

Internal note from the Foreign Office on discussions with the French on Western European defence (London, 16 December 1981)

Caption: On 16 December 1981, Philip John Weston, Head of the Defence Department in the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), sends a note to David Gillmore, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, regarding discussions with French diplomats about Western European defence issues. The note outlines the concerns expressed by Jacques Laureau, Deputy Director in the Strategic Affairs and Pacts Department of the French Foreign Ministry, about the long-term dangers of the 'zero option' negotiations and the compatibility of the negotiating approaches employed concerning the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START).

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. British policy towards the Western European Union. 01/01/1981-31/12/1981, FCO 33/5232 (Former Reference Dep: WRU 22/1).

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Mr. Arnold
Jac 23/12

Put WED policy file
ETH 11/12

Mr. Cunniff - paras.
MSA 18/12

Mr Gillmore

cc WED

DISCUSSIONS WITH THE FRENCH

1. As you know, M. Laureau came to see me yesterday. He was accompanied by M. Trémeau. Nothing very remarkable emerged, but you may like to be aware of the following points:

INF

2. M. Laureau was concerned about the long-term dangers in the 'Zero Option' bid. It suggested to public opinion that the modernisation programme was not necessary; it would be difficult to implement the modernisation programme while the negotiations were in progress; and the Russians would continue to exploit Western fragility on short-range systems. He also thought the position of the UK, as the first basing country, would be decisive - particularly if, for example, the Russians offered to reduce the number of SS20s to a level equivalent to British and French systems. I acknowledged the dangers to which M. Laureau drew attention but pointed out that they would exist whatever negotiating approach had been adopted. The fact that the 'Zero Option' was not a bargain which was likely to be concluded met his first point.

START

3. M. Laureau asked about compatibility of the negotiating approaches employed in INF and START respectively, given the importance of this in the longer term. I said I thought the Americans regarded compatibility as desirable but that their main concern would be their objectives in the negotiations themselves. If compatibility could be achieved as well, so much the better. We discussed the START negotiating models currently under consideration as well as American thinking on ABMs and ASAT. M. Laureau said that for the Americans ABM development was not just a bargaining chip for the START talks, it was a necessity (he appeared to mean R and D development rather than development of ABM systems themselves). I explained our understanding of where the Americans were on their ABM thinking.

CONSULTATION ON INF/START

4. I explained our attitude to Alliance consultation on the draft INF treaty, emphasising that insistence by some Allies on seeing all legal texts in advance could jeopardise the existing relationship between the Americans and the Europeans; and that it was more important to maintain confidence as to substance than to dwell on procedures. As for START, the Americans envisaged regular briefing of the NATO Council, followed by more thorough briefing by experts for those who wished. The American view was that the legitimate European interest in START was less than in INF. We would need to preserve the full rigour of the SCG machinery for crucial stages of the INF negotiations. The position was not the same on START. But from a political point of view it would be necessary for

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the Americans to be seen to be consulting the Europeans on START just as much as on INF. (M. Laureau's concern was, of course, the anomalous position of the French on these questions. But he said he did not wish to give me French views in writing and gave the impression of being well satisfied with the language of the NAC communique.)

THE DPC MEETING

5. M. Laureau was interested in American reactions to the way the Europeans were 'taking up the slack' to compensate for the RDF. As you know, the treatment of 'out of area' issues in the communique was one of the livelier topics at the DPC. I quizzed him on French attitudes on achieving greater cost effectiveness in defence and on rôle specialisation. What would the French attitude be to specialisation on the central front, for example, given the direct relevance of this for the French? M. Laureau refused to be drawn, saying it was a matter for the military liaison officers.

DIEGO GARCIA

6. M. Laureau explained that if the question of a French visit to Diego Garcia arose, they would, of course, as in the past, consult us through the proper channels including the FCO. A visit in January/February might be a possibility. But this exchange was not to be regarded as in itself a consultation with that end in view.

POLITICO-MILITARY TALKS

7. M. Laureau explained that M. Chandenagor, although himself the nominal successor to M. Bernard-Reymond, concerned himself with Community questions and not defence. If Mr Hurd was to have another round of talks, it might, therefore, have to be with the Deputy Secretary-General. As for talks between officials, we agreed that next April might be a good time for a further round.

