, Nehring draws a connection between the rhetoric used by anti-nuclear movements in Germany and religious and apocalyptic imagery.

Many statements highlighted the bombs’ “demonic power”; some classified them as “apocalyptic weapons.” Accordingly, their further development was regarded as “blasphemy,” “temptation of the Creator,” and “human hubris” (Nehring 2004).

Although Nehring’s focus does not align perfectly with this article, it nonetheless offers valuable insights into public sentiments and anti-nuclear weapons movements, which may have shaped German decision-making. More significantly, the rhetoric employed by anti-nuclear movements bears similarities to the research conducted by Nina Tannenwald in her investigation of the Nuclear Taboo.

Following is a discussion on the paper ‘Reform des Militärs in der Ära Adenauer’ (Reform of the Military in the Adenauer Era) by Detlef Bald, published in the German journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* in 2002. This paper scrutinizes the process and debates surrounding the rearmament of Germany under the Adenauer administration. Bald further substantiates earlier claims regarding Adenauer’s motivation for rearming Germany to facilitate its integration into the Western alliance. However, Bald also delves deeper into Adenauer’s intentions regarding the acquisition of nuclear weapons to be integrated into the German military. Importantly, Bald highlights Adenauer’s attempts to keep the potential nuclearization of West Germany concealed from the public (Bald 2002). Expanding on

Adenauer's nuclear policy, Bald reveals how Adenauer sought to manipulate public opinion on the matter by avoiding buzzwords already associated with apocalyptic imagery. Instead, when discussing nuclear weapons, Adenauer would frequently refer to them as 'modern weapons' to acclimate the German public to the topic and integrate nuclear weapons as a standard factor in rearmament policy (Bald 2002).

While there is a considerable number of papers that touch upon the nuclearization of Germany during the 1950s and 1960s, due to the constraints of time and space, the following papers will be more closely related to the topic of nuclearization. It's worth noting that German research has not primarily focused on interpreting the historical data through the frameworks used in political science, and more specifically, the field of international relations. The topic of a nuclear Germany under Adenauer, as mentioned earlier, did not enter public discourse until long after he had left office, hence most available research is concerned with historical facts.

When it comes to research on Adenauer and his impact on West Germany, one author, Hans-Peter Schwarz, has consistently appeared throughout the research papers. Recognized as the most authoritative historian on the matter, Schwarz, in his 1989 paper 'Zur Nuklearpolitik im Europa der fünfziger und sechziger Jahre', examines and crucially clarifies the role Adenauer played in German nuclear ambitions and their genesis. Schwarz explains that up to that point, most researchers in West Germany had focused on the atomic minister of the time to examine German nuclear policy. The general belief had been that Adenauer himself had been ill-informed about the issues connected to nuclear weapons and their effects on world politics. In fact, Schwarz has been frequently quoted in other papers with the phrase:

Not the Minister of Defense, but the Chancellor was like the spider in the web of decision-making processes that, in the broadest sense, had to do with nuclear weapons (Schwarz 1989).

Schwarz also establishes the link between the significance of nuclear weapons and German foreign policy. As he scrutinizes the most critical moments in German foreign and security policy, he reveals their profound connection to nuclear weapons. A recurring theme in Schwarz's paper is Adenauer's resistance to a non-nuclear Germany, whether it be through promises of non-proliferation or through a non-nuclear zone in Europe. The possibility of Germany's nuclearization remained a constant topic. However, while Schwarz acknowledges Adenauer's pragmatic and realpolitik-oriented approach to foreign policy, he does not contextualize the historical data presented throughout the paper within a broader framework of realism (Schwarz 1989).

Another paper that directly addresses the topic of nuclearization is 'Abschreckung und Verteidigung Die Kontroverse über die Atombewaffnung in der Ära Adenauer 1949-1963' by Mark Cioc. This paper, published as part of the book 'Vom Marshallplan zur EWG', grapples with the broader discussion on the nuclearization of West Germany. While Schwarz focused solely on Adenauer's role, Cioc strives to provide a comprehensive overview of how the topic of nuclearization evolved over time and identifies key milestones. This paper proves particularly useful when the discussion reaches the Bundestag, where representatives from all parties could participate in the discourse, rather than it being confined to the closed-door discussions of Adenauer and Strauss's offices. Furthermore, Cioc incorporates the reactions of the German public and leadership to NATO policy and contingency plans in the event of a crisis, where West Germany would have borne the brunt of the consequences amongst NATO allies (Cioc 1990).

