

Steinmeier Calls for U.S. to Withdraw Nukes

By Oliver Meier

In an unprecedented statement for a German foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier last month called for the withdrawal of the U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in his country. Steinmeier told the German magazine *Der Spiegel* April 10 that "these weapons are militarily obsolete today" and promised that he would take steps to ensure that the remaining U.S. warheads "are removed from Germany."

NATO keeps details of its nuclear deployments secret, but it is estimated that the United States probably still deploys 150-240 B61 bombs in Europe. Under nuclear sharing arrangements, up to 140 weapons can be assigned for use by Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey, which are non-nuclear-weapon states-parties to the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). (See *ACT*, September 2008.) These weapons remain under U.S. custody during peacetime but can be released to U.S. allies for delivery in times of war. According to independent estimates, there may be as many as 20 U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in Germany.

Steinmeier's call appears to be at odds with views held by Chancellor Angela Merkel. In a March 26 debate in the German Bundestag, Merkel defended Germany's involvement in nuclear sharing by stating that "it secures Germany's influence in this sensitive area of alliance politics." That argument is also prominent within the Federal Ministry of Defense, which is led by a member of Merkel's party, the Christian Democratic Union.

Steinmeier, of the Social Democratic Party, and Merkel are the front-runners in Germany's Sept. 27 national elections. The Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats form the current "Grand Coalition" governing Germany.

It is unclear what steps Steinmeier will take to follow up his initiative. Steinmeier "will speak about the nuclear weapons stored in Germany" in his next meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Rolf Mützenich, the Social Democratic spokesperson for disarmament, said in an April 24 parliamentary debate. Steinmeier will also say that the tactical nuclear weapons eventually "have to disappear" from all of Europe, Mützenich said.

In an April 20 interview with *Arms Control Today*, Mützenich said Merkel should discuss the issue with President Barack Obama "with a view to relatively quickly reaching an agreement on the withdrawal, preferably within the next couple of months." Mützenich also said he assumes that the German delegation at the May 4-15 NPT preparatory committee meeting will present as its position that Berlin aims for a withdrawal of the remaining U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany.

The three smaller opposition parties in the German parliament also support withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany.

Only the Christian Democrats take a different view. Ruprecht Polenz, Christian Democratic chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Bundestag, was quoted by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper April 8 as arguing that "an isolated discussion" of a withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany is "wrong and premature." Christian Democratic foreign policy spokesperson Eckart von Klaeden pointed out during the April 24 debate that Steinmeier had personally been involved in reaching a recent NATO consensus in support of nuclear deterrence. Von Klaeden argued that nuclear weapons deployed in Germany have to be discussed against that background of the continued need for nuclear deterrence. "Unfortunately we have to conclude that proliferation risks in recent years have not decreased but further increased," he said.

Steinmeier specifically placed his initiative in the context of Obama's April 5 speech in Prague, in which the president stated that the United States would reduce the role of nuclear weapons in national security and urged "others to do the same."

Steinmeier said in the April 24 debate that an agreement on tactical nuclear weapons has to be part of reaching the goal of complete nuclear disarmament. "Europe also has a role to play" in reaching a formal accord on tactical nuclear weapons, he argued. "If we want Europe to evolve into a nuclear-free zone, then what I say of course also applies to the remaining nuclear weapons in Germany," Steinmeier said.

The chair of the subcommittee on disarmament, arms control, and nonproliferation in the German parliament, Uta Zapf, told *Arms Control Today* April 20 that Germany and Norway should raise withdrawal as an issue under their initiative to strengthen NATO's profile on arms control.

On Dec. 7, 2007, Steinmeier and his Norwegian counterpart, Jonas Gahr Støre, launched an initiative "to identify areas in which NATO can better define its profile on disarmament, arms control and nuclear non-proliferation." (See *ACT*, April 2009.)

Asked about the implications of Steinmeier's call for NATO's upcoming review of its strategic concept, State Secretary Espen Barth Eide of the Norwegian Ministry of Defense told *Arms Control Today* April 17 that "all issues are on the table in NATO, including the presence of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe as well as tactical nuclear weapons and de-alerting." He cited recent statements on nuclear arms control by Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

At its April 3-4 summit in France and Germany, NATO agreed to review its 1999 Strategic Concept, including its nuclear policies. Alliance leaders agreed that "qualified experts" would support the alliance's secretary-general in the drafting and that the new strategy should be approved by the next summit, scheduled for late 2010 in Lisbon. Some are doubtful that NATO can meet that deadline because of the broad range of disputes among the allies. A U.S. official said April 20 that he would "be surprised if we get there by the next summit."

The recent summit, which was dominated by a dispute over the appointment of Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen as a successor to the current secretary-general, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, and the future of NATO's mission in Afghanistan, did not clarify what future role the alliance should play in arms control and nonproliferation. According to the U.S. official, "NATO managed to collectively underperform before the summit to the point where nobody expected any breakthroughs" on those issues. Assessing the outcome of the summit,

the deputy head of NATO's Weapons of Mass Destruction Centre, Roberto Zadra, told *Arms Control Today* April 20 that "allies have explored areas where NATO can provide added value to strengthening arms control and nonproliferation." They will continue to do so, but "one needs a certain degree of realism when addressing this question," he said.

Many had expected that NATO would endorse the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), just as it had done prior to the Bush administration, but the communiqué issued at the end of the summit does not mention the CTBT. The U.S. official attributed the omission to inertia. "Frankly, the issue didn't come up, and it was too soon for the U.S. at the working staff level" to champion the CTBT prior to and during the summit, he said.

The official said there was a dispute on the role of deterrence in alliance security. "This was a very sophisticated debate which involved a number of allies," he said. Sources indicated that some allies wanted to contrast the NATO summit communiqué language that "arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation will continue to make an important contribution to peace, security, and stability" with a direct reference to the importance of deterrence for alliance security.

Privately, officials said others opposed that approach, apparently with success. The final text of the communiqué does not contain any reference to deterrence while the "Declaration on Alliance Security," also adopted at the summit, states that "deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element" of NATO's overall strategy. According to several sources, the inclusion of that statement in the declaration was also contentious.

NATO leaders also adopted a "Strategic-Level Policy for Preventing the Proliferation of WMD and Defending against Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Threats." This document, which updates NATO's 1994 "Policy Framework on Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction," remains classified, although it appears to be a description of the current policy rather than a proposal for revising it.

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