

Annex 'J' to J.P.(55)151(Final) (12/1/55 -

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF  
NATO FROM THE STANDING GROUP ON  
THE NEED FOR CONVENTIONAL FORCES

*agreed to  
CUS (55)100, dm  
12/6/55 -  
see note  
for my*

1. At the NATO Defence Ministers meeting in Paris in October, 1955, the Standing Group were invited to prepare a paper justifying the retention of considerable conventional forces. This request followed a discussion of the Soviet land threat.

THE PRESENT PAPER

2. The paper under brief is the answer to this request and makes the following points.

③ Experience has shown that air power alone cannot protect land and sea areas, whether that air power employs ordinary high explosives or nuclear weapons.

④ The possibility that air forces will one day be wholly replaced by guided weapons and that land and sea forces will be equipped exclusively with nuclear weapons is at least many years ahead, if at all practicable.

⑤ The introduction of new weapons is an evolutionary process, limited by financial considerations.

6. The forces necessary to prevent enemy occupation of NATO areas are an urgent requirement since "liberation" involving further nuclear bombardment has grave implications.

7. The use of the term "conventional forces" should be discontinued, since it is apt to be misapplied to all land and sea forces, as distinct from all air forces.

8. The paper sums up by saying that land, sea and air forces are all needed for the protection of NATO and that the equipment of these forces will be changing as the design of weapons and the development of new equipment permits.

OUR VIEWS

9. The need for a paper on this subject has clearly arisen from the false appreciation by some NATO nations that nuclear weapons make the retention of considerable "conventional forces" unnecessary. We consider that the paper under brief does not take sufficient account of this factor and should be recast to stress the following points:-

(a) | However rapid or decisive may be the effects of strategic nuclear bombardment, there is no guarantee that it would immediately bring to a halt enemy land and sea attacks.

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- (b) In global war naval land and air forces will be required to oppose the Soviet offensive, in order to safeguard sea communications and to restrict the Soviet occupation of NATO territory. The implications of "liberating" such territory with the aid of nuclear weapons are so grave as to be unthinkable.

10. We further consider that the need for the retention of "conventional forces" for cold war should be emphasised and that account should be taken of the following:-

- (a) NATO and similar world-wide "conventional forces" are an essential complement to the primary deterrent, not only to Global War but also to Communist expansion by subversion.
- (b) Should the Communists revert to an aggressive policy, "conventional forces" are required to oppose threats and bluff. Without these forces we should not be able to stop a limited offensive by the conventional forces of a Satellite (e.g. E. Germany) without using nuclear weapons. The decision to initiate nuclear warfare would be a difficult one for NATO to take. We might not wish to run the risk of starting Global War and endangering European civilisation for the sake of a minor issue.
- (c) Such forces therefore play an indispensable part in the preservation of the strength and unity of NATO.

11. As regards paragraph 3 above the limited experience available of the effect of nuclear weapons makes the assertion a transparent over-statement which we consider would be too easily gainsaid, it should therefore be rewritten.

12. The Chiefs of Staff have already ruled that the term "conventional war" should not be used, but have stated that the term "conventional weapons" can be applied to weapons other than A B and C. It is the policy within NATO that, through an evolutionary process, forces should be rearmed with modern weapons, which will in many cases involve giving them a nuclear capability. We consider therefore that the term "conventional forces" will become more and more misleading as the evolutionary process continues. We therefore agree that the use of the term "conventional forces" should be discontinued, but that where applicable, the term "forces armed with conventional weapons" would be justified.

CONCLUSIONS

13. We conclude that:-

- (a) The paper in its present form does not give due weight to the essential factors involved and may not therefore give reliable guidance to the Council.
- (b) The paper should be revised to take account of our views as expressed above.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. We recommend that the United Kingdom representative should suggest revision of the paper to take account of the points made at paragraphs 9-12 above.