While these two papers are rooted in historical research, there are also papers that adopt a more international relations-focused approach to interpreting German nuclear policy within the provided frameworks. The book 'Westbindung oder Gleichgewicht? Die nukleare Sicherheitspolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zwischen Atomwaffensperrvertrag und NATO-Doppelbeschluss 1961-1979' by Andreas Lutsch, published in 2019, provides a detailed analysis of German nuclear policy from the 1960s up



to the end of the 1970s. As Lutsch covers only the latter part of Adenauer's term in office, only certain sections of his book are relevant to this paper.

Lutsch contextualizes German foreign policy within a neorealist system where Germany was structurally dependent on the U.S. and their security guarantee. Specifically, in the Federal Republic's security policy, the dependency on the U.S. significantly interfered with German decision-making. Lutsch asserts that Germany only gained some decision-making autonomy through its integration into NATO. However, Lutsch emphasizes Adenauer's rearmament policy as an attempt at integration into the West, and a continuous drive for nuclear weapons to achieve parity amongst the allies. In this context, Lutsch cites Adenauer's assertion that outward security is the state's ultimate goal. Another important topic Lutsch addresses is the general ability of West Germany to achieve nuclear status on its own and develop nuclear capabilities throughout the later stages of the Adenauer era (Lutsch 2019).

Another author utilizing the realist frame for interpreting the international system is Michael Knoll in the book 'Atomare Optionen: Westdeutsche Kernwaffenpolitik in der Ära Adenauer', published in 2013. In 'Atomare Optionen', Knoll presents German nuclear weapons policy under Adenauer from 1949 to 1964 and frames the interpretation of historical facts through a realist lens. This frame is chosen for two reasons. Firstly, Knoll argues that historical data collected from government documents, personal memoirs of those involved, and exchanges between leading figures of German politics, align with the analytical frame. Secondly, Adenauer is attributed a *realpolitik* approach by historians, which Knoll further uses to connect the data to realism.

In his initial discussion, Knoll introduces the possibility of a constructivist approach but discards it in favor of realism for the reasons mentioned earlier. Knoll examines German history related to nuclear energy and weaponry from the end of occupation in 1949 to Adenauer's departure from office in 1964. The historical examination includes a special focus on the London agreement, the civil development of nuclear

capabilities, French-German cooperation, and Adenauer's skepticism towards the U.S. security guarantee.

Especially concerning French-German cooperation (the participation of Italy is mentioned as well, yet the focus is on France and Germany, as they contributed the most), Knoll applies realist reasoning for the failure of a German nuclear bomb. Furthermore, Knoll examines German nuclear programs to track the possibility of a German nuclear weapon, and finally attests that Germany had the general ability to produce sufficient fissile material, however, no attempts in building a warhead were made according to available government documents. Ultimately, the lack of a German nuclear warhead at the end of the Adenauer administration is attributed to security concerns on the German side, as Germany was dependent on the U.S.'s security guarantee and nuclear umbrella. Furthermore, the cooperation with France is interpreted as a power struggle on both sides and the goal of collective security through a European nuclear warhead is dismissed (Knoll 2013).

The realist interpretation of German nuclear policy is predicated on power politics, security concerns, and a federal republic compelled into compliance by a bipolar international system. On one side, there's the threat of the USSR, not only with conventional weapons but also the U.S. threatening to withdraw the security guarantee provided through its nuclear umbrella. While this explanation certainly has its merits, it fails to address why a nuclear-armed Germany would pose such a threat to these superpowers. This explanation notably omits the concept of the nuclear taboo, as explored by Nina Tannenwald in her paper 'Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo' and further examined in her book 'The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use'.

