

Comments from the Defence Department in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the draft reply to Recommendation 360 on SALT and the British and French nuclear forces (London, 11 June 1981)

Caption: On 11 June 1981, the Defence Department in the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) submits its revisions for the wording of the reply to Western European Union (WEU) Recommendation 360 on the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) and the status of British and French nuclear forces.

Source: The National Archives of the UK (TNA). Foreign Office, Western Department and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Western European Department: Registered Files (R and WR Series). WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION. Western European Union Assembly recommendation 360: Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT) and the British and French nuclear forces. 01/01/1981-31/12/1981, FCO 33/5237 (Former Reference Dep: WRU 83/1).

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Reference

Mr Janvin ✓

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CALLS ON MR HURD AND MR MOBERLY BY MR MOMMERSTEEG

1. As you know, Mr Mommersteeg called at the FCO on 21 October to discuss aspects of his report on 'SALT III and the British and French Nuclear Forces'.
2. With Mr Hurd, Mr Mommersteeg alluded to Sir R Hibbert's remarks reflected in Le Monde, that the UK was interested in cooperation with France on defence questions, including nuclear matters. Mr Mommersteeg was interested to know whether the Ambassador's remarks, taken together with the Prime Minister's speech in Bordeaux, reflected specific cooperation initiatives on the part of the UK. Mr Hurd said that they did not; but defence was an important field and, as the two European nuclear powers, it was to be expected that France and we would have things in common. Mr Mommersteeg pressed Mr Hurd on the subject of ~~double~~ joint targetting and deployment; he also suggested that it would make sense for France and the UK to cooperate on the construction, for example, of submarine hulls for their submarine-based deterrent systems. Mr Hurd repeated that all this was rather far down the cooperative road and that the Prime Minister's message to President Giscard had been a general signal of interest in defence cooperation.
3. Pursuing the line reflected in the preceding paragraph, Mr Mommersteeg speculated that British military nuclear technology must, in several areas, be in advance of the French. Would not, he wondered, Anglo-French collaboration be a matter of some sensitivity for the Americans? Mr Hurd acknowledged that it might be.
4. Mr Mommersteeg also tackled the general question of the rational of the United Kingdom deterrent. Did it mean that we were not absolutely sure of the American commitment to Europe? Mr Hurd said that there was, of course, the theoretical possibility that US and British perceptions of the need to use the strategic deterrent might not, in some circumstances, coincide; but it was the 'second decision centre' argument to which we attached prime importance. Finally, Mr Mommersteeg questioned Mr Hurd about the 'independence' of the UK deterrent. Mr Hurd emphasized that it was targetted in accordance with SACEUR's plans, but that we also reserved the right to use the weapons unilaterally in supreme national emergency.
5. Mr Mommersteeg discussed TNF arms control with Mr Moberly and I do not propose to record the details of the talk, which covered standard ground. Mr Mommersteeg, as befits a Dutchman, was particularly concerned with battlefield nuclear weapons and argued strongly that the existence of large numbers of battlefield weapons in NATO's hands was not a deterrent but actually increased the likelihood of nuclear war.

D. Logan
D B C Logan
Defence Department

23 October 1980

WRO Council meeting 10 June

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(WRO 085/1)

WRO 083/1		
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11 JUN 1981		
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ITEM III ASSEMBLY RECOMMENDATIONS

C(81) 89

(a) Draft Reply to Recommendation 356 on nuclear, biological and chemical protection.

The amended parts of this draft reply, agreed by the French and Dutch between them, and indicated by dots in the margin, have been cleared with MOD. We can accept the draft reply.

(81) 90

(b) Draft Reply to Recommendation 360 on SALT and the British and French nuclear forces.

Defence Department say that at a pinch we could accept the revised paragraph 4 with the word 'affected' in place of 'determined' in line 5 but they think line 4 would be clearer if the words 'the results of' were omitted. Alternatively, 'progress in' might be better than 'results of'.

With the Assembly session beginning on Monday, it is essential we agree these draft replies at this Council meeting.

