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Bureau Clock
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SNIE 20-67
17 February 1967
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SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

NUMBER 20-67

FOREIGN REACTIONS TO CERTAIN US COURSES
OF ACTION REGARDING US FORCES IN EUROPE

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Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

17 February 1967

DATE

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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

17 February 1967

SUBJECT: SNIE 20-67: FOREIGN REACTIONS TO CERTAIN US COURSES OF ACTION
REGARDING US FORCES IN EUROPE

NOTE

This SNIE has been prepared in response to a State Department request for a review of an earlier estimate with the same title (SNIE 20-1-66, dated 27 October 1966, SECRET/SENSITIVE). The assumptions given for the present estimate are altered, particularly in that the alternative scales of proposed force withdrawals from Europe are in a more modest range. In addition, the paper considers certain recent changes in the political context which would have a bearing on reactions to the postulated moves. Finally, this paper primarily addresses reactions to the proposed withdrawals and does not attempt to measure the longer term effects.

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THE PROBLEM

To estimate foreign reactions to various US courses of action affecting American forces stationed in Europe. The alternative courses are:

Case 1: Maintain US ground and air forces in West Germany at their present level.^{1/}

Case 2: Return to the US one division and some support elements, leaving in Germany one brigade of this division on a rotational basis. Dual base in the US 216 of the 662 US tactical aircraft now based in Europe, with the result that at least 500 aircraft are in Europe at any one time (54 on rotation basis). The total number of US ground and air personnel withdrawn would amount to some 27,000 men plus dependents.

Case 3: Return to the US two divisions and some nondivisional support elements, leaving in Germany one brigade from each division on a rotational basis. Dual base in the US 432 of the 662 US tactical aircraft now based in Europe, with the result that at least 338 aircraft are in Europe at any one time (108 on rotation basis). The total number of US ground and air personnel withdrawn would amount to some 64,500 men plus dependents.

^{1/} The authorized strength of US ground forces in West Germany is 223,270 men including five combat divisions, three brigades and supporting elements; present US Air Force strength in Europe consists of 662 tactical aircraft and about 25,000 men.

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THE ESTIMATE

I. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS BEARING ON LIKELY REACTIONS

1. The idea that American force withdrawals may occur has become more familiar to informed opinion in Europe in recent months. Any agreements reached to reduce American forces, especially if the cuts are of the kind and scale now proposed, would be less likely to produce the kind of political shock they might have some months ago. The broader public, however, is not as well prepared as the governments, and the degree of general concern that might be manifested would still depend considerably on the way the matter was handled and on the efforts made by European leaders to support and explain the move.

2. A number of developments have probably worked on European opinion to make some reduction in the American military presence in Europe seem inevitable, and for some, acceptable and perhaps even desirable. Awareness of the scale, cost, and probable prolongation of the American effort in Vietnam has no doubt increased. Because this effort is widely disapproved, there is in some subtle way a decline in the sense of shared policies and purposes which had earlier characterized the European-American relationship. Although there is no way of measuring it precisely, the Gaullist

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emphasis on "independence" from American influence appears to have gained some support, even in quarters where de Gaulle himself is not much admired. The feeling is probably growing that the Atlantic Alliance is entering upon a phase in which the roles and relationships which have obtained in NATO have begun to change.

3. Developments affecting Soviet policy have strengthened these trends of opinion in Europe about the Alliance. Recent events have lent still greater conviction to the belief that the USSR's desire for detente in Europe is real. Signature of the Outer Space Treaty and reported progress toward a Non-Proliferation Treaty have been interpreted in Europe in this sense. But most important in this respect has been the dramatic deterioration in Soviet relations with China in recent months which, rightly or wrongly, persuades many Europeans that the Soviets are now compelled to stabilize and improve their relations with Europe. Heightened Soviet diplomatic activity in recent months, marked by a series of state visits by Soviet leaders, has nourished the idea that more stable and constructive East-West relations in Europe are possible. In turn, such an idea postulates a decline of American influence in European affairs.

