

By the spring of 1948 the process forecast by Mr. St. Laurent had reached the stage of "Western Union". On March 17 of that year Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg signed at Brussels a treaty providing for their collective self-defence. It was significant that on the very day the Brussels Treaty was announced, both President Truman in an address to Congress, and the Prime Minister of Canada, in a statement to the House of Commons, welcomed this first concrete step toward an effective system for the defence of the West.

In the months that followed there were many signs that determined European combination would find a ready response in North America. You may remember that, in the summer of 1948, both the major political parties in this country held national conventions. It was interesting and I think significant of the progress of Canadian thinking that both the Liberal and Progressive-Conservative platforms that emerged from those conventions should support quite categorically the association of Canada with special security arrangements in the Atlantic area. Since then, Canada's adherence to and support of the North Atlantic Alliance has never been a matter of party controversy.

That summer of 1948 and during the autumn, in Washington, the ambassadors of the Brussels Treaty powers and Canada engaged with representatives of the United States in what we diplomats call "informal and exploratory" talks. It will be remembered that in June the celebrated Vandenberg resolution had been adopted by the United States Senate. The course of American foreign policy was by that action set firmly away from the shoals of isolationism. The United States administration were in a position to give a firm bi-partisan lead to their Atlantic allies.

These talks ended in agreement and, on April 4, 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed. By its terms the seven original signatory nations - the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Canada (and, subsequently, Italy, Iceland and Portugal) bound themselves together by specific obligations to provide for their collective defence and to the adoption of the means necessary to preserve and to maintain the peace and security of the North Atlantic area. Within less than fourteen months after the fall of Czechoslovakia, the Atlantic countries had achieved a firm alliance. Considering the revolutionary character and scope of the Treaty's provisions, that comes pretty near to being a diplomatic speed record.

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The first sentence in the preamble to the Treaty is a reaffirmation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. This is important, for the twelve Atlantic nations have maintained throughout that their alliance, far from contravening the objectives of the United Nations was sanctioned as a measure of regional self-defence by the terms of the Charter itself.

The Treaty goes on to declare the determination of the signatories to safeguard their free institutions and their common purpose to promote the stability and well-being of the Atlantic area. Finally, it states their joint resolution to unite for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security.