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**UNITED STATES NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY TOWARDS
THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION
DURING THE KENNEDY AND JOHNSON ADMINISTRATIONS,
1961-1969**

A Dissertation

by

MICHAEL EDWARD MCKNIGHT

**Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 1997

Major Subject: History

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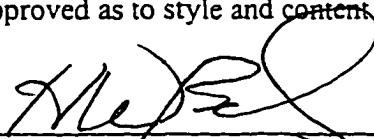
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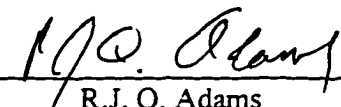
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ABSTRACT

United States National Security Policy Towards
the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

During the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969. (August 1997)

Michael Edward McKnight, B.A.; B.A., Texas A&M University

M.A., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. H.W. Brands

This doctoral work in National Security Affairs discusses the NATO policies of both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, advancing the thesis that these presidents successfully implemented U.S. national security policy by respectively utilizing flexible response and détente to guide the North Atlantic Treaty Organization through circumstances and events that were far different from those in 1949. The chapters covering the Kennedy years emphasize the archival material at the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Presidential Library, while the analysis of the Johnson record relies on the collections at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library. In addition to these declassified materials, the research includes several other significant sources, such as published government document collections, interviews, memoirs, and monographs.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense
ASD/ISA	Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJCS	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
DCI	Director of Central Intelligence (CIA)
DI	Directorate of Intelligence (CIA)
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
ExComm	Executive Committee of the NSC
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
ICBMs	Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles
INR	Bureau of Intelligence and Research (State)
IRBMs	Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
MLF	Multilateral Force
MRBMs	Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization & NATO Headquarters
NPG	Nuclear Planning Group
NSC	National Security Council
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander, Europe
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe
USDP	Undersecretary of Defense for Policy
USIA	United States Information Agency
USNATO	U.S. Mission to NATO
WEU	Western European Union

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since its inception in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has undergone many transformations, all the while playing a pivotal role not only in the often heated events of the Cold War but also in the momentous developments which occurred after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. While both scholars and public servants are familiar with the general role which the U.S. has played in NATO since 1949, a detailed knowledge of such critical periods as the 1960s is often lacking. Members of my generation, who were too young to remember Lyndon Baines Johnson, much less John Fitzgerald Kennedy, interpret U.S. foreign policy during the 1960s solely in terms of the Vietnam war. For those who were old enough to remember, the conflict in Southeast Asia grabbed such attention that interest in the events in Europe was set aside. As this study shows, events in NATO during the 1960s (for that matter, the entire scope of European security during this period) defined the general parameters of American national security policy. They also laid the groundwork for the way policymakers currently implement decisions in the interest of U.S. national security.

Besides delineating NATO developments during this period, I hope to give readers a better appreciation for these developments, and also for the policymakers involved, most notably Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. In this regard, I advance the thesis that they successfully implemented their NATO policies by respectively utilizing flexible response and détente at a time when the North Atlantic alliance reached a crossroads in the Cold War. Flexible response was the Kennedy administration's response to massive retaliation. Although the NATO allies were wary of the new strategy because of a perception that the former strategy served as a better deterrent

against any Soviet encroachment, as the 1960s progressed, these allies gradually accepted flexible response, until the North Atlantic Council, meeting in ministerial session, formally adopted it as NATO policy in 1967. While the U.S. government was implementing flexible response, the NATO allies, most notably the West Germans, were advancing the concept of détente as a way of accommodating the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the Cold War. The Johnson administration readily accepted the concept, but was prevented from fully utilizing it by such events as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Despite shortcomings which were inherent in U.S. national security policy, such as the application of the Cold War throughout the world, particularly in Vietnam, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson strongly guided NATO at a time when the North Atlantic Alliance was responding to circumstances and events which were far different from what either Harry S. Truman envisioned in 1949 or George H.W. Bush oversaw forty years later in 1989.

To date, no comprehensive survey of this period in NATO history exists, primarily because the documentation has just now become available. While several volumes have been written about Kennedy's role in world affairs, primarily as it dealt with the Cuban missile crisis, and while scholars, such as H.W. Brands (*The Wages of Globalism*) and Paul Hammond (*LBJ and the Presidential Management of Foreign Relations*), have begun to survey Johnson's role in topics not limited to Vietnam, no one has undertaken to write a comprehensive historical study of NATO during the tumultuous 1960s.

A project of this magnitude obviously calls for a careful examination of all the available archival material. However, to do so would entail examining the archives of all NATO states.¹

¹ The NATO archives in Brussels, for this period, will not be open for research until 1998.

For purposes of this research, this author has examined all available declassified material which the U.S. government generated.

I have limited my discussion of NATO primarily to the U.S. role in order to signal scholars, as well as policymakers, to the way the U.S. defined its relationship to NATO during the 1960s, particularly since the North Atlantic alliance continues to play a dominant role in U.S. national security policy. This study provides lessons which policymakers could use to implement European security in the post-Cold War period.

The research relies upon the examination of the available declassified documentation, which includes the holdings of both the Kennedy and Johnson presidential libraries. Since the purpose of this study is to discuss the relationship of NATO to U.S. national security policy, I have covered the complete machinery and process of American foreign (i.e. State Department), defense (i.e. the Pentagon), and intelligence (i.e. CIA) policy. I also analyze the role of the National Security Council (NSC), as well as all military organizations and related embassies and missions (most notably, the U.S. mission to NATO, USNATO). I also include material from all pertinent summits and ministerial meetings (particularly as they refer to the North Atlantic Council). The research focuses primarily on issues of the relationship of defense to U.S. national security policy, particularly as it relates to NATO. To supplement this, I include other document collections, such as the *Foreign Relations* series, interviews with several of the key policymakers, including former cabinet members (such as Dean Rusk), and ambassadors (most notably Harlan Cleveland), as well as several memoirs.

The work discusses such topics as NATO's prickly relations with Charles de Gaulle, the MLF (multilateral force), the nuclear sharing issue, and Vietnam -- all of which played prominent roles throughout the 1960s. At the same time, I include sections on NATO out-of-area problems

since they influenced the ways in which the United States conducted bilateral relations with each of the NATO states as well as affecting NATO policy . In addition, I assess such crises as Berlin, Cuba, de Gaulle's March 1966 action, as well as the Czech crisis to show the ways in which NATO redefined itself.

I would like to thank the Department of Defense, in particular the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) for allowing me to assume NATO- related roles in the post-Cold War period of international security. I especially thank Clarence Juhl for his willingness not only to examine the manuscript but also to circulate it among colleagues at the U.S. Mission to NATO. I'm also grateful for the cooperation of several interviewees for their willingness to offer me candid remarks of the roles they played during this period. At the same time, I thank the archivists at both the Kennedy and Johnson Libraries for assisting me in gaining access to pertinent archival sources. In particular, I thank Regina Greenwald at the Johnson Library for her work in securing quick declassification of classified information. Moreover, I'm grateful for the help which Lawrence Kaplan, affiliated with the OSD Historical Office, and Harlan Cleveland, former U.S. ambassador to NATO, have given me in preparing the manuscript. I also thank the German-American Academic Council, as well as Gustav Schmidt, for enabling me to travel to Bochum, Germany to share my research findings with European colleagues in an Experts' Meeting at Ruhr University.

Next, I thank my alma mater, Texas A&M University. In particular, I'm grateful for A&M's financial support in my research endeavors at the Kennedy Library. I especially thank H.W. Brands and the other members of my doctoral advisory committee.

Finally, I wish to thank my family, my parents in particular, as well as a few Texas and Washington-based good friends for bearing with me while I was completing this work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

EISENHOWER, DE GAULLE, KHRUSHCHEV, AND NATO AFFAIRS, 1958-1961

The 1958-1961 period, which marked the close of the Eisenhower years, witnessed events and decisions which directly affected the way Kennedy and Johnson conducted their respective NATO policies in the 1960s. By now, NATO was approaching the tenth anniversary of its existence. Though the structure of European affairs had changed considerably from that which was in place in 1949, the outstanding dispute between the Soviet Union and the United States continued. Because of such unresolved issues as the permanent status of Berlin as well as the failure of the key NATO allies to reach an understanding with Nikita Khrushchev at the 1960 Paris Summit, debate ensued on both sides of the Atlantic over the best way to manage the Cold War. In the United States, as President Eisenhower was preparing to leave the White House, the question remained whether or not his successor would continue his strategy of massive retaliation. In Western Europe, statesmen, realizing that the region had rebounded from the chaos of 1945 while also sensing that the Cold War would continue for the foreseeable future, began to press both the U.S. and the Soviet Union to reach some sort of a workable arrangement, a *détente*, whereby both could, at the very least, reach an understanding on some, if not all, of the outstanding issues which had divided Europe since the end of World War II. Although de Gaulle advocated this posture during this timeframe, his behavior toward NATO indicated that he intended to force the alliance to accept a greater role for France at the risk of isolating himself

This dissertation follows the style of *Diplomatic History*.

from the other allies. As the events surrounding the Berlin crisis of 1959 showed, Khrushchev was not about to reach an understanding with the West on any significant Cold War issue. While the Eisenhower administration desired to manage both de Gaulle and Khrushchev, it also tried to reinvigorate the Alliance by promoting the MLF initiative, which the Kennedy and Johnson administrations tried to implement in the 1960s.

de Gaulle

On June 1, 1958, Charles de Gaulle returned to the Elysee Palace with the commencement of the Fifth Republic. Returning to lead France amidst the continuing problems in Algeria, General de Gaulle sought to reinvigorate French foreign policy by pulling it away from the perceived designs of both the United States and Britain. Although he advocated greater understanding between the Soviet-controlled East bloc and the U.S.-dominated West, he, nonetheless, wanted France to exert its own assertive foreign policy. While the U.S. government respected his concerns, the Eisenhower administration wanted France to remain on good terms with the alliance out of a concern that NATO otherwise could not effectively prepare for any contingency from the Warsaw Pact.

By the late 1950s, U.S. influence over the allies had diminished. During the mid-1950s, outbursts of anti-Americanism became rampant in France as a result of Eisenhower's criticism of France's handling of the Algerian crisis.¹ De Gaulle challenged American command of Western

¹ Robert F. Kuisel writes in his study on Franco-American relations that "after 1954 and before de Gaulle's return in 1958 there were further outbursts of anti-Americanism caused by troubles in the NATO alliance. Colonial struggles continued to promote anti-Americanism among the French public, which tended to blame the United States for the predicament in North Africa. Robert F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 23-24.

Europe's military by removing French units from NATO's integrated force. After coming to power, he also pulled French naval units out of NATO and refused to reintegrate into NATO those army divisions returning from the colonial wars in Algeria. De Gaulle also began to question NATO's first premise: that the U.S. would retaliate against a Russian invasion of Western Europe with an atomic assault on the Soviet heartland. The security of America's nuclear umbrella became an urgent question in 1958 and again in 1961 when the Russians precipitated crises over Berlin.

Within a year of de Gaulle's return to power, U.S. policymakers had already discerned the negative aspects of de Gaulle's NATO policy. His challenge to American hegemony in Western Europe as well as his brusque manner bothered American policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic. In commenting about the Soviet threat during this period, de Gaulle wrote that he "... considered that the world situation was very different from what it had been at the time of the creation of NATO." He postulated that "it now seemed fairly unlikely that the Soviets would set out to conquer the West, at a time when all the Western nations were back on an even keel and making steady progress." To him, communism, "whether it rises from within or erupts from without, has little chance of taking root without the help of some national calamity."²

At the same time, de Gaulle set out to increase French influence in alliance policy by proposing the establishment of a three-power consultative body for global policy coordination. Calling it a directorate, de Gaulle presented this proposal in his first meetings with American and British leaders after his return to power in 1958. He sent a memorandum which outlined the contours of the proposed directorate to both President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Macmillan. De Gaulle wrote his American and British counterparts that he did not feel that

NATO was fulfilling French security needs. In his memoirs, de Gaulle explained his reasons for pushing this concept by writing that he wanted “to disengage France, not from the Atlantic alliance, which I intended to maintain by way of ultimate precaution, but from the integration realized by NATO under American command I called in question our membership of NATO which, I declared, was no longer adapted to the needs of our defense.”³

Needless to say, neither the British nor the American governments warmly received this proposal. The British disliked it because they believed that it would undermine the Anglo-American "Special Relationship" as well as disrupt alliance cohesion. Eisenhower's reply came on October 20, 1958. Although he agreed that a dangerous threat to the free world did exist, Eisenhower argued that “. . . it was necessary to avoid doing anything that would destroy or set back ‘this developing intimacy among all the members of NATO and the closer bonds it forges.’” He further argued that “the impression must not be given to the rest of the allies ‘that basic decisions affecting their own vital interests are being made without their participation.’” Eisenhower then stated that “he foresaw serious problems ‘both within and outside NATO’, in any effort to amend the North Atlantic Treaty so as to extend its coverage beyond the areas presently covered.”⁴

The Eisenhower administration tried to downplay this independent French posture.⁵ In December, Dulles told Eisenhower that “de Gaulle is becoming increasingly troublesome.”

² Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 200-201.

³ De Gaulle, 202-203. In her book on NATO, Elizabeth Sherwood writes that “although de Gaulle initially envisaged the Directorate as a Triumvirate steering group integrally limited to the alliance, his fundamental objective was the alignment of global – and specifically nuclear – policy among NATO's three principal powers.” Elizabeth Sherwood, *Allies in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 106.

⁴ Sherwood, 106.

⁵ British opposition to the Directorate centered on the view that not only could it disrupt the cohesion of NATO but it could also disrupt the “special relationship,” which was just now recuperating from the Suez war.

Eisenhower also sounded the warning against de Gaulle.⁶ France continued its trend of growing increasingly distant from the Atlantic alliance. The French government was now seeking ways of controlling those naval forces committed to NATO in the Mediterranean, an action which the Eisenhower administration opposed.⁷ At the same time, de Gaulle prohibited the introduction of American strategic nuclear weapons as well as their launchers in France. Moreover, he called for both the sharing and global cooperation of American nuclear weapons, knowing that this would cause fissures within the alliance.

When Dulles traveled to Paris in July 1959 to defuse the growing tension over the directorate proposal, he attempted to placate de Gaulle by inviting the French to participate in tripartite military consultations. Although he realized that his tripartite proposal was now dead, de Gaulle, nonetheless, continued to take additional steps to distance France from NATO. Such initiatives included barring US nuclear-equipped fighters in France as well as removing the French fleet from the NATO Mediterranean Command.⁸

Even so, notwithstanding de Gaulle's divisive actions within the alliance, the French president was responding to the changing nature of European affairs. To this end, de Gaulle began to promote a way of dealing with the Soviets which did not threaten their sovereignty.

⁶ In the second volume of his seminal biography on Eisenhower, Stephen Ambrose also writes that in a later NATO meeting in Paris, de Gaulle argued that either France participate as an equal partner in America's global decisions or France would cease its military participation in the Atlantic alliance. Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Vol. 2* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984).

⁷ Noted NATO historian Lawrence Kaplan writes that "the Mediterranean in particular was an area of historical interest for the Russians. Communist support of Nasser's ambitions for Arab leaders or of the Algerian struggle for independence was an issue that concerned more than just the southern flank of NATO. Yet Soviet efforts were marked more by failure than success. Lawrence Kaplan, *NATO and the United States* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 85.

⁸ Phillip H. Gordon comments on the following regarding the underlying themes in de Gaulle's foreign policy: "The policies developed by French leaders in the 1960s had their roots that were clearly planted in the years that preceded de Gaulle's return to power in the sense that the leadership of the Fourth Republic had to make national security policy 'in the same bipolar world and divide Europe as de Gaulle,' a world in which French influence, like that of other European states, was sarcastically reduced." Philip H. Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4.

This concept, commonly referred to as *détente*, would not reach its fruition until the U.S. government began to take it seriously during the Johnson administration. De Gaulle explained his views of *détente* by writing in his memoirs that “in my view relations between East and West should not be treated solely from the angle of rivalry between ideologies and political systems. True, Communism loomed large in the present international tension,” but he believed that *détente* would only gain credibility if “it were based on national realities.” He explained this posture by writing that while a “technical deal on armaments between Washington and Moscow might help matters,” this alone “could not be a real solution, any more than would an agreement, however spectacular, of mutual give and take concluded by the two camps each assembled in its entirety under the aegis of its protector.” He explained this view by writing that “this would serve only to perpetuate the two blocks, whose very existence precluded a true peace.”⁹

With increasing vigor, de Gaulle pushed for France’s case vis-à-vis NATO. Even before Eisenhower left office, U.S. policymakers discerned that not only was he unhappy with the NATO arrangement, but also that he contemplated bolting the Alliance. Though de Gaulle promoted *détente*, he did not do it as forcefully as the West Germans eventually did in the 1960s. Even then, de Gaulle continued to advocate, as he did in these early days of the Fifth Republic, that only France was strong enough to stand between the two superpowers.

Khrushchev and Berlin

Khrushchev gave almost no indication that he was interested in abating the Cold War. In fact, he gained a reputation for issuing some of the most colorfully belligerent rhetoric of the

⁹ De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 212.

period. Chairman Khrushchev showed no signs of seeking a middle ground with the West. In fact, he avidly solicited formal recognition for Soviet gains made at the end of World War II. Eisenhower, on the other hand, was not about to abandon the NATO allies just to please Khrushchev. Nowhere was this more evident than in the crisis which Khrushchev precipitated over the permanent status of Berlin. Not only did this crisis, and subsequent events, show the willingness of both the U.S. and NATO to stand firmly against the Kremlin, but the events also demonstrated that a détente was not yet possible.

The permanent status of Berlin influenced the way the U.S., as well as NATO, confronted the Soviets over their territorial rights within the divided city. Khrushchev wanted to legitimize the Soviet hold in East Germany by blocking NATO accesses (i.e. the U.S, France, and Britain) to the city. He precipitated an East-West confrontation over the status of the city on November 10, 1958, when he announced his intention of signing at an early date a peace treaty with East Germany, an action that would terminate allied rights in West Berlin. Should that happen, the allies would have had to deal directly with the German Democratic Republic, GDR, a regime that did not extend diplomatic recognition to the West, in order to supply the 10,000 allied troops in Berlin across 110 miles of East German territory. In so doing, NATO would have had to acknowledge the legitimacy of the East German regime and accept the permanent division of Germany, something which the U.S. and its allies had steadfastly refused to do. The NATO allies resolved to do nothing of the sort, pointing out that the British-French-American rights in Berlin rested on the wartime agreements at Yalta. Khrushchev did not threaten drastic action, as in the 1948 blockade of Berlin. Instead, he called upon the Western powers to begin negotiations with the East Germans, looking to a complete withdrawal of all foreign forces from the city. Four days later, Soviet troops began harassing American army truck convoys on the autobahn.

On November 27, Eisenhower received reports from State, CIA, and the JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff). According to the reports, French foreign minister Couve de Murville, as well as British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, thought that a “low-level” recognition of the East German government was preferable to risking war. He called Secretary Dulles, who assured him that Macmillan at least was not ready to do so. The Secretary of State also informed Eisenhower that a cable from the U.S. embassy in Moscow seemed to indicate a willingness on the Kremlin’s part to compromise. Khrushchev also said that although the status of Berlin should remain unchanged for the next six months, negotiations should, nonetheless, take place. The Soviets proposed making Berlin a free city under UN (United Nations) auspices.

Later in December, at the North Atlantic Council, NATO foreign ministers issued their Declaration on Berlin. Although the Soviets had denounced the postwar inter-allied agreements on Berlin, they held that not only did the Kremlin still have an obligation to comply with the agreements but also that the other state parties still held their respective rights in the city. This NATO ministerial also concluded that “the member states of NATO could not approve a solution of the Berlin question which jeopardized the right of the three Western Powers to remain in Berlin as long as their responsibilities require it, and did not assure freedom of communication between that city and the free world.” Furthermore, “the Soviet Union would be responsible for any action which had the effect of hampering this free communication or endangering this freedom.”¹⁰

In the midst of the crisis, Eisenhower discussed with Christian Herter, who had succeeded John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State, Mayor Willy Brandt’s proposals for a reconstituted West Berlin. According to the record, Brandt “would not mind what political set-up was decided on so long as the economic aspects were such as to assure the freedom of West Berlin from East

German domination.” Brandt also supported the call, which the U.S., France, and Britain were advocating, of holding a summit meeting to resolve the Berlin question, scheduled for the spring of 1960.¹¹ As Chairman Khrushchev remembered those events, “it was perfectly clear to everyone that until our former allies -- who had originated NATO -- agreed to a peace treaty, our troops would have to stay in East Germany.”¹²

At the same time, then-Vice President Nixon made his famous trip to the Soviet Union. In a conversation with Khrushchev, joined by U.S. Ambassador Llewelyn Thompson, Nixon discussed NATO matters by asking “whether the Soviets made a distinction between collective security arrangements such as NATO and the individual nations belonging to NATO. . . .” Although Khrushchev said yes, he, nevertheless, stated that “the individual members of such arrangements had to make a decision about bases if they wanted to avoid becoming missile targets. If some individual country decided not to accept rockets, the Soviet Union would not hit it with its own missiles.”¹³

As the allies were making preparations for the Paris Summit, the Soviets disclosed that they had shot down a U-2, which was flown by CIA operative Francis G. Powers. While it was no secret in the Kremlin that the U.S. was conducting such flights, the Soviet government did not feel the need to acknowledge its existence until it was able to perfect surface-to-air missiles that were able to bring down high-altitude aircraft such as the U-2. Charles Bohlen, who was then U.S. ambassador to Moscow, recollected those events by stating that “. . . I had heard of plans for

¹⁰NATO, *Final Communiqués* (Brussels: NATO Information Service, 1975), 123. According to Lawrence Kaplan, NATO for the moment appeared “more resolutely together than before.” Kaplan, *NATO and the United States*, 81.

¹¹ Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960: Vol. IX, 1959-1960; Germany; Austria* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1993), 82. Henceforth, the acronym *FRUS* is used to designate the *Foreign Relations* series. Citations will include the year, volume number (if applicable), as well as the page numbers.

the flights, but I did not know when they were being made. It was not considered [prudent] to inform the ambassador of the actual date of the U-2 flights. Secrecy was absolutely vital. Besides, if anything happened to a U-2, the Ambassador could honestly say that he did not know about the matter."¹⁴

The U-2 incident provoked a crisis for President Eisenhower when he met with de Gaulle, Macmillan, and Khrushchev in Paris on May 14, 1960. In fact, the event nearly caused Khrushchev to avoid the summit. In fact, he requested a public apology for the flights, a pledge to discontinue them, as well as punishment for those responsible for them. In addition, he advocated postponing Eisenhower's trip to the Soviet Union as well as delaying the summit for another six to eight months. Bohlen remembered those events by writing that "we were concerned what Khrushchev would do, whether [he] would even attend the conference." De Gaulle recalled the ways in which he tried to persuade Khrushchev to reach an agreement with Eisenhower when he paid a visit to de Gaulle at the Elysee the day before the summit. De Gaulle remembered that encounter by writing that "after expressing his respect and confidence for me personally, Khrushchev handed me the text of a statement in which he declared that he could take no part in the conference unless Eisenhower made a public apology to the Soviet Union ." He surmised that "the Soviets wanted either to inflict a spectacular humiliation on the United States or to extricate themselves from a conference which they now no longer desired after having clamored so loudly for it ." De Gaulle tried to placate Khrushchev by pointing out that the U-2 affair "was only an incident in the Cold War and the arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States" and that "it was precisely because of this state of tension that there were acts of

¹² Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, Trans. from the Russian by Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1970), 514-515.

¹³ *FRUS 1958-1960*, Vol. X, Part 2, 364.

espionage on the American side, as there had also been on the Russian side." He told his Soviet counterpart that "the real question was to discover whether the two sides were willing to put an end to this state of affairs and bring about a *détente*."¹⁵

Anatoly Dobrynin, a prominent member of the Soviet diplomatic corps who would later become Moscow's top envoy in Washington, served as a counselor at the Paris summit. He recalled that "Khrushchev's emotional speech . . . was a real surprise to Eisenhower and, besides, made him feel uncomfortable, since it had been delivered in the presence of his main allies. . ." Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko recollected the chilly atmosphere at this meeting by noting that as Eisenhower approached the Soviet delegation to greet Khrushchev, the president "met his [Khrushchev's] icy stare, understood the situation and remained where he was. No greeting took place: the two leaders did not even shake hands." Gromyko stated that "this somewhat unusual overture boded no good." In his memoirs, Khrushchev remembered that "when we arrived, I thought to myself, 'Well, here we are, ready to demand an apology from the president. But what if he refuses to apologize? What if he doesn't call off reconnaissance flights against us?' . . . To receive Eisenhower without first hearing him apologize would be an intolerable insult to the leadership of our country." Khrushchev offered a colorful account of his

¹⁴ Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1973), 464.

¹⁵ Bohlen, 467. De Gaulle, 247-248. Commenting on de Gaulle's anger at Khrushchev for using the U-2 incident as a pretext for disrupting the summit, Michael Beschloss, in his work on the incident, notes that de Gaulle "told Khrushchev, 'Before you left Moscow and after the U-2 was shot down, I sent my ambassador to see you to ask whether this meeting should be held or should be postponed. You knew everything then that you know now. You told my ambassador that this conference should be held and that it would be fruitful . . . You have brought Mr. Macmillan here from London, General Eisenhower from the United States and have put me to serious inconvenience to organize and attend a meeting which your intransigence will make impossible . . . Overflights, whether by aircraft, missile or satellite are, of course, a serious matter and they increase tensions. But the concept of these overflights is bound to change and they are bound to become a natural phenomenon. At this moment, a Soviet satellite is going around the world and it crosses French skies eighteen times a day . . . These satellites can take photographs, and tomorrow they may be in a position to launch terrible destruction . . . We should examine this question in its proper framework, that of disarmament and international tension . . . It would not serve humanity to break up on the basis of a parochial incident.'" Michael Beschloss, *Mayday*, 287.

announcement at the opening of the summit by writing that “I finished reading my statement and sat down. Frankly, I was all worked up, feeling combative and exhilarated. As my kind of simple folk would say, I was spoiling for a fight. I had caused quite a commotion, especially with the passage in which we warned we would rescind our invitation to Eisenhower if we didn’t receive satisfaction from the American side. There was a long awkward moment when nobody knew what to do. I think it was Eisenhower himself who gave the signal; he stood up and his delegation followed his lead. Then we all left. We had set off an explosion that scattered the four delegations into their separate chambers. The conference table, which was to have united us, had crumbled into dust.”¹⁶

The U-2 incident also inspired a reaction that united the NATO allies. Even so, the three major Atlantic allies were not able to reach a consensus with Chairman Khrushchev on the status of Berlin. Interpreting the failure of the Paris summit from the Soviet perspective, Dobrynin wrote that “to better understand Khrushchev’s behavior it should be said that from the very beginning he was convinced that Eisenhower would not allow the conference to collapse and would find a way out by sacrificing one of his generals ‘who had gone too far.’ But Eisenhower had spoiled this scenario by declaring that he, as commander in chief, was responsible for the operations of his armed forces. . .” Dobrynin further dismissed the claim that Khrushchev came to Paris with the intention of using propaganda to wreck the summit. He wrote in his memoirs that “our delegation brought with it extensive directives for each item on the agenda, after active

¹⁶ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 40. Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 171. Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 452, 455. In his work on intelligence activities and the U.S. presidency, Christopher Andrew comments that even though CIA’s Office of Current Intelligence forecasted that Khrushchev was upset over the incident, he, nonetheless, was committed to the summit. Thompson, reporting from Moscow, however, gave a more accurate forecast when he noted that ‘all signs. . . now appear to point to Khrushchev’s intention of trying to extort maximum propaganda advantage from the Summit rather than attempt a serious negotiation.’ Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only*, 248.

deliberation within the Politburo. So we left Moscow with the expectation of lengthy if uneasy discussions in Paris." Though he conceded that it was true that "Khrushchev asked for and received authorization from the Politburo to criticize American behavior strongly for arrogantly sending the U-2 into our airspace just before the summit, he had no instructions to demand a personal apology from Eisenhower." He believed that this was an "emotional attempt" on Khrushchev's part "to bluff an apology out of Eisenhower by threatening to ruin the summit. He failed. So the Big Four summit, the last in history of the four wartime allies -- should be remembered as a summit of lost opportunities."¹⁷

It would be up to Eisenhower's successor, however, to continue the dialogue on Berlin, as well as the daunting task of dealing with an individual who had solidified his reputation of intransigence towards the West. On the eve of Eisenhower's departure, U.S. policymakers sensed that the status of Berlin would present even more problems once Kennedy became president. Ambassador Thompson informed the State Department that, from his vantage point in Moscow, ". . . we will face a major crisis on Berlin within the next six months."¹⁸

In his dealings with the U.S. government during this period, Khrushchev gave ample indications of the firmness with which he would hold to his views on such issues as Berlin. While the U-2 incident was regrettable in the sense that it prevented progress at the Paris summit, the allies, including de Gaulle, nonetheless indicated their willingness not only to stand firm against the Soviets, but also to resolve pressing issues such as the status of Berlin. Even so, because of

¹⁷ Dobrynin, 41-42. Commenting on Eisenhower's handling of this Summit, Lawrence Kaplan writes that: ". . . so obstreperous on most occasions, [Eisenhower] seemed to relish his background on wartime colleagues. He countered the Soviet shock over being 'overblown' by saying that the most recently launched Soviet satellites overflew French skies eighteen times without its permission. If there were reservations about the management of the contretemps, it was of a streak of American naiveté in permitting the president to take responsibility on himself for what nations normally do and disavow." Kaplan, *NATO and the U.S.*, 83.

¹⁸ *FRUS 1958-1960*, Vol. XIII, 159.

the emotions of the time, détente was not a concept which Kennedy could accept as policy when he succeeded the esteemed World War II general in 1961.¹⁹

The MLF and the Nuclear Issue

As a way of promoting allied unity at a time when the NATO allies were becoming restless at the slow pace of developments in East-West relations, the Eisenhower administration supported the Multilateral Force, MLF, concept, which originated in the State Department in the last year of Eisenhower's presidency. By now, the Western European democracies were reaping the benefits brought about by the postwar recovery which the Marshall Plan initiated. Moreover, they were avidly seeking ways to play a greater role in alliance defense planning. In fact, France and West Germany were now discussing the feasibility of acquiring a nuclear capability. As a result, the Eisenhower administration wanted to include them in some form of nuclear sharing. Moreover, U.S. policymakers sensed that the MLF would promote allied unity at a time when anti-Western rhetoric was at a high pitch within the Kremlin walls.

By now, states such as West Germany were becoming more entrenched within the North Atlantic alliance. In the spring of 1958, Konrad Adenauer, the West German Chancellor, pushed through the *Bundestag* a vote favoring the acquisition of nuclear weapons, but not without an extraordinary and, at times, acrimonious debate in addition to massive demonstrations throughout the Federal Republic. Even so, Adenauer's government acquired access to some

¹⁹ In commenting on the ways which the U-2 incident prevented a détente, Beschloss concludes that "the tragedy of [the U-2 shutdown] was not of necessity but possibility. Had the two sides been in closer communication during the spring of 1960, each might have held fewer misperceptions about the other's intention to seek some curtailment of the Cold War. Instead . . . the two great powers resumed the follies that could one day cost them their lives." Michael Beschloss, *Mayday* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), 381-382.

nuclear-capability delivery systems (as opposed to nuclear warheads, which remained under American ownership and control). How the West Germans were to play a role in nuclear matters was a question which confronted U.S. and other NATO policymakers. Even though West Germany was now a full-fledged liberal democracy, the NATO allies were still wary of any nuclear weaponry that the West German state could control.

As the Soviet Union developed its own nuclear arsenal, and with the demonstration of its missile capability with *Sputnik*, doubts grew over whether the U.S. would use its nuclear weapons to defend Western Europe, especially if it were placing its own cities at risk. For his part, de Gaulle hoped to develop a nuclear force which was independent of NATO's nuclear capability. This concerned the U.S. government, which feared that this example would encourage the West Germans to demand their own nuclear programs in the interests of 'equality'. This 'nuclear nationalism' increased the possibility of the fragmentation of the alliance as well as the potential for war. Even so, Eisenhower recognized that the Western European desire for control over nuclear weapons reflected the need to have some control over their own security and their own fate.

For this reason, Eisenhower enthusiastically supported the MLF. As envisioned in the State Department by Robert Bowie, the plan called for an allied seaborne nuclear missile capability directly under NATO command, with the fleet assigned to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, SACEUR. In effect, the MLF called for a fleet of Polaris submarines and ships under different flags, as well as "a European finger on the nuclear trigger."²⁰ Under the concept, multinational crews would be so integrated that no country could withdraw its contribution and convert it into a national force. Every participating nation could veto the use of

the nuclear weapon. Although sole U.S. custody of stockpiled warheads on the continent would be neutralized under the new arrangement, the U.S. would still have the final control of these seaborne weapons until a unanimous vote of the alliance members released them for NATO's collective use. The MLF also included a conventional force buildup, something which the Kennedy administration viewed favorably in light of the fact that it wanted a greater emphasis placed on conventional strength in deterring the Warsaw Pact.

The Eisenhower administration viewed the MLF as the perfect vehicle to encourage a more unified Atlantic alliance to play a more active role in its own defense as well as to satisfy West German nuclear ambitions, especially in light of the fact that NATO Secretary-General Paul Spaak and General Lauris Norstad, the SACEUR, informed USNATO that the American monopoly over the nuclear strategy and planning in the alliance was no longer acceptable. They said that the West Europeans had become restive over being left out of nuclear planning and had wanted to become full partners in the decision-making process.

The Eisenhower administration also viewed the MLF as a way of decreasing the U.S. commitment in Europe. President Eisenhower never stopped arguing that the U.S. should decrease its responsibilities in Europe, and his support for the MLF flowed from this conviction as well. Another reason why Eisenhower advanced the MLF concept was to signal those European nuclear powers that the U.S. entrusted them with handling this capability. The administration also viewed the MLF, under NATO auspices, as a preferable alternative to an independent British

²⁰ David N. Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1983), 116. The U.S. Navy was not enthusiastic about releasing the Polaris submarines for NATO use.

deterrent.²¹ Moreover, it gave the Bonn government a “safe but respected role” in nuclear matters.²²

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On the eve of Eisenhower’s departure, the U.S. government found itself facing an alliance at a crossroads in the Cold War. While the deterrent against the Soviet Union held firm, the nature of that deterrent had changed. With de Gaulle’s criticism, the North Atlantic Alliance was no longer as united as on the April date when NATO came into existence in 1949. Crises such as Berlin and personalities such as Khrushchev tested the alliance’s cohesiveness as well as delaying a détente between the two sides. Even so, the Western Europeans had recovered from World War II and now asked for a greater role as allies. The MLF helped reassure NATO that the U.S., under this and the succeeding administration, intended to treat its counterparts as equals in nuclear matters. With NATO at the crossroads, the new president, John F. Kennedy, eagerly awaited his opportunity to redefine America’s national security strategy in the North Atlantic.

²¹ According to John Gaddis, U.S., as well as NATO, strategy during this period could be stated as one which, “compensated[d] for manpower deficiencies vis-à-vis the Soviet Union by making credible the prospect of escalation to nuclear war in case of attack. This required a delicate balancing act, because what had to be deterred was not only a Soviet invasion but also fears on the part of the West Europeans that the U.S. might abandon them, together with any temptations to deal with those fears either by attempting to appease the Russians, or by developing nuclear weapons of their own.” John Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 168.

²² Frank Ninkovich, *Germany and the United States* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 144.

CHAPTER II

BERLIN, THE MLF, AND THE RISE OF FLEXIBLE RESPONSE, 1961-1962

Promising that the United States would “bear any burden” to continue the Cold War against the Soviet Union, John F. Kennedy immediately set out to continue the work of both Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower in strengthening the NATO alliance against the designs of Khrushchev and the Warsaw Pact by invoking his strategy of flexible response. A Cold warrior, he also pledged that the United States would not lag behind the Soviet Union in the arms race, having highlighted in his presidential campaign against Nixon that the Eisenhower administration had allowed the Soviets to overcome the Americans in the number of missile warheads, thereby producing a disfavorable missile gap. Despite this alarm, America still glowed in its postwar prosperity, and, amid high expectations, Kennedy confronted issues left unresolved as a result of the continuing tension with Khrushchev as well as the increasing opposition which Charles de Gaulle was bringing to NATO programs. For this reason, Kennedy redefined the nature of American strategy in the North Atlantic to account for the dramatic changes which the Cold War brought about in the previous decade. At the same time, he concluded that the time had come to treat the NATO allies as equal partners in nuclear matters, thereby continuing Eisenhower’s work on the MLF. Several NATO themes stand out in this particular period of the Kennedy administration. After discussing the NATO work which Dean Acheson did for Kennedy in the first months of the new administration, this chapter assesses the missile gap. After providing a synopsis of flexible response, it examines the events surrounding the unresolved status of Berlin, the defining crisis of this period. The section dealing with the MLF focuses on the ways

Kennedy wanted to include the other NATO allies in NATO's nuclear planning while at the same time ensuring that the U.S. would hold ultimate control of the nuclear device. A section devoted to NATO's out-of-area problems discusses the ways that the crises in the Congo, Algeria, Laos, and Vietnam affected allied unity as well as redefined the nature of the Cold War. A section on de Gaulle analyzes the French general's important, and somewhat destructive, influence upon NATO.

The Kennedy Team and Acheson's Review of NATO Policy

The new administration, while representing a continuity with that of President Eisenhower, signified that a new generation of Democratic leaders had emerged. Kennedy wanted to advance the policies which Roosevelt and Truman promulgated, especially as they related to collective security in the North Atlantic, yet because the situation in NATO had changed dramatically from that in 1949, Kennedy asked for Dean Acheson's expertise in laying the groundwork which the new administration desired to take NATO into the 1960s.

Kennedy's foreign policy agenda marked a continuance of both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations in that he accepted the Cold War premise that the Soviet Union should not encroach upon Western Europe. Consequently, President Kennedy realized the importance of establishing a bipartisan team. He picked Robert McNamara, a Republican as well as the chief executive officer of the Ford Motor Company, to head the Department of Defense. At the same time, he delved into the academic community to choose individuals such as McGeorge Bundy for National Security Adviser. For State, he chose an old State Department

hand, Dean Rusk, who, during the Eisenhower years, headed the Ford Foundation.¹ Although Kennedy sensed that two-time Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson should join the administration, many in the new administration thought that he was too soft on communism. However, Kennedy did not want to antagonize the left wing of the Democratic Party. As a result, the new President appointed him to head the U.S. mission at the UN. Though relations between Kennedy and Stevenson were not close, they would remain on amicable terms throughout Kennedy's White House tenure.²

Acheson, with the cooperation of Paul Nitze (who became the first Assistant Secretary of Defense of International Security Affairs during this period), immediately began working on the NATO study, which he called "A Review of North Atlantic Problems for the Future" on February 8.³ The end product, a seventy-four -page policy directive written for the NSC, stoutly stressed the importance for the U.S. to consult with its NATO allies on all U.S. policy decision-making. It highlighted many issues for improvement, such as the lack of innovative leadership in the alliance.

¹ Regarding his perceptions of Rusk for the job at State, Clark Clifford wrote in his memoirs that "I was ambivalent about Rusk's appointment. On one hand, he had excellent qualifications, and came with high recommendations . . . On the other hand, I was concerned from the start that he would be too deferential to the President. No other action during the transition more clearly signaled Kennedy's intention 'to be his own Secretary of State' than Rusk's selection, yet even the most activist President needs a strong advocate at State, someone who will speak up for his views. Although Rusk was articulate and intelligent, I knew that this was not his style. I did not know, of course, that Rusk and I, having clashed in the forties over Israel, would have a far more serious confrontation over Vietnam within a few years." Clark Clifford, *Counsel to the President* (New York: Random House, 1991), 340.

² Interview with Harlan Cleveland, July 6, 1994; interview with Robert Komer, October 20, 1994.

³ Commenting on the Acheson-Kennedy relationship, Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas write in *The Wise Man* that "John Kennedy, who believed in the existence of an American Establishment, very much wanted its approval. The Kennedys had overcome much of their social insecurity, they had conquered Harvard, including its Brahmin sanctuaries. But the family felt slightly cowed by the disciples of Stimson and Marshall, the Achesons, Lovett, and Harrimans who had come from Wall Street and the great law firms. John Kennedy himself had more admiration for the cool toughness and unflinching pragmatism of Lovett and Acheson than he did for his more liberal advisers, men like Bowles and Galbraith, whom he considered idealistic but slightly mushy . . . Acheson was the most intimidating exemplar of the Stimsonian tradition. Young Kennedy, perhaps sensing Acheson's dislike of his father, was stiff and ill at ease around the old statesman. Acheson later recalled that Kennedy was so deferential to him that he made him feel old. It is too bad; the two had a common irreverence and might have enjoyed each other's company." Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1986), 590-591.

Moreover, it discounted the view that the Warsaw Pact had such superior conventional forces that NATO troops were futile. Acheson also recommended that the NATO states commit thirty active and thirty reserve divisions for the common defense. He argued that only such conventional strength could deter Soviet aggression, for NATO could then resist a Warsaw Pact conventional attack without having to resort to nuclear weapons. Acheson also pointed out that if nuclear weapons remained in Europe, the Soviets would not want to invade Western Europe, for fear of triggering a nuclear exchange. Consequently, the former Secretary adamantly opposed the view that France and Britain should maintain their own nuclear deterrent, claiming that chaos would erupt throughout the Western alliance should that occur. Regarding the MLF, Acheson opposed the concept, at least until the allies first fulfilled their conventional force requirements. Acheson's paper reflected a change in policy in the following respects: it made clear the support for European integration, whereas the existing National Security Policy directive stated that such initiative should come from the Europeans themselves. Clearly, Acheson was thinking along the same lines as members of the new administration in that he surmised that a more reasonable substitute for massive retaliation was needed.

Before it received White House approval, Acheson's review drew such attention within the U.S. government that a paper originating in Bundy's office compared the merits of Acheson's thesis to that of the existing policy. It stated that this review marked a clear change from the previous policy because it advocated that first priority "be given in NATO to preparing for contingencies short of a nuclear or massive non-nuclear attack." It also stated that the "Basic National Security Policy" defined local aggression as "conflicts outside the NATO area in which limited U.S. forces participate" and added that "conflicts occurring in the NATO area or elsewhere involving sizable forces of the U.S. and USSR are not to be construed as local

aggression Consistent with this policy, the NATO strategic concept, as it now exists, accords first priority to preparing for general nuclear war.”⁴

Acheson submitted his report to the new president in late March. In conjunction with this report, Acheson wrote another memorandum to the President in which he outlined possible changes within NATO. Among those items that he highlighted were the need for strong civilian leadership, which was no easy task since the SACEUR was the strongest figure in NATO. Acheson also raised the question of appointing a European SACEUR. Regarding this as a way of keeping the French in line, he stated that “this seems a much safer way to do this than to give the French missiles or other essentials of a nuclear strike force. In fact, the French national strike force is to a large extent a bargaining weapon to obtain a larger role in the conduct of the alliance.”⁵ Though this recommendation had merit, it was not practical because Congress would not accept a European SACEUR so long as the United States continued to provide the bulk of personnel and materiel for the common defense of NATO. On April 21, Kennedy accepted Acheson’s review as his official “Policy Directive Regarding NATO and the Atlantic Nations.”

With this report in hand, Kennedy immediately began to implement his new strategy of flexible response into his NATO policy. NATO had changed since 1949 and the new president was prepared to meet the new challenges. Even so, the problems which Kennedy had to face remained the same. Although the personalities had changed, he still had to confront a Soviet leader on issues affecting the security of Europe such as the unresolved status of Berlin.

⁴ John Fitzgerald Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts, The National Security File (NSF), Subject File -NATO General, Box 320, “Comparison of ‘A Review of North Atlantic Problems for the Future’ with existing National Security Council Policy”, Mar 28, 1961, NSC Memorandum on the Acheson Study, 2.

⁵ JFK Library, NSF, NATO General, Box 320, Mar. 29, 1961, 1-2, 7.

The Missile Gap

Shortly after becoming president, Kennedy had to confront the fact that the missile gap, which he raised in the 1960 presidential campaign, was exaggerated. When McNamara broke the news to him on the morning of February 6, just seventeen days after his inauguration, he angrily asked the new Secretary of Defense, "What the hell is this?" McNamara, however, simply responded that "the bottom line on the missile gap" was that the United States could withstand a full-scale Soviet attack, which included intercontinental missiles, bombers, and submarine-launched missiles, and still have, as McNamara succinctly put it, ". . . enough nuclear capacity remaining to destroy every city in the Soviet Union, kill 100 million Soviets, and demolish 80 percent of Soviet industrial capacity."⁶ Within Defense, policymakers debated over the exact meaning of the supposed gap. This issue affected the way that the new president allocated expenditures for NATO's common defense. Nevertheless, no valid reason existed to suspect that the number of U.S. missiles lagged behind those of the Soviet Union. Moreover, key congressmen such as then-Senator Johnson held all the facts to discount such a determination.⁷

McNamara explained the discrepancy by recounting that, during the presidential campaign in 1960, no direction existed in Central Intelligence. In effect, five intelligence agencies worked independently of each other. He recalled that the intelligence reports distributed to senior officials in the Eisenhower administration stated that a difference in missile counts existed. He explained that the CIA, as well as the Air Force, held a higher estimate of Soviet capability. This information ended up in the hands of a key Democratic Senator, Stuart Symington, who in turn leaked it to then-candidate Kennedy. Shortly after assuming his post in Defense, McNamara

determined whether, in fact, a missile gap divided American and Soviet forces. Within a month after the inauguration, he announced that a gap existed, but that it was in the U.S.'s favor.⁸

Although the press rebuked the Kennedy team for advancing the thesis of the missile gap during the 1960 campaign, the key players of this administration, such as Rusk and Theodore Sorensen, the president's speechwriter and close confidant, still maintained that not only did then-candidate Kennedy act in good faith but that McNamara made a strong effort to discount the notion of an unfavorable missile gap.⁹ Moreover, Clark Clifford, who played a prominent role as a White House adviser as well as a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Board (PFIB), supported McNamara's claim that Kennedy simply acted upon the knowledge that Symington had, which was interpreted as being good. As he put it, it was only, "after learning more about," this gap that it was evident that it did not exist.¹⁰

Bundy recalled that the misinformation resulted because there were external estimates by many Democratic experts. As a result, Kennedy talked about it in the campaign. As Bundy recalled, the president was surprised when McNamara came out with the disclosure. He also recollected that the NSC had no input nor did it contribute to any of the analysis which McNamara's Defense Department originated.¹¹ Edward McDermott, who was on the NSC staff during this time, recalled that the information on it was contradictory. In fact, the information which Kennedy received overstated it.¹² During that campaign, Senate Democrats, led by Symington, declared that the Soviets would have a 3-1 edge in Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles

⁶ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 58-59.

⁷ Charles Morris, *Iron Destinies, Lost Opportunities* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 130.

⁸ Interview with Robert McNamara, February 16, 1995.

⁹ Interview with Dean Rusk, July 5, 1994; interview with Theodore Sorensen, September 20, 1994.

¹⁰ Interview with Clark Clifford, April 28, 1994.

¹¹ Interview with McGeorge Bundy, October 12, 1994.

¹² Interview with Edward McDermott, June 29, 1994.

(ICBMs) by 1962. Eisenhower, backed by U-2 intelligence flights that revealed that the Soviets were not undertaking a massive missile program, knew that the charges were untrue.

While the issue of the missile gap played into the hands of those who wanted to continue the hard-line against the Soviet Union, it provided the best example of the tension that was prevalent between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Western European governments took an avid interest in this debate because of the way in which it affected NATO's defense allocations. Moreover, as strong supporters of massive retaliation, these governments wanted the U.S. to insure that the West held the balance in any missile gap.

Flexible Response

As Kennedy's foreign policy took shape, so did *flexible response*, the heart of his national security policy, as well as his critique of Eisenhower's strategy of massive retaliation. Within NATO, flexible response overhauled the way in which the U.S. committed its resources to defend Western Europe from the Soviet Union, even though the NATO allies were reluctant to accept the new strategy since, on the surface, it appeared not to provide the sure guarantee against a Soviet attack which Eisenhower's massive retaliation provided. Within the administration, McNamara, along with Rusk, emerged as the most vocal proponent of flexible response, which provided a more manageable way to not only deter the Soviets but to prepare for any contingency that need not include a nuclear exchange.

As early as February 4, Rusk wrote McNamara that the need existed for a strategy "in which our allies have *confidence*" and which "gives NATO the option of responding without nuclear weapons to substantial attack on NATO Europe by Soviet ready non-nuclear forces, for a

long enough period to enforce a pause which would give the Soviets time to appreciate the wider risks of the course on which they are embarked and provide an opportunity for negotiations.”¹³

While General Maxwell Taylor (the former Army Chief of Staff who served as Kennedy’s Military Representative before becoming the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in October 1962) was credited with coining the phrase, the outlines of this policy had its roots not only in Acheson’s NATO policy review but also in an NSC document entitled “Key National Security Problems”, which was dated on February 10, 1961 and authored by U. Alexis Johnson, who became Kennedy’s Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs three months later. This paper affected Kennedy’s interpretation of national security in much the same way that Acheson’s paper redefined Kennedy’s view of NATO. Along with Acheson’s review, this paper showed that Kennedy desired a more reasonable way to utilize U.S. military forces to wage the Cold War, which, from Kennedy’s perspective, showed no signs of abating.

The paper criticized massive retaliation from the onset by stating that “. . . our policy has been largely static for the last several years,” highlighting that “the present strategic concept has no place for limited war with the Soviets in Europe (exclusive of incursions, infiltrations and hostile local actions).” On the other hand, it asserted that “the Soviet shift to ICBMs, as the numbers increase and the vulnerability of delivery systems decrease, may bring about a lessening belief in U.S. willingness to move to general war in response to military aggressions not directly or critically endangering U.S. security.” Moreover, Johnson faulted the lack of conventional weapons in the NATO strategy when he noted that “. . . under existing policy the Soviets are met, if necessary, by nuclear weapons, whether or not they initiate the use of such weapons.” Johnson interpreted this as suggesting “some lack of confidence in NATO conventional capabilities, as

¹³ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. VIII, 26-27.

planned.”¹⁴ Supporting this argument, George McGhee, who at the time served as State’s Under Secretary for Political Affairs, noted that nuclear force alone was not a credible force because of the fact that due to the potential for utter destruction, governments would not want to use it in any case.¹⁵

With this paper in hand, the new president immediately set out to transform NATO’s conventional forces along the contours of the new strategy. Kennedy adamantly believed that it was reckless to respond to crises with the full brunt of nuclear weaponry. Under the new strategy, Special Forces would conduct counterinsurgency against wars of national liberation, while conventional forces would handle limited wars. The Kennedy administration envisioned that any confrontation with the Soviet Union would begin as a conventional war because of the large standing army which the Soviets maintained in Eastern Europe.¹⁶

To this end, shortly after becoming president, Kennedy increased the defense budget by 15 percent. Even though the number of ICBMs in the American nuclear arsenal also increased, the Kennedy administration placed the emphasis on conventional forces. Within NATO, the nuclear capability increased 60 percent. Kennedy’s flexible response also embraced non-nuclear aspects into NATO’s planning of nuclear forces in Europe.

McNamara articulated the reasoning behind the emphasis on conventional forces when he circulated a memorandum in which he proposed adding six additional U.S. divisions to strengthen

¹⁴ JFK Library, NSF, Key National Security Problems File - General, Box 318, 1-5, 14,16, 23-25.

¹⁵ Interview with George McGhee, January 3, 1997.

¹⁶ In explaining Kennedy’s wish to overhaul the U.S. national security strategy, Jane Stromseth writes in her book on the subject that “Kennedy’s interest in developing more flexible military options than the stark alternatives of ‘devastation or submission’ rested in part on his recognition of the increasing vulnerability of the American homeland as the Soviet Union developed its own strategic nuclear arsenal.” She also argues that “Kennedy was also concerned about the danger of a nuclear war by accident or ‘miscalculation’, in which both sides were caught in a situation that might unintentionally escalate to an all-out war, through misunderstanding or the sudden spreading of a limited conflict because of inflexible war plans.” Jane E. Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 26-27.

the long-term defense of Europe. He wrote that it would add substantially (about 35% in effective fighting strength) to NATO's ground strength in the Central Region.

The unresolved issue of Berlin played a role in this new strategy since McNamara declared that "inevitably it must be quite uncertain what would convince Khrushchev of our willingness to fight to a finish over Berlin. While a conventional build-up alone would be unlikely to convince him, the absence of a build-up would probably increase his doubt of our determination." He believed that nuclear threats alone would "carry less conviction than building up both non-nuclear and nuclear forces." Moreover, McNamara argued that this non-nuclear program provided for a greatly strengthened defense of Western Europe because it put NATO "in a much better position to engage in limited ground, air, and naval action over Berlin with attendant dangers of the escalation which Khrushchev almost certainly wants to avoid." McNamara believed that this new strategy made it "apparent" that the U.S. was in Europe "to stay regardless of the scale or intensity of any Soviet pressure or action. In this regard, deployment of forces toward the north of Germany increases our capabilities in an area where NATO is extremely weak and where the main effort of any initial USSR ground offensive would likely occur. In our judgment, Khrushchev will assess this build-up policy as significantly strengthening his opposition over Berlin."

Although McNamara conceded that Khrushchev might reciprocate by adding six divisions to Western Europe, he stated that while such could happen, "this resultant net total of Soviet divisions, however, probably could not be increased materially because of logistical problems,

dispersal required by the threat of nuclear operations, potentially hostile operations and the restrictive geography of the European peninsula.”¹⁷

On the eve of the Berlin crisis, Kennedy applied his flexible response strategy by assenting to defend Berlin by increasing the conventional strength committed to its defense rather than by resorting to nuclear forces. The president ordered McNamara to expand the U.S. Army’s eleven regular divisions to sixteen fully combat-ready ones, consisting of almost one million troops.¹⁸

Regarding the new strategy, the NATO allies were concerned that a build-up of conventional forces might tempt the U.S. to accept a limited war in Europe and, consequently, not use its nuclear deterrent against the Soviet Union. In a letter from USNATO, Ambassador Thomas Finletter, the U.S. Permanent Representative, commented on allied views to flexible response. Noting that “certain countries have individual resistances to our proposals,” he reported that the West Germans did not like the idea of a “pause” since they saw themselves, as Finletter put it, “correctly in the front line of any battle for Europe. . . . They fear the Russians may get the idea they can attack the NATO German forces with impunity -- that is, without fear of being hurt by atomic weapons -- if the U.S. views prevailed.” Finletter continued that the Turks and, to a lesser extent, the Greeks also objected to the new strategy of flexible response because, as they were exposed and away from the bulk of NATO military power, they believed that “the new U.S. thinking will be a temptation to the Russians to walk over them with conventional forces. They would like to see our policy be to use tactical nuclear weapons from the beginning -- for this would make for the minimum of temptation to the Russians to attack them.” Finletter also commented that the French would also resist the new strategy since their

¹⁷ JFK Library, Departments and Agencies File, Department of Defense, Sept. 18, 1961, “Military build-up and Possible action in Europe”, Box 77, 1-10.

¹⁸ Deborah Shapley, *Promise and Power* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 118.

determination to have a nuclear force placed them “in the position of giving first priority to nuclear weapons.” The Italians, however, would be lukewarm to the new emphasis on conventional weapons, while the Norwegians and the Danes would like the new emphasis.¹⁹ Finletter’s report obviously highlighted the problem which the NATO allies had about flexible response. Not only were they uncertain about the efficacy of utilizing conventional weapons, but they continued to insist upon the use of nuclear weapons for their defense. Clearly, they were not as quick to embrace the new strategy as the Kennedy administration, even if it was a more prudent way to deter a Soviet attack. In his memoirs, McGhee also supported Finletter’s assertion that the NATO allies were not comfortable with the new strategy. As he put it, flexible response “. . . alarmed our allies, who feared that the Soviets might not be deterred.”²⁰

Notwithstanding the allies’ concerns, particularly, as Finletter noted, those of West Germany, the Kennedy administration sensed that the new strategy was more in line with the trend in NATO’s increasing conventional strength. Even so, this increased reliance on the allies’ conventional forces compelled the Kennedy administration to accept a greater allied role in such questions as nuclear weaponry.²¹

Later, in June, in preparing for Kennedy’s meeting with Finletter, Bundy drew upon existing policy, as well as Finletter’s recommendation, in coming up with the consensus on this

¹⁹ JFK Library, NSF, Subject File, NATO-General, Box 320, May 29, 1961, 1-4.

²⁰ George McGhee, *At the Creation of a New Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 5. In his seminal biography of de Gaulle, French writer Jean Lacouture writes that de Gaulle bemoaned the fact that this strategy was forced upon the Europeans without their having been consulted on it. Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle, The Ruler, 1945-1970* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), 383. In her biography of McNamara, Deborah Shapley notes that flexible response “was decried in coffeehouses and parliamentary debates in Europe as evidence that the Americans were weakening their earlier guarantee to protect Western Europe from the Communists. The French in particular were adamant on their pledge, a French nuclear force was needed all the more.” Deborah Shapley, *Promise and Power* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 141.

²¹ Robert S. Jordan, “Norstad: Can the SACEUR Be Both European and American” in Robert S. Jordan, *Generals in International Politics*, 90. Jordan also argues that flexible response impelled the new administration to push the MLF as a way of garnering Allied support for flexible response.

new policy. While emphasizing the use of conventional weapons, he posited that, with regard to nuclear material, “we will keep the nuclear capability now in Europe, and make much of the *already approved* additions to it as are politically required.” Accounting for the MLF, he stated that “on a *technical* level, the U.S. wants steps taken to ensure that nuclear weapons in Europe are not subject to unauthorized use. On a political level, the U.S. would welcome its allies’ views as to how they might play a larger role in control of these weapons. It envisages the possibility of agreed principles to govern [the] use of these weapons and of a small grouping of the North Atlantic Council to convert about the application of these principles to specific cases.”²²

Later, General Taylor commented on the new emphasis on conventional strength by noting in an August 1961 memorandum that “it is possible to offset Soviet strength in Europe by increased NATO conventional forces supported by improved tactical nuclear weapons and by a quick-reaction medium range missile capable of neutralizing or at least threatening the Soviet MRBM’s. [medium-range ballistic missiles].”²³ Speaking before the North Atlantic Council the following May, however, McNamara insisted that nuclear forces need not play a role along with conventional forces because “. . . the kinds of conflicts we think most likely to arise in the NATO area, non-nuclear capabilities appear to be clearly the sort the Alliance would wish to use at the outset.” The Secretary then stated that “. . . . we do not believe that a forward defense must be able to defeat in non-nuclear action every conceivable element of Soviet strength that might be thrown against it” since NATO nuclear forces “would rapidly come into play if an all-out attack developed.”²⁴

²² JFK Library, NSF, Subject File, NATO - General, Box 320, June 9, 1961, 1-2.

