

21

The Art of Failure: British and French Policies towards Germany and the Council of Foreign Ministers, 1947

Martina Kessel

The Council of Foreign Ministers, set up at the Potsdam conference, was supposed to find a peaceful solution for the 'German question'. It was a daunting task. The foreign ministers of the four occupying powers, the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and France met five times between September 1945 and December 1947, devoting the last two conferences in Moscow in March and April 1947 and in London in November and December 1947 almost entirely to this problem. They discussed every major issue associated with it: demilitarization and democratization, economic and political unity, reparations and the level of industry, the control of German heavy industry and of its political structure, boundaries and the Saar question. At bottom, though, they had to solve the basic clash between Soviet and Western notions of democracy in this pivotal European country.

The failure of the Moscow conference in the spring of 1947, which marked the end of the four-power system in Germany, was not entirely the result of an inability to agree on details. In thinking about what kind of *Realpolitik* was possible in the presence of another new superpower with an expansionist ideology, British diplomats were quick to perceive a balance between fears and weaknesses in East and West that could be used to their advantage. The Potsdam protocol, which formed the basis both for the occupation policies and the ministers' discussions, was ambivalent; it demanded economic and political unity but allowed for independent zones and reparation policies. Still, the conferences' failure was not a foregone conclusion, but rather the result of active diplomacy.

In: Antonio Varsori, Elena Calandri (Hg.),
The Failure of Peace in Europe, 1943-48,
Hampshire und New York: Palgrave, 2002, S. 249-265.

The developments of 1945/46 had in French and British eyes already mapped out the future political and ideological landscape of Europe with an inner border running through Germany even before the conference started. The Foreign Office regarded the 'failure' of these peace talks as a precondition for achieving peace on Western terms. A clear separation of the spheres of influence in Europe seemed the best way to *prevent* a cold war, or even another hot war, instead of creating a battle ground in the middle of the continent that the two ideologically opposed sides could argue about endlessly, which, once more, would benefit Germany.¹

Containment and division

Some general remarks may help to clarify a tangled picture in which diplomats played a major and often decisive role, but were not alone – the respective governments and political coalitions at home, the members of the various institutions of the Control Commission in Germany, economic considerations and the needling issues of imperial politics, all these levels influenced policy making toward Germany. On each side, different people in various positions interpreted the German or Soviet threat differently, and their aims often conflicted. Policy making was not only in France a '*processus hésitant, marqué de reculs et de poussées*'.² These conflicting levels have to be kept in mind, even when studying primarily the diplomacy of the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay.

Furthermore, these events can only be understood in the light of longer-term perceptions of the future of the German question within the framework of European politics, the combined German and Soviet threat and the unstable relations with the new superpowers. Thus, the question was not and is not: who divided Germany? or who wanted to divide Germany? Not only is it impossible to personalize these complex issues. The division was never a goal in itself but a means towards a larger political goal.³ Memories played an equally important role: memories of the failure of the interwar system to stop German expansionism with treaties alone, memories of the powerful German military-industrial complex and – a decisive aspect of the French collective memory – memories of defining oneself as a great power without having the power to defend that status.

Looking for motives and perceptions on the British and French side, therefore, does *not* mean to push back the origins of the Cold War or to saddle any side with moral blame. It is hard to see why any country

should have taken pains to preserve German unity unless it served their own goals or helped to keep options open. The question was rather: how many problems for British or French foreign policy could a united Germany solve and how many new ones could it possibly create? The answer to this question was never one-sided even though the possibility of division had been contemplated at least by leading British diplomats since late 1945. But again, and this is a decisive point, it was never a question simply of 'division or no division'. The overriding issue after the end of the war was the *control* of Germany and its heavy industry and the desire to prevent any further aggression. All the European countries shared this desire for control, and this specific and important worry brought them closer together, despite all the differences regarding both details and the basic definition of 'democracy'.

The issue of control and the possibility of a division formed a threatening knot in the perception of those western European diplomats who already anticipated the breakdown of the four-power system. They feared that German (economic) power was only temporarily paralyzed, and they were also aware (an awareness that fuelled their fears) that the only country that might definitely profit from a conflict between East and West was Germany. Both British and French diplomats worried about what would happen if the western European powers demanded economic and political controls in Germany at the very moment when the division was revealed to the German population, while the Soviet Union posed as the defender of German unity.

