

Note by John Barnes on the creation of a European naval task force in the Mediterranean (London, 10 December 1968)


Caption: On 10 December 1968, John Barnes, Head of the Western Organisations Department of the Foreign Office, issues a note outlining the improvements in the United Kingdom’s contribution to NATO naval forces in the Mediterranean. He believes that a European naval task force, with a British component, as part of NATO’s naval forces in the Mediterranean would be a good idea from both the political (European) and military points of view. Given the penetration of Soviet naval forces in the Mediterranean, the Western countries are trying to improve the effectiveness of allied forces in the area. The proposal to establish a European naval task force in the Mediterranean, centred on a British carrier or amphibious ship, has been put forward in a speech by the British Conservative MP, Eldon Griffiths, to the Western European Union Assembly.

Source: The National Archives of the UK (TNA). Foreign Office, Western Organisations and Co-ordination Department and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Western Organisations Department: Registered Files (W and WD Series). WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION (WEU). Defence. Attitudes to Soviet penetration in Mediterranean. 01/01/1968-31/12/1969, FCO 41/535 (Former Reference Dep: WDU 11/10).

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Lord Hood

Parliamentary Office

who may want to clear with J. Gullery

There has been no formal recommendation from the W.E.U. Assembly for the creation of a European naval task force in the Mediterranean. However, Mr. Eldon Griffiths himself put forward such a proposal in a recent speech to the W.E.U. Assembly.

2. In the course of the past nine months Her Majesty's Government have made three announcements of improvements in our contributions to NATO, each of which has affected our maritime presence in the Mediterranean. It was announced:-

- (a) in May, that two frigates previously due to be re-deployed would remain in the Mediterranean;
- (b) in July, that a guided missile destroyer would be deployed there in 1970 and that a squadron of Shackleton Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft would go there early next year. Some Shackletons have in fact already arrived in Malta. They will work with MARAIRMED;
- (c) in November, that from January next year our presence would include almost continuously an aircraft carrier or commando ship or assault ship.

3. E.E.S.D., S.E.D., W.E.D. and the Ministry of Defence agree.

4. My own view is that a European naval task force, with a British component, as part of NATO's naval forces in the Mediterranean would be a good idea from both the political (European) and military points of view. We have put this to the Ministry of Defence several times, so far without success.

E.J.W. Barnes
(E.J.W. Barnes)
10 December, 1968.

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10/12/68