In her works, Tannenwald investigates the evolution of the nuclear taboo and its impact on the international system. The nuclear taboo could shed light on the question of why, even though Germany was permitted to commence rearmament, a line was drawn at nuclear weapons. As Tannenwald points out, traditionally, the introduction of new weapons

would eventually lead to their proliferation and normalization of use. However, the nuclear bomb did not follow this trajectory. In ‘Stigmatizing the Bomb’, Tannenwald traces the process of stigmatizing the nuclear bomb, which applies not only to the use of nuclear weapons but also extends to their acquisition. As Tannenwald elucidates, the use of nuclear weapons has been outlawed to the extent that “the weapons themselves are proscribed” (Tannenwald 2005). If so, then the effects should also apply to the acquisition of such weapons in the case of Germany. After the Second World War, the demilitarization of Germany went hand in hand with denazification, even if, compared to Japan, it was only a secondary priority (Sakaki et al. 2020).

With the conclusion of the occupation in 1949, Adenauer embarked on the process of rebuilding the German military, in line with the conditions set by the occupying powers. The nuclear stigma and its impact on Germany are already evident at this juncture, as the reconstruction of the German military was only possible with the exclusion of nuclear weapons from the arsenal. On a national level, a similar effect can be observed. Even though the German public initially opposed the formation of the Bundeswehr, Adenauer was able to gradually steer public opinion towards favoring a rebuild. However, this strategy was not successful when it came to nuclear weapons. The stigma of the nuclear weapon as an apocalyptic weapon persisted, leading Adenauer to initiate what Tannenwald refers to as a ‘strategic social construction’ process, renaming nuclear weapons as ‘modern weapons.’ A potential alternative explanation to the nuclear taboo could be a norm formed through Germany’s guilt from the Second World War. Such a norm can certainly be attested towards the end of the occupation period through the research conducted by Knoll, but it does not persist throughout the entire Adenauer era. This norm would have certainly prevented cooperation attempts between Germany and France towards the end of the 1950s.

This paper aims to elucidate an explanation grounded in the general constructivist framework of norm and identity-based interpretations. It will incorporate Nina Tannenwald’s findings on the nuclear taboo and her

discourse analysis methodology to trace the taboo's impact on decision-makers and the German government. Tannenwald elucidates the connection between the sway of discourse structures and behavioral choices through several pivotal mechanisms. Her approach underscores how discourse molds norms, which subsequently shape state behavior.

The analysis will delve into the moral and ethical discourses encircling the norm, encompassing the arguments advanced by diverse actors within the German parliament. Additionally, the article will pinpoint and scrutinize the mechanisms through which the norm wields its influence on decision-makers. This encompasses the existence of a stigma and the comprehension of national identity by actors within the Bundestag. To fortify the framework, the paper will employ a detailed analysis of speeches delivered during the parliamentary session in question. It broadens the scope of Tannenwald's nuclear taboo by identifying the taboo's influence beyond non-use, extending to the debate for nuclear armament.

### 3. History of German Nuclear Weapons

German research into nuclear energy and weaponry dates back to the Second World War, when German scientists were assigned the task of exploring the military potential of nuclear energy. The results were reportedly modest, with German scientists declaring it impossible to harness nuclear energy for military purposes in the foreseeable future. The reasons for this conclusion remain unclear - it could have been due to concerns about the duration of the war, limitations in the scientists' capabilities, or moral reservations about pursuing such a goal. As a result of the scientists' verdict, funding for research in this field was significantly reduced. However, during the subsequent years of the war, the scientists managed to construct a prototype for a nuclear power plant (Knoll 2013).

After Germany's defeat by the Allied forces, German nuclear research was drastically reduced, with strict limitations imposed on the amount of fissile material available for civil research. The concept of a German nuclear weapon did not re-emerge, as the idea of a German military seemed inconceivable for the remainder of the 1940s. Nevertheless, civil research managed to maintain a lead in the field of fissile material enrichment, with German researchers notably working on refining centrifuge technology. The research programs faced numerous challenges, including the departure of highly regarded researchers to join either Russian or US research programs, and financial difficulties, particularly when research was deemed crucial for national interests and conflicted with the level of secrecy required by the researchers' employers (Knoll 2013).

