

# France: new bomb, same doctrine

by Susan Welsh

The announcement by French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing at a press conference June 26 that France has successfully tested a "neutron bomb" does not at all herald a shift in French strategic policy toward closer integration with NATO, as some American analysts have hopefully claimed. Neither does it represent a move toward the NATO doctrines of "flexible response" and "limited nuclear war," as some of the President's Gaullist and Communist critics have charged.

Instead, the French President's declaration portends a far-reaching realignment of continental European defense in order to bolster the political alliance between France and West Germany. That axis is based on a policy of detente with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and cooperation for the industrialization of the Third World—policies opposed by the United States. Now the European "superpower" is looking to its own defense—the extension of France's "nuclear umbrella" to West Germany, a nation forbidden access to nuclear weapons by law.

Giscard underlined in his press conference that the neutron bomb, if the decision is made 2-3 years from now to go ahead with its production, will not mean that France has accepted the possibility of "limited" or "tactical" nuclear war in Europe—the doctrine most U.S. backers of the neutron bomb advocate.

"There is a point which must be understood as central in our system," he said. "It is that any nuclear attack on French soil will automatically give rise to a strategic nuclear response." According to French nuclear doctrine under Giscard, tactical nuclear strikes would be delivered by French forces in Germany as a one-time-only warning, and if that did not suffice to deter advancing enemy forces, the French president would launch a strategic strike against the cities of the attacking power.

What, then, is the purpose of the neutron bomb? "In our reflections on the use of this weapon," said Giscard, "we shall take account of the following: France is directly concerned with the security of neighboring West European states." Asked for a more detailed explanation of this statement, the President refused, promising a fuller exposition at a more appropriate time.

But the West European press was quick to draw the implications. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* commented June 28 that when former French President Charles de Gaulle built his independent deterrent, the *force de frappe*, no one took it seriously. But today things have changed. The *force de frappe* suffices to make any superpower attack on France unprofitable. Many a European who has lived under the American nuclear umbrella for the last 25 years will find it reassuring today, given doubts in Washington's defense loyalties, that there exists a deterrent force that is being deployed according to the standards of his own continent."

By ensuring West Germany's defense, at least in part, through the neutron weapon, the French government is undercutting arguments for the deployment of American Pershing II and cruise missiles in the Federal Republic. NATO's December 12 decision to begin production of these weapons—which for the first time would be capable of striking Soviet targets from Western Europe, with a mere 4-5 minute warning time—was only accepted by West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt because he perceived Soviet medium-range missiles targeted on Western Europe as a dangerous strategic imbalance. The NATO decision was one of the major factors which induced the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan, as a warning to the West. But deployment of the neutron weapons by France would help to calm West German fears about the "Eurostrategic" balance, while not threatening the Soviet Union with the possibility of a NATO surprise first strike.

French officials are at pains to stress that the development of the neutron bomb will not imply a departure from the Gaullist policy of nuclear defense "at all points of the compass" (*tous azimuts*). Defense Minister Yvon Bourges, who recently concluded a four-day trip to Poland, was asked by his Polish counterpart whether some kind of anti-Soviet shift was not underway. Bourges reportedly replied with a smile that such a reading of Giscard's statement was a misunderstanding, and that "France continues to organize its defense in every direction and, considering the increase in its military capability over the past few years, one could say that we are doing so even more than before." The Soviet press has reported on Giscard's announcement without criticism.

## The Gaullist tradition

Giscard's press conference caps a lengthy controversy over military policy in France, which has focused not so much on the neutron bomb itself as on the question of what strategic doctrine it should be deployed to support. The neutron bomb or "enhanced radiation weapon," is a form of thermonuclear weapon whose blast and heat effects have been reduced and whose kill power is basically confined to the release of neutrons. Its proponents in NATO therefore see it as an ideal

battlefield weapon which, used against advancing Soviet tanks, would stop the tanks by killing the soldiers inside, limiting the damage to NATO's home territory. This would serve the NATO doctrine of "flexible response," and is based on the assumption that the Soviets would not be using nuclear weapons, or could be induced to limit their strikes to tactical nuclear warfare.

