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## German Unification in the Works of British and American Researchers in 1945–1949: Pro et Contra

**Kwestia zjednoczonych Niemiec w pracach brytyjskich i amerykańskich badaczy z lat 1945–1949. Argumenty za i przeciw**

### • Abstrakt •

W artykule opisano podejście brytyjskich i amerykańskich badaczy do analizy perspektyw zjednoczenia Niemiec w latach 1945–1949. Określone zostały kluczowe argumenty zwolenników i przeciwników zjednoczonych Niemiec, chronologiczne okresy występowania każdego ze stanowisk w analizowanych anglojęzycznych publikacjach, a ponadto zidentyfikowano najważniejsze wydarzenia historyczne, które zdeterminowały ostateczną przewagę zwolenników podziału Niemiec. Wskazano także dwie główne tendencje w ramach koncepcji podziału oraz określono ich zasadnicze cechy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** historiografia brytyjska; historiografia amerykańska; kwestia niemiecka; plan Morgenthaua; stanowisko Kennana; zimna wojna

### • Abstract •

In the paper, the main approaches of British and American researchers to the analysis of German unification prospects in 1945–1949 are stated. The key arguments of supporters and opponents of the united Germany are determined, chronological periods of each approach's prevalence on the pages of foreign publications established, and the key historical events that determined the final predominance of the supporters of the Germany's partition identified. Finally, two main trends within the framework of this approach are stated, and the essential characteristics of them defined.

**Keywords:** British historiography; American historiography; German Question; Morgenthau's line of argument; Kennan's line of argument; Cold War

## Introduction

The first five-year period after World War II turned out to be the time of key decisions taken by the Great Powers. The consequences of those decisions predetermined the general framework of international relations for the Cold War era. Post-war Germany and the German Question were some of the most important problems of the new world order. The Allies had to determine the fate of the German state, including questions about the form of its existence, location in Europe, and the organization of its economic and political life. In 1945–1949, the most important question regarding Germany was the following: whether to maintain a single state or to divide the country? This question drew the attention of many researchers in the UK and the US. Historians, political scientists, and experts in the field of international relations analyzed the German problem and proposed various ways for its solving. Great Britain and the US, as occupying powers, took the burden of not only political but also economic responsibility. That circumstance brought increased attention to the problem and contributed to its active discussion on the pages of influential academic journals. The works of British and American researchers published during that period undoubtedly mirrored the increasing turbulence in relations between the US and the USSR. As rivalry between them had been growing since 1947, Great Britain and the United States changed the angle of view of the German problem, carefully assessing the ratio of possible dividends and potential threats to their national interests. The evolution of the official authorities' position was reflected in the publications of researchers. That gave the ground for establishing chronological periods during which a certain approach dominated.

When studying the works of British and American researchers published in 1945–1949, two main approaches to the analysis of the problem were established. The first group of researchers demonstrated their commitment to maintaining a single German state, which should arise as a result of concerted action taken by the Allies. The other group of researchers came to the conclusion that reaching an agreement by the Allies on the creation of a unified German state was objectively impossible; therefore, a split in Germany would be the best solution to the problem.

## Germany Should be a Single Economic Unit

In July 1945, American researcher Jacob Viner published the article “The Treatment of Germany” in the influential journal “Foreign Affairs”. The author sup-

posed the plan to divide Germany into three or four zones, each of which would be controlled by one of the Great Powers, to be very dangerous. Such a decision would inevitably complicate the management of Germany as a whole and, even worse, complicate the harmonization of the Great Powers' policies. Apparently, zonal separation might lead to the partition of Germany. Jacob Viner noted that zonal division was based on the experience of the Allies' collaboration during the war years, but political cooperation after the war followed different patterns. Each country had its own political, economic and territorial interests in relation to Germany and was likely to follow its own path. Thus, calling for maximum coordination of actions, *de facto* the Allies were going to create the least suitable mechanism for that (Viner, 1945, pp. 580–581).

