During NATO’s first ten years, the relationship between Britain and Germany was of particular significance. The conflict between the security objectives of these two major members of the Western Alliance played an important role in shaping the policies and institutional interactions within the Alliance as a whole.

A central goal for West German foreign policy was her rehabilitation as a member of international society in general, and her regaining of the freedom of action which had been so heavily circumscribed after 1945 by the Western powers.\(^1\) West Germany’s specific objectives accordingly were:

1. The preservation of West German security against the Soviet threat;
2. Acceptance of the Federal Republic as an equal member of the Alliance with the optimal freedom of action in foreign policy;
3. The reunification of Germany.\(^2\)

The only policy which the Adenauer government perceived as realistic in order to preserve West German security in the face of the Soviet threat was that of the closest possible integration with Europe and the Western Alliance and reliance on United States support. There was an inner tension between this approach to security and the goal of German reunification. It was clear that the path to reunification had to lead through Moscow. The USSR made a number of approaches suggesting that reunification might be possible if Germany were to accept restrictions on her foreign policy, entailing complete neutrality. When rejecting these approaches out of hand, Adenauer had to devise a different concept by which reunification might be achieved, namely ‘reunification from a position of strength’.\(^3\) This policy (\textit{Politik der...}
Stärke) was based on a view of the Soviet Union as being poised on the verge of expansion towards the West. It was therefore of overriding importance to check Soviet aggression. This image of Soviet expansionism was complemented by one of inner weakness through domestic, social and economic problems which, Adenauer believed, the Soviet Union would be unable to solve in the long term. Politik der Stärke implied resistance to all Soviet attempts at political and military expansion, making the situation ultimately untenable for the Soviet Union and compelling it to reach an accommodation with the West.4

Two paradoxical consequences flowed from this approach. By giving over-riding priority to West German security concerns and integration into the Western Alliance, the Adenauer government relegated the pursuit of reunification – despite official denials – to secondary importance. At the same time, the logic of the Politik der Stärke implied a strict commitment to the non-recognition of the status quo and a strong diplomatic campaign to change it. Thus, while in one sense this policy discarded reunification as a practical objective, it was still dominated by it.5

British foreign policy makers in the post-war era had to manage the nation’s transition from world power to regional power status. The point at which this touched British–German relations was Britain’s attitude to Europe. The movement towards integration which for many in continental Europe was the great hope for a new era after two world wars, did not generate the same degree of enthusiasm in London. Britain was particularly hesitant of becoming involved in the various supra-national frameworks which were being developed. There was, of course, a commonality of interests in relation to the defence of Europe and the preservation of the American commitment. Nevertheless, British security policy differed in many respects from that of Germany.

In the first place, Britain’s existing overseas commitments meant that her attention was not exclusively focused on the Soviet threat to Western Europe. Secondly, by the mid-1950s Britain, unlike Germany, had come to consider a deliberate Soviet invasion of Western Europe as unlikely.6 These divergences in security policy were thus based on quite different threat perceptions. Britain’s interests were best served by the mutual acceptance of the status quo. Britain was therefore very interested in pursuing diplomatic means of reducing East–West tension and the risk of military confrontation in Central Europe through arms control and confidence-building measures such as schemes for military disengagement. A major constraint on British policy was lack of resources, making a relaxation in the East–West confrontation