

Aide-mémoire from the French Government (11 March 1966)

Caption: On 11 March 1966, the French Government sends an aide-mémoire to its partners in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in which it announces its decision to withdraw its ground and air forces from the Alliance's integrated command.

Source: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee: A retrospective view of the political year in Europe 1966. March 1967. Paris: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee.

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Aide-mémoire from the French Government to the other 14 NATO countries (11th March 1966)

For several years, the French Government has repeatedly indicated, both in public and in talks with the allied governments, that in its view the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, insofar as France was concerned, no longer corresponded to the world conditions prevailing at present and which are fundamentally different from those of 1949 and of the following years.

There has been a change in the nature of the threats to the western world, and particularly to Europe, which had led to the conclusion of the Treaty. They are no longer as imminent or as menacing as they were formerly. Moreover, the European countries have restored their economies and have therefore recovered means for action. In particular, France is equipping herself with atomic weapons, the very nature of which precludes her integration. Thirdly, the substitution of the balance of nuclear power between the Soviet Union and the United States for the United States' monopoly in this field has transformed the general conditions of western defence. Finally, it is a fact that Europe is no longer the centre of international crises. This centre is now elsewhere, particularly in Asia, where the countries of the Atlantic Alliance as a group are obviously not involved.

This evolution does not in any way lead the French Government to call in question the Treaty signed in Washington on 4th April 1949. In other words, unless events in the years to come were to bring about a radical change in East-West relations, the French Government does not intend to take advantage in 1969 of the terms of Article 13 of the Treaty, and considers that the Alliance must continue as long as it appears to be necessary.

This having been categorically stated, there arises the problem of the organisation, that is to say, of all the agreements, arrangements and decisions made after the signature of the Treaty, either in multilateral or in bilateral form. The French Government considers that this organisation no longer corresponds to what, in its view, is required.

It would no doubt have been possible to envisage a negotiation to modify the present arrangements by common agreement. The French Government would have been happy to make this proposal if it had had reason to think that negotiations would have led to the result it had in mind. Unfortunately, all the evidence shows that such action would be bound to fail, since all France's partners either appear to be, or say that they are, in favour of maintaining the *status quo*, if not of reinforcing everything which France henceforth considers unacceptable.

Therefore France is constrained, insofar as she is concerned, to draw conclusions regarding the consequences of the situation, in other words, to take for her part measures which seem to her necessary and which, in her view, are in no way incompatible with her membership in the Alliance nor with her participation, should the need arise, in military operations at the side of her allies.

In the past, the French Government has already taken steps in this direction with respect to her naval forces assigned to NATO, either in the Mediterranean or in the Atlantic. It is now a question of the land and air forces stationed in Germany which are assigned to the Allied Command in Europe. France intends to terminate such assignments. This decision will entail her simultaneous withdrawal from the two integrated commands on which these forces depend, and in which she participates within the NATO framework, namely, from the Supreme Allied Command Europe and the Central Europe Command and, *ipso facto*, the transfer from French territory of the Headquarters of these two Commands.

The implementation of all these measures naturally raises a number of problems, which the French Government is now ready to discuss with its allies [and in particular with the United States of America]. It will be advisable to consider what arrangements should be made for liaison between the French command and NATO commands, and to determine the conditions in which the French forces, particularly those in Germany, would participate in time of war, should Article 5 of the Treaty of Washington become operative, in joint military actions, as regards both the command and the operations themselves. This presupposes, in

particular, that the French land and air forces currently stationed in Germany will be kept there within the framework of the Conventions of 23rd October 1954, which the French Government, for its part, is prepared to do.

It will be also necessary to consider the problems which may arise for France in regard to the Military Committee and the Standing Group, including the problem of liaison arrangements to be made, in the case of need, between these bodies and the French command.

These are, in broad outline, the steps which the French Government plans to take, in those matters which are its concern, in order to adapt to the new conditions the arrangements for its participation in the Atlantic Alliance. It is ready to start discussions on the practical implementing measures to be taken and hopes that adequate arrangements can be made by common agreement between all the allies.