

'European army: Wehrmacht or German unification?' from Le Monde (14 February 1952)

Caption: On 14 February 1952, in reaction to the post-war debates on German rearmament, the French daily newspaper Le Monde speculates on the precise shape of a future German army integrated into a European army.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 14.02.1952, n° 2191; 9e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Armée européenne: Wehrmacht ou unité allemande ?", auteur: Duverger, Maurice, p. 1; 4.

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European army

Wehrmacht or German unification?

by Maurice Duverger

We have been talking about German armed forces for two years now, with America pushing ahead, France dragging its feet, and the Federal Republic trying to revive a reluctant public's taste for things military by stressing the advantages to be gained from hard bargaining. Throughout that time, American ideas have been steadily gaining ground, not so much because the power of the United States gives it the last word, but because Europeans have been unable to do what Washington has done — propose a solution that is both coherent and practical.

Clearly, the transition period is coming to an end. And French opposition will count for little in the final decision if it is confined to a simple 'no', inspired by nationalism. The propaganda of the French Communist Party, which has adopted the old themes of Poincaré and Maurras, is very effective in influencing popular opinion, but perfectly futile when it comes to influencing events. French sentimental indignation and fear of the German peril, however strong, will not prevent rearmament, for the issue is no longer part of the ancient conflict between Frank and Teuton. It is a matter of East-West rivalry and the balance between two worlds.

Rather than saying 'no' to German rearmament to have a clear conscience, and then standing by completely powerless when it occurs, France must lay down clearly the two fundamental conditions for a 'yes': the conviction that German unification is impossible, and the organisation of a European army.

Rearmament and unification are linked in a strangely contradictory fashion. Rearmament of the Federal Republic would probably dash all hopes of unification, except by force (i.e. war or ultimatum). But abandoning all intention of rearmament would also remove the best condition for unification, since the key factor in Moscow's acceptance of East Germany's political withdrawal from the Soviet system would be its belief that it could thereby prevent West Germany from joining the Atlantic military alliance.

So it is no paradox to argue that the nearer we are to rearmament, the greater the chance of German unification (provided, of course, that we stop in time to do a deal with Moscow). Unthinking propaganda against rearmament, in the name of unification, defeats its own purpose. By making rearmament less likely, it reduces Russia's interest in unification. So it was that French opposition to American plans in December 1950 ruined the Palais Rose Conference before it began, by giving the Russians what they wanted before they had even arrived, namely the assurance that a German army would not yet see the light of day.

On the contrary, the ground gained by the idea of rearmament in recent months has led to parallel progress on the idea of unification. Grotewohl's acceptance of the main terms of the Bonn Constitution is a major step forward in this respect. The gap between the demands of the East and those of the West with regard to unification now seems quite small, and facts such as the recent trip by SPD leaders to the Eastern Zone give reason to think that it will not be impossible to bridge it. But the straightforward abandonment of plans for remilitarisation would probably put paid to these efforts.

Realistic French diplomacy would embrace this simple dialectic. Rather than slow down rearmament, which it will eventually be powerless to prevent in the present political context, it would state openly that rearmament is inevitable if Germany remains divided. It would accordingly propose that the great powers discuss the problem of unification without delay. Is unification actually possible? Many serious observers believe so. They feel that the Russians are ready to relinquish the Eastern Zone rather than see the rebirth of a western Wehrmacht. This approach may be over-optimistic. But the only way to find out is to try it.

France would be in a very strong position if it established a link between rearmament and the failure of unification, and its allies would have to take its position into account. Such an approach would reverse the moral position of the West. If unification failed as the result of a Soviet refusal, *Moscow — and not the Atlantic powers — would bear the responsibility for German rearmament.* That is a matter of capital

importance for international public opinion and especially for the peoples of central Europe, where the fear of German troops is very much alive.

But if German unity cannot be re-established, in the end a European army will be the only practical means of limiting the risks involved in German rearmament. If attempts at unification fail, only two solutions will remain: a German national army or German contingents within a continental army — the Wehrmacht or the European army. It will no longer be a question of being for or against German troops, but simply of deciding on their command structure. And since the second option is the easier, it will prevail if there is too much shilly-shallying over the first one.

Only, we must not forget that the choice between these two policies is of a subsidiary nature: we cannot finally proceed to implement one or the other before we have clearly established that it is impossible to do otherwise. As long as plans for German rearmament remained vague and in the future, it was too early for profitable discussions with the Russians. Once they have been put into practice, it will be too late, and nothing will be able to stop military rivalry between the two empires. The right moment for negotiations is when the plans have been finalised and their implementation is imminent. That moment has arrived.

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