
BACKGROUND BRIEFING—FRANCE

Three times during the past seventy years France has suffered unprovoked attacks from Germany. In 1870, 1914, and 1940 larger and better-equipped German armies defeated our armies and occupied sections of our country. Germany continues to be for us the major threat to the peace. The population of Germany, even after its wartime losses, exceeds ours, and the coal and iron resources of Germany far exceed ours. Just as Germany rebounded quickly from its defeat in 1918, so we fear that unless the victorious allies act decisively, Germany will again threaten the security of its neighbors. The following steps must be taken to guarantee the peace of the postwar period.

The Rhineland, the area forming the long western border between Germany and France, must be detached from Germany. By denying future German armies the Rhineland as a staging area, the likelihood of another invasion can be decreased. Also, the Ruhr Valley region, the major iron- and coal-producing area of all Europe, must not be under the control of any future German government. France, which was the world's largest importer of coal before the war, must have guaranteed access to the resources of this vital area if it is to develop its industries and fulfill the energy needs of its people. Just prior to the war, we imported an average of 400,000 tons of coal per month from this area. Now, we can obtain only 130,000 tons of coal per month. This is crippling France's recovery.

The allies must ensure that the Germany they reconstruct, while economically healthy, does not have the strongly centralized national government that made the invasions of 1870, 1914, and 1940 possible. To achieve this end, political power in the new Germany must be decentralized and located in the individual *Länder* (states) that make up Germany. The aftermath of World War I showed that France's allies could not be counted upon to cooperate with France to keep Germany from redeveloping its military potential. Therefore, Germany must be structured so as to make such a development impossible. We strongly oppose the efforts of the British, Americans, and Soviets to develop centralized German institutions designed to coordinate German reconstruction.

While we appreciate the efforts of our wartime allies in defeating the forces of Nazism and in liberating France from German occupation, we realize that we cannot depend upon them to ensure French security in the future. The British, who historically share with us a fear of a militaristic Germany, are experiencing severe economic hardships, and have difficulty financing the occupation of their zone of Germany. They now have reduced their army from 4.7 million soldiers in 1945 to 1.1 million in 1946. We recognize the strong domestic political pressures within Great Britain to scale back Britain's worldwide commitments and military establishment. The Americans, as the events of the 1920s demonstrated, cannot be depended upon to remain committed to the preservation of peace in Europe. The United States also has reduced its ground forces dramatically, from twelve million last year to fewer than three million today. Europeans must look to themselves for their own security needs.

Russia is France's oldest ally in Europe. The Franco-Russian alliance of 1894 was a major step in European efforts to check the threat of German militarism. Twice this century, we and the Russians have experienced unprovoked aggression from our common, powerful neighbor. In 1944, even before the war ended, we entered into a friendship treaty with the Soviets in which we pledged to cooperate against any future German threat and to refrain from entering any alliance directed against the other. The fact that during this fifty-year period of cooperation with Russia our domestic forms of government have been very different—France is a democratic republic and Russia is now a communist-dominated, single-party state and was an autocratic monarchy—has not prevented close cooperation in security concerns. In fact, several months ago the Soviet government, despite the Soviet Union's own economic difficulties, sent us a large shipment of wheat to help us deal with our food crisis. We oppose efforts by certain politicians in the United States and in Great Britain to create a gulf between the Soviet Union and the Western allies. France wants to remain on friendly terms with both the Soviet Union and the other Western democracies.

The French Communist Party is a responsible member of the three-party coalition that currently governs France. The French voters have given the Communist Party a large share of the popular vote (nearly 30 percent) in recent elections, and we reject the notion that the French Communist Party is controlled by Moscow. While it is true that the Communist Party has consistently urged closer ties with the Soviet Union, it is clear that this is in the security interests of France.

