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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

FRANCE AND THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
6 October 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

France and the Atlantic Alliance

Summary

De Gaulle's assurance in March 1966 that France, although it was withdrawing its forces from commitment to the NATO military organization, would remain a signatory to the North Atlantic Treaty and a participant in the North Atlantic Council still stands as the official French position. There is ample reason to believe, however, that De Gaulle's views of the current world situation might lead him to utilize the escape clause which he built into his pledge of loyalty--the promise to remain in the Alliance only so long as there was no fundamental change in Soviet-Western relations.

At this point, De Gaulle not only believes that the cold war is a thing of the past and the chance of a military confrontation between Western Europe and the Soviet Union increasingly unlikely, but he also thinks that the existence of two blocs is an obstacle to the general European settlement that he hopes to bring about. More concerned at present with growing US power and the dominant role played by the US in Europe than with fears of Soviet hegemony, De Gaulle might decide to move against what he believes is the prime vehicle of US influence in Europe, the Atlantic Alliance.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates.

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De Gaulle may not yet have decided on a specific course of action. A complete withdrawal from the Alliance, however, would be the logical culmination of the policy which De Gaulle began when he withdrew the French Mediterranean fleet in 1959 from its commitment to NATO. Moreover, he quite clearly is anxious that his foreign policy moves be set on a course which would be difficult to reverse after he departs from the scene and he has only a limited time for action.

EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs
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France's Present Role Within the Alliance

1. Eighteen months ago Charles de Gaulle announced the series of measures which cut France's ties with the military structure of the Atlantic Alliance. A host of arrangements now govern Paris' cooperation in most areas. No over-all arrangement exists, and the various accommodations reached with its North Atlantic Council (NAC) partners leave France with freedom of action on major issues.

2. Paris now has liaison missions assigned to the NATO Military Committee and military commands; it continues to participate in defense communications and the early warning system; it maintains two divisions in Germany, which it will hold ready to cooperate in wartime if France decides to side with its fourteen partners; and it takes part in research, development, production, and logistics activities. Only one major piece of unsettled business remains: the issue of France's financial responsibility to the Fourteen including claims resulting from Paris' unilateral action.

Official Position Toward the Atlantic Alliance

3. Paris' basic position on the North Atlantic Treaty, as distinct from the military superstructure from which France has already withdrawn, was spelled out in De Gaulle's letter in March 1966 to President Johnson, which outlined France's intentions toward NATO. De Gaulle indicated at that point that the "evolution" in the world situation--and in France and Europe specifically--which made the military organization unnecessary "...did not in any way lead the French Government to challenge the treaty signed in Washington April 4, 1949...Barring events that in the years to come might modify in a fundamental way the relations between East and West, it does not intend to take advantage of Article 13 of the treaty [which permits denunciation] and considers that the alliance should continue for as long as appears necessary." Shortly thereafter, French Foreign Minister

Maurice Couve de Murville reiterated that the government had stated "...officially and solemnly that it had no intention of denouncing [the treaty] when the time comes, that is to say, within the next three years."

4. Since that time, in numerous public and private statements, De Gaulle and his entourage have proclaimed France's continuing loyalty to the Alliance. In talks with the Italian ambassador to Paris, with Danish Prime Minister Krag, with Belgian Foreign Minister Harmel, and with German Chancellor Kiesinger as late as July of this year, De Gaulle has restated his intention to remain a signatory to the treaty "under foreseeable conditions." Most recently, French ambassador to the US Charles Lucet came away from a discussion with De Gaulle in September with the quite clear impression that the French President did not intend to withdraw. Lucet later admitted to Secretary Rusk that De Gaulle had not actually said specifically that he would not exercise the option given by Article 13.

Indications of Early Denunciation

5. Despite these pledges of loyalty, there have been indications that France is considering withdrawal from the Alliance. Paris hinted that it might extend its policy of disengagement beyond the military sphere in September of 1966, when France dissociated itself from the report on East-West relations drawn up by the political advisers for the North Atlantic Council. Paris argued that it would be harmful to draw up a "common political line" to follow in East-West contacts. Later, France adamantly opposed language in a NAC communique that would have, in effect, pronounced a common stand on the Middle East crisis.

