

Consideration was also given to the increasing cost of defence, and to the problems involved in trying to maintain large conventional forces to deal with limited attacks, in addition to forces equipped with tactical nuclear weapons.

International Situation Reviewed

As this Council meeting was concerned primarily with the non-military activities of NATO, the review of the international situation, with the recent events in Hungary and the Middle East as background, assumed considerable importance. The Ministers were quick to agree that the present turmoil in Eastern Europe presented dangers to the Alliance, and that great care should be exercised by all NATO governments not to interfere with the evolutionary process towards freedom in the satellites. While registering shock and revulsion at the course of events in Hungary, the Council members welcomed recent developments which gave reason to hope that in due time the apparent loosening of the Soviet grip over the Eastern European satellites would mean greater freedom for the people of these countries to choose the government they want. The Ministers reaffirmed the conviction of their governments that the United Nations should continue its efforts, through pressure of world public opinion, to induce the Soviet Union to withdraw its forces from Hungary and to right the wrongs done to the Hungarian people. The Council was, however, anxious to avoid any impression that NATO wished to arouse active opposition, or otherwise to intervene directly in the affairs of the Eastern European countries.

The fact that the Council devoted a significant part of its discussions to political developments outside the area covered by the North Atlantic Treaty constituted an important departure from earlier practices. The decision to discuss these situations reflected an increasing awareness that the stability, security and well-being of an area such as the Middle East are essential to the maintenance of world peace, which in turn is a matter of direct concern to the Atlantic Community.

It was, of course, agreed that it would be inappropriate for NATO to consider assuming special responsibilities in areas not covered by the Treaty. But there was evidence that NATO members may be less reluctant than before to discuss developments outside the NATO area when they have an impact on the Atlantic Alliance. It was within this context that it was agreed in the Council to emphasize the need for rapid progress in clearing the Suez Canal in conformity with the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, and for pressing ahead with the restoration of the Canal to full and free operation. The Ministers were also in full agreement in endorsing, as the basis on which a lasting settlement should be worked out, the six principles agreed upon by the United Nations Security Council on October 13 as basic requirements in any settlement of the Suez question.

Although this exchange of views on current political issues did not—and was not expected to—lead to the formulation of a common policy on all these matters between all NATO governments, it did succeed in bringing out more clearly the broad outlines of what should be the main objectives of the Atlantic Alliance in the world of today. The review of the international situation helped considerably in re-establishing the mutual understanding which had existed before the Middle East developments, and in laying down a basis on which to resume and to pursue constructive and close co-operation.