Gaullist military strategists have correctly pointed out that such a scenario would never take place in Europe. Gen. Pierre Gallois, the father of French nuclear doctrine under de Gaulle, pointed out in a June 7 interview to the *Washington Post* that Soviet military doctrine foresees a tank attack on Europe only after the terrain has already been saturated by strategic nuclear bombings. "The neutron bomb is a form of Maginot line," he said, referring to the defense line that gave France a false sense of security before the German invasion in 1940. "It is a typical idea of generals who want to fight the 1940 war over again in 1980. . . . If we build the neutron bomb, it would be just another case of copying what the Americans do—or, in this case, don't do."

The Gaullist party issued an official policy position a few weeks later, rejecting the n-bomb. It noted that while "the allied members of NATO have accepted by political choice the American strategy of flexible response . . . France cannot accept this choice," which implies turning Europe into an expendable battlefield in a tactical nuclear exchange between the two superpowers.

This rejection of "flexible response" is at the foundation of Gaullist policy, and was a major factor in leading to de Gaulle's withdrawal from NATO's military command in 1966. The General based his own deterrence policy on the premise that any attack against French national territory, whether by conventional or other weapons, will trigger massive and instantaneous reprisals with the French strategic nuclear force. In this context tactical nuclear weapons are used as an ultimate warning to the aggressor, not for either nuclear "chicken" games or defensive battles.

De Gaulle's army chief of staff, Gen. Charles Ailleret, first explained the reason for the *tous azimuts* policy in 1967.

"An *a priori* alliance could not give us a general guarantee of safety, since it is almost impossible to foresee what might one day be the cause of a serious conflict, and what would be the distribution of powers among the various sides. . . . To be as strong as possible, autonomously and individually, and to possess our own very-long-range armament with great power, capable of deterring any aggressor, whatever its starting point, is clearly a different formula from forming, at the same cost, a supplementary force to that of the main member of an *a priori* alliance. . . . Our independent force, intrinsically as powerful as possible, should also—since

we cannot anticipate from which part of the world the threat to future generations will come—be oriented not in only one direction, that of the *a priori* enemy, but should be capable of intervening everywhere, or as we say in our military jargon, at every point of the compass."

At the same time that he was outlining this revolutionary doctrine, Gen. Ailleret was placed in command of a mopping-up operation to clean out of the military establishment those elements that had supported anti-government terrorist operations launched during the Algerian war. In March 1968, Gen. Ailleret was killed in a helicopter crash, which recent investigations have attributed to sabotage.

The remnants of those pro-terrorist networks are now clamoring for the neutron bomb as a vehicle for France's closer integration with NATO and the "flexible response" doctrine. The Union for French Democracy (UDF), the coalition of parties that Giscard relies upon for his support, issued a document recently endorsing these policies. The UDF is an amalgam of factions close to Giscard's own thinking and those that had no other place to go after the resolution of the Algerian war; they could not join the Gaullist party after having been complicit in attempts to overthrow de Gaulle or have him assassinated. The UDF military commission is headed by Jean-Marie Daillet, an Anglophile "Europeanist." Not surprisingly, the UDF report overlooks Giscard's alliance with West Germany and calls for close cooperation between France and Great Britain "in all possible areas: operational, technical and industrial," including nuclear weaponry.

### Giscard's position

Giscard in his press conference dissociated himself from the pro-NATO features of the UDF document, simultaneously denying Gallois' charge that the neutron weapon would necessarily mean a resort to the Maginot Line mentality. ". . . The defense effort of a country cannot be delegated to these weapons," he said, "to new weapons or to 'smart' weapons, any more than it was possible to delegate it to the Maginot Line. The defense effort is inscribed in the soul of the people. . . ."