²³ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. VIII, 273.

²⁴ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. VIII, 281.

Flexible response provided a way for Kennedy not only to make his mark in U.S. NATO policy, but also to show that he endeavored to provide a more reasonable way to respond to a Soviet attack, even though massive retaliation was not only popular among Western European governments but had also served the Eisenhower administration during a period in which the United States and the Soviet Union did not enter into armed conflict. While this strategy would be criticized for the way which it was applied to the crisis in Vietnam, flexible response provided a more reasonable way to not only prepare for a Soviet attack but also to allocate NATO forces in a more efficient manner.

Khrushchev and Berlin

Berlin continued to play a central role in U.S. NATO policy, with Khrushchev adamantly pursuing his demands for Soviet interests not only in the city but also throughout East Germany. This issue played such a significant role during this period that Dobrynin remarked that “Germany and Berlin overshadowed everything” and that it was now “the main battleground of the Cold War, with Berlin, literally, as the front line.”²⁵ Dobrynin’s boss, Khrushchev, still wanted to sign a peace treaty with the German Democratic Republic, thus resolving the border issue satisfactorily in the Kremlin’s favor. As with the Eisenhower administration, Berlin would evolve into a major crisis during the Kennedy administration, testing the resolve of the new team to handle the enigmatic Soviet leader. Moreover, the crisis graphically illustrated the extent to which both the U.S. and the Soviet Union intended, literally, to draw the line in the Cold War.

²⁵ Dobrynin, 63.

A memorandum in Bundy's file addressed the problem of Berlin, and, for that matter, of Germany. This paper stated that while for the past ten years the West wanted a reunified German democracy to join NATO, "what each side really wanted was the preservation of the status quo, although neither was willing to admit it for fear of alienating the Germans." West Berlin was in fact a NATO enclave in the heart of East Germany which served as an "escape hatch" for professional people to flee East Germany. The paper also noted that West Berlin, from the political-military point of view, was not of particular value, "except that the West has incurred a moral liability to protect its 2,250,000 inhabitants from being overrun by communism. Strategically, the Western position is almost untenable. Economically, it is unprofitable."²⁶

In an April 4, 1961 memorandum for the President, Acheson, concerned that Khrushchev might again force the West to a confrontation, argued that Berlin was "of first importance" and that a crisis was likely later in the year. He concluded that "we have no good answer to Soviet pressure upon the routes of communication." In fact, Acheson stated that military force might be necessary. Acheson remarked that there existed "no 'solution' for the Berlin problem short of the unification of Germany. All courses of action are dangerous and unpromising. Inaction is even worse. We are faced with a Hobson Choice. If a crisis is provoked a bold and dangerous course may be safest." Acheson, who had played a key role in the Berlin airlift, correctly noted the crux of the Berlin problem: that is, a solution to the city's permanent status was tied directly to the reunification of Germany. However, such was an unlikely prospect so long as the Cold War continued.

²⁶ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, Box 81, June 1, 1961, 1. In his discussion on the Berlin crisis, Reeves notes the predicament that Berlin and Germany presented to the Kremlin leadership in that "... neither Khrushchev nor the East German Communist leader, Walter Ulbricht, could figure out a way to stop the continuing public renunciation of communism. East Germany was supposed to be a Communist showplace, the

Commenting on the problem of dealing with the Soviet Union, Acheson added that “no agreement with the Soviet Union on Berlin is possible which will not weaken the Western position and open the way to early Western elimination from Berlin – except, of course, a wholly unlikely USSR decision to drop the whole issue Nor is it probable that the crisis would be long deferred by any concession in the all-German field which we would realistically offer.”²⁷

The Berlin question played a central role when Kennedy met Khrushchev at the Vienna summit. On his way to Vienna, however, he stopped in Paris for a bilateral meeting with de Gaulle, who offered the new president advice on dealing with the Soviet leader. Recalling his perception of Kennedy on the eve of his meeting with Khrushchev, the French president wrote in his memoirs that Kennedy “seemed somewhat anxious about what might happen at his meeting with Nikita Khrushchev.” De Gaulle recounted the president telling him that he was going to Vienna “to show willingness, make contact and exchange views.” De Gaulle thought that this course was prudent, and said so to Kennedy. The French president also advised him that “since there is no fighting and the Cold War is very expensive, peace may be on the way. But it can only be based on a general and prolonged relaxation of tension,” something which, as de Gaulle put it, presupposed “the maintenance of the balance of power. Anything that upsets it, and in particular the German situation, would plunge the world into serious danger.” As a result, de Gaulle added that “when Khrushchev summons you to change the status of Berlin, in other words to hand the

most prosperous and creative of the countries and areas the Red Army occupied after 1945. East Berlin, with a population of 1.3 million, for all its shortages was the richest of communism’s satellite capitals.” Reeves, 186.

²⁷ JFK Library, NSF File - Regional Security File - Europe, United Kingdom, Box 127A, Memorandum for the President, 1-3.

city over to him, stand fast! That is the most useful service you can render the whole world, Russia included.”²⁸

The Soviet government did not expect to reach any significant agreement with the new president. Viktor Sukhodrev, Khrushchev’s interpreter, recalled that “nothing had been prepared, like a draft treaty or agreement, whether on arms control or anything else. Nothing had been hammered out prior. There had been no series of expert meetings, in short, leading up to the summit. So I don’t think that really anybody could have -- those who were in on the preparatory period -- no one really expected any specific agreements to come out of that meeting.”²⁹ After discussing such Third World issues as Algeria, the Congo, and Angola on the first day, Kennedy and Khrushchev continued their talks the next day at the Soviet embassy, with the bulk of the discussion centering on Berlin and Germany. Khrushchev expressed concern that, fifteen years after defeating Germany in World War II, the Federal Republic had “again acquired military power and has assumed a predominant position in NATO.” Again, he called for a peace treaty, while acknowledging that the Soviet government recognized the existence of two separate German states. He threatened Kennedy that even if the U.S. could not agree to a peace treaty, the Soviet government was prepared to go it alone. As Khrushchev put it: “If the US should fail to understand this desire the USSR will sign a peace treaty alone. The USSR will sign a peace treaty with the GDR and with the FRG if the latter so desires. If not, a peace treaty will be signed

²⁸De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 258. Andrei Gromyko recalls the Vienna meeting by noting that “disappointingly, although the conversation was conducted in frank terms, and went on longer than planned, it did not result in success.” Gromyko, *Memoirs*, 175. Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, in their study on the Soviet leadership, write that “Khrushchev met with Kennedy in Vienna as a prima donna meeting a first-time starlet. ‘I heard you were a young and promising man,’ Khrushchev greeted the forty-three-year-old president. The difference in age was almost a quarter of a century. This generation gap grows into an abyss, if one thinks of all the milestones of Russian history as well as the personal experience that had shaped Khrushchev, and of which Kennedy had only a limited understanding. The only two links between the leaders were World War II and the nuclear polarization of the Cold War.” Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 243.

with the GDR alone." Consequently, "the state of war will cease and all commitments stemming from Germany's surrender will become invalid," which included institutions, occupation rights, and all accesses to Berlin. Khrushchev further remarked that "if the US wants to leave its troops in West Berlin, that would be acceptable under certain conditions; however, the Soviet Union believes that in that case Soviet troops should be there too." To this, the president responded by strongly stating that "we are in Berlin not because of someone's sufferance. We fought our way there, although our casualties may not have been as high as the USSR's. We are in Berlin not by agreement of the East Germans but by contractual rights . . . U.S. national security is involved in this matter because if we were to accept the Soviet proposal U.S. commitments would be regarded as a mere scrap of paper. West Europe is vital to our national security and we have supported it in two wars." Khrushchev then responded that "he was sorry that he had met with no understanding of the Soviet position," adding that the U.S. "is unwilling to normalize the situation in the most dangerous spot in the world. The USSR wanted to perform an operation in this sore spot – to eliminate this thorn, this ulcer – without prejudicing the interests of any side, but rather to the satisfaction of all peoples of the world." The President then asked if a treaty would block the access to Berlin, to which Khrushchev stated that it would. Kennedy then said that the U.S. was opposed to a buildup in West Germany that would constitute a threat to the Soviet Union. Khrushchev responded, "all the USSR wants is a peace treaty. . . . [I cannot] understand why the U.S. wants Berlin. Does the U.S. want to unleash a war from there? . . . If a peace treaty is signed U.S. prestige will not be involved, and everybody will understand this. But if the U.S. should maintain its rights after the signing of a peace treaty, that would be a violation

²⁹ Gerald S. Strober and Deborah H. Strober, *Let Us Begin Anew* (Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 356.

of East Germany's sovereignty."³⁰ Khrushchev then added the surprising note that "if the US should start a war over Berlin there was nothing the USSR could do about it. However, it would have to be the U.S. to start there, while the USSR will be defending peace. History will be the judge of our actions If the U.S. wants to start a war over Germany let it be so; perhaps the USSR should sign a peace treaty right away and get over it." Kennedy recognized that the situation in Germany was "abnormal". The president then stated that the signing of a peace treaty was not a belligerent act. Subsequently, Khrushchev reiterated that the Soviets would sign the treaty alone if the U.S. objected. Even so, Kennedy stated that the U.S. position was strongly supported there. Once Kennedy realized that Khrushchev would not back down in his insistence of signing a separate treaty with East Germany, he not only remarked that "'it will be a cold winter' but that there will be war."³¹

Commenting on the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting, Rusk cabled the State Department that Khrushchev again raised the issue of alleged Soviet misperception by the West when he stated that "miscalculation" was "too much used by the West" in that it could mean defense of Soviet "vital interests", interests which the Soviets were prepared to defend.³² After stating that the U.S. should not intimidate the Soviets, Rusk commented on the President's Berlin argument by noting that "Kennedy may have weakened his own position by acknowledging, as Eisenhower had, that

³⁰ JFK Library, NSF, Country File -Soviet Union, June 4, 1961, Box 176-178.

³¹ JFK Library, NSF, Country File - Soviet Union, June 4, 1961, Box 176-178. Reeves, 171. The official transcript records Kennedy merely saying that "it will be a cold winter." However, in researching the Vienna summit, Reeves, who also interviewed Rusk, remarks that Rusk wrote him a letter which stated that "Mr. Khrushchev outlined what he planned to do with Berlin and said that if there were any interference from the West, there would be war." As Rusk recalls in this letter, "Kennedy replied, 'Then there will be war, it is going to be a very cold winter.'" Rusk Letter to Reeves, April 24, 1989, in Reeves, 687.

³² JFK Library, NSF File, Country File - Soviet Union, Box 176-178.

the Berlin situation was not satisfactory, but that ‘it is not the right time now to change the situation in Berlin and the balance in general.’”³³

Aside from discussing the status of Berlin and other issues such as Laos, the Vienna meeting provided Kennedy the opportunity to confront Khrushchev directly on the most pressing issues of the Cold War. According to Rusk, “I think President Kennedy was sobered and shaken by that experience. He wasn’t shaken to a point that he lost his balance or that he came away in a panic or anything of that sort, but he, for the first time, saw the full weight of Soviet pressure and the full weight of the ideological commitments of the Soviet Union.”³⁴ Robert Kennedy recalled his brother leaving Vienna thinking that Khrushchev “was a very tough, wily, unrelenting figure and. . . uncompromising.” He continued by noting that the president thought he “had a closed mind; it was very hard to get through to him.”³⁵

In recalling the Vienna Summit from the Soviet perspective, Dobrynin, who was about to become the top Soviet envoy in Washington, wrote in his memoirs that “on the whole, the meeting in Vienna between Khrushchev and Kennedy . . . had a significant effect. Khrushchev continued, to a certain degree, to underestimate Kennedy’s ability to defend his position, although his opinion of the young president had improved considerably. And it seemed that Kennedy

³³ Diane Kunz, *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 122.

³⁴ JFK Library, Dean Rusk Oral History, 165.

³⁵ JFK Library, Robert F. Kennedy Oral History, 72. Recounting the Vienna Summit, David Mayers writes that Thompson had recommended that Kennedy meet Khrushchev, “expecting the president would then better understand Khrushchev and with him could break the ice in bilateral relations that had congealed toward the end of the Eisenhower administration.” Mayers continues by noting that “in subsequent years, Kennedy could not resist chiding Thompson: ‘[The President] several times teased me about having recommended the Vienna meeting, saying that it had not gone very well, but he always ended up by admitting that it had been useful to him to get to know Khrushchev at firsthand.’” David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America’s Soviet Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 207. Arthur Schlesinger recalls that Khrushchev’s blunt demeanor surprised the new president by writing that “Kennedy had never encountered any leader with whom he could not exchange ideas — anyone so impervious to reasoned argument or so apparently indifferent to the prospective obliteration of mankind.” Arthur Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 374.

overestimated the readiness of Khrushchev and his allies to take decisive actions on Berlin, the most aggressive of which really was the erection of the Berlin Wall two months after the Vienna Summit.”³⁶ Khrushchev’s son, Sergei, recalled that “my father understood that Kennedy made his own foreign policy. He had everything in his own head. He never went to his advisers on how to answer Khrushchev; he liked to talk eye to eye. . . . he realized that Kennedy was a young but clever president.” Explaining the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting in terms of Kennedy’s inexperience as a statesman, Sukhodev noted that “. . . there was that kind of a guarded attitude to this new, young, unknown man who had suddenly been elevated to the presidency. And Khrushchev was trying to measure him up, to take his bearings. So, in any event, however, the entire tenor of the conversation was – they didn’t raise their voices, it wasn’t a slinging match, and that has to be, I think, understood from the very start. But at the same time there was no proper chemistry. They really didn’t latch on to each other constructively. . . . I’m afraid that he came away with the feeling that the guy was inexperienced, perhaps not up to the task of properly running a country such as the United States. And I think that led to some, perhaps, wrong judgments in Soviet policies, subsequently.”³⁷

Shortly thereafter, a second Berlin crisis broke out when the East Germans sealed off their sector of Berlin from the West.³⁸ On August 13, shortly after midnight, East German troops

³⁶ Dobrynin, 46.

³⁷ Strober and Strober, 204, 357, 359. In his work on U.S.-Soviet relations, Richard Stevenson interprets this summit by writing that “while the discussions were conducted in a civil manner, they were characterized more by statements of position than any real search for accommodation. Kennedy had come to Vienna, partly out of the need to demonstrate his and America’s determination to stand firm Khrushchev’s intentions and expectations were revealed by the fact that his proposals were nothing more than reproductions of those the Eisenhower Administration had previously rejected. Given these factors, the likelihood of progress was limited.” Richard W. Stevenson, *The Rise and Fall of Détente*, 107.

³⁸ The starting date of the crisis had its roots in February 17, 1961, when the Soviets sent a note to Adenauer asking for another peace treaty with East Germany. In March, Kennedy instructed Ambassador Thompson to avoid the subject of Berlin in a planned conversation with the Soviet leader. Wanting a clean slate from which to

installed roadblocks and barbed wire barricades at most of the crossing points between East and West Berlin. At first, fences went up. Soon thereafter, the East German police erected a wall, which for the next twenty-seven years would serve as a reminder of the East-West confrontation. Subsequently, the East German government ordered guards to shoot-to-kill anyone attempting to flee the East.

When asked whether or not the wall's erection came as a complete surprise, Martin Hillenbrand, a foreign service officer (FSO) then stationed in Bonn stated that "'entire surprise' is perhaps the wrong expression. It certainly came as a surprise in specific terms. It had become clear to many of us who were dealing with the Berlin problem that the East German regime and the Soviet Union would have to do something, somehow about the ever-increasing flow of refugees, which was reaching almost run-away proportions by mid-summer of 1961 We had always assumed that perhaps the most logical way for them to try to control the situation would be to place very rigid barriers against individual movement at the boundary between East Germany and West Berlin. Well, they didn't do that. They chose the method of the Wall. I don't know of anyone who anticipated that they would do precisely what they did in that particular way. I remember seeing no intelligence reports or any other materials which predicted the building of the Wall."³⁹ Paul Nitze, Kennedy's Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ISA), recalled the immediate U.S. response in that "we had expected a confrontation over Berlin, but frankly we had not anticipated a serious move on the part of the Kremlin in August Upon my hurried return to Washington, I called together those on my staff in ISA and other officials in the Pentagon concerned with Berlin to discuss what now was to be done. Allied

begin negotiations, the administration reviewed the consensus Eisenhower made on Berlin and had asked Acheson to write a report on NATO and Germany.

³⁹ JFK Library, Martin Hillenbrand Oral History, 17.

troops in Berlin had been put on alert but confined to barracks to prevent incidents. The wall, at this point, could easily be knocked down by a jeep or a truck, but it was not clear to anyone in the West whether the barrier was being constructed to keep the East Berliners in or to keep us out. Allied access to the divided city was our vital concern and on that score Mr. Khrushchev had assured us on several recent occasions that there would be no interference with allied traffic in and out of Berlin.” In defending the administration’s reaction time to this crisis, Bundy recalled that “the wall was a shock to morale in Berlin -- to everybody from Brandt on down. We didn’t respond to that overnight; it took us three or four days to send reinforcements -- to send the vice president. But if some in Germany think we should have made war out of it, I think that’s a lot of nonsense. And we did get there on time. It’s worth noting that we were a little quicker in reacting than the chancellor of the Federal Republic, who might have been thought to have been closer to the problem. Certainly the citizens of Berlin did not hold it against Kennedy -- as we all know from what happened when he went there.” Willy Brandt, speaking from a West German perspective as the mayor of West Berlin, remembered those events by noting that “only after the event did a significant, if not a very large, number of Germans realize that we could expect nothing from the Americans, or indeed from the Western powers as a whole, other than what they had promised besides the ever precocious 4-Power status, namely the three ‘essentials’ adopted as principles by the Council of NATO.”⁴⁰ Brandt also believed that the Berlin Wall “had glaringly revealed the limitations of Adenauer’s German policy and that of the Western Powers as well. The Chancellor’s attitude towards ensuing negotiations between the Americans and the Soviet Union was not only skeptical but thoroughly mistrustful.”⁴¹ McNamara recalled that “it was a very serious crisis, much more than many people realize then or today.” He continued by noting

⁴⁰ Willy Brandt, *My Life in Politics* (New York: Viking, 1992), 48-49.

that “nobody, including the Soviets, knew how it was going to come out.” The Kennedy administration was, in fact, prepared to go to war to defuse the crisis. Richard Mountbatten, who was then chief of the British Defense Staff, was against the use of nuclear weapons should all-out war break out. McNamara recalled that while it was “insane” to use nuclear weapons, the nuclear balance did favor the West (even though the use of such weapons was not seriously considered by the Kennedy administration).⁴² Kennedy asked his advisors, “Why would Khrushchev put up a wall if he really intended to seize West Berlin? There wouldn’t be any need of a wall if he occupied the whole city.” He postulated that “this is his way out of his predicament. It’s not a very nice solution, but a wall is a hell of a lot better than war.”⁴³

⁴¹ Willy Brandt, *People and Politics* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1976), 57.

⁴² McNamara interview. In her study on this Secretary of Defense, Deborah Shapley remarks that after the Wall’s erection, Kennedy asked McNamara to look into nuclear options. Subsequently, Henry Rowen, who worked for Nitze, wrote a paper showing that a few SAC [Strategic Air Command] bombers, avoiding detection by radar, could hit all the Soviet missiles, though a few could survive to retaliate on the NATO area. In such a scenario, Rowen declared that 34 million Western Europeans and at least 10 million Americans would perish. According to writer Fred Kaplan, Rowen’s paper bypassed McNamara and reached the White House, a fact which appalled Marcus Raskin, an NSC staffer. Shapley, *Promise and Power*, 121. Analyzing the effects of the Berlin Wall’s erection, Schlesinger wrote that “the Wall remained, a shabby obscenity straggling across the face of the city. . . . By stanching the blood-flow from East Germany, the Wall secured the most immediate Soviet interest in Berlin.” Arthur Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 397. Interpreting Kennedy’s response to the Wall’s erection, Michael Beschloss observed in his well-received volume on the Kennedy-Khrushchev relationship that “for eight days after the border was closed, and as the barbed-wire fence was replaced by a concrete wall, Kennedy did not say a word in public about what was happening in Berlin. Nor did he allow any statement on the subject to be issued in his name. As in the winter and spring of 1961, the President’s public silence was no doubt inspired by his desire to keep Berlin from becoming a bruising domestic political controversy that might force him to take a harder line than he wished to take Amazingly enough, it succeeded. In a later age, the American press and public would have been unlikely to tolerate a President’s refusal to comment for more than a week on such a momentous event as the building of the Berlin Wall. But in August 1961 not a single major publication objected to Kennedy’s silence.” Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), 277-278. In discussing U.S. options in the aftermath of the Wall’s erection, Thomas Shoenbaum writes in his study on Rusk that no practical military option existed apart from massively inflicting force. Furthermore, nothing would stop the East Germans from erecting another wall, fifty yards further back, if the Wall was simply knocked down. More importantly, Shoenbaum states that even though the Berlin Wall violated the four-power postwar Berlin agreement on free access, such had never been interpreted as a cause for war. Thomas Shoenbaum, *Waging War and Peace* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 343. Both Zubok and Pleshakov comment that the decision to build the Wall was “the benchmark of Khrushchev’s statesmanship.” Although it was expected, they maintained that Khrushchev spontaneously made the decision, thereby surprising observers of these developments. Zubok and Pleshakov, 251.

⁴³ Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 278.

The West Germans, particularly those in Berlin, were dismayed at the slow rate of NATO's response. After all, it took four days before Washington delivered a note of protest to Moscow. Indeed, when Vice President Johnson visited Berlin, he was greeted by hecklers, who claimed he had come too late. Recalling Johnson's performance, however, Rusk stated that the vice president was up to the task of visibly demonstrating the American will to stay in Berlin, while providing much-needed support to the people of Berlin.⁴⁴ Given that the wall was erected on East Berlin territory, the East Germans had not violated any wartime agreement, no matter how provocative the manner of its execution. NATO feared that the wall might serve as a prelude to aggressive action. Rusk recalled, however, that "we all were faced with a situation where we did not like what was happening, but we did not see any alternatives that would improve the situation We were not prepared to fight a war over the issue of the Wall since it did not intrude into the responsibilities of the Western powers for West Berlin and in itself did not interfere with access to the city it was not an issue of war as far as the West was concerned."⁴⁵ McGhee remembered those events by noting that the West, in effect, won the moral victory by not using force.⁴⁶

The crisis preoccupied the Kennedy administration as well as other allied governments throughout that summer. Bundy recalled that, within the U.S. government, not only did the Kennedy administration desire to handle it with care but it was also mindful that de Gaulle was worried about what this confrontation might lead to.⁴⁷

Amid that summer of crisis, an NSC paper, outlining the contours of the problem, stated that U.S. options were limited because of the points proposed by the Soviet Union. It declared

⁴⁴ Rusk interview.

⁴⁵ JFK Library, Dean Rusk Oral History, 175.

⁴⁶ McGhee interview.

that the Soviets were justifying “the action it wishes to take” on the grounds that Europe was in “danger of conflagration” if a peace treaty was not enacted. The administration, however, did not find any merit in that argument by reasoning that “minor incidents which occur from time to time in the present situation are settled through exercise of those quadripartite responsibilities which, in themselves, constitute the most effective protection against any local aggravation of the situation growing into a real threat to the peace.” It further added that “should the USSR make unilateral moves in its German policy, contrary to binding international agreements, the NATO countries could only interpret such moves as a purposeful threat to their national interests.”⁴⁸

At the request of Robert Kennedy, Walt Rostow, who at the time was the deputy National Security advisor, wrote a memo to the President outlining what he felt Kennedy ought to do to rally NATO in the wake of this crisis. He stated that “Mr. Khrushchev has done more than challenge our unity and our will. He has challenged us to negotiate.” He believed that part of this challenge was “to create and to present at the proper time and in the proper forum our own ideas as to how the difficult and dangerous problem of Germany might be moved towards a settlement which would respect the fundamental principle of self-determination and respect the legitimate security interests of all nations and peoples.”⁴⁹

Shortly thereafter, Bundy wrote an NSC memo for Kennedy outlining certain negotiating strategies which Kennedy could use as leverage. Among those positions which he advanced for discussion with Gromyko included a public presentation of U.S. proposals for German unity for the reason that this would get it on the record. Further elaborating upon this point, Bundy noted, “We think that no all-German or all-Berlin proposal will get anything but a flat NO [sic] from the

⁴⁷ Bundy interview.

⁴⁸ JFK Library, NSF, Regional SF-Europe (Germany), Box 117, Summary Statement of Position, 4-5.

⁴⁹ JFK Library, NSF, Regional SF-Europe (Germany), Box 177, Memorandum to the President, 1-2.

Soviets, and we think we'll look silly if we push very hard or long for what we know is unattainable." The memo continued by examining the status which the U.S. could give to East Germany. It stated that "the hardest question of all is how far to go on offering some degree of recognition or heightened status [for] the Ulbricht regime. You could end this crisis tomorrow by recognizing Ulbricht, and you could probably get some fairly juicy guarantees in return. But the West Germans would feel deeply betrayed. This is foolish, but factual. Since the Ulbricht regime does exist, however, and since the West Germans have given it a rather more de facto recognition than we have (by trade and business relations), there is room for maneuver."⁵⁰

On the same day that Kennedy sent Vice President Johnson to show American support, the president ordered reinforcements for the 50,000 U.S. soldiers stationed in Berlin. Six months later, these 50,000 reached Europe to raise U.S. troop levels in Europe to the record number of 434,000. At the same time, Kennedy sent General Lucius Clay to act as a special emissary of the President.

On August 30, Finletter responded to the president's question regarding the way the NATO allies handled the crisis at NATO, in particular what they wished in terms of negotiations with the Soviet Union on the Berlin question. The U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO said that, except for the French, the U.S. military buildup had not been accompanied by sufficient emphasis on the political aspects of the question.⁵¹

⁵⁰ JFK Library, NSF, Regional SF-Europe (Germany), Box 117, Memorandum for the President, 1-2. Walter Ulbricht headed the East German government. He was the chairman of the German Democratic Republic Council of State and of the Socialist Unity Party.

⁵¹ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XIV, 383. In analyzing the Berlin problem during this, the first year of the Kennedy administration, Alistair Horne, in his biography of Macmillan, notes that "the running crisis over Berlin was aggravated through 1961 by the rapid alternation with which Khrushchev blew hot and cold, and which kept the Western powers constantly on the defensive, reacting piecemeal to his changing whims and ploys." Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan*, 313.

That fall, on October 17, Khrushchev, addressing the Twenty-second Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, abruptly withdrew his deadline for a German peace treaty by the close of the year (December 31). Besides stating that war was not inevitable between the Communist and Western world, he acknowledged that the West was making a good faith effort to resolve the status of Berlin.⁵² Although Khrushchev did not retreat from his view on Berlin, he, nonetheless, now acknowledged the need to show flexibility when dealing with NATO on this important issue.

In recalling the crisis, Khrushchev wrote in his memoirs that “I would say that we didn’t quite achieve the same sort of moral victory that a peace treaty would have represented, but on the other hand we probably received more material gains *without* a peace treaty.” He still maintained that “if the West had agreed to sign a treaty, it would have meant concessions on our part, particularly with regard to the movement of people across the border.” Khrushchev justified his actions by also remarking that “the capitalist states realized that control had been firmly established in Berlin and the Russians wouldn’t back down. Word reached us that the West acknowledged our rights but hoped we wouldn’t aggravate the situation any further. . . . we had secured for the GDR [East Germany] its sovereign rights. That was reward enough for our efforts, and it made us pleased and proud.” Significantly, he concluded with the observation that “I was more pleased than anyone, because I had been the one who thought up the solution to the

⁵² In recounting this development, Shoenbaum writes that “the administration breathed a quiet sigh of relief. The situation in Berlin remained serious, but the crisis was no longer an imminent threat to world peace. The removal of the ultimatum was the core of the U.S. position, and that had been achieved. It appeared that Khrushchev was ready for a respite from crisis. The Soviets had attained some minimum objectives. The construction of the Berlin Wall had stemmed the refugee flow and stabilized the East German state. . . . And, apparently, the American military buildup and firm negotiating stance had convinced Khrushchev that his campaign to intimidate the new American administration had failed.” Shoenbaum, 350-351.

problem which faced us as a consequence of our unsatisfactory negotiations with Kennedy in Vienna.”⁵³

The status of Berlin continued to play a central role in NATO affairs in 1962. In a Geneva meeting attended by Llewelyn Thompson (U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union), Charles Bohlen (the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State) and Vladimir Semenov (the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister), Semenov “laid considerable stress on the obligation that West Berlin as now constituted is, in effect, a ‘NATO base’, largely, it appeared, because of the NATO declaration to the effect that an attack on the forces in West Berlin would bring NATO into action.” Semenov stated that “this NATO connection was incompatible with the solution of the Berlin situation that they envisaged.”⁵⁴

In the fall of 1962, the Berlin question continued as the pressing issue in East-West relations. On the eve of the Cuban missile crisis, Gromyko met with Kennedy to discuss Germany and Berlin. Again, Gromyko reiterated the line of instituting a German peace treaty and of resolving the status of Berlin, though he admitted that no progress had been made. Moreover he stated that the Kremlin could not tolerate a “NATO base” within East Germany. In fact he recalled Khrushchev’s statement that “the NATO military base and the occupation regime in West Berlin represented a rotten tooth which must be pulled out, and no one would be harmed by that. One could not take seriously the assertion that it was necessary to maintain a NATO base in West Berlin in order to protect the West Berlin population. As a matter of fact, the Soviet

⁵³ Strobe Talbott, ed, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 508-509. In analyzing Khrushchev’s motives, Francis L. Loewenheim comments that “from Khrushchev’s vantage point, . . . the wall appeared to be a striking success. For one thing, it put an end to the massive outflow of population from the East, and – perhaps he foresaw – it brought nearer the time when Western governments would feel compelled to recognize the division of Germany and the sovereignty of the self-styled German Democratic Republic . . .” Francis L. Loewenheim, “Dean Rusk: Diplomacy of Principle” in Gordon A. Craig and Francis L. Loewenheim, eds., *The Diplomats, 1939-1979* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 509.

Government was in favor of respecting the freedom of the West Berlin population, but no NATO base was needed for that purpose.” Kennedy responded to Gromyko’s assertion of Berlin being a NATO base by noting that the forces there had no offensive capability. Moreover, Kennedy stated that he did not want Berlin to be used as a base for subversion.⁵⁵

The Kennedy administration justified its flexible response strategy by the way that NATO resolved the crisis.⁵⁶ It also used this crisis as a test case for the Atlantic allies to show that flexible response was a more reasonable way to defuse the situation than the threat of massive retaliation. The following May, speaking before the North Atlantic Council in Athens, McNamara argued that “the Berlin crisis exemplifies a type of threat that we should expect to face elsewhere in the NATO area. In such a crisis the provocation, while severe, does not immediately require or justify our most violent reaction. Also as such a crisis develops, as military force is threatened or becomes engaged -- even in limited quantities -- the increasingly alert nuclear posture of the belligerents makes the prospective outcome of a nuclear attack for both sides even less attractive.” McNamara continued his line of argument by remarking that “the developments of recent events concerning Berlin may provide relevant evidence of the utility of limited but decisive action . . . it is not unlikely that the NATO non-nuclear buildup conveyed to the Soviets the right message about Berlin. When the Soviets began menacing Berlin, they may have entertained doubts about Western determination; clearly they were not deterred from their initial steps by our previous nuclear threats. But the creation of greater new non-nuclear strength has reinforced our

⁵⁴ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XV, 47.

⁵⁵ JFK Library, NSF-Country File (Soviet Union), Box, 18 October, 1962.

⁵⁶ Stromseth provides further commentary on the utility of flexible response when she writes that “if the Kennedy administration needed any confirmation of the wisdom of its policy of strengthening NATO’s conventional forces, Berlin provided it unmistakably . . . He was relieved that the strengthening of NATO’s improved military options, and he believed that this prevented Khrushchev from achieving gains on Berlin through negotiations held against the backdrop of threatened military action.” Stromseth, 39.

overall deterrent, and the aggression has not occurred.”⁵⁷ Berlin was the defining issue facing Kennedy in his NATO policy during this period. Whereas the city took a symbolic center stage in the continuing dispute between the United States and the Soviet Union, it, literally, became the crossroads of the Cold War. The crisis also served as a signal to both leaders that each expected the other to respect his government’s interests in Europe before any discussion of Europe’s permanent borders could take place.⁵⁸

de Gaulle

During this period, de Gaulle irritated the Kennedy administration much in the same way he had irritated the Eisenhower administration.⁵⁹ This presented problems because the Kennedy administration wanted to break with past NATO policy and make the push for flexible response.

Within the NSC, Bundy, along with members of his staff, was unhappy with the General’s behavior.⁶⁰ Bundy, however, clearly understood that, notwithstanding de Gaulle’s actions, the NATO alliance was central to America’s national security policy, and, to that extent, the NSC was prepared to render whatever support necessary to advance that policy.⁶¹ At the root of the problem was the fact that de Gaulle did not want France to remain under U.S. military and

⁵⁷ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. VIII, 277, 280.

⁵⁸ In his interpretation on the origins of détente, Stevenson comments that “. . . the wall served the purpose of détente; it was a statement in brick and mortar by the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic that a *modus vivendi* could be arrived at only on the basis of acceptance of the divisions and differences separating East and West; and the West’s tacit acceptance of the wall brought that *modus vivendi* nearer.” Stevenson, 110.

⁵⁹ As an example of this tension, Shoenbaum comments in his work that de Gaulle “was perhaps the only world leader with whom Rusk was unable to establish any kind of rapport or understanding.” In fact, Rusk’s meetings with de Gaulle “were always icily formal and correct, without the slightest hint of personal warmth. De Gaulle would begin by asking Rusk to transmit his greetings and respects to President Kennedy, then he would pause and say, ‘Monsieur le Secrétaire, je vous écoute.’ (Mr. Secretary, I am listening.)” Shoenbaum, 359.

⁶⁰ Komer interview.

⁶¹ Galbraith interview.

political control in Europe. Compounding this dilemma was the fact that not only did the U.S. try to treat de Gaulle as an equal partner but it also wanted to accommodate the French president by guaranteeing that the U.S. was prepared to accomplish whatever was necessary to defend Western Europe from the Soviet Union. Although de Gaulle resented American power in Europe, he, nevertheless, conceded that, without it, France could not face the Soviet Union alone.

De Gaulle's desire for a French independent role in NATO, particularly as it related to his desire for French nuclear control, affected Kennedy's conduct of Franco-American relations during this period, especially since he was now pushing a flexible response strategy. As a way of preparing for Kennedy's summit meeting with de Gaulle in June 1961, Bundy outlined the best approach that the president should take toward the French general, though Kennedy was perturbed at de Gaulle's continued opposition to NATO, going so far as remarking, "Why is de Gaulle screwing us? What does he want?"⁶² Bundy replied that de Gaulle wanted to play a greater role in the control of NATO's nuclear weapons, with the understanding that this would be done in conjunction with other allied countries. Yet, the memo also cautioned that in no way would France commit its nuclear forces to NATO.⁶³ At the same time, in a conversation between Nitze and Herve Alphanand, the French ambassador in Washington, the latter noted that France did support the new emphasis on conventional weapons (albeit lukewarm), significant in light of the French independent posture. Consequently, Alphanand echoed the view that the U.S. should not continue its dominant role within the alliance. When he inquired whether or not the French would receive a "wider sharing of information" if they committed their nuclear forces to NATO, Nitze

⁶² Reeves continues the narration by writing that "Kennedy had asked more than once when he was considering NATO affairs. From Kennedy's perspective, the French lived under the protection of the U.S. military but never hesitated to take an anti-American line in promoting de Gaulle's view of making France the leader of continental Europe and an equal partner of the Americans and the British." Reeves, 144.

⁶³ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, Memorandum, May 3, 1961, 1-3.

and his advisers were surprised that Alphand raised this point since de Gaulle “was not interested in any binding commitment of French atomic forces to NATO.”⁶⁴ Moreover, a CIA Current Intelligence Weekly Summary, written in the period immediately preceding the Paris summit, stated that “de Gaulle considers NATO in its present form outmoded and unable to cope with the diverse nature of the Soviet threat de Gaulle’s continued opposition to the integration of French forces in NATO reflects his feeling that NATO no longer offers adequate protection for French interests in the light of increased destructiveness of nuclear weapons.” Moreover, “there is widespread belief at the highest levels in Paris that the US would not use its strategic weapons against the Soviet Union in the event of a Soviet attack on Europe.”⁶⁵ Later, Spaak cautioned Rusk that Kennedy should appreciate the fact that the alliance’s new emphasis on conventional weapons (i.e. flexible response) had strengthened de Gaulle’s conviction that the U.S. did not intend to use strategic nuclear weapons for the defense of Europe.⁶⁶

NATO figured prominently between Kennedy and de Gaulle when they met from May 31 to June 2 in Paris. While de Gaulle did not dispute the need for keeping the alliance, he did question the organizational structure, and, more importantly, the control of nuclear weapons. He argued that NATO’s situation had changed from that which existed at its founding eleven years before. As he put it, “first of all there is no longer a nuclear monopoly. On the contrary, the Soviets and the Americans are more or less equal and each can destroy the other.”⁶⁷ To that, Kennedy bluntly responded in no uncertain terms that “for the United States, the defense of Europe and of America was the same.” He continued by noting that “American troops were stationed in Europe to remind Moscow that an attack on Europe automatically constituted an

⁶⁴ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, May 8, 1961, 1-3.

⁶⁵ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, Current Intelligence Weekly Summary, May 8, 1961.

⁶⁶ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, Message from Brussels to State, May 29, 1961, 3.

attack on America.”⁶⁸ When Kennedy returned to Washington, he stated to Stikker that the new emphasis on conventional weapons did not imply any weakening of the nuclear deterrent.⁶⁹

The role that France wanted to play in NATO also came up in discussions between U.S. and French policymakers during 1962. De Gaulle told Lemnitzer that France required an independent nuclear capability, and that France could not “commit all of her armed forces to NATO since France requires that the major portion of these forces be reserved for the defense of France. . .” De Gaulle stated that, under certain emergency conditions, “it was conceivable that all of the French Armed Forces might be made available to NATO but that the decision would have to be made at the time under the circumstances then prevailing.”⁷⁰

No stranger to alliance disruption, de Gaulle once again proved, this time to the inexperienced Kennedy, that he was not only capable but also eager to advance French interests at the risk of promoting Soviet anti-NATO propaganda. Notwithstanding de Gaulle’s views of NATO, the French president did show a willingness to side with the West.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XIII, 310-312.

⁶⁸ Arthur Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 353.

⁶⁹ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XIII, 322; According to James N. Giglio, “Beneath the Paris cordiality emerged differences [that] threatened American relations with France and other NATO nations. De Gaulle insisted that France — and other Western Europeans countries — must play a more important role in the defense of the Continent, particularly since the U.S. refused to furnish NATO allies with atomic warheads. Kennedy’s emphasis strengthening conventional weapons only convinced de Gaulle that the United States would not use nuclear weaponry to defend Western Europe. De Gaulle also thought the United States had become more vulnerable to Soviet nuclear retaliation, which meant France must become less dependent on America.” James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 73.

⁷⁰ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, JCS Memo, 24 July 1962, 1, 3.

⁷¹ Frank Costigliola supports this contention when he writes that “despite the differences with de Gaulle, the Kennedy administration did not seek to undermine the man who had contained the communists in France and who allowed Algeria to become independent in 1962.” Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 131.

The MLF and the Status of Allied Nuclear Weapons

Kennedy took the initiative in advancing the work begun in the Eisenhower administration on the MLF.⁷² During this period, the MLF was in its formative stages, with the new administration seeking to solidify allied support for the concept as a way of promoting flexible response. It played an important role in Kennedy's NATO policy in the sense that it was an opportunity for this president to show the European Allies that the U.S. was willing to allow the NATO partners to play a role in allied nuclear policy, even if it did not mean outright control of the nuclear trigger.

At the onset of the Kennedy administration, NATO nuclear capabilities included tactical nuclear weapons in Western Europe under two-key (U.S. and host country) control. The NATO inventory included the following: obsolete U.S. Jupiter and Thor missiles in Britain, Italy, and Turkey; a U.S. strategic retaliatory force consisting of bombers (mostly B-52s and B-47s) headquartered in the U.S.; new Minutemen intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and Polaris submarines; the British nuclear force centered on aging V bombers; and the French nuclear capability tied to aircraft.⁷³

⁷² While Kennedy should be credited for advancing this policy, Barry Rubin, in his book on the State Department, argues that it was State, in particular the political appointees such as Ball, who had made the strong case for the MLF and nuclear sharing. Barry Rubin, *Secrets of State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 115.

⁷³ Gaddis writes that this arrangement "presented most formidable differences." He continues by saying that "effects to bolster the alliance's conventional capabilities, neither the United States nor the Europeans themselves were willing to dispense wholly with nuclear weapons or a detraction to Soviet aggression. This had been an additional reason for Kennedy's unwillingness to rule out an American 'first strike'; his administration actually increased the number of tactical nuclear weapons stationed in Europe by some 60%." Regarding the effects which this strategy had on the NATO allies, Gaddis also remarks that the Europeans found reliance on the American deterrent unsettling, questioning whether or not the U.S. would risk annihilation of its own cities to defend Western Europe. He writes that the Kennedy administration, ". . . genuinely supported the concept of a self-reliant, independent, preferably unified Europe, capable simultaneously of resisting the Russians, submerging what

Shortly after receiving Acheson's 1961 report, the president, in a speech before the Canadian Parliament, stated that the U.S. looked to establishing a seaborne nuclear force, composed of five Polaris submarines that would be truly multinational in ownership, adding that he looked "to the possibility of eventually establishing a NATO seaborne force, which would be truly multilateral in ownership and control . . . once NATO's non-nuclear goals have been achieved."⁷⁴

Dean Rusk commented that Kennedy realized that the MLF proposal began as a European initiative and felt that it was up to the Europeans to follow through. Both publicly and privately, he and Kennedy told the allies that they would welcome any proposal they developed. For his part, Rusk reiterated Kennedy's pledge before the Canadian Parliament at the following December NATO ministerial session. Rusk argued that the MLF provided a secure, mobile base for the European deterrent away from populated areas. Moreover, by making decisions to fire missiles contingent upon the agreement of all NATO members, the MLF would afford each nuclear and non-nuclear power a sense of involvement in its own defense.⁷⁵

Regarding his perceptions of the MLF, George Ball commented that "though I was, of course, generally aware of the proposals for a multilateral force, I did not at first take them seriously. But as the French increasingly flaunted their *force de frappe* as a badge of great power status, I began to fear that the Germans might, over time, develop a sense of grievance. At the same time, for the Federal Republic to acquire a nuclear capability of its own would create great

was left of German nationalism, and relieving Washington of some of its global responsibilities." Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 221.

⁷⁴ Diane Kunz, *The Diplomacy of a Crucial Decade*, 122.

⁷⁵ Gaddis stated that "it seemed, at first glance, to be true only way to confine an Alliance's need for unified command with the *amour propre* of the respective constituents," Gaddis, 222.

tensions with a Soviet Union that still exploited German *revanchism* for its own purposes and would be totally unacceptable to other Western European powers.⁷⁶

The British, at first, were apprehensive of this proposal, blaming the State Department for trying to overcome deep-seated and complex issues such as national and military jealousies, as well as fears of military ambitions and nuclear proliferation. Consequently, the issue divided Washington and London. Realizing that they had to find an alternative, Kennedy, Rusk, McNamara, and Bundy proposed giving the British Polaris missiles or a more updated weapon system, but only if the British placed them under the command of NATO.

The Kennedy administration, however, opposed the idea of allowing NATO allies to develop their own independent nuclear capabilities outside of MLF on the grounds that small national military forces “would be neither numerous nor accurate enough to contribute an effective deterrent; they would, however, make their own home countries targets for Soviet attack. Nor, without a unified command strategy, would such weapons be used in the coordination manner prescribed by the strategy of flexible response.” Moreover, “. . . possibilities for miscalculations, even accidents, would accordingly be great.” The danger also existed that if other NATO countries developed nuclear weapons, the West Germans would want them too, a prospect that would not only provoke the Russians but also upset West Germany’s neighbors, and, consequently, break up the NATO alliance.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ David S. McLellan and David C. Acheson, eds., *Among Friends* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1980), 261. George Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982), 261.

⁷⁷ JFK Library, Theodore Sorensen Oral History, 102. Sorensen recounts that Kennedy’s views on the issue “stemmed from certain basic convictions which he made clear from time to time.” He highlights that they included his concerns about the proliferation of nuclear weapons by the West Germans. Moreover, Kennedy believed that the U.S. “was still and would continue to be for some time the chief nuclear deterrent for the West,” and, consequently, no other country should trigger “a nuclear war in which we would be forced to respond.” Sorensen also notes that Kennedy doubted that “the final decision-making in a nuclear deterrent could be distributed or delegated.” Consequently, “all of this led to his initial posture of indicating interest in involving our allies, but waiting to see if they could come up with a plan.” JFK Library, Sorensen Oral History, 103.

The British, hoping to be co-equal partners with the American nuclear deterrent, were not impressed with Kennedy's MLF. As a result, the Kennedy administration agreed to provide financial aid for the British in developing SKYBOLT, a missile system which was conceived in the United States. In this regard, Kennedy wanted to express support for the British in developing their own nuclear deterrent.

In April, Kennedy tested his redefinition of MLF when Chancellor Adenauer came to the White House. Among the briefing material prepared for that visit was a position paper drawn up by Bundy that outlined the options Kennedy should implement. The NSC adviser wrote that because one of the first acts of the new administration was to make it absolutely clear to the Atlantic alliance that U.S. forces in Europe were essential to the security of the Atlantic Community and the Free World as a whole, "there should be no doubt or uncertainty about our intention to maintain a full contribution to NATO defense." The paper continued by noting that Kennedy should stick "to an effective 'forward strategy' for the defense of Europe," and that one of the requirements of an effective deterrence in Europe was the maintenance of nuclear weapons in NATO forces. Discounting the notion that the Kennedy White House was abandoning the nuclear guarantee, Bundy wrote that "we intend to maintain these weapons in Europe, available for the Alliance in case of need." He specifically referred to the MLF by noting that "if the European members of NATO wish to contribute to the NATO seaborne missile force provided by the U.S. POLARIS submarines after completion of the 1962-1966 non-nuclear build-up, the U.S. would be willing to discuss the possibility of some multilateral contribution by the European members. In any such discussion the U.S. would want to ensure against any ownership of control

of MRBM forces, against any weakening of centralized command and control over these forces, and against any diversion of required resources from non-nuclear programs.”⁷⁸

Consequently, General Nortstad, the SACEUR, who was not enthusiastic about the prospect of sharing U.S. nuclear capability with the allies, outlined to Bundy his views regarding nuclear sharing within the context of the MLF debate. He wrote that it was necessary to avoid the extremes of vesting responsibility in all fifteen nations or in the hands of a single power. He argued that such was a tenable view, considering the problems which could evolve if all NATO states held an equal voice in nuclear matters, or if one state held the monopoly on nuclear decisions. Consequently, he recommended initiatives within NATO which would equip the alliance to better handle enlarged nuclear capabilities⁷⁹

Acting against Kennedy’s designs for the MLF, de Gaulle favored France’s obtaining its own nuclear force and operating outside the constraints of the NATO military structure. De Gaulle had hoped for a third force, under French leadership, as a go-between the major superpowers. He did not believe Kennedy’s assurance, however, that the U.S. would use its nuclear weapons to defend Western Europe in the event of a conventional Soviet invasion. De Gaulle believed that nations could not be expected to commit their nuclear arsenal in defense of other states. Moreover, he did not buy Kennedy’s argument that NATO states would be treated as equal nuclear partners since such control would still be in American hands and, consequently, any power-sharing would be nominal, at best.⁸⁰

As a result, de Gaulle began to develop a French nuclear capability, which he defined as the *force de frappe*. Although de Gaulle first brought it up in the 1950s, it did not come into

⁷⁸ JFK Library, NSF, Regional SF - Europe (Germany), Box 17A, 1-4.

⁷⁹ JFK Library, Staff Memoranda File, McGeorge Bundy, Box 62A, 1.

⁸⁰ James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

fruition until now. By 1963, French public opinion, including the National Assembly, would accept this policy as the cornerstone of de Gaulle's foreign policy.⁸¹ U.S. policymakers disliked this doctrine because it left West Germany as the only major nonnuclear power. An NSC paper commented on the *force de frappe* by noting that "it might seem logically that American military and political presence in Europe would tend to reduce fears and doubts of American resolution, while a U.S. exit would increase them. De Gaulle has worked out a doctrine which to him, reconciles the reduction of the US presence in Europe with an increase in the credibility to the Soviet Union, of the American deterrent, because he can 'trigger' it. The force de frappe thus not only serves political purposes and in itself provides some degree of deterrence of Soviet aggression, but also is intended to increase the credibility of the American deterrent in Soviet eyes despite American actions and attitudes which purportedly weaken it and even despite the American intention to reserve full power to decide when and where the deterrent force will be used." The paper concluded that France was "a genuine and interested member of the Western alliance in so far as it answers to a Soviet threat. But since de Gaulle would say every alliance presupposes a common enemy, so the permanent allies as proposed to him under the name of 'Atlantic community' presupposes a permanent enemy -- which de Gaulle would hold is a contradiction in terms"⁸²

In March, Rusk raised the issue of French nuclear forces with the French ambassador. Alphand told the Secretary that the issue of nuclear weapons on French soil remained unsettled, and was linked to general agreement regarding strategic planning and the use of nuclear weapons throughout the world. He said that France would like to have U.S. views on the future of NATO and the role of NATO as a nuclear power. When Rusk asked why de Gaulle concluded it was

⁸¹ JFK Library, NSF, Country File (France), Box 72,—Message from Emb Paris to State, 1.

necessary to control an independent nuclear deterrent, Alphand remarked that France made the decision to produce nuclear weapons before de Gaulle returned to power in 1958. As such, he asserted that "France had never asked for U.S. help in this respect, and that it remains for the U.S. to decide whether France has made 'substantial progress' in this field in the terms of U.S. legislation"⁸³ Obviously, the French government persisted in its insistence on maintaining their own nuclear capability, independent of anything which the MLF may produce.

At the December ministerial meeting, NATO foreign ministers did not make much progress on the MLF, though, in making ministerial preparations for this meeting, State noted that, on the whole, the alliance appeared "healthy".⁸⁴ With Rusk publicly affirming U.S. support for the MLF, the other NATO allies pressed the Kennedy administration to propose a modified MLF which both could live with.⁸⁵

Subsequently, the Kennedy administration formed a task force to implement the idea and present it to the allies. Because of the opposition of Admiral Hyman Rickover, who played a leading role in the development of submarine nuclear power, some congressional members hesitated in allowing the administration to share submarine technology with the allies. As a result, the emphasis soon changed to substituting a surface vessel force for a submarine force. However, problems emerged when the task force developed an enthusiasm for MLF that went considerably beyond Kennedy's, as well as Rusk's, perception. As Rusk put it, "In their zealotry, they forgot it was simply a simple idea of what might be done to create a NATO nuclear force. Such a desire might meet the desires of our allies for greater participation in nuclear matters. . . . the president

⁸² JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, Box 23

⁸³ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XIII, 266-269.

⁸⁴ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XIII, 335.

⁸⁵ JFK Library, Staff Memoranda File, Henry Kissinger, Box 321, 20 November 1961, 2

didn't want to ram it down their throats If our Allies had embraced the MLF enthusiastically, we would have gone forward with it."⁸⁶

According to Rusk, McNamara became more of a proponent of MLF than did he, since as the Secretary of Defense, he became responsible for working out the details. From McNamara's point of view, the MLF looked like a viable force. However, many in the administration, including the president, concluded that such a force could only come about if the Europeans took the initiative to agree on the *modus operandi*.

Shortly thereafter, in 1962, Britain and France continued to press for control of the nuclear trigger. At a NATO Defense ministerial meeting, McNamara declared that "limited nuclear capabilities operating independently" were dangerous, expensive, as well as "prone to obsolescence, and lacking credibility as a deterrent." The control of nuclear weaponry also came up when Secretary-General Stikker visited the Department of State and the White House in February. With Rusk, he raised the issue of the political control of nuclear weapons, expressing the hope that the U.S. would guarantee the maintenance of nuclear weapons as well as a pledge that the U.S. would take care of targets directly relating to the defense of Europe. In his bilateral meeting with Kennedy, Stikker highlighted that West Germany needed to be taken into consideration not only because of the pressing issues of Berlin but also because it was, in his view, the strongest member of the alliance. General Taylor pointed this out to the President two months later, when he argued in a fact-finding mission report that West Germany needed to be strengthened within NATO, "not only through the provision of this NATO nuclear force but also through evidence of a determination to use all NATO atomic weapons under certain predetermined conditions which will satisfy the German security requirement." "For the

⁸⁶ Rusk, 263.

moment,” Stikker argued, “some declaration of principles governing the use of atomic weapons such as [his] currently proposed guidelines, if approved by the President and NAC [North Atlantic Council], seemed the most feasible way to give the needed reassurance to Germany.”⁸⁷ After again pushing for the MLF, he pointed out that, as far as conventional forces were concerned, “he realized that some of our partners say that this emphasis on conventional forces means that the US will not use nuclear weapons.” He thought, however, that this was in many cases just an excuse.⁸⁸

At the same time, policymakers within the Kennedy administration were concerned that the MLF would allow West Germany a direct control of nuclear weaponry, as Stikker pointed out in his previous meeting with the President. Such a prospect, Kennedy officials worried, would “shake NATO to its foundations and inflame East-West tensions.” Although France shared this concern, they believed they could contain this danger by binding West Germany tightly to France. The administration, however, did not want to see the Paris-Bonn relationship, which was on the rise, that close and doubted that France was strong enough to hold West Germany.⁸⁹

Notwithstanding this development, the Kennedy administration still expected the Bonn government to support the U.S. in NATO councils. According to an INR (State Bureau of Intelligence and Research) assessment, “the Federal Republic can be expected to maintain for the next several years an overriding interest in preserving the solidarity of the Atlantic alliance. It is highly improbable that West German leadership, under Adenauer’s guidance or that of a successor, will push any independent initiative designed to augment in either the political or military field its influence over alliance policy to the point where this solidarity might be

⁸⁷ *FRUS XIII, 1961-1963, 370-373.*

⁸⁸ *FRUS XIII, 1961-1963, 360-364.*

⁸⁹ Costigliola, 131.

threatened.” INR interpreted this West German position in terms of the fact that Bonn realized that the “true” viability of the West German state and the integrity of its territory were dependent “directly as well as ultimately” upon the U.S. security guarantee.⁹⁰ Even though West Germany had regained the confidence of Western Europe, NATO allies were still wary of any role which it could wield in allied nuclear affairs.

In other NATO nuclear matters, military strategists, as well as policymakers, advanced the doctrine of flexible response within the new policy regarding nuclear sharing. In a letter to Norstad, Bundy outlined the relationship between flexible response and the use of nuclear weapons by writing that “at this juncture I place as much importance on developing our capacity and readiness to fight with significant non-nuclear forces as on measures designed primarily to make our nuclear deterrent more credible. In saying this I am not in any sense depreciating the need for realization by the U.S.S.R. of the tremendous power of our nuclear forces and our will to use them, if necessary, in support of our objectives.” Even so, Bundy argued that the U.S. nuclear deterrent would not be credible to the Soviets unless they were convinced of NATO’s ability “to become engaged on a lesser level of violence,” and, consequently, “made to realize the great risks of escalation to nuclear war.”⁹¹

By now, the MLF proved to be a useful tool for Kennedy to promote allied unity while also advancing the merits of using conventional forces to deter the Warsaw Pact.⁹² The documents show that, thus far, Kennedy was committed to the concept. Though the Kennedy team still had more work to do, Kennedy wanted to formulate an arrangement which was

⁹⁰ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, Germany, Aug. 3, 1962, Box 75, 1.

⁹¹ JFK Library, NSF, Chronological File, Oct. 20, 1961, Box 399, 3.

⁹² This assertion was supported by Raymond Garthoff, who worked on political-military issues during this time at State. Interview with Raymond Garthoff, February 5, 1997.

acceptable in all NATO capitals. At the same time, the MLF provided a useful tool, on paper at least, to control nuclear weaponry in a efficient manner.

NATO Out-of-Area Problems

The resurgence of revolutionary ferment in the Third World was another issue that Kennedy, like his predecessor, confronted with the NATO partners. President Kennedy was faced with the choice of either condoning European actions at the risk of alienating the emerging Third world states or rebuking the allies at the risk of losing their support in NATO, particularly at a time when the new administration eagerly solicited allied support for its new strategy.

The State Department emphasized that NATO was a hindrance to the Third World, particularly as it related to such disputes as those occurring in Algeria, the Congo, Angola, and Indonesia. Halfway through the year, George Kennan, who was now U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia, noted that Tito, already well-known for his anti-Western views in the non-aligned movement, believed that the U.S. "made a mistake in supporting our NATO Allies so extensively on such questions as Algeria, the Congo, and Angola."⁹³ Under Secretary-General Stikker's stewardship, the North Atlantic Council favorably viewed the way which the NATO members were contributing to foreign aid in the developing world, emphasizing that it was "dwarfing" that provided by the Sino-Soviet bloc.⁹⁴ Stikker later recalled that on such matters, he had asked Kennedy "to show more understanding not only for the internal domestic politics of his allies but also for future developments in these areas which the allies might expect."⁹⁵

⁹³ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XVI, 194.

⁹⁴ *NATO Final Communiqués*, 137.

⁹⁵ JFK Library, Dirk Stikker Oral History, 34.

Three months into his presidency, Kennedy gave the go-ahead for a policy which CIA Director Allen Dulles advocated with regard to the overthrow of the Castro regime in Cuba. Though Kennedy was at first apprehensive about approving this, he ultimately consented. The Bay of Pigs invasion turned out to be a fiasco, causing an embarrassment for the U.S. not only in the East Bloc but also throughout the Third World. Charles Bartlett, one of Kennedy's closest friends, recalled that Stevenson "blew sky high" on the Bay of Pigs.⁹⁶ Rusk recalled that NATO allies were disappointed that the U.S. went through this effort to topple the Castro regime.⁹⁷ General Andrew Goodpaster noted that, among U.S. forces committed to NATO in Europe, this action came as a "surprise". Goodpaster, who had close relations with Eisenhower, recalled that the former president did not want to implement the operation because only a small force would be available if there was an uprising in Cuba capable of dislodging Castro. As a result, the Kennedy administration was never prepared to carry it through.⁹⁸

After the incident, Walt Rostow embarked on a mission to persuade the NATO allies to cease shipping strategic goods to Cuba. The mission was not a success. Schlesinger noted that it had no particular effect on the situation, since the flow of strategic materials from NATO nations to Cuba was negligible. He declared that ". . . .we were in the absurd position of asking NATO to do something" which the Organization of American States (OAS) was not yet fully doing. As he put it, "We invited the response that, if we wouldn't help the NATO countries in Angola or West Irian, why should they help us in Cuba?"⁹⁹

Belgium was still having problems in the Congo, as noted in the previous chapter. The Congolese crisis proved to be a personal one for Secretary-General Stikker in the sense that he

⁹⁶ Interview with Charles Bartlett, September 30, 1994.

