

Secretary-General's note on the preparation of the joint meeting between the Council and the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments (London, 31 October 1958)

Caption: In a note dated 31 October 1958, the Secretary-General of Western European Union (WEU) circulates the text of his letter to the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), together with the text of the questions put to the Council by the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments concerning the maintenance of British forces on the European continent, the draft replies from the Council to questions 1, 2 and 6, and the final reply to Recommendation 23. In this final reply, the Council notes that its only powers on the matter of the financial contributions of Member States to the common defence derive from Article VI of Protocol No II to the Paris Agreements, and that it could not encroach on the role of the North Atlantic Council in considering the contribution made by each Member State of the Atlantic Alliance.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Secretary-General's note. Preparation of the joint meeting between the Council and the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments. London: 31.10.1958. C (58) 145 (final). Copy No 71. 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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SECRETARY-GENERAL'S NOTE

Preparation of the joint meeting between the Council and the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments

Letter to the Secretary-General of NATO

The Secretary-General circulates herewith the text of the letter sent to the Secretary-General of NATO on 30th October, 1958, concerning the forthcoming joint meeting between the Council and the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments.

Annexed to this letter are the text of the questions put by the Assembly which concern NATO directly, and the draft replies to questions 1, 2 and 6, drawn up by the working party which met on 24th October, 1958.

The agreement of delegations to the above texts was notified to the Secretariat on 30th October, 1958.

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Letter to the Secretary-General of NATO
dated 30th October, 1958

"I have the honour to inform you that representatives of the Council of Western European Union and of the W.E.U. Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments will be meeting in London on 2nd December, 1958, under the chairmanship of Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, Chairman in office of the W.E.U. Council, to consider a number of questions put by the above Committee, a list of which is attached.

Some of the questions deal directly with matters of a military nature which are outside the sphere of activities of W.E.U., and are of concern to NATO as a whole.

The Council have therefore requested me to ask you to supply the substance of replies to questions 3, 4, 5 and 7, in accordance with the written procedure agreed between our two organisations and following the procedure accepted by the Atlantic Council, as set forth in your letter of 12th February, 1958, on this subject.

The Council have also directed me to send you their draft replies to questions 1, 2 and 6, for an opinion by the competent NATO authorities.

Furthermore, I have been requested by the Council to invite a representative of the Secretariat-General of NATO or an officer of one of its Commands to attend the joint meeting; he would supply the Chairman, at his request, with such items of information as he may deem necessary to reply to the questions raised. In this verbal procedure also, the system described in your letter of 12th February, 1958, will be applied."

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Questions submitted to the Council by the Assembly
Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments

Level of forces of member States and the maintenance of
certain United Kingdom forces on the Continent

1. The British Foreign Office stated on 10th June 1958, that at the end of 1958 the British forces on the Continent would be reduced from 55,000 to 45,000 men unless alternative financial arrangements were made within NATO.

What is the present position of the NATO discussions to find alternative finance and what type of solution is envisaged?

What other countries are involved in bilateral or multilateral negotiations for financial aid for the maintenance of their forces abroad?

Has the Council received any request from the United Kingdom to withdraw a further 10,000 men?

2. The Committee is aware that SACEUR is opposed to any further reductions in the level of British or any other forces on the Continent. In view of this, what action is the Council taking in pursuance of paragraphs 1 and 2 of Recommendation No. 23?

3. Are the Council's military advisers satisfied with the present lengths of military service in the member countries, and the uncertainty which exists as to the periods to be adopted in the future?

4. What progress has been made in organising small tactically dispersed supply depôts under international arrangements in the Central Command as General Valluy has proposed?

5. Are the allied military authorities satisfied with existing arrangements and plans for integrating tactical nuclear weapons into the forces assigned to NATO command?

/6. ...

6. What arrangements exist for ensuring joint allied decision on the initial use of these weapons?

Since last reporting to the Committee at the joint meeting on 6th March 1958, what action has the Council taken in pursuance of Recommendation No. 21, Part 2, and what action will it take in pursuance of Recommendation No. 23, paragraph 3, both of which cover the strategic use of nuclear weapons?

7. How many different calibres of light and medium field artillery and mortars are in use in the forces of the Central Command?

Draft replies to questions 1, 2 and 6

Questions 1 and 2

1. The British Government intend to maintain B.A.O.R. at the strength of 55,000 men until the end of 1959.

The Council has received no request from the United Kingdom to withdraw a further 10,000 men from B.A.O.R.

2. The Council's views on paragraphs 1 and 2 of Assembly Recommendation No. 23 are set out in their reply to that Recommendation (cf. attached text).

Question 6

These tactical nuclear weapons are subject to the authority of the Supreme Allied Commander who acts under the direction of the North Atlantic Council exercised through the Standing Group. The responsibility for decisions to put plans into action in the event of hostilities rests with member Governments; and the existing machinery for consultation provides the framework in which such decision could be taken. It is not possible to define in advance the conditions under which these nuclear weapons would be used. Any attempt to do so might be playing into the hands of a potential aggressor by making clear to him the limits within which he could operate without incurring an unacceptable risk.

2. With regard to the second part of the question, as the Council have explained both at the joint meeting on 6th March, 1958, and in their reply to Recommendation No. 23, paragraph 3, they consider that these matters are not within their competence (cf. attached text).

Reply of the Council of Western European Union
to Recommendation No. 23 of the Assembly on the
present state of European Security

The Council have considered the Assembly's "Recommendation No. 23 on the present state of European security".

1. The policy of member States is to maintain their contributions to the common defence effort at levels which take into account both the needs of the Alliance and the available resources. The Governments concerned feel that their responsibilities in this field are already well set out both in the North Atlantic Treaty and in the revised Brussels Treaty and that the NATO Annual Review system provides a procedure for keeping contributions under continuous review.

The Assembly makes particular reference to the alleviation of financial strains imposed on individual States by their contributions to the common defence. In view of the existing NATO procedure established in July 1957 for the common solution of currency problems arising from the stationing of forces in other member countries of the Alliance, it does not appear expedient to develop a parallel procedure within W.E.U.

2. So far as the reduction of the contributions of member States is concerned, the Council wish to point out that their only powers in this matter derive from Article VI of Protocol No. II to the Paris Agreements. Moreover, they could not trespass on the functions of the North Atlantic Council, which considers the contribution of each member State of the Atlantic Alliance and gives them such advice and recommendations as it deems appropriate.

3. The Council consider that the matter raised in this question cannot be dealt with in the framework of W.E.U.

4. All member Governments carry out their national responsibilities for internal defence in full knowledge of the requirements of Allied Command Europe. There is already considerable co-ordination of work which has led in practice, to valuable results. The Governments concerned consider that the extension of existing practical methods of co-ordination in this field offers a better way towards a closer harmonisation of all defence activities than the conclusion of any formal seven-power agreement.