Already in the summer of 1946, Great Britain and the United States took the first steps towards emerging their zones and coordinating economic policy. Although France and the USSR did not show interest in that initiative, the US Secretary of State James Byrnes in his famous Stuttgart speech emphasized that this policy was not intended to exclude governments not planning to join at that moment (Mr. Byrnes' statement on Germany, 1946, p. 547). Such statements testified to the intention of the US government to maintain a united Germany. Assistant professor of international relations at the University of Southern California Ross Berkes also noted the importance of preserving the economic unity of Germany: "It would seem a poor victory to achieve a German federation comprising the three western zones at the expense of parting company with Russia in Germany and with the large agricultural and industrial Russian zone" (Berkes, 1946/1947, p. 49). Some years later, Cecil Weir, the Economic advisor to the British Military Government and the President of the Economic Sub-Commission of the Control Commission, in fact recognized the fallacy of the chosen German governance mechanism. In 1949, in the article "Economic Developments in Western Germany", he wrote: "We had not fully recognized, and some people had not appreciated, the essentially central character of most economic functions" (Weir, 1949, p. 251).

### **Political Risk: Prussian Spirit vs. Democracy**

Supporters of the German partition often used the thesis of the *Prussian spirit* and its influence on Germany's aggressiveness in international affairs. They suggested that the loss of traditionally Prussian territories (they got under the Soviet and Polish control) would have a beneficial effect on the formation of a new political

culture of Western Germans. However, opponents of Germany's division did not consider such arguments convincing. So, Carl Landauer (the University of California, Berkeley, the US) expressed the opinion that the separation of Prussian lands from the new German state could not guarantee its greater predisposition to the ideals of democracy. The author supposed the widespread idea that the inhabitants of southern Germany and the Rhine region were more committed to the democratic ideas of peace and freedom than the reactionary inhabitants of Prussia, to be a legend. C. Landauer drew attention to the fact that in the 1920s the main threat to the Weimar Republic came precisely from the southern Germany. He noted that excessive decentralization of Germany was not needed and could be even dangerous. Although, at first glance, Germany would not be able to start a war again without centralized management, the initial stage of preparation might prove more successful just under a decentralized regime. It could create favorable mechanisms for the rise of nationalists and the ultra-right forces, first at the local and then at the national level (Landauer, 1946, pp. 252–253).

Concerns about the possible revival of revanchism in divided Germany were expressed by American researcher Andreas Dorpalen. He argued that the partition of Germany would lead to the disappearance of the last potential buffer in Europe between the West and the USSR and would revive German nationalism. In such circumstances, war would seem to be the only possible way to unite the country. The main task of German nationalists would be to increase tension between the USSR and the Western countries. Germany would create new difficulties in relations between the East and the West and benefit from that. A. Dorpalen noted that “it would be a fatal mistake to consider the partition of Germany as an easy solution to the problem. This can help in solving certain issues, but at the same time it will create other, no less serious problems” (Dorpalen, 1946, p. 597).

Similar ideas were expressed by Ross Berkes in the article “Germany: Test Tube of Peace”, published in early 1947. The author called for maintaining cooperation between the Great Powers as it was the key factor in solving the German problem. The collapse of such cooperation, according to the author, was a much greater threat to peace and security than the hypothetical revival of the German threat with all its brutal force. In his opinion, the country division would lead to the emergence of a “two-world” Germany. A weakened federation in the west would be looking eastward, longing for national unity and strength. Thus, he regarded the cooperation with the Soviet Union and the preservation of quadripartite control as the main task of the Western Allies in Germany (Berkes, 1946/1947, pp. 55–56). The American researcher Russell Hill also expressed concern that the lack of agreement on the German Question would strengthen

the tendency for emerging of two German states, two Europe and two worlds, which would be armed and hostile to each other. From his point of view, it was necessary to reduce the financial costs of the Allies and restore the work of German industry. Germany was to be politically decentralized, but at the same time should stay a single state that includes the territories of the Ruhr and Rhineland, as well as part of the lands that came under Polish control in 1945 (Hill, 1947, pp. 162, 247–249).

Individual authors called social democracy as the best political basis for restoring a united Germany in the post-war world (Landauer, 1946, p. 260). However, the social-democratic government of a united Germany could not satisfy all countries concerned. As the contradictions between the Soviet Union and the US grew, the Western allies became increasingly suspicious of the socialists and social democrats. In the Cold War reality, the social democrats were seen as a potential ally of the left forces, and, therefore, the Soviet government. The democratic elements, which were most widely represented precisely in the social-democratic environment, in the trade unions, did not enjoy the support of Western states. In 1947, amid the difficult economic situation in Germany, as well as deteriorating relations with the USSR, Great Britain and the US made a choice in favor of the creation of a separate West German government.

