

8. Documents on French withdrawal from NATO 1966 French Disengagement from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Exchange of Letters Between President Charles de Gaulle of France and President Johnson, March, 7, 1966.

(a) President de Gaulle to President Johnson. MARCH 7, 1966.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: In three years, our Atlantic Alliance will complete its first term.

I wish to tell you that France appreciates the extent to which the solidarity of defense thus established among 15 free Western nations helps ensure their security, and, especially, what an essential role the United States of America plays in this respect. Therefore, France now expects to remain, when the time comes, a party to the treaty signed at Washington on April 4, 1949. This means that, unless events in the course of the next three years should change the fundamental elements of the relations between East and West, she would be, in 1969 and later, determined, just as today, to fight beside her allies if one of them should suffer unprovoked aggression.

However, France considers that the changes that have occurred, or are in the process of occurring, since 1949, in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, as well as the evolution of her own situation and her own forces, no longer justify, in so far as she is concerned, the arrangements of a military nature made after the conclusion of the Alliance, either jointly in the form of multilateral agreements, or by special agreements between the French Government and the American Government.

That is why France intends to recover, in her territory, the full exercise of her sovereignty, now impaired by the permanent presence of Allied military elements or by the habitual use being made of its air space, to terminate her participation in the "integrated" commands, and no longer to place forces at the disposal of NATO.

It goes without saying that, in order to implement these decisions, she is prepared to make arrangements with the Allied Governments, and in particular with the Government of the United States, regarding the practical measures that concern them.

Furthermore, she is prepared to reach agreement with them regarding the military facilities to be accorded on a mutual basis in the event of a conflict in which she would join battle at their side, and regarding the conditions

governing the cooperation between her forces and theirs in the event of joint action, especially in Germany.

And, so, Mr. President, my Government will get in touch with yours regarding all these points. However, in order to act in the spirit of friendly candor that should inspire the relations between our two countries, and, allow me to add, between you and me, I have sought, first of all, to let you know personally, for what reasons, to what end, and within what limits France believes that she must, for her part, change the form of our alliance without altering its substance.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my very high consideration and my most cordial sentiments.

(b)President Johnson to President de Gaulle.MARCH 7, 1966.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

I have read with care your letter of March 7, 1966.

I am immediately bringing your views to the attention of our other allies. Since the course you propose to take so seriously affects the security and well being of not only the French and American people but all the people of the NATO Alliance, I am asking for their comment.

I would be less than frank if I did not inform you that your action raises grave questions regarding the whole relationship between the responsibilities and benefits of the Alliance.

French Memorandum Delivered to the Fourteen Representatives of the Governments of the Atlantic Alliance on March 8 and 10, 1966. For some years, the French Government has indicated on numerous occasions, both publicly and in conversations with the allied Governments, that it considered that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization no longer corresponded, insofar as it is concerned, to the conditions prevailing in the world at present, which are fundamentally different from those of 1949 and the years thereafter.

Indeed, the threats weighing upon the Western world, particularly in Europe, which motivated the conclusion of the treaty, have changed in nature.

They no longer present the immediate and threatening character that they previously assumed. On the other hand, the European countries have re-established their economies and have thereby recovered their means.

In France, in particular, is equipping herself with atomic weapons, the very nature of which preclude her being integrated.

Thirdly, the nuclear balance between the Soviet Union and United States, replacing the monopoly wielded by the latter, has changed the overall

conditions for the defense of the West. Lastly, it is a fact that Europe is no longer the center of international crises.

The center has moved elsewhere, notably in Asia, where all the countries of the Atlantic alliance are obviously not involved.

These developments in no way lead the French Government to into question the treaty signed in Washington on April 4, 1949. In other words, barring events that in the coming years might change East-West relations in a fundamental way, the French Government does not intend to avail itself in 1969 of the provisions of Article 13 of the treaty and considers that the alliance should continue so long as it appears necessary.

This being unequivocally affirmed, there arises the problem of the organization, that is, of all the agreements, arrangements and decisions made after the signature of the treaty, either in multilateral or in bilateral form. The French Government considers that this organization no longer corresponds to what appears to it necessary. Doubtless, it would have been conceivable for negotiations to be undertaken to amend the provisions in force by common agreement.