4. The single most important new development in Europe, however, is the emergence of a new West German Government which has both resulted from and given new impetus to a shift in German opinion and policy. This has

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been manifested primarily in the priority given to an effort to restore good relations with France and to improve relations with Eastern Europe. The new government has thus sought quickly to convey an impression of activism and independence, and to reduce the heavy reliance on Washington which proved to be a political liability for the Erhard administration. There has been nothing explicitly anti-American in these moves, but they have nevertheless suggested that the new government would not be disinclined to see some reduction in the weight of American influence in the affairs of the Alliance.

5. These recent developments do not mean that there is a desire in Europe to see the Atlantic Alliance dissolved. The overwhelming weight of opinion no doubt continues to regard the American commitment to Europe's security as vital. But there is probably a growing feeling that the time has come for Europe to chart a more independent course. Moreover, although the NATO governments recognize that the military capabilities of the Warsaw Pact countries are improving, they feel that the threat of war has diminished and that this, together with the changes in the general climate in Europe in recent months, has made acceptance of a reduction of the American presence and influence more palatable. It is probably also true that the shift in European attitudes toward the Alliance and the European-American relationship described above is likely to develop further in any case, whether or not the American forces are reduced.

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II. WEST EUROPEAN REACTIONS TO THE PROPOSED REDUCTIONS

6. The substantial American military commitment in Europe for the last 15 years or so has been a major instrument, though not the only one, of our effort to preserve security and our influence in the area. A reduction in the American military presence would probably give some added stimulus to the trends described in the preceding paragraphs toward a decline in American influence, even though these trends seem likely to continue in any case. It might contribute to the feeling that the relevance of American power and presence to Europe is declining and that American influence and policies merit less attention and accommodation from the Europeans. And, generally speaking, it is to be expected that the larger cuts envisioned in Case 3 would carry a greater potential for adverse developments in American relations with Europe than would the more modest cuts under Case 2.

7. The political context in which the move was made and the tact and skill with which allied assent was obtained would perhaps be more important than the difference in the size of the two drawdowns. If agreement is reached, after due deliberation in appropriate Allied councils, that the move is acceptable and perhaps even advantageous in the present stage of East-West relations, the political risks would be small. If the US makes what is seen as in effect a unilateral decision, for reasons of its own which are not persuasive to the Allies, the political risks could be substantial. The Europeans would then be less concerned about the actual

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size of the cut than with what they thought it meant for the general direction of US policy, and in particular for the future of the American commitment to Europe's security.

8. Under Case 1 there would be some political risks but these would be offset by definite political and military advantages. Uncertainty about possible future US moves to reduce forces would remain as an unsettling factor in any case. But there are important differences between Case 1 and Cases 2 and 3. Those West European reactions of suspicion and concern which might arise from US force cuts in the present atmosphere within the Alliance would be avoided under Case 1, since the visible symbol of the US security commitment would not have been altered. West European doubts about NATO's validity and longevity would to a certain extent be mitigated. Finally, greater flexibility would be retained for approaches to the USSR on possible force cuts on a reciprocal basis.

A. West Germany

9. We believe that the Kiesinger government would be much more willing than its predecessor to accept US force reductions. The new German leaders apparently already expect that some cuts of US and British forces in Germany will be made, and they are almost certainly considering, not how to forestall this development, but rather how to react to it and perhaps capitalize on it as a political issue. Bonn would probably agree

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fairly readily to the smaller of the proposed cuts. At present it might be reluctant to accept the larger reduction, but it could probably be brought around to do so by careful and deliberately-paced negotiations. Moreover, the Federal Republic wants to hold its offset payments to the minimum in the future, and a lower level of US forces would allow it to argue for a reduction of such payments. In one sense a US cutback might be regarded with positive favor by the new Bonn government. In their present efforts to improve relations with Eastern Europe, Kiesinger and Brandt could exploit the US cuts, and Bonn's acceptance thereof, both as a German contribution to detente in Europe and as a basis for urging reciprocal Soviet moves.

