

French, Allied Orders Differ In NATO Talks

By Waverley Root
Washington Post Staff Writer

PARIS, Nov. 9—France has given its armed forces chief-of-staff, Gen. Charles Ailleret, considerable initiative to negotiate on the role of French forces in Germany and France's military relations with its NATO allies, highly reliable sources said today.

But NATO has instructed its commander, Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, only to "listen" to what the French have to say, these sources indicate, and report back to the 14 allies for further instructions.

The two generals are empowered to discuss French troops in Germany, but both are leaving Paris soon and no date has been set for their meeting. In any case, the contrasting sets of instructions make it likely that when they do meet, few positive results can be expected.

The question of what France would do if there were a war or some lesser military engagement affecting its NATO allies has been a key one ever since President de Gaulle announced his plans for French withdrawal from integrated NATO command last March.

French Viewpoint

The question of the role of French troops in Germany is a particular version of the broader issue. The French regard both matters as "within the competence of military authorities," as Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville made plain in Parliament last week.

Ailleret thus is understood to have been given detailed directives on the extent of the cooperation France is prepared to offer NATO. He reportedly has been authorized to reach what the French call "staff conventions" about the missions which may be assigned to French troops in common NATO actions.

These can be contingency

plans, worked out in accord with various hypotheses about how hostilities might break out. But each hypothesis begins with the proviso that France must first accept entry into the conflict in full sovereignty. She will in no case accept automatic involvement.

Plans for Withdrawal

This implies that one other hypothesis has to be worked out. In case of a NATO conflict which France declines to join, there would have to be a plan

for the evacuation of her forces from Germany. According to a French source this will not be a matter for bilateral discussion. If the case occurs—which the French seem to think unlikely—they will take their own dispositions for withdrawal. They are understood to have plans ready for evacuation if the Bonn government ever requests that they leave.

As a matter of fact, the French are already starting to withdraw some forces from Germany. It was announced today that two regiments equipped with Hawk guided missiles will be pulled back into France, while some armored units will also be brought back progressively from now until the end of 1967.

The French emphasize that what they are prepared to discuss is wartime cooperation

with NATO. Peacetime cooperation, they maintain, falls within the competence of diplomats, not of military men.

Flights Involved

Peacetime cooperation includes such questions as overflight rights for NATO planes, which de Gaulle hinted in his last press conference might be put on a basis of case-by-case authorization, instead of blanket monthly authorizations, as at present. Some NATO quarters are inclined to think this was mentioned largely for bargaining reasons, since France has interests of her own in maintaining peacetime cooperation, such as participation in the radar warning system.

Ailleret has reportedly been told he cannot accept keeping American air bases—now being evacuated—on a stand-by basis, either by American or French staffs. It seems that he may have been allowed some latitude for negotiation concerning the allocation of French bases for NATO use after war has started, with French participation. This would probably have to be done on the basis of bilateral agreements with other NATO members—meaning principally the United States.

This fits in with what has seemed to be a consistent French desire to replace NATO commitments with a series of bilateral accords. But it is not acceptable to the United States, which considers access to French bases only after hostilities have started will be too late.

Commitments Barred

Ailleret has also been forbidden to accept any advance commitment for cooperation in case of a "crisis," short of a war, in which France would have joined. This formula was brought up at the Brussels meeting of NATO ministers last June and nearly wrecked it. The French then refused to accept any engagement which they considered as enlarging their obligations under Article 5 of the NATO treaty. This calls only for the NATO members to consult on joint action in case of an attack on anyone of them, and does not specify an automatic response.

The French are reported resigned to the fact that their refusal to pledge automatic participation in a NATO conflict casts them for the role of reserve troops.

Contentment Seen

French forces in Germany

are already in a reserve position. One reason is that now that American nuclear warheads have been withdrawn from French planes in Germany, they must necessarily remain in reserve behind troops equipped with atomic arms. A second is their geographical position, which they tend to date back to the end of World War II, when they claim their allies grudgingly allotted them an occupation zone as far as possible from the East-West frontier.

In the present circumstances, it is possible to suggest that the French are not

only resigned, but content, to be occupying the reserve position, for if they were on the frontier and an attack was delivered from the East, they would immediately become automatically involved—exactly what they want to avoid.

The third reason why the French role would be to remain in the reserve, at the

beginning of a conflict at least, is a question of trust. How can NATO, it is pointed out, leave a front-line position in charge of forces whose participation in an eventual conflict is doubtful? This element may also crop up in the Ailleret-Lemnitzer talks and make agreement difficult.

It will in fact be more or

less necessary, in the working out of detailed contingency plans which would have any military value, to discuss deployment of forces. The question then arises: How far will NATO dare disclose its strategic plans to a country which may elect to stay on the ground when the balloon goes up?