

Brief by the British diplomatic services on nuclear weapons in NATO (October 1960)

Caption: In October 1960, the British diplomatic services issue an internal brief intended to guide ministers at the NATO Ministerial Meeting in Paris (16–18 October 1960). The note focuses on the deployment and control of nuclear weapons in the Atlantic Alliance and sets out the position to be adopted on the issues of medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs), the stockpile of nuclear weapons and the strategic deterrent.

Source: The National Archives of the UK (TNA). Cabinet Office and predecessors: Registered Files (1916 to 1965). Defence policy review. 01/01/1958-31/12/1960, CAB 21/4914 (Former Reference Dep: File 19/10/205/2 Pt 3).

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(a) NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN N.A.T.O.

1. This brief is intended to guide Ministers at the N.A.T.O. Ministerial Meeting in Paris on the various suggestions that are now being discussed for the deployment and control of nuclear weapons in N.A.T.O. There are three main ideas:-

- (a) M.R.B.M.s for N.A.T.O.
- (b) N.A.T.O. stockpile of nuclear weapons
- (c) A N.A.T.O. strategic deterrent

These were mentioned by General Norstad in his speech to the N.A.T.O. Parliamentarians on 21st November, but they are not new.

2. The Americans have persuaded themselves that something must be done to rally N.A.T.O. Although there is no immediate danger of N.A.T.O. breaking up, the Alliance is not in a healthy state. Current fears and uncertainties arise partly from General de Gaulle's attitude towards the Alliance and towards the principles of integrated defence, and partly from doubts in the minds of the European members of N.A.T.O. about United States willingness to protect Europe under conditions of "nuclear equilibrium".

3. The Americans have, therefore, been considering ways of achieving the following political objectives:-

- (a) to give the European N.A.T.O. countries the feeling that they have a share in the main deterrent, i.e. that they will have a call on nuclear weapons

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when European countries are being threatened;

- (b) to promote the solidarity of the Alliance and to reassure the European members that the United States intends to remain fully committed to the North Atlantic Treaty defence system;
- (c) to prevent the development of further national nuclear weapons programmes and, in particular, the West German programme.

4. This has led the United States Government to decide to put forward modified proposals at the NATO Ministerial meeting, largely to honour President Eisenhower's offer in 1957 to give NATO a share in 'second generation' M.R.B.M.s.

American proposals

5. Under their latest proposals, the United States Government will, at the NATO Ministerial meeting:-

- (i) assign 5 nuclear submarines with 80 POLARIS missiles to SACEUR by 1963;
- (ii) express the hope that other NATO countries would consider the creation of a multilateral M.R.B.M. force consisting of 100 POLARIS missiles in addition to the 5 submarines in order to meet SACEUR's requirement;
- (iii) guarantee that American nuclear warheads will remain available to NATO for as long as they are required by NATO military plans;
- (iv) express their willingness to consider suggestions for extending the authority of NATO over the stockpile of nuclear warheads in A.C.E.

Although these proposals are primarily intended to lead to the development of a permanent NATO M.R.B.M. force, there is a hint of the establishment of a NATO stockpile of nuclear weapons.

6. We recognise the importance of achieving these aims and would warmly support the Americans in seeking to do so. We examine below

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to what extent the proposals in paragraph 5 meet these objectives.

The brief covers the other suggestions set out in paragraph 1.

NATO M.R.B.M. FORCE

Background

7. We are committed in principle to supporting the Gates proposal for modernising SACEUR's tactical strike forces by providing him with M.R.B.M.s: we have entered reservations about numbers and deployment of these weapons: we have succeeded in our opposition to the proposal that these weapons should be made in Europe. The Gates proposal has met with little enthusiasm among the member nations of NATO but has been kept alive largely by the efforts of SACEUR and M. Spaak.

8. The latest American proposals represent a considerable modification of the original scheme outlined to us in October. The Americans have gone a long way to meet the objections we then had to their ideas, set out in Annex B. To some extent, the present United States administration has had to modify its plans because of Congressional difficulties and because the new administration refuses to be committed to its predecessors' policies. Nevertheless, the present United States Government are disappointed at our cool response to what appeared to them to be an imaginative plan needed to strengthen NATO both militarily and politically.

Implications of American proposals

9. We can argue that our support for the United States proposal to assign 80 POLARIS missiles to SACEUR goes some way towards satisfying our commitment to support the Gates proposal to provide NATO with M.R.B.M.s.

10. We accept that on the basis of present NATO strategy SACEUR has a case on military grounds for replacing with M.R.B.M.s some of his strike aircraft which are becoming increasingly vulnerable on base and over target. But, in our view the first requirement is for a comprehensive study of the purposes, control and deployment of the nuclear armoury in support of NATO, with the object of making the deterrent as effective as possible without waste of resources.

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11. We are not yet convinced that there is a case for providing with these weapons even for deterrent purposes. The main Western deterrent remains the United States and British strategic strike forces. It is possible that for political reasons, i.e. to achieve the American objectives, there may be grounds for providing NATO with some M.R.B.M.s under some form of NATO control arrangements. These matters are under consideration by the official Working Party.

12. We are averse from stationing M.R.B.M.s in Western Germany and from giving the Germans the appearance of having a real share in the control of these weapons, but we are not willing openly to discriminate against the Germans. As the Americans recognise, other serious problems arising from the examination of the American idea for establishing a permanent M.R.B.M. force in NATO are:-

- (i) ensuring adequate political and military control over the use of the M.R.B.M.s;
- (ii) the practicability of multinational manning;
- (iii) the heavy additional financial burden for the United Kingdom (and, of course, for the other members of NATO) of providing our share of the further 100 POLARIS missiles.

