

Discussion between German Chancellor Adenauer and American High Commissioner McCloy (July 12, 1950)

Abstract

The Potsdam Agreement, signed by the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union at the end of World War II, primarily addressed the military occupation and reconstruction of Germany, but also stipulated that Germany be disarmed in order to eradicate German militarism. For the first three years of occupation, German disarmament proceeded at a clip, but became increasingly unpopular, as many believed it was dampening Germany's industrial growth. After the Korean War began, there were increasing fears (especially on the part of the United States) that the Soviet Union would begin an offensive military campaign in Western Europe, and that Europe (and West Germany) would not be able to adequately defend itself from such an attack. Adenauer eventually demanded that West Germany be allowed to rearm itself, with support from the United States. France was deeply opposed to the proposal; Belgium was also opposed, and the UK was initially hesitant, but eventually agreed to a plan for German rearmament, as long as it occurred within the bounds of an alliance framework (in this case, NATO). West Germany's rearmament was crucial in bolstering the elements of Western European economic cooperation and assisted in West Germany's reintegration into the European community.

Source

A transcription^[1] of the discussion between the German Chancellor and Mr. McCloy, the American High Commissioner, on July 12, 1950 at Schloss Deichmannsaue.^[2] Also present were General Hays and Mr. Blankenhorn. The Chancellor elaborated in detail on the particular concerns of the German people and the West German government as a result of the steadily worsening international situation^[3] arising from the Korean War.^[4] At the same time, he strongly emphasized that a particular restlessness had taken hold of the German population on account of the country's lack of an adequate defense. This had also been the point of his letter addressed to the High Commission on July 1, 1950.^[5] The crucial aspect of the security problem facing Germany, he said, was that both the Russians and the Western powers wanted to possess the potential that West Germany now represented in terms of its people and its industrial capacity should we be faced with the outbreak of a Third World War or perhaps even only with a looming war. In a confrontation between the two world powers, possessing this German potential could be the decisive factor.^[6] Understandably, there is particularly great concern among the population that the substantial Russian forces in the Eastern zone could mount a sudden invasion. By contrast, the forces in Germany were too weak both numerically and in terms of equipment. He was informed by Count Schwerin, who received information from a very reliable source, that in the past three months seven additional battle-ready Russian divisions had arrived in the area of Guben (Lusatia). It is also known that the other approximately 23 Russian divisions were ready to move and could be deployed within 24 hours.^[7] In the Western zones, by contrast, there have been no indications of any preparations. Supposedly, the purpose of the discussions between Count Schwerin and Mr. Blankenhorn on the one hand and General Hays on the other, which took place on Monday afternoon,^[8] was to determine if any measures could be initiated immediately in case of emergency, because it would be untenable for the German government to be unprepared for the massive flow of refugees that would immediately ensue in the event of a Russian invasion. Although the current size of the American and British occupying forces is relatively large, he hoped that it would still be possible to reinforce currently active units.^[9] General Robertson had assured the Chancellor on the occasion of his last discussion^[10] that he wanted to slowly increase the size these active units to 70,000 and have them better equipped and trained. The Chancellor

would consider it very desirable if this were done by the American side.^[11] However, in order to be able to discuss our wishes, plans, and ideas for defense with the Allies in an expedient manner, it would be necessary to establish continuous contact between German and Allied experts. The Chancellor would be grateful if such contact could be set up as soon as possible. Mr. McCloy responded to these statements as follows: He certainly shares the Chancellor's concerns. There is no question that if the Russians invaded tomorrow, Allied forces would be insufficient. He stressed, however, that he was doing everything in his power to reinforce the occupation forces by procuring special troops from America. He welcomed the idea of strengthening active units and has already given corresponding directives to the American commander-in-chief, General Handy.^[12] He also agreed that there should be continuous contact between German military experts and Allied authorities. He believes it would be expedient if this contact took place initially between Mr. Blankenhorn, Count Schwerin, and General Hays.^[13] He requested that all German proposals regarding the various areas of concern be submitted to General Hays in order to further cooperation with American headquarters.^[14] He himself was extremely doubtful as to whether a German remilitarization would be expedient. He was inwardly reluctant to re-establish a German army whose leadership would undoubtedly try to influence the slowly developing democracy in a militaristic direction. He did not trust the German generals, who had learned nothing and who would all too easily make the democratic state serve their purposes. It would be better not to talk about rearming Germany until this democratic state can be more firmly established. What is more, it is quite doubtful that the Russians would just stand idly by and watch Germany rearm itself. He does not believe that a Russian attack is imminent. In addition, he has not heard anything about reinforcements in the Guben area. According to his information, Russian troops would not march this summer. He does, however, realize that all eventualities must be taken into consideration. He believes that any military conflict, which is probably unavoidable, would not begin before mid-1951 or even 1952.^[15] He is, however, worried by the troop concentrations on the Yugoslav border and the movements of the Czechoslovak army. From the American perspective, it is not at all clear how to interpret the movements of the Czechoslovak army—whether these were maneuvers serving a reorganization of the Czech army or if they indicate a deployment in the direction of southern Germany. The Chancellor responded emphatically that something must be done to ensure the defense of West Germany, which is so important to Western Europe and therefore also to the United States. Should it be lost, it would be enormously difficult to defend the Western world against the Soviet Union. The Russians would not hesitate to use the potential of Germany against the West. Developments in Korea have severely damaged the authority and prestige of the United States. He said that he hoped these setbacks would serve to encourage the United States in future to intensify its preparations in all parts of the world.^[16]

NOTES

[1] The conversation was transcribed by Ministerial Director Blankenhorn on July 15, 1950.

