

Arms control

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The Agency for the Control of Armaments (ACA) was established by the Modified Brussels Treaty of 1954. It took over the provisions of the planned European Defence Community, the essential aim of which was to reassure the French with regard to German rearmament. The Agency was a means of monitoring it without any national discrimination, since all the Member States placed themselves under its authority.

Arms control was certainly one of the WEU's most important functions in that, throughout the Cold War, it was a vital political matter that was also of concern to the public, to activist groups and associations and to industrial circles.

The positions of France and the United Kingdom

There was a paradoxical discrepancy between the initial desire to limit German rearmament and the subsequent attitude of France and the United Kingdom within WEU. The fear, especially in France, was that a rearmed West Germany would try to exceed the arms ceiling and increase the number of its divisions. Not only did that not happen, but Germany actually took a great deal longer than expected to put together the 12 divisions planned (at the end of 1963). And it soon turned out that the problem in fact came from France and the United Kingdom, not Germany.

The British managed to get the jurisdiction of the ACA limited to the territory of mainland Europe, in exchange for which they undertook to station substantial military forces on the mainland as part of NATO commands. In 1957 they decided to withdraw those forces and cut back their conventional arms, believing that they could keep up their share of the common defence through their nuclear weapons contribution. The problem then for France was not so much limiting German engagement as limiting British disengagement. The type of call made on the ACA therefore changed. France asked it to give equal attention to ensuring that there was no exceeding of maximum levels on one side or falling below minimum levels on the other.

At the same time, the British were annoyed at seeing cooperation developing between France, Italy and Germany outside the WEU framework. On 17 January 1957, German Defence Minister Strauss and his French colleague Bourgès-Maunoury signed the Colomb-Béchar protocol, a secret bilateral collaboration agreement aimed at establishing '*close cooperation in the field of military designs and armaments and, for that purpose, [...] coordinating their resources and scientific, technical and industrial means*'.^[1] The Colomb-Béchar protocol covered all military programmes, including those in the atomic field. It was very general. After the ministerial crisis of October 1957, Jacques Chaban-Delmas succeeded Bourgès-Maunoury. Very hostile as he was to cooperation with the United States, and determined to equip France with the bomb, he met his German opposite number on 20 November.^[2] Chaban-Delmas made a proposal to Strauss for German researchers to come and work with French scientists in the organisations that already existed in France.

The Paris Agreements in fact prohibited Germany from manufacturing nuclear weapons on its territory, but not by any means from working together on manufacturing them in a neighbouring country. France's concern was to keep control over the work. On 25 November, when the French president of the Council of Ministers Félix Gaillard discussed equality within the Alliance and potential Franco-British cooperation in the nuclear field with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan,^[3] Gaillard said not a word about the Franco-German agreements, and especially nothing about the tripartite agreement signed that very day between France, Germany and Italy.^[4] The WEU was not informed until after the event.

In fact, both the French and the British tried to limit the remit of the ACA when they were concerned.

Britain argued that its weapons storage depots on the mainland were NATO facilities, so as to restrict the ACA's access to them. By doing this, it considerably reduced the checks made on them, while the facilities on British soil were not within the Agency's remit. France refused to place its nuclear weapons under WEU supervision, believing that deterrence was a matter purely of national sovereignty. Also, as WEU only monitored the stockpiles intended for the Member States' armies, and not products manufactured for export, France forgot in 1970 to 'declare' the Mirage Vs intended for Israel but not delivered owing to the embargo imposed by the French government.

What was discussed in the WEU?

The WEU's Agency for the Control of Armaments was a relatively light organisation within WEU, especially if its staff numbers are considered in the light of the importance of the job it had to do. Based in Paris, it brought together some 20 experts specialising in problems relating to defence and weapons technology, both conventional and modern. It reported on its activities to the Council of Western European Union.

If we compare what the Agency did with its original mission, it did succeed in one area: restoring trust between France and Germany. Most of the conflicts within the ACA arose out of Franco-British rivalry rather than from the attitude of the FRG.

It was responsible for monitoring armaments, not for any disarmament. It had to monitor the stockpiles and manufacturing of a set of weapons listed in an annexed protocol. As regards artillery, for example, it only monitored guns of more than 90 mm.

The ACA carried out two types of checks. Firstly, there were quantitative checks, to verify that Member States' weapons stockpiles were kept within limits. Then there were checks that no manufacturing was taking place, to ensure compliance with the bans in force on German territory. Two operating methods were used: a general check on documents, then surveys, visits and inspections. The general document checks involved examining and processing the declarations supplied by the Member States each year in reply to questionnaires from the Agency about their armaments, their manufacturing, import, export and external aid programmes and their defence budgets. These declarations, for which the Member States accepted responsibility, were supplemented by the information supplied through NATO's annual examination procedure and those provided by the United States and Canada about the external aid programmes in materiel. The data were then verified by on-the-spot inspections. These were carried out by a group of three experts, who gave governments advance warning of their inspection programmes. They were able to inspect military units, depots and factories.

The results of these inspections were, of course, affected by the restrictions imposed by France, which refused to allow its nuclear facilities to be inspected, and Britain, which refused to allow any visits to be made to its NATO facilities.

[1] French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Secretariat-General, 63, cited by SOUTOU, Georges-Henri. *Les accords de 1957 et 1958: vers une communauté stratégique nucléaire entre la France, l'Allemagne et l'Italie?* In: BDIC, *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 1993, No 31, p. 3.

[2] Cable from Pineau to the Ambassadors of France in Bonn and Rome, No 4678-4685/2871-2878, 20 November 1957. *Documents diplomatiques français, 1957*, pp. 717-718.

[3] Summary report of the Franco-British talks of 25 and 26 November 1957, conversation between Félix Gaillard and Mr Macmillan. *Documents diplomatiques français, 1957*, pp. 770-777.

[4] Protocol between the Minister for National Defence and the Armed Forces of the French Republic, the Minister of

Defence of the FRG and the Minister of Defence of the Italian Republic, Top secret, Paris, 25 November 1957.
Documents diplomatiques français, 1957, pp. 762–763.