⁹⁷ Rusk interview.

⁹⁸ Interview with Andrew Goodpaster, December 7, 1993.

viewed the actions of the Kennedy administration in Africa as a betrayal of the principles that had united NATO since 1949. In fact, Stikker came to believe that President Kennedy unnecessarily interfered in the Congolese issue, which compelled him to resign from the Secretary-Generalship in February 1962. Looking back, he explained his actions by noting that the U.S. ideas could not be approved by those states which held a direct interest in African affairs. He remarked that a basic choice had to be made. As he put it, "Does the U.S. accord more importance to the UN than to NATO? In other words, in order to assure itself of the support or friendship of the non-aligned states, is it willing to sacrifice the interests or bruise the feelings of its allies in NATO?"¹⁰⁰

The Kennedy administration became increasingly frustrated at what it viewed as Belgium's hypersensitivity on the Congo issue. However, the U.S. still remained fairly optimistic for the long-term prospects in reaching a settlement. In a background paper on the Belgium government, the State Department concluded that "Belgium objected not so much to the fact that the U.S. supported UN efforts to obtain the withdrawal of Belgian troops, as to what was considered a lack of sympathy and understanding for their problems."¹⁰¹

The Netherlands, during this period, dealt with the insurgency in New Guinea. Like other former colonial powers, the Dutch were forced to accept the new realities of their role in the reconstituted Europe.¹⁰² Moreover, this issue further highlighted the problem now confronted by

⁹⁹ JFK Library, Staff Memoranda File, Box 654A, Mar. 5, 1962, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Douglas Stuart and William Tow, *The Limits of Alliance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 275.

¹⁰¹ JFK Library, NSF- Country, Belgium, Box 9, Guidelines for Policy and Operations.

¹⁰² Stuart and Tow, in their study on NATO out-of-area problems, offer the best analysis for the Dutch predicament. According to their analysis: "The transition from a colonial power to an Atlantic security . . . was more abrupt for the Hague than for other NATO allies. Furthermore, the Dutch had been in the business of colonialism far longer than the Belgians, and unlike the French and English, they returned no special arrangements or ties with their former colonies after their liberation. By the end of the 1960s, however, the Dutch experience with decolonization had contributed to a general mood in Holland of frustration and cynicism . . . relating to out-of-area cooperation. It also contributed to a widespread inclination to question the need for defense

the U. S. government in striking a balance between its' anti-colonial policy and its NATO policy. President Sukarno of Indonesia noted this dilemma when, meeting with Kennedy in an April 1961 Oval Office meeting, rhetorically queried the U.S. reasons for withholding support for Indonesia's claim in New Guinea (West Irian) by arguing that "the only real answer to that question I have had is your friendship with the Dutch, and your relations with NATO," going so far as to lecture Kennedy that "America should not play the role of a tight-rope dancer between Europe and Asia, always keeping a balance." Looking at Kennedy, he tersely stated: "Excuse me Mr. President, I am speaking bluntly."¹⁰³ As 1961 progressed, the Dutch were tiring of finding a solution to their problems in New Guinea. They were also examining this issue in the context of their relations with NATO. NSC staffer Robert Komer informed Rostow that there were "growing" indications that the Dutch were losing confidence that this dispute would ever be resolved. As Komer asserted, their view on self-determination was largely "a product of Luns [the Dutch foreign minister] fanaticism. I can't believe that [the] Netherlands would quit NATO or otherwise cut off its nose to spite its face if we switched our policy (any more than Belgians have on Congo or even Portugal on Angola)."¹⁰⁴

By the following year, the Dutch had still not resolved their dispute with Indonesia. As a preparation for a meeting with Luns, Komer wrote to the President in February 1962 that "the Dutch may still hope that if the Indonesians start shooting, we and the UK will be forced to support our NATO ally. We could knock this prop out from under them by making clear that, if the Dutch pursue their present course, they cannot count on us. One means of underlining this would be to tell Luns regretfully that we can't let any Dutch reinforcements transit the U.S. on

modernization in general. As a result, defense improvements have become more difficult for the Hague to carry out in recent times." Stuart and Tow, 267.

¹⁰³ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XXIII, 383.

grounds that it would slam the door on peaceful settlement. We'd reconsider only on clear, unequivocal evidence of an imminent attack beyond Dutch capabilities to handle."¹⁰⁵ Later that month, State cabled the U.S. embassy in Bonn that it was ". . . extremely important in [the] context of the NATO alliance and of our relations with the Dutch, that they themselves come to the inevitable decision regarding the transfer of administration to Indonesia, without ever being in the position of ascribing this decision to pressure on them by the U.S. Government."¹⁰⁶

Consequently, the issue of transit rights via the U.S. for Dutch reinforcements came up when William R. Tyler, who was the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, stated to Rusk that "the Dutch clearly expect us to honor what they view as our commitment" and that "failure to do so can have serious consequences for US-Dutch relations with repercussions in NATO." Tyler argued that if the U.S. denied the Dutch request, the action would cause "serious misgivings among our NATO partners who are already suspicious of our ability to preserve Western positions outside of Europe." He supported this view by remarking that NATO's attitude on the issue of withholding arms to Indonesia was "clear evidence of this."¹⁰⁷

Angola presented problems for President Kennedy in the sense that it directly challenged Kennedy, who wanted to firmly oppose colonialism, even when it involved an ally such as Portugal. Moreover, Kennedy's team was publicly criticizing the Portuguese behavior within the UN. Within NATO councils, the Portuguese tried to convince other European colonial governments that Kennedy was using Portugal as a stalking horse for a major campaign of

¹⁰⁴ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XXIII, 470.

¹⁰⁵ JFK Library, Staff Memoranda File, Robert Komer, Box 322, Feb. 28 1962.

¹⁰⁶ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XXIII, 539.

¹⁰⁷ On March 1, 1962, Averell Harriman, who served as the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs during this period, informed J.H. Van Roijen, the Dutch ambassador in Washington, that the U.S. was not going to give permission for the overflight on grounds that the U.S. obligation to prevent war between the Netherlands and Indonesia was more important than alliance considerations. *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XXIII, 543.

criticism and interference against each of them. The issue of Angola popped up in regard to the base agreement in the Azores, a fact which the Joint Chiefs reminded the President amidst the growing East-West tension over Berlin. By the end of 1961, the Portuguese campaign had succeeded. Washington backed away from its criticism of Lisbon for its colonialist policies. Kennedy abandoned his initial policy of restricting military assistance and commercial sales to Portugal, and the U.S. subsequently loaned \$69 million to the Lisbon government. Nevertheless, Kennedy held firm in his embargo against the use of U.S. arms and material in Portuguese-held territory in Africa. The Lajes base remained under U.S. control, but the Portuguese government refused to continue the policy of negotiating 5-year access agreements and demanded instead a yearly renegotiation of the agreements -- with each side entitled to abrogate the treaty within six months notice. Within the UN, the U.S. broke with its NATO allies and voted with the Soviet Union to publicly protest the Portuguese handling of the situation in Angola.¹⁰⁸

Algeria was a festering problem which Kennedy, like his predecessor, wanted de Gaulle to confront. To that end, President Kennedy wanted to give whatever assistance possible to de Gaulle to end the conflict. While Kennedy pressed de Gaulle on this point, he, nonetheless, also wanted French forces returned to NATO's command in Europe. Kennedy wanted France to cut its losses in North Africa, so that the French ground forces, tested over seven grueling years of war, could be incorporated into NATO's conventional forces.

While Kennedy was pressing de Gaulle on this point, disgruntled French officers and settlers in Algeria instigated several coup and assassination attempts against de Gaulle, the most serious occurring in April 1961 and involving former Air Force chief Maurice Challe, who had served in NATO's Paris headquarters and who had close ties to the U.S. Challe argued that an

¹⁰⁸ JFK Library, Charles Yost Oral History, 21.

independent Algeria would fall to communism. Moreover, he predicted that the French army would reintegrate into NATO after de Gaulle was eliminated.¹⁰⁹ Commenting on the situation, Norstad informed the White House that “in one respect, the ranking officers in NATO, France, and West Germany would be more suspect than those who were based in Algeria because the government had followed a deliberate policy of transferring out of Algeria those whose reliability was definitely suspect. Also, many responsible observers believe Challe and his associates have been assured of support throughout the armed forces; otherwise they would not have undertaken defiance of de Gaulle and the government of the Fifth Republic.”¹¹⁰

Discussing the problem that this created for Kennedy in terms of dealing with de Gaulle, a paper originating in State’s Policy Planning Council stated that “the imagination and courage with which the General has approached the Algerian problem have made at least some of the skeptics realize that de Gaulle is one of the if not the greatest asset on the Western side. The U.S. simply has not established a satisfactory working relationship with him and his Government. For the time being this lack may not seem too important because [of] the Algerian millstone.” If this “millstone” was ever thrown off, however, “the Gaullist search for renewed grandeur will be even more potent.” Consequently, the U.S. government would have to make, “some headway on

¹⁰⁹ As much as the Kennedy administration tried to dissuade the French from insisting on controlling Algeria at the expense of the ongoing decolonization in the Third World, contemporaries did interpret this struggle in terms of the Cold War. In *More Precious than Peace*, Peter Rodman writes that “Khrushchev hailed the Algerian Revolution as a ‘sacred war’, but this praise was hollow. The Soviets were already cultivating French president Charles de Gaulle to encourage his disruptive influence in NATO and were soft-pedaling significant support for the Algerian rebels. The Chinese were making the telling point that in Algeria and elsewhere, the Soviets were subordinating the interests of Third World revolutions to their Great Power interests.” Peter Rodman, *More Precious than Peace* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 97.

¹¹⁰ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, SHAPE to White House Message, 24 April 1961, 2. In a memorandum to the president a year later, Schlesinger remarked, “. . . de Gaulle will be more rather than less difficult after the resolution of Algeria and that his next objective will be the suppression of NATO by some form of Franco-German alliance.” JFK Library, Staff Memoranda File, Box 65A, Arthur Schlesinger, Mar. 5, 1962, 9.

influencing France while the Algerian difficulties remain, a la Adenauer.”¹¹¹ Evidently, State highlighted that de Gaulle was receptive to U.S. positions and actions while he was involved with the Algerian problem, and , consequently, in need of support. In April, Robert Komer, who was on Bundy’s NSC staff, circulated a memo to Bundy which stated that “to my mind the problem is less one of deciding what ‘concessions’ we can make to de Gaulle but of orchestrating these in such a manner as to give him a feeling that we are in fact taking him into partnership like the UK.”¹¹²

During the first part of Kennedy’s tenure, Congress still resented the fact that Chairman Mao controlled China, particularly since he had intervened in the Korean war on behalf of the North Koreans. At the same time, the debate over “who lost China?” persisted, even though it was not as virulent as during the previous decade, when McCarthyism was at its peak. Realizing this, Kennedy discounted the notion of recognizing China out of a concern that it would create political trouble for him in the 1964 election. After all, he had defeated Nixon by the slimmest of margins. Among NATO allies, de Gaulle was most vehement in his criticism of the United States for not recognizing China. As Bohlen put it, “de Gaulle acted simply because he felt that this was ridiculous not to have relations with a large country like China, regardless of its ideology. He also believed that France might develop a profitable trade with China. Like his expectation from his Soviet policy, his China hopes turned out to be more of an illusion than a reality.”¹¹³

At the same time, this issue divided the U.S. from the other NATO partners. During 1961, for example, Britain sent six military aircraft to China. The NATO allies wanted the U.S. to recognize the People’s Republic of China. According to Komer, the allies, especially the British,

¹¹¹ JFK Library, NSF, Key National Security Problems, p 23.

¹¹² JFK Library, NSF, Subjects, NATO - General, Box 320, April 1, 1961, 1

¹¹³ Bohlen, 505.

“thought it was stupid” for the U.S. to persist in its nonrecognition. Walt Rostow’s brother, Eugene Rostow (who was at the State Department), recalled that there was no united allied position regarding the Sino-Soviet Dispute.¹¹⁴ Arthur Schlesinger recalled, however, that the NATO allies recognized the predicament which Kennedy was in.¹¹⁵ Komer, who favored a two-China policy, lobbied the President to recognize China. Even so, Kennedy reminded Komer that “I got elected in 1960 by 100,000 votes”, and that such a decision would have to wait until the outcome of the 1964 elections.¹¹⁶

In a White House meeting with Giuseppe Codacci-Psianelli, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and a member of the Italian government, Kennedy commented that the U.S. could not admit Communist China to the UN. Among the reasons which he highlighted was the fact that it was still technically at war with the UN, though he conceded that this “was a point that would appeal most strongly to lawyers.” Nonetheless, he was concerned about the ways which this would affect the Taiwanese government. However, Kennedy related that the most important factor was the attitude of the Chinese Communist regime itself on the “inevitability and even the desirability of war.” As Kennedy told his White House guest, “this was the greatest stumbling block of all.”¹¹⁷

NATO allies were also responding to issues arising from wars of national liberation, which were now prevalent throughout the Third World. In Laos, the Kennedy administration wanted to maintain the neutrality of the Laotian government, thus carrying over a policy from the Eisenhower administration of insuring that it remained free from Soviet encroachment, which it had done by supporting the right-wing army against a government which, though neutral, included

¹¹⁴ Interview with Eugene Rostow, July 26, 1994.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Arthur Schlesinger, April 29, 1996.

¹¹⁶ Komer interview.

the pro-Communist Pathet Lao. During the Kennedy administration, Soviet aid continued to flow into the Pathet Lao. The president attempted to halt the imminent collapse of the government by placing the Seventh Fleet in the South China Sea and by placing 500 Marines with helicopters in Thailand. Although the Soviets stopped their aid, the Pathet Lao resisted, and fighting continued until 1962, when an agreement guaranteeing Laotian neutrality was agreed to in Geneva.

In July 1962, France caused a dispute within the Atlantic Alliance by its invasion of Tunisia, an action that particularly upset President Kennedy because it encroached upon the administration's desire to see states such as Tunisia become completely independent of foreign control. In an effort to avoid guilt by association, Norway and Denmark voted with the Third World bloc in the UN to condemn France. Although both the U.S. and British governments abstained, Washington pressured Paris to enter into bilateral negotiations with Tunisia to short-circuit the developing crisis. This event highlighted the problem which faced Kennedy: that is, how should the U.S. respond to actions by its NATO allies that clearly contradicted stated U.S. foreign policy objectives?

At the same time, Britain still could not admit that it had lost its major power status. The British reaffirmed their commitment to sustaining a presence not only in Europe but also in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa by issuing its "Statement on Defense", the first comprehensive look at future policy since the five-year plan prepared in the aftermath of Suez. The paper emphasized the requirements needed for Britain to remain a global power and on upgrading the British military commitment. In NATO, the paper reaffirmed that Britain would continue its worldwide contribution to allied security. Considering its view for holding the nuclear deterrent, the British

¹¹⁷ JFK Library, NSF Country File. Italy, Box 65, January 9, 1962, 1.

hoped that the “Anglo-American nuclear cooperation and the maintenance of British out-of-area commitments would enhance the special relationship and advance London’s interests.”¹¹⁸

Vietnam became an ever more important issue for Kennedy during this time, with the president applying his flexible response strategy to handle this U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia. Many NATO allies, particularly the British (who thought the U.S. was overextending itself) began to express concern over the degree of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, even though at this point it was only at the level of U.S. advisers.¹¹⁹ Believing that China was behind the insurgency in Vietnam and accepting Eisenhower’s “domino theory”, Kennedy tried to aid the Diem regime. Shortly after becoming president, he authorized \$28.4 million to enlarge the South Vietnamese army and another \$12.7 million to improve the civil guard. In May, after a fact-finding trip by Johnson, Kennedy deployed 400 Special Forces soldiers and another 100 military advisers to South Vietnam. Throughout this period, Kennedy increased the number of advisers. By the end of 1962, 9,000 U.S. military advisers were aiding the South Vietnamese military.¹²⁰

The problems related to the Congo, New Guinea, Angola, and Algeria, as well as the various issues resulting from the U.S effort to control the spread of communism, such as the effort to preserve the regime in South Vietnam, suppress the influence of the Pathet Lao, discourage the recognition of China, as well as to encourage the overthrow of the Castro regime

¹¹⁸ Sherwood, 116.

¹¹⁹ Komer interview; Interview with Francis Bator, January 5, 1995.

¹²⁰ Comparing the American obligation to defend the NATO area against the Soviet Union to providing a security guarantee to Southeast Asia, David DiLeo writes in his study on Ball’s role in the Vietnam war that this State Department hand believed that “America’s obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty, which ran ‘directly to each of the NATO partners,’ were ‘quite different’ from American responsibilities under SEATO. The United States had an explicit legal obligation (and significantly, Ball would add, a primary strategic interest) to defend Europe, and it was incumbent upon the American leadership to insure the survivability of its capacity to meet that commitment under any exigency.” David L. DiLeo, *Vietnam and the Rethinking of Containment* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 69. Moreover, George C. Herring believes that NATO matters such as the Berlin crisis delayed Kennedy from increasing the U.S. presence in South Vietnam. George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 80.

in Cuba, challenged Kennedy to answer the question which his two Cold War predecessors also confronted. That is, how did the U.S. manage an alliance that was originally set up for defensive purposes in a specified geographic area but that included states holding divergent interests around the world? Unfortunately, Kennedy, committed to attaining allied support for flexible response, joined his predecessors in not being able to provide a satisfactory answer.

* * * * *

The opening phase of Kennedy's presidency witnessed a new administration that was ready to redefine the U.S. role in the North Atlantic by avidly promoting flexible response, though, at this point, NATO allies were not yet comfortable with the new strategy. Once he dispelled the myth of the missile gap, Kennedy established the general contours of his national security policy. He defined his NATO policy, with the aid of Dean Acheson, by placing an emphasis on controlling NATO's nuclear arsenal through the MLF, while also using that seaborne force as a way of promoting flexible response. Delivering on his inaugural promise "to bear any burden", Kennedy desired to maintain the viability of the alliance against the Soviet threat. Though bruised from the embarrassment of the Bay of Pigs incident, Kennedy now understood the complexities of dealing with Khrushchev, who continued his unyielding stance at the Vienna Summit. Berlin played a central role in NATO affairs during this period. Although NATO remained at the center of American national security policy, de Gaulle was determined to exert his independence by questioning the need for France to participate in alliance activities. The turmoil in Vietnam continued, with the escalation of the U.S. involvement reaching new levels in 1962. The strongest test in NATO unity, however, would come with the Cuban missile crisis,

which was not only the most serious crisis for the North Atlantic Alliance, but the most serious threat to American national security in the ongoing confrontation with the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER III

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS AND THE ASCENDANCY OF THE MLF, 1962-1963

As a result of the U.S.-Soviet confrontation in Cuba, Kennedy took steps not only of strengthening the North Atlantic Alliance through his MLF initiative but also of providing a basis from which his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, would seek to implement détente. The Cuban missile crisis graphically highlighted the danger of risking nuclear war at the expense of discounting a conventional confrontation, thus further supporting the argument for a flexible response strategy in NATO contingency planning. Though the alliance was shaken by the events in Cuba, de Gaulle continued the anti-NATO rhetoric. For obvious reasons, a large section of this chapter is specifically devoted to the missile crisis. The subsequent section examines the ways that Kennedy utilized the MLF and the allied nuclear sharing debate to promote NATO unity. De Gaulle is given his due in the subsequent section, while the discussion in “NATO Out-of-Area Developments” picks up where the narration left off in the preceding chapter.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Like the Berlin crisis, the Cuban missile crisis represented a crossroads in the history of the Cold War. The events surrounding the crisis represented a watershed in the NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation. Because the showdown in Cuba represented the closest which the U.S. and the Soviet Union approached to nuclear war, Kennedy, as well as his successors, reconsidered the

reasoning behind the resort to nuclear weapons. Moreover, NATO became more adaptable to a strategy which need not include the blanket use of nuclear weapons.

The most serious crisis of the Cold War began on October 15, 1962, when Ray Cline, the deputy director for intelligence within CIA, examining the latest U-2 intelligence photographs, concluded that the Soviets had placed MRBMs in Cuba. He judged that the president needed to know right away. He recalled the events surrounding this discovery by remarking that “on the afternoon of the fifteenth, I asked our staff to check the photo information out twice. I felt everything was going to hit the fan the next morning, so I asked the staff to make sure they were absolutely right. They called me late in the afternoon to say, ‘We are absolutely sure we are right. We don’t have all the photographs yet, but by morning we will have it all organized.’”¹ The next day, Kennedy established what came to be known as the Executive Committee of the NSC, or ExComm, to coordinate the U.S. response to the crisis. In addition to the main NSC principals, it consisted of Ball, the Undersecretary of State, Roswell Gilpatric, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, U. Alexis Johnson, Maxwell Taylor, Sorensen, and Douglas Dillon, Secretary of the Treasury.² Until the Kennedy White House resolved this crisis, the ExComm secretly met in various locations, such as Ball’s study at State. Publicly, Kennedy did not change his routine, which in the fall of 1962 entailed making campaign stops for Democratic congressional candidates.

Events relating to this crisis quickly unfolded. On October 18, as previously noted, Gromyko was in the White House to discuss Berlin, a significant event in this new crisis because the Soviet foreign minister did not acknowledge the missiles’ existence. Shortly after Kennedy’s

¹ Strober and Strober, 374.

meeting with Gromyko, the president angrily remarked to Robert Lovett (Truman's Secretary of Defense whom Kennedy had summoned for advice in this crisis) that "all during his denial that the Russians had placed any missiles in Cuba . . . I had the pictures in the center drawer of my desk and it was an enormous temptation to show them to him."³ Kennedy also told Lovett that "Gromyko, in this very room not over ten minutes ago, told more bare-faced lies than I have ever heard in so short a time."⁴ Sukhodrev recalled that Gromyko was "tenser than usual" because, as he put it, the Soviet foreign minister "was sort of steeling himself to the possibility that Kennedy might just come out with it," though he acknowledged that "I really don't know whether or not Gromyko knew, or could know, that Kennedy had aerial photographs. I think he was steeling himself to being confronted with a direct statement. But Kennedy decided against it."⁵ Dobrynin, who as the new Soviet ambassador in Washington was also present in this Oval Office meeting, recollected that the conversation "abounded in abrupt turns and omissions. Both Kennedy and Gromyko were nervous, although both tried to conceal it." On the whole, however, Dobrynin noted that Gromyko was pleased with the meeting, though, as he remembered, "he was completely misled by Kennedy's conduct."⁶ Shortly before his death in 1989, Gromyko recalled that in case Kennedy had asked about the missiles, he had been instructed to say that the Soviet Union was deploying a "small quantity of missiles of a defensive nature," in Cuba that would "never threaten anyone." If the president complained, he was to encourage "quiet diplomacy".⁷

² Earlier in the year, on February 7, the U.S. decreed a total embargo on trade with Cuba, except for medicines and similar supplies. The State Department had also asked NATO partners to impose sanctions on their trade with Cuba, but only Turkey, West Germany, and Belgium gave token support to the request.

³ Isaacson and Thomas, 624.

⁴ Reeves, 382.

⁵ Strober and Strober, 385.

⁶ Dobrynin, 77.

⁷ Beschloss, 457.

The next day, the ExComm recommended a blockade of Cuba, even if it went against international law. By October 20, Kennedy was finding it increasingly difficult to keep the crisis under wraps from the press. Consequently, the ExComm, in addition to the blockade option, was now considering an air strike as well. Moreover, it recommended that the president address the American people regarding the crisis. At this point, Ambassador Stevenson entered the picture by advocating the withdrawal of the missiles in Cuba in exchange for the withdrawal of the Jupiter missiles in Italy and Turkey. The ExComm rejected the idea, with Robert Kennedy suggesting that Stevenson did not have the will to argue forcefully for the U.S. case in the UN Security Council. The next day, McCone, the Director of Central Intelligence, DCI, advocated the bombing of the missile sites. By now, the Soviets escalated the crisis by not only acknowledging the existence of these missiles, for *defensive* purposes, but by also publicly linking the crisis to the ongoing dispute over Berlin.

When the NSC met on October 22 to discuss options, Kennedy proposed distinguishing between the missiles in Cuba and the U.S. Jupiter missiles in Turkey and Italy, arguing that Soviet missiles in Cuba had a different psychological effect than Soviet missiles positioned inside the Soviet Union. Acknowledging the link which the Kremlin was now making between Cuba and Berlin while still noting the delicate issue of Berlin, Kennedy pointed out that “the Soviet action in Cuba may in fact be a probing action to find out what the U.S. is prepared to do in Berlin.” By now, Kennedy had assented to the blockade, stating that “we were not preventing shipments of food and medicine to Cuba, but only preventing the delivery of offensive military equipment.”⁸

As a way of reassuring the NATO allies, Kennedy called on Acheson to use the photographic intelligence to brief leaders, such as de Gaulle, over the developments in Cuba.

Though Acheson was prepared to present Kennedy's views to the allies, the former Secretary of State, nonetheless, all along favored forceful action, including air attacks on the missiles sites, as well as the air defense covering them.⁹ On this secret mission, Chester Cooper, a CIA officer, also went along. Before the Acheson mission headed for Paris, however, Cooper deplaned at Greenham Common, a U.S. Air Force base outside London and, along with David Bruce, the U.S. Ambassador to Britain, briefed Macmillan on the developments. Cooper recalled the prime minister saying that "now the Americans will realize what we here in England have lived through for the past many years."¹⁰

Bohlen, who had just become U.S. ambassador to France, presented his credentials to the French president shortly after Acheson's meeting.¹¹ He recollected de Gaulle giving him the same assurances he had given Acheson in that France would not abandon the United States in the event of war.¹² Notwithstanding this assurance, de Gaulle recalled that Acheson merely informed him of the developments rather than consult with him. In Ottawa, Livingston Merchant briefed Prime Minister Diefenbacker on the developments. Though Diefenbacker agreed to comply with the U.S. request to prevent Soviet planes, en route to Cuba, from landing in Newfoundland, he refrained from agreeing to putting Canada's armed forces on maximum alert.¹³

An hour before the president's scheduled speech that day, Rusk handed Dobrynin a copy of the speech, with the following personal message for Khrushchev: "The action we are taking is

⁸ JFK Library, Meetings and Memoranda File, NSC Meetings, Box 312-313. October 22, 1962, 1-6.

⁹ Paul Nitze, *Tension Between Opposites* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 148.

¹⁰ JFK Library, Chester L. Cooper Oral History, 23. In his work, Andrew compliments the way Kennedy briefed his NATO counterparts by observing that "no previous president had made such dramatic use of peacetime intelligence for the purposes of Allied diplomacy." Andrew, 293.

¹¹ Kennedy wanted Bohlen to delay his departure for France in order for him to take an active role in the ExComm. Bohlen declined the offer on grounds that it would arouse suspicion that the U.S. government was aware of the missiles' existence. Instead, the veteran FSO adhered to his schedule of crossing the Atlantic by ship.

¹² Bohlen, 494.

the minimum necessary to remove the threat.” Rusk later recalled that Dobrynin aged ten years when he received the news.¹⁴ In fact, Dobrynin wrote in his memoirs that “Rusk warned that this time he had instructions neither to answer any questions about the two texts nor to comment on them.”¹⁵ Dobrynin also commented that “in seeking to keep the secret, Moscow not only failed to inform me of so dramatic a development as its plans to station nuclear weapons in Cuba but virtually made its ambassador an involuntary tool of deceit, for I kept stubbornly telling the Americans that we had nothing but defensive weapons in Cuba.” Dobrynin postulated that the Kremlin’s reasoning behind this was that “the entire Cuban operation was so secret that Moscow may have decided not to communicate any information about it . . . via telegram, which might have been monitored and deciphered. The second, and more cynical one, was that without knowing the facts, we could better defend the government’s false version of its strategy in Cuba.” Dobrynin concluded that “this deliberate use of an ambassador by his own government to mislead an American administration remained a moral shock to me for years to come and left me more cautious and critical of the information I received from Moscow.”¹⁶

As expected, the president’s televised seventeen-minute speech that evening at 7:00 caught the American people off guard. For the first time in the Cold War, the threat of war appeared imminent, to the point that Eduard Ivanian, a Soviet diplomat at the UN who was watching the speech along with his colleagues, remarked, “Here lie the Soviet diplomats. Killed

¹³ In his study on the Cuban missile crisis, Robert Thompson believes that the Canadian prime minister took this action because Cuba was of peripheral importance to Canada’s security; Thompson, *The Missiles of October*, 264.

¹⁴ Giglio, 494.

¹⁵ Dobrynin, 78.

¹⁶ Dobrynin also wrote that, years later, Rusk told him that “a discussion took place at the White House about whether the government should insist on Moscow recalling me for ‘deliberately misleading’ the U.S. administration. They finally came to the conclusion that I lacked detailed information and that it would therefore be unfair to accuse me of duplicity.” Dobrynin, 74-75.

by their own bombs.”¹⁷ The president wanted Pierre Salinger, the Press Secretary, to make it clear in his press conference following the speech that “there’s a big difference between offensive Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba and our own . . . elsewhere” in that “ours are an attempt to redress the balance of power in Europe -- much in the sense as NATO is meant to balance the Warsaw Pact countries.” Moreover, although the U.S. government was not denying their location or capability, the situation in Cuba was “far different” in that it was a “provocative” change in the status quo of the western hemisphere. Moreover, the directive for Salinger stated that “. . . just last month, the Russians were saying they don’t need offensive missiles in Cuba” and that “the very secrecy of this operation, and attempts to [suppress] that secrecy especially by Khrushchev himself, poses a . . . danger to us that we can’t ignore.”¹⁸

Within the Pentagon, officials urged the issuance of a NATO alert. Macmillan opposed this and so informed Norstad, stating that this would unnecessarily raise the alarm for war mobilization by entailing the call-up of British and other nations’ reservists. The prime minister told the SACEUR that such mobilization had sometimes caused war, and that “here it was absurd, since the additional forces made available by ‘what’ had *no* military significance.”¹⁹

Following his speech to the American people, President Kennedy put U.S. strategic nuclear forces at the highest state of alert in the Cold War: DEFCON 2 (full readiness for hostilities), the highest alert short of nuclear war. At sea, 45 ships and 240 aircraft were enforcing

¹⁷ Reeves, 397. As Andrew comments on the telecast in his work, “In only twenty seconds Kennedy had raised the specter of thermonuclear war on American soil.” Andrew, 294. In his excellent work on the Kennedy-Khrushchev relationship, Beschloss analyzes Kennedy’s televised speech by noting that “the address was probably the most alarming ever delivered by an American president. Although it echoed Franklin Roosevelt’s Pearl Harbor message in language and meter, Roosevelt’s speech had been intended to calm the American people, Kennedy’s to frighten them. Roosevelt’s message was written to reassure Americans that the war would be won. Even without it, Pearl Harbor had already united the country behind the war effort. Kennedy knew that the missiles in Cuba were not open to such unambiguous interpretation as the attack on Hawaii.” Beschloss, 485.

¹⁸ Pierre Salinger, *With Kennedy* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966), 263.

¹⁹ Harold Macmillan, *At the End of the Day* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), 189.

the “quarantine.” Worldwide, the U.S. military prepared for a nuclear confrontation. The Pentagon canceled all leaves. More than two hundred ICBMs in silos across the western part of the U.S. were ready for firing. The Strategic Air Command (SAC), custodian of the nation’s nuclear bombers, ordered sixty B-52s, fully-loaded with 196 hydrogen bombs, to take to the skies in what was the biggest alert in SAC history. Should the order be given, their pilots were instructed to break sealed envelopes specifying their targets. Six hundred and twenty-eight more bombers armed with 2,026 nuclear weapons were dispersed to military and civilian airfields around the world. Consequently, twelve Polaris submarines carrying 144 nuclear missiles moved toward the seacoasts of the Soviet Union.

The U.S. government took very seriously the threat which the Soviets posed to Berlin. On October 23, the director of the CIA’s Office of National Estimates sent McCone a report on the survivability of West Berlin in case of nuclear war. In the report, Smith stated that Berlin could survive for six months, though the critical factor was psychological.²⁰ On that same day as well, Kennedy sent a cable to Brandt, assuring him that the U.S. would stand by Berlin in any event, as well praising the courage of the West Berliners to meet the Soviet threat.²¹ Rusk later recalled that the U.S. “had overwhelming conventional superiority in the neighborhood of Cuba, and we could have gone in there and taken out those missiles almost with the snap of a finger. But we knew that if we did that, this would force Khrushchev to take further steps, such as the seizure of Berlin or some other similar action that could have greatly enlarged the dangers of the crisis.”²²

²⁰ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XV, 394-395.

²¹ JFK Library, NSF, Country File -Germany, Box 86, State Message to Emb. Bonn, Oct. 23, 1962, 1.

²² Strober and Strober, 383.

At the Security Council, Stevenson explained the reasons for keeping the Jupiter missiles in both Turkey and Italy, forcefully arguing that “together with our allies, we have installed creation bases overseas as a prudent precaution in response to the clear and persistent Soviet threat. “ He further stated that even though “there are those who seek to equate the presence of Soviet bases in Cuba with the presence of NATO bases in parts of the world near the Soviet Union,” the U.S. government wanted “to subject this facile argument to critical consideration . . . Let me state this point very clearly: The missile sites in NATO countries were established in response to missile sites in the Soviet Union directly at the NATO countries. The NATO States had every right . . . to respond to the institution of these Soviet missiles by installing missiles of their own The United States and its Allies established their missile sites after free negotiations, without concealment and without false statements to other Governments.”²³

The next day, however, the ExComm now seriously considered using the Jupiter missiles in Turkey and Italy as a way of resolving the crisis. Yet, ExComm members decided against consulting with the Ankara government because they believed that doing so would shake Turkish confidence in the U.S. security guarantee. At the same time, they wanted to ensure that word of this option was not leaked to the press because they did not want their bargaining stance vis-à-vis the missiles in Cuba to be compromised.²⁴ Accounting for the congressional campaigns, they did not want to make the president vulnerable to attacks from Republicans, who might exploit the issue by arguing that Kennedy was compromising NATO’s security.

For obvious reasons, the Turkish government was upset that Washington was considering the Jupiters as a bargaining chip. In a message from USNATO to State, Finletter noted that the

²³ Walter Johnson, Carol Evans, and C. Eric Sears, *Papers of Adlai Stevenson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1977), 319.

Turkish Permanent Representative at NATO had made it “very clear” that Turkey regarded these Jupiters as symbols of the alliance’s determination to use nuclear weapons against a Russian attack on Turkey whether by large conventional or nuclear forces, even though the Turks had been reluctant to admit publicly the presence of these IRBMs (intermediate-range ballistic missiles). Finletter continued by noting that the missiles’ obsolescence and vulnerability were not persuading the Turkish delegation to accept them as a way out of the crisis. In fact, Finletter reported that they would resent being openly equated in any deal with Cuba. Finletter postulated that “. . . in my opinion we must be most careful in working out any horse trade of this type to be sure it does not set a pattern for handling future Russian incursions on other parts of world .” He warned that unless the U.S. can avoid establishing this precedence, such action could foreshadow “a dangerous and divisive situation” for the NATO alliance because other members may wonder whether or not they may also be asked to give up some military capability “at the time of the next Soviet manufactured crisis.” Rather than trading the Jupiters, Finletter recommended that the U.S. close down some U.S. nuclear base outside the NATO area since after all, Cuba was, by definition, outside the NATO area. Such a deal would then be strictly a Soviet-American trade rather than involving one of the NATO allies in any deal.²⁵

On Saturday, October 27, twelve days after the White House learned of the CIA intelligence photographs, the threat of nuclear war loomed. Within the ExComm, Rusk moved that the U.S. government warn NATO members of the emergency situation. U. Alexis Johnson composed a long cable that Rusk sent to all U.S. ambassadors in NATO capitals. After stating that the missile sites were operational and that some Soviet vessels were still proceeding toward

²⁴ Richard Reeves argues in his work that not only would this Turkey-Cuba missile swap make Kennedy appear weak, so it seemed at this point, but it could also have the effect of breaking up NATO. Reeves, 415-416.

²⁵ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XVI, 730-733.

the quarantine area, in direct violation of Khrushchev's assurances, Rusk warned that, as a result, the United States "may find it necessary within a very short time in its own interest and that of its fellow nations to take whatever military action may be necessary to remove the growing threat to the Western Hemisphere." Rusk then warned that "the U.S. action in Cuba may result in some Soviet moves against NATO."²⁶

Some ExComm members considered the missile swap an ideal exchange, especially since Polaris submarines, patrolling in Mediterranean waters, would soon replace the obsolete Jupiters. Kennedy was amused that the ExComm was taking the missile swap option seriously. Some have claimed that he was furious, stating that "I thought I had issued orders that those missiles were to be removed over a year ago."²⁷ Rusk remembered those events by noting that it was due to U.S. inaction to remove those missiles that they were still operating in Turkey. By now, however, Kennedy was beginning to accept the view that the missile swap was preferable to an invasion.²⁸

However, several members of the ExComm preferred the risk of bombing Cuba to the political risks in NATO of what would outwardly appear as a selling out of an ally if the U.S. committed to a public trade of Cuban for Turkish missiles.²⁹ The president, nonetheless, disagreed with this advice. Kennedy firmly stated that he did not believe that the Turks, who vehemently rejected any trade proposal, really understood what was, or might be, about to happen, arguing that ". . . it seems to me we ought to have this discussion with NATO about these Turkish

²⁶ Dino Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1971), 465-466.

²⁷ Brugioni, 465-466.

²⁸ Kunz, commenting on the effect which an invasion would have on NATO, writes: "NATO and the American public might initially support the war, but they would have immediately second thoughts when things went badly, especially if - as most of them expected - the Russians either struck NATO missile bases in Turkey, or took West Berlin." Kunz, 20.

²⁹ James G. Blight, *The Shattered Crystal Ball* (Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1990), 114.

missiles, but generally a sort of up-to-date briefing about where we're going we can't very well invade Cuba"³⁰

In the general meeting of the ExComm, discussion centered on the missile trade, a move which Bundy argued would undermine the confidence of the NATO allies, a point which Rusk supported. The ExComm agreed to tell the president that work on the missile sites should stop immediately and that the U.S. government accept the Soviet public offer, made on the previous day, to remove the offensive Soviet weapons from Cuba if the U.S. agreed not to invade. Kennedy, however, persisted in favoring the missile trade-off deal. Moreover, he did not like the idea of starting an air attack and invading Cuba, thus setting off a cycle of escalating events in which the Soviets would get Berlin. Should such an event take place, NATO would remind him that the Soviets had offered "a pretty good proposition." Nitze stated in this meeting that "it would be anathema" to the Turks to pull the missiles out, fearing that "the next Soviet step would be a demand for the denuclearization of the entire NATO area." Moreover, Rusk felt that the missiles in Turkey should not be linked with the missiles in Cuba, stating that the Jupiter missiles should be discussed within the context of NATO versus Warsaw Pact forces. Kennedy, thinking of Berlin, then highlighted that if these missiles added 50 percent to Soviet nuclear capability, then to trade these missiles for those in Turkey would be militarily prudent. However, the president added that "we are now in the position of risking war in Cuba and in Berlin over missiles in Turkey which are of little military value. From the political point of view, it would be hard to get support on an air strike against Cuba because many would think that we would make a good trade if we offered to take the missiles out of Turkey in the event the Russians would agree to remove the missiles from Cuba. We are in a bad position if we appear to be attacking Cuba for the

³⁰ Blight, 115.

purpose of keeping missiles in Turkey. We cannot propose to withdraw the missiles from Turkey, but the Turks could offer to do so.” Consequently, he concluded that the administration needed to inform the Turkish government “of the great danger in which they will live during the next week and we have to face up to the possibility of some kind of a trade over missiles.”³¹

As a way of relating the predicament that the missiles in Cuba posed on Turkey, Kennedy and others began exploring the possibilities of persuading Turkey, as well as NATO, that the U.S. wanted the removal of the missiles only to prevent a Soviet attack on Turkey. To persuade the Turks, Polaris submarines were now being taken seriously as a means of deterring the Soviets in the eastern Mediterranean.³² Within NATO, Generals Lemnitzer and Norstad, opposed withdrawing the Jupiter missiles from Turkey and Italy on the grounds that: 1) the withdrawal of these missiles should only be used in negotiations with the Soviets aimed at having the Soviets eliminate some of their SS-4 MRBM's and SS-5 IRBM missile sites in Russia targeted against NATO; 2) The Jupiters should not be removed under any circumstances before the U.S deployed its Polaris submarines to the Mediterranean. They felt that removing the missiles without accepting defensive measures would pose acute problems and dangers for the NATO alliance. Lemnitzer and Norstad further stated that the unilateral withdrawal of missiles from Turkey risked severe repercussions and could lead to the downfall of the Turkish government, a position which the State Department supported by stating that “neither Italy nor Turkey can be expected to accept being made the base of appeasement to the UN or the Russians.” These generals also argued that both de Gaulle and Adenauer would be alert to any sign of U.S. withdrawal from the

³¹ JFK Library, NSF, National Security Action Memoranda File, NSC ExComm, 10:00 27 Oct. 1962, Box 316, 2-5. According to an NSC paper, another distinction was drawn between the missiles in Cuba and the Jupiters in both Turkey and Italy in the sense that the former were secretly installed, and, as such, Moscow knew of their existence. JFK Library, NATO General, Box 223, “Attempts to equate Soviet Missile Bases in Cuba with NATO Jupiter Bases in Italy and Turkey.”

European continent and would regard such a unilateral move as another sign of weakness in foreign affairs by the Kennedy administration. The military was adamant in that the Jupiter missiles should not be removed, arguing that the onus was on Khrushchev since he had created the issue.³³

That same day, Kennedy informed the ExComm that, for the next few hours, the U.S. should emphasize the position that if the Russians halted missile activity in Cuba, then the U.S. government could discuss NATO problems with the Russians. Kennedy felt that the U.S. would not be able to offer any trade for several days. Bundy then pointed out that there would be a serious reaction in NATO countries if the U.S. appeared to be trading withdrawal of missiles in Turkey for withdrawal of missiles from Cuba. To that, Kennedy responded that if the U.S. refused to discuss such a trade and then took military action in Cuba, the U.S. would also be in a difficult position. Kennedy then debated whether or not NATO should be consulted on what the U.S. planned to do. According to the declassified record, the president stated, "If we reject Soviet efforts to tie in NATO problems to the Cuban situation, then we could persuade NATO to take the same position. An additional reason for the NATO meeting then is that if the Russians do attack the NATO countries we do not want them to say that they had not been consulted about the actions we were taking in Cuba." At the same time, Kennedy was concerned that the U.S. had not presented these alternatives to NATO. The president stated that NATO did not realize "what may be coming and the Europeans do not realize that we may face a choice of invading Cuba or taking the missiles out of Turkey."

McNamara then urged that a NATO meeting "be held tomorrow only if we have decided to launch our strike tomorrow." He repeated "his hope that we can act in such a way as to reduce

³² Giglio, 210.

the pressure on the Russians to hit Turkey.” Kennedy wanted the Turks to be consulted immediately, explaining what the current state of play was and to then explain the entire situation to the North Atlantic Council. The president stated that the key to any letter to Khrushchev was to state that work should cease on the missile sites in Cuba. He predicted that “if we make no mention of Turkey in our letter, Khrushchev will write back to us stating that if we include Turkey, then he would be prepared to settle the Cuban situation.” McNamara, however, responded that “if we leave U.S. missiles in Turkey, the Soviets might attack Turkey. If the Soviets do attack the Turks, we must respond in the NATO area.”

The ExComm met again that evening at 9:00. By now, Kennedy had received a message from Norstad that presented the difficulty for NATO’s part of any trade tying the Cuban missiles to those in Turkey.³⁴ Norstad stated that “I’m afraid of what’s going to happen in NATO, to Europe, when we get into this thing more and more, and I think they ought to feel that they are a part of it. Even if we don’t do anything about the Turks, they ought to feel that they know.”³⁵ McNamara then raised the issue of what would happen if the Soviets unilaterally decided to take out the Jupiter missiles on Turkey. If that were the case, the Secretary of Defense argued that the U.S. “*must* respond” since it could not tolerate a Soviet attack on the Jupiter missiles in Turkey without a military response by NATO. He continued by noting that, at this point, the minimum military response by NATO to a Soviet attack on the Turkish Jupiter missiles would be a response with conventional weapons by NATO bases in Turkey. Such action would entail utilizing Turkish and U.S. aircraft against Soviet warships and naval bases in the Black Sea area. As he succinctly put it, “now that to me is the absolute minimum, and I would say that is *deemed dangerous* to

³³ Brugioni, 468.

³⁴ JFK Library, NSF, NSAM File, ExComm, Oct. 27, 1962, 9:00, 1.

³⁵ Brugioni, 34.

have had a Soviet attack on Turkey and a NATO response on the Soviet Union. That is extremely dangerous. Now I'm not sure we can avoid anything like that, if we attack Cuba, but I think we should make every effort to avoid it, and one way to avoid it is to defuse the Turk missiles *before attacking Cuba*."³⁶

As a means of defusing the crisis, President Kennedy employed a two-track strategy for handling the situation: 1) the U.S. government would refuse to link NATO's defense with the situation in Cuba; 2) in public exchanges with the Soviet Union, there would be no explicit trade. Moreover, Kennedy decided to accept Khrushchev's vaguely worded offer to withdraw the missiles if Washington pledged not to invade Cuba. Furthermore, at McNamara's urging, Kennedy ordered the fifteen Jupiter missiles deactivated in order to show not only that the U.S. could not use them, but also that the Soviets could not then use these missiles if captured. Moreover, the president instructed his brother to tell Dobrynin that if Khrushchev removed the Soviet missiles from Cuba, the U.S. would take the Jupiter missiles out of Turkey. Kennedy stressed that a nuclear exchange was not worth starting over fifteen obsolete missiles, especially, as Robert Kennedy pointed out, if the Soviets attacked Turkey.³⁷ Kennedy conducted the missile trade part of the settlement in secrecy so as not to give the impression that the U.S. was abandoning a NATO ally, even though the missiles were not only obsolete, but were also about to be dismantled. As Bundy wrote in his study on nuclear strategy, "It remains the unanimous judgment of the surviving participants in the framing of this secret assurance that both the assurance itself and the secrecy with which we surrounded it were justified. The warheads for Jupiters in Turkey were worse than useless, and the president had full and single-handed authority to remove them. He was free to make this decision alone, and it was justified on the merits. With

³⁶ Brugioni, 35-36.

all its costs, secrecy prevented a serious political division both within the United States and in the Atlantic alliance. It would have been better if we had long since expressed in public the opinion Kennedy and Eisenhower both held in private, that such missiles were undesirable, but we had not done so. All day long most of us had been arguing that a public trade under Soviet pressure would have destructive effects in NATO, but no one had been able to dispute the president's insistent argument that we would be better off in reality if the Jupiters were out of Turkey."³⁸

That evening, General Lemnitzer discussed the swap with the president. As Lemnitzer recalled: "I pointed out to the President that the missiles in Italy and Turkey had been provided by the U.S., they were now in fact a NATO not a U.S. matter."³⁹ Lemnitzer was scheduled to leave for Europe the next morning, to begin the process of relieving General Norstad as NATO's Supreme Allied Commander. Kennedy, reviewing the situation with him, ordered him to start garnering support for the U.S. position among NATO allies.

The president firmly believed that problems would arise with the European leaders, especially de Gaulle. Kennedy shared with Lemnitzer de Gaulle's remarks to Acheson and de Gaulle's fear that the U.S. might take some military action without consulting either him or the other European allies. Kennedy was still concerned about the ways which this crisis would affect the debate over Berlin's status. He asked the general to warn the NATO commanders of his concern. Lemnitzer replied that if the situation worsened, then the U.S. could avail itself of "possible measures to be taken" to alert NATO forces and the Berlin garrison after its arrival on November 1. Lemnitzer then assured Kennedy that the Soviets had made a foolish move in challenging the U.S. in an area where it had overwhelming superiority in air and sea power,

³⁷ JFK Library, Robert F. Kennedy Oral History, 96.

³⁸ McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, 435.

³⁹ Brugioni, 468.

especially since the United States was able not only to “strike first against Cuba,” but also to inflict “intolerable damage in the Soviet Union as well.”⁴⁰

Johnson, who up to now had been playing a limited role in this crisis management, then told Lemnitzer that this proposal was reasonable and that the Soviets should accept it. Lemnitzer later wrote that “I had great difficulty in convincing the Vice President that our Jupiter missiles in Italy and Turkey were there by NATO’s approval and were an important part of NATO’s deterrent posture.” He also wrote that Johnson “adopted a rather belligerent attitude,” stating that “since we darn well gave them to the Turks, we can damn well take them back,” to which the vice president then added that “we can make it up to the Turks.”⁴¹

Fortunately, the Soviets did respond to Kennedy’s missile swap on October 28, thirteen days after the crisis began. In Cuba, workers began to dismantle the missile sites. Moreover, the Soviets called for, and received, a pledge not to invade Cuba. The president ordered that all the Jupiter missiles be taken off their pads. General Lemnitzer and other military officers later argued that had war broken out, this removal would have deprived the U.S. and NATO of a strategic strike force. Khrushchev, in accepting the deal, sent the following message to Kennedy: “We are ready to continue to exchange views on relations between NATO and the Warsaw Bloc, disarmament, and other issues of peace and war,” to which Kennedy replied that he hoped that both sides would agree to an end to the arms race.⁴²

The Berlin question again came up when David Klein, an NSC staffer, sent a memo to Bundy positing that “the Soviets might now conceivably push hard on Berlin to offset their Cuban losses.” Although he conceded that this was doubtful, he rhetorically asked Bundy whether or not

⁴⁰ Brugioni, 468.

⁴¹ Brugioni, 468.

⁴² Brugioni, 486.

the U.S. government should take the initiative in resolving the Berlin issue, considering the fact that the crisis was resolved in NATO's favor.

The next day, October 29, the Kennedy White House again raised the issue of maintaining the momentum on Berlin. However, Ambassador Thompson stated that he was reluctant to touch the Berlin issue for fear that the Soviets may think that NATO was overtly pushing the issue. Shortly thereafter, Nitze outlined this view in a memo to Kennedy. Commenting on the effect that the Cuban missile crisis was having on the NATO allies as it attempted to resolve the Berlin issue, Nitze stated that the NATO allies now had a "greater confidence" in the U.S. in that they "have seen success result from our firmness and moderation U.S. prestige is higher; its capacity and maturity more respected; its freedom to lead enhanced." Later, on November 7, Rusk cabled USNATO on the U.S. assessment of Soviet intentions. He noted that Moscow appeared "to be anxious that tension generated by Cuba not spill over into Berlin."⁴³ Regarding the way that the Cuban missile crisis defined the Berlin crisis, Hillenbrand noted that "we were prepared for a fairly severe Soviet reaction to the Berlin access routes" and that "recommendations were made to the President that could have provided the basis for his decisions had they been necessary. Obviously, here again we would have had to consult with our Allies, and we were not in exclusive occupation in Berlin." He concluded that the Cuban missile crisis "marked a watershed in the Berlin crisis," and that one of the effects of this experience as far as the Soviets were concerned was that they now appreciated the fact that the U.S. was prepared to utilize its nuclear deterrent in a way which could raise the element of risk for the Soviets to such an extent that they could not exert heavy pressure on other sensitive areas such as Berlin.

⁴³ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XV, 395-420.

Hillenbrand concluded that “once the Cuban crisis was over and its implications had sunk in, the Berlin situation gradually ceased to play a primary role in Soviet thinking.”⁴⁴

That day, in the aftermath of the crisis, the Turkish government, upset over the trade-off, instructed its ambassador in Washington, Turgut Menemencioglu, to inform Tyler, who was now the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, that the Ankara government had instructed its permanent representative in NATO to ask urgently for a special session of the North Atlantic Council. At this special session, the Turkish permanent representative would review events which led up to the ICBMs being stationed in Turkey not merely for Turkey’s defense but for NATO’s defense. At this meeting, the Turkish permanent representative would state that the Turkish government regretted that “when dangers subsequently appeared, some seemed to regard Turkey as at fault.” As a result, “Turkey wished to discuss this turn of events with its allies,” to which Tyler responded that the U.S. government viewed these developments from the point of view of the NATO complex in that these missiles were for the defense of the NATO area and that, as such, the defense was indivisible. Moreover, he stressed that the U.S. viewed its commitment in all areas of NATO as being equal. Evidently, even though the Turkish government still disputed the removal of these missiles, they, regrettably, still did not accept the fact that the Jupiters were

⁴⁴ JFK Library, Martin Hillenbrand Oral History, 29. In their study, Zubok and Pleshakov interpret Khrushchev’s actions regarding Berlin by writing that “what pushed Khrushchev into his worst *aventyura* [reckless gamble] was not the pragmatic search for the well-being of the Soviet empire. On the contrary, it was his revolutionary commitment and his sense of rivalry with the United States. From this perspective, the Cuban adventure was linked to the Berlin crisis. Khrushchev’s fear of losing Cuba was similar to his concern about the survival of the GDR [East Germany]. The geopolitical stake of the Soviets in East Germany was incomparably higher than that in Cuba, but what mattered for Khrushchev was to preserve the impression of communism on the march, which, in his opinion, was critical to dismantling the Cold War on Soviet terms. The loss of Cuba would have irreparably damaged this image.” Zubok and Pleshakov, 261.

obsolete. Even so, Tyler did not forcefully argue this point when the opportunity was presented to him.⁴⁵

Among NATO allies, Macmillan was adamant that any deal that traded NATO assets for the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba would destroy credibility of the American security guarantee in Europe. Some doubted, however, whether or not the proposed ten Polaris submarines would provide the same security guarantee that the Jupiters had provided. Even so, the U.S., as a matter of policy, would not have been in a position to remove the Jupiter missiles until the Polaris submarines were deployed to the Mediterranean and Turkey was provided with fighter aircraft to offset the loss of the missiles. It was not until April 1, 1963, that Polaris submarines began their patrols in the Mediterranean, thus giving further credence to the designs of the Kennedy administration for pushing the MLF.⁴⁶ In his memoirs, McNamara admired Kennedy for taking the initiative in using the missiles as a means of preventing war, even though this action was not only opposed by the Turks and NATO, but also by most senior State and Defense Department officials.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XVI, 733-734. Commenting on the effect which the crisis had on Khrushchev, Zubok and Pleshakov write that "trying to get beyond the crisis as soon as possible, the Soviet leader quickly unwrapped a negotiating package: a non-aggression pact between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, measures to prevent a surprise attack (old Soviet proposals of May 10, 1955) and German peace treaty. He even made Kennedy a party to his predicament, which squeezed the Soviet leader between pressures from the Chinese and Cuban Communists, as well as dogmatic in Moscow. 'Our friends,' he wrote, 'are trying to convince us . . . that imperialism cannot be trusted, that is that you cannot be trusted.' Khrushchev needed harder evidence that the dismantling of obsolete U.S. missiles in Turkey to demonstrate to comrades that his foreign policy worked."; Kunz, 140.

⁴⁶ Many have written on the ways in which Kennedy responded to this crisis. According to Giglio, "Kennedy's subsequent disclaimer that ground-to-ground missiles were offensive carried little weight." Moreover, he maintains that the president could not claim that the missiles in Turkey were defensive just because they were installed in a NATO context. Giglio, 297. Stuart and Tow believe that, considering the circumstances, the Kennedy administration adequately advised its allies while taking their concerns into account during the crisis, though they add the caveat that the exception was Turkey in that Kennedy demonstrated little support for Turkish sensibilities. Consequently, as Stuart and Tow put it, "The Turkish government began to be more retrospective regarding U.S. access to Turkish bases for out-of-area contingencies. As a result, Ankara began steadfastly after the 1960s of irritating U.S. requests for base use and overflights on a case-by-case basis." Stuart and Tow, 291.

⁴⁷ Robert McNamara, *In Retrospect* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 97.

The missile swap exerted strong emotions on both sides. Commenting on the effects of this crisis, Khrushchev surmised that “unfortunately, we’re in a kind of war where even though governments do not shout [sic] each other we were not inventing anything new. We were just copying the methods used against us by our adversaries when they encircled us with bases. There were missiles in Italy and Turkey, to say nothing about Great Britain, West Germany, and other countries that were NATO allies of the United States. All those missiles, aircraft, surface vessels, and submarines, all the military means possessed by America, were aimed at the Soviet Union.” Khrushchev also added that “we knew perfectly well that this pledge was of a symbolic nature: the American rockets in Turkey and Italy were already obsolete, and the Americans would promptly replace them with more modern ones. Besides, the US was already equipping its navy with Polaris missiles. Nevertheless, by agreeing even to symbolic measures, Kennedy was creating the impression of mutual concessions.”⁴⁸ Analyzing Kennedy’s thinking in using these missiles for a trade, Henry Brandon, a correspondent who covered those events, wrote that “Kennedy, in the end, reached the conclusion that those outdated Jupiter missiles in Turkey were not worth fighting a war over and was willing if necessary to propose a straight deal, their removal in exchange for the withdrawal of the missiles in Cuba.” He continued by noting that Kennedy did consider the ramifications of this action upon American credibility within the alliance. When it came to avoiding the risk of war, he wrote that “the President was willing to pay the price.”⁴⁹ De Gaulle sarcastically remarked that it was “annihilation without

⁴⁸ Strobe Talbott, ed., *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 512.

