

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

*Research
Memorandum*

REU-34, August 13, 1965

322

To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *Thomas L. Hughes*
Subject: The Significance of NATO -- Present and Future

Before long, some of the basic assumptions underlying the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, indeed its very existence in its present form, may face a challenge from France. The following Research Memorandum puts forward, in broad outline, some ideas as to the nature of NATO as the principal framework for U.S.-West European relations. It discusses the significance and especially, the non-military significance, of NATO to its European members. And it attempts to show what the possibilities are for adaptation of NATO into a more useful instrument of U.S. policy in the world as it has changed since the Alliance's birth.

ABSTRACT

The main arguments of this Research Memorandum are as follows:

- (1) NATO has become the generally accepted vehicle for a dominant U.S. presence, politically and militarily, in West Europe.
- (2) When West Europe was weak 10 to 15 years ago, NATO's main function and orientation was military.
- (3) Now West Europe is not only economically and politically strong but considers that the threat of Soviet attack has been replaced by a U.S. -- USSR nuclear stalemate. NATO has therefore become to a considerable degree, in fact though not in form and bureaucratic outlook, an instrumentality for regulating political issues within the West.
- (4) All NATO members, except for France, with its special Gaullist outlook, want NATO to go on and want the U.S. to stay in West Europe, not only for continued security, but also in order not to jeopardize the political equilibrium which NATO ensures in the whole region, especially including West

SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

GROUP 3
Downgraded at 12 year
interval, not
automatically declassified

DECLASSIFIED
Authority 70949

Germany, which might otherwise be a highly disturbing factor.

(5) As long as the U.S. remains committed to West Europe's defense and is militarily present there, the USSR can almost certainly be deterred from aggression on the continent, even if NATO itself does not continue in existence.

(6) Yet, NATO remains essential to the U.S. as a well established and easily available instrument for exercising American political influence in Europe, and it is important for U.S. objectives that France not be seen to be winning out over the U.S. on such a critical issue as NATO's continuance.

(7) If it is also to serve still broader U.S. purposes, NATO should probably try to do more to harmonize the many divergent U.S. and West European political and economic interests both in Europe and on a worldwide basis.

(8) The key factors that will determine whether NATO can evolve in this direction are to be found least in the nuclear field -- the one area where U.S. supremacy is unchallenged by the West Europeans and can scarcely be altered -- but may be substantial in the political field.

SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

DECLASSIFIED
Authority 70949

A series of clearly articulated warnings about French dislike for NATO and French determination either to change the North Atlantic Alliance drastically or to detach France from the Alliance make it probable that, sometime before 1969, the Organization will face a drastic challenge to its continued existence, at least in its present form. In considering how to confront this issue, the United States must first be sure that it has clearly in mind (1) what NATO now represents; (2) what functions it performs on the European scene; and (3) what objectives it fulfills for the United States. With these data in hand, it should be somewhat easier to assess the significance of French presence in or absence from NATO, as well as the feasibility of achieving U.S. aims through some instrumentality other than NATO.

NATO is the expression of the need which West Europe has felt since 1945 for outside military support to counterbalance nearby Soviet power. It provides the framework which institutionalizes and legitimates America's role as the dominant power in West Europe. It has allowed the countries of West Europe, behind the shield of American strength, to concentrate on economic recovery and growth and to devote a smaller share of their resources to defense than either the U.S. or the USSR. The existence of the Alliance has also meant that the U. S. has at least generally consulted these states on matters outside Europe on which, without it, many of them would have had no opportunity either to be informed or to express opinions. On the other hand these states have played an essentially subordinate role to the U.S. The integrated military structure of NATO is dominated by U.S. officers in top command posts, while through the political machinery, the U.S. seeks to line up maximum understanding and occasionally, backing, for its foreign policies on a global basis generally, and within the European-North American region in particular.

