

Even in NATO, however, decisions are merely recommendations to governments and parliaments, where the ultimate authority lies. That is why, when we are tempted to become exultant over resolutions passed at, say, Lisbon, we should not forget that our exultation can easily be turned into something else by the attitude taken to those resolutions by the legislatures in Paris or London, Washington or Bonn.

The equal status of NATO members is also qualified by the fact that the Organization, in certain matters, has to function by means of smaller committees on which not all the members are represented.

For example, the main strategic and military planning organ of NATO is the so-called Standing Group, located in Washington. It consists of the three big members of NATO - France, the United Kingdom and the United States - rather than of all fourteen signatories to the Treaty.

The reconciliation of unequal power and equal rights in this case is accomplished in two ways. First, the Standing Group is subordinate to and reports to a Military Committee which comprises the Chiefs of Staff of all the member countries. Secondly, the Standing Group, when it is discussing any matter that particularly affects a government not represented on it, invites a representative of that government to take part in that discussion.

There has been another NATO development which has reflected the difficulties of reconciling the legal equality of states with their actual inequality. At its meeting last September in Ottawa, the Council decided to attempt to relate the military requirements for the defence of the North Atlantic area to the political and economic capabilities of its member-states. This was to be done through an investigation conducted, in form, by a temporary committee representing all the members. In practice, however, the Committee operated largely through a smaller Executive Committee which came to be known popularly as the "Three Wise Men". These three - they were American, British and French officials - made a number of recommendations regarding the military and economic contributions of each country to the common cause. These resulted from what might be described as an inquisitorial examination into the defence programmes and economic and financial resources of the member countries. The fact that all yielded gracefully to this exercise is an interesting commentary on the extent to which sovereign states are now prepared to co-operate for the promotion of their joint defence and security and to subject themselves to international attention and supervision.

The fact, however, that they did not all accept every detail of the recommendations of the "Three Wise Men" shows where the ultimate authority still resides, even in an organization the members of which work so closely and co-operatively together as they do in NATO. Yet those governments which demurred at some of the "Wise Men" proposals recognized that recommendations from a group representing the most powerful members of the coalition must exercise considerable influence on them; that they could not and should not be ignored in the national decisions to be taken. The impact of these recommendations, I should add, was increased by the fact, an increasingly normal and dubious practice, that they leaked into the press before the governments could deal with them.