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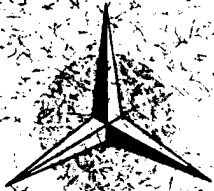
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NATO

Problems and Prospects

May 7-8, 1964



THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
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NATO AND NUCLEAR POLICY

by

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NATO—PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

*Conference of The Center for Strategic Studies,
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NATO AND NUCLEAR POLICY

NATO after 15 Years

It is obvious that the Western Europe of the mid-1960's—rich and innovative, full of self-confidence and *élan*—is, in these vital respects, utterly different from the Western Europe of 1949 when NATO was founded. The Europe of 15 years ago was still suffering from many wounds inflicted during the war; it was impoverished, disillusioned, played out; it lacked nerve. What is not so obvious, especially to many people on this side of the Atlantic, is that the extraordinary change that has occurred in the state of Europe calls for a radical transformation of the NATO alliance, if indeed the alliance will continue for long to serve sufficiently common purposes. At the present time, to be sure, the military recovery of Western Europe is lagging far behind its recovered and growing vitality in non-military activities, and its security still seems to depend heavily on the military power of the United States. However, there have been appreciable changes, in recent years, in European conceptions of the European security problem and in the realities of which these conceptions take account.

On the one hand, there is an inclination, especially in Britain, France, and Italy, to discount the threat of deliberate Soviet aggression for either one of two reasons or for both. Some influential groups view Soviet Russia as a state having undergone profound internal changes since World War II, having become pragmatically preoccupied with problems internal to itself and to what used to be called the Sino-Soviet bloc, having lost much of its revolutionary zeal and, as Peking has noted disapprovingly, showing signs of turning bourgeois in its orientations. Others believe that Soviet leaders have realized the vulnerability of their society in a nuclear war, a war that could be precipitated by minor conflicts, and, not wishing to jeopardize their substantial

achievements in modernizing their country, are deterred from risky courses of military action.

On the other hand, many Europeans have realized that, despite official U.S. assurances to the contrary, the U.S. "nuclear guarantee" of Europe is at least ambiguous, now that the United States also has become vulnerable in a large-scale nuclear war. This impression is reinforced by the recent U.S. insistence in NATO councils that the West requires other options than the threat of massive reprisal in the event of Soviet aggression in Europe. Europeans understand that, in order to cope with such contingencies, the United States might prefer to do so by means of a war limited to Europe and, if possible, waged with conventional arms whose employment may be less likely than tactical nuclear arms to induce escalation to strategic nuclear war. But it is hard for Europeans to share this preference. A limited war conducted in the heart of Europe would cause enormous local destruction. At the moment, at any rate, many knowledgeable Europeans are less interested than the United States in the defense of Western Europe. They prefer the unrestricted balance of terror—the threat of city destruction—to deter aggression altogether.

According to these changes, partly in military realities and partly in their subjective evaluation, both the threat to Western Europe's security and the value of U.S. protection seem to have declined. Under these circumstances, the costs to Europeans of military dependence on the United States are naturally registered more sharply than before. These costs, again subjective as well as objective, are far from negligible even though the United States has used its hegemony, on the whole, with considerable circumspection. The facts are that the military dominance of the United States has reduced its allies' freedom of action in foreign and military affairs, that American policy abroad frequently does not serve European interests or arouse European admiration,

and that the role of military client was bound to frustrate the gathering sense of European pride, dignity, and self-assertion.

General de Gaulle's Position and European Self-Defense

European forces pressing toward a basic reevaluation of relations with the United States are, of course, most manifest in the stand of General de Gaulle, who lets few opportunities pass without underscoring French independence from the United States. No other country in Western Europe is, at present, ready to follow the General's lead. In the Federal Republic and in most of the smaller countries, dependence on U.S. military protection is still keenly appreciated, while Britain, although both major parties feel an urgent need for redressing the balance of military decision making in NATO, is not enamored of the Gaullist posture. Yet, unless the United States responds constructively to growing pressures, France might soon make converts. There is, after all, an influential French "party" in Germany which, though at present inferior to the American "party" in appeal and influence, might well grow at the expense of its rival.

In order to reach a realistic appraisal of the security problem faced by the United States and by the West European nations, we must recognize that it is possible for the Western European countries, within the next five or ten years, to provide for their military security without formal alignment with the United States and, at the same time, to gain a freedom of action uncurbed by such ties.

