

Looking into the Annual Review procedure of NATO

At the ninth session of the North Atlantic Council in Lisbon in February 1952 it was decided the alliance would conduct a yearly examination of the military requirements of the alliance and the political and economic capabilities of the member states. In the 1950s and early 1960s the Annual Review was one of the most important tasks of the alliance. The process involved a continuous and intense dialogue between the central bodies of the alliance and the member states.

I would like to launch an international working group to study the Annual Review. This proposal is not an outline of a research programme, nor a call for papers. It's an open invitation to researchers to come forward with ideas; I welcome all comments. In my opinion this is an interesting and hardly explored research topic that can be studied from different points of view. At least two research questions have come to my mind.

Research questions

The Annual Review provides an excellent opportunity to study the internal performance of the alliance. The procedure was an instrument for coordinating the defence effort of the alliance members and to bring about 'harmonization' between the defence needs and the political-economic capabilities. By closely examining the defence efforts of the member states, deficiencies could be identified and recommendations formulated. Just how this coordination was brought about and what effect it had on national defence expenditures is still unclear. By studying both the procedure of the Annual Review and the outcome of the process we will get a better understanding of the internal dynamics of the alliance.

The Annual Review procedure was a highly complex procedure that involved many agencies both at the international as well as the national level. Different elements in the national bureaucracy were in close contact with comparable elements, either in the International Secretariat or on the military side of the alliance - the Military Committee, the Standing Group and SHAPE. Sometimes national bodies made common cause with international bodies against other elements in the national government. On the other hand national authorities tended to give a rosy picture of the situation. Apart from the fact that no government likes to expose himself to international criticism, there is another reason to explain this attitude. The United States used the agreed force goals as planning figures for their military aid programme. Thus the Annual Review was part of an international game that was played simultaneously at numerous chessboards. The process thus may put another light on the way national and international decisionmaking were tied together. It is precisely for this reason that we need to explore both the national as well as NATO sources.

Primary sources at the NATO Archives, Brussels

The NATO sources are divided into three groups of records. The first group are those of the committees and working groups associated with the Annual Review process. The second group of documents are the final version of the Annual Review, in which the returns for each country was produced. For these two groups of holdings all the documents from 1952 to 1965 have already been declassified by NATO and it is anticipated that the documents for 1966 to 1972 will be declassified and publicly disclosed later this year.

Beyond these two groups of documents, the NATO Archives also holds a series of subject files for each year of the Annual Review, approximately 35 linear metres in extent. While there is a significant amount of duplication in these files with the documents in the first two groups, these files also hold bilateral correspondence on the production of the questionnaire, including issues surrounding definitions and concepts, the responses to the questionnaires by

the member nations, the analysis of the national responses, correspondence regarding this analysis, and documentation and correspondence on the production of final version of the Annual Review. While these files have not yet been declassified, the NATO Archives is willing to cooperate with this project and does not anticipate any great difficulty in putting forth these records for declassification and public disclosure.

Access to national documents with regard to the Annual Review process will vary from one country to another and needs further investigation. The declassification of the records in the NATO Archives will facilitate the review and declassification and disclosure of the corresponding national holdings. With the declassification of these holdings and national correspondence with the various branches of NATO, this project will illuminate the dynamic between individual nations and NATO in the development of alliance defence capabilities and concepts. From the outset therefore the project should be an international endeavour.

I kindly request all national representatives in the Parallel History Programme to send this proposal to those individual researchers in their home countries whom they think might be interested. If you need any further information please contact me.

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