⁴⁹ Henry Brandon, *Special Relationships* (New York: Atheneum, 1988) 178-179.

representation.”⁵⁰ In explaining the reasoning behind the swap, Rusk later stated that “well, we weren’t trading it away We weren’t giving anything away by informing the Soviet Union that, as a U.S. matter, these missiles were on the way out”⁵¹ For his part, Dobrynin provided the best analysis of the missile swap when he wrote that “Khrushchev’s failure to insist on a public pledge by Kennedy cost him dearly. Kennedy was proclaimed the big winner in the crisis because no one knew about the secret deal. Khrushchev had been humiliated in not withdrawing our missiles from Cuba with no obvious gain. In fact, the terms of the final settlement were neither a great defeat nor a great victory for Kennedy or Khrushchev. Kennedy accomplished his main purpose: the restoration of the status quo ante in Cuba, although he had to accept the presence of Soviet military personnel there. Khrushchev fell short of shifting the strategic balance more in our favor, but he obtained a pledge from Washington not to invade Cuba, which had been sought by him and Castro, and withdrawal of American missiles from Turkey; which was also in our interest.”⁵²

Notwithstanding the seriousness of the crisis and the psychological effects that the missiles in both Cuba and Turkey provided, Dino Brugioni, who as a senior intelligence official played a key role in these events by supervising the preparation of the reconnaissance photographs and briefing material for CIA, pointed out that the Soviet missile base in Cuba, like the NATO base in Turkey, was of little military value in the sense that the former was defenseless while the base in Turkey was all but obsolete. He wrote that the superpowers could dismantle these two bases

⁵⁰ Sherwood, 122. Sherwood also writes that “. . . the missile crisis confirmed his suspicion that the U.S. might well jeopardize European security to protect its own interests in a region of little importance to the rest of the Allies.”

⁵¹ James G. Blight and David A. Welch, *On the Brink* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 172.

⁵² Dobrynin, 91.

without altering the world balance of power.⁵³ However, in a memo to Rusk, U. Alexis Johnson noted that, from a military point of view, even though the missiles were obsolescing and were in some respects vulnerable, they, nonetheless, remained a significant military asset for NATO, especially since 80 percent of these missiles stood at a fifteen-minute alert and could be fired at Soviet targets within that period.

Rusk reiterated Johnson's point to Kennedy when he wrote that these obsolete missiles remained a military asset, stating that even though these missiles were highly vulnerable to a Soviet first strike, as a result of their "soft" configuration, they were, nonetheless, effective in a NATO first strike if the U.S. knew that a Soviet attack was imminent. Rusk further highlighted the fact that they represented a significant military threat to the Soviet Union since they were targeted on 45 of the 129 Soviet MRBM-IRBM sites facing Europe. Moreover, these Jupiters were targeted by Soviet IRBM's, and, as such, diverted Soviet missiles which would otherwise had been aimed at other targets in Western Europe.⁵⁴

The Cuban missile crisis also caused the president to reexamine flexible response, particularly since he now had the opportunity of viewing this strategy in the context of both Berlin and Cuba. Kennedy raised the question whether the case for large-scale conventional forces was really well-based, except in the context of Berlin. Kennedy thought that the Soviets could find many other opportunities in Europe over time, which would not seem worth risking a nuclear war with the Atlantic alliance "and against which the only safe deterrent would be adequate conventional strength."⁵⁵ Even though the president perceived that both sides were still willing to risk nuclear war, Kennedy still held out hope that conventional forces could provide the needed

⁵³ Brugioni, 421-422.

⁵⁴ JFK Library, NSF, Subject File, NATO-General, Box 223, Nov 9, 1963, 1.

⁵⁵ JFK Library, NSF, NSAM File, ExComm Mtgs, Box 316, Dec. 10, 1962, 1-3.

deterrent that both sides wanted. At the fall's NATO ministerial meeting, Rusk continued to press for flexible response by calling upon NATO to provide for increased European continental forces.⁵⁶ Shortly after the new year, McNamara, in an NSC meeting, also raised the importance for the alliance to rely on its conventional strength by arguing that the reasoning behind building up NATO conventional forces was to gain greater control over the timing "of a showdown in Europe provoked by the Russians."⁵⁷

As a result of the Soviet-American confrontation over the missiles in Cuba, the pace of détente picked up, even though this development was not as visually evident in this administration as in the subsequent one.⁵⁸ Dobrynin recalled that "our relations with the Kennedy administration began settling into a more realistic mode in which the emphasis had to be on communication, discussion, negotiation, and continuous adjustment if not solution of the differences" between the two sides.⁵⁹ While both the White House and the Kremlin did not retreat from the security guarantee which both perceived was met by nuclear weaponry, both sides now seemed willing to discuss such issues as crisis management. As a result, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union implemented the "hotline" between Washington and Moscow. Later, on June 10, Kennedy publicly elaborated on the new status of Soviet-American relations when he spoke at American University. Although he acknowledged that the Soviet Union still posed a strong threat to the security of the United States, he nonetheless stated that "we can seek a relaxation of tensions without relaxing our guard." Calling upon the Soviets to join the British and the Americans in

⁵⁶ JFK Library, NSF, NSAM File. ExComm Mtgs, Box 316, Dec. 16, 1962, 1.

⁵⁷ *FRUS 61-63*, Vol. XIII, 484-485.

⁵⁸ David Mayers supports this view in his study of U.S. ambassadors to the Soviet Union. David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 212. Anton W. de Porte also endorses this view in his study of NATO's role in détente. De Porte in Kaplan, et al, *NATO after Forty Years*, 186.

⁵⁹ Dobrynin, 96.

discussing a atmospheric test ban on nuclear devises, Kennedy closed this momentous speech with the resonating call that “our hopes must be tempered with the caution of history, but with our hopes go the hopes of all mankind.”⁶⁰ Gromyko recalled that this speech showed that “Kennedy was looking ahead further than the captains of the arms industry and the Pentagon; it could be regarded as the outstanding act of his presidential life.”⁶¹ Significantly, the pace quickened that summer on the negotiations that ultimately led to the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty on August 5. Although France failed to sign it, the treaty, nonetheless, represented a step toward détente.⁶²

Kennedy successfully fended off nuclear war in the Cuban missile crisis, particularly in the way he used the missile swap to reach an understanding with Khrushchev. Even so, NATO suffered from a lack of consultation in that the interests of Turkey were quickly overlooked in order to avert war. Kennedy erred by not giving Turkey its due on the obsolete Jupiters only because this crisis was unprecedented. The Cuban missile crisis highlighted the fact that individual states’ concerns were not as important as overall alliance security. Because of the realities of the Soviet-American global confrontation, this crisis emphasized the unfortunate fact that NATO, though a regional organization limited to the North Atlantic, could enter, with little

⁶⁰ Stevenson, 119. Stevenson further comments that this speech “inspired hope without creating illusions. It advocated pragmatism and caution while, at the same time, called for positive action in the pursuit of peace.” Stevenson, 119. Beschloss writes that “this lyrical address was easily the best speech of Kennedy’s life The reason for that power was their startling dissonance with the shrill alarms of the president’s first two years in office. The speech was light-years from . . . his muscle-flexing Inaugural Address.” Beschloss, 599.

⁶¹ Gromyko, 181.

⁶² Schlesinger accounts for this development in his memoirs by noting that the Soviet leadership “had decided on a breathing spell.” He also remarks that “only two men on the planet had been exposed to the absolute pressure of nuclear decision; and even for them it was not till the missile crisis that what was perceived intellectually was experienced emotionally.” As for his boss, Schlesinger observes that Kennedy’s feelings “underwent a qualitative change after Cuba: a world in which nations threatened each other with nuclear weapons now seemed to him not just an irrational but an intolerable and impossible world.” Consequently, the Cuban missile crisis “made vivid the sense that all humanity had a common interest in the prevention of nuclear war – an interest far above those national and ideological interests which had once seemed ultimate.” Schlesinger, 891-893.

warning, into a nuclear war as result of linking events in the Caribbean with the ongoing events in Berlin. Although the U.S. and the Soviet Union nearly entered into a nuclear confrontation, Kennedy, to his credit, still saw the need for a flexible response strategy. Because a nuclear holocaust nearly occurred, a détente between NATO and the Warsaw Pact could now begin, especially since both sides now appreciated what a nuclear aftermath entailed.

The Ascendancy of the MLF and the Continuing Debate on Nuclear Sharing

During this period, Kennedy increased the emphasis on MLF as a way of continuing his policy of encouraging NATO to accept flexible response. Even so, the Western European governments still wanted a greater role in NATO's nuclear planning, a view that Washington was finding it difficult to discourage, particularly as it related to the British.

In December 1962, the issue of allied control of nuclear weaponry came up when President Kennedy met Prime Minister Macmillan at Nassau to discuss the status of negotiations for Britain's entrance into the Common Market. Skybolt, however, was a pressing issue which Macmillan wanted to raise with Kennedy. The discussion was heavy-handed despite the fact that Kennedy enjoyed the closest relationship with the British prime minister among the NATO government heads.⁶³ McNamara, who also was hoping to reduce British defense expenditures without sacrificing Macmillan's power status, told Kennedy that Skybolt's cancellation would surely dismantle his already wobbly parliamentary backing. Subsequently, in a move to aid Macmillan's Conservative government in the upcoming parliamentary elections, Kennedy offered him five Polaris submarines (without nuclear warheads) on the condition that Britain pledge them

to a NATO-wide nuclear force and not maintain an independent force of her own. Although unhappy, Macmillan realized that, for political reasons, he had to agree, so as not to leave the Bahamas empty-handed. After negotiating an escape clause that permitted the use of the weapons in case of national emergency, Macmillan accepted Kennedy's watered-down offer, which became known as the Nassau agreement, in order to save face and to camouflage yet another blow to British pride.

By giving Macmillan submarine-launched Polaris missiles, the MLF became an issue in Anglo-American relations. Macmillan recalled that Kennedy raised this point as a result of the fact that both Kennedy and his advisors "attached immense importance to the plan, which they truly believed would be very attractive to the NATO allies." Macmillan acknowledged that he thought joint force would best settle the question of authority within the multilateral nuclear force. He believed that the controls should be assigned to the U.S., Britain, and France. Macmillan also recalled that Kennedy did not want to give Britain the Polaris submarines on political grounds, out of a concern that this would upset those NATO nations who did not have a nuclear capability. Macmillan recollected that "on the other hand, I was determined to get Polaris and felt we had a right to it. In return we would be prepared to make it clear that in normal circumstances we would regard our nuclear powers as available at NATO."⁶⁴ Macmillan wrote in his diary that President Kennedy overruled key subordinates such as Ball and Walt Rostow, who wanted to use Skybolt's cancellation as a way of discouraging Britain's independent deterrent and integrate London's nuclear forces into the MLF.⁶⁵

⁶³ Interview with Donald Wilson, July 5, 1994.

⁶⁴ Macmillan, *At the End of the Day* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), 358-359.

⁶⁵ Robert M. Hathaway, *Great Britain and the United States* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 65.

The Nassau Communiqué, issued on December 21, 1962, stated that both governments were committed to integrating allied nuclear forces by handing to NATO some part of the forces already in existence, such as allocations from the U.S. Strategic forces, the British Bomber Command, and tactical nuclear forces throughout Europe. Kennedy and Macmillan also agreed that Polaris missiles would aid in developing a multinational NATO nuclear force in the closest consultation with other NATO allies.

Macmillan emphasized, however, that the British would use these forces only for the purpose of immediate defense of the Atlantic alliance in all circumstances, a significant caveat in light of the recent October crisis.⁶⁶ In exchange for receiving the Polaris submarines, he pledged that the British nuclear fleet would be “assigned” to NATO, except in cases “where Her Majesty’s Government may decide that supreme national interests are at stake.” Even with the contribution which Macmillan was making on behalf of the British government, the prime minister, at this point, did not believe that the MLF would take off.⁶⁷

However, an NSC paper drawn up to come up with a post-Nassau strategy stated that it was critical that “. . . the emergence of the multilateral mixed manned force be shifted from association in European minds with third class Alliance status to its being the wave of the future.”⁶⁸ According to Bohlen, Kennedy interpreted the discussion as well as the outcome of Nassau by noting that the dilemma was to find a way of satisfying the British desire to obtain a nuclear weapon in place of the Skybolt missile, which the U.S. had canceled because of high costs and doubts of its effectiveness. As Bohlen put it, “London was bitter, because without Skybolt

⁶⁶ Macmillan, *At the End of the Day*, 554.

⁶⁷ Macmillan, *At the End of the Day*, 360, 469.

⁶⁸ JFK Library, NSF, Subject File, NATO General, Box 230, Post-Nassau Strategy, Jan 3, 1963, 5.

Britain would have no nuclear deterrent and was doomed to drop to the status of a second-class power.”⁶⁹

Commenting on the effect which Skybolt’s cancellation had on the British, Rusk wrote that “the Skybolt offering was a painful, regrettable -- and uninspiring -- disturbance in U.S.-British relations. In the sweep of postwar history, it was ‘no big deal’ and certainly not worth all the attention it received.” Moreover, Rusk disputed the claim that the Skybolt problem nearly brought down the British government, asserting that “even had that happened, it would have been a self-induced fall. British leaders knew that Sybolt was headed for the rocks, and the responsibility for informing their government and public belonged to them.” He remarked that British defense minister Peter Thorneycroft viewed the Skybolt problem as an issue of British politics as well as an important factor in Britain’s participation in NATO defense.⁷⁰

Following the Nassau meeting, Macmillan met with de Gaulle in Paris on December 15, 1962, to discuss nuclear matters. Shortly before meeting the General, Macmillan recalled the growing difficulty in accommodating the French president in NATO nuclear matters by noting that “I still hoped that it might be possible to deploy arguments of sufficient strength to convince the General that he should yield at this decisive moment in European history. Yet I knew well . . . he viewed recent developments of America’s policy with displeasure and even with anger. McNamara’s fervent denunciation of the changes of the nuclear powers was an ill-attack upon the determination both of Britain and of France to maintain, at rate in the foreseeable future, their separate, independent nuclear forces. While I could argue the benefits of broad strategy and our continued planning through NATO, the fluid control of their individual [weapons] must depend

⁶⁹ Bohlen, 499.

⁷⁰ Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990).

upon each separate government.”⁷¹ Macmillan recalled that meeting by stating that the issue of nuclear weapons guided their discussion, with Macmillan highlighting the fact Britain was determined to provide its considerable nuclear force to NATO. Highlighting the need for allied joint action, Macmillan pointed out that “it would be absurd to have an Alliance without plans or the just use of its power. For this reason we had made tactical arguments to use our forces with that of the Americans to the best advantage.” Yet, he pointed out that “in the last resort we should have swift control in case we ever had to force a position of peril on our own. I thought the same could be true of France.”⁷²

Shortly thereafter, in a January 10, 1963 meeting with Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani of Italy, Kennedy reiterated the U.S. government’s support for the MLF, highlighting the fact that “any interested member of NATO would be able to play an active and significant role in manning, equipping and directing a nuclear force devoted entirely to the purpose of the Alliance.” However, Fanfani viewed Nassau in the sense that it should not be allowed to become a means of intensifying and extending a special nuclear position for Britain and France, since, as Fanfani put it, the present non-nuclear members of NATO, in the long run, would “find such discrimination intolerable.” Kennedy favorably viewed multilateral manning for the MLF because it would prevent any NATO state from exerting a predominant role in any vessel.⁷³

Kennedy wanted to maintain the momentum on MLF even though de Gaulle disrupted allied unity by vetoing British entry into the Common Market. He desired to keep the allies united as well as to reassure them that the U.S. intended to treat them as full partners. At the January 22 NSC meeting, Kennedy stated that it was in the U.S. interest to strengthen the MLF concept

⁷¹ Macmillan, *At the End of the Day*, 341.

⁷² Macmillan, *At the End of the Day*, 334.

because it would increase U.S. influence in Europe as well as to provide a way to insure that NATO remained a viable force. Noting de Gaulle's disapproval of the MLF, as well as his continuing intransigence toward NATO, Kennedy commented that, even so, "we have to live with de Gaulle" and that the U.S. could respond to his influence by strengthening NATO as well as by pushing the MLF, which, ultimately, would weaken de Gaulle's control within the Common Market.⁷⁴

The administration's push for the MLF significantly picked up when the president appointed Livingston Merchant as a special representative for NATO affairs. In effect, Kennedy ordered him to sell the MLF to NATO. Although the U.S. had not finalized a formal proposal, Ambassador Merchant stated in his initial briefing that guidance was needed on who would exercise control of the force and whether this force should consist of submarines or surface ships. While Kennedy noted Rickover's prior objections to putting Polaris submarines under multilateral control, McNamara stated a preference for surface ships on the following grounds: a submarine force would cost almost twice as much as a surface force; the survivability of a surface ship was greater than that of a submarine; and the attraction of a surface force would be increased by offering the new MRBM missile, under development, which was expected to be better and cheaper than the Polaris.

The issue of nuclear control came up when Kennedy asked Merchant how he would reassure the West Germans that they had a role, albeit limited, to play in allied nuclear planning. Merchant responded that he would assuage the Bonn government by pointing out that the possession of nuclear weapons was not the touchstone of political ownership. Even so, Rusk

⁷³ JFK Library, NSF, Country File - Italy, Box 65, "Prime Minister Fanfani's Visit to Washington", 16-17 Jan. 1963, 1,2.

⁷⁴ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. VIII, 459.

noted the importance of taking the Soviet view into account, noting that they would be reassured if the U.S. insisted on a veto over the use of a nuclear NATO force because the Russians did not like the prospects of West Germany obtaining control of nuclear weapons which they could then fire at will. For these reasons, Rusk opposed a European force in which the U.S. would not have a veto. Ambassador Bruce stated that if the Western Europeans actually concluded that nuclear war was indivisible and that, as such, it did not follow that a force could operate independently of the U.S. force, he believed that they would then argue that a multilateral force was not necessary.⁷⁵

Although Kennedy was making great strides in advancing the MLF, he was still encountering problems in utilizing the seaborne force in garnering allied support for flexible response. In a January 28 memo to Rusk, Tyler wrote that the administration had failed to convince NATO governments of the soundness of its arguments. He supported this contention, noting that the Western Europeans still believed that any Soviet aggression against NATO forces would escalate “rapidly and automatically” to general nuclear war. He observed that they still did not accept the possibility of a conventional war with Soviet-led forces on the European continent. Unfortunately, they still viewed a U.S. reluctance to commit its nuclear arsenal for the defense of Western Europe in the event of Soviet aggression. Moreover, they held that a NATO defense strategy which envisaged non-nuclear aggression with the Soviet Union, however limited, encouraged the Kremlin leadership to believe that there was a possible area of military conflict in “the heart of Europe” in which they can engage with impunity as far as nuclear warfare was concerned. Consequently, allied governments and public opinion were likely to make the effort

⁷⁵ JFK Library, Box 316, NSAM File, ExComm. Feb.12, 1963,1-9.

required to bring their conventional forces up to the NATO force goals.⁷⁶ While these comments were important in light of the MLF debate, they provided a remarkable lack of interest on the part of the NATO counterparts to accept flexible response as an acceptable substitute to general nuclear war, even though they nearly entered into such a confrontation the previous October.

Notwithstanding the problem which the Kennedy administration faced in promoting flexible response, the pace of promoting the MLF continued. In a February 21 memo, Kennedy instructed members of the MLF negotiating delegation, which in addition to Ambassador Merchant consisted of General C. Smith as well as Admiral J.M. Lee, to use the Nassau agreement as a basis for formulating the MLF policy.⁷⁷ The following month, Carl Kaysen, Walt Rostow's replacement as the Deputy National Security advisor, circulated a memo for both Rusk and McNamara which outlined the president's view for the way ahead with MLF. Kaysen reiterated McNamara's view that a surface force was preferable and that the U.S. should retain the veto on nuclear use.⁷⁸

By April, the state of play of the MLF was on the rise. In an April 5 meeting attended by Kennedy, Ball, Merchant, and Nitze, the participants noted that the West Germans were supporting MLF for political reasons. The group agreed that the administration should "give the [West] German government the arguments it needs to rally the necessary political support for the MLF. . . ." Taking into account de Gaulle's opposition, Kennedy ". . . asked about possible tactics for dealing with French obstructionism in NATO." Nitze reassured the president that a

⁷⁶ *FRUS 1961-1963* Vol. XIII, 491-492.

⁷⁷ JFK, Library, Box 316, NSAM File, ExComm, Feb 21, 1963, 1-3.

⁷⁸ JFK Library, NSF, Box 320. Subject File, NATO-General, Mar 23, 1966, 1.

scenario was under consideration calling upon Finletter to begin preliminary work with the French.⁷⁹

On April 24, Kennedy again discussed the question of nuclear control aboard MLF ships in a meeting that included Rusk and Bundy. The Secretary of State said that it was much more desirable for control of the warheads to remain in the multilateral force rather than in the individual nations in the force. When the group realized that it was necessary to transfer ownership explicitly, Kennedy asked whether or not a custodial guard would protect the ships' warheads. After the president received reassurances that U.S. personnel would form part of the custodial group, Rusk stated that as far as the question of ownership went, it was preferable for the U.S. to give the appearance of being indirectly involved even though the legal custody would remain in the MLF.⁸⁰

In May, Kennedy met with Patrick Gordon Walker, the spokesman for foreign affairs within the British Labour Party (i.e. the Shadow Foreign Secretary), a significant conversation because, within sixteen months, the Labor Party took over amidst the growing clamor in Britain to do away with the MLF. After Kennedy strongly outlined the efficacy of the MLF concept, Walker expressed concern over expenditure. Nonetheless, he stated that he and the Labour Party were "not very worried" about the possible effect of such a campaign issue, asserting that Labour had a "serious" defense policy, so that the British voter would not be confronted with a choice between a Tory defense policy and no defense policy.⁸¹ As a result of this meeting, Kennedy was fully reassured that both British political parties were committed to the conceptual facets of the MLF.

⁷⁹ JFK Library, NSF, NSAM File, ExComm, Box 316, April 5, 1963, 1-3.

⁸⁰ JFK Library, NSF, NSAM File, ExComm, Box 316, April 24, 1963, 1-5.

⁸¹ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, UK, Box 170, 1-4.

Later, in August, Britain, France, and the United States signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty, thus prohibiting nuclear tests in space, the atmosphere, and underwater. In the course of negotiating that treaty, Kennedy, along with the other principals within the NSC, instructed Averell Harriman, whom Kennedy appointed to lead the U.S. delegation in the negotiations, to state that the MLF was consistent with disarmament.⁸² The NSC also instructed the veteran diplomat to maintain the U.S. position that the MLF proposal was not inconsistent with the goal of a non-dissemination agreement. The NSC believed that this was important in order to avoid confusion among the allies which could, in turn, unravel the Atlantic alliance. Harriman was also instructed to point out that the MLF proposal actually meant greater control of nuclear weapons and, subsequently, was consistent with the U.S. desire in preventing further dissemination of nuclear weapons.⁸³

During this period, Kennedy accelerated the pace of the MLF while keeping the issue of nuclear control at bay. The Macmillan government still clung to its designs of Britain remaining a power of rank, though it did realize the necessity of supporting the U.S.-backed seaborne force in the interest of NATO unity. On the other hand, de Gaulle continued his opposition to partaking in any constructive role in nuclear planning. To Kennedy's credit, he took into account Soviet reservations when deciding on the proper role for West Germany within the MLF, a significant fact that signaled that the U.S. government was willing to consider the views of its Cold War adversary when providing for the defense of its NATO allies. Even so, Kennedy was still not able to use the MLF as a way of garnering support for flexible response.

⁸² JFK Library, NSF, Country File, Soviet Union.

⁸³ JFK Library, Meetings and Memoranda File, NSC Meetings, Box 314, July 9, 1963, 1-3. Although Harriman was not as highly regarded for advice on policy matters by President Kennedy as he was by Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, he was, nonetheless, viewed as indispensable when it came to negotiating agreements with the Kremlin.

de Gaulle

During this period, de Gaulle provided even more indications of the role which he wanted France to play in European security, a role which need not include NATO. Though his views of accommodating the Soviet Union were well-received in the Kennedy White House, he continually insisted that only France, independent of *les Angle-Saxons*, could handle the challenge which the Johnson White House later wanted to implement, with West German cooperation, in détente. For the moment, however, de Gaulle gave nothing but a firm no to any major U.S.-backed initiative in NATO, the most significant still being flexible response.

De Gaulle used the Nassau summit as a pretext to exert French control and influence in Europe. Commenting on the effect which the Macmillan-Kennedy summit played into de Gaulle's hand, Rusk wrote that "in a perverse way, the Skybolt affair served [his] purposes" since he saw the Nassau agreement as a pretext to block British entry into the Common Market.⁸⁴ The Polaris submarine deal provided de Gaulle with a much-needed excuse to veto British entry into the Common Market on January 14. Even though the Macmillan government did not view the Polaris submarine as serving its best interests, especially since it still regretted the Skybolt cancellation, de Gaulle, nonetheless, interpreted the Nassau meeting as yet another example of the close Anglo-American collaboration that existed at the expense of the French. Coming as no surprise to U.S. policymakers, de Gaulle publicly gave the following reasons for taking this action: British economic structure and monetary system differed from that of the six other members; it lacked

⁸⁴ Rusk, 267.

the will to change it; and current member nations had more similarity with each other than differences, whereas they had more differences than similarities with Britain.

De Gaulle's action came as a hard blow to the Macmillan government. In a January 19 telephone conversation with Kennedy, Macmillan told his counterpart that "well, I think it's a very bad situation. I think this man has gone crazy -- absolutely crazy," to which Kennedy asked, "Well, what do you think it is that's made him crazy?" The prime minister responded: "He's simply inventing any means whatever to knock us out and the real simple thing is he wants to be the cock on a small dunghill instead of having two cocks on a larger one."⁸⁵

As a result of this action, many within the administration wanted the president to respond forcefully. Ball wanted to take concrete actions against the French president, even though, as a Europeanist, he strongly supported NATO. As Rusk argued in his memoirs, neither Kennedy nor his predecessor could well afford to openly challenge the French leader; Rusk stated that "talking to de Gaulle was like crawling up a mountain side on your knees . . . a little portal at the top, and waiting for the oracle to speak." He noted that de Gaulle "rarely volunteered a subject of his own for conversation. There was never any give-and-take; de Gaulle gave us pronouncements from on high, but never any real discussion."⁸⁶

Shortly thereafter, the CIA's Office of Current Intelligence commented on the effects of de Gaulle's veto upon French foreign policy, noting that "with several of his trumps now on the table," de Gaulle may now attract more European support than he had before. The intelligence summary observed that public opinion in France, and to a lesser extent throughout Western

⁸⁵ Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan*, Vol. II: 1957-1986 (New York: Viking, 1989), 446. Horne analyzes the effects of de Gaulle's veto upon the British prime minister, observing that "to Macmillan it was a devastating blow. Up to the last moment he could not quite bring himself to believe that the man whose political existence he had saved, on more than one occasion, from the wrath of Churchill and Roosevelt back in wartime Algiers, should now act with such ingratitude to Britain, and be so personally snubbing." Horne, 447.

Europe, was increasingly receptive to his thesis that Europe, with its rebounding economic strength, should wield political and military influence comparable to as well as independent of the U.S.. The intelligence summary concluded that de Gaulle was now trying to bring French opinion into line with his policy, partly by means of “playing up evidence” of alleged U.S. intervention in European affairs.

This intelligence memorandum also concluded that the veto incident propelled de Gaulle to accelerate the pace of his other initiatives, such as his “Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals” concept in a campaign to readjust public opinion toward an independent Europe, a Europe which de Gaulle sought to define along French stewardship.

Regarding NATO, the CIA report noted that he was now drawing a distinction between the political parameters of the North Atlantic alliance and the military components within NATO. As a result of this delineation, the CIA predicted that France could restrict the assignment of French forces to NATO, refuse to support or participate in NATO military exercises, limit large-scale movements over French territory, as well impose prohibitive costs for the use of French facilities. More importantly, this memorandum stated that specific action in NATO directed toward the U.S. could include the following: making it difficult for the U.S. to obtain technical information helpful to U.S. technological programs, refusing to adopt U.S. equipment in NATO projects; opposing inclusion in future infrastructure programs of projects formerly financed by the U.S.. Nonetheless, the intelligence summary added the caveat that de Gaulle would not order these actions in the near term because of the damaging effect they would have on the members of the alliance.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Rusk, 268.

⁸⁷ JFK Library, NSF, Regional Security File, Europe, Vol. IV, Box 213, CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, “Current Intelligence Memorandum”, 1-9.

In a White House conversation with Kennedy, Sicco L. Mansholt, Vice President of the EEC (European Economic Community, formal name of the Common Market during this time) stated that, as a result of de Gaulle's veto, "the question was how far one could let de Gaulle proceed. While de Gaulle is not a positive force, he is a negative force and unity is required in opposing him." Mansholt also added that he fully supported the U.S. MLF initiative and warned about French participation in a NATO national nuclear force because, in such a scenario, the French would simply withdraw whenever they wished. Mansholt also outlined the problem which de Gaulle's independent posture was causing, noting that de Gaulle's definition of an integrated Europe was one that was "inward looking." As such, ". . . there was no place in this Europe for the United Kingdom and the [British] application had to be vetoed."⁸⁸

In 1963, de Gaulle accelerated the pace, begun shortly after returning to power in 1958, of withdrawing French units from the NATO integrated command structure, especially since France's economy and military resources were no longer being drained by the Algerian war. In June 1963, he removed the French Atlantic fleet from NATO's integrated command, which led to the departure several months later of French officers from allied naval staffs.⁸⁹

De Gaulle again manifested his intransigence by his behavior during the negotiations which led to the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty. Many, including Acheson, wondered what gain Kennedy expected to get since de Gaulle had refused to sign the treaty.⁹⁰ By signing the treaty, de Gaulle could have signaled that he really was serious about promoting a Europe that, in

⁸⁸ JFK Library, NSF, Country File - Belgium, Box 10, April 9, 1963, 1-8.

⁸⁹ Earlier in July 1962, French troops returning from Algeria were not reassigned to NATO.

⁹⁰ Assessing the effects of this treaty action, Giglio writes in his account of the Kennedy years that: "Neither side obtained all that it wanted. Kennedy failed to secure a nonaggression treaty between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, a previous Soviet precondition to an agreement . . . Nor did Kennedy succeed in checking China's nuclear ambitions, for China ostentatiously rejected the treaty, and the Soviets refused to commit themselves to any proposed joint action to combat Chinese nuclear development." Giglio, 218.

fact, extended from the Atlantic to the Urals.⁹¹ Commenting on de Gaulle's actions during the negotiations, Bohlen wrote that because of de Gaulle's independence, the Kennedy administration held no hope that France would join the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union in signing this nuclear test ban treaty. As Bohlen recalled, Kennedy sent a personal message to de Gaulle urging French signature and offering U.S. help in overcoming any delay that might result in the development of the French nuclear effort. Although de Gaulle would have liked the help, the U.S. ambassador in Paris recollected that de Gaulle refused to accept any curbs on France's nuclear program. Moreover, no one in Washington held any illusions that the French president would drop his effort in developing a French nuclear capability.⁹²

When Kennedy met NATO Secretary-General Stikker, for the last time, to discuss NATO affairs, both statesmen fully realized that de Gaulle was obstructing the Atlantic alliance, with Stikker pointing out that "if General de Gaulle wished to hold full responsibility for France's defense and for the deployment of French forces, and if he wished complete independence within the alliance, there was no chance that the General's viewpoint could be changed." Nevertheless, Stikker resolutely remarked that "the business of the Alliance must be carried forward and not threatened by an all-out French obstruction. . ." Significantly, Stikker commented that a substantial segment of French opinion was "unhappy about France's isolation."⁹³ That the NATO Secretary-General joined the U.S. government in criticizing de Gaulle's actions was significant because he, too, was as much a European as the French president.⁹⁴ From his vantage point in

⁹¹ Notwithstanding this development, however, de Gaulle did take the honorable step of signing the Franco-German treaty, which solidified the Franco-German entente.

⁹² Bohlen, 503.

⁹³ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. XIII, 619-624.

⁹⁴ NATO followed the custom of appointing an individual other than an American for the top diplomatic post within the organization because, as the largest contributor for the alliance's common defense, the U.S. held the preference for appointing the SACEUR. This practice continues to the present day.

Paris, Bohlen drew parallel conclusions, noting that de Gaulle would continue to refuse to cooperate “in the full sense of the word” in the structure of NATO, treating it as an alliance and not as organization.⁹⁵

For the remainder of 1963, Franco-American relations were on the decline, with de Gaulle accelerating the pace of French independence from NATO. Even though de Gaulle personally held a great respect for Kennedy and the American people (as evident by the fact that he was the first head of state to commit to attending Kennedy’s funeral), such sentiment did not extend to alliance, as well as U.S., security policy. During this period, Luns believed that Kennedy sincerely tried to get along with de Gaulle. He commented that Kennedy “often asked what we Europeans thought about the French President. I always replied to him that the French President’s memories of the way he had been treated during the war by Great Britain and America had, of course, something to do with his rigid attitude; that France, being a proud nation with a marvelous history and a great culture and with other fine assets, aspires to play the role which history, in the French view, wants France to play. But I, nevertheless, felt that the French general simply could not play the same role as a so much powerful and so much greater country like the United States of America.”⁹⁶ Moreover, his desire for European integration was offset by his refusal to allow full British participation in the Western European economy. Likewise, his call for a relaxation, a détente, of tension between the two superpowers was shallow because of his refusal to participate in the Limited Test Ban Treaty. As a result of de Gaulle’s actions, NATO could not claim that the alliance was united for the common defense of the North Atlantic, even though France’s neighbors in NATO appreciated the security guarantee which the U.S., under Kennedy’s stewardship, provided.

⁹⁵ JFK Library, NSF, Country File, France, Box 72, August 7, 1963, 6.

NATO Out-of-Area Developments

Third World matters continued to preoccupy the U.S. and its allies during the last year of the New Frontier, with Kennedy seeking to apply his flexible response strategy throughout this region with the same vigor he was applying the strategy within the NATO area. As in the previous period, the U.S., as well as its allies, found it difficult to separate their individual interests from that of the alliance.

McNamara pressed for flexible response by admonishing NATO to prepare to face a Soviet provocation through conventional means in areas that were beyond the scope of NATO. He argued at the fall NATO ministerial meeting in December 1962 that "if we were to agree that the sudden massive Soviet assault on Europe is a most unlikely contingency, how should this affect our planning?" Answering his own question by stating that the possibilities were many, he supported this contention by drawing attention to the events of the previous ten years, such as Soviet aid to both the United Arab Republic and Iraq as well as attempts at subversion in Africa. McNamara also drew attention to "a rash but supple move into Cuba." He told the North Atlantic Council that NATO should expect that both indirect and direct challenges to the security of the Alliance would continue into the future. Drawing attention to the "containment" of communist threats outside of Europe, the Secretary stated that in such situations, "there may be conflict, the conflict may spread, and military responses by the Alliance may become necessary." McNamara believed that this was probable in the Middle East and Africa.⁹⁷ By making this statement, McNamara was erroneously linking the concerns of the North Atlantic to other areas.

⁹⁶ JFK Library, Joseph Luns Oral History, 32-33.

Although the application of flexible response served a useful purpose within Europe, McNamara failed to note that flexible response as a NATO policy for contingencies arising outside the NATO area could only entangle member-states into crises that were beyond the original intention of the North Atlantic Treaty. Fortunately, this speech did not represent Alliance policy. As such, it represented the fallacy, so prevalent throughout the history of the Cold War, of linking unrelated events into a generality that did not exist.

Though the NATO states were retreating from their colonial possessions, albeit with great difficulty, Rusk echoed McNamara's call for greater NATO interest and involvement in areas beyond the North Atlantic. Even so, he recalled that, during the Kennedy administration, the NATO allies did not want to associate themselves with problems outside of the North Atlantic area by stating that "I think that probably the principal regret I have is that we were not able to stimulate our Western European friends to take a more active role in world affairs and to get them to look at the total world scene. When I tried to talk about matters outside the NATO area at NATO foreign ministers meetings, I got the feeling that they felt that I was bringing in issues that were not the concern of NATO. Europe became indrawn, and we were not able to shake them out of that. I think that had Europe moved ahead dynamically to play a great European role in world affairs that things would have been much easier for the United States."⁹⁸

While the Kennedy administration attempted to persuade NATO to take a greater role in out-of-area developments, these states tried to compel the U.S. government to reconsider its policy on such issues as the Sino-Soviet dispute. Though the White House was cognizant of this

⁹⁷ *FRUS 1961-1963*, Vol. VIII, 441.

⁹⁸ JFK Library, Rusk Oral History, 197. As far as Kennedy's tenure of NATO Affairs goes, Giglio continues with this observation: "Kennedy was unable to strengthen NATO. De Gaulle and Adenauer united became increasingly independent, partly in reaction to U.S. policy. In fact, Kennedy never did describe a coherent and purposeful strategy and oscillated between hard-line and conciliatory approaches with little apparent rationale." Giglio, 285.

development, it, nonetheless, wanted to balance the views of the NATO partners with those of the president's domestic critics. France was using it as leverage to show its independence from U.S. policy. A CIA Special Report noted that de Gaulle "may conclude that the time has come for some further initiative to push into the center of international negotiations and to demonstrate France's independence. He may see the changing relationship between Moscow and Peiping as an opportunity to be exploited."⁹⁹ The CIA's Office of National Estimates also concluded that it was "more difficult to say how much further the French aspire to go at this stage. Having already got a certain political mileage out of a mere show of interest in Far Eastern matters, de Gaulle must now decide whether the risks of a more positive policy are worthwhile. All things considered, we believe that de Gaulle is moving toward a more active China policy."¹⁰⁰

Vietnam now became an even more pressing issue within the Kennedy administration. In this area, the administration avidly applied flexible response. The number of military advisers had increased from 9,000 the previous year to 16,700 in 1963. In October, Couve de Murville told Rusk that, ultimately, Vietnam should "be united and neutral," even though this "would only be possible with the elimination of the Communists and clearly the Communists were not yet prepared to take themselves out of the picture."¹⁰¹

The U.S. government found itself in an embarrassing situation when the Catholic Diem regime started attacking protesting Buddhists. Realizing that Diem was providing needless provocations, the Kennedy administration wanted to diminish this threat. In October, the South Vietnamese military informed the CIA that it intended to overthrow Diem. Not finding a word of discouragement from the Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, the generals interpreted the action as

⁹⁹ JFK Library, Country File, France, Box 72, CIA Office of Current Intelligence Special Report -- France reassessing policy Toward Communist China?, 1.

¹⁰⁰ JFK Library, Country File, France, Box 72, CIA Office of National Estimates, 23 Oct 1963, 4.

a blanket endorsement and assassinated Diem. Regarding the ways in which this incident affected NATO, McNamara, contemplating the effects of this war, wrote in his memoirs that the U.S. “would and should have” withdrawn from South Vietnam either in late 1963 amid the turmoil surrounding Diem’s assassination or in late 1964 or early 1965 in the face of increasing political and military weakness in South Vietnam. As he put it, “I do not believe that U.S. withdrawal at any of these junctures, if properly explained to the American people, would have led Western Europeans to question our support of NATO and, through it, our guarantee of their security.”¹⁰² Notwithstanding McNamara’s regrets, the Kennedy administration, as well as that of its successor, became increasingly distracted by events in the Vietnamese civil war at the expense of overlooking its security commitments in Europe, where the U.S. national security interest was clearly at stake.

Out-of -area concerns during this period, such as the situation in Vietnam, demonstrated the danger of applying flexible response to situations not bearing on NATO’s security interest. While flexible response served a useful purpose in preparing for a Soviet contingency in the NATO area, such was not the case in those regions where the U.S. government still clung to the necessity of fighting communism on all fronts. Although de Gaulle continued to disrupt NATO unity, his government, nonetheless, provided a timely commentary on the failure of the U.S. government to account for such events as the Sino-Soviet dispute, events which could only hasten the pace of détente. This period witnessed a shift in priorities by both the U.S. and its NATO partners. While the Western Europeans now became more concerned with European affairs, the U.S. now became more involved in a war that was reminiscent of the colonial wars which the Western European states had waged for over a century.

¹⁰¹ JFK Library, France, Box 73, Oct. 7, 1963, 1.

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While Kennedy was still not able to attain general NATO approval for flexible response during this period of his administration, he, nonetheless, demonstrated that a détente was not only possible but necessary if NATO wanted to avoid nuclear war. Not only did the Cuban missile crisis compel the White House to find the wherewithal to avoid a nuclear catastrophe but it also highlighted the problems associated with maintaining an alliance whose overall security interests diverged from those of its member-states. Although Kennedy still encountered problems in garnering NATO support for flexible response, the onus clearly resided with the NATO allies because Kennedy continued to utilize the MLF as a way of attaining support for his strategy. Clearly, the Kennedy administration seriously considered sharing its nuclear capability with its NATO partners. While flexible response seemed well-adapted for the NATO area, Kennedy mistakenly began applying it in Vietnam, though its effects were not as discernible as in subsequent periods. And though de Gaulle made eloquent contributions to the debate on détente, such as his “Atlantic-to-the-Urals” concept, his actions, such as the events surrounding the negotiations on the Limited Test Ban Treaty, demonstrated that he was not ready to contribute to any dialogue on détente between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Unfortunately, President Kennedy was not able to complete the work which he began on flexible response. It would be up to Lyndon B. Johnson to pick up where Kennedy left off. No discussion of John F. Kennedy is complete without mentioning the reactions to his untimely and tragic death. The U.S. government deeply felt its loss; in fact, the entire nation came to a

¹⁰² McNamara, 320.

standstill. Kennedy certainly left an indelible impression among the members of his team. He relied heavily upon both Rusk and McNamara for advice on security issues such as NATO, and both of them worked well under him in the sense that they aimed at implementing Kennedy's initiatives within their respective departments.¹⁰³ Charles Bartlett not only added that JFK worked well with Bundy, but that he also had a good, personal relationship with both the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.¹⁰⁴

NATO allies were united in their sense of loss. Stikker remembered Kennedy as one who "by his character, by his knowledge of history, and by the many times that he had been in Europe, a man who was much nearer to the thinking of a great many statesmen in Europe than other Presidents before him had been. Thus there was an opening for many other statesmen in Europe to talk frankly and freely with him about their difficulties. He had a keen interest and understanding of European problems. . . . I think, therefore, that, although there were difficulties in the beginning, Kennedy had great influence on the shaping of policy in the Western world."¹⁰⁵ At a time when the Cold War reached the boiling point in both Berlin and Cuba, NATO was fortunate in that Kennedy, despite his youth, was capable of leading the North Atlantic alliance through its many challenges.

¹⁰³ Interview with Edward McDermott, June 29, 1994.

¹⁰⁴ Bartlett interview.

¹⁰⁵ JFK Library, Dirk Stikker Oral History, 18.

CHAPTER IV

CYPRUS, VIETNAM, AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE MLF, 1963-1966

Seeking to continue Kennedy's flexible response strategy as well as to build upon the progress in Soviet-American relations in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis, Lyndon Baines Johnson took over the management of United States national security at a time when the North Atlantic alliance was shaken by the untimely death of President Kennedy. After the shock of the assassination wore off, U.S. policymakers confronted an alliance that teetered on the brink of disunity as a result of the Greek-Turkish dispute over Cyprus as well as the serious threats that de Gaulle was issuing from the Elysee. Moreover, the NATO allies could not agree on a collective nuclear policy, thereby preventing the establishment of the MLF. While the U.S. government under Johnson's leadership attempted to improve the dialogue between the White House and the Kremlin, distractions such as the escalating involvement of U.S. forces in Vietnam prevented any meaningful progress toward détente during this period.

Kennedy's successor was not a foreign affairs specialist. Nevertheless, this Texan brought to the presidency his experiences of dealing with NATO issues and leaders both as the Senate Majority Leader during the Eisenhower years and as the vice president during the Kennedy years. Yet, Kennedy's contemporaries offered mixed evaluations of Johnson's contribution to NATO policy during the Kennedy administration. McNamara recalled that he played a limited role, noting that he was only present 50 percent of the time when the NSC was in session.¹ Edward McDermott supported this view, noting that LBJ's role in Kennedy's European policy was limited to formal meetings. On these occasions, Johnson tended to agree with the president. Even so,

¹ McNamara interview.

McDermott noted that he was, in fact, prepared for the presidency.² Schlesinger recalled that Johnson's role was only symbolic.³ Kaysen agreed with this view, noting that his role during the Berlin crisis was simply to travel to the wall and "show the flag."⁴ Clifford, however, recollected that he held a strong grasp of foreign affairs.⁵ Though Clifford correctly noted that Johnson did not fit into the close-knit Kennedy circle, Sorensen commented that the president did respect the views of his vice president and tried to include him in every major decision affecting NATO.⁶ Bartlett supported Sorensen's argument by noting that the "hostility" between Robert Kennedy and the vice president contributed to the unfounded rumor that the president and the vice president did not get along.

Cyprus

Cyprus became a NATO issue in the sense that both Greece and Turkey, allies in NATO, risked war against one another. The Cyprus issue highlighted the problem which confronted the U.S. in maintaining unity against a common Cold War threat among European nations that held strong historical antagonisms against one another, significant in this case because both states played central roles in protecting NATO's southern flank. At the same time, the crisis occurred in the Mediterranean, an area which the Eisenhower administration had deemed was vital to America's national security interest.⁷

² McDermott interview.

³ Schlesinger interview.

⁴ Interview with Carl Kaysen, October 15, 1994.

⁵ Clifford interview.

⁶ Sorensen interview.

⁷ Cyprus first emerged as major issue in February 1959 when, after four years of struggle, British control ended, and the Republic of Cyprus was created. According to the arrangement, while Cyprus remained autonomous, both

The crisis began when Archbishop Makarios, the president of Cyprus, added thirteen amendments to the constitution, all aimed at limiting Turkish Cypriot participation in government. As a result, intercommunal violence broke out. On December 26, 1963, nearly 300 Cypriots, mostly Turkish, died, thus drawing in the U.S. and NATO. From the start, Johnson discouraged Turkey from intervening militarily on behalf of the Turkish Cypriot minority.

In early 1964, Britain decided that it could not sustain the burden of peacekeeping in Cyprus indefinitely. Consequently, the U.S. made an effort to substantiate a NATO-based force for the British peacekeepers. Archbishop Makarios rejected it. At its worst, the crisis was provoking war between Greece and Turkey, thus wiping out NATO's southeast flank at one strike and possibly inviting the Soviet Union to intervene.

At the outset, most NATO allies did not believe that war would break out between Greece and Turkey. The British hoped to resolve the issue through their diplomatic channels, while the U.S. was preoccupied in East Asia as a result of its greater involvement in the Vietnam war. Consequently, Greece gave direct support to the Greek Cypriots, while Turkey prepared to invade the island.

Johnson dispatched a strongly worded letter to Turkish premier Ismet Inonu, informing him that U.S. military equipment allocated to Turkey under NATO auspices could not be used in Cyprus. He also took the extraordinary step of warning Ankara that it would not receive NATO

Athens and Ankara pledged to uphold and respect its autonomy. At the heart of the matter, the new republic was plagued by the long-standing power struggle between the island's two main ethnic groups – Greek Cypriots (Greek-speaking Greek Orthodox Christians) who represented 80 percent of the population, and Turkish Cypriots (Turkish-speaking Sunni Muslims) who constituted 18 percent of the population. Commenting on the effect which this had on Turkey's standing in NATO, Stuart and Tow state that "if Ankara had become a very supportive ally, it had also become a special source of concern because of the growth of Greek-Turkish tension over Cyprus. Britain sought to resolve the escalating conflict by the Zurich and London agreements of 1959 – designed to establish the guidelines for power sharing on the island and to claim the rights and duties of Ankara, Athens, and London vis-à-vis Cyprus By the time that the Republic of Cyprus was declared . . . neither the Greeks nor the Turkish Cypriot Communists were satisfied with the government system." Stuart and Tow, 290.

support if Turkish actions precipitated a military response from Moscow. The Turkish government viewed Johnson's letter as their most serious foreign policy setback of the postwar era because it demonstrated that Turkey had not yet recovered from the strains brought about by the Cuban missile crisis.

Subsequently, the parties agreed to a cease-fire, with the British agreeing to patrol a neutral zone in Nicosia. At the end of January, however, land skirmishes mounted in intensity, despite Johnson's warning to Makarios. NATO leaders, at Britain's request, advanced a plan that would send a 10,000 man all-NATO force to the island for three months to oversee the observance of the cease-fire agreement. Since Cyprus was not a NATO member, Makarios viewed this action as a disingenuous plan to occupy his nation with the aim of destroying Cypriot sovereignty. To Johnson's dismay, Makarios also rejected a UN peace-keeping force. He then requested Soviet support in case of a Turkish invasion. General Lyman Lemnitzer (the SACEUR), who was in constant contact with the Athens and Ankara governments, warned that if some sort of diplomatic initiative was not implemented at once, the U.S. would soon face a "Mediterranean Cuba."

In early February, Ball traveled to Nicosia, Ankara, Athens, and London. Unfortunately, his two weeks of shuttle diplomacy ended on February 16 with little success, especially because Makarios seemed incapable of managing the crisis. Commenting on the events in the Cypriot crisis in a February 12 meeting with Richard Butler, the British Foreign Secretary, Rusk postulated that "Makarios had evidently been placed under apparently heavy pressure by the Communists and the Soviet Union," to which Butler repeated the British desire to keep the U.S. in. He also stated that "the more the United States is committed, the less likely it is that the Turks

will do something silly.”⁸ Evidently, not only were Butler and Rusk concerned about the crisis’s effects on NATO’s important southern flank, but they were also alarmed at the fact that Makarios was leaning toward the Soviets for support.

On March 5, the UN Security Council passed UNSC (UN Security Council) Resolution 186, advocating that the UN implement a peace-keeping force as well as appointing a mediator for the crisis. By now, however, the Johnson administration discerned that neither the Athens nor the Ankara governments desired this accommodation.

In a July 7 NSC meeting, the principals agreed that one of the major problems in resolving this dispute was “irrationality on both sides. The Greeks figure time is on their side. They think they can work out a plebiscite . . . simply by sitting tight. The threat of Turk invasion has roused their stubbornness and Athens seems blind to its long-range interest in conceding enough to Ankara to provide a basis for improved relations after a Cyprus settlement.” They sensed that the Turks viewed their position as being eroded by the day and that they resented the fact that the U.S. had restrained them when they had the opportunity to mount a successful invasion. Moreover, the principals discerned that the Turkish government was also upset over Greek and Cypriot disregard of the London-Zurich treaties. Consequently, they viewed a political solution as the only alternative to intervening in the crisis. At the meeting, McNamara brought up the desirability of using Lemnitzer and the North Atlantic Council to press the Greek and Turkish military that a clash between them would be suicidal. Ball, however, said that Lemnitzer “was bearish on this idea because he did not feel the Greek military had much influence over its political leaders,” stating that his previous talks with them had “netted little.” Johnson then asked whether the U.S. had taken into account the demands which a Turkish invasion would place on NATO.

⁸ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File-UK, Box 213, Feb. 12, 1964, 1.

The president was also concerned about the way the Turks would receive a direct U.S. rebuff, though he did not feel that Turkey would switch sides and ally with the Warsaw Pact. Nonetheless, he felt that the strength of the Greek Communists potentially made Greece very unstable. Ultimately, he believed that Greece and Turkey would leave NATO "if hostilities were permitted to go [forward] . . ."⁹

Ball asked U Thant, the UN Secretary-General, to proceed with a new American mediation effort, with Acheson taking the lead. At the end of July, the former Secretary of State proposed the Acheson Plan, which became the basis for all negotiations. Although the Turkish delegation accepted Acheson's proposals as the basis for discussion, the Greeks were intimidated by Makarios' violent denunciation of the plan as a NATO trap.

On August 7, Turkey sent a squadron of 64 planes to bomb Greek Cypriot bases that had threatened to overrun the town of Kokkic in northwest Cyprus. One-hundred Greek Cypriots were killed and 2000 wounded before the Turkish air force was halted by a UN Security Council cease-fire. Khrushchev had warned Turkey to stay out of the strife and had secretly sent arms to Greek Cypriots. Nonetheless, following the attack, Khrushchev rejected Makarios' request for Soviet intervention.

On 25 August, both Prime Minister George Papandreou of Greece and President Makarios issued a joint communiqué declaring that they wanted the Cyprus question handed over to the UN General Assembly in November. However, six days later, the State Department formally announced the collapse of negotiations, with the permanent status of the island remaining unresolved.

⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Files of Walt W. Rostow, Box 1, NSC Meeting, July 7, 1964.

As a result of the Cypriot crisis, U.S.-Turkish relations became tense, the Johnson administration seeking to find a suitable way to treat Turkey. Robert Komer, who served in the NSC, recalled these events, noting that the Greeks warmly received the news about the U.S. “turning off the Turkish invasion.” As he put it, “the trouble is the Greeks and the Greek Cypriots have the upper hand in Cyprus, so Turkey’s only hole card was to threaten to intervene. And that was the one thing we couldn’t stand for because to have a war between two of our NATO allies, both totally equipped by us, using our equipment to fight each other at the expense of the defense of the NATO southeast flank against the bloc, and with the likelihood that who would have to intervene to stop the fighting? We would. Well, that was just too horrendous a picture to contemplate.”¹⁰

Because of the role it played in formulating Cyprus’ political status, the British government anxiously followed these developments. A March 1965 background paper on Cyprus, prepared for Stewart’s visit to Washington, noted that the British government desired a settlement to the crisis not only because Cyprus was a member of the British Commonwealth, but also because it considered its two military installations on the island as valuable and necessary.¹¹ Even so, NATO found it difficult to manage this crisis.

Considering the constraints which the Johnson administration faced as a result of Greece’s and Turkey’s unique roles in NATO, the new president handled the crisis as well as could be expected. Further pressure from Washington might have resulted in Turkey abandoning NATO, or, worse, intervention by the Soviet Union. However, the Johnson administration fell into the trap, as other administrations had done, of interpreting pro-Soviet sympathies as positively being anti-West in the sense that a course of neutralism was not accepted. In effect, the Johnson

¹⁰ LBJ Library, Robert Komer Oral History, 17.

administration miscalculated by concluding that a pro-Soviet stance, however benign, implied that the government was now working against the West. Nevertheless, the bigger issue was not whether Makarios was pro-Soviet but whether the U.S. government was capable of keeping Greece and Turkey firmly allied within NATO. Fortunately, NATO still had a southern flank, especially since the Greeks and Turks were dependent upon NATO for their defense planning. Since no succeeding administration has satisfactorily resolved the Cypriot question, the Johnson administration should not take full responsibility for its inability to reach an agreement on the island's permanent status.

Of the crises which NATO faced in the Cold War, the Cypriot crisis uniquely challenged the North Atlantic alliance in the sense that it touched upon historical questions of ethnic unrest. It further highlighted the fact that NATO, though playing a unique role in protecting European democracy, was still a defensive alliance organized along the political realities of the mid-twentieth century. Consequently, the Johnson administration, though making an effort to settle the issue, could not possibly negotiate an acceptable agreement, no matter how sound it may have appeared to both Greece and Turkey, because the issue at hand predated 1949.

The Escalation of the War in Vietnam

Following Kennedy's lead, Johnson implemented flexible response more forcefully in Southeast Asia by committing U.S. forces to the ongoing civil war in Vietnam as a result of the Gulf of Tonkin incident of August 7, 1964, in which a U.S. naval vessel allegedly responded to hostile fire from a North Vietnamese boat. Although it was later believed not to be so, Johnson

¹¹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - West Germany, Box 214, "Cyprus", March 1965, 1.

immediately requested, and, subsequently, received authorization, from Congress to use whatever was at his disposal to aid the South Vietnamese government from Communist infiltration. While the NATO allies had expressed reservations about the U.S. involvement in this Southeast Asian struggle since the Eisenhower administration, criticism for U.S. actions in this war now reached new levels as the U.S. became more preoccupied with events in Southeast Asia than with events in central Europe.

In the days preceding the Gulf of Tonkin incident, representatives of various NATO governments queried the Johnson administration over the role which the U.S. was assuming in Southeast Asia. As a result of U.S. activity in Vietnam during the last year of the Kennedy administration, the allies were questioning the resolve of the U.S. to stay in Europe. The Atlantic partners wondered whether or not Washington would press the NATO alliance to accept an active role in the Vietnam War effort. After all, the Johnson administration was now investigating ways of soliciting greater support from the NATO partners. William Bundy prevailed upon the British, the Australians, as well as the New Zealanders for some direct contributions to the war effort. However, the administration never held out any hope that NATO would make a direct military contribution.

The Johnson administration was obviously prepared to increase the American involvement on behalf of the South Vietnamese. On March 18, Harriman noted this development, while also accounting for de Gaulle's views. He wrote Rusk that "a full talk with de Gaulle personally" was in order about Vietnam. As Harriman declared, "Since we are determined to see South Vietnam through, we should make de Gaulle realize that and tell him directly that we will take a dim view

of any steps he takes which would undermine the morale of the people of the area.”¹²

Unfortunately, Harriman did not grasp that, even though de Gaulle was blatantly opposing the U.S. by his ongoing attacks on NATO, he, nonetheless, held the best advice about any future Western involvement in Southeast Asia as a result of France’s failure to manage Southeast Asia. Evidently, Harriman was not retreating from the view he helped articulate at the beginning of the Cold War that communism, no matter where in the world it appeared, needed to be contained by the West. This advice by one of the architects of American postwar security policy was indicative of the counsel which Johnson relied upon to wage this distant war.

Two months later, the U.S. continued its plea for support in fighting this insurgent war. At a May 15 NSC meeting, Rusk informed the other principals that, in the UN, the U.S. was submitting a report on what the U.S. was trying to accomplish in South Vietnam, accompanied by a plea to the NATO members to assist in the effort against the Vietcong. Rusk highlighted that it was “important that more flags appear in South Vietnam.” The Secretary of State reasoned that not only would this help the war effort but it would also have a beneficial effect on the morale of the South Vietnamese government. Rusk interpreted NATO’s views of the developments in South Vietnam by noting that “the resistance among NATO members to assisting in Vietnam is an echo of the past and recalls colonial disputes in which European nations believe we worked against them.”¹³ Unfortunately, Rusk did not perceive that the U.S. government was now assuming a role which was similar to that practiced by European governments when they were strong colonial powers.

Once Johnson received congressional approval for waging the war in Vietnam, his administration looked for ways to reassure the NATO allies that the U.S. was not pulling back

¹² LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -West Germany, Box 171, “Memo for the Secretary”, Mar. 18, 1964, 1.

from Europe. In a November 1964 intelligence assessment of the situation in South Vietnam, the intelligence community concluded that “within NATO (except for Greece and Turkey to some degree), the loss of South Vietnam probably would not shake the faith and resolve to face the threat of Communist aggression or confidence in us for major help,” provided that the U.S. did not carry out any military actions in Southeast Asia which seriously impeded upon its ability to defend the NATO area. At the same time, the intelligence assessment observed that the allies worried that if the U.S. became too involved in the conflict (to the point that it could not withdraw), then the American people would develop an isolationist sentiment against fighting communism.

