From Disarmament to Rearmament
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Introduction

On 8–9 May 1945, the entire German military establishment put down their arms and surrendered. Approximately six weeks later, the Potsdam Agreement stipulated that Nazism and German militarism were to be extirpated and Germany’s armed forces dissolved in such a way as to permanently prevent their revival or reorganization. Furthermore, because of the nature of German militarism and the crimes committed during the war, German soldiers were reviled and looked upon as criminals. No one wanted to see Germans in uniform again.¹

But just as wars have their unintended consequences, so too does peace—or at least attempts to maintain peace. For the United States, the desire to maintain the peace following World War II and prevent the Cold War from becoming a “hot” war resulted in a series of these unintended consequences. Rearming Germany was one. The irony of rearming Germany is that it had been agreed by all parties at the Potsdam Conference that Germany should be disarmed and demilitarized and that “all forces and all institutions or organizations which served to keep alive the military tradition [should] be completely and finally abolished.”² It is clear that the decision to totally disarm and demilitarize Germany stemmed from the failure of the World War I Allies to control German disarmament. The World War II Allies concluded that Germany alone was responsible for that war, and, because of the failure of the restrictions imposed by the Versailles Treaty to cure the symptoms of German militarism, they formed the concept of disarming and demilitarizing a nation without any serious thought given to whether it could, in fact, be done or what the consequences might be.³
The above notwithstanding, the emerging Cold War caused some, particularly in the US Department of Defense, to think differently. There was universal agreement that Western Europe had to be protected against a Communist takeover. The question that remained was how? Thus, after years of debate within the US government and between it and the governments of its West European allies, a resurrected West Germany was granted full sovereignty and authorized to create a national armed force just ten years after being totally defeated. That this Cold War event could occur at all was primarily due to the reversal of a major US policy decision made long before World War II ended to keep Germany disarmed and demilitarized for generations.

Revisiting the rearmament debate contributes a new perspective to the vast scholarly literature on the Cold War’s first decade. It reflects what has been called a real “gap between the disciplines” (meaning diplomatic historians have neglected the military aspects of the period before 1950 while military historians have equally neglected this period’s politics). This book endeavors to fill that gap and thus examines both military and political dimensions of the German rearmament process and, with respect to the evidence, goes where others have not. This brings to light (often for the first time) many previously unseen, neglected, or underexamined archival files from the Department of State, the Policy Planning Staff, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), as well as previously classified histories of the military services, some still unpublished.

While these documents do not change our overall understanding of the era in question, they provide fresh insights to the underlying discussions and rationales that led to the decisions initially made by the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff and subsequently within the Department of State and the War Department (later the Department of Defense). They also add context to the existing scholarship and depth to understudied issues, such as the lack of US preparedness to defend Western Europe in the face of possible Soviet aggression both before and after the Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb. Furthermore, they document the genesis of the original plan to disarm Germany and the heretofore unknown US military plans to arm West Germany that began as early as 1948, and provide additional meaning to the later debates over the question of German rearmament between officials of the departments of state, war, and later, defense. Using formerly classified documents, this history describes the efforts of and the obstacles faced by the US military services in planning for the creation of
a new German armed force. Lastly, these documents show that while the United States had no intention of incurring a long-term defense commitment in Europe, American officials believed that they had no choice but to make repeated assurances that US forces would remain in Europe as long as needed, both to deter the Soviets and to protect America’s European allies against an imagined German revanchism.

This archival focus is not meant to denigrate the plethora of published books and articles that cover this early Cold War period, but rather to fill the literary void on the subject of German rearmament below the policy level and provide new details that illuminate the rationale behind the policies and actions taken. Most of the discussions in the literature on this period focus primarily on the nuclear issue (i.e., America’s nuclear monopoly prior to 1949 and the need to rapidly build on that nuclear capability after the first Soviet nuclear test in August 1949). The literature does not mention that the US Army, rapidly demobilized and seen as inconsequential, had not included atomic weapons in its war-fighting doctrine and remained focused on large formations and a need to conduct a war of attrition. While it was eventually agreed that German troops would be needed on the ground to help defend Western Europe, the discussions, debates, and actual planning for German rearmament that took place within the War Department (later the Pentagon) prior to 1949 are simply absent from the literature.

