

## The question of 'out-of-area' NATO intervention: from West Africa to the borders of the Near East

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*‘[R]esolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security’*, the United States, France, the United Kingdom and nine other founder members established the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) by the Washington Treaty of 4 April 1949. Among other purposes, the organisation was required to supply mutual and joint assistance to its contracting parties when they were threatened with attack by a third party.<sup>[1]</sup> Its area of operation, laid down in Article 6 of the Treaty, was defined by reference to the territories of the Member States: it chiefly concerned western Europe and North America, also covering the French territories and departments south of the Mediterranean, the territory of Turkey and the islands under the jurisdiction of any Party in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer. NATO’s remit also covered armed attacks on the forces, ships or aircraft on any of these territories and in any other region of Europe in which the occupation forces of any Party were stationed or which were on the Mediterranean Sea or in the region of the North Atlantic north of Allied Naval Forces Southern Europe (NAVSOUTH). The proliferation of areas of tension between the United States and the Soviet Union soon led the members of NATO to start thinking about ways in which the organisation could deal with them, particularly when the areas of operation were outside the sphere of action provided for in Article 6.

### ‘Out-of-area’ operations by NATO

NATO’s ‘out-of-area’ operations were quite specifically focused on the Mediterranean, for a number of reasons. The area was of strategic importance to the countries of western Europe: four Member States (Spain, France, Greece and Italy) had a Mediterranean coastline; France and the United Kingdom had territories or exercised authority over territories on the other side of the Mediterranean. It was the main transit area for oil products imported from the Middle East to Western Europe or North America.<sup>[2]</sup> The expansion of the Soviet presence in the areas ranging from North Africa to Afghanistan was seen as a threat to Euro-Atlantic security; it required a reaction.

The Western response was not a fixed one; it varied in line with changes in the United States’ strategy towards the Soviet Union. The economic and political containment of communist forces<sup>[3]</sup> which the Marshall Plan attempted to bring about soon showed its limits. In Greece there was a civil war between the Communist Party and the royalist forces between 1946 and 1947, and Czechoslovakia fell into the communists’ hands in 1948. The Truman Doctrine of 1947 was the first time the containment strategy was called into question, advocating, as it did, United States intervention in the form of financial and military aid wherever democracy and freedom were threatened. Then, in 1953, John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State, devised the ‘massive retaliation’ doctrine whereby there would be massive nuclear retaliation in the event of an attack by the Soviet Union on any NATO member country. This was a crucial component of ‘rollback’, a policy aimed at rolling communism back and no longer just containing its forward advance.<sup>[4]</sup> This shift in US strategy towards a more military approach justified, in United States eyes, extending NATO operations ‘out of area’. NATO forces, however, were never involved in any military engagement during the Cold War.<sup>[5]</sup>

From 1951, NATO developed its command structures in the Mediterranean — Allied Forces Southern Europe (AFSOUTH) in Naples, then, in 1952, Allied Forces Mediterranean (AFMED) in Malta.<sup>[6]</sup> The strategy of ‘containment’ did not stop the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev, from developing closer economic and military links with the countries of the Middle East (Egypt)<sup>[7]</sup> and North Africa (Algeria),<sup>[8]</sup> an approach which was maintained during the ensuing

decades, particularly in the conflicts between the State of Israel and the Arab countries.<sup>[9]</sup>

As part of the ‘containment’ strategy, NATO carried out several large-scale naval manoeuvres in the Mediterranean in the 1950s,<sup>[10]</sup> a turbulent period in the region, which saw the independence of Morocco and Tunisia on 2 and 20 March 1956 respectively, followed, from 29 October to 22 December 1956, by the Suez crisis, after the nationalisation of the canal by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser on 26 July. These exercises came to an end in the 1960s, following, in particular, reductions in the British Mediterranean Fleet, difficulties in taking a political decision on the command structure, the withdrawal of France from NATO’s military structures and the reorganisation of the command structures for the southern region.<sup>[11]</sup> The Six-Day War (5 to 10 June 1967), which pitted Israel against Egypt, Syria and Jordan, once more put the Mediterranean area at the epicentre of geopolitical concerns, including at WEU, where the crisis was hotly debated.<sup>[12]</sup> Against this background, in 1969, NATO’s Defence Planning Committee established the Naval On-Call Force Mediterranean (NOCFORMED), a naval rapid-reaction force to secure the Mediterranean by acting as a deterrent against Soviet incursions.<sup>[13]</sup>

