

It seemed to me that this answer, whether given with tongue in cheek or otherwise, illustrates, if in somewhat extreme fashion, a quite basic, and, I think dangerous misunderstanding of the nature of the present Organization. For the fact is, of course, that the North Atlantic Council has no authority whatever to take the kind of decisions my military friend was talking about. And, did each of us fourteen permanent representatives possess even that high level of courage which he himself has so often displayed in battle, it would avail us little in the attainment of the objectives which we, equally with him, would have NATO achieve.

There is nothing to be gained by failure to recognize and appreciate the extraordinary complexity of what we are trying to do in NATO, or by under-estimating the difficulties. We are a voluntary organization of fourteen sovereign states. It is, I believe, quite strictly accurate to say that none of us have given up one single element of our sovereignty. The Prime Minister of this country made it abundantly clear in the House of Commons the other day that the United Kingdom Government had not abdicated its right to make decisions. And the same is true of the rest of us. In fact, from this point of view, the North Atlantic Council is no more than a committee of national representatives whose individual and combined authority is strictly limited. This is not to say that the Council has no power; nor indeed that its authority may not develop by custom, even by law, as the alliance gains confidence and strength. But, for the moment, we can only proceed by unanimity and delegations and through the implementing action of our governments at home.

I must not, however, be led into what might well be an arid "constitutional" examination of my subject. The essence of NATO is not so much law or even political organization but the willingness of free governments supported by free peoples to work together. In so doing we can achieve the unanimity which is necessary to our decisions only by the adjustment of purely national interests to the interests of the whole alliance and by the national determination of national policies in the light of what is best in the judgment of our friends.

Another side of our Atlantic association where there is some confusion, it seems to me, is in the relation between what we call the Atlantic community and NATO. For, as I see it, the community and the Organization are neither the same nor co-extensive. Established originally by twelve nations for the primary purpose of providing for a united system of defence for the West, NATO has already expanded by a process of strategic and political logic to include fourteen. Who will say that there is some special magic in the present number? In terms of military strategy, there is of course a certain unity in the geographical area covered by the Treaty. But, even here, it is difficult to contend that our alliance is complete.

Think for a moment in terms other than defence. We have, from the beginnings of NATO, insisted, and rightly, that ours was no mere military alliance. Ours has to be an alliance of the mind and spirit -- no mere huddling together in the face of a common danger. Ours was to be, as well, a developing community of like-minded peoples committed to the cooperative strengthening of our free institutions, to the promotion of conditions of stability and well-being and to the encouragement of economic collaboration.

Now it is true, of course, that our fourteen nations have much in common beyond our determination to remain free