

Address by Harold Watkinson to the WEU Assembly (Paris, 7 June 1962)

Caption: On 7 June 1962, Harold Watkinson, British Minister of Defence, gives an address to the Assembly of Western European Union (WEU). He discusses the question of defence outside the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and particularly emphasises how important it is for the United Kingdom to strike a balance between its commitments outside Europe and its responsibilities within WEU and NATO.

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Last updated: 25/10/2016

Mr. Goodhart (continued)

American policy in Kenya has not, however, always been particularly helpful to us. But I do not mind the fact that the Americans may convert one side while we convert another faction. Which ever side, in those circumstances, achieves power, the West will always have friends at court.

Our comparative lack of unity can at times give us great tactical flexibility. I would be perfectly happy if my country, the United States, France and Holland were to follow what seemed on the surface to be mutually contradictory policies towards, for example, Indonesia. But in such a complex situation we ought to agree to disagree and not disagree by accident or perversity.

I support the implementation of this Recommendation because I believe it will make it less likely that we cut each other's throats by accident rather than by design.

The PRESIDENT. (Translation). — The general debate is closed.

Has the Chairman of the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments any comments to make?

Mr. KLIESING (*Federal Republic of Germany*) (Translation). — Mr. President, it is not my intention to add anything to the excellent written Report submitted by Mr. Kershaw, nor to his supporting speech. I have asked to speak only because there is something to which I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly.

We are all very busy people, and are therefore unable to devote as much study as we would wish to all the documents sent to us. I would however ask you to spend five minutes or so in reading Appendix IV on pages 13 and 14 of Mr. Kershaw's Report. Here he gives eleven examples of the conduct of member countries of NATO during the voting on resolutions at the 16th session of the United Nations Assembly in 1961. There, Mr. Kershaw shows that the NATO countries were never on any single occasion in complete agreement on these political questions.

Naturally, no-one demands unanimity of view on all political matters in all circumstances between partners; but the opposite state of affairs, whereby they are at variance on all the questions

dealt with by the UN, is equally far from being ideal.

I would therefore like to point out that Appendix IV of Mr. Kershaw's Report provides an alarming indication of the lack of co-ordination and political consultation within NATO.

The PRESIDENT (Translation). — The Assembly has now to vote on the draft Recommendation in Document 230.

Rules 34 and 35 of the Rules of Procedure require the vote on a draft Recommendation taken as whole to be by roll-call, the majority required being an absolute majority of the votes cast. However, if the Assembly is unanimous, we can save the time needed for a vote by roll-call.

Are there any objections?...

Are there any abstentions?...

The Assembly is unanimous.

*I accordingly declare the draft Recommendation adopted unanimously*¹.

4. Address by Mr. Watkinson, Minister of Defence of the United Kingdom

The PRESIDENT (Translation). — We are very happy to welcome Mr. Watkinson, the United Kingdom Minister of Defence.

We salute in him a country that has given the world a great deal already and which we count on both to strengthen the European family by which it is impatiently awaited, and to increase the world's understanding of our duties and civilisation.

We welcome him personally as someone whom we have had the pleasure of hearing on other occasions and whom we shall take great pleasure in listening to again.

I call Mr. Watkinson, United Kingdom Minister of Defence. (*Applause*)

Mr. Harold WATKINSON (*Minister of Defence of the United Kingdom*). — Mr. President, thank you very much indeed for your kind wel-

1. See page 45.

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come and for saying what is certainly true from my country's point of view, that we hope very much two things. First, that we Britons may come more closely to Europe, and, secondly, that Europe itself may look perhaps with greater interest on the outside world and its problems and difficulties.

The last occasion on which I had the honour of addressing the Assembly was in London, a year ago. Much has happened in that last year — this is a great pleasure to me personally — to strengthen the links that bind my country to the mainland of Europe. Perhaps it is a sign of the times that I should appear so soon again before you, this time in Paris. I have, of course, made the journey in the old-fashioned way, by coming by air. No doubt before long I shall make the journey by motoring across the Channel Bridge or through the Channel Tunnel, or perhaps I may even come by hovercraft. Anyway, I appreciate that on this visit I had to take the old-fashioned way of crossing the Channel by air.

