

February 16, 1970
Memorandum for President Nixon from Kissinger,
"Brandt's Eastern Policy"

Citation:

"Memorandum for President Nixon from Kissinger, "Brandt's Eastern Policy"", February 16, 1970, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives II, White House Files, NSC, Europe, Box 683
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/116214>

Summary:

A memorandum for President Nixon from National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger summarizing West German Chancellor Willy Brandt's "Ostpolitik" or Eastern Policy, which sought to normalize relations between West Germany and the communist countries.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Brandt's Eastern Policy

The Goal as Brandt Sees It

The German Chancellor has stated the goals of his "Ostpolitik" in rather sober and realistic terms: he wants to normalize relations with the Communist countries and move "from confrontation to co-operation;" he is prepared in this context to accept the GDR as a separate state and to accommodate the Poles, within certain limits, on the question of the Oder-Neisse Line. He hopes in this way to reduce the antagonism toward West Germany in the USSR and Eastern Europe and to make the division of Germany less severe. He rejects the idea that Germany should be free-floating between East and West and he remains strongly committed to NATO and West European integration. Indeed he believes his Eastern policy can be successful only if Germany is firmly anchored in the West. He has in effect renounced formal reunification as the aim of German policy but hopes over the long run to achieve special ties between the two German states which will reflect the fact that they have a common national heritage. He has cautioned Germans not to expect rapid progress.

Brandt probably commands the support of a majority of Germans for this approach, although there is a strong and vocal minority among Christian Democrats and in sections of the press which is strongly opposed. Although Brandt has stressed that his Western policy has priority, German attention is currently heavily focussed on the East. The criticism of his opponents has been vigorous and has drawn bitter Government responses.

The Reasons for Concern

Much of the opposition within Germany and the concern among its allies stems not so much from the broad purposes which Brandt wants

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to achieve but from suspicions or fear that Eastern policy is acquiring its own momentum and will lead Brandt into dangerous concessions. Moreover, while even his critics generally credit Brandt with sincerity and wisdom, some of his influential associates -- for example his State Secretary, Egon Bahr -- are deeply mistrusted. Much of the worry inside and outside Germany focusses on the danger that as Brandt pursues the quest for normalization, his advisors and supporters will eventually succeed in leading him to jeopardize Germany's entire international position. This fear has already embittered domestic debate in Germany and could in time produce the type of emotional and doctrinaire political argument that has paralyzed political life in Germany and some other West European countries in the past. It is this possibility that we must obviously be troubled about ourselves.

Pressure for Concessions

Brandt has now made the opening moves in Moscow and Warsaw and has made overtures to East Germany. As was to be expected, the Communists have advanced maximum positions: full recognition of the GDR as a separate, equal and sovereign state under international law, acceptance of post-war territorial changes, notably Poland's western frontier as final, and acceptance of West Berlin as a separate entity dissociated from the FRG. Having staked much prestige during the electoral campaign and since on progress in his Eastern policy, Brandt is now under some compulsion to demonstrate that he can deliver.

Moreover, a potentially important state election is scheduled in June in North Rhine Westphalia where SPD and FDP now govern in coalition just as at the Federal level in Bonn. The CDU hopes that if it can reduce the strength of the FDP to knock it out of the coalition at the state level, it will have undermined the coalition in Bonn. "Ostpolitik" could become a significant issue if it either is demonstrably stuck or if Brandt, to save it, moves much further to meet maximum Communist demands.

Thus even in this early stage of his negotiating effort Brandt may find himself impelled to adjust his initial positions. While this may produce results for him -- in part because the Soviets may want to help Brandt for the time being -- it may arouse the opposition even further and make the German domestic debate more virulent. Some of Brandt's present support may desert him.

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The Longer Term Danger

The most worrisome aspects of Ostpolitik, however, are somewhat more long-range. As long as he is negotiating with the Eastern countries over the issues that are currently on the table -- recognition of the GDR, the Oder-Neisse, various possible arrangements for Berlin -- Brandt should not have any serious difficulty in maintaining his basic pro-Western policy. There is, at any rate, no necessary incompatibility between alliance and integration with the West on the one hand, and some degree of normalization with the East, on the other.

But assuming Brandt achieves a degree of normalization, he or his successor may discover before long that the hoped-for benefits fail to develop. Instead of ameliorating the division of Germany, recognition of the GDR may boost its status and strengthen the Communist regime. The FRG may find itself in a race for influence with the GDR in third areas which could quickly put FRG policies at odds with those of its allies, for example in the Middle East. Even in Europe, particularly in Scandinavia and the UK, the FRG might find its relations clouded by increased GDR commercial and other activities.

More fundamentally, however, the Soviets having achieved their first set of objectives may then confront the FRG with the proposition that a real and lasting improvement in the FRG's relations with the GDR and other Eastern countries can only be achieved if Bonn loosens its Western ties. Having already invested heavily in their Eastern policy, the Germans may at this point see themselves as facing agonizing choices. It should be remembered that in the 1950s, many Germans not only in the SPD under Schumacher but in conservative quarters traditionally fascinated with the East or enthralled by the vision of Germany as a "bridge" between East and West, argued against Bonn's incorporation in Western institutions on the ground that it would forever seal Germany's division and preclude the restoration of an active German role in the East. This kind of debate about Germany's basic position could well recur in more divisive form, not only inflaming German domestic affairs but generating suspicions among Germany's Western associates as to its reliability as a partner.

It should be stressed that men like Brandt, Wehner and Defense Minister Schmidt undoubtedly see themselves as conducting a responsible policy of reconciliation and normalization with the East and intend not

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to have this policy come into conflict with Germany's Western association. There can be no doubt about their basic Western orientation. But their problem is to control a process which, if it results in failure could jeopardize their political lives and if it succeeds could create a momentum that may shake Germany's domestic stability and unhinge its international position.

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