IN THE LAPS OF THE GODS:

THE ORIGINS OF NATO FORWARD DEFENSE

by

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> In my opinion as a military man . . . the people of Western Europe, with our assistance, and given time, can build up a sufficient force so that they would not be driven out of Western Europe. Now just exactly where they could hold . . . is in the laps of the gods.
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> — General J. Lawton Collins
> Chief of Staff, US Army
> 19 February 1951

The military strategy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is two-pronged, consisting of the principles known as flexible response and forward defense. While the flexible response doctrine has been subjected to intense scrutiny since its promulgation in 1967, the forward defense strategy more often has been neglected by analysts. This article addresses this less thoroughly examined side of NATO strategy, exploring the operational origins, rather than the strategic or political origins, of the forward defense strategy in the formative years of the alliance, 1945-55.

NATO's historians have traditionally agreed that in the early years the strategy of forward defense was mainly a political and psychological necessity to ensure eventual German rearmament and participation, as well as to allay French fears of a defeated *Reich* rearmed for the second time in half a century. The Allies did not believe that it was a strict military requirement to protect every square inch of West European soil with forces in being. Many modern-day commentators argue that since the Allies have constructed a layered scheme of national corps sectors across the inter-German border from north to south, NATO plans to fight a hopelessly linear forward defense. These conclusions are, at best, incomplete.

It is revealing to trace the military implementation of the strategy of forward defense through the early years of Allied defense planning. From the perspective of the operational level of war, it becomes apparent that the forward strategy was then, as it is now, subject to wide variation in interpretation in spite of the political unity that prevailed in the articulation of the strategy itself.[1] This variation derived from many sources, but principally from differing operational concepts, contrasting national styles of war, and the clash of military personalities.

INITIAL PLANNING: 1945-49

On Victory in Europe Day, 8 May 1945, the armies of the Western Allies had three enormous tasks ahead of them: occupation, redeployment to the Pacific Theater, and demobilization. By the winter of 1945-46, the absence of a fighting enemy, combined with the problems inherent in demobilization and redeployment, caused a serious deterioration

in the battle-seasoned units of one of history's largest land armies. The discipline, morale, and supply problems in Europe were of such proportions that General Eisenhower's first replacement as commander of US forces in the European Theater, General Joseph T. McNarney, remarked that his troops "could operate in an emergency for a limited period at something less than 50 percent normal wartime efficiency."[2]

Yet as Allied soldiers indulged themselves in the spoils of victory and awaited their turn to go home, Western leaders grew more concerned with the postwar intentions of the Soviet Union. On 12 May 1945, British Prime Minister Churchill sent his "Iron Curtain" telegram to President Truman. That same month, Field Marshal Montgomery, in command of occupation forces in the British sector, was ordered not to destroy any more captured German arms, "in case they might be needed by the Western Allies for any reason."[3]

By the time of Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech in the United States in January 1946, military planners in the West began to redirect their thinking from occupation duties to contingency planning for the possibility of an attack from the Red Army, which had neither demobilized nor redeployed to the extent that British and American forces had. American occupation forces by July 1947 were stabilized at a low point in strength of 135,000 troops, a level at which they remained until the early 1950s.[4] The US forces had been reorganized in 1946 into three components: a constabulary—roughly a division in size—dispersed in small units throughout the American sector; the 1st Infantry Division; and various theater and military government supporting units. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes signalled a formal change in the attitude of the American government as to the purpose of these troops in a speech at Stuttgart on 6 September 1946, when he indicated that the Americans were now in Germany not only for occupation, but also for defense.

