

Uneasiness in Europe Over Haig

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BRUSSELS.—The controversy in the United States over Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr.'s appointment as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe has failed to spark an echo from America's allies in NATO.

That does not mean there hasn't been considerable criticism on this side of the Atlantic about President Ford's selection of Haig for both the top NATO military post and the command of U.S. forces in Europe.

The weight of press comment in most NATO countries has been clearly unfavorable. And, among officers of the American forces stationed in Europe, the appointment has triggered a clearly discernible, though not openly displayed, feeling of bitterness about the elevation of a man regarded as a "political general."

But the reaction was quite different among those who make the decisions in the 12 countries that participate with the United States in NATO's integrated military structure. Here at NATO headquarters, sources in the various national delegations say that their governments accepted the Haig nomination with barely a whisper of dissent.

The sole exception was the Netherlands, whose government made it clear that it was displeased and tried to sound out the other European allies about rejecting Haig. In the end, though, the Dutch, seeing that they had no support, withdrew their objections, and Haig's appointment sailed through NATO's Defense Planning Committee without incident.

The initial Dutch opposition was based on the same



ALEXANDER HAIG
... muted criticism

consideration that has caused controversy in the United States—namely, the contention that Haig has been compromised by his political role in the Nixon administration.

Dutch sources say that they have nothing against Haig personally and do not mean to imply that they think he was involved in the Watergate coverup. But, they add, Foreign Minister Max Van der Stoep feels that Haig is so closely identified with former President Nixon that his appointment as supreme commander amounts to "a public-relations disaster" for NATO.

Influencing the Dutch government is the fact that public opinion in the Netherlands, particularly among young people, has grown increasingly hostile to all

things military. Much of this anti-military feeling springs from the Vietnam war, which European youth equates with Mr. Nixon.

As a result, the Netherlands government took the position that Haig's appointment was not exactly helpful to its attempts to convince its domestic constituency that Holland has a vested interest in remaining within NATO. Yet, while all the other European NATO members have essentially the same problem, they all steered clear of the Dutch effort to mount a campaign against Haig's appointment.

NATO sources say this was due to a number of reasons, chief among them a desire not to embarrass and possibly antagonize Mr. Ford at the very outset of his presidency. Therefore, even those with reservations about the wisdom of the appointment apparently decided that accepting Haig was the lesser evil.

A secondary reason cited by some is the fact that the present Netherlands government, which loomed as the spearhead of any opposition movement, has developed a reputation for eccentricity in NATO circles.

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Joop den Uyl's Socialist-led government provoked the anger of its allies by proposing cuts in the Dutch forces beyond what NATO regards as a safe level. Then, two weeks ago, Defense Minister Henk Vredeling seemed to go out of his way to deliberately enrage the rest of the alliance.

While the Haig appointment has made remarkably few waves within NATO, the story is somewhat different regarding his other job as

U.S. Army, Air and Naval personnel grouped in the European Command.

Although no one will say so publicly, Haig's appointment is clearly a bitter pill for many command officers. His takeover of the command, scheduled for Nov. 1, is the most talked-about subject in U.S. officers' messes throughout Europe, and military sources say that the sentiment, particularly among professional army officers, is overwhelmingly hostile.

Their objection is described as being based not on ideological grounds but on the fact that Haig achieved his position through service in the White House rather than coming up through the normal military channels.

In a service where most officers find promotion a slow and grinding process, there appears to be great resentment over the way that Haig, in the words of one officer, "jumped the line."

In private conversation, these officers point out that Haig was catapulted by Mr. Nixon over 240 generals to four-star rank, although he had never held a major field command during his army service.

This, many contend, is grossly unfair to the number of officers who have far greater experience and demonstrated records of achievement in traditional military command and staff areas.

As a result, the tendency is to regard the appointment as a bad precedent harmful to the morale of senior officers and likely to convince younger officers that the path to advancement lies in politics.

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