


The need for German rearmament

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In 1950, a few weeks after the outbreak of the Korean War, the United States ordered France to accept the rapid rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), because they were increasingly afraid that the Soviet Union, which had had nuclear capability since late 1949, would launch an offensive military campaign in Western Europe. At the same time, the French army was embroiled in Indo-China, and British units were involved in Malaysia. The 14 Western divisions based in Europe did not seem up to the task of taking on over 180 communist divisions. The West German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, officially called for the right to raise an armed force capable of protecting the country from the threat posed by the East German 'People's Police'. The situation was far from simple. In 1950, the FRG had neither army, Ministry of Defence nor, of course, a general staff. It still had no Ministry of Foreign Affairs, yet its geographical position at the heart of Europe, as well as the fact that its eastern part had been annexed, meant that it was sure to be the literal battleground of any East–West conflict.

The member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) were also in favour of German rearmament, with the notable exceptions of the French and Belgian Governments. The bulk of public opinion, too, especially in France, did not seem ready to accept a new German army, as memories of the Second World War and of German occupation were still too painful.