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Today and Tomorrow . . . By Walter Lippmann

NATO and Its Future

THIS WEEK the Foreign Ministers of the NATO countries have been holding their annual meeting, and the subject before them is what to do about the "O" in NATO, that is to say about the military organization which was constructed after the signature of the



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North Atlantic Treaty itself. The future, it may indeed be the very existence, of the organization, and not the existence of the treaty itself is the problem before the Foreign Ministers.

THE MILITARY organization, according to the most recent figures available, has assigned to it about 58 divisions. There are another 30 marked as a possible reserve. There are about 5500 tactical aircraft based on 22 NATO airfields and dependent upon a joint system of fuel pipelines and signal communications. There are naval forces which would come under various Allied commands in case of war and there are also several thousand tactical nuclear weapons which, though stockpiled in Europe, are held under an exclusively American chain of command. Beyond all this, but wholly outside of the NATO organization and indeed of the NATO treaty, there is the enormously powerful American Strategic Air Force.

The large and expensive military organization, which does not include the United States strategic nuclear forces, is now under wide attack as being obsolete and superfluous. General Eisenhower, who was supreme commander in Europe when the NATO organization was assembled and constructed, has now come to the conclusion that the United States troop contingent, which consists of five divisions, can be reduced safely

to one Army corps of two divisions plus a reconnaissance regiment. This is a striking confirmation of the general belief that the threat of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, which existed in the fifties, has diminished greatly, and that the Soviets do not contemplate the invasion of Western Europe either because they don't want to or because the United States nuclear force deters them, or for both reasons.

The prospects of the NATO military organization have been affected by President Johnson's decision that Asia is the primary theater

of danger and concern to the United States, implying that Europe is now a secondary theater.

Finally, of course, there has been General de Gaulle. He has brought to a head and has made sharp and logical, clear and definitive, the basic considerations which account for General Eisenhower's and for President Johnson's change of course. The main consideration is that the cold war with the Soviet Union has thawed out to a point where coexistence is an accepted fact, where the beginning of detente and collaboration are in sight.

THE PRACTICAL problems with which the Foreign Ministers are now struggling are for the most part the result of France's retirement from the integrated commands of NATO, the expulsion of the NATO establishment and its facilities from French soil, and the rejection by France of any automatic military commitment as part of its obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty. These French actions have thrown into great confusion the strategy, the logistical system, the housekeeping, and the bureaucratic routines of the NATO organization.

For France is the geo-

graphical heart of Western Europe. Without France the military forces in West Germany are without an adequate hinterland from which to maneuver and into which to retreat; without France the northern countries of NATO are physically cut off from the NATO countries of the Mediterranean. What is more, the main considerations which have prevailed with General Eisenhower and with General de Gaulle are quite well known in other NATO countries.

THE REAL QUESTION, the true necessity, is not how to preserve the organization as such but how to preserve the alliance. The organization, it must be said I think, is no longer a genuine military investment but an expensive and deteriorating ruin. It is like a mansion, once the pride of the neighborhood, from which the tenants have moved away, for which no new tenants can be found. There is no use cutting the grass and mending a few window panes if nobody will live in the mansion.

The Western Alliance itself can and should be preserved and strengthened. That cannot be done by statesmen who do not conceive of the alliance without the elaborate and compli-

cated bureaucracy which was built up in the organization. They will have to learn that the organization, which was an afterthought and not part of the original treaty, which was very useful in its day, is not meant for perpetuity. They will need to learn this because the disputes arising from the ruins and the debris of the organization are a threat to the alliance itself. These disputes have to do with the remnants of an organization that its members are abandoning. They are disputes about money and about where to put up buildings and they are inherently insoluble because there no longer exists the essential premise of the whole organization which is that it is a vital necessity to the peace and security of its members.