

Summary record of the conference of Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Staff of Western Union (London, 30 April 1948)

Caption: On 30 April 1948, the Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Staff of the five powers signatory to the Brussels Treaty meet in London to discuss the creation of a Military Committee.

Source: Summary record of conference of five Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Staff of Brussels Treaty powers.

London: Brussels Treaty Organisation, 30.04.1948. 15 p.

National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>, Records of international organizations, DG. Copies of records of the Brussels Treaty Organisation and Western European Union. Brussels Treaty Organisations and Western European Union: Microfilm copies of files, DG 1.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/summary_record_of_the_conference_of_defence_ministers_and_chiefs_of_staff_of_western_union_london_30_april_1948-en-ee18e425-95c2-478b-8e9b-03a6a7fd91c0.html

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Vol. I

BRUSSELS TREATY ORGANISATION

SUMMARY RECORD
OF
CONFERENCE OF FIVE DEFENCE MINISTERS
AND
CHIEFS OF STAFF
OF
BRUSSELS TREATY POWERS
HELD AT
No. 1, CARLTON GARDENS, LONDON
ON
FRIDAY, APRIL 30th, 1948.

Released by Western European Union
on 1st March 1984

ORGANISATION DU TRAITE DE BRUXELLES

COMPTE RENDU ANALYTIQUE
DE LA CONFERENCE DES MINISTRES DE LA DEFENSE
ET DES CHEFS D'ETAT-MAJOR DES CINQ PUISSANCES
SIGNATAIRES DU TRAITE DE BRUXELLES
TENUE AU No. 1 CARLTON GARDENS, LONDRES
LE VENDREDI, le 30 AVIL 1948

Ouvert au public
par l'Union de l'Europe occidentale
le 1er mars 1984

TOP SECRET.

COPY NO.....

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SUMMARY RECORD
OF
CONFERENCE OF FIVE DEFENCE MINISTERS
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CHIEFS OF STAFF
OF
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NB Annexes A to F are attached to the
English text only

No supporting documents available in
either language

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W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1964 FIRST MEETING.

11 a.m.

For list of those present see Appendix A.

- I. The Right Honourable A.V. Alexander, C.H., M.P., United Kingdom Minister of Defence, welcomed the delegates and delivered an opening address, the verbatim text of which is given at Appendix B.
- II. Mr. Alexander then turned to the second item on the agenda (text at Appendix C) - Nomination of Chairman. The FRENCH delegate proposed that the United Kingdom delegate should take the Chair: this proposal was seconded by the BELGIAN delegate, supported by the DUTCH delegate; and approved.
- III. The CHAIRMAN then took the third item on the agenda - Composition of Military Committee.

Mr. Alexander said that in the view of the United Kingdom delegation the Military Committee, in order to prove an effective instrument, must be broad in scope but small in size: it should deal with defence by land, sea and air and ultimately with civil defence as well. The United Kingdom proposed to appoint an Air Vice-Marshal to lead the British team, supported by two officers, one from the Army and one from the Royal Navy, of appropriate rank. The United Kingdom proposed that the detailed work should be relegated to three sub-committees (one each for Navy, Army and Air) on each of which the five Powers would be represented by the suitable officer from its team on the main committee.

The FRENCH representative gave it as his opinion that the Military Committee should subdivide its work into two series:

- (a) normal preparatory working committees, at which the delegations would each be led as proposed by the United Kingdom delegate;
- (b) sub-committees, again to be led as suggested by the United Kingdom delegate.

He foresaw, however, the need for occasional meetings, on major issues, of the Chiefs of Staff of the five Powers.

The BELGIAN delegate suggested that it might also be necessary to hold occasional meetings of the Ministers of Defence, they alone being qualified to take major policy decisions.

The NETHERLANDS delegate supported this view, drawing a parallel between the division on the political side as between the Consultative Council and the Permanent Commission and on the military side as between the occasional meetings of the Ministers of Defence and the regular meetings of the Permanent Military Committee.

The LUXEMBURG delegate stated that his Government would wish to be represented on the main Military Committee, but of the sub-committees only on the military one: on the work of the air sub-committee his Government would only wish to be kept informed and consulted as occasion arose.

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W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

The CHAIRMAN stated that, as agreement seemed to have been reached in principle, exact procedure should now be decided.

It was the United Kingdom view that each country's representative on the Military Committee should be directly responsible to his own Chiefs of Staff and through them to his Minister of Defence.