Last year, I had the pleasure of telling you something about how we in Britain intended to fulfil our defence responsibilities within Western European Union and the NATO Alliance. I did, however, remind you then that there were many other areas of the world where aggression might seem more easy to the Communist powers and perhaps more profitable to them, than in Europe and that, sometimes in company and sometimes alone, Britain had special responsibilities in those areas. I would like to repeat some of the words I used then, for they are the theme of my speech today. What I said to you last year was this:

“The world is now too small to isolate any major conflict. Therefore, to keep the peace outside Europe is just as much a European interest as to secure peace within the European theatre.”

In repeating those words I am, of course, not underrating the importance of defence in Europe. We in Britain are part of Europe. There is, I agree, and we know well, what one might call a European point of view on defence. We share it, and I think we share it with great knowledge and understanding. We know that it will

come out more clearly as the new Europe takes shape and if we join the European Economic Community we shall throw ourselves wholeheartedly into the concept in this respect as in all others. So, in talking today chiefly, as your Report calls for, about the problems of defence outside the European theatre I hope no-one in this great Assembly is in any doubt of the sincerity of the British wish to find the means which will enable us to play our full part in the defence of Europe and the life of Europe as a whole.

As I have said on several occasions in the British House of Commons, we fully support General Norstad's strategy for Europe and we intend to fill our current obligations under the Brussels Treaty, to which Mr. Housiaux referred in his Report. I said to this Assembly last year that our decision to go over to regular long-term forces, about which I shall be saying something in a moment or two, would mean a difficult change-over period for us. When one goes over from a two-year to a six-year manning cycle, one has carefully to regulate the intake each year so as not to have too many men leaving at the end of the six-year period.

But let me repeat what I have often said in our own House of Commons. We regard and pledge ourselves as a good NATO ally and we want to bring our army contribution on the central front to our treaty obligation of 55,000 men as soon as we reasonably can. It will be backed by the strategic reserve in the United Kingdom. Beyond that we are not prepared to go and I hope to be able to indicate to you this morning some of the reasons why that is so.

First, I would like to say this in general terms. None of us in this Assembly, I am sure, is working for a Europe cut off from the rest of the world. Many countries in Europe have ties of friendship, commerce and influence spanning the world, as we have, for example, in the Commonwealth. It would be tragic to cut these ties or even by neglect to allow them to slacken. They are, I believe, our inheritance from history, the

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common patrimony of the new Europe, won by the achievements of our peoples. We in Britain would like to see Europe as a kind of heartland of a world-wide assemblage of free peoples. Taking the long view, Europe must look outwards, not inwards, to secure her economic future.

What I have just said leads straight to the question of defence outside NATO, which you have kindly invited me to discuss today, because friendship, commerce, influence across the world, mean responsibilities across the world and, of course, that is where defence comes in. As Minister of Defence of the United Kingdom, I would like to tell you how we see our defence responsibilities outside Europe and NATO, how we meet them, and how we bring them into balance with our responsibilities nearer home. But, first, I would like to congratulate Mr. Kershaw on the Report on defence outside NATO. It was, in my view, a most clear and able presentation of the facts and problems which we face. I would also like to say that I agree strongly with the general theme of the Report. I think this general view, looking outwards at these problems, was absolutely right.

First, then, the picture of our responsibilities. I will deal with them under four heads: collective security alliances; bilateral alliances, by treaty or tradition, with other countries; British territories overseas which have not yet reached independence; and the fully independent Commonwealth countries with whom we have arrangements or understandings. I do not place these in any particular order of importance. Indeed, I do not believe that arguments about who comes first are at all useful. If peace is indivisible, so certainly is defence policy.

Let me remind you briefly, then, of the formal obligations we have under the collective security alliances to which your Rapporteur has already referred. Apart from NATO, we are full members of CENTO and SEATO, and I welcome very

much the suggestion that closer links between the three should be developed. I suppose none of us here would question the link between CENTO and NATO. Turkey and ourselves are associated in both. CENTO also includes Iran and Pakistan. The defences of NATO are thus extended to cover a dangerous flank. I wish to say again that I believe even closer links between NATO and CENTO would be in the best interests of both alliances.