[2] Seat of the American High Commissioner in Bonn.

[3] On July 11, 1950, the Chancellor already presented his assessment of the situation to the British High Commissioner. In addition, on July 14, 1950, American High Commissioner McCloy conveyed the following information from Kirkpatrick concerning Adenauer's position: "... he feared the revival of an attitude among the Germans, particularly if the news from Korea continued bad, that they had better modify their policy regarding Russia unless the Allies took steps to convince the Germans that some opportunity would be afforded to them to defend their country in the event of emergency. He said that he acknowledged that any thought of creating a German army as such was out of the question, at least as long as France remained with no substantial army, but that some provision should be made to maintain stability in West Germany in the event of a Volkspolizei attack from the east and that opportunity should be given to Germans to play some part if such a development occurred. He is also concerned naturally with a Soviet attack and he makes the same point if the attack should take such a form. The Chancellor also complained that he had no knowledge of Allied plans in the event of an attack and felt there should be exchanges between a representative of the

Allies and a representative of the German Government to deal with these emergency plans.” See the diplomatic cable to Secretary of State Acheson; FRUS 1950, IV, pp. 696–7.

[4] See Document 81, note 2.

[5] See Document 81.

[6] The Chancellor made similar remarks to the British High Commissioner on July 11, 1950. From Kirkpatrick’s report on Adenauer’s remarks, French Deputy High Commissioner Bérard noted on July 13, 1950: “Il fait valoir que l’Allemagne représente encore un potentiel militaire considérable qui compromettrait les chances de victoire de l’Amérique s’il tombait aux mains des Russes.” See BÉRARD, Ambassadeur, vol. 2, p. 336.

[7] On August 2, 1950, Count Schwerin, adviser on security matters, confirmed the information: “There are reports that over the past 10–14 days, the Russian occupation forces in the Eastern zone have been amassing stocks of fuel for jet fighters, tanks, and motorized troops, far exceeding the normal supply needed for training purposes. It has also been reported that there has been an influx of newly arrived young recruits.... There has been renewed confirmation that Russian fighter formation reserves are being continuously replenished with jet fighters. Similarly, there has been confirmation of the formation early this summer of a new corps unit (3 divisions) to the south of Frankfurt/Oder, the existence of which had initially been doubted by the Americans.” See VS-Vol. 24 (Office of the State Secretary); B 150, Document copy 1950.

[8] Concerning discussions from July 10, 1950, see Document 87.

[9] Concerning the active units of the occupation forces of the three Western powers, see Document 61, in particular n. 5.

[10] Concerning discussions from June 6, 1950, see Document 65.

[11] See further Document 107.

[12] Corrected from “Handley.”

[13] On July 14, 1950, American High Commissioner McCloy reported the following to Secretary of State Acheson: “Indeed, I have already told Handy that I have no objection to the enlistment of aliens in the army in the event of emergency and I understand that he is about to request permission to do this. Moreover, I have agreed that Hays can act as the Allied representative to receive any proposals from Adenauer’s representatives for the safety of the government and the employment of German volunteers in the event of an emergency. While my view is that we should make plans to permit Germans to fight with us if an emergency arose, we should make no commitment in this regard unless we know we have the equipment and the means to enable them effectively to do so.” See FRUS 1950, IV, p. 698.

[14] Concerning further discussions between Ministerial Director Blankenhorn and Count Schwerin, the adviser on security matters, and American Deputy High Commissioner Hays and for the aide-mémoire transmitted on July 17, 1950, see Documents 93, 94, and 97.

[15] See, in comparison, the remarks by French High Commissioner François-Poncet on July 15, 1950 vis-à-vis Ministerial Director Blankenhorn; Document 92.

[16] On July 13, 1950, the Allied High Commissioners discussed the concerns of Chancellor Adenauer. Subsequently, American High Commissioner McCloy informed U.S. Secretary of State Acheson on July 14, 1950: “Both Kirkpatrick and Poncet expressed the belief that continued bad news from Korea would cause Western Germans to become more restive, dilute their enthusiasm for Adenauer’s Western policy, and create pressure to change it ... Kirkpatrick pled as a minimum step for the immediate approval of an effective German auxiliary force which would at least be able to deal with refugees and assist in keeping order while the Allied armies composed themselves for an attack.... While I naturally discount somewhat Kirkpatrick’s and Adenauer’s concern in view of the possibility that Kirkpatrick may only be pressing in another form the British desire for the rearmament of Germany and that Adenauer may only be seeking means to strengthen his

government by the creation of a federal police force and using the Korean incident as a gambit for this purpose, I feel that continued bad news from Korea and the likely increase of rumors in the Balkans and perhaps from Czechoslovakia will tend to unseat the general stability of the population which now exists." See FRUS 1950, IV, p. 697. 2.

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