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CANADA AND NATO

Canada was one of the original 12 (now 15) nations signatory to the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949, and played a leading role in the formation of the Alliance, the members of which are, in the words of the Treaty, "determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples ... (and) are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security". NATO continues to be an essential foundation of Canada's foreign and defence policies. Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker has stated: "I believe that NATO is, and will remain, an association where Canada belongs. It not only meets the criterion of self-interest from the point of view of military defence. It is a group of nations, strong of purpose, sound and good in motive, respectful of free institutions, and representing collectively those heritages that are part of our civilization. It has proven to be an impregnable bulwark for freedom. Its function today is as imperative as ever."

NATO was the response of the free countries of the West to Communist expansion in Europe after the Second World War, and to the impasse that arose in the United Nations when, by the use of its veto in the Security Council, the Soviet Union obstructed Western efforts to make the organization an effective instrument for peace. Faced with the threat to their security and to the basis of their civilization, the Western powers resolved to group themselves in an Alliance that would indicate clearly their determination to resist aggression, from whatever quarter it might come, and to maintain peace.

As Article 51 of the United Nations Charter gives member nations the right of individual or collective self-defence, the proposal for an association of nations for this purpose accorded with the principles of the Charter. A preliminary step towards the Alliance was taken in March 1948 when the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg signed the Brussels Treaty for their mutual defence; the strength and resources of North America, however, were needed to balance the strength of the Soviet Union. Negotiations for the North Atlantic Treaty began in July with Italy, Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Portugal joining the Brussels Treaty powers, the United States and Canada, and, on April 4, 1949, the Treaty was signed in Washington, D.C. Greece and Turkey joined the Alliance in 1951 and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1954.

Terms of the Treaty

The articles of the Treaty deal in particular with its relation to the Charter of the United Nations, the responsibility of member countries to each other in non-military and military matters (including common defence), and with the duration of the Treaty and its implementation.