

In 1940, Britain - only a few years before cool and confident behind its channel - proposed full union with France. It was the moment when continental Europe was about to fall victim to the Nazi aggressor. The offer was too late. Offers made under the imminence of defeat and collapse, for radical and immediate action to implement ideas which the day before yesterday were considered as visionary and unrealistic, such offers always are too late. Do we have to have panic before we can make progress?

At this moment, moreover, a feeling of discouragement is more likely to work in the wrong way -- not in the transformation of NATO into something better, but in its reduction into something less. This is a very real danger. French policy has underlined it.

General de Gaulle has rejected Atlantic defence integration. He has ordered France's withdrawal from the North Atlantic defence organization. In doing so, his procedures have been brusque and his ideas understandably disturbing to France's friends and allies.

It would be foolish, however, to push the panic button over this. By doing so, we might merely push France not only from the NATO military organization but out of the Atlantic alliance itself. And France does not want to leave the alliance.

It would be shortsighted, also, not to realize that the attitude of Western Europe to American commitments in Europe is changing, just as the attitude of Eastern Europe toward Moscow is changing.

We should not try to throw all the blame on France and General de Gaulle for recent NATO developments. Some of General de Gaulle's decisions, I know, have been disconcerting and seem to indicate a return to a kind of nationalism from which France has suffered as much in the last 50 years as any country in the world. Before we condemn, however, we should try to understand what is behind France's recent actions. France is not, has not been, and will not be, satisfied with an Atlantic organization, or an Atlantic alliance of independent states, dominated by America. France, and not only France, feels that continental Europe is now strong enough (in large part because of the generous assistance of the U.S.A.) to be given its rightful share in the control of the policies of the alliance.

While France is not alone in this feeling, only de Gaulle has translated it into policy and action. If he has gone too far in that action (as I think he has), if he is on the wrong course, we should not drive him farther in the wrong direction but try to bring him back to the right course by seriously re-examining the purposes and the organization of NATO in the light of 1966, not 1948. As I have said, we should have done it years ago. If the reason for General de Gaulle's action is his belief that the other allies will not consider any change to NATO to meet new conditions, let's take positive action about the necessary reforms. Surely it doesn't make sense any longer to take the position that NATO is sacrosanct and mustn't be altered. Our reaction should be just the opposite.