

# Protector and pacifier

**T**he breach of Hitler's "Atlantic wall" on D-Day doomed the Nazi empire. Ten months later *der Führer* was dead, and by May 1945 the Third Reich was kaput. That much everybody knows.

But June 6, 1944, deserves a double entry in the history books—it was not only a military watershed but also a political one. On the "Longest Day," the United States became a European power for good. Although Franklin Roosevelt confided to Stalin at Yalta in February 1945 that U.S. troops would be home in two years, the Stars and Stripes is still fluttering over Europe 50 years later.

That is testimony to the most amazing transformation of American foreign policy since James Madison's 1783 resolution: "The true interest of these states requires that they should be as little as possible entangled in the politics and controversies of the European nations." The Continental Congress unanimously approved.

As they waded ashore in Normandy 161 years later, Madison's heirs thought they were merely re-enacting their fathers' mission in World War I: win and withdraw. Yet the two years foreseen by Roosevelt have stretched into half a century, and therein lies an enduring lesson that neither America nor Europe ought to forget.

Compare and contrast World Wars I and II. In the first, the United States played the legendary lonesome cowboy: Ride in, rid the town of the baddies, ride out. The result was million-fold tragedy for Europe and then for America. With isolationism triumphant, the Continent was left to the mercies of those who cherished neither democracy nor peace. And so American GIs had to fight their way back into Europe a generation later.

**Right question, right answer.** Luckily, Harry Truman was no Warren Harding. He asked the right question: "Which is better for the country—to spend \$20 or \$30 billion [over the next four years] to keep the peace or to do as we did in 1920 and then have to spend \$100 billion for four years to fight a war?"

This time, the United States did not cut and run, and that was the smartest investment of any president since the Louisiana Purchase of 1803—when Thomas Jefferson bought half a continent for \$15 million. Put it this way: What is the value of 50 years' worth of quiet in a place where for 600 years peace was but a pause between wars? In an age in which nuclear weapons have driven the costs of war beyond calculation? Thanks to America, West-

ern Europe became an island of tranquillity after 1945.

In analyzing the American role, historians have usually concentrated on the obvious part: as the sole counterweight to Soviet might and ambition. Yet the United States acted not only as the protector of Western Europe but also as its pacifier. Why did France and Germany link hands in friendship instead of having yet another go at each other? The answer is a three-letter word: U.S.A.

For once, there was a power on the Continent larger and mightier than either. With its 300,000 men and thousands of nuclear weapons, the United States protected the West

Europeans against others and also themselves. America took the existential sting out of the old game of nations, assuring the French against the Germans and vice versa. And its presence allowed the smaller nations to swallow integration with the large because they no longer needed to fear domination.

As Secretary of State Dean Rusk put it in 1967: "Without the visible assurance of a sizable American contingent, old frictions may revive, and Europe could become unstable once more." That truth is worth pondering today as the Russian Army is about to relocate 1,000 miles to the east and as Americans ask why the descendants of Eisenhower's D-Day troops cannot at last go home, too.

First of all, by unshouldering the burden, the United States would also yield its exalted place as power-in-Europe and the influence that goes with the American presence there. It is

hard to conceive of America as a global player without a seat at the European gaming table.

Second, the United States would leave a power vacuum somebody else would seek to fill. And the more recent game of trust and cooperation might revert to the game of rivalry and mutual fear, good for neither Europe nor America.

Third, Russia may be down, but it is not out. Russia, whether ruled by white or red czars, has always been pressing on Europe. A reliable counterweight will help keep Yeltsin's successors on their best behavior.

Finally, the Europeans know all this. Even those who demonstrated against American Pershing missiles yesterday and who rail against U.S. "cultural hegemony" today, speak quite fondly about keeping U.S. forces in place. Shouldn't Americans do so, too?

As a down payment for peace, D-Day continues to pay magnificent returns. There is no better way to honor the fallen than to keep their investment alive. ■



D-Day. Citizens of Normandy greet U.S. liberators.

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