Unfortunately, the assessment supported the prevalent view that the U.S. could not now back away from the war. It surmised that “there are enough ‘ifs’ . . . so that it cannot be concluded that the loss of South Vietnam would soon have the totally crippling effect in Southeast Asia and Asia generally that the loss of Berlin would have in Europe; but it could be that bad, driving us to the progressive loss of other areas or to taking a stand at some point where there would almost certainly be major conflict and perhaps the great risk of nuclear war.” It further stated that “we must maintain, particularly to our key NATO allies, the picture of a nation that is strong and at the same time wise in the exercise of its power.” However, the assessment pointed out the danger of fighting this war at the expense of risking European security, noting that all European countries could be affected in their view of the U.S. as well as in their willingness to accept a continued U.S. leadership by the way the war in Vietnam was handled from Washington. The assessment concluded that the major European allies probably would become seriously

¹³ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. 1, 328.

concerned if the U.S. was so involved in this war that it diminished the U.S. ability to defend the NATO area and “produced anything less than an early and completely satisfactory outcome.”¹⁴

By the early part of 1965, U.S. forces were already on the ground and fighting. On February 7, bomb runs on North Vietnamese targets began in earnest. Within a year, the American presence in Vietnam increased to 190,000, culminating in 650,000 by the ill-fated Tet offensive in 1968. Looking at these numbers, it is difficult not to understate the war’s impact upon NATO. Komer noted that from 1965 to 1972 the U.S. had “robbed our NATO forces.”¹⁵

Johnson’s handling of the ever-growing war significantly and adversely affected NATO readiness. The decision not to mobilize new forces but to expand those on active duty in Vietnam resulted in a serious drawdown of U.S. forces in Europe. Although he could have issued a call for reserves, he knew that such an action would further undermine public backing for the war by connoting an emergency rather than a gradual build-up. Reflecting the priority he now placed on achieving victory in Southeast Asia, Johnson diverted quality assets intended for Europe -- such as personnel and materiel -- to Vietnam. By 1966, the U.S. had cut logistics and support forces in Europe below the level considered necessary to provide adequate support for combat units. Even so, McNamara vehemently denied that NATO was being adversely affected as a result of the U.S. intervention on behalf of South Vietnam. Among the allies, only the French were not concerned by the cutback in personnel, believing as they did that only a nuclear war would be fought in Europe. Nevertheless, the shift in personnel impeded the American argument for flexible response because it relied upon the efficacy of conventional force.

¹⁴ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. I, 919.

¹⁵ Sherwood writes that the U.S. sent most resources to Vietnam at the expense of NATO modernization. Moreover, she writes that both the quantity and quality of troops in Vietnam diminished. Sherwood, 124.

As the Vietnam war escalated in 1966, so did European interest in the way the U.S. conducted its operations. In January, Johnson, against the advice of France and Britain, decided to bomb Vietnam intensively. Although West Germany publicly supported the war, the other allies decried Johnson's single-minded focus on Southeast Asia. As an institution, NATO chose to remain mute, with no single mention in any North Atlantic Council communiqué throughout the 1960s.¹⁶

Although NATO did not comment on U.S. activity in Vietnam, Manlio Brosio, who was now NATO's Secretary-General, told Rusk in a October 7, 1965, meeting that he was "worried about the situation in Vietnam and the attitudes of the European allies toward the U.S. effort his own position was clear; the Alliance members should stand together He thought that [North Atlantic Council] consultations had helped increase somewhat European understanding but wanted to be more helpful if we had other suggestions." Besides bemoaning the fact that the NATO allies were not playing a role in the war, Rusk emphatically stated that the U.S. had no other choice but to fight the war to the end, noting that ". . . it was possible for the situation to become neither better nor worse. The direction depended as much on the Viet Cong as on ourselves We have now faced the other side with a situation where we clearly cannot be driven out, given the present level of the U.S. effort."¹⁷ Evidently, as early as this period, the U.S.

¹⁶ Commenting on the war's effects upon NATO, Kaplan notes the following: "Through its involvement in the Vietnam War, the Johnson administration appeared to turn the clock back, to return the United States to its earlier concerns with the Pacific rim . . . the combination of the President's unfamiliarity with Europe and the dominance of the Vietnam War in America's consciousness seemed to push NATO into the background during the Johnson years." Kaplan, "The United States and NATO in the Johnson Years" in *The Johnson Years*, 119. Gaddis summarizes best the dilemma faced by the U.S. involvement in Vietnam in NATO by writing the following: Vietnam distracted attention from other problems as well. General de Gaulle's intransigence and the continuing debate over nuclear strategy placed NATO under serious strains during the mid-1960s, but the Johnson administration . . . had few suggestions to make toward relieving them." Gaddis, 270.

¹⁷ LBJ Library, NSF Agency File - NATO, Box 35, MemCon , 7 Oct. 1965, 1-2.

government jeopardized its role in Europe by adamantly insisting that there was absolutely no way out of Vietnam.

At the December 1965 NATO Ministerial, in another bilateral talk with Brosio, Rusk told the Secretary-General that "Vietnam was a serious, dangerous problem which lay close to the interests of NATO countries." In fact, NATO countries, as he put it, "needed to think about it" and decide where their national interests lay. Specifically, they "had to think about what would happen in the world if, through Vietnam, the idea arose that the United States did not honor its commitments."¹⁸

Reporting on the sentiment among the NATO Permanent Representatives to the war's escalation, Harlan Cleveland, who was now the U.S. ambassador at NATO, noted that "in the short run, there is grudging acquiescence that the United States has no honorable alternative in its present course, and we get an increasing playback of the notion that U.S. fidelity to our Far East commitments is important to Europeans protected by the U.S. commitment here." Regarding the perception that the U.S. was scaling back its commitment to defend the NATO area as a result of the Vietnamese conflict, the new ambassador noted that "... ministers can hardly have failed to get the point" that the increasing requirements for the U.S. effort in Vietnam was bound to have some impact on the U.S. deployment of NATO support forces. He observed that "as practical political leaders they can see that with growing U.S. casualties in Vietnam, American opinion will be increasingly impatient with a detached European attitude toward our commitment in Vietnam while they press us to honor every scruple of our pledge to them."¹⁹

¹⁸ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 36, MemCon, 13 Dec. 1965, 1-4.

¹⁹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 285-288. McGhee notes that, on Vietnam, the West Germans were tactful in their comments to the Johnson administration. Even so, they thought that the war was "a waste of effort". McGhee interview.

It is quite clear that at this early point in the Vietnam war, the U.S. involvement was adversely affecting the U.S. role in NATO. Significantly, U.S. policymakers had already concluded that the U.S. was in Vietnam to stay to the bitter end. These developments did not bode well for U.S. NATO policy, especially since that policy still hinged upon NATO's acceptance of flexible response, a strategy that was leading the Johnson administration into this unnecessary war. While flexible response was a workable allocation of forces in Europe, such was clearly not the case in Southeast Asia.

The Decline of the MLF and the Debate on Allied Nuclear Sharing

Although Johnson attempted to maintain the momentum on MLF which Kennedy had developed, the NATO allies could not agree on its arrangement and, subsequently, the U.S. government no longer encouraged its implementation. Moreover, factors such as de Gaulle's opposition as well as his stance on NATO programs prevented any significant action on this seaborne force. Nonetheless, it still represented the first serious attempt in allowing the allies to play a role in NATO's nuclear policy, as well as in giving the U.S. another opportunity to promote flexible response.

By the time Johnson became president, the MLF, on paper, consisted of twenty-five surface ships, each armed with eight Polaris A-3 missiles and mixed crews. From the outset, it was clear that Johnson strongly supported the concept. Harold Wilson, the Opposition Leader

within the British Labour Party who would become the Prime Minister later in the year, noted that Johnson advocated the MLF with “even more fervor than President Kennedy.”²⁰

Nonetheless, it became clear to the new president that the U.S. alone could not enact this multilateral nuclear force, even though the intention rested on the fact that the U.S. wanted other NATO members to assume a nuclear role. In a December 5, 1963, memorandum to Johnson, Bundy argued that the principal problem in enacting the seaborne force was the fact that the U.S. was the only NATO member which was actively promoting it. Summarizing the views of the allies on this concept, he remarked that the Greeks and Turks were presumably “still aboard on the clear assumption that we will pay their way.” Having yet to show an enthusiasm for the concept, the Belgians, Bundy observed, viewed the MLF as a luxury they did not need and could not afford, reflecting not only “the thinking of Belgium’s guardian of the purse strings,” but also of the military, which would rather spend on programs they considered more essential. Noting that the Dutch were literally “dragged in on the enterprise,” Bundy remarked that even though they recently agreed to discuss the technical aspects of the proposal, they nonetheless declared that this activity did not imply a commitment. He continued by stating that the British were still not receptive to the concept, going so far as to write that it was clear that “most British politicians wish it would disappear.” In fact, he informed Johnson that “unless the British hand is forced by events over which they have no control, there is unlikely to be any British action to bring the force into being . . .” In this dismal assessment, Bundy believed that only the Italians held out the promise that the MLF could be implemented.²¹

However, in a January 1964 meeting with Rusk, Giuseppe Saragat, the Italian foreign minister, maintained that his country’s support for MLF hinged on the outcome of the British

²⁰ Harold Wilson, *A Personal Record* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1971), 43.

parliamentary election. Yet, Rusk pointed out that the British might not provide enthusiastic support for it because they already had their own nuclear force, and, consequently, a lack of political motivation.²²

Although NATO states such as Italy supported the MLF, France used it as a way to criticize the alliance. Consequently, its provocations in NATO were affecting the allied deliberation on the MLF. At the NATO ministerial meeting that spring, Stikker informed the foreign ministers that if the MLF were established outside NATO, serious difficulties would ensue if MLF participants wanted to establish its headquarters in France or have its vessels, armed with nuclear weapons, enter French ports.²³

Despite French opposition, Johnson earnestly began planning the multilateral force's implementation. At a White House meeting attended by the president, Finletter, Rostow, and Tyler, Ball noted that congressional support was evident.²⁴ Although he also pointed out that the British, in particular Wilson, wanted to discourage the MLF, Ball, nonetheless, declared that they would go back to the U.S. deterrent if the U.S. made it clear that the MLF was the only alternative for them. At the conclusion of the meeting, Johnson directed that State broaden its MLF discussions with Congress by providing informal briefings to the concerned committees. Although Johnson realized that the MLF served a beneficial purpose for the allies, he astutely warned against trying "to shove the project down the throats of potential participants." At this point, Johnson was hoping for an agreement on the MLF by the end of the year.²⁵

²¹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -West Germany, Box !90, Memo for David Klein to Bundy, Dec. 5, 1963, 1-5.

²² *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 5-7.

²³ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 25-30.

²⁴ By now, the Italians had joined the West Germans in being enthusiastic supporters of the MLF.

²⁵ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 35-37.

Among the allies, the West Germans provided the strongest support for the concept during this period because it allowed them to play a significant nuclear role while also signaling that it had resumed its respective place in European security affairs. Regarding Soviet concerns, Chancellor Erhard believed that the MLF provided a useful argument “against Soviet charges that contemporary German leaders were revanchist.” McGhee later recalled that the West Germans supported the MLF because the concept involved them in nuclear affairs.²⁶

The British government, observing that the Johnson administration wanted to implement this seaborne force, hoped to modify the MLF in ways that were more amenable to British defense interests. In June, Britain proposed an alternate MLF plan based on a force of land-based aircraft. When Wilson took office later in the year, the government came up with a second alternative that would set up a separate nuclear force consisting of American MRBM weapons already in Europe, with Britain’s V bombers and Polaris submarines joining the allied surface ships. Though these changes were cosmetic, Wilson faced political pressure in that anti-German sentiment within Labour’s ranks disfavorably viewed any major West German nuclear role. Moreover, Conservatives held a nationalist pride in ownership of nuclear weapons.

In July, the Soviets tried to shape the MLF debate out of a concern that the Bonn government was acquiring what they viewed as a disproportionate influence in allied nuclear matters. From Moscow, Ambassador Foy Kohler reported that the Kremlin continued its opposition to the MLF on the grounds that it hastened West Germany nuclear development. He noted that the longer Moscow persisted in its opposition to the MLF campaign, the more likely that the U.S. government would have to make concessions to assuage their concerns.²⁷

²⁶ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 37-39. McGhee interview.

²⁷ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 64-67.

At the same time, NATO's attention, led by the U.S., focused increasingly on the conventional defense of Europe, the heart of flexible response. Though NATO was gradually accepting Kennedy's strategy, the alliance, nonetheless, felt that if conventional forces failed to check Soviet aggression, the option for nuclear weapons, tactical and strategic, should become available. The threat of escalation would serve as a deterrent. In this context, NATO viewed the MLF as a safeguard should conventional forces fail.²⁸ While the Kennedy administration viewed the MLF as a way of compelling allied support for flexible response, the Johnson administration now tailored that tactic by showing that the MLF could play an integral role within the flexible response strategy.

While the MLF negotiations were proceeding within NATO governments, de Gaulle was interpreting West German interest in the MLF as an excuse to distance France from the Atlantic alliance, even though de Gaulle had acceded to the Franco-German entente. In November, McGhee, who was now the U.S. ambassador to the Federal Republic, reported that de Gaulle informed Erhard that West German participation in the MLF would violate West Germany's duty to Europe. The Chancellor interpreted de Gaulle's remark as one which not only downgraded Bonn's involvement in the MLF but one that also attempted to "push Germany down." Erhard emphatically stated, however, that de Gaulle's attitude would no way affect West Germany's decision to participate in the MLF. In fact, he asserted that if Bonn were to comply with de Gaulle's wishes, then his government would become a "laughing stock." Erhard told McGhee

²⁸ Paul Hammond summarizes the MLF by noting that: "For all members, NATO is a convenience. The MLF was supposed to address German dissatisfaction with a peace treaty that presented Germany's owning nuclear weapons. Yet, the FRG, of all NATO members, was the most dependent on NATO for help in managing its own expectations about security and for legitimizing its national security policies. If one takes into account the sense of opinion among German political leaders about the MLF, they remained uncertain until the eleventh hour. It was not until de Gaulle had created a problem in the Bundestag for Erhard's government that the latter acted

that West Germany could not accept a “law laid down” by de Gaulle and that it would neither “yield to pressure.” In fact, he also told him that “Germany will remain firm on the MLF and hopes that the U.S. will.” Despite his strong convictions on the MLF, the Chancellor obviously did not relish the prospect of a confrontation with de Gaulle.²⁹

By now, however, interest in the MLF was beginning to wane. Because Britain was never entirely comfortable with the concept as defined by Washington, the Wilson government now proposed the Atlantic nuclear force (ANF), which consisted of an advisory group of French, West German, and Italian representatives which would participate in American conventional and nuclear planning. Even though the smaller NATO allies and the U.S. Congress held reservations about this scheme, Wilson liked it because it diverted attention from the MLF. Moreover, his government did not believe that the allies would seriously consider implementing it.

Johnson doubted its usefulness in that he interpreted its implementation as being primarily an Anglo-American force, which would alienate the West Germans and confirm de Gaulle’s view of Anglo-Saxon cooperation. In this context, Bundy and McNamara, who also held reservations, worked to minimize the American role.

Consequently, Bundy sensed that the NATO allies were no longer taking the MLF seriously and that the ongoing discussion comparing the merits of both plans was detracting from more pressing alliance concerns. He now believed that it was not worth risking the necessary political capital in order to implement it. He argued that the MLF, as well as the ANF, would make very heavy demands on direct presidential leadership, and, consequently, “there are better things for the President to do.” Supporting this view, he also noted that not only was Lemnitzer

decisively.” Paul Hammond, *The Presidential Management of Foreign Relations* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 149-150.

²⁹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 100-103.

warning against this concept (on grounds that it was dividing the alliance), but also that Norstad was now publicly against it. He also observed that "the JCS will be loyal but probably not enthusiastic" and that former President Eisenhower "may not be any better than neutral and could be opposed. . . ." At the same time, Bundy perceived that the Senate Armed Services Committee was very wary of any treaty which affected U.S. nuclear power. Noting the de Gaulle problem, Bundy wrote that "we can continue to prevent de Gaulle from dominating Europe even without an MLF -- the Europeans themselves have no desire to follow him. His nuclear force is a big magnet. The number of Germans who really tie their fate to France as against the U.S. is ridiculously small. The German politicians who favor France today would be the first to come to Washington if they ever came to power." He then stated that the U.S. could still promote allied nuclear consultation outside of an MLF context. Bundy conceded, however, that "it is true that this is an inferior way of doing it, but if the MLF is not destroyed by us but by circumstances, new consultative procedures would usefully show our good will."

Bundy now outlined to Johnson two options for handling the MLF, which in either case did not hold the promise that the plan could be salvaged. He stated that "if you go full steam ahead, you face a long, hard political fight, a major confrontation with de Gaulle, and a possibility of defeat or delay which would gravely damage the prestige of the President If you go half steam ahead, there will probably be no MLF, but it will not be your fault alone. You will have kept the letter and spirit of the Kennedy readiness to move if the Europeans wanted it. There will be trouble with the Germans, but nothing unmanageable. There will be plenty of opportunities for debate, discussion and delay, and for gradual and ceremonial burial. Your wisdom, caution and

good judgment will have the praise of liberals, of military men, of the British, of the French, and of many Germans -- and you will have freedom to make a different choice later if you wish.”³⁰

Notwithstanding this advice, President Johnson still endeavored to make the MLF acceptable to NATO. Desiring that NATO maintain its unity, particularly in an area that the allies had wanted to play a greater role, he still hoped that France would reverse its initial opposition to the concept. Bundy proposed the following to make the MLF more viable: “an ostentatiously open attitude to the French, with repeated invitations to membership and repeated offers of ‘cooperation’ if they chose to stay outside and an interlocking set of financial and political bargains on details in which the dominant object is to make the British and the Germans see their common interest in agreement.”³¹

A week later, however, Alphand told Rusk that France still opposed the MLF because it would integrate West Germany into an U.S.-controlled defense organization outside of NATO as well as involve “smaller European powers in adventures for which they have displayed little enthusiasm,” in addition to “whetting German appetite for a national nuclear program with Germany perhaps using MLF as a first step toward attainment of own nuclear capability.” Obviously, Alphand was not speaking within the spirit of the Franco-German because he also stated that since West Germany was “the only European country with unsatisfied territorial claims, such capability could create a serious threat for the rest of Europe,” thus providing the Soviets with an opportunity to interpret this as a “*causus belli*.” To his credit, Rusk vigorously protested this French view on the grounds that since West Germany was the “closest bull’s eye for Soviet nuclear missiles,” it was only natural that the West Germans would want a role in allied nuclear defense strategy which the MLF, as Rusk argued, would make it possible without the

³⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 134-137.

creation of a West German nuclear program. Moreover, Rusk told Alphand that the MLF was “an outlet for any German appetite [which] French nuclear capability has whetted.”³² Though the French government acknowledged an entente with West Germany, Alphand unfortunately expressed reservations about any West German nuclear control. Regretfully, neither he nor his boss was able to acknowledge the constructive role that MLF could play in their great entente with the West Germans.

By late November, Bundy acknowledged that the MLF was dead. He wrote that “against my own expectations of two weeks ago, I am reaching the conclusion that the U.S. should now arrange to let the MLF sink out of sight. Whether this should be done quickly or slowly is an important tactical question, but the overriding point which I wish to suggest in this tightly limited group is that we should now ask the President for authority to work toward a future in which the MLF does not come into existence.” Bundy cited the following reasons for this action: an “. . . . unessentially unpersuaded Great Britain”, as well as a West Germany whose government was divided on this issue and whose participation was ambiguous in meaning. Likewise, he mentioned “additional strains on an Italian government” which were weaker instead of being stronger as a result of its last parliamentary elections, as well as a “protracted and difficult congressional struggle in which we would be largely deprived of the one decisive argument -- that this arrangement is what our major European partners really want, a constitutional debate in NATO which, even if successful, would provide justification for further Gaullist outrages . . .” Bundy then stated that Johnson was now receptive to any new ideas which might appear to be more workable than the MLF. However, he stressed the importance of working with the West Germans, going so far as to state that “as long as the German chancellor is treated with care and

³¹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 100-107.

dignity by the American President, I believe we can meet the main purposes of the MLF, at least in the short run, without paying heavy costs And even if a fresh look should lead nowhere over the next year or two we would still be free to take new steps with the Germans until the situation then demands. I do not believe that any such steps need be worse than the MLF is today. . . .”³³

The Johnson White House subsequently witnessed further signs of the MLF’s decline, even in a member state such West Germany, which had provided the strongest backing to date. In a November 25, 1964, letter from Bonn, Hellenbrand told Klein that “there is no doubt but that the MLF as a concept has failed to capture the popular imagination in Germany, except to the degree that it gets involved in discussion of the adequacies or inadequacies of the Government and thus becomes identified with personalities.” An NSC paper drew the same conclusion by also noting that the MLF did not enjoy a broad base of support in West Germany, even among those who were “politically highly literate.” As a result, the paper recommended that Johnson divert Bonn’s “official interest in the MLF into revised channels, that would prove more manageable in terms of U.S. relations with many West European countries.”³⁴

Though the MLF was waning, the Johnson administration still hoped to employ some type of allied nuclear arrangement within the context of flexible response. A background paper entitled “The Role of Tactical Nuclear Forces in NATO Strategy,” prepared for the Johnson-Wilson summit, stated that the number of alternatives in NATO ran “the gamut from relying on nuclear defense to relying principally on a major nonnuclear option buttressed by tactical nuclear weapons.” It faulted the current NATO strategy for overly relying upon general war to the

³² *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 107-109.

³³ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 121-122.

detriment of essential conventional capabilities. Although the paper stated that nuclear options were not adequate substitutes for nonnuclear options, it conceded that a modest tactical nuclear capability was needed to reassure the allies, help deter nuclear and conventional forces, as well as to provide “a hedge short of general war should deterrence and our nonnuclear defense fail.” The paper also discussed the arguments of those within the administration who still wanted a strong nuclear role by pointing out they viewed nuclear power as exploiting NATO’s strategic nuclear superiority and large tactical nuclear arsenal, which should inhibit the Soviets from escalating beyond a certain level on an engagement that only held a limited objective. As the paper put it, “Assuming nonnuclear defense to be infeasible, they expect our allies to accept engaged nuclear battle in Central Europe and abide by its constraints.”³⁵ The Johnson administration, however, was still committed to advance Kennedy’s strategy.

Adding to the problems posed by NATO’s reluctance to accept the MLF, the Soviets were now becoming more vocal in stating their opposition to the concept, even though the U.S. government was trying to accommodate their concerns. A State INR memo, dated on December 8, highlighted the fact that they felt that this force would create new obstacles to German reunification.³⁶

Along the peripheries of the Johnson-Wilson discussions of December 8, the U.S. and British defense ministers submitted a paper entitled “Atlantic Nuclear Force”, which elaborated upon the ANF concept by committing British strategic nuclear forces, including four Polaris submarines, to a new Atlantic nuclear force with the exception of certain bombers and submarines. The paper also acceded to the concept of West German equality in the force, and

³⁴ LBJ Library, NSF, Subject File, Box 23, “Considerations Involving Germany and France Which Are Pertinent To Modifications of the US Position On MLF”, 1-7.

³⁵ LBJ Library, NSF, Committee File, Box 4, “The Role of Tactical Nuclear Forces in NATO Strategy”.

agreed to the mixed-manning for some of the bombers. The potential for even more confusion in the ANF was obvious, however, especially since support for the MLF was now uncertain and neither the U.S. nor the British were ready to embrace the ANF.

Subsequently, de Gaulle descriptively outlined his opposition to West Germany's role in any allied nuclear program. In a December 15, 1964, meeting with Rusk, he stated that if the MLF "had the advantage of assuring that the Germans would never get the weapon this might be some compensation." Even so, he argued that "... you know and we know that the MLF will not eliminate the German appetite but will in all probability increase [it]" and that "... even more importantly it changed the entire texture of the organization of the Alliance which had been based upon the proposition of the equality of European countries under the protection of the U.S. and this would give the Germans a privileged position." He succinctly concluded that "the MLF would be disastrous for NATO." Significantly, de Gaulle failed to mention that he was challenging that American protection, which made his concern for NATO that much shallower.³⁷

Even though Johnson sensed that the MLF was now dead, he, nonetheless, saw the need to continue promoting allied nuclear sharing. Two days after the Rusk-de Gaulle bilateral meeting, he issued NSAM 322 (National Security Action Memorandum), in which he stated that, in regard to nuclear defense, "no agreement can be made with the U.K. that does not take account of the legitimate interests of Germany, and that similarly no agreement can be made with Germany that does not take account of the legitimate interests of other European states." It also encouraged direct discussion among Europeans, particularly as it related to an agreement between Britain and West Germany, the two Western European nuclear powers other than France. As a way of demonstrating his willingness to continue working with de Gaulle on this issue, Johnson

³⁶ LBJ Library, NSF, Committee File, Box 5, Memorandum from INR to Rusk, Box 5, December 8, 1964.

admonished all U.S. negotiators “to avoid public or private quarrels with France,” as well as to maintain both in public and private a course of action that endeavored to reduce differences with the French government. In fact, Johnson stated that “we will never support any proposal for a nuclear force which is in fact directed against France; we will not sign any agreement until after French opinion and French desires have been carefully and responsibly explored.”³⁸

In the wake of NSAM 322, the Johnson administration continued the dialogue of nuclear sharing. In a cable from State to Bonn, Rusk wrote that that the “present hiatus in ANF/MLF in no way indicates a reduced U.S. interest in bringing allies more fully into [the] nuclear planning and sharing process.”³⁹

Amid the MLF/ANF debate, a September 21, 1965, NSC paper entitled “The Nuclear Problem of the Alliance” concluded that a NATO nuclear problem existed because “no single course of action emerges with respect to that problem which logic and self interest ineluctably lead us.” It also bemoaned the fact that “the motives, objectives, and preference” of the European allies were “sufficiently uncertain and fluid that a primary objective should be to learn more about them, and to try to change them in directions we prefer, while keeping our options open insofar as we can . . .” Even though it concluded that the MLF/AMF concept would serve the purposes of the Erhard government, it, nonetheless, stated that it was incompatible with U.S. objectives as well as possibly being inconsistent with West German objectives.⁴⁰ Evidently, the administration was joining the British in not considering the ANF as a serious replacement for the MLF.

³⁷ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 160-165.

³⁸ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 165-167.

³⁹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 201-204.

⁴⁰ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, -The Nuclear Problem of the Alliance, Sept. 21, 1965, 1-34.

As further indication of the MLF's demise, an October 18 paper in Bundy's file concluded not only that the MLF was dead but that the time had come for a replacement. It stated that three years of effort had shown that the MLF and its related proposals had no adequate base of political and public support within the Atlantic alliance. It highlighted this point by noting that "they are strong only in Foreign Offices. They are unattractive to Finance Ministers and unimpressive to most Defense Ministers. They have little support from professional soldiers. They have few friends in legislative bodies. In no country have they won popular support. They are strongly opposed by the partisans of France, the partisans of disarmament, and by those who are habitually suspicious of Germany. They are an apple of discord in Germany itself Throughout these three years the MLF has served the useful purpose of demonstrating American willingness to move to new arrangements -- if these new arrangements were directed by the members of the Alliance." It concluded with the remark that "we have given this hose a full run But the fact is that opposition to the MLF had gradually increased, while support has slackened The passage of time has demonstrated, finally, that there is no strong military need for such a new strategic system at this time history has shown that these forces are adequately countered by the deterrent strength of the United States, and NATO Europe could accept this basic proposition."⁴¹

A November 1965 memo on NATO, also written for Bundy, conclusively stated that the Johnson administration had given up on the MLF when it outlined the effect of its demise by stating that although "the basic idea behind the MLF was good, if NATO is to survive it must become a nuclear armed organization." It noted that the MLF failed because the military proposals were inadequate. It supported this argument by observing that "the fact that none of

⁴¹ LBJ Library, "NSF, Files of McGeorge Bundy, Boxes 15, 16, "The Case for a Fresh Start on Atlantic Nuclear

the nuclear powers has considered putting its deterrent weapons on surface ships is enough to discredit the idea . . .” Even so, the paper warned that “if it is to survive, NATO must become a true nuclear alliance,” especially since the U.S. had “never given the Europeans a [major nuclear] voice in NATO.”⁴²

By the time the MLF met its death, Cleveland had become the new U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO. He recalled Finletter’s disappointment with the way Johnson handled the issue in that the president was too willing to let the Western Europeans take the responsibility for its implementation, a view which Cleveland shared.⁴³ Although both U.S. NATO ambassadors correctly emphasized this problem, the Western Europeans, unfortunately, did not show a willingness to take the initiative on the issue. If the MLF was to succeed, both Johnson and his predecessor realized that the initiative had to come from Western Europe. After all, the MLF was supposed to benefit them, and not the United States.

For more than three years, the U.S. government supported the MLF concept as a way of responding to NATO’s doubts about the U.S. strategic guarantee. It had hoped that it would advance European integration.⁴⁴ Neither the U.S. nor NATO vetoed the concept. It simply disappeared in an even vaguer rhetoric, without satisfaction to any party. Rusk recollected that “we let it wither on the vine, and it died a natural death.”⁴⁵ Erhard would push for the MLF, but

Defense (with no mixed manned forces or plans for such forces), October 18, 1965, 1-8.

⁴² LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File -NATO, Boxes 37-38, memo for McGeorge Bundy, November 2, 1965, 1-2.

⁴³ LBJ Oral History, Harlan Cleveland Oral History, 37-38.

⁴⁴ Robert Divine concludes that the U.S. government supported the MLF because of an “. . . abiding conviction . . . that Western security rested in centralized control of nuclear weaponry in American hands and the buildup of conventional forces as a major deterrent. The MLF, however, involved creating a new nuclear entity and a concomitant downplaying of conventional forces.” Divine also writes that the MLF lingered because, “. . . the MLF debate seemed to dissolve, if not solve, some critical problems of the Alliance. It did deflate excessive German pressure for more nuclear involvement. The MLF, or at least its fate, satisfied the British . . . [They] received the Polaris missile without having to pay the penalty of assigning their nuclear force to NATO. . . , Divine, *The Johnson Years* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994) 126.

⁴⁵ Rusk, 265.

even he would give up on it. The MLF or ANF appeared in none of the NATO communiqués of December 1964 or throughout 1965.⁴⁶

Once the MLF was out, the North Atlantic Council immediately acted to come up with a solution to the alliance's problem of nuclear sharing. A special committee of defense ministers collaborated in setting up three working groups that began operating in February 1966. Later, the Defense Planning Committee (DPC) established within NATO two permanent bodies for nuclear planning. Of the two, the most significant was the Nuclear Defense Affairs Committee (which made policy), as well as subordinates, such as the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), composed of seven members to manage the detailed work. The NPG embodied McNamara's concerns for educating the allies to the realities of nuclear warfare and for sharing, at least to some degree, the nuclear planning process. President Johnson supported the NPG because, like the MLF, it was aimed at encouraging greater alliance cohesion on nuclear matters. The NPG did more than make national and multilateral nuclear forces appear impractical and unnecessary. It also educated the Western Europeans on the soundness of flexible response in promoting alliance nuclear strategy, thus enabling NATO's acceptance of Kennedy's contribution to strategy.

Although it might appear that the MLF was a dismal failure for U.S. policy towards NATO, the record shows that such was not the case. It represented the U.S. government's best effort to promote allied unity in an area which the NATO allies felt the U.S. had neglected -- the control of the allied nuclear arsenal. Even though NATO could not agree on the organization and control of this force, the MLF did succeed in advancing the discussion of allied nuclear planning since it ushered in the NPG, which continues to play a significant role in NATO councils.

⁴⁶ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 168-169.

Moreover, the MLF showed that the U.S. was sympathetic to the views of those allies who did not make as big a contribution to NATO as the U.S. military.

The MLF, though not successful in the end, showed that the U.S. government was seriously committed to promoting NATO unity alliance nuclear policy. The Johnson administration, like its predecessor, could take credit for actively promoting the concept throughout NATO. Unfortunately, the Western Europeans did not realize the windfall which this concept provided. Though a multilateral seaborne force never came about, the debates on such a force contributed to the establishment of the NPG, thus pleasing those in NATO who felt that the U.S. government was wielding too strong a role in the North Atlantic alliance. Moreover, it advanced the U.S. case for flexible response, though later events, such as the U.S. role in détente, enabled the formal acceptance of the strategy.

de Gaulle and NATO Policy on the Eve of the French Pull-Out

De Gaulle continued to invoke his anti-NATO views to the extent that the Johnson administration concluded that he would soon carry out his threats. Even so, Johnson, like Kennedy, realized that he could not prevent the French president from making his move. Central to de Gaulle's thinking in promoting this independent stance was his view that the time had come to accommodate the Soviet Union in a détente, albeit at France's bidding. Throughout this period, the evidence shows that the Johnson administration was already preparing for whatever action de Gaulle was contemplating.

Although Thomas Hughes, the director of INR, wrote that de Gaulle would not "leave an alliance the necessity for which he still frequently proclaims," a CIA Special Report titled "de

Gaulle's Eastern European policy," which originated in the agency's Office of Current Intelligence, elaborated upon de Gaulle's motivations in seeking this independent stance by noting that the French president continued to be cautious of Moscow's demarches, especially those concerning Berlin. However, CIA noted that de Gaulle's assessment of the Soviet threat was changing in that he was now believing that Soviet policy was evolving to the point where negotiations on "European questions" could now take place "in a new context." Sensing this, the assessment stated that de Gaulle "seems ready to exploit the greater flexibility that an appearance of improved relations with the USSR would give him," and that he would endeavor to increase his contacts with Moscow as a way of balancing his recognition of Beijing (then called Peiping). CIA believed that de Gaulle wanted to undertake these initiatives as a way of promoting "his idea of European unity associating all nations, from the Atlantic to the Urals," which he believed would appeal to the Eastern Europeans and, eventually, the Soviets. Evidently, de Gaulle saw himself at the center of any development between the East Bloc and the West, even though the U.S. government shared his desire in seeking an understanding with the Soviets.⁴⁷

At a meeting in the State Department on February 5, 1964, Stikker remarked to Ball his concern about de Gaulle's negative influence on NATO, insisting that "he admired de Gaulle as a man but thought it important to appreciate the extent to which he blocked so many avenues of progress." He also warned that "there will either be hard collisions or we shall have to find some way to handle him."⁴⁸

At the spring NATO ministerial meeting at the Hague in March 1964, Italian foreign minister Saragat, when discussing the issue of de Gaulle, told Rusk that not only was the alliance

⁴⁷ LBJ Library, NSF, Files of Robert Komer, Box 20, Research memorandum, September 2, 1964, 1-12; LBJ Library, NSF, Files of Robert Komer, Box 20, CIA Office of Current Intelligence "Special Report: de Gaulle's Eastern European Policy", 1-6.

important to Italy, but that, in fact, it was more important than the EEC. He also mentioned that his government did not believe that de Gaulle would “push so far as to break up NATO,” especially since this would effect a serious “rupture” with the West Germans.⁴⁹

In April, William Tyler, the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, informed the U.S. ambassador in Belgium that “for the time being,” the U.S. government would prefer a more subtle approach in which it would initiate steps to keep NATO intact without French participation whenever the French “chose to remain aloof.”⁵⁰ A June 30 CIA memo for the DCI, however, reported that de Gaulle was about to make his move against the Atlantic alliance. The unidentified source quoted this information from General Michel Fourquet, the Secretary General of National Defense, who said that de Gaulle “was preparing to take a drastic step against NATO.”⁵¹

Subsequently, a State Policy Planning paper stated that “the idea of a NATO lacking France is surely not on these grounds to be ruled out . . . a NATO without France may be tolerable. That does not suggest it is better than a NATO in which France cooperates.” Even so, the paper, commenting on the long-term effects of the French action, further stated that Franco-American relations would initially not suffer and might even improve in some respects in that the French would recognize that their ultimate dependence rested upon the U.S. strategic nuclear umbrella and that, as a result, “new respect for U.S. political purposefulness and skill would emerge, not least on de Gaulle’s part . . . It would appear that a NATO from which France had withdrawn might be tolerable to U.S. interests, though not without substantial costs.” State defined these costs along economic lines in that a new infrastructure would have to be created.

⁴⁸ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 12-14.

⁴⁹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 53-54.

⁵⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 31-34.

Moreover, military risks to the alliance would increase in the event of a massive deliberate attack. Politically, however, State held that a NATO "pruned of its obstructionist member should add considerably to the effectiveness of political consultation and general deterrence of the USSR across the whole spectrum of violence."⁵²

By the fall's NATO ministerial meeting that year, State knew that de Gaulle's actions were inevitable. A briefing paper for Rusk's use at the meeting stated that French opposition to NATO was becoming "increasingly clear." It postulated that if de Gaulle remained in office, it did not seem likely that France would continue to be bound by the North Atlantic Treaty or to participate in NATO activities.⁵³

In a June meeting with the British Deputy Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Rusk, in discussing contingency planning in the event of de Gaulle's withdrawal, stated that both governments felt that "we should use the rest of this year to prepare for steps we might have to take if and when the French acted," even though both the U.S. and the British did not believe that the implications of the French position for NATO were "fatal". They agreed that the following steps should be implemented in the event of a French withdrawal: 1) continue acting as if NATO would go on as an institution; 2) synchronize statements by NATO's other allied leaders; 3) announce that the alliance was taking the necessary precautions to meet possible French actions; and (4) have the allies exchange a list of actions which they thought the French might take vis-à-vis NATO. Moreover, both agreed that the U.S. and British governments should downplay any talk of contingency planning lest word should leak to the press.⁵⁴

⁵¹ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, Memo for the DCI, 30 June 1964., 1-2.

⁵² LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File -NATO, Box 35, "NATO and France", 6 May 1964, 1-9.

⁵³ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File -NATO, Boxes 33-34, Scope Paper, 8 Dec. 1964, 1-5.

⁵⁴ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 217-220.

In October, a State memo observed the problem which de Gaulle was posing for the U.S. government in that, while seeking an accommodation with the Soviet Union, the French president still wanted France to play the dominating role. It stated that "we cannot be sure of the precise nature and timing of de Gaulle's actions with respect to the future of NATO" and that his statements on Europe appear "vague and inconsistent." Significantly, the memo noted that de Gaulle "speaks at times of transforming the continent into 'one of the three planetary powers' which 'one day if necessary could arbitrate between the Soviet and the Anglo-Saxon camps' and at other times of an 'association of Slavs, Germans, Gauls and Latins,' uniting Europe 'from the Atlantic to the Urals.'" Notwithstanding de Gaulle's grand designs, the paper predicted that de Gaulle would still want France to remain technically and legally in NATO until 1969. Despite de Gaulle's plans, the paper warned against taking any preemptive action against France on the grounds that U.S. consultations with its NATO allies had so far shown that the Johnson administration would not gain any political support for an active anti-de Gaulle policy since each of the allies had vested interests in preserving their bilateral ties with France.⁵⁵

As part of the contingency planning for what was to come, Ball informed Rusk, McNamara, and Stewart that allied military activities in France needed to be reassessed, especially since de Gaulle had already stated that foreign troops in France had to be under French command. Ball also stated that "we must decide at what point we will insist on disclosure of France's intentions since we cannot allow the Alliance to be nibbled away." Notwithstanding the seriousness of Ball's tone, McNamara responded that a French withdrawal from NATO would be

⁵⁵ LBJ Library, NSF, Subject File, Box 42, Sept. 25, 1965, 1-21.

more a political than a military problem. The Secretary of Defense believed that it was possible to defend NATO without France.⁵⁶

At that December's NATO ministerial, Rusk told Brosio that "he understood the French were beginning to hint that NATO should not be situated in France," to which Brosio replied that such would "mean the French would be out of the Alliance." Brosio believed that the alliance's effort "ought to be centered on getting the French to say how they would like to see NATO change, especially on the military side."⁵⁷ Moreover, in reporting on the ministerial events, Cleveland commented that the Atlantic alliance still remained united by writing that "French bargaining power is not very strong with the allies who are increasingly willing to leave the French chair vacant and go ahead on moves to strengthen NATO." Specifically, he mentioned that both the British and the continental allies shared this assessment, thus accounting for, as Cleveland wrote, "their stiffened posture," a posture which the French now sensed. Even with de Gaulle's impending move, the allies still saw the necessity of moving ahead without France.⁵⁸

The de Gaulle problem again came up when Wilson visited the White House on December 15 in that a briefing paper also forecasted what would happen if de Gaulle left NATO. It stated that the United States should not make the first move in anticipating possible French actions against NATO or U.S. facilities in France, but should seek, through continuing consultation with the allies, a collective action "when and if a confrontation with France becomes unavoidable." The paper stressed, however, that the Johnson administration should "make it clear that we are

⁵⁶ LBJ Library, NSF, Box 209, Country File -UK, MemCon, Oct. 11, 1965, 1-2.

⁵⁷ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File -NATO, Boxes 33-34, MemCon, Dec. 13, 1964, 1-3.

⁵⁸ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 285-288.

not endeavoring to organize the other NATO countries in a campaign to isolate the French or to initiate action against France.”⁵⁹

Not only did Johnson know of de Gaulle’s impending action, but he took steps within NATO to prepare for the upcoming event. Moreover, the Atlantic alliance was prepared to stand by the United States. Even though de Gaulle wanted to distance France from NATO on grounds that such distancing would bring about his “Atlantic-to-the-Urals” Europe, the Gaullist interpretation of détente, the other allies did not seem to welcome either France’s initiative or its leadership, partly as a result of the fact that they still saw the U.S-led NATO organization as the surest way to bring about European integration. The contingency planning as well as the discussions at NATO confirmed that the allies were committed to keeping the North Atlantic alliance intact against any adverse action from de Gaulle.

* * * * *

Seeking to advance President Kennedy’s mandate, President Johnson encountered several obstacles that redefined his resolve in maintaining unity throughout the North Atlantic alliance. Fortunately, he was able to prevent NATO’s southern flank from collapsing as a result of the Cypriot crisis. However, he joined prior Cold War administrations by needlessly delaying the process of détente with the Soviet Union as a result of continuing Kennedy’s misapplication of flexible response in a Southeast Asian war that did not directly affect the U.S. national security interest. Moreover, this war directly affected the ability of the United States to maintain its defense commitment in NATO. Although Johnson continued the U.S. support for the MLF, it

⁵⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -UK, Box 215, “UK, France and NATO”, Dec. 13, 1965, 1-2.

collapsed as a result of a lack of unity among those allies whom this seaborne force was supposed to have benefited. Though it went down in defeat, the MLF proved that the U.S. was willing to treat its lesser allies as equal partners, as evidenced by the fact that the NPG evolved out of the MLF discussions to provide a continuous forum for allied nuclear discussions. As in other allied initiatives, France proved instrumental in bringing about MLF's downfall. Nevertheless, the NATO allies showed a willingness to stand united against de Gaulle's impending move against NATO, an action which would change the nature of the North Atlantic alliance.

CHAPTER V
THE FRENCH WITHDRAWAL FROM THE NATO
MILITARY STRUCTURE, 1966

The year 1966 opened with de Gaulle finally taking action against NATO, a move which the U.S. government had long been anticipating. The withdrawal created the potential for the serious weakening of the Atlantic alliance, and posed a grave threat to U.S. leadership in NATO. Acting with precision, the Johnson administration immediately set out to coordinate the allied response to the crisis, beginning with events which occurred in early March. Though de Gaulle's expulsion order transformed NATO, the other members of the North Atlantic alliance did not forsake their loyalty to each other. The events surrounding the withdrawal pitted de Gaulle against the Johnson administration, thus providing de Gaulle the opportunity to show whether or not he was more capable of bringing about a détente than the United States government, and thus disrupting the allied implementation of flexible response. However, the Johnson administration was not only successful in maintaining allied unity, but was also able to keep the momentum on flexible response as well as to adapt the U.S. government and the North Atlantic alliance to the realities of the relaxation of tension, thus seizing the initiative from de Gaulle. The chapter opens with the events and activities surrounding de Gaulle's announcement, followed by an examination of U.S. efforts to control the new situation in its alliance policy. A subsequent section discusses other reactions and U.S. diplomatic efforts at maintaining NATO unity.

de Gaulle's Announcement

Although de Gaulle's expulsion order did not surprise the Johnson administration, it, nonetheless, dismayed U.S. policymakers because they still held out hope that an accommodation could be attained with the Elysee. Acting in conjunction with U.S. missions in Europe, the Johnson White House not only followed the developments preceding the action, but also coordinated the way it would respond to de Gaulle's announcement with its representatives throughout the NATO area.

By early March, U.S. policymakers were already concluding that the impending action was just a matter of days away. At the end of February, de Gaulle had held a press conference in which he announced his desire for NATO to leave France. On March 2, Ball warned the president that French action against NATO was imminent. He believed that de Gaulle could denounce bilateral agreements, withdraw French military personnel from all NATO facilities, order the removal of SHAPE, as well as insure that French divisions remain in West Germany under a non-NATO control.¹

That same day at NATO, Pierre de Leusse, the French Permanent Representative reassured the U.S. delegation not only that France would remain in the North Atlantic Council but that NATO headquarters could also remain in Paris, though he added the caveat that the International Military Headquarters would have to relocate and that such information was to be treated "as strictly confidential." Even though the U.S. Permanent Representative knew that de Leusse had authority to provide some advance warning to the NATO ambassadors, Cleveland believed that he was providing more details about the impending action as well as answering

questions more frankly than expected. Despite de Leusse's warnings, the U.S. ambassador did not believe that the French would denounce the North Atlantic Treaty. However, he noted that the French ambassador was vague when it came to the subject of France's military relationships with NATO, though, like Ball, de Leusse noted that it would include a departure from SHAPE as well as removing French troops in West Germany from the NATO integrated structure.²

That same evening, in a circular cable to NATO capitals, Rusk stated that if de Gaulle insisted on the removal of U.S. forces from French soil, then the U.S. government would have no other choice but to "accede gracefully." Rusk believed that attempts to dissuade President de Gaulle or to negotiate concessions would be unfruitful. He stated, however, that no bilateral accord between the U.S. and France should replace the Franco-NATO relationship if France should leave the alliance. Rusk believed that such action would not only make it difficult for France to return to the organization at a later date but it would also set a pattern that could undermine the NATO structure. If France should withdraw from NATO, Rusk stated, the allies should make it clear to the French people that there would be "an empty chair" always ready and waiting for France should she decide to return. Rusk saw this as a way of drawing a distinction between de Gaulle and the French people in the sense that the latter could be persuaded to see the merits of maintaining the alliance. The "empty chair" line was a running theme in the way U.S. policymakers endeavored to treat de Gaulle. While they were annoyed by his pique, they also realized that they could not prevent de Gaulle from taking this action.³

The next day, March 3, Francis Bator, an NSC staffer, obviously knew that something was afoot with the French when he wrote Johnson that not only would the French move occur "during

¹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII., 318-319.

² LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -West Germany, Box 127, March 2, 1966, 1.

³ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 319-321.

the next several days,” but that it would take the form of a de Gaulle letter addressed to the president. Even with this dismal situation, Bator, nonetheless, believed that maintaining unity with the other allies would still be manageable.⁴

By now, events were moving rapidly, with the U.S. government closely monitoring the situation within the French government. A situation report for the president that day stated that “as of mid-afternoon, the other shoe has not yet dropped” and that there was no definite, formal indication that de Gaulle would, “really go through with the package . . .”⁵

From Paris, Bohlen reported on the rapidly-moving events, noting that de Gaulle was now contemplating dispatching the letter not only to Johnson but also to the other NATO counterparts such as Wilson, Saragat, and Erhard. Along the same lines, Bohlen noted that the French government did not believe that NATO or the West Germans would oppose France’s desire to withdraw its forces under NATO command in West Germany on the grounds that the allies had not reacted in strong terms to any of the earlier French actions, such as the withdrawal of the French fleet.⁶

The following day, March 4, INR also predicted, on the basis of information received over the previous ten days, that de Gaulle intended within the next week to implement his move against NATO’s military arrangements.⁷

To no surprise in U.S. government circles, the French government, on March 7, 1966, formally announced its intention to withdraw from the integrated command structure of NATO, as well as the eviction of French NATO forces from French soil. De Gaulle sent Johnson a

⁴ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 2, Memo for the President, March 3, 1966.

⁵ LBJ Library, Country File - France, Memo for the President, March 3, 1966, 1-2.

⁶ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, “For Secretary from Ambassador Bohlen”, March 3, 1966, 1-4.

⁷ LBJ Library, Country File -France, Box 177, INR Research Memorandum, March 1966, 1-4.

handwritten letter outlining the reasons for removing French forces from the integrated NATO military system and for ousting NATO forces from France.

In his letter to Johnson, de Gaulle softened the blow he was making to NATO by first noting that “. . . France appreciates the extent to which the solidarity of defense thus established between 15 free peoples of the West contributes to assuring their security and, especially, what essential role the United States of America plays in this respect. Accordingly, France intends from now on to remain party to the Treaty signed at Washington on April 4, 1949. . .”

Nonetheless, the French general bluntly drew his point by stating that “France considers the changes which have taken place or in process of occurring since 1949 in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, as well as evolution of her own situation and her own forces no longer justify insofar as that concerns her the arrangements of a military nature adopted after the conclusion of the alliance.”⁸

In helping Johnson draft a response, Bator analyzed de Gaulle’s letter by drawing the distinction which de Gaulle made regarding his obligation under the treaty to go to war in case of an unprovoked attack on an ally and the organizational and command arrangements which were not strictly a part of the treaty but had evolved since 1949. He also told Johnson that the U.S. government needed to inform the French president that the allies were still committed to preserving an integrated NATO structure with or without France, with Bator offering his personal view that “the question is whether we should go further and tell him that if he won’t play his part in the . . . organization France will no longer enjoy the protection of the . . . treaty. . .” Even so, Bator noted that there was “another side to the coin” in that it was “a fact of geography” that a U.S. threat to deprive France of its protection was “at best barely credible and, at worst, just

plain silly.” In fact, he drew the analogy that it was “like threatening to abandon Kentucky in the face of a land attack by Canada. It is hard to do unless one is prepared to throw in Ohio. If we are going to defend the Germans against the Russians, we cannot help but defend France too The alternative is not to appease de Gaulle. He is clearly not appeasable.” Bator realized that, strategically, it was impossible to deny France a security guarantee while committing to defend France’s neighbors. As a result, Bator also recommended that the U.S. reaffirm the continuing commitment to an integrated NATO, and to do what is necessary to make good on that commitment with an empty chair always waiting” Even so, Bator concluded that “perhaps, in the end, de Gaulle will behave so outrageously as to force us to take a hard line even on the treaty,” proposing that the U.S. should withdraw its nuclear support for the two French divisions in Germany as soon as de Gaulle actually withdrew those divisions from NATO command.⁹

Tyler downplayed the French action to Rusk by stating the importance of downgrading the importance of de Gaulle’s role as well as making it clear that he “cannot call the tune for the Alliance to follow” as well by asserting that “his outmoded ideas are empty posturings insofar as other countries are concerned.”¹⁰

From Paris that day, Bohlen analyzed de Gaulle’s thinking by reporting that his letter to Johnson represented “the harder line” under discussion within the French government, stating that it amounted to a denunciation of all the bilateral and multilateral agreements concerning French participation in any collective military defense arrangement.¹¹ In a meeting with Couve that day, Bohlen recalled that “after reading the note, I asked if this represented a denunciation of

⁸ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 325-326.

⁹ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 2, March 7, 1966, Memo for the Pres., 1-2.

¹⁰ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 2, March 7, 1966.

agreements,” to which Couve simply replied that the letter’s purpose was to inform the U.S. of French intentions. Bohlen, noting the number of U.S. installations in France, then pressed the foreign minister whether or not it was necessary that all U.S. troops leave French territory. Bohlen ended the meeting by highlighting the seriousness of de Gaulle’s action in that it would have “a very bad effect” upon the United States. The U.S. ambassador also asserted that NATO was still necessary because of the Soviet military posture in Europe. Taking the long view of de Gaulle’s action that day, Bohlen remarked that on leaving, “I told Couve that I was very saddened by this news,” especially since he had been present at the creation of NATO and was also particularly aware of the amount of effort and devotion which had gone into the creation of the Atlantic defense community which France was now leaving.¹²

In his instructions for Cleveland to deal with this crisis at NATO, Rusk wrote that U.S. objectives were to relate the seriousness with which U.S. viewed the situation, “leave no doubt” that the French action directly affected the entire alliance, as well as “make clear that Alliance business” would continue without French participation. At the same time, Rusk noted that the North Atlantic Council should not be made the immediate focus of further consultations on de Gaulle’s withdrawal order especially since France was still a participant in the NAC.¹³

On March 8, Ambassador Bruce underlined to Rusk the importance of responding to his action lest the British take the initiative. The U.S. ambassador in London wrote that “what bothers me is that we may give the impression of taking too passive a part, leaving it to the British to develop a response.” He believed that some of the NATO allies may interpret the U.S.

¹¹ LBJ Library, Country File - France, Box 177, “From Ambassador Bohlen.”, March 7, 1966, 1.

¹² *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 322-324.

¹³ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 329-330.

response to de Gaulle as one being preoccupied with the Far East at the expense of Europe, “a problem we already face in considerable degree.”¹⁴

Three days later, an aide-memoir to the U.S. government from the Quai d’Orsay explained the reasons for de Gaulle’s actions, acknowledging that the situation in Europe had changed since the treaty’s inception in 1949. It further explained de Gaulle’s actions by highlighting the fact that the Western European countries had reestablished their economy and consequently regained their resources.¹⁵

By mid-March, the Johnson administration was weighing the effects that the withdrawal was having on the alliance. On March 16, Komer appraised the situation to Johnson, noting the new role which West Germany now assumed as a result of France’s departure. He wrote Johnson that France’s withdrawal from the NATO structure inevitably enhanced West Germany’s role, a cause of concern with many allies. Moreover, Komer advised the president not to undertake any action against the French general because it would only play into de Gaulle’s hands. He cautioned that “. . . the lessons of recent history all suggest that we stop, look, and listen before flinging down the gauntlet to de Gaulle. He may well be right in thinking he has us in a spot where we can’t react vigorously -- let’s not underestimate him. . . . He also has a receptive European audience of his mischievous contention that we might drag NATO into a larger war emerging from Vietnam.” Komer felt that “it may be wiser to outwait de Gaulle -- while limiting the damage he can do.” He labeled this a firm defensive stance in which NATO would continue with its regular operations, while reserving, “an ‘empty chair’ till France outlives de Gaulle.”¹⁶

¹⁴ LBJ Library, Country File -France, Box 177, To Rusk From Bruce, March 8 1966, 1.

¹⁵ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 333-335.

¹⁶ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 335-338.

The Johnson White House was still mulling over a written response to de Gaulle's letter. On March 17, Bator wrote the president that "I am afraid the entire business of the letter is at least premature" on grounds that the basic policy issues and choices in dealing with de Gaulle needed to be addressed. Regarding the issue of French forces in West Germany, Bator wrote that this was "the toughest problem on the table" and that "we run the danger of being caught in the middle." The issue of French forces in West Germany was a delicate one because de Gaulle ordered their removal from West German territory by July 1, 1966, in compliance with the new policy of distancing French forces from any unified NATO command. Regarding nuclear support for French forces in Germany, Bator continued by noting that it was "straightforward" and that when the withdrawal did take place (which promised not to be an easy feat since it carried a price tag of \$175 - 275 million), the U.S. "will certainly want to withdraw U.S. nuclear support. . ."¹⁷ Bator clearly delineated the predicament for West Germany. While France now threatened to deprive her of its protection by removing French forces from West German soil, the Federal Republic now wanted to use this opportunity to play a greater role in allied nuclear policy.

In a subsequent memo, Bator continued to press the importance of addressing the French removal of forces from West Germany. In terms of the French forces in West Germany, he stated that even though these two French divisions "don't much matter," the terms on which they remain, or are withdrawn, would, nonetheless, "become a hot political issue in Germany . . ."¹⁷ Bator noted the problem which a separate Franco-German agreement entailed. If the U.S. accepted it, it would set a bad precedent in fragmenting the alliance. However, if the Johnson administration discouraged it, the U.S. government would "get the blame" in West Germany and

¹⁷ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 2, March 16, 1966, 1-4.

the rest of Europe for forcing the French out. Bator, consequently, conceded that “on this one . . . there are no easy answers.”¹⁸

Though de Gaulle removed all French units from NATO’s integrated command structure, USNATO reported that France would maintain French officers at SHAPE and that the French military was determined to keep its military position in the alliance. While these officers now reported directly to Paris, their continued presence indicated that France was not leaving the alliance.

Surprisingly, the mission noted that “de Gaulle’s confidants believe he is very sick and that de Gaulle, knowing this, decided to act.” Although most French officers were shocked at the manner de Gaulle used, diehard Gaullists, nonetheless, supported the eviction order. Most other members of the French military, however, believe that it was a “catastrophic” action.¹⁹ John Leddy, Tyler’s replacement at State, maintained that the new French policy in NATO would outlive de Gaulle. Calling it “irretrievable”, he supported his argument by noting that Francois Mitterand (leader of the French Socialist Party and “the only possible opposition leader to de Gaulle”) had criticized de Gaulle for not going further by advocating the elimination of both the NATO alliance and the Warsaw pact. Although Frenchmen felt that the time had come for a reappraisal of the alliance, Leddy noted that they still supported NATO.²⁰

That same day, USIA (United States Information Agency) reported on the withdrawal’s effect upon the European media, noting that, with the exception of the Gaullist and Communist press, the Western European press reaffirmed its support for the North Atlantic alliance and rejected de Gaulle’s attempt to revert to the “old-fashioned” and “discredited” system of bilateral

¹⁸ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 2, March 1966, 1-4.

¹⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country-File - France, March 17, 1966, Emb. Paris to State., 1.

²⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 347-350.

treaties. Specifically, it noted that in NATO's southeast wing, much of the Greek press was sharply critical of de Gaulle, viewing the action as "suicidal" and striking at the heart of the NATO alliance. The Turkish press viewed de Gaulle's move as a "justified" accommodation for present realities and as a necessary step toward reform of NATO's structure, which had been dominated by U.S. interests. Not surprisingly, the Soviet and East European propaganda media extensively applauded de Gaulle's action by interpreting it as a sign of disarray in NATO, with the allies rejecting U.S. hegemony and its "imperialist" designs.²¹

The next day, March 18, Bator again advised Johnson on his reply to de Gaulle, encouraging him to "put de Gaulle in a more difficult position tactfully" by "dramatically" demonstrating that the president was not influenced by pique. In fact, Bator recommended that Johnson emphasize the fact that it was de Gaulle who was isolating France.²²

On March 19, Michael Stewart, the British Foreign Secretary, prodded ministers attending the WEU (Western European Union) meeting in London by urging them to examine the NATO crisis. He pointed out that French withdrawal from NATO would violate international agreements. With the obvious exception of the French representative, the other representatives supported Stewart's plea. For his part, the French representative rehearsed the familiar Gaullist arguments against NATO in its present form.²³

By now, Cleveland was tasked by State to examine the ways NATO states now viewed their alliance. On March 20, Cleveland, reporting on his visit to Italy, noted that Italian government support for NATO was solid though Italy was reluctant to support any moves in NATO that could be criticized as unnecessarily being anti-French. Cleveland surmised that a

²¹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, March 17, 1966, 1-i-ii.