6. A new and potentially more serious division between France and its allies now seems to be brewing over the so-called Harmel study--a review of the future tasks of the Alliance. The study is designed



EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs
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to give NATO a major role in promoting East-West détente, a matter which Paris believes should be handled bilaterally. France has indicated its great displeasure with the lines which the study is now taking, arguing that an "exchange of views" in NAC should not be extended into a system of obligations or commitments by the allies outside the NATO area. Should the study result in a statement of Alliance policy implying a commitment on the part of its members, De Gaulle would almost certainly move to dissociate France from such policy implications. He might even cite it as a reason to cut all ties with the Alliance, in which case he would merely be using it as an excuse to justify a decision based on other grounds.

7. These attitudes can be interpreted as a caution against the Fourteen moving toward political consultations in opposition to French objectives. Nevertheless, warning signals have been detected in recent months.

EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs
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the newly appointed French representative to the North Atlantic Council, Roger Seydoux, was told by Couve that his job would not last more than 15 months beyond June 1967. Later, the French ambassador to the European Communities stated that the Seydoux job would last until September 1968, at which time France would give notice of its intention to withdraw.

8.



The ensuing speech, based on his dossier, did not contain the usual statement of France's loyalty to the Alliance. Although the story has not been verified,

De Gaulle told Rumanian President Maurer during his June 1967 stopover in Paris that France would leave the Alliance in 1969.

Lt. General M. G. Ailleret, son of Armed Forces Chief of Staff Charles Ailleret, remark in December of 1966 that France's seat in the Alliance "would soon be empty."

EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs
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EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs
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9. Added to this [REDACTED] reporting has been a spate of articles in the French press on the possibility of France's withdrawal. One of the latest and most provocative was an 18 September article-- which may have been officially inspired--by the left-wing Gaullist Louis Vallon, who argued that De Gaulle's acts are leading him inevitably toward a break with the Alliance. Vallon indicated that the General would "most likely" put the question to the French people in a referendum early in 1968 if he decided to withdraw. Several journalists and other informed sources, such as the director of the reputable French Institute for Public Opinion, indicated Vallon's article should be taken seriously.

EO 12958
3.4(b)(1)>25Yrs
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De Gaulle's Broad Objectives

10. Since De Gaulle's return to power in 1958, he has consistently maintained that changes in France, in Europe, and in the world balance of power demand revision of the structure and functioning of the alliance system, which was created when Europe's strength was at a low ebb. He equates "integration" under the aegis of NATO with "subordination" to the US because he maintains it perpetuates military dependence on the US, which in turn creates political dependence. The French President's concern over the role the US plays in Europe is particularly acute now because he believes the US has emerged as the sole superpower without a sufficient Russian counterweight to balance the equation.

11. Tied up inextricably with his obsessive desire to reduce US power, particularly in Europe, is De Gaulle's "grand design" for Europe involving the eventual creation of a broad confederation embracing both Western and Eastern Europe. The general European settlement which would be an integral part of this development would almost inevitably call for dismemberment of both the Atlantic Alliance and the Warsaw Pact.

12. In De Gaulle's view, then, the Alliance is now a direct obstacle to the achievement of two of his prime goals. He has never been attached to the treaty for any other reason than its promise of security from military attack. Following the failure of his gambit in 1958 for a tripartite Western clearing house on global problems, the General has at various times indicated his preference for a series of bilateral agreements among the major Western powers. This solution, he believes, would give him the protection of the US nuclear umbrella without perpetuating US influence in France or involving Paris automatically in US policy moves.

The French View of the State of Detente in Europe

13. De Gaulle pledged fidelity 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. The escape clause which he unflinchingly added to any public or private statement of support for the Alliance was that his pledge was valid until the "ambitions and threats of the Soviets" disappeared. How far along the path of detente has Europe, in De Gaulle's eyes, moved?

14. De Gaulle believes that the era of the cold war has come to a close and that there is little likelihood of a direct military confrontation between the Soviet Union and the countries of Western Europe. In December 1965, shortly before he announced France's withdrawal from NATO, De Gaulle spoke of his "...wish to lead the great endeavor of rapprochement with the East, so happily begun..." In October 1966 he stated that "today, the cold war seems a matter of laughter between all these peoples and ours. A growing and friendly cooperation is being organized." And in August 1967 the French President spoke of "...replacing the dangerous tensions of yesterday with Eastern Europe by fruitful and cordial relations."

