

De Gaulle's Mission to Moscow

by Philip Ben

Why is de Gaulle going to Moscow next week? "Because of Lyndon Johnson, Ludwig Erhard, Dean Rusk and Gerhard Schroeder; and because of the policy of isolating France from her European allies, initiated by President Kennedy and his Harvard braintrusters." That is the answer given by French officials whose duty it is to explain de Gaulle's policy to baffled foreigners.

In signing a treaty of collaboration with Konrad Adenauer in 1963, de Gaulle believed that he had redeemed two earlier failures – first his inability to persuade President Eisenhower, and later John F. Kennedy, to let an American-British-French triumvirate lead the Western Alliance and set common world policy; then, his failure to persuade France's partners in the Common Market to establish a "Europe of Homelands" in which France would play the principal role. A Franco-German alliance, which is what de Gaulle meant the agreement with Adenauer to be, would have been led politically, militarily and intellectually by France, thus assuring her hegemony in Western Europe and reestablishing her as a world power, a status which her resources alone cannot give her.

But for John Kennedy, the prospect of West Germany's being more intimate with Paris than with Washington was hateful. The history of American pressures on the successors of Konrad Adenauer to downgrade the agreement with de Gaulle remains to be written, but Paris believes that Bonn would not have behaved as it has recently without Washington's encouragement.

How often have de Gaulle's opponents in France caustically referred to the "grotesque alliance" with Adenauer, pointing out that even before the ink on the agreement was dry, Franco-German relations had reverted to mutual suspicion and thinly veiled contempt. Since 1963, on almost every significant issue in European or world politics, France and Germany have been at odds: the quarrel over British participation in the Common Market, the crisis over Common Market agriculture, the various proposals for an MLF or an Atlantic Nuclear Force, the Kennedy round of tariff negotiations. The Great Charles is easily slighted and the humiliations pile up. Kennedy, though he did not relish too passionate an affair between France and Germany,

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had no great sympathy for Bonn, her leaders and her interests. But in this Johnson era, every visit to Washington or to the Texas ranch of Professor Erhard and his foreign minister, has seemed a festival of friendship and has left little doubt that West Germany is the United States' most important and trusted ally.

It took little imagination on the part of an experienced politician to think up a way by which to counterbalance this American-German intimacy: a turn toward Moscow. American and German policies being what they are, what is surprising about the French-Soviet flirtation is that it has started so late.

Still, there were serious psychological obstacles both in Paris and in Moscow. Until about a year ago, each of de Gaulle's biannual press conferences exhibited anti-Soviet theories and anti-Soviet sentiments of unparalleled magnitude in the '60's. Everything the General said about the US was but a delicate critique, compared to the views he expressed about Soviet methods and purposes. But more disturbing to Moscow were the General's deeds. How could they forget that during the Berlin crisis of 1961 it was de Gaulle who advocated the toughest response to Soviet demands? (Those who do not remember would do well to read Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *A Thousand Days*, whose account also throws light on de Gaulle's attitude toward NATO and on Kennedy's policy, adopted at the State Department's insistence, of fighting French supremacy over Germany.) How many State Department "position papers" offering various "accommodations" on Berlin, proposals which caused panic in Bonn, were wrecked by de Gaulle's veto? And could Moscow forget that the de Gaulle-Adenauer friendship was for a brief period a nightmare to all the Communist regimes in Europe? And how could it not recall that France's recognition of Communist China was not only a rebuff to Washington, but a calculated slap at Russia? Finally, could the Soviet leaders ignore de Gaulle's vision of a "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals" – which vision, vague though it was, could only mean that de Gaulle looked to the day when Russia, minus Siberia and all her other possessions in Asia, would have no choice but to become part of Europe, and thereby no longer a super-power?

No, for quite a while the Kremlin could not close its eyes to this "deplorable" record. And so, for as long as Nikita Khrushchev was in power, the Russians paid little attention to France's growing quarrel with Wash-

ington; Khrushchev was interested in coexistence with the US and not much else in the West.

But Khrushchev's successors, who in the beginning appeared even more interested than he in peaceful coexistence with the Americans, found that this would only be possible if they were to ignore the war in Vietnam and the mounting American intervention there. It was asking too much. Rejecting the American suggestion that Washington and Moscow do "business as usual," the Russians decided, sometime early in 1965 when there was so much talk of Bonn's "getting a finger on the atomic trigger," to start smiling at de Gaulle.

