

INTRODUCTION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a political and military alliance of sixteen democratic nations in Western Europe and North America acting collectively to deter and, if necessary, defend against any aggression, in accordance with the terms of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The primary purpose of the Alliance is to defend the NATO area through effective co-ordination of the collective military capabilities of Alliance members. But it also serves the equally important political role as the central Western forum for consulting on developments of common interest, particularly on means of reducing East-West tensions and maintaining international peace and security.

The 16 Allies are Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Formation and Evolution of NATO

After the Second World War, it became clear to the democratic societies on both sides of the Atlantic that, if another such global conflict were to be avoided, they would have to work together during peacetime as they had during the War. Deteriorating relations between the Soviet Union and its former allies, and developments in Eastern Europe, persuaded the free countries of Western Europe and North America that common defensive action was needed.

While several Western leaders had considered the idea of a defensive alliance within the framework of the United Nations, the Europeans were the first to take concrete action. In early 1948, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom signed the Brussels Treaty, and pledged themselves to build up a common defence system and to strengthen their economic and cultural ties.

But it was apparent that, in Winston Churchill's words, it was still necessary to bring in the New World to redress the balance of the Old. During the summer of 1948, representatives of the Brussels Treaty signatories and of Canada and the United States began discussions that ultimately led to the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty of April 4, 1949. In 1952 Greece and Turkey joined the twelve original signatory countries, and in 1955 the Federal Republic of Germany also acceded to the Treaty.

In 1982, Spain joined the Alliance, although like France its forces are not part of the Integrated Military Structure of NATO (France withdrew its forces from the Integrated Military Structure in 1966).