10. The new government in Bonn with its large parliamentary majority would also be much more capable than its predecessor of managing the political repercussions inside Germany of US force cuts. German politicians who wished to appeal to nationalist tendencies and to reduce the US role in German affairs would of course cite any cutbacks as evidence of American unreliability. Efforts by the Bonn government could, however, help to minimize the effectiveness of such appeals. This could be best done by a united coalition, but there is some risk that moves to redefine the German-American military relationship could in themselves be divisive.

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11. The eventual risks which might attend a change in the German-American military relationship are not all measurable now. If the CDU-SPD coalition should prove unstable, if Bonn's new initiatives in its Eastern policy should be frustrated, if US dealings with the USSR nourish the view that Soviet-American detente is developing at the cost of German interests -- then German opinion might in retrospect magnify the significance of a draw-down of US forces, seeing it as the turning point at which the American commitment to support German aspirations manifestly weakened. This is why so much hangs on the manner in which the decision for US force cuts is undertaken. An unhurried negotiation, i.e., not conducted under pressure, which ended with Bonn fully and freely committed to the decision, would help to minimize the long-term risks.

B. Implications for NATO as a Whole

12. Since either of the proposed cuts would leave substantial American forces in Europe, they would not, as isolated measures, be interpreted as a deliberate US disengagement from European affairs. Some Europeans would see them, however, as the confirmation of a trend. Either of the cuts would add to the continuing debate that has developed in Europe about the future of the Alliance, but this debate -- assuming that the threat of war continues to remain remote -- will probably intensify anyway over the next several years. In addition, all members of the Western Alliance except

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France still want NATO to continue as an instrument of Atlantic political-military cooperation, in part because it is seen as a framework in which to contain the Germans. US cutbacks of the size indicated might in fact rouse some member states to try to insure that such a move did not portend a significant decline in American involvement with Europe's affairs.

13. The proposed cuts would to some extent bolster de Gaulle's efforts to destroy the organizational superstructure of NATO and to undermine the US position in Europe, but probably only marginally. They would generate somewhat greater receptivity for the Gaullist argument that the US commitment to Europe is unreliable, and de Gaulle could be counted on to encourage suspicions that small cuts were only a prelude to larger ones. Such tactics would probably gain some support in other West European countries for French policies, if not for French leadership.

14. Great Britain will almost certainly cut back the British Army of the Rhine whether or not there are US cuts, because it is now clear that the Germans will not meet offset costs to Britain on the scale demanded. US actions might affect the timing of British moves, and would certainly allow London to justify cutbacks more easily in European eyes. Unless the US itself helped with the British offset problems, the size of the British cuts will probably not be much affected by what the US does. On the other hand, among all the allies the British would most clearly understand that

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US cutbacks of the sizes indicated did not portend an American pull-out from Europe. Other NATO allies, such as Canada and Belgium, would also probably reduce the size or alter the composition of their military forces in NATO following US cuts.

15. In general, although some members of NATO would be disturbed by implications they might see in the US move, none of them appears to be particularly worried about an immediate threat of Soviet aggression, and none would build up its own defenses in response to US cuts. But most of them will wish to see a strong US presence in Europe continue, not only because of the potential Soviet threat, but because they regard it as a restraint on a possible revival of German nationalism and on a Franco-German combination prejudicial to their interests.

III. IMPORTANCE OF THE MODALITIES AND TIMING OF US FORCE REDUCTIONS

16. The prospects for minimizing the adverse effects of force reductions in Europe would be significantly influenced by the way in which the issue was handled. If the cuts followed careful consultations in the existing trilateral mechanism and in NATO, and if the result were an agreed drawdown and agreed arrangements on offset, we believe that the repercussions in Germany and elsewhere would be manageable. European reactions would be much more negative if the cuts were carried out precipitately

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and if sufficient time were not allowed for careful consultation. It is especially important that any actions to change force levels taken by the British and ourselves, and possibly others, be so coordinated and timed as to reflect NATO acceptance of the strategic as well as other considerations which prompted the change.

