

NATO Strategy

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Cut in Military Forces Likely

In his talks with Chancellor Erhard, President Johnson did not press the German leader on the touchy issue of his nation's role in nuclear weaponry. But in a roundabout way the issue has now been advanced a significant notch.



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The two leaders did agree on an American-British-German "searching reappraisal" of the Western Alliance and the forces necessary in tomorrow's world.

The study, it was formally said, will take into account "changes in military technology and mobility" in determining "the forces required to maintain adequate deterrence and defense."

As described by American officials, the study will consider the nature of the Communist threat, appropriate forms of deterrence and defense, what is a fair share for each NATO member nation in that defense and how to deal with the balance of payments problems those shares create.

The net result, it is now widely conceded in Administration circles, probably will be a cut in NATO forces, including the number of American troops in Germany. The hope is to bring it about in an orderly way and to justify it in a rational framework.

The communique reference to changes in military technology and mobility provides the route to "dual basing"; that is, pulling some American forces back to the United States to be kept in readiness for swift airlift to prepared European bases.

There is likely to be a struggle within the Administration over the new study, especially if, as is possible, John J. McCloy, long-time advisor to Presidents, is the American representative.

McCloy represents the

hard-line school, men who oppose cuts in NATO. President Johnson himself often seems to lean to this school but he has never gotten himself flatly committed. He is, of course, under senatorial pressure here to trim the American forces in NATO.

On the other hand, the President would dearly like to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, something he recently has been referring to in terms of hope.

To do this will require Germany to give up the so-called option for a multilateral nuclear force. Erhard could not do so while here without collapsing his own government, in the view of students of German politics, and the President did not press him because he knew that.

But it is conceivable, in the view of some American officials at least, that Erhard or his successor could give up that option sometime next year as part of a new NATO strategy posture.

What could make that possible will be the formal creation at the December meeting of NATO foreign and defense ministers of a permanent NATO body for the planning of nuclear operations. That is the expected outcome of the so-called McNamara Committee which met again last week in Rome.

In his public remarks here, and in the communique, Erhard left open the option of bowing out on the multilateral force. By late winter or early spring, if he has survived the intervening political assaults at home, he may be ready to give up the multilateral idea which, in any case, is dead in Wash-

ington though not formally buried.

For those who, like the President, want a nonproliferation treaty the problem now is to create through the coming American-British-German talks a new NATO setup which gives the Germans an adequate consultative role in nuclear affairs—and permits them to finally drop the idea of sharing in any new form of nuclear hardware such as the multilateral force.