

How NATO Works

Dept. of Foreign Affairs
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Paul-Henri Spaak

Ministerial meetings of the NATO Council are held about twice a year and usually attract wide-spread attention. Little publicity has ever been given, however, to the way in which NATO carries on between these full-dress meetings. In fact, there is perhaps no international organization of such importance as NATO about whose day-to-day functions so little is known in Canada and the other member countries. As can be seen from the charts on pages three and four, NATO is, in fact, a great co-operative enterprise of 15 nations, requiring continuing activity in many fields and dealing with many different aspects of international co-operation.

The Council

63 SP.26.29

The North Atlantic Council is the supreme governing body of NATO and is composed of foreign ministers and, according to the agenda of the meeting, defence and finance ministers, assisted by senior civilian officials and ranking military officers. A foreign minister is President of the Council, the office rotating annually among member countries. As indicated above, ministerial sessions are held only about twice a year; between these meetings, however, the Council is in permanent session in Paris, where member governments are represented by permanent representatives, usually holding the rank of ambassador, (Mr. L. D. Wilgress is Permanent Representative of Canada to NATO).

The permanent representatives meet at least once a week at the Palais de Chaillot under the chairmanship of Paul-Henri Spaak, who in 1957 succeeded Lord Ismay as Vice-Chairman of the Council and Secretary-General of the Organization. On hand also, to provide both secretarial assistance and expert advice, are members of the international staff. The permanent representatives, armed with background information and recommendations prepared by the Council's subordinate bodies with the help of the staff, consider a widely assorted group of items. The business of a typical meeting may include a variety of matters, such as reports on international developments of concern to NATO, the plans of the Organization's military bodies for future