

Internal note from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the current negotiations with France on the standardisation of armaments (17 December 1975)


Caption: This internal note from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office dated 17 December 1975 describes the recent initiatives in and between Europe and North America in the area of standardisation of armaments and interoperability. The note addresses renewed French participation in North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) initiatives such as the Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD) and its subsidiary Armament Groups. It also points out that the French Government has stopped its attempts to revive the Standing Armaments Committee (SAC).

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). Future of Standing Armaments Committee of Western European Union. 01/01/1975-31/12/1975, FCO 41/1749 (Former Reference Dep: WDU 11/1 PART B).

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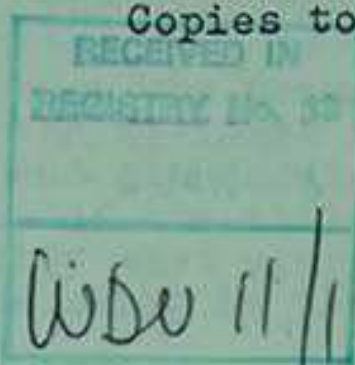
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CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS WITH FRANCE

1. Addressees may welcome a short note setting out the present state of play on various initiatives that have been taken in recent months in the general areas of equipment co-operation with Europe and between Europe and North America, standardisation, interoperability, etc. A central factor in all this has been the position of France.

2. This note only purports to give the situation as at Noon 12 December, and anyone wishing for information for a particular occasion is welcome to consult IP2 for an update, since the state of the game, and even the rules continue to change from day to day. Addressees may wish to give this note wider circulation in their own areas. Copies are being circulated separately to members of the FE Management Board.

3. NATO

The French participate in the deliberations of the Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD) and its subsidiary Armament Groups. They have just nominated an officer for, and have had elected to, the chairmanship of the NAAG. They do not take part in the meetings of the Defence Planning Committee, and their Foreign Minister does not normally attend the meetings of the North Atlantic Council although their Perm Rep does. The NATO Secretary General recently proposed, in response to an American initiative, the establishment of an "Ad Hoc Committee on Procurement of Armaments", composed of Deputy Permanent Representatives and reporting to the Council. The functions of this body were in essence to be to draw up a set of principles concerning standardisation and armaments procurement and to examine the machinery that was needed to implement them, and to consider specific proposals by the Eurogroup, the NATO Military Authorities and others. The Secretary-General's proposals were generally welcomed but the French response was hostile to such a group dealing with principles of standardisation, but were prepared to agree to the establishment of an ad hoc committee on interoperability with the limited mandate of preparing a specific programme of action. Basically, they regarded it as premature to discuss Alliance-wide standardisation and co-operation (ie the two way street) until the European position

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had been concerted. The Ministerial meeting of the Council last week agreed to the French proposal for an ad hoc committee on interoperability and to "instruct the Council in permanent session and the competent bodies of the Alliance to pursue studies of questions relating to armaments and standardisation within established procedures." The 'competent bodies of the Alliance' of course include CNAD. It is too soon to see exactly what else, if anything significant, may be involved for the time being in the Council itself.

4. EUROGROUP

During the summer, the "Euronads in special configuration (ie including general defence and foreign policy representatives)" undertook a study of the two-way street and European co-operation. This was considered by Ministers at their meeting on November 5 and resulted in decisions to:

a. 'explore the potential for extending co-operation in European armaments collaboration in an independent forum open to all European members of the Alliance'. The terms of reference proposed for this forum, known as the Independent Programme Group are given at Annex A. The precise shape and form of it are not yet clear, but its basic function would be to involve France in equipment procurement discussions: it would therefore in time largely supersede Euronad. The press has reported that France has 'reacted favourably' to the suggestion, which is true, although their participation is not yet certain, and depends on further talks. The proposal to France was put not by the Eurogroup, but by a group of European defence ministers who all happened to be sitting together in the same room at the same time. French antipathy to the Eurogroup remains;

b. in principle, to form a European Defence Procurement Secretariat. This is on ice for the moment, as the French have said in their contacts with us, that although it could be justified later on they do not think that a Secretariat is needed yet. Our attitude is that if the IPG develops, some form of small secretariat is likely to be necessary to service it and to collect information for it, but we are content to let this happen in its own time;

c. commission a study of the tasks that a European Defence Procurement Organisation might undertake. The Dutch wanted Eurogroup Ministers to agree in principle straightaway to set up this Procurement Organisation, but others (including ourselves) took the line that the establishment of such an institution must depend on a clear need being shown for it on the basis of experience. No action has yet been taken on this, and any developments are likely to happen extremely slowly.

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Discussions with the French of the form and tasks of the IPG will start in the New Year and it is hoped that their initial reaction pre-sages their actual involvement in the Independent Programme Group. But it will be necessary to convince them that the IPG is not the Eurogroup in another guise, and for this reason the indepen-

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gence of the IPG from the Eurogroup should always be borne in mind, and stressed, if necessary, in any international meetings that your officers attend.

5. NATO Defence Equipment Planning Cycle proposed by the Military Committee. This idea, apparently for the regular review of schedules of national requirements and procurement plans, was discussed at the recent DPC Ministerial meeting, though there were no conclusions. The French had already indicated, at a Perm Reps meeting of the Council, that they would not wish to join in any discussions of this matter, which seemed to them a matter for those nations which participate in the integrated military structure. It is not clear what will eventually transpire, though the possibility of devising an arrangement in which France can take part will be considered and - as an important point of detail - it will surely be desirable to ensure that any NATO schedules are compatible with those produced for other purposes.

6. SAC of WEU

Even the French, barring a few members of the Gaullist rustic right, now accept that the SAC is a dead letter, and their attempts to revive it appear to have stopped. However, too overt an attack on it may still cause annoyance, and we should avoid being seen to be putting the boot in just at the moment, in view of the delicacy of the discussions with France mentioned below.


7. FINABEL

FINABEL continues to provide useful contacts between European Army staffs, including the French, but excluding the Northern and Southern flank countries.

8. The EEC

The Treaty of Rome did not discuss defence questions, and, in spite of some occasional efforts, EEC organisations have maintained that they are not competent to deal with them. We endorse this attitude, and suggestions in the Spinelli report on the Aircraft industry that the EEC should set up an Armaments Procurement Agency are not on as far as we are concerned.

9. We will attempt to keep you informed of developments, and should have further news in the New Year.


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ANNEX A

The intention is to establish an independent programme group of senior officials open to all European members of the Alliance for the purposes of:

- a. exploring the conditions for a European co-operation in defence procurement;
- b. studying the possibility of a number of joint projects where a common requirement appears to exist;
- c. preparing the basis for the dialogue with the North Americans.

This programme group will be served by the European Defence Procurement Secretariat and will report to the Ministers of the countries taking part.

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