

# Solidarity, Yes; Surrender, Never!

by Karel Vereycken

On March 4, 1947, France and Britain signed an agreement of mutual military assistance. Rapidly joined by Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, and with the winds of the “Cold War” blowing over Europe, a trans-Atlantic dialogue brought these nations to sign a treaty establishing an Atlantic Alliance with the United States and Canada, on April 4, 1949. This was joined by others, including Germany, in 1955. Its military structure is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), whose Article 5 requires mutual defense assistance in case of an attack on the territory of a member state.

Over the years, many voices in Europe considered the creation of a European defense force. In 1950, the French head of state, René Pleven, proposed the creation of a European Defense Community (EDC), a plan that especially pleased Britain and a post-Roosevelt United States, which was at that time fully committed to creating a federal Europe (on the continent) capable both of “taming” France and preventing Germany from being an effective nation-state. The EDC treaty was signed in 1952, but it never went into effect because the Gaullist-dominated parliament refused to ratify it in 1954, considering it to be a threat to France’s sovereignty.

Contesting the “special relationship” uniting the U.S.A. and the U.K. on top of NATO’s political command structure, French President Charles de Gaulle sent a memorandum to U.S. President Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Macmillan in 1958, pleading for the creation of a tripartite directorate that would put France on an equal footing with both the United States and the United Kingdom. Dissatisfied with the answer, France started building its own independent defense capability.

Then, in 1959, France withdrew its Mediterranean fleet from NATO command, and banned the stationing of foreign nuclear weapons on its soil. The weaponry was transferred to Germany, and France developed its own nuclear “*force de frappe*,” tested in 1960 in the desert of Algeria, and operational in 1964. Although France showed solidarity with the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, all French armed forces were removed from NATO’s integrated command, and all non-French NATO troops were asked to leave France. In 1966, the Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) was forced to relocate to Casteau in Belgium, and the NATO headquarters left Paris for Brussels.

## A Return to NATO?

During the 1995 Balkans crisis, President Jacques Chirac renewed basic French coordination with NATO’s Military Committee and agreed to “insert” some French liaison officers into SHAPE. As a member of the Council of the Northern Atlantic, where decisions are taken only by a unanimous vote, France stands as NATO’s fifth-largest financial contributor and second-largest contributor in terms of troops (17% of all NATO troops engaged in battle in February 2005 were French). The “dispute” so far has never been about France’s solidarity with its allies, but about French concerns of losing its sovereignty, and its refusal to submit to NATO’s unspoken political objectives.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s recent election made many neoconservatives (both French and foreign) believe that a rapid return of France into NATO’s integrated command would happen. If Sarkozy’s interview with the *New York Times* of Sept. 24, 2007 is seen as a milestone in that direction, the best insight into the matter comes from the report written at the same moment by former foreign minister Hubert Védrine, at the request of the French President, on France’s role in the era of globalization.

Although Védrine says a simple return to NATO would be close to vulgar, he emphasizes that “for France, to rejoin a reformed NATO, thanks to the good management of its readiness for such a rapprochement, would have a far different appearance, and a meaning other than simply a ‘return to NATO.’” One should note here that “socialist” Hubert Védrine sits on the board of the French luxury goods producer LVMH with “Democrat” Felix Rohatyn, who recently called on France to fully reintegrate into NATO.

Encouraged by the U.S. ambassador to NATO, Victoria Nuland, the wife of former Dick Cheney advisor Robert Kagan,<sup>1</sup> the Sarkozy government is bargaining to send more French troops to Afghanistan in exchange for a leading role at the command of a “European pillar” of NATO. A 60,000-man European defense force would be created by a “G-6” (France, the U.K., Germany, Poland, Italy, and Spain), six countries each capable of contributing 10,000 troops and spending 2% of their GDP on Defense.

Also in Paris, the fact that the group of French experts in charge of negotiating with NATO is dominated by such French neocons as Thérèse Delpech of the Rand Corporation, and UMP Member of Parliament Pierre Lellouche—both in favor of preventive air strikes against Iran—makes things only worse.

The good news might be that the recent discussion paper released by the five prominent “first strike” generals, while pleading for a global reform of NATO and France’s return, could eventually trigger the exact opposite reaction. Besides the banalization of nuclear weapons and proposing a preven-

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1. Nuland invoked NATO’s “solidarity clause” (Article 5) after the bloody events of Sept. 11, 2001, events that Tony Blair’s foreign policy guru Robert Cooper suspected were about to happen. Cooper remains the EU official in charge of EU/NATO relations.

tive nuclear “first strike,” the report’s proposals to suppress veto rights and abolish majority vote within NATO’s decision-making process might revive French opposition. Already, initial reports indicate that the upcoming Bucharest NATO conference, under French and German pressure, refused to put the question of Ukraine and Georgia becoming new members on the agenda. NATO’s provocative attitude is seen as irritating the Russian military, already furious about NATO’s role in Kosovo—an irritation that could militate against the new Russian President-elect Dimitri Medvedev’s allegedly greater openness to the West.

While the Lisbon Treaty allows the EU to become a military power, NATO proposes to become a political one, since military action is deemed “insufficient.” The conjunction of both processes in a time of financial breakdown means a return to imperial dictatorship. LaRouche’s co-thinkers in France, under the leadership of Jacques Cheminade, are calling the shots on this “hidden” agenda for a world government, and are committed to awake the French tradition in defense of the nation-state and the legacy of the Peace of Westphalia.