There was never a 'red scare' wave that shook the whole Foreign Office or Quai d'Orsay. Very few planners put forward wholeheartedly the hypothesis of a united Germany going Communist. But French and British diplomats accepted the role of the Soviet Union as a new superpower and its predominance in eastern Europe. And when thinking of a divided Germany forced to accept international control of its economy, most officials feared a German *revanchisme* that would *then* turn against the West and move toward the Soviet Union. During the Moscow conference the French representative in Stuttgart and Tübingen, Pierre d'Huart, summed up some of those fears when he warned that the choice *Germany* would make at a given moment in the future would depend on the power of its partners.⁴ Thereby, he reminded his colleagues, on the one hand, of the French traumatic discovery after defeat and occupation that in order to be a power you had to be accepted as one, and on the other hand, that Germany would be able to *make* a choice.

By 'power' they meant a combination of economic and military capacity that seemed to be necessary to make Germany accept a specific

political system. During the conferences, the question of economic unity and reparations always took up a large amount of time, and most speakers presented it as the major stumbling block.⁵ But this question was not only an economic issue but also a problem of ideology and security. Both British and French diplomats assumed that, in order to convince the German population in their respective zones of the effectiveness of Western democracy, it must be shown to pay off economically. The rise of National Socialism had proven, in their eyes, that the majority of the German population would opt for a totalitarian solution in times of economic crisis and social turmoil. Communist ideology presented the West as being in crisis after the war. The huge deficit in the British zone did little to disprove that, and it was highly visible, whereas it was very difficult for the Western powers and the German population in the Western zones to estimate the economic situation in the Soviet zone. This was a second reason why British planners at least worried about German reactions if they opted for heavy handed control while at the same time not being able to balance the budget.

Perceptions and policies: on the road to Moscow

While generally agreeing on the necessity for control, British and French plans for Germany and Europe were at odds. Basically, the British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin used the conferences as a means for 'dual containment' (Wolfram Hanrieder), whereas the French tried to achieve a Western agreement for the control of the Ruhr industry as long as the four-power system lasted. As long ago as the autumn of 1945 British scepticism regarding Soviet aims had been translated into carefully crafted diplomatic language that paved the way for future action at the meetings. At the first Council of Foreign Ministers in London in September 1945, Bevin introduced the formula he would never abandon until the Council of Four had definitely failed: he said he would not accept an agreement on any single issue until a solution for 'Germany as a whole' had been found.⁶

The notion of a 'general settlement' had originally been discredited because of the failure of appeasement. This failure raised the basic question of how to deal with non-democratic countries that followed an expansionist ideology. After the war, the same formula allowed the West to play for time to find out more about Soviet aims and to develop its own plans. Moving from one issue to the next while insisting on a definition of 'democracy' at large as the necessary precondition for a

'general settlement' – this notion could now be used to delay any agreement.

In the month before the founding of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei*, March 1946, the forced unification of the Social Democratic and the Communist Party in the Soviet zone, the Foreign Office decided not to run the risk of a united Germany susceptible to Soviet influence. With 1938 in mind, they chose to build up Western democracy behind the 'protective zonal barrier'.⁷ The FO differed slightly from Sir Brian Robertson, the British commander-in-chief in the zone, who also saw no common ground beyond the economic realm but who favoured zonal co-operation in order to ease the economic crisis.

Moving from apprehension to decisiveness, the Foreign Office was not swept by a 'red scare'. In particular Frank Roberts, member of the British embassy in Moscow, argued very carefully that the Soviet Union seemed economically as weak as Britain, and that British politics had to turn this parity of weakness and of fear to Britain's advantage. In an extremely farsighted analysis of later developments, he envisioned in September 1946 two spheres of influence in a peaceful Europe, trading across the frontier between two saturated German states, partners respectively in a western and an eastern bloc.⁸ In general, the Foreign Office used a language of artificially heightened 'threat perceptions' in order to create a defence barrier while the Soviet Union seemed to be as weak as the West.⁹ Germany had to be the pivotal frontier separating the spheres in Europe, but Roberts also emphasized that the Western zones needed to be offered attractive moral and especially economic conditions in order to accept this system.

