

Article on the Debate over German Rearmament (September 14, 1950)

Abstract

The Allied agreements of the war years and the Potsdam Agreement of August 1945 had declared that German demilitarization was an important war goal and had thus ruled out rearmament. But the rise of the Cold War and the outbreak of the Korean War led to a fundamental change in conditions, and the debate over a German contribution to European defense began sooner rather than later. In the following article from *Die Zeit*, journalist Claus Jacobi argues that the Allies should continue to be held responsible for protecting the Federal Republic against external attacks. At the same time, however, he also notes that the burden on the Allies could be eased through the establishment of a West German “home guard” [*Heimwehr*] to secure domestic peace and order without foreign help.

Source

Home Guard instead of German Army

At the end of a press conference last week, Chancellor Dr. Adenauer turned to the assembled journalists and asked, “Have you already seen the new German uniforms?” “No,” they answered expectantly. Adenauer said “I haven’t either” and then left with a mischievous grin. Had he already seen the story published the following day by the foreign correspondent of the American news agency “The Associated Press,” Adenauer could have just as easily answered, “No, not yet,” since the correspondent began his report from New York with the words: “One thing is certain in these uncertain days: the successful defense of Europe against a Communist attack is only possible . . . with the rearmament of West Germany.”

Truly, if the pace of the rearmament debate over the past few weeks is maintained for a little while longer, we might justifiably expect to see pre-military exercises in kindergarten curricula next year. Today, what rolls smoothly off the lips of politicians at home and abroad, military men, and correspondents would have inspired the likes of a Drew Middleton^[1] to an entire series of articles only a year ago. Except that this grotesque also has its serious side: at stake in all of this are our necks, our lives.

One can point to a good many shortcomings in the chancellor’s policy. But one cannot accuse him of a reckless approach to the subject of “remilitarization.” He only pushed aside his last misgivings when the outbreak of the Korean conflict made it very clear that further hesitation could be deadly.

His choice for military advisor (a position that has now become necessary) confirmed his basic stance once again; the chancellor did not choose one of those bustling brotherhood-generals for the position, no interview-happy Manteuffel or Guderian, but a quiet and circumspect man, General Graf Schwerin. And despite the looming danger, Dr. Adenauer has not presented the Allies with any extravagant demands. Likewise, he has not demanded anything in return for Germany’s accession to the Council of Europe. The chancellor’s decision in favor of the West was unconditional; it was and still is today.

And so he did not demand – but hoped with good reason – that the Allies might recognize the kinds of political and military preconditions that they have to meet today. Preconditions that arise from the fact that a bound man with his head in a lion’s mouth looks toward the future with little confidence.

Just as a policeman is responsible for the safety of the crazed gunman he has disarmed, the Western

powers are responsible for the military security of the Federal Republic. Nobody can free them from that moral obligation. But that doesn't mean that we can't help them. To maintain peace and order in the Federal Republic, a protective force should be set up as soon as possible, a kind of "home guard" that is powerful enough to successfully put down any unrest, any putsch, any civil war.

Its task would be neither purely military nor purely political; its strength most certainly would have to correspond to that of the police in the Soviet zone. In other words: the Western powers are still responsible for external security, for guaranteeing against a general attack from the East; the more divisions they send across the Atlantic, the better. We, however, can and want to secure our own internal security – as soon as the external conditions are met. This is the "military dispatch" from the Germans to New York.

NOTES

[1] Drew Middleton (1913-1990) covered World War II and postwar Europe for *The New York Times* and later served as the newspaper's military correspondent – eds.

Source: Claus Jacobi, "Heimwehr statt deutscher Armee", *Die Zeit*, September 14, 1950.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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