

Introduction

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Introduction

France and the United Kingdom are two major political, military and economic players in the European area. Their strategic choices in terms of foreign, security and defence policy have a direct influence on the direction and pace of the European integration process.

The two countries, once long-standing adversaries in diplomatic and military terms, grew closer throughout the 19th century, gradually settling their territorial conflicts. On 8 April 1904, they signed a series of bilateral agreements which enshrined their 'Entente Cordiale'. The two world wars demonstrated the political and military solidarity between Paris and London^[1] but also put this solidarity to the test.

In the post-war European context, France and the United Kingdom played a significant role in establishing the various defence organisations that were set up between Western states. The two countries are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council; they are in the 'Nuclear Club' and each has a deterrent force to defend its 'vital interests'. They have also both maintained a political and cultural influence that extends beyond European borders, particularly through the Commonwealth and the Francophonie.^[2] However, the similarity of the countries' responsibilities at international and European level does not mean that they share the same views on the contours and substance of the European defence system: the UK's Atlanticist approach clashes with the Europe-based vision of France. This difference of opinion, although less marked since the late 1990s, still holds true today.^[3]

On 4 March 1947, keen to forestall any possible revival of the German policy of aggression, France and the United Kingdom signed a Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance.^[4] This placed the security of Western Europe at the centre of Franco-British relations.^[5] On 17 March 1948, they concluded the Brussels Treaty establishing Western Union (WU). This treaty, also signed by Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, provided for cooperation between the signatory countries on economic, social and cultural matters and in the area of legitimate defence.^[6] It reflected a development in the perception of the threats facing Europe: although Germany was still a major concern, attention was turning to the USSR, with its growing empire and its influence on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the south-eastern Mediterranean. Partly in response to these fears,^[7] on 4 April 1949, 12 Foreign Ministers gathered in Washington to sign the North Atlantic Treaty, thereby establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which incorporated all the countries of Western Union. In addition to the five signatory states to the Brussels Treaty (France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg), the United States, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway and Portugal also joined NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty came into force on 24 August 1949.

In May 1949, the German territories under US, British and French control partly regained their sovereignty within a new German state, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). During this period, European defence was weakened by the mobilisation of French troops against colonial independence movements from 1946 onwards (the First Indochina War) and the redeployment in Korea from June 1950 of US troops previously stationed in Europe. The FRG's contribution to the rearmament of the Western European bloc was directly called into question: the country could play an active role in this field as long as limits were placed on its rearmament.^[8] That was the aim of the plan presented by the President of the French Council of Ministers, René Pleven, on 24 October 1950, which led to the signing of the Treaty establishing the European Defence Community (EDC) in May 1952. This treaty included a political dimension, which was intended to provide an overall framework for the economic integration that had been launched with the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, signed in April 1951. However, the EDC Treaty never came into force following

opposition to its ratification in the French National Assembly.^[9] The United Kingdom was not involved in the Pleven Plan and was excluded from negotiations on the EDC. But despite this setback, the need to strengthen European security and defence remained. Three months after the failure of the EDC, the deadlock was broken by the signing of the Paris Agreements on 23 October 1954 under the impetus of the UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Anthony Eden. The Brussels Treaty of 17 March 1948 (Western Union) was amended and supplemented by the protocols signed in Paris, which founded Western European Union (WEU). The FRG^[10] and Italy also became members, and the following year the FRG joined NATO.

WEU was given responsibilities in the fields of security, defence and armaments, as well as economic, social and cultural issues.^[11] Its members were at pains to avoid any overlap with the activities of other international organisations with powers in these areas, a concern that was particularly visible when it came to NATO.^[12]

Prior to the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which laid the foundations for a common foreign and security policy, WEU was the main European body for the discussion of security and defence matters affecting Western Europe. The organisation served as a forum for information, consultation and cooperation between its members, in addition to the frameworks provided by NATO and the European Community (EC). The exchanges of information between WEU and the EC served a particularly important function, especially in the period before the United Kingdom's accession to the latter organisation.

However, during the first 30 years of its existence, WEU's role in managing and resolving crises in the field of defence and security was extremely limited. The organisation was caught between NATO for military questions and the EC for economic questions; to a large extent it could only operate effectively if its main members were able to harmonise their positions. WEU was unable to compensate for the lack of a security and defence identity and a defence capability for the countries of Western Europe. That was one of the aims of the revival of WEU^[13] spearheaded by France in autumn 1982,^[14] against the backdrop of preparations for the French Presidency of the European Community in the first half of 1984 and growing tensions between the United States and the USSR.