As soon as NATO had become active, the question of ‘out-of-area’ operations had been a matter for military, and also political, planning.<sup>[14]</sup> These were given a fresh boost in December 1967 with the submission of a report on the ‘*Future Tasks of the Alliance*’ to the North Atlantic Council by the Foreign Minister of Belgium, Pierre Harmel. Looking ahead to the 20th anniversary of the organisation, this report stressed the need to adapt the Alliance to the new political circumstances and to France’s withdrawal from the integrated military command.<sup>[15]</sup> The report was presented at a time of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union, and was one of the first signs of a possible rapprochement between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. It was also to influence the spirit of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in 1973.<sup>[16]</sup>

The fall of the dictatorships in Portugal (25 April 1974) and Greece (24 July 1974) strengthened NATO’s position in the Mediterranean. Although Portugal had been a founder member of the Atlantic Alliance and Greece a member since 1952, the dictatorial regimes in those countries meant that cooperation was not very developed. The end of Francoism in November 1975 and the rapid democratisation of Spain led to that country’s joining NATO in 1982.<sup>[17]</sup> NATO then had easier access to the region surrounding Gibraltar for mounting patrols in the North Atlantic and increasing the numbers of bases from which operations could be run in the western Mediterranean.<sup>[18]</sup>

Also in 1974, NATO was faced with a political and military crisis triggered by the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey. As a NATO member since 1952 and the largest military presence in the Mediterranean, Turkey was strategically vital to NATO planning in the Mediterranean. However, the general weakening of the military presence in the eastern Mediterranean owing to the unilateral withdrawal of Jupiter missiles by the United States because of the Cuban crisis, the Cyprus conflict in 1964, the US embargo on arms deliveries to Turkey following its intervention in Cyprus in 1974 and Turkey’s international isolation over the Cyprus question were detrimental to cooperation between the allies in the region.<sup>[19]</sup> In addition, Cyprus proved to be vital to the United Kingdom’s strategic planning as it maintained a sizeable naval presence on the island and in the Mediterranean area, particularly as Britain had already been forced to close its naval bases in Egypt following the Suez crisis.<sup>[20]</sup>

As regards ‘out-of-area operations’, the French and British had, *prima facie*, shared interests. Both had worldwide responsibilities and, as such, were forced to allocate part of their military resources for that purpose.<sup>[21]</sup> The two countries also agreed that the external threats to Europe came mainly from the Soviet Union, given its expansionist political intentions and offensive capacity. At the same time, they recognised that developing countries might, for particular motives of their own, engage in hostile behaviour.<sup>[22]</sup> No form of cooperation outside Europe was set up between Paris and London,

however, with the notable exception of their intervention in Suez in 1956.<sup>[23]</sup> The main reason for this was that French and British interests were geographically separated and often made them rivals rather than allies, particularly when it came to arms sales.<sup>[24]</sup>

Perceptions in both countries as to NATO's role outside its operational area also accounted for NATO's limited role in the Mediterranean basin. Both France and the United Kingdom reserved the right to pursue their interests out of the NATO area, although they did have to keep their allies informed.<sup>[25]</sup> In addition, France was against the principle of operations outside the NATO area, and that hostility grew even more marked after the country left the integrated NATO command. Differences between Paris and Washington focused on the concept of security. The United States recommended a 'globalised' response to threats, through the adoption of economic boycott measures as well. France's view was that if such an approach were defended in NATO it would lead to NATO straying from its purpose, including as regards 'its geographical area of operations'.<sup>[26]</sup>