British diplomats achieved their goal of Anglo-American co-operation in Germany at the Paris conference in the summer of 1946, when American Secretary of State James Byrnes dropped his piecemeal approach to the German problem, and like Bevin demanded a solution of the general principles of the occupation policy before details were discussed, and finally offered the fusion of the British and American zones.¹⁰ In Paris, the British officials decided not to push harder in order not to be left in isolation if the 'point of splitting Germany' should arise.¹¹ But the careful British diplomacy from 1945 and 1946 resulted in a triumphant note of January 1947 that with the setting up of the bizonia it would be Britain and not the Soviet Union that could best afford to deal slowly with the German problem,¹² thus also refuting the thesis that Britain had acted under the pressure of events.¹³

The means for controlling the process were written into the conditions for joining the bizonia.¹⁴ These in turn were included in the

'Revised Potsdam Agreement' which formed the basis for the British position in 1947. The bizonie was defined as the first step towards economic and political unity. The Foreign Office was quite sure that the Soviet Union would not accept this unity because the Russians would have to open up their zone *and* help reduce the already existing deficit in order to join. The Potsdam protocol did not provide explicitly for the latter but stated that the export surplus of one zone could be used to balance the deficit of another. The Soviets refused to accept this reading because they had received less in the form of reparations from the West than they had demanded, and the Americans in turn refused reparations as long as they could not assess developments in the Soviet zone.¹⁵ British diplomats acknowledged that both sides had equally valid arguments; therefore, procedural questions became very important. The British clung to their idea of an all-inclusive solution, whereas the French and the Soviets followed a piecemeal strategy. Besides a traditional reluctance to get involved on the continent, it was due to these worries and their anxiety about German opinion that the Foreign Office diplomats refused to support any detailed French plans to control German heavy industry, beyond a general endorsement.

But by solving the Soviet problem in Germany, Bevin had to ignore some irritation at home. First of all, while refusing the Soviet claim for reparations, he was confronted with similar claims in his own country. Therefore, he carefully never ruled out reparations in general, only on Soviet terms. Second, the FO wanted control of German political and economic developments, just like the other Europeans. As long as the four-power system lasted, though, Bevin did not push for this publicly. Only during and after the Moscow conference did he try, unsuccessfully by then, to secure US support for a slow and controlled development in Germany, something the French had demanded since 1945. The American commander-in-chief Lucius D. Clay had always suggested that an agreement with Moscow was possible, and the US delegation in Moscow toyed with the idea of a 'rapprochement' on reparations. To my mind, Marshall did not really want an agreement but used this ambivalent approach to silence the British and French. A third problem was that both British and French planners were convinced that democracy in Germany needed an efficient economic basis. Yet they feared both the centralization that would be necessary for improvement in the economy and a backlash of German nationalism against *Western* control in a divided country. Shuttlng between the German desire for unity and the Allied insistence on security, British policy was criticized both at home and in Germany.

John Kent summed up Britain's imperial strategy explaining that the goals of its policy were set in terms of great power status and equality with the United States and the Soviet Union. British policy-makers did not refuse to recognize Britain's postwar weakness, but refused to accept that it could not be overcome.¹⁶ This analysis applies to some extent also to the French position. France wanted security and the restoration of its former power. But haunted by their recent memories of defeat, occupation, collaboration and dependency on the Western allies, French planners were less certain than the British about their position in *German* eyes.

The French situation was even more complicated, the views in Paris, in Berlin and in the zone, even more diverse than on the British side and certainly less co-ordinated.¹⁷ French policies resulted from a complex mixture of the desire for security, the wish to reinstate French standing in Europe and elsewhere, an apprehensive fascination with Germany's military-industrial complex, and the strong will not to be entirely dominated by the United States in a future Western alliance.¹⁸ With respect to their status both in the West and in German eyes, most French planners harboured few illusions; their plans betrayed a burning awareness first to having lost the peace and then to *not* having won the war on their own account.

French German policy rested on three premiss. First of all, planners assumed that only an agreement with Germany could secure peace in the long run. Second, they expected the German population to opt for the West (or France) only if France proved to be firm, the more so in a bipolar world. The 'German choice' was a recurring phrase. Paradoxically enough, clinging to the '*thèses françaises*' could be interpreted as a way to prove French steadfastness. Third, French planners realized early on that international control of German heavy industry would only be possible within a tripartite coalition. Due to his permanent contacts with the British and his unsuccessful attempts since 1945 to organize an effective alliance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Georges Bidault (who as the former leader of the Résistance in France had experienced the German occupation) was aware that the four-power system would not last long. And in the Western group, Paris would certainly be the weakest partner.