Accordingly, the constabulary was given primary responsibility for maintaining law and order, and the 1st Infantry Division was assigned a reserve mission to be ready to block any Russian advance. As the events of 1947 in Berlin, East Europe, and Greece were marked by the creation of Bizonia, the Marshall Plan, and the Truman Doctrine, US military leaders more fully comprehended the implications of the Cold War. On 4 August 1947, after the June failure of the Allied talks on troop withdrawals, the US military governor, General Lucius D. Clay, sent a wire to his superiors concerning a British proposal to the Americans for unilateral withdrawals; in his opinion the idea of leaving Western Europe in large numbers was tantamount to abandoning Germany to the communists.[5]

While American military planners were reorienting their thinking, Montgomery, now preparing himself for his future duties as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, directed his own Occupation Zone Staff in May 1946 to prepare a paper discussing defense against an external threat. In that paper he argued for a British presence on the Continent alongside potential allies.[6] Montgomery submitted his staff paper to the Ministry of Defense amid frequent trips back to the Continent in 1947 to inspect the British Army of the Rhine. By December 1947, the joint planners in the Ministry of Defense had considered his paper and proposed three possible strategies in the event of a Russian attack: an air offensive; a Continental defense; or a Pyrenees defense, followed by a liberation operation based from Spain and Portugal. The preference of the Ministry of Defense staff was the air strategy, with the land defense of the Continental strategy being summarily dismissed.

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Montgomery's reaction was not subtle: "I blew right up, saying that I disagreed completely . . . . We must defend Western Europe, not liberate it."[7]

While British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin was preparing to make his public call for a Western European Union in January 1948, Montgomery was personally preparing a response to the Defense Ministry's European strategy paper. In his reply, dated 30 January 1948, he not only reiterated his argument for a conventional land defense, he also proposed his formula for effecting his strategy: "We must agree that, if attacked, the nations of the Western Union will hold the attack as far to the east as possible."[8] This is the earliest public record of an official postwar reference to a forward defense of Europe. Thus, at the operational level of war, Montgomery should be credited with being a fundamental proponent of forward defense.

Bevin's Western European Union proposal was welcomed, of course. The Brussels Treaty, signed on 17 March 1948, marked the beginning of joint military planning by Western armed forces. The first steps were the appointment of a military committee and the selection, in late September 1948, of Field Marshal Montgomery as Chairman of the Commanders-in-Chief Committee, with headquarters in Fontainebleau, France. His committee began its planning in secrecy, but immediately came under public scrutiny and criticism as a debate ensued over where the defensive line should be drawn in Europe.

The public discussion was wide-ranging. Arguments were heard from a number of sources, contending that the line ought to be drawn variously at the Vistula, Oder-Neisse, Elbe, Rhine, Brittany Peninsula, or Pyrenees Mountains. In particular, the French generally were suspicious of British intentions to defend the Continent, based on their initial experience in the two previous world wars. Although Montgomery publicly declared, "Together we will fight to prevent this and we will win,"[9] many Frenchmen remained unconvinced. In the words of one French official, "If we must one day evacuate France it must not be a British officer who orders it."[10] General DeGaulle joined in this sentiment with his own brand of French nationalism, decrying alleged British intentions of planning an early withdrawal from the Continent in the event of a Soviet attack.[11]

As the Berlin crisis carried over into 1949, the public debate intensified and concern over American intentions rose. On 28 February 1949, French Premier Henri Queille pleaded for the United States to prevent a Soviet advance beyond the Elbe.[12] He expressed his concern graphically in a later interview when he said, "We know that once Western Europe was occupied, America would again come to our aid and eventually we again would be liberated. But the process would be terrible. The next time you probably would be liberating a corpse."[13] French Prime Minister Paul Ramadier gave official endorsement of the strategy of forward defense. In response to questions from the French communist opposition he mentioned the Rhine River as a defensive line, but then concluded, "We shall endeavor to halt the aggressor as far as possible from our frontier."[14]

Finally, once the North Atlantic Treaty was signed on 4 April 1949, the United States committed itself publicly to the concept of forward defense. The day after the signing of the treaty, General Omar N. Bradley, then Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in a speech to Jewish war veterans in New York that America's commitments "have carried its international obligations east of the river Rhine."[15] Thus, at least in public, the Allies were agreed in principle that Western Europe must be defended forward. However, while the North Atlantic nations were publicly subscribing to the forward strategy, military planners were facing up to the realities of the military balance in 1948-49.