The BELGIAN and FRENCH delegates expressed their agreement; and the FRENCH delegate went on to say that his Government agreed that a permanent organisation should be set up in London, composed of one general officer representing each country, with two assistants (representing the two other Services) and that this permanent nucleus should work, each delegation in direct liaison with its own Chiefs of Staff, from whom it would receive all necessary documentation and data. It might be necessary to arrange occasional meetings of the Chiefs of Staff themselves, on an ad hoc basis. A separate issue was the possible desirability of occasional meetings of the Ministers of Defence, to give quick decisions at a Government level on major problems.

The CHAIRMAN agreed, but expressed his hope that it would not be necessary to resort too frequently to such meetings of the Ministers of Defence.

Unanimity having been expressed on this point, the LUXEMBURG delegate enquired whether the delegates to the permanent Military Committee were to reside in London or only to come for occasional meetings.

The CHAIRMAN replied that it seemed essential that the Military Committee should be in permanent session in London. The Defence Ministers would report from time to time to the Consultative Council, but as that body would only meet quarterly, the Defence Ministers would in the interim keep the Permanent Commission informed of their activities.

This point was agreed by the NETHERLANDS and FRENCH delegates: the latter went on to suggest that when the Ministers of Defence met they should be accompanied by their respective Ambassadors to assure close liaison between the military and political sides.

This point was agreed and the CHAIRMAN then enquired whether it would not be desirable that specifically operational matters should be kept for discussion solely by the Ministers of Defence.

The FRENCH delegate agreed in principle: he felt that the greatest secrecy must be preserved on such operational matters: he suggested, however, that closer definition of these categories must be left for later decision in the light of experience.

The CHAIRMAN agreed and suggested that the Chiefs of Staff should advise their Defence Ministers on the delimitation of these subjects.

The FRENCH delegate, returning to the earlier point of discussion, suggested that the rank of the three officers constituting the delegations to the Military Committee should be defined forthwith.

The UNITED KINGDOM delegate repeated that it was his Government's intention to appoint an Air Vice-Marshal, assisted by two officers of appropriate rank: it was not, however,
his /

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W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

5

his Government's intention to impose strict definitions of rank which might prejudice the appointment of suitable personalities.

The BELGIAN delegate also pointed out that the armies of the Benelux Powers had in general lower ranks than those of France and the United Kingdom.

IV. The CHAIRMAN then passed to item 4 on the agenda - Tasks to be performed by the Military Committee.

He suggested that the Ministers of Defence should give a broad indication of the lines on which they envisaged the task of the Military Committee but that they should not, by too strict definition, preclude consideration by the Committee of any other matters which it might wish to consider.

The CHAIRMAN then read to the meeting the list of seven questions to be answered about the military policy of the five Powers (already circulated to the Permanent Commission as Metric document No. 1: see Appendix D). The Chairman realised that these were questions of major importance, but he felt that the Foreign Ministers would wish to be able to reply at the earliest possible moment, even if the reply were only of a provisional nature.

The FRENCH delegate pointed out the different needs with which the Committee was confronted. We were asked to prepare an inventory of the forces and material resources available to us; but before this could be done, it was really necessary first to know to what use these forces and material resources were to be put. A double problem thus presented itself:- the duties to be apportioned to each force and the common policy to be followed. We all knew that we had to push our defences out as far as possible in front of our respective countries, but for operational purposes a combined military doctrine must be worked out. The form and structure of the operational plan necessarily depends on this which in turn again depends on the resources available. If however we were to await the evolution of a common strategic plan before answering the seven questions, too much time would be lost. We must therefore abandon what would seem to be the logical procedure and try first to answer the seven questions. Our first task therefore was to draw up forthwith a provisional set of answers: these in turn would procure for us the further information on which to base our subsequent actions.

After some further discussion the CHAIRMAN stated his entire agreement with the French view that our immediate need was for a stocktaking: this should include not only our existing military supplies but also our war potential in productive capacity. The aim should be to pool all resources in the event of a crisis. The Permanent Military Committee should consider all this with a special eye to the integration of resources for the defence of Western Europe by the combined force of the five Powers.

The FRENCH delegate then stated that he was authorised by his Government to make two statements: first, that France accepted the principle of pooling equipment; secondly (subject to certain technicalities) that France accepted standardisation of armaments.

