The Right Honourable Louis St. Laurent with a group of NATO trainees attending ceremonies marking the fifth anniversary of NATO in Ottawa, in April 1954.
Public Archives Canada Photo

A preliminary step towards the establishment of NATO was taken in March 1948, when Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg signed the Brussels Treaty for mutual defence. Other Western countries subsequently began giving consideration to their own needs and to the possibility of a broader collective arrangement. On April 28, 1948, the idea of a single mutual-defence system, including and superseding the Brussels Treaty, was put forward by the Canadian Prime Minister, Louis St. Laurent. Negotiations on the North Atlantic Treaty began in July 1948 among the countries of the Brussels Treaty, the United States and Canada. They were later joined by Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway and Portugal, and the Treaty was actually signed in Washington, D.C., on April 4, 1949. Greece and Turkey joined the Alliance in 1952 and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1955.