The Soviet Union could count on perhaps a hundred fully combat-ready divisions within a short time, including 22 in place at full strength in Eastern Europe which needed only orders to attack—contrary to the then-popular notion that they needed only shoes, which of course they already had. The Western powers had only ten divisions, all of

which were at less than full strength and readiness, and no quickly available reserves.[16] On 16 June 1948, the Allied Commanders-in-Chief—US General Clay, British General Robertson, and French General Koenig—agreed that the Rhine would be the defensive line in the event of an attack, and requested the immediate appointment of a supreme commander and the formation of an Allied staff to plan the "coordinated defense of the Rhine."[17] In August came the authority to conduct the planning effort, and General Clay could inform his superior, General Bradley, that a tripartite staff had begun its work in Wiesbaden. This staff operated in accordance with a directive that discussed plans to defend along the Rhine River, specifically incorporating the work of previous consultations which already had provided for initial positioning of forces.[18]

Thus, despite the somewhat ambiguous public statements on the nature of the notion of forward defense, and despite the lack of a formally integrated military structure or a supreme commander, there were by mid-1948 three separate but coordinated plans for a defense on the Rhine River, and there was a committee tasked to prepare a more fully developed combined forces plan. The military commanders of the occupation zones, recognizing that the defense of the separate zones had to be coordinated, anticipated that a more formal Allied command structure would be established in the event of war. They were reluctant to delay planning on the formation of Western European Union organizations, so they prepared the contingency plan for forward defense at the operational level in an informal, somewhat ad hoc fashion, knowing that if war came they would be held accountable for stopping the Red Army.

In September 1948 Montgomery became Chairman of the WEU Defense Organization. His first task was to select the high-level staff officers who would work with him in conducting the overall planning effort and who would hold, presumably, although not by explicit agreement, supreme command over the Brussels Treaty forces in the event of war. He selected British officers for the air and sea staff positions, but looked to the French for a land force representative. Montgomery reasoned that the French would make the greatest contribution to the land forces, and he was aware of French sensitivities to British command over Continental defense.

The first choice for the land forces position was General Alphonse-Pierre Juin, who declined the position. It was suggested in the press that General Juin shared General DeGaulle's misgivings about British domination of Western European Union forces, and for that reason did not take up the post.[19] The job then fell to General de Lattre de Tassigny, who had commanded the French First Army under US General Devers in the Southern Army Group during the Allied forces European offensive. General de Lattre brought with him an officer named Andre Beaufre, who would later become a significant contributor in his own right to forward defense concepts. By mid-November 1948, Montgomery's staff had pieced together the first joint defense plan for the WEU.

This plan was much more than the earlier effort of the local commanders to coordinate their separate defense plans. It called for three potential operations, depending on the level of forces available to the WEU on the Continent at the time of attack. The initial plan, based on existing force levels, was called the Short-Term Plan; it called for an emergency evacuation of the Continent behind a forward delaying action and a stout defense at the Pyrenees.[20] At a second level was the Medium-Term Plan, so named in anticipation of the time it would take to generate the forces necessary to implement it and to shift the logistical infrastructure away from the relatively exposed north-south axis of the occupation forces to a more secure east-west system. This plan called for a mobile defense in which the US constabulary, organized into armored cavalry units, would conduct the screening operation east of the Rhine along the border, in front of 18 divisions between the border and the Rhine. The bulk of the WEU forces, 36 divisions, would be employed in defensive positions along the Rhine River. This force was to hold

the Rhine until European and American reserves could be mobilized and deployed in a counteroffensive to force the aggressor's withdrawal back to the east.[21] The third plan, the Long-Term Plan, anticipated the day when up to 100 divisions would be available in Europe to conduct a linear defense along the border between East and West Germany. There apparently was no plan to construct heavy fortifications; rather, the divisions would be deployed to take advantage of terrain favorable for defense, weighting forces along the more vulnerable avenues of approach.[22]

Despite later public statements, there developed at about this time some important differences in approach between the French and British staffs at Fontainebleau.[23] To be sure, it was agreed by all that existing forces were incapable of holding even at the Rhine.[24] The disagreement arose over where the line of the main defensive effort was to be drawn once the Brussels Treaty states began to meet their commitments for additional forces. For the British, especially Montgomery, forward defense would be achieved by screening and delaying forces between the Elbe and the Rhine, with the Rhine River being the line along which the final stand would be taken.[25] To the French, particularly to General de Lattre de Tassigny, forward defense meant a stand closer to the Iron Curtain.[26] Thus there might have been a difference of opinion amounting to as much as 150 kilometers, considering the depth of the Fulda-Mainz corridor.