He went on to say that it was easy to make an inventory of what we actually possessed; but that it was a longer and more difficult job to produce an inventory of our combined

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1st MARCH 1984

industrial potential. When we had made these two inventories, we would find that they fell short of our needs: the deficit thus revealed would be the basis of our third inventory. But for this third inventory to be exact we had to know the military doctrine which was to govern its use and this could only be fixed in conjunction with our American ally.

He therefore proposed that the Ministers of Defence should consider, when the first two inventories had been drawn up, the desirability of inviting the United States Government to send an observer to assist at our further discussions. This should simplify the production of the third, or "deficit", inventory.

The CHAIRMAN, summing up put three points:-

- " (1) What have we got?
 (2) In the light of what we have got, what could we do if required now?
 (3) What must we do if we are to move to safety? "

The word "must" in this last point was the clue to our immediate obligation, and the staffs should draft a directive on this point to the Military Committee, with a view to rapid determination of our interim needs. Obviously there would be a big gap: but he felt sure that our potential opponents too had a gap: with the aid of our American allies we would fill our gap. Once we got our deficit-assessment, we could go to the United States Government for the next step. We should now direct the staffs to prepare the necessary directive.

This was agreed.

V. Secretariat and Records.

The CHAIRMAN stated that the Military Committee would need a Secretariat and that His Majesty's Government was prepared to offer staff and machinery: if agreeable to the other delegations, he proposed as head of this Secretariat Colonel Mallaby, to be assisted by Major Gabbett. These officers had suitable experience and qualifications.

The FRENCH representative thanked the United Kingdom delegate for this offer and suggested that each power should be represented on the Secretariat: the French Ministry of Defence would be able to nominate its representative very shortly.

It was agreed that the Military Committee should start its work on Wednesday, 5th May (time and place to be notified later), by which date it was hoped that the Secretariat would be in being.

VI. Publicity.

It was decided that the routine meetings of the Military Committee should have no publicity whatsoever, that its work should be conducted in the strictest secrecy and that the most closely limited distribution should be given to its papers.

A communiqué would be issued on today's meeting of the Defence Ministers: this communiqué to be drafted during the afternoon and submitted for approval to the Ministers later in the day.

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DECLASSIFIED
W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

7

At this point the BELGIAN delegate announced that a technical military agreement was to be signed at The Hague on May 10th between Belgium and the Netherlands: he hoped that this agreement would strengthen and promote cooperation in the Military Committee.

The CHAIRMAN expressed his gratification at this announcement.

The FRENCH delegate then returned (a) to the question of the Secretariat, which he suggested should be definitely not a military staff but a secretarial body serving the Military Committee; and (b) to the directive to be issued, which he felt should, in the interests of speed and clarity, be a document uniform to the five Powers.

The CHAIRMAN agreed with the French about the Secretariat, which in his opinion had three main functions: (a) to prepare the agenda for the Committee; (b) to arrange meetings; (c) to take records. It was not called upon to express views.

The CHAIRMAN also agreed with the French delegate's suggestion about the directive: the staffs should meet at 4 p.m. to draft this document, for submission to the five Defence Ministers at their second meeting at 4.45 p.m.: if approved, the Defence Ministers would then issue it as their instructions to the Military Committee.

The CHAIRMAN then expressed his satisfaction at the morning's work and invited the delegations to join him below for luncheon.

1st May, 1948.

DECLASSIFIED
W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

SECOND MEETING.

4.45 p.m.

- I. The CHAIRMAN read out the text of the draft communiqué: after some discussion and emendation this was approved for issue to the press (see Appendix E).
- II. The CHAIRMAN then read out the text of the draft directive from the Defence Ministers to the Military Committee: after a short discussion this was approved (see Appendix F).
- III. The FRENCH delegate then proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairman for his skilful direction of the day's work, which he felt had achieved the most satisfactory results.
- The CHAIRMAN replied thanking his colleagues and the Chiefs of Staff for their cooperation.

The meeting then adjourned.

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W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

APPENDIX A.MEETING OF FIVE-POWER DEFENCE MINISTERS.

held at 1, Carlton Gardens
on
Friday April 30th at 11 a.m.

Attendance List.