Instead of supporting the idea of a 'general settlement', the French tried to reach a step-by-step agreement for measures of control before the four-power system collapsed. As they did not expect the German economy to be cast down for long, they argued for a precise assessment of the German economy instead of endless conference rhetoric. Various

plans for economic integration had surfaced since 1944/45, based on the lessons of German occupation: in order to control a country, you have to control (or integrate) its economy. Bidault shared the British conviction that the German economy needed to be improved in order to appease German public opinion, and he proved quite flexible in discussions about the acceptable level of industrialization. Regarding the political structure, the Quai d'Orsay insisted on a successive development that could be controlled easily, but most plans aimed at a federal system instead of a confederation of states. Already in 1946 French planners drew up plans for a federal Germany,¹⁹ and in 1947 France was the only occupying power to present a detailed plan for the future political system.²⁰

These actions do not bear out an often alleged inflexibility. In particular, French ideas about control via co-operation refute the thesis that France accepted the development of a West German state only under severe pressure from the USA in 1948. The infamous '*thèses françaises*' (the exclusion of parts of the Rhineland and the Saar from German control and a strong decentralization) were more tactical than genuine; Bidault needed something to concede in talks with the Western powers. At the same time, Bidault was very sensitive about having to follow the British lead, whereas internal critics quite correctly pointed out that it was the lack of a clear foreign policy that forced France to compromise with the British.²¹

Both National Socialist Germany and Communist Russia confronted the Western allies with (seemingly) successful ways to organize mass societies and run them efficiently. In France, an eye permanently on the East probably fuelled the '*mentalité productiviste*' that characterized the '*trentes glorieuses*', the three decades of economic improvement after the war.²² The French military warned again and again *not* to repeat the mistakes of Versailles, that is either to replace France's own economic rearmament with demands for German reparations, or to try to guarantee peace with a system of alliances that excluded Germany. Instead, they demanded an active foreign policy based on French initiatives in order not to present Germany anew with the picture of France as the weakest Western ally.²³

In general, planners on both sides of the Channel developed ideas that in the long run became central to the representation of West Germany as a state and to the development of its political mentality. What became known in the Federal Republic as Adenauer's '*magnet theory*' was clearly visible in British thinking: economically strong Western zones should serve as an attractive model of efficient democracy, making sure that the anticipated fervour for national unity in Germany

would function on Western terms and would be inclined toward Western democracy. The '*politics of productivity*' (Charles Maier) were not only an American idea. In France, several suggestions were developed – behind the shield of the '*thèses françaises*' – on how to integrate the German economy into western Europe, allowing for control by co-operation. Both concepts were fuelled by the desire never again to underestimate the relevance of economic power in international relations, although only France translated this awareness into a programme for itself. In Britain, success at the conferences on Germany may well have hindered deeper reflections on the relation between means and goals in imperial and internal politics.²⁴

The Byzantine round: conference diplomacy

At the Council of Foreign Ministers in Moscow from 10 March to 25 April 1947, more than six long weeks of discussion produced more paper than decisions of substantial value – except for the basic result that an agreement concerning all four zones was put off.²⁵ After the first round in which all sides presented their views, the following discussion of economic problems in late March and early April ended with a disagreement on reparations. The breaking point came on 1 April. Once again Bevin refused reparations from current production as long as one zone carried a financial deficit, and demanded instead a general share in the deficit of the bizon. Marshall suggested a limited amount of reparations from current production, instead of capital equipment but also demanded firmly the opening of all zonal borders, in order to achieve real economic unity. Molotov insisted that both reparations from current production and delivery of capital equipment were possible with a higher level of industrial production (a position the Foreign Office agreed with internally). At this point and with three more weeks to go, Bevin had everybody agree that no single issue would be decided unless they reached a decision on 'Germany as a whole' first. Due to the Anglo-American connection between the political and economic aspects, the following agreements regarding the political organization of Germany were quite useless. The British team enjoyed the triumph of its '*comprehensive method of approach*'.²⁶