What the literature does cover is the belief that German rearmament would require an end to the occupation, a step that would make the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) not only independent but also stronger. This, in itself, was feared as an invitation for a Soviet attack, one that some felt could not be resisted. France also feared a strong Germany, despite evidence that some French leaders had realized as early as 1945 that Germany would have to be rearmed to ward off the emerging Soviet threat. Even Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, chairman of the Western Union Military Committee, stated in late 1948 that a rearmed Germany should be admitted to the WEU and later to NATO. French WEU staff officers were of the same mind. However, despite all the words that have been written on the subject of German rearmament, still missing is a comprehensive narration of how the military services planned for it, how it was viewed by Congress, what actions they took to speed up or impede this rearmament, and under what conditions it finally took place.

Despite the key role played by the rapid disarmament and demilitarization of Germany following World War II, there is little in the literature
about the two-year-long disarmament planning process that became Operation Eclipse or about its outstanding results. None of the several long and detailed articles on posthostilities planning for Germany even mention Operation Eclipse (with one exception), and the official histories of the World War II period only mention it briefly, if at all.11

Aside from the several texts that inform us that President Eisenhower was a strong supporter of the European Defence Community (EDC), as was his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, little is really known about Eisenhower’s initial opposition to EDC and his subsequent conversion to favor of it when he was Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), or how deeply he became committed to it as president. Nor has much been written about how his support impacted US policy to make the success of the EDC a cornerstone of US European policy. Similarly, while the literature underscores Dulles’s threats of an “agonizing reappraisal” of US policy toward Europe should the EDC fail, there is no real narrative in the literature of his everyday thoughts about the EDC or of his discussions with Eisenhower about the EDC or German rearmament.12

One reason there are so few details on the process of disarming and demilitarizing Germany is that when most of the history covering that period was written and documented, many of the key State Department and Defense Department papers had not been declassified and were simply not available to researchers. Since their declassification, both time and interest have passed, so a number of documents that can add depth and detail to the narrative are now available but remain largely untouched.

Discussions on rearming West Germany can be broken into two chronological periods, the first from the end of the war on 8–9 May 1945 until 12 September 1950, the day Secretary of State Dean Acheson presented the US demand that West Germany be rearmed to the British and French foreign ministers, and the second from 13 September 1950 until 9 May 1955, when the FRG was admitted to NATO as a fully sovereign nation following its earlier admission to the WEU (along with Italy), an expanded Brussels Treaty Organization. For the first of these periods, archival research is necessary because until 1948, with the exception of rumors and innuendo published in a number of American and European newspapers, there is no mention of arming West Germany in the literature covering that period.13 For the second period, archival research is still necessary to fill in the gaps that remain in the large number of books on German rearmament published after 1950.
The various agencies in Washington responsible for formulating pre-
surrender and posthostilities policies for Germany were slow to act on the
need for posthostilities planning. They were plagued by serious divisions
and fundamental differences in outlook. In addition, the State Department
and the War Department were greatly at odds with one another over the
role Allied military forces should have during the occupation. The re-
sulting US posthostilities planning process, albeit thorough and extremely
broad in its coverage, was overly bureaucratic, cumbersome, and to some
degree duplicative. Much of this can be understood by realizing that post-
hostilities thinking was, aside from the obvious task of disarming German
forces, focused on establishing military government there to restore law
and order initially, eventually establishing civil government in the liberated
areas, and enforcing the terms of Germany’s surrender.14

From the end of the war until the September 1950 unilateral US
demand that West Germany be armed (despite the outbreak of the Ko-
rean War), the official US position regarding Germany was that it should
remain disarmed and demilitarized. The September 1949 Occupation
Statute stated explicitly that not only would the newly created Federal
Republic of Germany remain disarmed and demilitarized but that all
military-related areas of scientific research, industry, and even civil avia-
tion would remain circumscribed, if not totally forbidden. In this regard,
the Tripartite Military Security Board was created to ensure that the de-
militarization of Germany continued.15 This Allied position was actually
welcomed in many quarters of Germany. For example, in the fall of 1950,
before German interior minister Gustav Heinemann resigned from the
cabinet, he told Chancellor Konrad Adenauer that “since one of the no-
blest Allied war aims was to disarm us and keep us disarmed into the fu-
ture, and the Allies have done everything during five years of occupation
to make the German military despicable . . . and to educate the German
people about military attitudes, it is therefore not for us to either search for
or offer military measures.”16 Heinemann also invoked God, opining that
“after God had twice dashed the weapons from the hands of the Germans
they should not reach for them a third time.”17