The root cause for this state of affairs was the weakness of West Europe after World War II, economically, politically and militarily, combined with the existence of a mighty Soviet military machine that was perceived to have hostile, and perhaps aggressive, intentions. This does not accurately describe the situation which now prevails. True, the Soviet military machine is still powerful and more than a match even for any combination of West European nations by themselves. However, in the general evaluation of West European leaders and public alike, the threat of direct aggression has now considerably receded.

The West Germans attributed this almost entirely to NATO's strength and are inclined to think, or at least, to argue, that there is a real danger that the USSR may return to more menacing policies. Most other Europeans, while not denying the importance of NATO's (i.e., America's) strength for purpose of deterrence and of counterbalancing Soviet political weight, prefer to believe that in addition, the nature of the Soviet problem has changed to a major degree. They ascribe this to the Sino-Soviet dispute, to East European "de-satellization", to a U.S.-Soviet nuclear stalemate, to internal changes within the Soviet Union, to enhanced Soviet interest in developments on other continents, to the general decline of Communist Party strength and action potential in West Europe, and to general Soviet satisfaction with the European status quo. They do not deny that the USSR could revert to direct threats against West Europe, but they think this unlikely, even if they allow for ups and downs in the level of East-West detente.

SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

DECLASSIFIED
Authority 70949

Not only is the original military rationale for NATO's existence thus somewhat undercut in West European eyes, but there has also been a drastic change in the other crucial causal factor, West Europe's weakness. In spite of the loss of colonies and empires, the West European states have new worldwide political prestige as stable and developed countries. Moreover, they have made unprecedented economic progress, and, far from being economically dependent on the United States, they are equals in a tremendous variety of commercial, financial and economic links. They bargain actively and fearlessly on these questions with America, and Washington must take their views and proposals into account.

From their newly-won positions of strength vis-a-vis the United States, and in the current absence of any serious fear of Soviet aggression, the West European nations are able to re-examine their relationship with the United States, against which they have a number of cumulative grievances, big or little, real or imagined.

There is envy of U.S. wealth and power, particularly by countries that were themselves formerly world powers. There is noticeable unhappiness about the fairly consistent American failure to consult with and take advice from its NATO allies before undertaking major new policy departures, even though they must often share the consequences. There is resistance against American attempts to enroll its allies into supporting U.S. policies elsewhere in the world which are of little or no concern to West Europeans, or which may not accord with specifically West European interests. There is often a dislike for the style and tone in which U.S. foreign policy is conducted. There are residual resentments over such incidents as Suez. There is concern, especially among the smaller powers and in Socialist circles, about Washington's supposed tendency to support reactionary regimes and causes.

While these feelings exist fairly broadly under the surface, they are outweighed in most West European countries by other factors which continue to make the U.S. presence and even its political and military pre-eminence not only tolerable but positively desirable. Indeed, only the French Government has come to an opposite conclusion and, in consequence, launched an active campaign to undo NATO and the American role. Why this divergence of outlook between France and the other 13 NATO members has come about, and what it implies for NATO's future, is well worth examining.

Relatively little need be said here about France's current posture. Essentially, de Gaulle has decided that his overriding purpose will be to restore France to a leading position in world affairs from which it can act "independently" in regard to political and military problems. Not only does American involvement in Europe inhibit such a French role and make it seem of only secondary importance, but, in de Gaulle's view, U.S. "hegemony" also prevents certain desirable regional policies from being realized. These thwarted policies would include a West European rapprochement with Eastern Europe and the USSR, and the emergence of, first, West European states and, eventually, all European states, acting in concert (perhaps in confederation), as an independent power base with its own global interests to pursue and protect. The only solution, therefore, is for France to work to undermine the NATO structure, which it sees as a key instrumentality for preserving the present American position in Europe.

