

NORTH ATLANTIC MILITARY COMMITTEE

COMITE MILITAIRE DE L'ATLANTIQUE NORD

Standing Group

Groupe Permanent

REGRADED NATO UNCLASSIFIED

SGM-912-55

Per Authority IMSM-431-99

22 December 1955

By JACO... Date 25-11-98

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY GENERAL,
NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

SUBJECT: Requirement for Conventional Forces

1. During a session of the Defense Ministers' Conference on 12 October 1955, the Standing Group was invited to submit to the Council a written report setting forth the reasons for continuing to develop and maintain conventional forces on a considerable scale and answer the question "Why do we need 'conventional forces'?" This report is contained in the following paragraphs.

2. In questioning the need for "conventional forces" some persons imply that land and sea forces are no longer required to defend land and sea areas. All military experience through the ages and including the most recent fighting in the world, clearly demonstrates that forces are required on the surface of the land and the surface of the seas to prevent the overrunning of these areas by aggressors who are equipped with land and sea forces. Air power alone cannot protect and hold land and sea areas whether that air power employs ordinary high explosives or atomic or thermonuclear weapons.

3. If the term "conventional forces" means land, sea and possibly air forces equipped with non-atomic weapons, the question as to the necessity of forces so equipped may be a valid one. It is conceivable that some day air forces may be wholly replaced by guided missiles and land and sea forces equipped mainly with weapons

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which would employ atomic or thermonuclear explosives. But this possibility is at least many years ahead, if it is indeed practicable at all.

4. In the meantime, the equipment of land, sea and air forces is undergoing evolutionary changes as new and more effective weapons are developed. Our armed forces have been reinforced by new weapons but it is too early to predict in every case which of the present-day weapons can eventually be replaced nor can we estimate with accuracy the cost of such changes. While atomic weapons and guided missiles are more effective, they are very expensive. Their availability is also affected at present by limitations in production facilities and the raw materials required.

5. But in any event, land, sea and air forces designed to prevent the rapid overrunning of NATO command in Europe and the adjacent high seas will be urgently required. The alternative to such forces is inevitable occupation and isolation of the areas that could be overrun in a matter of days. If NATO could survive the occupation by Communist forces of large areas in NATO Europe, the surviving members could "liberate" the occupied areas only with the aid of atomic and thermonuclear weapons. The implications of such a "liberation" are so grave as to answer in themselves the question whether or not so-called "conventional forces" are necessary.

6. In light of the foregoing and the misunderstanding caused by the term "conventional forces" it is recommended to all concerned that its use be discontinued. The basic answer to the question is that land, sea, and air forces are all needed for the protection of NATO and that the equipment of these forces will

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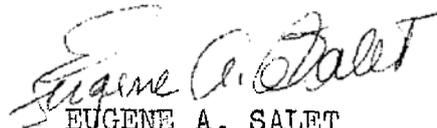
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be changing as the design of weapons and the development of new equipment permits.

7. Security classification may be removed from this memorandum upon release of its contents.

FOR THE STANDING GROUP:



EUGENE A. SALET
Colonel, USA
Secretary