²² LBJ Library, Papers of Bator, Box 2, March 18, 1966, 1-2.

²³ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -UK, Box 207, Memo From Hughes to Rusk, March 19, 1966, 1-2.

strategy of forcing de Gaulle to act rather than one that advocated NATO taking preemptive action would maintain Italian support for this policy. The U.S. Permanent Representative also noted that the Italians would be willing to participate in multilateral discussions with those who wanted to make sure at each step that the “candle is left in the window for return of prodigal son who is temporarily misusing his talents.” Cleveland also stated that the Italians were receptive to a policy which distinguished between mortal de Gaulle and immortal France.²⁴ Like Komer, the Italians were advocating a policy that took into account the fact that de Gaulle would not stay in power indefinitely.

Two days later, March 22, Johnson replied to de Gaulle’s letter, stating that “I am puzzled by your view that the presence of allied military forces on French soil impairs the sovereignty of France.” Johnson outlined his view of the disagreement, noting that those NATO forces were in France at the invitation of the French government to “insure the security of France and her allies.” He further noted that “I have always viewed their presence as a wise and far-seeing exercise of French sovereignty.” Commenting on the North Atlantic Treaty, Johnson wrote the French president that if it was “to have force and reality,” the alliance, as a whole, should make arrangements regarding command structures, strategic and tactical plans, forces, as well as their designation to NATO prior to any crisis. Johnson then reiterated the American support for NATO, writing that member states, working within the alliance, should adapt to whatever organizational arrangements “the needs of the hour may require.” In closing, the president expressed his hope that France, which had played a central role in European security, would not remain withdrawn from “the common affairs and responsibilities of the Atlantic,” to which Johnson added the line that later became well-known: “As our old friend and ally her place will

²⁴ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, 20 March 1966, Emb. Paris to State, 1.

await France whenever she decides to resume her leading role.”²⁵ With this closing note, Johnson supported his advisers’ views that NATO should have an “empty chair” ready whenever France chose to return to the military structure of NATO.

Policymakers vividly recalled these momentous events in NATO. Rostow downplayed the eviction order because he believed that de Gaulle’s successor would reverse the decision once the French general left office, a view which Rusk shared.²⁶ For his part, Goodpaster interpreted these events by noting that de Gaulle was concerned that flexible response prevented France from exercising its prerogatives in allied nuclear matters. Clifford recalled that though Johnson did not want to provoke de Gaulle, the president was, nonetheless, “put out” with the General for instigating an action that effectively weakened NATO. Notwithstanding this personal sentiment, Clifford agreed with Rostow, Goodpaster, and Bator in that the president was up to the task of managing the crisis.²⁷ Adam Yarmolinsky recalled that the NATO allies were not too surprised since it was typical of the way de Gaulle handled Franco-NATO relations.²⁸

Although the Johnson administration knew that de Gaulle’s action was imminent, U.S. policymakers both in Washington and Europe quickly acted to manage the crisis. On both sides of the Atlantic, these individuals clearly agreed that the way to manage de Gaulle’s expulsion order from the onset was not by criticizing the French general but by analyzing the French move in order to control the damage within NATO. By telling his French counterpart that NATO was willing to wait until his nation resumed “her leading role” within the Atlantic alliance, Johnson displayed not only a willingness to cooperate with de Gaulle, but also an appreciation for the fact

²⁵ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 342-344.

²⁶ Interview with Walt Rostow, September 2, 1994; Rusk interview.

²⁷ Goodpaster interview; Clifford interview; Bator interview.

²⁸ Interview with Adam Yarmolinsky, July 26, 1994.

that France had an indispensable part to play in NATO, particularly as the alliance was now moving into a period of détente with the Warsaw Pact.

Johnson's NATO Policy in the Wake of the Expulsion Order

Once Johnson replied to de Gaulle's formal notice, his administration immediately took steps to adjust NATO's programs and infrastructure to the new realities facing the Western alliance, particularly since President Johnson was still committed to following through with Kennedy's flexible response strategy within NATO. Closely following developments in Europe, particularly those in France, the Johnson administration endeavored to insure that not only would NATO be able to provide for the common defense of the Atlantic area, but that the alliance would also be capable of dealing with its Soviet-led counterpart in détente.

On the same day that Johnson replied to de Gaulle's letter, Cleveland was able to gain further insight into de Gaulle's thinking from the French Permanent Representative in that he confidentially told the U.S. ambassador at NATO that while he had not asked the French president why he had just now decided to make his move, he, nonetheless, believed that de Gaulle feared that "he may not repeat not stay in office for more than a couple or three years more, that in any case he may have less control over the situation after the parliamentary elections next year, and that it was therefore now or never." Cleveland further noted that de Gaulle was convinced that he was the only one who could carry through the decisions he had now taken. The U.S. Permanent Representative also stated that ". . . all his life General de Gaulle has made up his own mind and then stuck to his own decisions no matter what anybody else thought. In this situation, de Gaulle's objective was clearly to carry present line of action far enough to make it QTE

[quote] irreversible UNQTE [unquote].” Cleveland concluded this report by cynically noting that “my guess is that there is still some uncertainty in French government as to just when the further and more detailed French demarches should be sprung on the NATO Allies.”²⁹

From the Hague, however, Tyler, who was in Europe for consultations with other U. S. ambassadors, echoed the Washington sentiment that the U.S. should prepare for the eventual return of France to NATO’s military structure, reporting in a cable to State that the U.S. should not let its short-term response to de Gaulle’s tactics divert the administration from the long-range objective of facilitating, to the extent that it was possible, France’s eventual return to full status in the alliance. To facilitate that goal, Tyler noted that a key factor in keeping alive this prospect would be the future attitude of the French people as well as the state of public opinion in other NATO countries. He closed by noting that the U.S. should avoid, if possible, any step which was likely to drive the French people to de Gaulle’s side on NATO issues as well as adversely affecting opinion in other NATO countries.³⁰

On March 29, Cleveland reported that the withdrawal adversely affected de Gaulle’s much-publicized force de frappe. Recalling his meeting with Ball, Bohlen, and Lemnitzer, he wrote that the group highlighted the damage likely to be done to operational effectiveness if de Gaulle took measures anticipated against NATO, especially since the early warning for France’s air defense of France as well as the launch of the force de frappe was largely dependent upon NATO’s air defense system, of which France was a beneficial recipient. If France withdrew her active forces from the NATO air defense system, Cleveland reasoned that it would have only a fragmentary air defense system capability. Moreover, the group noted that France was almost completely dependent on NATO data for intelligence on Soviet intentions as well as its active and

²⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, Emb. Paris to State, March 23, 1966.

passive defense. Consequently, the military separation of France from NATO and the various national intelligence inputs which were pooled and disseminated through NATO would mean that the force de frappe would be virtually without the critical "eyes and ears," and so its prospects of being implemented with adequate warning would be drastically reduced. The group further highlighted the fact that, in a combat situation, France was dependent upon her allies for the use of their air space and aircraft control coordination in order to accomplish the mission requirements of the force de frappe. If France could not over-fly adjacent countries, or refuel over their territory, or count on air traffic guidance from the allies, the routes which her planes must follow would be so lengthened that the effectiveness of the force would once again be seriously impaired.³¹ Evidently, not only did de Gaulle's action upset the NATO allies, but his eviction order also threatened his vaunted force de frappe.

Cleveland also assessed the impact of de Gaulle's action by noting the ways that it was affecting NATO's obligations for the common defense. Among the effects which he pointed out were: an increased emphasis on forward defense capabilities, a probable requirement for earlier use of nuclear weapons in event of enemy attack in central Europe, a decreased capability of reinforcing central Europe and the NATO flanks in the event of aggression, an increased requirement for adequate forces in being and in place in the central Europe area, an increased risk of being unable to defend successfully the central Europe area in event of aggression, as well as the fact that facilities would not be made available for peacetime training.³²

Bohlen further analyzed the ramifications of de Gaulle's eviction order by commenting that it was doubtful whether or not France would have taken this step had de Gaulle not been in

³⁰ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Message from the Hague to State, March 25, 1966.

³¹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, Emb. Paris to State, March 28, 1966, 1-2.

³² LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, Emb. Paris to State, March 29, 1966, 1.

power. On commenting on the French political scene, the U.S. ambassador also noted that it was “an interesting side light on the future of affairs in Gaullist France” when someone like de Gaulle literally dominated not only the policy itself but its execution in the most minute terms without any serious interference from a legislative body. However, Bohlen added the caveat that French law allowed the denunciation of these agreements without prior approval from the French Assembly.³³

Clearly, de Gaulle did not seek any accommodation with NATO on any of his outstanding issues. At the end of March, Bohlen analyzed de Gaulle’s thinking by commenting that it was “perfectly” clear that de Gaulle did not seriously consider the option of negotiating any future status of NATO with either the U.S. or the other allies.³⁴

In outlining the way ahead for NATO in light of the French withdrawal, Walt Rostow, who had now replaced Bundy as the National Security advisor, wrote Johnson on several aspects which the administration had to consider in light of the new realities in the alliance, among them the realization that the maintenance of an integrated NATO capable of deterring Moscow would remain a fundamental issue.³⁵

By now, the intelligence community was forming assessments of the de Gaulle action. On April 18, a CIA intelligence memorandum, originating in DI (the Directorate of Intelligence), commented on the ramifications of the French withdrawal from the NATO unified command in West Germany by noting that even though the French forces contributed to the over-all Western defense posture on the central front, they were, nonetheless, important primarily because of their political significance for France and Germany as well as for many European countries with a

³³ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, Emb. Paris to State, March 31, 1966, 1-4.

³⁴ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 351-353.

³⁵ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 370-372.

latent fear of Germany. DI viewed the French posture as a significant indicator of the strength of French intent to press ahead, with or without compromise, with its withdrawal from the NATO military structure. The intelligence memo also noted that other NATO states wanted a resolution to this issue because these French forces symbolized the French-German relationship which had helped stabilize Western Europe since the late 1940s.³⁶

Along the same lines, an April 9 memo, commenting on the withdrawal's effects on West Germany (and written as guidance for John McCloy, the former High Commissioner for Germany who now served as an adviser in the Johnson White House), stated that West Germany was still committed to adhering to an Atlantic defense system based on peacetime integration and that its government was willing to discuss the French forces issue within the NATO context.³⁷ As a result of his eviction order, de Gaulle was not only endangering the security of West Germany, which was heavily dependent upon the West, as the crises in 1948, 1958, and 1961 showed, but the French president was also risking losing the gains made in the Franco-German entente. French forces in West Germany numbered 74,000.

Though the withdrawal was affecting Franco-German relations, de Gaulle's domestic political standing remained steadfast. A May 9 INR assessment noted that his policy toward NATO did not seem likely to develop into one of the decisive issues for the forthcoming French parliamentary elections. The assessment drew this conclusion on the premise that the opposition parties had been unable to form a successful opposition to de Gaulle and his supporters.

Although the memo also noted that de Gaulle wanted some changes in NATO arrangements which he could then show to the French people as signifying the end of their psychological, if not

³⁶ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 178, May 9, 1966, 1.

³⁷ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 36, Memo for Guidance of Mr. McCloy in His Discussion of French Forces in Germany", April 9, 1966, 1-4.

military and political dependence upon the U.S., it also stated that his denunciations of integrations should not be taken literally since the form seemed as important to de Gaulle as the substance.³⁸

On April 26, de Gaulle continued to seek ways in swaying French public opinion in the anti-NATO direction. He formed a special committee to prepare a pamphlet on NATO, which would show that NATO had no relevance to the security of France, and that there was no change whatsoever in relations between France and the U.S. - i.e., "Frenchmen love Americans; Americans love Frenchmen." De Gaulle ordered that 2,800,000 copies of the pamphlet be ready for distribution by the end of May.³⁹

That day, Bohlen reported that, from his perspective, it was clear that de Gaulle wished to force the U.S. into either a public confrontation with France or to have the U.S. accept without question his views. The U.S. ambassador believed that de Gaulle wanted to promote a public row in words with the U.S., which probably he believed might help him generally with French public opinion.⁴⁰

In May, both Rostow and Bator again alerted Johnson to the issue of the status of French troops in West Germany. They wrote that, with the exception of overflights, the French would be unyielding and that, consequently, negotiations would be unsuccessful. As a way to avoid antagonizing the French in the negotiations, they suggested that the U.S. should publicly argue in terms of an integrated military alliance rather than bilateralism and fragmentation of the West. They also stated that the U.S. willingness to do without the French constituted the best negotiating cards. Noting the withdrawal's effect on the posture of the alliance, they also

³⁸ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -France, Box 178, May 9, 1966, 1.

³⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, Emb. Paris to State, April 26, 1966, 1.

⁴⁰ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, Emb. Paris to State, April 26, 1966, 1.

remarked that there was enough ambiguity in de Gaulle's current commitment to NATO that the allies could not now depend on France in times of either peace or conflict.⁴¹

Although NATO remained steadfast in this crisis, Johnson was upset by the turn of events, though he conceded that he was limited in his options without rupturing Franco-American relations. Consequently, he uttered the now-famous quip that "when a man asks you to leave his home, you don't argue; you just get your hat and go."⁴² He wrote in his memoirs that even though "many people expected me to denounce the French leader's move and to resist his disruptive tactics I had long since decided that the only way to deal with de Gaulle's fervent nationalism was by restraint and patience. He would not remain in power forever, and I felt sure that the fundamental common interest and friendship of our two nations would survive. To have attacked de Gaulle would only have further enflamed French nationalism and offended French pride. It also would have created strains among the nations of the European Common Market and complicated their domestic politics."⁴³

The Johnson administration continued to respond to the fallout. As part of that effort, a joint State-USIA cable stated U.S. intentions for France in that the desire was to give the French people every possible opportunity to understand the adverse effects Gaullist NATO policies would have on France, as well as to rebut the arguments and allegations made by Gaullist leaders against NATO and the U.S. role in NATO. Moreover, this cable also wanted to assert the view that, in NATO, France could be the leading nation in Europe as well as having the opportunity to influence NATO decisions on matters vital to France, whereas, outside of NATO, France would remain alone, isolated, as well as without prestige and power in the important interests of France

⁴¹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 384-390.

⁴² LBJ Library, John Leddy Oral History, 9-11.

⁴³ Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1971), 305.

and Europe, such as the Franco-German entente. By taking France out of NATO, the cable argued that de Gaulle deprived France of influence over the great question of West German access to nuclear weapons as well as adversely affecting the costly force de frappe, thereby reducing it to a “gigantically expensive white elephant.” The cable also declared that, “by dropping out of NATO,” France was “getting a free ride in defense, at the expense of faithful NATO members,” even though the North Atlantic alliance, through its collective strength and unified policy, could take full advantage of the changes (i.e. détente) going on in Europe which would enable Europeans “to realize their deeply felt desire” to establish normal relations with the Soviet Union as well as the East Bloc.⁴⁴

From his vantage point in Paris, Bohlen further analyzed de Gaulle’s actions by noting that he was concerned that, if war came, the command would pass into the hands of an American general since every SACEUR had been an American. Recalling the World War II French experience, Bohlen perceived that de Gaulle doubted that the U.S. would provide for its security since Eisenhower argued with the French command over the proper use of French troops during the German offensive in the Ardennes. Noting the problem that the global commitments of the Cold War posed to French security, Bohlen also wrote that the Cuban missile crisis showed the French president that a war with the Soviet Union could break out over an issue which had no relationship whatsoever to European security interests. In such an event, Western Europe, under the integrated structure of NATO, would be “sucked in to the vortex, no matter what it felt.”⁴⁵

The U.S. government also followed the ways de Gaulle’s action was affecting Franco-Soviet relations. On May 20, the CIA’s DI analyzed the effect that the withdrawal had on a possible rapprochement between Moscow and Paris when it stated that the Kremlin was trying to

⁴⁴ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 178, May 5, 1966, 1-30.

foster the view that better Franco-Russian relations would enhance the prospect of new security arrangements for all Europe. In fact, the Soviet propaganda was referring repeatedly to the “realism” in French foreign policy and to the inevitable breakup of NATO in view of the “unrealistic” bastion on which the alliance was founded. DI further stated that the withdrawal action pleased Moscow because of the immediate effect of highlighting disagreements with the Western alliance. It stated that it did not cost the Soviets anything to encourage de Gaulle to believe that cooperation with Russia could vindicate his great design for a Europe which extended “from the Atlantic to the Urals” and which was free from United States hegemony and the threat of war. Furthermore, the intelligence memo also noted that Moscow saw the limited value of de Gaulle as a mediator between the Kremlin and the White House at a time when Vietnam prevented progress in Soviet-American relations, even though Moscow recognized that Washington was the “real power” and, as such, would prefer to deal directly with the Johnson administration.⁴⁶ While the assessment narrowly focused on the effects that the withdrawal had on Soviet propaganda, it correctly noted the value which de Gaulle was providing in advancing a dialogue between the White House and the Kremlin. Although it highlighted the problem that Vietnam presented in this endeavor, it unfortunately did not offer ways which the Johnson administration could use de Gaulle as a way of dealing directly with Moscow, much less the ways which the United States could advance a détente with the Soviet Union.

Bohlen correctly interpreted the withdrawal events in light of détente. He noted that, immediately following de Gaulle’s eviction order, the French government changed its rationale for withdrawing. Alphant had previously told Bohlen that de Gaulle enacted the withdrawal order as

⁴⁵ Bohlen, 507.

⁴⁶ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File, France, Box 177, CIA DI Intelligence Memorandum, France, May 20, 1966, 1-1.

a way of creating a condition for a détente with the Soviet Union, an argument which Couve recently advanced at Brussels. However, Bohlen noted that there was little reason, based on past history and experience, to think that the proper way to create a détente with the Soviet Union was to tear down Western defenses before any analogous move on the part of the Soviet Union. In fact, Bohlen argued that if de Gaulle's policies were pursued another six years, it would result in the complete disruption of the Western alliance because the other NATO members would be tempted to free themselves from any organizational obligation, especially if the Soviet leaders were "tactically smart enough to continue their benign behavior." Bohlen shared the view that only a unified, strong NATO could propel the emergence of a détente between the United States and the Soviet Union. The ambassador then noted that even though this détente was also taking place in the Warsaw Pact, the administration should not forget the fact that the Warsaw Pact was chiefly a facade, with the real Bloc power residing within the Soviet Union, not only because of its military might and party control but also because of its strategic geographic position in relation to Europe (in contrast to the United States position). Bohlen then stated that though he did not fear an abrupt break in America's European policy but a gradual reduction in the number of troops and, more importantly, a gradual reduction in the U.S. awareness of the Soviet threat to Europe. As he put it, "the United States might be not only physically out of Europe but psychologically little interested in developments there."⁴⁷ Bohlen not only contributed to the view that de Gaulle's action was disastrous for Soviet-American relations (not to mention the ways in which it affected NATO's cohesion) but that it also adversely affected the U.S. public interest, an interest that was already rapidly waning because of events in Vietnam.

⁴⁷ Bohlen, 507.

During this time, de Gaulle traveled to Moscow. Commenting on that trip, a July 20 DI intelligence memo analyzed the ramifications of de Gaulle's trip to Moscow by noting that Moscow passively pushed its rapprochement with France lest it flounder on a particular point or be carried too far. Referring to détente, the assessment added that de Gaulle viewed the visit as a milestone in the process of détente in Europe. In fact, the French president interpreted the visit as a symbol of the process of détente in Europe and a way of giving "his benediction to that process." The DI report referred to the Kremlin's perception of "the incipient feeling of trust in Europe" and the "gradual development of relations between all European states" as a way of demonstrating Moscow's interest in continuing to project an image of reasonableness and responsiveness without altering the essentials of its policy.⁴⁸

While the Johnson administration continued to pursue ways to accommodate de Gaulle, Bohlen supported Johnson's claim that a NATO without France was still a workable military alliance by noting that "the really effective thing is the United States France hasn't got much military power either, one way or another. And France is still in the Alliance, but not in the organization."⁴⁹ Bohlen further discounted the role that de Gaulle would play in détente as a result of the withdrawal order. He wrote Rusk that "the great fallacy in de Gaulle's policy is his belief that France is important in Soviet eyes," which Bohlen flatly declared was untrue. In fact, the U.S. ambassador saw "no problem for the Russians in ditching de Gaulle for the sake of an agreement either with Germany or the United States."⁵⁰

For his part, McNamara maintained that the removal of France from SHAPE did not destabilize the military posture of the Alliance. He maintained that French territory was not

⁴⁸ LBJ Library, Country File -France, Box 177, CIA DI Intelligence Memorandum, July 20, 1966, 1-9.

⁴⁹ LBJ Library, Charles Bohlen Oral History, 20.

⁵⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 404-405.

necessary to the defense of the West. As he put it, "Neither the U.S. nor its allies have ever contemplated a way in which falling back upon French soil through the battlefield of Germany was an accepted strategy for the alliance. Forward defense meant the West German frontier. So although French cooperation was desirable, it was not vital to military planning."⁵¹

Although the withdrawal profoundly altered the structure of NATO, de Gaulle, nonetheless, subsequently took steps that minimized the damage, such as assenting to allowing continued operations of the oil pipeline from the West to West Germany across French territory as well as granting permission for flights of allied aircraft from Britain to southern Europe. Had the latter not occurred, France would have joined Austria and Switzerland to form a neutral bloc of nations, thus dividing NATO into two parts and further reducing flexibility in troop disposition.

Notwithstanding these positive developments, Bator noted on September 30 the problem that France's withdrawal posed to NATO's ability to respond to an emergency, observing that France would not make a prior commitment to permit reentry in time of crisis for a NATO alert. In fact, the most the French were willing to say now was that they would be willing to consult and to let NATO in if France also declared war. More importantly, Bator highlighted the fact that the French government was not providing any assurances that its facilities would be readily available in wartime since France might abstain from participating in a war in which the rest of NATO was engaged.⁵²

From Paris, Bohlen, recounting a meeting with the French president, gave further indications of the role which de Gaulle wanted France to play in this reconstituted NATO, remarking that the French president envisaged Franco-NATO relations becoming "more and more difficult" as time passed, stating that the North Atlantic alliance had been set up to deal with the

⁵¹ Kaplan, "The U.S. and NATO in the Johnson Years", in *Divine*, 130.

threat of war but it was not to be expected that this semi-state of mobilization could be carried on when the threat of war was visibly diminishing. Yet, de Gaulle told Bohlen that France would remain in the alliance since the danger had not been totally eliminated.⁵³

By the timetable set by de Gaulle, NATO completed its withdrawal from France in April 1967. However, France and Germany did not resolve the issue of French forces in West Germany until later in the year. In a September 3 cable from Bonn, McGhee noted the dilemma, commenting that it was difficult to solve the problem since French troops had been in West Germany for the past twenty years. If they fought it would, in the first instance, be in the defense of Germany. McGhee continued, observing that only the West German government was capable of forcing the French to comply with their troop commitment. McGhee then concluded that the Bonn government did not have "the strength for a hard confrontation with France on the issue of French troops in West Germany."⁵⁴

As the year drew to a close, NATO again reevaluated its role, now that the withdrawal process had come to a close. Bator wrote the president that NATO's fourteen member-states had worked out new procedures for dealing with military questions in which the French did not participate. Moreover, both France and West Germany had worked out an arrangement which permitted French troops to remain in the Federal Republic. Significantly, he wrote that the alliance members began to make more intensive use of the alliance as a forum for consultation on steps to improve the East-West environment, thus providing a further indication of the lessening of tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.⁵⁵

⁵² LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 2, Memo for the President, September 30, 1966, 1.

⁵³ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 500.

⁵⁴ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 461-464.

⁵⁵ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 4, December 30, 1966, 1.

Along with these year-end observations on NATO, Bator also assessed de Gaulle in a memo to Rostow, observing that there was no question that “publicly stepping on U.S. toes at regular intervals is important to de Gaulle’s attempt to resuscitate the French ego.” Even so, Bator noted that it would be difficult to split de Gaulle’s domestic base. Bator then supported the president’s policy of not doing anything which would provoke de Gaulle any further. Moreover, he supported Johnson’s policy of not forcing other NATO capitals such as Rome, Brussels, the Hague, or Bonn to choose between France and the United States. As Bator put it, “the alternative is to make certain that the monkey remains where it belongs, on de Gaulle’s back.”⁵⁶ Bator did not advocate a policy of actively isolating de Gaulle in NATO. After all, such tactics would not only dilute the U.S. role in Europe but it would also give de Gaulle a disproportionate voice in détente, a concept now coming to the forefront in European affairs.

So important was the discussion of détente that a DI intelligence memorandum concluded that de Gaulle not only believed that the cold war was a thing of the past and the chance of a military confrontation between Western Europe and the Soviet Union increasingly unlikely but that he also thought that the existence of two blocks was an obstacle to the general European settlement that he hoped to bring about. It observed that de Gaulle pledged loyalty to the alliance only so long as the basic relations between East and West were governed by mutual hostility and the possibility of overt attack. Moreover, the intelligence memorandum surprisingly noted that de Gaulle believed that the cold war had come to a close and that there was little likelihood of a direct military confrontation between the Soviet Union and the countries of Western Europe. It concluded that “Gaullist pronouncements on détente have been accompanied by practical action to forward the development,” with Paris no longer viewing the Soviet Union as posing a genuine

⁵⁶ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 4, December 24, 1966, 1-2.

threat to French security. Even so, de Gaulle still acknowledged that the U.S. had a role to play in Europe: the memo further stated that “even if he thinks some small threat continued to exist” de Gaulle undoubtedly reasoned that U.S. power was more than sufficient to deter any open attack. While de Gaulle had challenged U.S. leadership in the alliance, he, nonetheless, still desired the option of seeking a bilateral agreement with the United States on the grounds that the U.S. might find a bilateral arrangement a convenient way to maintain some coordination of planning, logistics, infrastructure and air defense. At the same time, a separate Franco-American agreement would be eminently satisfactory in de Gaulle’s eyes since it would have few of the disadvantages and most of the advantages of a multilateral treaty. Although Paris would still have a formal link which would permit an exchange of views, it would no longer be part of a bloc which de Gaulle believed was splitting the world and could avoid being linked with broad political objectives with which it had little sympathy. More importantly, it would permit Paris to claim equality with Washington. Commenting on what would happen if de Gaulle renounced France’s membership in NATO, the intelligence memo stated that although his move would not seriously impede Franco-German relations, few if any of the other alliance members would likely seek retaliation against France for withdrawal.⁵⁷

In October, while paying a farewell call to Brosio, de Gaulle still held steadfast in his view that neither NATO nor détente could co-exist. He told NATO’s Secretary-General, who like de Gaulle was also a European, that he did not think that a USSR-European security pact was possible since the British, Germans, and Italians were not agreeable to it. De Gaulle said that if the Atlantic alliance should become a political alliance, designed to control and direct East-West relations as well as to impose on them an allied policy, France would not accept it. In such a case,

⁵⁷ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Boxes 174-176, CIA DI Intelligence Memorandum, “France and the

France would have to reconsider whether to stay in NATO. In any case, de Gaulle said France might refuse to accept the allied policy.⁵⁸ Once again, de Gaulle provided contradictory evidence of his views regarding European security. While on the one hand he was the visionary statesman who selflessly pushed his version of a united Europe, on the other hand, while acknowledging France's need for the U.S. defense guarantee, he was the unrelenting spoiler who constantly bemoaned the necessity of NATO.

The Johnson team quickly adapted to the new situation in NATO by carefully weighing the advice and analysis provided by its NATO and French experts, such as Cleveland and Bohlen, as well as information provided by the NSC and the intelligence community. In fact, these assessments were valuable to Johnson because they highlighted the fact that not only could NATO function without de Gaulle, but that France was dependent upon the Western alliance for such defense initiatives as the force de frappe. More importantly, the Atlantic alliance continued to advocate a détente, with the United States promoting consultations among the NATO members. By simply taking his "hat" and leaving de Gaulle's "house", President Johnson displayed an appreciation for these circumstances while also insuring that the U.S. did not passively view developments which de Gaulle was now forcing upon the Atlantic alliance.

Other Reactions and U.S. Diplomacy at Maintaining Allied Unity

Although the NATO allies appreciated the fact that France was a powerful force in European affairs, they, nonetheless, stood with the United States through this alliance crisis.

Atlantic Alliance", October 6, 1967, 1-10.

⁵⁸ LBJ Library, NSF, Files of Walt Rostow, Box 24, October 15, 1967. 1-4.

These states acknowledged that only the U.S. was capable of fending off a Soviet attack in the heartland of Europe, though they had not yet accepted Washington's view that flexible response was a better strategy than massive retaliation. Even with this show of unity in NATO's low point in the 1960's, the Johnson administration still had to persuade the alliance members to remain united not only because the Soviets were viewing de Gaulle's action as a sign of weakness in NATO, but also because the U.S. government wanted détente to occur within the framework of a strong Atlantic alliance.

Throughout this period, the NATO states showed concern with the effects of the French action. At the ninth meeting of the Atlantic Policy Advisory Group, held in Cascais, Portugal, on March 25, all delegations, except the one from France, "expressed strong regret" over de Gaulle's actions. Moreover, they rejected the French view that a meaningful distinction could be made between the alliance and NATO. At the same time, these delegations were also concerned that the French action represented a set-back to the collective, as opposed to the purely national, approach to international problem-solving.⁵⁹ Clearly, France stood alone in its struggle to define an integrated Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals.

In analyzing the ways which the Soviets as well as its Eastern European allies viewed the French action, an April 4 cable from Ambassador McGhee in Bonn stated that they were concerned with the new status of Germany as a result of the move. However, the U.S. ambassador recommended that West Germany should still play an integral role in the alliance since it provided the best way of offsetting the fall-out from de Gaulle's move.⁶⁰

Near the end of April, administration officials were still upset at the action which de Gaulle took. Meeting with Stewart, Rusk said even though the Johnson administration knew

what de Gaulle wanted to do, it, nonetheless, did not seem to know why he was doing it. Stewart agreed with the view, noting that he had no rational answer, though it was not necessarily proof that the answer was wrong. The head of the British Foreign Office remarked that it was partly as a result of sheer French pride that French government believed that it could influence developments by having an independent policy. However, Stewart acknowledged that de Gaulle took action because he saw himself at the center of any pending rapprochement with the Soviet Union. The British foreign secretary observed that de Gaulle seemed "to have convinced himself" that the Soviet threat had almost disappeared and that the French must take the lead toward European reconciliation. Stewart further added that he did not believe that the French people fully grasped the meaning of de Gaulle's actions. Even though the Atlantic alliance remained united, Stewart stressed the importance of not giving de Gaulle a pretext for disrupting NATO's unity.⁶¹

Despite de Gaulle's actions and Stewart's concerns, Cleveland continued to seek evidence that the alliance remained united. On April 26, at the ambassadors' regularly scheduled weekly lunch at NATO, Cleveland recounted that the Belgian permanent representative informed the group whether or not it was now necessary to worry about the defense of France, in view of the French declaration of intentions. He stated that certain Belgians would advocate Belgian neutrality under such circumstances. While the larger nations in NATO would now have to act with a certain sense of responsibility, he pointed out that the smaller nations could now show "what nuisance value they still retained in relation to France."⁶²

⁵⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 178, State to all NATO Capitals, May 10, 1966, 1.

⁶⁰ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - West Germany, Box 177, Emb. Bonn Cable to State, April 4, 1966, 1-4.

⁶¹ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, April 16, 1966.

⁶² *FRUS, 1964-1968.*, Vol. XIII, 344-347.

Later, Senator Frank Church, a leading Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, highlighted the fact that even though the United States and its allies held valid reasons for maintaining the alliance, he, nonetheless, felt that the U.S. government should heed de Gaulle's underlying message of European unity, stating that it would outlive General de Gaulle. In reporting on a meeting with Erhard and Wilson, as well as de Gaulle, Church wrote the president that "to the degree that President de Gaulle has plumbed the European desire to reach eastward, and to the extent that he has appealed to the dignity, pride and independent spirit of Europeans, he is not isolated either in France or in Europe. In this sense, it seems likely that much of what is called 'Gaullism' will outlive de Gaulle. Although Europeans, including the French, still want to remain beneath the American nuclear umbrella, there is a restiveness about what is sometimes described as the American hegemony over Western Europe. The defiance of de Gaulle has thus engendered both apprehension and admiration . . ." While arguing that Western Europe appreciated the security which the U.S.-led NATO provided, Church, nevertheless, correctly noted that the United States should not only not take this for granted, but that it should also continue the eastward dialogue, the *détente*, which de Gaulle advocated by militarily withdrawing from NATO. In recommending further steps in Franco-American relations, he stated that "we should act with firmness plus correctness" and that "any American attempt to reach the French electorate by going over, under, or around de Gaulle, will surely backfire." If NATO was to function without France, Church continued, "the old architects must come up with new plans or new architects must be engaged." As a way of further advancing allied unity as a result of France's "empty chair," he advanced the unpopular American view that NATO appoint a European for SACEUR on the grounds that SHAPE existed for the defense of Europe, though he

added the caveat that the command arrangement guaranteed that U.S. nuclear weapons remain "in your hands."⁶³

As Church stated in his letter to Johnson, détente certainly played a role in de Gaulle's eviction order. After all, the French president had maintained that France alone could guarantee Europe's security absent a U.S.-controlled NATO. Rusk reiterated this point in a letter to Gerhard Schroeder (the West German foreign minister during this period) in that de Gaulle's challenge to NATO was, in one important respect, based on the presumption that only he was capable of promoting European détente rather than NATO and that the Western alliance was in fact, in its present form, an obstacle to the promotion of more favorable East-West relations.⁶⁴ Détente was not a concept that only de Gaulle promoted. Where the U.S. government and de Gaulle differed was on the issue of who could more effectively bring it about. Although de Gaulle's goal of a united Europe was progressive, it lacked the inherent support among European democracies, whose support was critical if de Gaulle wanted to implement it. Importantly, these democracies, which were members of NATO, believed that only a U.S.-backed NATO could bring about the kind of Europe which de Gaulle envisioned. Had this not been the case, then the NATO states would not have stood with the United States when de Gaulle took action against the North Atlantic alliance.

At the NATO ministerial meeting that spring, NATO foreign ministers responded to de Gaulle's action. After noting the importance of maintaining the security of all the members, the North Atlantic Council agreed to transfer the military headquarters out of France, allow the Benelux countries to bid for new SHAPE headquarters, allow Italy to provide a new site for the NATO Defense College, as well as to simplify NATO's command structure.

⁶³ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - France, Box 177, May 19, 1966, 4,5.

The NATO International Staff earnestly began plans to transfer NATO headquarters from Paris to Brussels. Because de Gaulle wanted NATO out by April 1, 1967, General Lemnitzer had no choice but to begin immediately the arduous task of transferring NATO's apparatus out of French territory. Belgium eventually won the rights to host NATO, though it was a qualified sigh of relief in that the Belgian government had stated that only NATO headquarters would be allowed to relocate in Brussels, claiming that it was inadvisable to place SHAPE in an urban setting. SHAPE eventually moved to the southern reaches of Belgium, though the Belgian decision was partly based on economics in order to help the deprived province of Herineut. Lemnitzer recalled the move as an enormous undertaking involving the movement of over 100,000 personnel as well as over 1 million tons of supplies and equipment. As Lemnitzer put it, "We had less than six months to complete enough of the Headquarters so we could shift our operations from France by April 1, 1967, thereby beating the deadline to everyone's surprise."⁶⁵ Significantly, the NATO move from France to Belgium highlighted the resolute way that the NATO states worked together while willingly adapting to the new circumstances in the alliance.

As a way of elaborating upon the Western European support for the U.S. leadership in the alliance, a May 19 memo stated that the NATO crisis had focused attention on the military area in which the U.S.-Western European cooperation had been intimate. Furthermore, it observed that despite de Gaulle's action, allied support for the Atlantic defense system remained widespread and

⁶⁴ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 398-399.

⁶⁵ Kaplan, "The U.S. and NATO in the Johnson Years" in Divine, 130. Though upset by the logistics of the move, the Johnson administration earnestly wanted to accommodate de Gaulle in every way possible. On December 13, 1966, while the move was taking place, Nicolas Katzenbach, the Under Secretary of State, remarked that "we should do our very best to comply with de Gaulle's request that we leave -- even if it means putting men in inadequate housing during winter." *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 511-513.

strong, with the U.S. leadership of the alliance still being accepted by most of the European public.⁶⁶

Brandt, who had just become the West German foreign minister, interpreted these events by declaring that “once France, giving plenty of notice, had left the integrated Western defense organization in 1966 and the French troops in Germany had left the command structure of the Alliance It was easier to support the demand ‘Americans out of France’ when he was sure they would stay in Germany.”⁶⁷ Brandt clearly echoed the prevailing allied view in that the U.S. presence in Europe was critical for the security of the NATO area.

A further indication of this view was the August 21 summit between Johnson and Lester Pearson in New Brunswick. At this meeting, the Canadian prime minister noted his disgust with de Gaulle’s action by declaring that it “had been particularly hard for the Canadians to swallow” especially because of the historic Franco-Canadian relationship. Even so, Pearson asserted that emotional sentiment “was no basis for policy.” Moreover, he did not resist the urge to ask rhetorically whether or not it was also necessary to remove the Canadian “one hundred thousand dead.” Speaking for the Canadian government, he believed that “we should not make it easy for the French to pull out of NATO.”⁶⁸

Assessing the status of the North Atlantic alliance, a State paper prepared for the upcoming NATO Fall ministerial meeting declared that the allies had stood united throughout 1966 in the face of de Gaulle’s challenge. Even so, the paper noted that there were serious strains in the alliance in that Western European confidence in a solid U.S. commitment to NATO had been weakened by de Gaulle’s attacks. More importantly, the paper discussed détente by noting

⁶⁶ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File -NATO, Boxes 37-38, Memorandum, May 19, 1966, 1-13.

⁶⁷ Brandt, *My Life in Politics*, 229.

⁶⁸ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 451-453.

that “the détente atmosphere has fostered heavy public and parliamentary pressures to relax NATO defense efforts” and that “the atmosphere of détente has also spurred the NATO nations to an intense and occasionally uncritical pursuit of improved East-West relations.” The paper then discussed the ways various allies were viewing this development. It stated that the Scandinavians and Belgians were optimistic about the possibilities of future developments, while the Greeks, Turks and Germans reservedly viewed this concept, believing that the attitudes of some of the allies underestimated the continuing Soviet threat as a bar to détente. To no surprise, the French had disassociated themselves from any concerted NATO position. The paper concluded that the allies recognized NATO’s real value and indispensability as long as the basic problems of peace and of European security and German reunification had yet to be resolved. Even so, the NATO members were, nonetheless, searching more intensively for ways to adapt their alliance to changing conditions as well as to enlarge its usefulness.⁶⁹ Though the paper acknowledged that détente was affecting allied support for NATO’s large defense effort, it, nonetheless, highlighted the fact that the allies still viewed NATO as indispensable for European security as well as correctly recognizing the necessity for the alliance to accept détente, which was rapidly becoming a reality in Soviet-American relations.

Regarding France’s new role in NATO, another State position paper, also for use in this ministerial meeting, stated, that, as a general rule, it should not be precluded from participating in alliance activities. Even so, State felt that France should not be allowed to block or delay progress in fields or activities to which it did not contribute. Moreover, the paper noted that the U.S. should be wary of attempts by France to continue receiving the full benefits from advanced

⁶⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, “NATO Ministerial Meeting”, December 7, 1966, 1-4.

technology generated by other members since it refused to participate in the integrated military defense of the North Atlantic area.⁷⁰

Despite de Gaulle's action, the alliance not only remained steadfast, but also displayed a marked agitation with de Gaulle's actions, the Pearson comment on the Canadian war dead being a case in point. Although the allies held differing views on the concept of détente, the NATO states were resolute in their determination to follow the American lead in providing for the common defense, especially since, despite de Gaulle's attack on the alliance, the Soviet threat persisted.

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The French withdrawal from the NATO military structure highlighted the fact that the United States was able to lead an alliance that still remained united. By gracefully responding to de Gaulle's expulsion order, Johnson displayed a notable sensitivity in managing the crisis. Upon the recommendations of various experts on both sides of the Atlantic, he was also able not only to guide the alliance but to insure that the U.S. was not reduced to the point of passively observing the events in Europe, developments which were increasingly being influenced by détente. If the United States government wanted to promote flexible response, much less provide for the allied common defense, its policymakers needed to adjust to the changing circumstances in NATO. More importantly, when given a choice, the members of the Atlantic alliance chose to stand with

⁷⁰ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, "France/NATO", December 3, 1966, 1-2. "The Special Committee", December 8, 1966, 1-10.

the United States rather than France, thus clarifying to U.S. and French policymakers alike that the security of Europe hinged on the U.S. defense effort in the North Atlantic alliance.

CHAPTER VI

BRANDT AND THE BEGINNING OF DÉTENTE, 1966-1968

In the mid-1960s, President Johnson guided NATO through a time when the North Atlantic alliance embraced flexible response while détente swept through West Germany and Europe. Both flexible response and détente were mutually dependent upon each other, thus highlighting the fact that NATO rested on the twin pillars of active U.S. as well as European participation. Because the signs were evident that the Cold War was thawing, the NATO allies now formally replaced Eisenhower's massive retaliation strategy with Kennedy's flexible response strategy. Consequently, the Johnson administration felt comfortable initiating serious discussions with the Soviet Union, the Glassboro summit being a case in point. Détente was clearly a term not limited to Johnson's successor. While both sides of the Atlantic embraced this relaxation of tension, de Gaulle, on the European side of the ocean, still insisted on playing the leading role in this endeavor, even though Brandt, in his own right, now emerged as the true alliance spokesman for this development with his famed "Ostpolitik". Although de Gaulle was unsuccessful in unraveling the Atlantic alliance as a result of his withdrawal action, Johnson could not take full advantage of détente because of his desire to follow his Cold War predecessors in fighting communism along the periphery of the U.S. national security interest. His administration increasingly came under criticism from its NATO counterparts for neglecting Europe at the expense of waging the war in Southeast Asia. While the Johnson administration tried to accommodate the allies on this problem, it also took steps in resolving the balance of payments issue with both West Germany and Britain. Meanwhile, both the U.S. and the Soviets continued

to create systems in the ongoing contest to outdo each other in missile technology, the development of the anti-ballistic missile (ABM) being the prime example, though the U.S. acknowledged the potential which the ABM provided in advancing arms control negotiations with the Kremlin. Even with these challenges, NATO remained steadfast through various events, such as the Six-Day War in the Middle East, when both Washington and Moscow utilized the "hotline" for the first time. The chapter opens with an examination of the continuing U.S. foray into the Vietnamese quagmire, followed by a discussion of troops cuts and the West German offset question. Brandt's contribution to détente is given its due in the following section, followed by a discussion of U.S. efforts at attaining this relaxation. The chapter then closes with an analysis of the ways détente influenced the U.S. response to out-of-area developments such as the Sino-Soviet dispute.

Vietnam

Vietnam now dominated American attention, both in and outside the Johnson administration. Its costs were now interfering with the president's Great Society programs. As a result of this fact, Western Europeans increasingly became concerned that the United States was losing the will to maintain its security guarantee to NATO. Although some of the allies gave public endorsements to the war effort in Vietnam, they stopped short of making troop commitments. The continuing U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war also prevented the Johnson administration from making further strides in détente.

NATO allies differed on the ways they publicly endorsed the U.S. war effort. While they did it to please the Johnson administration, these states, nonetheless, wanted the U.S. government

to turn its focus back on European events. As William Colby (a CIA officer who eventually became the DCI) recalled, the NATO allies were increasingly saying that the main problem was Europe, not Southeast Asia.⁷¹ Among Johnson's counterparts, Wilson supported Johnson's conduct of the war at the risk of expending his political base, though, as Bruce pointed out, the British at no point agreed to fight in Vietnam.⁷²

At the December 1966 NATO ministerial meeting, several NATO allies announced positions regarding the war in Vietnam. While some allies provided more than just lip service in supporting the war effort, no one was willing to make troop commitments. With regards to Greece, the U.S. expressed appreciation for the Greek government's contribution of \$15,000 worth of pharmaceutical supplies to Vietnam as well as for its cooperation in halting Greek shipping to North Vietnam. While not pressing for a troop commitment in Southeast Asia, the Johnson administration, nonetheless, urged Greece to consider other kinds of assistance which "would demonstrate the support for the free world cause in Vietnam," such as sending in noncombatant personnel, a medical team, or suitable technicians. With respect to the Dutch, the administration expressed gratitude for the foreign aid program which the Netherlands funded in South Vietnam, hoping (against hope) that they would also provide civilian workers as well.⁷³

By now, the Johnson administration had begun to withdraw troops from Europe to support the war effort in Southeast Asia, with Senator Mike Mansfield continually calling for more troop withdrawals. In May 1967, the U.S. government announced plans to remove 25,000 troops from West Germany, including two army brigades and four Air Force fighter-bomber squadrons. Washington explained the troop cut in terms of the need to offset growing foreign

⁷¹ Interview with William Colby, May 3, 1994.

⁷² Bruce Oral History, 24.

exchange costs attributable to the U.S. deployments in Europe. Six months later, the Department of Defense announced that the U.S. could no longer guarantee that it could send five divisions to Europe within 60 days after the outbreak of a major NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict, owing to the increasing manpower requirements that the nation was using elsewhere. In fact, from 1964 to 1972, the U.S. presence in West Germany decreased from 263,000 to 210,000.⁷⁴ Besides the obvious effect which this had on NATO's readiness to meet a contingency from the Warsaw Pact, the troop cuts did not encourage the NATO allies to make up the difference by increasing their troop levels in NATO. Since Europe was moving toward détente, they did not have the incentive to do so.⁷⁵

In preparing for the June NATO ministerial meeting, which was overshadowed by events in the Middle East, the Johnson administration noted that while the European governments understood what the U.S. was trying to do in Vietnam better than the European public, the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia was, nonetheless, still a source of difficulty for them. Moreover, the sentiment that the U.S. preoccupation with Vietnam had brought about lessened American interest in Europe also persisted.⁷⁶ At this meeting, the U.S. government also observed that, notwithstanding public pressure, Belgium had refrained from direct criticism of U.S. policy in Vietnam. In fact, Belgian aid to South Vietnam had been minimal and its government even publicly denied having given anything more than scholarship aid. As at the previous ministerial meeting, the U.S. was pressing for humanitarian aid, such as medical teams, teachers, agricultural

⁷³ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, "Greece", December 6, 1966, 104, "Netherlands", December 6, 1966, 1-7.

⁷⁴ Stuart and Tow, 77.

⁷⁵ Yet, Stuart and Tow notes that, "on the other hand [it] provided a new basis for the Europeans to question traditional U.S. containment postures and further complicated efforts to create the kind of intra-alliance 'grand strategy, that had been envisioned by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson," Stuart and Tow, 78.

⁷⁶ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, "Issues Paper", June 5, 1967, 1-4.

experts, etc.⁷⁷ Moreover, Amintore Fanfani, the Italian foreign minister, remarked that Italian public support for the American war effort in Vietnam was eroding. Consequently, he urged another pause in the bombing of North Vietnam to demonstrate U.S. goodwill as opposed to Hanoi's "intransigence".⁷⁸ Though the Dutch government had been under increasing pressure to criticize U.S. policy in Vietnam, Luns assured the U.S. that his government fully supported the U.S. objectives in Vietnam and his government's resolve not to be drawn into any criticism of the United States in a Dutch parliamentary debate.⁷⁹

During this period, the Vietnam war increasingly distracted the Johnson administration from its commitment to NATO, as more U.S. forces were being transferred from Europe to Southeast Asia. By now, the U.S. government was incurring a noticeable economic burden in fighting this war. Short of making troops commitments, most NATO allies realized it was convenient to render support for the U.S. effort in Vietnam by issuing statements as well as by providing humanitarian relief. As a result, they could tell Johnson that they supported his war effort without having to convince their respective governments to provide armed forces to the conflict. The U.S. government now found itself relegated to the necessity of actively lobbying its NATO allies for support in a war that was rapidly becoming more unpopular on both sides of the Atlantic.

⁷⁷ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, "Belgium", June 3, 1967, 1-3.

⁷⁸ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File -NATO, Box 35, "Italy", June 5, 1967, 1.

⁷⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, "Netherlands", June 5, 1967, 1-2.

Troop Cuts and the Offset

The escalation of the Vietnam war affected the U.S. troop commitment in Europe. The U.S. dropped its complement of troops committed to NATO from 380,000 in 1963 to 300,000 in 1969. Members of Congress as well as allies in NATO (such as West Germany) were concerned with the cost associated with maintaining these troop levels. More importantly, it caused the Johnson administration to question whether flexible response could still work amid the call to withdraw forces from Europe.

By 1966, the Vietnam war had increased the U.S. balance-of-payments deficit dramatically, thus instigating a crisis over NATO's future. In mid-July, Senator Mansfield warned Johnson that unless American forces in Europe were reduced, he and other Democrats would pressure him to do so by Senate resolution. Moreover, problems in the British economy kept the pound sterling under severe pressure, culminating in a run on the pound in July 1966. Consequently, the West German economy faced its first severe recession of the postwar period, while the Erhard government dealt with a large budget deficit. Under pressure to curb government spending, especially the expensive and questionable purchases of American military equipment, West Germany badly lagged in fulfilling its offset orders.⁸⁰ Consequently, Erhard told

⁸⁰ Since the late 1950s, the stationing of American troops in West Germany created balance-of-payments problems for the United States. Monies spent by the U.S. government on supplies for troops and dependents and by those troops and dependents on various items caused a sizable net outflow of dollars to West Germany. The growth of West German exports to the U.S. accompanying the rebuilding of the West German economy ballooned the deficit further. During the Kennedy administration, Washington and Bonn handled the matter by several ad hoc arrangements whereby Bonn pledged to offset American expenditures in West Germany with purchases of U.S. military equipment. McGhee recalled the situation by noting that West Germans tended to associate offset payments with reimbursements to the U.S. for stationing costs, which, as he put it, "... depicted U.S. troops as mercenaries. . .," something which was "onerous" for both countries. He stated that West Germans did not understand that they received a full quid pro quo from the U.S. in their purchases and that the only consequence was on the balance of payments. Highlighting the U.S. role in this, McGhee further stated that "for their part,

Washington that he needed significant relief from the offset payments. As a result of de Gaulle's withdrawal, however, Bonn told both Washington and London that cutbacks would weaken the alliance. They wanted more, not fewer, payments. In late August 1966, the U.S. suggested a form of trilateral negotiations among the U.S., Britain and the Federal Republic to resolve these offset problems. Highlighting the problem by stating his desire not to endanger NATO's security as a result of this crisis, Johnson later wrote in his memoirs that he "was determined to resist the unraveling of North Atlantic defenses and the collapse of our postwar efforts to build a healthy Atlantic political community. A new test of wills between East and West was certainly not what we needed if the business of building a reasonable and safe world was to go forward. It was crucial that we solve the foreign exchange offset problem and keep NATO strong."⁸¹ McGhee recalled that "the implied linkage of German performance under the offset agreement with the continued stationing of U.S. troops in Germany became of increasing concern to me" and that he "... fully understood the importance of trying to improve the adverse U.S. balance of payments." As he put it, West Germany and other affected nations "complained that we were exporting our inflation and thereby increasing theirs. Nevertheless, I viewed the continued presence of a significant U.S. troop level in Germany necessary for the success of NATO in organizing a credible European defense."⁸²

Subsequently, these three governments instituted what was commonly referred to as the Tripartite Talks, the purpose of which was to provide a basis for a limited withdrawal of U.S. troops. President Johnson asked John McCloy to lead the U.S. delegation. The documents clearly showed that flexible response still played a key role in these discussions in that the Johnson

Americans often perceived German reluctance to make the offset payments as reneging on their obligations, though also without understanding clearly what the payments were for." McGhee, 76.

⁸¹ Johnson, 307-308.

administration wanted to insure that the offset problem was resolved in ways that did not impede NATO's ability to deter a conventional attack from the Soviets. McNamara remarked that "a two-division cut could be safe," believing that it would not "tempt the Russians to mischief," or seriously impede the alliance's ability to mount a graduated, conventional response. In the NSC, Bator commended McNamara for highlighting this point.⁸³ While the administration viewed the offset problem as being serious, it correctly noted that the resolution of this problem should not jeopardize flexible response.

McCloy developed this theme when reviewing U.S. NATO policy to Johnson. He argued that flexible response, backed by adequate conventional, as well as nuclear, capabilities, was essential for a balanced defense and effective deterrence. Furthermore, he noted that existing NATO conventional forces for the central European region were adequate in size to support a flexible response strategy and that any material reduction in U.S. forces would probably provoke the allies to cut their forces. The net effect would reduce substantially NATO's conventional capability to support a flexible response strategy as well as lowering the nuclear threshold. While the effect of such cuts on the deterrent could not be precisely assessed, they could enhance to some degree the risk of Soviet pressures or actions at lower levels, especially in view of the growing Soviet strategic nuclear strength. As a result, McCloy recommended that the U.S. continue to press the NATO allies to provide reasonable stocks, equipment support and reserves for forces in conformity with a flexible response strategy. Based on these observations, he asserted that a flexible response strategy, backed by adequate conventional capabilities, was essential for U.S. security. Even with strategic nuclear parity, it would not make sense for the Soviets to undertake a massive conventional attack on Europe since they would realize that the

⁸² McGhee, 176.

United States would resort to nuclear weapons if necessary to prevent any conquest of Europe. As McCloy argued, the Soviet leaders would be aware of the danger that a limited war, especially in the NATO area, would readily escalate into general nuclear war. Thus, conventional forces could complete the spectrum of deterrence by safeguarding against any tempting gap in the NATO armor. McCloy provided further commentary on flexible response by noting that to conform to this strategy the Alliance did not need massive conventional forces. What it did need, however, were conventional forces sufficient to deter and counter a limited non-nuclear attack as well as to confront the Soviets with the prospect that any larger conventional attack will result in hostilities on such a scale as to involve a grave risk of escalation into nuclear war. To be a convincing deterrent, McCloy asserted, such forces must be substantial, properly equipped, trained and mobile.⁸⁴

In August, the congressional sentiment for reducing the U.S. involvement in Europe increased when the Senate Majority Policy Committee approved the so-called Mansfield Resolution, which advocated substantial cuts in American forces in Western Europe (then hovering between 400,000 and 450,000 troops) by arguing that a reduction of U.S. forces permanently stationed in Europe could be made without adversely affecting either the American resolve or ability to meet the commitment under the North Atlantic Treaty. The administration wanted to control this congressional sentiment. In a September 1 conversation with Mansfield, the Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations stated that this resolution was “a very bad one” and was one which created difficult problems for Chancellor Erhard. He even highlighted the fact that Mansfield and other U.S. representatives had been stressing the theme that there could not be a double standard whereby the U.S. was expected to meet agreed force

⁸³ LBJ Library, NSF, Trilateral Talks, February 23, 1967, 2.

goals but other NATO members need not meet theirs. The administration official also argued that, without question, the resolution would be exploited by the Gaullists to prove their contention that not only was the U.S. not dependable, but that it was also willing to take such unilateral action without consideration for the alliance.⁸⁵ Although Mansfield was aware of the seriousness of the payments deficit problem in NATO, he was, nonetheless, more concerned with events in Southeast Asia, thus highlighting the fact that Congress was also distracted by the Vietnam war.⁸⁶

As part of the debate on the West German offset question, Bator wrote to Johnson on August 11 that the tactical question was whether (1) to send Erhard a serious warning that the U.S. would cut back troops if he did not come through with a new offset deal (to follow the one which was scheduled to run out in June 1967); or (2) simply to ask Erhard not to foreclose a renewal of the full offset before his September visit, and ask him, in the interim, to explore with the U.S. and the British a modified version of the offset which would avoid the payments drain but give the West Germans some extra options (such as buying goods other than weapons, and perhaps even buying long-term U.S. securities). McCloy again highlighted the importance of strategic considerations when noting that any major shifts in U.S. security policy in Europe should primarily be based on political and military factors. He argued that to base such shifts on money would confirm the impression that NATO was falling apart, that de Gaulle was right in saying that the British and Americans were unreliable and that they cared more for their pocketbooks than for the safety of Europe. As such, unilateral troop cuts would reduce the U.S. assets for an eventual

⁸⁴ LBJ Library, NSF, NSC History, Box 50, November 21, 1966.

⁸⁵ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 459.

⁸⁶ Walt Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 396.

mutual-withdrawal bargain with the Soviets. Most important, it would seriously unsettle West German politics -- with unpredictable results.⁸⁷

As McCloy emphasized in his memo to the president, the balance of payments issue was now drawing attention to the cost of maintaining the allied security umbrella in Europe. The problem occurred on two fronts: Britain and West Germany. Within the British government, the problem reached such proportions that Wilson was now under domestic pressure to pull British forces out of West Germany if Britain's foreign exchange burden was not offset.

