

## Address given by General Norstad to the Atlantic Council of the United States (Washington, 14 January 1963)

**Caption:** In an address delivered to the US Atlantic Council in Washington on 14 January 1963, US General Lauris Norstad, a former Supreme Allied Commander, refers to the question of authority and control over the nuclear potential within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

**Source:** Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee: A retrospective view of the political year in Europe 1963. March 1964. Paris: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee.

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**Publication date:** 25/10/2012

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[...]

I do wish to speak of what is at the very heart of this great problem of nuclear power in its military application - the questions of the locus of authority and how that authority should be exercised.

These questions of authority and control are now very much with us. They will remain with us whatever level of nuclear effort may be considered appropriate for the Alliance and regardless of the form in which that effort may be organised.

Here the views in Europe, as in the United States, vary over a wide range. Nevertheless, there are some common denominators which appear fundamental. Most Europeans are convinced that nuclear weapons, in some strength and in some form, are essential to their defence. They want a guarantee of the continuing availability of the weapons on which they must place dependence for the preservation of their freedom. Further, they wish a voice, an influence, in the decision-making process. They feel they need this in order to fulfil their responsibilities to their own people as well as to the Alliance.

These convictions are very real to the Europeans. I find them eminently reasonable. Like the renewed strength of Europe, they must be accepted as a fact of life.

The time has come to grasp this problem. There must be willingness on the part of all to consider the views, the needs, of others. Since every nation stands to gain, and should gain, from a successful resolution of the problem, each must be prepared to give in its own and in the common interest.

Let me say that I am well aware of the complexity of this subject and the danger of trying to make it appear simpler than it is. But before I am too long out of uniform, while experience is still fresh, I would like to make a few suggestions and conclusions of my own. They are not offered as the solution to this difficult problem. It is enough that they should contribute something to the discussion now taking place.

I believe it is the desire of almost all NATO nations that the authority over the nuclear capability which supports NATO defence plans should be vested in the Alliance itself. To meet this desire, the nuclear weapons deployed for the purpose of giving reality and substance to the NATO principles should be wholly committed to the Alliance. I am opposed to the proliferation of independent control and authority, as most of us are. In my judgment, the actual physical custody of the weapons or warheads, therefore, should be retained by the donor country.

By taking on this new authority, the NATO Council would assume a wider responsibility. To discharge this responsibility, the Council should develop, as indeed it has started to do, guidelines, rules of engagement, principles and established conditions for the possible use of the weapons in the defence of the people and territory of the Alliance.

In principle, the responsibility relating to the NATO nuclear capability is a collective one ; it must be shared by all of the fifteen member countries. However, a conference of fifteen powers is hardly an effective operational or executive body. It should not be expected to direct military operations nor, in emergency, to take those urgent decisions which might be required to initiate such operations.

One answer to this problem would be for the Council to create a smaller executive body wholly responsive to it. In its simplest form this body might consist of a representative from the countries contributing to the NATO nuclear stockpile : the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. To make sure that all fifteen countries are represented, that all views are heard, and to assist in integrating the overall efforts of the Alliance, the Secretary General, who serves all member nations, could preside over this executive group but not necessarily as a voting member.

The formula I am suggesting seeks to respect the rights and responsibilities of each NATO member. It aims to add strength and substance to the Alliance as a political authority. It seeks a solution within the structure and spirit of NATO. On the other hand, it should go some distance toward meeting the particular requirements of certain countries, France for instance, since it recognises the special position of the three NATO nations possessing a nuclear capability.

There are at least two possible variations of the executive group to which I have just referred. For instance, the size, the strength, and the geographic position of the Federal Republic of Germany, the involvement of that country in almost every aspect of the defence of central Europe, must somehow be taken into account. Perhaps this could initially be met by giving Germany some appropriate representative status with the executive body. Another possible variant would be to have two additional members elected from among the NATO nations on a rotating basis, although enlargement of the body might limit its effectiveness.

I believe the NATO nations agree that their responsibility is a collective one. The Council as a whole could, therefore, as I have suggested, direct and supervise the development of the Alliance's nuclear capability and lay down rules governing its use. In a military emergency, the Council as a whole should of course be consulted if time allows. But in the most urgent situations, the executive body should in my opinion take action in the first instance, being guided by the rules established by the Council, the highest political authority of the Alliance. Because a prompt and positive decision would be essential in a quickly-developing situation, the rule of unanimity may not be workable even in this small group. If a unanimous decision could not be reached, a majority vote could govern, and in my judgment should govern. In such an event, the member in the minority could reserve the option of withholding the forces of his own country, although in logic it would be desirable to commit them and in practice this would probably be inevitable. However, the weapons which the dissenting country will already have made available for use by the forces of other countries, under the common NATO plans, must remain committed and available.

A formula of the sort I have just outlined would, I am convinced, permit the NATO political authorities promptly to exercise their powers in a military emergency. It may meet some of the desires - the demands - of the Europeans for a voice, a real voice, in the control of military power.