15. Former premier Edgar Faure, now a member of De Gaulle's cabinet, has explicitly stated that

"there is no longer any danger of war due to a Russian invasion of Europe." He would thus, he stated, experience no crisis of conscience if France left the Alliance. Well-informed Gaullist commentator Georges Broussine indicated in a September issue of his newsletter that the threat of an attack from Russia had disappeared. In contrast with 1966, when French statements generally termed the threat as greatly reduced but still existing, these assertions by Faure and Broussine are not qualified in any fashion.

16. Gaullist pronouncements on detente have been accompanied by practical action to forward the development. Although De Gaulle learned during his visit to Poland in September 1967 that most Eastern European nations are unwilling to relinquish the tangible benefits of the Warsaw Pact for his perhaps illusory goal of an East-West settlement, France plainly looks for progress through the continuing series of high-level exchanges and agreements in scientific, technical, and cultural spheres.

Possible Consequences of Withdrawal

17. Does De Gaulle believe that a French withdrawal from the Alliance would deprive France of the protection of the US nuclear umbrella? The USSR in Paris' eyes no longer poses a genuine threat to French security. Even if he thinks some small threat continues to exist, De Gaulle doubtless reasons that US power is more than sufficient to deter any open attack. He probably is confident that the US will remain committed to Europe not only because of its moral obligation but also--and more importantly--because of its fear of allowing the USSR to control Europe's economic potential. This commitment of the US to the rest of Europe would, he believes, be a sufficient umbrella for France because he discounts the possibility that France would be an isolated target of a Soviet attack.

18. Withdrawal from the Alliance would still leave De Gaulle the option of seeking a bilateral agreement with

the US. He could reason that the US might find a bilateral arrangement a convenient way to maintain some coordination of planning, logistics, infrastructure and air defense. A separate Franco-American agreement would be eminently satisfactory in De Gaulle's eyes, because it would have few of the disadvantages and most of the advantages of a multilateral treaty. Paris would still have a formal link which would permit exchanges of views. However, it would no longer be a part of a bloc which De Gaulle believes is splitting the world and it could avoid being linked with broad political objectives with which it had little sympathy. Most important, it would permit Paris to claim equality with Washington.

19. Would France by withdrawal lose a forum to advance its policies or a chance to influence the policies of others? De Gaulle would answer "no" without hesitation. One of France's continuing complaints about the Alliance is that the US has ignored its partners in most matters of vital interest and consulted them only after the fact even when unilateral US moves could have involved the Alliance in war. Furthermore, Paris has already indicated the limited value it attaches to the consultative machinery of the Alliance. France clearly finds bilateral exchanges for the most part more profitable and has steered clear of multilateral approaches whenever possible. Then, too, Paris still has an important forum in Europe in the EEC, and further more De Gaulle clearly feels he is speaking to the whole world in his press conferences and TV addresses.

20. Would France's withdrawal damage its relations with its other allies? De Gaulle's greatest concern would be the effect of his move on Franco-German relations. The recent course of events, however, would probably lead him to conclude that he could withdraw without seriously damaging the Paris-Bonn connections. Following France's withdrawal from the military organization, the West Germans, after some initial hesitancy, opted for preserving

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military ties with France to the greatest extent possible. Ultimately Bonn made numerous compromises--some not wholly acceptable to the rest of the Alliance--to keep French troops in West Germany. The joint Franco-German study of European security problems in the 1970s--a study apparently initiated by Bonn--could serve to link the two countries even should Paris sever all formal ties with its allies.

21. Few if any of the other Alliance members are likely to seek retaliation against France for withdrawal. The post - De Gaulle era figures prominently in their thinking and they might hope to keep open whatever channels possible, as most of them did after France withdrew from NATO.

22. For certain of the Alliance members, other policy considerations dictate a moderate attitude toward France. For the EEC members, France's role in that organization is too pivotal to risk any kind of split over the North Atlantic Treaty. Nor will Britain be able to forget that its actions in the Alliance could affect its chances for entry in the EEC or Canada to ignore the consequences of any immoderate actions on the Quebecois.