In the Far East, SEATO takes up the strain. Again, there is interlocking membership. The United States, France and ourselves are in NATO and SEATO, and SEATO also includes three other Commonwealth countries — Pakistan, Australia, and New Zealand — and also Thailand and the Philippines. All three of these great collective security alliances have the same defensive purpose, to guarantee the integrity of free countries against Communist aggression and subversion. All impose military commitments on their members. All, in my view, will have to work more closely together in the future if we are to maintain an adequate military posture at all points. I am sure that when you have studied Mr. Kershaw's very able Report, with its maps and backgrounds, you will have a picture of the immense frontier which these alliances have to cover, a frontier along which failure in one sector would inevitably have very damaging results in all the other sectors of this immense front.

Perhaps I may say, particularly as representing Britain, not in any spirit of boastfulness, but as a matter of record — and perhaps as a matter of slight pride — that because Britain is at the moment the only country that is a full member of all three alliances we in Britain can see most clearly the general indivisible problem presented to all of us by this long frontier, curtain — call it what you will — that separates the free world from the Communist world. So there is the main problem which is presented to us in our membership of these three alliances, which I believe, as I have said, must draw us more closely together.

I would now like to turn to the treaty or other defence arrangements that we have with a num-

Mr. Harold Watkinson (continued)

ber of countries in parts of the world where we stand alone; notably, perhaps, in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. Most of those countries are small and, in the absence of an effective international force to keep the peace, none, in its present state of development, could expect to survive for long without our help. Perhaps I need only mention the threat to Kuwait a year ago to make my point there.

The sort of task we perform in those parts of the world is sometimes called "policing", and I would only add that in Britain we have an expression that a policeman's lot is often not a happy one. None the less, that is our responsibility. We must carry out this task of policing. Someone has to do it; and it certainly cannot be done on the cheap in terms of men, money or material.

We are also still responsible, single-handed, for the defence of many dependent territories, large and small, all over the world, which are not yet sovereign. I think our policy is well known. It is to help those countries towards nationhood as quickly as we possibly can, and I hope history may say that we were not unsuccessful in that task. The number of dependent territories therefore dwindles steadily, but there are still a great many that are passing through various stages towards full independence, and many that may have full internal self-government but do not yet have external responsibilities, including responsibility for external defence.

For example, it may surprise some of those present to know that there are still over 40 British and other territories overseas which look to us alone for protection. Their total population is 32 million and, what is more significant from a defence point of view, they are scattered across the world, separated by many thousands of miles of ocean and continent, from Fiji to Bermuda, from the Seychelles to Sarawak. All those people are coming to nationhood and, as they attain nationhood, they naturally wish to take greater responsibility for their own defence — as, indeed they must. We welcome this and help them to

do so, but until it is achieved, as I have made plain, we have these responsibilities for their defence which we must fulfil.

Their joining the circle of the free independent Commonwealth countries brings me to my fourth defence problem and responsibility in the outside world: that of the independent Commonwealth countries with whom we have close family connections. I use the word "family" in quite a literal sense, because there are not many households in our country where there is not a Canadian cousin, or a father or grandfather who served in India, or an uncle who went to Australia or New Zealand. I mention that because you may wonder why we do not have formal alliances with these fellow members of the Commonwealth.

We have, in fact, very few formal alliances with these independent nations of the Commonwealth. They are, of course, developing their own very efficient armed forces, and it is worth remembering that some, from time to time, have views on domestic or foreign policy that differ from our own. I think it puzzles many people to know how this loose assemblage of free people, looked at in the defence sphere, really becomes the successfully functioning entity that it is. The reason is that we exchange information, defence facilities, visits, courses and personnel, freely and as matter of course, and without much public fuss or ceremony. That is the way in which we manage to achieve a great deal of valuable military burden-sharing all over the world. It is a useful lesson to us on how best to manage these relationships in, perhaps, the sphere of the whole world.