The southern Mediterranean region — the Near and Middle East plus the Gulf States and Afghanistan — had been on WEU's agenda since the organisation first started operating, both in the Council and in the Parliamentary Assembly.<sup>[27]</sup> How far-reaching the work it did in that field was depended on how much those areas were in the news. To be more specific, the Assembly was very active at the beginning of the 1960s owing to the international situation and the work put in by its French and British members on subjects relating to 'out-of-area' operations by NATO.<sup>[28]</sup> One of the first subjects WEU addressed was the question of the Suez Canal: having been on the agenda for the Standing Committee of the Brussels Treaty Organisation,<sup>[29]</sup> this was transferred to WEU when it was established. Topics as diverse as North Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan were added subsequently. At their quarterly meetings, the ministers taking part in the Council of WEU would consider the situation in the various parts of the world where the Member States had military obligations, 'in order to gain the best possible understanding of their respective problems', to look into ways of helping each other on a case-by-case basis<sup>[30]</sup> and to pursue common objectives such as the stabilisation of the Middle East area and the establishment of energy supply security. These last two questions were to arouse particular interest in WEU, both in the proceedings of the Assembly and in Council discussions.<sup>[31]</sup>

On the substance, WEU generally supported the expansion of NATO's mandate both politically and geographically. The argument put forward at the time was that it was not just a matter of defending a geographical area but also a 'way of life'.<sup>[32]</sup> The Council abstained from making any recommendations for operational measures. It was felt that defence questions outside the 'NATO area' fell within NATO's remit and not that of WEU. Its involvement consisted mainly of organising prior joint consultations between European countries before international meetings. This task was watered down after the United Kingdom joined the European Communities.<sup>[33]</sup> As for the Assembly, it called repeatedly on the Council to adopt common positions in favour of the peaceful resolution of the various conflicts in the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East (e.g. the Cyprus question, the Israeli–Arab conflict, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran–Iraq War).<sup>[34]</sup> The debates were sometimes tough, and on rare, exceptional occasions led to diplomatic crises, in particular in the form of the empty chair policy pursued by France from February 1969 to May/June 1970.<sup>[35] [36]</sup>

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[1] Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty of 4 April 1949 (also known as the Washington Treaty). For further information about the North Atlantic Treaty, see section 1, 'The relationship between WEU and NATO'.

[2] CHAUVEL, Jean. Les puissances et la Méditerranée. In: *Politique étrangère*, 1971, vol. 36, No 5–6, pp. 463–471.

[3] While he was ambassador in the Soviet Union, George Kennan had said that, although the Soviet Union could not be overcome by force of arms, it could nevertheless be brought under control. He therefore proposed a third path

between war and appeasement. The analysis contained in Kennan's 'Long Telegram', however, ended up being used as grounds for United States military expansion during the Cold War and accounting for increased 'out-of-area' activity by NATO. George Kennan to George Marshall ['Long Telegram'], 22 February 1946. In: *Harry S. Truman Administration File, Elsey Papers*. A copy of the original is available at: [https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/6-6.pdf](https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/6-6.pdf) [consulted on 28 July 2014]. See also: X. [KENNAN, George F.]. The Sources of Soviet Conduct. In: *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947, Vol. 26, No 2, pp. 566–582. Available at: <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm> [consulted on 21 September 2015]; A.B. A conversation with Kennan's biographer. Quick study: George Kennan's cold war policy of containment. In: *The Economist* [online]. 28 November 2011. Available at: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2011/11/quick-study-george-kennan%E2%80%99s-cold-war-policy-containment>.

[4] See: *Timeline of the Cold War*, available at: <http://www.cvce.eu/en/timeline/coldwar>.

[5] NATO operations and missions, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_52060.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52060.htm) [consulted on 2 March 2015].