Continuing Dependence on the United States

Before explaining the reasons leading to this assumption, I must stress two important qualifications implied in my statement. First, even if NATO were abandoned or, though formally continued, became looser and less cohesive, Western Europe would not necessarily forfeit

a degree of military protection by the United States. In both World War I and World War II, the United States came to the aid of Western European nations with which it was not formally allied. Even though the protection now afforded by the United States to its allies has become ambiguous in the sense that neither the Europeans nor the Kremlin can be sure that the United States will risk its own destruction in order to protect its allies under all circumstances, this ambiguous protection probably still commands a great deal of deterrent power. Moreover, even though this protection became less dependable, should the formal alliance lapse, it is, in view of strong American self-interests, unlikely to disappear. The very possibility of American intervention, however uncertain, might suffice to deter Soviet aggression under most, if not all, circumstances, and might, indeed, do so more effectively than any capabilities for retaliation and defense established by the Europeans. My second qualification is that although it is *possible* for our NATO allies in due time to provide for their military security without formal ties with the United States, it is not certain that they *can* and it is not certain that they *will*, even if they can.

French Role in a Militarily Independent Europe

What is the West European potential for a measure of military independence? Let us begin with the case of France. Some years ago, when France began its efforts toward nuclear independence, there were good reasons to doubt both the feasibility and the value of the goal. The enormous expenses incurred year after year by the United States and Russia, and the bitter experience of the British, suggested skepticism. Now, however, it is not at all clear that the French endeavor makes no sense, and the inclination to belittle this endeavor, frequently met with in Britain and the United States, may be governed more by wishfulness than by cold analysis. Uncertainty, to be sure, cuts both ways.

It is impossible to demonstrate convincingly that the *force de frappe* is or is not economically feasible or that, if feasible, it will or will not have appreciable military utility.

In 1963, France's atomic arms program claimed about 15 per cent of her military budget, which, in turn, amounted to less than 7 per cent of her gross national product. Future costs are planned to rise steeply and to these must be added, of course, rising expenditures on delivery vehicles and infrastructure. It may turn out that required outlays will expand much more than the French now anticipate and that other and urgent claimants to the French national income will inhibit the allocation of much larger proportions to defense. It is possible, therefore, that the French program will be stretched out over time, retrenched in scale, and end up producing a capability of symbolic significance perhaps, but of very little military consequence. On the other hand, the French may be able to spend on the *force de frappe* a large share of a rapidly expanding income and, benefiting from a position of imitating rather than innovating arms technology, may succeed in keeping costs within tolerable limits. Equally controversial is the question of technological feasibility. Can the *force de frappe* achieve appreciable military value? At least as long as the delivery of French atomic bombs is limited to a force of Mirage IV's, critics point to the vulnerability of the French retaliatory capability to a disarming first strike and to the great difficulties that aircraft would encounter in penetrating Soviet air defense.

In view of short geographic distances and warning times, a French retaliatory force dependent on the Mirage bombers would no doubt be vulnerable. But, at a cost, vulnerability can be diminished by various measures and, for the period after the 1960's, the French hope to shift to missiles, probably mounted on submarines. Moreover, for the Soviet Union to initiate a disarming strike against France would constitute an

extraordinarily aggressive and, in view of the U.S. posture, extremely risky action. Unless the USSR drastically changes its character as a militarily cautious power, it is hard to imagine circumstances desperate enough to make such an act more than an exceedingly remote contingency. Nor, except under unusual conditions, could the Soviet Union be sure of landing a good enough knock-out blow. As for penetration, though the sum of expert opinion leans toward downgrading the future usefulness of manned aircraft compared with missiles, there seems to be no reliable defense against fast and low-flying bombers at the present time. On the basis of known technology, then, the French may be able to build a striking force good enough to give the Kremlin pause because it could not be certain of not losing a few large Soviet cities to French reprisal.

This qualified conclusion is, however, sensitive to further and radical advances in relevant arms technology. There is a widespread assumption that both the United States and Soviet Russia are at present on a plateau of arms technology, that further refinements of known weapon systems will be achieved, but that no major breakthroughs—such as an economical defense against low-flying aircraft and against rockets—are now probable. If this assumption turns out to be correct, the French are facing no prohibitive technological obstacles. If it is disproved by unforeseen events, France may find herself lagging seriously in technology and, despite vigorous effort, commanding no more than an obsolete or obsolescent force of little military worth.

The military value of the *force de frappe* is not, of course, only a matter of technological feasibility. It is also a question of what the force would be good for. As it is hard to conceive of situations in which a prudent Kremlin would decide to launch a disarming first strike against France, so it is difficult to imagine circumstances under which the French would find it rational to threaten a counter-

city first strike in response to lesser forms of Soviet aggression in Europe or, indeed, in which their threat to retaliate with a countercity attack against a Soviet counterforce strike would have strong credibility. Moreover, as observed in the foregoing, French security may continue to rest primarily on American protection, however ambiguous. The question may well be raised, therefore, of whether the French program makes sense, in terms of French interests, even if the building of the *force de frappe* does not run into insuperable obstacles on economic and technological grounds.

