

'Europe defence our first priority' from The Guardian (15 September 1970)

Caption: On 15 September 1970, the British daily newspaper The Guardian reports on the statement made at the Council meeting of Western European Union (WEU) by Anthony Royle, British Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, on the priorities of British defence. Although the defence of Europe remains a priority, the address by Anthony Royle particularly focuses on the importance of security in the Mediterranean, given the Soviet advance into the region.

Source: "Europe defence our first priority" from The Guardian. London: Guardian Newspapers. 15.09.1970, p.3.

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Europe defence our first priority

Tivoli, Italy, September 14

Mr Anthony Royle, British Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, said at a Ministerial Council meeting of the seven-nation Western European Union today that the first priority of British defence policy remained the defence of Europe, where British security fundamentally lay.

Britain, he said, believed she could continue to contribute to the security of South-east Asia and the Gulf without impairing the priority she gave to the defence of Europe. This policy was not aimed at the perpetuation of British influence in these areas, but, the British Government believed, was in the best interest of Europe as a whole.

Expressing his certainty that Britain's efforts to guarantee stability in these areas would be understood by her European friends, Mr Royle proposed that Britain should keep them

informed of the progress of these policies through WEU channels.

On the Gulf, Mr Royle said Britain believed a precipitate military withdrawal could create a situation of general instability which other Powers might exploit.

The formidable increase in the size and range of activity of the Soviet Navy could change the balance of power at sea and pose new political threats to coastal States. Once the Suez Canal was reopened and the Soviet fleet from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean could move easily into the Indian Ocean and the Gulf, further efforts to expand Soviet political influence could be expected.

The lines of communication

of Western Europe stretched through many seas, including the Indian Ocean, and this gave an additional vital interest to the balance of naval power.

Sources said that in secret talks on air piracy member States agreed that the present delicate situation made it inopportune to make public proposals on ways to curb hijacking. But they agreed to examine the problem further within WEU. The sources added that no agreed solutions to the problem had so far emerged.

The conference also agreed to continue permanent consultations on the problem of kidnapping and violence against diplomats, which Italy feared might spread outside South America.

In a discussion on the Middle East Signor Moro referred to "deplorable measures" against the Italian community in Libya. —Reuter.