The founding of the West European Union (WEU) in 1948 marked the first step towards a sovereign Germany. However, the final step took longer than anticipated and culminated in the Bonn-Paris conventions, which are often cited as a reason for Germany's lack of nuclear weapons. The significance of these conventions lies in a concession made by Chancellor Adenauer to French considerations of withdrawal: Germany pledged not to pursue the production of nuclear weapons on its own soil. Adenauer would later argue for a rather loose interpretation of this pledge as "*clausula rebus sic stantibus*" (Latin for "as long as circumstances do not change") (Schwarz 1989). In addition to Adenauer's interpretation, the pledge left another loophole: it only prohibited Germany from producing nuclear weapons, not from owning them or producing them on foreign soil. In the years following the conventions, German discourse focused on reunification and its facilitation as the main objectives of German foreign policy. This context is crucial for understanding the discussions about rearmament and integration into the WEU and NATO. Meanwhile, German nuclear programs were kept under the control of the WEU, while striving to maintain a technological lead in the uranium enrichment process (Knoll 2013).

A significant shift in Germany's nuclear program occurred with the

successful launch of Sputnik by Russia and the Suez Canal conflict. One after another, the lag in US commitment to allied foreign interests began to erode trust, as the US pressured French and British forces to retreat from the region after the USSR had issued nuclear threats in retaliation for further actions by the two parties. Following this initial crisis within the alliance, Sputnik caused further degradation within the alliance. When the USSR successfully launched Sputnik, it demonstrated ICBM capabilities, which put US cities like Chicago within the range of nuclear retaliation by the USSR. French Prime Minister Charles De Gaulle famously questioned whether the US would be willing to risk New York to save Paris, Bonn, or London. Amid this sentiment of uncertainty, European leaders began to explore alternative options for achieving the level of security they desired vis-à-vis the USSR. Germany, one of these states, had already positioned US nuclear weapons on its soil but was further approached by the French government regarding a joint venture. The initial approach was halted by De Gaulle, but even De Gaulle eventually set aside his resentments against the former archrival to investigate a potential joint nuclear force.

In the wake of the German government's newfound interest in nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence in general, several civil movements emerged to protest the government's course. The Göttingen Manifesto led the movement when 18 German nuclear scientists published a paper expressing moral concerns about nuclear proliferation and Germany's role in it. While the criticism reached the upper echelons of the German government, it was easily dismissed by citing a lack of understanding of foreign policy matters, effectively undermining the scientists' credibility. Public attention soon shifted away from German nuclear ambitions as politicians from the ruling parties began to refer to nuclear weapons as "modern" weapons or avoided mentioning them altogether.

Despite the cessation of opportunities to acquire a nuclear bomb in the immediate future, Adenauer continued to pursue a policy of keeping the door open for any future opportunities. He consistently opposed proposals for nuclear-free zones in Central Europe and would eventually also speak

out against the non-proliferation treaties proposed after his term had ended.

The end of the Adenauer era in Germany was marked by numerous internal political conflicts. Notably, Konrad Adenauer's comment during a press conference on April 4th, 1957, in which he described the nuclear bomb as nothing more than an advancement of common artillery, was decidedly detrimental to his public standing. This statement portrayed him as out of touch with the atomic age in the public's eye. Another scandal later erupted involving Franz Josef Strauss, the German defense minister from 1956 onwards, who had long been considered a potential successor to Adenauer. The "Spiegel" affair followed intense criticism by the German magazine Spiegel of Strauss' stance on preventive nuclear strikes and the arming of the German army with tactical nuclear weapons (Gunkel 2022).

After a heated discussion between the defense minister and the magazine's authors, the offices of Spiegel and its authors were raided by police, and several authors were taken into custody on charges of suspected treason. While Strauss claimed not to be involved in the raids, it was later discovered that he had pushed for the arrest of Conrad Ahlers, one of the magazine's authors, while the latter was on vacation in Spain. Internal political crises like this had a significant impact on the reputation of Adenauer's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party and eventually led to a substantial loss of public support. The results were already evident in the 1959 election, as the CDU finished under 50% and had to form a coalition with the Free Democratic Party (FDP) to establish a governing majority in the Bundestag. Ultimately, the decline led to a change in government, with the SPD taking over with Willy Brandt as their chancellor candidate in 1969.