1. UNITED KINGDOM.

Mr. A. V. Alexander..... Minister of Defence
Admiral Cunningham..... First Sea Lord
Field Marshal Lord Montgomery..... Chief of the Imperial
General Staff
Marshal of the R.A.F. Lord Tedder... Chief of the Air Staff
Sir Harold Parker..... Permanent Secretary,
Ministry of Defence.
General Hollis..... Chief Staff Officer

2. BELGIUM.

H. E. Colonel de Fraiteur..... Minister of National Defence
Lieut.-General Baele Chief of Staff of the Army
Colonel Leboutte..... Chief of Staff of the Air Force
General de Leval..... Engineers
Monsieur Walravens..... Counsellor, Belgian Embassy,
London.

3. FRANCE.

His Excellency Monsieur Teitgen..... Minister of the Armed Forces
General Lechères..... Chairman of the Combined General
Staff Committee of the French
Armed Forces
General Ely.....
General Revers..... Chief of Armed Forces Staff
Committee
Admiral Lemonnier..... Chief of Naval Staff
Monsieur P. Baudet..... Minister, French Embassy, London.

4. LUXEMBURG.

H. E. Monsieur Lambert Schaus..... Minister of the Armed Forces
Colonel A. Jacoby..... Commander-in-Chief

5. NETHERLANDS.

His Excellency Colonel A. Fievez..... Minister of War and Navy
Lieut.-General H. J. Kruls..... Chief of Staff of the Army
Vice-Admiral van Holthe..... Chief of Staff of the Navy
Major-General Giebel..... Chief of Staff of the Air Force
Baron Bentinck..... Counsellor, Netherlands Embassy,
London.

6. SECRETARIAT OF PERMANENT COMMISSION.

Mr. E. Star-Busmann

7. SECRETARIAT OF DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING.

Colonel G. Mallaby..... Ministry of Defence
Mr. John Russell..... Foreign Office
Mr. E. Jeffes..... Interpreter

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W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

10

RESTRICTEDAPPENDIX B.

Opening Remarks by the Rt. Hon. A. V. Alexander, C.H., M.P.
Minister of Defence, at Meeting of Western Union Defence
Ministers at Lancaster House S.W.1. at 11 a.m. on Friday
April 30th 1948.

Your Excellencies and Gentlemen, or, may I say, more familiarly, my Friends.

I take great pleasure and pride in welcoming you all to London and to this conference. It is only a few short years ago since in this same city our Governments worked side by side in easy comradeship for the achievement of a common purpose. The understanding and goodwill which developed between our Governments, between our fighting men and between our peoples in those hard years are one of the most abiding results of the struggle which we carried through to victory. We fought then side by side each contributing what we could without counting the cost to ourselves and for our children the values of Western Civilisation. The bonds that were established then have not grown weaker in the interval since the war was won. Our purpose today is the same as it was then. The circumstances have changed, but we have not changed. Our beliefs and ideals are now what they were then when the free nations of Europe stood together against the tyranny of dictatorship. London was then the rallying point of our cause and I am proud that London should again offer its hospitality to you today as we open another chapter in the story of the free democratic world. As Minister of Defence I welcome my colleagues who bear the same office as I do in the Governments of the other signatories of the Five Power Treaty and, on behalf of the British Chiefs of Staff and myself, I also welcome the distinguished and proven military advisers who are with you today. I am sure that, between such warm friends as are met together here today, I need to say no more than that we are very glad to see you all, to have the opportunity to renew old friendships and to make new ones.

The circumstances that bring us together are too familiar to require any detailed recital from me.

It was our common purpose in the war to restore the liberty of all the peoples of Europe so that the whole continent might live together in peace and unity of spirit. We did not desire the creation in Eastern Europe of any such tightly knit system of states as has now appeared. But in face of that exclusive bloc of states, which deny the fundamental principles on which our Western civilisation has been built up through the centuries, it was inevitable that the free states of Western Europe should draw closer together. Our Governments have been led by the march of events and in response to the broad democratic wishes of the peoples they represent to conclude the Five Power Treaty. That treaty provides for close collaboration between our countries in the fields of policy, of economics and of defence. Our concern is with the last of these, but I cannot stress too strongly that they interlock at all points. For the essential basis of planning any realistic measures of defence must be the re-establishment of a healthy economic life in the countries of the Western Union. The development of effective defence plans and, if it should ever be necessary, the prosecution of war today would call into play the whole economic resources of the states affected and that is why our first objective must be the restoration of war damage, the rebuilding of our industrial strength and the development of new techniques and equipment. This has indeed been the primary aim of us all since the war ended and we all of us welcome the

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DECLASSIFIED
W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

understanding and generous attitude adopted by our friends across the Atlantic Ocean in the assistance they have given and are giving towards that end. And it is fitting that the economic aspects of collaboration under the Five Power Treaty should have already begun to be tackled by the responsible Ministers of our countries in Brussels.