17. In West Germany, it would probably help to play up the beneficial effect which US force cuts might have on Bonn's Ostpolitik. In Europe as a whole it would probably help to emphasize the US move as a contribution to East-West detente. If a persuasive argument could be advanced that increased firepower, mobility, and capability for reinforcement would allow cuts to be made without danger, the US case might also be buttressed. Most other possible rationales which the US could use would tend to heighten rather than mitigate adverse reactions. Explanations which emphasized the financial and manpower needs of the Vietnam war, or US balance of payments difficulties, would imply to Europeans that the US really was being forced to reduce its commitment to Europe. Explanations which emphasized German unwillingness to accept satisfactory offset arrangements, or the unwillingness of other European nations to maintain adequate defense efforts, would also suggest that the US was reducing its commitment to Europe -- not because it had to but (in European eyes) because of pique with the Europeans.

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18. The timing of US force reductions would also affect their reception. The German response would probably not be very favorable, and German efforts to cushion their public reception not very helpful, if widespread German uneasiness in connection with the nonproliferation agreement still persisted. On the other hand, should the problems related to this agreement be resolved, the German response might be more helpful.

19. The European reaction to force cuts would also vary depending on the status of the Vietnam war at the time cuts were formally proposed. If the proposal came during a period when US activity in Vietnam was still expanding, most Europeans would be convinced, whatever the US said, that the cuts were prompted mainly by the war, and that the US was becoming ever more involved in Asia at the expense of its commitment to Europe. On the other hand, if the cuts were proposed when the Vietnam war appeared closer to resolution, rationales which at present would have a negative effect on European opinion might then be accepted or even have a beneficial impact. Reductions at such a time might also increase the chance of reciprocal cuts of Soviet forces in East Germany. Moscow would presumably no longer be under pressure to avoid actions which would make it easier for the US to strengthen its forces in Vietnam.

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IV. COMMUNIST REACTIONS

20. There have been no developments in recent months which would substantially change Soviet or East European responses to US troop reductions in Germany. The Bloc States would see the cut as favorable to their present policies toward Western Europe. Moscow would probably continue, at least for a time, its present conciliatory line toward that area. Whether or not US cutbacks occur, the USSR in the coming year will probably accelerate its diplomatic campaign to stir up discussion and ferment on the general subject of European security. It would probably regard US force cuts as something which might enhance the prospects of these diplomatic efforts, by making West Europeans a little more willing to deal with the USSR independently of the US.

21. We still believe the chances are good that the USSR would, after it had taken some time to appraise the political-military effects of the US withdrawals, unilaterally carry out some withdrawals of its own in East Germany.^{2/} Moscow probably would not wish to negotiate a formal agreement on this, however, at least until the Vietnam war had reached some resolution, and probably even then only in the framework of broader East-West undertakings which would have the effect of consolidating the status quo in Germany. We do not believe that the recent intensification of the

^{2/} Maj. Gen. Chester L. Johnson, Acting Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, believes that, while a possibility of Soviet withdrawals exists, available evidence is insufficient to support a judgment that "the chances are good that the USSR would ...carry out some withdrawals of its own ..."

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Sino-Soviet dispute will make it necessary for the USSR to withdraw troops from East Germany.

22. In general, the reactions of the USSR's Warsaw Pact allies to the moves discussed in this estimate would be much the same as those of the USSR. The idea of a developing detente on terms which the East has advocated would be congenial to them. They would welcome the opportunity to develop their trade with Western Europe, and would hope that military burdens could be eased. Some of them might want to move faster in developing relations with West Germany than East Germany, Poland, and the USSR would want. Rumania, for example, would welcome changes on the European political scene which would permit it greater freedom in pursuing its own interests with Western European states. The USSR might think it had reason to be concerned about the degree of independence that would develop in time from the assertion of such interests. But unless there were fundamental changes in the political and military structure of Europe, the basic alignment of these countries with the USSR would not be affected.

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