13. It is being suggested to the Americans that it is undesirable that they should mention a specific number of POLARIS missiles, as it will hit the headlines before we or the Americans have had time to consider the requirements or the practicability of the whole suggestion.

NATO STOCKPILE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The proposal

14. General Norstad has, on various occasions, suggested that there should be a NATO stockpile of nuclear warheads. The United States Government have indicated their willingness to examine a scheme of this kind if it is suggested at the NATO Ministerial meeting. This stockpile might comprise a cross-section of the nuclear warheads in SACEUR's armoury including up to a half their total number. It would be in the charge of a NATO Committee, consisting

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perhaps of the Secretary-General, United Kingdom and France, together with those of two other NATO countries in rotation. General Norstad has never been specific or consistent about the powers of this Committee. His proposals have varied either (a) from giving NATO a share in the control of the use of the warheads to (b) providing NATO only with information about the size and distribution of the stockpile, and control over the removal of the warheads from Europe.

Implications

15. This idea has not yet been examined but the following are some of the considerations that arise.
16. A NATO stockpile in one or other of these forms might in varying degrees reassure European members of NATO that nuclear warheads would be available in their defence. The shared control of use which must be made public if it is to achieve its aim would raise difficulties about the credibility of the deterrent. This difficulty might be overcome by the complicated device of putting only a part of the present nuclear armoury in the stockpile, as General Norstad has suggested.
17. The United States Government will have to modify present United States legislation if they are to surrender custody of the nuclear warheads to NATO.
18. Any scheme of this kind would be warmly supported by the Federal German Government and welcomed by other members of NATO, but it is unlikely to deflect General de Gaulle from his decision to build up a French "force de frappe". A scheme of the type in paragraph 14(a) would probably satisfy the aspirations of other NATO countries which had wished to become independent nuclear powers.

United Kingdom attitude

19. A scheme on the lines of 14(b) would not raise the difficulties of control of use of nuclear weapons and looks promising.
20. If, however, a scheme on the lines of 14(a) could be worked out that would reassure NATO without detracting from the credibility

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of the Western deterrent and without imposing a heavy additional burden on our resources, we should welcome it. It would have the merit of achieving the political aims of promoting the cohesion of NATO and perhaps of checking the emergence of additional independent nuclear powers without the objections inherent in the permanent NATO M.R.B.M. scheme, i.e. providing Allied Command Europe and especially the Germans, with what are, in effect, strategic weapons; and the demand for an additional United Kingdom contribution to NATO.

NATO STRATEGIC DETERRENT FORCE

The proposal

21. This proposal does not form part of the United States plan for NATO. It has been mentioned publicly by General Norstad, although it is not advocated by him. Indeed, General Norstad has always been careful to base his requirement for M.R.B.M.s on their tactical use. However, the United States Government recognise that the NATO M.R.B.M.s might share in dealing with "deeper targets". This idea is unlikely to arise at the NATO meeting and it has not been studied.

U.K. TACTICS AT NATO MINISTERIAL MEETING

22. Although the United States Government will be putting forward in NATO the proposals set out in paragraph 5 they are not expecting much discussion of them, and certainly no decisions can be reached, at the Ministerial meeting. The Americans will expect us to support them and we have agreed to give what support we can.

23. In general, we can support their objectives (set out in paragraph 3): we are bound to welcome the assignment of the 5 nuclear submarines to NATO, as we have supported in principle in NATO the Gates' proposal: we can certainly welcome the United States undertaking to keep their nuclear warheads available for NATO forces as long as NATO military planning requires them. As we have not had time to study the full implications of the ideas put forward by the Americans for study in NATO, i.e. a permanent

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NATO M.R.B.M. force and possibly a NATO stockpile of nuclear weapons, we should avoid supporting them. We can, however, agree that these problems should be examined in NATO. Attached at Annex C is a suggested form of words for use during the discussion of the American proposal at the NATO Ministerial meeting.

24. There remains the question of a procedure for these studies to be undertaken. If carried out in a NATO forum, we are likely to be faced with the fixed positions of SACEUR and the International Staff. We would prefer to have time to concert an agreed policy with the new American Administration before trying to influence NATO thinking. To this end we might suggest that the first step might be the circulation of a paper by the Secretary General identifying the various proposals for examination.

25. It is hoped that the Permanent Representatives will work out the lines of the communiqué in advance of the Ministerial meeting. A note on the guidance sent to Sir Paul Mason is at Annex D.

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ANNEX C

SUGGESTED FORMULA FOR MINISTERS

I would like, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, to welcome the generous offer made by the United States Government to assign part of their latest weapon system to the North Atlantic Alliance, and also for their important undertaking to keep their nuclear warheads available for NATO forces as long as NATO military planning requires them.

I am sure that these arrangements will be a source of great strength to the Alliance. Here is proof indeed of the importance the United States Government attaches to this Alliance and these proposals provide an adequate reassurance, if any were needed, that the American Government regards its future defence policy as bound up in NATO. We are glad to be able to support wholeheartedly the objectives underlying the American proposals.

The United States Government have also suggested that NATO should examine the possibility of developing a permanent M.R.B.M. force. Her Majesty's Government wish to support this suggestion too, but they feel that the examination should not be confined only to this problem. Another idea briefly mentioned by ----- implied that the United States Government would be willing to consider suggestions for increasing the authority of NATO over the stockpile of nuclear weapons in Allied Command Europe. I should like to see the examination cover this interesting proposal and any others that may have been made. In our view, the first requirement in such an examination is for a comprehensive study of the purposes, control, and deployment of the nuclear armoury in support

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of NATO, with the object of making the deterrent as effective as possible without waste of resources.

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