#### **4. Debate on Nuclear Armament**

The debate on the nuclear arming of the Bundeswehr on March 25,

1958, was a continuation of the nuclear debate that had already taken place in 1957. However, a difference can be observed compared to the previous Bundestag debate. While in 1957, the opposition in the form of the SPD had submitted the motion for a debate on atomic bombs in Germany, in 1958, it was a representative of the government, the CDU. As explained in the introduction, the following section contains the most prevalent arguments from the March 25th debate.

For this purpose, excerpts from Dr. Heinemann, a member of the SPD faction, are presented. The following excerpt from the speech of Dr. Heinemann is the second part of his two questions to the government. The first question was legally motivated and questioned how the government could justify a weapon that, by its nature, would always have innocent people as victims. According to Heinemann, this situation would conflict with international law, which has been adopted into German law. The second question, addressed in the present excerpt, deals with the question of morality. This question introduces the nuclear taboo as a central element at the beginning of the debate on March 25.

Ladies and gentlemen! I said there is a second preliminary question before you and before all of us: Are weapons of mass destruction justifiable, morally justifiable from a Christian perspective? You don't need to tell me that according to the teachings of the two major churches, conscription is permissible under certain conditions. The question is whether everything that the two major Christian churches have said and developed over centuries holds against weapons of mass destruction today. That is the question! Weapons of mass destruction are, as many of you have also stated, not considered weapons. Mr. von Brentano said so. Mr. Kiesinger, you just repeated it on Südwestfunk when you expressed that nuclear weapons are qualitatively different. You referred to them as devilish things (Deutscher Bundestag - 3. Wahlperiode - 21. Sitzung. Bonn, Dienstag, Den 25. März 1958).

The representative explicitly addresses the question of morality by



inquiring about the 'Christian' justifiability of a weapon that, due to its destructive power, must also impact civilians. He categorizes nuclear weapons as weapons of mass destruction, denying them the status of weapons, and distances them in a moral sense from general conscription. Furthermore, he refers to statements by representatives of the ruling party CDU, according to which nuclear weapons are not considered weapons but something qualitatively different, namely 'devilish things.' In this way, the representative not only acknowledges the nuclear taboo at work within his own ranks but also highlights the moral classification of these weapons within the ruling parties. Dr. Heinemann also addresses an argument raised by the government faction during the January 23rd debate, stating:

I raised all of this in connection with the preliminary question of whether weapons of mass destruction can be morally justified from a Christian perspective. Recently, on January 23, it was countered with: 'But self-defense!' Ladies and gentlemen, self-defense, by its nature and character, is a limited defense, but self-defense with weapons of mass destruction is impossible (Deutscher Bundestag - 3. Wahlperiode - 21. Sitzung. Bonn, Dienstag, Den 25. März 1958).

Dr. Heinemann clearly rejects nuclear weapons for religious and moral reasons, referring to them as weapons of mass destruction. He disarms the ethical argument that relies on self-defense as a moral act of violence. According to Dr. Heinemann, this moral norm applies to a limited use of force, which is exceeded by the use of nuclear weapons. He not only distinguishes between conventional and nuclear weapons but also between justified violence and the use of nuclear weapons. The stigma of weapons of mass destruction makes any use of nuclear weapons an exaggerated and unjustifiable action. Now, however, to a new element introduced by Dr. Heinemann into the debate:

I understand this rejection when you say: Of course, we do not intend nuclear war. No, you do not, but ultimately, you must still say that you

want nuclear war because you have to want it if your threat is to be taken seriously, if your threat is to be effective (Deutscher Bundestag - 3. Wahlperiode - 21. Sitzung. Bonn, Dienstag, Den 25. März 1958).

