

Minutes of the joint meeting between the WEU Council and the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions (2 July 1957)

Caption: On 2 July 1957, the Council of Western European Union (WEU) meets to reply to the questions put by the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions. French Ambassador Jean Chauvel notes that, unless there is a change in the allocation of responsibilities, the Council is not in a position to reply to questions on overall strategy because, since 1950, WEU has no longer been responsible for planning defence policy and organising common defence, these tasks having been transferred to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The best approach is to address the various questions in the most appropriate framework. The Chairman of the Council, Louis Goffin, adds that this means that the Council no longer receives information about the implementation of defence obligations for each Member State and is therefore unable to give information to the Assembly; he also points out that NATO is not subject to parliamentary control. The other questions focus on the reorganisation of the Member States' land forces for security in Western Europe and the 'British strategic outlook'.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from the minutes of the joint meeting, Assembly Committee on defence questions and the WEU Council, 2nd July 1957. C (57) 134. 6 p. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1956, 01/10/1956-30/11/1958. File 202.413.41. Volume 1/1.

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EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING,
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE QUESTIONS AND THE
WEU COUNCIL, 2nd JULY 1957 C (57) 134)

II. British Strategic Outlook

Question 1. Can the Council supply information as to when it is likely to resume the study of the United Kingdom proposals relating to the redeployment of British Forces on the Continent of Europe?

The CHAIRMAN of the Council replied that the Council would be likely to resume their study in October 1957, after reception of the results of the N.A.T.O. review.

Question 2. Will the Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany be in a position to tell the Committee whether the withdrawal of 13,500 British soldiers from the German soil has or has not had unfavourable consequences on the defence of Germany?

Lord HOOD considered that this question should really be answered by the United Kingdom representative. The major part of the withdrawals had not yet taken place. He recalled that in February 1957 the Council had requested the views of SACEUR on the United Kingdom proposals concerning the redeployment of British forces on the Continent. In giving his views, SACEUR had at one point drawn attention to the unfortunate effect of an early withdrawal of the British forces and the United Kingdom Government had in consequence readjusted their plans to take account of this view. This had meant that their proposed reduction had been divided into two parts, the second of which had been reserved for further discussion. Of the 13,500 men comprising the first "slice", the major part would not be withdrawn until the first quarter of 1958.

Question 3. Is the Council aware of the unfavourable reaction which its approval of the British plans for the 1957-58 financial year, given at its meeting of 18th March, 1957, has encountered on the Continent?

The Committee requests to be consulted before the Council takes a decision on further reductions of British or other forces stationed on the Continent.

Lord HOOD replied that the Council were aware that a motion of censure had been put to the Assembly at its recent session, but had not commanded the necessary majority.

As regards consultation of the Committee, the CHAIRMAN of the Council replied that no answer could be given at such short notice but that the Council would take note of the Committee's request.

Question 4. Has the question whether other member countries of W.E.U. besides the United Kingdom should manufacture, or would like to manufacture, strategic nuclear weapons, been discussed by the Council?

The CHAIRMAN of the Council replied that the Council had not considered this question.

Question 5. What is the opinion of the Council regarding the sharing of the tasks between the member States of W.E.U? If Britain is to concentrate its efforts on the supply of atomic and thermo-nuclear bombs while continental countries are to make a corresponding effort concentrated on their land forces, would a sharing of the right of decision regarding the use of the bombs and of the land forces between member States not be the logical complement of such a division of labour?

Through such a decision W.E.U. would recover the cohesion which it had before the redeployment of British forces, last March.

M. CHAUVEL said that though the Council could not reply to this question, it was most interesting as showing the lines along which the Assembly was thinking. The Council would transmit this and other points raised by the Assembly to Governments for their most careful consideration.

Question 6. Are all the member States of W.E.U. agreed that their land forces should be equipped on an equal footing with tactical atomic weapons and guided missiles of tactical operational value?

How long will it take to provide this equipment?

M. CHAUVEL replied that this matter was the responsibility of Governments and that the Council could not, therefore, reply.

Question 7. Is it agreed that, as regards deliveries of tactical atomic weapons from the United States, the member countries of W.E.U. will act collectively on a multi-lateral basis and not individually on a bilateral basis?

M. CHAUVEL replied that the Council could not answer this question, but would transmit it to Governments, as indicating the way the Assembly viewed the matter.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF JOINT MEETING Ass. Cttee on Defence
Questions OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 2 July 1957 (C(57) 134)

- A. RECOMMENDATION NO. 8 (see file 202.413.00)
I General Strategy

Question 3. Has the Council been informed of the progress of this review undertaken by N.A.T.O. at its request?

Question 4. Is the Council able to give any indication as to the date of the completion of this review?

The CHAIRMAN of the Council said that the latter were of course aware that N.A.T.C. had accepted the recommendation of the seven Governments that the North Atlantic Council study urgently the proposals made by the German Chancellor for a new overall review of the resources of the Alliance. However, in accordance with the division of competence between N.A.T.O. and W.E.U., although the member Governments of W.E.U. were of course fully informed of the

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progress of this study in their capacity as members of N.A.T.O., the Council of W.E.U. were not, and were concerned only with the results, which would be communicated to them in due course by N.A.T.O.

