

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY

TREATY AT A GLANCE

Completed

April 4, 1949, at Washington, D.C.

Signatories

Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Greece and Turkey joined in 1952, the Federal Republic of Germany in 1955, Spain in 1982, the reunited Germany in 1990, and Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1999)

Overview

The North Atlantic Treaty established the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which had as its purpose the deterrence of potential Soviet aggression in Europe, one in a series of such regional alliances aimed at "containing" the spread of communism.

Historical Background

One of the many effects of the Marshall Plan, America's scheme for revitalizing a war-torn Europe in the wake of the Nazi Armageddon, was a hardening of the division on the Continent created by a growing rift between the Soviets and the other great power Allies. Stalin had denounced the plan as a capitalist plot even as he himself was plotting to overthrow the fragile new republics of eastern Europe and partition Germany in order to ring his country with puppet states that could serve as military and cultural buffers against the West, whose influence he saw as a threat to his dictatorship. When the Western European states, Great Britain, and the United States responded to the Stalin-backed Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in March 1948 by pressing ahead with the unification of the West German zones of occupation and the establishment of a West German currency and government, the Russians stormed out of the Allied Control Council. Three months later, Soviet occupation forces in the eastern zone shut off Allied access by road or rail to the western zones of Berlin.

U.S. president Harry S Truman was worried about the expansion of Soviet influence, particularly in Europe, and persuaded by the famous "Long Telegram" from Moscow by American diplomat George Kennan, suggesting that a policy of "containment" should be exercised toward Stalin. Truman had already begun to set up a national security apparatus, including a per-

manent Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Strategic Air Command, and the CIA. He had also signed the PACT OF RIO, which would serve as a model for a series of regional mutual defense agreements linking the United States to nations ringing the USSR and its new client states.

Announcing he was ready to "get tough" with the Soviets in what policy mavens such as presidential advisor Bernard Baruch and press pundit Walter Lippmann were calling the cold war, Truman was forced to test his new policy in response to this latest move by the Russians in Berlin. Made necessary by the anomaly of an American-British-French zone of interest stuck some 100 miles inside an eastern German occupied by Soviet troops, the Berlin Crisis became a defining moment in the history of this new cold war. Allied commander in Berlin Lucius Clay and Secretary of State Dean Acheson wanted to flex American muscle and send an armed convoy straight through the Russian zone to Berlin, but the Joint Chiefs and certainly the British and the French were unwilling to risk provoking a war. Instead, Truman responded with an immense and ultimately quite effective airlift to keep West Berlin supplied with food, fuel, and medicine.

Historians have often wondered what Stalin hoped to accomplish. Perhaps he feared the rearmament of a West German state and hoped to block it. Perhaps he was trying to scare the American public to retreat into its traditional isolationist shell. The real result of the Berlin blockade was to frighten the Western powers into taking stronger measures than they might other-

wise have taken to contain the Soviet "threat." On April 4, 1949, the foreign policy heads of the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Portugal, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Canada met in Washington to found the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, the premier cold war multinational mutual alliance.

Terms

The preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty clearly established the signatories' purpose:

The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments.

They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.

They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.

They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security.

They therefore agree to this North Atlantic Treaty

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But the crux of the North Atlantic Treaty was Article 5:

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all, and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually, and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

NATO conformed to Article 51 of the UNITED NATIONS CHARTER, which granted nations the right of collective defense, but NATO also promoted political, social, and economic ties between the members:

ARTICLE 1

The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

ARTICLE 2

The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them.

Consequences

If the impetus for the treaty was the increasing intensity of the cold war, including the communist coup d'état in Prague in February 1948 and the Berlin Blockade, beginning in June 1948, NATO nevertheless began without an established military structure. It took the outbreak of the Korean War, in June 1950, to prompt the establishment of a NATO military force, the principal element of which was Allied Command Europe, headquartered in Brussels, Belgium (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe [SHAPE]). Policy was made by the North Atlantic Council, which met in Brussels (it met in Paris until 1967, France having withdrawn from the military structure of NATO the year before). However, the alliance was first and foremost a military one, and the Military Committee, composed of senior military representatives from each country (except Iceland, which had no military forces but was represented by a civilian, and France), recommended defense measures it considered necessary.

With the end of the cold war and the disbanding of the WARSAW PACT Organization, which had been formed by the Soviet bloc to counter NATO, some European leaders called for replacing NATO with some less exclusively military organization, especially as former communist bloc countries now sought entry. In the early 1990s, the United States took steps to reduce its NATO presence, substituting for the large standing forces of NATO contingency plans relying on smaller "rapid deployment forces," with reinforcements available from the United States in time of need.