At the conference table, Britain and France moved between the Soviet demand for a central government and the American inclination to go fast in Germany in order to stop the European economic crisis. Using the same strategy as Bidault, Molotov tried to keep the four-power system going. Norman Naimark has pointed out that Soviet policy

included three options: a 'neutral', demilitarized Germany, which became increasingly unlikely throughout 1945/46; a united Germany under the leadership of the SED, or at least susceptible to Soviet influence; and third, the separate establishment of an Eastern zone. According to Naimark, even in 1949 Molotov might have been willing to work for the solution of a united Germany.²⁷

Judging from the conference records, Molotov did indeed try throughout the conference to prolong the four-power system, in order to keep at least the last two options open. He slowly began to compromise on important issues. The Soviet Foreign Minister also tried to avoid being held responsible for the division of Germany. He emphasized explicitly those points where the Soviet position resembled western European ideas, for example how similar they were on the level of steel production, the establishment of central administrations and the need for higher German exports. Molotov also suggested the reparation period should be lengthened from ten to 20 years in order to lighten the immediate burden on the German economy.

Three factors especially highlight the complex interactions not only between East and West, but also between the Western allies. First of all, the most vexing problem for Bevin in Moscow was less the Soviet demand for reparations than the Soviet compromises on this issue. Molotov kept insisting on a total of US\$ 10 billion. But on 19 March he started to give some information about the reparations the Soviets had taken from their own zone up to that point, a concession the British had required before talking seriously about reparations. Furthermore, he promised to give all the relevant information. The British minister countered this with his idea of 'Germany as a whole'.

Second, however, this dilemma intensified the tensions between the western Europeans and the United States. The US Secretary of State George Marshall showed little inclination to agree with Molotov on reparations. But he played with the idea of a Soviet-American rapprochement in order to silence western European demands for control mechanisms in Germany. At least he always raised this possibility whenever his French and British colleagues started to debate institutionalized means of control in Germany. And he pushed the idea more, when an agreement with Molotov became less likely. This aspect, evident not only in Moscow, but particularly prevalent during those meetings, foreshadowed the perennial western European dilemma after the Second World War, of being dependent economically and militarily on the United States and wanting its commitment, but not wanting to have their policies influenced by Washington.

Third, all three Europeans harboured similar hopes for controlling Germany without ruining it economically. In particular the final discussions about the Ruhr area, the boundaries and a German peace treaty showed how close they actually were. France and the Soviet Union both demanded the control of the Ruhr, but differed on how to organize the German government. London and Moscow, on the other hand, had closer views regarding Germany's political organization. Furthermore, all agreed the level of industry should be revized and exports raised. Molotov emphasized these similarities in order to highlight the possibilities of an agreement in the eyes of the public. When Marshall discussed these issues with Bevin, he was less of a cold warrior than when he talked to Truman. Although Bevin never specified any possible restrictions (reflecting the rather vague planning at home), Marshall brought up the question of saving American expenditure if the Soviet Union played straight on economic unity.

For French foreign policy, the Moscow conference was not a big turning point in terms of planning, only in terms of public opinion which, as Wilfried Loth has pointed out, was still not prepared to accept the division of Europe.²⁸ The Quai d'Orsay had not expected an agreement between the superpowers – '*rien ne sera réglé à Moscou*'²⁹ – and Bidault was already looking beyond, not debating a federal West German government in principle but only the details of its structure, development and control. Intensive talks with Washington and London before the conference had confirmed what the Quai d'Orsay had suspected, that is that any policy could only be managed with the US and Britain and definite arrangements for the Ruhr could be made only after the Council's failure. But Paris hoped to sell the tripartite agreement as dearly as possible. Against the wishes of the Ramadier government, Bidault stuck to his demand for taking one problem at a time. He managed to annoy both Marshall and Bevin most of the time, but he also ensured coal deliveries to France. Molotov's refusal to agree on the Saar question offered a welcome argument to convince the French public of the need for a split.

In the thorny debate about reparations, Bidault left the field mostly to his British and Soviet colleagues. Molotov tried to involve him in the debate on political principles, touching on the relationship between the *Länder* (states) and the federal government, so central in French plans, or talking about who should head central administrations, but with little success. Bidault was more specific about security controls, and he emphasized this point again and again for the benefit of Western ears. The Moscow conference foreshadowed the complexity of dealing exclusively

with the United States. Not only French, but European interests in general, could always be threatened both by a separate agreement between the superpowers (an idea Marshall played with superbly) and a hot cold war that would make an independent policy within or without a Western alliance illusory.

