

UN Charter. Faced with a threat to their security while Europe was still recovering from the ravages of the Second World War, the Western countries resolved to group themselves into an alliance that would give substance to their collective resolve to resist aggression.

Despite the fact that collective security had proved unattainable through the agency of the United Nations, the organization of the Atlantic Alliance was carried out within the framework of the UN Charter, Article 51 of which gives member nations the rights of both individual and collective self-defence.

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, which dealt with mutual assistance. 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. These 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.

Terms of the treaty

Both in the treaty's preamble and in Article I, the signatories emphasized their support for the United Nations and for the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the UN Charter. Subsequent articles deal with collective defence and provide for consultation "whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the parties is threatened". Participation in this collective-defence effort does not, however, prejudice the freedom of decision of member countries or involve an automatic commitment concerning the means of providing mutual support. Article 5 states that each member should take "such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed forces to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area".

Canada, whose spokesman was the late Lester B. Pearson, was responsible for the inclusion in the Treaty of Article 2, which states