
Preface

The Grand Alliance's triumph over the Axis powers in 1945 lifted a grim shadow that had blanketed international life for more than a generation. People everywhere hoped that a new day had arrived in which nations could coexist in a world of peace and stability. This sweet reverie, however, soon turned to bitter rivalry. Ironically, victory in the Second World War spawned one of the most turbulent and dangerous periods in the history of international politics. The policies enacted by the great powers in the extended wake of this conflict wrought unprecedented change, as Europe moved from a fluid constellation of great powers to one seemingly frozen in two antagonistic geopolitical blocs.

Two developments were largely responsible for this change. One was the integration of a rearmed Federal Republic of Germany into the Atlantic Alliance. Germany thus evolved from an international pariah—a symbol of hatred and militarism—to a vital member of the Western community, soldiering loyally in the defense of democracy. A powerful West Germany, however, unnerved the perennially suspicious Josef Stalin, who would not rest easy until he settled the so-called German question to his satisfaction. His efforts to block Germany from rearming and Western leaders' subsequent attempts to resist him ensured a clear political demarcation of continental Europe.

The second and most important development concerned the transformation of America's relations with its European allies. Sharply departing from past policy, the United States went from simply underwriting its allies' defense in peacetime to explicitly committing American blood

and iron to the cause of fighting the Cold War. Together, these two events swept aside Europe's traditional geopolitical order and ushered in a new system with a potent American military force as its permanent strategic centerpiece.

Despite its far-reaching consequences, the meaning of this novel arrangement adopted by the Western powers at the end of 1954 has eluded many observers. Claims to the contrary notwithstanding, this arrangement was neither inevitable, nor reached by chance, nor imposed by the United States. Instead, it emerged from a dispute between America and France about one of the central issues of post-1945 international politics—Germany's proper role in the Western world. In this dispute, American officials championed the immediate restoration of German military prowess as an added weapon in their Cold War struggle against Soviet Communism. A rearmed Germany would, in turn, spare the United States from having to assume the role of Europe's permanent night watchman. However, many French officials resisted this plan, convinced that aspects of it compromised France's national interest. Only after the United States reformed its policy to France's liking did the Cold War order in Europe coalesce.

This book seeks to explain how and why this geopolitical system developed by attempting to solve two related puzzles, the first being why the United States did not simply ignore repeated French objections to its desired German policy and rearm the Federal Republic unilaterally. Determined to convert Germany into a political and military rampart against Soviet Communism, American officials possessed a powerful incentive to disregard French objections. Ultimately, other considerations prompted Washington to avoid taking unilateral actions. Leading American officials eventually recognized that the aftereffects of any abrupt move to rearm Germany could imperil the safety and independence of the United States and its allies. A rearmed Germany might prompt the Soviet Union to strike preemptively in order to eliminate a potentially deadly rival. Better to play it safe now, they reasoned, than to rush matters and be sorry later.

The second puzzle involves why France finally yielded and agreed to German rearmament, irrespective of American demands. Perhaps surprisingly, while U.S. pressure played a role in France's decision, it was far less important than other factors. Key French officials concluded that whereas significant drawbacks would attend the remilitarization of the Federal Republic, these disadvantages would pale next to those incurred through France's outright rejection of the plan. Moreover, many French

officials did not see a remilitarized Germany as an unmitigated negative—to the contrary, they believed the French state could benefit if German rearmament were done the right way at the right time.

Despite sometimes heated debate, France and the United States engaged in a genuine political discussion, the fruit of which was an arrangement that satisfied both sides' most basic needs. This study attempts to lay bare the dynamics of this arrangement, as well as to highlight its larger consequences. As this account suggests, international politics is not simply a tug-of-war whose outcome is sealed by the relative power of those nations whose interests and wishes are in conflict. Rather, this study concludes that while power is an essential ingredient of international relations, it is merely a tool in the service of diplomacy and statecraft. Failing such guidance, power alone can achieve little of lasting value.

The remainder of this book unfolds chronologically and thematically as a detailed historical narrative. Chapter 1 examines the period from the end of the Second World War to the summer of 1950, while Chapter 2 treats the remainder of that year. Chapters 3 to 7 cover the years 1951 to 1954.