It is an informal, friendly and close association which hangs together because it shares a common concern for a free world where the rule of law prevails. There really is no closer tie than that except the tie of family — a common interest, and a friendship, and a working together. It is certainly something in the Commonwealth which, in the defence sphere, works remarkably well, and it is perhaps a tradition that I think and hope we will be able to establish outside the

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Commonwealth as our European association gets closer and, I hope, on more friendly and personal terms.

As I have said, these are our responsibilities, and we could not keep up those connections — which are, as I have said, part of Europe's heritage — if, militarily, we turned our backs on all those countries and on our responsibilities to them. Those countries have come without question to look for our help, and have come to our help, without treaty obligations in many cases, and our military posture must make it possible for us to come quickly to their help if help is needed. That is our position outside Europe, and it is well summed up in the Report now before you. I have merely tried to add to that Report some of the personal relationships and treaty obligations that help to hold things together.

Let me now turn to how we plan to meet these responsibilities. Our strategy and our deployment of forces must, of course, be adaptable to changing circumstances. During my two and a half years as United Kingdom Minister of Defence I have put in hand a series of radical reviews of various aspects of our strategy to try to meet the needs of a rapidly-changing world — including, perhaps, too many developments in science and technology. I have no doubt that the pace of change will be maintained; it might even accelerate. Equally, we can be sure that pressure from the Communist world, although it may take new forms, will continue relentlessly over this period, and will be exerted anywhere in the world at what appears to be a weak point.

The conclusion we have drawn from all this is that we must be able to bring forces to bear more rapidly and flexibly than ever before, sometimes over very long distances. We have also come to the conclusion that these forces must be trained and equipped to fight in widely different conditions of climate terrain and opposition, and that they must become much less dependent than they are today on fixed installations ashore. That is the basis of our new strategy.

Our new strategy, therefore, gives first priority to mobility and flexibility, and to concentrating on a limited number of main shore bases from which our forces can fan out by sea and air. Those bases in future will be Britain, Aden and Singapore. By "base", of course, I do not just mean a place where there is an army garrison, but a place where troops, ships, aircraft, equipment and supplies can be held for military operations elsewhere. We also seek greater mobility and flexibility by keeping men and equipment afloat, and by increasing the air and sea portability of our forces.

Of course, we still maintain powerful forces round the world, and this has been clearly pointed out in the Report in front of you. It might, perhaps, give you just an idea of the size of the task if I say that our Middle East Command, which is based on Aden, covers an area of about 7 million square miles, and that our Far East Command, centred on Singapore, covers over 18 million square miles of land and sea. Those two figures, I think, give a fairly clear idea of the way in which we must achieve greater flexibility and rapidity of movement if we are to discharge our task.

The other main point of development in the current White Paper — and thus in our future plans — is that we believe we must increasingly use the sea and the air to transport men and equipment and support land operations. If we are to do this successfully, we believe that the three fighting services must work and train together more closely than ever before. With the aim, outside Europe, of fighting on a joint service concept of joint service task forces, we have made changes in the command structure and the machinery at the centre in my own ministry to match this concept of joint tri-service operation. I shall not pursue this. Those who may be interested in it will find it quite clearly set out in this year's British Defence White Paper.

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But the point for me to make now, perhaps, is that we believe that our forces overseas and our mounting capacity to reinforce them rapidly in emergency are a valuable insurance against encroachment and infiltration. We do not believe the prospects of world peace would be improved if we were to weaken these forces; and, of course, in stressing this, I am not forgetting the quite indispensable part played by our other allies, particularly our American allies, in South-East Asia and the Pacific and elsewhere. We could not do this job alone, except perhaps in the areas I have indicated — in the Persian Gulf and Aden.

I come, finally, to the question of balance, which is fundamental to all problems of defence. How do we, how should we, strike the balance between these commitments outside Europe and our responsibilities in Western European Union and NATO? What are the limiting factors? I believe the broad answer to the first question is that we all live in this one world and that it is shrinking fast, from a defence point of view. Let us for a moment try to see this world through Communist eyes — because that is the yardstick which we in Britain seek to use in our analysis of our defence problems. The Communists have made no particular secret of their intentions. You will remember that Mr. Khrushchev, in a speech only last January, distinguished three kinds of war — world wars, local wars and liberation wars and popular uprisings. He then proceeded to rule out the first, to reject the second because of the dangers of escalation, and to promise Russian support for the third.