Our duty today is to match the developments in the economic field with plans for collaboration in the field of defence, no less realistic and no less cordial. Under the impact of war we learnt the need to pool resources and to combine for the common good - we have not forgotten those lessons. I feel sure that we shall each of us recognise the need for a spirit of accommodation and conciliation as our discussions proceed. In particular we must be ready to adjust the requirements of national defence to the broader conception of the security of the Western Union as a whole. We must approach these problems in a spirit of friendly realism. The march of technical progress in the means of waging war has never been more rapid. The difficulties will be great - their very magnitude should stimulate our efforts to find a solution and our determination to place the security of our countries on a basis which none will care to challenge.

Our particular duty is to devise the machinery by which the security problems of the Five Powers can best be examined and through which decisions can be taken for the common good. We have to set up the permanent military committee which under the Treaty will be the necessary instrument for this purpose.

This is our task. I believe we have the will to succeed and the intention to succeed. I am confident that our deliberations will lead to speedy agreement on what has to be done and that we shall demonstrate in this field, as our countries have done and will do, in many others, that the free processes and discussions of the democratic way of life in which we believe are no barrier to the attainment of effective results in defence of our ideals and civilisation against the threats to which these are now undoubtedly exposed. A great responsibility is entrusted to us - I do not think we shall be unequal to its challenge.

DECLASSIFIED
W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

12

SECRET.

COPY No.

DRAFT AGENDA FOR MEETING OF DEFENCE
MINISTERS ON FRIDAY, 30TH APRIL 1948
AT NO. 1, CARLTON GARDENS.

1. Opening welcome address by the Minister of Defence of the United Kingdom.
2. Appointment of Chairman.
3. The composition of the Military Committee.
4. Tasks to be performed by the Military Committee.
5. Secretariat and Records.
6. Any other business which Ministers may wish to raise.
7. Communiqué.

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W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

APPENDIX D.QUESTIONNAIRE.

It is desired to know whether

- (a) A Combined Staff is contemplated in Western Europe.
- (b) Equipment will be pooled.
- (c) Types standardised.
- (d) What forces the Allies could probably now assemble on the ground and in the air.
- (e) What would the plan of action be until American help is available.
- (f) What would the Allies have in the way of their own sources of supply.
- (g) In what general direction is the Allies military thought moving and how would they wish the United States to cooperate.

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W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

14

APPENDIX E.

COMMUNIQUE.

issued by the Secretariat of the Permanent
Commission.

In accordance with Article III of the Communiqué issued on 17th April 1948 by the Foreign Ministers of the Five Powers signatory to the Brussels Treaty, the Defence Ministers of the Five Powers held their first meeting in London today. They were attended by the Chiefs of Staff of their countries and other Service Representatives.

The Ministers decided upon the organisation and composition of the Military Committee of the Five Powers, which will be of a permanent character. This Committee will examine the common defence problems within the scope of the Brussels Treaty.

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W.E.U. 1st MARCH 1984

Appendix F 15

TOP SECRET.

DRAFT DIRECTIVE FROM THE MINISTERS OF
DEFENCE OF THE FIVE POWERS TO THE
MILITARY COMMITTEE.

The Defence Ministers of the five Powers require the Military Committee to undertake the necessary examination in order to be able to provide answers to the following questions:

- (a) Will the resources and equipment of the five Powers be pooled?
- (b) Are the types of equipment of the five Powers to be standardized?
- (c) What forces could the five Powers assemble on the ground, in the air and at sea?
- (d) What is the plan of action of the five Powers until American help is available?
- (e) What are the sources of supply of the five Powers?

In order to be able to produce the answers to these questions, the Defence Ministers of the five Powers are agreed that the Military Committee should first undertake the following tasks:-

- (a) To prepare an inventory of the total military forces and resources of the five Powers at the present time.
- (b) To prepare an inventory of the potential military forces and resources of the five Powers.

(c) To assess from an examination of (b) above what resources and assistance will be required from other sources. The Defence Ministers recognise that without an agreed strategic doctrine and agreed operational plans it would be difficult to produce a conclusive report on (c) above. Nevertheless the examination should be made, after the completion of (a) and (b) above, on varying assumptions with regard to the strategic doctrine and operational plan.