This first period of Western European military planning was marked by significant differences between the British and the French in the operational dimension of war. Although much of the planning at first consisted of ad hoc efforts, the military commanders recognized a need to be prepared to fight the Russians. The differences were both conceptual and personal, and they were present not only between Allies but sometimes, as in the British case, within the defense establishment of a single country. The formation of the WEU Defense Organization resulted in a coordinated plan, but the Union did not reduce the effect of the differences because it lacked sufficient troops to do much more than protect an evacuation of the Continent, and because it lacked a supreme commander with the authority to resolve the differences. But the danger of the Cold War suddenly going hot in 1950 soon imparted a sense of urgency at the operational level that was to produce temporary resolutions.

A SENSE OF URGENCY: 1949-52

Although the Berlin Airlift had been an overwhelming success by May 1949, and the April signing of the North Atlantic Treaty had seemed to signal for the Allies that the Russians might be contained in Europe with no further encroachments on the Free World, a number of subsequent events rapidly brought to the West a fear of imminent war with the Russians in Europe. The announcement on 22 September 1949 that the Soviet Union had detonated an atomic device caused consternation in Western military circles, more because of the unexpected quickness with which the Soviets had developed the bomb than from fear of their ability to deliver it in 1949 or 1950. The second event was the outbreak of the Korean War, half a globe away, in late June 1950. The Korean attack seemed to signal a Soviet willingness to use armed force in the Cold War, and Western Europe looked like an easy target for the massive Red Army in Eastern Europe. What had become obvious by late 1949 was that any defense of Western Europe, forward or otherwise, would require a contribution of troops in some form from West Germany. The unanimity of this view among the Western Allies did not, however, lessen the differences in approach to Continental defense, especially between the French and British military planners.

In the fall of 1949, Montgomery had told Bevin that a German contribution to WEU forces would be necessary. In November, Monty carried the same message to President Truman and to General Eisenhower—then President of Columbia University—in the United States.[27] Equally obvious was the implication that if the conquerors were going

to expect the conquered people to provide soldiers to oppose the new enemy, the territory of the occupied country would also have to be included in the defense plans. Accordingly, the protection of the North Atlantic Treaty was extended to Germany, and the doctrine of forward defense was adopted by the North Atlantic Council in its September 1950 meeting.[28]

The Brussels Treaty powers merged the military planning organizations of the Western European Union with analogous NATO structures in December 1950, and General Eisenhower was appointed the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) on 19 December. Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) was activated on 2 April 1951, and by February 1952 the council at Lisbon approved force goals for the implementation of the forward strategy. It is significant that in the September 1950 communique, "forward defense" was not established on any specific line, nor even was it specified that the defense would be mounted "as far east as possible." Indeed, the term "forward defense" is used nowhere in the text. Thus, the military planners were allowed some room for interpretation as to the operational implementation of forward defense.

Using this latitude of interpretation, the military planners prepared an operational concept that was in accordance with the spirit of the forward strategy, yet which sought to minimize the risk of a military defeat in the face of overwhelmingly unfavorable force balances. The solution was a mobile defense, calling for a delaying operation from the intra-German border westward to a final defensive stand along the Rhine. The defensive force would be required to hold until reinforcements from mobilized Continental reserves and from the United States, Canada, and Great Britain could be formed and launched into a counteroffensive.