23. Finally, would France's withdrawal advance or hinder De Gaulle's European plans? De Gaulle would probably expect the other Alliance members, despite a certain evolution in their thinking on relations with the East and a growing awareness that their interests and those of the US do not always run parallel, to remain within the Alliance. Over the longer run, however, he probably would hope that his withdrawal might prompt some serious thinking as to whether the maintenance of the Alliance--and the Warsaw Pact--was compatible with the demands of a European settlement. In the meantime, free of any multilateral entanglements and still protected by the US nuclear umbrella, De Gaulle could continue his role as the "honest broker" in bringing East and West together and

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at the same time enhance French prestige and dramatize French independence.

Possible Timing of Action

24. Article 13 of the treaty provides that "after the treaty has been in force for twenty years, any party may cease to be a party one year after its notice of denunciation." Thus De Gaulle could move as early as April 1968. French Foreign Ministry lawyers contend that the article should be interpreted to mean that a party may give notice of denunciation in 1968 to take effect in 1969, although other observers believe that the notice of intention cannot be given until 1969. In any event, as Paris demonstrated during the earlier period of its withdrawal from the military organizations, legalities will be ignored if they conflict with the major policy aims.

25. A factor which might dictate a withdrawal in either 1968 or 1969 is that De Gaulle's presidential term ends in 1972, at which time he will be 82. The French President wants to ensure, before his departure, that he has set France on an irreversible foreign policy course. Although withdrawal from the Alliance would not absolutely guarantee that France would not rejoin after De Gaulle's death or retirement, it would certainly make it more difficult for France to retrace its steps. Moreover, by taking the step before his term of office expired De Gaulle would have time both to convince the people of the wisdom of his action and to take parallel steps to promote rapprochement with the East.

Public Response in France to Withdrawal

26. The apathy in France when Paris withdrew from the military organization will probably prevail should France pull out of the Alliance itself, although De Gaulle did cushion the blow by indicating his intentions to remain a signatory to the treaty.

In part, the lack of concern reflects general disinterest of the French people in foreign policy matters. Even at the height of the NATO crisis over French withdrawal, only a small minority of Frenchmen expressed great concern over the decision. Then, too, by the time France would announce a decision to withdraw, a certain amount of "conditioning" would already have taken place. Using the government-controlled radio and TV facilities and Gaullist newspapers, De Gaulle could paint a reasoned picture of the need for French withdrawal. Should he be sure of winning, he might even hold a referendum beforehand to "consult" the public on his projected course of action. The possible use of the referendum was raised by Vallon in his news article and other sources have indicated it might in fact be a useful device. De Gaulle in the past--most particularly on his Algerian policies--has used the referendum to emphasize public solidarity with his course of action in order to undercut any opposition.

27. No current polls are available which indicate the average Frenchman's feelings about the Alliance. An August poll does indicate, however, that only 13 percent of the people felt that France should be, on the whole, on the side of the US, taking into account the world situation. This figure was a drop of six percentage points from April 1966 and probably reflects a real fear that a close relationship with the US does carry the possibility of involvement in dangerous situations such as Vietnam. Another late summer poll showed that 57 percent of the people approved of De Gaulle's over-all foreign policy aims, aims which already are tending toward a break at some point with the Alliance. Thus, even without a specific poll on the North Atlantic Treaty itself, the trend of the other polls would indicate that there would be no great popular hue and cry should France withdraw.

28. Both the government party and the opposition would suffer some divisions over withdrawal, but probably the rifts would not be deep enough to

cause serious damage. While Valery Giscard d'Estaing and his Gaullist-allied Independent Republicans are more Atlantic minded than the orthodox Gaullists, they would probably be unwilling to create a government crisis over an issue which would arouse little public response. The Center for Progress and Democracy of Jean Lecanuet would be most opposed to the move, but it is too small to have any impact. The French Communist Party (PCF) would welcome the move, although this would bring it into some conflict with its would-be partner, the Federation of the Left. Federation President Francois Mitterrand has been somewhat ambiguous on the issue, however, and his "attachment" to the Alliance would certainly take second place to such considerations as the effect of any open support for the treaty on his relations with the PCF and his general standing with the public. Even staunch Atlanticist Guy Mollet of the Socialist Party--now part of the Federation--has been less than forthright in support of the Alliance, probably a reflection of his hopes for a return to power as part of a united left which would need at least the tacit support of the Communists. Thus, De Gaulle's freedom of action will probably not be limited by domestic political considerations.