Regarding the political structure of Germany and its establishment, the alliances were curiously reversed. Bevin and Molotov both opted for a provisional government on the basis of a provisional constitution. Marshall wanted to appoint as soon as possible a government formed by state representatives to work out a permanent constitution. Bidault insisted, like Marshall, on a government formed by state representatives, but also on a provisional constitution like his European colleagues. The Western countries sorted out their differences about the political system on 4 and 5 April, at least for the time being, and foreclosed the conference. More specifically, Bevin and Marshall backed Bidault's demand to let bodies of state representatives, instead of permanent secretaries, supervise the central administrations, as the Potsdam protocol and Molotov had demanded. Marshall and Bevin decided on 8 April that the conference was over, and even Molotov's acceptance, a week later, of former Secretary of State Byrnes' ideas about demilitarization as a basis for a future peace treaty did not help. The deputy ministers, who were to continue the Allied discussions after the Moscow Conference, were not entitled to discuss economic principles, thereby safeguarding the Anglo-American position.

The last 'Council of Four' in London from 25 November to 15 December 1947, took place after the Marshall Plan had been launched during the summer. It was supposed to clear the way for the development of the western zones on a democratic free-market basis, but without holding the Western powers responsible for the division of Germany. At least the British delegation knew well that it was impossible 'to choose any one point about which we are so right and the Russians are so wrong that a break can be justified in the eyes of the world'.³⁰

In the light of this policy development, the last meeting of the Foreign Ministers in London does not look like the 'conference of the last chance',³¹ only in the eyes of the public. It was little more than a nervous affair of how to seal the end of the four-power system in Germany without setting a new date for another fruitless meeting and without being saddled with the responsibility for failure. Concerning East–West relations, especially the French harboured the same hopes that Frank Roberts had formulated in his 'long telegram' of September 1946, the hope that once the bitter feelings of the immediate postwar

period had died down, it would be possible to enter a policy of détente with Moscow without too much ideological encumbrance. The French wanted to end the talks with the Soviets about Germany without giving up the possibility to deal with them on other matters. Up to the very last day of the four-power conferences, Bidault, therefore, was extremely careful to let differences crystallize only on concrete issues, not on general principles and without much ideological fighting. While the British also hoped for clear-cut spheres of influence in Europe and a policy of détente across the ideological borders, they never spelled out in detail how a policy of confrontation could be turned into co-operation between systems. While Roberts had mapped out the policy of détente that would be started 20 years later, Bevin proved once more extremely apt in tactics but refrained from offering precise concepts for Germany or the framework of European politics.

Given the events of the summer, Molotov tried even more intensely to keep the four-power system in place by strongly pushing for a central government. It proved therefore the most important point for the Western diplomats to avoid an agreement on. It would have left things as they were, and it would have brought out Western differences about the German federal structure. Bidault saved this most dangerous situation by steering the discussion back to the agenda when Marshall was drawn out by Molotov and had demanded the quick establishment of a provisional government. Bidault, who like Marshall was addressing Western listeners, pointed again toward a slow and piecemeal solution of all problems. He also managed to secure the Americans' agreement to prevent the revival of German industry at a faster pace than that of the other democratic countries in Europe.

After 2 December, Marshall and Bevin tried to cut the conference short. Yet, they had several other meetings during which Molotov attacked exactly those points that the Foreign Office also thought to be the weakest aspects of Western policy. On the one hand, the Soviet foreign minister pointed to the low rates of production in the bizon. On the other hand, he complained about Western negligence of German public opinion regarding a separate development of the western zones, a worrisome point also in Western eyes. In terms of compromise, Molotov went as far as to call for agreement on reparations that was a preliminary condition for economic unity; he proposed to do both at the same moment. But Molotov's offers were as carefully devised as Bevin's; even his latest proposal included a free hand for the commanders-in-chief of the zones. Neither side tested the seriousness of the other's efforts at compromise. After even Marshall admitted, on 10 December,

that Molotov's 'almost desperate attempts' to continue the talks could be embarrassing in developing the western zones, he demanded a comprehensive solution of all the critical points.³² Marshall achieved the adjournment without setting a new date for another meeting.