The other West Europeans (and Canada) share to a degree some of de Gaulle's general aspirations for enhancing Europe's stature, but they strongly disagree with the means which he seeks to employ to attain his ends. They believe that West Europe is not ready for a return to its old (prewar) habits of power politics which could again propel the nations of the continent into rival power groupings, promote nationalism, and disturb indispensable cooperative ventures in economic and other fields. They are most especially anxious not to turn West Germany loose into such an environment because they cannot see where that country would lead them amidst the uncertainties of the unyielding problems of Germany and Central Europe. They are much less certain than de Gaulle of the feasibility of taming the USSR and freeing the Soviet satellites in a new framework of "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals". As a consequence of these various factors, they feel a genuine need for the U.S. presence in this situation, and they value NATO as the established modality through which America can easily and almost painlessly make its power operative in preserving West European stability.

For West Europeans, therefore, NATO is now a framework within which they have achieved and can maintain a certain (satisfactory) political equilibrium among themselves. NATO integrates West Germany into their region without upsetting the balance, because even Germany is greatly overshadowed by the U.S. NATO sharply reduces the scope for traditional power politics among the West Europeans;* indeed, it also provides an umbrella beneath which the embryonic institutions of West European economic and political unity can grow. NATO encourages habits of joint international planning and stabilizes the foreign and domestic policies of its members. It also permits the West Europeans the luxury of not spending as much on defense as they would probably have to do in its absence (because of the U.S. commitment), and it gives military assurance about such worries as they still entertain concerning Soviet military capabilities and intentions.

By and large, the foregoing catalogue also covers current American interests in West Europe. Fundamentally, the U.S. wants a stable and prosperous North Atlantic area, which is growing internally towards greater unity of purpose and towards greater understanding of its long-range similarity of interest with the United States vis-a-vis both the USSR and the rest of the world. Washington opposes any tendencies to a revival of internal dissensions within West Europe or to any resurgence of hostility between East and West Europe, whether because of Germany or any other serious problem. To ensure against such contingencies, as well as to safeguard its own commercial and political interests in West Europe, the U.S. wants to safeguard its position of great influence in the area. No means of accomplishing these objectives is likely to appear which will be as efficacious as NATO.

* See RM REU-30, "Western Europe Looks at Germany," August 4, 1965, Confidential/No Foreign Dissem/Controlled Dissem.

That these vital political arrangements have to be rationalized in the context of a military alliance imposes certain problems. There is inevitable pressure for this alliance to justify itself by references to a Soviet menace, even though this menace is less actively felt than it was. The orientation of NATO's military and civilian bureaucracies is quite naturally toward military problems and solutions, and there is the danger that this can lead to an overly expensive emphasis on confrontation with the USSR and to an immobility when it comes to exploiting opportunities to decrease East-West tension. Nevertheless, this is a problem that alert political leadership should be able to minimize, and, in any event, it does not appear to pose so serious an issue that the other many manifest advantages of NATO for the United States should be surrendered.

In fact, from a strictly military point of view, NATO in its existing form is probably not now indispensable to American purposes, nor will it be over the next five years or so. The protection which the U.S. now extends to the West European countries could presumably be managed by a series of bilateral or other agreements. These agreements, perhaps supplemented by arrangements for loose staff and planning coordination among Alliance countries (a concept often associated with de Gaulle), while less dependable and effective than the NATO system, would still probably suffice to avert an active and credible Soviet military threat to Western Europe. Indeed, as long as the U.S. remains militarily committed to and present in the area, and as long as the general U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear balance stays unimpaired, it is unlikely that Soviet military strength will be able to disturb West Europe psychologically, whatever the framework for military alignment among the North Atlantic countries. In other words, the resulting situation might be less satisfactory for preparing for a war, or for fighting one if worse came to worst, but it would probably be sufficient to deter one.

