The French Dilemma: National Dignity vs. Economic Need

By EDDIE PRICE
Thresher Staff Writer

With the dramatic and permanent reversal of foreign policy which was represented by America's entry into the Second World War and her reaction to the spread of Communism during its aftermath, America assumed a position of dominance in Europe as unprecedented as it was inescapable.

Europe was prostrate and threatened from within and without by forces whose strengthening would be our doom. Within the envelope of protection provided by American forces, with the capital supplied by the Marshall plan, and through their own skill and initiative, Europeans have now undergone an economic and political revival which has in many ways put the Americans to shame. In the case of the French at least, their condition of dependence has become incompatible with their revived national dignity and even their military security.

The keynote of French Ambassador Herve Alphand's talk in Hammond Hall Wednesday afternoon was "Alliance and Independence"—an adroit combination of friendship with firmness in the French attitude toward the United States.

Answering questions from the audience with clarity and consistency, Alphand skillfully presented the aims of French foreign policy in the years ahead: European unity, a reorganization of NATO, detente with the Soviet Union, and negotiated settlement for the "childhood crises" of the New Nations.

Central to DeGaulle's whole diplomatic position is the possession of an independent nuclear force. Admittedly very small and modest, it is this force alone which makes possible an independent French foreign policy. Alphand recalled Suez, and asked: "Do you want 100 million Americans killed for some French action you don't agree with?"

What the French are afraid of, according to Alphand, is the possibility of someone blackmailing France without threatening the United States—the danger that America would not use nuclear weapons, whose unleashing would bring a rain of destruction upon North America, to protect the Europeans against an enemy threat, or to back a French diplomatic adventure, perhaps.

It is the desire to participate more fully in their own defense, and specifically to have more authority over nuclear policy, that lies behind the French desire to reorganize NATO. Indeed, the problem of coordinating the nuclear forces of the allies is a crucial issue that has got to be faced.

The American President, over whom the Europeans have no control whatsoever, cannot continue to be the sole judge of when Europe is to be defended by total retaliation. But to put this authority in the hands of a committee, each member of which had a veto, would mean paralysis.

The American proposal for a mixed-man multilateral force of missile-carrying surface vessels
was an attempt to postpone the necessity of dealing with this problem. Independent national forces as the pattern of nuclear dissimination would mean that the Germans, out of sheer necessity, would have to acquire an atomic capacity of their own.

And the possession of such weapons by a nation sheered in half by enemy occupation, and still unquenchably nationalistic, fills the minds of French diplomats with visions of horror. But the French do not want the Germans tied to the Americans through a joint military force, for this would block the unification and independence of Western Europe, which has been De-Gaulle’s dream since he came to power.