However, as early as 1946, it was becoming clear to both the United
States and Great Britain that a defeated, apathetic, and virtually prostrate
Germany was no longer to be feared, while their erstwhile ally, the Union
of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), was changing into a potential threat.
The changes taking place in that relationship spawned fears that unless
the USSR were contained (an effort that could only be successful with
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(a rearmed Germany), a third world war would erupt. This created quite a dilemma, however, as the act of rearming Germany might instigate the very aggression it was meant to prevent.  

While the initiative to arm the FRG in 1950 came from the United States, the plan was not conceived in a vacuum. Both Great Britain and France, the United States’ main NATO allies, had also been considering the matter. But while the objectives of the NATO allies were the same (containment of possible German revanchism and deterrence of Soviet advances), the means were not. Each nation found itself at times working at cross-purposes to the others and even resorting to deception as the perceptions of political realities and strategic imperatives demanded. As a result, the United States lost both the initiative and control of the process of rearming West Germany.

The United States’ objectives for the 1950 decision to arm the Federal Republic, aside from the goal of strengthening the defense of Western Europe against the perceived Soviet strength, were twofold: to bind the western half of the divided German nation to the West by forming a West German army within an integrated West European edifice, and to withdraw US occupation forces from the European continent. The actual outcomes of the 1950 decision to rearm—a West German “national” army and US commitment to a virtually permanent presence in Western Europe—were completely at odds with those objectives. While the United States wanted a rearmed Germany, it did not as a matter of national policy want a national German army. Despite long-held plans to remove US forces from Europe—to build down as the Germans built up—the United States was forced to assuage European fears of a resurgent Germany by promising an open-ended commitment to keep significant US forces on the continent. The subsequent failure of the EDC in 1954 forced the United States into a “double containment” situation, where the United States would now be called upon to protect Western Europe against a Soviet invasion on the one hand, and to protect all of Europe against a possible resurgent Germany on the other. Furthermore, faced with a fait accompli, the United States’ pledge to retain an open-ended commitment of military forces was made in order to regain its lost initiative and leadership of the Alliance. The NATO treaty imposed no requirement on any member nation to station troops either on the continent or in Germany; therefore (discounting altruism as a motive), the US commitment was made to balance its military imperatives with political realities. Regaining the initiative in and leadership of the Alliance would do just that.
Conventional wisdom attributes the arming of the FRG to the Korean War. Robert McGeehan writes that “the German rearmament question was among the most important, and frustrating, concerns of American diplomacy during the postwar period” and that rearmament was the result of a unilateral US decision in the summer of 1950 following the outbreak of the Korean War. While this statement is true in regard to the timing of the decision and that it was unilateral, one cannot deny that in reality the issue of rearming the Germans had roots going back as early as 1948 and possibly even 1947. That said, there can be no question but that the hostilities in Korea, seen by the West as blatant Soviet-backed aggression, gave a greater urgency to the issue of rearming Germany and caused West European nations to make a U-turn regarding their own rearmament thoughts and view the use of German manpower and resources as imperative.

In this book, I document US Army plans to rearm West Germany that began as early as 1947 as well as discussions that took place between the departments of state and defense prior to the formal presentation of the US decision on 12 September 1950. As alluded to above, many of the existing histories have failed to fully indicate that in some instances, particularly in the early period of the Cold War, military-diplomatic actions were taken without strategic guidance or even a strategic consensus. One key purpose of this history is to draw together these heretofore ignored or underemphasized aspects of this issue, such as the delaying tactics used by the British and the French to slow the German rearming process down. This provides a more detailed and nuanced picture of this key episode in the first decade of the Cold War.