This, however, is no justification for complacency about NATO. It is important for the protection of American interests in Europe and for American influence there that France not be seen to be winning its battle against the U.S. presence. It is important that West Germany not be cast adrift politically and not be forced down a road which would require it to create a high command structure that does not now even exist (because all Bundeswehr forces are committed to SACEUR). It is important that countries such as Denmark, with anti-military traditions, have an acceptable way, such as via NATO, to justify a military establishment. It is important to have a forum where the many political issues of common concern to NATO member countries, or even of individual concern to a few of them, can be aired and discussed.

Despite these values of NATO, however, France's European fellow members of the Alliance do not want to make the issue of NATO's continued existence

DECLASSIFIED

Authority 70949

the occasion for a final show-down between France and its allies. France is involved in a host of regional relationships with other European countries outside of NATO, to which great importance is attached. This is especially true of the Benelux nations, Germany and Italy, which, with France, make up the three European Communities. As much as these states regret Paris' attitude toward NATO, they strongly hope to avoid active conflict with France on that subject. If France insists on leaving NATO, they cannot stop it, but they seek to avoid giving Paris any pretext for such a move, and they would prefer that the parting take place with minimal fuss and minimal repercussions in other fields. In fact, if France eventually left NATO, they would hope to work out a modus vivendi even on military matters and to effect a restoration of French participation in NATO affairs after de Gaulle's departure from active rule.

This situation points to the general desirability of maintaining as much of the NATO organization as is possible even if France withdraws.* This is not to pretend that, quite apart from the serious military, logistic and strategic problems raised by French departure, there would not be grave political consequences for Western Europe. A West European organization without France would be something less than a healthy and normal political animal. Yet, all problems would only be heightened by abandoning the field to France. Indeed, the most likely way of inducing Paris to reverse field -- after de Gaulle, and assuming that de Gaulle will, before his demise, have pulled France out of NATO -- would be to demonstrate that the resolve of the other 14 NATO states to remain united is firm and that France has only harmed itself rather than profited from its unpopular actions. Besides, the clearly evident determination of the 14 to stick with NATO might even induce modifications in de Gaulle's tactics and short-run goals during any negotiations that France might initiate with its allies, from 1966 on, regarding modifications of NATO.

There does not, then, appear to be any serious reason why NATO should not be able to carry on, with adjustments, and with a willingness to allocate new funds for vital alternate infrastructure facilities, in spite of French disruptive tactics. However, this is by no means the same as saying that the other member states are entirely enamored with conditions in the Alliance as they are.

Even when the position of France is set aside, it cannot any longer be thought that NATO's European members are prepared to accept without question, either the total identity of their interests with those of the United States, or the judgment of the United States as to what policies and actions are in their interests. They well understand that the United States, as a super-power, confronts problems and bears responsibilities entirely commensurate with their own. Yet their membership of NATO involves or potentially involves

* For a discussion of de Gaulle's policy toward the Alliance and the circumstances in which he may decide to leave it or remain in it, see RM REU-17, "De Gaulle and the North Atlantic Alliance," (May 4, 1965) (Secret/No Foreign Dissem/Controlled Dissem).

them in the consequences of American actions in many parts of the world. Thus, while they do not overestimate the extent to which their views and wishes can be taken into account by the United States in the conduct of American foreign policy on a global basis, they understandably want a chance to make these views known beforehand. In cases where they have immediate interests, they want these to be given due weight. As a minimum, they want to be able to cover their political flanks domestically in advance of U.S. action, instead of being caught short by faits accomplis. They argue that they will be able to support the U.S. more effectively at home if they are prepared for U.S. actions rather than surprised by them.

Unless possibly divergent U.S. and West European interests on many problems can be aired ahead of time, and unless the U.S. can give the appearance -- and occasionally the substance -- of taking its allies' views carefully into account before finally adopting positions and basic policies, the existing strains in the NATO fabric will continue (though this is not to say that they will, by themselves, rend NATO assunder). To be sure, no one in West Europe expects the U.S. to withhold action in any urgent crisis, such as in 1962 over Soviet missiles in Cuba, until it has first consulted its allies. And also, it is true that there are already many subjects on which there is advance discussion in the North Atlantic Council -- Germany, Berlin, certain moves vis-a-vis the USSR, some disarmament matters, export controls, etc. Yet, there are many other matters which NAC learns about ex post facto, or else only bilaterally, or through the press.