On the eve of the Erhard visit to Washington, McGhee outlined the contours of the problem when he stated that the U.S. troop commitment was not solely to West Germany but also to NATO. He further stated that if it was known that the U.S. government presented NATO with a fait accompli on U.S. troop levels as a result of the West German failure to meet the offset, the U.S. position in NATO would be greatly weakened as would the whole future of NATO itself. If the U.S. reduced its forces under such circumstances, the British would also certainly do so. He then noted the dilemma by stating that there was no reason why others should not follow suit and that, as a consequence, "the unraveling of NATO [would] begin." Discussing the problem that this posed on flexible response, he further remarked that it would be necessary to review the concept which the U.S. had promoted since the remaining NATO forces might have to resort immediately to the use of tactical nuclear weapons in the event of an all-out Soviet attack. McGhee strongly, and correctly, advanced the view that it was not in the U.S. national security interest to return to the strategy of massive retaliation. He further argued that these proposed troop cuts demonstrated to NATO that the U.S. pushed "a low price tag on our military

⁸⁷ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 443-448. McGhee noted that while the Bonn government was tactful about further U.S. troop cuts when dealing with the Johnson administration, they, nonetheless, did not like it. McGhee Interview.

commitment to Europe”, and that “in the future Europeans would have little confidence in our assertions that American and European security are indivisible or that we, as we say, consider the Soviet threat to be undiminished.” McGhee also asserted that these cuts would also enable the Soviets to exert a greater influence in Western Europe. Highlighting the Federal Republic in particular, he observed that even though it had until now depended almost entirely on the U.S. for its security guarantee, it would, nonetheless, be forced to reorient its basic security policy. This could then form a “go-it-alone” nationalism or efforts to accommodate itself with the Soviets. If West Germany increased its forces to make up the gap created by the U.S. withdrawal, the status quo with the East would be altered and fears would be engendered in Europe as well as in Eastern Europe. The Soviets would then assume a much stronger position vis-à-vis Germany and Europe. McGhee argued that, as a result, they would then be in a better position to make exorbitant demands and engage in blackmail, particularly in Berlin where the U.S., as principal recipients of such pressures, would have only a weakened Seventh Army as a backup. Evidently, McGhee considered the ramifications for détente because he noted that “America would no longer be able to play a decisive role in the great decision affecting the future of Europe which still lie ahead” because Western Europeans would increasingly tend to handle their own affairs independently, possibly including a rapprochement with Eastern Europe.⁸⁸ These proposed troop cuts not only affected allied perceptions of the American willingness to defend Western Europe, much less its intention to employ conventional forces in the pursuit of a flexible response strategy, but it also jeopardized the role which the U.S. government could exert in détente, a role which de Gaulle unsuccessfully challenged with his eviction order. In fact, such cuts would enable the French president to claim that the U.S. had abandoned Europe, thereby making a strong case for French

⁸⁸ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -West Germany, Box 193, “Text of Cable from Ambassador McGhee”,

leadership in the North Atlantic. After all, another background paper stated, troop cuts “would provide comfort to those voices in NATO countries who sympathize with de Gaulle,” as well as encouraging the “centrifugal tendencies within NATO.”⁸⁹

On September 26, Erhard met with Johnson at the White House. Regarding the offset problem, the West German chancellor informed the president of the difficult situation facing the Bonn government in that the steep economic growth curve of the past had flattened out, a particularly vexing problem since Bonn had made financial commitments on the assumption that such growth would continue. Johnson reassured Erhard that the U.S. could resolve the troop cut issue by proposing that certain reductions could be made if the Chancellor was willing to take the lead as well as by specifying exactly what West Germany was not able to do in the current year. Johnson then echoed McCloy’s view regarding troop cuts by reassuring Erhard that the U.S. military presence in West Germany was in no way related to the West German financial payments.⁹⁰

A month later, the Joint Chiefs also voiced their concerns regarding the effect of troop cuts on flexible response. Speaking to McCloy, General Wheeler stated the JCS view that NATO should have the capability in Europe to cope with a major conventional Soviet attack, thereby forcing the Soviets to escalate.⁹¹ Shortly thereafter, in a memo for McNamara, Wheeler wrote that the Joint Chiefs did not believe that a military justification existed for reducing forces in NATO Europe by the United States, Britain, Belgium, or any other NATO member, in light of Warsaw Pact capabilities as well as the Soviet capability in rapidly augmenting its forces in central Europe. He also informed the Secretary of Defense that while the Joint Chiefs recognized the

September 20, 1966, 1-3.

⁸⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, NSC History, Box 51, Background Paper - Trilateral Talks.

⁹⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 471-477.

political and economic pressures for a reduction in NATO forces, they, nonetheless, did not believe that the military situation in Europe justified this cutback. If implemented, Wheeler maintained that they would provoke unforeseeable results.⁹²

A December 7 State paper, prepared for that fall's NATO ministerial meeting, elaborated on the ways the troop cut issue was affecting the North Atlantic alliance. It stated that a European confidence in a solid U.S. commitment to NATO had been weakened not only by de Gaulle's unremitting attacks and innuendoes, but also by events in the U.S. like the Mansfield Resolution as well as the intimations linking withdrawals to manpower needs in Vietnam or the balance of payments deficit.⁹³

By December, Mansfield had firmly established his anti-NATO reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. He informed Eugene Rostow (who as the new Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs was trying to dissuade the senator from supporting troop cuts) that the United States was the only NATO country that was meeting its commitments, except for some withdrawals for Vietnam, and that he had offered the resolution "not just for financial and balance of payments reasons, important as they were, nor because of Vietnam." Even so, Mansfield believed that there were clear indications that fundamental changes had taken place and that the continued presence of so many American troops in Europe twenty years after the end of the Second World War was beginning "to get in the nerves of Germans and Europeans outside of government." As a result, he argued that in terms of the overall U.S. political and security stance the time had come to make a reduction in forces.⁹⁴

⁹¹ LBJ Library, NSF, NSC History, October 25, 1966, 1.

⁹² LBJ Library, NSF, NSC History, Memo from Wheeler to McNamara, October 27, 1966.

⁹³ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 504-508.

⁹⁴ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 508-509.

Rostow was not the only administration official who tried to persuade Mansfield. In explaining Johnson's policy, Rusk wrote Mansfield that "our forces should be stationed abroad only for reasons of national security, and that they should be withdrawn only if considerations of security justify such a move. In this connection we should keep in mind that all troop withdrawals are politically sensitive signals, and their significance can be misconstrued." The Secretary then remarked that U.S. membership in the alliance was still necessary because the national interests of the United States continued to require a strong Atlantic alliance, as well as a strong and balanced NATO force under integrated command. He asserted that "it would be unthinkable" to risk the loss of either Western Europe or its independence. He noted that while the deterrent strength of NATO had led the Soviet Union to pursue a relatively mild course in Europe since 1962, the military strength of the Warsaw Pact powers deployed in Eastern Europe was, nonetheless, formidable and still rising.⁹⁵ Significantly, Rusk highlighted the fact that NATO was still necessary despite the post-1962 progress in Soviet-American relations when he commented on the sheer strength of the Warsaw Pact forces in Europe.

By early 1967, McCloy had reached the halfway mark in the negotiating process, which had begun in October 1966. Discussions were taking place in Washington, London, and Bonn. Commenting on the U.S. negotiating strategy, Bator reiterated Rusk's concern on NATO force levels vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact to the president by observing that the U.S. should not recommend any withdrawals on account of the military capabilities of the Warsaw Powers as well as the European political situation. As he put it, "NATO and the Alliance which have been the bulwark of Western defense since the war are in real danger of disintegration," and, consequently, "acts of renewed faith and encouragement in respect of NATO" were necessary. In fact, he

⁹⁵ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 561.

believed that this situation transcended the mere problems of force levels. Commenting on détente, he further remarked that it had created fears that a Soviet-U.S. arrangement was emerging in substitution for the original NATO concept of an equal partnership alliance. He argued that the stability of West Germany and its firm adherence to NATO was a vital element of the security of the alliance until the two sides agreed to an overall East-West settlement. He commented that any U.S. unilateral withdrawal would only stimulate the further loosening of U.S. ties to Europe, weaken the whole concept of collective Atlantic security and further “shake German confidence.” Like other policymakers, Bator drew a complementary relationship between NATO and détente. Along the same lines, he argued that the allies could agree to some reduction in forces without substantially impairing the deterrent if they felt that the U.S. would continue to reinforce their defenses. McCloy supplemented Bator’s observations by noting that if the threat posed by Warsaw Pact forces were reduced by some tangible action on their part, the U.S. action would consequently make further withdrawals acceptable to the NATO allies without damaging the credibility of the U.S. commitment to the alliance.⁹⁶

In his report on the negotiations, McCloy again highlighted the importance of flexible response by writing to the president that NATO needed sufficient conventional forces to deter and counter a limited non-nuclear attack as well as to deter any larger conventional attack by confronting the Soviets with the prospect of conventional war on such a scale that they would not want to risk nuclear war with the West. McCloy also reported breakthroughs in many areas of the payments-deficit issue, such as the fact that the Bonn government agreed to buy in the British defense sector the value of DM 200 million in the 1967-1968 fiscal year. Furthermore, he noted that, pending approval by the WEU, the British would withdraw one brigade group (about 5,000

⁹⁶ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 4, February 23, 1967, 1-3.

troops) from West Germany to the United Kingdom during the first quarter of 1968. This brigade group, however, would still be earmarked for NATO. Apart from the implications of its change of location, the relationship between this British force and the SACEUR would remain unchanged. In addition, and on the same basis, the British Government would transfer to the United Kingdom two squadrons of the 2nd Tactical Royal Air Force. For its part, the U.S. government would increase its military orders and payments to Britain by 7 million pounds in the April 1, 1967, to the April 31, 1968 period. The West German government also agreed to continue the acquisition of U.S. military goods and services on a scale significant in relation to the West German defense effort. When making this procurement, West Germany would take into account its military requirements and budget capabilities, given the availability and economic advantage of those U.S. items.⁹⁷

As part of the settlement, the West Germans also agreed to meet the offset by purchasing and holding some \$500 million in U.S. government medium-term securities and, even more importantly, agreeing to make public their intention to refrain from buying gold, as well as to determine how much military equipment they would buy from Britain and the U.S. to meet NATO force goals. Consequently, the U.S. withdrew one army division and ninety-six aircraft, although these forces remained committed to NATO for the sake of appearance. Moreover, with regard to the British, the U.S. government had to increase its own spending in Britain to help the West Germans reach a 90 percent offset of the foreign exchange costs.⁹⁸

The Trilateral agreements were a stopgap measure, temporarily holding the alliance through a serious crisis as well as through the adjustment caused by France's withdrawal. They provided the president the weapon he needed to fend off congressional challenges. As McGhee

⁹⁷ LBJ Library, NSF, Trilateral, Memorandum for the President, 17 Mar. 1967.

recalled, Johnson was not only against troop withdrawals, but he was also avidly pushing for the lowest number of withdrawals possible (35,000).⁹⁹

Although Washington, London, and Bonn had completed the Trilateral negotiations by April, the discussion of troop cuts for both NATO and the Warsaw Pact continued throughout 1967. However, an October 1967 State paper remarked that the prospects were poor at this time for reaching an accord with the Soviet Union for a mutual reduction of forces in Europe. Even so, existing economic and political pressures among some NATO members to reduce defense expenditures were likely to continue and, in fact, increase. State observed that these pressures were manifested in budgetary defense cuts by some NATO allies. The paper also noted that until the Soviets showed an intent in discussing the subject, any discussion should only be based in a step-by-step, "mutual example" approach, an approach which could advocate a US-USSR trade-off of percentage reductions of NATO and Warsaw Pact forces. It further stated that NATO discussion now of mutual troop reductions should be directed toward agreement upon procedures and general guidelines, rather than a mere discussion of specific numbers of troops and reductions, which could precipitate a divisive debate that would prove disadvantageous to U.S. political interests. The study reached this particular conclusion because even though the U.S. and several of the NATO allies desired to discuss the question of mutual troop reductions with the Kremlin, the Soviets were not showing an inclination to make any cuts in their forces in Eastern Europe, either by agreement or by "mutual example", claiming that European frontiers had to be settled first. This State paper highlighted the fact that not only did the U.S. government seek a

⁹⁸ LBJ Library, George McGhee Oral History, 11.

⁹⁹ Kunz, 140; LBJ Library, George McGhee Oral History, 13. Brands analyzes the Trilateral Talks by remarking that they "released without explosion most of the pressure that had built up in America for a major reconsideration of policy toward Europe," and that "it also established, or at least confirmed, a spirit of cooperation that carried over into other aspects of U.S.-European relations." Brands, *The Wages of Globalism*, 116.

troop cut agreement with the Soviets, but that it also wanted to advance détente. However, Vietnam would have affected the outcome of such a withdrawal settlement. After all, the paper highlighted the fact that the Soviet government, in any case, could not agree to any arrangement which would free U.S. troops to fight in Vietnam, thus emphasizing the problem that the Vietnam war imposed not only upon U.S. NATO policy but also in the larger issue of détente.¹⁰⁰

The commitment to flexible response affected President Johnson's response to the troop withdrawal issue in that he was not prepared to accept any financial settlement which jeopardized a strategy which his predecessor first advanced at the beginning of the 1960s, even though the very nature of the American presence in Europe was now being challenged by the payments deficit issue as well as being questioned by congressional critics such as Senator Mansfield. The issue further highlighted the problem of simultaneously maintaining a strong military presence in both Europe and Asia. Notwithstanding his questionable objections, Mansfield did contribute to the debate over the proper role of U.S. forces in NATO by highlighting the European developments revolving around détente. For its part, the Johnson administration demonstrated in its willingness to discuss possible troop cuts with the Warsaw Pact that the North Atlantic alliance and this "relaxation" of East-West tension were not incompatible.

Ostpolitik and the Rise of Détente

As the United States became more preoccupied with matters in Southeast Asia, Western Europe, particularly West Germany, began embracing détente between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, partly as a result of such factors as the status of Soviet-American relations in the wake of

¹⁰⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 632.

the Cuban missile crisis as well as the renewed prosperity that was now sweeping the market economies of the continent. Although a European initiative supported by Charles de Gaulle, détente was nonetheless propelled by Willy Brandt, thus providing a basis for Lyndon Johnson to apply it to his NATO policy.

A proponent of détente since he returned to power in the 1950s, de Gaulle pursued this; and, as the events surrounding his eviction order showed, he wanted to take the lead in it. Reporting on the specifics of de Gaulle's views, a DI intelligence memo reported that he wanted a détente with the Soviet Union because of a "mutual apprehension" concerning the possibility of a resurgent West German military arm sales. It also noted that Moscow viewed a dialogue with the French in order to encourage an independent French policy which the Soviets saw as valuable support for the efforts to bury once and for all four-power responsibility for German reunification.¹⁰¹ Evidently, de Gaulle had motives for pushing détente other than a desire to effect a truly united Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals."

While the U.S. government was responding to the fall-out brought about by de Gaulle's withdrawal order, the State Department's Policy Planning Council concluded on March 23, 1966, in a paper entitled "Prospects for Détente with the USSR" that the Soviets were not demonstrating a genuine willingness to engage the U.S. in this dialogue. It concluded that the "vicarious" rationales which argued that now was a propitious time for a new advance in Soviet-American understanding were not very persuasive. They observed the official Soviet view that relations had become "considerably complicated" and had a clear tendency toward freezing. State perceived that this seemed "near the mark," while also noting that American policy should, of course, always be open to improved understanding with the Soviet Union. Moreover, it

concluded that it was extremely easy for the Soviets, even by mere gestures, to encourage optimism for such improvement. It surmised that what people usually meant when they speak of a new effort for understanding was that some resort of "sacrifices" should be made. It noted that "mere expressions of good will and new offers to talk" were rightly recognized as insufficient to resolve détente. Even so, State believed that the issues were still as valid as when the Cold War was "starker and simpler" in that only "situations of strength" could make possible the kind of détente which the U.S. wanted. The Policy Planning Council further remarked that the basic element of an effective American policy toward the Soviet Union remained what it was when the cold war began in that the U.S. should harbor no illusions and make no myths about the Soviet Union's intentions while playing close attention to what its leaders both constantly said and actually did about the kind of world they desired. It concluded by asserting that "there are no maneuvers of policy which can bring a quick fix in Soviet-American relations, and least of all can a policy which aims at détente for its own sake do so. . ."¹⁰²

In 1966, however, Ostpolitik came to fruition. Proposed by Brandt when he became the foreign minister as well as the vice chancellor in Kurt Kiesinger's coalition government, this initiative caused the Soviets to take a second look at détente. Brandt conceived this concept as a way of opening the door to the East Bloc. This "politics of the East" was Brandt's way of acknowledging the status quo in Europe by inviting the Soviets to accommodation on many issues, such as security and economics. Brandt proposed strong economic ties between West Germany and Eastern Europe, believing that they would strengthen both entities. In addition to this overture to the East, Ostpolitik called for a reconciliation with the Soviet Union as well as

¹⁰¹ LBJ Library, Country File -France, Box 171, CIA Office of Current Intelligence Special Report: France's Dialogue with the Soviet Union, May 21, 1965, 1-4.

stronger contacts with East Germany. The Soviets closely followed these developments because they still maintained the necessity of keeping a standing army in the region to protect its borders from any invasion originating in Western Europe.¹⁰³

West Germany had clearly surpassed France as the main proponent of détente, with Brandt, strongly supporting his Ostpolitik initiative, now replacing de Gaulle as the chief spokesman.¹⁰⁴ Even so, Brandt was not one to claim credit for this initiative, crediting the Adenauer and Erhard governments for striving to improve relations between Bonn and Moscow.¹⁰⁵ Brandt offered his own definition of détente, stating that “whatever the meaning of the word détente -- and its introduction into the field of international debate was not our doing -- it pointed to a common interest: a desire for survival in the nuclear age.” Supporting the view that the Cuban missile crisis had advanced this concept, he also wrote that “there had long been indications that the United States and the Soviet Union aspired to a new relationship. The need for an accommodation had been dramatically highlighted by the Cuban crisis.”¹⁰⁶ Brandt further defined Ostpolitik, noting that an essential ingredient of it was that Bonn applied itself to its own affairs “in a new and more positive manner instead of relying solely on others to speak for us.”

¹⁰² LBJ Library, White House Central File, Confidential File, “Prospects for Détente with the USSR”, March 23, 1966, 1-33.

¹⁰³ In his discussion on Ostpolitik, A. James McAdams explains this development in détente by noting that Brandt and other West German leaders advanced it because both the Soviet Union and the United States had attained military parity, “in the contest over Europe’s future.” A. James McAdams, “The New Diplomacy of the West German *Ostpolitik*” in Craig and Lowenheim, 537.

¹⁰⁴ Earlier, in a 1965 Paris meeting, Brandt recalled his Ostpolitik proposal with de Gaulle by remarking that it was not a policy which was meant to act as an American “spearhead” towards Eastern Europe. Moreover, Brandt argued that the Soviet Union need not feel that it was being provoked. Highlighting de Gaulle’s role in this endeavor, Brandt stated that the French president, “needed co-operation with Germany if his policy were not to fail.” In fact, Brandt also stated that de Gaulle, “could not pursue a fruitful policy of détente in isolation. The success or failure of Europe’s East-West policy depended on Franco-German solidarity.” Brandt, *People and Politics*, 126.

¹⁰⁵ Brandt continued in his memoirs by noting in June 1961 the Bundestag had unanimously passed for moves that advocated an opening overture to Moscow. He further stated that “my own ideas and recommendations had taken shape over a period of many years, and my party’s proposals were available during the formation of the Kiesinger-Brandt government.” Brandt, *People and Politics*, 166.

He further elucidated that “this meant that, while remaining in touch with our allies and retaining their confidence, we became the advocate of our own interests vis-à-vis the governments of Eastern Europe.” As such, West Germany became more independent, “. . . more adult, so to speak.” In fact, “a contributory factor was that our allies came to regard us as a country with definite frontiers which no longer burdened the European Community with problems whose solution would have entailed a fundamental change in the international and European *status quo*.”¹⁰⁷

The issue of German reunification significantly played a role in any discourse relating to détente. When Erhard met Johnson in September 1966, a State paper remarked that it remained “. . . one of the prime objectives of German policy.” It further stated that the West Germans were gradually accepting the view that reunification would require a long process of improved relations between itself and the Eastern European countries, leading to a restoration of Eastern European confidence in German intentions. Moreover, Erhard’s Government had initiated a number of steps designed to institute the process of improving relations with the Eastern European countries. The paper also observed that with the exception of Rumania, the Eastern European countries had not shown much interest in establishing diplomatic relations, even though there was some possibility that diplomatic relations between West Germany and Romania could soon be established. Accordingly, “this would constitute an important break in the log jam.” Until the Soviet Union was prepared to become more flexible in its policy on this question, the outlook for progress was very dim, a fact which the West Germans recognized and, as a result, were not pressing the U.S. for new initiatives. Moreover, popular feeling in West Germany for reunification was overwhelming and a continued show of American support for reunification was

¹⁰⁶ Brandt, *People and Politics*, 167.

necessary both for Erhard's internal political position as well as for the maintenance of a higher level of collaboration between the United States and West Germany.¹⁰⁸ Kiesinger then continued this theme in that West Germany needed to direct its efforts not just to the Communist countries but also to convincing the international community that although the Federal Republic would exercise its rights, it was, nonetheless, seeking solutions in a responsible way on the basis of justice for all. McGhee noted that, in so doing, "they recognized fully that the first step must be détente with the East" and that unification could not precede détente.¹⁰⁹ Brandt held out hope that détente "might possibly create a new framework for the solution of the 'German question', if only by mitigating the hardships and burdens arising from partition."¹¹⁰

In a November 3 report from Bonn, McGhee stated that the process of détente was "slow and uneven" with the issue remaining among the most contentious in West German politics. McGhee emphasized that the U.S. should not disregard its post-war policy in Central Europe and that the basic position on Germany's eastern frontiers as well as the active support of German reunification by whatever peaceful means available remained unchanged.¹¹¹ McGhee later commented in his memoirs that West Germany was seeking to distance it from the U.S. in making these overtures to the East. McGhee correctly interpreted this as being a positive sign in that the Bonn government no longer wanted to depend upon the U.S. as being able to resolve all of West Germany's problems. He remarked that, as a result, ". . . I predicted there would be less closeness in our relations but also, in the long run, less potential tension and fewer

¹⁰⁷ Brandt, *People and Politics*, 168-169.

¹⁰⁸ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -West Germany, Box 193, "Memorandum for the President", September 26, 1966, 4-5.

¹⁰⁹ McGhee, 237.

¹¹⁰ Brandt, *People and Politics*, 167

¹¹¹ LBJ Library, Country File - West Germany, Box 187, "Text of Cable from Ambassador McGhee" November 3, 1966, 1-4.

recriminations.” Although the U.S. had encouraged West Germany to make contacts with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, McGhee noted the differences that were beginning to emerge between Bonn and Washington on this issue, observing that “should the East seem ready for movement and the Germans respond, I fear misunderstanding might arise between us as to how far the FRG could and should go.”¹¹² Evidently, West Germany did not want to rely upon the U.S. promoting its East Bloc policy out of concern that the U.S. could not influence the outcome of events in this particular West German initiative. As a result, not only was the Bonn government promoting *détente*, but it was also exerting its independence from Washington in an area of East-West relations which the Johnson administration supported.

From NATO, Cleveland commented on this development in a November 17 memo to Rusk, stating that there were “forces at work on both sides,” which neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. could control fully. Moreover, the Johnson administration needed to recognize that the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. held a common interest in seeing to it that the scope and pace of change did not get out of hand. If the Germans were to be persuaded to accept this sequence as a better strategy for ultimate reunification, then they must also be convinced that “ultimate” did not mean “in the sweet bye-and-bye.” Consequently, Cleveland argued that the strategy and the objective must therefore be linked as organically as possible and that the goal of reunification must be reasserted and that the prospect of it should not be indefinitely postponed. Cleveland argued that some kind of machinery must be implemented to initiate and guide, even at a leisurely pace, the “evolution” toward a settlement.¹¹³ Like McGhee, Cleveland noted the emerging differences between West Germany and the United States, highlighting the importance which the Bonn government viewed the question of German reunification. While he supported the eventual

¹¹² McGhee, 230.

reunification of the German state, he correctly noted the problem in achieving this aim since the U.S. also needed to consider the Soviet view on this issue.

Although Cleveland advocated a slow approach, a State position paper prepared for that fall's NATO Ministerial, nonetheless, offered U.S. government support for Brandt's concept, stating that the objective was to draw Communist countries on to wider trade and contacts, in the hope that this would create an environment in which a just Central European settlement would be easier to achieve. Furthermore, it endorsed détente by stating that the U.S. welcomed expansion of bilateral ties between Western and Eastern European countries, as well as multilateral cooperation which would permit East and West jointly to address problems of all-European interest. Cleveland then stated that in seeking improved relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, an objective shared by all the allied governments, there was certainly no need for the U.S. to abandon any of its fundamental interests. He also remarked that "perhaps the question of whether détente should precede a [German] settlement or the other way around" was somewhat theoretical. He believed that progress toward relaxation of tensions and progress on the German and Central European issues were complementary courses and that both objectives should be realized. Highlighting NATO's role in this endeavor, the paper noted that its function in East-West relations was basic in that it should act as a clearing house and a means of harnessing policies. It also maintained that NATO's deterrent strength was needed both to prevent the danger of Soviet miscalculation and a renewal of political pressures directed at the West. Cleveland also advanced the view that only a unified alliance would permit a stable East-West settlement, stating that the East Bloc would take into account the content of any allied unified policy. He also commented on Ostpolitik's effects by noting that if this trend

¹¹³ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Boxes 37-38, Memo from Cleveland to Rusk, November 17, 1966, 1.

materialized, it could strengthen West Germany's ability to stand on their own vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.¹¹⁴

Besides the fact that it was the last time that the NATO foreign ministers held their biannual meeting in Paris that December, this ministerial meeting was significant because NATO took the first steps in adapting the North Atlantic alliance to the new realities of détente. As a result, the North Atlantic council directed Pierre Harmel, the Belgian foreign minister, to recommend options, an action which the Johnson administration fully supported because it countered the impression that NATO was simply reacting to events.¹¹⁵

By 1967, the West German version of détente was drawing attention to Eastern Europe. Bonn had established diplomatic ties with Bucharest and was contemplating normalizing relations with Budapest and Sofia. Even with these developments, Moscow took a hard line towards Bonn. Brandt defended Bonn's actions vis-à-vis Bucharest by noting that the initiative for opening relations had come from the Romanians and, as he put it, ". . . we had no reason to spurn it."¹¹⁶ Although it was now actively engaged in Eastern European politics, the Kiesinger government refrained from taking the next step in pursuing relations with both Prague and Warsaw because of the Oder-Niesse border issue.¹¹⁷

As Harmel researched the way ahead for NATO, U.S. policymakers worried that his study might threaten the future of NATO. At the 569th meeting of the NSC on May 3, Vice President Hubert Humphrey noted that "Europeans have rejected the world after the loss of their colonies. They resent U.S. power. Détente is what they want. Their young people are causing many

¹¹⁴ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, "East-West Relations and the State of the Alliance", December 6, 1966, 1-4.

¹¹⁵ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Boxes 37-38, Nov. 14, 1966, "Belgian Proposal for Experts Study on Future of NATO ("Wisemen") and "East-West Issues in NATO", 1-2.

¹¹⁶ Brandt, *People and Politics*, 170.

problems. The Soviets are still actively seeking the dissolution of NATO.”¹¹⁷ Bator then commented that “we want to be well-prepared for the conclusions which might come out of the . . . study.” However, a DI intelligence memorandum, written five days later, assuaged the fears of those who believed Western Europeans no longer saw the need for NATO. The intelligence report concluded that the decision to focus part of the review on East-West relations reflected the preoccupation of alliance members with the more relaxed posture of the Soviet Union and the need to counter de Gaulle’s charge that NATO hindered détente. The CIA wanted to impart the necessity of viewing this U.S. concern in light of West Germany’s desire to settle its territorial claims. The intelligence memo further observed that in the initial procedural discussions on this topic, some Western European states showed concern lest a reunited Germany loosen its alliance ties. Moreover, although these countries would have preferred to play down the West German question in the final resort, the memo also noted that they had shown a surprising eagerness to plunge directly into the discussion of some of the very hard questions on the sensitive topic of their future. It further remarked that the Western Europeans must be convinced of the full commitment of the dominant power of the U.S. to the alliance while still viewing themselves as equal partners.¹¹⁹

With his Ostpolitik initiative, Brandt significantly and irrevocably advanced détente. While the U.S. government supported it, it nonetheless acknowledged that this step toward the relaxation of tensions in Europe was a way for the Bonn government to assert its independence within the alliance. Even so, Bonn’s efforts to link Ostpolitik with the unresolved status of German unification insured that the viewpoints of Washington would have to be taken into

¹¹⁷ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -West Germany, Box 193, “German Reunification”, February 6, 1967, 1-3.

¹¹⁸ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 572.

¹¹⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Boxes 37-38, May 8, 1967, 1-12.

consideration since Moscow at this point was not ready to give its assent to such a move, given its experience with the Germans during the Second World War. Not only did Ostpolitik show the proper context of European leadership in détente, but it also highlighted the fact that NATO operated on the mutual give-and-take of the entire Atlantic community since, after all, the U.S. still insisted that NATO formally adopt flexible response.

U.S. Initiatives in Détente

The Johnson administration embraced Ostpolitik, thereby providing a basis for formulating a constructive détente policy which the Nixon administration would subsequently follow through. Because of this relaxation of tension in Europe, President Johnson could now make a strong case for the alliance's formal adoption of flexible response, while also taking the first steps since in his presidency began in 1963 to discuss arms control and disarmament issues directly with his counterpart in the Kremlin.

Foy Kohler, the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, elaborated in a letter to the British Under Secretary of State that it was important to define what détente was all about, what it meant to NATO, as well as what could be expected in the future. While Kohler stated that the administration should not attempt a "Webster definition" of détente, he, nonetheless, wanted to set forth what the U.S. believed to be were the Soviet objectives in détente. Even so, Kohler not only noted that both East and West held differing interpretations of it, but that the alliance also held differing views of the concept as well. Kohler addressed the reason why policymakers such as Humphrey were finding it difficult to accept this relaxation, observing that because there were clearly differing views of détente (as each member of the

alliance held a somewhat different perspective), the U.S. would not be able to devise any sort of a coordinated approach with the East Bloc unless it could reach some measure of agreement on what détente meant. Kohler continued by noting that, in recent years, the Soviets had come to view this relaxation of tensions as meeting their own national interests by weakening the cohesion of the alliance, divide the NATO states, and in particular, isolate the Federal Republic and open up differences between Western Europe and the United States. The Soviets, moreover, hoped to convince the U.S. that NATO was no longer relevant and that a U.S. military presence in Western Europe was no longer required. Nonetheless, Kohler advocated the need for maintaining the momentum by writing that a recognition of these Soviet objectives did not mean that the U.S. should abandon its efforts to improve East-West relations. For détente to work, the West needed the full cooperation of the Soviet Union. As a result, Kohler remarked that it was limited in part because the Soviets had not announced their basic objectives. They continued to seek means of dividing the Atlantic alliance, advocating the removal of the U.S. presence in Europe as well as continuing their opposition to German unification on any basis that would be acceptable to the West. Kohler remarked that they saw a “purposeful and selective” relaxation of tensions as serving these objectives.¹²⁰

Notwithstanding U.S. concerns over the degree to which the Soviets were also willing to join the West in pursuing a détente, Ostpolitik played a prominent role when Johnson met Aleksei Kosygin, Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers and titular head of the Soviet government, at the June 1967 summit in Glassboro, New Jersey. Rusk had arranged this meeting between President Johnson and Premier Kosygin, who was in New York visiting the United Nations. The Secretary of State chose this site because it was the mid-point between New York and

¹²⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 591-595.

Washington. Neither of these leaders wished to appear anxious to call on one another.¹²¹ While this meeting was noteworthy for the ways in which the two leaders discussed Ostpolitik, the summit itself significantly advanced détente because it represented the first time that an American president had met his counterpart since the Vienna summit in 1961, even though this meeting was not one of the significant summits between the Kremlin and the White House during the 1960s. Unlike Kennedy, Johnson met a Soviet leader who was not as unyielding as Khrushchev, who had been removed from power three years before. In a meeting with Rusk, Gromyko dismissed Ostpolitik, remarking that the Soviets did not detect any real steps by the Bonn government to improve its relations with the Soviet Union “and its friends.” Rusk, however, responded that the Soviet foreign minister was underestimating the readiness of the Federal Republic to improve its relations with Eastern Europe, and that the U.S. viewed the Kiesinger government as desiring more realized relationships. To this, Gromyko remarked that if there were real changes, the Soviet Union was ready to respond and that it would like to improve relations with West Germany. Even though the Soviet Union had suffered greatly from Germany in World War II, Gromyko argued that it was ready to think about the future but that it had found only statements. In concrete terms, Gromyko pointed out that the Kremlin could see no change in that Bonn was still hostile towards the GDR and that it had not yet settled the question of nuclear arms. In fact, Gromyko resorted to polemics, remarking that “every day there [was] evidence of revanchism and propaganda.” Evidently, the Soviet government was not willing to embrace the concept, even though its satellite states were heeding Brandt’s message. Moreover, the Glassboro summit highlighted the fact that the Johnson administration was ready to talk about détente directly with the Kremlin leadership. A veteran of the most momentous events of the Cold War, Gromyko did

¹²¹ Shoenbaum, 483.

not want to confront this development, choosing instead to dismiss the West German initiative on grounds that Bonn was not serious in pursuing it. The activity surrounding Ostpolitik, however, was forcing him and his colleagues in the Soviet government to yield to the desires of its “sister governments” in Eastern Europe, states that wanted closer integration with the West.¹²²

At this summit, Johnson and Rusk also told their counterparts that the U.S. strongly favored increased contacts and improved relations between the NATO states and the Warsaw Pact. Consequently, they informed Kosygin and Gromyko that they supported Kiesinger’s efforts to that end. In support of the North Atlantic alliance, they also stated that NATO was “the result, not the cause of the tension in Europe.”¹²³

By simply agreeing to meet, Johnson and Kosygin played a key role in advancing the concept of détente, even though they did not agree on the specifics, such as Ostpolitik. Although Komer viewed this meeting as the starting point for détente, Eugene Rostow disagreed with that assessment.¹²⁴ However, new evidence showed that both individuals understood its ramifications, and, subsequently, were prepared to meet the challenge. In his memoirs, Johnson recalled that he had left Glassboro “with mixed feelings” in that he was disappointed that “we had not solved any major problem” but that he hoped that both sides “had moved to a better understanding of our differences.”¹²⁵ Dobrynin explained in his memoirs that both sides did not expect to leave the summit with any significant breakthroughs since it was hastily put together by both the Soviets and the Americans.¹²⁶

¹²² LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - Soviet Union, Box 229, June 16, 1967, 1.

¹²³ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - Soviet Union, Box 229, June 1967., 1.

¹²⁴ Komer interview; Eugene Rostow interview.

¹²⁵ Johnson, 485.

¹²⁶ Dobrynin, 167. In explaining the outcome of the summit, Shapely comments that Kosygin held “deep suspicions of the West and knew little about Americans and their casual ways. Nor did he care to learn, since he

Despite the Glassboro summit, however, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union continued to develop their missile technologies. With the advent of the ABM system, designed to defend an area from incoming warheads, NATO now examined the ways which this system could be incorporated into its defense planning. Since the Soviets also acquired this capability, the Johnson administration now determined the ways which the ABM affected Soviet-American relations within the arms control context of détente. In fact, Johnson and Rusk discussed this issue with their Soviet counterparts at Glassboro.¹²⁷

Following Rusk's lead, the U.S. discussed the ABM with the allies, highlighting the issue at the first meeting of the NPG on April 7, 1967.¹²⁸ The fact that the Johnson administration discussed the details of this system with the allies in the first meeting of the NPG was significant because the Nuclear Planning Group was established as a forum to review such matters in the wake of the MLF demise. The NATO allies recognized that the ABM could lead to an arms build-up. Consequently, they commended the U.S. government for its willingness to raise the issue in bilateral arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union.¹²⁹ Although the ABM began to

planned to spend the next day, Saturday, visiting Niagara Falls. He would get a view of nature but no insights into the arms race or Johnson's habit of bringing up earthshaking matters at crowded lunches." Shapley, 393.

¹²⁷ In the previous December, McNamara explained the details of this system, reporting that the Soviet Union had initiated deployment of an ABM system, and, were accelerating their build-up of ICBMs as well. McNamara stated that the first known ABM deployments were in the Moscow area and that they could become operational within the next several years. However, McNamara noted that this system was limited in technical sophistication and that he considered it inferior to the American anti-ballistic missile development. He further observed that this system was consistent with the Soviet's past practice on relying heavily in defensive systems. Notwithstanding this development, McNamara also remarked that the Soviets were expending their resources on a system which the U.S. could readily overcome. LBJ Library, State Cable, December 31, 1966, 1-6.

¹²⁸ Reporting on this meeting, which was held in Washington, State informed USNATO that just as the U.S. could be expected to react to ABM deployments in the Soviet Union by improvements in offensive missile forces, the Soviets could likewise be expected to react similarly to ABM deployments in the West, thus increasing defense expenditures on both sides without improving the security of either. *FRUS 64-68*, Vol. XIII, 556.

¹²⁹ Although the U.S. possessed this missile capability, it chose not to deploy it at this time. In a background paper prepared for the June 1967 NATO ministerial meeting, the Johnson administration stated that it was likely that the Soviets, in response to such a U.S. deployment, would maintain their deterrent by improving their offensive forces, thereby leaving the U.S. "no better off than before" the deployment. It also noted that the deployment of an ABM by the U.S. was not a necessary response to a Soviet ABM deployment. Instead, the U.S. military was doing this to

play a role in U.S. defense planning, that role was not as important in this period as in subsequent ones. While the Johnson administration did not view Soviet ABMs as significant threats, it, nonetheless, acknowledged their potential role in promoting arms control, thereby advancing détente.

In the period following the Glassboro summit, the NATO allies displayed a marked interest in the Harmel study, particularly since the Belgian foreign minister was about to reveal his conclusions at the fall's upcoming NATO ministerial meeting. As in other allied issues, however, the French again displayed a willingness to oppose allied policy. In an October 19 meeting of the Senior Interdepartmental Group (composed of senior officials, such as the Deputy Secretary of Defense from State, Defense, and CIA), these policymakers noted that France stood alone among the allies in not supporting the Harmel study, even though de Gaulle had actively supported détente. Cleveland, who had flown in from NATO, commented that the "balance" in the North Atlantic Council had now changed (partly, no doubt, as a result of France's withdrawal from the allied military structure). The U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO also observed that the U.S. was now viewed among the allies as taking the lead in détente, noting that countries that hesitated to debate the French on defense policy the previous year were now taking a strong position on this issue. Cleveland also commented that the U.S. now stood "somewhere in the

improve its offensive capability. Noting the way that the ABM was affecting U.S.-NATO relations, the paper not only observed the fact that the allies were interested in U.S. efforts at advancing the program but that they were also disinterested in forming a European ABM deployment on the grounds that this system was very costly and of limited effectiveness. However, the paper noted that if the U.S. deployed an ABM, it would be necessary to garner European support for implementing the system on European soil since it would ultimately be directed at the general defense against the Soviet Union. The paper targeted West Germany as a NATO state that would welcome such a deployment, while the British, on the other hand, could oppose it. LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, "ABM", June 5, 1967, 1-3. Leddy later recalled that the allies were not interested in acquiring this capability on the grounds that such a system would compel the U.S. to use the nuclear deterrent in defending Europe. LBJ Library, Leddy Oral History, 16. The following September, Thompson, who had already returned to Washington from his tour at Spaso House, recommended that the U.S., "put forward a specific strategic freeze

middle” between the Danes and others who wanted a NATO political role in détente and the West Germans who feared offending the French with an emphasis on political tasks.¹³⁰

In December, shortly before the convocation of that fall’s NATO ministerial meeting, a memo generated by the U.S. intelligence community reiterated the views expressed in the 23rd Meeting of the Senior Interdepartmental group the previous October by noting that the French were having reservations about the Harmel study out of a concern that it would develop moves toward political integration in the alliance.¹³¹

Meanwhile, Bonn continued to press for Ostpolitik, partly as a way of garnering support for reunification, though McGhee recalled that no progress was possible on reunification. Although he stated that the eastward direction of Bonn’s foreign policy was “a good step,” he, nonetheless, conceded that the U.S. could not make a significant contribution to Ostpolitik because of the lack of strong diplomatic relations with the Eastern European countries. In fact, he reported that West German-American ties were hindering Bonn’s effort at a rapprochement with the East, thus explaining why the Johnson administration downplayed its role in this initiative. However, McGhee also noted that “privately we made it clear to the Germans that we approved of what they were doing and not to hold back on our account.”¹³²

At the December NATO Ministerial, the North Atlantic Council, accounting for the developments in détente, accepted the Harmel Report. Because the report strongly recommended the formal adoption of flexible response as an alliance strategy, NATO now accepted the goal

proposal” prior to the announcement of an ABM decision. LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -Soviet Union, Box 231, September 6, 1967.

¹³⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 628.

¹³¹ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File -NATO, Boxes 37-38, “Intelligence Memoranda”, December 7, 1967, 1-11.

¹³² LBJ Library, George McGhee Oral History, 17-18.

which Kennedy had pursued earlier in the decade, the North Atlantic allies now realizing that this was the preferred strategy within the context of the relaxation of tensions.

The flexible response strategy adopted by NATO provided for a wide range of possible military responses to aggression, depending on the circumstances. It committed NATO to respond initially to any aggression, short of general nuclear attack, with a *direct defense* at the level of force -- conventional or nuclear -- chosen by the aggressor; to conduct a *deliberate escalation* if the direct defense at the level of force -- conventional or nuclear -- chosen by the aggressor; to conduct a *deliberate escalation* if the direct defense could not contain the aggression and restore the situation; and finally, to initiate a *general nuclear response* only in the event of a major nuclear attack. This strategy was a compromise in both military and political terms. Militarily, it was a compromise between a full-scale conventional defense and a "trip-wire" strategy in that, as opposed to massive retaliation, flexible response provided for an initial non-nuclear response in a broader range of circumstances. Politically, it represented a compromise between the initial American goal of building conventional forces capable of responding to a major Warsaw Pact attack without resorting to nuclear weapons, and the European preference for a more modest conventional capability. Even with this acceptance, however, the allies did not significantly increase NATO's conventional forces and defense budgets.¹³³

Along with its ringing endorsement of flexible response, the Harmel Report acknowledged Adenauer's view that the resolution of the Cold War was ultimately tied to the resolution of the

¹³³ Stromseth, 175-176. Stromseth further explains the reason why NATO did not increase its conventional capability by observing that "in seeming to be all things to all people, the compromise of flexible response allowed NATO to mask -- but not resolve -- the clash of views in the alliance over how far NATO should rely on non-nuclear forces for deterrence and defense." She also notes that "the vary ambiguity of flexible response, which was both a virtue and a necessity in political terms, was a serious liability from the standpoint of military planning. Flexible response seemed to justify an open-ended array of nuclear capabilities to maintain a 'seamless web' of deterrence. It allowed decision-makers to avoid hard choices regarding the role and adequacy of NATO's

permanent status of Germany, or as the report put it, “. . . the possibility of a crisis cannot be excluded as long as the central political issues in Europe, first and foremost the German question, remain unsolved.” Noting a relationship between NATO and détente, Harmel endorsed the view that the two were compatible by accurately observing that military security and détente were not contradictory but complementary. In fact, collective defense was a stabilizing factor in world politics in that it was the “necessary condition” for effective policies directed towards a greater relaxation of tensions. Harmel further supported this view, noting that the way to peace and stability in Europe rested in particular on the constructive use of the alliance in the interest of détente. His report further advanced the spirit of détente by remarking that “the evolution” of Soviet and East European policies gave grounds for hope that those governments would eventually come to recognize the advantages of collaborating with the West in reaching a settlement to the outstanding issues in European security.¹³⁴ The Harmel Report continued by admonishing the NATO allies “to direct their energies” in advancing a further détente in East-West relations. As Harmel put it, the relaxation of tensions was not the final goal but merely a part of a long-term process to promote better relations and to foster a European settlement.¹³⁵

With the Harmel Report, détente was in full swing, and so was flexible response. The events in East-West relations now convinced Western Europeans that massive retaliation was unnecessary. Although the Johnson administration supported this development, it did not provide a resounding endorsement because the Soviets did not clearly state that they too supported it,

conventional forces. It also undermined efforts to make conventional force improvements a matter of high priority in the alliance. Stromseth, 194.

¹³⁴ In his chapter on détente, Anton W. Porte comments that the Harmel Report compelled the NATO allies “to pursue a changed relationship with Eastern Europe. Each remained free to make its own policies but all agreed to engage ‘in frank and timely consultations’ with the others to avoid splitting the alliance.” Anton W. de Porte, “NATO and Détente: Cycles in History” in Kaplan, *NATO After Forty Years*, 188.

their opposition to Ostpolitik being a case in point.¹³⁵ Nonetheless, they displayed a willingness to engage in high-level discussions with Washington, as the Glassboro summit demonstrated.

Although the ABM now affected Soviet-American relations, the Johnson administration displayed a willingness to discuss the system with the Soviets as a way of attaining an arms control agreement. Allied policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic did not interpret détente as signifying the end of the Cold War. As Chancellor Adenauer once remarked in an earlier period and which Foreign Minister Harmel now clarified, no discussion of Germany's reunification, the outstanding issue in any final resolution between the East Bloc and the West, could take place until the Cold War was resolved. Détente simply called for an accommodation between East and West, the hope that both sides could tolerate each other's security interests. In this sense, it was a relaxation of tension, though a nascent one at best.

¹³⁵ *NATO Final Communiqués*, 198-202. Kaplan correctly interprets the Harmel Report as signaling "more than the diminished role of France in the alliance; it represented, as did the NPG and the resuscitated DPC, the new authority of the smaller nations." Kaplan, "The U.S. and NATO in the Johnson Years" in Divine, 125.

¹³⁶ McAdams continues his Ostpolitik discussion by noting that "one impediment was always clear. No one doubted that the Soviet Union's acquiescence was essential to improve East-West relations. Yet, even as the leaders of the USSR warmed to the idea that they would benefit from a friendlier relationship with the Federal Republic, they were never entirely free of the contrary influences of their allies in the GDR." Craig and Lowenheim, 538. McGhee commented in his memoirs that although the U.S. government welcomed West Germany's achievement of better bilateral relations with the Soviet Union, leading to fewer Soviet anxieties about the two Germanies, "prospects for sweeping change seemed unlikely." McGhee continued, noting that "the Soviets obviously preferred the status quo. But it impressed me that the field of European security presented a significant potential for misunderstandings between ourselves and the Germans on Eastern policy." He also remarked that "I pointed that such issues as mutual troop reductions and exchange of military observers had traditionally been a matter of NATO and four-power concern. But I also believed that the German initiative for mutual renunciations of force with the Eastern European countries merited continuing support." McGhee, 231.

Détente and Other NATO Out-of-Area Developments

During this period, out-of-area developments impacted the ways President Johnson utilized détente in NATO much in the same way that earlier events throughout the Third World influenced the ways President Kennedy promoted flexible response in the alliance. The two most pressing out-of-area concerns during this period involved the third Arab-Israeli war as well as the Sino-Soviet dispute. Commonly called the Six-Day war, the former concerned the NATO allies as well as advancing détente by showing that the hotline system between Washington and Moscow, established in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis, worked. Like Kennedy, Johnson considered extending recognition to China. However, events such as the war in Vietnam prevented his administration from making strides in Sino-American relations, and, as a consequence, making further advances in détente.

Because of the fact that the U.S. supported Israel while the Soviet Union backed Egypt, the Six-Day war alarmed the Johnson administration. At NATO, Cleveland recalled that while there was no decision to make in the North Atlantic Council, there was, nonetheless, a lack of unanimity on the ways which NATO should respond.¹³⁷ Reporting on NATO interests in the Middle East, USNATO reported on June 8 that the alliance concluded that, as an institution, NATO should have no active role vis-à-vis the Middle East. Even so, the U.S. mission reported that such a role would be “understandable” in the East-West context.¹³⁸

Since NATO’s foreign ministers were holding their biannual meeting during this time, Cleveland reported on June 17 that domestic opinion in NATO countries greatly favored Israel and that the Soviet miscalculation was enormous in providing sophisticated machines without

developing the sophisticated military men to use them. In fact, no one at the ministerial meeting thought anything of worth would come out of an emergency session of the General Assembly, even though there was a grudging admiration for Soviet tactical skill in selecting a forum in which they could embarrass Western nations while they themselves could look as if “they were doing something big for their Arab friends.” As for any allied action, however, Cleveland remarked that when ministers moved beyond merely discussing the crisis to providing tangible options, the consensus emerged that NATO should just keep consulting.¹³⁹

On 19 June, Bator, reporting on his lunch with Kiesinger, commented on West German views of this war by reporting that the chancellor indicated that West German popular sentiment sided with the Israelis.¹⁴⁰ Three days later, McCloy also recalled that Kiesinger was sympathetic to Israel and explained recent Soviet tactics as an attempt to recoup. Moreover, he stated that West Germany was interested in playing a constructive role in resolving the crisis.¹⁴¹ By making these statements, Kiesinger showed that the West German government was like the other NATO governments in strongly supporting the state of Israel, a significant step for this representative of the West German state since his government was also advocating such controversial measures as the reunification of Germany.

While Kiesinger was seeking to show that West Germany no longer posed a threat to its neighbors, de Gaulle was trying to use the crisis to convince NATO that France still mattered. A July 26 INR research memo from Hughes to Rusk pointed out that this Arab-Israeli conflict had stirred de Gaulle in the sense that he had been less alarmed by the prospect that the “Big Two”

¹³⁷ Interview with Harlan Cleveland, July 6, 1994.

¹³⁸ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 582.

¹³⁹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 586.

¹⁴⁰ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 6, “Meeting with Kurt-George Kiesinger”, June 19, 1967, 1-3.

¹⁴¹ LBJ Library, Bator Papers, Box 6, June 22, 1967, 1-2.

might clash and more concerned by the prospect that they might decide to work together to impose their authority in the Middle East, as well as to reimpose it in Europe, where it was now “relaxing,” to de Gaulle’s satisfaction. Evidently, de Gaulle interpreted the Six Day war as being a threat to détente. The assessment further observed that in the Middle East, de Gaulle had to deal with the fact that his hope to maintain a balance of power in the area had now dissolved in the sense that Israel became more firmly allied with Washington while most of the Arab states reinforced their ties to Moscow. Apparently, his undisguised effort to demonstrate French partiality toward the Arabs turned out to be futile. Hughes wrote that it was nothing more than a “frantic and forlorn attempt” to try to restore the previous power balance in the area.¹⁴²

In an August 14 meeting with Sir Patrick Dean, the British Ambassador, Eugene Rostow, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, touched upon the war’s implications in Soviet-American relations, remarking that the Soviet position was stronger and that the flow of Russian arms continued. Dean shared Rostow’s view that this third Arab-Israeli conflict should also be viewed as a Soviet-American conflict “with large stakes.” After stating that it was difficult for some Britons to understand this, Dean told Rostow that it was important that NATO members reach a strong position on this issue in light of several differences.¹⁴³

The Six-Day War shook the NATO allies. Eugene Rostow recalled that there was more unity within the Atlantic alliance in the Six-Day War than in any other Middle Eastern conflict. He pointed out, somewhat sarcastically, that even the French cooperated.¹⁴⁴ Bohlen recalled that as far as the French general was concerned, “when the war was over, [his] attitude toward Israel did not change. There were cold-blooded reasons behind de Gaulle’s policy. He realized that the

¹⁴² LBJ Library, NSF, Country File -France, Box 173, INR Research Memorandum from Hughes to the Secretary, Box 173, July 26, 1967, 1–3.

¹⁴³ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - UK, Box 211, Memorandum Conversation, August 14, 1967, 1-2.

U.S. and Britain had lost their standing in the Arab countries, and he saw an opportunity for France to move in. For the West, this policy was not bad. With Soviet influence rising, it was advantageous to retain some Western friendship among the Arabs, and France was the only country with a chance at success.”¹⁴⁵

The Sino-Soviet dispute also affected Soviet-American relations, particularly since NATO states such as France had extended recognition to Peking. Commenting on this development, a CIA information cable noted that Erhard was disturbed that de Gaulle did not consult with the U.S. government before taking this step.¹⁴⁶ However, Eugene Rostow pointed out that there were no allied positions in NATO regarding the status of the dispute.¹⁴⁷

In a December 3, 1964, position paper, prepared for that December's fall NATO ministerial meeting, the U.S. interpreted events in the Sino-Soviet dispute by remarking that with China deeply involved in an internal crisis, which was the start of the Cultural Revolution, Moscow was moving to the offensive in seeking to exploit Peking's damaged standing in the international communist movement. In fact, China had not launched any sustained new challenges to Moscow, although the anti-Soviet aspects of the cultural revolution had heightened existing strains.¹⁴⁸

At that NATO ministerial meeting, Saragat informed Rusk that the most important question was what kind of decisions were being handed down in Peking. Saragat held that China was a threat to the West but that it was even more of a threat to the Soviets. Advocating recognition of China, he posed the question whether China was more dangerous isolated or with

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Eugene Rostow, July 26, 1994.

¹⁴⁵ Bohlen, 509-510.

¹⁴⁶ LBJ Library, NSF, Files of Robert Komer, Box 20, CIA Intelligence Information Cable, February 27, 1964, 1-2.

¹⁴⁷ Eugene Rostow interview.

¹⁴⁸ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Box 35, "Sino-Soviet Relations", December 3, 1966, 1-3.

diplomatic ties to the West (he concluded that it was more dangerous isolated). Rusk tried to explain U.S. reasons for not recognizing China by informing him that even though the U.S. government held more serious and more frequent contacts with China than any other nation but the Soviet Union, nothing had developed as a result of those contacts.¹⁴⁹

While the State Department was monitoring the events in both the Middle East and China, it also observed that the Western European democracies were disengaging from the rest of the world. Noting this development, Leddy wished the NATO states would take "a larger look at the world."¹⁵⁰ Harmel reiterated this view when, preparing his long-term study on NATO, he commented that even though there were real interests beyond the NATO area, the Western European states were extremely reluctant to involve themselves partly due to a view that they could not influence the U.S. in such regions.¹⁵¹ In his report, however, he argued that the North Atlantic Treaty area could not be treated in isolation since crises arising outside the area could impair its security either directly or by affecting the global balance.¹⁵² He undoubtedly recalled the Cuban missile crisis when arguing this point.

In out-of-area developments during this period, the Johnson administration confronted the problem associated with managing America's global power while also maintaining the status quo within its most important alliance affiliation, NATO. Although the third Arab-Israeli war was a regional conflict, it, nonetheless, affected NATO in that Kiesinger used it as a way of joining the other allies in expressing solidarity for the state of Israel while de Gaulle used it as a way to make yet another unsolicited case for French leadership. Even though the NATO allies were advising his administration to recognize China, Johnson refused to take action. Had he done so, the pace

¹⁴⁹ LBJ Library, NSF, Agency File - NATO, Boxes 33-34, MemCon, December 15-17, 1964, 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ LBJ Library, Leddy Oral History, 14.

¹⁵¹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 624.

of détente would have advanced significantly. Unlike the United States, the Western European democracies continued to display a marked indifference to events outside the NATO area, thereby continuing the trend begun in 1945 when the U.S. surpassed them in exerting Western influence in international affairs. In the mid-1960s, however, the Johnson administration was straining that role by simultaneously trying to manage events in Europe and Southeast Asia.

* * * * *

With the beginning of détente, the Johnson administration successfully persuaded NATO that flexible response was more prudent than massive retaliation. Consequently, U.S. NATO policy shifted from one which actively promoted flexible response to one which readily accepted détente. This development highlighted the fact that not only were the NATO allies mutually dependent on one another but also that theirs was increasingly an alliance of equal partners under U.S. leadership. Nonetheless, congressional critics in the United States now questioned the necessity of that role to the point that such actions as the Mansfield Resolution nearly threatened the U.S. case for flexible response. Even so, these critics appreciated the importance for Johnson to acknowledge the viability of détente, which the president did by showing a willingness to negotiate with the Soviets, as the Glassboro summit and the ABM issue demonstrated. With the NATO allies disturbed with the continued American focus upon Vietnamese affairs, the Johnson administration was now overextending U.S. influence by trying to handle events in both Europe and Southeast Asia, a significant action in light of the economic burden that the Vietnam war now placed on U.S. resources. Although the Western Europeans initiated détente, President Johnson

¹⁵² *NATO Final Communiqués*, 198-202.

fully embraced it by the way he responded to Brandt's Ostpolitik, the clearest manifestation of their contribution to this positive and overdue development in European security. The advent of détente, however, also highlighted the fact that Western Europe wanted to exert a strong, independent voice, Bonn's push for German reunification being a case in point. Despite the constructive impact of détente, President Johnson's determination to continue the Southeast Asian policy established by President Truman prevented him from making further strides in this relaxation of tension, such as utilizing the Sino-Soviet dispute in this endeavor. Nevertheless, the Soviets also joined their American counterparts in not fully taking advantage of this development by not only downplaying Ostpolitik but by also maintaining an unwanted military presence in Eastern Europe, a presence which the Czechs would fully understand in 1968.

CHAPTER VII

CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE IMPASSE IN DÉTENTE, 1968-1969

In the last year of the Johnson presidency, events in Czechoslovakia postponed any significant progress in détente until the Nixon presidency continued the work begun by allied policymakers in the 1960s. Notwithstanding this disappointment, NATO, though renewing its sense of purpose as a result of the crisis, advanced Harmel's work in adapting the North Atlantic alliance to the realities of détente, while also bemoaning the fact that it could not prevent the Soviet Union from intervening in the Czech crisis. While flexible response worked in Europe, it failed in Southeast Asia. With no end in sight to the Vietnam war as a result of the Tet Offensive, the American people questioned not only the necessity of fighting this war but also the utility of continuing the post-1945 active engagement in international affairs. Consequently, Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not seek another term in office. NATO viewed these developments with alarm, although it did not lose faith in either the effectiveness of American strategic power or of the will of subsequent administrations to provide for the common defense of the North Atlantic area.

The Czech Crisis

The Soviet regime united NATO by surprising the international community with its invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The crisis had its roots the year before, 1967, when students, demonstrating at Prague University, protested the collapse of the Czech economy and

the continued repression forced upon it by the Communist government. By the spring of 1968, the protests had spread and, recognizing the peril, the Czech Communists responded by naming Alexander Dubcek, a committed Communist, as the new head of the government. Although Dubcek attempted to initiate reforms, he had no intention of pulling out of the Warsaw Pact, or, for that matter, of encroaching upon the hegemony of the Communist Party. By May, however, these reforms began to include such planks as more freedoms for the press. Calls for a multiparty system of government were now resonating throughout Czechoslovakia. Viewing this from Moscow, the Kremlin leadership concluded that Dubcek was losing control of the situation. As a result, they ordered the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

By June, American policymakers were closely following developments in Czechoslovakia, as Dubcek was continually initiating reforms which were escalating tensions between the Prague and Moscow governments. In a special memo initiated by the CIA's National Board of Estimates, the intelligence community advised that tensions seemed to have eased into a "temporary domestic equilibrium and, abroad, into an easy truce with Moscow." It further stated that Prague "seems. . . . to have been able to preserve the essential substance of its democratic experiment." The estimate noted, however, that "if quiescence has been restored to the relationship, it is by no means assured indefinitely."¹

When the invasion did come, Johnson was in the midst of preparing negotiations for limiting strategic arms with the Soviets, and, consequently, carrying détente a step further. John

¹ LBJ Library, Austin, Texas, NSF - Country File, Bd. of National Estimates, Special Memorandum "Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek Pause", June 13, 1968. Cynthia Grabo, a DIA analyst who played a direct role in monitoring the developments in Czechoslovakia recalled that by early February, a crisis was evident, and that there was no question that the Soviets were planning to take action by April. She maintained that the intelligence community failed to give policymakers adequate warnings of the threat. On July 31, the intelligence community reported that the largest build-up of Soviet ground forces since World War II was now at the Czech border. She

Leddy, who had replaced Tyler as the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, recalled the ways in which the Johnson administration, preparing for a Johnson-Kosygin summit in Moscow, first heard about it. He noted that Rusk “had a dinner, and my wife and I were invited. We went down there and Dobrynin and Mrs. Dobrynin came there As we were coming into dock about 10 o’clock the Secretary took me aside and told me that Dobrynin had agreed to have this summit meeting, and the agreement had been reached in the Soviet Union. So he asked me to think about what we should do about informing some of the other countries. I went back to the office and called the Secretary and told him I thought we’d better get word out to NATO at the foreign minister level very soon. Then we were working on how to handle it so that the timing was such that it wouldn’t leak. The date, time was set for the morning of August 21st, thrown into a cocked hat by this Soviet invasion.”² Adding to the fact that Johnson was caught off guard, Komer recalled the invasion by remarking that there was “nothing we could do about it.”³

From the Soviet side, Dobrynin recalled that the idea of suppressing the reformist regime through a military intervention was not one which was unanimously supported in the Kremlin. Recalling that Brezhnev did not have a “resolute” character, Dobrynin stated that even he had reservations about it on the eve of the military action. Although Kosygin held doubts, Dobrynin maintained that most of the other members of the Politburo as well as the Central Committee Secretariat held to a tougher line. The Soviet envoy in Washington also remarked that the Kremlin did not give him advance notice of the invasion. Once the invasion began, he believed that the action would spoil Soviet-American relations.⁴

recalled that the community made it clear that this was not an exercise. Interview with Cynthia Grabo, December 30, 1996.