[6] In 1951, AFSOUTH (Allied Forces Southern Europe) was established in Naples to defend southern Europe. On 10 July, the headquarters of Allied Land Forces, Southern Europe (LANDSOUTH) went into operation in Verona while the headquarters of Allied Air Forces, Southern Europe (AIRSOUTH) went into operation in Florence on 5 August 1951. *The birth of AFSOUTH*, available at <http://www.jfcnaples.nato.int/page1170299.aspx>; GUILLAUME, Gilbert. Malte et l'Organisation du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord. In: *Annuaire français de droit international* [online]. Volume 12, 1966 [consulted on 2 March 2015], pp. 434–455. Available at: [/web/revues/home/prescript/article/afdi\\_0066-3085\\_1966\\_num\\_12\\_1\\_1894](/web/revues/home/prescript/article/afdi_0066-3085_1966_num_12_1_1894). ISSN:2105-2948.

[7] Cable from Maurice Couve de Murville to Antoine Pinay about the Egyptian–Soviet arms contract (Washington, 2 October 1955). Mr Couve de Murville, Ambassador of France in Washington, to Mr Pinay, Minister of Foreign Affairs: Washington, 2 October 1955, T. Nos 5404 to 5414. Reserved. In: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Committee for the Publication of French diplomatic documents. *Documents diplomatiques français: 1955*, Volume II, 1 July–31 December. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1988. Document No 263. pp. 596–599.

[8] French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Political Affairs Directorate. North Africa. Note re the Soviet Union and North Africa. Paris, 21 December 1970. 10 p. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Archives Centre in Nantes. Archives repatriated from the Embassy of France in London. 'Western European Union (WEU)' Series. 1953–1992 (2002). 378PO/UEO/1-389. Number 34. Serial mark UEO.1.2.Luxembourg. Ministerial meeting, 11 January 1971. 1970–1974.

[9] Cable from Maurice Schumann to Roger Seydoux de Clausonne about Iraqi–Soviet cooperation on oil (Paris, 27 June 1969); Mr Schumann, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Mr Roger Seydoux de Clausonne, Ambassador of France in Moscow: Paris, 27 June 1969, 21:07., T. Nos 1133 to 1137. In: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Committee for the Publication of French diplomatic documents. *Documents diplomatiques français: 1969*, Volume I, 1 January–30 June. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 2011. Document No 453. pp. 1031–1032.

[10] In 1952, the Grand Slam and Longstep naval exercises mobilised the largest armada assembled since the end of the Second World War. In the autumn of 1952, Mainbrace was the first large-scale exercise undertaken by one of the two military commands, Allied Command Atlantic (ACLANT). In 1957, NATO held various large-scale exercises extending from Norway to Turkey, in particular Operation Counter Punch, Operation Strikeback and Operation Deep Water, involving more than 250 000 men, 300 vessels and 1 500 aircraft. MISKEL, James F. US Post-War Naval Strategy in the Mediterranean Region. In: HATTENDORF, John B. (ed.). *Naval Strategy and Power in the Mediterranean: Past, Present and Future*. London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 147–163. ISBN 978-0714680545; SURHONE, Lambert M., TENNOE, Mariam T. and HENSSONOW, Susan F. (eds). *Operation Mainbrace*. Betascript Publishing, 2011, 128 p. ISBN 9786135395037.

[11] NATO. *Allied Joint Force Command Naples: Brief History*. Available at: <http://www.jfcnaples.nato.int> [consulted on 2 March 2015].

[12] Council of Western European Union. *Extract from minutes of 281st meeting of WEU Council held in The Hague on 4th November 1965*. CR(65)17. Copy No 9. 04.03.1966, pp. 34–37; 40–41. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Archives Centre in Nantes. Archives repatriated from the Embassy of France in London. 'Western European Union (WEU)' Series. 1953–1992 (2002). 378PO/UEO/1-389. Number 14. Serial mark EU.40.1.3. The Hague (November 1965). 1960–1969; [French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.] Directorate for Africa and the Levant. Subdirector for the Levant. *Speaking points (Meeting of the Council of WEU). Re Middle East: Paris, 29 June 1967*. 4 p. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Archives Centre in Nantes. Archives repatriated from the Embassy of France in London. 'Western European Union (WEU)' Series. 1953–1992 (2002). 378PO/UEO/1-389. Number 16. Serial mark EU.40.1.3. The Hague (July 1967). 1960–1969.



