

# RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

## COMMUNIST AREA

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### THE SOVIET LINE ON NATO

After a period of comparative silence, the Soviet government appears to be formulating in small and not altogether unambiguous stages a clearer public position on U.S. Secretary of Defense MacNamara's proposal for a "select committee" for the consideration of NATO nuclear problems and policy. When the proposal was first voiced in vague form last May, the Soviets were quick to come forth with a negative reaction, charging that the new scheme invited "the Bonn militarists into the nuclear club" and amounted to giving West Germany atomic weapons.<sup>1</sup> After this initial shot, they more or less ignored the subject, concentrating their ire on the NATO Multilateral Nuclear Force (MLF), their intense dislike for which is well known, and, to a lesser extent, on the British Atlantic Nuclear Force proposal.

The MacNamara proposal has, in the meantime, acquired a prominent place among the several possible solutions to the NATO nuclear problem but remains wholly lacking of any precise definition with respect to its functions and powers. MacNamara's original suggestion was itself surrounded with ambiguity. As he formulated the idea and as it has essentially remained, the select committee could be an interim discussion group for the consideration of substantive plans for NATO's nuclear integration or it could constitute a real nuclear directorate to which members would delegate a measure of sovereignty in military and foreign policy. The former alternative would represent little more than a device to remove the heat from NATO discussions and to delay painful decisions on a real solution. The second alternative -- which ironically mirrors an earlier proposal by that arch-opponent of integration, General de Gaulle -- goes directly to the heart of NATO's difficulties by raising the

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1) Izvestia, 10 June 1965.

crucial issue of sharing sovereignty, the issue which must be confronted if NATO is to survive as an integrated alliance.

While the select committee proposal has yet to be endowed with any precision by NATO's members, an increasing number of them -- ten at last count -- have stated in one form or another their desire to be included. The principal motive behind this expansion of the as-yet-hypothetical committee lies not so much in the merits of the proposal itself but in the insistence of NATO's smaller members that they not be left out of a possible forum. The "mushrooming" of the select committee is reported to have somewhat reduced its attractiveness in American eyes because Washington's original hope appears to have been for a small, flexible decision-making or consultative body in which German desires for a role in strategic policy formation could be satisfied.

Despite NATO's failure to solidify the select committee proposal, the idea has been kept very much alive by the hope that it might provide a way out of the East-West impasse on a nuclear non-proliferation agreement. The Soviet Union has vehemently insisted the only acceptable agreement is one which would

So far, criticism of the select committee has been largely absent from the central press, but other media, principally Radio Moscow, have been increasingly critical. The weekly round table of Radio Moscow's Domestic Service carried a discussion on 17 October in which the committee was described as a behind-the-scenes equivalent of the MLF "for which Bonn is striving." Two days later, Radio Moscow's commentator Belyaev stated that the new, apparently expanded, committee does not differ from the older, more select version which was rejected by France, supposedly because it "gave West Germany access to the button of nuclear war." Bonn, Belyaev claimed, "is in no way to be satisfied with a purely consultative role. The pretensions of West German politicians go somewhat further, i.e., to the acquisition of nuclear weapons. In subsequent commentaries, Radio Moscow underscored the United States' official position that consultative arrangements were not being regarded as substitutes for the MLF and repeated the charge that Bonn regarded the select committee as just another path to the nuclear button.

Soviet criticism of the select committee idea achieved new explicitness in a commentary by Tass "observer" M. Sagatoyan, broadcast on 26 October, under the title "Washington Maneuvers". The commentator noted Western rumors, attributed to "anonymous officials of the American government", which proclaimed that "the Soviet Union is supposedly prepared to agree to the access of West Germany to nuclear arms under the flag of 'a strategic nuclear committee.'" "Such an argument", he rebutted, "is so ridiculous that it does not even deserve any serious reply." He continued:



Soviet inconsistency, these rumors have continued to float, especially in United Nations circles where non-proliferation is currently being discussed.<sup>3</sup>

The possibility of Soviet inconsistency regarding the select committee is certainly not to be disregarded. The line transmitted by Radio Moscow can be seen to vary at times. On 5 November, for example, Moscow's correspondent E. Mnatsakanov (phonetic spelling) reported that major objections to the committee were now coming from Bonn because it promised to be too large and diffuse to satisfy German ambitions. To claim that the West German government has doubts about the now not-so-select nuclear committee as a solution to NATO's problems is not at variance with the facts, but it is logically inconsistent with Radio Moscow's earlier position. For, if the committee is merely a back door via which Bonn can reach the atom, a less expensive avenue than MLF, moreover, why then should Bonn regard it as inadequate? It would seem that the line laid down for Radio Moscow on the select committee is not a very precise one.

If the Soviet Union has privately or otherwise expressed some willingness to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable ways in which NATO may coordinate its nuclear policies, one searches in vain among the public statements of high Soviet officials for clear evidence of it. None appear to have gone further than the position formulated by Brezhnev at the Soviet-East German friendship rally held in the Kremlin on 24 September. He stated:

The acquisition of nuclear weapons by West Germany, whether in a multilateral system or in any other form, would inevitably oblige the socialist states, members of the Warsaw Pact, to take appropriate steps to strengthen their security and to preserve peace in Europe. This was clearly announced by the participants of the January [1965] session of the political consultative committee in Warsaw to those who are planning to give the German Federal Republic nuclear weapons.

