

Internal note by the British Foreign Office on defence questions related to Germany (May 1950)

Caption: In May 1950, in anticipation of the forthcoming meeting between the Foreign Ministers of the Four (the United States, France, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union), an internal note from the services of the British Foreign Office sets out the position to be adopted by the British delegation on the question of German rearmament. The note also includes a draft reply to the numerous requests made by Federal Chancellor Adenauer for a security guarantee from the Western Allies for the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Source: The National Archives of the United Kingdom, [s.l.], Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU.

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Brief for the Secretary of State at the Foreign Ministers' talks

GERMANY - DEFENCE QUESTIONS.

It is possible that the general question of the defence of Germany may arise during the Foreign Ministers' talks. This subject divides under three main headings:

- (a) The possible re-establishment of German armed forces.
- (b) A guarantee by the western occupying Powers of the security of the German Federal Republic, and
- (c) The creation of a gendarmerie in the German Federal Republic.

2. Briefs on these subjects are attached.

3. The brief on the creation of a German army is intended for the confidential guidance of the Secretary of State and is not suitable for submission to the French and U.S. representatives.

4. The brief on a guarantee of the Federal Republic's security is intended primarily for the guidance of the Secretary of State, but may be shown to the French and U.S. representatives if considered desirable.

5. The brief on the creation of a German gendarmerie is intended for submission to the French and U.S. representatives with a view to reaching agreement on a common policy on this subject.

Re-establishment of German Armed Forces Recommendation

(a) The U.K. Delegation should not raise this subject.

(b) If the subject is raised by another Delegation, our attitude should be that there is no need to discuss the question in its short term aspect, since all three Powers are understood to be in agreement as to the impossibility of an early re-establishment of German Armed Forces, and that any discussion of the long-term aspect is premature.

Background.

The Governments of all three Western Powers have publicly declared themselves against the rearmament of Germany. The most recent occasion on which H.M. Government's attitude was stated was the Foreign Affairs Debate in the House of Commons on the 28th March, when the Secretary of State declared:-

"..... I must say to the right hon. Gentleman that we have set out face - the U.S., France and ourselves - against the rearming of Germany, and that, I am afraid, we must adhere to." The French Government's attitude was expressed by the French Foreign Minister in a speech to the National Assembly on the 24th February, when he said: "The French Government, to the same extent that it is in favour of the progressive incorporation of Germany in a European whole and in favour of the admission of Germany to the organisations which will form the basis of peaceful cooperation between the countries of Europe, considers that it is quite impossible even to discuss the question of a restoration of Germany's military forces". The United States view was expressed by the American High Commissioner in a speech at Stuttgart on the 6th February after his return to Germany after consultation with his Government. On this occasion he said: "the German people should take an increasingly active part themselves in the political and economic organisation of Europe. Germany cannot be allowed to develop political conditions or a military status which would threaten other nations or the peace of the world. That means there will be no German army or air force. German security will best be protected by German participation in a closely-knit Western European community". The German Federal government has also expressed general opposition to projects for German rearmament.

2. At the same time, the British Chiefs of Staff have examined the question, and although they accept the

view that immediate German rearmament would be imprudent on political grounds and is therefore impracticable for the time being, they have also stated that the successful defence of Western Europe against eventual Soviet attack can only be assured with the participation of Germany.

3. Even if this long-term view is accepted, all concerned are agreed that the creation of a German army now or in the near future is impracticable. The considerations on which this conclusion is based are as follows:-

(a) In the present climate of opinion in France it is unlikely that any French Government could agree to the rearmament of Germany.

(b) The Russians are genuinely afraid of a revival of the military might of Germany. The rearmament of Western Germany might, therefore provoke the Russians to a preventive war and so precipitate the catastrophe which it would be designed to prevent.

(c) In the present economic condition of Germany it would be impossible to organise German rearmament without American assistance. The resources of America are not inexhaustible. If we assume, as we must, that in the distribution of American resources France and the Western European countries should have priority, there will in fact be nothing available for Germany for a considerable time to come.

(d) We have a major interest in keeping the American troops in Europe for as long as possible. At the moment the Germans are prepared to put up with the occupation because they realise that the occupation troops constitute the only protection against the Eastern German People's Police and the Russian Army. If the Germans were allowed to reconstitute the army this sense of dependence on the occupation troops would disappear and there would be strong pressure on the Western allies to terminate the occupation. The Americans, under such pressure, would be only too inclined to withdraw their troops from Germany.