This ePublication makes extensive use of the WEU archives, to which the CVCE was given privileged access under the decision of the WEU Permanent Council of 11 May 2011. The exploration and exploitation of these archives was based around the following research question: what were the positions adopted by the French and the British within WEU on major issues relating to European security and defence?

The ePublication develops four case studies, each of which highlights the French and British interests and positions, the main defence and security matters discussed in the WEU Council and the importance given to WEU by the two Member States in their diplomatic strategy with regard to these major questions between 1954 and 1982.^[15] The topics explored are as follows: relations between WEU and NATO, emphasising both their complementarity and WEU's dependence on NATO; the nuclear question, with a particular focus on deterrence, disarmament and the Euromissiles crisis; the Defence Technological and Industrial Base (DTIB), examining both arms design and production and arms control;^[16] and the 'out-of-area' question from Western Africa to Afghanistan, particularly the security issues related to energy supply and the Soviet presence in this geographical area.

- [1] See Jean Monnet's plan for a political union between the two countries presented to Winston Churchill in May 1940.
- [2] COLARD, Daniel. Le couple Paris-Londres: un partenariat original mais ambigu. In: *Défense nationale*, 04-1998, No 4, pp. 68–69.
- [3] BELL, Philippe M.H. *France and Britain, 1940–1994: The long separation*. London and New York: Longman, 1997. TOMBS, Robert. *That sweet enemy: the French and the British from the Sun King to the present [Britain and France — the history of a love-hate relationship]*. London: Pimlico, 2007.
- [4]http://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/treaty_of_alliance_and_mutual_assistance_between_the_united_kingdom_and_france_dunkirk_4_march_1947-en-1fb9f4b5-64e2-4337-bc78-db7e1978de09.html
- [5] SANDERSON, Claire. *L'impossible alliance? : France, Grande-Bretagne et défense de l'Europe (1945–1958)*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003, p. 14.
- [6] Article VII of the Brussels Treaty.
- [7] The signing of the treaty also reflected the fact that the Americans were keen to avoid any resurgence of militarist movements and wanted to contribute to the political reconstruction of the European continent. See *A short history of NATO* [online]. Brussels: NATO, 2015. Available at <http://www.nato.int/history/nato-history.html>. Consulted on 19 May 2015.
- [8] http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_plan_for_an_edc-en-4996601d-bd87-49e8-a5ff-f69cb86a7309.html
- [9] On 31 August 1954, the Gaullist group of the RPF (Rally of the French People) and the communist group, both opposed to the EDC Treaty although for different reasons, secured a majority in a vote on a point of procedure prior to the vote on the law ratifying the EDC Treaty. Without a large enough majority to ratify the treaty, Guy Mollet's government withdrew the bill.
- [10] On the same day, the FRG signed its Accession Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty.
- [11] The transfer of these powers to the Council of Europe was decided on 15 June 1959. Information taken from: Council of Europe. External Relations Department. *Transfert au Conseil de l'Europe des activités sociales et culturelles de l'UEO*: 15.06.1959. http://www.coe.int/t/dgal/dit/ilcd/archives/selection/brussels/RelExtTransferJuin59_fr.pdf [accessed on 03.10.2014]
- [12] Article IV of the Brussels Treaty.
- [13] Statement by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Defence, Rome, 26 and 27 October 1984.
- [14] See the address by French Defence Minister Charles Hernu to the WEU Parliamentary Assembly on 30 November 1982, and the Franco-German Summit on 21 and 22 October 1982. Cited by Philippe Moreau Defarges, '... J'ai fait un rêve ...'. Le président François Mitterrand, artisan de l'Union européenne. In: *Politique étrangère*. 1985. Vol. 50. No 2, p. 366.
- [15] Eric Remacle referred to the 'instrumentalisation' of WEU by these two countries, which he identified as 'successive leader states' within the organisation. REMACLE, E. L'Union (de l'Europe) occidentale durant la guerre froide (1948–1989). In: E. REMACLE and P. WINAND (eds). *L'Amérique, l'Europe, l'Afrique (1945–1973)*. Brussels: PIE-Peter Lang, 2009, p. 197.
- DEIGHTON, Anne and REMACLE, Eric. *The Western European Union, 1948–1998: from the Brussels Treaty to the Treaty of Amsterdam*. Brussels: IRRI-KIIB, 1998.
- DEIGHTON, Anne. *Western European Union 1954–1997: Defence, security, integration*. Oxford: St Antony's College, 1997.
- [16] Parliamentary questions inspired by BRIGOT, André (ed.). *France/Grande Bretagne. Consultations sur la défense et la sécurité*. CIRPES-EHESS/EPPI — Warwick University, 1994, 166 p.