This excerpt from Dr. Heinemann's speech highlights the conflict of the nuclear taboo regarding the use and possession of nuclear weapons. According to the SPD representative, for a threat of nuclear weapons to be effective, one must be willing to use them. However, if one contradicts this willingness from the outset, the deterrent effect is lost. Thus, the normative reluctance of the government coalition to use nuclear weapons creates a conflict with the acquisition of these weapons, which, according to Dr. Heinemann, would lose their deterrent effect without such a willingness. In response to Dr. Heinemann's accusations against the government coalition, Dr. Gerstenmaier, the President of the Bundestag and CDU/CSU representative, spoke. In the following excerpt from his speech, Dr. Gerstenmaier justifies the armament based on the moral imperative that one cannot expect allies to do something that one would not do oneself.

I took the liberty – I believe the question arose for the first time back then – on August 9, 1950, before the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, in agreement with my political friends – they are all still here – but without prior consultation with the federal government, to say that despite our aversion to any kind of new military measures, we did not expect others to do for us and our protection what we were not willing to do for ourselves. (Applause from the government parties.) At that time, it seemed to me not only a political but a moral imperative. I still believe that the fundamental stance we took was correct and can be defended to this day and beyond (Deutscher Bundestag - 3. Wahlperiode - 21. Sitzung. Bonn, Dienstag, Den 25. März 1958).

So, the CDU faction representative describes the rearmament as happening from the moral dilemma of whether it could be justified for

others to do something for the protection of Germany that Germany itself was not willing to do. In previous debates, this argument is interpreted similarly but more in the context of security concerns, that Germany would lose the support of NATO partners if it did not rearm. Dr. Gerstenmaier's argumentation is based not so much on a security issue but rather on a normative premise. Non-nuclear norms and a certain contribution norm are thus in opposition here. The following excerpt from the CDU representative's speech once again showcases the moral considerations.

I have taken from the statements of the Federal Minister of Defense in this debate that the effective nuclear arming of the Bundeswehr could, at the earliest, be completed in the fall of 1959, that is, in one and a half to two years. I also consider it not only morally permissible but realistically justified to take the position today that it is not about distributing atomic warheads to the Bundeswehr's batteries today or tomorrow, which, anyway, do not belong to us, and will never belong to us if the Americans stick to their law. Instead, it is primarily about highlighting the unavoidable consequences for the Federal Republic and NATO if the disarmament negotiations, the European security system, and the German question do not finally—finally!—take a different turn at the upcoming international conferences than they have had so far (Deutscher Bundestag - 3. Wahlperiode - 21. Sitzung. Bonn, Dienstag, Den 25. März 1958).

Dr. Gerstenmaier argues that the government sees itself as morally justified in arming the Bundeswehr with nuclear weapons due to the failure of disarmament negotiations. Furthermore, Dr. Gerstenmaier establishes a direct link between German reunification and nuclear weapons. While opposition speakers had previously viewed the threat of nuclear rearmament as a hindrance to reunification, Dr. Gerstenmaier portrays it as potential leverage to resolve the German question. From the DP's side, Deputy Schneider came forward to defend the government's course. Deputy Schneider began by stating:

Ladies and gentlemen, I stated at the beginning of my speech that we have all seriously examined our consciences, and we even share, in principle, the deep concern associated with such armament with Mr. Heinemann and his friends. However, we see the political and military reality more soberly than Mr. Heinemann and the opposition do. It is not the renunciation of nuclear armament for the Bundeswehr that is crucial. However, the decisive factor could be the loss of security and defense readiness that could occur if we discriminate against our soldiers, i.e., if we do not equip them with the weapons, they may potentially face an opponent with (Deutscher Bundestag - 3. Wahlperiode - 21. Sitzung. Bonn, Dienstag, Den 25. März 1958, 1958).

In the Bundestag debate on the nuclear arming of the Bundeswehr on March 25, 1958, Schneider, a representative of the government party CDU, asserts that all members of parliament, regardless of party affiliation, have seriously considered the moral implications. Interestingly, Schneider's conclusion appears to align with that of SPD representative Dr. Heinemann. However, towards the end of his speech, Schneider reverts to the pattern of security concerns, warning about potential implications for the 'security and defense readiness' of German soldiers. This differs from the arguments of the CDU faction, which are based on concerns about NATO allies withdrawing from Germany. However, the views of the two coalition partners, CDU and DP, converge again in the following excerpt, where Schneider explicitly describes a dynamic in which the government wants to renounce nuclear weapons but cannot do so due to security reasons.

