

Complementarity or dependence?

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Complementarity or dependence?

To secure military support from the United States commensurate with the Soviet threat, the Consultative Council set up under the Brussels Treaty had resolved, on 1 August 1950, that *‘the closest possible cooperation’ should be established ‘between the Brussels and Atlantic organisations, not only in the military sphere but also in the field of financing and armament’*.^[1] On 20 September 1950, the Atlantic Council decided to establish unified NATO commands. On 20 December 1950, pursuant to that decision, WU’s military responsibilities were transferred to the NATO bodies. The Consultative Council of the Brussels Treaty organisation officially recorded the end of WU at the end of a ‘wind-up meeting’, in the words of René Massigli, the French Ambassador in London.^[2] The French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, did not even go to it. *‘It was on the basis of a British resolution that the fate of the defence organisation set up in 1948 was finally decided. The final resolution adopted by the Consultative Council stated that special solidarity would be maintained between the Five in the political, cultural and social fields. As though to salve a bad conscience, the Dutch, Belgians and French stressed that the organisation should continue to exist in some form, even on the military level, because of the automatic nature of the mutual assistance provided for in the Brussels Treaty.’*^[3] He added: *‘In 1948 the dream had been of a European defence organisation supported by the United States; what we ended up with was an Atlantic organisation into which Europe’s forces were incorporated. For the five members, the defence of Europe had ceased to be a shared responsibility; how could they then flatter themselves that there could one day be any hope of a common policy? France has been delivered from the nightmare of British predominance, but the reality of US domination is beginning to become clear ...’*^[4]

WEU therefore seemed to be moving into a ‘self-censorship’ phase. Under Article VIII of the revised Brussels Treaty (1954), the Council of Ministers of WEU could have decided to give the organisation its own military implementing bodies. The Parliamentary Assembly of WEU spoke out several times in favour of establishing a committee of Defence Ministers and holding regular meetings of Chiefs of Staff. The Council of Ministers refused to act on these calls, in particular to avoid any duplication of arrangements with NATO. On 27 February 1957, the Council of Ministers of WEU decided to restrict itself to four matters: the size of the Member States’ armed forces, the maintaining of certain British forces on the mainland of Europe, the Agency for the Control of Armaments and the foreign policy questions which various members wanted to raise. In the interests of effectiveness, and perhaps of making savings, WEU gave way to NATO.

The positions of France and the United Kingdom

Predominance, domination, hegemony. These were the key words in the complex relationship established, from the outset, between European defence and Atlantic defence. Issues of power and economic and material reality did not coincide in such discussions. The state of Franco-British relations loomed large in the close relationship which was established between WEU and NATO from 1954 onwards. For WEU to make its voice heard, London and Paris had to speak with one voice in favour of it. Relations between France and Britain after the London and Paris Agreements, however, *“were neither so intimate nor so cordial as they have been and should be.”*^[5] The scars left by the

European Defence Community were difficult to heal in France and mistrust for the English-speaking allies was lasting.^[6] The Suez affair in 1956 made matters worse. The military alliance between the two countries soured, setting the final seal on the withdrawal of the two European powers in the face of the United States and Russia. The special relationship between Britain and the United States seemed incompatible with a European policy.

The misunderstanding between Britain and France also had to do with their involvement in Western defence. Each was apprehensive about withdrawal by the other and each thought it contributed more to the common effort than its partner. London was alarmed at the repeated removal of French divisions assigned to defend Europe being sent to and their sending to Algeria in the name of common defence.^[7] From 1954 onwards, France progressively withdrew three divisions from Germany (the 2nd Motorised Infantry Division, the 7th Rapid Mechanised Division and the 5th Armoured Division) and thereby deprived NATO of its best units in the Central Europe sector. The French response was that the danger was from the south and that in defending Algeria they were defending Europe.