Question 5. Does the Council share the opinion of the Committee that while awaiting the completion of this review no government should institute unilaterally any reorganisation of its own national defence that would in any way create a fait accompli?

The CHAIRMAN of the Council stated that this problem was the responsibility of Governments on the national level and as members of N.A.T.O.; it did not concern the activities of the Council.

When the CHAIRMAN drew attention to the Council's examination of the question of the maintenance of United Kingdom forces on the Continent, the CHAIRMAN of the Council recalled that Article VI of Protocol II laid a definite responsibility on the Council in this matter, and that it therefore formed part of their activities as already defined for the Assembly. This responsibility was however limited to the maintenance of United Kingdom forces, and did not cover those of other countries.

M. de la VALLEE POUSSIN thought that this question brought the meeting to the heart of the matter. Parliaments naturally wished to continue to oversee questions of national defence. But they realised that this had to some extent become a practical impossibility since in the framework of N.A.T.O. such questions were discussed behind bars of secrecy and only such information on military policy as Governments felt disposed to give was furnished to national parliaments. The W.E.U. Assembly wished to arrogate the right to carry out this task of overseeing that was denied to national parliaments. This was a fundamental problem, which was bound to arise even more acutely in the future.

M. CHAUVEL said that unless the whole organisation of competence in these matters were changed, it must remain difficult for the W.E.U. Council to reply on questions of general strategy. He recalled that the Council had already informed the Assembly that once N.A.T.O. had been set up, Governments had taken the view that the defence of Western Europe could only be considered effective within this wider framework which included, in particular, the United States and Canada and that the Brussels Treaty Governments had recognised that they could best fulfil their obligations under the Treaty within that framework. The 1950 transfer of responsibility for planning defence policy and organising common defence had been complete. W.E.U. had no military planning or command machinery; on the contrary, member Governments had been unanimous in deprecating any duplication of the N.A.T.O.

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military organisation and command structure. Referring to M. de la Vallée Poussin's remarks concerning the evolution of national and international institutions, M. Chauvel pointed out that the Governments represented in the Council were members of different organisations and dealt in each with the questions most appropriate to that particular framework; this was surely the most effective way to proceed.

The CHAIRMAN agreed that the Council had given the Assembly full information concerning this transfer; but they had not been aware that this meant that the Council received no information concerning the implementation of the defence obligations of member States with N.A.T.O. and were therefore unable to give any information to the Assembly. The important question here was that responsibility had been transferred from an organisation which was now subject to parliamentary control to one that was not.

Question 6. How does the Council reconcile the often repeated statement by SACEUR that 30 divisions constitute the minimum ground forces necessary for the defence of Western Europe, with the fact that there exist hardly 15 divisions at present on the Continent?

Does the Council think that the figure of 30 divisions will be reached rapidly?

M. ZOPPI said that here again the Committee's question concerned the activities of N.A.T.O.; the matters raised had never been considered by the Council of W.E.U.

Question 7. Is the Council aware that the danger inherent in a too drastic reduction of the armed forces of member countries of W.E.U. may lead the United States in turn gradually to withdraw its forces?

Mr. GOEDHART doubted whether, in view of the Council's attitude, there was any purpose in continuing the present discussions. The Committee was here to discuss the vital question of the defence of Europe, but the Council were unable or unwilling to furnish them with any substantive replies.

The CHAIRMAN considered that the discussions with the Council were proving useful, since the reasons given for their failure to reply to the Committee's questions were in themselves of great interest. This particular question was undoubtedly of political importance.

The CHAIRMAN of the Council replied that the seven Governments were fully aware of the danger referred to in the Committee's question and that this was constantly before them in considering their military policies.

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Question 8. Does the Council consider that the equipment of the armed forces of member countries with tactical atomic weapons would justify further reductions in the near future?

M. CHAUVEL replied that this question again did not concern the activities of the Council. The question was under study in N.A.T.O., and the Council did not possess the information necessary for a reply.

Question 10. In connection with its Report on the state of European security (Doc.38), the Committee would like to know when France is likely to replace under the command of SACEUR those troops withdrawn from Europe and sent to Algeria?

M. CHAUVEL, speaking in his capacity of French Ambassador, replied that his Government intended to replace under the command of SACEUR the troops withdrawn from Europe and sent to Algeria.

The Government obviously could not give an exact date, but had given an undertaking that this would be done as soon as feasible. In the meantime, certain measures had been taken to permit the temporary replacement of these troops by other forces, of admittedly lower combat value.

M. LEGENDRE added that, despite the statutory limits to military service, two "classes" had already done 30 months national service, and the average length was at present 24 months: this clearly demonstrated the very substantial defence burden shouldered by France.

The CHAIRMAN wished to stress that no criticism had been intended by this question of a country which was such a valued member of the Alliance.

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