

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

MINISTERIAL MEETING, BRUSSELS

The North Atlantic Council met in advanced session at the ministerial level, for the first time in the history of the alliance, on November 15 and 16, 1968. The meeting in Brussels was brought forward from its normal date of mid-December in response to the wish of the member governments for an early opportunity to discuss the situation resulting from the armed invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces under Soviet leadership. It was attended by foreign and defence ministers, as well as finance ministers from some member countries. The Canadian delegation was lead by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, and the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Léo Cadieux.

At the conclusion of the meeting the following communiqué was issued :

1. The North Atlantic Council met in Ministerial session in Brussels on 15th and 16th November. The meeting was attended by Foreign, Defence and Finance Ministers. The Council had moved forward from mid-December its normal year-end meeting so that Ministers might discuss at an earlier date the serious situation following the armed intervention in Czechoslovakia and the occupation of that country by forces of the Soviet Union and of four of its Warsaw Pact Allies.

2. Ministers reaffirmed the inviolability of the principle, which has been invoked on numerous occasions by every country, including the U.S.S.R., that all nations are independent and that consequently any intervention by one state in the affairs of another is unlawful.

They noted that this principle has been deliberately violated by the Soviet leaders with the backing of four of their allies. World opinion has been profoundly shocked by this armed intervention carried out against the wishes of the Government and people of Czechoslovakia. All the members of the Alliance have denounced this use of force which jeopardises peace and international order and strikes at the principles of the United Nations Charter. Like all other peoples, the people of Czechoslovakia must be free to shape their future without outside interference. Agreements concluded under the pressure of occupying forces can provide no justification for challenging this basic concept.

3. The contention of the Soviet leadership that there exists a right of intervention in the affairs of other states deemed to be within a so-called "Socialist Commonwealth" runs counter to the basic principles of the United Nations Charter, is dangerous to European security and has inevitably aroused grave anxieties. It gives rise to fears of a further use of force in other cases.