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# Vogel leans toward East bloc's views on pact with NATO

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Top U.S. officials are paying particularly close attention today to Hans-Jochen Vogel, the West German opposition party leader who is visiting Washington, because he represents what they see as a weakening of resolve in America's most important front-line ally against the Soviet arms buildup.

His visit yesterday with Secretary of State George Shultz, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and with congressional leaders, and today with President Reagan, comes at a time when the Soviet Union is working hard on European leftists and moderates to force NATO governments to abandon plans to deploy 572 Cruise and Pershing II missiles against the Soviet Union by the end of this year.

And Vogel, whose Social Democratic party is campaigning to recapture the West German Bundestag in the March national elections, after three months of control by Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Party, appears to be backing away from his predecessor's commitments to that deployment.

"Economics is the main problem in Germany, but the elections could be a significant barometer of the strength of the European peace movement," said a State Department official. "The rhetoric is heating up on the anti-nuclear issue."

Said another administration official:

"Our interest in the Social Democrats and Mr. Vogel is largely long-term. Depending on the way the elections go, they could end up back in a grand alliance coalition with the CDU and whoever else, or they could end up really as the opposition, without the same sense of responsibility that comes from being part of the government."

If that happens, some Americans fear the SDP may follow other European Socialists and turn leftward, possibly trying to seek a coalition with the pacifist and environmentalist group, The Greens, which could gain parliamentary seats for the first time.

Vogel already has been strongly criticized by Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, a Free Democrat whose tiny party has drastically dropped out of favor and may lose representation in the elections. Genscher said in Bonn Tuesday that Vogel was increasingly backing away from the NATO "double-track" agreement to deploy the U.S. missiles, signed by then-Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, SDP leader in 1979.

"He has been retreating step by step. Now he is bounding away from it," said Genscher.

Vogel has insisted the SDP still supports the "double-track" agreement, which is to negotiate with the Soviets about removal of their SS-20 nuclear missiles aimed at Western Europe, and to



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prepare for deployment of the American missiles by late this year if they don't remove their weapons. But Vogel also has criticized his government's "out-of-hand" rejection of the Soviet Union's new proposal to reduce those missiles to 162 — the exact number of British and French missiles.

Vogel appears to be cultivating a growing West German concern about nuclear weapons, based on a recent study by the West German magazine *Der Spiegel*, which showed that 55 percent of the population thought the United States and Soviets were not negotiating seriously about arms control and 61 percent thought the deployment of U.S. missiles should be postponed.

What complicates the German political situation is that the elections are more likely to be a poll on concerns about the economy than on nuclear weapons. The December unemployment rate, just released, shows 2,200,000 Germans out of work, or 9.1 percent of the population.