(e) Until Germany is far more involved with the West than she is at present we have no firm assurance that Germany will not throw in her lot with Russia, until the Federal Republic is firmly in the camp it would be dangerous to allow it to rearm. Moreover, even if Germany does not ally herself to Russia, experience teaches us that an armed Germany soon develops a truculence and arrogance which makes it impossible to deal with. Experience also teaches us that plans for limiting German armed forces or for giving them only partial or defensive armament are unlikely to be successful. Total prohibition of German rearmament for a stated period with adequate measures for enforcement is the only safe solution.

4. The Chiefs of Staff, who have been consulted, have expressed the view that, apart from the establishment of a gendarmerie in Western Germany (which, they say, should be undertaken as a matter of urgency), "there is no hurry about the formation of anything more, since we would not contemplate even the partial rearmament of Western Germany until the French army has been built up".

5. Thus, while it is by no means impossible that in the long term political considerations will develop which may outweigh the adverse factors listed above, the fact remains that as regards the short term the three Western Powers have independently reached the conclusion that the creation of a Germany army is undesirable at present. There would therefore appear to be no useful purpose in the Foreign Ministers discussing the matter at this stage, and it is accordingly recommended that it should not be raised by the Secretary of State during the forthcoming talks. If the question is opened by the French or U.S. representatives, it is recommended that discussion, if possible, should be limited to its short-term aspect on which the three Powers are in agreement, and that discussion of its long-term aspects should be postponed.

Security Guarantee for the Federal Republic. Recommendations.

The U.K. Delegation should endeavour to secure the approval of the U.S. and French Delegates for the draft oral reply to Dr. Adenauer which is attached to this brief.

Background.

1. At a Meeting with the Allied High Commissioners on the 8th December, 1949, the German Federal Chancellor raised the question of the defence of the Federal Republic against possible Soviet aggression. He said that rumours that the North Atlantic Treaty Powers were hesitating between defending the Rhine or defending the Elbe, were raising profound disquiet in Germany. He further stated that he had definite information that the armed gendarmerie in the Eastern Zone was nothing less than an army, and that, moreover, it would become a good army and would obey the Russians.
2. The Federal Chancellor expressed the view that the Western Allies were in duty bound to maintain the security of the Federal Republic and that, in any case, unless the Russians were halted in their present position, Western Europe would be finished. He asked for an Allied declaration that "the territory of the Federal Republic would be defended against attack."
3. The Federal Chancellor subsequently published his views on the necessity for a guarantee of the Federal Republic's security and he has since restated them on several occasions. In a speech at Koenigswinter on the 25th February Dr. Adenauer confirmed that he was absolutely opposed to any form of German remilitarisation. On account of Germany's precarious geographical position, however, and of the disarming of Germany, he added that he had asked the High Commissioners to request their Governments to make a declaration to the effect that they will assume responsibility for German security. He said that he must insist on this demand, as in his opinion international tension was sure to increase. He realised of course that such an Allied guarantee did not in itself bring security with it, but it did imply an obligation. Dr. Adenauer has recently taken the line that unless the Federal Republic obtained a security guarantee it would be rash for it to commit itself to a policy of integration with Western Europe. It is likely that he will persist in his request for a specific guarantee and will raise the matter again with the Allied High Commission.
4. H.M.G. recognise that a certain degree of uneasiness exists among the population of the German Federal Republic arising out of fears that plans for the defence of Western Europe envisage the abandonment of German territory between the Elbe and the Rhine in the event of Soviet aggression. They accordingly recognize that the Federal Chancellor's preoccupation with the defence of the Federal Republic is to some extent legitimate, but they are not in a position to any assurance that the Federal Republic will be defended on its Eastern frontiers. No Power can safely give even its ally an assurance that its entire territory will rest inviolate. The most effective defence of the territory of the Federal Republic lies in the creation of a Western security system so effective that the Soviet are discouraged from aggression.
5. Until Western Germany can be trusted politically and be permitted to rearm, her security must depend on (a) the presence of allied troops in Western Germany (b) the existence of the North Atlantic Treaty, Article 6 of which covers the occupation forces in Europe of any Party to the Treaty.

This state of affairs is likely to continue until Western Germany has shown conclusively by her actions that she is prepared to cooperate with the West and has been accepted into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Suggested Reply to Dr. Adenauer

6. In considering how to deal with Dr. Adenauer's approach, the Western Powers can choose between three course of action:-
- (a) they can continue to ignore the request for a security guarantee on the grounds that matters of defence are beyond the scope of the Federal Chancellor's responsibility under the Occupation Statute;
 - (b) they can answer the request for a security guarantee by making a public statement of their own views on the matter, including a reference to the Atlantic Charter;
 - (c) they can instruct the High Commission to discuss the matter privately and orally with the Federal Chancellor.