We do not want nuclear weapons, unless Russian policy forces them into our hands, and I assure you: we also do not want them through the back door. We do not want them unless Russian policy forces them into our hands (Deutscher Bundestag - 3. Wahlperiode - 21. Sitzung. Bonn, Dienstag, Den 25. März 1958).

This excerpt reveals the fundamental relationship in the views of the

government parties, balancing the desire for renunciation based on moral reasons and the predominance of security concerns. However, the nuclear taboo is also evident, making it impossible for the government parties to openly discuss arming themselves. Instead, a greater evil is invoked, making arming seem necessary. To conclude the debate, remarks were made by Dr. Schmid from the FDP, which, like the SPD, belonged to the opposition. Dr. Schmid embodies the nuclear taboo and, consequently, the norm that prohibits the possession of nuclear weapons. Dr. Schmid is particularly direct, as he not only speaks of the moral value and responsibility of nuclear weapons but goes further by describing the decay of humanity and its conscience.

This entire race in nuclear armament boils down to making us objects of such soulless mechanisms, corrupting our moral resilience so that we resign ourselves to it. In this way, the spiritual personality also perishes (Deutscher Bundestag - 3. Wahlperiode - 21. Sitzung. Bonn, Dienstag, Den 25. März 1958).

In the preceding excerpt, Dr. Schmid specifically describes the decay of moral resistance, referring to nuclear weapons. He attributes the moral norm attached to nuclear weapons as the reason why atomic rearmament had not occurred up to that point. However, this norm is intended to be eroded further through the arms race, and people are to become accustomed to the nuclear weapon. Yet, Dr. Schmid introduces another element into the debate, which concerns the division of Germany.

I would like to appeal from this platform to our American, French, British, and other friends—I emphasize: friends—to consider in what terrible moral dilemma they are putting a divided people when brothers must face each other with the most terrible weapons in the world! (Deutscher Bundestag - 3. Wahlperiode - 21. Sitzung. Bonn, Dienstag, Den 25. März 1958).

Thus, the nuclear taboo in the German context takes on an additional

nationalist dimension, questioning the arming with nuclear weapons in a divided country like Germany. Although this argument already existed in the context of establishing a Bundeswehr in previous debates, Dr. Schmid emphasizes the status of nuclear weapons in the dynamics of the two parts of Germany. He characterizes the situation as a “terrible moral dilemma” and the nuclear weapons as “terrible weapons.” In summary, it can be observed that while the government parties reach for nuclear weapons, they must always hide this intention behind larger evils, as the nuclear taboo would otherwise downgrade them in public opinion. The argument is often made from the position that they do not want these weapons and would not acquire them if the USSR were willing to make significant disarmament efforts. However, substantial disarmament efforts were challenging to envision during the height of the Cold War.

## 5. Conclusion

During the tenure of Konrad Adenauer, nuclear policy was a significant aspect of German foreign policy, and numerous debates on nuclear weapons took place. Mark Cioc’s 1990 work “Deterrence and Defense” highlights five such debates, revealing not only a stigma that distinguishes nuclear weapons from conventional ones but also a general taboo associated with nuclear weapons (Cioc 1990). In the spring of 1958, following the 1957 elections, these debates echoed many points from their predecessors. However, the opposition, comprised of the FDP and SPD, began to place a greater emphasis on arguments grounded in ethics. They questioned the Christian responsibility for nuclear weapons and the mutual nuclear rearmament of the two German states. In response, the governing parties, CDU and DP, countered with their own ethically grounded arguments, primarily focusing on self-defense as a moral imperative:

A campaign initiated by the SPD, the German Trade Union Federation

(DGB), and pacifist groups in March 1958, “Fight against Atomic Death,” led to large demonstrations in the following weeks.<sup>2)</sup>

