
Interview: General (ret.) Lauris Norstad

'Adenauer and de Gaulle asked me if we'd defend Europe with nuclear arms'

Following are excerpts from an interview with Gen Lauris Norstad, former Supreme Allied Commander, Commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) 1956-62.

The interview

Chaitkin on March 1, 1987, at the home of General Norstad. The general will celebrate his 80th birthday soon.

The discussion ranged over military and strategic topics from the 1950s and 1960s, and the lessons of that period for strategists of the 1980s. Then, as now, there was a fierce factional dispute between the traditional military men best represented by General Norstad and his senior, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, as against the Eastern Liberal Establishment faction, with its "utopian" military doctrine, personified by Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy. The views of the utopians, along with liberal kingmaker Averell Harriman, were also sharply contrasted with the traditional republican views of French President Charles de Gaulle and German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who had created a French-German alliance to help withstand the Soviet threat to Europe.

General Norstad was removed from his post on Jan. 1, 1963, a victim of the utopian faction whose tactics are spelled out in this interview. There were multiple attempts on the life of de Gaulle. *Washington Post* and *Newsweek* owner Philip Graham, a friend of General Norstad and a former Air Force intelligence aide to General MacArthur, was reported as a "suicide" by his estranged wife, Katharine Graham, after bitter political fights. The traditionalists had been influencing President John F. Kennedy away from the utopians' program of nuclear disarmament, the abandonment of Europe's defense, and the trap of a war in Vietnam; but President Kennedy was murdered in November 1963.

General Norstad: I opposed McNamara on many things, on many policy matters.

EIR: How did you come to resign from your position as NATO commander?

Norstad: They leaked to the press, in Europe and America, the lie that I was having a feud with President Kennedy. This was a deliberate lie, I had no particular problem with the President. This undercut my ability to continue to work with the Europeans.

EIR: So this is how they beat you.

Norstad: Well, as I told all my friends, they aren't beating me, I'm beating them, and that's how it's going to stay! . . . My great friend Adenauer called me in one day, he was disturbed after hearing this fabricated news of the "feud." . . . His aide had previously told me, "Your government is trying to undercut you." Adenauer asked me, "What in the hell is your government doing now?" I patiently explained to him, and he then understood, that it was not our government, but only certain individuals, who were doing this.

EIR: What was your relationship to Phil Graham. . . ? What were his views on the NATO issues?

Norstad: Phil was strongly in favor of NATO and American leadership and America's contribution of strength to NATO. In the fall of 1950, Phil and [his father-in-law] Eugene Meyer got together just before I was to go overseas as U.S. Air Force commander. We discussed the efforts then being made by some persons to cut down the American contribution to NATO, which we all agreed was the wrong way to go. . . .

[Editor's note: Events of two years previous to this meeting illustrate Graham's views on these matters. In 1948, as Soviet military moves heated up the Berlin crisis; Phil Graham had convened a meeting in his Washington home for 20 newspaper publishers. Then-U.S. Defense Secretary James Forrestal asked Graham's guests if they would support the government should it be deemed necessary to resort to nuclear weapons to defend Germany from Russian aggression; Graham and all his guests agreed that they would support the government in such a decision.]

EIR: What was your relationship to Charles de Gaulle?

Norstad: De Gaulle and I got along very well. Perhaps I was the only one in the world to do so! . . . He gave me the [French] Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor.

EIR: Like yourself, General de Gaulle was the subject of vicious press attacks in this country. What is your view on that?

Norstad: The attacks on de Gaulle are an example of our deterioration as a people. [General Norstad here talked at length of his warm personal relationship with Charles de Gaulle, and about his invitation to visit France in 1964, after Norstad had resigned as commander of NATO. De Gaulle had his defense minister begin a detailed briefing of Norstad on France's independent nuclear weapons force, and how Norstad interrupted the briefing because it was inappropriate for him to receive this as a private citizen. The French explained that they developed this relatively weak *force de frappe* as a deterrent to the Russians, as a potential "trigger," since its use by the French would force NATO to come into nuclear conflict.]

EIR: Today there is a policy conflict over whether the United States should honor its commitment to defend Europe, just as there was during the 1950s and 1960s. [Current NATO commander] Gen. Bernard Rogers has been criticized, as you were, and is being forced to resign, for supposedly being "too willing" to defend Europe, for being "too European." Some West Germans have said they would be very happy if General Rogers were appointed U.S. ambassador to Germany, to replace the soft-on-the-Soviets Ambassador Richard Burt. What do you think?

Norstad: That would be great! Bernie Rogers is a totally capable, very, very intelligent man, who understands history.

EIR: What can you say about the "flexible response" doctrine, which came to be interpreted as implying the U.S.A. would not use nuclear weapons to defend Europe?

Norstad: What was good about "flexible response," I designed. What was bad about it, I didn't design. In 1957 I outlined NATO nuclear policy. "Appropriate response" meant that we must retain our option to use nuclear weapons, or we simply *give* Europe to the Russians. This is what I said: We are charged with defending these people. That doesn't mean defending them with popcorn. That doesn't mean that if we have to defend them and it comes to using a weapon that is unpopular, that we agree to defeat rather than using that option. The Europeans knew that they were really defenseless, that they had no ability under any circumstances to hold up to meet the Russians' overwhelming conventional superiority. . . . So let's make it damn clear, that our use of these weapons is up to us. . . . Adenauer and de Gaulle asked me if we would use nuclear weapons to defend Europe. So I put their question to President Kennedy. Kennedy answered that

we would use the means at our disposal. We are committed to the defense.

EIR: Did you know Gen. Douglas MacArthur?

Norstad: Well I was only a junior in his time. But MacArthur was a giant, a brilliant intellect, the greatest general of his era, probably in the world. In 1951, when the Korean War was stalemated and General MacArthur had not made his surprise landing behind enemy lines at Inchon, [the Air

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Force] sent me out to Korea to confer with General MacArthur about his situation. . . . I got Averell Harriman to come out with me . . . because I wanted Harriman to hear what MacArthur had to say. . . . The first thing after our arrival, MacArthur explained 300 years of Asian history to us. He was the greatest, and his presence was totally commanding, for everyone.

EIR: And the liberal news media called him a warmonger, he certainly wasn't that.

Norstad: Did you ever know a single American general who was a warmonger? . . . Eisenhower was totally misrepresented as to his intent in his famous [presidential farewell] speech. When I brought up to Ike the press accounts of his attacking [industrialists] in that way, he told me "I never said that!" Ike said that you must have that big developed industry as the base of any actual military defense.

EIR: The Fusion Energy Foundation held a conference in Tokyo last year, showing the Japanese how their participation in our Strategic Defense Initiative would benefit them. This countered a faction even including Richard Perle of the Defense Department, who told the Japanese not to get involved, that President Reagan would be out of office in two years and the next President would shelve the SDI. What do you think?

Norstad: No matter who is President, SDI will live. It is essential.