For its part, the British government published a White Paper on 4 April 1957 which radically altered its defence policy. Britain announced that henceforth it would base its strategy on a national nuclear deterrent force and therefore intended to reduce its conventional forces, particularly in Germany. This policy went hand in hand with closer relations with the United States. On 25 October 1957, US President Eisenhower and the British Prime Minister Macmillan published their 'Declaration of Common Purpose'. This contained the words: '*For our part we regard our possession of nuclear weapons power as a trust for the defense of the free world.*'^[8] The French could not help but be worried at such a trend. They feared that the British force reductions would have a snowball effect and induce other countries to follow their example. They were also worried about the emergence of a more peripheral defence system relying on new weapons which they did not yet possess. On 4 and 5 July 1958, during a visit to Paris by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, the French President General de Gaulle asked for US aid in equipping France with nuclear weapons. He made clear, however, that, unlike Britain, 'France will not do any deal, and will refuse to trade favours done in the nuclear sphere in exchange for agreeing to the siting of launch pads on French territory.'^[9] Dulles left Paris without achieving any result. General de Gaulle, however, did not stop there; on 17 September 1958, a few days after the meeting in Colombey-les-deux-Églises, with strong backing from German Chancellor Adenauer, he sent US President Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Macmillan a memorandum^[10] in which he asked for the pooling of nuclear secrets and the establishment of combined commands in the various theatres of operations throughout the world. He also proposed the creation of a tripartite Directorate of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), whereby France, the United Kingdom and the United States would be put on an equal footing for the purposes of discussing nuclear strategy.

The Eisenhower administration rejected the memorandum. It rebuffed the idea that there was any ranking order among the members of the Alliance and stressed, on the contrary, that France, Italy and Germany were equal. It also pointed out that concerted action between the English-speaking countries was justified by their common interests in areas outside NATO (the Middle East and Asia). This

rejection, to French eyes, justified their gradual disengagement from NATO. In successive moves, France decided on 11 March 1959 to withdraw the French fleet in the Mediterranean, which had been placed under NATO command. In June 1959 it announced that it would not stock foreign nuclear weapons on its soil. The talks on establishing IRBMs in France failed. Finally, General de Gaulle refused to incorporate France's air forces into NATO's planned air alert and defence system for Western Europe.^[11] This led eventually to the decision to leave the integrated NATO command in 1966.

From December 1958 to the abortive conference of May 1960,^[12] the 'Berlin crisis'^[13] (which started on 27 November) did not cause any hardening of the West's position. On the contrary, it encouraged a process of East–West détente headed by Britain, with the United States following in its wake. De Gaulle backed the German Chancellor in his uncompromising stance towards Moscow. The dominant feature of Franco-British relations was mistrust, which led them in two different directions. London preferred to favour the 'special relationship' with Washington and tighten the defence of the continent around NATO, while France looked more to the Franco-German tandem and towards European integration in the framework of the EEC.^[14]

What was discussed in the WEU?

The argument regularly put forward in defence of WEU was the automatic character of the provision in Article V. It was brought up again every time WEU was called into question. The Brussels Treaty laid down that '*If any of the High Contracting Parties should be the object of an armed attack in Europe, the other High Contracting Parties will, in accordance with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, afford the Party so attacked all the military and other aid and assistance in their power.*'^[15] The Washington Treaty provides as follows: '*The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.*' The slight difference between the two provisions needs to be seen in context, however both articles speak of mutual assistance.^[16] The automatic effect was clearer in the case of WEU, but the military resources depended on NATO.^[17]

Military questions were handled by NATO. The London and Paris Agreements established what the historian Pierre Gerbet describes as an '*Atlantic solution behind a European façade*'.^[18] The closeness of the two organisations was to the advantage of NATO. There is a clue to this in the choice of the prominent figures appointed to represent their countries on the various bodies. The people who represented their countries at NATO were also on the delegations sent to WEU, recommending, after the establishment of the Standing Armaments Committee of WEU in May 1955, the appointment to it of Engineer-General Bron, who was already France's representative on NATO's Defence Production Committee. What is more, WEU was not responsible for defence policy planning or for organising the joint defence system, as both activities were transferred to NATO in 1950. Even though it was the setting for serious, high-profile discussions of defence matters, the Assembly of WEU had no power.