² LBJ Library, Leddy Oral History, 18-19.

³ Komer interview.

⁴ Dobrynin, 179.

Dobrynin also recalled the ways in which he formally informed both Johnson and Rostow about the Soviet action, stating that he asked for an appointment with both the president and the National Security adviser on the evening of August 20. After reading the message from Moscow, which stated that there was “conspiracy of internal and external reaction against the social system” in Czechoslovakia, Dobrynin recollected that Johnson listened carefully, but, apparently, did not at first appreciate the significance of the news. Rostow, however, “sat with lowering face, trying not to interrupt the president.” In fact, though Johnson was upset by the news, he was still hoping that a summit was possible in Moscow.⁵

Needless to say, the invasion came as a surprise to both the U.S. and NATO. Commenting on the quality of intelligence produced on the eve of the Soviet invasion, Colby later recalled that accurate forecasting as far as troops were concerned was not feasible.⁶ Cynthia Grabo, a former DIA analyst, recalled that the Soviet intelligence services did not make a concerted effort to deceive the West about its intentions, especially since their disinformation capabilities were well recognized by the U.S. intelligence community. She interpreted this development by recalling that the Soviets may not have seen the need for this type of effort in these circumstances and that they “may have preferred not to release a flood of misleading reports,” which could have caused alarm in the West as well as raising suspicions that the Soviet buildup might have been directed at some nation other than Czechoslovakia. She also remarked that one of the most notable features of the entire Soviet military and political effort in the summer of 1968 was that it was so clearly directed at Czechoslovakia that there was no cause for any undue alarm in the West, despite the scale of the military buildup. She interpreted this by

⁵ Dobrynin, 180-181.

⁶ Colby interview, May 3, 1994.

noting that it appeared likely that this was a consequence of a deliberate decision by the Soviets “to keep the temperature in Europe as low as possible.”⁷

Although the Soviets crossed the Czech border with force, they soon realized that they could not easily compel the Czech people into submission, especially since they displayed a lack of cooperation soon after Soviet troops began their occupation. Predominant on policymakers’ minds during the crisis was the Soviet behavior on Berlin. They feared that Moscow would exploit the Czech action vis-à-vis Berlin. In a handwritten note to the president, Johnson was informed that the DIA had assessed that the rotation of troops between East Germany and Czechoslovakia “appeared imminent,” thus increasing Warsaw Pact forces in a probable attack on the city.⁸

Before the crisis escalated, the CIA reported in the aforementioned memo that recent East German moves affecting West German access to West Berlin could cause the Czechs “some considerable anxiety.” The memo concluded that another Berlin crisis could give the Soviets a pretext for insisting that their troops in Czechoslovakia remain there at least for the duration of this crisis. Soviet propaganda against West German “fascists and revanchists” would subsequently make it difficult for Prague to demand the removal of Warsaw Pact troops already in Czechoslovakia.⁹

As the discussion of the NSC meeting following the Soviet invasion showed, the event hampered the American bilateral relationship with the Soviets in many ways. However, no evidence appears that Ambassador Dobrynin was aware of the impending invasion. As Bohlen, now Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, asserted in his memoirs, “Dobrynin

⁷ Cynthia Grabo, “Soviet Deception in the Czechoslovak Crisis” in *Studies in Intelligence*, Spring 1970, 32.

⁸ LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, Handwritten Note from Gen. Ginsbury to the President, October 19, 1968.

⁹ Special Memo, “Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek Pause.”, 3.

himself had no foreknowledge of the invasion.” Like Leddy, Bohlen recalled Dobrynin’s presence on the *Honey Fitz*, while also recalling that he did not appear cognizant that a military intervention was about to occur.¹⁰ Not only was the Soviet decision to intervene received with amazement, but U.S. policymakers were also puzzled at the way the Soviets went about reaching a consensus on this decision. Bohlen added that the Kremlin made the decision to invade only on the day before troops were ordered to move. He recalled that, two days before the invasion, Kosygin sent Johnson a note which outlined the agreement to begin the strategic arms limitation (SALT) talks in Moscow. Bohlen commented that it was highly unlikely that Kosygin would have agreed to a summit meeting, knowing that Johnson would have canceled it as a protest to the invasion. As he put it, “I’m sure the Soviets were reluctant to invade Czechoslovakia. They were aware that their reputation would suffer and that Communist parties throughout the world would be placed in an awkward position.” He reasoned that the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia not only because Dubcek appeared “to preside over the liquidation of the Soviet system in Czechoslovakia,” but also because that system appeared to be losing its control over the entire East Bloc. Moreover, Bohlen held that the Kremlin was concerned about the effects which Dubcek’s reforms would have on East Germany, a state in which the Kremlin wanted to maintain its control.¹¹

NATO reactions to the way the Soviets responded to Dubcek’s “Prague Spring” were swift. The immediate concern, as expressed by the West German Permanent Representative to NATO, was that the Soviets might interfere in Romania as well. As a message from USNATO to the State Department stated, “. . . once the Soviets are this pregnant, they might decide to have

¹⁰ Bohlen, 530.

¹¹ Bohlen, 532.

twins.”¹² In a situation report issued by the State Department’s Czech Task Force, formed to coordinate this crisis, the Department stated that the Romanians were “strenuously” collecting intelligence on Soviet troop movements, especially in the border areas. Moreover, the Soviet ambassador in London advised another Soviet official to cancel a planned visit to Bucharest because of “great events there soon.” Yet, this situation report also noted that the Romanian ambassador in Washington was downplaying this tension.¹³

As was his American counterpart, de Gaulle was surprised at the rapid pace of developments in Prague. Alain de Boissieu, de Gaulle’s son-in-law, recalled that the French president was shocked at the fact that the Czechs offered no meaningful resistance to the Soviet army, especially since the East German police and the Hungarian army had tried to repel Soviet incursions into their respective territories. De Gaulle postulated that, under similar circumstances, the Yugoslavs, as well as the Poles, would have reacted in the same manner. De Boissieu recalled de Gaulle exclaiming, “What can you do for a nation that does not want to defend itself?” Etienne Burin des Rozières, one of de Gaulle’s closest colleagues at the Elysee later recollected that the Soviet invasion was “a very hard blow for him. His view of the future of Europe involved the re-establishment of our traditional relations with our friends in the East. He considered that détente provided the best hope of emancipation Obviously, the Prague affair smashed that hope.”¹⁴

¹² LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, USNATO to State, August 1968.

¹³ LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, State, Situation Report, August 24, 1968.

¹⁴ Lacouture, 473. In his analysis of de Gaulle’s reaction to the Czech crisis, Lacouture states that “the old gentleman faced that terrible catastrophe calmly and no one was less inclined than he to reveal the signs of any discouragement. But something was shattered in his great hope. Something was corrupted in the prospects that he held out so nobly to the East. Five years of effort to file down the Iron Curtain and so restore to the states of central Europe their role as link between East and West, their cultural duality, their political ambiguity, had come to nothing.” Lacouture, 473.

At NATO, Cleveland, remarked that the alliance was limited in its reaction to the Soviet invasion in that it could only enunciate political declarations outlining the obvious violation of Czech territorial integrity. He further added that although it was an East-West problem, NATO was primarily limited to political declarations. In NATO councils, allied delegations debated whether or not NATO should respond to an event that occurred outside the NATO defense perimeter. Raymond Garthoff, who was posted to USNATO during the crisis, recalled that the alliance did not expect Johnson to do more since the West was not bound to defend Czechoslovakia.¹⁵

The NSC, meeting in emergency session, convened on August 20 (shortly after the Soviet military action commenced) at the request of President Johnson. General Wheeler noted that the Soviets had moved Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia, and that these troops had originated from Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, as well as the Soviet Union. According to Johnson, Dobrynin informed him that the Soviets “were invading Czechoslovakia because the Czechs had asked them to come in.” As the president put it: “It is one country invading another Communist country. It is aggression. There is danger in aggression anywhere.” Immediately, however, the principals reached the consensus that not much could be done to help the Czechs. Rusk stated that “we do not know yet if the Czechs will raise a voice. There is not a great deal we can do if they don’t. We could support the Czechs in the United Nations and through USIA. If we do they can put pressure on the West, particularly Berlin.” The president moved that Rusk summon Dobrynin that evening. Speaking for the intelligence community, Richard Helms, the DCI, remarked that “it is not what has happened but what has not happened. They wanted to see if the Czechs would clamp down on the press. They did not.” Helms then concurred with Johnson’s suggestion that

¹⁵ Cleveland interview; Garthoff interview.

Rusk call in Dobrynin. Taking the long view, Clifford, who was now Secretary of Defense as a result of McNamara's resignation over Vietnam, remarked that "Czechoslovakia is just one piece on the chessboard. This march will have effects on Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary." Considering the recent strides in the U.S.-Soviet bilateral relationship, Johnson echoed the consensus of the NSC by labeling this provocation as a "bombshell". Clifford suggested that the Supreme Soviet may have been behind the intervention. Even if the U.S. could intervene militarily, General Wheeler remarked that the forces were not available to confront this particular military action. Vice President Humphrey advised that the U.S. should "show caution," further arguing that "the Czechs touched the heart of the Communist revolution. All you can do is snort and talk." In his memoirs, Clifford recalled that the U.S. could not do anything to help Dubcek except to issue "strong statements and protests" on the grounds that the Johnson administration did not want to repeat the Eisenhower administration's "tragic mistake" in 1956, when the CIA gave the Hungarian resistance "rhetorical encouragement which [the U.S. was] neither able nor willing to back up with more tangible support."¹⁶

As instructed, Rusk summoned Dobrynin to the State Department that evening. Dobrynin recalled that, on the whole, Rusk was "composed and calm," though it was clear to the Soviet diplomat that the Secretary's attitude toward the Soviet action "represented anything but approval," and that Rusk "would spare no effort to make President Johnson disapprove of it as strongly as he did." Three days later, in another meeting with the Secretary of State, Dobrynin recalled that Rusk stressed that he was not certain about the prospects for Soviet-American relations, stating that Johnson also had to consider the present public mood, which was unlikely to understand or accept presidential initiatives now in East-West relations. Rusk informed him that

¹⁶ LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, "Notes on Emergency Meeting of the National Security Council", August 20,

for the present, "there was nothing the president and the American government could do but to sit back and hope things would go better," a fact which left "little time for accomplishment in the remaining months of the Johnson administration."¹⁷

U.S. Defense Attaché Offices (USDAO) in Europe continuously monitored Soviet troop movements. USDAO Belgrade reported that the Soviets were not putting new troops in the region.¹⁸

The consequences of this invasion, in hindsight, were not surprising. Clifford recalled that it seriously damaged U.S.-Soviet relations. He also remarked that there was now little chance that U.S. troop levels in Europe would decrease.¹⁹ The Soviet action certainly did not do anything to endear Tito's regime in Yugoslavia to the Soviets. In fact, it encouraged him to move further away from the Soviet orbit. The State Department advised that Yugoslavia would continue its independent policies despite Soviet disapproval and possible sanctions. State held that Yugoslavia would trade entirely with the West if the Soviet bloc severed trade relations as a result of Tito's condemnation of the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia."²⁰

In its assessment of the post-invasion state of affairs in Czechoslovakia, a CIA intelligence information cable reported that the optimism which prevailed after Dubcek's first return from Moscow now had changed to "a hard realistic resignation and pessimism." It reported that Soviet psychological pressure had been partially successful as the unity of the Czech leadership had now weakened. Moreover, the Czech people appeared apathetic to some of the Czech leaders and policies. CIA believed that this trend could pave the way for the establishment of a new pro-

1968. Clifford, 561.

¹⁷ Dobrynin, 181-182.

¹⁸ LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, State, Sit. Rep., September 4, 1968.

¹⁹ LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, State, Sit. Rep., September 11, 1968.

²⁰ LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, State, Sit. Rep., September 15, 1968.

Soviet government. Apparently, this report confirmed the perception that the Soviets were successful at intimidating the Czech people, though the cable also added that, other than sanitation supplies, the Czechs had not aided the Soviets in their efforts to supply their occupation troops with the exception of sanitation supplies. Commenting on the Czech state-of-play in foreign policy, the cable also remarked that even though Czech foreign policy was now strongly controlled by the Soviets, Dubcek's economic reforms continued, although at a markedly reduced rate. Nevertheless, the Soviets had replaced press freedom, which was a reality during the Prague spring, with a stringent censorship.²¹

Shortly thereafter, State reported in a cable that a large delegation of Czechs were in Moscow working out the details regarding the stationing of Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia.²² Four days later, the American embassy in Prague reported that Kosygin, accompanied by Gromyko, arrived in Prague to sign a new treaty.²³

On August 27, the U.S. embassy in Bonn reported that Keisinger requested a NATO summit meeting to deal with the crisis. Though the embassy was cool to the idea, it did note that the opinion of the political leadership throughout Europe was unsteady, thus highlighting the need for leadership and direction in the crisis. Even though the Czech crisis was disrupting détente, the embassy reported that it was, in fact, strengthening NATO by noting that the lack of effective political leadership in Western Europe again provided the U.S. the opportunity to fill that leadership void. It observed that the Western Europeans now favored the U.S. goal of European integration within the context of a strong NATO alliance.²⁴

²¹ LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, Intel. Info. Cable, October 11, 1968.

²² LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, State, Cable, October 12, 1968.

²³ LBJ Library, NSF - Country File, State, Cable, October 11, 1968.

²⁴ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - West Germany, Box 189, Emb. Bonn Cable to State, August 27, 1968., 1-2.

Along with the embassy in Bonn, Rusk analyzed the ways NATO had justified its existence as a result of the Czech crisis. From NATO, the Secretary relayed to Washington his views in a paper titled "Strengthening NATO in the Wake of the Czech Crisis." Rusk recommended that NATO maintain an interim freeze on NATO forces as well as laying the groundwork for establishing a floor under force levels for the longer term. At the same time, he wanted the other NATO states to make greater provisions for their own defense, such as improving their reserves, equipment and mobilization capabilities. Rusk also wanted to redeploy those U.S. forces which had previously been withdrawn to participate in exercises with their NATO counterparts. Not only was the Secretary advocating greater participation by the allies in providing for the common defense, but he also advocated a reorientation of the U.S. commitment to Europe by calling for the return of U.S. troops to the NATO area. Furthermore, he reinforced the validity of flexible response as a viable strategy option by stating that the aim would be to seek "allied reaffirmation of the validity of the flexible response concept . . . with agreement to reexamine the direction of political warning time . . ." ²⁵

Although the Czech crisis reinvigorated NATO as well as the U.S. commitment to defending Europe with a flexible response strategy, a State paper commented on the ways in which the Soviet invasion affected détente, remarking that the invasion "provided a cold douche for the future of détente, or the progressive rapprochement of East and West." It noted that the stationing of Warsaw Pact forces in Czechoslovakia as well as the continuing occupation of the country had compelled the alliance to reexamine its policy objectives as stated in the Harmel Report. State observed that NATO must now reexamine its entire force posture and dispositions as a result of what the Czech showed about Soviet and Warsaw Pact operations and capabilities,

²⁵ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 741-743.

as well as the fact that Soviet forces would probably be stationed on Czechoslovakia's western frontier for an indefinite period. Even so, State fortunately commented that NATO would not fundamentally alter its new flexible response strategy, though "certain aspects . . . will have to be reexamined." The Department elaborated upon this point by recalling that the doctrine envisaged that, prior to an overt Warsaw Pact action against NATO, there would be a period of "heightened tension and warning," which would permit the alliance to take necessary reinforcement measures.²⁶

Within the 590th meeting of the NSC on September 4, Rusk reported on State's findings regarding the crisis's effect on détente by informing his colleagues on the council that the Soviet action had seriously affected détente. He stated that "NATO members must consult with each other and be seen consulting." After Johnson noted the recent congressional action of troop cuts in Europe, Rusk asserted that "the country will now have to debate again the amount of its resources which it is willing to commit to keeping peace in the world. There is some isolationism in the United States. As NATO warned at the last meeting . . . fears of the Soviet leaders as they face a changing world would create a dangerous attitude in Moscow." Cleveland, who flew in from Brussels, reported to the council that the Europeans viewed the Czech invasion as a momentous event. He elaborated upon the crisis's effects on détente by observing that "in recent years NATO had followed a two-pillar policy. One pillar was the defense of Western Europe and the other was détente, including the concept of a mutual reduction of NATO-Warsaw Pact forces." He argued that this "détente pillar" had made it possible for political groups in Western Europe to support NATO. However, there was now uncertainty "about what NATO now sees . . . There are proposals to hold a high level meeting consisting of foreign ministers plus defense

²⁶ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 744-749.

ministers Some members favor a review of NATO strategy. Another proposal is to find a way, without amending the treaty, to give members assurance that NATO's life will go beyond the treaty fate of 1969." Clifford then observed that there were two views as to whether or not the Soviet intervention into Czechoslovakia had increased the threat to NATO. The first view held that the actual threat to the alliance was actually less than before the Czech crisis because Soviet divisions were now farther away and because Romanian and Czech troops were no longer available to the Warsaw Pact. The other view, however, held that the threat had increased because Warsaw Pact forces were now more powerful as a result of the partial mobilization prior to the invasion and as a result of the fact that they were now on a higher readiness level. Clifford believed that the threat to NATO had increased and that, consequently, the U.S. should prompt its allies to improve the quality of their forces and mobilization potential. Recalling the previous problem concerning the offset, Clifford stated that even though the U.S. was "pushing hard" on the West Germans to increase their defense budgets as well as to address the offsets and other balance of payment problems, the administration should request more from NATO members, especially since it was not likely that the French would rejoin the NATO military effort. The NSC also noted that, fortunately, Mansfield was no longer calling for major troops cuts in Europe. General Wheeler highlighted the fact that détente was definitely at a standstill since the threat to NATO was greater now than prior to the Czech crisis, noting that the Kremlin had now deployed more Soviet troops throughout the East Bloc. As he put it, "The Soviets are on the alert and will stay on the alert."²⁷ The principals clearly understood the implications of this crisis for NATO. Even though critics such as Mansfield no longer called for more troops cuts, the Soviet action limited their options in promoting détente.

²⁷ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 749-754.

Johnson further commented on the ways the Czech crisis influenced the debate on troop levels in Europe by noting later in the month that “. . . before Czechoslovakia, support for troop reductions was so strong that as a compromise it might have been necessary to schedule reductions of 50,000 to 100,000 men The Russians were trying to catch [the U.S.] off guard before our elections.” With congressional criticism of the U.S. role in Europe now silenced with the Soviet action, his administration could now refocus attention to Europe’s security, especially since efforts were now being made to extricate the U.S. from the quagmire of Vietnam as a result of the Tet offensive.²⁸

From Europe, Kiesinger echoed the administration sentiment that the Soviet action advanced NATO’s case for the defense of Europe as well as its role in détente by informing the U.S. government that while he had been concerned “with the slow erosion of NATO over the past few years,” he, nonetheless, “agreed that the events in Czechoslovakia provide a new opportunity for revitalization,” and that “whatever NATO does should not be dramatic, but measured and considered.” Furthermore, he felt that “a stronger and united NATO” would affect the East Bloc in that the Soviets would negotiate “differently and more responsibly” while the other Eastern European countries would “be heartened” by developments within NATO. However, he admonished the U.S. government “to exercise at least full co-leadership in the process of developing a proper NATO reaction.”²⁹

In October, Brosio summed up the effects of the Czech crisis on NATO by noting that, notwithstanding the Soviet provocation, the alliance was still prepared to engage in the dialogue of détente. He remarked that the alliance endeavored to continue its dialogue with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, “but with discretion and moderation so as not to appear in any way

²⁸ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 756-759.

to condone Soviet aggression” Luns interpreted these events, remarking that the Czechoslovakian intervention had caused the Soviets to embark on a new policy, in which military and political considerations took precedence over ideological ones. Significantly, he questioned whether or not the North Atlantic alliance had or was entering into “a period of preparation” for conflict. If so, he stated that “all we have been talking about here is insignificant. If we are entering such a period, we must have discussion with the U.S. regarding its nuclear intentions for the defense of Europe.”³⁰ Clearly, the Soviet action still addressed the need for the United State to continue its active engagement in Europe. Not only did Luns stress this point, but he even went further by mistakenly imploring the U.S. government to discard flexible response and return to the policy of relying exclusively on the American nuclear arsenal to deter the Soviet Union.

Besides joining the clarion call for maintaining a viable military presence in Europe, the Joint Chiefs, in analyzing the effects of the Soviet action, argued that the \$50 million U.S. effort to strengthen its NATO posture was inadequate, even though the U.S. had used considerable pressure in urging the allies to expand their defense capabilities. Although most of them had declared firm intentions to do so, the NATO allies, nonetheless, questioned how the U.S. would carry out its planned U.S. reductions in Europe while concurrently increasing its contribution to NATO. As a result, JCS recommended that, for political as well as military reasons, the U.S. should impose a moratorium on force level reductions and other programs which adversely affected the U.S. security guarantee to NATO.³¹

Regarding the ways that the crisis affected de Gaulle’s views of NATO, a DI intelligence memo stated in October that even though de Gaulle’s initial response to the Soviet invasion was

²⁹ LBJ Library, Country File -West Germany, Box 190, Emb Bonn to State, September 18, 1968, 1-5.

³⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 772.

³¹ LBJ Library, Clifford Papers. Box 7, Memo for the Secretary of Defense, October 8, 1968, 1-3.

“business as usual,” recent evidence suggested that the French president was reappraising his policies to ensure that France continued to play a dominant role in Europe. Even though it was apparent that the French general still entertained grand designs for France in a Europe that supposedly orbited around him alone, as if the message was not reinforced in his eviction episode, the intelligence memo stated that the Soviet action was a serious setback for de Gaulle. The intelligence memo noted that the French president had hoped to prevent the crisis from bringing the West Germans more closely “into the arms of the U.S. and forcing Bonn to assert its own interest more actively at France’s expense de Gaulle not only failed to offer the unambiguous pledge of military support so desired by Keisinger, but he also infuriated the German chancellor by suggesting that German policy might have been a factor in provoking the Soviet invasion.” DI interpreted these counterproductive moves, commenting that they evolved from de Gaulle’s uncertainty about which position to take in the new situation brought about by the Czech crisis, as well as his concern about the best means to preserve his dominant role in Eastern Europe.³² An INR memo, written for Rusk the following month, reinforced DI’s assessment, stating that the Soviet action seriously affected de Gaulle’s foreign policy, though the assessment also concluded that “despite the blow dealt to French foreign policy by the invasion of Czechoslovakia,” de Gaulle was not likely to alter his foreign policy.³³ A December 10 INR memo further analyzed the effects of the crisis upon de Gaulle by observing that France stood to lose more than any other NATO state.³⁴

³² LBJ Library, Country File- France, Boxes 174-176, CIA DI Intelligence Memorandum: French Foreign Policy In the Wake of the Czechoslovak Crisis, 1-8. Shortly after the invasion took place, de Gaulle’s government issued a public statement which stated that France deplored the Prague events in that they not only constituted an infringement “of the rights and destiny of a friendly nation, but are of a nature to undermine détente in Europe, which she herself practices and urges others to do so, and which alone can ensure peace.” Lacouture, 472.

³³ LBJ Library, Country File - France, 174,175,176, November 27, 1968, 1-2.

³⁴ LBJ Library, Country File - France, Boxes 174-176, INR Research Memorandum, December 20, 1968, i-iv.

Bohlen recalled that although de Gaulle never admitted it, the invasion, nonetheless, shocked him. Bohlen commented that “his immediate reaction was to fall back on one of his classic formulas, blaming the Yalta Conference for giving the Soviet Union a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe Despite de Gaulle’s hackneyed response, the invasion caused him to revise some of his estimates and possibly to rethink his foreign policy. Russia was not reverting as rapidly as he had thought it would to the style of a great power, it was following ideology.”³⁵

In an October meeting with Kiesinger, Clifford noted that even though the need was seen for the U.S. to stay engaged in Europe as a result of the crisis, American criticism persisted on the grounds that “some of the NATO countries are not doing their share,” especially since states such as Belgium and Canada were discussing troop reductions.³⁶ In a White House meeting, also occurring on the same day, President Johnson expressed to Stewart his concern about the possibility of isolationism in the U.S. and the effects that such would have on U.S. troop levels in Europe, admonishing the British foreign secretary that “British withdrawals haven’t helped It was necessary now to use that time well. Our people have gotten the impression that others are not pulling their share of the load.” Johnson agreed that the crisis renewed the call for the U.S. to continue its strong presence in NATO’s military structure, informing Stewart that the U.S. would “stay in Europe indefinitely if others showed they were helping,” to which Stewart agreed, remarking that the British wanted to strengthen NATO.³⁷ Although congressional critics were silenced as a result of the Soviet invasion, the Johnson administration, like other administrations during the Cold War period, still availed itself of the necessity of garnering popular support for staying engaged in Europe.

³⁵ Bohlen, 533.

³⁶ LBJ Library, Clifford Papers, Box 7, Mem Con, October 11, 1968, 1- 3.

³⁷ LBJ Library, NSF, Country File - UK, Box 212, MemCon, October 11, 1968, 1-4.

In November, the intelligence community provided a further assessment of the crisis's effect upon NATO, noting that whatever the initial reaction to the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia, none of the allies seemed willing to set aside their frugal attitude toward defense spending or "to rush to the support of the 'flexible response' strategy," on which the argument for increased conventional forces had been based. The intelligence community analyzed allied views on flexible response, stating that even though it was officially adopted by NATO, the Soviet action had compelled the allies to continue to view the strategy "as a prelude to U.S. nuclear disengagement." Because of the rapid airlift of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia, the allies believed that it was no longer certain that NATO would have sufficient lead time to rotate back into Europe the U.S. and British forces earmarked for allied defense. As a result, these states no longer sensed the urgency to add further resources to NATO's conventional forces since, in the likelihood of a Soviet attack, such forces would be quickly superseded by a resort to nuclear weapons. Thus, the intelligence community took into account that while NATO as a whole accepted the strategy, individual governments, such as the one represented by Luns, continued to view the U.S. nuclear arsenal as the surest guarantee for their security. Even so, the allies were "once again talking seriously about strengthening the organization . . . the shock of the Czechoslovak tragedy had galvanized new interest and support for the alliance although not to the degree that some of the allies would prefer." More importantly, the intelligence community concluded that the Czech crisis promoted alliance solidarity in that for the first time since the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, all fifteen NATO allies seemed "equally sensitive" to the Soviet threat. As a result of this renewed threat from the Kremlin, member states now had the necessary arguments to justify new defense commitments to their parliaments and citizens. Significantly, the intelligence report highlighted the continued allied appreciation for the U.S.

defense effort in Europe, remarking that the allies now appreciated the fact that they, nonetheless, had to accept the fact that even though the U.S. government was willing to provide forces for NATO defenses, such support was dependent upon U.S. public opinion, particularly in the way it was manifested in the U.S. Congress. As a result, the assessment noted that the British wanted to create a European defense grouping in NATO as a way of offsetting any U.S. troop cuts in the future. Even so, the allies appreciated the fact that the U.S. wanted to be relieved of some of its defense burdens within NATO.³⁸

Assessing the way détente affected the Czech crisis, a State position paper, prepared for NATO's fall ministerial meeting that November, stated that the allies were still committed to continuing the dialogue with the East Bloc and while they still wanted both superpowers to commit their nuclear weapons to arms control, they were, nonetheless, "seriously concerned about the psychological and political effects of any early talks in view of the post-Czech situation."³⁹

In summarizing the deliberations of this ministerial meeting, which met a month earlier than usual, "to underscore by word and deed their reaction to the Soviet aggression," Rusk reported that the NATO allies agreed to increase their defense expenditures, thus aiding the Johnson administration's effort at convincing the American people of the necessity of remaining in Europe. The Secretary reported that most of the allies now pledged to spend more money to improve their military forces. Significantly, Rusk noted that the trend in reduction of military spending was stemmed, and, hopefully, reversed as well.⁴⁰

³⁸ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 778-780.

³⁹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 782-786.

⁴⁰ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 790-792.

In a bilateral meeting with Fritz Hellwig (the acting president of the EEC) held in Brussels along the periphery of the deliberations within the North Atlantic Council, the Secretary of State further elaborated upon the importance of maintaining a viable U.S. military presence in Europe, remarking that “in NATO, one asks how NATO can be strengthened after Czechoslovakia; what the Europeans decide to do will largely dictate what the U.S. does. Europe is in the presence of a miracle that it may not understand.” Rusk explained this “miracle” by remarking that although the U.S. had 650,000 troops in Southeast Asia, it, nonetheless, continued to maintain its forces in Europe. Commenting on congressional pressures to further reduce the U.S. presence in Europe, Rusk stressed the importance of managing an alliance wherever everyone pulled “his own weight . . .” Highlighting the domestic opposition to maintaining the U.S. troop commitment in Europe, Rusk further observed that if the Mansfield resolution had been voted by the Senate in June, prior to the action in Czechoslovakia, it would have received a majority vote. As Rusk put it, “The Soviets saved us; this pressure has been postponed but probably not indefinitely.”⁴¹

Reporting on the Soviet reaction to this development at this NATO convocation, another INR research memorandum, stated that the Soviets had assessed that while the new attitude towards defense spending was an “undesirable development,” the Kremlin, nonetheless, aimed at reversing this trend within the NATO states by employing overt, as well as covert, propaganda.⁴²

Although the Czech crisis fortified NATO’s solidarity, it evidently detained détente. Glenn Seaborg, who was instrumental not only in the implementation of the Limited Test Ban Treaty but also in other facets of nuclear arms control and disarmament throughout the 1960s,

⁴¹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 787-790. In a December 2 meeting with the Italian ministry of defense to discuss the effects of the Czech crisis, Clifford and Nitze noted that it “had at least temporarily strengthened the hand of those desisting to maintain strong presence in Europe. However, the opponents had ‘merely gone underground.’ The presence for reduction would return, with perhaps even greater force, after the new Congress convenes and as the Czech crisis recedes.” LBJ Library, Clifford Papers, Box 7, MemCon, December 9, 1968, 1-4.

echoed the sentiment that the Czech invasion affected Johnson in that he was eager to move forward with SALT, going so far as to say that he was prepared to sign the preliminary treaty.⁴³ Such would not be the case, however, until the reemergence of détente during the Nixon administration's overture to China in 1972. Had Johnson been successful in negotiating this agreement, this accomplishment could have improved the Democrats' prospects for retaining control of the White House after 1968. Détente and the drawdown in Vietnam were already "works-in-progress" by the time Richard Nixon assumed the presidency in January 1969.

The Kremlin needlessly impeded détente by proceeding with this action. After all, the intelligence community had concluded that by June 1968 the Dubcek regime had taken steps to satisfy the Soviets, such as reaffirming their military commitment to the Warsaw Pact, pronouncing the preeminence of the Communist Party in national life, and by even discouraging anti-Soviet statements in the media (a questionable action, considering the fact that Dubcek was supposedly a reformist).⁴⁴ For the long term effect on the Soviets, the invasion propelled the Kremlin leadership to formally articulate the Soviet policy of armed aggression in defense of communism. Leonid Brezhnev, the First Secretary of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, issued what the media soon called the Brezhnev Doctrine. This "doctrine" stated that the Soviet Union would use force to preserve and protect the Soviet structure wherever it was installed.⁴⁵

⁴² *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 793-794.

⁴³ Interview with Glenn Seaborg, May 9, 1994.

⁴⁴ Special Memo, "Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek Pause", 4-5.

⁴⁵ Kaplan comments that "the Czech crisis of 1968 was carefully identified by the Soviet Union as a problem of the Warsaw bloc and not a reason for conflict between NATO and the Warsaw countries." Kaplan, "NATO and the Johnson Years", in Divine, ed., 120. In his discussion on the ways the Soviet action impeded détente, Anton W. de Porte comments that "the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia and the proclamation of the Brezhnev Doctrine signified that the Soviet Union was not ready to allow its bloc to unravel, whatever France or others did in and to the Western bloc. If there was to be relaxation of tension, it would have to be developed, at least in the beginning, not by trying to overcome the two-bloc system in Europe but by accepting and even reaffirming it, because the Soviet Union, without which nothing could be done, would not take part unless the process and the outcome were

Brandt echoed the view that the provocation into Czechoslovakia was an internal Warsaw Pact matter. Dobrynin agreed with this assessment, observing that the Soviet action “cost us dearly both politically and morally.” Not only did the mood of the Czechoslovak public turn “abruptly against us,” but Dobrynin also conceded that “a wave of protest swept the world” and that within the Soviet Union itself, dissidents emerged in public for the first time to demonstrate their opposition to the government. Although he discounted the Brezhnev doctrine by remarking that “no such policy had ever been proclaimed or in fact even mentioned at Politburo meetings in Moscow,” he, nevertheless, conceded that “the determination never to permit a socialist country to slip back into the orbit of the West was in essence a true reflection of the sentiments of those who ran the Soviet Union.” Significantly, Dobrynin mentioned in his memoirs that the Kremlin leadership took account of the fact that NATO was not prepared to defend the territory of a non-NATO member. As Dobrynin put it, “this weighed in the balance in the Kremlin when it decided on a new invasion, in Afghanistan, slightly more than a decade later.”⁴⁶ Unfortunately, Gromyko did not share Dobrynin’s enlightened view of the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia., even when those events were no longer current. Writing his memoirs shortly after Mikhail Gorbachev’s Glasnost forced him from the Soviet foreign ministry, Gromyko still maintained that the Soviet Union was merely helping the Czech people, writing that “requests to the Soviet Union for help were transmitted to the capitals of the other socialist countries in order to block the path of the

consonant with the consolidation and re-recognition by the allies of its bloc.” Anton W. de Porte, “NATO and Détente: Cycles in History” in Kaplan, et al, *NATO after Forty Years*, 189.

⁴⁶ Dobrynin, 184. In his essay on Rusk in *The Diplomats*, Francis L. Loewenheim agrees that the “brutal” Moscow-directed action put a sudden end to what Johnson and Rusk had hoped would be another significant step in the improvement of East-West relations. In fact, Loewenheim notes that Johnson was looking forward to traveling to Moscow before the elections to negotiate the SALT treaty, though as he comments, “With hundreds of Soviet tanks rumbling in the streets of Prague, such a trip was obviously out of the question. To the president’s and the secretary’s deep disappointment, it remained for the next administration to see what it could accomplish in the vital field of arms control.” Francis L. Loewenheim, “Dean Rusk: Diplomacy of Principle” in Craig and Loewenheim, *The Diplomats*, 522-523.

counter-revolution,” even stating that “the fraternal countries gave immediate and effective support.” Gromyko went so far as to declare that “once events had been channeled in the desired direction and the collapse of the counter-revolution was an established fact, it was necessary to strengthen the country’s internal forces. The people expected nothing less.” He closed his analysis of the Soviet action by asserting that “Czechoslovakia and her people found the assurance that their country would continue along the sure path of socialist construction and firm friendship with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries.”⁴⁷

Looking back, Bohlen recalled that “we had learned from the Eisenhower-Dulles experience in 1956, during the Hungarian revolution, that it would be a mistake for the United States to give any indication that it was going to do something to throw back the invaders. Our bluff would have been called.” Because the U.S. was concerned that such moves would have further impeded Dubcek, Bohlen argued that Johnson’s response had to be low-key. As he put it, “We did not want the United States to be shown up as impotent to deal with the situation. Nor did we want any actions to be seized on as proof that the United States was instigating the Czech reform movement. The Czechs realized that public support by Washington would hurt them, and indicated privately to us that they appreciated our policy of saying nothing.”⁴⁸

From Bonn, Brandt recalled that “gritting my teeth, I clung to the realization that we had, even now, to maintain a course at reducing tension – partly, if it ever became possible, in order to prevent tragedies like the one in Prague,” a view which Kiesinger also shared. He drew the conclusion that the Czech crisis “had to be seen as a tragic hiatus but not a historic turning-point in the relations between East and West.” Commenting on the ways which this crisis affected détente, he also wrote that “a renewed hardening of bloc alignments could not be ruled out, but

⁴⁷ Gromyko, 232-233.

we should not accept this as the end of our *Ostpolitik*. Most of our Czech friends thought we were right.”⁴⁹

Although the Soviets restrained détente, the Czech crisis united NATO by giving the North Atlantic alliance yet another *raison d'être*.⁵⁰ Even with this setback, the Johnson administration provided leadership among the allies by continuing the call for détente, with de Gaulle still trying to replace the United States in that role. Although they willingly subscribed to U.S. leadership by committing to increase their share of the allied defense burden, the NATO allies, while accepting flexible response, still viewed the American nuclear arsenal as providing the surest guarantee for their security. Within the United States, the events in Czechoslovakia convinced critics of the necessity of staying in Europe, though the war in Vietnam highlighted the fact that the United States was clearly overextending itself in international affairs.

The Peak of the U.S. Effort in Vietnam and Its Effect on NATO Policy

Tet, the new offensive which began at the start of the Vietnamese new year, affected not only Johnson's NATO policy, but his presidency as well, by highlighting the problem associated with fighting a war in Southeast Asia while also deterring another one in Europe. Needless to say, Tet drew attention away from European matters. The NATO allies interpreted this offensive as yet another potential escalation of the U.S. effort in a war that was now viewed on both sides of the Atlantic as hopeless. Tet further highlighted the problem with flexible response in Vietnam.

⁴⁸ Bohlen, 532.

⁴⁹ Brandt, *People and Politics*, 217-218.

⁵⁰ Brands also comments that “more persuasively than anything Johnson could have said, Brezhnev's statement and actions argued the continued need for NATO.” He also states that “no one expected Soviet armor to continue

Having lost the political will to continue in office, Lyndon Johnson succinctly announced in March that he would not seek another term in office, even though his administration still viewed a need for fighting this useless war. With the American public calling for an end to the war in Vietnam, the NATO governments hoped that, at last, America's focus would return to the North Atlantic area.

Although it was now clear that the United States could not win this war, U.S. policymakers still insisted that there was no way out. Although Rusk admitted that serious problems existed in this position, Rusk informed former Chancellor Erhard, who was visiting Washington in March that "it was not a question whether Europeans supported the U.S. or the U.S. supported Europe. It was more important for Europeans to ask themselves what kind of Asia did they want to live with. What kind of Southeast Asia was desired by Europe? Did Europeans look without apprehension at a militant brand of communism in Asia which had sent 40,000 guerrillas to Laos, penetrated Thailand, entered Cambodia and sent agents to Burma?"⁵¹

The next day, Cleveland, who was in Washington for consultations over NATO on Capitol Hill, reported to the president that congressional frustration over Vietnam was widespread. Unfortunately, Cleveland committed the fallacy, so prevalent among policymakers during this period, of interpreting both the Vietnam war as well as the NATO events in Europe as being "necessary parts of a global strategy to keep the peace."⁵²

Meeting with Raymond Bare, the Vice President of the Commission of the European Communities, later in June, Rusk discussed the way ahead for the Vietnam situation by stating that "much will depend on how the conflict in Vietnam will be settled. Many Europeans ask the

rolling from Czechoslovakia into western Europe. but the danger of additional military action by the Soviets could not be dismissed." Brands, 119.

⁵¹ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 681.

wrong question," he said. "They ask whether they should support the U.S. in Vietnam. It is easy to say that the U.S. is big and stupid, but no matter what happens U.S. power will insulate Europe from South East Asia." He remarked, however, that the Europeans should be asking two other questions, those queries being 1) what sort of Asia was in Europe's self-interest?, and 2) "what is the interest of Europe in the fidelity of the United States to its security commitments?" On the latter question, Rusk held that for the U.S. to settle the Vietnam war in terms "which would signify abandonment would be tragic for Europe" because the U.S. would consequently revert to isolationism. Evidently, Rusk still saw the war as being necessary for trans-Atlantic security. After Rusk emphasized that the U.S. defeated Japan without either much assistance or help from Europe, he reiterated U.S. concerns for the way the outcome of the war would affect its relations with allies throughout the region, as well as how states such as North Korea and China would view the action. Even with these ringing justifications for continuing the war, Rusk was, nonetheless, uncertain about the chances for a settlement.⁵³

Regarding the ways the NATO allies viewed this protracted conflict, now that Tet clearly showed that the war was not winnable, Ambassador McGhee recalled that the war "hurt us with the students, but it didn't hurt us with the great majority of Germans. The Germans never really understood the issue very clearly. They'd had no real experience in that part of the world. They mainly regretted us having gotten involved in that it might force us to decrease our interest in European defense. They thought it was hurting us, and they regretted that. They wished we'd just get it over with. They wouldn't have cared too much how we did it."⁵⁴ Cleveland recalled that NATO allies viewed the U.S. as in a quagmire, and that once in, it was impossible to get

⁵² *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 682-683.

⁵³ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 701-702.

⁵⁴ LBJ Library, George McGhee Oral History, 18-19.

out.⁵⁵ Nitze asserted that the NATO allies believed that U.S. policy was misguided.⁵⁶ Rusk still maintained that, notwithstanding de Gaulle's objections, the other NATO allies supported the U.S. policy in Vietnam.⁵⁷ Goodpaster recalled, however, that NATO allies such as Britain and West Germany gave mixed signals. He stated that they went along with the U.S. policy, but refrained from saying so publicly since public support was not forthcoming. He believed that the European media, much like the American media, was strongly critical. Bator pointed out that the British in particular thought that the U.S. had overextended its power in Southeast Asia.⁵⁸ Because the allies were dependent upon the U.S. commitment to defend the NATO area, Yarmolinsky recalled that they restrained their criticism of the U.S. role, with Schlesinger adding that these allies wished the U.S. had heeded the repeated warnings which de Gaulle gave to the U.S. government.⁵⁹ McDermott recalled that the allies never wanted the U.S. to continue its involvement since France had also experienced problems in the previous decade.⁶⁰

Regarding the ways which the Vietnam war affected the U.S. troop commitment in Europe, McCloy believed that the U.S. paid a huge price in being overly involved with Europe. He recalled that "I thought that we took Europe a little too much for granted. Maybe it was because of our preoccupation with Asia and Vietnam. I remember using the expression that 'after all, Europe was the Big League.' But this wasn't directly certainly solely against Mr. Johnson. I had the feeling that the State Department took the European scene a little too much for granted and that if they had been a little more prescient in terms of what was developing in France as well as in Germany we might have been able to avoid the difficulties that we got into in the abrupt

⁵⁵ Cleveland interview.

⁵⁶ Interview with Paul Nitze, April 28, 1994.

⁵⁷ Rusk interview.

⁵⁸ Bator interview.

⁵⁹ Yarmolinsky interview; Schlesinger interview.

withdrawal of France from NATO.” McCloy conceded, however, that “maybe that’s not a sound judgment, but I just felt that that area needed closer attention than it was getting from the administration. I think I was probably more critical of the Secretary of State in that respect than I was of Mr. Johnson.”⁶¹ However, McGhee also recalled that Vietnam did not distract the administration from conducting European affairs by remarking that “we kept our forces there, except for this 35,000. We were very active in NATO. We had more ideas than anybody about improving NATO.”⁶²

Although the events surrounding the Tet offensive drew attention away from Europe at a time when the NATO allies wanted the United States to remain engaged in the North Atlantic, the Johnson administration still insisted upon the necessity of fighting the troublesome Southeast Asian war, even though the events surrounding Tet demonstrated that the U.S. was not winning. If anything, the Tet offensive confirmed the fact that flexible response was not working in Indochina. Like the previous Cold War presidents, Johnson blindly insisted on the necessity of fighting communism on all fronts, even on fronts beyond the periphery of the national security interest. Unfortunately, his successor committed the same fallacy.

Détente

The year 1968 marked a turning point in détente in the sense that while the NATO allies were committed to this development, events such as the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia detained any further progress until the early 1970s, when Nixon replaced Johnson in promoting

⁶⁰ McDermott interview.

⁶¹ LBJ Library, John J. McCloy Oral History, 17.

this relaxation of tension. Although the United States now replaced West Germany in advancing the concept by promoting such initiatives as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) the Johnson administration's preoccupation with the Vietnam war demonstrated that no full implementation of this concept was possible until the U.S extricated itself from the Vietnam conflict.

At the June NATO ministerial meeting in Reykjavik, NATO enacted the last action on Harmel's study by adopting a resolution calling upon the Soviets to engage in mutual force reductions.⁶³ Later that month, a State Intelligence Note outlined the new détente goal which the NATO ministers had adopted at Reykjavik. However, it also noted that the allies were still concerned about the Soviet's "rigid posture" toward the West. As a result, they adopted a cautious negotiating approach towards the Soviet Union by publicly reaffirming the alliance's commitment "to continue efforts to promote détente, while warning that opportunities for rapid progress should not be overrated," as well as by continuing "the examination and review of European security problems and to prepare for the time when "fruitful discussions" of these questions might be possible with the East, as originally called for in the Harmel Report."⁶⁴ Although NATO was calling for these force reductions, it clearly wanted to follow the lead of the United States in monitoring developments in the Soviet Union before making any further commitments.

In July 1968, the U.S. and the Soviet Union signed the NPT, thus advancing détente a step further. The press, particularly that in West Germany, criticized the Johnson administration for not keeping NATO fully informed when the U.S. signed with the Soviets. McGhee responded to this charge by explaining that "there was nothing really to discuss until the Russians indicated that

⁶² LBJ Library, McGhee Oral History, 19.

⁶³ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol. XIII, 719.

⁶⁴ *FRUS 1964-1968*, Vol XIII, 722.

we were willing to make new concessions, which they hadn't previously. As soon as the Russians gave this indication, then we did talk with our allies."⁶⁵ However, Leddy recalled that "we did not handle that consultation with NATO too well. When we opened the whole thing up to consultation, we were more or less saying, 'We and the Soviets are in effect agreed on this thing; we don't know how we could change it; and we know they won't agree.' The NATO countries didn't like that. But apart from that very first - the very first two clauses, on all of the resort of the negotiations, on all the other clauses, in detail we consulted NATO like mad, as well as bilaterally with the Germans."⁶⁶ With the NPT, both the Soviets and the Americans committed not to proliferate weapons of mass destruction (WMD) throughout the world.

Although the events in Czechoslovakia prevented any significant progress in détente, the U.S. and its NATO allies continued to promote the concept. Notwithstanding the events of Eastern Europe, developments such as the signing of the NPT treaty highlighted the fact that some accommodation was possible with the Soviet Union. Within NATO, the Johnson administration advanced détente, though its insistence on fighting the war in Vietnam prevented the United States from fully exploiting the potential that the relaxation of tension provided to European security.

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As a result of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, no further significant progress in détente occurred until Nixon replaced Johnson as president, even though this crisis unified NATO

⁶⁵ LBJ Library, George McGhee Oral History, 14.

⁶⁶ LBJ Library, John Leddy Oral History, 15.

in defining its role in providing for the common defense of the North Atlantic area. Although the crisis enabled the Johnson administration to make the case that the U.S. military still had a significant role to play in European affairs, its continued preoccupation with fighting communism threat in Southeast Asia prevented this administration from drawing American public interest to the important events across the Atlantic, even when the Tet offensive clearly showed that the war was no longer winnable. Although President Johnson was not successful in extricating his administration from this war, he supported other developments within NATO that advanced détente, such as the alliance's endorsement of the NPT as well as the further discussions on the Harmel study. Even so, Vietnam prevented this president from fully implementing the benefits that détente was sure to reap. Subsequently, Johnson was forced to let his successor take the popular credit for a development which his administration unquestionably advanced.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION:

NATO AND UNITED STATES NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE 1960s

John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson successfully implemented their national security policies by respectively utilizing flexible response and détente at a time when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization reached the crossroads of the Cold War. Both presidents provided the necessary leadership to direct NATO in confronting the various challenges of the 1960s. Despite shortcomings which were inherent in U.S. national security policy, such as the application of the Cold War throughout the world, particularly in Vietnam, they led the NATO allies at a time when the North Atlantic alliance was responding to circumstances and events which were far different from what Harry S. Truman envisioned in 1949 or what George H. W. Bush oversaw in 1989.

At the end of the 1950s, with Dwight D. Eisenhower about to leave office, policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic reexamined the mission and purpose of their trans-Atlantic alliance. In Europe, political leaders such as Charles de Gaulle, who had recently returned to power with the inauguration of the French Fifth Republic, now called for a relaxation of tension, a détente between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, because of the fact that not only had the European democracies recuperated from the effects of World War II, but they were also growing increasingly weary of being caught in the middle of such serious crises as the unresolved status of Berlin. In the United States, individuals such as Kennedy called for a reexamination of the strategy of massive retaliation. Along with these developments was the fact that even though the economies of the Western European states had recovered from the war, these democracies were,

nonetheless, no longer able to maintain their vast colonial holdings throughout the world. Consequently, the United States replaced these European powers in exerting Western influence in international affairs. This presented problems in the 1960s as the United States tried to balance its commitment to the North Atlantic alliance while also advancing interests which were different from those proposed by its NATO allies. In the 1950s and early 1960s, these differences came to the forefront when the U.S. tried to promote democratic institutions in regions previously controlled by the Western Europeans. As the 1960s progressed, the NATO allies questioned the U.S. commitment to defend the North Atlantic area when the war in Vietnam escalated, a war which concerned the alliance for the way it distracted the United States from the problems of Europe.

With the arrival of the New Frontier, President Kennedy immediately began to reorient U.S. NATO policy by calling upon Dean Acheson, who had been “present at the creation” of NATO, to provide recommendations for guiding the North Atlantic alliance with a strategy that was more reasonable than massive retaliation, even though that strategy had guided the previous administration through a period which did not witness an armed conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Kennedy accepted Acheson’s recommendation by adopting flexible response as a way of more fully utilizing conventional forces. At first, the Western Europeans opposed this shift on the grounds that massive retaliation provided a more effective deterrent. As the 1960s progressed, however, these allies gradually accepted flexible response, until the North Atlantic Council, meeting in ministerial session, formally adopted it as NATO policy in 1967. The allies grudgingly accepted this strategy only as *détente* gradually became a reality in European affairs. President Kennedy first demonstrated the efficacy of flexible response by the way he approved contingency planning for the defense of Berlin, highlighting that flexible response was a

more effective way of deterring the Soviets than an outright nuclear strike. As a way of garnering support for flexible response, Kennedy accepted the MLF concept from his predecessor as a way of showing the allies that the U.S. wanted to treat them as equal nuclear partners. Not only did the Kennedy team apply flexible response to the NATO area, but it also applied it to its out-of-area concerns as well, though the ill effects of this strategy, as applied most notably in Vietnam, were not as discernible in this period as in subsequent ones. As in the late 1950s and so in this period, de Gaulle challenged U.S. leadership in the North Atlantic alliance, though his challenge was not as pronounced in this period as in subsequent ones.

As a result of the Cuban missile crisis, the NATO allies faced its most serious threat to allied unity, particularly since Turkey's Jupiter missiles were used as bargaining chips as a way of removing the missiles from Cuba. Although these obsolete missiles resolved the crisis and thus prevented a nuclear holocaust from occurring, the U.S. government soon realized that it needed a more effective method of allied crisis consultation, particularly since the realities of warfare in the nuclear age called for ways of rapidly responding to any crisis. Since the United States and the Soviet Union came extremely close to nuclear war, their respective governments soon realized that a more effective way of accommodating one another needed to be implemented. Consequently, they enacted confidence-building measures such as establishing the hotline between Washington and Moscow as well as assenting to the Limited Test Ban Treaty. These developments contributed toward a *détente* between the two sides. As the Kennedy administration continued its push for flexible response, its advocacy of the MLF still held the promise of being accepted by the NATO allies. As decolonization continued, so did the escalation of the war in Vietnam, with leaders such as de Gaulle correctly noting that the U.S. was needlessly intervening in this struggle. Although the French president offered this constructive

criticism, he also continued his anti-NATO rhetoric. Although he called for an integration of Europe, he, nonetheless, vetoed Britain's entry into the Common Market, thus continuing a pattern whereby his actions contradicted his wishes. Such examples included his call for a Europe monitored by French influence and which stretched "from the Atlantic to the Urals," as well as his absence from the signing ceremony of the Limited Test Ban Treaty. While he talked about a détente, his actions were clearly aimed at attaining French control of European security affairs.

After Johnson took office in the wake of the Kennedy assassination, the United States confronted the problem of managing an alliance that still contained historical antagonisms even though it was united in purpose against a common threat. Such was the case when Greece and Turkey nearly went to war against each other over the unresolved status of Cyprus. Though the Johnson administration was able to keep NATO's southern flank intact, the issue continued to divide both Greece and Turkey past the 1960s. With the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the U.S. government fully implemented flexible response in the war in Vietnam. While the intervention at this point was not as great as it was in subsequent periods, the NATO allies now voiced legitimate concerns about the U.S. commitment to NATO. Although flexible response was readily gaining acceptance in Europe, this was not the case with the MLF. De Gaulle, for one, criticized it as a way of compelling the allies into thinking that they were really going to be treated as equal nuclear partners. Moreover, the Soviets were weary of the role which West Germany would exert in allied nuclear policy. Although the U.S. government was not successful in implementing a multilateral seaborne force, the series of MLF discussions between the U.S. and its allies enabled NATO to establish the NPG, thus realizing the American goal of allied nuclear consultation while also dismissing de Gaulle's charge that the U.S. was not serious about allied nuclear sharing. By

now, it was also evident that de Gaulle was about to make his anticipated move, thus seeking to bring France back to the forefront of international security affairs.

When the eviction did come and de Gaulle left an “empty chair” at the North Atlantic Military Committee, the United States, rapidly responding to these developments, still found itself at the center of alliance security, seeking to keep the alliance intact. De Gaulle’s action did not effect a serious disruption in NATO as the other allies continued to look upon the United States for their defense needs, thus showing that not only did the Western Europeans view the United States as providing the surest guarantee for their security but also demonstrating that the North Atlantic allies preferred that the U.S., with its sheer power, to take the lead in détente.

Unfortunately, the Vietnam war continued to distract American attention from the NATO area, with the Johnson administration failing to see the utility of exploiting the Sino-Soviet dispute to resolve the crisis. Notwithstanding the growing domestic discontent with the war effort as well as the noticeable effects on the American economy, congressional critics called upon Johnson to initiate troop withdrawals, even though such actions impeded flexible response. Later, Johnson won the argument as a result of subsequent developments in Eastern Europe. Even so, the president was forced to make some cuts because of the war in Vietnam. Although these critics nearly impeded flexible response, they, nonetheless, highlighted the fact that a large U.S. military presence was not necessary in Europe because of détente. Consequently, they compelled the Johnson administration to reconsider the ways NATO could adapt to the new climate of détente.

Détente was now sweeping the continent, as the events surrounding de Gaulle’s withdrawal clearly showed. Though a European initiative no longer being advanced by France but by West Germany in its “Politics of the East,” the Johnson administration readily accepted Ostpolitik while the Kremlin unsuccessfully prevented it from being advanced throughout its East

Bloc. In addition, the U.S. government promoted détente by hosting the Glassboro summit. Moreover, it began to explore ways of utilizing systems such as the ABM to advance détente within the context of arms control.

Although the U.S. now actively promoted détente in the final year of the Johnson administration, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia halted any significant progress until the beginning of the Nixon administration. Nonetheless, the Soviet action united the allies by invigorating a common sense of purpose. Even so, de Gaulle still tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to wrestle control of détente away from the United States. At the same time, the Czech crisis caused the NATO allies to question whether flexible response was a viable strategy by still insisting that the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal provided the best defense against any Soviet action. With the Tet offensive, the NATO allies now hoped that the U.S. would soon extricate itself from the conflict, especially since the offensive showed that the Vietcong as well as the North Vietnamese were not about to capitulate. Although the Soviet Union impeded détente by intervening in Czechoslovakia, the United States also limited its contribution to this development by insisting on continuing the war in Vietnam.

During the 1960s, NATO was a different alliance from what it was in 1949 and certainly from what it became forty years later in 1989. Under their careful management, both Kennedy and Johnson guided NATO at a time when the North Atlantic alliance was redefining itself as a result of both flexible response and détente, concepts which were not mutually exclusive. The two revolved around each other throughout the 1960s. While policymakers within the U.S. government did not stop promoting flexible response at the time of Kennedy's death, officials within Western European governments did not begin discussing détente when Johnson became president. These two concepts further reinforced the cohesion and interdependence of the trans-

Atlantic nature of NATO in that flexible response originated in the United States while détente began in Western Europe. Although both Kennedy and Johnson were unfortunately distracted by events in Vietnam, they, nonetheless, succeeded in maintaining unity within the North Atlantic alliance. Under their leadership through such events as the Cuban missile crisis as well as the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, they demonstrated that the United States still had a significant role to play in safeguarding the security of the NATO area.

The North Atlantic alliance, under United States leadership, remained a viable security organization during the 1960s because NATO adapted to the various events of this decade. It showed that it could still provide for the defense of its members even though the situation surrounding European security had changed from what it was in 1949. As long as the North Atlantic alliance was able to adapt to the changing circumstances, the allies guaranteed that NATO would still play a role in determining the outcome of those events. The ways in which NATO redefined its role in the 1960s, the crossroads of the Cold War, provided lessons for the ways in which the North Atlantic alliance, under United States leadership, would reorient its purpose in the post-Cold War period and demonstrated the potential for redefining its mission in subsequent periods.

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