

Little Else to Be Said

NATO Conference at Least Kept Thing From Getting Worse

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BRUSSELS, June 9—The NATO conference which ended here in a cloud of cigar smoke yesterday evening managed to keep things from getting worse, but you can't say much else for it.

Maurice Couve de Murville, Gen. de Gaulle's suave and bland foreign minister, complete with his pin-striped suit, was the center of attraction for both the diplomats and the press. They all tried to worm out of him and his agents just a wee bit more information on where the General intends to go but as usual they learned very little.

"Couve," as they refer to him, was affable as ever and managed a small joke or two. But by the time it was over those who had thought de Gaulle is determined to undermine the American position in Europe seemed to be even more convinced:

Some, especially the Canadians and the Danes and in part the Belgians and Italians, were hopeful that something would turn up to prove that de Gaulle was not as bad a fellow as the Americans and the British have been saying, not to mention the Germans. These Mr. Macawbers managed to prevent the immediate move of the NATO Council out of Paris, as Dean Rusk would have liked.

Indeed, these moderates helped to compose some of the minor Franco-American difficulties. The French never talked about a fight and

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they ridiculed every rumor of a walkout. This made it even harder for the Americans to convince the press that the French were behaving as outrageously as they contended.

Unhappily, American press relations here fell back to something like the low they were in before James Greenfield managed to represent newsmen and not just protect the Secretary of State while serving as Assistant Secretary for Public Relations.

Cleveland, Schaetzel Busy

On top of this, two of the hardest-line American officials were busy here: Harlan Cleveland, the Ambassador to NATO, and J. Robert Schaetzel, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe. It was Cleveland who said publicly before the meeting that de Gaulle's actions in tossing the Americans and the integrated NATO headquarters out of France was a "declaration of undependability." Even some American diplomats over here who are anti-de Gaulle gulped at that one.

Of course, the Americans contended that the 14 stood rocklike on principle against the errant France, but the evidence was minimal beyond the obvious fact that none of them wants to go without the American umbrella in case any nuclear rains should fall from the East.

There was talk too about improving East-West relations, but Danish Foreign

Minister Per Hakkerup never got his peace conference idea off the ground after Couve and Rusk agreed that caution was in order. That was about the only real agreement of substance, too.

No Open Break

So the ministers rushed for a late dinner and then for their planes as this latest jet age diplomatic act came to an end. Since this meeting had turned out to be only a way station, instead of a major point in the NATO crisis, it is unlikely anybody will even remember a month from now what did happen here.

Probably the most important fact is what did not occur. There was no open break between Washington and Paris. Nobody knows why the French played it that way but everybody assumes that President Johnson had finally taken enough time out from Vietnam to lay down the law to Rusk, that is, told him to be polite but firm and to avoid a break.

This, of course, did not prevent some hard words being spoken in private around the Palais des Congres, but at least they are not on the public record. However, the net result is likely to be more poison in the air between and among allies.

As usual it was rush, rush, too little sleep and too many cold sandwiches. The lucky ones were those who could dawdle over a \$20 three-hour lunch in a two-star restaurant.