### **Morgenthau's Line: Why Germany Should be Divided**

First, the concept of post-war German division was substantially presented in the works of the ex-Head of the US Treasury Henry Jr. Morgenthau. His proposals to dismember the state, eliminate the national heavy industry and turn Germany into a rural country were reflected in the book "Germany Is Our Problem" (1945). H. Morgenthau was confident that in the post-war period it would be easier to deal with two German states than with one. From the author's point of view, this would significantly reduce the fears of other European nations about the revival of the German threat: "According to the laws of international arithmetic, two parts are not equal to a single whole. Consequently, the partition of Germany will reduce by half the threat to world security" (Morgenthau, 1945, p. 155). He also criticized proponents of creating a united and strong Germany. Referring to the experience of history, he recalled that conflicts and disagreements between Britain, Russia, France and the United States allowed German militarism to revive after 1918 and unleash World War II. A similar split among the Allies after 1945 might give Germany another chance (Morgenthau, 1946, p. 129).

At the beginning of 1947, American researcher Michael A. Heilperin, while developing Morgenthau's ideas, proposed the exclusion of the rich industrial areas of the Rhineland, Ruhr and Saar from the German state, transferring them to the control of France, Belgium and the Netherlands. According to the author, those territories were to become part of a single European economic zone. That would prevent German aggression in the future. M. Heilperin believed that the creation of a safe and prosperous Europe was incompatible with the restoration of its pre-war structure. The center of political power, according to the author, should be moved from the territory of Germany as far westward as possible (Heilperin, 1946/1947, pp. 24–25). Supporters of the Morgenthau's line maintained their positions until mid-1947, when it was decided to preserve German industry for the sake of the post-war reconstruction of Europe.

### **Economic Checks on German Question: Kennan's Line**

After the failure of the quadripartite negotiations in 1947 and in the face of constantly increasing contradictions between the US and the USSR, the division of Germany began to appear the only possible correct solution to the problem. The change in the policy of the Western states on the German Question was also reflected in the publications of researchers in Great Britain and the US. Since 1948, the vast majority of authors considered the partition of Germany as the least evil and the only possible way out. Thus, the head of the CIA, Allen Dulles, in the article entitled "Alternatives for Germany", noted that any solution to the German Question posed risks. However, there was no more dangerous situation than the ongoing disintegration, which at that time swept Germany at all levels, as well as the rivalry of the occupying powers, which only exacerbated centrifugal tendencies (Dulles, 1947, p. 422).

Analyzing the consequences of the decision to divide Germany into four zones, many researchers came to the conclusion that it was impossible to carry out effective management throughout the country. Harvard University professor Edward Mason noted that the original decision to seize reparations from German occupation zones separately contradicted Potsdam decision to treat her as a single economic unit and was an ominous portent of future events (Mason, 1946, p. 579). Under the conditions of 1948, he considered the partition of Germany the easiest solution to the problem, which would consolidate the influence of each of the Great Powers in a certain part of German territory. However, the partition would also consolidate the split of Europe between the East and the West. US German

policy after that would have to become part of a broader Western European policy. Consequently, the United States would need to be more actively involved in European affairs and provide assistance to individual countries (Mason, 1946, p. 589).

In 1947–1949, the criticism of Morgenthau’s line began to sound more distinctly on the journals’ pages. During that period, the United States and Great Britain recognized the need to solve three interrelated tasks: to reduce national spending in the occupied territory; to restore the German economy and living standards; to prevent left-wing forces from coming to power in Germany. In the absence of an agreement with the USSR, the creation of a separate West German state on the territory of three zones seemed to be the optimal solution to the German problem at that moment (Rodnick, 1948, p. 7; Kindleberger, 1949, p. 68; McCloy, 1946, p. 548). Moreover, in 1947, US Director of Policy Planning George Kennan submitted to Secretary of State George Marshall proposals for the restoration of the European economy, which also included the revival of the German economy. The economic recovery of Europe in the framework of the Marshall Plan, announced in 1947, was not possible without the restoration of the industrial potential of Germany (Bryan, 1991). From that time on, the followers of the Kennan’s line began to gradually supplant the Morgenthau’s line of argument from the pages of influential publications in Great Britain and the US.

