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NON-MILITARY CO-OPERATION IN NATO

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Text of the Report of the Committee of Three



The Committee of Three: from left to right, Mr Halvard Lange, Prof. Gaetano Martino,
and Mr L. B. Pearson

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foreword
by

Lord Carrington

Secretary General of NATO

FOREWORD

There are few events in the life of the Alliance which have left so lasting an imprint on its purposes and operating methods as the "Report of the Committee of Three on Non-Military Co-operation in NATO", affectionately known to a generation of statesmen as the report of the "Three Wise Men".

Italy's Gaetano Martino, Norway's Halvard Lange and Canada's Lester Pearson undertook their task in 1956, at a time when one era in East-West relations was ending, and the Alliance had to prepare itself to face the next. The winds of change, symbolised by Krushchev's secret speech to the 20th Party Congress, had not diminished the seriousness of the Soviet military challenge. However, earlier fears of all-out Soviet attack on Western Europe, which had led to NATO's foundation, had diminished. And NATO's deterrent effectiveness had become more credible as successive Soviet moves against the status of Berlin were repulsed, and as Moscow's attempts to extend its dominance over all of Central Europe came to nought.

Faced with this situation, Moscow learned to pose an increasingly complex and more diverse challenge. Blunt military threats and crude propaganda did not disappear. The Warsaw Pact's military build-up steadily continued. But in this new era of "competitive co-existence", Moscow became more skilled and active in its attempts at political and economic penetration of vulnerable nations in Europe and throughout the free world, and at wedge driving between the Allies.

It was to this new sophistication of the Soviet challenge that the Three Wise Men addressed themselves, calling for a matching NATO response. Collective defence would remain one essential pillar of Alliance action to assure our security. NATO would also have to learn to consult more effectively and equip itself better in organizational terms to deal with the USSR's political, economic, scientific and propaganda challenges. Since then this dualism, reaffirmed in the Harmel Report and the Two-Track Decision, has come to constitute the very essence of NATO's balanced approach to East-West relations, in which effective common defence efforts are coupled with a continued Allied political willingness to negotiate, while deflecting political attacks.

This was the central contribution of the Three Wise Men. Flowing from it is a wide range of advice, which remains valid as well as a host of practical suggestions which have left their mark on virtually every aspect of the Alliance's working philosophy and operations. In the first instance, the Three Wise Men urged a substantial strengthening of the NATO's consultative process to offset the "centrifugal forces of opposition and indifference"; they offered rules of conduct for achieving that goal, such as the right of any member to raise issues of common concern, which are still standard practice today; and they proposed simple but effective new mechanisms to make enhanced consultation work. One was the creation of the Political and Economic Committees, which since then have been essential work-horses of the NATO Council. Others comprised important proposals for strengthening NATO's efforts and staff capabilities in the scientific, cultural and information fields. And still others aimed at substantially enhancing the rôle of the Secretary General, who was henceforth expected to raise issues in Council, and to offer his Annual Political Appraisal of the state of the Alliance.

So thoroughly have all these recommendations become the warp and weft of NATO's working life that they seem rather unspectacular today. At that time, when nations were less aware of the degree to which they are dependent on each other for mutual security and the preservation of the fundamental values they all share, they were considered thoroughly radical.

The Alliance today is once again confronted by a set of new Soviet leaders and wholly new political and security risks and opportunities. In the coming years NATO's challenge will be to preserve cohesion in a period when significant reductions of opposing military forces may be possible, although it will remain essential to ensure that the Alliance's security remains unimpaired at every stage. These will also be years when the Alliance's economic, cultural, scientific and information skills will be needed as never before. NATO, itself approaching its 40th anniversary, will have to continue to play a central, critically important co-ordinating rôle.

To the Three Wise Men, who contributed so much to strengthening the Alliance's foundations, we owe a great and continuing debt of gratitude.

Lord Carrington
Secretary General of NATO