My friend and colleague, the United States Secretary of Defence, in a speech subsequent to Mr. Khrushchev's remarks interpreted them as a decision to concentrate on wars of covert aggression; and I agree with him. I believe this is the most likely future development. How are we to dispose of it? If we in Britain disposed of unlimited resources we could afford to match every conceivable threat at every possible point, but there are practical limits set to our total defence effort by economic considerations and by manpower. None the less, I hope you will

agree that our effort is tailored to try to meet this kind of threat.

I would like to say a word about our decision to go over to all-regular forces. I am convinced it was the right one for us. It implies no criticism of the national service or conscript principle. We need long service fighting men if we are to fulfil commitments as far apart as Hongkong and the West Indies. Two years' military service or less is perfectly adequate for many defence needs in Europe, but for us it involves very wasteful use of scarce national manpower which we cannot afford. If you have been watching our recruiting figures you will know that we have succeeded and are succeeding well in recruiting regular forces at a rate far beyond the expectations of some of our critics. We hope we will succeed in building up our regular forces to match our needs to our world-wide defence policy.

For some years now we have kept the amount we have spent on defence each year running at about 7% of the gross national income — and this in good years and bad. This year we shall spend £1,721 million, which is considerably more than in 1961-62; and, as the Defence White Paper makes plain, we do not rule out a further increase in defence spending in absolute terms if our national income rises, as we plan that it should.

We think that, on the whole, this is good going by any standard. We are also quite clear that we must keep this balance. We must spend enough, and I believe that 7% of the gross national product is about right. But, equally, we must not spend so much on defence that we undermine all the other things we have to do to keep our free world vigorous and prosperous. But I think that at 7% the balance of expenditure is about right.

Mr. Harold Watkinson (continued)

In conclusion, I would say only that I have tried briefly to set out the considerations which the British Government take into account in deciding how and where to make their defence contribution. We have tried very hard to get the balance right and I think that, on the whole, we have it about right. As I have said, we should continue to play our full part in Western European Union and NATO. Outside NATO, as you have accepted by passing the Report, we also have heavy obligations which have a direct relationship to the security and safety of Europe and the NATO area as a whole. In discharging them, I can say with sincerity that we are inspired by the conviction that what we do outside Europe and outside NATO we do as good Europeans and loyal allies.

Lastly, I would say this: we in Britain want to face these world problems together, because I believe that together we can do an enormous amount in our time to see that those who come after us find a little easier the task of maintaining and keeping our concept of freedom, justice and tolerance alive. I sincerely believe that it is a task which we can only successfully achieve together. It is in that spirit that I hope that I and my colleagues at Westminster and the British Chiefs-of-Staff approach this immense, difficult, complicated and challenging task of keeping our free world free.

The PRESIDENT (Translation). — Thank you very much. Mr. Watkinson has also been kind enough to agree to answer any questions put to him by the Assembly.

I call Sir Otho Prior-Palmer.

Sir Otho PRIOR-PALMER (*United Kingdom*). — In relation to what the Minister of Defence has said and to the Report which has been accepted, I would like to ask a question about the liaison which exists, or does not exist, with other defence communities.

As I have said once before in this Assembly, I do not believe that the liaison is sufficient. I do not know whether the Minister can answer this, having regard to security. If he cannot I will understand. But I would very much like to know whether an overall plan is being worked out between various defence organisations. I do

not believe that the liaison is right. There must surely be someone working on a global plan which will go straight into gear in the event of world conflict.

The PRESIDENT (Translation). — I call Mr. Scott-Hopkins.

Mr. SCOTT-HOPKINS (*United Kingdom*). — I would like to ask the Minister of Defence whether the standardisation of armaments and arms is proceeding rapidly enough to satisfy him and whether there is an adequate interchange of knowledge and information on this subject.