The French Government would have been happy to propose it, had it been given to believe that such negotiations could lead to the outcome that the French Government itself has in view. Unfortunately, everything shows that such an undertaking would be doomed to failure, since France's partners appear to be, or assert that they are all advocates of maintaining the status quo, or else of strengthening everything which, from the French viewpoint, appears henceforth unacceptable. France is therefore led to draw, insofar as she is concerned, the consequences of the situation, that is, to take for herself the measures that appear to her necessary and that, in her view, are in no way incompatible with her participation in the alliance, or with her participation, should the need arise, in military operations at the side of her allies. Already, in the past, the French Government took measures in the direction involved for its naval forces assigned to NATO, either in the Mediterranean or in the Atlantic.

The question now is the ground and air forces stationed in Germany and assigned to allied command in Europe. France proposes to put an end to that assignment. The decision will entail her simultaneous withdrawal from the two integrated commands under which those forces fall and in which she participates in the NATO framework, namely the Supreme Command Allied Forces Europe and the Central Europe Command, and it will thereby entail the transfer of the headquarters of these two commands outside of French territory.

The application of all these measures quite understandably raises problems, which the French Government is prepared, as of now, to discuss with its allies. There will be reason to examine the liaisons that would have to be established between the French command and the NATO commands, and also to determine the conditions in which the French forces, especially in

Germany, would participate in time of war-if Article 5 of the Treaty of Washington were to be invoked-in joint military actions as regards both the command and the operations as such.

This is based particularly on the assumption that the French ground and air forces now stationed in Germany will be maintained there in the framework of the conventions of October 23, 1954-which the French Government, for its part, is disposed to do.

On the other hand, there will be reason to consider the problems that may arise for France with respect to the Military Committee and the Standing Group, including the problem of the liaisons to be established, if need be, between these bodies and the French command. These, in their broad lines, are the provisions that the French Government envisages, insofar as it is concerned, in order to adapt the terms of its participation in the Atlantic alliance to the new conditions. It is prepared to enter into discussions on the practical conditions for applying these measures and hopes that adequate arrangements can be made by common agreement between all the allies.

[The following paragraphs were added to the text addressed to the United States:]

Yet multilateral problems are not the only ones to be raised for the United States and France. In the past, the two countries have in fact concluded a series of bilateral agreements that are still in effect, as follows:

- depots at Déols-La Martinerie;
- certain air bases and installations in France made available to American forces;
- supply line;
- American headquarters at Saint-Germain;
- pipeline.

The French Government considers that these agreements, in their entirety, no longer correspond to the present conditions, which lead it to reassume full exercise of its sovereignty on French territory, in other words, to accept no longer that any foreign units, installations or bases in France be responsible in any respect whatsoever to authorities other than the French authorities. It is prepared to study and, eventually, to settle with the United States Government the practical consequences of this.

The French Government is, furthermore, prepared to enter into a discussion on the military facilities that could be made available to the [United States] Government on French territory in the event of a conflict in which both countries would participate by virtue of the Atlantic alliance. These facilities could be the subject of an agreement to be concluded between the two Governments.

**ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOINT DECLARATION AGREED UPON BY FOURTEEN
MEMBER NATIONS OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION¹⁸
MARCH 1966**

The following declaration has been agreed between the heads of governments of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

“The North Atlantic Treaty and the organization established under it are both alike essential to the security of our countries.

“The Atlantic Alliance has ensured its efficacy as an instrument of defense and deterrence by the maintenance in peacetime of an integrated and interdependent military organization in which, as in no previous alliance in history, the efforts and resources of each are combined for the common security of all.

We are convinced that this organization is essential and will continue. No system of bilateral arrangements can be a substitute.

“The North Atlantic Treaty and the organization are not merely instruments of the common defense. They meet a common political need and reflect the readiness and determination of the member countries of the North Atlantic community to consult and act together wherever possible in the safeguard of their freedom and security and in the furtherance of international peace, progress and prosperity.”

**SECOND LETTER FROM PRESIDENT JOHNSON TO PRESIDENT DE GAULLE²²
MARCH 1966
THE WHITE HOUSE,**

Washington, March 22, 1966

His Excellency General CHARLES DE GAULLE,
President of the French Republic, Paris.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT

On March 7 you wrote to inform me of the general course of action your Government proposes to follow with regard to the North Atlantic Treaty and the organization and arrangements which have been set up to serve its purposes. The course you propose will so seriously affect the security and well-being of citizens of all the allied states that I felt it imperative to seek the counsel of the other Treaty members before replying in detail. I should like now to set forth what seem to me the fundamentals of this matter.

