

Remarks by Mr. George Thomson to the
North Atlantic Council on 15 February.

I wish to begin by expressing sincere gratitude to M. Harmel, first for his initiative in making the proposal which led to the Council Resolution of 16 December, and then for coming here today to give us his views in greater detail. We are also grateful for the very valuable paper by the Secretary General, which illuminates the background of this discussion.

I am sure it is right that, at the end of a year of intense activity and change for our Alliance, we should take stock of the position which we have reached and assess the tasks which face us in the future.

We find ourselves at a moment of transition for various reasons. Do not let us underestimate the flexibility which the Alliance has already shown the importance of what has already been taken. First of all, the decision has been taken to move the headquarters of the Alliance and to regroup the main political and military directing bodies together in a new relationship at Brussels. It follows that we must give consideration not only to the implications of the move for the structure of the Alliance itself but that we should also consider the tasks on which the new regrouped and I hope streamlined organisation should best employ itself.

Secondly, I think we are all conscious that there is a new atmosphere in East-West relations and that the Alliance should not concern itself exclusively with defence and deterrence but also, I would hope, increasingly with détente.

Thirdly, it is I think generally recognised that the voice of Europe should be heard as strongly as possible in the Councils of the Alliance. This in no way implies any weakening of the essential transatlantic links of which this Alliance is the supreme expression. But I think it would be in accordance with the wish of all member governments that we should explore ways and means of increasing European consultation within Atlantic consultation, and taking account of specifically European interests where these can be identified.

These I take it were the main objections which lie behind the Resolution of 16 December. M. Harmel has suggested that we should approach the problem in two phases: first, we should analyse the present situation, taking account of the changes which have occurred since the formation of the Alliance, and secondly, we should identify the future tasks of the Alliance.

I agree that these are both essential elements of the study on which we are embarking. We must certainly have well in our minds the political background to any new tasks which we undertake. I have already referred to some of the main changes in the political background to our present discussions. Most of them are, I believe, familiar to us all and I should have thought that it would be a comparatively swift and simple task to draw up the analysis of them. This is something indeed which we might entrust to the International Staff in the first instance, with appropriate help from Delegations.

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-2-

What I am suggesting is that we need not draw too sharp a distinction between the analysis phase and the action phase. There are certain tasks on which I expect we can reach early agreement and for which we can begin to consider the appropriate action without further delay. We do not need a preliminary analysis before embarking on them. Other tasks will, as M. Harmel suggests, become apparent as a result of the analysis.

In this way I should hope that even before the June meeting we should be able to show that the Alliance is taking lively action in certain fields and not just revising the situation with which it is confronted.

In looking to the future I do not think we need spend too much time on a redefinition of the aims and purposes of the Alliance. We are, I think, all well aware of the role which the Alliance plays in binding us together, not only for our common security but also for common political purposes. The decisions which have been taken over the past year have shown that we all intend to continue to make the Alliance a reality even though we shall not all take part in the integrated defence organisation.

For the same reason I would suggest that we need not fix our eyes too sharply on the date of 1969. Admittedly, from that date it becomes open to any member country to withdraw from the Alliance under Article 13 of the Treaty. But already in 1954 the Nine Powers which took part in the London Conference in October of that year affirmed their intention to regard the Alliance as being of indefinite duration. More recently, there have been reaffirmations of the view that the Alliance should continue after 1969. My government, for one, certainly intend that this should be so and have no apprehensions about the similar views of their allies.

My own feeling, therefore, would be that our main purpose in giving effect to the Resolution of 16 December should be to identify the most important specific tasks which face us over the months and years ahead. This indeed is one purpose of the paper which we have circulated for today's discussion. I do not pretend that the items listed in that paper are in any way exhaustive or comprehensive. We are very ready to consider any other suggestions. I would suggest, however, that our task is not to try and produce an exhaustive list of all the aims and purposes of the Alliance. It should rather be to isolate those matters which we all agree to be of supreme importance and then to consider how our attention and our resources, which after all are not unlimited, should be concentrated on achieving them.

The list which we have circulated in our paper also raises another general point. It will be seen that it contains items of military as well as of political significance. We believe that it would be quite unrealistic for an Alliance of which defence and deterrence remain among the main purposes to give the impression that it was now solely concerned with political and non-military matters. We do not suggest that this exercise should deal with military organisation or duplicate existing machinery of the D.P.C. or Nuclear Planning Group. But there are certain broad defence questions which necessarily have important political implications, such as those mentioned in our paper. Moreover it would not be necessary that all member-

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CONFIDENTIAL

-3-

governments should take part in the study of all the items, military as well as political. It is for each government to decide in which aspects of the study it wants to take part and we should seek to make our organisation suitably open-ended for this purpose.

This brings me then to the procedure for these studies on which M. Harmel has outlined his ideas. We also have some suggestions in the paper which the Secretary-General himself circulated to us, and in our own paper. It is common to all these suggestions that this exercise should be conducted under the authority of the Council. I think it is also common ground that the procedure should be flexible, that in its early stages it should be informal and without commitment by governments. I suggest also that there would be advantage in using the practice of small sub-groups with national rapporteurs as was successfully done in the past. There does not seem to us to be much difference between the two ways in which this arrangement can be formulated. We have suggested the Council of Permanent Representatives with occasional Ministerial meetings. We would certainly understand that for the preparatory work the P.Rs would be able to meet informally and without committing their governments. The alternative, as suggested by M. Harmel, is that a Special Group should be set up whose members would be appointed by governments but I suppose might in practice largely be the P.Rs, but with the understanding that the Special Group would be able to work on its own responsibility in a more flexible way than the Council, but equally that all drafts and recommendations from it would require endorsement by the Council at either P.R. or Ministerial level. If this kind of formulation were generally preferred we for our part would see no objection. In any case, I agree entirely with M. Harmel that the work should be done under the Chairmanship of the Secretary-General.

In order to provide more time for the P.Rs to carry out this work we believe that the present working of the Council can be considerably improved by arranging that a large number of more or less routine matter could be settled out of committee or by meetings of the Deputies to the P.Rs. We see no reason why this sort of procedural improvement should not be introduced now without waiting for the Ministerial meeting.

Similarly, once the Council or its subordinate bodies have formulated questions on which it would be useful to have outside advice, we could I think certainly consider whether such questions should be remitted to appropriate outside bodies or even to individuals for their advice. One such body, whose advice we might perhaps seek, is the NATO Parliamentarians' Conference, for I believe we all share the objective of interesting parliamentary opinion as closely as possible in the affairs of the Alliance. Moreover, one of the most important questions is to maintain an active public opinion in support of the Alliance. This is a most important contribution to the effectiveness of the Alliance and therefore in working towards a more durable world order.

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