

PRIME MINISTER

FRANCO/GERMAN DEFENCE COOPERATION

I attach a translation of President Mitterrand's message, following his telephone conversation with you, about Franco-German defence cooperation, together with the FCO's commentary on it.

The FCO conclude that Franco-German cooperation, so far at any rate, is symbolic more than practical; that it holds no significant risks for Germany's commitment to NATO; and that, since we cannot in any case do anything to block Franco-German cooperation, we should join the Germans in trying to involve the French more closely in the collective defence of Europe.

This judgement is surely too complacent and insufficiently political.

This is because:

- rather than edge back closer to NATO, the French are trying to construct a Franco-centric system of European defence, based on a series of bilateral agreements or understandings with France as the major partner in each of them. This runs directly counter to our interest in strengthening the defence of Europe on a multilateral basis;
- at the same time, the French are playing games with WEU. They are proposing a grandiose declaration on European Security, while resisting any moves to make WEU more practically effective by moving it to Brussels, where it can be more closely associated with NATO;
- all this must bring with it a risk of loosening the cohesion of NATO - or at the least slowing down the process of closer integration - without producing

anything adequate to put in its place;

- in short, the French are dissatisfied with their present defence policy, but too proud and too selfish to come back fully into NATO, seeking instead a 'French' solution;
- this cannot be in our interest when we have invested so much politically and militarily in NATO. Moreover Franco-German cooperation risks, if not side-lining us, at least reducing our influence;
- the Germans ought to realise this too, but are so befuddled with the political benefits of being seen to promote Franco-German cooperation that they are allowing themselves to be led up the garden path.

Some of this may be overstated. But I think one can construct sufficient of a case about the risks to NATO from the course the French are pursuing to warrant your asking the FCO for a more sophisticated analysis which looks at both sides of the case and comes up with a clear recommendation on how we should react, e.g., by doing more to point out the risks to the Germans.

Agree ?

Yes - I don't like the proposal at all

CDP

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21 October, 1987.