Conclusion

The failure of the Council of Foreign Ministers to agree on Germany to my mind does not necessarily prove that such a council was in the first place the wrong way to deal with this important question, as Ann Deighton suggests.³³ It was rather a deliberate choice not to take the road of private diplomatic talks with Moscow as there had been between all three western Allies. The conference talks repeatedly reached a point where compromises could have been possible, as not only the American and the British commanders-in-chief in Germany but also the Foreign Office was quick to point out. But Bevin's fine art of diplomacy included the art of failure, using the Council of Foreign Ministers successfully as a means of containment – of two countries.

Bidault tried to use the conferences to put pressure on his Western allies, to gain their assent for control measures in Germany, for a French solution to the Saar question, for coal exports and for the basic desire not to let the German economy recover more quickly than that of the democratic Allies. After the Council of Foreign Ministers at the end of 1947, the most fascinating aspects of French planning since 1944/45 surfaced. One of the central features of postwar co-operation between France and West Germany, the Schuman Plan, reflected their primary goal of tying the German economy closely to the rest of the French and the European economy, hoping on the one hand, that economic efficiency and the doctrine of European integration would supplant the violent aggressiveness of German nationalism, and, on the other hand, to ensure a French position independent of *both* Soviet Communism and American power.

The western Europeans realized again and again, that getting closer to the desired 'special relationship' with the United States created its own problems. A steadier US foreign policy did not necessarily make this relationship any easier, either for London or for Paris. The 'German question' always included the double worry about the strength of German nationalism and the problem of not letting all international relations be burdened by the German question. In general, the conferences were as important for Britain and France in trying to carve out a good place in an alliance with the United States as they were with regard

to the four-power system. Whereas British planners formulated some aspects of a détente policy, via trade and other economic relations, that would only be implemented more than two decades later by the Nixon administration, French diplomats and military personnel indicated, in their overriding desire to be independent from all sides, their later distance from NATO.

Underlying the heated atmosphere of the year 1947, British and French planning reflected, beyond all wavering and hesitation, a surprising sense of realism, regarding both the presence of a new superpower in Europe and the difficult question of setting up an economically strong, but peaceful and non-Communist Germany. Next to the overriding influence of the United States in western European culture and politics after 1949³⁴ one should, on the one hand, minimize neither French nor British influence on the complex bundle of economic, ideological and political factors and mentalities that made up the rationale of the Federal Republic. On the other hand, fears of a united Germany never subsided totally in western Europe. In 1989, François Mitterrand explained to Gorbachev that it would be the four powers that would have to secure the balance of power in Europe, and Margaret Thatcher was even willing to leave Soviet troops in Germany.³⁵ The history of the years in between is, as always, not just a history of diplomats and conferences. It is a history of fears, of pride and of anger, translating into images, metaphors and memories that in turn influenced international relations after the Second World War, a history of '*l'imaginaire*' that spreads beyond the boundaries of 1945 and 1989.

Notes

- 1 M. Kessel, *Westeuropa und die deutsche Teilung. Englische und französische Deutschlandpolitik auf den Außenministerkonferenzen 1945 bis 1947* (München: R. Oldenbourg 1989) p. 297. A. Deighton, *The Impossible Peace. Britain, The Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) reaches similar conclusions regarding the British side. See also: M. Kessel, "L'Empêchement de la danse en ronde": Französische Deutschlandpolitik 1945–1947, in S. Martens ed., *Vom 'Erbfeind' zum 'Erneuerer'. Aspekte und Motive der französischen Deutschlandpolitik nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1993) pp. 65–85. Further literature in W. Loth ed., *Die deutsche Frage in der Nachkriegszeit* (Berlin: Akad Verlag, 1994).
- 2 G. Soutou, *Les dirigeants français et l'entrée en Guerre Froide: un processus de décision hésitant (1944–1950)*, in G. Schmidt ed., *Ost–West–Beziehungen: Konfrontation und Détente 1945–1989*, Bd. 1 (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1993) pp. 256–69 in particular 256.
- 3 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 9. For the following see esp. *ibid.* pp. 295–305.