The newly formed SHAPE staff began its work by drawing upon the staff work done by the Western European Union Defense Organization, the Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Plans. In the summer of 1950 the WEU had conducted an exercise under General de Lattre de Tassigny called "Triade." This exercise tested the ability of the deployed forces to conduct defensive operations to stop an attack. According to General Beaufre, both British and French Ministers of Defense concluded that the exercise was a success.[29] The plans called for stiff fighting east of the Rhine, using delaying tactics in order to stop the Red Army as far east as possible. In March 1951, the operational plans were being implemented; roads and bridges east of the Rhine were prepared for demolition, an important indicator of the plan to fight a delay east of the river.[30]

The fact that SHAPE was planning a mobile defense became clear in the public testimony of US officials in February 1951 Senate hearings on stationing US troops in Europe. At those hearings, General of the Army Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke of the "greater depth" that NATO forces could fight in with the four divisions that the United States planned to deploy in Europe.[31]

General J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff of the Army, stated clearly that a mobile defense was planned, using demolitions, antitank weapons, and mobile reserves,[32] all characteristics of a mobile defense rather than a linear or area defense. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, confirmed that delaying tactics would initially be employed.[33] Even the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, supported the delaying operation,[34] although other unofficial air power advocates at the hearings argued that ground forces might not be necessary at all in the light of the capabilities of the Strategic Air Command.[35] In retrospect, Drew Middleton's report in September 1951 on SHAPE's plans was probably accurate: "deliberate withdrawal in front of the Soviet attack across the North German plains and through the Fulda gap, followed by concerted attacks on the flanks of the Soviet advance by strong forces stationed around the base of the Jutland Peninsula and in the area of the Main River."[36]

The official pronouncements by the North Atlantic Council in September and December 1950 thus gave SHAPE planners

some leeway in planning for a forward defense which would conform to the realities of the military balance of the early 1950s. The mobile defense concept would ensure that the Russians would meet some organized resistance from the moment they crossed the border, but Allied delaying tactics, with large forces refusing to become decisively engaged, would prevent an early defeat at the hands of a foe with superior numbers. The Lisbon Conference of February 1952 called on Alliance members to provide sufficient forces by 1955 to mount a credible defense east of the Rhine without giving up territory. Nevertheless, critics of SHAPE's operational concept were quick to point out that the planned delay looked very much like an American and British plan to abandon the Continent in the event of an attack, much like the WEU Short-Term Plan.

In spite of repeated denials by General Eisenhower himself, this criticism persisted.[37] The principal sources of criticism were the French Gaullists and the West German Social Democrats. It is not insignificant that both groups were in the opposition to their governments in their national legislative bodies. For the West German Social Democrats (SPD), the issue was not so much forward defense as it was the implication of the strategy for the issues that the SPD considered most important: rearmament and reunification. The SPD leader, Kurt Schumacher, spoke in 1950 of establishing Western protection for Germany, "such as to enable a military decision on the Vistula and Niemen."[38] After initially voicing the SPD's opposition to *Vorfeld-Verwendung* (forefield employment) because of inadequate plans to rearm Germany, Schumacher late in September 1950 said, "We are ready to bear arms once again if, with us, the Western Allies take over the same risk and the same chance of warding off a Soviet attack, establishing themselves in the greatest possible strength on the Elbe."[39] For the SPD, apparently, a mobile defense was not an adequate return on the investment of Germans to rearm themselves. Chancellor Adenauer nevertheless contended that the September 1950 decision marked the end of a Rhine defense and the beginning of Allied abilities to mount a forward defense beginning at the border.[40]

In France, DeGaulle continued to allege that the true intention of the United States and Britain was to abandon the Continent in case of war. He pointed to the concept of a delay as merely a cover for another Dunkirk-style evacuation. Although Eisenhower appointed Marshal Juin to replace de Lattre de Tassigny as land force commander, DeGaulle was not appeased. He argued that the Allies were not committed to defense of the Continent, but were "disposed to limit their effort to defense of a few points: England, Spain, a Breton redoubt."[41]