The SPD’s anti-nuclear campaign in the subsequent years had a significant impact, as described in a report by the German Bundestag. Public outcries, such as those exemplified by the 18 scientists of the Göttingen Manifesto, demonstrated the acceptance and influence of the nuclear taboo in the public sphere. The Göttingen Manifesto was a direct response to a public speech by Konrad Adenauer, in which he downplayed nuclear weapons and their effects on April 5, 1957. The weight of the scientists and their impact on German society at the time led the Social Democratic Party to request an immediate seating, which was also attended by Adenauer and his Defense and Nuclear Minister Strauss. During the meeting, these two leading figures of German nuclear ambition sought to marginalize nuclear weapons, a tactic already described in Knoll’s work. They rationalized the necessity of nuclear armament by externalizing responsibility to the USSR and NATO. In their attempts at rationalization, both politicians were careful not to explicitly name nuclear weapons, opting instead to use circumlocutions.

Until the success of disarmament efforts, the federal government, in the interest of the security of the Federal Republic, cannot deny the United States Armed Forces, the backbone of collective defense, the provision of weapons that are at least equivalent to those of the Red Army in the corresponding area (2. Deutscher Bundestag - 209. Sitzung. Bonn, Freitag, Den 10. Mai 1957).

Strauss, the defense and nuclear minister, articulated the need for nuclear armament, demonstrating the influence of the taboo on his choice of words. During the debate on May 10, 1957, Adenauer himself acknowledged the moral pressure in the face of a national debate, while

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2) (<https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/873618/ca6a9475fe2a1120a0200e5f09455b65/WD-2-066-21-pdf-data.pdf>. accessed 10 April 2023)

also avoiding direct mention of the tabooed nuclear weapons.

I would like to emphasize here, initially, that I – and I claim this for myself – feel the profound moral dilemma just as much as you and just as much as Mr. Erler, which the development of these weapons has brought upon anyone involved in politics in some way. (2. Deutscher Bundestag - 209. Sitzung. Bonn, Freitag, Den 10. Mai 1957)

The lasting impact of the normative rejection of nuclear weapons is evident in the future as well. The roots of the anti-nuclear movement in Germany can be traced back to the anti-nuclear weapons movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s (Nelkin & Pollak 1980). While the realist explanation can provide a convincing rationale for West Germany's decision not to arm itself with nuclear weapons, as advocated by Michael Knoll in "Atomare Optionen," it fails to explain the Adenauer government's hesitancy to pursue more direct measures to acquire nuclear weapons when the opportunity presented itself (Knoll 2013). Furthermore, the government's public stance, which often sought to downplay the issue of nuclear armament, is not adequately addressed by the realist approach. In these instances, the nuclear taboo framework can provide compelling arguments that complement a realist perspective.



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국문요약

## 서독의 핵무장?: ‘핵 금기(Nuclear Taboo)’ 사상은 서독의 핵 정책에 어떻게 영향을 끼쳤나

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1950년대 아데나워 행정부는 독일이 한 번도 핵무장을 고려한 적이 없다고 강력히 주장했고, 독일 국민과 국제사회는 그렇게 믿고 있었다. 하지만 아데나워 행정부의 주장은 사실이 아니라는 증거가 최근 연구조사에서 드러났다. 최근 연구물들은 주로 국제관계학의 현실주의적 시각에서 서독이 핵무장을 고려했지만, 결국 포기했다고 주장한다. 미국이 서독에 확장억제를 제공했고, 이러한 상황에서 핵무장을 감행한다면 오히려 서독의 안보 이익에 역행하는 결과를 초래할 수 있으므로 핵무장을 포기했다는 것이다. 이러한 현실주의 시각의 분석은 상당한 설득력이 있지만 당시 서독의 정치인들과 정책전문가들의 말과 행동을 설명하기에는 부족하다. 본 연구는 구성주의적 시각에서 ‘핵 금기(Nuclear Taboo)’ 사상이 1950년대와 1960년대 초 독일(서독) 국회의원의 정책 담론에 어떠한 영향을 끼쳤는지를 추적한다. 그 목적을 위해 독일 의회의 의사록을 주로 검증했다. 그 결과 핵 금기 사상이 서독의 핵 정책에 상당한 영향을 끼쳤음을 확인할 수 있었다.

주제어: 서독, 핵무장, 핵 금기, 구성주의, 냉전