Nor did WEU have any armed forces or command of its own. For that, it was dependent on NATO.

The WEU's intrinsic value lay in other areas. It lay, firstly, in the fact that it served as a forum for exchange among Europeans. It acted as a liaison bureau between the EEC and Britain while at the same time constituting a form of 'European pillar' of NATO long before that term was used.

[1] French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Service des Pactes, 15, note from Service des Pactes re Brussels Treaty and the Atlantic Pact, 2 October 1950.

[2] MASSIGLI, René. *Une Comédie des erreurs, 1943–1956, souvenirs et réflexions sur une étape de la construction européenne*. Paris, Plon, 1966, p. 133.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[5] Eden, Anthony. *Full Circle — The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden*. London: Cassell, 1960, p. 195.

[6] The ratification of the Paris Agreements is an illustration of this. Whereas the outcome of the vote in London was categorical (280 for, 4 against, with the Opposition abstaining), in Paris the first vote went against the motion (280 against, 258 for). The Prime Minister, Pierre Mendès-France, had to make it into a question of confidence in order to get the text through — just (by 287 votes to 260).

[7] NATO, IS005, Summary Record of a meeting of the Council held at the Palais de Chaillot on Wednesday, 17 November 1954, at 10.15 a.m., C-R(54)43, 19 November 1954.

[8] *Documents on American foreign relations, 1957*. New York: Harper, 1958, p. 135.

[9] *L'Année politique 1958*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959, p. 372.

[10] GAULLE, Charles de, 1958, *Lettre et memorandum du général de Gaulle au général Eisenhower (17 septembre 1958)* [online]. [Accessed 15 December 2015]. Available from:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/lettre_et_memorandum_du_general_de_gaulle_au_general_eisenhower_17_septembre_1958-fr-aebdd430-35cb-4bdd-9e56-87fce077ce70.html

[11] Kitsikis, Dimitri. L'attitude des États-Unis à l'égard de la France de 1958 à 1960. *Revue française de science politique*, No 4, 1966, p. 708.

[12] The 1960 conference, which was to have brought the four Major Powers together, was cancelled after the affair of the overflying of Soviet territory by an American U2 which was shot down by the Russians.

[13] Khrushchev condemned the tripartite memorandum on the administration of Greater Berlin by France, the United Kingdom and the United States.

[14] KARNER, Stefan, Stelzl-Marx, Barbara, ... (eds.). *Der Wiener Gipfel 1961 : Kennedy - Chruschtschow*. (in Veröffentlichungen des Ludwig-Boltzmann-Instituts für Kriegsfolgen-Forschung. Sonderband 12). Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2011.; DEIGHTON, Anne. „Großbritannien un der Wiener Gipfel im Juni 1961“, in KARNER, Stefan. (eds.). *Ibid.*, SOUTOU, Georges-Henri. „Paris als Nutznießer des erfolglosen Wiener Gipfels“, in KARNER, Stefan... (eds.). *Ibid.*

[15] Article VI of the Brussels Treaty (1948 version).

[16] *Interview de Francis Gutmann (Paris, 10 septembre 2014) – Extrait: comparatif entre l'article 5 du traité de Bruxelles modifié et l'article 5 du traité de Washington*, [2014]. [online], Accessed 15 December 2015. Available from: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/interview_de_francis_gutmann_paris_10_septembre_2014_extrait_comparatif_entre_l_article_5_du_traite_de_bruzelles_modifie_et_l_article_5_du_traite_de_washington-fr-dbbec72c-c768-4a81-945d-

2341138789e5.htm

[17] KAPLAN, Lawrence S. *NATO divided, NATO united : the evolution of an alliance*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2004. KAPLAN, Lawrence S with the assistance of Morris Honick. *NATO 1948: the birth of the Transatlantic Alliance*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

[18] GERBET, Pierre. *La construction de l'Europe*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1999, p. 184.