DeGaulle's reference to "a Breton redoubt" was apparently taken from an account of General Eisenhower's congressional testimony in 1951. Although General DeGaulle's accusation may have been politically motivated with a view toward getting votes in the upcoming French national election, Eisenhower felt it was serious enough to warrant a public denial.[42] Furthermore, DeGaulle's charges were not without a basis in fact. As President of Columbia University, Eisenhower had said in October 1950, before the North Atlantic Council asked Truman to make him available for the SACEUR position, that American soldiers should not be stationed outside our continental limits; rather, they should serve as a global central reserve.[43] Other American conservative leaders had taken a similar public stance. For example, Senator Taft urged that the United States could not hold the Elbe line, and that therefore we ought to concentrate instead on the Navy and Air Force for defense.[44] In his congressional testimony in February 1951, General Eisenhower reworded his position but did not categorically support stationing US troops in Europe.[45] No amount of reassurance from the Americans could subsequently assuage the fears of the German and French opposition parties.

In spite of the misgivings of the aspirants to political power, the February 1952 Lisbon Conference marked a unity in the Alliance at the operational level that certainly has not

been achieved since. The widely accepted perception of the willingness of the Soviet Union to use force to achieve its hegemonic goals served to rejuvenate the wartime alliance relationships among the Western powers, particularly under the leadership of the former Supreme Commander of the coalition armies. As economic realities set in to cast doubt on the attainability of the Lisbon force goals, and as concern over Soviet use of force declined, the unity began to erode.

STRETCH-OUT: 1952-55

The Lisbon force goals were overly optimistic in terms of the Allies' abilities to provide fully combat-ready divisions for the Central European region. Indeed, there are, among those who participated in the Lisbon talks, some who believe that many Alliance members knew they could not meet their commitments even as they were making them.[46] This period was a time when the military planners occupied themselves with somehow reconciling the need for a forward strategy with the lack of sufficient conventional forces to conduct a defense at the border.

One potential solution that began to receive serious attention early in 1952 was the use of nuclear weapons to stop a Russian breakthrough east of the Rhine. General Beaufre was given the task of studying this potential, even as SHAPE's staff had completed its plans for the conventional mobile defense.[47] While General Beaufre began work on what was to become the important nuclear doctrine, two events dominated SHAPE in April 1952. The first of these was an early command cell exercise, which was held 2-13 April. The second event was Eisenhower's replacement on 28 April by General Matthew B. Ridgway.

The SHAPE exercise of April 1952 was the first of its kind. It was important not only for its role as a vehicle for practicing agreed NATO strategy and operations, but also for the method involved in the conduct of the exercise. In the event, known as "Venus de Milo" (no arms and all SHAPE[48]), the mobile defense was exercised on maps by SHAPE commanders and staffs under the overall supervision of the Deputy SACEUR, Field Marshal Montgomery. Montgomery handled it as a classroom exercise, challenging participants to react instantly to his prepared scenario.[49] By controlling the scenario and the procedures for this and subsequent exercises at SHAPE, Montgomery was able to influence the particular interpretation of forward defense practiced by SHAPE in the early years. Thus the idea that the Russians would concentrate their drive along the North German Plain approach came out of these "teaching exercises in which the great tactician lectured to his subordinate NATO commanders and their staffs in an entertaining but very positive way."[50] Montgomery would then have the main Soviet attack come out of the Magdeburg area, cross the Weser River, and dash to the Channel ports. He considered the larger Central Army Group region to be the more easily defensible, thus rendering a Soviet main effort there unlikely.[51]

The second critical event of April 1952 was Eisenhower's replacement as Supreme Allied Commander Europe by General Matthew B. Ridgway. In leaving the post to seek the Republican nomination for the US Presidency that year, General Eisenhower reported on the year's activities at SHAPE to the Standing Group. In this report, he stated his desire to have the forces required to fight a defense in depth in Europe.[52] In his assessment, NATO was not yet capable of forward defense at the Rhine River: "As of today, our forces could not offer prolonged resistance East of the Rhine barrier."[53] With General Eisenhower went a certain ability to produce consensus and urgency in operational matters among the Allies.[54]

General Ridgway ran head-on into the problems of differing national perspectives and personality conflicts as SACEUR. General Ridgway faced great problems of suspicious partners who doubted that French, British, or American troops would defend the smaller countries forward.[55] In responding to these suspicions, Ridgway went so far as to speak personally to the Dutch cabinet at

length to reassure them of the intentions of SHAPE to defend the territory of all members of NATO, but made clear that he would fight a delaying action rather than risk losing his entire force by taking a final stand too far forward.[56]