THE WEU

8. I asked M. Laureau about the recent Cheysson interview which appeared to be one in a succession of high-level expressions of French interest in the WEU as a possible basis for a European defence identity. M. Laureau was dismissive of the recent French statements. He said that the WEU was a fact of life; it was of personal interest to some French politicians (particularly the Assembly) who had been in on WEU from the outset and was 'psychologically important' to the French. But any ideas of a more ambitious sort were very long-term.

P J Weston

P J Weston
Defence Department

16 December 1981

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Mr Weston, Defence Dept

FRANCE AND EUROPEAN DEFENCE

1. As I told you on the telephone, Sir R Hibbert warned me ten days ago that he was proposing to write yet again on this subject. That was before Sir N Henderson's latest letter arrived, but I imagine that that will only make Sir R Hibbert the more determined to write again. Perhaps I could use the interim to float one or two further thoughts on this endless subject.
2. I was much struck by paragraph 4 of Ukdel NATO telno 493 reporting the outcome of the recent NATO Ministerial meeting. If this record is accurate, the Eurogroup appears to have taken on a new lease of life. Even if that judgment is excessively optimistic, it raises in my mind the question to what extent we can or should try to use the Eurogroup as an instrument/weapon in our continuing battle with the French over European defence matters. I say 'battle' because the French for their part will never tire of putting forward vague proposals in this area, which they know are unlikely to appeal to us, while simultaneously accusing us publicly of losing interest in the subject (and thus, by inference, being bad Europeans). It seems to me that one can either regard the Eurogroup as handicapped because of French absence or seek to make use of it as a means of dragging the French in the direction of real meaningful European defence co-operation, ie within, rather than beside, NATO. If, as I assume, our eventual aim is French membership of the Eurogroup, I think we have nothing to lose, and possibly much to gain, by taking up public (and private) expressions of French interest in European defence and suggesting in turn that French membership of the Eurogroup would be to everyone's advantage - implying that we would be happy so to speak to sponsor their entry into the club.
3. The only other ways I can see of carrying the debate with the French forward is either:
 - a) to engage in purely bilateral discussions with them (which is what, I think, Sir R Hibbert will be recommending); or
 - b) to find some way of at least appearing to pump a little more life into the WEU.

I am content to let Sir R Hibbert argue the case for a) above. As to b), we are all agreed that there is no prospect of - and indeed some danger in - letting the WEU actually do anything. On the other hand, there is little reason why the WEU should not, if its members wished, be used rather more intensively

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than at present as a talking shop. The Council and Parliamentary Assembly exist and no further machinery needs to be created. Nor, I think, do any new members need to be co-opted, given that the Irish will debar themselves, the Danes will presumably continue to see a danger to Nordic solidarity if they were to join, and that whatever the Greeks think, no one will want to invite them in. On that basis, one could I think argue that in the defence field European integration has perforce to proceed à deux vitesses and that the WEU will be the forum in which defence co-operation is discussed.

4. One of the major obstacles we have always seen to any development of the WEU has been the fundamental dislike of the organisation on the part of the Germans. If one wished to create a larger role for the WEU one would have to do something about the German angle and we are currently examining with your department the possibility of amending the Brussels Treaty so as to remove the remaining provisions which discriminate openly against the German armed forces. If only for tactical reasons vis à vis the French I think it would be valuable if we were able to say, publicly if necessary, that HMG at least saw no reason to maintain the discriminatory aspects of the WEU (although ~~of course~~ the unilateral commitments - by ourselves to maintain troops in Germany, as well as by the Germans not to manufacture ABC weapons - would of course remain).

5. After nearly three years of dealing with the WEU I am all too well aware that any initiative on our part would be all too likely to run into the sand. But it would make it much easier, not only to convince our colleagues that the administration of the WEU needed to be streamlined, but also to counter French claims that we are unenthusiastic about European defence, if we were able to put forward some constructive ideas which would cost us nothing and which might even, who knows, bear fruit one day.



D A S Gladstone
Western European Department

16 December 1981

cc:

Planning Staff

Mr Ceurvorst ✓

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