In the view of US political and military leaders, the Soviet threat had been growing since 1944 and took on greater urgency following the 1948 Czech coup, the Berlin Blockade that same year, and the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb in the late summer of 1949. For these reasons, five years after the war’s end, US policy, which had initially supported disarming and demilitarizing Germany, changed direction. Prior to these events, President Harry S. Truman had stated on record that he planned to reduce the US military presence overseas and wanted to cut an additional $5–$7 billion from the $13.7 billion defense budget. These events, however, intervened and led to the promulgation of NSC 68 and a massive US rearmament program, and caused the president and Secretary of State Acheson, both disposed to keeping Germany disarmed, to bend to the fear in Europe resulting from the Korean War and the urgings of the Joint Staff
to strengthen the defense of Western Europe. They reversed course and began to favor a German contribution to that defense.\textsuperscript{26}

In addition, before 1950, the desire to arm the FRG was deeply imbedded in an international, politico-military conundrum that followed two separate but related paths from 1948 until the late summer of 1950. The differences were not in the fundamental goals but in the tactical approaches to the same goal.\textsuperscript{27} The State Department saw the threat and sought to strengthen Western Europe by unifying it politically and economically, thereby creating a mechanism by which a rehabilitated Germany could be reintegrated into Western Europe without posing a threat to the peace and stability of its neighbors. As mentioned above, the State Department wanted Western Europe to be a third power, capable of saying no to the United States and the USSR. Only once that was accomplished, some State Department officials thought, could one raise the question of arming Germany. It was not that the leading officials of the State Department were adamantly against seeing Germany armed; they just wanted to decouple this issue from other issues they deemed more important and less risky.\textsuperscript{28} They believed that in this manner, the Soviet threat could be held at bay.

Defense officials likewise believed that the reconstruction of Western Europe and the need to strengthen its economy took precedence over rearmament and preparing for a possible war against the Soviet Union. Because strategic planners believed the Soviet Union would not risk a war with the United States, their planning was more of a theoretical exercise.\textsuperscript{29} Nonetheless, the Department of Defense faced a number of challenges to that assumption during this period. The first Soviet nuclear bomb test and the Communist takeover of China, for example, provided reason to suspect that a powerful coalition might be forming that could threaten US national security. Furthermore, the USSR army outnumbered the US Army in terms of manpower due to the United States’ postwar demobilization, caused by a limited budget. The army was also dealing with the threat of additional reductions, caught in an interservice rivalry with the air force and the navy for money and resources as well as roles and missions, and associated with the relatively weak West European powers, who were still recovering from the ravages of World War II. In light of these circumstances, and because they needed to rapidly devise a strategy to defend Western Europe, the War Department chose the path advocated by the JCS and sought a solution that would utilize
the manpower and highly regarded fighting expertise that the recently defeated Germany could provide, placing German boots on the ground as quickly as possible.30

In addressing these issues, US policymakers and the administration were confronted with several difficulties. First, gaining popular approval for this decision would require reversing American attitudes that had been held throughout the war years about the Soviet Union (erstwhile ally) and Germany (erstwhile enemy). Second, US policymakers needed to find a way to rearm Germany in a manner that would “deter the Russians but not scare the Belgians” while at the same time ensuring that the new German army would not be able to act independently and threaten the peace of Europe again.31 Third, the United States had to convince its European allies to strengthen their own defensive capabilities. Finally, the American public had to be convinced that the preservation of democracy and the “American way of life” required the long-term presence of US military forces on the European continent.

The situation with the USSR worsened, causing the United States to make two major decisions that, as Acheson said, “took a step never before taken in [US] history.”32 The first, in 1949, was to end an almost two-hundred-year-old isolationist tradition and become part of an entangling foreign alliance, NATO; the second was to reverse a key World War II policy by formally deciding in 1950 to rearm West Germany. This latter decision ran up against strong French opposition, which succeeded in getting the initiative for German rearmament handed to the French, who introduced the Pleven Plan for an integrated European army and used it as a tool to arm the Germans without arming Germany. The Pleven Plan metamorphosed into the ill-fated EDC. The EDC was based on the principle of supranationality and, despite strong support from the Eisenhower administration to the exclusion of all other alternatives, failed, leaving only one alternative that was successfully brought to conclusion by the British.33

