

France Scores Point on NATO

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The United States was officially silent yesterday on the French charge that it has altered NATO's central strategic doctrine and exposed Europe to devastation without ever putting it to a vote in the alliance.

In fact, it is a case, as officials here privately concede, less of what the United States did than of how it was done. The truth is that French Premier Georges Pompidou has scored a technical point with his charge.

The history is illuminating. It began when the Eisenhower Administration, then equipped chiefly with big nuclear weapons for big bombers, proclaimed and the NATO Council adopted, in essence, what John Foster Dulles called the doctrine of "instant massive retaliation" with nuclear weapons in case of a Soviet attack on the West.

As Pompidou told the French Assembly, "officially, this remains the NATO doctrine." But the Kennedy Administration quickly backed away from it, especially with the buildup of American conventional forces and the coming of the so-called "small" nuclear weapons.

At the May, 1962, NATO meeting in Athens, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara gave the allies a preview of what was to become the new American — and NATO — doctrine of flexible response. All of this had the effect of nibbling away at the massive retaliation doctrine without any formal vote on repealing it.

McNamara told the ministers that in case of a nuclear attack by the Soviets the United States would respond with nuclear weapons but in case of a conventional attack the United States would consult with its allies before using nuclear weapons.

McNamara elaborated on

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major strategic statement without consultation inside NATO."

Pompidou contended that "Mr. McNamara had rejected the conceptions of Mr. Dulles for a strategy which the NATO Council has never approved to become in fact that of the command" of NATO, the command which President de Gaulle is now ordering out of France.

The French Premier contended that "a large proportion, perhaps even the majority, of the allied military leaders share our point of view" but dare not publicly "oppose the sovereign theme of the United States."

In the French view, the only answer to a Soviet attack would be a massive nuclear reply for, as Pompidou put it, "if there has to be a third great war in Europe, it will be nuclear, and Europe will be destroyed." The French nuclear force is designed, as the French put it, to at least "tear off the arm" of the Soviet bear.

From Athens onward McNamara has ridiculed the French force and its doctrine. American officials concede that some allies are unhappy about abandoning massive retaliation for what President Kennedy called the "pause" theory, a pause after an initial conflict to permit a truce rather than an automatic escalation to nuclear Armageddon. But they insist this is the only rational policy in an age of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The Pompidou point thus is one more exposure of inept American relations with its NATO allies. Though it does not alter the power of the United States to impose its doctrines on its allies, it does help to explain the sorry state to which Franco-American relations have fallen.

this theme at Ann Arbor, Mich., the next month. There he spoke of using non-nuclear forces "to deal with situations where a nuclear response may be inappropriate or simply not believable" and he enunciated "a strategy of controlled response."

As one American official put it yesterday, referring to Ann Arbor, "we made a