Those in a position to know what went on when the Soviet foreign minister was feted in Paris last spring and when the French foreign minister reciprocated by going to Moscow last autumn, were struck by how little business was transacted, how careful both sides were in drafting every word of their communiqué, how anxious each was to stress that what brought them together was self-interest and not sentiment. All Paris and Moscow had in common at that time were their quarrels with Washington and Bonn, though they were not the same quarrels.

To put de Gaulle's June 20-July 5 trip to Moscow in perspective, we must remember that since last fall, the General has been signaling, privately, his fears about future German policy. He had begun to suspect Bonn of really wanting atomic arms and of preparing to avenge Hitler's defeat, or at least of working to regain territories lost in the East. He now seems to think that that is exactly where the policy of Herr Schroeder and the encouragement Bonn is getting from Washington will lead. Washington's attitude since de Gaulle's denunciation of the NATO agreements has only strengthened his suspicions.

De Gaulle's Moscow journey may therefore produce something quite different from what had been intended earlier this year. Last March, a French official involved in the arduous job of preparing the details of the trip reacted vigorously when asked whether any important political business would be transacted. "This is not a political occasion; it will be splendor, lots of symbols, lots of color, lots of historic reminiscence. France will meet Russia once again. It will be a new version of the Bayeux tapestry." If there were political overtones to the visit, they were secondary. For instance, the Russians very much wanted the General to travel somewhere beyond the Urals, probably in order to convince him that Russia does not end at that chain of mountains, and that the old geographic division between Europe and Asia has become meaningless. Or perhaps they considered that de Gaulle's presence would represent a kind of recognition for the legitimacy of Soviet domination of Siberia and of Middle Asia. Anyway, de Gaulle did agree to visit the great Siberian metropolis

of Novosibirsk (to which, normally, foreigners are not admitted). But he refused the Soviet offer to take him to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. The reason for his refusal, so I was told, was that the General thought Peking might be offended. At that time, the highest French officials were emphasizing that de Gaulle would enter into no new agreements while in Moscow.

But speaking a few weeks ago in the National Assembly, the foreign minister, Couve de Murville, modified this assurance: "No agreement will be signed in Moscow, at least no military agreement." This, of course, does not exclude a moderately worded denunciation of American policy in Vietnam, and probably, an even more carefully worded opposition to any plan under which Germany would be given a say in the use of atomic weapons. It seems likely that the joint communiqué from Moscow at the end of de Gaulle's visit will insist that all the problems of Europe (including Germany) are best solved by its inhabitants.

De Gaulle will not recognize East Germany. He will not accept Soviet supremacy over Eastern Europe (he sent his foreign minister recently to Bucharest, Sofia and Warsaw to show that his mission to Moscow is to the capital of Russia, not that of Eastern Europe. And Couve de Murville will soon carry the same message to Prague and Budapest). He will not come to any agreement with the Soviets concerning Asia, the Middle East, Africa (where Franco-Soviet interests clash sharply in many places), Latin America (though both parties are likely in private to condemn American interventions there). There will be memorable ceremonies, elegantly worded speeches, military displays, trips to industrial plants and to Russian cultural landmarks.

But there will be something else, something which none of the Russians or Frenchmen will forget for one moment: 40 French Mirage IV bombers (60 before 1966 is over), each capable of delivering a Hiroshima-type "baby atom bomb" on Western Russia, and none capable of crossing the Atlantic.

There also in the background of the Moscow talks will be the knowledge of construction which has started in Upper Provence, one of France's poorest and most thinly populated areas, where villages and vast tracts of unfertile soil have been abandoned by the peasants in recent decades. In this cavernous country, French army engineers are digging 35 deep silos. By 1970, they will house French medium-range ballistic missiles, equipped with "baby-size" nuclear warheads. The range of these weapons again is 2,000 miles - enough to reach Moscow, Kiev and Odessa, but not enough to reach New York or Washington.

This is the most convincing proof that despite his retreat from NATO and his trip to Moscow, de Gaulle still sees France as part of a Western alliance which has only one potential enemy. That enemy is the not the US.