On this matter, again, uncertainties preclude safe prediction. But a French *force de frappe* possessed of a measure of survivability and penetration power surely would add to the Soviet Union's problem if it contemplated aggressive moves in Europe, although how much it could add would depend on various conditions—notably, the degree to which the Soviet Union was deterred by uncertainties about American counter-moves. Likewise, France would surely feel less awed by Soviet attempts at nuclear blackmail or, for that matter, by any United States threats of withdrawing support from her; and whatever choices might be open to the United States in a crisis menacing Europe's integrity, France would be capable of some measure of independent initiative and response. However, the fat dividends from her investment in nuclear power would seem to accrue when no dangerous crisis prevails, and that means most of the time. These dividends would be political rather than military. Enjoying a greater degree of military independence, France would be freer to pursue national interests conflicting with American policy. She would fortify her position as a leading European power, command a stronger voice in international negotiations on disarmament, the organization of Central Europe, and many other matters important to her and, above all, as long as she craved such status, she would have the subjective satisfaction of knowing herself to be an independent nuclear power.

There are, of course, drawbacks to the French nuclear posture. Thus, France may have to neglect investment in education and other bases of strength. She may suddenly find herself disarmed by technological progress. She may give West Germany an emulative incentive. She may push the United States into a dangerously isolationist mood. She must bear the moral compunctions arising from the possession of nuclear weapons. She foregoes the advantage of being a non-nuclear country--the advantage, that is, of being spared nuclear devastation which may be worse than military defeat. Nevertheless, an independent nuclear posture may confer sizable net advantages. One would have to be French and clairvoyant to be sure, one way or the other.

The European Case for Nuclear Independence

If there is a plausible French case for a degree of nuclear independence, it does not, of course, follow automatically that there is an equally or a more plausible European case for such a posture. Beyond doubt, what is--in terms of economic and technological constraints--feasible for France is, in these terms, feasible for Britain and, given time to catch up, for the Federal Republic, perhaps even for some other European countries. Again in these terms, any collaborative or collective European effort would improve feasibility if by "collaborative effort" we mean cooperation toward the production of separate national forces, and by "collective effort" an attempt to produce a joint nuclear force. It must be noted, however, that collaborative and collective programs are apt to involve delay.

What is doubtful is that several West European states, or Western Europe as a whole, would derive as much benefit as France from a measure of nuclear independence. This follows from the subjective values on the basis of which various benefits are necessarily measured.

Not all Europeans hold the same preferences. Other countries may not derive as much enjoyment as France does from asserting their independence from the United States or from the status of being a nuclear power. They may agree with de Gaulle that the independent nation-state remains a strategic organization for social goal-striving but, unlike him, perceive great advantage in a high integration of national efforts. They may be more sensitive to any loss of United States protection that might result from the assumption of an independent, or at least quasi-independent, or pseudo-independent, military posture. Some nations may be more susceptible than France to the moral burden of participating in, and perhaps encouraging, a spreading nuclear arms race. Clearly, the utility to be drawn from an equivalent independent nuclear capability differs with the objective situations of various countries and, besides, is in large measure subjective. Therefore, what is good for the French is not necessarily good for the Germans or the Norwegians—as, indeed, the value of an independent nuclear force is assessed differently by different groups in the same country. For instance, neither the socialists nor M. Monnet and his friends agree with the Gaullists on this matter, and the British Labour Party is at present hostile to British nuclear independence while the majority of the Tories apparently are not.

Because of such differences in situation and preference, the West Europeans as a whole may not opt for the French model even though they are increasingly impatient with their status as military clients of the dominant United States. Some Europeans favor adjustments that would give Europe a greater share in the management of U.S. deterrent power. Others prefer a collective capability—whether a NATO or a European force—although the problem of making decisions on the employment of a collective capability may defy a solution that would not impede its employment and hence reduce the credibility of its use and its military utility. Still others are amenable to "neutralist" arguments.

Nobody can foresee now how our Western European allies will settle their military problem. Yet American behavior will certainly figure importantly among the determining factors. It should be noted that United States policy in and toward NATO will be only one element in what I have called American "behavior." The European public is highly attentive to a wide variety of United States moods and actions, such as, currently, our policy toward Cuba, Peking, and Panama, our record in Southeast Asia, our policy on foreign trade and disarmament, and even to such domestic matters as the Negro problem and the choice of President. Some actions clash directly with European interests while others affect the degree of respect we inspire in European publics.