[13] NOCFORMED was activated 43 times between 1970 and 1991. Source: <http://www.jfcnaples.nato.int/page1170302.aspx> [consulted on 27 February 2015].

[14] The basis for consultation and political cooperation within NATO was actually to be found in the text of the Washington Treaty (preamble, Articles 2, 3, 4 and 9). In its ‘first stage’ of political consultations, the ‘Committee of Political Advisers’ was already a pointer to the fact that the threats to the Atlantic Alliance were global and that discussions of foreign policy could by no means be restricted to the North Atlantic area. As it would be difficult to lay down limits, the criteria would have to include ‘the degree of common interest or the likelihood of a need for coordinated action.’ <http://www.nato.int/archives/docu/d630502e.htm> [consulted on 31 July 2014].

[15] <http://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/80853.htm> [consulted on 3 March 2015].

[16] VERNANT, Jacques. La Conférence sur la sécurité et la coopération en Europe. In: *Politique étrangère* [online]. No 1, 1973, 38th year [consulted on 4 March 2015], pp. 13–25. Available at: [/web/revues/home/prescript/article/polit\\_0032-342x\\_1973\\_num\\_38\\_1\\_2027](/web/revues/home/prescript/article/polit_0032-342x_1973_num_38_1_2027). doi: 10.3406/polit.1973.2027.

[17] Greece joined the EEC in January 1981, while Spain and Portugal became members at the same time, in January 1986. What is more, Portugal and Spain did not join the WEU until 1990, in the first enlargement of the organisation. Greece became a member in 1995.

[18] With the accession of Spain on 30 May 1982, NATO had 16 members with an approximate capacity, at the height of the Cold War, of 5 252 800 active troops. Available at: [https://www.lc.nato.int/articles.php?page\\_id=3](https://www.lc.nato.int/articles.php?page_id=3) [consulted on 4 March 2015].

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[20] See: BERNARD, Jean-Yves. *La Genèse de l’expédition franco-britannique de 1956 en Égypte*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003, Chapter II (414 p.). ISBN 9782859444792; ALFORD, Jonathan. The prospects for military co-operation outside Europe: a British view. In: BOYER, Yves, LELLOUCHE, Pierre and ROPER, John (eds). *Franco-British defence co-operation: a new entente cordiale*. London: Routledge for the Royal Institute of International Affairs. Paris: Institut français des relations internationales, 1988, Chapter eight (p. 86). ISBN 0415031125 9780415031127.

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[24] ALFORD, Jonathan. The prospects for military co-operation outside Europe: a British view. *Op. cit.* p. 84.

[25] ALFORD, Jonathan. The prospects for military co-operation outside Europe: a British view. *Op. cit.* p. 90.

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[35] It has not been possible to establish the exact date of the end of the ‘empty chair policy’, but it can be estimated as having been between May and the beginning of June, according to certain documents: Council of Western European Union. *Secretary-General’s note*. London: 21.04.1970. C(70)64. Copy No 53. 2 p. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council’s Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1970, 01/01/1969-31/12/1969. File 212.00. Volume 1/1; French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Directorate for Political Affairs, Africa-Levant Subdirectorates for the Levant. *Speaking points (Meeting of the Council of WEU). Re Situation in the Middle East: Paris, 1 June 1970*. 5 p. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Archives Centre in Nantes. Archives repatriated from the Embassy of France in London. ‘Western European Union (WEU)’ Series. 1953–1992 (2002). 378PO/UEO/1-389. Number 31. Serial mark UEO.1.2.Bonn. Ministerial meeting, 5 and 6 June 1970. 1970–1974.

[36] For an account of the origins of the ‘empty chair’ crisis in WEU, see DUJARDIN, Vincent. Les petits pays et la crise de l’Europe dans les années 1960. In: DEVAUX, Sandrine, LEBOUTTE, René and POIRIER, Philippe (ed.). *Le Traité de Rome: histoires pluridisciplinaires. L’apport du Traité de Rome instituant la Communauté économique européenne*. Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 69–75.