General Ridgway had a particularly difficult time resolving the personality conflicts within SHAPE. This was especially true in his own relationship to his Deputy Supreme Commander, Field Marshal Montgomery. By this time Montgomery had seen several Western European staffs come and go: two of his own in the Western European Union Defense Organization, and before that his staff in the British Occupation Zone, as well as Eisenhower's first SHAPE staff. Now he was to be subordinated to an American who had been a two-star general and division commander during the D-Day invasion, at a time when Montgomery had already been appointed a Field Marshal, the equivalent of a four-star general. Ironically, during the Normandy operation, Ridgway had worked under Montgomery in the Army Group responsible for the northern portion of the Allied invasion. At the outset of his new command, General Ridgway attempted to defuse any potential misunderstandings with Montgomery as to who was in charge; but apparently Montgomery would take matters into his own hands. Occasionally the Deputy SACEUR would give unofficial, personal recommendations to field commanders that were contrary to official SHAPE policy. When Ridgway would confront him with such veiled disloyalty, the result was less than satisfactory: " 'You're right Matt,' he'd say. 'You're quite right.' Then he'd go out and do it again."[57] Meanwhile, the public debate over forward defense was renewed as the failure to meet the ambitious Lisbon force goals became publicly apparent.

In the summer of 1952 there were a number of reports that the French had arrived at a concept of a withdrawal into a "French Fortress" if the Russians were to attack in central Europe.[58] These reports drew repeated denials from SHAPE in the fall of 1952 upon the conclusion of a large-scale maneuver involving NATO forces, including the newly deployed US, French, Belgian, and Dutch units, practicing delaying operations east of the Rhine River in Exercise Rosebush.[59] However, these denials failed to clear up the confusion regarding SHAPE's intentions, because SHAPE spokesmen seemingly contradicted each other. Specifically, Marshal Juin issued a statement in September 1952 asserting that his NATO land forces could delay east of the Rhine and hold firm at the river.[60] Juin's statement elicited an immediate critical response from the German Social Democrats who demanded a defense farther east.[61] In response to this demand from the SPD, the US forces commander in Europe issued a statement the following day, pointing out that in delaying operations terrain sometimes is traded for time, but denying that Exercise Rosebush revealed any operational plans for wartime contingencies.[62]

The apparently contradictory statements coming out of SHAPE caused consternation at the diplomatic level. At the Council of Europe's Consultative Assembly, J. J. Fens, from the Netherlands, condemned any prepared plan to relinquish territory.[63] This brought a response from General Ridgway himself, who reiterated the mobile defense concept and again called for large numbers of reserves.[64] Marshal Juin rephrased his declaration into terms more acceptable to critics in the West German SPD.[65] Finally, the Standing Group itself stepped in to reassure the Allies of SHAPE's intentions, and it "reiterated the accepted strategy, namely the defense of all peoples and territories for which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is responsible."[66]

Despite the best of intentions, the SHAPE staff was unable to convince its critics in this period that its concept of a mobile defense between the Rhine and the intra-German border was the most forward defense possible within the constraints of the conventional forces that were available or planned for in 1952. By the autumn of 1952, the operational planners began to look seriously to battlefield nuclear weapons as the primary guarantor of forward defense at the border.

In September 1952, General J. Lawton Collins, US Army Chief of Staff, told a NATO press conference that atomic weapons "will result ultimately in the ability to do the job with a smaller number of divisions."[67] The first attempt to integrate nuclear weapons into SHAPE plans involved a plan to use atomic devices to destroy the Soviet army while keeping NATO forces deployed as they would be in a nonnuclear defense; it was known as the Ridgway Plan of 1952-53.[68] The results of war-gaming this plan were that conventional forces were destroyed faster and more completely in the firepower of atomic weapons, generating requirements for even more replacements of conventional forces to maintain the forward defense.[69]