Determinative as these matters are of the American ability to deal with European governments, the present paper concentrates on United States policy in and toward NATO. Regarding this policy, what are the main American interests involved, and by which means are these interests best served?

U.S. Policy Considerations

In recent years, U.S. policy has been emphatically opposed to the establishment of further independent nuclear forces by our NATO allies and, in order to accommodate some contrary European interests and demands, the United States has pushed the plan for a multilateral nuclear force as a preferred alternative. Among the considerations that have led to this position, five seem to have been of great importance.

First, we are convinced that any proliferation of independent nuclear forces will increase the chance of nuclear war breaking out by accident or design, and hence will make this small planet a less safe place to live in. Second, to the extent that arms control and disarmament may offer opportunities for improving security, we have felt that

the more independent nuclear powers there are, the harder it will be to negotiate and police such arrangements. Third, the increasing realization that cities anywhere, including our own, are virtually defenseless in general nuclear war has made us interested in the possibility of conducting such a war, should it break out, on the basis of a strategy favoring the destruction of military targets and the sparing of cities. Our European allies, however, are unable to afford strategic forces of a kind and size required by this strategy and, besides, regard the threat of retaliatory city destruction as most likely to deter aggression. Fourth, in order to avoid, as much as possible, situations in which the West would face a stark choice between accepting defeat or invoking the mutually destructive balance of terror, the United States has also advocated the expansion of limited-war forces and frowned on European interest in adding to strategic nuclear capabilities for fear that the large expense of doing so would preclude a substantial strengthening of the NATO shield. Finally, the United States has been apprehensive lest the establishment of independent nuclear capabilities in Western Europe would corrode cohesion in the alliance, particularly if such independent capabilities could not be denied to Germany, which, divided in two, cannot be expected to tolerate the present territorial status quo and might, sooner or later, adopt courses of action dangerous not only to herself but to the entire alliance.

Differing Interests

If these considerations chiefly govern U.S. interests in NATO, the first point to notice is that European interests do not necessarily coincide with ours and that NATO is bound to become moribund if we insist that, where interests diverge, NATO must primarily serve our own. Of course, we sometimes persuade ourselves that the true interests of our allies do coincide with ours--that we, in other words, know better what the true European interests are. This is a dangerous delusion.

To be sure, we may know more than our allies about nuclear weapons and other relevant matters. But if we do, the sensible thing would be to communicate such knowledge to the proper authorities. After all, like everyone else, the Europeans must be expected to act upon their interests as they see them. One suspects, however, that differences of interest mostly reflect differences in situations, including geographic location, and differences in values that determine the utility of alternative courses of action. A limited conventional war in the heart of Europe is a different prospect to the Germans than to the United States. If the U.S. "nuclear guarantee" of Europe has become ambiguous, this is bound to be more worrisome to Europeans than to us. If dependence on U.S. nuclear power limits European freedom of action in foreign policy, this is easier for the United States to accept than for France or Britain.

The second point to notice is that the considerations governing our interests are not immutable and that they require, therefore, continuous review in the light of new circumstances. For instance, the conception of a spare-cities strategy did not emerge until after the Kennedy Administration took office and may lose appeal in the future if changes in the structure of opposing forces diminish its feasibility. Similarly, the recent U.S. preference for waging limited conflicts by means of conventional arms may be abandoned if both potential opponents and our allies refuse to take it seriously and to equip themselves for it.

The third point to consider is that we should not let our preoccupation with U.S. interests, formulated some time ago, shut our eyes to the advantages to the United States that may result from the contrary policies of its allies. Thus, provided a combination of economic and technological constraints does not condemn to failure the independent effort of countries of France's size, it should in some measure bolster the deterrent power of the West, especially since the U.S. "nuclear

guarantee" of Europe has become ambiguous. With several governments capable of independent action on the nuclear level, the Soviet Union faces a more complicated and less predictable situation, and the United States may be relieved, in certain crises, from the necessity of making hasty decisions of formidable consequence. Moreover, if Europeans wish to discard their role of protégé and instead assume chief responsibility for their own military security—for which they do command the economic, scientific, and technological resources—they may come to require less American support and perhaps to agree to the repatriation of American divisions. Surely, such a development would not be altogether bad for the United States. Indeed, if such developments materialized over time, the very termination of the NATO alliance would not be without compensating gains. After all, the alliance limits the freedom of action not only of its European members but also of the United States, and it might constrain the United States more in the future than in the past as our position of hegemony diminishes. Finally, the entire world and the entire West, including the United States, might be better off if the European states, singly or jointly, enjoy the freedom and possess the military basis necessary to bring European imagination and resources to bear on the solution of a large variety of international problems. Close alignment may promote strength, though it does not do so necessarily, but it may also produce endless delays and uninspired compromises when it comes to meeting new external challenges. An effective pluralistic structure among the Western nations may well be as healthy and productive as it is within each national community.