The debate over the new weapon has overshadowed what appears to be an important scientific breakthrough achieved by French scientists working with neutron devices in the Pacific. According to the newspaper *Le Quotidien de Paris*, scientists have developed the basis for a "strategic" neutron bomb—one with much greater range and power than presently tested versions. This line of research will also enhance the country's ambitious nuclear energy program, which foresees 50 percent of electricity consumption from nuclear reactors by 1985. Powerful neutron devices can also be used to generate fissile fuel from ordinary uranium ore very cheaply and in virtually unlimited quantities.

## Giscard hints at 'nuclear umbrella'

*French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing's June 25 press conference clearly marked the newly won leadership role which France is assuming for the West. In the press conference, Giscard announced France's decision to proceed with development of an experimental neutron bomb, and reasserted that "France is directly concerned by the security of neighboring European states." Some of the highlights of his statement follow:*

### **French independent policy**

The policy of France is independent but it is neither neutral nor neutralist. [Our independence] stems at once from the historical situation and tradition of our country. She is not neutral, because we belong to an alliance. . . . The second characteristic of our foreign policy is to seek to correct an anomaly—the self-effacement of Europe in the world. Finally, our foreign policy starts from the idea that there exist at the present time possible solutions to the problems at hand.

### **On Afghanistan**

Our position has been that the Soviet armed forces intervention was unacceptable and . . . that we must act for their total withdrawal. I presented that analysis to Brezhnev during our useful conversation in Warsaw. I told him there were two ways to resolve this situation: to establish a calendar of troop withdrawal, and then to begin that withdrawal . . . I further indicated that the solution could only be a political one.

This political solution must entail the complete withdrawal of foreign armed forces from Afghanistan. It must allow the Afghan people to choose its own destiny and its policy expression. . . . Afghanistan must be reestablished in its traditional historical situation as a nonaligned country, a country which cannot constitute a threat to neighboring states, nor be utilized as a base, or as a support to create such threats to neighboring states.

We have learned of the decision to withdraw certain

armed elements from Afghanistan. How should we judge that decision? However limited its bearing might be in terms of numbers, it is a step in the right direction, answering demands made upon the U.S.S.R. This gesture has two consequences: the first one is that the U.S.S.R. recognizes that it is from Afghanistan that the deterioration in international relations can be stopped. The gesture itself, the publicity surrounding it, shows that the Soviet Union intended to insist on its resolve to end this deterioration, from Afghanistan.

Should a country like France help militarily the Afghan rebellion? The answer is no. France advocates a political solution. Is there a calendar for withdrawal of Soviet armed forces? Not to our knowledge. But in the request we presented to the Soviet authorities, we indicated that what was essential for us was a calendar of withdrawal, starting with a first gesture, but leading to such a calendar. What do we think of the approach to a political solution? I could say that one should not at the present time seek a transitory political solution [e.g. Carter's—ed.], one must seek on the contrary a definitive solution.

### **On the Middle East**

The solution to the problems of the Middle East lies in conciliating two fundamental rights. . . . The right of the State of Israel to security. . . . The right of the Palestinian people to exist, which is also a universal right. Is the conciliation of those two rights possible? I am convinced that it is desirable. I am convinced that the present solution represents in reality a course into an abyss. . . . In reality the best approach to the problem is the evacuation of the Arab territories occupied in 1967, territories which are truly Arab. . . . I must remind you that we have always said that this self-determination [of the Palestinian people] must be realized in the framework of a global peace settlement. . . .

### **On defense**

I now come to our conception of deterrence. . . . There is one point which must be understood as central in our disposition: it is that any nuclear attack on French soil would automatically call for a nuclear strategic retaliation. . . .

As far as the enhanced radiation warhead is concerned, I have followed the recommendation of the feasibility studies of that weapon by the Defense Council in December 1976. Those studies have led to the preparation of the weapon. The first experiments have been carried out. . . . And the decision to be made then will have to take into account the expected status of the nuclear armaments in Europe at that time. France is directly concerned by the security of the neighboring states.