The planners therefore started over by reexamining their assumptions and strategic concepts. The result was a plan called the New Approach doctrine of 1954-56, which "called for a tactical nuclear response to Soviet aggression in Europe from the outset."[70] This strategy was a trip-wire operational concept in which conventional forces were not needed for maneuver; instead, "manpower requirements are limited to those needed to force concentrations on the attacker, identify these . . . and deliver the nuclear firepower."[71]

General Beaufre confirms that the conventional forces took on the role of a trip-wire under the New Approach strategy.[72] US Secretary of State Dulles announced the strategy in his January 1954 "Massive Retaliation" speech. This strategy was not particularly secret[73] but the issue of the tactical use of nuclear weapons in forward defense, so controversial in later years, was lost in the background of the major issue of 1954: German rearmament.

It had become apparent in the early 1950s that the Germans would have to contribute to the conventional defense of the central region of Western Europe. Indeed, we have seen that this consideration was part of the rationale for the forward defense strategy. The Pleven Plan for a sort of European, non-national army became the vehicle expected to carry German rearmament through all the sensitivities of the Europeans' fears of a resurgent Germany. When the French National Assembly failed to ratify the European Defense Community Plan in August 1954, the Western powers, two months later, officially ended the occupation. They also offered sovereignty and accession to the Brussels Treaty to the West German state.

In anticipation of eventual rearmament, Chancellor Adenauer had appointed Theodore Blank as a special adviser on the question. Blank had a notable staff, including former *Wehrmacht* strategists of considerable success during the war who had been cleared of National Socialist ties. The West Germans for the most part concurred with both the forward defense strategy and the mobile defense concept.[74] There was at least one member of Blank's staff, however, who did not go along with the mobile defense idea, Colonel Bogislaw von Bonin.

Von Bonin proposed a linear defense at the border that would not yield an inch of German territory. What is significant about Von Bonin's proposal is not so much that it called for a truly forward defense with conventional forces, but the fact that his concept was rejected by the West Germans. Upon the rejection of his plan, Von Bonin went public with his dispute and was promptly dismissed. He was later connected to communist front organizations in West Germany.[75] It was ironic that his was a truly forward concept; supposedly that was what the Germans, French, and the smaller Continental states wanted, yet the proposal was nevertheless unacceptable to the most threatened ally, West Germany.

CONCLUSION

By 1955, Western Allied military strategy had come full circle. Starting in the occupation years of the 1940s, there was at the operational level an initial emergency defense plan, coordinated by the French, British, and American zone commanders. The Western European Union Defense Organization plan under the chairmanship of Field Marshal Montgomery produced the first integrated defense plan for the Brussels

Treaty Powers. When NATO formed SHAPE, General Eisenhower's staff took over the work and developed a plan for a mobile defense between the border and the Rhine. As the sense of urgency of 1945-52 abated, NATO members fell short of their goal of providing the nearly 100 divisions that would be required to fight a linear forward defense in accordance with the September 1950 council declaration on the forward strategy. The allied effort had begun, because of lack of forces in 1948, as an impossible forward conventional defense; it had evolved into a more practical mobile defense by 1952; but then it had regressed into an impossible forward conventional defense again and a reliance on nuclear weapons.

The early history of NATO thus demonstrates the complex operational origins of the forward strategy. All the factors affecting the operational level of war were present in vivid illustration in this time. Differing operational concepts were proposed by the various factions interested in forward defense, ranging from the British Ministry of Defense option of the Pyrenees defense to Von Bonin's linear defense proposal. The cultural, historical, and geographical makeup of the factor of a national style of war is amply portrayed in the tension among the French, British, American, and Benelux reactions to the various plans for forward defense throughout these years. And certainly the force of personality was a major contributor in determining the operational concept for the implementation of forward defense; plans changed with changes in command and as strong personalities came into conflict with each other. Still today, these several complexities continue to nag the operational dimension of NATO forward defense.

NOTES

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15. "Text of Bradley Address Hailing Atlantic Pact," *The New York Times*, 6 April 1949, p. 3.

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25. Beaufre, p. 26.

26. Ibid.

27. Montgomery, p. 458.

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