LAST PAPER

WRU Reference W63
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Mr Jarvvin
Defence Department

WEU ASSEMBLY RECOMMENDATION 360
SALT AND THE BRITISH AND FRENCH NUCLEAR FORCES

1. I believe Miss Sarginson asked you to defer further consideration of Document WPM(81)6/1 since there have been further discussions in the Working Group. In fact there have been two further sessions from which we have emerged quite well.
2. The French, wanting to make clear that they were not part of the decision to modernise TNF, sought an alteration in paragraph 1 so that the last sentence began "The decision of the integrated military structure to modernise ...". They have now been persuaded that that is not correct and the latest version reads "The decision of 12 December 1979 to modernise ...". I am sure this is acceptable to you.
3. The difficulties which the Italians and French had with paragraph 2 of the draft have now been overcome in a way which I imagine also meets with your approval. The paragraph now quotes verbatim from a NATO communique as follows: "The Council consider that as stated in paragraph 11 of the Final Communique of the North Atlantic Council at its meeting on 11/12 December 1980 'assuring strategic balance between the United States and the Soviet Union is central to the security of the Alliance. The Alliance supports further negotiations and remains deeply committed to the SALT process as a way of achieving meaningful mutual limitations on United States and Soviet strategic nuclear forces and to help to enhance Western security and preserve East-West stability."
4. I do however need your assistance on paragraph 3 of the draft. You will see that the French delegation has proposed an alternative first sentence. At the Working Group meeting on Monday, 23 February, faced with a straight choice between your draft and the French, all my colleagues expressed support for the French sentence. It would therefore help if you could allow me to accept the French alternative at the next meeting. If you find it objectionable and you can provide me with suitable ammunition, I will have another go.

A P Ceurvorst
Western European Department

25 February 1981

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WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION ASSEMBLY
 SECOND PART OF THE 26TH ORDINARY SESSION
 1-4 DECEMBER, PARIS

DRAFT REPORT ON 'SALT AND BRITISH AND FRENCH NUCLEAR FORCES'

1. This Guidance Note relates to a draft report by the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments on 'SALT and British and French Nuclear Forces'. Rapporteur Mr Mommersteeg.

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2. The report reviews the current US and Soviet strategic and long range theatre nuclear force balance in order to put the UK and French nuclear forces into perspective. It describes current US and Soviet force modernisation plans before describing the recently announced US countervailing strategy (Presidential Directive 59). Here the report stresses that this strategy emphasises the need to provide the US President with a greater range of nuclear options. But it does not perhaps bring out why the Americans see a need for such a doctrine. Their objective remains deterrence: persuading the Soviet leadership that they could not hope to fight and win a limited nuclear war.

3. Sections III and IV review accurately the UK and French nuclear programmes leading up to the UK Trident decision and recent French announcements on the future of their strategic force. The report does not however bring out one notable difference between the UK and French programmes. The United Kingdom currently devotes under 5% of its defence budget to its strategic deterrent; according to Le Monde the French expect to devote some 19% of their defence budget to their nuclear forces in 1980.

4. Section V reviews the contribution of the French and British nuclear forces to allied defence. Having discussed the argument that the smaller nuclear forces represent a diversion of limited resources away from conventional defence it concludes that the French and British forces, by representing a second centre of decision making, contribute to the effectiveness of the allied nuclear deterrent, but to an extent that cannot be defined. It adds that the effectiveness is enhanced when the forces are

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assigned to NATO and especially when targetting is coordinated with those of other allied nuclear forces.

5. The report then turns to the prospect of Anglo-French nuclear collaboration. It concludes that there is no military or conventional incentive at present for Britain to seek cooperation with France in the production of nuclear warheads and that there are understandable technical and economic reasons why the United Kingdom has looked to collaboration with the United States for a successor to the Polaris missile. It suggests that there might be opportunities for collaboration on the construction of strategic submarines but acknowledges that this is unlikely given difficulties caused by additional delay and cost that such cooperation would entail. However the report suggests that there might be scope for operational cooperation over deployment and targetting.

6. Finally the report discusses the current state of the SALT negotiations, stressing the need for the closest allied consultation in the arms control process, noting with satisfaction that this had been effective in the case of theatre nuclear forces.

7. The report is generally accurate, comprehensive and useful. However the accompanying draft recommendation is less satisfactory. First it calls for 'the earliest ratification of SALT II irrespective of other aspects of East/West relations'. This does not take account of the fact that Mr Reagan has just won a landslide victory on a platform including the view that SALT II was 'fatally flawed'. Mr Reagan has also endorsed the idea of 'linkage': relating progress in arms control to other aspects of East/West relations. It would therefore seem more realistic to call for the early continuation of the SALT process in the interests of all NATO allies.

8. Secondly, the recommendation suggests that 'any modernisation plans for British and French nuclear forces should not lead to

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diversion of resources from conventional defence'. The British Government are determined that the provision of the Trident force should not undermine their continuing efforts to maintain and improve our conventional forces. Moreover we see no other potential application of the funds that would add as much to deterrence. On the other hand, money spent on Trident is obviously money not spent elsewhere. It might therefore be more appropriate to rephrase this recommendation that 'any modernisation plans for British and French nuclear forces should be consistent with efforts to upgrade the conventional forces of these two countries.'