These points are not made to prove that on balance recent United States policies in and toward NATO frustrate rather than further American interests. Many of the conditions just discussed refer only to possibilities, not to present-day realities. But, looking sufficiently far ahead, it is not so clear along which directions of policy the net advan-

tages to the United States may lie; and, in any case, the differences in American benefits to be gained from several divergent lines of development may not be as great as is often assumed.

Nevertheless, how well European countries will perform in taking on a larger responsibility and burden for their own security remains uncertain, and the considerations that have impelled the United States to oppose a multiplicity of independent nuclear forces in Western Europe are, taken together, unquestionably weighty at the present time. Nor is there anything wrong about the United States' promoting its own interests even when they run counter to those of its European allies, just as there is nothing wrong about France or other European nations pressing their interests in opposition to the United States.

Alternatives for the United States

What has kept us from recognizing and acting upon these plain facts of international life has been, on the one hand, the remarkable degree of deference that European countries, at least until the renewed rise to power of General de Gaulle, have paid to United States leadership of the alliance. Accustomed to this deference, we may register its diminution with some pain. On the other hand, we have been handicapped by some subtle misconceptions about the nature of the alliance—misconceptions anchored in a great deal of loose talk and wishful thinking about the so-called "Atlantic community." We are on reasonably safe ground if we mean by this term no more than that among many of the countries bordering on the North Atlantic there is an appreciable sharing of values originating in a more or less common heritage, a certain similarity of outlook derived from a high degree of scientific and industrial development, and some congruity of interest in confronting major problems arising outside the region or facing mankind as a whole. However, if by "community" we mean a structure in which an

important category of decisions is subject to a supranational scheme, then an Atlantic community does not exist even in a rudimentary form. The United States surely has never displayed much eagerness to participate in a community that abridges its national prerogatives, and the current trend in Europe is away from rather than toward such a development.

Within the alliance, the United States must obviously yield to European demands, present and future, for a greater role in safeguarding European security. If it does not, the United States nevertheless stands to lose its dominant position as the military director of the North Atlantic alliance and, besides, will find the pursuit of its own national interests grievously frustrated and its authority incessantly challenged. If, on the other hand, the United States is ready for imaginative adjustments, it will cede a degree of its previous dominance in return for constructive compromises between American and European interests. It can then hope to minimize the disadvantages, and maximize the advantages to itself, of Europe's self-assertion.

Whether in its present form the idea of the MLF represents a constructive compromise remains to be seen, and the matter is certainly open to question even though it expresses a genuine American move in the right direction. The crucial test is whether or not it will satisfy actual and potential European demands. Little would seem to be gained if some sort of MLF did come about with only partial and half-hearted European participation, and with the French and perhaps the British unwilling to forego an independent nuclear role. On the other hand, if the MLF can be made more attractive, possibly by ridding it of a special U.S. veto over its employment, and if it received genuine backing from Germany, Britain, and Italy among the larger countries, the fact that France (and perhaps the United Kingdom) continued to maintain a small independent force might then turn out to be of little more

than symbolic significance, and the incentive to nurture these separate forces might gradually diminish.

Conclusions

However, except for this illustration, I do not propose in this paper to examine specific policies and schemes. What I have been concerned with is setting out a basic perspective which, in my opinion, should guide the search for specific policies. My conclusions on perspective may be summarized as follows. The powerful influence over Europe held by the United States in the past rested in large part on anomalous and transient conditions. If the West is taken as a whole, the diminution of this influence is in all probability a sign of vitality. Instead of feeling frustrated and peeved at the passing of United States hegemony, we might derive some pride from it, for this country has contributed significantly to the recovery of Europe, including France, by giving generous economic aid at the critical time and by affording military protection which Europe was incapable of providing for itself. We should begin by acknowledging the basic change in the position of Europe, and we might then announce to our European friends that the United States is prepared to consider any European demands for reorganizing NATO, even for letting the alliance lapse if this is what most West European nations want; and that the United States is ready to conclude any military arrangements that are in keeping with its own interests as well as of those of its allies. If the air were thus cleared, it is my guess that the United States would occupy a strong bargaining position.