The official Soviet position, therefore, remains comprehensive but vague, which probably accounts for the variations observed in the line propounded by Radio Moscow.

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3) See William R. Frye in the Washington Evening Star, 6 November 1965.

The Objectives of Soviet Policy. One can hardly demand of the Soviet government an unambiguous position on the alternative schemes confronting the Western alliance when the debate within NATO is itself fraught with wholesale confusion, when the MLF has been contradictorily reported from various vantage points in the West as being dead, dying, and very much alive. The Soviets quite reasonably feel that they have little interest in spelling out a precise policy before it becomes clear which way the wind is really blowing. They may well regard it as distinctly possible that an amorphous nuclear committee will actually be created within NATO as a kind of minimum device to temper debate, quite apart from their objections. Why should they declare categorically that even a select committee would be regarded as an insurmountable obstacle to a non-proliferation agreement, when such a position might actually strengthen the hand of those, namely the West Germans, who insist that NATO must go as far as the physical sharing of nuclear control? It is thus somewhat problematical to enquire whether Soviet spokesmen are "privately" abetting rumors about their willingness to accept a select committee.

But his, of course, begs the far more basic question: What are the essential policy objectives of the Soviet government regarding the current nuclear debate within NATO and the evolution of the alliance? Unfortunately the gravity of the question does not add to the ease of answering it. One may reasonably formulate two hypotheses or points of view, and indeed they can hardly be recognized as much more than this.

A charitable interpretation, which concentrates on the supposedly "objective" Soviet interest in European security and maintenance of the status quo, might argue that the Soviet Union has made its peace with the existence of collective security arrangements in the West (although it can not admit it for ideological reasons), that it is seriously concerned about the problem of nuclear proliferation, but that an historical fear of Germany generates an irrational negativism about any NATO nuclear arrangements in which Germany has a voice even though no direct access to the nuclear button. Thus the Soviet Union finds itself opposed to any NATO arrangements, which must per force accommodate Germany to some extent. It should be noted in this connection that the shrill tone of Soviet warnings that the MLF would constitute Bonn's road to national control over nuclear weapons can not simply be dismissed out of hand as propaganda since so strong a defender of NATO as Henry Kissinger has voiced the same warnings, albeit in milder form.

The second possible interpretation of Soviet policy is less charitable but perhaps, alas, more realistic since it



concentrates on actual Soviet tactics as a source of insight about Soviet objectives. This interpretation would argue that it is the Soviet Union's objective simply to disrupt NATO in any way possible and to extend its influence into the resulting security vacuum. Thus the Soviet Union tantalizes the United States and Britain with the prospect of concrete agreements, such as non-proliferation, and the welcome atmosphere of detente, but only at the price of foregoing the solution of NATO's problems. It vilifies West Germany but continues to emit hints that a German policy less oriented toward the West could bring rewards, ignoring the fact that a Germany searching alone for its identity in the center of Europe was the cause of two world wars. It plays hypocritically on the widespread fear of Germany to shore up a shaky position in East Europe. It flirts with General de Gaulle who, although dedicated to the termination of NATO integration, aims his infant nuclear force at Moscow and entertains a pan-European vision far more radical in its anti-Communist implications than President Johnson's tentative efforts at "bridge building". According to the logic of this interpretation, the present confluence of French and Soviet interests is based on a long-term wager between Paris and Moscow. De Gaulle is betting that America can be replaced in Europe, at least in part, by France; the Soviet leadership is making every effort to ensure that it will be replaced by the USSR. For the moment, their tactical objective is the same: to remove the United States from a position of decisive influence in Europe. In view of the present blurring of Soviet authority in East Europe, the Soviets have a great deal to lose by playing this game; but they may regard the stakes as well worth the risk.

One need not necessarily accept either one of the foregoing interpretations of Soviet objectives as the exclusive truth even though they would seem logically to exclude one another. Politics are often illogical and Soviet motives have often been proven to be mixed. But whether or not one regards Soviet tactics toward Europe and the NATO alliance as being motivated by irrationality or opportunism or both, one must recognize that they are rooted essentially in an irresponsible short-sightedness. The operating assumption behind them is that insecurity and confusion west of the Elbe contributes to security and stability to the East. In the two decades following the Second World War, when the dominance of the two power blocs rendered international politics, in the language of game theory, a zero-sum competition, there was a certain crude logic to this assumption. But the fact that this assumption can no longer serve as an operative guide to the defense of real Soviet interests has been shown with clarity in other parts of the world, in the Indian-Pakistani conflict

and in Vietnam. In Europe the action appears less dramatic than in Asia, but for the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies the stakes are immeasurably higher. The problems of European security are currently forcing the United States to adjust itself to the changed power realities that have emerged a generation after World War II. The Soviet stance toward collective security within the Western alliance and, of course, within the Warsaw Pact will serve as a sure test of the current Soviet leadership's ability and willingness to adjust to these realities. So far Moscow's response has merely been to develop more facile tactics, an expedient which may delay the inevitable adjustment but will surely exacerbate the problem.

Fritz Ermarth

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