7. Course (a) is unlikely to prove satisfactory since Adenauer will merely persist in his request and play upon public opinion in Germany until further notice is taken of him.

Course (b) involves a degree of publicity which, on the whole, the subject had better do without.

8. It is recommended therefore that the approval of the French and U.S. Governments should be sought for Course (c).

9. A draft text of the oral reply to be given to the Federal Chancellor is annexed.

10. In the event of the Federal Chancellor asking whether there is any objection to the publication of the statement made to him by the High Commission, it is suggested that the High Commission should endeavour to persuade Dr. Adenauer that any further publicity is likely to be harmful and should be avoided. In the event of Dr. Adenauer proving unwilling to give any undertaking on this subject, the High Commissioner should have discretion to authorise the publication of the statement. The argument in favour of this course of action is that he will let it become known anyhow and it had better come out in a correct version.

Establishment of a German Gendarmerie Recommendation

(a) The three Foreign Ministers should approve in principle the formation of a Federal Gendarmerie.

(b) The initiative in proposing the formation of such a body should be left to the Germans and the decision at (a) should be kept secret.

(c) The High Commissioners should be authorised to discuss secretly among themselves the size and character of the body required.

Background.

1. There are two main reasons for considering the establishment of a Federal gendarmerie. The first is the fact that the Government of the Federal Republic at present has no means whatever of enforcing its authority throughout the territory it purports to govern. It has no army, and we do not propose to give it one. The ordinary police forces are organised on a Land basis, and any attempt by the Federal Government to make direct use of these forces for Federal ends would be unlikely to produce effective results. The absence of any such force has led to difficulties for the Federal Republic in the past and is likely to do so again in the future. Examples of such difficulties were the near-riot at Bonn when the roads were blocked by lorries demonstrating against a decision of the Federal Government, and the difficulty getting the authorities of Laender bordering on the Eastern Zone to comply with a Federal instruction about the non-admission of refugees from Poland.

2. The second main reason why a gendarmerie appears desirable is that without some such force the occupation forces themselves are the only effective means of enforcing law and order and maintaining internal security throughout the territory of the Federal Republic. This responsibility is an undesirable for political reasons; it would be awkward for Allied troops to have to use their arms against members of the public demonstrating against some action or failure to act on the part of the Federal Government in circumstances where public sympathy in the Western countries lay with the demonstrators rather than with the Government. Moreover, responsibility for internal security makes a considerable call upon Allied manpower and may result in a distribution of Allied forces in Germany inconsistent with their military responsibilities in regard to the danger from the East. These considerations naturally weigh with the British military authorities.

3. Other reasons which favour the establishment of a gendarmerie are

(a) it would serve to strengthen the authority and prestige of the Federal Government;
(b) it would counter-balance the damaging moral effect of the existence of a powerful police force in Eastern Germany;

(c) it could contribute in a small but appreciable degree to the Allied military effort in the event of war.

4. The British Chiefs of Staff, who have recently studied this question, have stated that they consider the establishment of a gendarmerie should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

5. The exact nature of the body which might be set up has not yet been determined. The general conception is that it should be 40-50,000 strong and armed with nothing heavier than personal weapons. It is not considered that a force of this kind, restricted in numbers, equipment and functions, would be at all likely to promote a militarist revival in the Federal Republic. Neither could it be held to diminish our right to condemn the establishment of the People's Police in Eastern Germany, since this Soviet-controlled force, unlike the proposed Federal Gendarmerie, is organised on a full military scale, containing formations as large as battalions and weapons as heavy as field guns and tanks.

6. No actual proposal for the formation of such a gendarmerie has yet been received from the Germans. Dr. Adenauer is understood to be in favour of it, while the S.P.D. are likely to take a contrary view. A recent report indicates that Adenauer may propose as an initial step the establishment of a Federal gendarmerie only in the Bonn enclave, with the intention of developing a wider Federal force from this nucleus.

7. It is important that the Western Powers should avoid pressing a gendarmerie upon the Germans, since this would merely give them an opportunity to make conditions and seek to extract fresh advantages. It will therefore be desirable to allow the initiative in this matter to come from the Germans.

8. However, in view of the need for the establishment of some such force at an early date, it is suggested that it would be advisable in order to avoid delay when the proposal comes forward, that the three Foreign Ministers should now decide in principle on the establishment of a gendarmerie and give the High Commissioners authority to discuss secretly among themselves the size and character of the body required.