For example, American researcher Lewis Brown noted that at one time H. Morgenthau convinced President F.D. Roosevelt to follow the political course which ultimately led to the division of Germany into four zones. The destruction of the political and economic unity had led to a shaky economy that could not stand on its own without external help. The author expressed confidence that political and economic stability in the world depended on European affairs, and the restoration of Western Europe was impossible without the restoration of Germany. L. Brown called for creating a new Germany within the borders of the three zones as soon as possible and transfer of power into the hands of a responsible government, while preserving US general control. The author expressed the common fears of 1947–1949 period – that a devastated and impoverished Europe might welcome the expansion of communist Russia, while “a productive Western Europe will stand in the way of its dictatorial ambitions” (Brown, 1948, p. 89).

American researcher Drew Middleton was confident that the Morgenthau’s plan did not initially correspond to the thesis of “politics is the art of the possible”. Even after the closure of factories and mines, the natural resources would not disappear from German soil and sooner or later someone would want to take possession of them. Taking into account that “Germany is the most important battlefield and the main prize after the War”, the author also considered it neces-

sary to create a separate West German state that would contribute to the post-war reconstruction of Europe (Middleton, 1949, pp. 38, 125).

Realizing the irreversibility of the movement towards the creation of two German states, some authors directly or indirectly expressed concerns about the possible return of Germany to the *Schaukeln* policy and its transition to the Soviet Union side in the Cold War. Professor Gordon A. Craig (Princeton University, the US) was convinced that the struggle for Germany posed many dangers for the Western world. The main one was if Russia won the confrontation and established control over all Germany. But even if the West created a viable West German state, there would be a danger that the power could get in the hands of individuals who have nothing to do with the values of the Western world. Such a state could become a source of upheaval and danger. According to the historian, “that such a state will be an effective bulwark against the Soviet threat is doubtful. [...] The Germans, after all, remember their own history and are aware that, in the 20’s, Soviet Russia – as a counterweight to the West – was a potent instrument in German recovery. The temptation to try to make history repeat itself may be too great to resist” (Craig, 1949, p. 230).

## Conclusion

In the post-war period, the academic community of Great Britain and the US turned out to be divided on the issue of maintaining German unity. In the years 1945–1947, advocates of a united Germany prevailed in publications. They motivated the need to create a single German state by three arguments:

1. United Germany, as an important economic link in the European economy, would help to quickly overcome the consequences of World War II and restore the economic life of the region. The partition of Germany would lead to the disruption of traditional economic ties between German states and Germany’s European partners.
2. The partition of Germany could activate nationalist, ultra-rightist sentiments among the population. Seeking to reunite the country, calling for the return of territorial integrity and former glory, nationalist organizations and parties would become an influential force in the political life of the country. In such a situation, fragile democracy on German soil was unlikely to stand the test of strength.
3. The split of Germany would lead to serious complications in the relationship between the East and the West. This event would become a symbol



of the split of Europe and the world into two opposing systems. A divided Germany, by definition, would seek reunification. For this, it could return to the traditional policy of maneuvering between the West and the East – *Schaukeln* tactic. The Germans' attempts to capitalize on the contradictions between the superpowers could once again put humanity on the brink of a major military conflict.

Simultaneously, there was the Morgenthau's line in the historiography; its supporters adhered to the thesis that it was necessary to divide Germany and eliminate (or significantly reduce) the potential of German heavy industry. After the failure of the quadripartite negotiations in 1947 as well as the beginning of the first Berlin crisis, the creation of an autonomous West German state began to appear to be the best possible solution to the German Question. In publications of 1947–1949, arguments in favor of the partition of Germany obviously prevailed. It was considered as a necessary measure to solve a number of related problems. After the adoption of the Marshall Plan, the authors emphasized the need to restore the German and European economies in order to strengthen the democratic foundations of political life, prevent a social explosion and the coming of leftist forces to power, deterrent ideological march of the Soviet Union in Germany and Europe as a whole. The Morgenthau's plan was harshly criticized by the Kennan's line followers. Its implementation was called incompatible with the new realities of the Cold War, where the role of the main rival passed from Germany to the Soviet Union. In 1949, George Kennan went further and proposed well-known Plan A which supposed the creation of a single German state. But till then international events had gone too far to make that ambitious plan come true.

At the same time, even Kennan's line followers drew attention to the need to maintain common control over the new German government, its foreign policy, and urged not to forget the lessons of history. British and American researchers were particularly concerned about the recollections of Russian-German cooperation and its consequences in the 1920s–1930s and called for caution on the way to a separate West German state.

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