

5. Interim Reports of the Secretary General on Political Cooperation 17 NOVEMBER 1958 Excerpts

(...)

2. In Copenhagen, at the close of their last meeting, the Foreign Ministers of the NATO countries declared: "The Alliance is becoming a true community of free nations. Within this community, to a degree unprecedented in history, countries are carrying out a policy of close co-operation in peacetime-without abandoning their independence". They also noted that "remarkable progress had been made in the strengthening of political consultation".

(...)

7. Apart from consultation, mention must be made of another form of political co-operation to which NATO, during the last few months, has devoted considerable time, namely conciliation.

Whereas the purpose of consultation is to secure for the Alliance unity of views and action vis-à-vis the outside world, the aim of conciliating is to maintain internal unity by endeavouring to smooth out any difference which may arise between its members.

The efforts of NATO in the field of conciliation have been directed mainly at two issues, the Icelandic fisheries dispute and the Cyprus problem.

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11. It functioned with complete success in certain cases, the most noteworthy being the harmonising of the replies to Marshal Bulganin's letters and the preparation of the Summit Conference.

12. Both these issues concerned East-West relations, a field in which consultation had already given excellent results the previous year, mainly by making possible the adoption of a common position on the question of disarmament.

13. It did not achieve its aim on other occasions, either because the existence of a permanent divergency was revealed, as in the case of the exchanges of views on the Soviet proposal for a conference on the Middle East, or because no conclusions could be reached owing to the silence of some of the parties consulted, as in the case of the communications of the United States and United Kingdom their intention to intervene in Lebanon and Jordan, and the communications of the United States on the Quemoy affair.

14. The difficulties encountered therefore depend in part on the geographical framework within which political consultation is set.

The examples I have just given demonstrate, in fact, that it is more difficult to obtain positive results when consultation concerns questions outside the area defined by the Treaty.

However, those difficulties also arise from the inherent limitations of consultation between sovereign states.

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17. The fact of the matter is that, the Soviet threat having become “global”, the Alliance must do all it can to meet it with a “global” policy, and that this can only be achieved through the practice of consultation on a world wide scale. As a principle, this necessity can scarcely be contested, and the members of the Alliance with special responsibilities outside the area of the Treaty have on many occasions given evidence of their willingness to take part in consultations on questions outside the boundaries of this area.

18. Nevertheless, unity of views is found to be more difficult of attainment on questions which arise outside these geographical limits, partly because the common danger and the need for solidarity are less strongly felt here and partly because the member States less directly affected refrain from taking a definite stand, no doubt in order to avoid widening their responsibilities.

19. The most stringent limitations on consultation arises from its very nature. It is simply a procedure by which the search for agreement can be facilitated; agreement itself depends in the final analysis upon the will of the national governments. Consultation is successful if it brings out a common purpose or common views; it is a failure if it brings to light irreconcilable differences. When that happens independent and even conflicting actions may follow and there is a partial breach of solidarity, of a more or less serious character, But even a failure of that sort pre-supposes that the various points of view have been explained in the course of collective-discussion, and this is the lesser evil referred to in the report of the Committee of Three, in the statement: “At the least, it will ensure that no action is taken by one member without a knowledge of the views of the others”.

20. However, there is one hypothesis not dealt with in the report of the Committee of Three. I refer to the case in which the consultation remains incomplete and inconclusive because of the silence of the parties consulted. This, as we have just seen, has occurred particularly in connection with questions arising outside the Treaty area.

When the United States and the United Kingdom Governments informed their partners of their intention to intervene in Lebanon and Jordan, it was certainly for the purpose of ascertaining, by consultation, the views of their allies. Several of the latter, however, expressed no opinion.

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24. However well-founded these criticisms may be, it should be remembered that NATO was not originally designed to undertake the tasks thrust upon it today by the extension and expansion of the Soviet threat. It is therefore natural that it should experience difficulties during the process of adaptation. Nevertheless, any positive action to remedy the defects of our Organization must take account of certain basic conditions which cannot be called into question without seriously endangering western solidarity; namely, the North Atlantic Treaty itself, the legal equality of its signatories and the fundamental institutions of the Alliance.

