

Post 11/5/64
Option Provided in MLF Future

By Chalmers M. Roberts
Staff Reporter

President Johnson's Thursday speech on the future of the Atlantic alliance provided the backdrop of his policy for the four years ahead. But it was not in itself a commitment to the multilateral nuclear force as a necessary part of that policy.

In short, Mr. Johnson outlined the general but avoided commitment to the specific.

There are a number of reasons, foreign and domestic, for what amounts to a go-slow on the MLF project, which he inherited from the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. They are:

- The President knows that in addition to the public opposition of France and the doubts of other NATO allies, some of those Europeans publicly favorable to the scheme take that position only because they think the United States very much wants MLF to come into being.

- The President knows there is increasing opposition in Congress to MLF, indeed so much opposition that as of now it probably could not command the votes for Senate ratification or for changes necessary in the Atomic Energy Act.

To understand the Johnson attitude it is well to remember how much he

wants to succeed in the field of foreign affairs as he has long succeeded in domestic matters. Like other Chief Executives before him, Mr. Johnson sees his place in history likely to be largely determined by his handling of foreign affairs.

But despite his massive election victory on Nov. 3 he has not yet crossed the psychological barrier of inheriting the Presidency on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. That day comes next Jan. 20, when he will be inaugurated for a full four years on his own.

Probably after that date the President will begin a number of foreign journeys. One visit likely will be to Paris to talk with French President de Gaulle.

Further Delay Due

The President, of course, knows that de Gaulle opposes the MLF scheme and favors some form of "European Europe" related to the United States and Canada in the Atlantic alliance but with a high degree of independence from this side of the ocean.

He knows this differs from the "interdependence of nations" about which he spoke on Thursday. But he wants to "reason, not to dominate" in the problems of the alliance, just as he always has believed in "come, let us

reason together" in domestic matters.

Thus it is probable that he will refrain from any further American commitment to MLF until spring, until he has met British Prime Minister Wilson here on Monday and Tuesday and de Gaulle and other European leaders after Inauguration Day.

The President's speech at Georgetown University had the virtue of historic sweep; it reduced the controversial MLF to the status of "an isolated or single dramatic step" that, he said, is not by itself the answer to today's problem in the alliance.

"But we all know that the problem is there. It must be solved," he said. And lest anyone, as some in the alliance do, think that the current detente between the United States and the Soviet Union removes the necessity of improving the alliance, Mr. Johnson added:

"... let no one mistake a brief calm for an end of the storm."

One important passage in the speech related to the Federal Republic of Germany, for West Germany was indeed the reason for creating the MLF scheme.

Those who thought it up for President Kennedy started from a belief that Germany could not be expected indefinitely to be a second class power in the alliance, a major contributor in con-

ventional arms, economics and diplomacy, but with no real say in the life or death field of nuclear arms.

Take Positive Stand

And so the President did what Prime Minister Wilson neglected to do in his own remarks on the alliance in Commons on Nov. 23: he took a positive, not just a negative, attitude toward Germany.

Wilson, who often had said he wanted no German "finger on the trigger," said that was not involved as long as the American veto was retained in the MLF scheme. But he indicated alarm that the day might somehow come when that veto might be removed.

Mr. Johnson did not talk in such specifics. Rather he congratulated the Germans for rejecting "all separate adventures, especially, and I think most wisely, in the field of nuclear weapons.

He said the Federal Republic must be "treated as an honorable partner in the affairs of the West." And he said there can be no "stable peace in Europe" until East Germany is reunited with West Germany "in the Federal Republic"—but by peaceful not military means.

These passages thus make it possible, if that is what the President in the end decides, to put aside the MLF plan for some other scheme or schemes. It amounts to a guarantee to the Germans that, if not by MLF then in some other form, their interests will be well advanced.

By his Thursday speech, then, the President has enlarged his options, given himself more elbow room, for the coming discussions on the future of the alliance. The end result is not predictable, but Mr. Johnson is determined that it will be positive and on the side of further unity in the face of a long-term Soviet menace.