

French Gov't:

'Topsy With The Perfume Of It's Neutrons'

The following are excerpts of an interview given by French Air Force General (retired) Pierre Gallois to the Paris newspaper Le Quotidien de Paris, July 15. Gen. Gallois, who was Director of Strategic Studies for the French armed forces from 1954 to 1957, is a well-known exponent of traditionalist Gaullist strategic conceptions. In this interview, he refutes the new "correction" (toward adaptaton to the U.S. utopians' "tactical nuclear war" schemes) of the traditional French strategy of nuclear deterrence, retailed in particular by French Prime Minister Barre in a recent radio-televised address.

Gen. Gallois: In fact, Mr. Barre reasons in 1977 as one could have done 30 years ago. For instance, he sticks to the concept of "military alliances," of "battle," and, implicitly, of the geographical delimitation of this battle to a "theater of operations": all notions made obsolete by the military stature of the possible aggressor, as is said today, and by the very nature of the new weapons this aggressor possesses.

Q.de P.: So, according to you, atomic weaponry prohibits the repetition of great classic battles in Europe?

Gen. Gallois: It seems obvious to me that the development of new nuclear weapons definitively throws recent military methods back into a totally unrepeatable past.

Take the example of the latest Russian ballistic baptized SS-20, whose 3500 km. range — not enough to reach the United States — ranks it among tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) in the eyes of the Soviets as of the Americans. Instead of deploying them like a super-artillery — which seems to be the role of tactical weapons for the (French) head of state and even, whatever he may have said to the contrary, for General Mery (Chief of Staff of the French armed forces — ed.), since he wants to implant these weapons within conventional divisions — the Soviets want to deploy them east of Moscow. That is to say a location from which they could, on any given Saturday night and by surprise, destroy in a few dozens of minutes all of NATO's arms, airfields, barracks, tank concentrations, the some 100 American locations where tactical nuclear weapons are stored, etc. If, as the Americans assert, the Russians deploy 1200 of such vectors, and if each has three nuclear warheads, you can imagine the extraordinary power of destruction which would fall by surprise on NATO's armaments.

Thus, there would neither be a theater of operations, nor a battle, nor troop movements, but either immediate capitulation, or non-war thanks to the deterrent power of nuclear arms capable of escaping this operation of massive and instantaneous destruction.

Q. de P.: Even if he resorts to concepts which you call obsolete, the Prime Minister opts nonetheless for deterrence, and even goes as far as to apply it to "neighboring and allied territories..."

Gen. Gallois: That's true but, doing so, the Prime

Minister does not escape contradictions. What are they? First, when ten years ago French nuclear ambitions were considerably greater — that is to say when she wanted to deploy 54 missiles on the Albion Plateau, six atomic submarines and over 200 "Pluton" missiles — very few in France (or abroad) believed that this force would be capable of "balancing" the value of the "French stake."

Today, when the projected nuclear force has been cut in two — thanks, by the way, to the President of the Republic — the government assigns it the pretentious mission not only to defend France, but also Western Europe, and even its northern and southern perimeters, as is spelled out in the preamble of the military program bill. This is paradoxical, to say the least.

Another contradiction: at a time when it is clear that almighty America would no longer dare use its formidable strategic arsenal to defend the West European ensemble, now France, with its own arsenal, pretends to pick up the slack and to protect everybody. It is a dangerous ambition for the country, and a laughable one for others.

And even the conception Mr. Barre has of deterrence applied to the sole national territory seems the more singular as it condemns this very same deterrence: the Prime Minister stated that an eventual aggressor could be tempted to "go around" our nuclear deterrent by trying to "gnaw at us" progressively.

But "gnaw" at what? Naturally, at the national territory. But what else do we have to lose in Europe, apart from the national territory? And if it were "gnawed at," would this not be a direct cut into the national flesh? And would this not merit that our nuclear arsenal be directly brought into action? *There* is a singular conception of the role of nuclear deterrence..."

Q. de P.: Certain people are wondering why the Prime Minister did not reject the presence of tactical nuclear weapons within France's foreign intervention forces...

Gen. Gallois: That is in fact my last criticism, and not the least. Does Mr. Barre mean that... over a stake that would not be major... France could call upon its nuclear arsenal? And against whom? Against a country which itself would be equipped with nuclear weapons?... But that would be tantamount to entering an extremely grave conflict for an affair that would not be vital... Or perhaps against a non-nuclear country? Can one imagine France brandishing its nuclear weapons against the naval forces (for instance) of a small state which, egged on by a large adversary, would want to do us harm? When the U.S. itself, during the Vietnam war, did not dare do so?

These are not serious views, and they give me the sentiment that we are dealing with sorcerer's apprentices made tipsy by the perfume of their neutrons. France today gives the image of a certain irresponsibility in the political handling of the weapons she inherited.