Let me begin with the American conception of the purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty and the Alliance it creates.

Under our Constitution, that Treaty is the law of the land.

Like our Constitution, it is more than a legal document.

It is the outward and visible form of a living institution - not an alliance to make war, but an alliance to keep the peace.

For nearly two decades this alliance has assured the peace and security of the North Atlantic area.

It has greatly reinforced stability throughout the world.

The Alliance, in our view, reflects two important propositions.

The first is that if war should come to the Atlantic area, we must fight together-and fight effectively.

The second is that if we act together for the common interest during peace, war will not come.

The organization designed to carry out both these propositions, NATO, became in fact an Organization for Peace.

To that Organization, which grew significantly out of France's own needs and urging's, France and many distinguished Frenchmen have made an inestimable contribution. The Organization combined the contributions of the member nations into a common instrument for deterring war by preparing together to meet aggression if aggression should occur.

I have no doubt that deterrence resulted not only from the military coherence achieved but also from the political unity of purpose it exemplified.

If the dissolution of the former casts in doubt the latter, as it inevitably will, I fear that those who draw hope from Western disunity will be much encouraged. As you say, conditions have changed since 1949.

They have greatly changed for the better, due significantly in my opinion to our combined efforts under the Treaty.

But should our collective effort falter and erode the common determination which it reflects, the foundation of the present stability would be undermined.

In your letter you restated the firm commitment of France to fight beside her allies if any member of NATO should suffer unprovoked aggression. I respect that pledge. But we believe more is needed to achieve effective deterrence and to maintain peace in the North Atlantic area. I am puzzled by your view that the presence of allied military forces on French soil impairs the sovereignty of France.

Those forces have been there at French invitation pursuant to a common plan to help insure the security of France and her allies.

I have always viewed their presence as a wise and far-seeing exercise of French sovereignty. For our part, we continue to believe that if the Treaty is

to have force and reality, members of the Alliance should prepare the command structure, the strategic and tactical plans, the forces in being, and their designation to NATO in advance of any crisis and for use in time of crisis. NATO arrangements should reflect the technological and strategic imperatives of our age. Readiness to fight instantly under agreed plans and procedures, worked out and [practiced]³ in peacetime, adds immeasurably to our common strength.

We will continue our past policy of full participation and cooperation in NATO.

We believe the member nations, working within the Alliance with one another, should adapt to whatever organizational arrangements the needs of the hour may require. I do not consider that such participation and cooperation involves any impairment of our own sovereignty-or that of any of our allies.

In my judgment it reflects the exercise of sovereignty according to the highest traditions of responsible self-interest.

The North Atlantic Treaty commits its signatories to assist any member subjected to armed attack within the areas specified. Governments, of course, must fulfill their commitments in accordance with their own constitutional procedures. But commitments should be honored as effectively as peacetime preparation can assure. It seems to me essential, therefore, that all members of the Alliance be prepared to act in any emergency through their mutual organization and in accordance with mutual plans. Reliance in crisis on independent action by separate forces in accordance with national plans, only loosely coordinated with joint forces and plans, seems to me dangerous for all concerned.

It has proved disastrous in the past.

The other fourteen member nations of NATO do not take the same view of their interests as that taken at this moment by the Government of France.⁴ The United States is determined to join with them in preserving the deterrent system of NATO-indeed, in strengthening it in support of the vital common purposes of the West. We do not intend to ignore the experience of the past twenty years.

Indeed, we find it difficult to believe that France, which has made a unique contribution to Western security and development, will long remain withdrawn from the common affairs and responsibilities of the Atlantic. As our old friend and ally her place will await France whenever she decides to resume her leading role.

**REMARKS BY PRESIDENT JOHNSON TO THE FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE
AND SENIOR SEMINAR, DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
23 MARCH 1966**

I am very pleased to address the Foreign Service Institute this morning and to come here to meet with so many Americans that are preparing to serve their country abroad.

As one who believes that we cannot shorten our reach in the world, I am greatly encouraged by the number and the quality of those who are studying at this Institute. You have the gratitude of your countrymen and my own assurance of support.
