

EPUBLIC

What's Eating Our Allies

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President Johnson said last week this country is determined "to preserve and to strengthen the deterrent strength of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization." In a technical military sense that is feasible, even if General de Gaulle withdraws French facilities. But it won't cure NATO's political headaches.

Mr. Johnson put his finger on the trouble when he said NATO came into existence 17 years ago because of "fear of Communist aggression and Communist subversion." Among Europeans, that fear is fast being replaced by hopes of a knitting together of all Europe, including the Soviet Union. What price Cold War, when a rock-ribbed German conservative like ex-Chancellor Adenauer says, as he did in Bonn last week, that "the Soviet Union has entered the ranks of the nations that desire peace"?

No longer terrified of their own Communist Parties or of a Russian military attack, the West Europeans resent dependence on US military power. European politicians now work hard to get domestic mileage out of this resentment. De Gaulle was the first to do so and his success has produced imitators. In the current British electoral campaign Tory leader Ted Heath, who hasn't much else going for him, has experimented with anti-Americanism. In Germany, Chancellor Erhard may be politically embarrassed if de Gaulle's anti-NATO moves enhance Germany's NATO importance - for this will also underscore Erhard's loyalty to a US line.

There isn't much this country can do about its allies' fretfulness over our preponderant military strength. We can't really share our nuclear power with them without encouraging nuclear proliferation, which we are against. All attempts to share such responsibility, like the proposed multilateral force, have flopped.

France and the other 13 European allies might be less envious of US military superiority if they felt less uneasy about US policy. It seems only yesterday that the US was hopping mad over the Europeans trading steel for oil with Russia. Now members of Congress are hopping mad about French and German plans to sell a steel mill to China. These periodic outbursts of irritation don't make our allies act differently; they only sharpen their suspicions that Washington has lost touch with a fast-changing world.