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26. It may well be asked whether it is not outside NATO that a remedy for these defects should be sought and whether, owing to its geographical boundaries and the constraints of consultation between fifteen countries, the framework of our Alliance is well-suited to the formulation of a "global policy"; whether, in fact, this task should not be left in a very large measure to separate consultations between the powers having the largest share of responsibility. Whatever reply may, in principle, be given to this question, I wish to indicate here within what limits I consider the system of holding consultations outside NATO could be practised without contravening the obligations of the Alliance.

27. No one claims that the Council is, for each of its members, the sole agency for political co-operation. The NATO countries remain entirely free to reach agreement with one or other of their partners, or with non-NATO governments, on questions of particular concern to themselves. In this respect countries whose responsibilities extend far beyond the boundaries of the area covered by the Treaty can certainly consult each other on the overall problems within their competence. But after having reached agreements outside NATO, it is essential that these governments should report to the Council the outcome of their negotiations, for although they can decide between themselves to adopt a common position, the latter insofar as it affects the interests of the Alliance as a whole, must be the subject of consultation between all its members. Practised in this manner, such a system is in conformity with the principles of NATO and can usefully serve the cause of unity.

For the unity of the Alliance is particularly vulnerable to divergencies between those governments which have the most widespread responsibilities, and in many different cases the representatives of other allies have had to express the hope that these governments would first achieve unity of views and intentions between themselves.

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29. In the first place, we can try to improve consultation within the Council by seeking to make it effective in all cases, including those which arise outside the area of the Treaty. This might perhaps be more readily achieved if governments kept in mind the following principles:

- Consultation between allies is a duty. Each is entitled to know the opinion of the others. A request for consultation must therefore receive a reply sufficiently clear to avoid ambiguity and misunderstandings, the responsibility for which would fall on those those keep silent.
- Every member of the Alliance who takes part in consultation bears the political responsibility of his opinion; this is the necessary counterpart of his right to be heard and a pre-condition for serious and significant consultation. However, this responsibility cannot add in any Way to the military and political commitments deriving from the Treaty.
- Consultation on questions outside the boundaries of the Treaty area does not involve for the parties consulted so high a degree of responsibility as in the case of questions arising within these boundaries, in respect of which they have a direct share of the common burdens and obligations. Conversely, the parties who initiate consultation with a view to action outside this area legitimately retain greater freedom of appraisal as regards the opinions laid before them.; In other words, it must be recognised that there are different degrees of consultation, corresponding to the differences of interest and of practical to the responsibility in the proposed action.

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32. However, although it seems difficult to go further than this as regards the bare principles of consultation, we can certainly improve the methods we employ.

33. Our efforts to this end should be focused particularly on one point, namely the preparatory stage of consultation.

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35. This would seem to be a weak spot in our methods.

It could be eliminated by recourse to a procedure closely resembling that used last Spring for the preparation of the Summit Meeting:

namely by the setting-up of committees composed of high-ranking the setting-up of government officials.

This seems to be to be the best way of tackling in the most favourable circumstances, the preparatory stage of consultation:

- It would in no way affect the equality of members of the Alliance or the authority of the Council, for the Council would set up the committees and the Council alone would be able to take decisions on their recommendations.
- It would enable account to be taken of the special position and interests of member states, and would make the best use of the knowledge of their specialists; for the composition of the committees would vary according to the questions submitted to them.
- The rank-of these officials, who might, for example, be the heads of major geographical divisions in the foreign ministries, would give them the freedom and authority necessary for the formulation of common views based on objective appraisal of the facts and of the collective interests of the Alliance.

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40. The suggestions contained in this report can be condensed into the following points which I submit to the Council as subjects for discussion at the Ministerial Meeting in December,

- (1) Political consultation, practised on a wide scale, is a necessity for the Alliance.
- (2) Such consultation cannot be restricted to the geographical limits of the Treaty area, as defined in the assistance clause,
- (3) Consultation is a duty between allies. The rights and duties which it implies vary in degree according to the differing interests and responsibilities of the parties.
- (4) When member governments consult with one another outside the framework of NATO on matters of concern to the Alliance, they should submit the outcome of their deliberations to a further consultation within the Council.
- (5) The preparation of consultation, at the policy-forming stage, should be made more effective. A suitable way of achieving this would be for the Council to set up committees to present recommendations on questions selected by the Council.
- (6) NATO should tackle the study of long-term political problems and devise the necessary machinery.

(...)

(Signed) P.-H. SPAAK