- 4 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 241.
- 5 Cf J. Fisch, *Reparationen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (München: Beck, 1992) pp. 69 ff., pp. 92–104; see esp. the careful discussion of the change in US reparations policy by W. Mausbach, *Zwischen Morgenthau und Marshall: Das wirtschaftspolitische Deutschlandkonzept der USA, 1944–1947*, (Düsseldorf: Droster, 1996).
- 6 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 35. For the personal dislike between Bevin and Molotov see Deighton, *The Impossible Peace* op. cit., p. 47 ff.
- 7 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 52 ff., esp. p. 55 ff.; for an insider's view see N. Annan, *Changing Enemies. The Defeat and Regeneration of Germany* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), who organized a referendum in the Western sectors of Berlin on the unification. J. Farquharson, 'From Unity to Division: What Prompted Britain to Change its Policy in Germany in 1946?' *European History Quarterly* 26 (1996), pp. 81–123, sees a change only in the winter of 1946 on economic grounds. I would emphasize wider political and ideological considerations instead.
- 8 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., pp. 38, 56, for his 'long telegram' in September p. 107 ff. See also S. Greenwood, 'Frank Roberts and the "other" Long Telegram. The view from the British embassy in Moscow', *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990) pp. 103–22.
- 9 F. S. Northedge and A. Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism. The Impact of a Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1982) p. 122.
- 10 The latest revisionist account is offered by C. W. Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to divide Germany, 1944–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 11 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 90.
- 12 Kessel, *Westeuropa*, p. 161.
- 13 A. Deighton, 'Towards a Western Strategy: The Making of British Policy towards Germany 1945–1946', in A. Deighton ed., *Britain and the First Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) pp. 53–70.
- 14 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 121 ff.
- 15 Mausbach, *Zwischen Morgenthau und Marshall-Plan*, traces the conflict in US policy over how to use reparations as a tool for securing a peaceful Germany. The options were either to disarm Germany economically by dismantling capital equipment, or to use its economy for the economic recovery of the rest of Europe through reparations from current production.
- 16 J. Kent, *British imperial strategy and the origins of the Cold War, 1945–1949* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993) p. 214.
- 17 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., pp. 15–24 and 60 ff.; for the latest account see D. Hüser, *Frankreichs 'doppelte Deutschlandpolitik': Dynamik aus der Defensive – Planen, Entscheiden, Umsetzen in gesellschaftlichen und wirtschaftlichen, innen- und außenpolitischen Krisenzeiten 1944–50* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996).
- 18 For US–French relations, see F. Costigliola, *France and the United States. The Cold Alliance since World War Two* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992).
- 19 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 133 ff.
- 20 F. R. Pfetsch, *Ursprünge der Zweiten Republik. Prozesse der Verfassungsgebung in den Westzonen und der Bundesrepublik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990) p. 228.
- 21 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 66 ff.
- 22 R. Frank, *Les Français et la deuxième Guerre Mondiale depuis 1945: Lectures et interpretations*, in R. Frank *Histoire et temps présent* (Paris, Institut d'histoire du Temps: 1981) pp. 25–40.
- 23 For example Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 97 ff.
- 24 C. Barnett, *The Lost Victory. British Dreams, British Realities 1945–1950* (London: 1995) criticizes the Labour government for losing the peace during those years. On foreign policy attitudes, a similar critique by M. Blackwell, *Clinging to Grandeur. British attitudes and foreign policy in the aftermath of the second world war* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1993).
- 25 For a detailed account see Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., pp. 210–56.
- 26 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 232 ff.
- 27 N. M. Naimark, *Die Russen in Deutschland. Die sowjetische Besatzungszone 1945 bis 1949* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1997), p. 584; N. M. Naimark, 'Die Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland und die Frage des Stalinismus. Veränderte Sichtweisen auf der Grundlage neuer Quellen aus den russischen Archiven', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 43 (1995) pp. 293–307.
- 28 W. Loth, *Stalins ungeliebtes Kind. Warum Moskau die DDR nicht wollte* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1994) p. 88.
- 29 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Extérieures, Paris, Série Y 1944/1949, Internationales, 378–55–1/3, Secrétaire Générale, MAE, note 8 March 1947.
- 30 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 293; for an account of the conference, *ibid.* pp. 282–94.
- 31 This is the view of C. Buffet, *Mourir pour Berlin: la France et l'Allemagne 1945–1949* (Paris: Colin, 1991) p. 55.
- 32 Kessel, *Westeuropa* op. cit., p. 292.
- 33 Deighton, *The Impossible Peace* op. cit., p. 233.
- 34 Some recent literature in D. Reynolds, 'Review Essay: America's Europe, Europe's America: Image, Influence, and Interaction, 1933–1958', *Diplomatic History* 20 (1996) pp. 651–61.
- 35 P. Zelikow and C. Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed. A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).