Our efforts to recover the Great Power position that France has occupied for many centuries will depend heavily upon our reasserting control over our colonial possessions. The U.S. government has publicly criticized French colonial policies and this causes us great concern. Similarly, actions by the British government in the Middle East appear designed to force France out of its historic position of influence in certain countries of that area (Lebanon and Syria). Both the Americans and the British must realize that a healthy, democratic France requires the resources of its restored Empire. Also, the anti-colonial propaganda that the Soviet government has been directing to this area endangers France's vital interests.

France will require extensive U.S. assistance in rebuilding, and in constructing the modern industrial society upon which its future prosperity and security will depend. The \$750 million U.S. aid package received earlier this year is a major step in this direction. Unfortunately, the resources of the French zone of occupation in Germany are much less than those of the British and U.S. zones. While the British and U.S. zones combined contain 78 percent of German coal production and 80 percent of German steel-making capacity, the French zone contains only 8 percent of the coal production and 12 percent of the steel capacity. Consequently, France must insist upon reparations from the other zones. Also, full restitution in kind must be paid by Germany for all French goods and equipment forcibly removed by the Nazis during the occupation.

In conclusion, France does not want to see the world's powers split into two antagonistic camps. The French people want to remain on friendly terms both with other Western nations and the Soviets, for only in doing so can we prevent the reappearance of a strong militaristic Germany, which we recognize as our primary security concern.

FROM THE HISTORICAL RECORD

Excerpts from an article by French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, July 1946

"The troubles of the war-shattered world are like a tangled skein.... The skein is full of knots, and the main knot is Germany.... Only yesterday the breeding place of war, today a fathomless gulf, Germany is in truth the world's Number One problem.... From the French point of view, the German question is first of all a problem of security. In this connection, no one in the world will deny that geographically and politically France constitutes a nerve center, and that when it is struck the most serious and far reaching repercussions invariably follow.... When France declares that her security and by implication world security call for certain measures, her suggestions would seem at least to be worthy of sympathetic examination....

"The security of Europe and the world requires that Germany be deprived indefinitely of the war potential represented by the resources and raw materials of the Rhine-Westphalian region, and that the Rhine districts shall never again be able to serve as a zone of passage, arsenal and base for invasion. The mines of the Sarre, transferred to French ownership by the Versailles Treaty, must again become French property, with as corollary the inclusion of that territory in the French customs and monetary systems, the two economies being complementary. As for the Ruhr, Europe's immense treasure-house, consisting of coal mines and the factories associated with them, employing in normal times five million workers, the French Government considers that, in conformity with the general interests of humanity, it must be treated as a political entity independent of Germany and placed under a regime of internationalization both political and economic....

"Should a "hard" peace be imposed on Germany?... Is it harsh to deprive an inveterate transgressor of the means of repeating his offense?... Despite the evil they have done to us, we French know that the German people are endowed with many good qualities: they are hard working, disciplined, and inventive. Unhappily, they are also endowed with a tendency to use those qualities in a dangerous way.... The problem is not how to keep Germany in a state of misery, but on the contrary how to pull her out of it without in the process producing a new catastrophe for the world and for peace....

"The argument is also made that in this epoch of the atomic bomb it is an obsolete conception to suppose that France would gain additional security by occupying the Rhineland and thus pushing her military cover some thirty miles beyond her own border. The obvious response to this contention is that precautions of the same kind have been taken along other frontiers, despite the existence of rocket planes and other lightning weapons.... What France in fact proposes to do is not to deprive Germany of the arsenal of the Ruhr but to establish there an economic regime which will permit the freest possible exchange of goods with both the west and the east, including, naturally, the rest of Germany.... The coal which formerly sustained the Hitlerite aggression now comes in such meager amounts to warm our homes and run our factories....

"We French are not haunted by werewolves. The realities we have suffered are so bitter that we distinguish them quite easily from shadows. However, we are aware that if the phantom is given the opportunity, it will once again put on flesh. Nor is this by any means an exclusively French conviction. All the pacts of mutual assistance signed in Europe during the past year have been directed against the German peril, showing that it does not seem in the least theoretical to Germany's near neighbors. The instinct of nations is to feel that the firmest union in peace is based on the realities that drew them together in war."