The PRESIDENT (Translation). — Mr. Watkinson, are you willing to reply to these questions?

Mr. Harold WATKINSON (*Minister of Defence of the United Kingdom*). — In reply to the first question concerning overall planning, I must not, of course, go beyond the proper dictates of security, but I can say this. There are already the beginnings of closer contact between CENTO and NATO. I am sure this is right. I hope it will grow naturally and sensibly into, in the end, common planning. We must give it time. So far as I know, there are no contacts at the moment, except those which flow through the member nations which have common membership, between SEATO, CENTO and NATO, but I very much hope that these can now be arranged.

If you ask my personal view, whilst giving no commitment — that could not be for me; it must be for those who look after the alliances, their Secretaries-General, their military leaders, and so on — the only suggestion I would make is that, first, it would be a good thing if military experts came from these three alliances to meet together and to talk about their common military problems, when they would find that they were much more common than they might imagine, and to discuss in general how best to meet them. That would be good and profitable, and from my point of view I will endeavour to foster this kind of co-operation as best I can.

As my British colleagues know very well, arms co-operation is a favourite hobby-horse of mine

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and they run a great risk in asking me to talk about it. I will, however, try to be brief. If NATO, to begin with, and all the alliances gradually cannot share arms production more efficiently than we are sharing it today, in the end we shall not get the necessary amount of efficiency out of the kind of budgets that we can devote to defence.

This, however, is a difficult and painstaking task. It might interest you to know, for example — probably most of you already know — the time cycle for a weapons system. We do it very quickly if we do it in less than seven years. With the more complicated weapons, their time cycle from the scientists' concept to the finished weapon in service may be as much as ten years. Therefore, we must not be too impatient. It is only fair to say, however, that as yet we have not produced nearly enough end products in NATO, let alone in the broader field. At the Athens NATO meeting, we had a very useful discussion of this problem. We were all in absolute agreement that we should do much more to try to speed up matters.

Therefore, I can only report to you today that in NATO the will exists to try to speed up the processes. So far as Britain is concerned, we will play our full part in the task; and I only hope that one day, at least, we shall see some end products.

The PRESIDENT (Translation). — Thank you very much, Mr. Watkinson.

5. Application of the Brussels Treaty: Reply of the Assembly to Chapters I, II B, III and IV of the Seventh Annual Report of the Council

(Debate on the Report of the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments and Vote on the draft Recommendation, Doc. 233 and Amendment)

The PRESIDENT (Translation). — Next on the Orders of the Day is the presentation of and debate on the Report of the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments on the Reply of the Assembly to Chapters I, II B, III and IV

of the Seventh Annual Report of the Council and Vote on the draft Recommendation, Document 233 and Amendment.

I call Mr. Housiaux, Rapporteur for the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments.

Mr. HOUSIAUX (*Belgium*) (Translation). — Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very happy to see Mr. Watkinson, the United Kingdom Minister of Defence, present among us.

It may be an old parliamentary tradition, but I find it difficult to get used to what has gradually become the custom in this Assembly, of addressing a Council that is represented neither by the Ministers themselves nor by their deputies. And so I am especially pleased that Mr. Watkinson should be with us today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the first subject I want to discuss is one the Assembly is familiar with: the necessity of setting up in WEU an adequate parliamentary control over the expenditure of our seven States.

This has been a subject of discussion between the Assembly and the Council for nearly eight years. We all know why parliamentary control is required. In the present situation, and for reasons mentioned by Mr. Watkinson just now, it has become impossible to supervise the cost of armaments at national level. If we want to institute parliamentary supervision this can be done only at international level, and in the first instance by WEU, the only organisation which has an assembly and where it would be possible.

The sums involved are enormous. WEU's defence budget for 1960 was \$13,356 million, which is 21% of the total NATO budget. If we turn this sum into French francs, the figure over which control must be exercised is NF 66,780 million.

If we take NATO's budget for the joint infrastructure in 1961 we find that it amounted to NF 472 million. Up to now, the total expenditure on infrastructure for the period 1950-64 has been NF 16,770 million.