

Draft replies by the British delegation to the WEU Council to questions put by the Assembly on defence issues (London, 22 October 1958)

Caption: On 22 October 1958, the Secretary-General of Western European Union (WEU) circulates draft replies prepared by the British delegation to questions 1, 2 and 6 put by the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments of the WEU Assembly. On the matter of the withdrawal of the British army from the Rhine, the British Government states that it intends to maintain its current forces of 55 000 men until the end of 1959. The Council notes that it has received no request concerning a further reduction in the level of British forces or other forces stationed on the continent. On the question of tactical nuclear weapons, the Council explains that these questions are not within their remit but come under the authority of the Supreme Allied Commander, who acts under the direction of the North Atlantic Council (NAC). The WEU Council also points out that the North Atlantic Council is not currently considering arrangements for the joint control of the use of strategic nuclear weapons. It believes that any attempt to reach agreement on this matter would end in failure.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Secretary-General's note. Draft replies to the Assembly's questions on defence matters. London: 22.10.1958. WPM (120). Copy No 55. 3 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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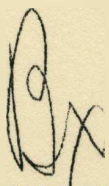
22nd October 1958

SECRETARY-GENERAL'S NOTE

Draft replies to the Assembly's questions on defence matters

As requested during the meeting of the working party held on 14th October, the United Kingdom delegation has prepared draft answers to the questions of the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments transmitted with the letter from the President of the Assembly dated 1st October 1958 (C (58) 129).

These draft answers are circulated herewith and will be considered at the meeting of the working party to be held on 24th October 1958.



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DRAFT ANSWERS TO ASSEMBLY QUESTIONS 1 and 2

1. The N.A.T.O. discussions mentioned in the United Kingdom announcement of May 29 have now been concluded. The British Government intend to maintain B.A.O.R. at the strength of 55,000 men until the end of 1959.

France is the only other country to have invoked the N.A.T.O. procedure for the common solution of currency problems arising out of the stationing of forces in other member countries. Discussion of her case still continues in N.A.T.O.

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 is not aware of any proposals to effect further reductions in the level of British or any other forces on the continent. Their views on Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Assembly Recommendation 23 are set out in their reply to that Recommendation.

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DRAFT ANSWER TO ASSEMBLY 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. 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 March 6 and in their reply to Recommendation No. 23, paragraph 3, they consider that these matters are not within their competence.

[Note for supplementary question]

3. The North Atlantic Council have not considered arrangements for the joint control of the use of strategic nuclear weapons (other than those which are to be placed at the disposal of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe). Nor is it possible to say whether they will do so. They consider that any attempts to reach agreement on such arrangements at the present time would be doomed to failure.