Several months later, on 9 May 1955, exactly ten years after the armed forces of Germany’s Third Reich surrendered unconditionally and ended World War II in Europe, the black, red, and gold flag of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was raised at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Rocquencourt, France, alongside those of the fourteen other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), most of whom had been Germany’s enemies just ten years earlier.34 Six months later, on 12 November 1955, the two hundredth
birthday of General Gerhard von Scharnhorst, Prussian reformer and father of the German general staff, the first 101 German soldiers—2 generals, 18 lieutenant colonels, 30 majors, 40 captains and naval lieutenants, 5 first lieutenants, 5 sergeants first class, and 1 master sergeant—received their appointments to the new German armed forces (Bundeswehr) in Bonn’s Ermekeikaserne from newly appointed Defense Minister Theodor Blank.35

How this reversal of policy came about is the topic of this book. Starting with the total disarmament of Germany and continuing to the entry of the new Federal Republic of Germany into NATO, the following chapters describe the paths taken by the US State Department and Defense to reach a common goal.

Chapter 1 tells the story of Operation Eclipse, the Allied plan to completely disarm, demobilize, and demilitarize the German nation, first enunciated in the 1941 Atlantic Charter. This plan stemmed from the beliefs that militarism was ingrained in the German soul and that this had made Hitler’s rise to power inevitable. It was further believed that only by uprooting this militarism could Germany ever be a productive and peaceful neighbor in Europe. Thus, the total demilitarization of Germany, a goal never before imposed on any other nation, became a major undertaking that required the development of agreed-upon guidance, policy directives, manpower, and time.

Chapter 2 describes and analyzes the State Department’s approach to the rearmament of Germany, its approach to European efforts to find security in the Dunkirk and Brussels treaties and, in 1949, its approach to the Washington Treaty that created NATO. The relationship between John J. McCloy and Colonel Henry Byroade and the development of an American plan for a European army is brought to light before arriving at the crisis year of 1950, the Korean War, and a detailed explanation of Acheson’s “conversion” and demand to arm the Germans in September 1950.

Chapter 3 mirrors chapter 2, highlighting the military’s approach to the “German Question,” the thinking within the joint and army staffs on making use of German manpower, and the efforts of the Department of Defense to convince the government that the Germans should be armed. This chapter also discusses the problems with and evolution of different plans to defend Western Europe between 1946 and 1949, the Defense Department’s analysis of Europe’s defense needs, and the initial weakness of
the NATO organization. It concludes with the impact of the Korean War on the rearmament question and the JCS’s response to President Truman’s letter containing eight questions, the answers to which would help him decide the issue of German rearmament.

Chapter 4 brings the paths taken by state and defense together, presents their joint answer to President Truman’s eight questions, and segues to the 12 September 1950 tripartite meeting and the demand to rearm Germany that led to the development of the French Pleven Plan (which soon became the EDC) and the problems that confronted it. This chapter also addresses the Eisenhower administration’s plans and attempts to save the EDC from rejection by France and its inability to come up with an alternative.

Chapter 5 continues the narration to the defeat of EDC and the US quandary over what to do next in light of the administration’s belief that there was no alternative to EDC. It concludes this history with the solution to the “German problem” found and implemented through the efforts of the British foreign minister, Sir Anthony Eden, who brought West Germany into NATO and opened the way to create a German military force.

The epilogue that follows addresses the activities undertaken and obstacles faced by the three US military services during the EDC phase (as they prepared to train what would become the new West German Bundeswehr) until the FRG’s admission to NATO in 1955.

Seven appendices follow that provide additional information on the European Advisory Commission (EAC), a list of the Eclipse memoranda and other directives relating to German disarmament, the Himmerod Conference, an essay on Acheson and the “Single Package,” and the “Great Debate” over the power of the president to send troops overseas.

The evidence presented in this book calls for a revision of certain conventional views about West German rearmament and the beginnings of the Cold War. First, once the decision was made to change standing US national policy and arm the Germans, the US government lost effective control of the process when it voluntarily ceded leadership of the implementation of German rearmament to France. Second, despite the efforts of two US administrations, neither pleas nor threats were able to save the EDC from defeat. Third, the United States’ total commitment (at the highest levels of the US administration) to German rearmament within the EDC precluded consideration of an alternative. Lastly, when a solution
to the German rearmament problem was found following the defeat of the EDC, the United States found itself pledging an open-ended troop commitment on the European continent, a pledge that remains in force today, albeit somewhat diminished from what it was prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.