Washington's past diagnoses of NATO's problems have not been concentrated in this political area, but, rather, in the military field. Indeed, since 1959, there have been a number of American efforts to give the appearance of a multilateralization of influence and, to a lesser degree, of control in the nuclear field. The Athens Guidelines of 1962, the establishment of a NATO Nuclear Committee, and Secretary McNamara's recent plan for a NATO "Select Committee" are examples of the ingenuity of the United States; and the MLF/ANF project, though it aims to promote a number of broad objectives, also concerns itself with nuclear-military arrangements.

Nevertheless, it is well to reiterate that the nuclear field is precisely the one area where the U.S. role is not only the most recognized and accepted by almost all other NATO members, but also the one where the least can be done substantially to change the existing state of affairs. The West Europeans are aware that the hard facts of nuclear arms and missile research and production, the long U.S. head start over any West European country, the strong American impulse against nuclear proliferation, and Washington's unreadiness to surrender ultimate decision-making power over the use of U.S. nuclear weapons all pose sharp limits to "nuclear sharing" plans under American auspices. (This, of course, does not mean that they would deprecate whatever moves can be made in this field in practical ways to devise palliative measures which can soothe whatever Allied sensitivities may exist over the conspicuousness of U.S. nuclear predominance.)

DECLASSIFIED

Authority 70949

Even if nuclear problems have been allowed to become one of NATO's most prominent preoccupations, a more significant question may still be the extent to which NATO can and should be used as a forum for the discussion and formulation of broad policies on such issues as moves in the United Nations, basic disarmament proposals, actions in regard to Communist China, tactics in the Middle East, plans for coping with potential crisis points before the crises happen, and so forth.

The choice for the United States seems to lie between, on the one hand, routinely submitting important foreign policy decisions to the advance scrutiny, comment, and perhaps even modification of its NATO allies, and thus surrendering, if only to a limited extent, its uninhibited freedom of action, and, on the other hand, a continuation or even an intensification of the lack of political cohesiveness in the Alliance. It is not suggested that this lack of cohesiveness is fatal to the Alliance, but only that NATO is not likely to evolve as a more tightly knit political alliance (if this is what Washington believes to be desirable) unless the U.S. can and does incorporate the interests of its allies, as expressed by them, into its own decision-making process.

Merely to put the question in this way may expose so many difficulties as to make the answer obvious that greater inter-Allied political consensus is a will-o-the-wisp, hardly attainable on a global basis. Even in regard to the future shape of Western and Eastern Europe, there are some major differences of objective among major NATO members, such as Great Britain, France, and Germany. In respect to the rest of the world, divergencies are still more evident. Many NATO countries would be content to adopt fairly neutral positions on the conflicts and tensions of Asia, Africa and Latin America; they are less than enthusiastic over U.S. involvement. Others have their own special interests, such as Portugal's in Africa or Britain's in the Far East, which will not get broad NATO support.

It may therefore well be pondered whether such broad-ranging U.S. consultation -- assuming that the security difficulty of possible leaks in NAC could be overcome -- would improve inter-Allied relationships unless they actually helped to achieve a meeting of the minds, at least in some instances. Yet, as noted, there is a serious question whether a meeting of minds on important issues (except, perhaps, European issues) can often be achieved when the 15 nations involved have so many dissimilarities in their respective views of proper policies for given problems and crises. This memorandum does not suggest that there is an easy answer to this query, but only that it should be recognized that it is here that the problem of NATO's future evolution lies, rather than in NATO's military or organizational aspects.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority 70949

**NATIONAL
SECURITY
ARCHIVE**

This document is from the holdings of:

The National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu