

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

ON APRIL 4, 1949, when the Plenipotentiaries of the twelve nations of the North Atlantic community affixed their signatures to the North Atlantic Treaty, they signified their collective determination to stand together in the face of a very clear threat to their common heritage of freedom and political ideals based on democracy and the rule of law.

If this aim was to be accomplished, much more than a mere expression of the good intentions of the Parties was, however, required. A strong, cohesive and effective organization was necessary. Accordingly, a Council composed of representatives of each Party was provided for by Article 9 of the Treaty "to consider matters concerning the implementation of the Treaty" and "to set up such subsidiary bodies as may be necessary". Immediately after the signature of the Treaty, a Working Group, composed of representatives in Washington of all the Parties, was instructed to report on the organization needed to implement the Treaty. In undertaking this task the Working Group was in a position not unlike that of a builder called upon to construct a complicated edifice from a sketchy blueprint. The words of the Treaty itself had to be transformed into an organizational structure which, on the one hand, would be sufficiently precise to permit immediate action to establish and maintain a collective system of security throughout the North Atlantic area, and, on the other hand, would be sufficiently flexible to allow for adaptations in the light of experience and changing world conditions. The report of the Working Group on the broad outlines of the organization of the Treaty was approved by the Council at its first meeting on September 17 and a second phase in the history of the Treaty—the organizational phase—may be said to have begun on that date.

The North Atlantic Council

As the supreme governing body in the organization, the Council is charged with terms of reference as broad as the Treaty itself. It is normally composed of the Foreign Ministers of the Parties, although, should they be unable to attend any meeting, their places may be taken by designated diplomatic representatives. Specifically, the diplomatic representatives of the Parties in Washington are empowered to act as their governments' representatives whenever necessary to enable the Council to meet promptly to deal with ordinary business or to meet an emergency.

The Council has already held two sessions. At the first, on September 17, 1949, it approved the general plan of organization under the Treaty as formulated by the Working Group. The diplomatic representatives of the Parties in Washington met for a second meeting of the Council on November 18, 1949, and approved, again on the basis of a report of the Working Group, the establishment of a Defence Financial and Economic Committee. (A chart showing the organization as established to date appears on page 4).

Military Organization

The military organization under the Treaty as set up at the first meeting of the Council consists of a Defence Committee, a Military Committee, a Standing Group of the Military Committee, and five Regional Planning Groups.